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Layers



The city, through a different lens

The concept of an 'architecture open' is an attempt to ignite the discursive consumption of architecture for participants and architects alike, thus discovering and cataloguing a dialogue between the audience and the buildings they visit

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The Bengaluru Architecture Open held in February this year was an eye-opener for us at ThreeFlaneurs in many ways. We try to curate projects with the aim to open up well-designed projects which are otherwise inaccessible to a curious audience across typology and scale. What we think makes the building tours interesting are the discussions with the architects as well as the stories behind these projects. The discussions on site highlight, among other things, the challenges that the practices face in materially realising a creative project right from conception to occupation, the relationship with the clients, and finally the contributions from the contractors and vendors. But it is also our constant endeavour as curators and theorists to catalogue and discover a dialogue between the projects once

we visit them. Bengaluru, culturally and architecturally, gave us a great space to have this dialogue with the audience as well as the buildings.

Given the nature of development of, and in Bengaluru, the most common sites that architects can build on are the 30 x 40 feet ones, or variations of the same. While most of the development on these is generic in nature, there is also a lot of experimentation, as seen at the Bengaluru Architecture Open 2018. We encountered three buildings that – while being completely different in programme and aesthetics, namely the B-One by Cadence Architects, Nirvana Films Office by Shimul Javeri Kadri and Associates, and the House + Studio of BetweenSpaces – projected a very strong attitude about the building and its relationship with the city, architecture in general, and the architecture specific to

Bengaluru. Each project has strong standpoints with regard to inside-outside relationships, order and organisation, and detailing and materiality.

B-One by Cadence is reflective of a continued stance taken by the practice with respect to a banal city. They have consistently eschewed opening the house up to the main street, and instead turned inwards, focusing on the courtyards. The front façade of the project is stoically solid and blank to the street, and gives away absolutely nothing about the inside of the house. The entire house is organised into a double-height living space that occupies the front and sleeping spaces at the rear that are separated by a courtyard. The upper levels are connected by a bridge that cuts through the court. All the movement and action in the house is introverted and through the controlled exterior space of the courtyard. Nirvana Films Offices adopts a diametrically opposite stance to this, and the building opens to the street that surrounds it on two sides. It invites viewers as well as adventurous squirrels and dizzy butterflies to engage



This page, left: Participants at the Neev Primary school by Hundredhands; bottom, left and right: discussions in progress at the campus of B-One
Opposite page: The façade of the B-One building by Cadence Architects in Bengaluru



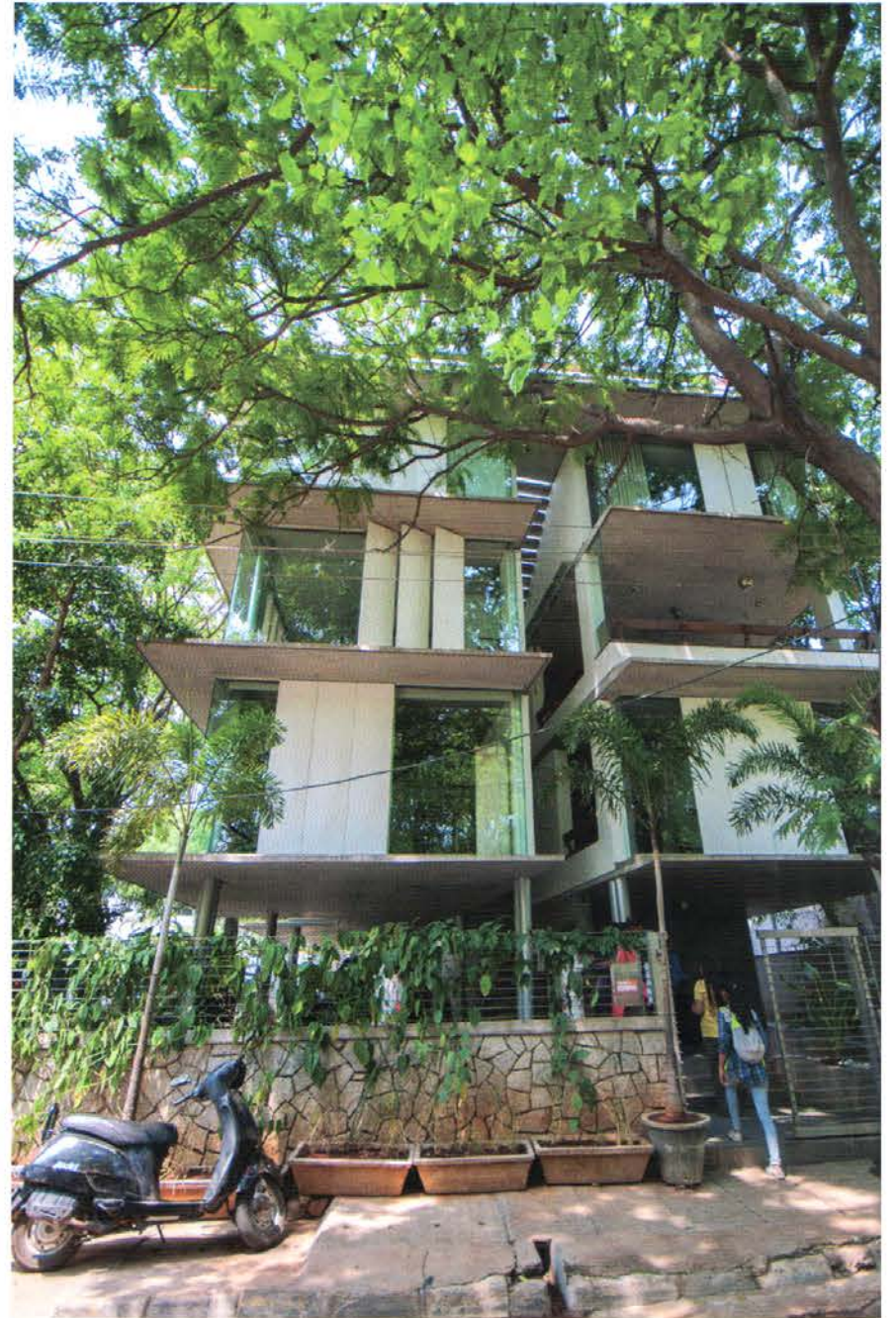


with the building without restraint. The building is, in fact, a beautiful manifestation of Le Corbusier's Maison Domino diagram with the planes of the floor plates extending into space. Every floor plate is an open plan, with rooms scattered like pavilions, and privacy enabled only by slender white panels that can be rotated to open or shut, thus allowing the air to circulate. Unlike in the Maison Domino, the staircase moves right into the centre of the stack and also mimics the void of the courtyard, thereby ascertaining that the building can never be completely shut off from the outside.

The Studio + House by BetweenSpaces is interestingly an amalgamation of both the above-mentioned projects. Programmatically it packs a residence and a studio on a 30 x 40 feet site. The house occupies the lower two floors of the building and is once again a starkly introverted diagram with all the living and sleeping spaces opening into the double-height atrium of the dining room. The studio that sits on top of the house is accessed separately from the outside. Internal staircases and voids are used to create order and connect the two floors of each programme. The black shutters that have been employed by the architects on the façade serve to unify the different programmes with a singular identity and can either present a severe uncompromising façade to the street, when closed, or when pulled back, completely bare the inside of the house and office to the outside. The shutters have a much stronger presence in this project than at Nirvana Office, perhaps due to colour but also because they form a singular wall when closed rather than just compositional elements.

Materially the three projects

express very distinct attitudes. B-One categorically stands apart in the architects' deliberate intent to suppress detail and increase the expedient reading of form and space within the house. The polished travertine on the front façade and the large overhanging roof do not offer any reading of the veracity of the material or the structural gymnastics of the expansive cantilever. Inside the house, most of the detail is erased in favour of legibility, be it the sculptural soffit of the staircase or the expansive glass separating the courtyard from the inside. The expressive intent is authored by the architects and their aesthetic vision. The Nirvana's Films' office is likely the most minimalist of the three projects; one only encounters form-finished concrete with salvaged wood, and shutters made of white solid acrylic. Glass is almost dematerialised in its use. At Nirvana, the architects privilege views, light, and tactile sensations more than the plasticity of the material or the expression of form. The clients' vision is apparent in the eclectic colours of the furniture and artwork that suffuse every room. The expressive intent is not too choreographed, and can be freely interpreted by occupants or visitors. BetweenSpaces are the most deliberate with material expression out of the three projects. The architects juxtapose the materials – concrete, brick, white plaster and black shutters – on the façade in a very deliberate manner. Internally, the exposed brick is carefully coursed and the rat-trap bond conceals electrical conduits. The detailing is perhaps most obvious in the studio space where the



This spread, top left and right: the organisers at #ThreeFlaneurs engage with the participants at B-One and BetweenSpaces respectively; centre: images of the façade of the Nirvana Films office. Designed by Shimul Javeri Kadri and Associates, the building is perhaps the most minimalist of the three projects – one only encounters form-finished concrete with salvaged wood, whereas the shutters are made of white solid acrylic; right: on the other hand, the house and studio designed by BetweenSpaces is the most deliberate as far as material expression is concerned

internal walls are manipulated to not just create partitions between spaces but also to perform other functions such as storage and furniture.

The other three architectural projects at the Bengaluru Open were comparatively larger in scale and programme. All three projects were schools catering to different age groups of students and consequently dealt with programmes in different ways. The two Neev Schools on the same campus, while quite different in their attitude and aesthetics, sit comfortably adjacent to one another within the landscape design of the campus. The Neev

Primary school by Hundredhands was conceptualised purely using the 'Mat' building diagram to order the space and the programme. The *Mat* building lends itself interestingly to many programmes, and especially well to learning institutes as seen in Aldo Van Eyck's Orphanage project in Amsterdam Zuid, and retrospectively, the Green Acres school (that was covered during the Mumbai Architecture Open) was a *Mat* project in section. At Neev, the classrooms sit along the grid but shift periodically to accommodate courtyards. The circulation and informal learning happens in the

unused parts of the grid. The grid is then reinforced by the columns and the parasol roof over the second floor terrace that shades it for outdoor activities like permaculture. Even the flooring is a play of various textured stones that notionally create spaces and inform behaviours. Simultaneously complimentary and unique to the building is the landscape enhances how the building sits on the ground and incorporates several reflective pools within the grid—a continual source of delight for the students.

The Atelier Project by Biome Environmental Solutions is also, in





This page, top: The Atelier Project by Biome Environmental Solutions consists of a roof supported on a grid of columns; left and below: on the campus of the Neev School, the classrooms sit along the grid but shift periodically to accommodate courtyards
 Opposite page, left: at Neev, the grid is reinforced by columns and a parasol roof over the second-floor terrace; right: the redevelopment of Church Street was a long-championed project by architect Naresh V. Narsimhan of Venkataramanan Associates



some ways, a *Mat* building but not so deliberate in its expression as the Neev primary school. The project is essentially a free plan with a roof supported on a grid of columns. The otherwise opaque roof is continually punctuated by transparent materials to allow natural light to filter into the space below. Divisions between the columns are freeform self-supporting walls made of paper tubes that can be reconfigured. The Atelier provided a refreshing contrast to the other projects through its attitude to permanence. If the other projects are about the finesse of the craft or the nuance of materiality and craftsmanship, Biome has assumed that the building is meant to be ephemeral, and is thus designed to that intent. The roof is built to be dismantled, if required, and the partitions are similarly impermanent. Even the plinth is constructed in the chappadi granite stone slab foundation that can be

carted away. The interlocking paver blocks of the flooring are used without any mortar and therefore easy to remove. While the roof of the project acts as a large rainwater catchment and collects almost all the water used annually by the project, a local septic tank handles sewerage. The Atelier proved to be a fascinating commentary in contrast on so many aspects of what could possibly define the hallmark of Indian architecture that is otherwise characterised by its obsession with craft and materiality. It was perhaps in its deference of permanence the most authentically indigenous building.

The project that we concluded with was, in many ways, a testament to the spirit of the architect as 'community crusader'. The redevelopment of Church Street was a long-championed project by architect Naresh V. Narsimhan of

Venkataramanan Associates. The project took a complex street housing several entertainment establishments, businesses and residences in the CBD, but in a state of apathy and neglect, and relocated the services underground into chambers for easy access and repair, freeing up the main carriageway from constant digging. The design by VA prioritised the area allotted to pedestrians by increasing the width of the pavement and providing additional infrastructure such as garbage bins, streetlights, and street furniture at regular intervals. Services have been moved to the periphery and adequate service chambers along the length minimise disruption due to repairs. But perhaps the most humanising aspect of the project is the 'Kasuti'-patterned cobblestones that reduce the scale of the street and act as a traffic-calming measure.

Architectural discourse and consumption perhaps has become primarily about the image portrayed on social media and not so much about the multiplicity of ideas and narratives within the various realms that architecture can operate in. These multiple approaches and attitudes that we continue to encounter in situ at the Architecture Open allows us to perhaps attempt to ignite the discursive consumption of architecture for participants and architects alike. It's only possible to fathom context, precedents, scale, space, materiality, tactility, tectonics, affect, and other visceral sensations that are important to the consumption of architecture through experience, and it will be our continued effort to engage with more projects such as these in future.

#ThreeFlaneurs (www.threeflaneurs.wordpress.com) is a design and travel blog, and is the brainchild of three architects – Ekta Idnany, Sahil Latheef, and Amrita Ravimohan – who believe in the importance of learning architecture through experiencing it in person. Along with conducting regular curated trips for a curious audience, they also organise Architecture Opens. The response received for the inaugural edition held in Mumbai early this year – in collaboration with the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival 2018 – enthused them to bring the event to Bengaluru in March 2018.

