

COMMERCIAL DESIGN

The definitive guide to successful commercial spaces and facilities management

A peak into the role of WiREnet
— a group that is opening up new
avenues for collaboration and
innovation for a more gender-
diverse work environment

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Women's Month Special

An issue dedicated to
women, who are leading
the realm of design and
construction in India

SCALING HEIGHTS

Nirupa Shankar, the Joint Managing Director
of Brigade Enterprises, gives us a detailed
insight into the factors that are contributing
to the unstoppable rise of the company and
its growth

Breaking through

We speak to women in the design industry who have tackled the glass ceiling and made their mark

A brief insight into each of your design journeys?

Alpana Gupta (AG): After graduating from Architecture school, I worked for a year with Sarda Plywood Industries on their housing project, after which I freelanced as an event decorator for a bit, working with British Airways and KLM Cargo. Freelancing gave me a good balance between work and my personal life – making time for my young children. Once they were older and went to school regularly, I joined Vijay Gupta Architects, the firm my father had established. I started by learning AutoCAD as a fresher architect, which was quite a humbling experience. It felt like the architecture degree I'd worked so hard for was in vain!

Mitu Mathur (MM): Growing up in a family of architects, the excitement of experiencing a holistic profession grew on me gradually, and choosing architecture was, therefore, a natural instinct. My undergraduate degree in architecture in Delhi and master's degree in Urban Design in New York further propelled that direction and a creative thought process. The built environment and urban challenges in my professional journey also

urged me to question the current norms of the practice and how we approach design for people and cities. As an architect and designer, my family, life, and work have always inspired me in this journey, teaching me key lessons, and making me socially aware and sensitive, shaping my life.

Ekta Parekh (EP): My initiation into design was pure chance. I was all set to follow in my mother's footsteps and become a surgeon. But life had a different plan for me. While helping my cousin make architectural models in the summer between Grade 12 and professional college, I absolutely loved what I was exposed to. On a whim applied to Architecture School and surprisingly got in! From then on, design has been a love I couldn't get over.

I went to KRVIA for my undergraduate degree and subsequently worked with Ranjit and Associates. Further went on to do a MArch with Theory and Design as my major from UPENN, Philadelphia. I spent a summer semester through Grad school in Paris learning about construction methodologies through time. Thereafter was a stint in New York with Renfro Design Group for about two years.

GETTING TO KNOW THE WOMEN IN DESIGN:

- **Alpana Gupta**, Partner at Vijay Gupta Architects
- **Mitu Mathur**, Director, GPM Architects and Planners
- **Ekta Parekh**, Partner, reD Architects
- **Pragya Sanghavi**, Director, Pentaspace Design Studio
- **Priyanka Khanna**, Founder and Architect, 42MM Architecture;

To convince and market your design to your client and his team, and execute it the way you have conceived it, is very difficult. Design school doesn't teach you that."

In 2004 I moved back to India and started reD (research|inquiry|Design) with Rajiv Parekh.

Pragya Sanghavi (PS): Since a kid, I was always interested in buildings. Built structures always fascinated me and I felt a certain kind of romance around architecture & construction. The idea of pursuing civil engineering did not excite me, so I studied architecture at IES College of Architecture, and after practising as an architect for over a year and a half, I went on to study Advanced construction management at NICMAR Pune. While studying Construction Management, I also studied Real Estate Finance. Later on, I was selected for a 10K Women Entrepreneur Program which was conducted by IES.

Bangalore & Goldman Sachs, where I learnt how to manage and grow a creative studio successfully.

Priyanka Khanna (PK):

Architecture is a profession which is sustained not just by design skills; It actually takes a huge group of people to make every space come together, which requires a lot of project management, teamwork and coordination. Even after 15 years of practice, being a female architect you still encounter the initial barriers with site supervisors & people working on site. It takes a little while for people on site to gain confidence in my skills and experience to take technical instructions. It has been imperative for me to be assertive and place my opinion with clarity and reason to establish a sense of authority. The women in the field have to work a little bit harder to get to that same point, but we all knew it would not be easy. As famously quoted by Zaha Hadid – "If you want an easy life, don't be an architect".

How did you get your first projects?

AG: The first projects I worked on were not core architectural projects because I was a freelancer. But when I joined my father's firm, the first buildings I worked on were residences and playschools, and I really enjoyed the immersive experiential aspect of design these projects exposed me to.

MM: My journey in the architecture and construction industry has been a gradually expanding experience that has taught me new ways of questioning my work. I see myself as an explorer decoding the means and ends of both architecture as a profession and as a responsibility towards the greater good. Heading a design-oriented practice, I consider myself fortunate to be exposed to various social and economic challenges that will gradually shape our future.

In the beginning, the college



MITU MATHUR,
Director, GPM Architects and Planners

regime came as a big shock, with never-ending submissions and sleepless nights, but the excitement of creating and ideating is what fuelled my enthusiasm and continues to drive me every day. While working in both Government and Private sectors, I have learnt the long-term impact our projects have on society at large. The most delightful aspect of my career is playing a pivotal role in reading and revitalising places in our Indian cities and creating spaces where people engage with the users. This keeps me driven towards practising as an architect.

EP: After moving back from the US with a Master's Degree and many hopes and aspirations, our first project at reD was a 100 sqft bathroom. It was indeed a reality check! We did take it on, of course, and gave it literally everything we had! Now, when I look back at the space, of course, I feel it's overthought and overdesigned. The next few projects were for friends and family who were willing to trust their small spaces with a young practice. That started reds journey!

PS: We are four co-founders, and since the inception of Pentaspace, we decided that the boys would be leaving their existing jobs and giving their full time and energy to Pentaspace; while Bhakti and I would be working with different organisations to keep us afloat. I, at that time, was working in the business development department with a reputed developer in Mumbai. I (as part of the business development team) was pitching for redevelopment projects with various societies. I saw this as a window of opportunity for Pentaspace to showcase its work. Pentaspace presented some of their designs to the developer for these redevelopment projects, which were highly appreciated by both the developer's team and the society members we were pitching



PRAGYA SANGHAVI,
Director, Pentaspace Design Studio