

growth with awareness:
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
IN INDIA



the indian market is gradually opening up to the concept of achieving a balance between the built environment and the un-built, in a move toward more healthful living.

shanti ben and associates, kolkata | shag dwivedi/interiors.com



salient design studio, kolkata | ecospaces/rajarhat, kolkata

From exquisitely designed gardens to stunning landscapes, from unique outdoor kitchens to sleeping arrangements in exotic exteriors, landscape architecture has carved out a special niche for itself in the field of mainstream architecture. Hiring professional help to design an outdoor space turns out to be a great investment as studies show that the valuation of the property shoots up 15 per cent compared to the other houses in a similar locale!

Ar. Om Merchant, Senior Architect, Ratan J Batliboi Consultants Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai, says, "Landscape Architecture always existed, but only recently it has gained complexity in its scope, which has created a distinct niche for a specialist professional. A landscape architect's domain includes a wide spectrum of understanding viz. climate, geography, geology, biotic and non-biotic systems and processes, human psychology and behaviour, aesthetics, construction technology." An area with infinite scope, landscape architecture encompasses a whole range of projects. Designing parks and residential gardens is just a minuscule part of the field.

Landscape architects also specialize in street and highway beautification, waterfront improvement projects, playgrounds or shopping centers. Other fields include work in regional planning and resource management, feasibility, environmental impact and site construction. Increasingly, landscape architects deal in environmental restoration and remedies, such as preservation and restoration of wetlands or abatement of storm-water runoff in new developments. Historic landscape preservation and restoration is another area where landscape architects increasingly play a role.

present day relevance

The popular urban trend toward apartments, has broadened the scope, rather than diminished the importance of this open-air architecture. According to Ar. Kamal Sagar, Principal Architect, Total Environment, Bengaluru, "Landscape architecture has gained importance and we have keenly observed the needs of individuals and families, and have catered accordingly to our home buyers. For instance, the concept of a private garden for every home on every floor came about from most of our Bangalore buyers preferring their own independent bungalows to an apartment. When we asked what the difference between the two was - the most common answer was 'a garden'. So we thought, why couldn't all our flats have a garden?" Indian landscaping is still an evolving practice. Time and changing trends play a pivotal role in determining the demands of the client and with this form of architecture gaining world-wide popularity, India has been quick to explore the diverse nuances of landscape architecture. There is a lot to learn from landscape architectural practices in countries where it has played an important role in larger scale projects. Aspects of streetscape design and its interaction with traffic and speeds of travel are extremely well researched in countries that

are heavily automobile dependant. Some of these measures have been seen adopted in integrated residential developments with well planned pedestrian amenities and planted boulevards.

Growing Internet accessibility, according to Ar. Sunil Patil, Principal, Sunil Patil & Associate Architects Interior Designers, Pune has helped cultivate progressive thinking in India. Previously, the projects that dealt with open spaces were rare and few, with a majority of the funds being allocated for the interiors. Thus the shoe string budget limited the scope of exploring new ideas and designs for exteriors. Ar. Jayashree Darda Bhalia, Principal Architect, Studio for Environment & Architecture, Mumbai, concurs saying, "There are environmental restrictions but no positive design interventions that save a space. It is faintly visible in resorts at most and is emerging at airports and other scattered urban environments as manicured gardens. Although historically the formality of the Mughal gardens, Rajput city of Jaipur or the imposing landscape of Lutyen's Delhi could have laid a higher reverence for landscape, the experience of comfort due to landscape planning in urban areas is hugely lacking."

luxury and sustainability in the surrounds

But this is changing, and Indian clients seem to have re-focused on their surroundings. Ar. Anuradha Rathore, Landscape Architect, Salient Design Studio, Kolkata, says, "The Indian landscape profession is still maturing in our country as the need for landscaping and results still need to be explained to clients. It is only when a number of good projects are experienced by the client, do they begin to relate to or understand the depth of designers' contribution."

Broadly, open space architecture may be luxury-centric or environment-friendly and sustainable. A paradigm shift towards conservation and sustainability has ensured that 'environmental friendliness' is the new mantra. Another factor that promotes this 'Go green' philosophy is the cost-effective nature of many pool and landscaping products and systems. Drip irrigation promotes sustainability by conserving water and appeal to home owners as they cost less to run than a typical irrigation system. In an evolving industry, the best of both worlds is now offered to the client, making a project a winning combination of luxury and sustainability.

Ar. Kamal Sagar, Principal Architect, Total Environment Building Systems, Bengaluru, says the provision of cantilevered terrace gardens with every apartment, was introduced by their company in 1997, in a pioneering initiative in residential projects across the board. Since then, this has become an integral part of a number of similar projects. The gardens are larger and expansive with features like water bodies and wood decks, boulders, cascades, pools and indigenous vegetation - bringing the outdoors in and taking the indoors out.

In the quest to create a balanced environment, technology plays an important role in conserving and nurturing the goodness of the natural habitat.

Most architects feel that the climate of the location is the main determinant of the design plan. While the location affects the availability of various plants and trees, plant growth is dependent on the climate, soil and topography of the location. The designing of the landscape, as determined by the architect's conceptualization and the client's brief, is often influenced by the locale and its local flora and fauna.

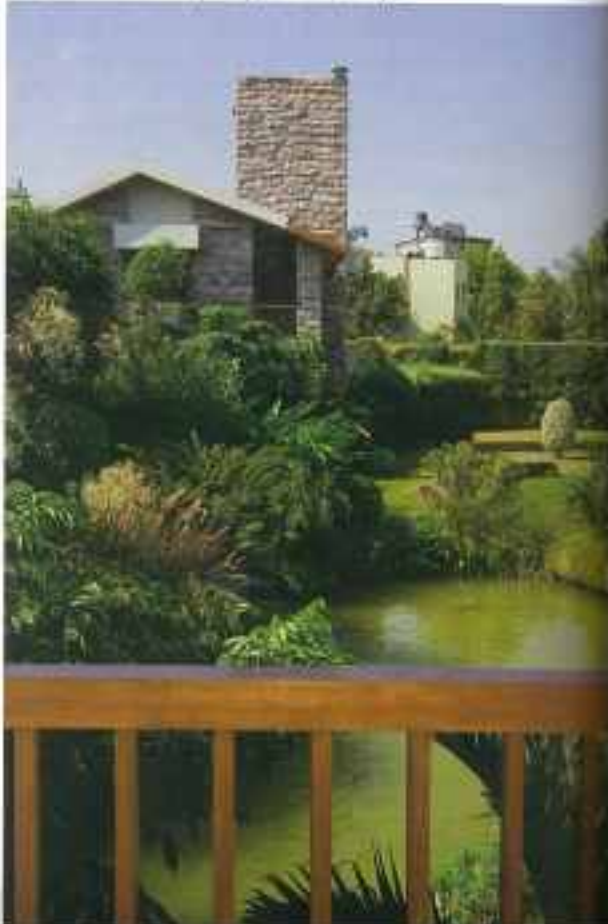
Ar. Anuradha Rathore further believes that by detaching itself from nature, architecture has floundered. And thus, new generation architecture aspires to achieve a union of nature with science. The works of Frank Lloyd Wright, Luis Barragan and Geoffrey Bawa are the best examples of this. Speaking of the importance of place, Ar. Sanjay Puri, Principal Architect, Sanjay Puri Architects, Mumbai, discusses a Hyderabad commission, by Suchir India, where he stresses the importance of keeping the design as close to nature as possible. Locally sourced materials are utilized to give the one acre site a natural look with boulders and vegetation indigenous to the area. Ar. Pavitra Sriprakash concurs, reiterating the importance of the location of the project in determining the palette of materials available for the design and so, the character of the landscape itself. In planting, only plants that thrive in a region should be used in order for easy maintenance with optimal water consumption and in cases of large areas of plantation, it is wise to start a nursery during ground breaking in a designated area to ensure good heights of plants and healthy transplants with a higher rate of survival.

architect haleez contractor, mumbai | iff anilias, gurgaon

ucj architecture & environment, mumbai | partner architect: shona jain email heritage, jodhpur



suni patil and associates, pune | sathniran, kalyanur





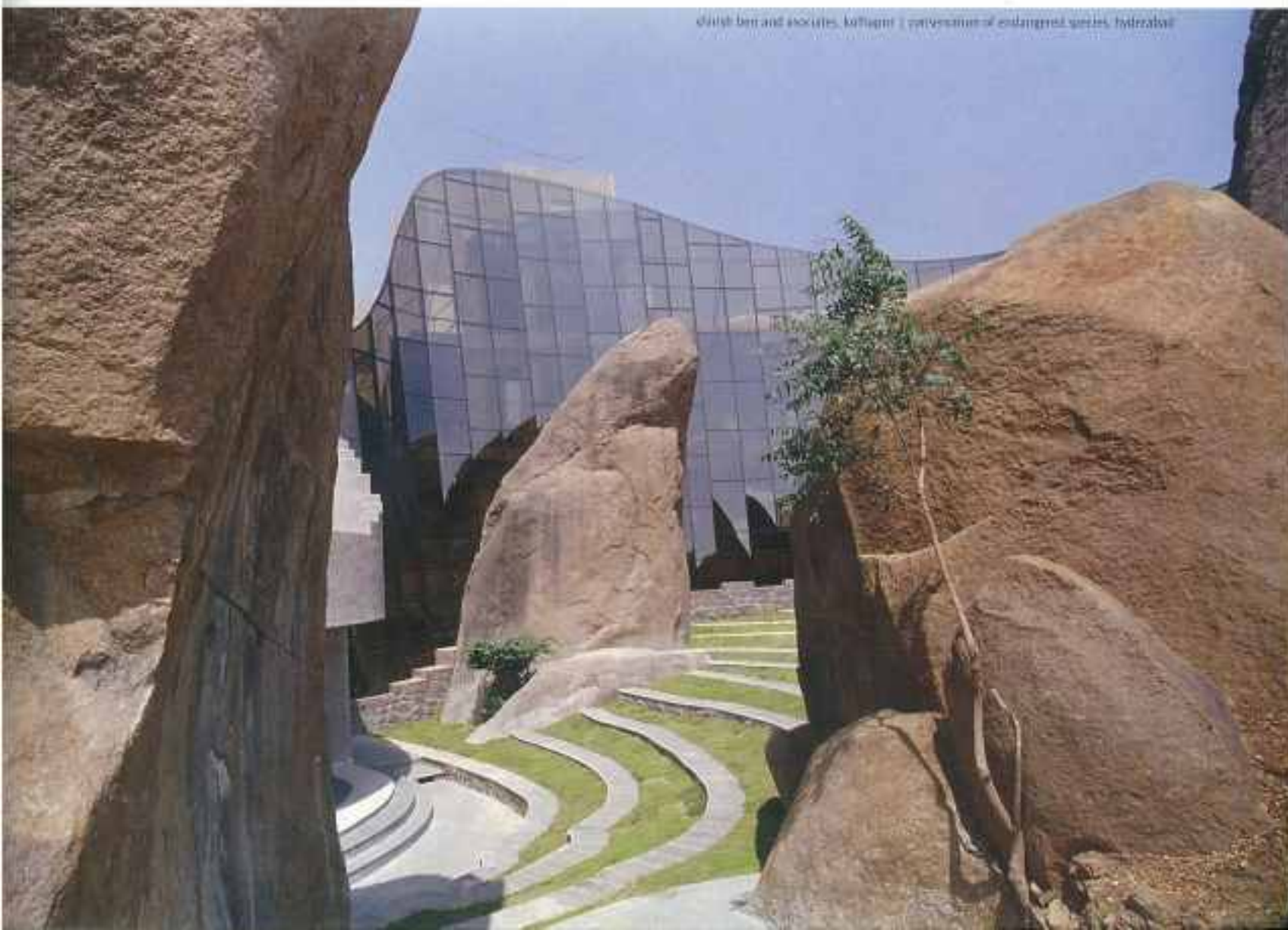
continuing relevance

Ar. Anuradha Rathore says, "Landscape architecture is most fundamentally about us and our environment. It is an integrated design discipline that involves the analysis, design and management of the natural and built environment." Talking about the current scenario as well as the potential of this fast growing industry, Ar. Chirag Jain, Partner, UCJ Architecture & Environment, Mumbai, aptly sums up saying, "Landscape architecture will receive exponentially growing attention in the years to come as a result of our growing sensitivity to the un-built environment. There is an ever increasing awareness of the overkill we have made with the built environment over the

past several years. Situations like the current global environmental scenario (driven equally by economic ground realities), usually lead to an equal and opposite reaction."

Landscape architects work at that interface between the physical environment and human culture. In a world ever more concerned

with promoting a sustainable future both for ecosystems and for humanity, landscape architects have a special mandate to work towards sustainable design solutions for the built environment, which respect the special character of the place, while protecting the natural environment and ecosystems in order to improve the quality of life for all living things. 



functionality and beauty of surround spaces

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DESIGN

prominent Indian architects talk about the design nuances involved in achieving an ideal combination of beauty, functionality and harmony with nature that makes landscaping a key aspect of modern spaces



Architecture exists

is a literal reflection of the building itself. Landscapes help architecture establish a link between the built and un-built, enabling a mediation into the external urban context. Open spaces and courtyards modulate a building, giving it scale while allowing it to breathe, filter in natural light and provide visual relief. They also provide transitional and interactive spaces among other spatial, socio-cultural and climatic benefits. Urban landscapes with a high content of vegetation create healthy, desirable and restorative urban landscapes.

variety of the parameters and criteria decided by clients in metropolitan cities. Landscape architects are overwhelmed by their constant warfare by abundance and a scattering of water bodies act as a soothing balm when over-whelming city traffic and the ubiquitous concrete structures become an evasive. Ar. Ranjit Sanjhi, Principal Architect, Ranjit Sabkhi Architects, Delhi, points out the diminishing beauty and greenery that have become the reality of busy metropolitan cities. Ar. Sabkhi says, "In recent times every single available space in Mumbai is being built up in the form of cramped multistorey development. No serious lessons have been learnt from the past stellar urban design exercises.

There is a tendency to build each new multistorey complex as an enclosed unit completely isolated from the surroundings. The result is an absence of urban linkages, and breakup in the continuity of urban space. As can be imagined, landscaping in such situations can help to provide an important healing touch." Many open spaces across the city can be developed as a linked network of green parks, connected by a system of pedestrian paths and bicycle tracks. A bicycle network through the green spaces, completely isolated and protected from fast moving vehicular traffic, would provide a viable alternate system of movement for many able young people, and those who don't wish to drive.



total environment building solutions, bengaluru | windmill of your mind, bengaluru



shishu Beri and associates, kottapur | silm hospital, dharwad



ucj architecture & environment, mumbai | partner architect : chirag jain | jawaharlal darla memorial, yavatmal

the brief

Trained in the earth sciences, construction materials, and technology as well as design aesthetics, a landscape architect's primary responsibility is to assist in integrating environmental and aesthetic concerns with engineering and safety requirements.

Discussing conceptualization and design, Ar. Pavitra Sriprakash, Director, Shilpa Architects Planners and Designers, Chennai, says a good landscape designer creates a well balanced concept that uses both programmatic and aesthetic landscape strategies. A typical landscape project should begin once the building footprints have been frozen. This will start defining the spaces

that are available for the landscape designers to work within. The next step is to understand the type of landscape intervention and determine if it is programmatic or aesthetic.

Landscaping is an ageing process. While the design and implementation may be completed in any period from a month onwards, the plants will continue to grow over the years and impart a different feel as time progresses. The extent of the area to be landscaped determines the time period. Ar. Narendra Dengle, Principal, Narendra Dengle & Associates, Architects, Pune, feels that, "As a practicing architect, one gets into appreciating the context of site and its relevance

at various levels as mentioned above. This must trigger the conceptual thinking for a project. Conceptual thinking comes from contextuality and formless ideas which may originate almost anywhere. These together configure the nature of design strategies and priorities without being so explicit – as these are discovered in the process of design, often taking a lot of twists and bends. As much as the site informs you of the context and concerns so does one's sketching of ideas. These two have a strange relationship and discovering their interface becomes an intriguing journey."

The advantage of creating a programmatic landscape is that it becomes part of the system of



simil pahl and associates, pune | varmaan, kollapur

working infrastructure at the site level. The natural contours are retained and it is a sustainable approach to the design of the landscape. An aesthetic landscape involves the treatment of an existing space and a clean space being presented to the designer and the various elements of design such as paving, planting and water bodies planned within it.

The local flavor of an architectural project is enhanced by Nature's participation in the process

to express its seasonal and cultural phenomena, giving the project a sense of place. Every structure built should reflect the uniqueness of the natural landscape of its origin. A strong participation of the local elements like geography, climate and hydro-geo-morphology of the place can influence the culture and life style of the society of the region. The landscape design must respond to this existing matrix in creating everything from golf courses to college campuses and residential areas.

Some architects feel that the main challenge in landscape architecture lies in convincing the client of the importance of allocating adequate resources for the beautification of their outdoors. Ar. Pavitra Sriprakash says, "Landscape architecture even today is treated as an afterthought or one of the last entrants in the design scene of the project; an aesthetic layer that is added to enhance the look and feel of the outdoor space so that it does not feel barren." This mind shift from treating landscape as a purely aesthetic addition is the key.

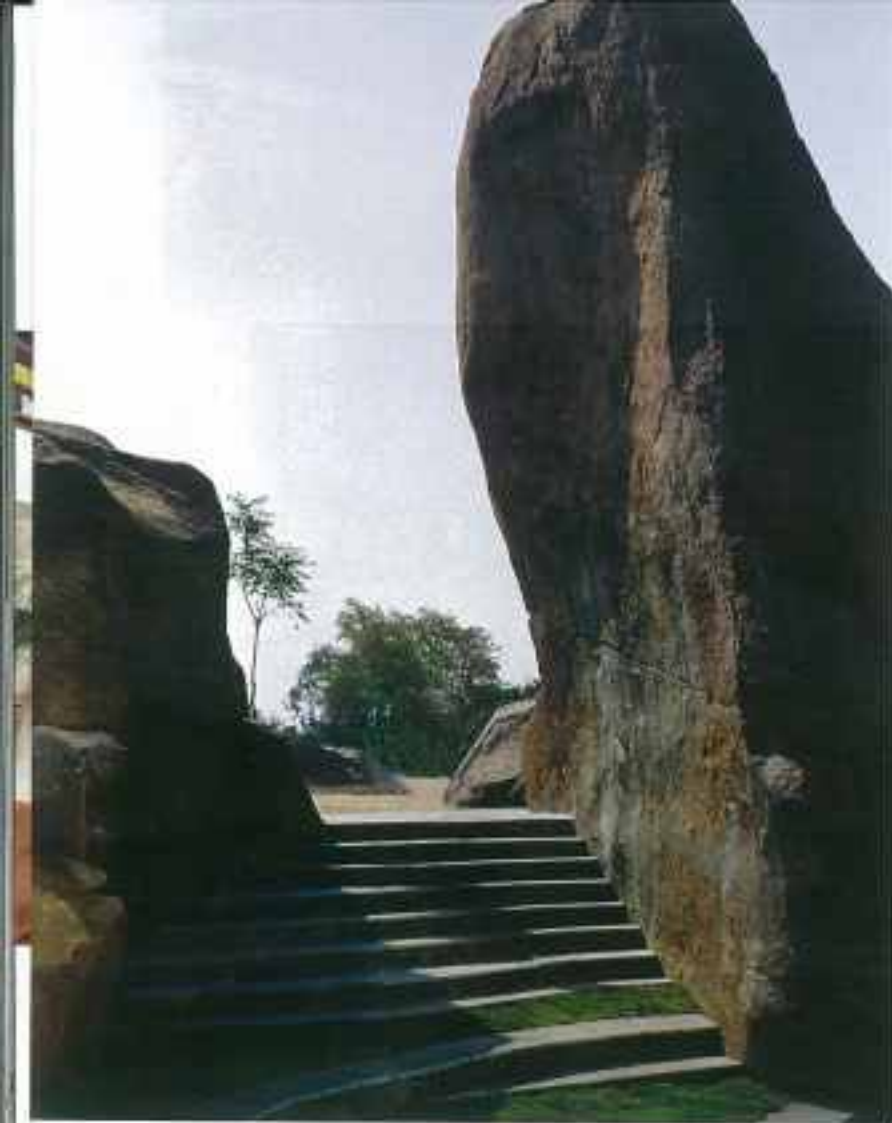
architect rahasz contractor, mumbai | dfi project, gurgaon



ramendra dengle & associates, pune | model colony lake, pune



landscape design and development, mumbai | we school, bengaluru



shirish beri and associates, kothapur | conservation of endangered species, hyderabad



surel jirli and associates, pune | sahman, kothapur

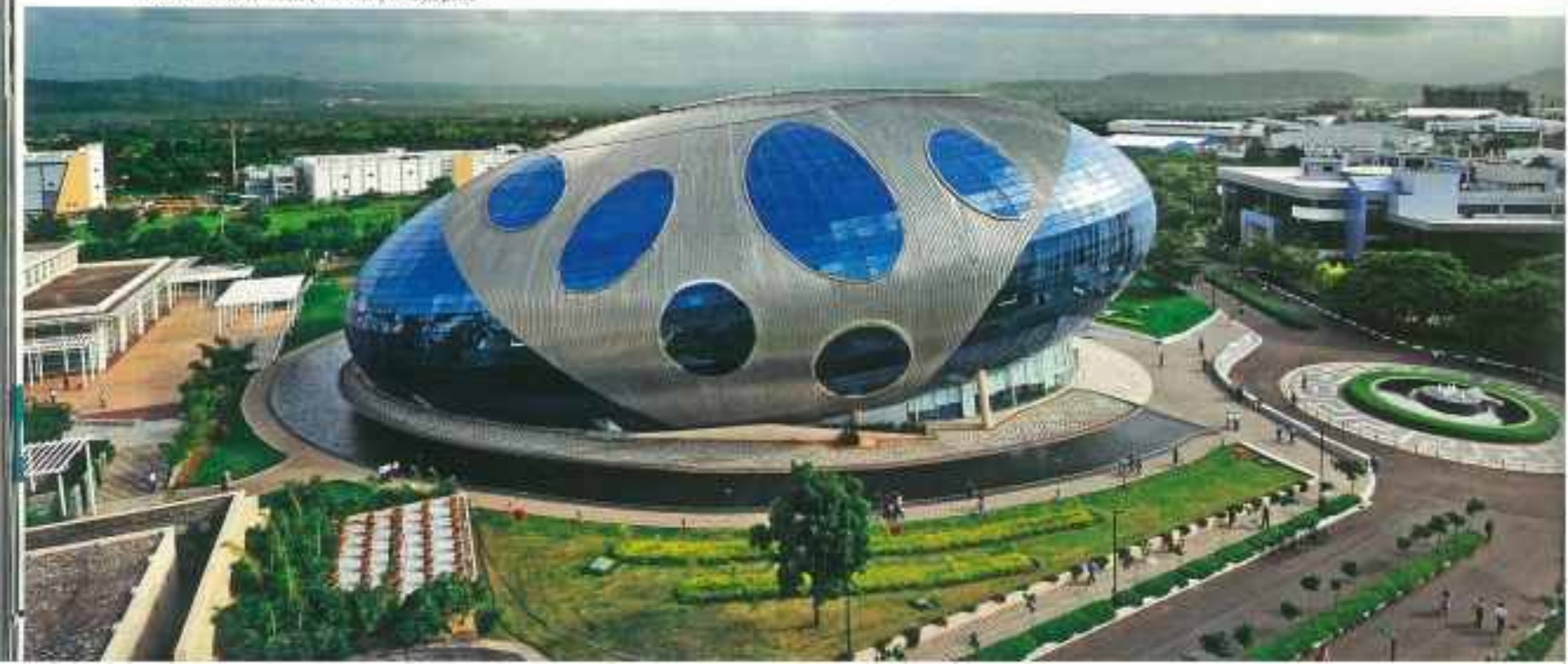
challenges in execution

The design process must incorporate aspects of infrastructure design as part of the overall landscape strategies need implementation at a very early stage in the overall design process. Ar. Anuradha Rathore, Landscape Architect, Salient Design Studio, Kolkata, says, "The landscape execution agencies are still not very equipped all over India. Similarly the nurseries in most parts of the country are yet to become comprehensive."

Ar. Kamal Sagar, Principal Architect, Total Environment Building Solutions, Bengaluru, feels that the challenges are mostly to do with the fact that construction is a very messy business – with dust and cement and heavy construction equipment, while landscaping involves the use of delicate

living organisms which have to be protected. Therefore a clear process and accountability between teams is critical. Other challenges are to do with the availability of plants, water and sunlight. Ar. Jayashree Bhalla, Principal Architect, Studio for Environment & Architecture, Mumbai, discusses yet another challenge when it comes to landscaping in India : cost. Developing countries that often go the dual progress way initially seek an immediate, band aid solution which hardly ever includes landscape, and then as development progresses, landscape design is given more recognition and immense efforts invested to correct the earlier plan and work on upping its sustainability, desirability and equitability.

architect hafeez contractor, mumbai | infosys, pune





total environment building solutions, bengaluru | windmill of your mind, bengaluru

the future

Despite landscape architecture existing for decades, professional specialization seems to be recent. According to Ar. Rajoo and Ar. Padmaja Pradhan, Principal Consultants, Landscape Design and Development, Mumbai, "The scientific approach is recent. Artistic approach and environmental concerns did exist in the past too. The development was carried out by many, such as horticulturists, administrators, engineers and vastushilpis depending upon the size and the focus." Specialization opens up several dimensions within a discipline as the subject becomes increasingly complex. Thus, due to the evolution of landscape architecture, specialized jobs, depending upon scale and type, are now handled by specially trained professionals.

Each landscape project throws up unique and new ideas, prolific concepts and interesting designs. Designing a club commissioned by Ambuja Realty, Ar. Anuradha Rathore talks about how the site was expected to have a spacious outdoor dining space, an open air theatre with a seating capacity of 700, badminton and basketball courts. The design that evolved was a natural response to all these requirements. Another project commissioned by Mahindra Integrated Township Ltd, and executed by Shilpa Architects Planners Designers required internal streetscapes created at street level, pedestrian boulevards created in spaces between buildings interspersed with pausing nodes and plazas, an amphitheatre and nature groves to add a forested feel to the site.

The meaning and definition of landscape architecture changes with time, place and context. At one point of time it meant only to plan, design and execute gardens. With changing context it came to mean 'organizing outdoor spaces'. Organizing spaces from the utility, beauty, conservation and durability points of view are the factors defining landscape architecture. As new ideas emerged in the field of planning, development and architecture; the concept of environment, ecology and conservation became the main focus of landscape architecture. This focus shifted as the scale changed from micro to macro level and regional to urban scale and will keep evolving with the pressing issues of environment globally. *ifj*



salient design studio, kolkata | yashwantrao chavan, kolkata