

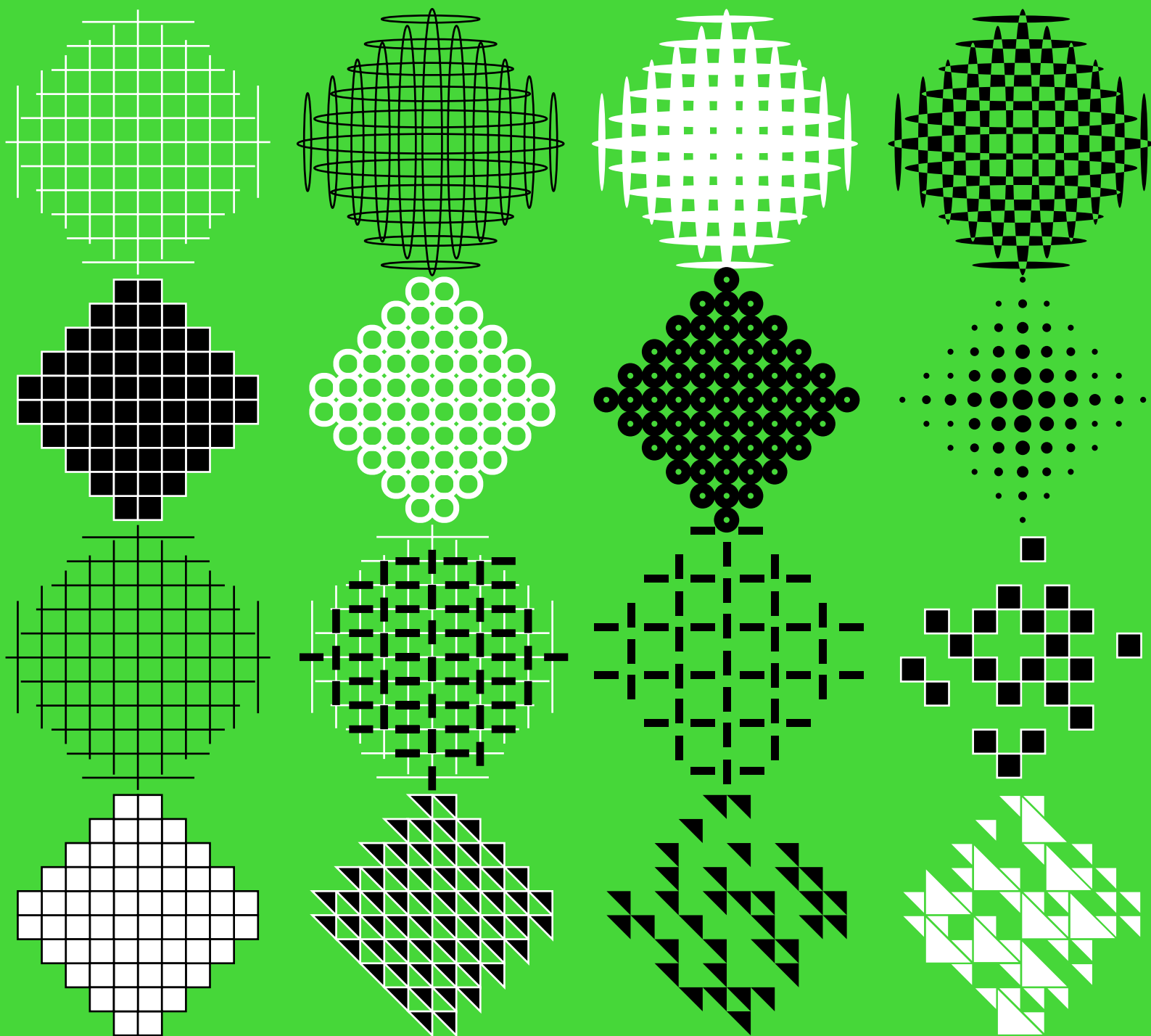
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[lighting talk]

*mondo*arc india* speaks with **Morphogenesis**, one of India's leading and award winning contemporary architecture practices founded by **Sonali** and **Manit Rastogi**. In conversation with Sonali, the role of light is established as an integrated tool in the architectural process, imperative for a wholesome design, but inconsequential in isolation.



Pic: Jatinder Marwaha

COULD YOU TELL US...

...what made you become an architect?
I hail from a family of architects and therefore was exposed to architecture from a very young age. I grew up in my father's studio and enjoyed every bit of it. Many summers were spent learning how to cut and assemble models. I relished the idea of going to site, and looked forward to it as an adventure. So for me, architecture was a quintessential part of my life.

...why you chose to pursue your studies abroad?

While I was in college, the only source of information regarding what was happening in the world was a set of glossy magazines in our library. It was a time when many esoteric topics were being written about - the deconstructivist movement, German and French philosophy etc. I could not relate to these topics or establish a connect between my own architectural studies and global discourse, which was tending to be esoteric and metaphysical. It was also a time when drawings were being over-manipulated; a plan was never published as a plan - it was a collage of sketches with overlays of other contexts, plus, I wondered how a building could possibly be represented or built with these documents. My curiosity and confusion inculcated a desire to be where the conversation was taking place, to understand what it was about, what it represented, and whether it delivered a different kind of architecture than what I knew. Therefore, I chose to attend the Architectural Association in London, the epicentre of these design discussions, where I was exposed to global perspectives and philosophies.

...what made you return to India and how Morphogenesis came about being established?

While AA was the center of global discourse, Mani and I realized the dearth of design conversation pertaining to India. Occasionally, one heard of architects like



Artisan House
Pic: Edmund Sumner



JRE Group of Institutions
Pic: Edmund Sumner



Amarnath
Visual: Morphogenesis



Travellers House
Pic: Edmund Sumner

Charles Correa or BV Doshi. A void of three decades of architecture compelled us to return to what seemed to be a paradigm shift. We had left a closed and insulated economy, but came back to a growing and emergent economy. Setting our own standards and benchmarks, we embarked on the journey of Morphogenesis, which completes two decades this year.

...about your first explorations with light.

I have to credit my father for exposing me to the art of sketching as a child. It made me aware of light and shadow, and patterns cast by solid forms depending on the direction of light. Today everything has become automated. You can model a tree in Sketchup, drag it into an editing software,

select a light source and the shadows are created by themselves. The lack of handskills perhaps reduces the perception of fine grain nuances. The ability to draw makes one more aware of texture and light. If you do not train your eye for light, you are unlikely to plan for it.

...about the Morphogenesis working methodology and its approach to light and lighting.

Light and lighting is an integral part of the building design process. It is one of the many imperative aspects of a site or brief that we take into consideration at the initial stages. We work with a holistic approach to any project. In a sub-tropical climate like ours it is important to make a

special effort to plan for shade and cross-ventilation. We often work with courtyards in our designs and the very basic concept of a courtyard is to get both sunlight and shade into the heart of the built form. Responsive architecture is the design mantra that we practice at Morphogenesis.

...how natural light plays a pivotal role in some of your works.

I have always been intrigued by natural light. Being able to engage with it in our built environment has in fact driven us to experiment with it in our projects. In one of our earlier projects, the Amarnath Shrine, the basic concept was centred around eight monolithic rocks cardinally aligned to the sun's axis. The stones were

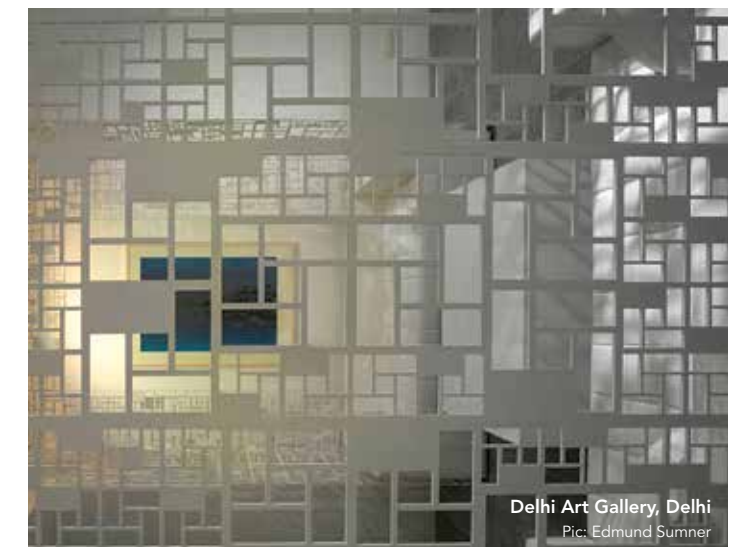
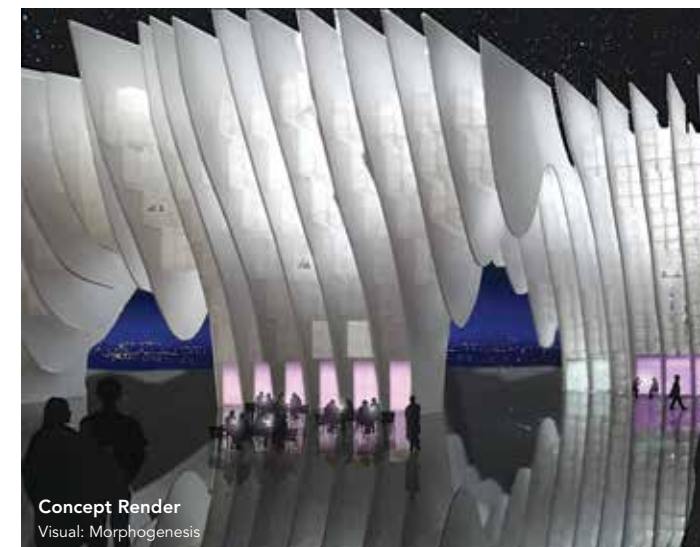
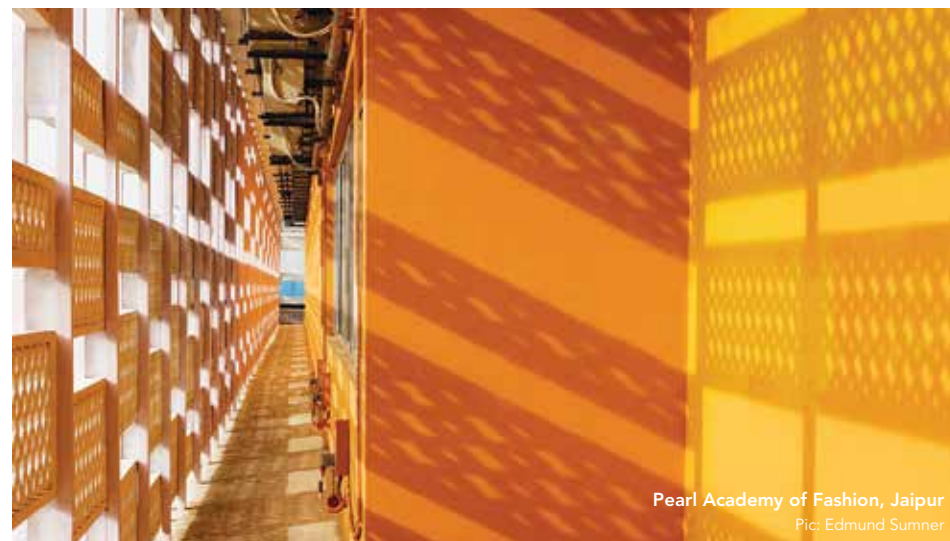
[lighting talk]



chiselled in a manner that at different times of the year, each one caught sunlight in a specific way. With fresh water running over them, the stream would sparkle as light hit the stone at varied angles. The intent was to make this pilgrimage vantage point as poetic as spiritual, and that was achieved by choreographing daylight over the boulders. The Pearl Academy on the other hand, also harnessed daylight, but in a different manner. With a limited budget and restricted use after dark, the institutional building did not require extensive artificial lighting. This however did not deter us from experimenting and manipulating diffused natural light cast at the onset of dusk. Mounting jalis against brightly painted orange walls that catch the amber of the setting sun, creates an illusion of the lattice work being backlit in a mellow glow.

...the importance of shadow, and the balance of darkness and light in your work. Shadows play an equally important part in our design process. In projects that comprise of courtyards, the quintessential idea is to bring shade and light into the building. When a perfect balance is struck between light and shadow, architecture finds its true glory.

...if light is a magic wand in the hands of an architect, how would you use it to change the experience of space? Every project is different and we approach

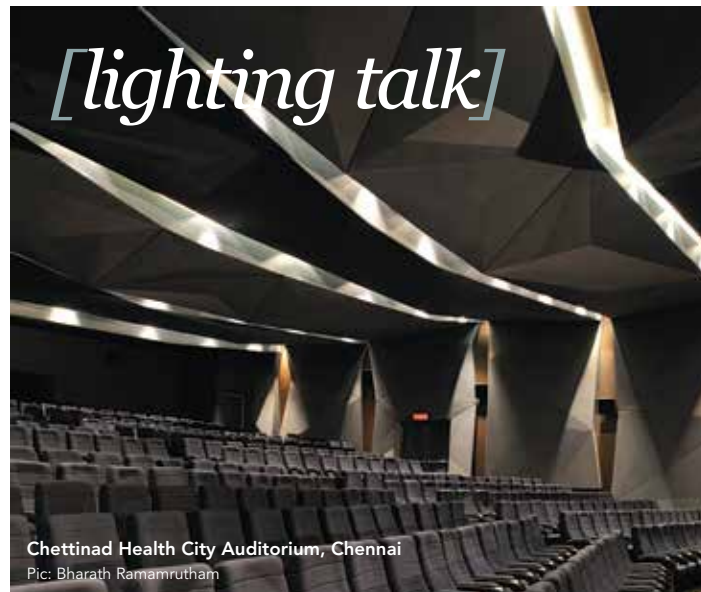


each design differently. Light gives us a sense of time. And to capture daylight well in a project is quite an admirable achievement. If the lighting quality in the space becomes one with the building, we consider to have accomplished what we set out to do. We are currently working on a project which is particularly interesting when looked through the lens of light. The endeavour is to let light into the main living space, but change the texture and glow of its intensity through the day. Therefore we have designed a skylight that deflects sunlight onto a textured shingled surface, allowing the scattered rays to then illuminate the

space. As the sun angle changes through the day, the light quality changes, imparting a distinct character in the space at different times; rendering an altered feel and appeal to it through the day. On the other hand, artificial light and lighting is driven by the mood that needs to be created. It may become an important feature depending on the function of the built form. There is a lot of scope for light to enhance and augment what is being conceived spatially. The Delhi Art Gallery in Emporio Mall was designed to cater to the need for flexibility in usage. Therefore, the display and the lighting system were created in a manner that everything could

move and be adjusted as per requirement. In the Chettinad Health City Auditorium, Chennai, the need was to design an interior space that was iconic, while the budget was restricted. Innovating with material, we used acoustic board in a manner that hid luminaires in layers of the undulating panels; avoiding extravagant expenditure on expensive fittings, while achieving desired lighting effects.

...about the role light plays in the life of a city. The first thing that comes to my mind when I think about public lighting at an urban scale is safety. If a place is well lit,



it invites more users; and there is most certainly safety in numbers. Often the leftover negative spaces in the city that need to be revitalized, also need to be well illuminated, which is a gradual process. The advent of LED technology has allowed many changes; public lighting has become cost effective and energy efficient. Light also symbolises celebration. In a culturally diverse country like India, festivals and light are some of the most distinct ways to spread cheer. The lighting up of a city sends out a vibe of joyfulness that can uplift the spirit of its citizens. At the end of the day, cities are about memories and the impact that they leave on us. However, with respect to lighting our cities at night, I do believe that there is a definite

need for more innovation in the way we illuminate our institutional and commercial buildings. We need to be more dynamic in our approach towards lighting spaces that we use everyday.

...how Delhi, projected as a world Heritage City, can also maintain its mantle at night when darkness shrouds over the urban fabric, hiding all evidence of historicity. It is interesting that most historic sites in the city are only accessible in the day, when most residents are busy with work. It is quite unfortunate that when the citizens do get free, the heritage sites close for the day. Thus, the heritage of the city is always hidden from its public. These buildings and structures need to be

illuminated, open and accessible to the people of the city. They need to be offered as moments of pride, creating landmarks in the urban fabric. Add light to the local landmarks and the city will open itself up to its residents post dusk, inculcating a sense of security and acceptability.

...whether you think there is an intrinsic need for dedicated lighting education, courses, institutes, conferences, or magazines.

While I consider lighting as an essential design tool, it is one of the many other design tools in the process. I would not isolate it as being special. However, it is a field wherein innovation is the need of the hour. Lighting design has to be imbibed in



our building style, and it needs to gain a place of importance. I would not say that there is a need to introduce special courses as such, but at the same time, lighting does need to be addressed in the course of design study. We need to integrate the subject into the design process as it cannot and must not be taught in isolation.

...whether there is a need to recognise the field of lighting design, perhaps through dedicated awards programs.

I believe we need to integrate light more closely in the built form and not segregate it as an independent component. It would be difficult to adjudge a project based solely on its lighting intent. A building is meant to lend itself to the lighting, and in turn its lighting should blend with the built form. If you consider Calatrava's work, you cannot segregate his structural genius from the architectural aesthetics or lighting design. They are all integrated and inseparable. This is ideally how architecture and light should work.

In order to judge the lighting design of a building in isolation, all the entries should cater to the same architectural project; to fully comprehend how each lighting designer intends to accentuate the same built form and thus understand their respective approaches.

...about the best illuminated places you have visited.

I like the way the Aman hotel was originally lit. I felt it was a little on the darker side but the spaces were tall and long, and so the illumination style complimented the experience of the space. The lighting design attempted to enhance the scale of the project.

The Church of Water by Tadao Ando is another interesting project. The experience of the space is truly surreal. www.morphogenesis.org