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LA CITTÀ DELL' UOMO

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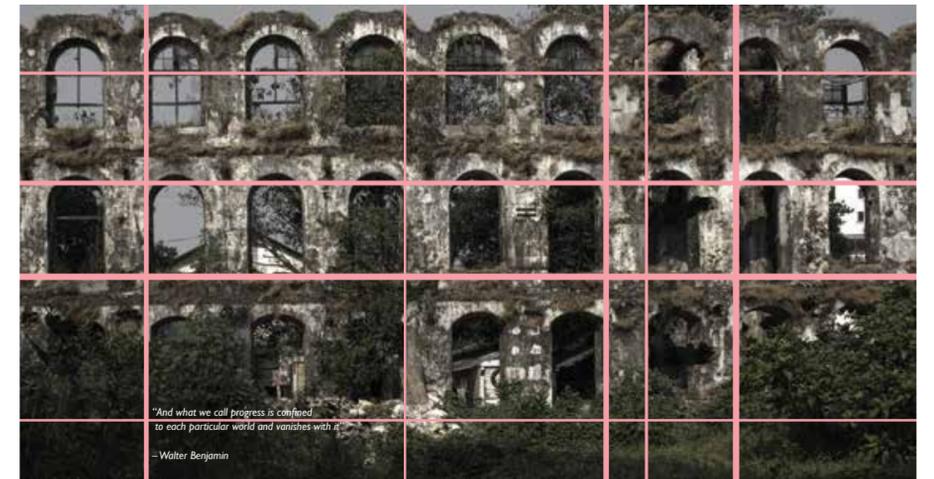
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Cover: In spatial terms, the Triburg Headquarter in Gurgaon by SPA Design is an "inverted step-well" where the visual axis is horizontal through all the courtyards and diagonal through all the terrace gardens. The building does not adopt the unified urban-block mentality, but plays with its volumes, step-back terraces and most importantly, its sense of transparency.



A page from the art-book Into a rose garden by Meera Devidayal



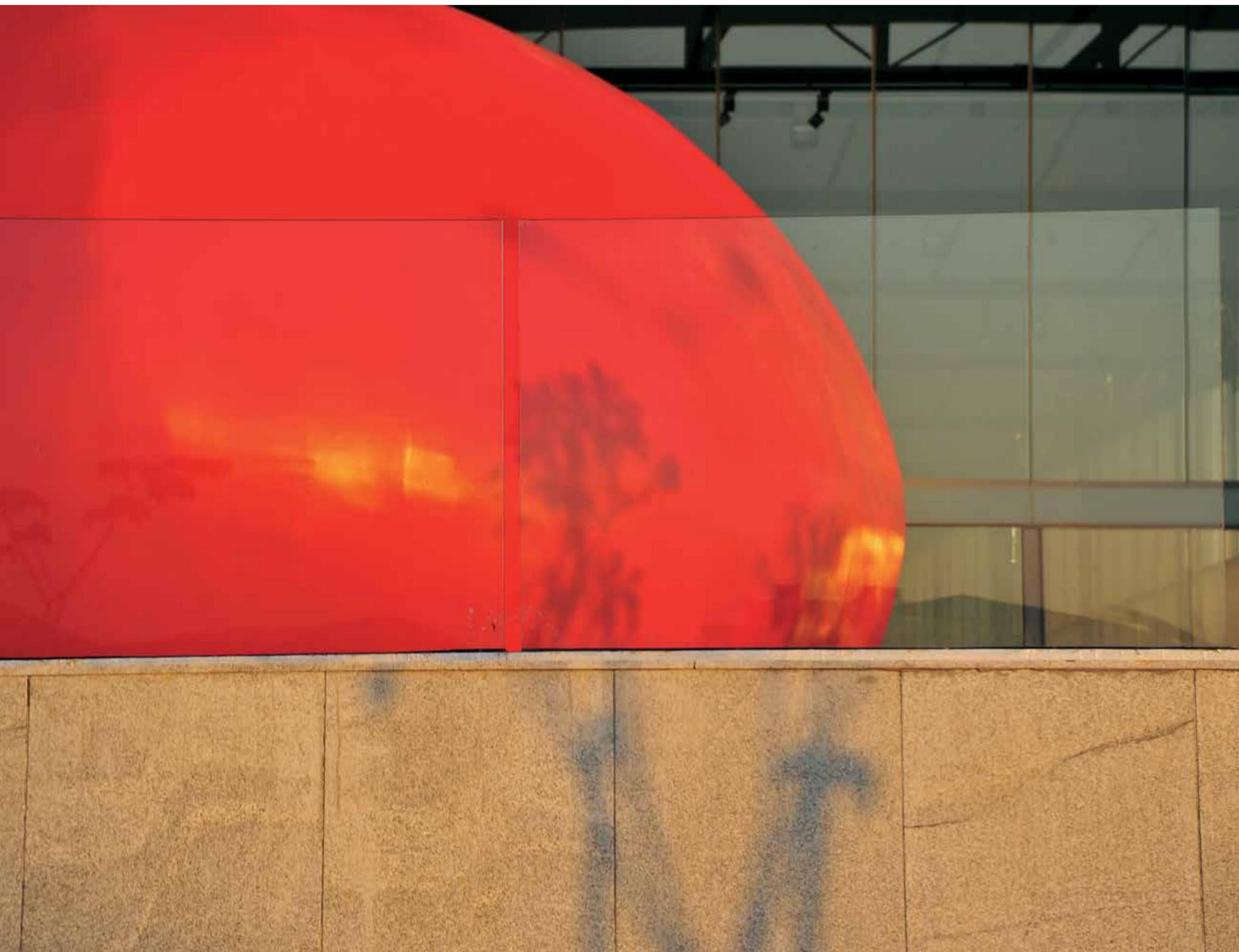
Architecture Discipline

A SPATIAL MOMENT

The Discovery Centre in Bengaluru built to share and exhibit information about a new township, is symptomatic of the idea of architecture as a transient yet strikingly attractive built space; one that would serve its purpose in a temporary period of time, and vanish

Text Kaiwan Mehta
Photos Jeetin Sharma

This spread: a bright red egg-shaped auditorium amidst an urban plaza is intended to attract the urban Indian family looking to be a part of the township



'Firmness' has always been the virtue of architecture; firmness and beauty, or delight, are two of the three Vitruvian virtues of architecture we celebrate at all times. Firmness, at one level, indicates the strength and stability of a building to stand tall and shelter, but firmness also points towards the long lasting possibility of architecture. The possibility for architecture to be monument, to be that piece of human creation that can delight you with shape, size and scale and can live beyond time! One of the crucial indicators in Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* was the discussion on architecture's move into the realm of Delight; and that also came in certain ways with moving away from Firmness that indicated timelessness. In many ways, in the last few decades, architecture has indeed, at its basic core, changed into a commodity that needs to constantly reproduce itself, reinvent itself, and hence, also needs to destroy its own self. Permanence or the ability to survive the tides of time is not the quality we look for in architecture, but rather its ability to surprise and delight us at all times; it need not be beautiful but it should be delightful – it bores you if it stands too long, so it should change, again and again. Having said that, it would be interesting to note how some

of the classic and often the most politically potent, or most historically landmark buildings have been temporary pavilions – Crystal Palace in 1851, London, to Meis's Barcelona Pavilion and many others, and Beatriz Colomina discusses this beautifully in a couple of her essays recently published as a small book. The building we feature here – Discovery Centre – in an area just outside Bengaluru, designed by Architecture Discipline, is designed on the premise of a short-term life, and with the intention to lure and attract. It is an impactful building, and that it needs to be for the functions it serves; it may not live down in history as a landmark building, but it is precisely this nature of this building – the ability to exist delightfully today and not exist tomorrow, probably not even as memory – is what makes it interesting. It attracts and draws people to a new built environment that reinforces normative family life in a new urban development, drawing on the virtues of planned living (and hence planned life), celebrating a coming together of community, and living with the facilities of a good civic life, but this very 'building of promises' will vanish after six years, or move on somewhere else. This fine building, well crafted, well thought through, attractive in the landscape it sits, sustainable and all of that, is

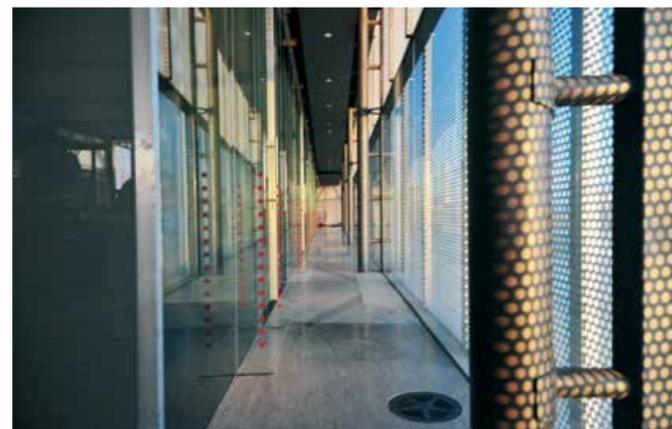


truly emblematic of the building cultures we live in – it promises permanence in declared states of fragility. We delight in the ability to disappear, but never claim it as a virtue; promises are embedded in time, and so was architecture at one point; today as much as architecture recalls its monuments that stand firm and for long, it breathes a language that revels in short-spans of life and the capacity it has to awe and delight! At the same time, one wonders how such buildings allow for the possibility to let go, to have architecture beautifully crafted and nurtured into becoming a fine building, only to one day move on and not become an object of fetish for history. However, it precisely for these reasons itself becomes the object of fetish in the contemporary moment, to be consumed as a talisman for the new futures to come!

Notes from the Architect:

As a studio that engages in progressive architectural practice with an intent to make buildings last longer through the utility of longer life-span materials, the Discovery Centre is envisaged as architecture that exhibits cultural continuity and creates built form that need not to be conditioned and spruced up timely. A Greenfield project purposed to demonstrate the upcoming progressive development at the Bhartiya city, Bengaluru, the brief was to create a flexible city town hall that would also serve as the site office/sales office to illustrate the urban real-estate initiatives of

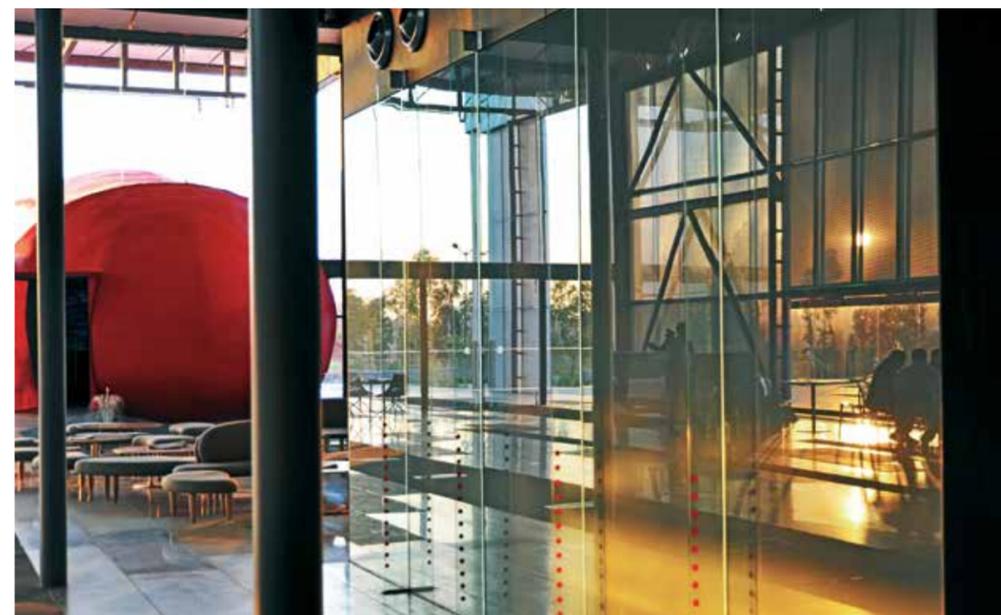
the Bhartiya Group. The brief also demanded the exploration of the possibilities of sustainable design and sustainable development on an extremely tight budget. Spread across 125 acres, the development is planned as a place-making exercise to craft an environment to attract people. Also determined from the brief is the fact that the building is only placed for six years and post that, it would be relocated and moved down the site precinct and hence the building was conceived as



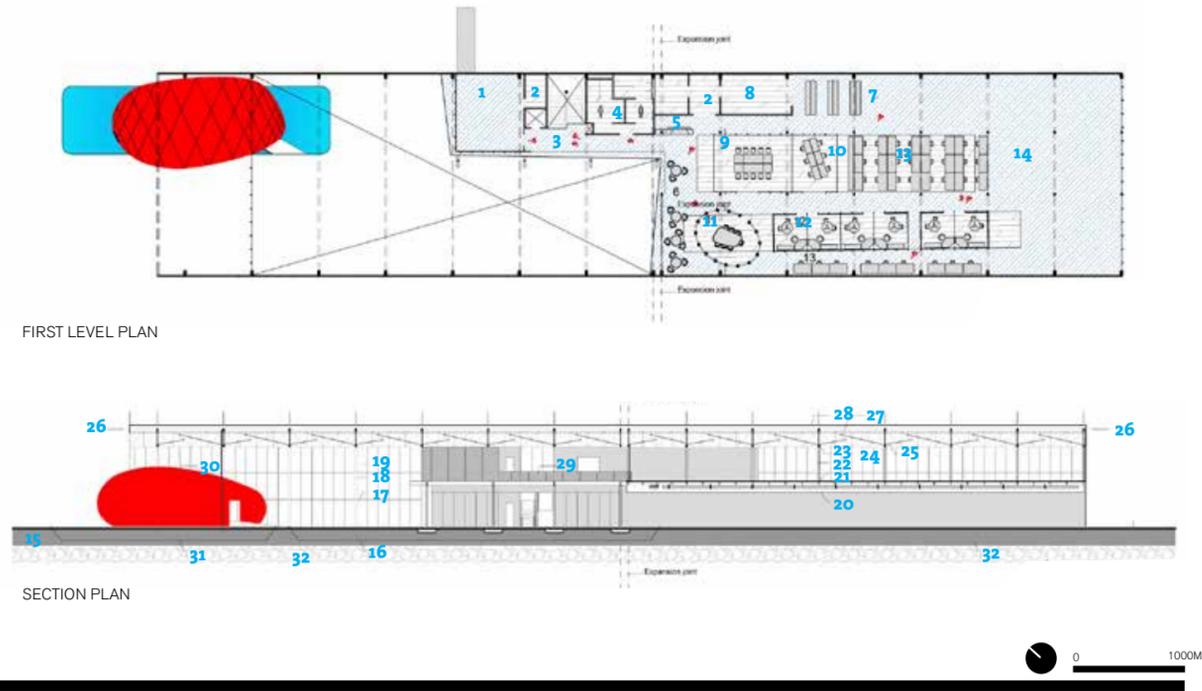
This page: the structure's night lighting is dramatically different from the visual experience during the day. Opposite page: the idea of the Discovery Centre is to take modularity beyond its conventional theoretical understanding, to a more literal level, that enables each panel, each nut and bolt to be assembled, dismantled and then reassembled processing the building like a machine

an assemblage of parts. Being a Greenfield project in the outskirts of Bengaluru, the design had to be more than just a rudimentary structure that would establish an identity even from the glimpse off the highway. While typically, a building of this nature is placed at the edge of the site as an open flexible shell that is dressed up, in order to enhance the spatial connect with the visitors, the Discovery Centre is placed at the heart of the site to engage the visitor right through

the development. The building had to tell a story, the concerns of the township and of course demonstrate the residential and commercial characteristics of the development. Optimising the sky, light and air quality in Bengaluru, the intent was to create a progressive design experience that would demonstrate the core value of a high quality of life in the development. Innovation is therefore crucial, and something distinctive had to be created that would not only stand out in form but also in colour, revealing a narrative for the township. In a derelict zone with no clear indication of what was to come in up in the imminent future, a palette that would enable all these aspects is adopted. An egg-shaped auditorium amidst an urban plaza is therefore conceived, which would attract the urban Indian family looking to be a part of the township. Built with glass fibre to introduce the narrative, the auditorium sits amidst a lotus pond that with its lotus motif pays homage to Indian design. Painted red, the egg on the plaza is aimed to bring the family together at one point. Red as a colour has the longest wavelength, and can be easily spotted from a distance even in the back of beyond – an in the face gesture for the visitor. Every other element such as golf carts, an ice-cream van, plasma screens are typological inserts that may get amended over time. A single flight staircase in red steel and regional granite stands out as a distinct feature that brings visitors



to itself. All other functions are planned as occurrences in an event that one happens to chance upon, inside the building. The building opens out at a lower level, connecting the north-south plaza, while creating a spill out space. A lightweight building is hence built on compacted soil that is borrowed from the excavated foundation of the surrounding development. The structure uses longer life span materials in a modular manner for ease of composition and assembly. Earthfill has been used to create the plinth, in order to use all the material that is dug out from the lower levels. The idea is to take modularity beyond its conventional theoretical understanding, to a more literal level, that enables each panel, each nut and bolt to be assembled, dismantled and then reassembled processing the building like a machine. A large-span built form is fashioned with the truss being the most economical way of covering these large spans. Using a truss system also aids in keeping the roof light, brings light inside and also enables controlled surrounding views of the site. An architectural mesh and glass is hence used; frit printed glass is used in a manner that reduces internal heat gain, and in an environment like Bengaluru, is easy to ventilate. Functionally, what is created is a 90-metre-long building with a 20-metre-large span and a double-height space and a deck that is suspended from the trusses to get a clear, multi-function space that can perform most functions (with a height of 4.5 metre). The structure is exposed in its entirety and painted with water-based paint to further allow for visual connections. In a conventional large-span structure, the column sizes are fairly large; to avoid this, dynamic laced columns are used that enable the structure to become a part of the building skin. In a typical 6 metre bay, the column is perceived to be much thinner than it actually is because it partially embedded within the glass, whilst being integrated with the ventilation system. Sun breakers at appropriate angles are employed both on the outside and the inside of the building. The clear Bengaluru sun is exploited by the photovoltaic farm that powers the plaza, the public area and the street lighting while grey water is used for landscaping. A thermal storage system is piggybacked on a 100 per cent fresh air, earth cooling system. Displacement ventilation techniques are used to introduce cool air from below the floor; this in turn is extracted through the glass skin and layered



FIRST LEVEL PLAN

SECTION PLAN

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Press lounges | 18 Built-up column |
| 2 Strong room | 19 Perforated fabric panel |
| 3 Circulation core | 20 False ceiling |
| 4 Restrooms | 21 Robertson's deck (suspended) |
| 5 Reception | 22 Suspension column |
| 6 Waiting lounge | 23 Steel truss |
| 7 Archival | 24 Steel N-girder |
| 8 Pantry | 25 Fabric louvres |
| 9 Conference | 26 Glazed facade |
| 10 Call centre | 27 Composite fascia |
| 11 Meeting | 28 Translucent fabric layer |
| 12 Glass cabin | 29 Translucent poly-carbonate sheet |
| 13 Secretarial port | 30 Glass fibre shell-auditorium |
| 14 Future | 31 Lotus pond |
| 15 Stabilised quarry and deep excavated rubbish | 32 Reclaimed earth |
| 16 Underground fresh air trenches | |
| 17 Lateral brace | |

Project
The Discovery Centre
 Location
Bengaluru
 Client
Bhartiya City; Bharatiya Urban
 Architect
Architecture Discipline
 Principal Architect
Akshat Bhatt
 Design team
Aditya Tognatta, Nishant Malhotra, Nidhi Khosla
 Consultants
 Structural: **Isha Consultants pvt ltd**, Project Lead: **VP Aggarwal**
 Electrical: **Lirio Lopez**, Project Lead: **Linus Lopez**
 Landscape: **BDP London: Chris Stanton (assisted by Design Milieu)**
 HVAC: **Gupta Consultants and Associates**
 Project Lead: **Nirmal C Gupta / Sameer Uddin**
 Plumbing: **Deepak Kumar & Associates**
 Engineering: **Lyrta Audio / Viren Bakhshi**
 Lighting: **Lirio Lopez, Linus Lopez**
 Site Area
5 Acres
 Project Built-up Area
3.44 m²
 Completion of project
November 2013

the roof. Designed as an exhaust duct, the glass skin has a void in between; beyond a certain point, a pressurised glass cavity is created which exhausts the air. This air coming out is at around 27 degrees C, and hence, the convection heat transfer is completely negated. The flooring is such that it can be reused, including the materials used. Some parts of the building are false floor, owing to the under-floor ducts. Atypical elements such as a Robertson deck are used to ensure that even the deck slabs are removable and can be used again. Frit printed glass is used to not only dissipate heat, but also to play with patterns and enable changes in light transformation to make the building appear dynamic through the day. Grey on the outside and white inside, the multiple layers of the frit-printed glass creates a dynamic during the day and at night. The Lighting transforms itself with the change in the number of people occupying the plaza, and likewise at different times of the day. The Night lighting is dramatically different from the visual experience during the day, and is always unique with Interesting colours making the building come alive even at night. The building should react

instantly to the environment; since seasons, time zones and durations create different experiences, the building should express that change. This dictates the choice of the local materials that are adopted to integrate with the regional context; steelwork that is typical of this area is manipulated for a responsive material palette which is fairly simple comprising of glass, steel, fabric and stone with no timber bring brought in from the outside. Locally available sadarali stone that is typically used to create archetypal freestanding walls to demarcate boundaries in the region is used to further exemplify the cultural continuity as a monolithic sculptural entity in the form of ramps, the water body etc. The longitudinal trusses are clad in a vinyl to express them as a visual element. The flora selection is also regional and berming from the excavated top soil is used to create more gathering space outside that also maximized the moderate climate of the region. Ferns and grasses that change quickly in colour and texture are exploited as a canvas to further enhance the architectural dynamic that creates a unique experience on each visit. @



Left, middle left, below, and far below: using a truss system aids in keeping the roof lightweight, and brings abundant natural light within indoor spaces. Middle, right: the clear Bengaluru sun is exploited by the photovoltaic farm that powers the plaza

