

ARCHITECTURE+DESIGN

A N I N D I A N J O U R N A L O F A R C H I T E C T U R E

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& JASREEN SHANGARI

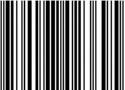
ICONIC BY NATURE, FUTURE-READY BY DESIGN



NEW URBAN FRONTIERS

- AAKASH SAXENA
- BJARKE INGELS,
THOMAS CHRISTOFFERSEN
& CLIFF GAYLEY
- GOONMEET SINGH CHAUHAN
- JUHI PATEL & JOSHUA JOHN
- RENY LIJO & LIJO JOS
- WINY MAAS

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CONTENTS

— ARCHITECTURE+DESIGN —



50



52



54



56



70

SPECIAL FEATURE

49 **Second Cities, First Chances**

50 **Snehal Shah**

Essteam Design Services LLP

52 **Nirop Kumar Reddy**

NA Architects

54 **Ashwani Duggal**

Subhash & Associates

PROJECT FEATURES

56 **A Green Refuge**

La Vallée Verte, France

MVRDV

64 **When Learning Finds its Playground**

The Big Little School, Bareilly

Design Ally Studio

70 **Theatre as Urban Gesture**

Tennessee Performing Arts Center, Tennessee, United States

BIG-Bjarke Ingels Group,

William Rawn Associates (WRA) & HASTINGS Architecture

78 **A House That Whispers**

The House Veiled In Brick, Kerala

LIJO.RENY.architects

84 **A Nexus for Urban Socialisation**

Eldeco Centre, New Delhi

Design Forum International (DFI)

90 **Between Density and Stillness**

Split House, Bengaluru

Yellow Door Architects

Special Feature

SECOND CITIES, FIRST CHANCES

PRODUCED BY KASHISH KAUSHAL

India's second cities are growing fast. The question is whether they're growing well. The metros have already written their cautionary tales, however, the tier 2 and tier 3 cities are still holding the pen. The real question is what kind of cities these places are becoming, and whether they can evolve without repeating the mistakes that have made many larger cities difficult, fragmented, and increasingly unlivable. The cities in this feature are places that have, until recently, been peripheral to the national conversation about urbanism. Cities like Chandigarh, Surat and even a tier 1 city like Hyderabad. They are among the fastest-growing urban centres in Asia where investment is arriving, towers are going up, and the property market is heating. Through the lens of architecture and urban design, the idea is to decode what makes smaller Indian cities distinct, what they stand to gain from thoughtful planning, and what they risk losing if development is driven only by speed, speculation, and imitation. The architects and designers featured here reflect on urban form while engaging with a larger civic question. What should a future-ready Indian city look like when it is not trying to become another metro, but something more balanced, more responsive, and perhaps more enduring?

SNEHAL SHAH

From Surat's fast-paced growth to its climate-conscious ambitions, he explores how smaller cities can evolve intelligently without becoming resource-heavy replicas of metros



Surat's municipal competence is exemplary at macro-engineering—sanitation, water networks, and rapid infrastructure execution. However, the city is getting away with a lack of holistic and genuine green development.”

—SNEHAL SHAH

Seven consecutive Swachh Survekshan titles, infrastructure delivered at speed, a municipal machine that actually functions. By the metrics that most Indian cities can only aspire to, Surat is a success. Ar. Snehal Shah of EssTeam Design Services is not unimpressed, but he is unsatisfied. Because competent governance, he argues, is not the same as conscious urbanism—and Surat, for all its civic excellence, is constructing a future built on borrowed energy, imported aesthetics, and a public realm that has yet to be held to the same standard as its drains. With the diamond and textile economy generating private wealth at extraordinary velocity, the city is at an inflection point: the infrastructure is in place, the capital is present, and the question now is whether Surat's next chapter gets written with the same rigour it brought to its first.

When you think about the future of tier 2 and tier 3 cities in India, what is the first architectural or urban condition that demands urgent attention?

The most urgent condition is the blind adoption of resource-heavy, metropolitan archetypes that ignore local climate and ecology. Tier 2 and 3 cities are rapidly building glass-and-aluminum clones that act as greenhouse boxes, detached from regional construction methods. At EssTeam, our USGBC and IGBC certified projects prove that sustainability is not a premium add-on; it must be the baseline. We must arrest this trend by mandating passive design strategies, carbon-neutral materials, and microclimate management. Before these cities lock themselves into decades of high energy dependence, we must pivot toward climate-responsive, low-carbon urbanism. For that, the foremost need for architects and designers is to consciously and responsibly learn how to measure the impact of each action in their design process.

If you had to articulate one guiding principle for the future of tier 2 and tier 3 cities, what would it be?

The existing mechanism of development, viz. Town Planning Schemes (TP Schemes) & General Development Control Regulations (GDCR) seem to lack the possibilities to generate better liveable cities. There is a very hard edge between the developable plots, and the public realm, and results in many negative spaces within the private plots. If the paradigms of development of plots can be challenged and changed, other than the building footprint, the entire leftover space can become the public realm offered by the plot, and that would create great synergies between the public and private stakeholders of a city. Singapore is such a wonderful learning ground to understand the details of this kind of human centric & sustainable development.

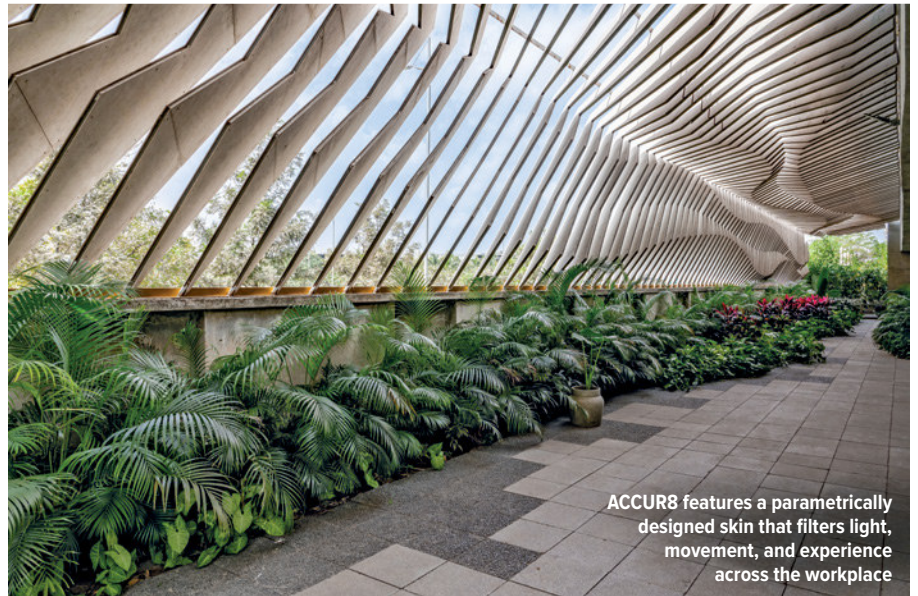
Surat is one of the fastest-growing cities in Asia, with remarkable civic



Gopi Talao Redevelopment is a decade-long urban regeneration effort that reimagines the lake as a shared civic and ecological asset



JENGA is a sculpted interplay of cantilevered forms that gives the project its distinctive architectural identity



ACCUR8 features a parametrically designed skin that filters light, movement, and experience across the workplace

governance. What is Surat getting right in the built environment, and what is it getting away with?

The ultimate guiding principle is: ‘Ecology must precede economy’. Long-term growth is impossible without a resilient, self-sustaining environment. Surat’s municipal competence is exemplary at macro-engineering—sanitation, water networks, and rapid infrastructure execution. However, the city is getting away with a lack of holistic and genuine green development. We are building vast amounts of real estate that ignore lifecycle carbon costs, energy efficiency, and indoor environmental quality. Another miss out, I feel, of civic governance, is in effectively implementing its vision of

creating a good liveable city. We believe that great civic governance must now evolve to mandate sustainable and human-centric development frameworks, and that too backed by professional and high-level implementation, ensuring rapid economic expansion doesn’t come at the cost of environmental bankruptcy.

In your city, what is the one urban condition that most urgently needs design attention—movement, public realm, housing, infrastructure, or civic identity?

The public realm re-engineered as a green, sustainable infrastructure. Surat has reasonably mastered utilitarian movement, but our public spaces lack ecological and

human integration. We urgently need to redesign our streets, riverfronts, and plazas to serve as the city’s green lungs. This means transforming concrete heat-traps into shaded, walkable corridors that encourage non-motorized transport, integrate bio swales for flood mitigation, and use sustainable, regional materials. Infusing the public realm with the same rigorous sustainability standards we apply to certified green buildings will redefine Surat’s civic identity from an industrial powerhouse to a sustainable metropolis. We strongly believe a good city is developed by addressing issues at the source in a decentralised manner and not always gunning for large capital-intensive centralised projects.