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Architect D Mukesh's home in Salem

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Rahul Mehrotra creates a bungalow in Alibaug

AWARD

The Singapore Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) Architectural Design Competition

A Glowing Lantern for Little India



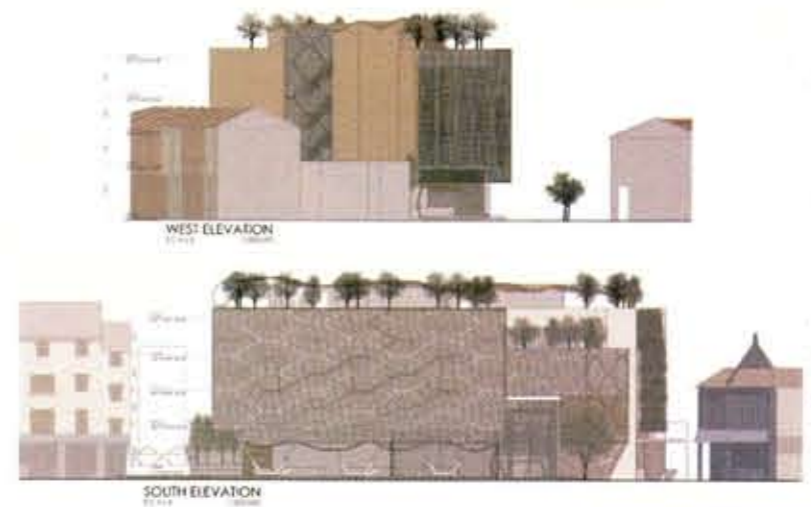
TEXT: AMITA SARWAL PHOTOGRAPHS & ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY: URBNArc PTE LTD & RGSA ARCHITECTS, SINGAPORE

A Glowing Lantern for Little India' serves as 'an urban form where the rich diversity of Indian culture is celebrated, nurtured and allowed to grow,' say Gaurang Khemka, Principal of URBNArc Pte Ltd, and Greg Shand of RGSA Architects, winners of the Singapore IHC design competition. The concept won as it best translated IHC's vision of an iconic, unique and sustainable building that blends both traditional Indian and modern architectural elements.

'The inspiration for IHC evolved from a spiritual idea of the encompassing universe providing shelter and sanctuary. This concept was then translated by us into physical form using the essence of some key traditional Indian elements and metaphors,' says architect and urban designer Gaurang Khemka. The first metaphor used is 'baoli' - a stepped well which traditionally is the 'source' of nourishment - water - and a meeting point for the community. The second metaphor is 'purusha prakriti' - the concept of solid/void; male and female and opposites creating a 'whole'. It is the very essence of humanity and the universe as perceived by Indians and Asians alike. The Heritage Centre will thus be an embodiment of this richly layered duality - 'light/dark', 'male/female' and 'old/new' within space and time, all linked together by the common thread of India's heritage.

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Explains Gaurang 'The thread in this case being the steps from the "baoli" that further evolve into a path that links the primary activity points within the building, and are expressed as a "path of growth", a vine aspiring upwards along a fluid, sensuous, playful, colourful path, culminating into the light at roof top level. The building is a manifestation of permanence - "matter" - whilst the people, the exhibits and the path - "spirit" - are everchanging.

'When Greg and I decided to collaborate on this project, we were faced with the daunting task of understanding India, Indians in Singapore, the history and character of Little India and Singapore to evoke a response for an important civic building from the city and its Indian community, says Gaurang.

The Singapore IHC traces the history of the Indian and South Asian community in the South-east Asian region. Located at the Little India Heritage District, the S\$12 million building has been scheduled to open in 2013. It will feature small scale museum facilities as well as programming and educational spaces.

