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The Disruptors

By **MOHAN SIDDHARTH & KAMAYNI**, STUDIO GULMOHAR

“As an architect you design for the present with an awareness of the past for a future which is essentially unknown.”

– Norman Foster

Architecture is one of the most prominent reflections of a culture. Throughout history, architecture has told us about the customs and lifestyles of people living in unique environments.

This is a three-part series that focuses on the Top 30 architects and designers under the age of 45 who are creating a powerful impact on the architectural and designing landscape of India and across the globe. They are the new age

trailblazers who have carved a niche for themselves in their respective fields of construction, development, art, design, lighting and architecture.

Architects create structures that inspire and interior design breathes life into it. It transforms the structure of beams and pillars into a space that thrives with life. Architecture and interior design go hand-in-hand in building habitable and pleasing places where dreams are realised and destinies are built.

This eclectic list is a mix of young leading architects and interior designers some of whom have ventured out on their own, a few have launched successful partnerships, some have given a

new direction to their family legacy while some others have created their own niche in renowned firms.

Renowned designer and architect Cameron Sinclair has said: “If you focus on design, you can call yourself a designer. If you focus on the implementation of your designs, you can call yourself an architect.”

In modern society people rely on function, durability, and visual appeal when selecting designs for their homes, businesses, and places of leisure. Great architecture elevates its interiors while exquisite interiors enhance built architecture.

Here’s presenting the first of the three-part series celebrating the best in the business.



METHODOLOGY

The research for the final list of Top 30 under 45 followed a step-by-step process. First, an exhaustive list of over a hundred young and promising architects and interior designers was created. Next, a basic sanity check that included age, education, experience, achievements and prominent projects narrowed it down to 50. Last, the ones who made it to the final 30 fulfilled a defined set of parameters comprising their work philosophy, challenges faced, vision and prospective contribution to the field of interior design and architecture.

Sense and Sensibility

Honesty and client satisfaction are the principles that Aahana Miller believes in. “Our process is very client-driven and the project evolves with our interaction with them. We work with them to meet their expectations using value engineering and ‘jugaad’.”

Hailing from a family of artists, designers and architects, Miller grew up in an atmosphere that fostered art and design. Her parents were the founders of the prominent architectural firm ABM Architects.

Her interest in restoration and

preservation led her to pursue an undergraduate fine arts degree in interior architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). It encompassed a combination of architecture, conservation and design of the built environment, involving an innovative approach to the transformation of existing

ABM Architects, Mumbai

Aahana Miller, 31
 Principal Architect

buildings. At RISD, she was involved in projects in Japan and Costa Rica, which helped her gain experience in experimental and hardcore architectural projects.

Pursuing a masters at UPenn gave her the requisite skills to approach planning and engineering of projects through team-based studios as well as independent assignments.

Though it was a challenge for her to join a firm that already had an established reputation, Miller soon became instrumental in the growth of ABM. “With my experience in fine arts and graphic design, I bring some freshness to the style ABM has been known for. I have also been key in bringing new technologies and software to the firm, such as parametric modelling and fabrication techniques.”

Miller prefers to use the term ‘sensible architecture’ rather than sustainable architecture. ABM Architects are pioneers in using electrochromic glass in India for the office building of the pharmaceutical giant Divis in Hyderabad. Electronically tintable, the glass regulates the intensity of sunshine pouring in during the day and changes tint by an electrical signal, thereby making the building more energy efficient.

Her favourite project is the recently-completed Domestic Lounge ‘080’ at Bangalore International Airport T1. “My design philosophy is echoed in this project, where the use of colour and a combination of eclectic materials with wood brings in a beautiful blend of traditional Indian aesthetics with modern sensibilities.”

Going forward, Miller would love to work on an adaptive reuse/conservation project in India. “That is where my interest in architecture, interiors and conservation will truly be amalgamated.” **F**

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

Aahana Miller has been key in bringing in new technologies and software to ABM



The Social Network

Nishita Kamdar dons many hats. A multi-faceted personality, she is a name to reckon with in the interior design space. Other than being the founder and principal architect of Studio Nishita Kamdar, which she established in 2014, she also runs a bakery business with her mother and a bespoke furniture design company P.O.D (Pieces of Desire). She is also a visiting faculty at her alma mater KRVI, guiding future architects and designers. Kamdar believes that designers have the incredible power to create social patterns by designing the way people live their lives.

Being a Mumbai-based business comes with its own challenges. Spaces are becoming smaller and

Studio Nishita Kamdar, Mumbai

Nishita Kamdar, 34
Principal Architect

smaller than ever before while expectations are becoming larger than ever. “I think the challenge for us, at least for Mumbai-based designers, is how to creatively design something within a realistic shoestring budget.”

“We are of the belief that we need to design more smartly and efficiently when it comes to quintessential residential spaces in India.”

At Studio Nishita Kamdar, a new project means taking up a whole new task from scratch.

They follow an exhaustive meditative process backed by a lot of research not only in design but also in understanding the client’s vision. As she says, “As designers, we are problem solvers as well as




Nishita Kamdar believes in designing residential spaces more smartly and efficiently

service providers. We take a lot of pride in space designing and like to call ourselves space designers and not interior designers because space is three-dimensional and that’s how all projects are.”

The Studio’s favourite project is their very first one, a lovely farmhouse in Karjat, called ‘Under the Mango Tree’, which is appreciated for its simple but aesthetic design. As Kamdar puts it, “It’s always about the simplicity of it which actually

wins over complexity.”

Another interesting project undertaken by her studio was a smart, efficient, centralised vacuum system for an entire house for their client, Dreamvac.

In her words, “Doing your own little thing is always the best way to make a larger difference. We collectively work towards the singular goal of achieving something that is best for design and best for the environment.” 

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

Playing with Space



Roshni Kshirsagar tries to ensure that the carbon footprint of a project is minimal

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Roshni Kshirsagar has always enjoyed spaces, how they make one feel, the visual language, the visual depiction. She has always found spaces to be impactful, which raise different kinds of emotions, both physically and emotionally. All these factors led her to study interior designing at Rachana Sansad, Mumbai.

Kshirsagar joined SJK as a junior designer in 2007, and with sheer hard work and persistence has become a partner and design director in the firm. She says: “Each role, phase and process have impacted my outlook because when responsibilities changed, the scale of the project changed. Gradually, I have created a niche for myself within the organisation”. Evidently, Kshirsagar has carved her very own space in

a purely architecture company.

She believes that understanding the culture and context of the client is of paramount importance in order to make the space far more effective in terms of its operation. A design project is a collaborative effort, inclusive of designers, external parties and most importantly clients.

“While designing a space, we make sure that the carbon footprint is minimal. We try not to have people and material travel from afar. We are always mindful in terms of choosing what materials we are using, going more with handmade

SJK Architects, Mumbai

Roshni Kshirsagar, 38

Partner

finishes and hand-crafted. And at the same time help with the livelihood of the local community.”

Kshirsagar is a great admirer of Carlo Scarpa, the famous Italian architect known for fine detailing, use of material and technique to create timeless designs. Among her own designs her personal favourite is The Forest of Chintz store, Mumbai. “It’s special because it embodies handmade finishes, simplicity in design, is contextual and reflective of what is needed of the space, project and the user.”

Going forward, Kshirsagar would like to embrace designs that create an impact for the user. One should look at the true potential of their project and how they can achieve it and be unique in that way, she says. 

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

Striving for Change

Disha Bhavsar and Shivani Ajmera are first-generation entrepreneurs. They come from different backgrounds, but their love and appreciation for art and design brought them together in a job when they decided to take the plunge together and set up Quirk Studio in 2013.

“Our studio finds its roots in the confluence of our design ideologies, striving towards an ethos that shapes people-centric

Quirk Studio, Mumbai

Shivani Ajmera, 37

Co-Founder & Principal Designer

Disha Bhavsar, 35

Co-Founder & Principal Designer

spaces and environments. We continually focus on creating work that is authentic, inspiring and that reflects our aesthetic, in order to attract like-minded individuals and homeowners,” says Ajmera.

Hailing from Oman, Bhavsar pursued her interior design degree from Mumbai and master’s in design management from the Winchester School of Arts. Ajmera pursued an education in interior design from Florence, Italy, and thereafter worked with some leading architecture firms.

Quirk Studios has projects all across India and abroad. Their upcoming projects include a large residential project in central London as well as a 100 percent green energy estate in Solapur, among others.

“Change is the only constant,




Shivani Ajmera (left) and Disha Bhavsar like to combine functionality with classic design.

and we have to keep evolving and bettering ourselves with every project that we undertake. We have always vouched for a design aesthetic that sustains functionality, while being classic in its appearance.”

“We are constantly seeking innovative technology in products, materials, and finishes. Whether it’s AR, VR, 3D printing, software, virtual resource libraries or apps, there is a lot of innovation in the field of design. Automation and technology have been a natural progression in our spaces. Ninety percent of our spaces are automated.”

Ajmera believes a sustainable interior design practice reflects the honest commitment to protecting

the environment. “Sustainability can start with smaller, mindful steps, such as reducing wastage, using naturally and locally sourced materials, using energy-conserving products and incorporating green spaces into your homes and offices.”

Bhavsar and Ajmera aspire to work towards their idea of creating spaces that inspire and change the way people live and experience spaces. In their own words, “Our studio’s contemporary vision imbibes an innovative and experimental quality to the spaces, which embody a unique experience and subsequently contribute to the design landscape of India.” 

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

For the Love of Building

Pentaspaces Consultants has been named as one of the fastest growing architectural practices by government body IEDRA. Co-founders Gaurav Sanghvi and Harsh Pote nurtured the idea of starting a firm while in college at Rachana Sansad Academy of Architecture, Mumbai. In 2007, along with their architect spouses, Pragya Sanghvi and Bhakti Pote, they embarked on this dream and set up Pentaspaces.

In spite of coming from a business family background, Sanghvi always wanted to be an architect. “Buildings always fascinated me, while travelling I was naturally drawn towards the monuments and the architecture of that area.”

Pote, on the other hand, grew up amid the architectural landscape, as his family is into the real estate business. His insights and interest in architecture led him to take up a part-time job at an architectural firm while he was still a school boy.

Today, Pentaspaces is among the leading architectural firms in the real estate market, with around 100 completed projects in housing, retail, hospitality, industrial and commercial spaces. They provide a holistic real estate experience backed by interior design and research. The co-founders with their varied background and skill sets have catapulted the firm to this stage.

“Since the beginning, we wanted to position our firm as an architectural firm. We penetrated the market as such, and then set up our interior and research department.”

Every project needs to be dealt with on its own challenges and merit. A new project comes in as a concept and passes through the development and conceptualisation stage that involves a lot of brainstorming



Gaurav Sanghvi and Harsh Pote (seated) want to draw on Indian heritage

Pentaspaces Design Studio, Mumbai

Gaurav Sanghvi, 41

Co-founder

Harsh Pote, 41

Co-founder

backed by research. Their projects are in confluence with the neighbourhood, like the project Rainforest in Mumbai that is set among rainforest trees. They believe making a building more efficient in

terms of running costs, efficiency and capital cost is extremely important.

As for their favourite project, Sanghvi states, “The SBUT project in Bhandi Bazaar is like a crown jewel of our projects at this stage of a life cycle, where we’ve been able to push the edge in terms of a concept and a building of that look, feel and stature.”

India has a rich architectural heritage as they feel, “We need to be more relevant to Indian heritage. We need to learn from the old, use it in the new and then create a new product.” **P**

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

Design in his DNA



Ali Baldiwala picks projects that are satisfying for the soul

Young interior designer Ali Baldiwala truly believes in the saying that if you really want something and align your thoughts in that manner, there is no chance it cannot work.

A multi-talented personality, he not only designs clients' homes, offices and commercial spaces, but

has also fulfilled his childhood dream of becoming an actor by starring in the acclaimed film *Neerja*.

"Design has always been a part of me, I've always seen it. It's always been around drawings and pencils and sketches and rulers and scales," he says. Baldiwala studied interior design at Rachana Sansad, Mumbai,

and worked for two years with a renowned firm. Thereafter, he joined his father's firm Baldiwala Associates and soon gave it an edge, quite literally. Today, Baldiwala Edge is a much sought after designing firm. Within a short time, he created a niche clientele for himself within the firm. As he states, "There's nothing that I've taken from my dad."

They follow a strategic process of design, conceptualisation and bidding for the project in terms of the BOQs and then coming down to the execution. Styling the entire project and keeping a budget aside for it from the beginning is very important.

Baldiwala believes in prioritising projects that are satisfying for the soul, being able to connect to the

Baldiwala Edge, Mumbai

Ali Baldiwala, 35

Partner

project more creatively. "I think in recent years there's a rat race happening in the design fraternity, which is very challenging for a designer. But how you deal with and balance it is something that comes from introspection."

During the pandemic, they started a new virtual interior design vertical called 'Inside the Box' to help people spruce up their homes and make them more efficient. They collaborated with a number of brands and found virtual solutions for real problems.

Among Baldiwala's favourite projects is Mysiga Home, a Japanese and Scandinavian concept home, which is called Japandi.

He envisages an inclusive environment where local materials and crafts are used in tandem with global techniques and infrastructure materials to create a truly global design aesthetic. 

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

Block By Block

If you concentrate on the architecture, everything else comes along for the ride. This is the mantra Ranjit Wagh, architect and founder director of Dar & Wagh keeps dear to his heart.

Having studied at the renowned CEPT, Ahmedabad, and graduating as a gold medallist, he was influenced by the teachings and works of stalwarts like Balkrishna Doshi, Anant Raje and Kurula Varkey. In his own words, “Great teachers bring good luck.” He garnered rich experience working with some of the most renowned practices in India, Bali and Singapore for 13 years.

Returning to India he founded Dar & Wagh with his interior designer wife Amber Dar Wagh. The beginnings were challenging as they had to start from scratch but with persistence and hard work, Dar & Wagh has become a name to reckon with. Their portfolio boasts of 17 completed and nine upcoming projects. Their built work spans India, China, Bhutan, Bali, Maldives, Malaysia and Singapore.

Alila Villas Uluwatu in Bali and Parkroyal on Pickering in Singapore have been Wagh’s star projects, while working with WOHA, Singapore.

For Dar and Wagh, time is of utmost importance; minimising delays and controlling client budgets are their priority. As Wagh says, “We’re big supporters of pre-fabrication.” In a country like India, it becomes one of the best ways of maintaining quality. For one of their resort projects in Maldives, large parts have been pre-fabricated, shipped and installed.

“Most of our work goes through multiple iterations before being built. It allows for appropriateness and refinement,” adds Wagh.

Dar and Wagh also believe



Ranjit Wagh is all for designing multi-functional spaces and building less

Dar & Wagh, Pune

Ranjit Wagh, 44

Co-founder

that architecture and design are collaborative processes. “Context—that’s the magic word. We try to achieve a certain simplicity that looks deceptively effortless,” says Wagh.

The key is “adaptive reuse, to integrate something existing and come up with a cohesive solution that allows us to be minimally

invasive. We think this is the sustainable way of building.”

“Convincing clients to build less by making multi-functional spaces is a critical part of developing a brief. This works best for putting together successful projects and clients are happy too,” Wagh adds.

India, with its unique culture, has been at the forefront of design in the world but now seems to be losing out. As more thoughtful designers and practices emerge, Dar & Wagh wish to be a part of rebuilding India’s design thread. **F**

• MOHAN SIDDHARTH, STUDIO GULMOHAR

Art of the Matter

Sarah Sham never planned to be an interior designer. She had always been interested in art considering her background of a family-run 130-year, four-generations-old business dealing in art, antiques and furniture.

She trained as an art historian from the Duke University in the US and Oxford University, UK, and afterwards started working with her father. It was at the suggestion of a client during one of their interactions that she ventured into interior designing. Inspired, she went back to school to train as an interior designer from Rachana Sansad, Mumbai.

Essajees Atelier, the company that

Essajees Atelier, Mumbai

Sarah Sham, 35

Principal Designer

she established in 2014, has already completed about 60 projects in residential and commercial spaces.

For Sham, the size and budget of any project are secondary. The main emphasis is on client relations. As she says, “I’ve become attuned to operating on an energy frequency with my clients. It’s literally about wanting to associate with people who are on the same wavelength as me.”

The pandemic has changed many things, including the way people want to design their homes. The focus on quality has shifted to wanting things that last for a long time and that are super easy to use and maintain.

“I’ve not done a single home project in the last three years without a home office integration, it’s literally just not going forward unless it’s a home office,” she says.



For Sarah Sham integrating technology and innovation in design is important

A lot of focus is now being laid on sustainable architecture and green environment. However, efficient, effective and affordable eco-friendly products are not readily available. Also the standards and processes are not in place. “Wherever possible, we’re continuously developing and learning about new materials and reusing what’s already there.”

Sarah believes that integrating technology and innovation in design is important, but not if it’s

transient or changes very quickly.

What sets the Essajees Atelier apart is that its entire ethos and philosophy is based on sharing. “We have started Whatsapp groups across 150 cities for designers to connect, share information, leads or any kind of information one needs for a young design studio and mentorship to ensure that everyone goes together as an industry.” **F**

• KAMAYNI, STUDIO GULMOHAR

For the People

Every house is about the people living in the house. I do a lot of people-centric designs.” That’s how Poonam Mehta approaches a project for her design studio AMPM. An acronym for Akash Mehta and Poonam Mehta, AMPM is a premium luxury interior design studio that’s making waves for all the right reasons.

A psychology graduate, Poonam Mehta was always interested in human behaviour and how it changes in different surroundings. She amalgamates her study of human psychology with her designs to create perfect luxurious homes for her clients.

“I feel psychology has really helped me deal with people, understand what they want in

AMPM Designs, Pune

Poonam Mehta, 36

Principal Designer

Akash Mehta, 38

Principal Designer

advance.” Her love for the creative arts and design persuaded her to do a master’s in interior design from University of Arts, London.

She has worked with renowned design firms like Talati and Panthaky Associates and DSP Designs.

“Working with such reputed firms laid the foundation of my career. It’s always important to respect the journey that you’ve come from.”

Akash Mehta comes with a background in lighting and design. He creates the drama of light and shadow for their creations. For them, understanding the client in-depth first is important for creating a good relationship with them. “We start understanding them as

Poonam Mehta and Akash Mehta try to understand their clients before starting the design process



individuals, what they come from, their background, their lifestyle, how they have lived, how they have seen their journey, before starting the design process.”

Their most favourite project is the stud farm that they designed in Pune. It was inspired by the heritage of India, especially the rich tapestry of palaces.

AMPM, as a firm, does the wholesale design process for any

house, or retail or office project, from interior lighting and styling to designing their interior space. For every project, they design a few pieces of customised furniture for their clients, also adding a touch of personalisation, like creating a family crest or logo introduced in embroideries, or towels or napkins, which really makes it bespoke and brings luxury to the space. **IF**

● MOHAN SIDDHARTH, STUDIO GULMOHAR

The Art of Uneven

Architecture is a form of art wherein the buildings start becoming homes.' Dexter Fernandes believes that basic love for art and knowledge about technicalities, as to how buildings are made, serves as a good mix for a successful architecture project.

Eighteen years ago, Fernandes and Shourya Patel got together and founded Uneven on the philosophy of yin and yang where both have different approaches, styles and methods, but their beliefs, love for nature and ultimate goal of delivering remarkable designs define the same. Together they make everything even under the Uneven canopy.

While Fernandes heads interior designing, Patel manages the architectural aspects of the

Uneven, Vadodara

Dexter Fernandes, 41

Founder Partner

Shourya Patel, 41

Founder Partner

projects. Together, they have designed and executed projects across cities and types—individual residences, commercial complexes and communities. They have also ventured into set designing for some films. They consider 33 LE and Back to Heaven as two of their landmark community living projects.

Fernandes is a true animal and nature lover, which is subtly translated in his ventures. "Being nature lovers, everything around us that speaks about nature has inspired us. We design



Dexter Fernandes (left) and Shourya Patel are inspired by nature and focus as much on landscape as on the buildings and interiors.

our landscape with the same detailing as the buildings and interiors we design," he says.

Patel is a master doodler who likes to dress his architectural pieces tactfully so that they not only look stunning but also serve the needs and functions at the same time. "As a rule, for each new project we make sure of not cutting any trees on site. Also, providing rainwater harvesting goes hand-in-hand for our sites."

His love for exploring details through various materials, textures and compositions in any kind of space has allowed Fernandes to

master interior design projects, furniture details, and landscape design under the Uneven umbrella.

Patel believes Indian culture and science go way back in time to teach us about sustainable living, which can be a great tool for working in today's time for achieving green buildings and sustainable architecture.

Going forward, they wish to take Uneven to different parts of the country and contribute to the supremely diverse architectural landscape of India. **F**

• MOHAN SIDDHARTH, STUDIO GULMOHAR