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DESIGN IS BOUND TO RESPOND TO THE CHANGING WORLD'S NEEDS. THE DESIGNERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON HOW DESIGN CAN PLAY A ROLE IN MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.

As the world is emerging from the aftereffects of the pandemic, it is reengaging with spaces and space designing concepts are evolving in real time and long term. The common set of expectations from the built environment, have changed and new norms and patterns are getting defined in sync with the new people's behaviours and interaction models.

The designers are conceiving new spatial typologies and formulating new ways of product applications with the goal of elevating the human experience, wellness and sustainability in the built spaces. **Mayooree Saxena, Founder & Principal Architect, SAI Consultants**, a Bhopal based architectural and interiors consultancy was of the view that the pandemic has forced us to re-evaluate our thought process behind every design concept, especially public areas. **Asha Sairam, Principal, Studio Lotus** from New Delhi agreed that with the pandemic gradually redefining our notions of 'normalcy', we are increasingly turning inwards, reflecting on the quality of our lives during this enforced pause from daily routines.

Amit Aurora, Partner, groupDCA based in New Delhi says that as we get increasingly conscious about green and sustainable living, it is imperative to design according to the context and the local climate. **Kanhai Gandhi, Partner, KNS Architects**, a Mumbai based design firm concurs that the pandemic has led people to question their relationship with the environment and what they were doing to help it.

Anurag Pashine, Founder & Principal Architect, Salankar Pashine & Associates from Nagpur mentions that architects and designers are constantly working to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, and they can now discern certain significant trends that are expected to last a decade. **Pallavi Pashine, Founder & Principal Architects, Salankar Pashine & Associates** added that during the



MAYOOREE SAXENA



ASHA SAIRAM

lockdown, half of the world's population worked from home, and while few had pre-existing home offices, many struggled to manage work within the family. With the popularity of adaptive and multifunctional furniture, the era of dynamic working has begun.

OFFICE SPACE PLANNING TAKING A NEW MEANING

The modern workforce is growing more dynamic, and office density is becoming more flexible. The role of the workplace is transforming as flexible working evolves. In addition, how offices are used and function will change.

Kanhai Gandhi elaborated, "Densities or strength per office to be checked, in case of inadequate space or any sort of space constraint, this could be negated by staggering of the work force per office or cubicles, as well as compartmentalising of every desk with clear screen guards to ensure perfect personal distancing. Sanitizers could be placed at the entrance door of every office or cubicles. In case of a new development, the office or cubicles could be designed keeping in mind the minimum distance required between two tables along with the clear screen guards. Apart from the above, the other ancillary activities like toilets, pantries, meeting rooms, etc. need similar solutions like the cubicles to be incorporated to ensure the required health measures are in place. Existing canteens and office cafes could be made more functional and efficient by keeping a staggered timing in mind or a



perfect personal distancing in place within these spaces. This could be achieved by introducing, innovative flooring patterns which define the zones of each employee at the same time its graphical representation would add to the aesthetics of the space.”

Mayooree Saxena expressed similar thoughts, “The pandemic has forced designers and organizations to



AMIT AURORA

HISTORICALLY, TECHNOLOGY WAS INTEGRATED INTO THE BUILDINGS IN A PIECEMEAL WAY. TAKING CUES FROM HUMAN BEHAVIOUR AND CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS, THE INTEGRATING OF DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL DESIGN SOLUTIONS IS GROWING.

reimagine their work culture and the role of offices in creating safe, productive and enjoyable jobs and lives for employees even if they are now working in hybrid mode. However, organizations have started to shrink footprints so that they have less than one desk per person, and the recession is likely to accelerate that trend. But, focus on sustainability and nature-based designs is of prime importance now. At the most basic level, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of hygiene and safety, giving popularity to more of contact-less technology, facial recognition technology, automatic doors, voice-activated elevators, cell phone-controlled room entry, hands-free light switches and temperature controls. Co-working spaces is another concept which is getting popular after pandemic.”



KANHAI GANDHI

Anurag Pashine & Pallavi Pashine said, “Due to COVID-19 and efforts to stop the virus's transmission, work-from-home and remote working are now commonly used in professional settings across the world. It is well recognised that the way we define work is undergoing a transitory period. The design and functioning of workplaces, and subsequently the relationship between people and spaces, are expected to be considerably impacted by the revolutionary working practices brought in by digitalization and future expectations in the working environment. Office activities are changing from what is considered “normal,” and this change has both personal and social consequences that may affect effectiveness. A great opportunity exists to evaluate solutions on how to “redefine” the workplace of the future to promote the existence of flexible working patterns while also fostering elevated office experience.”

Asha Sairam was of the opinion that the conventional archetype of the modern, 21st century office – an open-plan, hermetically sealed, air-conditioned glass enclosure – is no longer feasible in the post-pandemic hybrid work culture. “The health and wellness of employees depends on cross-ventilation, daylight and natural air exchange, with a discernment in furniture layouts and material choices to ensure they adhere to distancing regulations and remain infection-free. Returning to traditional building principles with well-planned courtyards, day-lit spill-outs and terraces reduces dependence on retrofitting, while planning interventions such as smaller seating clusters

suited to a hybrid, flexible roster of employee occupancy effectively address the organizations’ COVID-safety regulations. True post-COVID resilience has emerged from combining borrowed wisdom from the past with cutting-edge technology: projects now include provisions for occupancy sensors to monitor employee strength, disinfection robots deployed at regular intervals, and touch-free doors for minimised surface contact.”

Amit Aurora shared his opinion, “Office design directly affects the productivity and wellness of the company and its employees it is, therefore, imperative that office designs are set up to be the best possible working environment it can be—to make its employees comfortable, relaxed, and productive. Lighting greatly affects the physical and psychological well-being of the employees in a workspace. While dynamic day-lighting is good for health and enhances productivity, static lighting causes stress and negatively impacts the health of the user. It is always better to use daylight optimally and reduce the use of artificial lights during the day.”

DESIGN FUTURE FOR HOSPITALITY AND RETAIL SPACES

Convivial public spaces that offer a discerning retail and hospitality experience along with opportunities for organic social interactions are becoming the preferred choice for people as they emerge from a prolonged spell of limited communal engagement.

As per Asha Sairam, the accepted notion of luxury associated with opulence is steadily giving way to an authentic experience through the richness of a space and communal experiences. “Design that advocates for greater equality and feels part of our daily lives, as opposed to an inaccessible edifice predicated upon expense and exclusivity, is set to become the new paradigm for this sector. At Studio Lotus, we believe in elevating the spatial experience through contextual authenticity that supports every lifestyle and individual, while also aspiring to set global benchmarks with our design contributions. Spatially, eateries have become more compact to encourage consumers to engage more personally – subtly dissolving the barrier between patron and personnel. If we’re able to create hybrid, miscible hospitality and retail experiences by reconfiguring the norms of conventional design – with a discerning provision for social distancing measures – something truly interesting could emerge as a result: a dynamic hub for human engagement.”

THE CONCEPT OF HOW WE LIVE AND EARN A LIVING HAS UNDERGONE A COMPLETE OVERHAUL, AND IN ORDER TO ADAPT TO THE EMERGING WORK CULTURE, WE TOO MUST REMAIN FLEXIBLE IN OUR DESIGN SOLUTIONS.

“Creating distinct experiences for every place is necessary to make them stand out,” said **Amit Aurora**. “Every space has its own challenges and opportunities, so it is important to make the best of them and create a unique experience. For retail spaces, there is an increased focus on lighting, materials, display systems and interior decor. Day and Night Lighting moods and effects are conceived with exclusive design intent with no compromise on the lighting fixtures,” he added.

Kanhai Gandhi shared that all the public spaces will move toward more automation to mitigate contagion. “COVID-19 has hastened the development of all types of touch-less technologies—automatic doors, voice-activated elevators, cell phones-controlled hotel room entry, hands-free light switches and temperature controls, automated luggage bag tags, and advanced airport check-in and security. Moreover, ventilation seems to have generated more attention in recent times as the chances of the virus spreading in enclosed spaces is higher than otherwise. Materials that are easily maintained should be used. Metals if used in the right fashion add a tint of luxury as well to the designing with a modern look. Fabrics that are allergen-free may cost a bit more but would certainly help in the long run. Having said that, you need to be careful as to what material is it exactly as brands have started pushing anything and everything as anti-bacterial anti-allergy etc. A good air purifier along with a dehumidifier is certainly a good idea to consider in a city like Mumbai with or without the pandemic.”

Mayooree Saxena concurred that in the hospitality sector, increased safety is the future trend that will be permanent. “Hotels are no longer places for short stay; they are also used as place to work remotely. The new normal is about creating spaces that maximize safety and minimize stress. Increased standards for cleaning and distancing, better flexibility, and attention to create



ANURAG PASHINE & PALLAVI PASHINE

comfortable, safer experience for guests. Antimicrobial countertops, laminate floors, and app-controlled amenities are all important in post-COVID guest room design. There is no doubt about the fact that pandemic has changed physical retail forever. Cost effectiveness and safe aesthetics are the two important criterion of retail spaces design along with better filtration and HVAC.”

Anurag Pashine & Pallavi Pashine agreed that the hospitality and commercial industries have been particularly impacted in recent years, and many of the improvements they have made to increase safety, will probably be implemented permanently. “As we return to our regular routines and begin the journey of reopening, these industries must be prepared to develop in response to the evolving expectations of their end

users. The pandemic inspired many firms to implement revolutionary measures to protect structures and people against future breakdowns. These new criteria prioritise safety, adaptability, and the creation of open, welcoming environments without compromising grace or comfort. Another alternative is the collaboration of cleanliness and sustainability, which has the potential to be an innovative solution," they shared.

INTERIOR DESIGN CHANGES THAT ARE HERE TO STAY

The well-being of our mind, body and soul reflect in our places of habitation. The simplest of experiences – such as access to good quality nutrition, clean air, an active life connected to nature and community – have become even more essential to give substance to our technology-dependent lives.

As architect **Asha Sairam** puts it, "The post-COVID aftermath urges us to interrogate the sustainability of our actions – we are keenly aware of our responsibilities, and have been actively replacing conventional 'chilled air-conditioned buildings' with naturally-ventilated comfortable spaces for the past several years through our projects. These enduring initiatives ensure the embodied and operational energy footprint of our buildings is low: a step towards increasing the longevity of our planet. At the studio, we are constantly exploring ways to holistically integrate these into the design of our homes, offices and places of leisure. It is abundantly clear that our engagement with the outdoors – a place to interact with nature and people alike – is innately tied to a healthy relationship with ourselves. Through minimal design interventions that focus on maximising exposure to fresh air, daylight and a view of the outdoors, we can reactivate our connection to the larger context within our temporarily restricted lifestyles. "

Sharing his opinion architect **Amit Aurora** stated, "We have to minimise wastage, reuse as much as possible as the way forward is a mix of local craft, technology and minimal consumption. Daylight and natural ventilation can drastically improve our built environment. To maximise daylight and keep the heat out of the structure, we have to design as per the climate and site conditions. The placement of windows and openings, the orientation of the building, and the use of local materials must be taken

THE PANDEMIC HAS MADE PEOPLE TO LOOK AT NEARBY SURROUNDINGS. BE IT TRAVELLING, BE IT SHOPPING, BE IT FOOD, PEOPLE HAVE STARTED APPRECIATING AND PREFERRING REGIONAL DESTINATIONS AND LOCAL SHOPS. PRESERVING THIS APPRECIATION OF THE IMMEDIATE MAY HELP US REORIENT OUR VALUES TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES.



into consideration. It's important to realise the value of designing with respect to the context."

"The adaption of up-cycled or repurposed furniture, light fittings and décor items is picking up," said **Kanhai Gandhi**. "Energy-efficient appliances are also in demand, as they don't just save money in the short term but also



help in the fight against global warming in the long term. Smart home technology like self-regulating thermostats that only heats or cools when there is an occupant present and smart hydroponic systems prevent wastage of scarce natural resources. More people are looking for homes with balconies or access to outdoor green spaces which they

could visit during times of physical distancing,” he added.

Stating her perspective architect **Mayooree Saxena** expressed, “I think the post pandemic era will nourish the desire for quality places. It is an opportunity for designers to incorporate innovative notions, techniques and strategies in blueprints. Our designs should ensure a healthier place. This includes paying more attention to the environment and impact that humans are having on the Earth. Hopefully this terrible pandemic will be a realisation that there is no longer a place for unthoughtful developments and buildings.”

“Architects and designers are increasingly being asked to design home offices. This trend is likely to continue much longer because it provides a balanced approach to living,” share architects **Anurag Pashine & Pallavi Pashine**. “Home offices are becoming a common practice, and since most businesses are already comfortable with them, this trend is continuing to stay. The most obvious transformation homes are to undergo is a designated space for the need to work. People have begun turning their study rooms into at-home workspaces. Another alteration will be in the office design. The pandemic has caused a considerable shift in working methodologies and expected operational outcomes. The employees will seek the same level of flexibility when they resume work as they had in previous years. In today's offices, creative approaches are required to offer employees what they need while also achieving efficient work performance. Moving forward, every company will need to create a distinctive and experiential dynamic environment that caters to the demands of its employees on physical, digital, emotional, and psychological factors,” they added.

A lot has changed since the pandemic from the way of living and working to rediscovering the value of green open space and community interactions. Designers emphasize that many of the changes are here to stay. However, whether the positivity of changes will continue and have a lasting impact will largely depend upon the consumers of spaces - how they change their perspective towards new forms of mobility, public areas and interior built spaces that are inclusive and accessible to all. On their part, the design fraternity with their collective creativity and ingenuity are set to redefine the future of our buildings.