

# traditionredux

A hotel in Ranakpur, India, attempts to interpret traditional Indian architectural elements within a new **context**.



**TRADITIONAL INDIAN** architecture is typically associated with ornamental detailing, and more specifically in Rajasthan, the architecture connotes the forts and palaces through techniques that are resonant of the wealth and culture of the region. Typically, people engage with tradition in a superficial manner in ways that are ordered, orthogonal and more often than not, a contemporary take on Indo-Sarcentic architecture. Architectural experience is about creating memories, and often, in an attempt to insinuate traditional architecture in order to create a lasting image while adopting a universal aesthetic, intervention ends up being kitschy and pastiche. Techniques, technology and methods of construction that draw from the region and are 'of the earth' get lost in the midst of mainstream processes. Within this context, the design of this hotel, Mana Ranakpur, attempts to demonstrate the architect's agenda of regional expression within a global context while being environmentally conscious, without adopting a kitschy intervention and predictable construction techniques. The local and regional forms of expression are explored as vital resources to create an architecture that engages with the future and is of a progressive disposition.

Sited in the vivid, enchanted Udaipur valley in the Ranakpur province, the Mana Ranakpur hotel as a public space with a service-intensive program is conceived to celebrate order and dissonance, continuity, stability, the experience of slow-moving time and the vernacular as an imbibed ethos. These values are celebrated



through an architectural intervention, form and material play in a region with a stark change of seasons and landscape, where the forest changes from lush green to bare and arid and the hills turn red during spring as the Tesu trees come to full bloom. Amidst the hills, with a clean, shallow river in the front, a km away from the famed Jain temple and adjoining a reconstructed old haveli, the client brief called for a boutique hotel that offers a unique, iconic experience for travellers in all seasons.

Through this apparent harshness, extreme weather and striking landscape, the vernacular acts as a bare canvas and forms a stoic backdrop for this dramatic change of seasons. Amidst the vernacular milieu, the site was extremely challenging as a reclaimed river bed with the water table at 600mm. While local sites represent solid stone in an intense and intricate manner in the form of Paleolithic monuments or pathological homes or as boundary walls that segregate the farmlands, the hotel is evocatively fabricated in the frugal stone masonry which is locally available as an expression of timelessness, space and contrast, old vs new, and the light vs heavy expressing the changing landscape throughout the year.

Introducing the design intent to the visitor by creating a reading of the building as it is unraveled, allows for moments and spatial intervention. Layering is adopted to restore the notion of the collective memory, and repetition is used as a technique to establish the contrast and difference. The site is planned in a manner that upturns the land, as it opens up to the river on one side, while establishing contrast with the old haveli and the temple. The plan is derived from the time-honoured 9x9 grid and the site was dotted with points that would then go on to become trees. Normalcy is achieved through the grid, and deviations are used to break the order. Aligning the grid with the north-south axis through the linearity of the site, a 1.8 m wide

sliver is fashioned for pedestrian movement that reinforces the linear planning on the site and brings in a strong order. Settlements happen along these linear walls, crafting straight views to the outside, helping the visitors orient themselves within the site. Superimposition of these various layers establishes a dynamic between architecture (constant) and the landscape (in motion through change) and leads to chance encounters and moments of rest. A huge, existing Budh tree on the site with its unique characteristic of a large spread of about 25-30 metre in diameter, is identified as a focal point for the alignment

View of the main hotel block



of linear vistas. Views and movement are orientated towards this tree, which is a remnant of the customary tree-chaupal that would provide shade under a large tree in a communal space. Unlike mainstream hotels, some rooms also look out into this public space using a modern, glassy interpretation of the traditional jharokha (overhanging enclosed balcony), while other room ceilings look up to the underside of the tree.

In order to endow a visual clarity to the movement path and to create vistas and open up views as one walks through the site, Buttressed random rubble walls that are symbolic tradition lend

scale to the movement passage by naturally tapering away from the visitor and structural tactics are employed to make the columns disappear. The narrow, linear sliver of space is exaggerated through height while creating a dialogue with time, always allowing the visitor to walk along a masonry wall, hence facilitating orientation. A Linear staircase is wrapped and brought out on the façade to encourage the visitor to walk through, further enhancing the vista. Water bodies are interspersed through this loop that create the water loop from the building to the ground and temper the climatic controls whilst creating points of interchange. Engaging with the sky, the seasons and materials of the earth, landscape is brought as an infill into the built volume. The sloping roof brings in the sky, and expresses three-dimensional direct views whilst the wall remains timeless, as other edifices take support in the wall through temporary interventions that enable an architectural dialogue between form and technique.

In order to be environmentally conscious by reducing transportation, local material and

manpower dictated the architectural intervention; only what was not available was prefabricated and brought from the outside. Apprising the visitor of local ethnicity, an archetypal regional material palette of Stone Masonry and Sandstone floors has been adopted. For most part, the local Rajasthani craftsmen and construction workers were employed to build in a manner rooted in the region and its landscape. Structural steel has been used as it is a long life span material, reducing dead load and thereby overall material consumption. The concrete consumption is insignificant for a building of this type and size. The spanning system is made with locally available kashia stone - a sandstone that can span up to 3 metres and trusses are used to support it. Being in seismic zone 2, a lean, vernacular method of creating structural stability is adopted that allows for the creation of large spans that are well-optimised by the nature of the space. The steel joists that hold up the Kashia slabs are visible within the guest rooms. The main load bearing wall of the hotel cuts through the corridor one side, in contrast with the fabric panels on the other side. An acoustic ceiling also reminisces the perforations while cutting doing ambient sound.

Rainwater is harvested and 'grey' water from the sewage treatment plant is used to irrigate the hardy, local trees that are a part of the landscape. During construction, tree-cutting was avoided and the external hardscape is constructed and recycled from the waste materials that was accumulated during the digging process of the foundation. An exclusive HVAC system is developed as a significant element; a system that uses Earth cooling, Thermal Storage and Displacement ventilation to reduce energy consumption. While conventional air-conditioning systems consume 40% of the energy used in a building, apart from lower energy consumption, this system also ensures better indoor air quality and avoid recy-

cling. Both water and air circulate in distinct open loops and air is exhausted from in-between the dry, sandwiched roof. Towers that emerge from the ground help to transfer air to the interiors, and work as a means of architectural expression that is evocative of the traditional forts of Rajasthan. Multiple layers of glass are used to generate draughts of air and to filter sunlight. The minimal heat transmitted through the glass is used to induce the displacement ventilation system. Jaalis that are evocative of traditional Rasjasthani stone Jaalis with filigree are recreated in vinyl as a notional device to filter light and air for comfort.

Daylight ingress into the building is ensured in a manner that eliminates the use of artificial light during the day. Night lighting resonates that of an art gallery; all lighting is from the top with a hint of the sky, the jaali or the clear glass. The landscape lighting is de-cluttered, and is lit with borrowed light from the cottages and the hotel buildings. The overhang roof is used to bounce life from under the cottage and the overall intent is to efficiently orchestrate lighting in line with the running cables with no sharp rendering. Light from the west that is a dramatic, warm yellow, crafts an array of experiences in the different rooms, while bright southern light is used to bring in luminosity into interior spaces.

A minimal palette of stone, glass, steel and vinyl that is not distracted by too many surfaces is adopted to craft an architecture that is intense and bare-boned all at the same time. Concrete is used to a minimum, hard edges are contrasted with timber warmth, and the structural system/ construction techniques are expressed clearly with as little cladding as possible. As a hat tip to the 70's India modern, the solid, minimal furniture in rubberwood and rosewood inlay as inserts is designed to reflect the environmental concerns of the hotel. The contrasting circular pattern in the perforations also mimics and expresses itself as an intention in the upholstery,

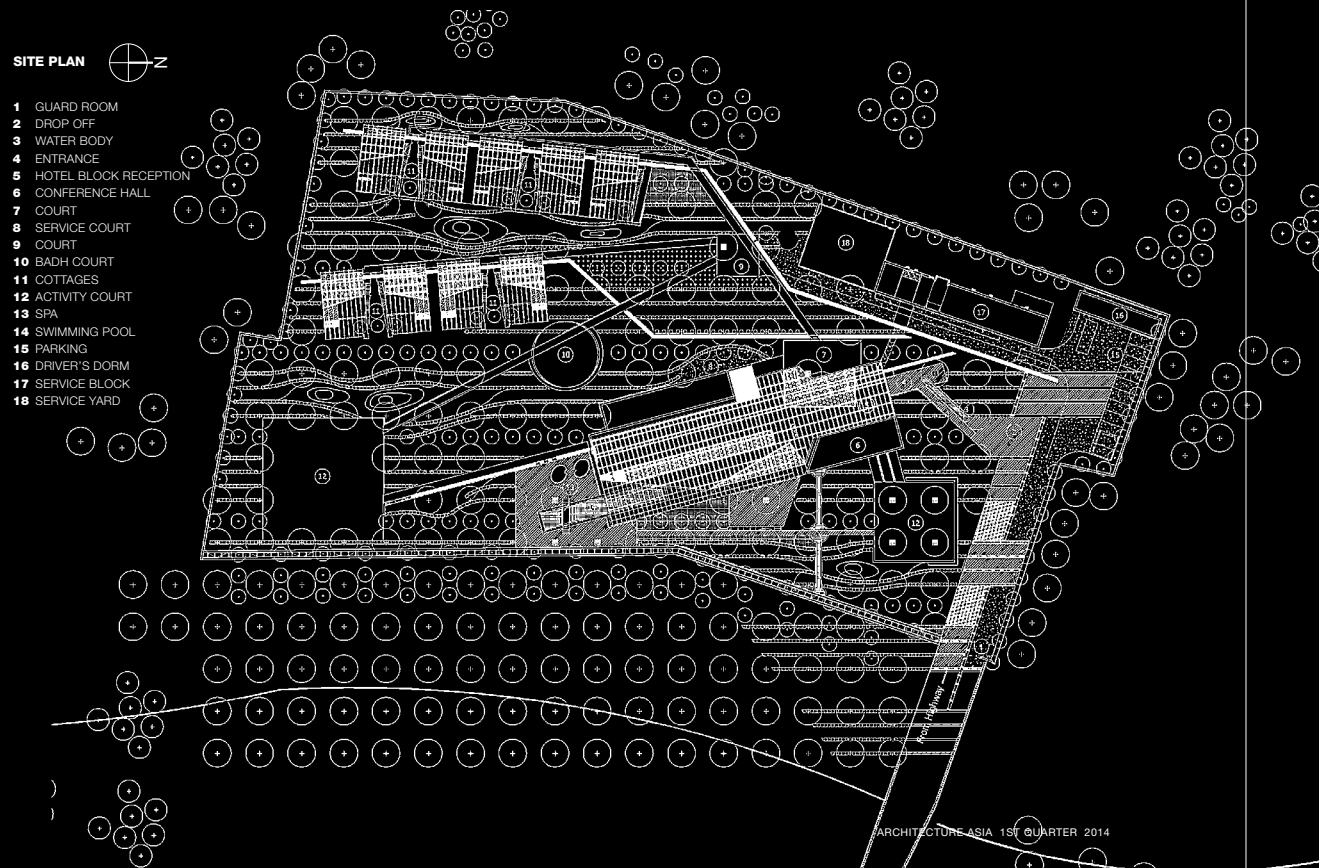
linen and furniture. As an attempt to blend in the local craft and culture, the furniture is sourced from local artisans and craftsmen.

Like a glasshouse in a jungle, Mana Ranakpur attempts to recreate the site as it was discovered, by unearthing the various layers that have been embedded in time. Rooted in regionality and collective memory, through its architecture, it creates interfaces that are expressed not as mere filigree or ornate decoration, but as a reflection of time. [aa](#)

Stone, glass, steel and vinyl forms the basic palette for the architecture



1/ Cottages 2/ Interior view



**LOCATION**  
Ranakpur, India

**ARCHITECT**  
Architecture Discipline / Akshat Bhatt

**DESIGN TEAM**  
Sneha Gurjar, Nidhi Khosla, Stuti Sahni, Debbayoti Dey

**BUILT-UP AREA**  
6,040 sqm

**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT**  
Isha Consultants

**M&E**  
Lirio Lopez

**LANDSCAPE**  
Plan Loci

**HVAC**  
Gupta Consultants & Associates

**PLUMBING**  
Deepak Kumar & Associates

**FURNITURE**  
Architecture Discipline

**LIGHTING**  
Rahul Singh & Akshat Bhatt

**ACOUSTICS ENGINEERING**  
Viren Bakshi & Akshat Bhatt

**PHOTOGRAPHER**  
Akshat Bhatt