

Mud Architecture

Mandawa Desert Camp

Indian tribal architecture has continued virtually unaltered for thousands of years. The annual ornamentation of mud huts has been a form of worship and homage to the gods since the times of pre-Hindu animist faiths when it was believed that specific diagrams had the power to contain and direct the supernatural. The ancient Sanskrit works on Indian painting, for instance, describe the worship of the sun god through the drawing of an eight-petaled lotus flower. The materials and techniques traditionally handed down from mother to daughter are charged with symbolic meaning. By depicting the gods they are summoning them to enter the house. Daughters of the villages practise painting from the age of four and by the time they reach their teens they are fluent in the forms that express their spiritual expectations. This tradition of surrounding the doors and windows of mud houses with decorative painting is still carried out throughout the villages of India in an annual ritual of renewal. The purpose is not only decorative but also symbolic of a sacred and protective role and reveals the deeper meaning underlying the mud structures of the village.

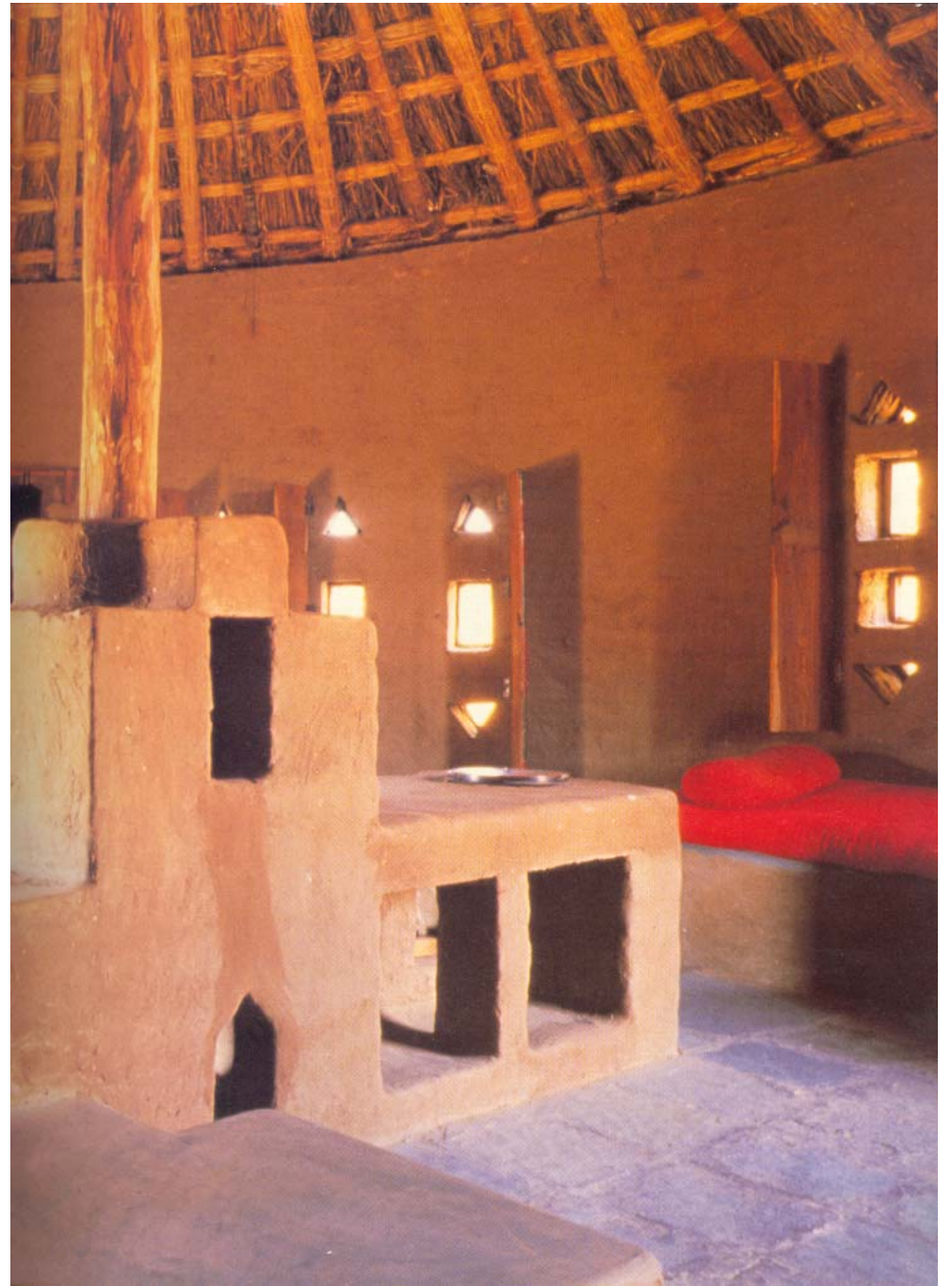
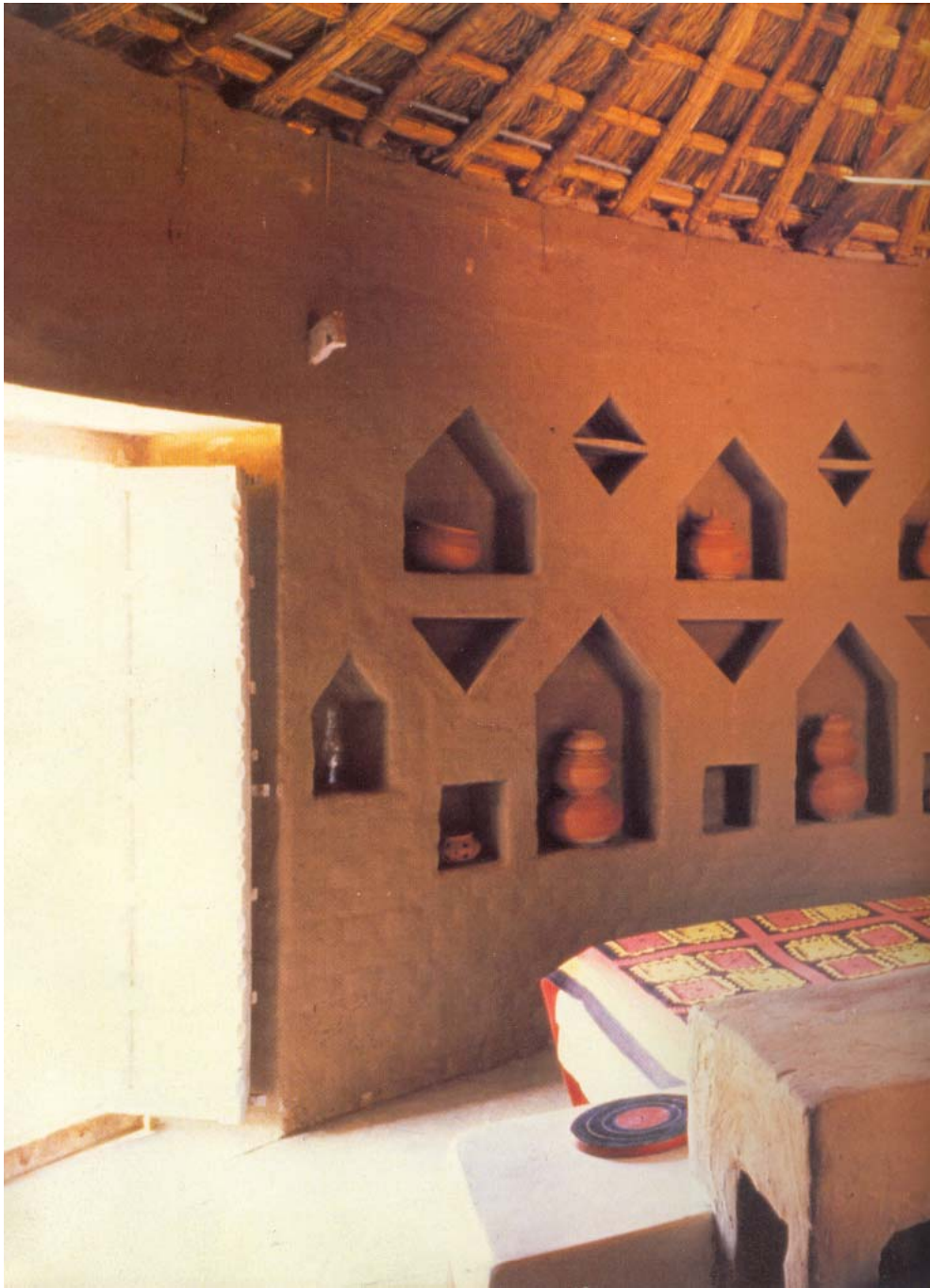
Mandawa Desert Camp, a resort hotel developed by Revathi and Vasant Kamath, a husband and wife architectural team based in Delhi, was designed to create the atmosphere and incorporate the images, forms and spaces of a typical village of rural Rajasthan. The huts, designed to represent the homes of the village farmer, potter and weaver, are arranged to imitate a street in a typical village. Yet this Desert Camp is not a straight copy of a Rajasthani village: in balance with the ethnic authenticity of the design, Mandawa also incorporates the contemporary conveniences and luxuries that today's five-star guest demands. Indeed, it is this very juxtaposition of Indian traditions and Western considerations that makes Mandawa so successful.

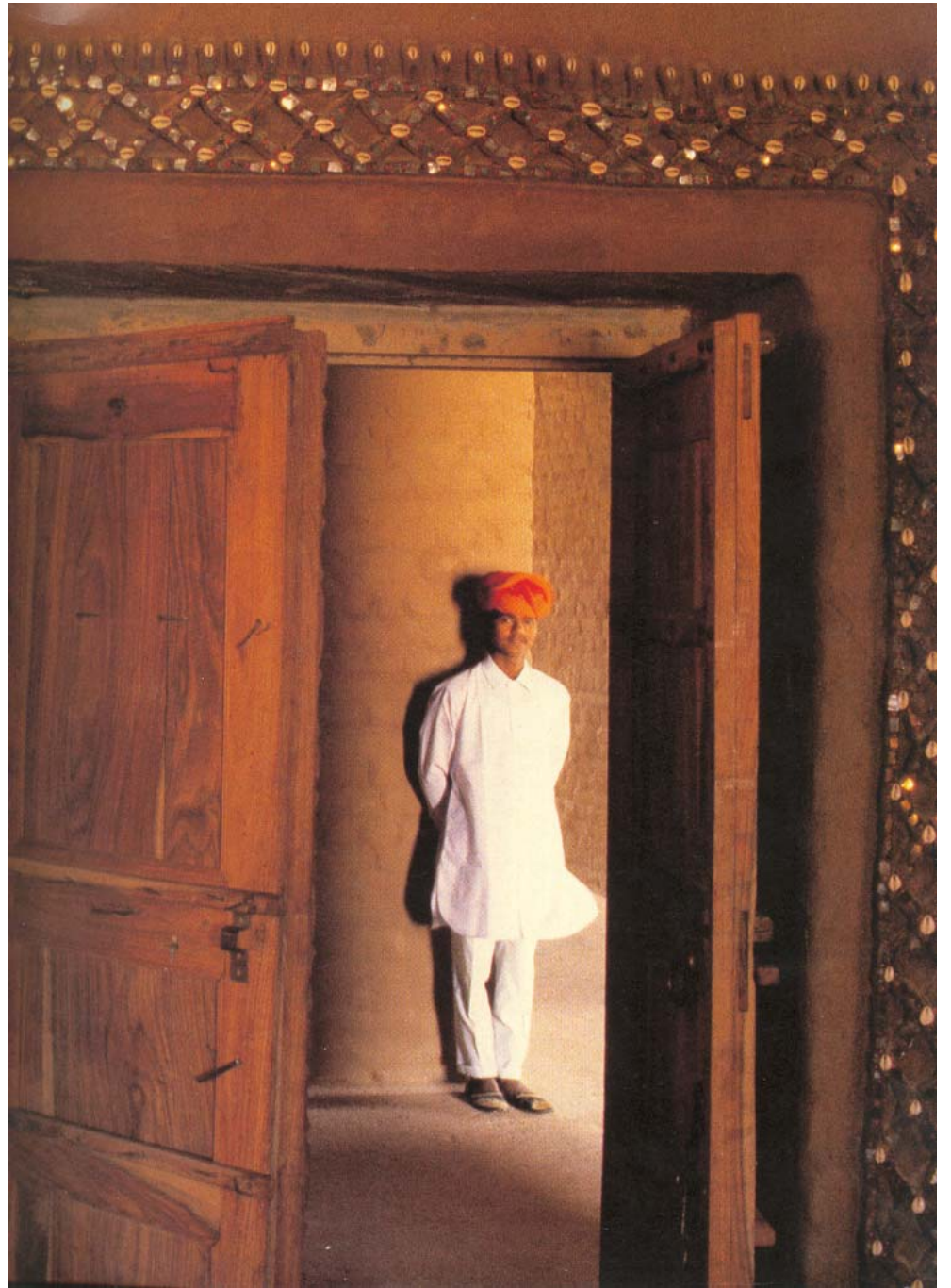
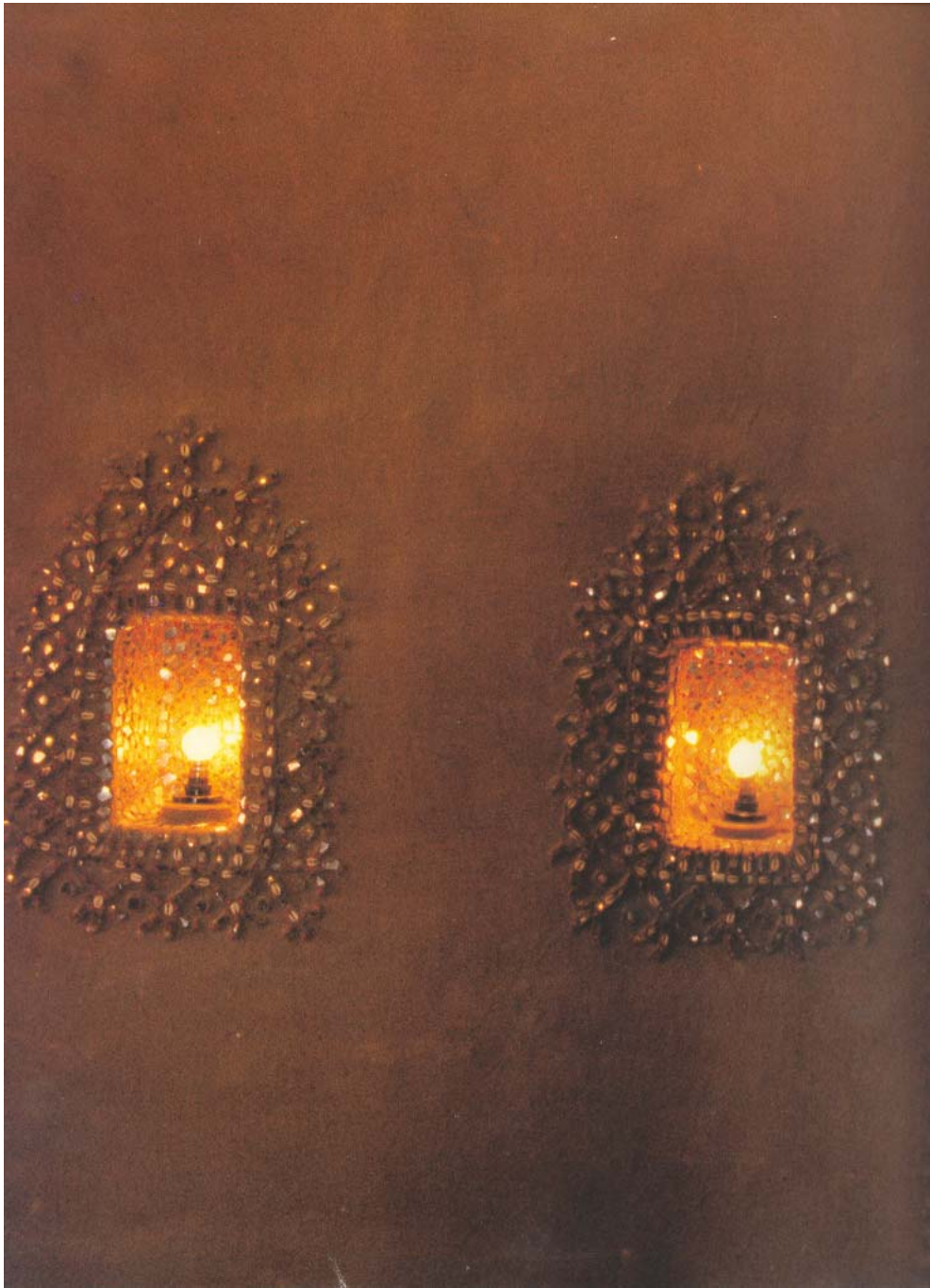
The Kamaths have emerged as India's leading protagonists of mud architecture and this is one of their most highly acclaimed projects. It is an example of a growing practice among India's architects to produce contemporary work in a traditional idiom, and contribute

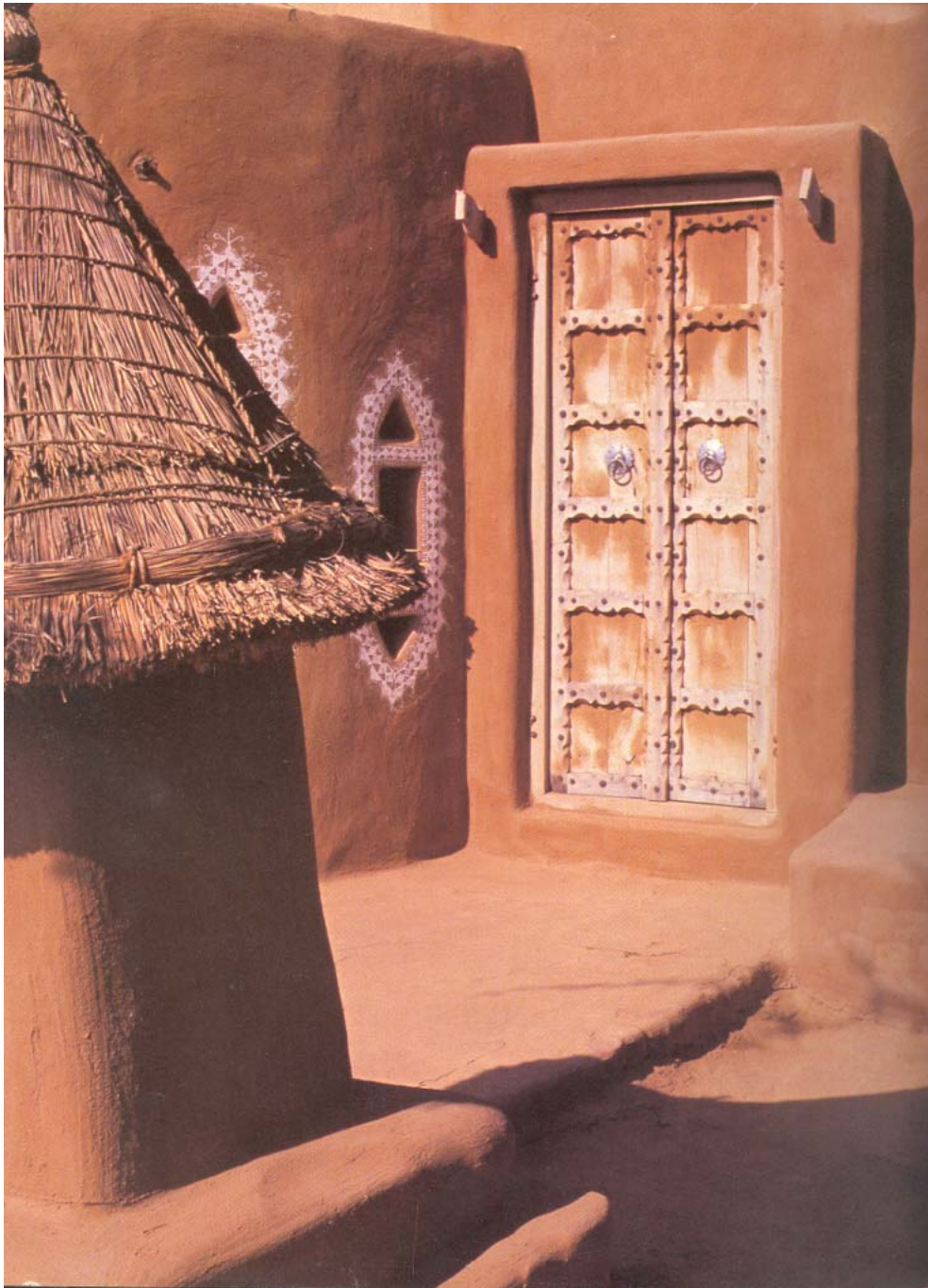
to post-independence India's strong and recognizable cultural identity. Revathi and Vasant Kamath believe strongly in the continuing use of mud as a building material. For them it ensures a continuity of traditional aesthetic sensibility and knowledge; knowledge that in many ways is becoming, if anything, more relevant in an era of increasing ecological consciousness. As Revathi says, 'it is most wonderful to know that when a building has outlived its life it can return to the earth'.

Mandawa Desert Camp was the result of a visit from the Thakur of Mandawa who, armed with the brochure of a Canadian holiday resort, enquired whether the Kamaths would be interested in designing and building a similar project near the ancient Shekawati city of Mandawa in Rajasthan. The Thakur had already successfully converted his city palace in Mandawa into a hotel and he hoped the new project would further increase the tourist activity in this region. Central to the Kamaths' ideas for the resort was their insistence in building the accommodation huts using the mud tradition of the area. Once the Thakur was persuaded by the allure of the authenticity of mud and the rather more practical consideration that it would be less expensive, he quickly accepted their proposals, and it soon became apparent that Mandawa Desert Camp would become a unique attraction in the world of hotels and resorts.

Local craftsmen were employed by the Kamaths to construct the resort: village carpenters made the furniture, local masons built the structures and the women from the villages hand-plastered and decorated the walls with mouldings, relief-work, embedded mirrors and symbolic tribal-painting. Sun-dried bricks were made from the bed of a dried-out water-tank adjacent to the site; thatch was created from grass growing on the property itself, and the stone for the foundations, sills, lintels, brackets, and roofing came from a nearby village. As contemporary comforts are seamlessly combined with traditional Indian finishes, the visitor to Mandawa Desert Camp is enveloped by a richness of textures, colours and decorative details that evoke the symbolism of an ancient tribal village and offer a unique Indian experience.







When we talk of building in mud, I don't know why we term it 'alternative' building. The natural way is to build with mud, stone, timber, thatch and so-called bio-materials. I work with these materials because they are beautiful and powerful. That, to me, is justification enough. It is most wonderful to know that when a building has outlived its life, it can return to the earth. When you work with mud and hand-plaster the walls, it is like forming an external skin; it is as if every bit of the building embodies the human spirit, the cyclic care of the building being a part of the act of living.

Revathi Kemath



Modern

Forms and Contemporary Design

'To be modern is not a fashion, it is a state. It is necessary to understand history, and he who understands history knows how to find continuity between that which was, that which is, and that which will be.'

Le Corbusier, on the definition of 'modern'

The 'look' of India provides an endless source of inspiration to modern designers in the West, yet this visually stunning photographic survey is the first to examine contemporary work in architecture, design and craft in the sub-continent.

India Modern explores the themes used through the centuries by village craftsmen on Hindu temples, Mughal palaces and traditional crafts. The author reveals how modern designers are reinterpreting these forms and returning to the indigenous skills of Indian craftsmen and women to produce works that are praised worldwide for their aesthetic quality. He looks at the exciting developments in modern architecture in India, in particular at the work of architects Charles Correa and Satish Gujral who have returned to the heritage of Indian civilization to design buildings that are both culturally relevant and highly modern. And he shows how the power and beauty of India's decorative heritage – the skill of being able to use different patterns, forms and shapes in endless combinations of colours and rhythms – is being utilized in all aspects of the contemporary arts, most notably in the textile design of Asha Sarabhai and Shyam Aujia.

Herbert Ypma, together with a team of talented photographers, travelled across India to bring together an array of astonishing images from ancient and modern India. Together with a perceptive and personal text, these images create a source of ideas and an insight into the emergence of an exciting aesthetic that truly combines the old and the new.



india mode

Traditional Forms and Contemporary Design

PHAIDON