

IN CONVERSATION

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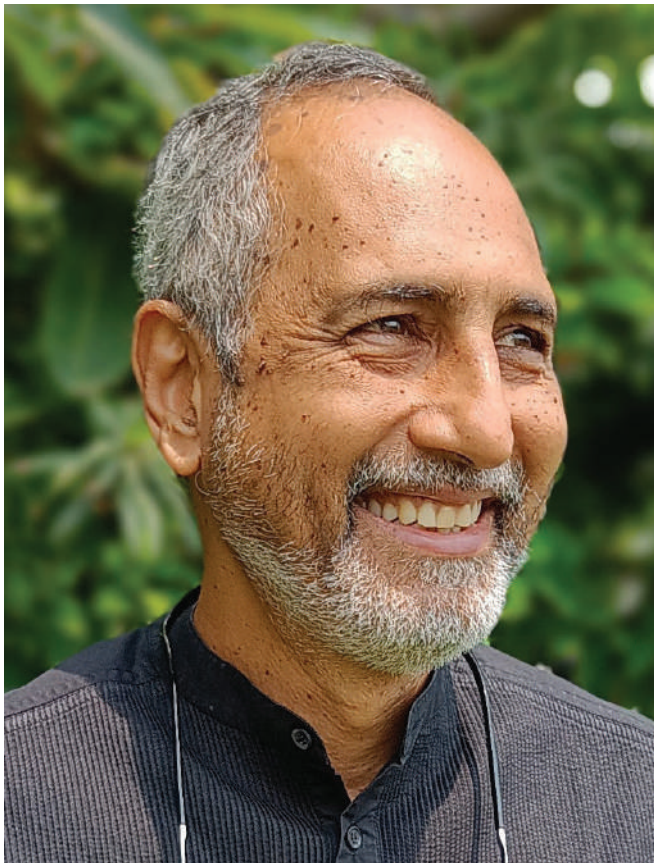
Abin Chaudhari, Abin Design Studio

Rahul Kadri, IMK Architects

A&B

The evolution of a legacy

Rahul Kadri is a Partner & Principal Architect at IMK Architects, an architecture and urban design practice founded in 1957 with offices in Mumbai and Bengaluru. Rahul Kadri took over the reins of the practice from his father I. M. Kadri in the 1990s after completing a graduate diploma in architecture from the Academy of Architecture, Mumbai, and a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Michigan, USA. With Kadri at the helm, IMK Architects has evolved to focus its practice on social consciousness and urban ecological sensitivity.



The 1990s were marked by significant shifts in India's socio-cultural landscape in a newly liberalised economy. Models of patronage and typologies of projects evolved while modern technology made inroads into the architecture and construction industry. Concerns of climate change emerged in mainstream discourse as well. At such times, IMK was the first architectural practice in the world to adopt SCRUM, a unique, collaborative design process, which involves intense workshops with all project stakeholders. It helps to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of holistic design solutions from buildings to city master-plans - vibrant, dynamic, healthy and robust spaces where people



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thrive. In light of this, Kadri's work has been widely acclaimed with multiple felicitations from the Indian Institute of Architects, the Times Network and the Construction World and Builder Awards 2020. Most recently, IMK Architects was honoured as the '*Supreme Winner*' as well as the winner in the '*Public Building Exterior*' category at the **2021 Surface Design Awards, London.**

"Since my father is an architect, I was exposed to architecture at a very young age. However, while growing up, I never wanted to be an architect—I was fond of horses and wanted a stud farm. Later, in boarding school at the Sherwood College, Nainital, I spent most of my time walking around in the

forest and that's where my love affair with nature started. This early relationship with nature infused within me a deep passion to create buildings and spaces in harmony with their natural context. At around the age of fifteen, I remember my father taking me and my siblings for a drive around the city of Mumbai. He wanted to show us some of his buildings. He took us on three drives, and it was really those drives that made me realise what a difference it makes when you start looking at buildings in a different way and my love for buildings began from there.

I went on to study architecture at the Academy of Architecture, Mumbai, and then moved to the University of Michigan,



The Club Mahindra Madikeri Resort, Coorg | Credits- Rajesh Vora.

USA, for a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning, where I was influenced by the work and writings of British-American architect and design theorist Christopher Alexander and American architect Charles Moore. Their ideas of holistic architecture and social architecture particularly influenced me. Reading 'The Pattern Language' and 'The Timeless Way of Building' were the biggest watershed moments in my life. The books spoke about human behaviour and geometry, how design affects what we do, and how patterns link to patterns of behaviour. That way of thinking really grew on me and I have been growing that way of thinking ever since.

I was so fascinated by Christopher Alexander's writing that after graduating from the University of Michigan, I landed up at his door and expressed a desire to work with him. He told me that I was lucky as he needed someone to join him the next day. I worked with him for around 6 months during which time I learnt so much from him.

In 1989, I returned to India and began working with my father, slowly imbibing my own approach into the work of the firm. My first semi-independent project was an engineering college in Salem. The project helped me learn to trust my instincts and



Symbiosis International University, Pune. | Credits- Rajesh Vora.

to understand that I needed to develop my own style that was different from my father's.

However, my first independent project - a notable milestone in my career - was the Club Mahindra Madikeri resort at Coorg. We won a design competition against six architectural firms to secure the project. The Madikeri Resort in Coorg, Karnataka is a hospitality project that was designed for Club Mahindra Holidays and Resorts. The design takes cues from the indigenous Kodava culture and upholds biophilia as a central element to create a site-sensitive habitat that is in harmony with nature. With

maximum exposure to nature, the soul of the design lies in the interaction between people and the outdoors. Through the revival of the age-old vernacular techniques, the resort creates a green abode amidst the hills.

The Symbiosis International University, Pune, is another important project in the journey of our practice - yet another project we won through a competition. The campus is home to 1000 students and houses educational and administration functions for four faculties - the Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, the Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication,



Rahul conducting a workshop with members of a Housing Society in Mumbai for a self-redevelopment project.



Rahul conducting a workshop with members of the Treeshade Cooperative Housing Society in Mumbai.



Symbiosis International University, Pune. | Credits- Rajesh Vora.

the Symbiosis Institute of Telecom Management and the Symbiosis Institute of Photography – in addition to an auditorium and convention centre, a library, and housing, dining, and recreational facilities for students and staff. We designed the buildings and systems to respond to local climate and ecology so they would integrate seamlessly with the landscape, fostering a harmonious relationship between people and nature, while a hierarchical network of open spaces cultivates social interaction and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Another milestone project is the master planning and campus design for the Sona College of Technology in Salem. The campus master plan and all the buildings within have been designed by IMK Architects over a span of over 3 decades in close association with the client.

Discovering the SCRUM process in my search for the effective and efficient delivery of holistic design solutions across varied scales of projects - from buildings to city master-plans - was another breakthrough in our journey. SCRUM, simply put, is a framework for project management that



The Club Mahindra Madikeri Resort, Coorg. | Credits- Rajesh Vora.

emphasizes teamwork, accountability and iterative progress toward a well-defined goal. This process focuses on bringing clarity to our client's vision. Intense workshops with the clients and all stakeholders help to identify and establish the desired brief; following which requirements are analyzed and prioritized. Together with the clients, tasks of high priority are identified and addressed first, so as to enable us to deliver high quality in a tight time frame.

I enjoy projects which are challenging and have scope for innovation – those that have the potential to fulfil modern society's

growing demands and can be made future-proof. We constantly seek to make places where people thrive. We don't create places or use geometries only for visual effect. It is the relationship between human aspiration, activities, and the geometry of space that interests us. In recent years, we have also been experimenting with design processes that strive to utilize the full creative potential of each member of the team.

I believe that it is imperative for all public projects to truly be representative of the needs and aspirations of the cities and the people that they serve. Participation of



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citizens is key to creating a shared future. As we shape cities of the future, we need to encourage diversity in thought and value local knowledge. As we shape cities of the future, we need to encourage diversity in thought and value local knowledge."

I.M. Kadri was born in Ahmedabad in 1929, finished his schooling in New Delhi at Jamia Millia Islamia and completed his civil engineering degree at the Engineering College of the University of Pune in 1953. Driven by the belief that architecture shapes society and human life over time, he set up his architectural practice I.M. Kadri

Architects (now IMK Architects) in 1957 at Churchgate, Mumbai, and later expanded it in 1971 to Bengaluru and Muscat. Practicing in a newly-independent India that witnessed mammoth transformations and ideological shifts in a brief span, Mr. Kadri's work navigated questions of tradition and modernity and business and politics. ■