

domus

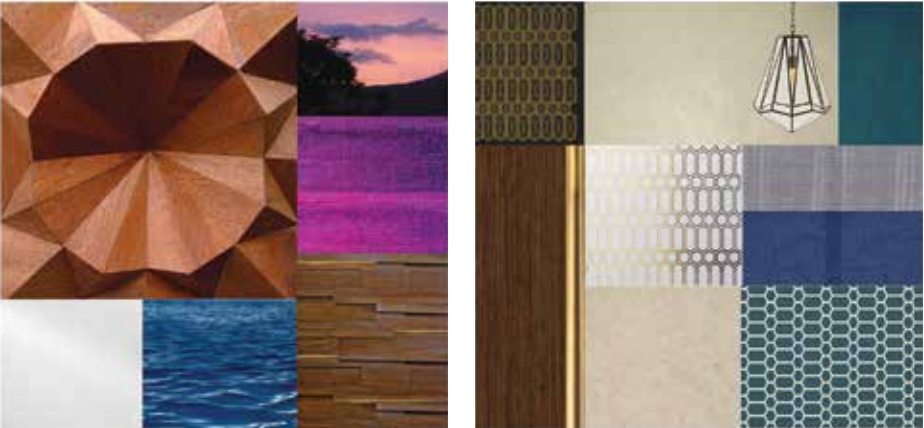
INDIA053LA CITTÀ DELL' UOMO



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Cover: The resort in the temple town of Tirupati designed by Mumbai-based SJK Architects is a contemporary building with a central open courtyard, which is a water body. The all-day dining space – The Lotus Café (glass-walled space seen in the centre of the image) is envisioned as a lotus in the pond, and appears to be 'floating' in this water body.



The material and colour palette of The Lotus Cafe (left) and Kurma reception area (right) in the Tirupati resort designed by SJK Architects.



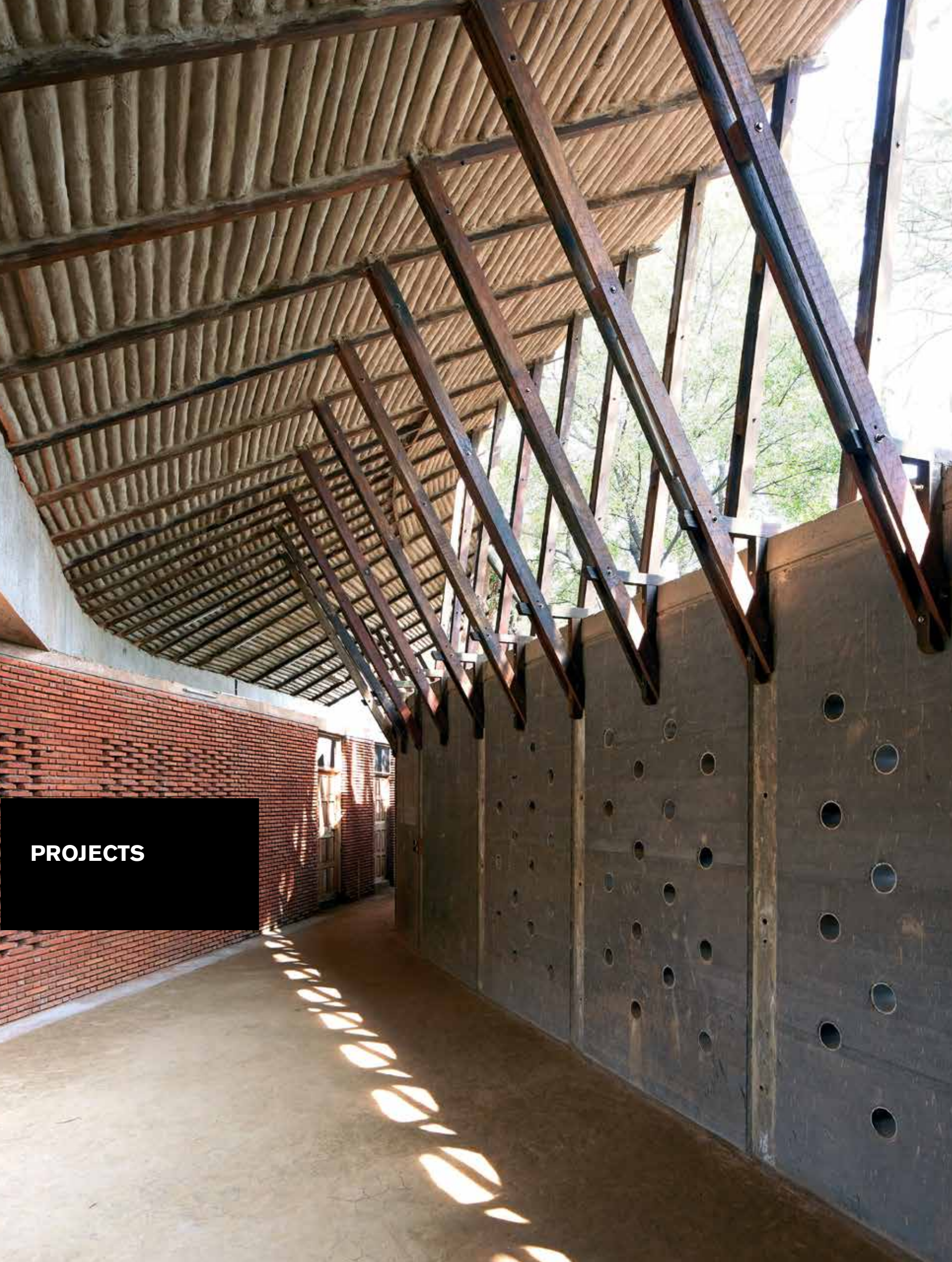
CALIBRATING THE CONTEMPORARY

Kaiwan Mehta

What shapes the contemporary is a growing question and as it is becoming more and more easily available as a term, the more serious critics and theorists are arguing for a more responsible understanding of the term, including its nuances and histories. But this question of the contemporary in architecture, especially in the region of India, has been a kind of quest in the many pages, and through the many issues of this magazine. The attempt has been to avoid large generalisations or assumptions, and to also sometimes softly and sometimes aggressively reject existing formulas and ideas on the subject. The method of approach is simple – pay attention to what is being made, produced, and built all around us; there is no doubt a selection of sorts, a curatorial framework which points us toward what we pay attention to more and what we pay attention to less – but in the end, it is the observation of practice and production in architecture that we are looking at. The structure of *Domus* has constantly offered the space for reviewing projects as well as contemplation on matters at hand through the form of the essay. Projects are reviewed as visual constructions, detailed productions, as well as a glimpse into the philosophies that engage with design. Essays have strayed into the wider world of culture and history, as well as philosophy and politics, but also ethics and principles of design and building, and the meaning of artistic practices in our everyday life. I use the word strayed very carefully here – as indication towards the necessity for a thinking and doing mind to wander and roam the pages of many ideas, and be able to build up a sense of perception, and a sensibility towards the tasks at hand, and in our case the practice of making architecture and human habitats. As much as we still keep going on and on about the Global and the Local debate, maybe it is time to put the two to rest! We exist amidst overlapping worlds, and none of these worlds are cocoons or islands, and there is no ‘inside’ world ‘influenced’ by some foreign ‘outside’ world – these constructions of the 19th century need not be stretched any longer. The present is a sea nourished by many waters and touching many shores, and as critic and cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote often puts it, we are today essentially ‘citizens of the world’ who can draw strength and ideas from the many shores the sea meets. In such a scenario the contemporary in India can only be a broad canvas of ideas that are in experimentation, working at the junctures of many confluences. Interestingly, the three projects we feature

in this issue produce special occasions for the study of what the contemporary can be, because these buildings take on subjects and sites that are normally only seen through the lens of some cultural formula or religious dogmatism. One is the site for a Buddhist learning centre, the other a temple, and the third, a resort in the pilgrim town of Tirupati. In all three cases the sites are not metropolitan but are actually within geographies where the local has a strong sense of the self – yet in each case the design transcends into a world of new meanings in form exploration, where indeed ‘architecture is the medium’ of exploring the many questions of space and community in everyday life of people. The form-explorations are actually reordering questions on community and religion, worship and living, but also about the way practice shapes different studios and architectural methodologies, technologies of understanding what details mean literally. All these three projects excitingly bring together architectural explorations and the larger understanding of the social sense of being. Two features talk about archaeology, one in the eternal archaeological site of Pompei, but in the work of a young and emerging artist, Sahej Rahal, the archaeological is a construction materially produced out of the mind’s journey through space and time, locality of site and the travels through literatures of the world. Excavation is an important state of being – one where the self, in body and mind, is emerged in an ongoing discovery, restoration, and hence also a recalibration of the existing. In the feature discussing Orchha Temples there is this beautiful mix of straying away, as we discussed above, and the sense of excavation as we just pointed out. Research often misunderstood as a fact-finding mission or a hypothesis proving battle, is actually all about constructing the present through excavations, straying away in many journeys, and then building into forms of knowledge, that exist but can always be (and should be) challenged. Architectural theory, or for that matter theory and criticism concerning any fields of artistic and cultural production, cannot and should not emerge from textbooks that account a history of theories and thinkers, but from the close encounters with practice, as practice engages with history, with culture, with materiality, with technology, with systems of education, and workshops of production. The field of knowledge that we define or call architecture, is then a site, an arena, for entering into questions of organising the life-world we occupy as cultural and political beings. The contemporary

architect is conscious and embedded in her/his craft – the art and act of building, but is the aware ‘citizen of the world’ as well. But again here we will have to be critical of the super self-conscious architect who fetishises her/his craft and then the practice is only about high points of ecstasy, rather than the journeys of self-awareness. To detail architectural materiality or its craft of production beyond a point, such that after a point it is only the celebration and exhibition of this excess that becomes the agenda, then architecture is lost – then let us say it will be ‘the devil revels in the details’! In the many projects and studies featured in this issue one can safely say ‘the journey lies in the details’ and an excavation of that journey would be necessary to understand the making of architecture today. Architecture today for most architects is a struggle – I do not mean the usual struggles with contractors and clients, and schedules and payments – but their own internal struggle to produce that which is contemporary, that which is sensible, and that which is contributing to the larger discourse on form, space, and detail. Very few architects are actually aware of the third – but it is something they should think more actively about; and to the credit of many they are thinking of this aspect but maybe not in a very conscious way, and that realisation or awareness is what good criticism and journalism can aid and should aid. The struggle of the architect, project after project, is actually the most interesting and productive state of being for all of us today – the architect and the critic – and the more we are able to openly and freely talk about this struggle, the contemporary in architecture will emerge – a cloud that can absorb but also shed, changing form through resistances but also new encounters and engagements with atmospheres that surround it. **km**





SJK Architects

## CONVERSATION BETWEEN FORM AND DETAIL

A resort in Tirupati takes off from the basic orthogonal temple form, but then develops the design to a sequence of form-space dialogues, articulated by a deft use of materials and crafted detailing

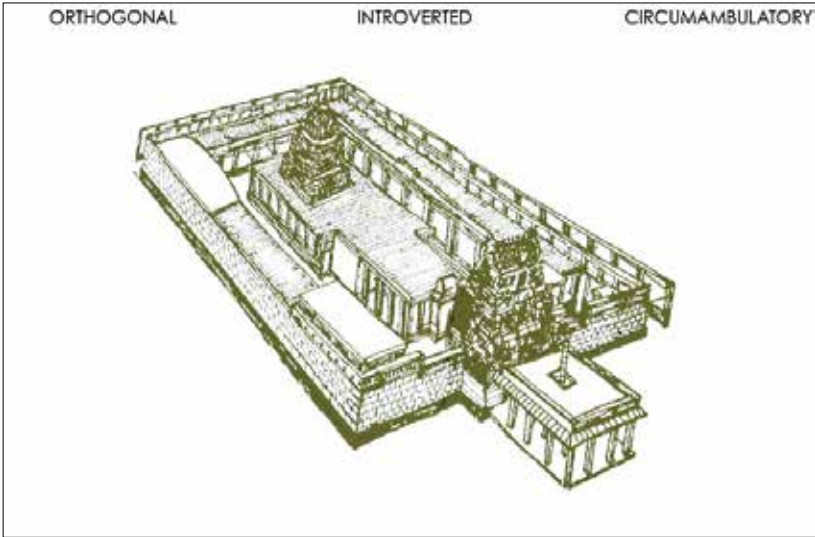
Text Kaiwan Mehta  
Photos SJK Architects



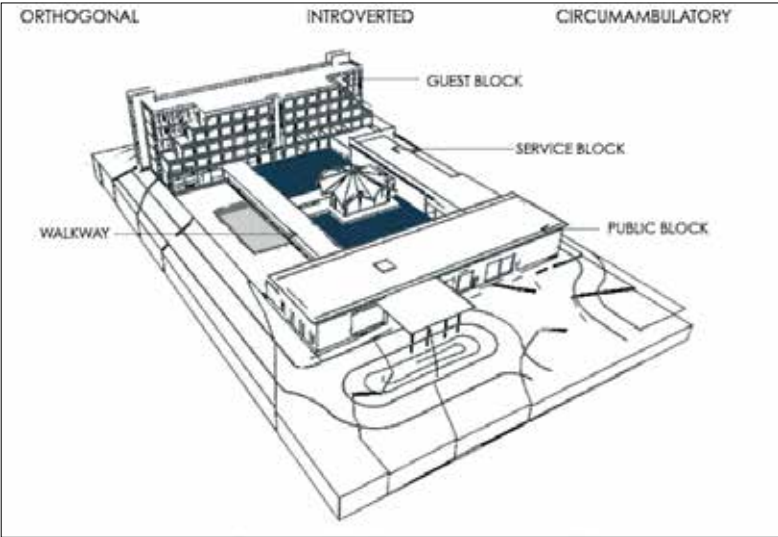




Photo Himanshu Sheth



THE TIRUPATI TEMPLE

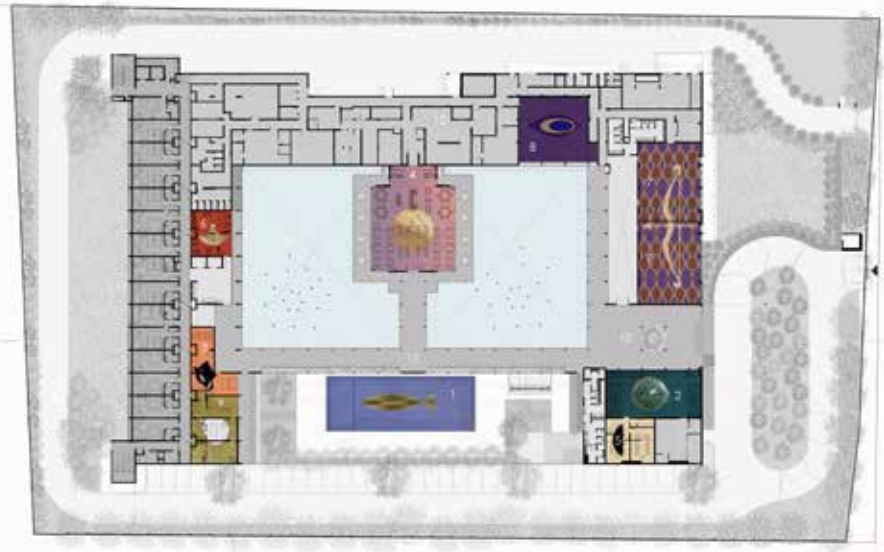


... HAS BEEN REFINED AND DISTILLED INTO CONTEMPORARY BUILDING



Photo Rajesh Vora

Previous spread and this spread, above: the resort is a contemporary building with a central open courtyard and a water body, within which “floats” the all day dining space – The Lotus Café, envisioned as a lotus in the pond. This spread, below: the temple town of Tirumala – Tirupati, is considered to be the sacred abode of Lord Vishnu, one of the three supreme deities in the Hindu Trinity. The design of the resort draws inspiration from the classical elements of temple architecture – the orthogonal, introverted Hindu temple plan



SITE PLAN

Context has been much hyped in the last few decades; not that the idea of context or locality are not important, but its excessive hype has also lead to many stereotypical responses in design. Since the 1980s in India, one could easily point out three generations of responses to the idea of context. Some of the more recent approaches that we see towards a sense of the context are thankfully based much more on the sense-perception of things rather than some formulaic imagination of climate or soil! Context has to be opened up to a contemporary sensibility at all points in time; and no forms should be compulsively tied to context and soil such that design can never explore either – form or context. The resort building in Tirupati designed by Mumbai-based SJK Architects headed by Shimul







Photo Rajesh Vora



Photo Rajesh Vora

Javeri Kadri is an important case regarding the form-context dialogue. As much as the basic design-evolution story sounds predictable, the explorations in design process with materials and spaces completely revise the predictability of context-based designs. Context-based designs are predictable by nature of very closely following their references, rather than exploring the possibility to play around with them, and even let them recede to a respectable background. The initial references to the temple and town of Tirupati in the design approach to this resort does not matter after a point, because beyond that very basic step, the design methodology of exploration and material-space choreography

takes-off in a way that is much more about design questions today, and the design ideas explored at SJK Architects studio itself. The design takes the Tirupati temple-form that is introverted and orthogonal, centred around a courtyard as its key reference – and so the resort building adopts these within its basic plan. It is good that the reference is the specific temple and no generic notions regarding ‘temples in India’ were assumed, as many have done in the past. The resort building then indeed opens itself up to a logic of spatiality that is explored through very contemporary techniques of design and materiality. The building is a sequence of form-space dialogues, essentially contained

or choreographed by the floating walkway and the water-courtyard. As the designers also emphasise, it was more about the journey to reach the room that they wanted a resident of the hotel to experience, and so the building is also about exploring the various spaces that make it, but where every space also has its own sense of character and story. Developing the resort plan from the basic grid of the temple layout itself, the design of spaces and especially the detailing of the different parts of the structure make references to the many details and nuances of pilgrim cities such as Tirupati itself; as it develops into a tectonic structure how the many details of navigating small cities



Photo Rajesh Vora

influence the design. But what the building best captures, is architecture's relationship to pictures and imagery. In our Bauhaus-sensibility with the Modern, we have often denied the relationship that pictures and image-scapes play in architecture. What is Ajanta or Shekhawati, or even many temples in India, or the gothic cathedral in Europe if not an architecture of collecting pictures? And even with the strongest of modern architects in India, the turn to an architecture of image-construction has been difficult to avoid – Charles Correa's Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur or the Husain-Doshi Gufa in Ahmedabad are important examples of this. However, the resort building does something

interesting with the relationship of architecture and imagery – it picks-up two areas of inquiry – Mythology and Craft, and then develops a beautiful process of design development to merge the two, to develop a visual-spatial landscape. The details developed out of this marriage of mythology and craft create visual landscapes throughout the buildings, from hexagonal mirror-work, to light-fixtures with flutes, to the use of gold as colour and as pattern. The central deity at Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple is a Vaishnavite temple in the hill town of Tirumala at Tirupati in the district of Chittoor, in Andhra Pradesh. And mythology elaborates on the dasavatars or the ten avatars of Vishnu – Matsya

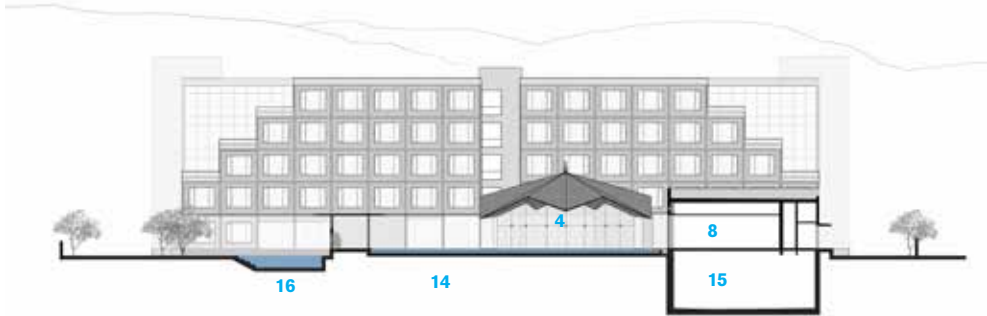
(the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar), Narasimha (the half-man/half-lion), Vamana (the dwarf), Parashurama (the axe-warrior), Rama (the prince of Ayodhya), Krishna (the eighth son of Devaki and Vasudev), Buddha (the enlightened one), and Kalki (the destroyer of unrighteousness and evil). The design starts interpreting the various functions and programmes in the resort according to the different characteristics that mark and define each of the ten avatars. For instance, Matsya is the Pool Court; Kurma (transformative) is the Reception area; Varaha (fierce) is the Indoor Games section; symbolising Narasimha expressed as “Neither Beast nor Man”, “Neither Day nor Night”, “Neither

**This spread: the open spaces are drawn within the building complex and redrawn as water bodies, with the central water-courtyard operating as the key space. This central water body forms the core of the hotel, both spatially and experientially. The tectonic of slender columns and finely detailed roof slab make the building visually bright**





SITE PLAN

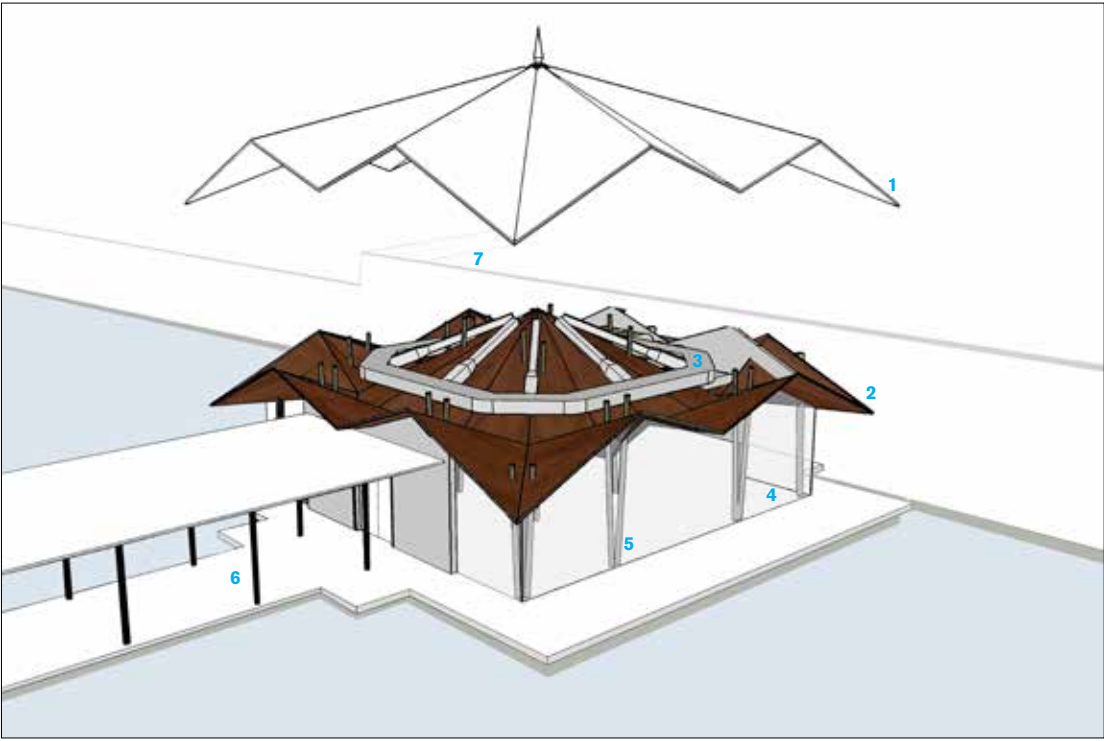
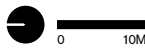


CROSS-SECTION AA

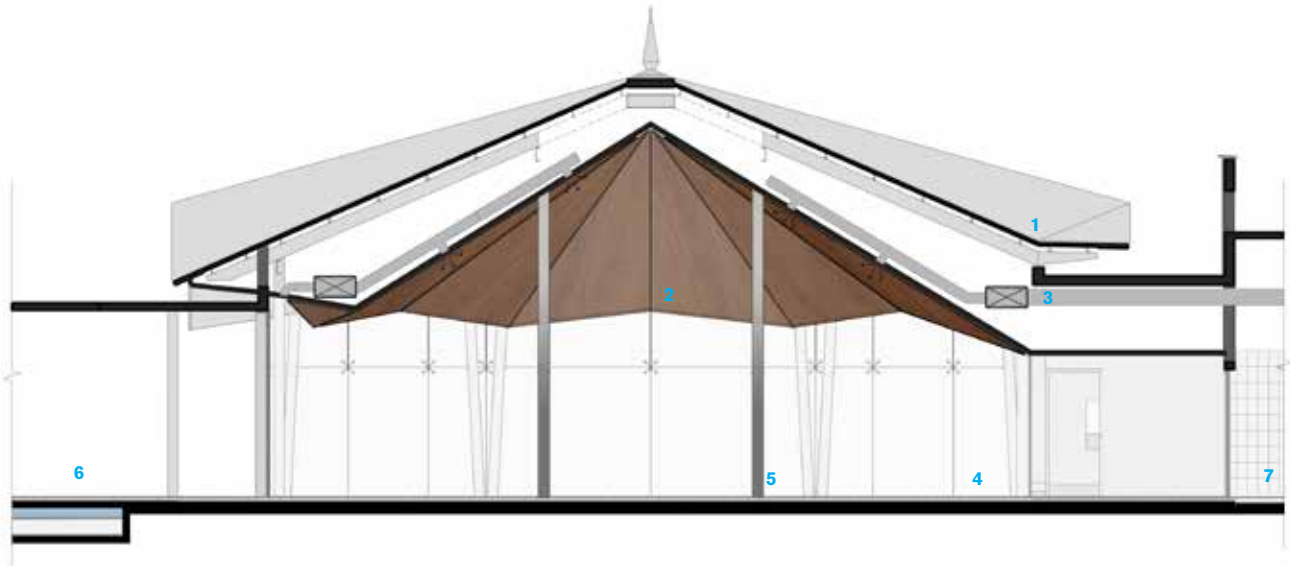


LONGITUDINAL SECTION BB

- 1 Matsya Water Pool Courtyard
- 2 Kurma Transormative Reception
- 3 Varaha Fierce Games Room
- 4 Narsimha Transitional Lotus Cafe
- 5 Vamana Intellectual Business Centre
- 6 Parasurama Power Gym
- 7 Rama Social Banquet Room
- 8 Krishna Versatile Thali Restaurant
- 9 Buddha Peaceful Spa
- 10 Kalki Modern Entrance Courtyard
- 11 Guest Rooms
- 12 Kitchen and Back of the House Services
- 13 Connecting Walkway
- 14 Central Waterbody
- 15 Services
- 16 Swimming Pool
- 17 Guest Block



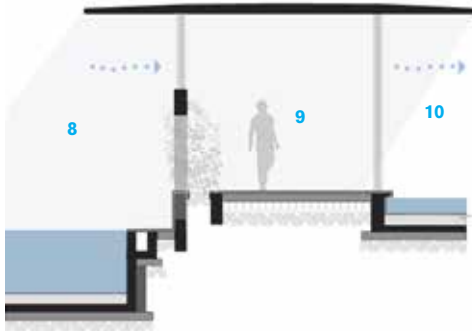
VIEW OF CONSTRUCTION SYSTEM FOR THE ROOF OF LOTUS CAFE



CROSS-SECTION OF LOTUS CAFE

Project  
**Marasa Sarovar Premier, Tirupati**  
Client  
**Marasa Hospitality Private Limited**  
Architect  
**SJK Architects**  
Design Team  
**Shimul Javeri Kadri, Sarika Shetty, Michelle Pereira**  
Project Area  
**1.15 lakh ft<sup>2</sup> ( 121 Keys)**  
on **3.25 Acres**  
Project Duration  
**February 2011 – January 2015**  
Structural Engineers  
**Engineering Creations Consultancy (I) Pvt. Ltd.**  
MEP & FF Consultant  
**AECOM**  
Lighting Consultants  
**Lighting Design Works**  
Landscape Consultant  
**IPDM Services (India) Pvt. Ltd.**  
Kitchen & BOH Consultant  
**Mistry Associates**  
PMC  
**Sycone CPMC Pvt. Ltd.**  
Civil Contractor  
**Asia (Chennai) Engineering Company Pvt Ltd**  
Interior Contractors  
**K.P.Interiors (Guest Block)**  
**Interex Arch Designs Pvt Ltd (Public Areas)**  
Facade Glazing & windows  
**Urban Arch System Pvt Ltd**

- 1 Main Structural Roof
- 2 Faceted Veneer Finished False Ceiling
- 3 Airconditioning Ducts
- 4 Shear Glass Facade
- 5 Gold Painted M.S. Hollow Y Shaped Columns
- 6 Service Block
- 7 Floating Walkway
- 8 Pool
- 9 Connecting Walkway
- 10 Waterbody



FLOATING WALKWAY







Land nor Water”, the Lotus Café is designed as a visually floating café at the threshold of Water and Land; Vamana (intelligent) is the Business Center; Parashurama (powerful) is the Gym; the Banquet Halls are Rama (social man); the Thali Restaurant is Krishna (versatile); the spa is Buddha (peace); and the Entrance Lobby/Courtyard is Kalki (saviour). We know these ten avatars of Vishnu best through their representations in the many miniature painting traditions – and the design palette of colour and materials begins to emerge. It is exciting at every stage how some of the obvious references are picked up, but their interpretation into design is developed through the eye of a designer playing with forms and materiality, rather than being reduced to some reductive (meagre) symbology. So in interpreting the marks, characteristics, and visual codification of the ten avatars, different building and design materials, as well as craft-techniques that have integrally contributed to architecture are explored and excavated. The primary spatial form that is developed from reference to an introvert and orthogonal planning of the temple now develops a story and texture of its own and the starkness of stone and the crudeness of streets in densely used temple-cities gives way to a building that is lighter in form and spatially a landscape of crafted details, materials, and geometry.

This page, top: conceptual rendering of the Lotus Café. Left and below: the 15m x 15m faceted roof structure during construction. Below left: the roof structure is evolved from an interpretation of the Lotus flower petals into geometric facets. Opposite page, left (from top): the natural landscape of Tirumala; the axe of Parashurama; turmeric and Vermillion applied to temple steps; steps leading to a temple. Centre and right: the colour and material palette for various sections of the resort. Far right below: kalamkari artist from Srikalahasti at work

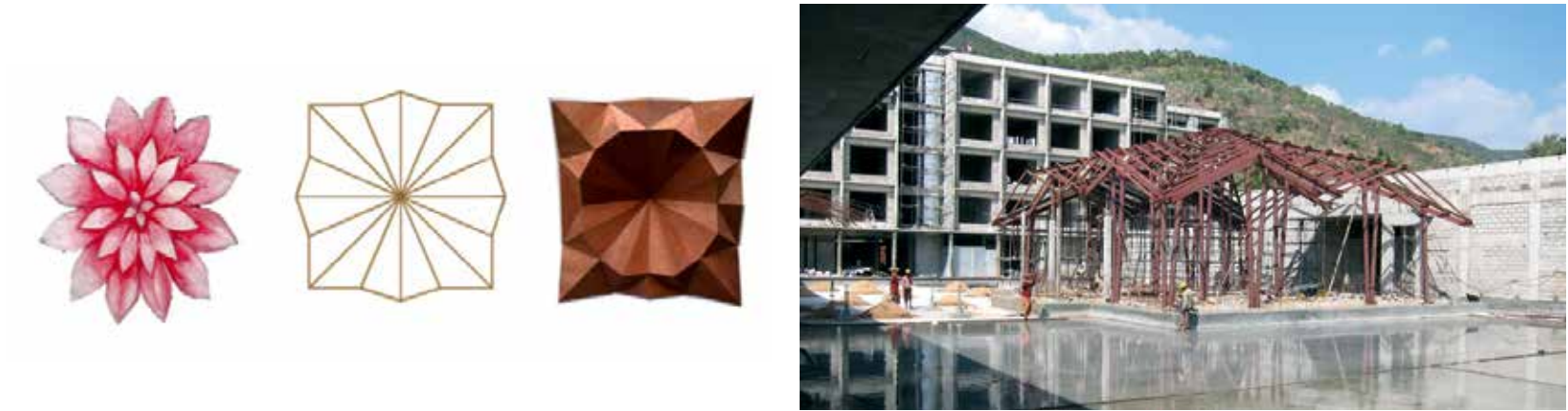






Photo Rajesh Vora

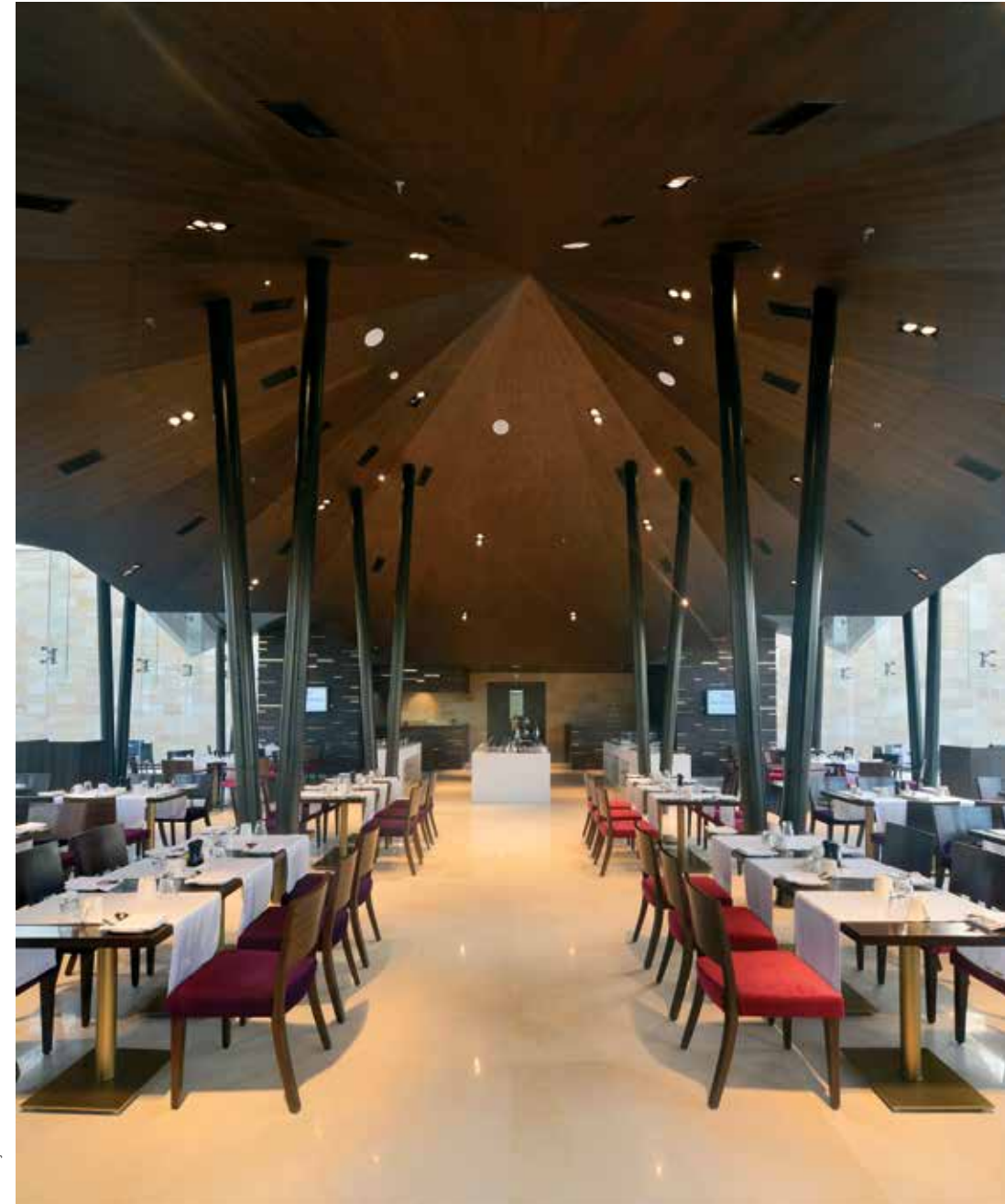


Photo Himanshu Sheth

As Shimul points out, the idea was primarily to develop the plan as a journey towards a room and to achieve this the designers had to argue against the normative practice in resort or hospitality design, where public programmes are placed on the lower floors and the more private residential rooms on the upper. This sectional division of spaces in hospitality design is now organised along one level, with only the building with residential rooms, attached to a farther-end, one sides of the orthogonal plan, is a six-storey building. The open spaces are drawn within the building complex and redrawn as water bodies, with the central water-courtyard operating as the key space. The walkways just about float on water, and their tectonic of slender columns and finely detailed roof slab literally help the building lose weight. This entire series of spaces are anchored in the Lotus Café – a glass structure floating on water, with a dynamic roof canopy that is geometrically articulated in the third-dimension; it is the one structure that sits with a very conscious sculptural presence. Evolved from an interpretation of the Lotus flower petals into geometric facets, the 15m x 15m faceted roof structure symbolises lightness in structure and visually. But there is another level of sculptural articulation – and that is the way surfaces, doors, wall textures, ceiling, and even the furniture is detailed. It would be safe to say that this building could be a rare case where interior design structurally contributes

This spread: interior design structurally contributes to architectural articulation, and is not only enhancing the quality of architecture, but is working simultaneous

with form and space in the shape of design. Below: view of the reception area. Symbols associated with the ten avatars of Vishnu have been contemporised using the “dokra” craft

and integrated into the project as door handles. From left: Kalki – the Entrance Lobby/Courtyard; Rama – one of the Banquet Halls; the design also interprets the various functions and

programmes in the resort according to the different characteristics that mark and define each of the ten avatars of Vishnu



Photo Rajesh Vora



Photo Rajesh Vora



Photo Rajesh Vora





Photo Rajesh Vora

to architectural articulation, and is not only enhancing the quality of architecture, but is working simultaneous with form and space in the shape of design. The tectonics of lightness and transparency are the essential poetics with which this design works. The more sculptural and active nature of the Lotus Cafe roof nearly floating above water, the reflections of water, the slender columns that keep you in tow all the way, constantly juxtaposed with glimpses or views of crafted material details and patterns in colour produces a spatial narrative of dynamic images; indeed affords the space a strong sense time, best enacted through qualities of change and narrative, as one moves through the building. An important player in this is the craft techniques and methods used – and thankfully the design does not obsess over crafts involved in its design process but lets those forms of detailing and nuances with material mechanics and geometry structuring, as well as colour articulation gently but firmly build into the sense of form. The structure could be a good example of what a conversation between form and detail could mean, and how one need not follow the other, but both are equal journeys in the exploration of design, tectonics, and poetics. @

#### SPECIFICATIONS OF DETAILS FROM THE ARCHITECTS

Exterior shell finishes – black gold paint, sandstone, beige wall paint, blue-tiled water body, imperial beige Turkish marble flooring and shear glass facades. Guest Block's south façade has been finished in an exterior grade black-gold paint (exterior grade paint was customised with Archital-Oikos, to arrive at a specification that is anti-fungal and breathable). Black gold tone was customised in Metal Paint specification as well and used as final finish on all Structural steel columns (200mm dia circular columns). Exterior façade along the South and internal façade along east length of water body has a Teak sandstone finish, respectively used as stone on edge and cut stone in a staggered pattern (stone supplied by Italiano Stones and Tiles). These stones were pre-sealed and fixed using a specialised polymeric adhesive-based grout from Ardex Endura (to help reduce structural loading factors otherwise encountered while using cement mortar while cladding walls). Internal space finishes – The approach throughout the resort was to adapt an absolutely light structural system using a combination of structural steel columns with RCC Flat slabs + 2m deep roof overhangs on both sides and a plinth designed to appear floating along the water body, thus forming the connecting walkway and an RCC framed structure with filler walls in aerated concrete



Photo Rajesh Vora



Photo Sanika

blocks and plaster, detailed such that the exposed slabs and columns appear visually light and sleek. The guest block has deep lateral columns to in-turn form a recessed main façade along the south and north length of the building, to function as weather shades. The structural system here has been unequivocally expressed (this design could not have been perceived any other way), thus reducing capitol cost of what Indian hotels usually tend to do by adopting thunky structural sizing, further clad with expensive marbles. Most spaces that have minimal MEP services intervening, have their slab soffits with plaster and paint – no false ceilings. Rest of the Public areas have spatially large spans and volumes with a gamut of MEP Services and in-turn false ceilings. Lotus Café – This 15m x 15m faceted roof structure (evolved from contemporizing the Lotus flower petals into geometric facets), required absolute lightness – both structurally and visually. We adopted a steel structure with 16 V columns (Twin 200mm dia columns) to create a faceted roof structure, carefully engineered using GI sheeting as shuttering/ sub-structure, over which a 50mm-thick screed concrete, was painstakingly done along sloping roof facets and intermittently rodded to avoid any honey-combing. This slab over side was treated with Sunanda Chemical's Flexiroof PU as waterproofing and further painted with a sheen based exterior grade paint developed by Asian Paints with a brass

finial located at the apex of the faceted/folded roof structure, like “the Kalash on the Shikhara of the Temple's Garbagriha”. This being an All Day Dining space required a gamut of MEP services and underdeck insulation to be accommodated within this faceted roof's underside, so we created yet another highly faceted roof underside in Teak veneer. Crafts – Every region has its distinct crafts that reflect its history. Andhra Pradesh, the state in which Tirupati resides, is known for its varied textiles and metal crafts. Symbols associated with these ten avatars have been contemporised using the “dokra” craft and integrated into the project as door handles. Wall artworks that use the bidri form of silver in gunmetal, and the kalamkari painters of nearby Srikalahasti have been incorporated in various locations whereas the traditional weaves of the area have been designed into the furnishings.

**This spread: exterior shell finishes are in black gold paint, sandstone, beige wall paint, blue-tiled water body, imperial beige Turkish marble flooring and shear glass facades**



Photo Rajesh Vora