

This & that

Architect of the Month

“PEOPLE PAY US TO HAVE SO MUCH FUN, WHAT MORE CAN WE ASK FOR?”

Architect Rahul Kadri's design ideas have changed the architecture of urban India. He shares his journey.



By RIDHI KALE

In the world of design and architecture there are only a few who haven't heard about IMK Architects. The practice was founded in 1957 with offices in Mumbai and Bangalore, lead by architect IM Kadri. Today his son, partner and principal architect Rahul Kadri is at the helm. Some may say architecture was in his blood, however, growing up Rahul did not want to be an architect—he was fond of horses and wanted a stud farm. “I was in boarding school, most of the time walking around in the forest that's where my love affair with nature started,” he says. Then his father took him and his siblings for a drive, when he was 15. “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 that what a difference it makes when you start looking at building at a different way and my love for buildings began from there,” he says.



STANDING TALL

Architect Rahul Kadri (left); National Judicial Academy, Bhopal (above) by IMK Architects

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Then when Rahul went to Academy of Architecture, Mumbai, the wonderful teachers made him fall in love with architecture all over again," says Rahul. In his second year in college he studied Christopher Alexander, a physicist who later became an architect; he was a professor at Berkley. "Two books by him *A Pattern Language* and *The Timeless Way of Building* that spoke about human behaviour and geometry; how design affects what we do, 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. Our designs are focused on people flourishing and people thriving," he explains.

When Rahul went to study urban planning at University of Michigan, USA, he landed up at Christopher Alexander's door and expressed his desire to work with him. "He told me that I was lucky as he needed someone to join him tomorrow," says Rahul, who worked with him for six months. Alexander believed that architects should make things; so when he was making furniture for Herman Miller, Rahul turned into a carpenter, when he was designing a house for a teacher and painter, Rahul along with two other architects turned into the masons, carpenters, concrete layers, labourers... "I really learnt a lot," says Rahul. He returned to India in 89 and soon took over his father's firm.

ROOM FOR MORE

The library and admin block at Sona College of Technology, Salem, Tamil Nadu (above); Club Mahindra Madikeri Resort in Coorg (below); a render of Sona Vistaas, Bangalore (top right); Yashraj Studio in Mumbai

Rahul worked with his father for 12 years imbibing his unique design approach and slowly added his own. "Back then, we were not allowed to participate in competitions. My father believed that his repertoire of designing over 100 buildings was enough for someone to select him for a project," explains Rahul. But the industry had changed and those in charge of selecting architects felt inept to make a decision without a competition. So Rahul entered a competition for a Club Mahindra project in Coorg, on the sly and won it as well. "At that time I entered two or three crucial competitions—one for Symbiosis where 60 architects participated, another one for Club Mahindra and a township by Sahara group in Nagpur. These three became our clients for a long time," he says.

Photograph by RAJESH VORA



So, how many projects does he like to work on at a time? "We have five great teams. Each team is led by a director and design manager," says Rahul. The team comprises 30 members and Rahul is particular that even the junior most's voice is heard. Therefore the firm is able to work on almost 12 projects at a time. "My job is to keep raising the bar, and keep questioning," he says.

Currently IMK Architects is working on completing a library and a university admin building for Sona College of Technology in Salem. "It's a campus we have been working on since 1993. This library is set to be the finest in the country. The client wanted to focus on how to bring people back to the library and make it an important place in their lives," says Rahul. In addition the firm is working on a residential complex in Bangalore, Club Mahindra resorts, outside Shimla and

Palna and a forest trail in for the BMC in the Malabar Hill. Rahul and his team are also working on safe-redevelopment of residential buildings. "Many buildings need urgent repairs. Developers aren't able to cope. We help societies self develop; prioritise what they want, help them get the loans and sell for them as well. This gives societies much better deal, with 50 per cent extra area, larger corpus for maintenance in the future, among other things. We don't get paid after a year or so of pretty hard work," he says.

That's not all. Rahul's team has proposed a design solution for Mumbai slums and the government has agreed to include the firm's policies. But is this enough for Rahul? Certainly not. We can't wait for what's coming next.

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