

FEEDING THE MIND

museums have always delighted the eye and the mind with their contents. but architects are now ensuring that the structures housing the collections are just as noteworthy.

Museums have been regarded

as a treasure chest of history, culture and traditions throughout the centuries. As interest in museums and art galleries grows, people have started to move beyond the conventional mindset.

Ar. Sourabh Gupta, Founder, Studio Archohm, Noida, says it well, "Museums are usually built for the public, assigned by governments or non-profit organisations. Their value systems and philosophies are qualitative or quantitative, and working on museums requires a sensitive understanding of the subject, its position in society and its relevance in today's context – philosophically, programmatically and technologically."



the museum of european and mediterranean civilisations, france | rudy ricciotti architecte, france

photography : kilian o'sullivan



berkeley art museum and pacific film archive, (bampfa), california | diller scofidio + renfro, new york

photography : elizabeth daniels and iwan bann



bharatpur museum, bharatpur | abha narain lambah associates, mumbai

working of the 'museum' typology

Designing a museum is always an exciting challenge for an architect and encompasses an eclectic range. Ar. Abha Narain Lambah, Founder, Abha Narain Lambah Associates, Mumbai, explains, "We have designed museums ranging from archaeology, sculpture, textiles, political history, memorials and period rooms. Also, we have worked on creating interpretative narratives, amenities, signage and graphic design for these projects, usually heritage buildings. Our projects range from historical palaces converted into museums - such as the Chowmahalla Palace in Hyderabad, while other sites have been the homes of political leaders such as Mani Bhavan in Mumbai, Teen Murti Bhavan in Delhi and Anand Bhavan in Allahabad."

How has a museum changed over time, and what are the changes to be expected? Ar. Shimul Javeri Kadri, Principal Architect, SJK Architects, Mumbai, says, "Museums are no longer an elite box for scholars and enthusiasts, but have now transformed into a community-based space. Since they contain antiquities, security is a paramount aspect. Due to the climate and humidity, air-conditioning is a must to preserve the antiquities."

Speaking of museums as a place of heritage and culture, Ar. Abhishek Ray, Founder, Matrika Design Collaborative, Mumbai, says, "Our work started with a temporary exhibition centre that documented Mumbai's history at the CSMVS (formerly, the Prince of Wales Museum). Apart from that, we have worked on art galleries on miniature paintings, decorative arts, religious objects, arms and armour."

Ar. Soumitro Ghosh and Ar. Nisha Mathew Ghosh, Founders, Mathew and Ghosh Architects, Bengaluru, share the extensive possibilities in the field. "We have worked on a public urban park set in a colonial-era Central Jail, the National War & Military Museum, and the Max Mueller Bhavan Goethe Institute."

The space itself must provide more than a simple display, as Ar. Sonali Rastogi, Founding Partner, Morphogenesis, Delhi, says, "To attract tourists, we need a better mechanism where our work becomes part of the global discourse. India's culture, art and heritage need to be brought to the fore."

scheduled monument of sutton hoo, the national trust, suffolk | nissen richards studio, london





bronze gallery, ministry of culture, national museum, new delhi | matrika design collaborative, mumbai

creating the museum space

When architects design a museum, they have to grapple with how to display the artefacts, not simply as objects. Ar. Abha Narain Lambah says, "Architecture has always been a responsive medium to social, economic and cultural events along with functionality and style. They are so expressed to become the inherent character of a building being restored. We must not simply limit design to learning but also familiarising the audience with their heritage."

A deep connection to the past is key, according to Ar. Siddharth Bathla, Creative Director and Co-founder, Design factory India, Noida, who says, "I believe that taking inspiration from local culture isn't the only way. Our design must be original, accessible and tangible that connects us to our history."

Ar. Maanas & Nidhi Vanwari, Founders, Vanwari Architects, Mumbai, say it's a question of balance. "We must continue to take inspiration from our historical traditions, to build architecture that learns from the past and resonates with the present."

Ar. Pippa Nissen, Director, Nissen Richards Studio, London, prefers a collaborative approach for a culture-appropriate space. "We start projects by researching both the subject matter and the buildings to strike the right balance, and our concept stage is about finding options and variety within the approaches. We must be careful when dealing with colour, tone and light, so that we conjure a culturally-appropriate atmosphere. We must test these aspects at a 1:1 scale with mock-ups and prototypes, and also invite different user groups, collaborators and experts to comment."



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museum of socialism, jayaprakash narayan interpretation centre, lucknow | archohm studio, noida



jamiat ulama-i-hind museum, (juh), new delhi | design factory india, gurugram

shrujan gallery, kutch | matrika design collaborative, mumbai



thinking it through

Once the architect has received the brief, how is the design executed? Ar. Narain Lambah answers, "A museum needs a visitor-centric approach, which is reflected in its design philosophy and experience. In a historical building, where the spatial layout is predetermined, the functional spaces depend on the available space for display, storytelling, interpretation and engagement. The challenge is to build a structure that blends its historical character with modern technology, respects the context and allows the art to coexist."

Ar. Ray adds, "In a culturally-diverse country like ours, we have historical and regional influences that always render a unique influence. Our solutions involve museum graphics, appropriate lighting, media, acoustics and micro-environments."

The museum space has evolved, according to Ar. Gupta, "Traditionally, museums were simply repositories of inanimate objects. Today, they have evolved into immersive experiences. In-depth research, extracts, programmatic inserts and design roadmaps are only some of the elements used, along with high, low and resting points along the journey. Public spaces such as shops, amphitheatres and cafeterias are also important, along with temporary galleries and versatile spaces."



lino tagliapietra glass studio, seattle | graham baba architects, seattle

materials, design and inspiration

Before designing a museum, many Indian architects have harked back to institutions abroad for inspiration. Ar. Narain Lambah says, "One of my favourite projects would be The Musée D'Orsay, a derelict railway station converted into a cultural centre in the 1980s. The Musée du Louvre is a royal palace exhibiting the finest art in the world, and has a new grand entrance with a central lobby space."

Ar. Ray also looked to Europe for guidance. "We were inspired by the Musée D'Orsay, MACBA Barcelona, The Porsche and Mercedes Museums in Stuttgart, the Museum of Communication at Frankfurt and the Glass Flowers gallery at the Harvard Botanical Museum."

Ar. Gupta says, "The use of pure materials subconsciously echoes the unpretentious character of the museum, along with promoting its iconicity and timelessness. Material choices reiterate the building's personality for its visual appeal, ease of maintenance and immutability needed for a public space. We take inspiration from Bilbao and the Guggenheim in New York, Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Chichu Museum by Tadao Ando and Kunsthau Bregenz by Peter Zumthor."

the museum of modern art, new york | diller scofidio + renfro and gensler, new york

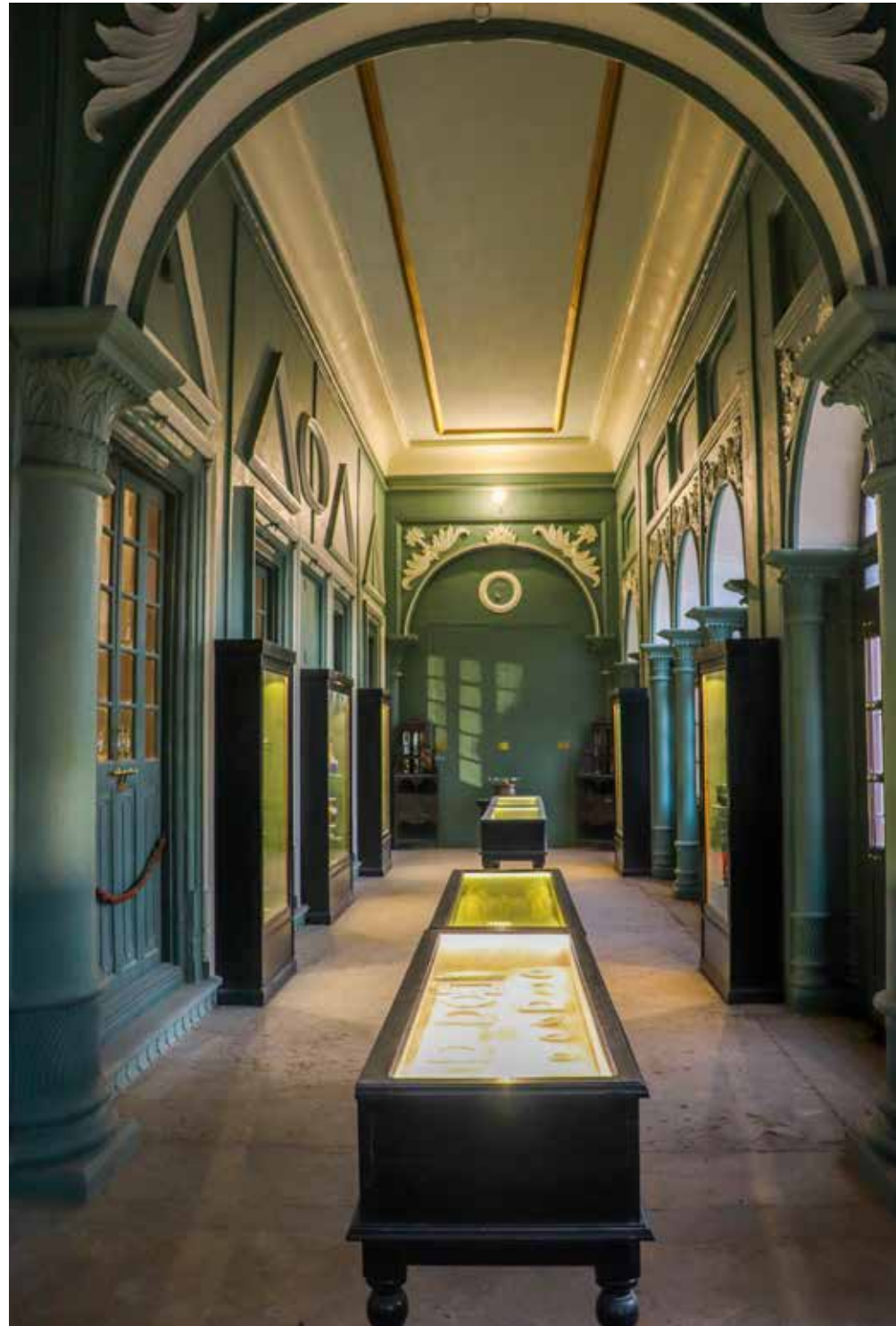


photography : brett beyer and iwan bann

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Speaking of materials, "Ar. Bathla says, "Materials used for the museum depends on the user experience, functionality and purpose. Collectively the design of the museums involves the process of streamlining the content, curating experiences, evoking emotions, and keeping visitors informed. I am highly inspired by the work of Tadao Ando, especially the Museum of Wood Culture."

Inspired by the work of the greats, Ar. Vanwari says, "We don't hold pre-conceived notions when designing museums, as a lot depends upon the history, landscape and locally-sourced materials. We are greatly inspired by museums that reconstruct histories with local

materials, such as the Kolmba Museum by Peter Zumthor in Cologne and the Ningbo History Museum designed by Wang Shu."

Sustainability remains an essential goal when finding the right material and construction methodology as well. Ar. Nissen says, "We are often drawn to materials that have a quality, which in some way, adds a dimension to the material itself, such as appearing different in different lighting conditions, or a quality that shifts as you move around the space. We also enjoy using materials that are made out of unusual and sustainable materials such as compressed paper, or recycled plastics."

bruce museum, connecticut | eskew+dumezripple, new orleans



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the museum of modern art, new york | diller scofidio + renfro and gensler, new york

technology blending the past, present and future

All of us remember the signboard 'Don't Touch' whenever we visited a museum or art gallery, but does it still remain so? Ar. Narain Lambah says, "Art is no longer a unidimensional experience, and new technology allows visitors to interact with the exhibits. There are almost 55,000 museums where visitors go to be challenged and commemorate important historical moments, and we strive to deepen diversity, shift authority and create digital experiences."

Ar. Bathla agrees, "When thinking of museums and art galleries, we imagine a solemn space with the artefacts neatly set out in a row. With strategic structures and complex reflections, museums provide tangible experiences about the museum's political order, social structure and thought process. Virtual reality and augmented reality have transformed the segment as well."

Ar. Vanwari agrees with him, "Modern thematic museums follow a non-linear path of storytelling where visitors can piece together the narrative as they

shrujan gallery, kutch | matrika design collaborative, mumbai



photography :: frederik vercruyse

hof van busleyden, belgium | dmva architects and hlcr architects, belgium



move along. Instead of simply creating an iconic structure, we need something that automatically belongs to visitors. Today, we focus more on immersive spaces, resting areas and longer viewing spots for them."

Ar. Ghosh says, "A museum must be physically accessible for all - which is why we must be responsible with designing the structure. The primary goal is its structure, language and narrative embedded in its immediate context, city and the world of art."

Ar. Nissen says, "Up to now, technology has been sometimes an add on. However now the price has decreased, and technology has also got smaller, I feel that augmented reality tours can be feasible. We always need to think carefully about how different audiences interact

with and access information within our museums. Catering for someone who may not have English as their first language is important. So is thinking about how you might access information visually without words, effectively 'feeling' an idea or a space or appreciating in a more subliminal way via graphic symbols that are more universal. We consider, for example, information heights and readability, as well as stairs, lifts and ramps to make sure they work together with lighting and materials to create a wonderful experience."

Ar. Sonali Rastogi says, "I think museums and art galleries can be small spaces today because art galleries carry much rotational work. I think the ability to expand oneself with the content outside of the gallery's physical confines is the hallmark of the modern art gallery today."

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photography :: kilian o'sullivan

the challenges

What are the challenges encountered when designing a museum? Ar. Narain Lambah says, "Museum institutions are facing challenges such as deepening diversity among audiences, shifting authority and keeping pace with the creation of a digital offering to be provided in the new shared economy."

Sometimes the challenges are more central to the context. Ar. Ray says, "The biggest challenges encountered in the design of museums in India has been the very idea of reinventing the museum in the local context. The sanctity of the museum needs to be maintained by creating an effective balance between educational experiences and fun learning. One cannot cross the line into making something that is a gimmick on the actual purpose."

The spiritual is a part of the process according to Ar. Bathla, "Designing a museum is a meditative process, more than dividing a story at some fathomable square feet but a process of providing fathomless experience and emotions. The spaces are meant to spiritually guide, uplift, and be accessible to all and not just be the realm of the elite."

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what the future holds

What would be the future of museums and art galleries? Abha Narain Lambah says, "Embracing digital technology can take many forms. Some museums, for example, decide to digitise their existing collections of artwork. Bringing the museums to the less privileged sections of society or the upcoming generation is a great idea which has recently been done by the CSMVS with "Museum on Wheels".

Ar. Javeri Kadri says, "In the Koba Jain Museum, while the architect interpreted the design, the BMCA had planned it. In the future, we see a focus on the equality of

religion, an interactive experience and a change in mentality itself. There will be plenty of public spaces, with seating and water bodies."

Ar. Ray said, "In hindsight, I enjoyed visiting the science museum more than the historical one. The science museum offered many instances where visitors could interact with the exhibit. To relate to younger generations, we need to make it more engaging and interactive."

Ar. Ray sums up, "For millennials, we need to rethink museums in ways that have not been thought about before. We love the generation of a memory which can be quickly exhibited over social media. As an example, museums in the West have tried to meme-ify their historical characters to entertain younger visitors. The key would be to have millennials participate alongside experts in planning events at the museum." if

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