

**MARK ELEY
WAKAKO KISHIMOTO**

SURFACE

SOUTHEAST ASIA



ISSUE 23
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2014

IN FASHION

SGD 12.90 / USD 15 / HK 120 / RM 26.50
IDR 160,000 / PHP 600 / BHT 500

ISSN 238-74766
9 772087 476009



Miniature City

Firm believers of the expression “what you see is what you get”, the minds behind Bangalore’s behemoth project, Bhartiya City, offers a comprehensive look at the development through its sustainably-designed Discovery Centre.

BY ASIH JENIE

India’s own Silicon Valley, Bangalore, is set to see Bhartiya City, its most ambitious development to date, built in 10 years’ time. Spread across 125 acres, the behemoth project is an independent city that comprises five precincts to be built in four phases. The project has taken six years and six teams of international architects and urban planners to design. Bhartiya is envisioned as “The City of Joy”—a city which combines India’s vibrant modern living with the sustainable blueprint of some of the best cities in Europe where, in the words of its founder, “the common man there could afford a good home and cycling to work was not life-threatening.” Now entering its second year of construction, Bhartiya City has launched Discovery Centre, a grand-scale visitor centre to give everyone a clear picture of the magnificent city to come.

Designed by New Delhi-based firm Architecture Discipline, the Discovery Centre is nestled at the heart of the site to engage the visitor right through the development. “The brief was to create a flexible ‘Town Hall’ that would also serve as the sales office and corporate office to illustrate the urban initiatives of the development,” says Akshat Bhatt, principal architect of Architecture Discipline. “The design had to be iconic so as to establish an identity and mark its presence from the highway.” Spanning 90 x 17 x 9 metres, the rectangular building might appear like a utilitarian hangar from the distance if not for the egg-shaped auditorium—its bright red shell sticking out from the clean-cut volume, a welcomed break from the banal form. “It’s really meant to show the germination of a new city, therefore the emerging ‘egg,’” Bhatt explains.

There is no clear distinction between the interior and exterior of the building. What partitions it has were finished with materials with some degree of translucency—polycarbonate sheets, glazed glass, perforated panels, and even layers of fabric. The building is set on a raised platform, accessible via a well-paved driveway

and a wide set of stairs. Visitors are greeted with cool air courtesy of the tall grasses surrounding the building and the extensive water surface set beneath the auditorium. Inside, natural light filters through the layers of fabric and the composite fascia boards, illuminating the space without heating the air. “It’s really a public space that demonstrates all that is positive about the natural elements in Bangalore, the sunlight, the air and the greenery,” says Bhatt. In addition to the auditorium, the double volume space and its mezzanine contain offices, a business centre, and a generous exhibition space hosting interactive exhibitions that show visitors the whole (future) cityscape. It will also be supplemented by tourist-friendly amenities like a retro ice-cream van, golf carts, cycle stands, information kiosks, and a lounge dotted with the actual furniture that would be used to furnish Bhartiya City’s residential quarters.

Natural light and air were not its only environmentally-friendly systems. Grey water from the building is recycled and stored in a number of water features spread around the building, as both a landscaping element and a passive cooling system; and an array of photovoltaic panels are arranged neatly across the driveways, harvesting solar energy to power the building at night.

And although branded as the iconic herald of Bhartiya City, the Discovery Centre is designed to anticipate changes brought by its advancing construction. It has a projected lifespan—six years, to be exact—and is accordingly assembled from modular parts that can be knocked down and re-assembled elsewhere if necessary. “Almost like a kit of parts,” adds Bhatt. Coming up with this knock-down concept, according to him, was the most challenging part of designing the building. “Locating such a large structure within an ever-changing master plan was the trickiest bit [and] to predict the evolution a little beyond six-year phases given that the last 15 years of development have been dictated more by economic considerations than anything else,” he says. “This isn’t just true for India, it’s true for all the world over.”

(FROM TOP TO BOTTOM) Night view of the Discovery Centre. Interior of the Discovery Centre seen from the mezzanine. The two-level business centre inside the Discovery Centre. Photos courtesy Architecture Discipline.

