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TAKENOUCHI WEBB'S ASIAN ADAPTATION

MILAN DESIGN WEEK 2014 | SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO | SILICON STRAITS CO.LAB
BY OUTFSTOCK | SILVERKRIS LOUNGE BY ONG&ONG | WEE HOUSE BY HCF AND ASSOCIATES

BUILDING SEASONS

ARCHITECTURE DISCIPLINE DEMONSTRATES ENGAGING WITH CLIMATE, TOPOGRAPHY, MATERIAL AND CRAFT

TEXT + PATRICIA CHIA
IMAGES + COURTESY OF ARCHITECTURE DISCIPLINE



LOCATED BETWEEN Udaipur and Jodhpur is Ranakpur, a modest five square kilometre village primarily occupied by farmers, shepherds and artisans. A reclaimed river-bed within a valley, Ranakpur's surrounding landscape undergoes picturesque seasonal changes: vegetation on the hills remain lush green through winter, bloom red over spring and turn barren yellow over summer.

"We found the site enchanting," Akshat Bhatt, principal architect of Delhi-based Architecture Discipline shares on the area located far from the metropolis. The summers are hot and dry, while winters are cold. A captivating site for paradisiacal repose, it was the perfect site for Mana Hotels to develop into nine luxury cottages for tourists coming to see the renowned ancient marble Jain temple.

When asked about the design intentions of this project, Bhatt responds firmly, "It is important for

architecture to belong to a place and time. It is also equally important to respect a place and contribute to its progress." It was these fervent beliefs that drove the design and its treatment of the site.

The site was first overlaid with the traditional Indian Vastu Purusha Mandala grid of nine-by-nine squares through the placement of *tesu* trees at every point on the grid. The *mandala* formula is believed to have been used by the Hindu god Vishwakarma to turn his own thoughts into material forms. An existing *bodhi* tree, unique for its large crown that can span 30 metres in diameter, was then identified as a focal point. This resulted in the skewing of the three axial rows of the nine cottages and main hotel block such that they are tilted off the grid axis. "The tree is reminiscent of the traditional *chaupal* that serves as a communal space shaded by a large tree... [Due to the choreography of these vistas], some

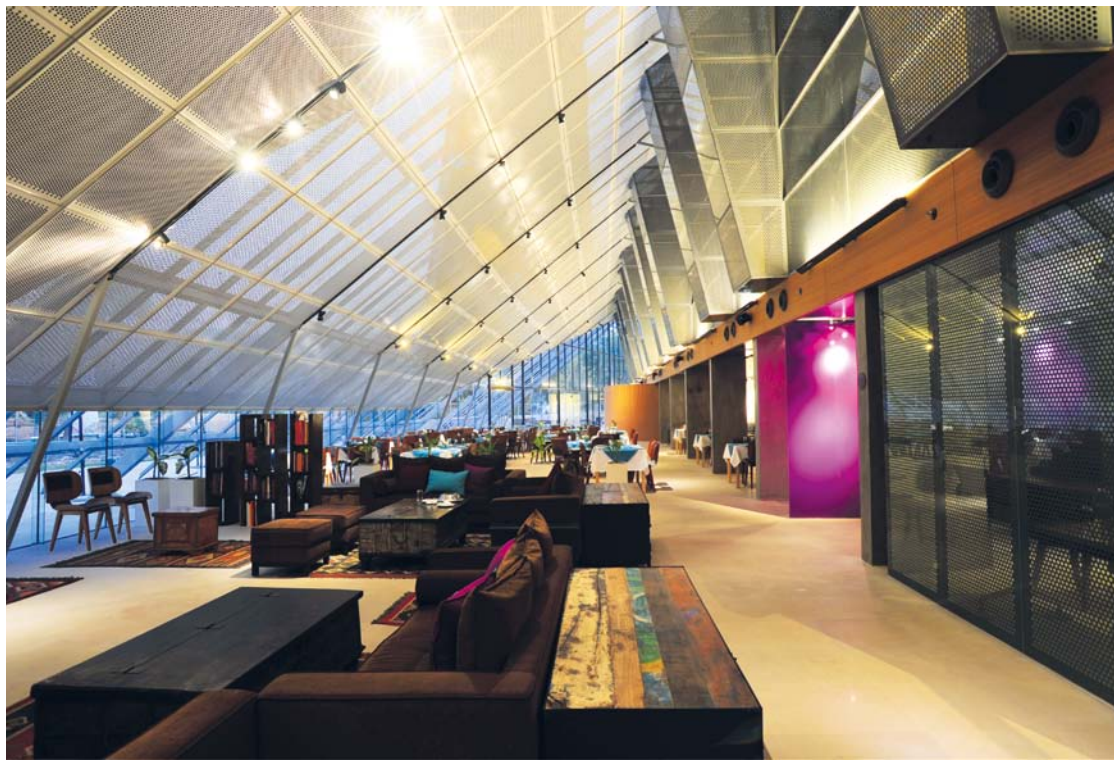
rooms are able to look out into this public space, while other rooms are able to see the canopy of the tree," says Bhatt.

High red stone walls lining the west facades of the cottages and hotel block stand out as signifiers of Rajasthan's vernacular. These locally-mined stones not only reflect an ethereal glow into the two-bedroom cottages, but also perform as thermal masses; the walls retard diurnal temperature fluctuations, and act as heat storage during winter months, re-emitting heat into the interiors at night. "The stone was regional, so it made sense to use local masons and craftsmen due to their knowledge of the material," Bhatt shares. He continues that the experience of working with them was a challenging one, as "not a single one [of these workers] could read drawings; we were pushing the limits of their skills."



Top: A screen caps the entire length of the public spaces, acting as a thermal and light filter

Bottom: Stone from the region is used at great lengths, providing a visual and tactile link to the locale



“WE WERE TRYING TO EXPRESS TIME AND MOVEMENT IN THE VALLEY OF RANAKPUR”

» AKSHAT BHATT

MANA RANAKPUR HOTEL

CLIENT Sheevam Comfort Hotels Pvt. Ltd.
ARCHITECTURE FIRM Architecture Discipline
PROJECT TEAM Akshat Bhatt (Principal Architect), Sneha Gurjar, Nidhi Khosla, Stuti Sahni, Debbayoti Dey
C&S ENGINEER Isha Consultants Pvt. Ltd.
M&E ENGINEER Lirio Lopez
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR Plan Loci
PLUMBING CONSULTANT Keepak Kumar & Associates
FURNITURE CONSULTANT Architecture Discipline
LIGHTING CONSULTANT Rahul Singh, Akshat Bhatt,
ACOUSTICS ENGINEERING CONSULTANT Viren Bakhshi, Akshat Bhatt
HVAC CONSULTANT Gupta Consultants & Associates

TOTAL FLOOR AREA 65,000sqft (Built-Up)

ARCHITECTURE DISCIPLINE
 (919) 8111 9122 architecturediscipline.com

FINISHES

Generally Throughout, Flooring is Unpolished Sandstone, Walls are Semi-Coursed Rubble Masonry from Unstructured Mines in Surrounding Regions, Interior Walls are Plasterboard on Galvalume Frame Insulated with Thermally Bonded Fiber Wool, False Ceiling is Stretched Fabric Panels, Roof is Laminated Glass with Perforated Vinyl Stickers, Roof is Aluminum Composite Panels and Frit-Printed Glass, all from St. Gobain Glass.



Top: The building's triangulated form creates a tent-like feel within the public areas

Bottom: At the hotel's reception area, stone and wood reference the surrounding natural landscape

The traditional is juxtaposed with contemporary steel and glass structures. Glazing coated with perforated film patterns creates a modern *jaali* sunscreen that filters sunlight during the day and mitigates heat gain during warmer summer months. The traditional *jharokha*, an ornate, overhanging, enclosed balcony typically made of stone, is re-interpreted as steel and glass projections from the west facade of the main hotel block. From the warm entry into the main lobby with textured high stone walls and smooth rubber wood reception desks, to the ascent into the intimate cottages up open-riser steel and wood stairs, the adjacency of vernacular and modern is apparent from all aspects of the guest experience. Yet this proximity is unobtrusive, particularly when in the bedroom looking out into the surrounding landscape.

Architecture Discipline's engagement with the traditional is authentic. Vernacular material, craft and even atmosphere are superimposed onto contemporary elements, creating a collage of dichotomous relationships. "The composition is a series of contrasts; the heavy versus the light, old with the new, loose with tight, cold with warm, stoic versus soft. We were trying to express time and movement in the valley of Ranakpur. There was an opportunity to translate the vernacular in a modern program, and in so doing hopefully encourage a community to hold on to their roots," Bhatt explains. Fundamental to the value of their work is this very transposition of techniques from the past to the present, resulting in inventive critical regionalist features such as the *tesu* tree, the *mandala*, the hotel *chaupal*, *jaali* glazing, or the glass and steel *jharokha*.

The architects' coherent layering of site responses results in an exciting diachronic drama that is sensitive to seasonal changes. In Spring, the *tesu* trees that mark out the *mandala* grid bloom with red flowers, in time to celebrate *Holi*, the spring festival also known as the festival of colours. During the monsoon season, a seasonal river appears where a small stream was carved out from the site.

"The intended experience was clear – it was to be an experience of the place. We expressed the seasons, the sky and the regional palette along with re-interpreted construction techniques," says Bhatt. Architecture Discipline's work has certainly left a gracious mark in the depths of the Ranakpur valley; only time will tell if its ambitions to anchor the community and contribute to its progress will be successful. «