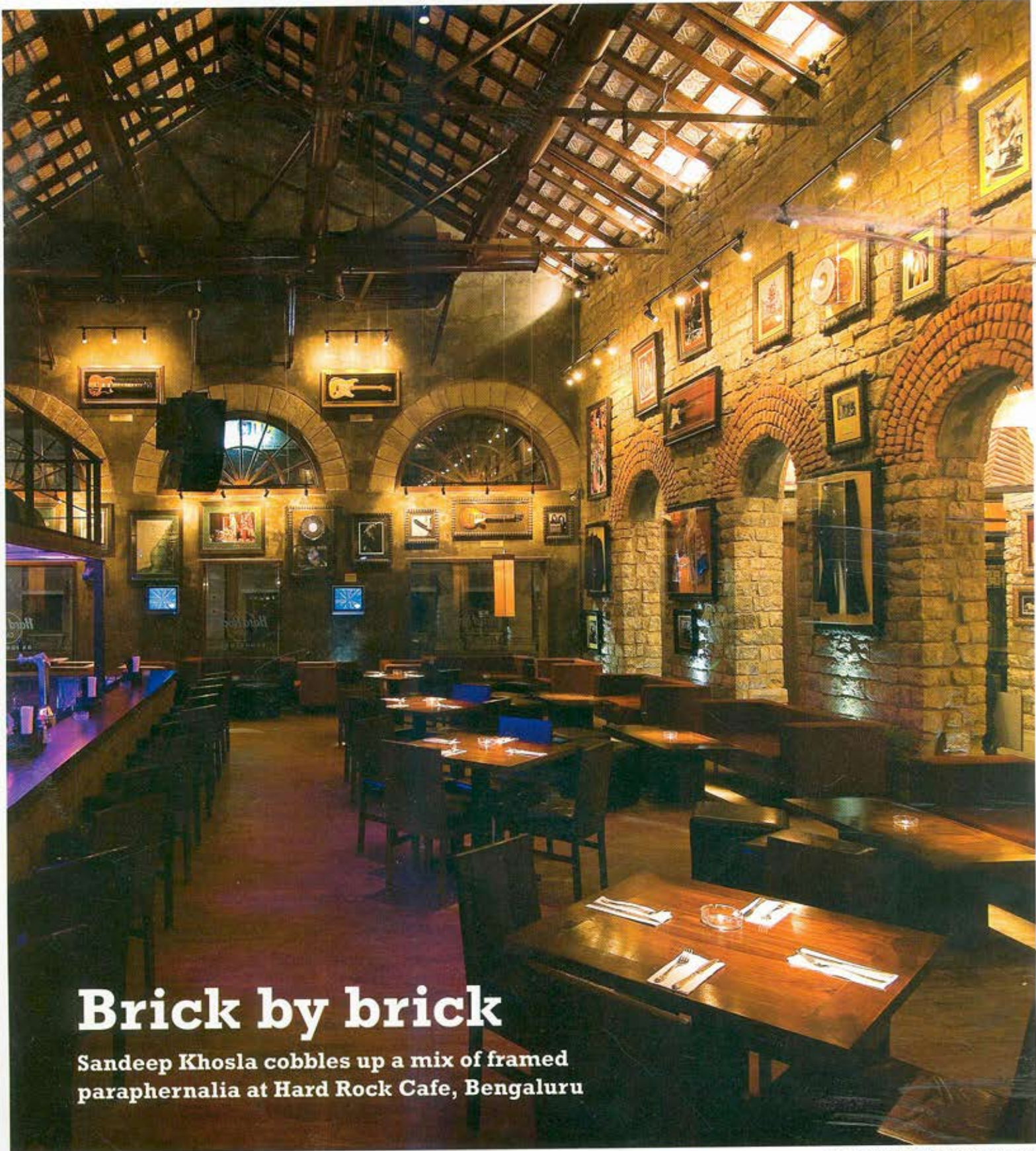


COMMERCIAL DESIGN

Kohelika Kohli on the essence of office planning; Benjamin Graindorge and his design sensibilities; Reflecting on washrooms

The definitive guide to successful commercial spaces

Total pages 52
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Brick by brick

Sandeep Khosla cobbles up a mix of framed paraphernalia at Hard Rock Cafe, Bengaluru

APRIL 2014 Volume 1 Issue 8



22

6 BULLETIN

A round up of the latest news from around the country.

8 INTERVIEW

Kohelika Kohli discusses the changes, challenges and concepts prevalent in commercial spaces.

16 PROFILE

French designer Benjamin Graindorge on his creations that merge the boundaries between science, art and design.

22 COVER STORY

Exploring the world of Sandeep Khosla and comprehending the aesthetic expressions in his works.

30 TRENDS

Reflecting on the must-haves in office washrooms.

38 CASE STUDY

The alluring retreat that changed the sleepy Ras Al Khaimah to a desert destination.

48 PRODUCTS

What's new on the market.

50 OPINION

Ankush Aggarwal on planning retail stores.



8



38

Interview



High on design

Kohelika Kohli, CEO and creative director of K2India discusses the changing landscape of commercial design

INTERVIEWED BY ANAMIKA BUTALIA DALAL

Tell us about how K2India came about...

For people looking for refined, comfortable, affordable, and sophisticated living, a 40 year old interior design and furniture manufacturing company, Sunita Kohli Interior Designs partnered with a young firm, Kohelika Kohli Architects, to give birth to their umbrella company, K2India.

How is it working with your mother?

It has truly been an amazing experience. When I moved back from New York, after graduating from The Pratt Institute of Design, I started my own practice. It was only five years later that we decided to merge. The entire idea behind K2India was to be able to collaborate more seamlessly.

As an architect, what are your thoughts on the current state of commercial design?

Office buildings and workspaces are becoming more design centric and aesthetically pleasing. Functionality and design now go hand and hand. People are trying to make their workspaces more comfortable. Malls and the retail spaces are competing not only aesthetically but also in terms of the experience.

What factors are vital in commercial spaces?

That spaces should be functional and ergonomically workable. Design is important but should never take the lead. Spatial planning becomes the starting point and functionality remains the key.

What are common challenges one faces?

Tighter timelines, getting natural light into spaces, and even getting enough ducting for fresh air.

How do India's commercial spaces compare globally?

I think we are now at par with what is happening globally, at least from the point of view of design. On the architectural front, often architects build without giving due consideration to the environment and to climactic conditions.

Why do you think green architecture has lost traction?

Unfortunately, it is more expensive to go green than to just build. The equipment and services required add a huge expense on the initial infrastructure costs. Albeit the long term benefits of energy savings are considered during the project's initial budgeting.

Do workplaces always have to be corporate?

People want to be in pleasing places. Working hours are getting longer, so the office environment has to adapt and offer areas to relax in and socialise.

How does design raise productivity and efficiency?

Architects and designers have to understand the required levels of engagement and interaction of people. First understand whether it is a mixed culture or a hierarchical structure. Spaces should have the ability to metamorphose through the day; allow business as well as casual conversation

to take place. Large offices provide gyms, terraces for fresh air, and even complete kitchens. A designer should take on the persona of multiple individuals to fully understand requirements and conceive an adaptable design that a larger spectrum can relate to.

What do awards mean to you?

It is an acknowledgement of doing things right and choosing the right path.

Of the commercial projects undertaken by you, which one did you enjoy the most?

Recently, I completed an office space in Gurgaon that was small, long and needed a certain amount of innovation. It was intuitively conceived with a 10 ft long aquarium at the entrance, smartly segregating the conference room. I'm also working on designing gyms for Fitness First in India. It is in competition with the bar next door alongside shopping spaces. We've had to provide solutions while being aesthetically pleasing and inviting enough so that people take an hour off to hit the gym instead of the bar or a shop!

Architects and designers have to understand the required levels of engagement and interaction of people [in offices]. First understand whether it is a mixed culture or a hierarchical structure."

Commercial Design peeks into the whole gamut of K2India's commercial projects



K2India office, New Delhi

My studio and offices are an extension of my home. I could live there if I so wanted. It provides for my every whim and fancy. It has a fantastic Poggenpohl kitchen, where often I am found cooking since it's a stress buster for me. My dogs often come to give me company, if I am working on a Saturday. They feel at home too. In my own room, I am surrounded by things that either give me peace, inspiration or are a good feeling. I am highly organised and hate things out of place, so everything in my office has a space where it belongs. I have an attached bathroom, which allows me the luxury of working late and leaving for a night out with friends, from the office itself.

The conference room is fully equipped with state-of-the-art additions. Over three screens, we can move presentations around and take clients back and forth through desired sections and selections. The office is fully automated and controlled by Lutron. We have a fully loaded Audio Visual Room complete with a retractable projector and screen, 5.1 surround system from The Soundsmith who used Art Acoustic for this solution. We do not just talk about great design in our studio, we allow clients to come in, touch, feel and experience great design. I remember once, we were in a meeting with a client who was debating between a 70" television set and a projector screen. We walked him over to our AV Room so that he could experience both. Little did I know, that he and my mother were going to sit through the entire movie screening.

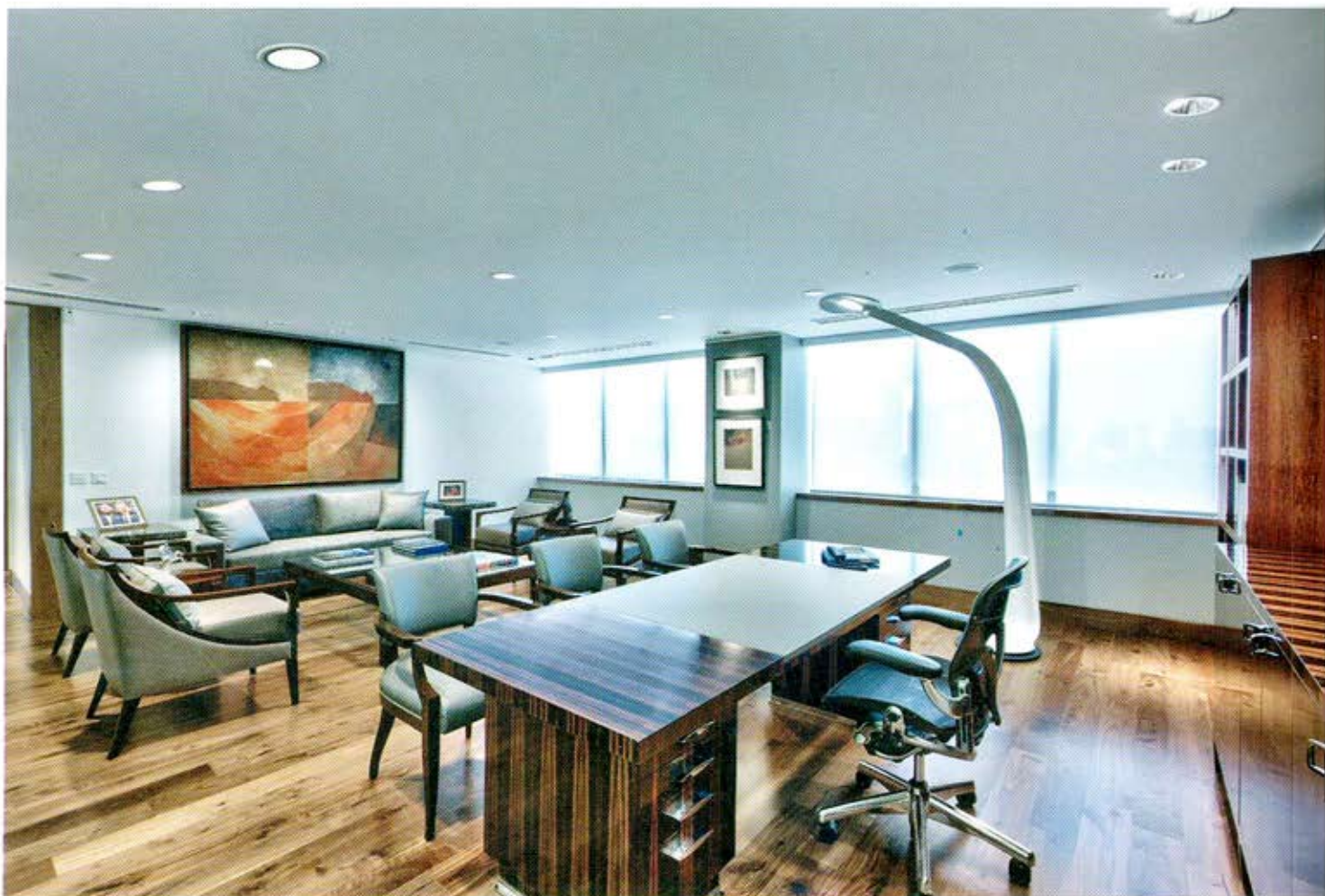




Labomed, The Time Tower, Gurgaon

Neeraj Jain, MD and art aficionado, wanted an airy and open, multi functional space with a timeless design. The primary purpose for the city office was to have a space where foreign clients could be received periodically for product updates and training, eliminating the need for them to travel to the clients manufacturing facilities located in Haryana. Therefore, the office needed to be dynamic: A conference room to seat eight persons, expanding to accommodate gatherings of upto 20 people for product launches and trainings. The space is open plan, pushing all the necessary enclosed spaces to the back of the 2,200 sq ft area. Most partitions are in glass allowing for an unobstructed view of the entire office. The conference room is a glass enclosure with large gaps, sitting like an island in the middle, segregated from the casual meeting/waiting area by a 10 ft fresh water aquarium. It wears a casual yet sophisticated look with finely equipped arrangement for dining, a sleep cell for occasional clients in transit, a full shower area, workstations for six employees, managing directors private cabin, three separate sitting areas, and a video wall for product news feed to the clients, video conferencing facilities, discreet and tasteful display of clients product.





Fortis Healthcare, Gurgaon

Located on the fifth floor of the Unitech Building is the office of the chairman of Fortis Healthcare Management. It has been designed and styled to be sophisticated, international and yet hugely comfortable and functional. Adhering to the client's needs, a large Ruhlman desk is placed to one side, allowing him to host meetings with a large group at a time while, alternatively, a comparatively informal seating arrangement is placed opposite. The office is fully hi-tech using Lutron integration systems to control the lights and blinds. The artwork in his space was ideally selected to suit his taste and standards, as he is an art collector with an exceptional compilation.

