

#SRRisingStars

SURFACES REPORTER'S

RISING STARS SPACEMATTERS, NEW DELHI



Ar Amritha Ballal, Ar Moulshri Joshi and
Ar Suditya Sinha
SpaceMatters, New Delhi

SpaceMatters is an integrated design practice with architecture, interior, urban design and habitat research capabilities based out of New Delhi. Founded in 2005 by architects Amritha Ballal, Moulshri Joshi and Suditya Sinha the award winning design practice has been consistently recognised as one of the leading design firms in India. Its projects span a variety of scales and contexts. These range from public institutional projects such as the award winning Bhopal Gas Tragedy Memorial and revitalisation for the post-disaster industrial complex in Bhopal, urban planning projects including one of the first Integrated Development Plans (IDP) for urban villages in Dwarka, New Delhi to designing commercial and residential spaces for leading corporates such as Titan, DLF Retail and Jindal Steel. It was a pleasure for the #SurfacesReporter team to interact with one of the founding members, Ar Amritha Ballal and discover about the young firm's aspirations, accomplishments, motivations, and future plans.

S Why did you choose architecture as a career?

All three of us had different paths to architecture - but overall we were attracted by the diversity of experience that it offers. Not just diversity of built projects, but writing, research, art, management. One can indulge in a wide spectrum of interests within architecture.

S What or who has been your inspiration?

India abounds in inspiration. Even everyday scenes have some form of innovation, diverse textures and a very fluid sense of time. Many worlds and eras co-exist and contradict here.

S Please tell us about 'Habitat Research' by SpaceMatters?

We started our practice with the Bhopal Gas Tragedy memorial - arguably one of the most complex projects in the country till date. It needed us to engage with issues of a site of conscience, brownfield restoration, industrial heritage, while designing a sensitive architecture to memorialise the victims. We realised we needed to educate ourselves, and in many of these aspects there was very little research available in the Indian context. Each of these aspects has become a research vertical, and the research wing has evolved to work on issues of urban homelessness, rural craft communities, forestry etc.

S Why focus on public institutional projects?

Because they serve the largest and most diverse group of people and not just the elite, and provide spaces for human interaction beyond transnational consumption. We have always been curious and engaged about architecture and its interface with the society, and public institutional projects fit very sweetly into this interest.

“The symbiotic relationship between research and practice helps us to ask questions that have no ready answers, especially pertaining to climate change and inclusion in a space outside the constraints of projects. The answers help us to provide small changes and solutions within projects, creating an incremental shift towards the desired results.”

S Is there a difference in approach when handling private and public institutional projects? if yes, how?

Well, a lot depends on the client's vision, but between a public and private project, there can be a considerable shift in the degree of inclusion, the degree of control and the degree to which the projects are managed during construction.

S How are you bringing in sustainability in your projects?

It's a struggle, however beyond the LEED/GRIHA rating etc., we are encouraging clients to build less and reuse where possible. We are also educating ourselves on traditional knowledge systems, such as native species, water recharge systems etc.

S What are the future plans?

In our future projects, we are working with Urban Ecology, Transport and Experience Design. SpaceMatters is working on the revival of urban water bodies and restoration of other degenerated landscapes and has signed an MOU with NEERI (National Environmental Engineering Research Institute), also collaborating with rural NGOs on reviving native forests. We are working on the retrofitting of Local Bus Terminals in Delhi, re-designing them as public utilities instead of the bus parking lots they have been used as.

Finally on varied projects such as the Bonjour India Experience, Campus France, the Hotstar VR etc., we are working with our clients to design powerful narrative experiences of their brands. Using virtual and augmented reality, we are now working on virtual space as an extension of physical space.

S What is your dream project?

Restoring a degraded landscape and bringing nature and people back to it. Our work in industrial heritage and brownfield restoration makes restoration of abandoned industrial sites a good candidate.

S What are your views about Surfaces Reporter and WADe Asia?

It is great to see a home grown platform for architecture evolve and also bring necessary attention to issues of equity - starting from gender.

S How does SpaceMatters differ from others?

We see ourselves as a multidisciplinary collaborative platform rather than as a hermetic studio. This enables us to engage and absorb multiple ideas and disciplines that expands our understanding of space and how we conceive it. Having an independent research vertical helps us design solutions that uniquely meet the requirements of clients and sometimes reconfigure the entire brief to best meet their needs. This is why, whether it's a temple like The Temple in Stone and Light, a university through Ashoka or a traveling experience pavilion for Bonjour India, each of these projects is one of its kind and one of the best in its segment. The symbiotic relationship between research and practice helps us to ask questions that have no ready answers, especially pertaining to climate change and inclusion in a space outside the constraints of projects. The answers help us to provide small changes and solutions within projects, creating an incremental shift towards the desired results.

S Your message to the younger generation.

The older generations have left behind a bit of a mess. Don't repeat what has been done, it has led us here. Make your own path and always be kind.

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SOME PROJECTS BY SPACEMATTERS, NEW DELHI



THE BONJOUR INDIA EXPERIENCE

SpaceMatters curated and designed the Bonjour India Experience pavilion, a one-of-its-kind travelling exhibition at the heart of Bonjour India that celebrated Indo-French collaboration. Combining art, architecture, experience design and urbanism, the 9-meter-high, 800 square meters and 40 ton installation travelled approximately 3500 kilometers from the iconic India Gate in Delhi to Cross Maidan Garden behind the historic Churchgate Station Mumbai to become the star attraction of the world's largest book fair in Kolkata. It welcomed more than 180,000 visitors over a period of 30 odd days spread over the three cities. An outcome of possibly one of the single largest and most diverse collaborations between India and France involving artists, writers, filmmakers, musicians, designers, artisans, builders, researchers, institutions, corporations, academicians, publishing houses, architects and many others. The Bonjour India Experience brought together extraordinary content and talent from both countries, which was presented to an equally diverse audience. When asked to suggest an appropriate public space to place the Experience in their city, associates initially suggested commercial malls or museums. Often perceived as elitist, these spaces cater to a small segment of the population in stark contrast to the diverse, inclusive energy of the urban public space in Indian cities. IFI and SpaceMatters took the decision to locate the pavilion in truly public urban spaces instead of economically and culturally exclusive institutions. However, the pavilion's inclusive accessibility and interaction with the urban context became its defining



“ The pavilion’s inclusive accessibility and interaction with the urban context became its defining characteristic and was instrumental to its success. ”

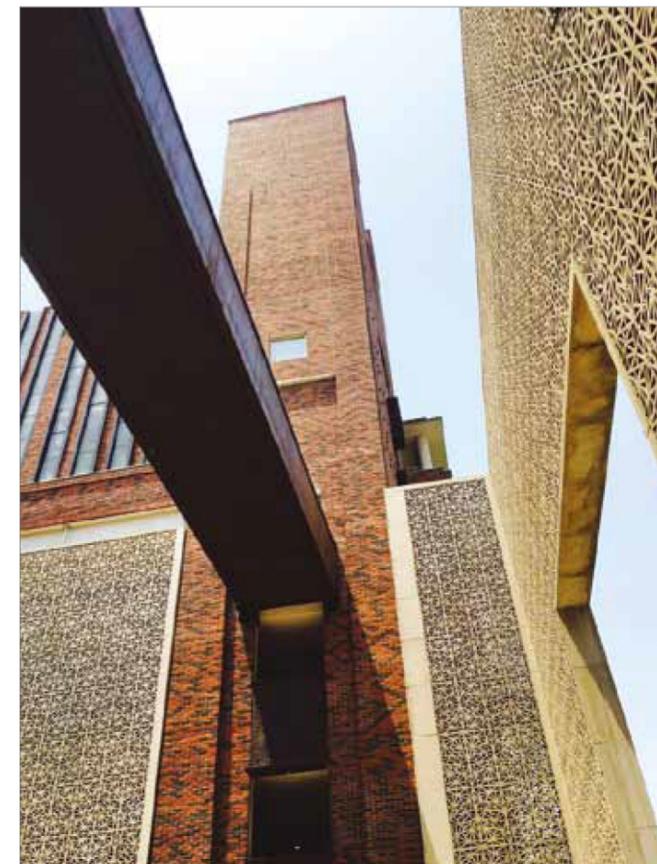
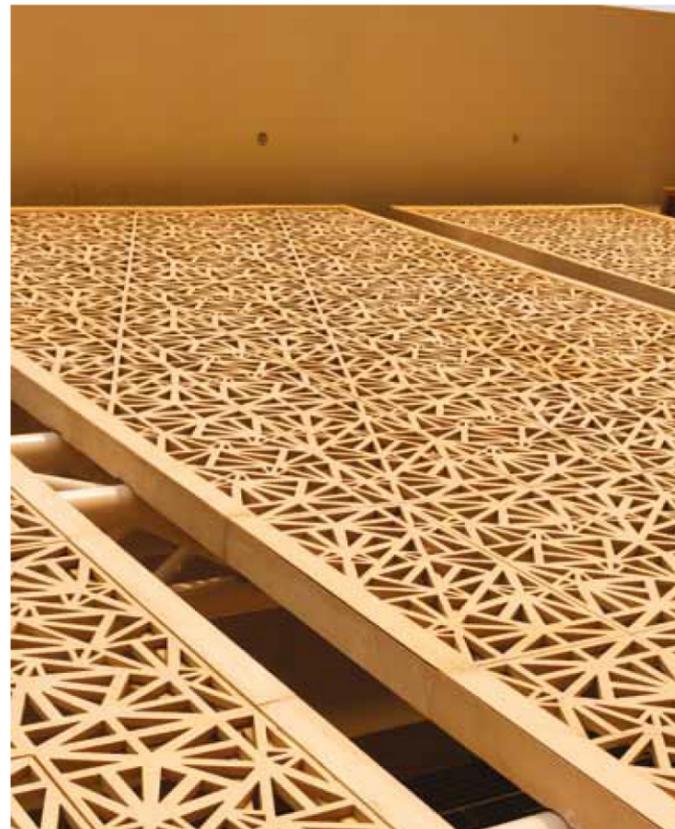
characteristic and was instrumental to its success. In the visitors’ book of the Bonjour India Pavilion, people often remarked at the pleasure of encountering the unexpected on an ordinary day; the joy of a whirlwind journey into a French culture on the way to the everyday commute to work, the discovery of a new land and language, and the rediscovery of new aspects of our own shared history in Indo-French collaboration.



ASHOKA UNIVERSITY

Ashoka University is a leading private university with a focus on liberal arts. Located in Sonapat, Haryana, the idea of such a university was put forward to train individuals to think critically about issues from multiple perspectives and become leaders with a commitment to public service. As a space for learning and imparting education, using stone in the architecture was an immediate choice, its timeless quality in the context of quick-fix design is hard to deny. Its tactility serves as a throwback to the skill and creativity of our craftsmen while serving as a reminder of natural materialism in an urban context that is increasingly removed from nature. As a material, stone embodies properties that resonated with the vision of Ashoka.

“ This 24200 square feet, delicate, yet strong installation is one of the most iconic features of the institution that looked to evoke the sentiments of an “ivy-league” institution. ”



All jaalis across the Ashoka University Campus, lining its grand public corridors are built in Gwalior Mint stone. This 24200 square feet, delicate, yet strong installation is one of the most iconic features of the institution that looked to evoke the sentiments of an “ivy-league” institution. The patterns were jointly developed by SpaceMatters and Perkins Eastman - the Concept Architects for the project. The design of the jaali is reflective of the fractal geometry that is embedded in Ashoka University’s brand logo.

Economising on the properties of stone to maximise its effectiveness in design was a prime criterion in our endeavours. The test of our creativity lay in translating the traditional idea of stonework as slow, laborious and ‘old world’ into its current avatar - one that is contemporary, dynamic and modular.