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Bimal Patel

*It seemed inevitable for **Bimal Patel** to become an architect since his father was a well known architect himself, though Bimal thinks he could have made a good physicist as well. Now, when he has taken the firm that his father set up to greater heights, he cycles around Ahmedabad, and spends time reading strange esoteric stuff. The man fascinated by evolutionary biology believes that the world is going through a transformation which is akin to the one that Galileo transformed. In an exclusive interview with Pool, he shares his views. Excerpts:*

HCP was set up in 1960 by your father. What change have you contributed?

BP: I did not want to work with my dad on projects that he was doing. On finishing architecture school, I started participating in design competitions that the office was invited to and the first project that we won was the Entrepreneurship Development Institute. I am also a qualified urban planner. So the work we do is actually between planning, urban design and architecture. Planning is very different from architecture.

How does Bimal Patel manage HCP?

BP: Management is getting everyone to work as a team. So managing architectural urban design projects is not just about managing a team of designers, it is managing your contractors and

consultants so that the project becomes the central most important thing. It is about accommodating a lot of different points of view.

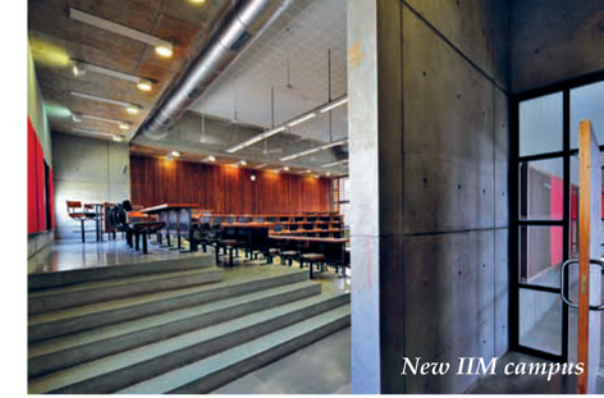
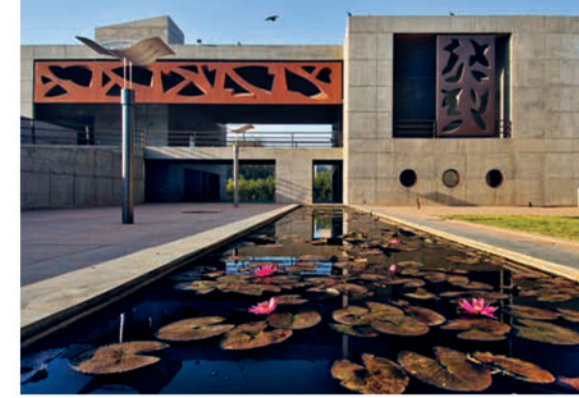
Since when you joined HCP to now, how has the organization changed and how has the management changed?

BP: India has changed, in the mid'80s, India was a place isolated from the rest of the world because of the economic policies. There was no trade, no import and India had also developed a psyche where everybody was determined to be isolationist. The '70s and the '80s were about charting a different course. Architects would say that we had to have a style of 'Indian Architecture' that was different, very specific from the West. We had yet to use appropriate technologies,

we were not going to splurge, not going to be consumerist like the West and suddenly in 1990 India decided to liberalize. Once the floodgates opened trade with the world, we decided we would not reinvent the wheel and copy what was there.

What does India really need now?

BP: I think we have to understand that our solutions have to be local even as we learn from the West. Today the world itself cannot live the way the western world has lived and still lives. It is ecologically and environmentally unsustainable. We need to find indigenous solutions or adopt existing solutions which make sense for us. And we need these fast. Evolution is happening at a far faster pace. I want to design the future. And as a designer I have to consider local conditions and come up with viable solutions.



New IIM campus



Where do we look for inspiration?

BP: Inspiration is all over. Take public spaces. If I look at cities, I find many cities in the world are places where we can get a lot of different inspiration from. I think European cities are fantastic for the manner in which they create public space. Paris and London are fantastic examples.

The creation of public realm goes with the creation of a public, of greater and greater democratization. Public space is where everybody meets as equals. Private space is the opposite. A mall is not a public space because people don't

“The best cities grow organically. Planned cities are actually boring. Chandigarh is sterile!”

meet as equals there. People with more money have more power and those who do not have money won't even walk in. But a plaza, open street, where you do not spend money is public space. The definition of public space is a space in which people meet as equals. Indians are not equal as yet. We have great divisions. We need to create a political space where we can all meet as equals. Although now I see demand for meaningful public space. However people are trying to solve that problem by creating private solutions, gated communities and malls which create divides. ➤



Around Mills

@HIDDENBUTTON First Phillips says the key is simplicity and then BOOM, manish arora clad models clomp down the runway in a show sponsored by them.

Cover Story

One of the best examples of a modern city is Hong Kong. It is a fantastic city. People don't own cars and public transport is the prime mode of transport. It is a compact city. In 200 sq km, they have managed to fit in more people than Ahmedabad fits into 300 sq km. That is what we need. The best cities grow organically. Planned cities are actually boring. Chandigarh is sterile.

What is the future of urbanization for professional architects?

BP: All architects are also facing that same dilemma, how to invent something that truly makes sense in our local conditions. And I don't think architects have got that. We never thought steel glass and prefabricated building was our problem. Now suddenly you have the onslaught of new technology and new types of building. Everybody wants their buildings to look like others anywhere in the world. We may now have to reinvent or at least re-examine what we did in the past to figure out relevant solutions. Most though are still just blindly copying.

In one of the buildings we have invented a whole louver system for the external face of the building. In the past the façades of buildings had to have some sort of shading for the windows. You have either weather shades or you articulate the wall back and forth to

create weather shades because we have a harsh sun here and because of the high cost of real estate nobody wants to waste space on thick walls. Thin walls and glass buildings makes sense from the point of view of real estate but it also has to make sense from a temperature point of view, so we decided to put louvers on the external face of the building. Since we did not want to import expensive stuff we designed a louver system ourselves. We will use it on a number of buildings we are working on now. We are trying to redefine what the façades are made of and what are the different materials that can be used.

What is your dream project?

BP: What I really want to do is write a book about making city planning work in India. I enjoy doing architectural projects, but I think the real challenge now is fixing our cities. We have many things wrong and our cities are a growing mess. This planning has to come from urban planners. We need to get our framework right so that our designers and architects can work in a sensible way. Architects have to follow building regulations when they build in cities and you will find that all architects complain about the sort of building regulations they face. They constrain what an architect can do and in a city like Mumbai where real estate pressures are very high, it is actually building

regulations that shape the city and its buildings. If we fix the regulations we can fix the cities. We get wretched cities because we have poor rules, and if we were to change the rules, we'd get better cities.

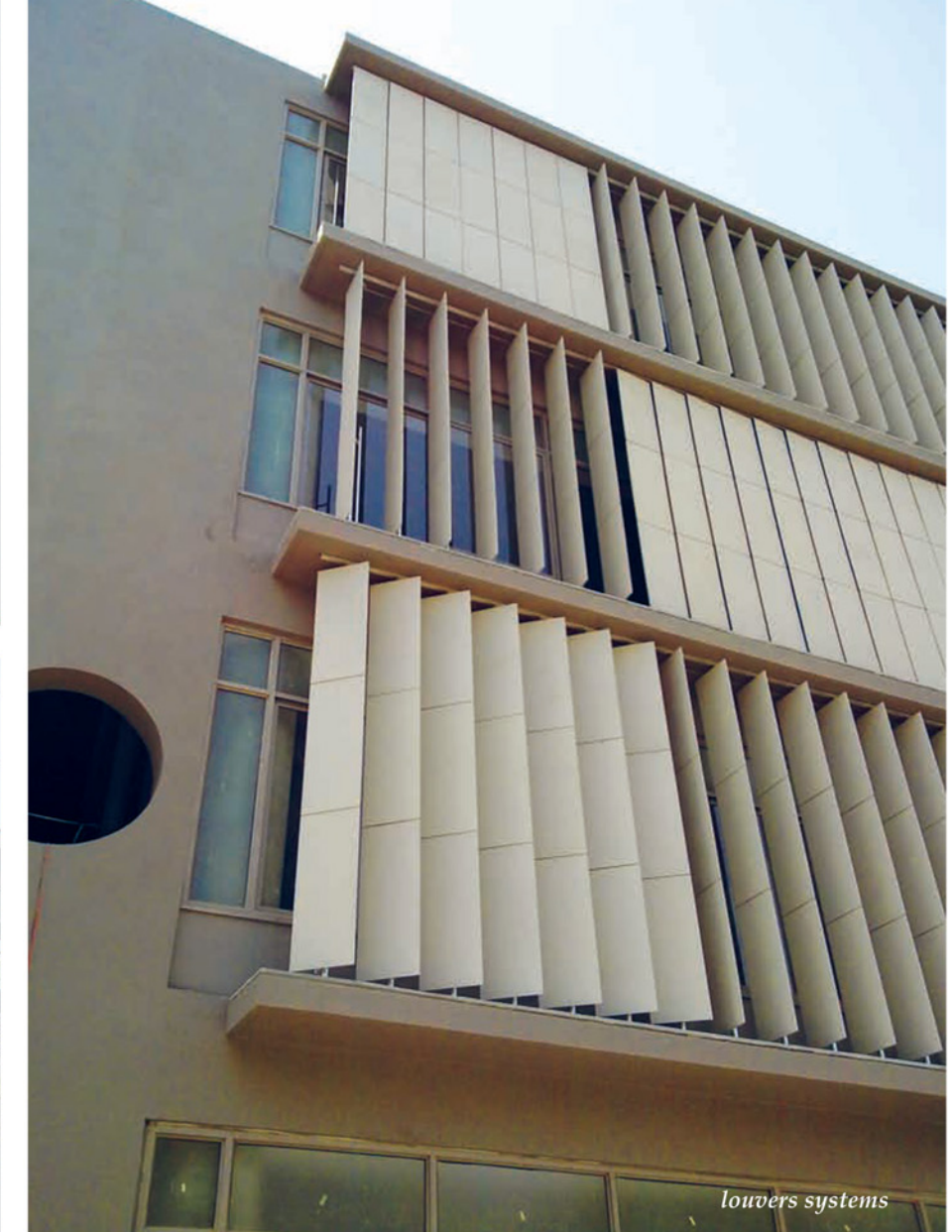
Where does the problem lie?

BP: I think we have got many things wrong and it is easy to find fault in hindsight, so I don't want to complain about that. We just did not pay enough attention to how the rules are to be made. We have to get the foundation right. In the past 25 years I have operated at different levels. As a trained city planner I can look at the city from an abstract and very high sort of a level. It is like an eagle looking down at a city. I have also done interior design, sort of like an ant looking at it. And at different levels there are different issues, different opportunities and constraints.

www.hcp.co.in



Photograph by Mickey Bardava



louvers systems



Visualisation of the Riverfront Project