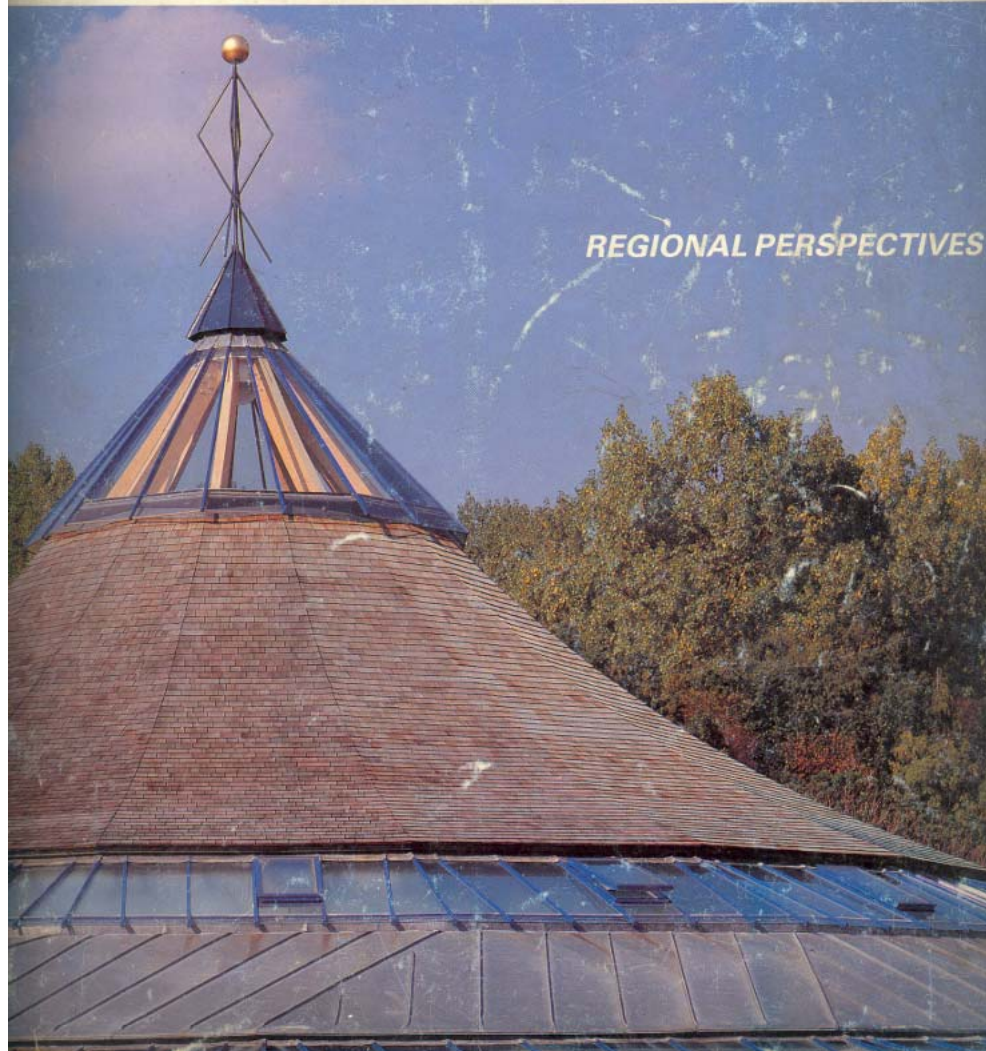


THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW



REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

1
Krant Singh house, Manali,
designed by Ronit Khwala with many
of the details being finalised during
construction by the local craftsmen.
2
Screen wall of the Abu Abraham
house, Trivandrum, designed by
Laurie Baker.

INDIAN REFLECTIONS

Gautam Bhatia

Young Indian architects are looking at the specific traditions of the regions in which they are building to learn lessons about local custom, handling severe climatic conditions and the importance of reinvigorating almost lost craft skills. Below, a Jaisalmer *haveli*, one of the patterns for contemporary work.



The real architecture of India, as Delhi-based architect Ashish Ganju has said, is in the country's villages. Ganju's assertion was meant for places where building still conforms to the dictates of land, resources and climate. Whether village or medieval city, he meant places that to this day remain unaffected by the demands of India's growing industrial tradition.

Along the coast, on the mountain or in the plains, the traditional Indian dwelling was born out of community. The strengths of a community, its bonds and ties of family and kinship, caste and profession created the intricacies and proximities of domestic architecture. The Ahmedabad *poel* house of the Bombay *ekani* or the *havelis* of Delhi as types are enough to suggest the nature of the community that inhabited them, the lifestyles they created, the incomes they generated and the climates they were set in.

In such places, the private house was a public effort; built elements of the home were fabricated by the craftsman, the memory and skills of his continuing family trade, and then assembled by the owners in their own individual ways. Consequently, the bracketed columns and the sun screens of a Jaisalmer *haveli* were made by stone workers who knew nothing of how their handiwork would be eventually assembled and it was this, the economic necessity of creating a common language of building, that assured the perpetuation of a craft tradition.

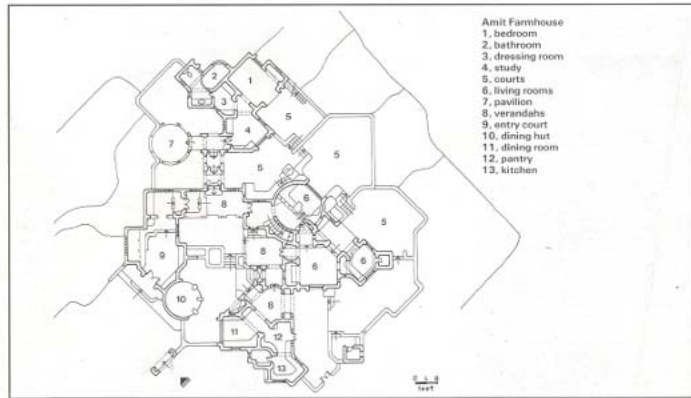
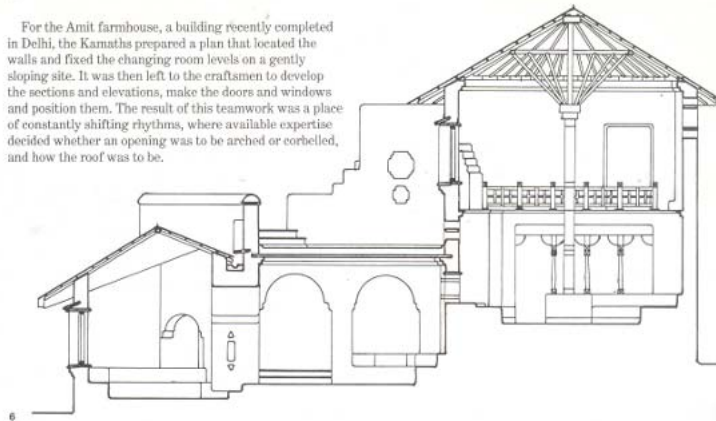
Do the new buildings of India suggest anything of these ideas, or are the real conditions of India and Indian building absent in contemporary architectural expression? If different parts of the country—the plains, the coast, the mountain and the desert; if North and South, urban and rural have developed their own local domestic architecture, is a strain of this carried into the recent work in these places?

Today, a rising discontent with Modernism and the capacity of technology to solve human problems is inducing architects, and clients, into an active appreciation of the architecture of the past. Working with limited resources, but within easy access of local skills, there appears in the new work an implicit acknowledgement that the craftsman's role is critical in making and enriching buildings.

Though many architects have used indigenous architecture decoratively, the truth of indigenous expression can only be seen in buildings that actively employ craft as a participatory activity. This is the contention of Revathi and Vasant Kanath, a Delhi-based husband-and-wife team who scoff at excessive romanticising of tradition that is indulged in by some of their contemporaries: "Local masons, carpenters and metal workers are our greatest assets, because we can offer them employment, they can teach us much more of their skills and trade". The first signs of a recognition of craft invariably occur in houses whose affluent owners use the skills of their rural neighbours to build indigenously.



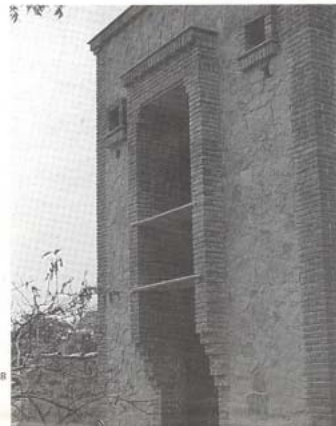
For the Amit farmhouse, a building recently completed in Delhi, the Kamaths prepared a plan that located the walls and fixed the changing room levels on a gently sloping site. It was then left to the craftsmen to develop the sections and elevations, make the doors and windows and position them. The result of this teamwork was a place of constantly shifting rhythms, where available expertise decided whether an opening was to be arched or corbelled, and how the roof was to be.



In the Kamal Singh residence nearby, the creative potential of indigenous skill was harnessed in a more conventional manner. The understanding of local craft in this, the Kamaths' most recent work, was so comprehensive that a complete set of drawings was prepared incorporating the local elements—the dome, air vents and corbelled window shades.

The Kamaths have always felt that true revival of a building tradition can come about only if the architect allows the craftsman a free hand in expression—and primarily in the smaller scale of residential work. Larger institutional complexes tend to make overtures to culture and location in a speculative and abstract way. The actual values of a place can be effectively expressed only by those who live in it.

For the outsider, Romi Khosla, another Delhi-based architect, maintains that the task of architectural interpretation in the highly complex place-specific culture of India, is a difficult and tenuous one. Khosla's work, as varied in function as it is dispersed over India, allows him to speak and practise from the privileged vantage of an architect conscious of the myriad images and associations of each of the places in which he has built.



3, 4
Elevation details of the Amit farmhouse, Delhi, designed by Vasant and Revathi Kamath.

5
The Kamal Singh house, Delhi, designed by Vasant and Revathi Kamath.

6
Section through living room, Amit farmhouse.

7
Ground floor plan of Amit farmhouse.

8
Entrance to Kamal Singh house.

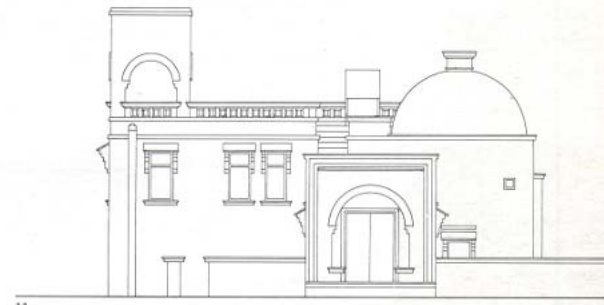
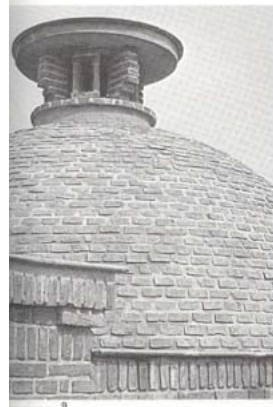
9
Dome ventilator, Kamal Singh house.

10
Plan of Kamal Singh house.

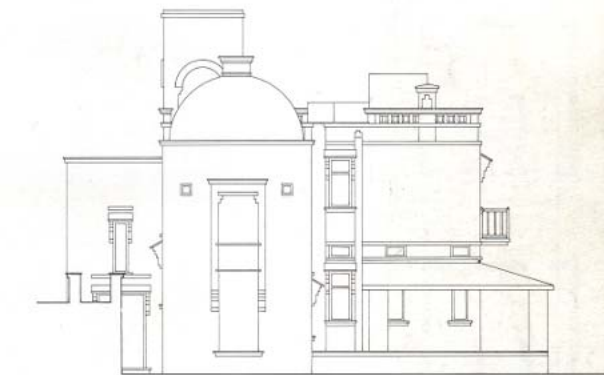
11
Entrance elevation, Kamal Singh house.

12
Side elevation.

13
Section through living room.



11



12

Kamal Singh
1, bedroom
2, bathroom
3, kitchen
4, dining room
5, living room
6, courts



10



13