

# Learn how architects can balance business and design successfully

Pentaspaces Design Studio, a Mumbai based full-service architecture practice, have quite a bit to say on the subject of business in architecture.

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They say that success usually comes to those who are too busy working to go looking for it. Architecture offices around the world have definitely been busy coming out of the recent pandemic. In the post-modern world, along with the impact of using the latest technology available, it's become increasingly clear that architects and design practitioners are expected to get better at their business skills if they want to get ahead. Professional abilities like managing a practice, establishing relationships with clients and efficient time management have become crucial differentiators that keep the best firms a head above the rest. As the current system of education does not produce office-ready architects, a great deal of clarity on these entrepreneurial aspects could be provided by veterans in the industry.

Pentaspaces Design Studio, a Mumbai based full-service architecture practice started out as a young firm in 2007, on the advice of their mentors, they decided to focus on architecture rather than interiors and got serious about pursuing work in the real estate industry. Having four principals at the helm, they worked towards their goals by adopting an exploratory approach that evolves with each site. Since architectural projects take a few years to complete on average, they had to work hard to get their foot in the door at multiple offices of developers to try and secure as many projects as possible, as early as possible. Today, the firm's robust portfolio rounds up to about 20 million square feet of space within the country. Aroha and Rainforest are some of their well known, multi-level residential tower projects in Mumbai.



Pragya Sanghavi, one of the partners, mentions the importance of assessing the firm's business needs accurately. She is the one who oversees all the financial planning and business development aspects of running the firm. Since there is a separate individual looking at it in a more critical and profit oriented way, it gets easier to manage the business aspect without compromising on any other factors.

If architects need to thrive in the shape changing reality of the construction industry, one whose value fluctuates based off market prices all over the world, a strong business strategy is absolutely critical. Aiming for excellence in fewer directions and focussing on the strengths of the firm is a good way to go. Business plans can no longer be a year-end reflection of what has worked in the past but must evolve into informed decisions on how they will grow in the years to come. Accurate methods of calculating design fee, accounting for all expenses and personal commission is a practice that might initially take some time to master, but will pay hefty dividends in the long run.

Additionally, it is important to evaluate early on the number of players on the field, so to speak. Especially when it comes to large scale projects, financial viability depends on the contributions of various departments to the construction team, government authorities, builders and investors. Pragya candidly shares her experiences with Chambers, their striking commercial building project that took all of thirteen years to go from conception to reality. The site faced numerous challenges having been leased out to Metro development, then fell victim to modifications in municipal and construction rules, and underwent drastic design changes that eventually pushed its façade 45 degrees to the north west, opening it up to the surrounding cityscape. What emerged is now an iconic structure, where daylight streams into the atrium throughout the day and shines bright at night with the help of some façade lighting. Perseverance is another oft overlooked characteristic that cannot be taught, but must rather be gleaned along the way.



Pragya also mentions how it's been advantageous to them to factor in multiple revisions to the design fee at the outset, to help mitigate the losses that come from a project that stalls because of slow decision making. Getting the right team for the right job is another component that contributes to overall gain. The competencies of the design teams directly affect the timelines and outcome of any project. She makes it very clear though, that at no point is design sacrificed for profitability. Therein lies the challenge that architects most commonly face – how can we provide our best creative solution within a stipulated time frame, while the outcome is running around playing hard to get with all the parties involved?

At the end of the day, architects need to make money. It is as simple and as complicated as that. As host in a multi-sided business model, the architect of today is expected to produce stunning visuals, orate the most compelling sales pitches, manage warm relationships with his client and all along deliver prompt information to the various other interested consultants in order to survive. Business acumen whether innate or learned is essential to arriving at success. Intentional mentorship from other firms, especially those that have come through the past few decades which have been through much change, can put younger ones on the right path to finding profitability while doing something they love. All over the world, architects are faced with a new challenge: to get as imaginative with their business strategies as their building designs.

***About Pentaspace:***



*A 15-year-old full-service design consultancy, Pentaspace works on real estate projects in the residential, commercial, institutional, and hospitality sectors. Over the years, they have expanded their portfolio from a single building in Mumbai to nearly 1.5 crore square feet of real estate development. The firm is headed by Gaurav Sanghavi, Harsh Pote, Pragya Sanghavi, Bhakti Pote.*

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