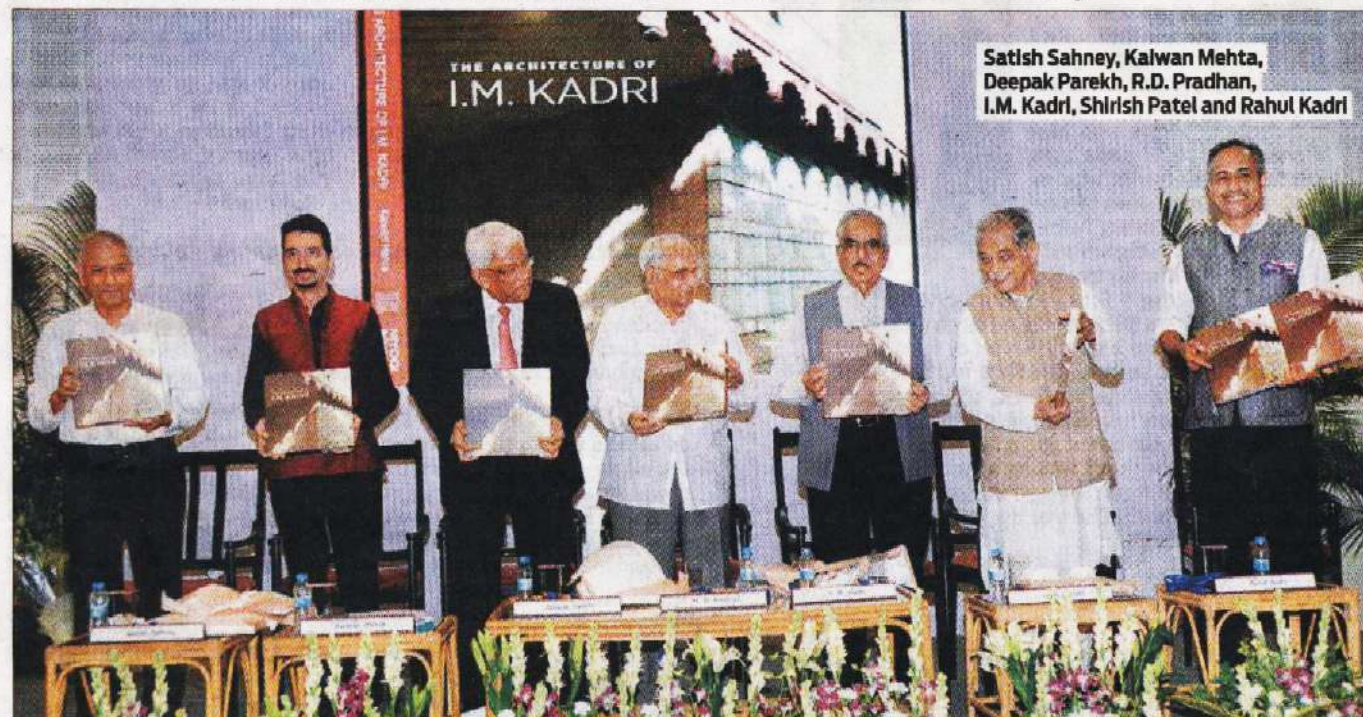


An architectural legacy

Renowned Mumbai-based architect **I. M. Kadri's** body of work titled *The Architecture of I. M. Kadri*, was launched at **Nehru Centre** recently



Satish Sahney, Kalwan Mehta, Deepak Parekh, R.D. Pradhan, I.M. Kadri, Shrish Patel and Rahul Kadri

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If you were to list some of the most intriguing and uniquely built buildings of South Mumbai, chances are that you'd be listing structures built by legendary architect, Iftikhar M. Kadri. The renowned architect, known for his path-breaking work over the past five decades, has designed prominent commercial, residential and hospitality buildings in India and other countries. In Mumbai, some of his popular works include Shivsagar Estate, Brighton Apartments, Islam Gymkhana, Nehru Centre, National Association for the Blind, and many others.

At a recently held event at Nehru Centre, Kadri's body of work was presented in the form of a book—a literary and visual masterpiece titled *The Architecture of I. M. Kadri*. The book, penned by Mumbai-based author, Kaiwan Mehta, was launched amidst esteemed company such as Satish Sahney, CEO, Nehru Centre; Deepak Parekh, Chairman, HDFC Ltd.; Shrish Patel, Sr. Structural Consultant; R. D. Pradhan; apart from I. M. Kadri, Rahul Kadri and the author himself.

The legacy

Mehta, who has studied architecture, literature, Indian aesthetics and cultural studies, shared how privileged he felt to have the opportunity to put together a volume representing Kadri's work. "It is with great happiness that I stand here to present a celebration of architectural legacy, to produce a certain kind of understanding of the journey of a man's work."

Kadri's work marks and punctuates the architectural journey in India, believes Mehta. He asks, "What can a large body of work tell us about history?" going on to explain how Kadri extended the potential of architectural material—an example of which was the curtain *jaali* wall of the Otter's Club built in 1973, achieved by cutting against the grain of the stone.

A complete ecosystem

Apart from his talent for creating intriguing facades, Kadri is also cognizant of the fact that he is

PROMINENT SOUTH MUMBAI BUILDINGS BY I. M. KADRI ARCHITECTS:

- >> Jivan and Maneck
- >> Shivsagar Estate
- >> Brighton Apartments
- >> Islam Gymkhana
- >> Grand Paradi Apartments
- >> Nehru Centre
- >> National Association for the Blind
- >> Haveli House
- >> Happy home and School for the Blind
- >> CEAT Mahal
- >> Swapnalok
- >> Hochst House
- >> Shanmukhananda Hall
- >> Sahayadri Guest House
- >> Petit Hall
- >> Haj House

building for the masses and that his buildings contribute to the environment, and not compete instead. "Buildings should have an identity, not a placard" is a famous quote by the celebrated architect. One of the many examples of this philosophy is reflected in Nehru Centre with its expansive lawns, as explained by Satish Sahney, CEO, Nehru Centre.

The secret tool

A bit later, Rahul Kadri, the principal architect of IMK Architects, and son of I. M. Kadri,

shared the "secret" to his father's success by revealing how he would carry an A6 paper with him for drawing the masterplan or design of a building. This showed the focus, clarity and preciseness, with which I. M. Kadri worked. Rahul also expressed gratitude towards the team that worked on the book, right from the photographer to the designer. An exhibition of I. M. Kadri's works were also displayed at Nehru Centre on the occasion of the book launch. shradha.shirodkar@dnaindia.net

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BOMBAY SHOWCASE

A new book that focuses on architect IM Kadri's work also aims to uncover the city's relationship with urban development

CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

SCALING HEIGHTS architecture

Can the story of a city be pieced together from its buildings? Critic and theorist Kaiwan Mehta certainly thinks so. Mehta, who writes widely on urban design and visual culture, explores the relationship between development and the city's buildings in his new book, *The Architecture of I.M. Kadri*.

In telling the story of Kadri, Mehta also hopes to tell the story of the city's complex negotiation with space, change, and beauty. "Bombay hasn't yet found its rightful place in the narrative of modern Indian architecture," says Mehta. "Bombay is, unfortunately, seen primarily as a commercial centre, unlike Delhi, where the big cultural institutions and public buildings were set up immediately after Independence."

The book was a project that was commissioned by Iftikhar M Kadri, the founder, partner, and principal architect of IMK Architects, who began his practice in Mumbai in the 1950s.

"When I was invited to review Kadri's work," says Mehta, "I was told that I could play with the material for two months. After that, if I felt charged enough to write about it, I could take it on or drop it. The questions I had were never points of anxiety. They became opportunities for rich conversation."

"Kaiwan has worked meticulously," says Kadri. "He has gone through my archives, and looked at each and every drawing. He went all over India to see the buildings I have designed."

While the book does refer to Kadri's projects in Delhi, Goa, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Tajikistan, and the Middle East, Mehta quite firmly places Kadri in the shoes of a Bombay architect. The architect has designed apartment complexes, office towers as well as recreational spaces. However, his most identifiable imprint on Bombay is perhaps the pineapple-shaped Nehru Centre building, a source of delightful surprise in a city dotted with skyscrapers on one hand and slums on the other.

Architect Rahul Mehrotra, who recently co-curated an exhibition with Mehta and Ranjit Hoskote, titled *The State of Architecture: Practices and Processes in India*, at the city's National Gallery of Modern Art, says, "Kadri's career runs parallel to Mumbai, developing in the late 1950s and through to the 70s and 80s; a period when apartment living was proliferating through the city. Kadri combined pragmatism with luxury in his projects, and invented a range of apartment types for the city. Prominent among these for me are the Jivan and Maneck towers and Swapnalok, the luxurious stepped terraced apartments which blur the difference between bungalow and apartment living."

Delhi-based photographer Ram Rahman, son of architect Habib Rahman (a contemporary of Kadri's), says, "One would be critical of Kadri's work as an architect if one looked at the range



Kaiwan Mehta (left) tells the story of Bombay's complex negotiation with space, change, and beauty in his new book, *The Architecture of I.M. Kadri*, a project commissioned by Iftikhar M Kadri (centre), the founder, partner, and principal architect of IMK Architects. — PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Kadri combines pragmatism with luxury in his projects. — PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of the lens of the kind of modernist work that was happening in Delhi and Chandigarh after Independence. However, it is important to understand that Kadri's work is closely linked to the city's culture and ethos. Kadri's use of Muslim cultural tropes such as arches and jaalis is also a unique

kind of stylistic exploration. Not every architect should be expected to engage with hardcore Bauhaus modernism."

The book discusses how Kadri's education as an engineer gave him "a solid foundation in the art of construction," and "enervable confidence in engaging

with structure and materiality." Mehta talks about Kadri's "Eklavya-Dronacharya moment" as a student at the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi when Karl Malte von Heinz, the Austrian-German architect, was designing the university buildings. "Kadri was enchanted with the way Heinz was carrying out his tasks at the construction site. Kadri followed Heinz at work, observing his work and actions."

The two kept in touch later when Kadri went to Pune for his engineering degree and Heinz advised the young man to travel widely to broaden his horizons. Taking his advice, Kadri travelled across Europe to see the architectural styles emerging there.

On his return to India, Kadri was offered a job by Phirozshah Dubash, an influential businessman who ran the construction company, Anderson and Dawn. Kadri was offered a job as an engineer to gather some experience before setting up his own architectural practice.

"The company had acquired," writes Mehta, "a plot of land at Nepean Sea Road to build an apartment building. As the company and Kadri were both unhappy with the proposed design, Kadri offered to design the building himself." The building was called Brighton, and the design included terrace gardens as well as a swimming pool.

Kadri decided to stay back in Mumbai, and he has lived here ever since. "I have stayed here for almost 60 years," says Kadri. "I am 86 now. I wish I was 40 instead. I could have done a lot more work. I haven't done enough."

Picture perfect

Rajesh Vora's photographs illuminate the finer architectural details in IM Kadri's work.

"The fact that I had to photograph projects of IM Kadri built as early as 1959 and spanning over 50 years was a not-to-miss opportunity for any photographer but it was equally challenging. The three of us — architect, writer and photographer — were of different age groups, al-

most 20-25 years apart. When it came to selecting photographs, there would be obvious personal choices, and to maintain visual uniformity would be a constant challenge.

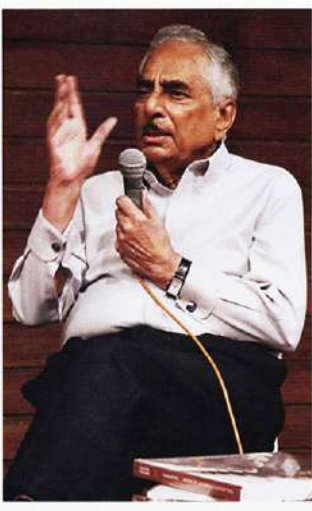
These buildings were built to last. They are still making their proud presence felt in the contemporary surroundings. I am sure, in those times, there were rules and by-laws governing the

built space. But still, one can find the luxury of the use of space and, at the same time, consideration of the most minute detail in all its aspects. Above all, there was no greed seen in these buildings but only monumental work standing tall."

The Architecture of I. M. Kadri launches at **Nehru Centre, Worli. Time: 6.30 pm onwards**

The Architecture of I.M. Kadri

By Kaiwan Mehta
Publisher: Niyogi Books



IFTIKHAR M. KADRI, the architect of well-known buildings such as Shivsagar Estate, The Happy Home and School for the Blind, Ceat House, Otters Club, Jivan and Maneck, as well as Grand Paradi Towers, has worked in the urban landscape since the 1950s.

Kaiwan Mehta, architect, who has authored the book (and is also Managing Editor of *Domus* India), says "This book is rather unique, in that it is not just a monograph, which generally uses the format of a few essays followed by photographs of a body of work. This has been imagined as a full book, in which the architect gets someone else to review his work."



Mehta also finds that Kadri's much criticised engagement with ornament actually functions on a much deeper level, in which he understands the very role that ornament plays. It is not just a gimmick, or slapped on to the facade of Mehta's

PhD thesis is 'Ornament', his opinion comes from a position of a deeper understanding of this aspect of architecture. In Mehta's reckoning, Kadri's use of ornamentation has value. It comes from the experience of being both within the structure as well as viewing it from outside.

Says Shimul Javer Kadri: "I find Kadri's position in the history of Indian architecture quite distinctive. He worked at the same time as the other 'Masters' of Modern Architecture in India — Correa and Doshi — but in a very different genre, evolving his own distinctly 'Indian' buildings, rather dismissive of the very 'modernist' atmosphere in which his contemporaries were thriving. His buildings in the late 1950s and early 1960s were modernist and often veered towards the international style prevailing in the postcolonial era, but progressed towards elements and motifs that were distinctly 'Indian' in character.



Nehru Centre

Islam Gymkhana

National Judicial Academy

Mumbai, Mehta began the journey of writing this book by standing with Shimul at Piyadashirini Park on Nepean Sea Road where they surveyed Kadri's work from Grand Paradi on the crest of the hill to Swapnalok, nestled into the hill, to Jal Darshan at the bottom of the rocky cliffside, to Jivan and Maneck sweeping against the wind with their broad curving overhangs, to Haveli with its 'hanging gardens'.

A journey from the airport to southern Ceat Tyres — a little taste of decorative opulence in the sea of modernism that Mumbai has spawned, and then a more varied encounter at Worli with the Nehru Centre building — often the symbolic representation for the city and the very modern sleek Shivsagar Estate buildings and Happy Home across them. All three stylistically very different but memorable icons for their cause.

If Kadri's aesthetic has ever been misunderstood, Kaiwan's endeavour is to set the misperception right. **16**