Contents

Introduction 5
In Conversation | Part I 7
1975 - 1985 19
  Restoration of a Basalt Quarry | Timba 23
In Conversation | Part II 29
1985 - 1995 37
  Town Development | Shirpur 39
  Samode Bagh | Jaipur 233
1995 - 2005 43
  Mud House | Ahmedabad 45
  Aman | Ahmedabad 51
  Restoration of a Medieval Fort | Devigarh 57
  Blossom Industries | Daman 65
  Ghuma House | Ahmedabad 71
  Beach House | Tithal 77
  Devi Art Foundation | Gurgaon 83
  Delhi Public School | Ahmedabad 234
  Khemani Distilleries | Daman 235
  Pool in the Garden | Delhi 236
  Mariwala House | Alibaug 237
  Jariwala House | Ahmedabad 239
  Symbiosis University | Pune 241
2005 - 2015 93
In Conversation | Part III 95
  Aakash | Ahmedabad 99
  Calcutta Riverside | Kolkata 107
  Halfway Retreat | Ahmedabad 111
  Deviratn | Jaipur 119
  Bridge House | Baroda 127
  Akalpya Lounge | Ahmedabad 139
  Drum House | Ahmedabad 143
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akalpya Gardens</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abhishree Lounge</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrent Pharmaceutical Campus</td>
<td>Dahej</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maha Eco</td>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Bricks School</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrent Pharmaceutical Limited</td>
<td>Chhatral</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casa Rio</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nirmal Bhartia School</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in the Orchard</td>
<td>Baroda</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - Think Techno Campus</td>
<td>Kanjurmarg</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House with Selective Vision</td>
<td>Amby Valley</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supremus Offices</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palava</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tank</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haven Apartments</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai Vishram Gruh</td>
<td>Bhiwandi</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Club</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Alchemist's Abode</td>
<td>Baroda</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnating Varanasi, Reincarnating India</td>
<td>Varanasi</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devarshi House</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Play Area</td>
<td>Visnagar</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Landscape</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunken Retreat</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Park</td>
<td>Chennai</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecostead</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrent Research Centre</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajesh Brahmbhatt's Garden</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monsoon Palace</td>
<td>Amby Valley</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surfaces Plus</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAME University</td>
<td>Pune</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Trade Centre</td>
<td>Gandhinagar</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAF Documents</td>
<td></td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition at Trichy</td>
<td></td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

While putting together this compilation, at some point while we were reviewing the projects, I asked for the file that listed projects from 1973; when the office was established by my father. There were about 30 names for each year and as I read them my heart filled with remorse. Many names were of projects that never took off; the number that did not in those days, far outnumbered the ones that did. And of those that did, we had no documentation.

Of those, many were places I knew as a child or visited when I started studying architecture. They were simply divine landscapes; mostly homes; but were elegant, simple, tranquil and very skillfully planted. Others were institutions such as NID, which I maintain; had the best landscapes I have ever seen amongst institutions till date. Even these never got documented and what remains today is fragments of what was a glorious garden. Then there were the precision like groves planted at IIM at Louis Kahn’s behest and they remain, or the trees that line all of Gandhinagar, but all those poetic gardens are now gone and are only in the memory of those who made them or enjoyed them.

Such is the real tragedy of landscapes.

They are ethereal but temporal, unless a culture evolves to safeguard them. I learnt that rather too late, in the work I did when I led design in the firm. A lot of the early work beginning from 1987 for many years did not get documented. Perhaps just as well, since in retrospect a lot was tardy.
The projects here in this compilation, really are a record of selected work done in the last 17 odd years; and when I look at them, were there some more that I wish were there and now have no records of? The answer is, yes; and that is the sad truth.

Nonetheless, here they are - representative images for a series of 50 odd projects, shown in great brevity. We have only compiled those that got built or just about to be completed. Many that never saw the light of the day or those on the drawing boards waiting to find their moment in the sun are not here.

Upon looking at them when finally put together, it’s with some satisfaction that one realizes that many are extended narratives in themselves deserving a lot more telling and more importantly, they all stay true to some core values of articulate exactitude, spatial explorations that are exuberant; an unhindered use of materials, of symbolism and poetry and a bold but responsible freedom and joyousness that peppers all the work.

And they demonstrate a large range of scale and typology; all done with great passion and conviction. Also interspersed in this book are three discussions; the notable one with Professor P. B. Bhagwat in which he recounts his life.

Then there are some pages from the LEAF documents that we do and smaller essays making comments on the decades beginning from 1975 till 2015.

Recently we were invited by a college of design at Trichy, to deliver their annual lecture, but also were asked if we could mount an exhibition. This we did; and it was called 24 Intercessions; and post this exhibition, this effort seemed a natural conclusion.

Aniket Bhagwat
January 2015

The Exhibition at Trichy.
1975 - 1985

In 1975, the office had been now working for two years. After a long stint in the National Institute of Design, starting from 1965, my father had left it and in 1973, taken up the position to head the first landscape design programme in India, at Delhi. Barely a year into it, he had decided that the bureaucracy there was not to his liking, and had left rather abruptly to return home. The prospects had seemed dim; but much encouraged by a few friends, namely Navneetbhai Choksi and the late H.M Joshi he started his practice. To reassure him, his friends told him that he should work hard and whatever shortfall he had at the end of the month to run his household would be contributed by them; luckily such a situation did not arise.

I remember in 1973, going to the opening of the office in a four storied thin building, near the Bhadra Fort in the older quarters of the town. It was a space lent by H.M. Joshi, in a building called Jummah Manzil. It measured about 12 X15 feet. Many of his friends came and wrote beautifully wishing him well in a book specially bound for the day.

By 1978 I had joined the college to study architecture, but as a child I used to join him occasionally when he went to work- more as an outing, than as an education. Those few trips had started allowing me some idea of what it is that landscape architects do.

The one garden that I still dream about, that I saw on one of those trips was for a house of Balkrishna Harivallabhdas. It was only later that I learnt that the house had been designed by Kanvinde and over time greatly admired his work and lament to this day, that he left us early and his work is not celebrated enough. The garden was sublime. The grass was perfect, in level and an even hue of green. The trees were sculptural and arranged in a way that one could enjoy each group and yet one could also notice how they screened a window, or gave shade against the afternoon sun where a swing was positioned.
A thuja stood alone, like art in the middle of an opening in the garden and I admired it a lot for its form. This was the kind of work that he did; lyrical and gentle landscapes for homes and occasionally gardens for factories. The focus was on celebrating plants and creating humane spaces for outdoor use.

In college, architecture was really taught through the lens of Corbusier and Kahn which in retrospect was natural, given the work they have done in the city and the many teachers who had worked with them. We on our own steam, enjoyed the works of Ricardo Boffil, when he built the offices for his Taller de Arquitectura in abandoned silos or the greatly participatory work of Lucien Kroll.

Strangely no one taught the work of Nari Gandhi or Antonin Raymond then; nor do they now; as they do not teach the work of Kanvinde and Stein.

By 1980 we had already moved office; this time, to an empty space belonging to another friend, Tarunbhai Kothari in Embassy Market, near Ashram Road.

I had started working in the office in summers; mostly drafting drawings and making tracings. The world of landscape design was getting a bit clearer. In retrospect it was perhaps a golden age. There were few practitioners; my father, Satish Khanna, Ravindra Bhan and Ram Sharma; but amongst them, they held the ideals of the profession high and practiced with the discipline and rigor that really set the foundations for what could have been a great profession in the country.

By 1985, I was finishing my post graduate degree in landscape architecture at New Delhi. It had been two useful years. There was no education in the class rooms, since the department seemed in perpetual turmoil with heads of departments coming and going; but it allowed time to reflect and work with many abstract ideas in design, that rarely got discussed in the studios but were extremely important to me.
Early hand drawn drawings for residential landscapes.
My father has never tired of recounting the story of him and the client Indubhai, in the bowel of a basalt quarry on a day when temperatures were soaring above 40 degree Celsius; my father remarked he wanted to make this sheer hot hard mass of rock into a forest. Indubhai rushed him to the side of the rock face where there was some shade and called for cold lemon water immediately; he was convinced that my father was having a hallucination!
When I joined in 1986, the office had already been working for over 15 years. Every year my father would sign on about 30 projects; so there were already about 450 projects on the list and then the many more he had done when with his father, or then when part of NID. It was a large repertoire. It consisted of homes, small factories and some amount of work for city corporations.

My father worked alone, with 2 draftswomen. He would usually leave at 7.00 AM in the morning and visit sites, supervise the work, do the planting and come home for lunch and then go to office where he would sketch new designs for a garden; and give it to be drafted; post which, he would check the drawings that had been done in the morning.

It amazes me to this day, that he executed almost all his projects with 3 to 4 drawings. There was a final plan, a dimension plan for civil work that had lighting and irrigation marked on it; and sometimes a drawing to show typical civil details; and finally a planting plan, which usually was more of a guide - since the actual and finer placement of plants he did himself at site.

In my first two years in the office, my wife and I were unfortunate to start work with three clients who would make us work on many designs and then not pay. This went on for some time and my father was too polite to ever say anything. Finally in rebellion, I decided to undertake a project for one of his old clients on my own and quoted a fee, before I started work. He was aghast, both at the impudence of quoting the fee and also at what he thought was an obscene amount. Then and many times later in the subsequent years he was sure that I would run to ground the hard earned reputation that he had gained and often asked me to leave the office. That project was exquisite and while the garden is long gone, the parts of the fine brick work in it still remain; and I was paid what I was asked for.
I had by then also been taken under the wings by an architect in Ahmedabad, who was doing a large amount of real estate work. A very gentle and fine person, he gave me all the work he designed to do the gardens for; and I did them feverishly. By 1990, I had on my own done some 100 gardens, and when I went to review them, I was shocked that most were not the way I left them. The love for gardens was slowly dying in the city and everyone wanted an instant garden, and had no patience to grow with the trees.

Luckily for us, a large industrial estate was being developed near Surat and this led to the office doing huge commissions for industry, many measuring over hundreds of acres. The work usually meant doing soft landscape schemes for the portions delineated in master plans. With my father, for another five years I threw myself in this work and did shelter belts and industrial landscapes of great scale. And barring a few examples, found here too, that the work was mostly being requested for regulatory clearances and only to occupy land that was earmarked till expansion was taken on board. Many of those gardens were also lost.

Ten years of work and little to really show for it, except names and drawings.

Thankfully, there were still enough very fine small gardens or the occasional institutional garden, that built the office’s reputation. My father had started leaving a lot of decisions to me, and I decided to not take on any work till I could enthuse clients to care for the landscapes we did; and of course for years we had no work. It seemed a foolhardy decision at that time, but in retrospect it was a good one - it just strengthened our resolve to only take on projects that we imagined had a better chance of surviving the years.

In 1993, my father had set up the landscape department in the city and this too demanded large amounts of collective attention.

Above: The poster for the landscape architecture program at CEPT in 1993 when it was established. Below: Stamp from the office in 1986.
1995 - 2005

Things started changing slowly. The office from a 5 man firm had grown a bit. My wife Smruti came in intermittently, busy as she was taking care of the daughters; at work we seemed to be finding a new wind. As a school boy and right through college I had been a voracious reader and Carl Jung’s book, “Man and His symbols” along with the work of many other existential thinkers, such as Camus, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky and Jaspers, had somehow left a mark; and I was intrigued in finding the abstract signs and narratives that landscapes could be embedded with.

That coupled with a lot of reading on the paintings in India and their implied spatial space, had me convinced that there was more to landscape design than what was then a rather lyrical, but singular way of imagining space. This decade allowed us to experiment some of these ideas, and by the end of it we found that we had done a clutch of projects that seemed to be appreciated a fair amount and that also satisfied us a great deal.

Projects like the Ghuma House, Devigadh, Aman, Tithal and Blossom all happened in this phase. But these were not the main stays of the practice. The cement company near Veraval for whom we had started work in the early 90’s was a relation that grew in this decade, in which we did some very well received landscape design and architecture, but also did a large restoration of lime stone quarries and then for another cement company later, were doing complex afforestation work in the deserts of Rajasthan.

These ten years at least for me, helped clarify the many roles of the profession; part poetry, part abstraction, part ecological, part theatre of human drama; and all of it with large doses of common sense and pragmatism.
In 1993, a few years after I had just started work, with some landscape experience and really no architectural experience, a client for whom I had done a residential landscape asked me to visit a land he had near town.

It was barren.

Completely.

But had two majestic mango trees on it; the rest of the large land sun scorched and bare. He wanted to build on it, a place to sit; that’s all - and did not want to spend much money. I remember seeing the trees and deciding that I had to build somehow engaging them.
Gurgaon, for anyone who has been there is an assault on senses and urbanity gone crazed. The site sat amidst a medley of rather indifferent, aggressively uncouth buildings. Our first response was to turn away.

The building also became a laboratory to examine the many tenets of modernism, from integrity, rationality and leading from that the choices made on materials. We also noted with some concern that except for an effort by the artist Satish Gujral for the Belgium Embassy Building, the humble brick was never allowed to reincarnate; and concrete as a material was used in its brutality or neutrality, but rarely as a plastic material capable of gentle poetry.
The one thing we did not like about Aman was the lighting.

We had resorted to tall, high mast lights to illuminate the 4000 sq.mts space.

A few years later, when we were asked to do another venue for the same owner, we resolved to change this. The space was over 9000 sq.mts and upon researching we found that there was no equivalent in the world where a space so large needed to be lit with soft light that at least allowed 50 lux and did not cause a glare.

Left: Detail of light.
Right: Walkway leading to the venue.
Arjun, the owner was all of 28 years old when he commissioned this house.

It was called Half Way Retreat because the original plans were for a much grander weekend home down the road would have taken too much time and money - two things that always seem in short supply till one learns to breathe regularly.

We decided to build it in the shortest time possible, and if I recollect from design to occupation it took under 13 months.

It started with a conversation in a car with Arjun, where he doubted that an idiom that was modern and truly localized was even possible - any mention of that in Ahmedabad meant exposed concrete and exposed bricks; or when extended, it led to an aesthetic that seemed to place us in parts of Spain or Mexico; the palette ended there, as did the logic and articulation of spaces.
The house has a mask made in fine concrete that flows like fabric; behind the mask is a warm generous verandah space that connects you to a gorgeous landscape; then there is the drum made of customized bricks that denies itself the pleasure of looking out, but looks inwards and towards the sky, with small apertures to remind itself where it is located, and then there is the stockade, that protects and houses the sleeping spaces.

Exposed concrete at entrance.
Of late, the firm finds itself doing many projects of this typology. Spread over 170 acres, this is a middle class housing project with a density of 800 people per hectare.

The curse of the car is always with us. After designing the roads and the parking, the green spaces literally need to be carved and wrested from such developments. We anchor the master plan, help in siting the buildings, design road networks and the landscape spaces. Over time we have found that sensible and balanced neighborhoods can be created, simply by paying attention to the smallest details.
This particular development has occurred at a fast clip and is nearing completion and we find that there is a tremendous rigor and leading from it a deep satisfaction from focusing on what is often the mundane; the exact location of each manhole, the turn of the curb, the garden spaces, the pedestrian cross over, the signage post, the bus stand and such areas of daily life.

While sounding perhaps simple; it is not so; scale and its related complexity, the ability to construct such large volumes, makes the process arduous and sometimes convoluted. The budgets are very frugal, the time limited and yet, the end result is a tribute to the ordinary, done with unparalleled exactitude at such a scale in this country.
Pooja is a young passionate educator who lives in the southern part of India and actually manages to run one of the best schools in Delhi which is miles away from her. She visits it often, makes calls and lives on Skype. She inherited an old school built by her family which was mostly neglected and was fired by the zeal to make it the best. While she had commenced on rebuilding large parts of the school, she appeared in our office and was convinced that we had to do the landscape.

I remember trying to dissuade her. The project was too small and there was just not enough to do. She would not take no for an answer. Over the years that we worked on it, this became an extremely touching and joyous journey.
Over the last decade and a bit more, matters of Indian urbanity have gained a lot of traction. The view seems to be that while a majority of India is rural, this is set to change and more and more people will migrate to urban centres to seek a better future. Evidence seems to support this assumption. But this recent attention has nothing to do with Mumbai. It has and will continue to be India’s city of dreams. For decades, millions of people have been lured to its wily charms and Mumbai continues to grow at alarming rates where today a shade under half it’s population lives in what really may be called shanty like conditions. As it bursts at it’s seams, many efforts have been made to find homes for the residents of this city; but perhaps no other experiment is as ambitious as Palava.

LEGEND
1. Waterfront - River
2. Waterfront - Lake
3. Gauchar Maidan
4. Swale Park
5. Grid Park
6. 3.5 acre Community green
7. Pocket Parks – Spaces within Buildings
8. Suggested location for STP
Spread over 4000 acres, Palava aims to be home to over 2 million and more people; and get there in the next 15 years.

This is audacious.

There is certainly no other equivalent in the world where using a free market economy a city is sought to be established in such a compressed time.

We anchor the master plan for this city and also undertake its street design, landscape design, coordinate its infrastructure and furthermore mentor or assist some of the architectural programmes.
The Tank | Mumbai – 2012

A note by Darshan Mehta

It was meant to be the UNO store, all our Brands in one. The One store and yet, when the space was into the last mile of its coming to life - when Vyom's lit monster went up - UNO did seem very inadequate. That's when Aniket mentioned that his daughter had come up with The Tank. I Instantly loved the sound aesthetic of it. It brought up an imagery of something raw, metallic and unexpected. It seemed to match the mystique of the space. So The Tank it was. And is. Thanks Malvika.

When I first visited RPL house, I knew that this was the opportunity. To push the envelope, to dare and to make a leap into taking fashion in India from the real to the philosophical. Serendipity that I was at that time also talking to Aniket Bhagvat for designing another space. "Aniket, would you design a retail space?" "Sure, would love to. Never done one before". The perfect qualification. When I saw the first presentation, the two alternate design concepts, the history of the beautiful building and it's neighborhood unearthed - I knew that we were on to creating something very unique and disruptive. There was then the long journey of fun and frustration, of monies and purchase orders, of conference calls and tempers, of successive opening dates come and go.
As a part of pro-bono work initiative within the office, we designed this small playground for a village near Ahmedabad using scaffolding timber and other construction waste. While it was being made, on one of my trips, I could not but help notice the graphical similarity of the crop that grew all around the grounds of the playground.
Landscape Environment Advancement Foundation (LEAF) is engaged in research and publication in the area of landscape design and environmental planning. It supports research programs of varying durations every year.

We realized that there is very little by way of text, for landscape design studies, as also for architecture in India. There is even less, by way of a body of knowledge with which to theorize.

Then we have forgotten how to see. And when we do know how to see, we know very few ways to do so.

LEAF was born out of these concerns; and through many research projects we look at things that no one often cares to; how birds fly? Can we show sound graphically? Or smell? How does a cow in a city move differently from one in the village? What really happens in the small cracks and pores of the ground on which we walk? Can we find a structure in natural landscapes? And many such questions.

The research is always primary; always things we can sit and observe; the ways of representing this greatly debated and experimented.

Aniket Bhagwat