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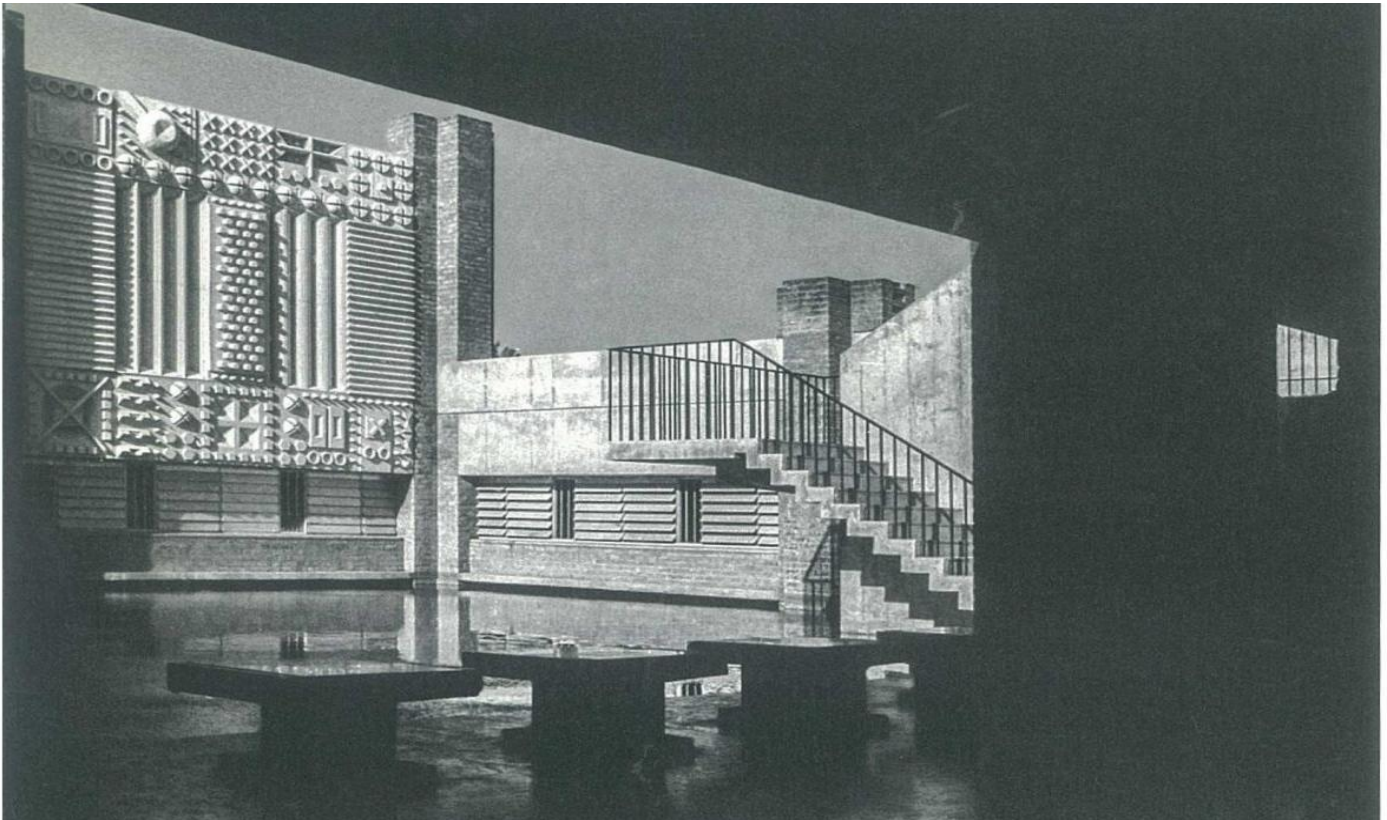
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Book Review: The Architecture of Hasmukh C. Patel

A look at the legacy of Hasmukh C. Patel—former director at CEPT Ahmedabad—and the culture he cultivated through his practice.

Devanshi Shah MAY 29, 2017

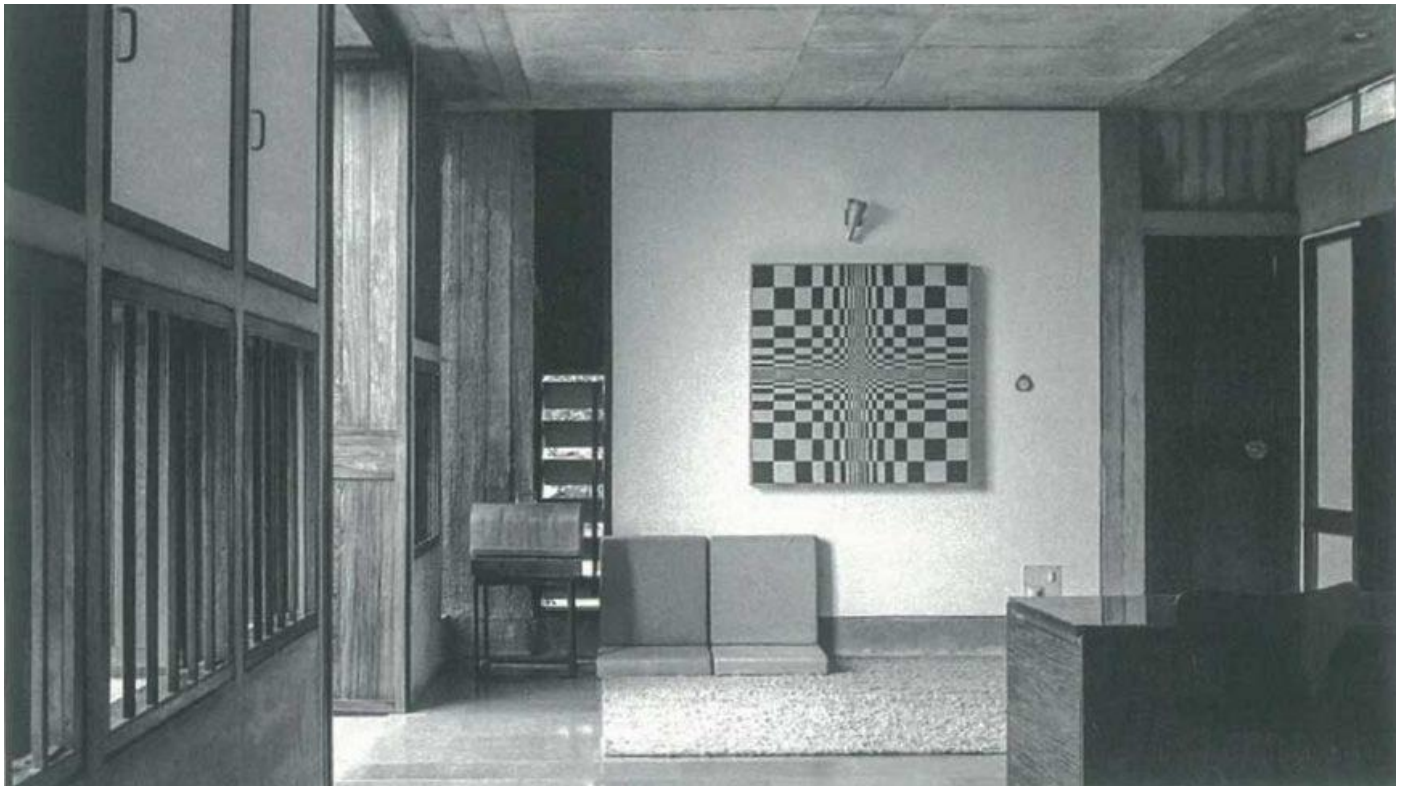
The Architecture of Hasmukh C. Patel



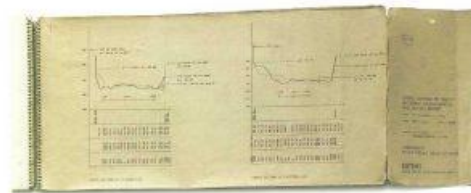
Water Courtyard at St. Xavier's Primary School, Ahmedabad, 1967;
The Architecture of Hasmukh C. Patel

Hasmukh C. Patel, best known to have popularised the phrase ‘common sense architecture’, started his practice in 1956, in Ahmedabad. Over the years he evolved both his building style and the form of his practice. Some of his most famous buildings include the St Xavier’s Primary School, the State Bank of India, Dena Bank, Reserve Bank of India, Newman Hall, Bhaikaka Bhawan, Shyamal Row Houses—all in Ahmedabad. But his work in Bihar, Udaipur, Bharuch, Mokasan, Kolkata, and Rajkot are just as remarkable.

Compared to the 2008 monograph published by HCP Design and Project Management, “The Architecture of Hasmukh C. Patel” (Mapin, 2016) is a dossier, highlighting 51 marquee projects by the 83-year-old veteran. Accompanying each project is an insight, not just about the process, but rather the work’s influence.

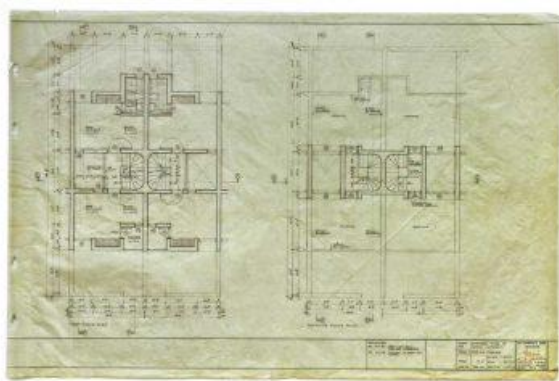
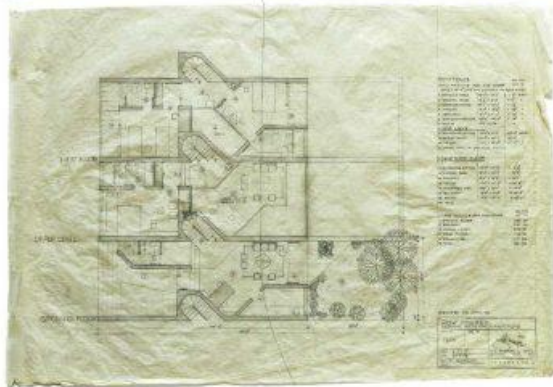
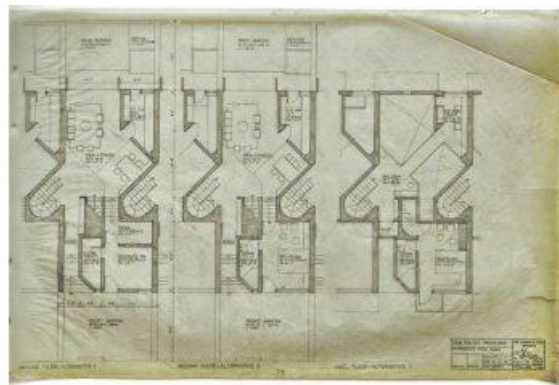
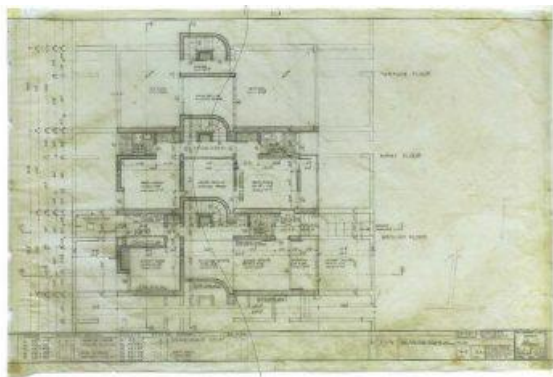


Interior view of the Master bedroom, House for Bhakti and Hasmukh Patel, Ahmedabad, 1966.



Above, facing page and following pages: Drawings from the Sabarmati River Front Development Report, 1976.

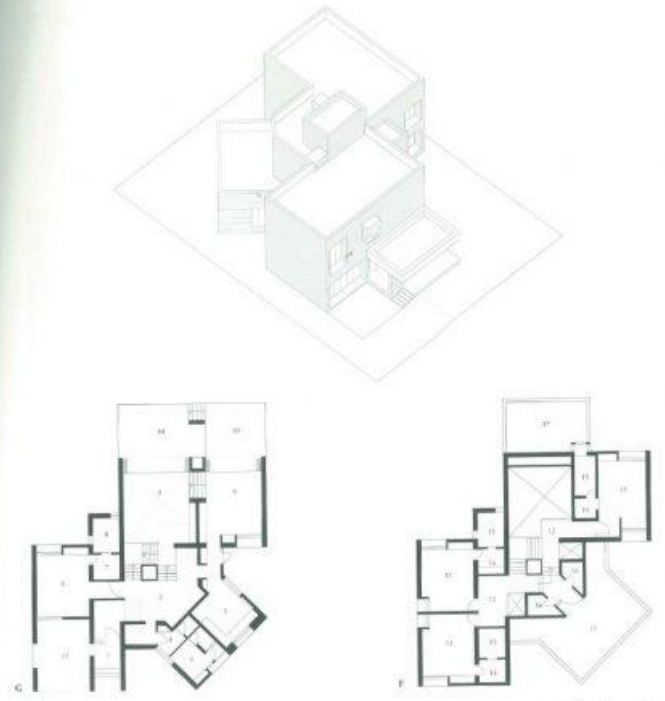
Drawings from the Sabarmati River Front Development Report, 1976.



Hand drawn archival plans for various row houses.

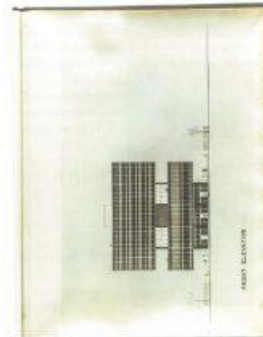


Four such identical houses were part of a set of six, for six brothers, set within a park-like communal garden. They incorporate the deeply recessed windows, double height living room and low deep verandah developed in Patel's own home. Clever use of stairs separates the adjacent dining and living rooms, which access the garden on different levels. The diagonal is utilised as an organising device in the compact plan.



Basement plan not shown | Ground Floor: 1. Entrance 2. Vestibule 3. Living 4. Dining 5. Kitchen 6. Guest Room 7. Dress 8. Toilet 9. Service Room 10. Verandah 11. Garage | First Floor: 12. Pooja 13. Bedroom 14. Dress 15. Toilet 16. Store 17. Terrace

Six Houses for Six Brothers, Ahmedabad, 1972. Ground floor and First floor plan, along with an axonometric of each individual home.



(left) Members of Hasmukh Patel's office in the 1980s when the practice was located in HK House. Hasmukh Patel's thesis project from Cornell University, Ithaca.



(left top and centre) Members of Hasmukh Patel's office in the 1970s when he was working from Bhavani Chambers. (left bottom) Arvind Patel with Ramesh Desai. (right) Hasmukh Patel at Cornell University, including fellow Indian student of architecture Ratan Tata.

The book starts with a first person account by his son Bimal Patel, the current director at CEPT—who has co-written this book alongside Catherine Desai—describing what it was like to grow up in a house designed by his father. The home itself exhibits every penchant that defined modern architecture and the international style. With an open, uninterrupted veranda framed by columns (*piloti*), each facade plays with surface levels while maintaining a strong geometric elevation. By the younger Patel's account, his father often had more than just a single reason—sometimes three—for a particular design feature. The plinth of the house extended beyond the foundation, just enough to give it an appearance of floating above ground. Bimal Patel, welcomes us into his childhood home and takes us on a nostalgic tour of the homes, the construction and future additions.

“I don’t think I have in mind a particular theory or philosophy that helps me design buildings—Hasmukh C. Patel”

Apart from being a flag bearer of Indian *Brutalist* architecture, Hasmukh Patel was an eminent educator. In 1976, Patel took over the mantle of Director at CEPT from Professor BV Doshi. In an eloquent essay towards the end of the book, Catherine Desai asks architect Rahul Mehrotra, founder of RMA Architects, about his time at CEPT during the Patel years. If the projects and the snippets of the hand drawn blue prints do not suffice this dialogue gives a very holistic insight into the Patel’s process. Mehrotra reminisces listening to Buckminster Fuller, Aldo Van Eyck, Frei Otto and Paolo Soleri, all invited during Patel’s time as Director. Important characters on the international stage of architecture, giving their two cents to young aspiring Indian architects.

“He had exposure; he was a man of the world; he knew what was happening but he never beat the drums on any one particular aspect—Rahul Mehrotra”

Commenting on the style and calibre of Patel’s work is futile. It belongs to a well-documented part of our collective history. Instead, what this book offers to current students and architectural practitioners is a more holistic understanding of over four decades of Hasmukh C Patel’s work. Over and above the project documentation, the concluding essays by Arindam Dutta, Bobby Desai and Ismet Khambatta are validations of the inborn meticulousness and passion in Patel’s work that transcends the traditional paradigms of architecture.

Patel has been Honorary Director and Dean at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT), Ahmedabad and a visiting professor at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver and the University of Bristol. His work has been featured in numerous journals and books across the globe including India, UK, USA, France, and Italy.
