

THE HIGH OF CREATIVITY

Maverick architect Jimmy Mistry is an accidental architect who loves the freedom that hospitality design offers him, says **Aabhas Sharma**

There are some things you don't want to know about your architect. Such as a passion for bikes, for instance. When you're looking for an architect to design your home, or office, you don't want someone who'll necessarily be concentrating only on the garage. Though Jimmy Mistry's credentials more than make up for his maverick interests, it's something to keep in mind. Till you realise that he's also a devout Parsi, the same Mistry who, as a matter of conscience, initiated work on the Fire Temple in Dadar, Mumbai, one of his more challenging assignments, but more about that later.

For those who came in late, Jimmy Mistry set up his architectural practice—Della Technica—with a handful of people and a few lakh rupees between them. They were keen to make it big, but could hardly have anticipated the success of their venture. That was eleven years ago. Today, Della Technica has a turnover of over Rs 100 crore and has become a name to be reckoned with in architectural circles. Which must be some vindication for Mistry who, he is at pains to point out, is neither a qualified architect nor a designer. The company may be known today for its residential and commercial complexes, IT parks and hospitality projects, but Mistry started off by picking up contractual assignments for repair work and maintenance of buildings. Opportunity knocked on his door when a design firm in Italy offered him the chance to work with furniture. Mistry has since not looked back.

His design philosophy, he maintains, is simple. "Each structure we work on should be a landmark." Which is why Mistry and his team undertake extensive research about the intended project as well as its users before accepting an assignment.

And which is why, Mistry explains, everything from building solutions to the choice of colours or even lighting materials is determined by the nature of the building—whether it is an Ayurvedic spa, for instance, a commercial office or a chemicals company. Nor is he averse to using international designs or materials, so long as they are not "an eyesore in the name of creativity", he laughs. It's one reason why he is crit-

ical of architects who use too much glass or steel in their work. "Each area has its own sensibilities and it's important to keep that in mind as well," he insists.

Citing the example of the Crisil office complexes in Delhi and Mumbai, he says the company wanted to strike a balance between the conventional and the contemporary. His solution was materials like ceramic-coated coloured glass, veneer panels and marble flooring for a look that matched both sets of sensibilities. "The right design is all about understanding what your clients want and then mixing it with your sensibilities," he says. "So far it has worked for us."

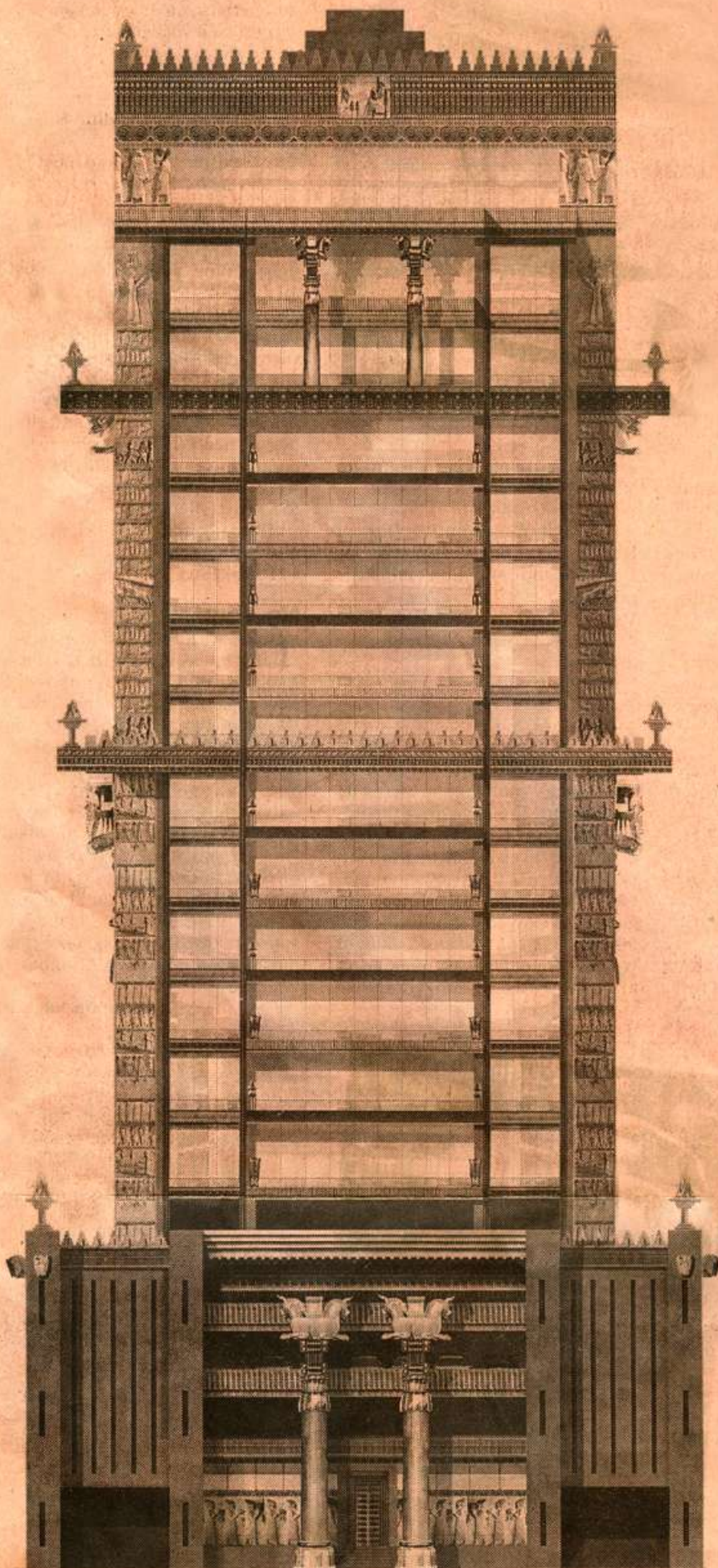
No wonder he was keen to take on the Fire Temple renovation in Dadar as part of his exercise to ensure that Mumbai does not become a jungle of concrete boxes. "We could not change certain elements, and yet it needed a major facelift," he explains of his restoration effort. While he chose to replace the worn out floors

with Italian marble, he managed to retain the original wood on the doors and windows, simply ensuring it was touched up almost beyond recognition. A landscaped garden was created inside the temple compound to breathe new life into it. "We took two months to complete the project but it was one of my most satisfying experiences."

No wonder hospitality projects—a spa or, say, a recreational resort, give him a creative high. One such resort is the CEO's Enclave in Lonavla, which has a similar spin-off in the south as well. For these, he has used lighter shades to create a sense of space and lighting that plays on the sprawl rather than just for dramatic affect.

It's hardly surprising that after his stint in Italy, Mistry should be passionate about furniture design. Della Technica, therefore, has a furniture manufacturing plant and produces modular furniture. Which also fits in with Mistry's belief that the company should be a one-stop shop for all architecture and interior design solutions. But a biking architect? Mistry, who when not working is out riding his three superbikes, two of them Harleys, laughs. "It's the best stress-buster for me," he says, "it takes my mind off everything else." Architects too perhaps need their time off. ■

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Della Tower, Mumbai: a skyline with a defining sensibility