

outsourcing india modern

an ifj initiative to bring the wisdom and experience of the gurus of design, art and architecture to the minds of young designers, seeking illumination and inspiration in a world disconnected from the traditions of mentoring. ifj open space offers you the thoughts of these great personalities, in their own words.

Ar. Yeshwant Ramamurthy provides an insight into the evolution and transformation of interior design in the indian sub-continent

The first tangible evidence of interior "design"

as defined by western parameters appears in India's history during the Raj. Nostalgic for the life they left behind and driven by a desire to make themselves as comfortable in an alien land as they were in their European homes, the colonists imported furniture, rugs, chandeliers and other paraphernalia with which to decorate their life styles. The aim was to replicate their roots albeit the incongruous conditions of climate and culture of the colonized country. Interior style was yet another way of insulating themselves from the onslaught of native heathenism.

Brown Sahibs, aspirational of the status that such interiors connoted, began to emulate the imperial ambience often stripping their homes of traditional elements that evolved out of contextuality to our lifestyles and substituting them with western furniture that was largely inappropriate for India. This cultural hegemony over our indigenous design continued well past independence as manifested in the interiors of affluent homes across urban India. Even Indian design education sought to perpetuate this outmoded western model of the ideal interior architecture by emphasizing Period detailing long relegated to the dustbins of the past even in the land of its origin. To the vast majority of our post-independence anglophile society, the display of any form of Indian-ness was even considered inferior.

Change began to gradually emerge in the 1960's when largely due to the efforts of visionaries like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, India's dying arts and crafts witnessed a renaissance and the products of their revivalism came on display at the Central Cottage Industries Emporium, New-Delhi. In the corporate sector, credit must be given to Air India and the India Tourism Development Corporation who consciously defined policy to showcase Indian art to visiting tourists through the décor of their airport lounges and hotels.

Ethnicity in the form of ambience was parceled as an integral part of the exotic India experience. Major hospitality chains fast followed the model. Ironically, it took initial

acceptance and appreciation by the Westerners to open our eyes to the potentially vast indigenous world of traditional Indian art to redefine a new aesthetic revolution. While the grammar of India's interior design still remained largely western, its vocabulary became strongly local. In the 70's and 80's, the handicrafts emporia of different states, zonal cultural centers, crafts bazaars such as Tillonia, Dilli Haat and the Surajkund Mela opened the floodgates of easily available and affordable ethnicity. What began as an awareness, soon accelerated to a deluge, transforming countless urban dwellings, cutting across class and income distinctions. Interior design was no longer the privileged domain of affluent high society. Growing emphasis on Indian creative arts like classical

dance, music and haute couture simultaneously displayed a return to the roots of our traditions and culture. At an International level, Indira Gandhi's initiative, visualized and executed by the czarina of culture P. P. Charya displayed to the world our finest textile and craft traditions through the Festivals of India at major world capitals.

Indian interior design came to project an eclecticism where western inspired furniture provided elegant comfort and the ambience was accessorized by traditional Indian elements. Abstract art and modern sculpture came into increasing usage while colour, texture and fabric gave subtle visual form to the suggested ethnicity. Designers Elisabeth Kelkar, Sunita Kohli, Rajiv Sethi and Francesca

Basu were the torchbearers of this new sophistication and inspired a fresh generation of Indian interior designers who were equally enthused by the latent potential of this emerging "fusion" genre. Over trial, testing and time, this style evolved into a major design movement by which many a designer touched the horizon of cutting edge elegance. Contemporary Indian style balanced the best of both worlds with tremendous aesthetic appeal. **Most importantly, the practitioners of this home-grown harmony were designers born of Indian sensibilities and practicing within a framework of our technological parameters.**

Ar. Yeshwant Ramamurthy



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Experiments with commissioning foreign designers to hybridize Indian style didn't always succeed. Sometime in the 90's, the Government of India invited the internationally acclaimed fashionista, British designer Zandra Rhodes to re-style our handicrafts so as to increase their marketability in the West. In spite of working with our finest craftsmen, her line up of prototypes turned out to be as bizarre as her poly-chromatic hair and thankfully never went into commercial production.

And then came Globalization, bringing with it a rapid pan-Indian revolution in the design profession. Overnight, stylistic transformation uprooted established interpretations of

Indian modernity, changing the mindset of design firms and student of interior architecture. Corporate style hopped from Manhattan to Meerut as instantly as the internet could transpose ideas across the macrocosmic world of design universality. The booming growth of India's software industry singularly fuelled this juggernaut. An overnight proliferation of design periodicals and the availability of cheap mass manufactured interior products from the burgeoning Chinese dragon completed this sociological Tsunami. (The only redeeming fact is that private domestic architecture and interiors have mercifully not fallen to the onslaught of sterility. Incredible India continues to inspire much of our perception of space and contemporary style in this sector).

Ar. Yeshwant Ramamurthy, a founder member of the Hyderabad chapter of the IIID and past chairman IIID, graduated from Sir J.J college of Architecture, Mumbai in 1973. Principal Architect of Studio One for over 30 years, he has designed buildings across various typologies ranging from high end private residences to affordable housing, using sustainable technology and restoration projects, three of which have received awards from the local chapter of INTACH.

As a founder member of the crafts council of Andhra Pradesh, Ar. Ramamurthy has interacted with craftsmen and created designs using their traditional skills to make contemporary interior components. In addition to his practice, he enjoys writing on the architectural and interior issues for the city publications.



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But what happened to Indian Design? We lost it. In one wide leap we emerged into the new millennium having severed ties with indigenous sensibilities that designers at the close of the last century had so passionately and assiduously nurtured.

De-linked from contemporary ethnicity, modern design is now synonymous with geo-political neutrality. As soulless as the Lego-set architecture within which it defines space, the interior design of India's new urban affluence is a disastrous product of mindless imitation without the least local contextuality .

To add insult to injury, foreign consultants are now hired to design Indian projects. Do they understand India's ethos ?. Can they comprehend our technical services?. Don't we have enough of our own acclaimed and emerging design talent to execute these commissions with far more meaningful results?. Will these same foreign firms accept anything less lucrative than mega-buck M.N.C. projects ?. How are they practicing in this country without any form of official / professional accreditation ?.

We have come full circle. Design-wise, aping the west is back in vogue and commissioning on overseas mercenary to create culturally sterile spaces is the new style mantra. Clients buy status over astronomical fees and the colonization of design is complete again 63 years into independence. ifj