

WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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From left:
Shruti,
Minu Margeret
and Pallavi Utagi

MY STARTUP, MY RIGHT

How more and more women
founders are slowly but
surely finding access to
capital, mentors and a
support system

PLUS

The View from
Women VCs

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Modern Masters

By MOHAN SIDDHARTH & KAMAYNI

‘Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness.’

–Frank Gehry

Architecture is part art and part science. As an art, it provides an outlet for creative expression that leads society to look at their living space and the overall environment in different ways. At the same time, architecture responds to society’s functional needs while making use of modern technology in building design.

Although architecture is a physical structure and has materialistic value, it has also been a representation of culture, society, ways of living, and other fundamental concepts of human existence.

This issue celebrates the stalwarts of modern architecture under the age of 45. These architects and designers are instrumental in shaping the architectural landscape of

India with their innovations, sensibilities and aesthetics using modern technologies.

Sustainable architecture is the need of the day. It is the ability of a building to suffice its own needs and if possible, cater to the needs of a few others in the vicinity. The key to architectural sustainability is to work with rather than against nature.

In the words of renowned Australian architect Ric Butt: “Sustainable design is about creating buildings as ecosystems.”

Today, India is one of the major contributors in developing green technology in the building industry. The wave of sustainable design is sweeping through the entire country, and leading the pack are the following modern-day trailblazers who are making conscious efforts to inculcate green architectural solutions by employing minimum wastage processes, and creating productive and healthy environments.



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.

COURTESY STUDIO GULMOHAR

Shaping Spaces

Priyanka Khanna and Rudraksh Charan's designs are based on an understanding of the end-user



Rudraksh Charan was introduced to the world of architecture and construction through his architect-father, while Priyanka Khanna was keen to pursue a career with an amalgamation of art and engineering. Both graduated with a bachelor's in architecture from Sushant School of Art and Architecture in 2003, and co-founded 42mm Architecture, a multidisciplinary architecture, interiors and urban design practice, in 2005. As Khanna puts it, "Our interests are rooted deeper into the profession with the understanding of what architecture can do as an impact in how it shapes the way people experience spaces."

Their journey had its share of challenges—whether it was finding new clients, consultants, contractors, or the right quality product, and engineering it effectively. The conviction of achieving the right solution

42mm Architecture, Delhi-NCR

Rudraksh Charan, 42

Principal Partner

Priyanka Khanna, 41


Principal Partner

despite the hurdles has enabled them to create a large portfolio of work with over 110 completed projects in residential, commercial, institutional and hospitality sectors.

A few of their prominent projects include the corporate office of Crystal Corp, an agrochemical manufacturer, in Delhi, in which basic crisp forms were created out of natural raw materials that helped in achieving an earthy-yet-sophisticated aesthetic. While a bungalow in Delhi, Prarthana, was conceived and executed as perfection in pronounced French classicism.

Over the years, their projects have become more people-centric than architect-centric. Their design style is based on understanding, interpretation and reflection of the personalities of the end-user. There is high emphasis on spatial arrangement, planning and research to adopt any architectural style that can express the interpreted meaning to the built form. In Khanna's words, "We create objects of art and one-of-a-kind design by crafting the experiences within."

The firm is now moving towards projects that have a larger social impact. They wish to have their architectural footprint defined by their timeless body of work.

"We wish to achieve diversity at the micro level of developing a system, material or even a detail as well as at a macro level of developing a form style to be inspired from," says Charan. 

• KAMAYNI

Poetic Approach To Architecture

Akshat Bhatt is the founder and principal architect of Architecture Discipline, a multidisciplinary architecture practice he established in 2007. The firm's portfolio boasts of more than 500 projects, ranging from residential, retail and hospitality sectors to large-scale commercial and public assignments. Bhatt is inspired by the edgy, bold and progressive architecture of Norman Foster, Richard Rogers and Daniel Libeskind.

For Bhatt, design is about bringing joy to people's lives: "Architecture is the art of creating

Architecture Discipline, Delhi-NCR

Akshat Bhatt, 43
Principal Architect

a habitat for human beings". He believes to practice architecture one needs to be a poet, an engineer and a sociologist in equal measure. His approach to architecture is influenced by his long engagement with progressive music and the guitar. Music has complemented his architectural journey and cemented his belief in progress, optimism, sustainable development and a strong work ethic.

At the studio, they use cutting-edge technology in their design process. "Good architecture is about setting up dialogues for continuity and contrast through the built form, using beauty, scale, and rhythm expressed through construction," says Bhatt.


The Discovery Center in



Bengaluru is a flexible town hall where the design explores sustainable development with a high-tech approach to construction. His award-winning Make in India Pavilion at Hannover Messe 2015 positioned India's advancements across industrial sectors on the bedrock of its rich culture and idiom.

Bhatt hopes to be involved with more public service projects like the Mohalla Clinics, made using

upcycled shipping containers and providing primary health care to every neighbourhood in Delhi.

Bhatt believes that for the country's growth, it is imperative that the designs should be about reduction and optimisation. As he puts it, "Being mindful and treating our own waste, generating our own energy, and reducing consumption is the most pressing need in today's times." 

• MOHAN SIDDHARTH

Sustainability Statement

Amit Khanna is the founder and design principal at Amit Khanna Design Associates (AKDA), a globally recognised multidisciplinary architecture and design firm. In his formative years in Kenya, he was fascinated with the relaxed and positive disposition of a family friend who happened to be an architect. This instilled in him the idea of architecture as a profession and he ended up studying architecture at the iconic School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, followed by a master's in Sustainable Urban Development from the University of Oxford.

Khanna is a strong advocate of sustainable design. He firmly believes that in present times, architecture must seriously consider the global crisis of energy consumption, waste management and wealth inequality while creating new designs and projects. He feels that architecture is more about experience rather than imagery. "Architecture needs to retreat to the background, creating spaces for shelter that work effortlessly, effectively and efficiently," he says.

At AKDA, any new project starts by identifying the regional context of the neighbourhood, and issues related to sustainability. The collective goal is for buildings to project a strong statement to answer these issues. Khanna fondly reminisces the progress they have made creating office interiors, restaurants and houses, as well as building large-scale commercial spaces. The greatest challenge, he says, is to maintain a design-centric approach to the business of architecture, rather than letting the economics of the project dictate the terms.

To date, AKDA has completed

Amit Khanna's AKDA has completed over 100 projects in the residential, commercial, retail and hospitality sectors



Amit Khanna Design Associates, Delhi-NCR

Amit Khanna, 44
 Design Principal

more than 100 projects in the residential, commercial, retail and hospitality sectors. Some of their flagship designs include an automated warehouse in Faridabad for a precision components firm that uses an architectural screen to achieve indoor temperature control

without air conditioning; Atrium Tower in Delhi, a tall commercial building with a double-glazed façade; and Safdarjung Residence, an apartment building in Delhi with a unifying façade and exceptional levels of thermal insulation.

Going forward, Khanna hopes to lead a motivated group of people and a practice that is involved in defining a certain type of architecture that is deeply rooted in the country's regional vernacular, aware of its craftsmanship and spatial traditions. **IF**

• MOHAN SIDDHARTH



Asha Sairam looks at design as an opportunity to solve a puzzle

The Immersive Experience

Asha Sairam is the design principal at Studio Lotus, an award-winning interdisciplinary design practice. While studying Communication Design at NIFT, Delhi, she came across Studio Lotus for her colloquium research paper on experiential design in retail space. She joined as an intern in 2008 and started her journey with the studio as a designer in 2010.

For Sairam, design is an opportunity to make something

complex, layered and immersive, like solving a puzzle, and an opportunity to collaborate with different partners to achieve the desired result. Every new project's journey starts with a brief followed by dialogues between the design team and the client to understand the client's perspective on the project to create something authentic and meaningful. The project's narrative is built taking into consideration the site's geographic context, the brand's history, and the clients' aspirations.

"I thrive on challenges, and have a voracious appetite for learning," says Sairam, who enjoys learning through the process of trying something new and unfamiliar. Over the years, Sairam feels she has gotten more comfortable with ambiguity as she gained more clarity on the design process. With experience, she now has greater empathy for all the stakeholders in a project and has a better understanding of their challenges and limitations.

Sairam has spearheaded many projects at the Studio—Masti, a restaurant in Dubai that brings together the vibrancy and eclecticism of Indian culture, and Cousu D'Or, a couture bridal wear exhibition held at Bikaner House, Delhi,

Studio Lotus, Delhi-NCR

Asha Sairam, 34

Principal

where the design emerged from the idea of the eternal connection between flowers and weddings.

Sairam enjoys adaptive reuse projects where existing structures find new meaning for modern users while still sharing the memory of their earlier purpose. Her favourite project is the revitalisation of the F&B amenities at Raas Devigarh, a luxury hotel within an 18th-century palace in Udaipur.

At the studio, they try to weave in regional crafts and techniques in their projects that help to root the project in the context of the region. Sairam wishes to provide contemporised renditions of these crafts to every average Indian homeowner to style their homes. Moving forward, she would like to work on hospitality projects looking to create authentic and bespoke experiences for guests across global destinations. 

● KAMAYNI

Shivani Gupta Mittal and Ayush Mittal, co-founders of House of Lalitty, acknowledge their respective mothers as stimulants in their journey in the field of design and architecture. Shivani's mother, an interior designer and a homemaker, introduced her to the world of design while Ayush's mother supported his desire to create, design and sketch which encouraged him to take up architecture as a career.

The Language Of Design

House of Lalitty, founded in 2018, is an award-winning interior designing, architecture and furniture design studio. It has completed more than 15 projects in four years. The firm gives precedence to a triumvirate of three ideals: Authenticity, quality and functionality. They are consistently working to stay on top of trends and acquire new knowledge every day.

“Design is a means of expression, one without needing words or actions,” says Shivani. A good design generates synergy, makes the space feel special and wholesome, and adds life to it. They wish to curate meaningful designs and innovative architecture for all their clients, irrespective of the project or budget size.

For them, every client and

House of Lalitty, Delhi-NCR

Shivani Gupta Mittal, 29

Founder, Principal Designer

Ayush Mittal, 31

Co-founder, Principal Architect



Shivani Gupta Mittal and Ayush Mittal aspire to put Indian design on the global map

every project is distinct, and it's important to ascertain a plan that accommodates their needs and expectations. They don't seek a typical business relationship with their clients; they'd rather have an informal interaction with them to get a better understanding of their tastes, habits, routine, nature of work and requirements. To accomplish this, they have developed a tradition of ice-breaking lunches or dinners with their clients, which help in developing trust and compatibility.

Going forward, they aspire to bring ingenuity to their craft and help put Indian designs and architecture on the global map. They are strong advocates of the Make in India initiative, and look towards working with local brands and collaborating with Indian startups in their projects. 

● KAMAYNI

A World Of Possibilities



Meena Murthy Kakkar and her team want to build a state-of-the-art education campus with sustainability as a core feature

Meena Murthy Kakkar had always been creative since her childhood and had a high degree of empathy. Architecture was a natural progression, and her journey into the profession began when she was ranked eighth in the all-India entrance exam prior to joining the reputed School of Planning and Architecture (SPA) in Delhi. Her quest for design started after graduation when she co-founded Envisage, an interior design and architecture firm, with her husband and co-alumnus Vishal Kakkar in 2007. She is passionate about sharing her knowledge and experience with young aspirants as an associate professor at SPA since 2008.

For Kakkar, design is a synonym for possibilities. She believes that design thinking is essentially a problem-solving technique, a way

Envisage, Delhi-NCR

Meena Murthy Kakkar, 43


Design Head and Partner

to improve things. With time, her designs have evolved from being functional-driven to being more experience-driven. “The unsaid latent needs of the user play as big a role as the defined functional need established by the client,” she says.

At Envisage, they try to achieve sustainability in all three forms—environmental, economic and social. Kakkar believes it is their duty as designers and architects to build green architecture, and incorporate local arts and crafts in their projects. They consciously make efforts to use biophilic designs in their ventures. “We see all creations and

elements as processes instead of products,” she says. For Kakkar, the economics of a project are as important as the design. A project needs to be financially sustainable.

These thoughts are evident in their projects like The Mann School in Delhi, known for its environmental sustainability and user sensitivity, or the Marbella residence in Lucknow, famous for incorporating local arts and crafts in the home, or a law firm’s office in Gurugram which has global design aesthetics and beautiful Indian craftsmanship.

Kakkar and her team collectively dream to build a state-of-the-art education campus with sustainability as a core feature. Going forward, she endeavours to amalgamate Indian design, technology, and art to create something new for the global market. 

• KAMAYNI

Urban Sensibilities

Mitu Mathur and her team approach design through the lens of three Es: Ecology, economy and equality



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SUDHIR CHANDRA

Mitu Mathur is director at GPM Architects and Planners, one of India's leading architecture and design firms. Growing up, she was inspired by her architect-father's passion and commitment to design and development, which steered her to pursue a master's

in Urban Design in New York.

Mathur established the Urban Design Wing at GPM, foraying into the domain of public and infrastructure projects. Her work in the urban realm—both with the government sector and private developers—has given her an opportunity to be a part of the

country's thriving economy. "I see myself as an explorer decoding the means and ends of both architecture as a profession and a responsibility towards our community," she says.

For Mathur, "Design is a process, a solution to a situation, and a response to a problem." With the core philosophy of 'people, process and passion', she creates successful designs that are different, efficient and aesthetically pleasing. Her team approaches design through the lens of three Es: Ecology, economy and equality. They integrate the latest


GPM Architects and Planners, Delhi-NCR

Mitu Mathur, 38

Director

technologies and systems within their design approach to establish self-sustainable development models with respect to the environment.

GPM is involved in a wide range of projects like the redevelopment projects of the old colonies of Delhi at Netaji Nagar and Sarojini Nagar, and upgradation of railway stations. JW Marriott Resort & Spa in Shimla is a project close to Mathur's heart, with sustainable and inclusive hospitality designs that include context, culture and climate.

In future, Mathur is interested in working on projects that relate to the unexplored regions and cultures of India, engage with communities, and create an impact on the physical, social and economic ecologies of these areas. "Our goal as a firm and in my own personal capacity is to enhance the end-user, the community and eventually, the country," she says. 

• KAMAYNI

Enriching Lives With Designs

Interior architecture, and not just interior decoration, is the most fundamental element of Pooja Bihani's designs. 'Designing—inside out—architecture into interiors and vice versa' is the mantra of Spaces & Design, an award-winning interior architecture firm, founded in 2006 by Pooja Bihani, who is the principal architect of the firm.

As a first-generation architect, Bihani faced many challenges, but her dedication and hard work, along with her aspirations, helped her overcome all hurdles. Her firm has now completed over 100 projects. Some significant ones helmed by her are Ashira, a residential project in Kolkata that is unique for its infusion of art; The Half

Spaces & Design, Kolkata

Pooja Bihani, 45

Principal Architect

Arc office, a heritage property in Kolkata adapted to function as a modern workplace; and RC Golf Club's Bar at 19th, a restored and renovated 200-year-old heritage building, also in Kolkata.


For Bihani, every user is unique given their lifestyle and environment. "The purpose of Spaces & Design is to create environs that epitomise harmony, aesthetics and optimum functionality; enriching the life of the user in his habitat."

Bihani is also an energy practitioner. She believes in vastu and feng shui, and incorporates them in designing the spaces to allow the users to feel comfort and solace in them. She hopes her interior designs by their virtue inspire users.



Pooja Bihani believes in creating environs that epitomise harmony and optimum functionality

Bihani's dream project is to design an ecological, sustainable, and energy-efficient habitat away

from the city, and set a precedent for such designs in the future. 

• KAMAYNI

Aesthetics At Play

There cannot be a better inspiration than your own father in your life,” says Sanchit Arora. Watching his father, Sanjay Arora, the founder of Renesa Architecture Design Interiors Studio, work on drafting tables and making beautiful blueprints by hand instilled a spark in Sanchit. After completing his architecture studies in India and

abroad, he worked with a few firms before joining Renesa as principal architect. Thus began a beautiful journey oscillating between a tender father-son relationship and a disciplined mentor-apprentice relationship that paved the way for Renesa to grow and flourish.

“Design is a distillation of aesthetics that resonates with each person individually,” says Sanchit.

The inspiration comes from the brief given by the client, leading to first sketches and models.

He believes that a truly good design can only emerge when architecture, landscape, furniture, lighting, and art, all work in unison. “Our process is to transcend artificial labels of traditional and modern, and create a fresh approach to the rhythms of an ethereal project,” says Sanchit.

He feels that the realms of architectural design bear a deep-rooted and transformative emotional impact on its inhabitants.

This philosophy is evident in their flagship designs. Rosie and Tillie, a restaurant bar in Delhi, is based on the concept of Yin and Yang. Casa Brut, a private residence in Delhi, displays brutalist design while paying homage to Indian nuances with grace. Tintin, a restaurant in Chandigarh, is in the realm of experimental design that engages

Renesa Architecture Design Interiors Studio, Delhi-NCR

Sanchit Arora, 30

Principal Architect

the senses of vision and tactility.

Sanchit envisages the future path to centre the emphasis on initiating a cultural shift in the way architecture and design are perceived. “The studio strives in the direction of reappraising spatial classifications of spaces, unshackling itself from the limitations of the ‘anticipated’,” he says.

They aim to continuously tap into Indian culture and traditions, and strive to blend designs for society and industry through their projects. **IF**

• KAMAYNI

Sanchit Arora believes architectural design must have a transformative emotional impact on its inhabitants



A Safe and Holistic Approach

Inspired design for people' is the core philosophy of Square Consultancy Services, an award-winning multidisciplinary architectural design consultancy, which provides architectural, interior and landscape design solutions to hospitality, corporate and commercial projects. It was co-founded by Ranit Maiti and Subhrajit G Mitra in 2008. Maiti and Mitra were classmates studying architecture at Jadavpur University. After completing their master's in Urban Design, they wanted to do something of their own and established the firm together.

Opening a studio with no prior experience came with its own set of challenges. With persistence and

Square Consultancy Services, Kolkata

Ranit Maiti, 40

Partner

Subhrajit G Mitra, 40

Partner


hard work, they are a successful business today with more than 54 completed projects under their belt. Some of their flagship projects are Merlin Oikyo Experience Center in Kolkata that has an old Kolkata theme that brings back memories of the colonial era; 6 Ballygunge Place restaurant in Kolkata, which tells the story of Bengali culture, art, and architecture in an innovative way; and DTC Capital City Experience Center, also in Kolkata, where the steel structure is a series of curves merging into the surrounding landscape.



Ranit Maiti (left) and Subhrajit G Mitra want to create meaningful spaces for communities on the city scale

About their design process, Maiti says, "We prioritise the needs and well-being of people in the design process, focusing on creating spaces that are comfortable, accessible and functional, and are closely tied to the local context, taking into consideration the cultural, historical and physical elements of a specific site." They follow a SAFE (Structure, Aesthetics, Function, and Economy) approach to every design. This offers a unique perspective on the design process and helps to guide the creation of spaces that are functional, beautiful and sustainable.

Going forward, they would like to extend their holistic approach to urban design problems creating meaningful spaces for communities on the city scale. As Mitra says, "As architects, our commitment to the society is not just to create buildings but instil design awareness across the population through the creation of democratic spaces that they can see, learn, experience and upgrade."

In the future, they hope to combine machine learning and human empathy, and create a new design language for the country. 

● MOHAN SIDDHARTH