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were slow in com-

ing, and when they did, many joined

leading local archi-

tectural firms of the

time such as DP Ar-

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#### **AMITA SARWAL**

OING back

# Building a reputation

to an era before World War I, Singapore's skyline was dominated by colonial buildings which were mostly designed by British archi-

The first, tallest skyscraper in South-east Asia was Singapore's 79.5m Cathav Building (1939) by Frank Brewer. Three decades later another foreigner, the renowned I.M. Pei, gave Singapore the 197.7m OCBC Centre (1976). Another milestone was the multi-use Suntec City (1994) by New York-based Tsao & McKown Architects with local firm DP Architects.

Then came what has turned out to be one of Singapore's most recognisable buildings: Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay, built in 2002. Mr Vikas Gore, director, DP Architects (DPA). was director-in-charge of the project. This made him the first Indian to helm a major development on the island nation which has gained global appreciation.

During the construction boom that began in the 1980s, Indian architects

chitects, Ong & Ong, Indian architects and designers in Singapore RSP Architects, Architects 61 and RDC, many of which are still active. add their touch to the landscape

A first... DPA director Vikas Gore became the first Indian to helm a major development in Singapore when he was put in charge of the Esplanade project.

PHOTO: DP ARCHITECTS

Singapore is undisputedly becoming the regional leader among design hubs. Practices offer challenges both in terms of scale and types of projects. Architects and designers based here are also increasingly doing extensive work in India, Indonesia and China.

Perhaps one of the largest design practices belongs to Gaurang Khemka of URBNarc. He hit the headlines when, along with RGSA, he won the International Design Competition for the under-construction Singapore Indian Heritage Centre. Next, Himaal Kak Kaul concentrated on homes and gained renown as design principal of Metamorph. When the over 50-yearold fabindia, one of the best valued brands in India, ventured overseas and opened its maiden retail outlet in Singapore, Ujjwala Naik Goenka who founded Studio Paradigm, was selected to design the store at Paragon.

More about the Indian architects and designers on Pages 12 & 13



## Gaurang Khemka: Touching the ground lightly



Winning work., Mr Khomka award-winning Indian Heritage Centre (too)

in October this year.

Mr Khemka.

THE founding director of URBNarc describes his architectural

aesthe tics-cum-maxim thus: "Connect to the context, and touch the ground lightly. Use as few resources as possible. but still serve humanity.

Mr Gauranz Khemka, 40 number of other practices as well." started his practice in 1993 while at Sushant School of chitects are in teams which shoulder Art & Architecture. much of the drawing and documentation Gurgaon, India. He did some work and a smaller number are also involved in deprivate residences in New

en route to work for some of

India, Singapore, Hong Kong and the US, and did a terrare

his favourite architects in

at UC Berkeley studying

In 2009, this journey

ounding of URBNarc, a

design practice formulated to

focus on all aspects of the

built environment. He chose

Singapore despite not being

here. The decision was taken

living here that affirmed my

belief that this is a true hub

registered as an architect

based on "two stints of

In parallel, URB Narc has been busy doing some small

residence and even a food court "just to keep our hands

dirty and our knees bloody in realising our dreams", says

offices, a bespoke restaurant, a retail shop, a small

boutique hotel, an apartment modification, a private

lminated with the

Urban Design.

sign. With the introduction of BIM-based software Delhi to "realise my ideas the distinction between these two roles is diminishand dreams that were being ing. Buildings in which they have had significant formulated on paper in the roles range from iconic landmarks to major commerstudio' cial complexes to residential projects and so on, I Within two years, searching fresher pastures. think it would be fair to say that their influence, he set on a journey stooping while still small, is still larger than their numbers

would suggest Yet Mr Gore rues: "Unfortunately because of the increasing numbers. Indians from India seem to din into a comfortable expatriate existence with little empathy or integration with local tastes and priorities. That's a pity because one misses out on a rich international experience. Horsefully, over time, this will

came one of the earliest Indian ar-

He recalls: "Indian architects, whether local Indians or exputriate Indians, were

knew of Indians who had worked short

stints before (and moved on) and one or

two Indian Singaporeans in local firms. I

can't remember actually meeting another

nent are numerous, as are other professionals. Naturally their contribution has

also grown with their increasing num-

hers. Within my immediate environment

there are architects from India working at

both senior and iunior levels throughout

our office and this is certainly true of a

Mr Gore continues: "Many of these ar-

"Today, architects from the sub-conti-

When I first came here, although I

a rarity until the early 2000s.

architect from India

The senior architect points out the hurdles the younger generation faces: "Nonetheless, at present, architects educated in India suffer a common handicap in Singapore. Their degrees are not recognised and strictly speaking therefore they are not architects. The Board of Architects in Singapore and the Council of Architects in India are working at selec-



**Building a reputation** 

## Vikas Gore: Breaking ground with iconic projects



portiolio. project in Singapore is Statelite Earth Station

tive mutual recognition at a glacial pace but there is

Despite this, some Indians, after having honed their skills with reputable architectural firms, have se tup their own independent practices offering architectural, interior design, landscaping and even architectural abotography services

The 61-year-old deector at DPA, who has an impressive portfulio of projects to his credit in Singa-

pore, India and Indonesia, says he has "no grand philosophy". He adds: "Just a few thumb rules, Idon't believe in nifering historical icons. Historical architecture is expedic to a culture that has changed.

From his completed and ongoing projects he selects five which he has a special affinity

1. Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay: "The Government wanted an iconic building. We won the project in association with Michael Wilfred and Partners (MWP). Unfortunately. once its initial layout was set, MWP left in 1995. Initially I panicked at having to shape the project alone. But this had become DP's opportunity to shine. We rebuilt our team and shaped Esplanade. It opened in 2002 and all that time I was constantly learning something

2. Seletar Satellite Earth Station: "An early fayourite project for SingTel. The clients wanted a shownece to bring schoolkids and visiters to. One day, Nikhil, my son who was six years old then, saw me designing and said, Oh! Satellites are up in the air, then how

come nothing points up?" It made me think and I designed a sky-facing, blue crescent-shaped gantry to mount microwave dishes on. A touch of inspiration from the mouths of kids! S. RMZ Ecoworld, Bengaloru: "The 7 million so ft

business park is due for completion by mid-2014. RMZ wants to make Ecoworld a unique experience for everyone working there. I think we will deliver

4. Sky Gardens, Bengaluru: "This G: Corp 20-storey project with two apartments per floor, each with double-height terrace gurdens, is Bengaluru's tallest and most attractive residential building."

5. Select City Walk, New Delhi: "When Select was

tendered out by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), they specified the general plan which had ostive as well as negative implications. DDA did alow one crucial flexibility - a temporary mod over the central open space which creates an extensively-used public space and simultaneously offers substantial exposure to most shops. Good buildings are always a nartnership between a client and an architect - and Se lect is a good example, with very enlight-



Ms Kaul (above) and Art of the Stair one of her projects at Camelot (top).

### Himaal Kak Kaul: Shaping the past, present and future

AFTER moving to Singapore in 2000, Himaal Kak Kaul spent six years honing her design skills in residential architecture at the small and extremely design-focused practices of Erresto Bedmar of Bedmar and Shi and Guz Wilkinson of Guz Architects.

Setting up her own practice. Metamorph, in 2006, making her a pioneer among her Indian peers, was "a natural progression of wanting o express, explore and refine my own design philosophy", "Singapore is a very fulfilling place to practise in as dientele are discerning

and well-informed," she says.

Among her work is the design of a good class bungalow at Binjai Walk from scratch, additions and alterations to an Emerald Hill shophouse and the repovation of several apartments at Gallon Gables. Fortana Heights. Horizon Towers, Trevose Park, Camelot,

Costa Rhu and Sheliord Green. The 40-year-old design principal's endeavour is to create humane and timeless architecture and interiors that optimise the potential of the site, reflect the personality of the clients and go beyond the design brief to achieve a tranqual retreat from the world

Towards this end, Ms Kaul strives "to

emphasise the inherent beauty in natural materials like stone and timber to give

character to the interior". She adds 'Integrating interior spaces with transitional spaces built around the landscape characterises inspired living in the tropics. Passionate about inspired design, for me every project is an opportunity to engage with a completely different set of requirements and work closely with my

clients to explore built expressions of their unique design sensibility." After eight years of independent practice, she is looking beyond a purely modern expression of design to re-adaptive use of old elements with a contemporary aesthetic. She considers the one limitation of working in Singapore to be the lack of skilled artisans for crafting

bespoke design features.

available to them. Integrating such elements with my work is a

"Many young designers in India are creating contemporary design elements impired by the wealth of traditional skills and craftsmanship direction I am moving forward to explore," concludes Ms Kaul whose exclusive homes are testimony to her flair for design.

for South and South east Asia, has a transparent and Ujjwala fair economy that embraces talent and offers a fair chance of success' Naik Mr Khemka recalls his initial years as "a fun ride. I built up the studio to 10 international architects, Goenka: becoming a veritable sampling of the global talent that Singapore attracts". Early commissions included a hotel in Perth; a high-end resort in Kerala and winning an Visualising Aquarium-centric mixed use design competition on Mumbui's famed Marine Drive. More commissions concepts followed such as the Alila Seminyak in Bali, Indonesia. The 240-room, five-star beach resort is scheduled to open from In 2011 Mr Khemka won the international design award for the Indian Heritage Centre, commissioned by the Singapore Government to be opened by August this existing year. He collaborated with RGSA as Mr Khemka is still not a registered architect in Singapore spaces

SHE landed in Singapore in 1997 as a fresh graduate from CEPT, Ahmedabad, India. Along with short stints at DP Architects and Guz Architects and the three formative years at SCDA, Ms Ujiwala Naik Goenka imbibed a thorough grounding in the aspects of design and building processes ranging from shop interiors to a high-end condominium.

Ms Goenka's big break came when Kerry Hill Architects offered her an opportunity to work on the design and construction of a set of six Amanresorts lockers in Rhutan

'From 2001, the next five years provided an amazing experience working on the project from the concept to handing over five completed hotels in the kingdom of Bhutan. It was hands-on learning in conceptualising, detailing, drawing and on-site supervision of a resort hotel which sits comfortably in its spectacular setting and becomes an integral part of

A second stint with SCDA involved overseas ojects including the Park Hyatt, Maldives and in India the JW Marriott in Manesar and some high-end

residential projects.

While working on the hospitality projects.





Assthetic appeal... Ms Goerka (above) and fabindia (1eft), one of her most challenging

Ms Goenka felt a void in access to a holistic approach to styling and accessorising in hotels. In 2010, along with Ms Sonali Chitale, she set up Souk Design Resources, a sourcing and styling company for accessorising spaces. It led to the opening of Kaizen Design Accents, a furniture and lifestyle store in

Studio Paradigm was set up simultaneously in Singapore offering design services. Ms Goenka, 39. has since independently completed a range of retail.

commercial and residential projects. Her most challenging commissions were fabindia (Paragon) and Benares (ION Orchard), two brands which entered Singapore concurrently yet offered

completely diverse experiences Fabindia's rectilinear space allowed for a dramatic spatial installation made from rope creating a visual focal in the space. Benares' linear space is onceptualised as a covered hazaar with its vaulted main street and alcoves alongside the walls for product display. A full-height mirror covering the rear wall gives an illusion of greater depth.

"They required distinct visual identities," she

OP ARCHITECTS METALAKOR PH DESIGN PARADICAL