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At Red Mars, the roof cantilevering over 7 m provides protection against heat and rain, and its one-point converging support is sturdy and has withstood strong winds.






Organic Fare

Mahesh Naik speaks about his quest to define and promote a new Indian idiom that is rooted in the principles of Organic Architecture.

In sharp contrast to the mainstream architectural thinking dominated by modern designs, new technologies and new materials, **Architect Mahesh Naik's** projects are based on Organic Architecture (OA), which believes in creating structures that grow from nature and blend with it. All his projects, mostly farm houses and private residences in Maharashtra and Gujarat, display skilled craftsmanship and structural ingenuity. They have been built with local materials and age-old construction methods. Red Mars, Naik's first project, was featured in the Phaidon

Atlas of 21st Century World Architecture and was nominated for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2007.

For a man who entered architecture by chance rather than by choice, Naik has taken to it like a fish to water. After graduating from Pillai's College of Architecture, he worked for a while with renowned architects like Venkat Pillai, Dean D'Cruz and Hafeez Contractor before venturing out on his own in 2002. Naik's mission is to develop projects based on OA all over India and to create awareness about its significance and benefits. His immediate dream is to



Located amidst verdant Sahyadri hills, Moon Light, with its brick and stone arches, dome vaults and a concrete shell roof enhances the environment.

build a restaurant that will withstand the test of time, carved out of stone and set amidst cascading water.

In a tête-à-tête with **JANAKI KRISHNAMOORTHY**, he shares his dreams, views and experiences.

Q What is OA and how did you get drawn to it?

American architect Frank Lloyd Wright introduced OA to the world. Wright based it on the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu's thinking that the reality of a building was in the space within. OA also believes that a building must grow, as nature grows, from inside out. 'Organic' denotes the relationship between the building and its environment, the continuity of internal and external space and the use of building materials in accordance with their own nature.

Wright followed this principle and so did his student, Nari Gandhi, whom I consider my guru. Although I have never met him, I have seen some of his work. It

is stunning! My hands-on exposure to OA happened when I worked under Venkat Pillai, a student of Nari Gandhi.

Q What is your mission?

My quest is to search for new Indian architecture. Several eminent architects, notwithstanding their significant contribution to architecture in general, have done very little for Indian architecture. Most are importing Greek, Zen, Balinese and Italian architectural styles that neither represent Indian architectural traditions, nor are they suitable for our socio-economic, cultural and climatic conditions.

Q How would you define new Indian architecture?

I am still trying to give it a form. Indian architecture is rooted in its history, culture and religion. Features like courtyards, terraces, balconies, roof overhangs, etc are integral to our structures. Climate responsiveness has long been a feature of our architecture – many old

Spaces created by an architect have their own vibrations and should be in accord with the personality of the occupant; otherwise, they become uncomfortable spaces.



buildings remained cool even without air-conditioners or fans.

I study the designs adopted and materials used in our old architecture and give them a fresh approach and treatment, which could be termed as new Indian architecture. I use local materials like black basalt, bricks and Mangalore tiles but give them a new expression.

Q || What is your signature style?

None. Any architect following the principles of OA conscientiously cannot have a signature style because each project will have different expressions at different places shaped by the site environment, local materials, climate and culture. My designs emerge from the site environment, client's personality and materials available locally. In fact, the nature of the material often dominates a design.

Except for the initial conceptual layout plan and elevations, I do not make any detailed drawings. I work directly at site with local masons and fabricators. I personally supervise and execute the projects. I do not appoint civil or structural engineers, contractors or site supervisors. The only thing I demand from my client is to leave the designing to me and not interfere in the creative process.

Q || But, is that not too much to ask for? An owner would have his own ideas and would want his house to be built his way.

Yes, I know. I recently backed out of a very high value project because the client wanted the interiors to be done his way. But, my experience is that clients often have no idea what would be appropriate for them, no understanding of space or of the vibrations that are created by the spaces, the objects and the occupants. OA entails that every element in a building, from windows, floors, furniture to occupants emit vibrations that gel with each other.

Q || Can you elaborate on this concept of vibration?

Each one of us sends out or receives positive or negative vibes that affect our relationships and our environment. Buildings, furniture and even paintings emit vibrations.



Meet the **Architect**

Mahesh Naik

MAJOR COMPLETED/ONGOING PROJECTS:

- Red Mars, Awas, Alibaug
- Red House, Mehsana, Gujarat
- Moon Light, Kot, Ratnagiri
- Bluebell Cottage, Sutarwadi, Kollard
- Mushroom, Vahangaon, Pune
- Wildecho, Agarsure, Alibaug

FIRM: Architect Mahesh Naik established in 2002.

FIRM SPECIALISATION: Organic Architecture, which includes interiors and landscaping.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY: Evolved as a response to the context, strongly rooted to the site and well linked to the surroundings.

FAVOURITE ARCHITECTS/DESIGNERS: Frank Lloyd Wright, Laurie Baker, Nari Gandhi and Charles Correa.



The roof of Red Mars pavilion (open air one) tapers down almost to the ground, providing complete privacy.



The bell-shaped Blue Bell Cottages have been given an organic look to make it merge with the nature surrounding it.

Similarly, spaces created by an architect have their own vibrations, and they should be in accord with the personality of the occupant; otherwise, they become uncomfortable spaces.

For instance, if the occupant is an introvert who turns his mental interests and energies away from people and events, the space created for him must also be introvert, providing ample light-filled space at the core of the structure and embracing a protected inward-looking space that turns its back on its surroundings. On the other hand, an extrovert space would expand horizontally outward from the centre towards the light and view at the perimeter of the house to suggest continuity with the landscape.

Q Tell us about your experiments and innovations.

I experiment a lot. For instance, in Red Mars and in Moon Light, the roof edge is cantilevered by more than five metres on each side to provide ample shade. To avoid the normal heavy slab, low-cost light-weight 5 ft x 5 ft grids of hollow box MS sections were constructed with battens on top of the Mangalore tiles. The grids are supported by a space-frame made of circular rods to transmit the load to the brick walls and prevent the roof from buckling.

For the arches, I followed a new method. To cut down the cost of shuttering, 9-inch thick brick walls without

mortar were constructed as shuttering for arches. Mortar was used for smoothing the top, creating a smooth curve, which was then covered with bricks. The gaps between the bricks were filled with dry sand. After an arch was complete, the shuttering bricks were removed and reused for the next.

Q Is it feasible to implement OA in urban areas and in high rises or townships?

It is possible. Wright's Price Towers – a 19-storey skyscraper in Bartlesville and Guggenheim Museum in New York are perfect examples. You can have townships, corporate offices, institutions, malls and even hospitals built on OA, provided the government and developers are open to it. I dream of building an entire township based on OA!

For Naik, OA is not just a philosophy, it is a way of life; and creating sensible spaces is more important than making money. May his tribe increase! **I**

PHOTOS | MRIGANK SHARMA & BHARAT BHIRANGI
- INDIA SUTRA (RED MARS), ASIM WADKAR (MOON LIGHT), ARCHITECT MAHESH NAIK (BLUE BELL)

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