



THE TRANSFORMERS

In a world crying out for change, these 50 architects and designers who comprise our iGen hotlist this year could make a telling difference

BY MARIA LOUIS

Once again, it's time for us to nudge India's young architects and designers to the forefront. They are the leaders of tomorrow and the promise of a new and improved urban lifestyle that takes into consideration the issues that challenge the built spaces they design. Their idealism, intelligence, inspiration and ingenuity enable them to take giant strides towards a brighter future for us all.

Putting on our talent scout hats, as we have done every year since 2012, we sought out the best of the fresh crop of architects and designers who are informed, individualistic and innovative. In keeping with the 'i' generation they represent – an alphabet that has acquired new meaning thanks to the illustrious Steve Jobs and the ubiquitous iPhone, iPad and iPod – we call them iGen (short for iGeneration).

Our selection of gen-next architects and designers is eagerly awaited. On the basis of recommendations by their gurus, seniors and peers as well as the quality of work they have done, we invited these architects and designers to share their dynamism,

energy and enthusiasm through this forum.

This is the sixth year since we began conducting this exercise (so we have 300 iGens now!), and we are amazed that we still end up overshooting the number 50 that we have set for ourselves. They are not just a dynamic, young bunch of design enthusiasts, but also passionate souls who have a burning desire to raise the bar when it comes to Indian architecture and design. Apart from socially responsible, sustainable or contextual architecture, our iGen candidates are aiming to make a difference in rural areas of the country too. From economically-viable spaces created out of recycled waste to campuses and institutes that celebrate their Indian identity, their portfolio addresses varied and distinct design needs of the country. Through their work, they are exploring the limits of innovation – only to find more room for their idealistic pursuits.

Carrying in their heart a profound appreciation for the legendary architects of the past and present, the young professionals are interpreting the vision and ideologies of their role models through their own visual vocabulary. This seamless amalgamation of tradition and 21st century needs speaks of a generation that is innovative in its reverence.

As you flip through the pages, prepare to be inspired by the people who are shaping the future of their individual cities and the country at large. Get a glimpse into their practice as they discuss their definition of innovation, the role of technology in modern architecture and design, and the challenges they face with optimism – sometimes even with a dash of humour that will leave a smile on your face.

Gen
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PRAVIR SETHI

PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT, STUDIO HINGE, MUMBAI



“Critical self-analysis and introspection upon one’s own portfolio is required to avoid stagnation and promote innovation. It is essential to keep moving.”

The child is the father of the man – and this is true in the case of Pravir Sethi, who knew from a fairly early age that he wanted to be an architect. “This was informed by an early aptitude toward sketching, maths and physics,” Sethi admits. “However, I would prefer to think it was something of the writer within, and a marked proclivity to never build Lego sets as per the instructions given.”

Sethi trained at the Rachana Sansad Academy of Architecture in Mumbai, during which time he interned with Sameep Padora and PG Patki & Associates and, later, Samira Rathod Design Associates. He did a Master’s in Architectural Design under Professor Peter Cook at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, London. The design icons who have shaped his sensibilities include Peter Cook and Archigram, Bjarke Ingels, Carlo Scarpa, David Chipperfield and Zaha Hadid – each for different and varied lessons.

After his return, he spent nearly four years at Sanjay Puri Architects before starting Studio Hinge in March 2014. There was a strong conviction that “good design should be ubiquitous (but not repetitive), should trickle down into the nooks and crannies of daily life, and not just be the preserve of a luxury lifestyle.”

Sethi emphasises that the studio’s aesthetic is firmly contemporary, but sometimes punctuated with winks and nudges and nods to the past. It is not uncommon, for example, to see hand-carved teakwood used alongside laser-jet or water-jet cut stainless steel.

About the USP of the firm, Sethi

maintains, “It is our ability to provide design solutions that are flexible. This stems from the recognition that we live increasingly in a world of mass consumption, where people crave customisation, where one size does not fit all (and sometimes does not even fit one).”

The Merint Group HQ in Dubai remains a landmark project for Sethi. Since the company’s main business vertical is glass, much of the design incorporates glass in innovative ways.

He discloses that his most significant project happened in 2014, when they were asked to provide a concept for an entrance lobby to a luxury apartment building under construction on Boat Club Road in Pune. “On the basis of that concept, we were also awarded the commission to design the interiors of the show apartment and the rooftop clubhouse and, eventually, the façade and landscape – which means we control detail and finishes across the entire property,” states Sethi, adding that his dream project would be a public building, or at least one that is visited by the public.



PROJECT
Merint Group HQ, Dubai