I am a NON-QUALIFIED ARCHITECT!

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"The interesting thing is, the driving force and inspiration, the man behind all these creations, Jimmy Mistry, candidly admits,"

Well, his passion and determination speak through his work and has proved beyond doubt that it doesn’t necessarily take a degree from an elite design school to set new benchmarks in design.

Jimmy Mistry

Earlier, when we had only one kind of lighting to work with, materials responded in a certain manner. Now with numerous lighting available, materials respond in a completely different manner. Sound plays an important role too. Unlike today, most of the Indian architect’s work paid attention to sound insulation in hospital projects earlier. Today, it is vital to choose materials that are sound absorbent. This is one more dynamics one needs to keep in mind while selecting materials.

With science and engineering becoming more and more complex each day, do we just go by aesthetics and functionality? For instance, in India, textiles, we use water soluble parts and have completely stopped using glass and other form of wood products because the world has started talking about being green. We have always been conscious about the world has started talking about being green. We have always been conscious about..."
Experience of designing the police station in Mumbai...

Jimmy Misty: It was not only the Police Station; I have designed a lot of things for the Maharashtra Police including the Commissioner's office. It's office, Immigration, Traffic headquarters etc. It was a pleasurable experience.

While designing the police station, a great understanding of materials was required. It is easy to design an office because we know that an office is going to be maintained. To design a police station, which will look good 10 years down the line, you need to be very careful about the kind of materials you use because they are 'not' going to be maintained. The Police station designed at Marine drive was a one in its kind and it was a good experience to try and sit with the Maharashtra police to standardize things where they do not have a standardized manual even today. I gave them materials that would look nice, function well and they don't need to be maintained at all. I think we were quite successful in creating a maintenance-free design where people get surprisingly refreshed on entering a police station like that.

About Urban Planning and Urban design ideas...

Jimmy Misty: Being a non-qualified architect, non-qualified designer and a non-qualified urban planner, I try and address the same vacuum. If I am designing a township for middle class group in India, considering the cost of constructing 1000-1200 sqft for a ground+14 storey, I try to analyze what are the other developers doing and offering for that price and what is it that I via my judgment of design and selection of materials can offer a better product in the same price range.

A better product in terms of better space planning, better selection of materials, better understanding of cross ventilation, getting an optimal amount of light in the building etc.

Sometimes the package also includes lighting with the developers for providing dressing balconies so that the clothes are not hanging all around the building. Nobody wants to hang their clothes out of their living rooms; they do it out of no choice.

A better understanding of creating air conditioning shaft is important so that you don't have condensers seen typically hanging out in these middle-income housing.

Now if a simple municipal low were to address this that a flat plan will not be approved without a dressing balcony, in the next 20 yrs, all the hanging clothes in our city are going to vanish off. This is my way of addressing a design issue right at the core after having a thorough understanding of what is missing and addressing them.

Being a non-qualified architect and designer, I need to be on top and deliver viable project after project because I am not to prove a point. I am not in the project purely for fashion or brand name. I am in the project because I add value to the project and my thinking is pretty different from mundane trained designer's mind. I come up with things, which are different and add value to the overall project and the experience of the people who occupy those premises.

Idea of high-end mass housing solutions...

Jimmy Misty: The minute it is mass housing, it is of poor quality. We need to get new construction technology into high-end mass housing that's the only way to address this situation and improve the quality.

In India, we suffer a lot because of poor workmanship and quality of concrete. If these two things are taken care of in mass housing, the smaller issues can be easily addressed.

Suppose, if you are today plastering a building and you know that the quality of concrete and sand are not going to last even for 10-12 years, which means it would be due to repairs by then. This is because the sit percentage in sand which is supposed to be only 2-3% is actually 20-30%. You cannot be using sand like this.

“Nobody wants to hang their clothes out in the balconies; they do it out of no choice.”

You can get silica, or read mix plaster which would be manufactured by reliable sources and you know that the plaster is going to wear and tear for the next 30-50 years. It will not lose the bond on the concrete surfaces where it is put up. If these basic things are addressed, I think we can go a long way in mass housing. So you need to change materials at times and stick to quality; that’s where magazines like yours come into picture, in educating and advocating sound material practices.

Similarly the foundry needs improvement. We need to move away from traditional shuffling plies to stainless-steel or aluminum. I wish some kind of norm or regulation be implemented prohibiting the use of sand simply because the regulatory body won’t allow it. You have to use a precast then, automatically things will improve. And the sand mafia will have nobody to sell their sand to and we will get pre-mixes which are coming from plants where the silica percentages are controlled.

This way, the life of a plasterer is going to be much longer. You know things like this are going slowly but steadily change our environment around us and the mass housing culture.

Also, nobody really focuses on lighting when it comes to mass housing. No lighting consultants are used. Why can't we use the services of lighting consultants because then it is going to be replicated. My idea is to get the best professional help you can get for mass housing. You do it not because the project deserves it but because you are emotionally connected and want to improve the quality of human lives.
What led to the concept of Persian Architecture...

**Jimmy Mistri:** It is my belief and understanding that as a designer my job is to identify a vacuum and then design within that vacuum. Persian architecture is something where there is a vacuum. If I had designed anything else in Della Tower, be it contemporary or classical, I wouldn’t have addressed the vacuum. The Persian and Perzi community being extremely successful in India, they have put in a good gamut of temples, which have severe architecture with clean simple lines, but not anything of the great Persian architecture.

I addressed that vacuum and it serves the purpose from a community standpoint where I can showcase the Persian architecture to the current generation and the future generations. It addresses the vacuum where people are now poised to see something in pristine glory rather than what is in the rains. I design to create something unique.

While designing a resort in Lonavala, I would study worldwide and design something that is not available. When you think of Goa, you can immediately think of Portuguese architecture, Balinese architecture, but there’s no Lonavala Architecture.

So you need to address this vacuum and design something that is truly contemporary and international yet very earthy which lifts in the context of the Sahyadri Mountains & ranges. For example, some restaurant designs tend to be nice, boldly done and too plush yet without any fun element. I feel fun elements add to greater connectivity.

When I design restaurants, I try to throw in some interesting elements. It may be in the washrooms by using materials which make people talk about it. Not because they have an expensive marble or other stone, but the “Concept.” You know, the whole word “Design-ideology” has to revolve around creation of that uniqueness in the design.

**Any plan for venturing out into public spaces as well...**

**Jimmy Mistri:** I would love! I have a friend whom I admire when it comes to public spaces. Thomas Heatherwick of Heatherwick Studio. I have had the pleasure of having Thomas in India stay with me in my house and come and see my Lonavala project.

What architects start designing for themselves, then majority of the issues with poor architecture would be resolved. If I were to design a 600sqft flat in Juhu Road and imagine myself in my family living there, I would automatically be sensitive to everything including the nature in the environment. I would be supersensitive to the amount of light and that enter my flat. I would be highly sensitive in utilizing every inch of the 600sqft in the most optimal manner.

When architects start getting emotionally bound to their projects, things will completely change. Without a doubt, safety & security will be a number one priority. In most cases however, I think, the conceptual aspect takes over.

Please share your experience in designing the Della Resorts and Della Adventure.

**Jimmy Mistri:** It has been quite a life-changing experience for me because last 4 years have gone into doing it. And the net result is a total shift in my entire life & career from being a designer and an architect to being a resort owner. It is India’s largest adventure park and we know we are running a resort so we have become a proper hospitality company that is running 9 restaurants, 3 Images, a convention center, a resort and an adventure park. And now we are talking about doing a similar set up in Bengaluru, Dells and Goa. My whole career and life has changed into doing something like this. I enjoy designing for myself because I am not under somebody’s control. It is quite motivating to hear appreciations about what you have created and your level of passion speaking in the minutest detail of the project. You feel devoted to do more.
“I am working on a residence to be designed for Chairman of Religare in Delhi on a acre piece of land. It is a very high-end residence and a very tastefully done up place. It is an exciting project. Setting up Della Adventure in Bangalore is another interesting project where my mind is continuously working.”

Moral responsibility of architects...

Nancy Mistry: It is a complex issue and I think education is definitely one of the answers to that. The quality of education is quite poor in overall design sense in engineering aspects, in terms of architecture, also in terms of sensitivity towards design.

A line of thought to be incralated into every budding architect and interior designer in the country is that you are designing for others and you are morally responsible for the people you are designing for. This is the missing link.

There is no such line of thought inculcated into the students that you are morally responsible, if not legally for your design, be it a house, a warehouse, a house or an office. If this thought can be engraved in their DNA while they are in college then I believe everything else will be answered automatically.

Tell us about your love with Lighting.

Nancy Mistry: I get involved with landscape and lighting design at a personal level. I am very intrigued with it because of my initial exposure to studio design with majority of the television studios that we had designed. My involvement in lighting started much before most architects and designers started realizing the importance of hiring professional lighting consultants. My office Della House was done entirely with LED lights way back in 2004 when people have not really even understood the importance of LED lights.

In all our projects, Della House or other projects, extreme amount of importance is given to exterior elevation lighting and interior lighting design. I tend to get involved with it entirely and enjoy designing the lightings myself.”
Spotlight

Della-Terra is responsible for all the corporate office furniture in the showcased project - Black & Veatch (both designing & manufacturing) of a 44,000 sq ft. office space located in Pune.

You usually manufacture the furniture for your projects?

Jimmy Mistry: Yes. I had setup a furniture factory in Daman in 1997. It is a pretty unique 70,000 sq ft factory that manufactures furniture which only supplies to our own projects. We don’t sell the furniture in the market.

My entire resort furniture has been designed and manufactured in the factory. It produces great quality furniture while price-wise, it is even more competitive than China. Retail furniture in all our projects are 100% designed and manufactured by us.
Your favourite project...

Jimmy Misra: Definitely, today it is designing the Adventure project at Lonavala. Designing the adventure park, the second homes, designing the public spaces inside the park, the resort & landscaping, the gardens, multiple restaurants, convention centre & ball rooms. It is a great feeling when you can do the entire project the way you want to get it done. It is my favourite project and I feel that my design talents are best explored in a diverse project like this where in a single project I am able to do so much together.

Dell Adventure is India's largest adventure park which is constructed together with a resort, making it a great hospitality package with Adventure & relaxation. The project has 1 restaurants, 1 lounge, a convention centre, a resort and an adventure park. "And now we are talking about doing a similar set up in Bangalore, Delhi and Goa," says the proud owner.

Your message for Surfaces Reporter magazine.

Jimmy Misra: You guys are doing a good job. If you could consciously mention designers' contributions to make them feel responsible for whatever they are doing in terms of materials, a larger purpose would be served to the society, the architecture and the design community in particular.