

THE CHROMA ZONE

In Florence, Italy, the new Museo Novecento
— dedicated to Italian art of the 20th century —
takes a vibrant approach to wayfinding

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HK\$48
US\$18
€15





An architectural transformer

Text: Leona Liu Photography: Courtesy of DCA Architects

Designed by DCA Architects as a studio space within an existing warehouse structure, the Group DCA office in Sultanpur, New Delhi successfully transforms an old storage unit to a fully-functional work space



As Delhi continues to expand as a metropolis, the organic settlements that once dotted the surrounding landscape are gradually being subsumed into the city. Existing linkages to suburban nodes are also strengthening as traffic volumes increase and the city's hugely successful mass transit system spreads into the hinterland. This evolving fabric of the city is creating a complex confluence of building typologies, as pioneering entrepreneurs seek out the elusive combination of large flexible spaces and lucrative capital investments.

Located just off the main arterial connection to Gurgaon, the Group DCA office, a 413 sq-m building, is highlighted by the dichotomy of adaptive reuse within an old warehouse structure and the local context of an indigenous settlement. Conceived as a box within a box, the design employs a complex layering of spatial hierarchies that caters to flexibility and provides spaces for both private and communal use, fostering a sense of creative continuity.

Upon entering, a stark reception area divides the space into two parts: the common interaction zone, and the studio itself, which is the bulk of the workspace. The interaction zone is designed as a large hall, with two glass and wooden boxes that are used for meetings; the large remaining space serves as a multipurpose hall which is used for more hands-on design activities and engagement such as demonstrations, mock ups, internal team meetings and trainings, as well as a lunch room and a resource centre.

Between the two zones and strategically situated next to the entrance is the pantry, while on the other side of the reception is a cavernous studio. Four glass boxes within the studio, which create 'cabins' for the partners and the finance and projects heads, lend transparency between the individual rooms and the larger workspace, while affording required privacy for senior management.

Below

Approached from the exterior, the building unfolds in a series of architectonic gestures, like the virtually transparent front façade

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Conforming to the 'box in a box' concept, the DCA office is designed to be flexible and provides both private and communal spaces





Top
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Facing page clockwise from top
The edgy, industrial appearance inherited as a part of the old structure is further enhanced with the use of raw wood • Between the two zones and strategically situated next to the entrance is a visually engaging pantry • The carpenter's work table, commonly known as *adda*, is set in its original form as a discussion table in the library

Internally, the DCA building unfolds in a series of planned and unplanned architectural gestures. The front façade is virtually transparent, the emphasis being on traversing a path around a mostly glazed pavilion. An intimate courtyard is carved out from within the rectilinear volume, minimally adorned with a steel planter bench and providing unrestricted views through the studio and into the reception, transposed against a white brick wall set within a glazed envelope delineated only by the thin members of the dark frame. A rough-hewn stone wall on the right has been raised to the same height as the building, creating the appearance of a walled-in court in the spirit of Pritzker Prize-winning Mexican architect Luis Barragan.

The edgy, industrial appearance inherited as a part of the old structure is further enhanced with the use of raw wood, rough unpolished Kota stone and unfinished steel in the pantry and toilets, with a basic lacquering/waxing to seal untreated surfaces.

Unplastered walls are simply painted, the concrete floor is retained and the services remain exposed across the ceilings.

The finish and joinery of the materials and details is maintained as natural and minimalistic. Rubber wood is used for the workdesk partitions, tables, and glass supported ceilings in cabins, while a carpenter's work table, commonly known as an *adda*, has been ingeniously repurposed as a conference table, with its original form retained for holding open discussions in the library.

Working with a small budget, the space has been transformed from an old storage unit to a fully functional workspace, flexible enough to foster a high level of interaction between the two verticals within the company, the studio and the projects team. A combination of old and new furniture, along with elegantly detailed new lighting, aids in creating a befitting ambience. The executed design successfully employs a complex layering of spatial hierarchies that caters to the flexibility essential for a growing design services firm. ●

