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**Dazzling lights in the
offices of the Merint
Group, Dubai**





PRAVIR SETHI
Principal Architect, Studio Hinge

Educated and gained work experience both in India and abroad, and also having taught at a couple of institutions in India, Pravir Sethi brings a variety of unique ideas and techniques to his work. From his neat but effective office in Marine Drive, Pravir says he is keen on developing the narrative of a project, and its influence on the solution that follows, particularly as evinced in the details. Good design to us, he says, is like a clever bit of story-telling. It is contextual, has a narrative, (and) can be witty, moving or both. It evolves, evokes, revealing new turns at every reading. His philosophy, in his own words, is that design should be ubiquitous, should trickle down into the nooks and crannies of daily life, and should not just be the preserve of a luxury lifestyle. 'We recognize that one size does not fit all and deliver tailored solutions to reflect this; from a township to a door handle, we build in flexibility. And create things that bend/fold/twist/slide to become other things, new things. Detail is everything to us. We are driven by tactility, surface, texture, joinery, the coming-togetherness of things and the whole-more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts of it all'.

TEXT: SUBUR MUNJEE
PHOTOGRAPHS: IRA GOSALIA PHOTOGRAPHIX



AM Engineering

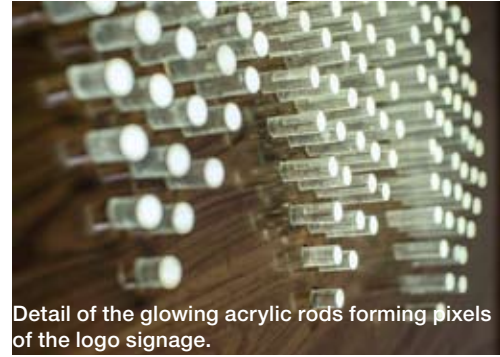
TYPE:
Commercial exterior

AREA:
1000 sq ft

STATUS:
Completed



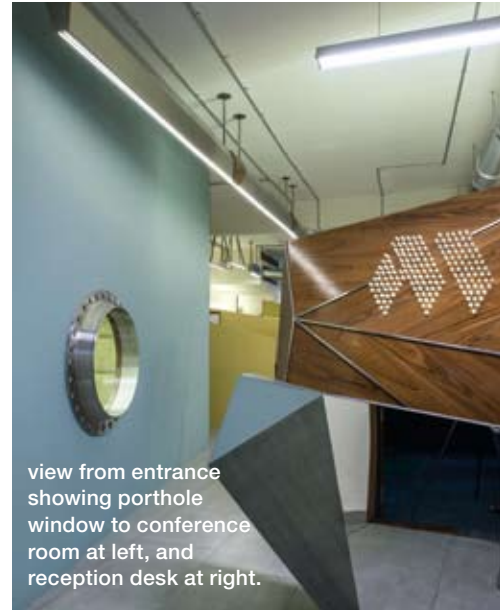
An elevation view of the workstation shows an SS frame structure with integrated LED lighting, and overhead storage with perforated SS shutters, and branding on the AC duct.



Detail of the glowing acrylic rods forming pixels of the logo signage.



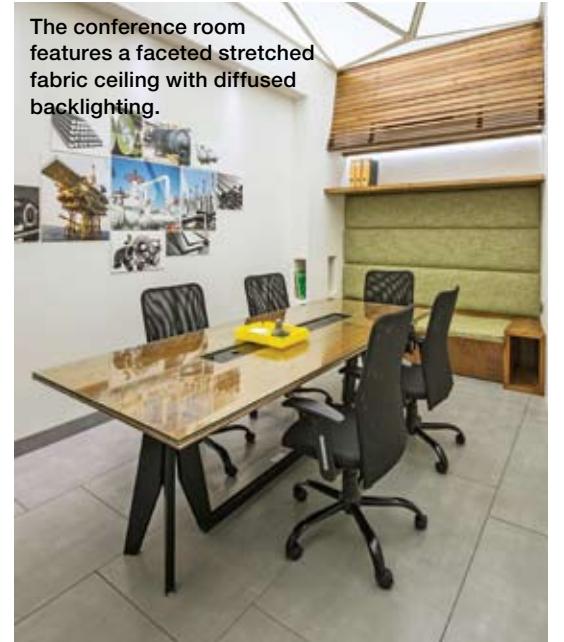
Reception desk in satin, mirror polish and gunmetal finish SS, with veneered partition backdrop featuring firm logo signage in backlit acrylic rods.



view from entrance showing porthole window to conference room at left, and reception desk at right.



Detail of the bespoke workstation in SS and glass, with mobile drawer box.



The conference room features a faceted stretched fabric ceiling with diffused backlighting.



View toward entrance showing reception and waiting area with pantry beyond, and parabolic arc formed in ceiling installation.

Steeped in the concept of conceptuality, the choices made for this office were clear. The text almost wrote itself. AM Engineering represents manufacturers of high-grade

stainless steel products in the marine, oil, gas and petrochemical industries. The design is both a tribute to steel and also a eye-opener as to how it can be used in non-technical spaces. One of the first things that Pravir did was to remove the loft and raise the

roof, where the directors have low, open-plan seating. Only the conference room is full height, its main feature a backlit, fabric ceiling. The exposed AC ducts in the conference room become the canvas for the logo of the company, creating a discreet collage.

The fabric feature is the only 'soft' feature, in an environment which displays an exuberance of steel. And so cold rolled sections, solid bars, perforated plates, extruded tubes sit comfortably alongside lathed flanges and heat exchangers. A 900mm diameter flange is

converted into a porthole in the conference room, a quirky reminder of the uses their products can be used for. The reception desk uses three inventive finishes to the base SS, brushed, gunmetal and mirror polish.

This isn't the end of the drama. In their own publicity

brochure, Pravir talks about the real showpiece, the signage itself. The logo is pixelated and renders each pixel as a point of light. 18mm-thick solid acrylic rods lit from behind achieve this using the principle behind fibre optic lighting – total internal reflection – where the rod is clear,

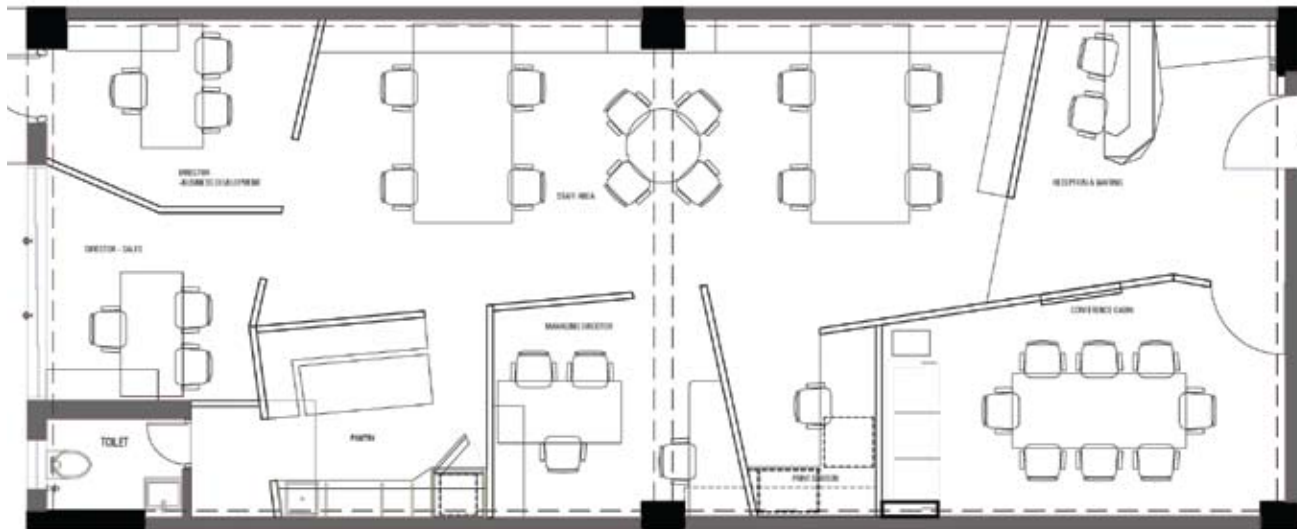


Faceted paneling to passage wall around entrance door, finished in silver stucco metallic texture paint. Also shows firm logo in SS studs on the door and in acrylic rods inside.



Bespoke conference table with base in powder coated MS, top finished in teakwood veneer and lacquered glass covers for integrated cable management.

with just a glowing tip. The rods push through, emerging from a faceted walnut veneered partition creating a jewel-like object of surprising delicacy in this industrial playground of a workspace.



An overview of the open office area from the entrance end shows the long central workstation and the freestanding 'egg' partition in timber fins.

Please see

TYPE:
Commercial interior
AREA:
800 sq ft
STATUS:
Completed



*P*resented with a 1300 sq ft area in an old heritage building where few structural changes could be made and renovation rested on a tight budget, Pravir decided to make a virtue out of a necessity. The recessed windows allowed for the cre-

ation of seating areas, and the exposed pipes around the space were painted yellow, incorporating it into a design feature. Since the requirements for the accommodation of staff were just over 10, perhaps going up to 20, Pravir opted for a single, long, seating work table. The photographs of the work tables display the detail that have gone

into its conception and also the abiding interest of the firm in designing and fabricating its own furniture to the degree possible. This concept also fulfilled the requirements of the brief for an easy work area with full communication and access amongst the staff. Privacy, when needed, was provided by creating semicircular areas made of wooden staffs,

A notional sense of privacy is provided between the 'egg' partition and the open office area.

The recycled discussion table sits between two generous windows, and is lit by the suspended custom chipboard lighting fixture.



Hanging lamps within the 'egg' partition create striated shadows through the timber fins.



The necessarily exposed electrical conduiting forms a playful mural on the wall behind the reception.



Conference-pantry partition - open.

which also became a design feature. The area between the conference and work areas flows into one another – coffee and conferencing! The high ceilings and the louvred



Wire manager trench in carved teak wood - open.



The detail of the main central workstation shows MS framing and waterjet cut legs, with drawer boxes and bag hooks slung below the worktop.

the reception. The overall impression is an attractive mixture of the old and new, light, airy, young and convivial, all elements conducive for a creative team.



Evening view showing outdoor areas and kiosk with screened access beyond.



Model showing outdoor reading area and verandah.



inspiration for this project was provided by the Art-Deco building of the club itself, hence the softly rounded corners, spiral staircase and gently arched win-

dows. The other inspiration was the exterior green space made available for the library, providing an attractive vista from within and the freedom to perhaps take a book out to one of the seating arrange-

LIBRARY: Cricket Club of India

TYPE:
Institutional building and interior
AREA:
5000 sq ft
STATUS:
Competition entry



ments designed outside. The architects prefer to consider this addition to the club as a 'house of books' rather than a library. The idea is apparent at the entrance. This façade is composed of a



View of children's reading area at mezzanine showing sun pipes and light wells to floor below.



large series of timber-framed glass doors on central floor pivots, punctuated by fixed glazing within arched teak-wood frames. No one could mistake the identity of the premises they were entering! There were practical issues

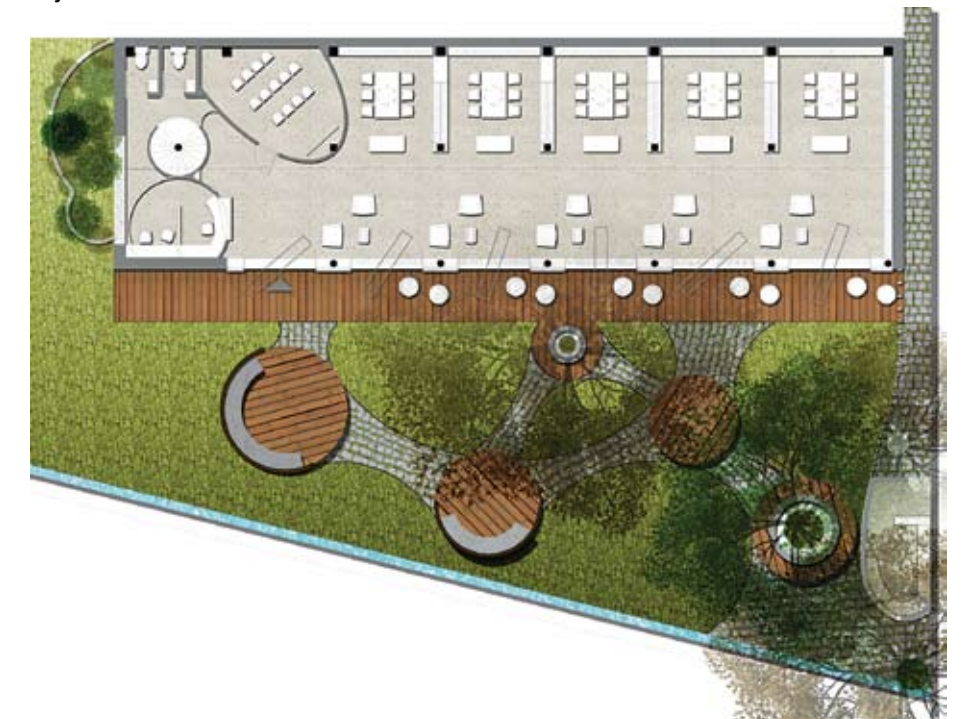
to be accommodated as well. The book-carrying capacity of the library was to be increased by 40 per cent and seating for a substantially greater number of users than currently possible. Space was also created for an audio-visual room, an



informal reading area for children in the mezzanine. Once completed, the library will provide enhanced capacity for readers, in a harmonious intermingling of inside and outside and a valuable addition to the club facilities.

Pravir Sethi's next project in Dubai is one particularly close to his heart, fulfilling many aspects of his design philosophy that are extremely important to him. So we have requested him to tell the story of this project in his own words.

informal reading area along the pivoted bookshelf windows, with reception and AV room beyond.





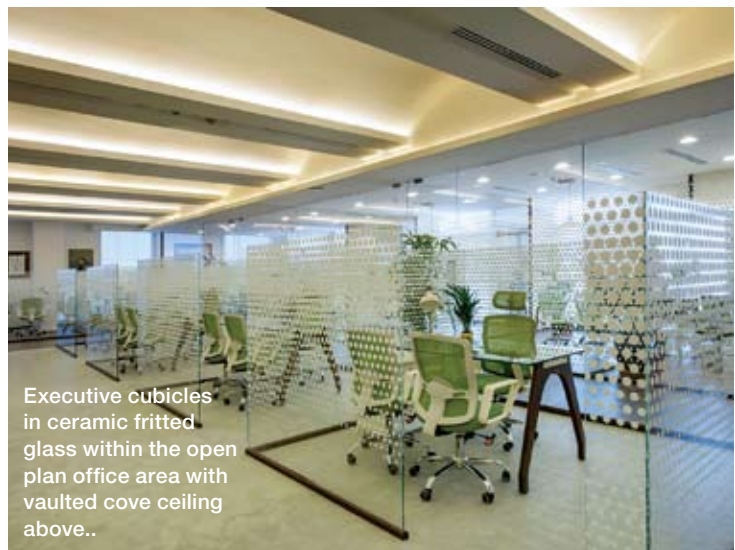
Merint Group, HQ, Dubai

TYPE:
Commercial Interior

AREA:
10,000 sq ft

STATUS:
Completed

The Merint Group of companies will consolidate their 5 different offices across the UAE into the purpose-built 40,000 sq ft building in Dubai Investment Park, incorporating warehouse and factory floor facilities along with 10,000 sq



Executive cubicles in ceramic fritted glass within the open plan office area with vaulted cove ceiling above..

ft of office and reception area, and approximately 25000 sq ft of showroom space.

The Group's main business vertical is glass, with Merint being one of the largest distributor's for Saint Gobain glass in the Middle East. Taking a cue from this, and reinforcing the idea that one's workplace should speak

about what one does; much of the design incorporates glass in innovative ways.

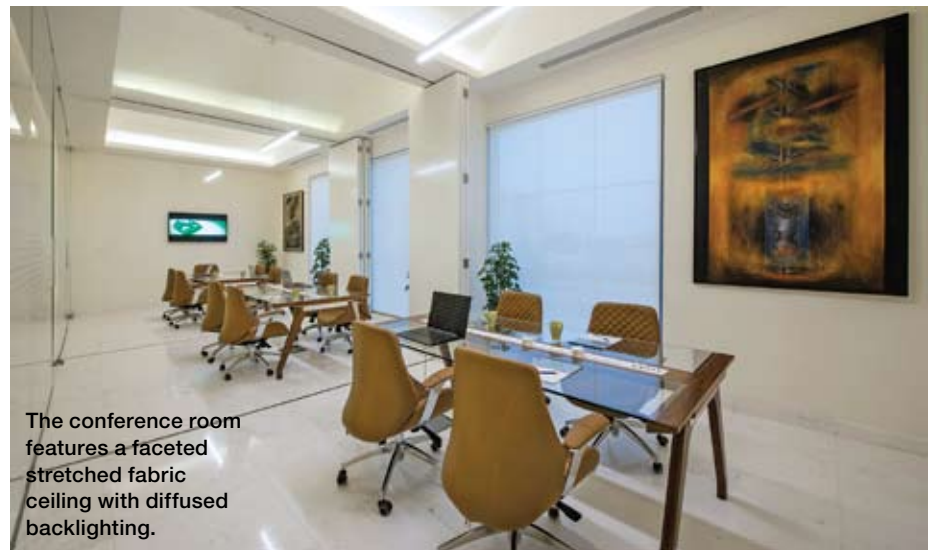
The ground floor features a tall and airy lobby into the building, where a reception desk is separated from a cantilevered steel staircase by a single 6m sheet of extra clear frameless glass. The apron of the reception desk is constructed by



The cantilevered MS staircase leading from ground to first floor is contained behind the 6m tall frameless glass.



Landscaped area under the main staircase, fronted by the 6m tall frameless glass.



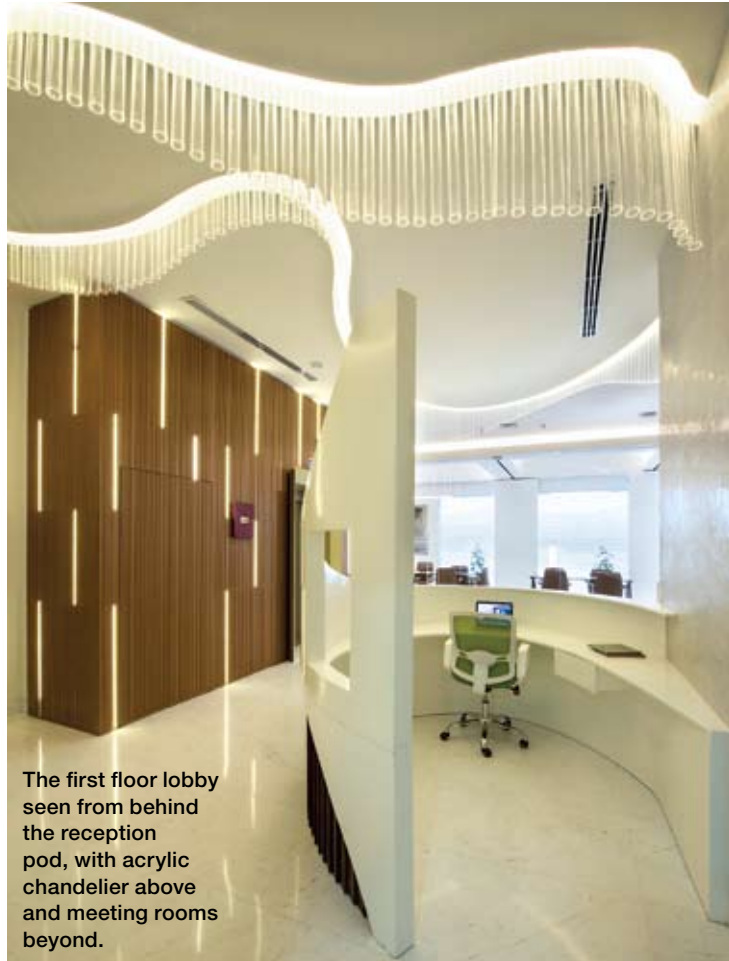
The conference room features a faceted stretched fabric ceiling with diffused backlighting.



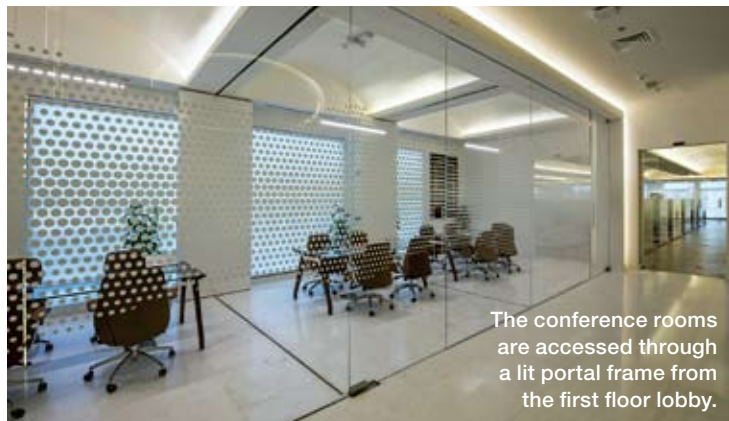
An elliptical pod in white lacquer and timber forms the first floor reception desk, placed eccentrically under a chandelier made of hollow acrylic tubes.

stacking 116 sheets of thick clear glass, each laser cut to a distinct profile and backlit to form a glowing contoured landscape. The ceiling features an installation of panels

made up of fabric and metal mesh laminated between clear glass and suspended at varying heights using aluminium profiles housing strip LED lighting.



The first floor lobby seen from behind the reception pod, with acrylic chandelier above and meeting rooms beyond.



The conference rooms are accessed through a lit portal frame from the first floor lobby.

In the firm's own lobby, at the mezzanine level above, the custom-made reception pod sits eccentrically within a sinuous chandelier, made up of hollow acrylic tubes following a sweeping curve. After prototyping, glass was rejected here in

favour of acrylic due to weight, and also the effect of total internal reflection which rendered glowing circular edges at the end of clear tubes.

The studio designed almost all the furniture including work-stations (linear and



Open plan office area with bespoke 120-workstation in foreground.



The ground floor reception desk is framed by a lacquered glass box, punctuated by openings.

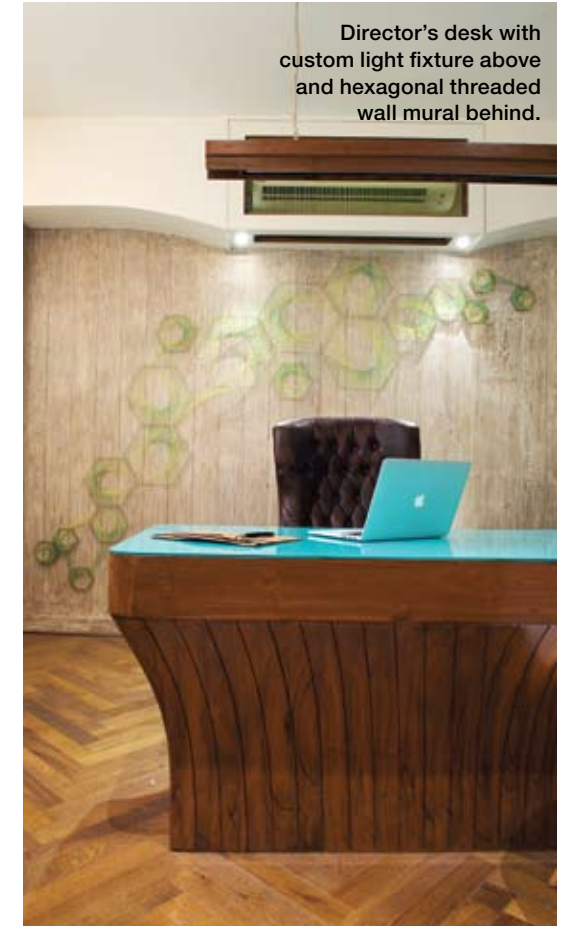


These pictures of the reception desk during its assembly show 116 uniquely shaped glass pieces stacked to form an undulating 3d surface.

120 degrees), desks, storage units, meeting tables, etc. All the tables have tops in extra clear glass, joined to the base using clear UV glue. All partitions are in frameless glass with a customized pattern enameled on using the ceramic frit technique. The density of the pattern varies to provide differing levels of privacy.



The view from entrance shows the reception and cubicles beyond, separated using loom partitions of diminishing heights.



Director's desk with custom light fixture above and hexagonal threaded wall mural behind.

Krimpex Office

TYPE:
Commercial Interior

AREA:
800 sq ft

STATUS:
Completed

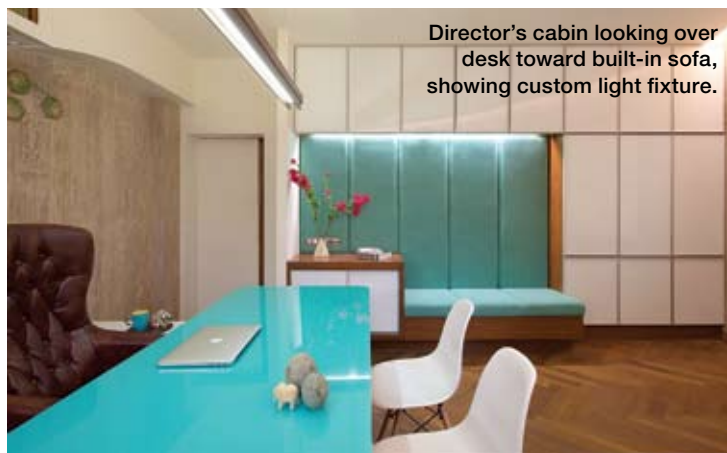
Contextuality at play again in the small office in this trading company, originally a part of a silk mill. The brief was relatively simple – renovation of the director's cabin and creating more efficient space in the rest of the office.

Having decided to focus on

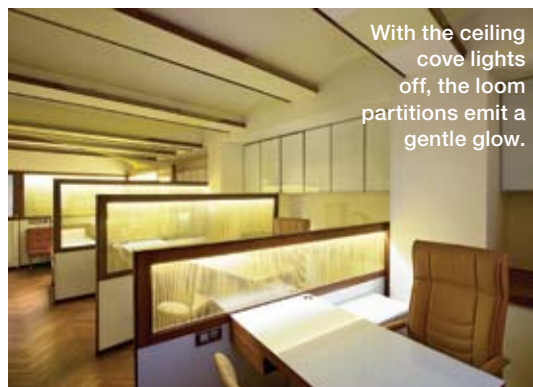
the textile history of the company, the signs are already clear at the entrance, where threads are stitched into the veneer to create text, using solid and void to form the company's name. Inside the office, the partitions dividing the seating spaces are threads by threads encased

in glass, lit from below. Overhead, in the false ceiling, the play of threads continues, twisted between fluted wooden mouldings. This flow of tensile threads not only provides flow and movement but also seems to tie the space together, according to the architect.

profile



Director's cabin looking over desk toward built-in sofa, showing custom light fixture.



With the ceiling cove lights off, the loom partitions emit a gentle glow.



View toward entrance showing reception and waiting area with pantry beyond, and parabolic arc formed in ceiling installation.



The corner of director's cabin features a floor lamp and seating for visitors.



Director's cabin with walnut engineered wood flooring in herringbone pattern and antique white wood panelling to walls.

To quote again from the architects brief, the mural in the director's cabin is a study in hexagons inspired by the spirographs of childhood, and other specially shaped hexagonal threaded artworks lie loosely around the office. All the thread used is what was originally

used to make the harness of the Jacquard looms, and has carbon fibre woven into it, imparting it with tensile strength and an antistatic property that repels dust.

Thus, the office, with the use of contemporary technology, both preserves and innovates on a past craft. 