



“There is no space for an architect to resist the client's Vaastu insistence.” Architect, Jagrut Patel

ARCHITECT'S VOICE

Born and brought up in Ahmedabad, architect Jagrut Patel studied at St Xavier's Loyola, before doing his Bachelor of Architecture from the Institute of Environment Design (I.E.D).

His family hails from the village Jaitalpur, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad; but moved to the city when his father Mr. Ramanbhai was doing his primary schooling.

We met Jagrut Patel at his office “Vitan” in Ahmedabad. Excerpts from the interview:-



Architect Jagrut Patel



Vitan

On his Architectural Education

From my schooldays, I have never been baffled by technology. In fact, I loved to crack any technology challenge and am a firm believer in deploying advanced computing both at home and the workplace.

Architecture happened to me. My father, who was a civil engineer working with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation wanted me to become a civil engineer like him. But, my own inclination was towards becoming an industrial designer. However, things took a turn of their own accord. My maternal uncle Rameshbhai whose favourite I was, took me under his charge and got me enrolled in an

architecture course at I.E.D During the first couple of years of my architectural studies I sleep-walked through the curriculum. But, during the third year of my studies at the Institute of environment design (I.E.D) where I did my architectural course, I woke up to architecture and its possibilities.

Architects and Architecture

I think Architects have perpetrated a wrong notion of what architecture is by over-emphasizing the role of aesthetics. Architecture is about offering space solutions to society. Thus, architects are not painters or sculptors but the facilitators of society. They have the specific task of providing solutions related to built-space. Architecture is for society. Society is not for architecture. Architects tend to forget that people come first, their designs second. They need to remember that their designs must rise to every occasion and accommodate various strains of lifestyle rather than straight-jacketing the lifestyles by offering a singular “signature” design framework within which various lifestyle strains will have to compromise and somehow fit in.

As I mentioned earlier, the role of aesthetics is over-emphasized by the architect. Perhaps unconsciously – or otherwise – this is to get the sanction to wriggle out of meeting customer requirements. I will elaborate with an example. The most beautiful person or the ugliest person has the same component features. Both have two eyes, two ears, two lips, one forehead and one nose. Yet one face looks beautiful and the other the exact opposite. What is the difference? The difference is in the proportions. So, even a cube because of the right proportions is beautiful. An architect must strive for proportion.

I believe that, as an architect I have the responsibility to elevate the level of society through my contribution. Rather than falling for catchwords like “Green Buildings”, I would rather speak of sustainable architecture and by that, I mean a design that is extroverted and flexible enough to accommodate/adapt to the foreseeable future without recourse to major changes.

On Vaastu

Sometimes, Vaastu can be a difficult subject for an architect to talk about. I do believe in many things spiritual and further I add that I have made private investigations into the spiritual and meta-physical aspects of the universe.

One of my goals as an architect is making my buildings more connected to people. Spaces affect people in more ways than people imagine or are even aware of. What is the right mechanism for managing these effects? I don't know; but I am not sure whether Vaastu has the answers either.

Whatever might be my views on Vaastu, the fact remains that people have faith in it and as an architect my only agenda is to fulfill the client's requirements, After all, the house is his and he has every right to get it made to his choice.

If my client wants a Vaastu design I must not only give it to him, but do so with all conviction and make sure that I obey all the Vaastu rules in every aspect of the construction, be it related to the stairs, the number of doors, or even the colours of the walls and tapestry.



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If I get a Christian client who wants me to design a church for him, I cannot insist that since I am a Hindu, I will design the church like a temple. That would be foolish on my part. When – as an architect – I take up the design of a church, I must adopt the style and essence of churches; my beliefs in Hinduism and temple architecture are in no way compromised or diminished by this.

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Safal Parivesh, Ahmedabad.

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However, I must share with you my concern about the compromise in optimal flow of movement between spaces that Vaastu implementation entails. For example, Vaastu will insist on the kitchen in direction X, but the dining table may be in direction Y and this will involve needless movement. Not just the

kitchen but in other areas too, these compromises will have to be made. In small flats, this loss of flexibility and the compromised fluidity of movement really hurt the occupant. Moreover, many sites are at loggerheads with Vaastu and this is all the more in the case of multi-storeyed housing.

Our Vedas have tremendous depth. All current scientific thought and research in the western world is converging on our ancient Vedic sciences. A body of knowledge so ancient and revered cannot come up with something erroneous or irrelevant. Yet my own position on Vaastu is still not final. On the one hand, I know that there is a vast body of thought that emphasizes the role of space in the well-being of man, but on the other I have many doubts about Vaastu for which I am seeking solutions..



Aangan Banquet Hall, Ahmedabad.

The relation between happiness/sadness and space is very tellingly articulated in our ancient language of Sanskrit. The Sanskrit word for space is *kham*. For happiness, it is *sukham* and for sorrow it is *dukham*. Thus, happiness or sorrow is related to space; indeed they originate from there. There are many grey areas in Vaastu and its implementations and by this I refer to the prevailing lack of understanding of Vaastu as also the deep trust deficit in many of the Vaastu proponents and consultants as also the unrestrained destruction of walls and rooms in the name of Vaastu correction. I also believe that every law of physics – or any science – must have



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universal application. In case of Vaastu, I do not see the application/efficacy of the laws in places other than some parts of India.

Vaastu has a strong undercurrent of Hinduism and it is perhaps on this count that there is resistance to its acceptance worldwide amongst architects. As an architect I believe that even if – for the sake of argument – only 25% of what is spoken about Vaastu is true it still makes sense to follow it. All improvements to design are welcome. We must design with

the right intentions and everything else will fall in place. In fact, many of my designs have been pronounced as being sound Vaastu designs even though I designed them as optimal solutions based on site conditions and the client's brief.

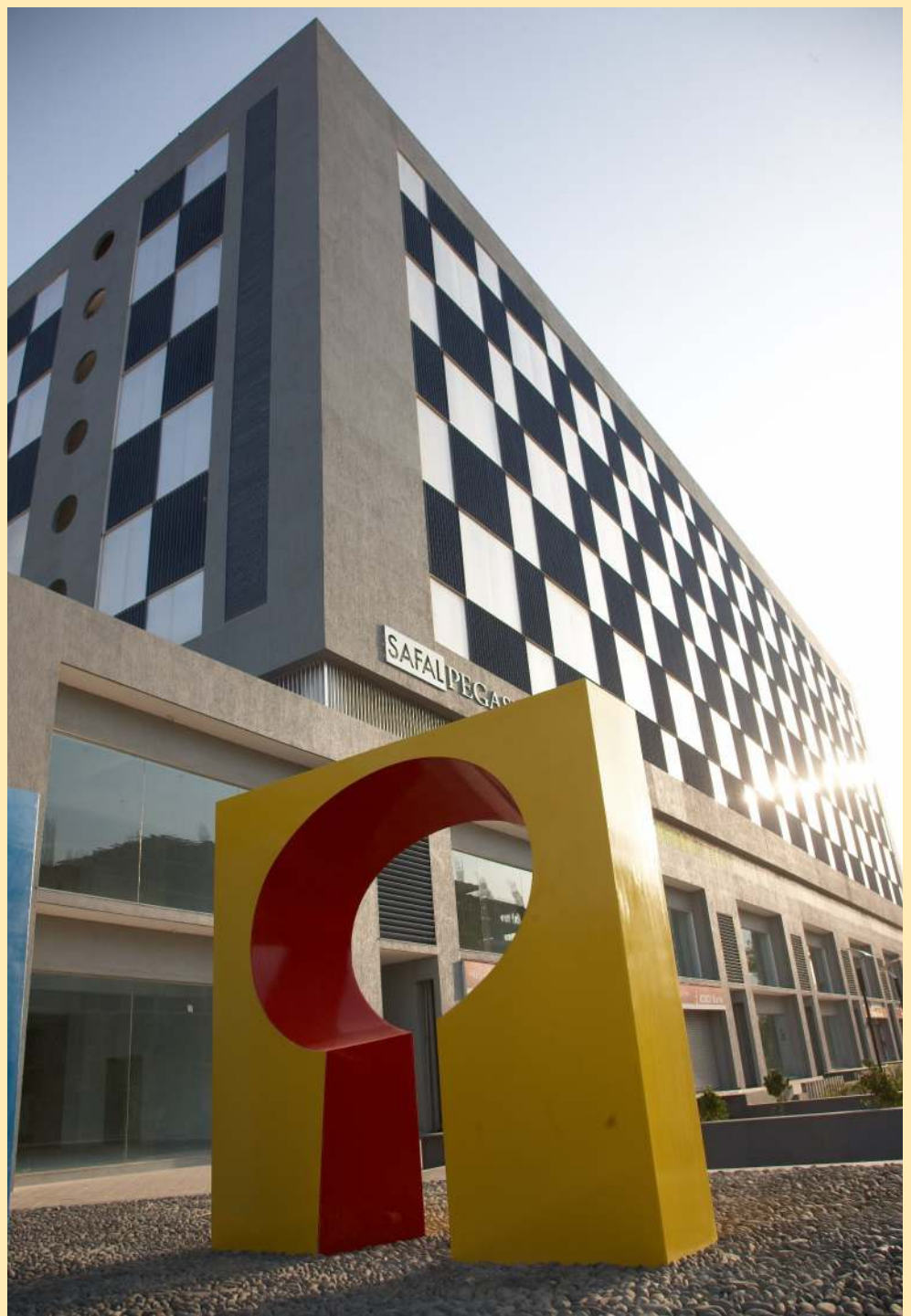
We need to find a modern interpretation of Vaastu. We need to do serious research on the subject and ultimately redefine it so that it is more accessible to the needs of society today. Vaastu was formulated in ancient

times. At that time, the needs of society were different. It worked wonderfully at that time but I think it needs to be amended suitably now. It is time to have a new release of Vaastu - Vaastu Version 2 or something like it, which has an inclusive agenda and makes room for modern technology and concerns.

Reading Vaastuyogam and getting a glimpse of Dr Rao and his ways, it seems he is busy living out this new approach. ■

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Pegasus, Ahmedabad.