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Lines of Thought, Layers of Meaning

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IAPRINTSPECTIVES

Lines of Thought, Layers of Meaning

IAPrintspectives is more than a journal—it is the living chronicle of the Institute of Architects Pakistan. Conceived to capture the pulse of our profession, it reflects the projects that shape our cities, the ideas that challenge convention, and the stories that inspire the architects of tomorrow.

Within these pages are imprints—the enduring marks we leave on the built environment—and perspectives—the diverse voices and visions that define architectural discourse in Pakistan. From groundbreaking design and academic inquiry to industry innovation, from studio to skyline, from the first sketch to the final structure—IAPrintspectives documents how ideas travel, evolve, and take form.

This is the narrative of our shared pursuit. A space to celebrate what we build—and why we build it. A place to look beyond the façade and into the soul of place. Here, architecture is not only visualised but deeply experienced; remembered not just for its form, but for its meaning.

IAPrintspectives speaks in narrations of light, form, and life—capturing the essence of our time and the people who shape it.

Welcome to the journey—ours to shape, to share, and to remember!

Ar. Bisma Sami Askari
Chairperson BAE-IAP

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OF GADDAFI STADIUM, LAHORE





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IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT, IAP

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



I, on behalf of the IAP National Council extend our warmest appreciation on the second issue of the IAP Journal for the year 2025. IAP has achieved major milestones earlier and become a landmark in fostering innovation, knowledge sharing and continued progress within the country and beyond.

As responsible architects, we lead eco-friendly initiatives and are at the forefront of shaping the built environment we inhabit. IAP serves as a dynamic platform for us to engage with industry partners, allied professionals & explore cutting-edge technologies and exchange ideas with multidisciplinary professionals that will shape the future of sustainable construction in Pakistan. The Journal focuses on celebrating our architects and showcasing what the Institute is doing collectively. These advancements have the potential to revolutionize the way we design and build structures. The IAP is particularly interested in exploring how these technologies can be leveraged to achieve greater heights, efficiency, reduce environmental impact and ultimately create more resilient and sustainable buildings that are human centered.

As professionals we have to reaffirm the role of cities as dynamic centers of cultural interaction and their responsibility to ensure a balanced and sustainable habitat.

IAP fosters crucial discussions & discourse on key challenges and opportunities facing the construction industry, with a specific focus on promoting sustainable practices. It actively promotes the adoption of sustainable design principles, and serves as a powerful platform for knowledge exchange, learning and collaboration between architects, engineers, planners, developers, construction professionals and policymakers, ultimately leading to a more sustainable built environment for Pakistan.

I commend the Editorial Team especially Vice President IAP, Ar. Dr. Samra Mohsin Khan & Chairperson BAE-IAP Ar. Bisma Sami Askari for the dedication in putting together the IAP Journal for our national membership and international associations. IAP looks forward to continue engaging with fellow professionals, exploring the latest advancements, and contributing to discussions that will shape the future of Pakistan.

Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi, FIAP
President IAP

During a recent visit to London, I was struck by how intentionally public space design is embedded into the city's urban development. From the affluent heart of Central London to its more economically challenged boroughs, there is a consistent and visible investment in enhancing public streets and cultivating meaningful places for people. These placemaking initiatives go beyond aesthetics; they are profoundly transformative. By putting people at the center of design, London empowers its residents, workers, and visitors. The results are compelling: safer streets, increased property values, and more inclusive, vibrant neighborhoods.

This issue of the IAP Journal champions people-centric design as the cornerstone of sustainable architecture in Pakistan. It showcases urban interventions that reclaim congested roadways for pedestrians, reimagine traditional neighborhoods through community engagement, and reconceive architectural education to cultivate socially responsive professionals. The journal delves into transformative efforts such as the reclamation of polluted waterways into inclusive urban parks, and the activation of green spaces as vibrant learning environments. In each case, architects are reclaiming the built environment for public benefit, by placing people, culture, and sustainability at the heart of their practice.

We are particularly proud to present two exceptional projects from Pakistan that have been shortlisted for the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2025. Both projects offer compelling insights into sustainability and the value of context-specific design approaches. Together, these contributions reflect the evolving role of architecture in responding to environmental, cultural, and technological challenges, while staying rooted in a sense of place and history.

Our featured articles underscore the importance of architectural education in nurturing critical thinking and social-environmental responsibility. Exploring the dynamic interplay between aesthetics and functionality, tradition and innovation, and highlighting how architects are reshaping urban futures through sustainable practices. With a blend of theory, practice, and reflection, the journal affirms architecture's evolving role in building equitable and resilient communities.

We extend our sincere gratitude to President IAP Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi and Chairperson BAE Ar. Bisma Askari for their valuable input for the success of this issue. We thank all the authors for their invaluable contributions; their dedication and expertise are the foundation of this journal's success. We would also like to acknowledge the generous support of our sponsors, without whom this issue would not have been possible.

Dr. Samra M. Khan, AIAP

Vice President, IAP



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IAP EVENTS & ACTIVITIES



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IAP EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

IAP Secretariat

Pakistan was represented by a nine-member **IAP delegation** at the **ARCASIA Forum 22 in Colombo, Sri Lanka (14–18 January 2025)**. Led by President Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi and Vice President Ar. Dr. Samra Mohsin Khan, the delegation actively participated across ACAE, ACSR, ACGSA, ACPP and ACYA. A win was the election of Ar. Umer Saeed as Deputy Chair of ACAE, who will take over as Chair for the 2026–27 term. President IAP also spoke at the Forum, while works by Suhail & Fawad Architects and ORAD were showcased at the exhibition. A tribute to Ar. Zaigham Jaffrey (IAP) through poetry and music, celebrating his lasting legacy within ARCASIA, and Pakistan's joint Second Prize with India at the Friendship Night.

IAP EX 2025, hosted by the **Rawalpindi-Islamabad Chapter** at the Pak-China Friendship Centre from 7–9 February, revolved around the theme **“Urban Horizons – Architecture and the Future of Urban Precincts.”** The three-day event brought together architects, industry leaders, and the public to engage with innovative ideas on sustainable urban development and future-focused design solutions underscored the critical need for sustainable urban planning in Pakistan's growth. Showcasing cutting-edge materials, emerging trends, live demonstrations and interactive discussions, IAP EX 2025 proved to be a dynamic hub for knowledge sharing, professional networking, and creative exploration.

IAP EX Karachi 2025 emerged as a landmark celebration of architecture, innovation and collaboration, raising the bar for creativity, outreach and participation. Held over four dynamic days, it introduced groundbreaking firsts — a bold event logo brought to life through an architectural installation. With inspiring keynotes, engaging panel discussions, interactive workshops and the thought-provoking **“KAL: Kaleidoscope of Architectural Lifescape”** conference, the event drew record-breaking participation from architects, designers, students, professionals and the public. Concluding with a vibrant Gala Night, IAP EX Karachi 2025 firmly established itself as a defining moment in Pakistan's architectural calendar.





IAP hosted its **Fellowship Investiture Ceremony** in Islamabad, to honour **40 distinguished architects** conferred **Fellowship in 2023** and **2024**. Organized by the **IAP Rawalpindi–Islamabad Chapter** as the concluding highlight of **IAPEX 2025**, the prestigious occasion was graced by Chief Guest Dr. Shahzad Khan Bangash, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Works. IAP President Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi, together with senior Fellows, formally invested the new Fellows with gowns and medals in recognition of their outstanding contribution to the profession. Marking a historic milestone for IAP, the ceremony celebrated not only individual achievement but also the enduring legacy of architectural excellence and leadership in Pakistan.



IAP hosted its **Fellowship Investiture Ceremony** in Karachi, honouring **12 eminent architects** awarded **Fellowship** between **2023** and **2025**. Graced by the Governor of Sindh, Mr. Kamran Tessori and culminating **IAPEX 2025**, the ceremony celebrated the architects' outstanding contributions to Pakistan's built environment. Organized by the **IAP Karachi Chapter**, the event brought together leading architects from across the country and international delegates from Morocco, Bangladesh, and Nepal, reaffirming IAP's mission to uphold excellence, leadership, and innovation in architecture.



IAP in collaboration with the **PCATP** and **EAROPH International**, hosted a **Meet & Greet** and **Fellowship Dinner**. Organized by the **IAP Rawalpindi–Islamabad Chapter**, the gathering welcomed delegates from **"Gandhara's Legacy: A Pilgrimage Through Time"** alongside renowned architects from Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar, Gujrat and Mirpur. The evening was marked by inspiring addresses from President IAP Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi, Chairman PCATP Ar. Ejaz Ahmed Qadri, President EAROPH International Ar. Jahangir Khan Sherpao. Special tributes were extended to Chief Monk Mr. Jong Lim and Ar. Umar Saeed for their contributions. Blending fellowship, culture and heritage, the evening celebrated Gandhara's timeless legacy.



The **Training Workshop for Practicing Architects 2024**, jointly organized by the Multan Development Authority (MDA) and the Pakistan Council of Architects & Town Planners (PCATP), was held on December 5, 2024, at the historic Multan Tea House. The workshop brought together leading professionals, including IAP Lahore Chapter Chairman Ar. Faisal Riaz, IAP National Council Member Ar. Toobia Yousaf, and executive members from IAP-LC, IAP-CC, and IAP-RIC. Focused on strengthening professional linkages, the event served as a vital platform for dialogue, collaboration, and relationship-building between architects and key stakeholders in the development sector.

IAP led by President Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi, has launched a **Green Initiative** to counter deforestation and unplanned urban growth in Islamabad. At its first meeting, senior and young architects, pledged collective action to **protect parks, reserve land and public spaces** while **pressing for accountability and sustainable planning**. IAP also voiced support for the **Lahore Conservation Society's** stance against the Yellow Train Project, with leading architects like Ar. Kamil Khan Mumtaz and Ar. Yasmin Lari joining the call. The Green Initiative forms part of **IAP's national outreach on policy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** to **safeguard Pakistan's cities** from further **environmental decline**.

It has been noted that **Islamabad has lost 600% of its tree cover in 15 years**, blaming unchecked **deforestation** and chaotic **urban sprawl**. It is noted that the capital—once designed for **systematic masterplan reviews**—has seen **violations** in Zones 4 and 5, rampant tree felling and short-sighted projects that erode green space. In response, the IAP Green Initiative is working with the **CDA and Ministry of Climate Change** to halt deforestation, reform urban planning and lead mass tree plantation. IAP stresses on **inclusive, science-based planning** and **condemns profit-driven expansion**, linking vanishing forests to floods, hailstorms, and rising urban heat. **IAP demands: 1. Immediate deforestation ban, 2. Participatory urban planning, 3. Large-scale plantation drives.**

IAP and WWF-Pakistan have entered into a landmark **five-year partnership (2025–2030)** to advance **sustainable architecture, climate-resilient urban planning** and **eco-conscious development**. The MoU was signed at the **IAP Lahore Chapter Secretariat** in the presence of senior representatives from both organizations. The collaboration will drive initiatives in **water conservation, green building design, capacity building, research, and advocacy for nature-based solutions and renewable energy integration**. Speaking at the ceremony, President IAP highlighted the alliance as a vital step toward shaping **climate-conscious cities** through **interdisciplinary cooperation**.

IAPEX Karachi 2025 emerged as a landmark celebration of architecture, innovation and collaboration, raising the bar for creativity, outreach and participation. Held over four dynamic days, it introduced groundbreaking firsts — a bold event logo brought to life through an architectural installation. With inspiring keynotes, engaging panel discussions, interactive workshops and the thought-provoking **“KAL: Kaleidoscope of Architectural Lifescape”** conference, the event drew record-breaking participation from architects, designers, students, professionals and the public. Concluding with a vibrant Gala Night, **IAPEX Karachi 2025** firmly established itself as a defining moment in Pakistan's architectural calendar.



FROM FOUNDATION TO FUTURE: THE RENEWED VISION OF



Architecture is more than the design of structures; it is the weaving of ideas, identities, and societies. From the first ideation lines drawn in studio to the shaping of cities, communities, and environments, architecture is a journey of transformation. At the heart of this journey in Pakistan stands the Board of Architectural Education – Institute of Architects Pakistan (BAE–IAP).

Since its establishment in 2010, BAE–IAP has worked to bridge gaps in architectural education, serving as a vital platform where students, faculty and institutions converge. What began as an effort to fill institutional voids has grown into a comprehensive national framework that strengthens pedagogy, nurtures creativity and connects academia with the profession.

Today, as the field of architecture becomes increasingly global, interdisciplinary and socially engaged, BAE–IAP has renewed its mission: to prepare future architects for contemporary challenges while remaining deeply rooted in local context and cultural identity. Its refreshed identity and tagline—“From Foundation to Future”—encapsulate this vision of resilience, inclusivity, innovation and continued learning.

A Collaborative Framework

At the center of this renewed vision

is inclusivity. BAE–IAP has expanded its governance structure to actively integrate all stakeholders; heads of departments, faculty representatives, student ambassadors, chapter representatives and professional advisors.

This model of shared ownership ensures that initiatives reflect the diverse realities of Pakistan’s academic landscape while creating a more unified and collaborative national community. By bringing voices from all levels to the table, BAE–IAP strengthens its role as both a facilitator and a unifier.

Celebrating Heritage and Context

BAE–IAP along with longstanding partners, the Department of Architecture at COMSATS University, Lahore, host Iconic Architecture Practices of Lahore—a lecture series convened by Ar. Maira Khan.

The series celebrates Lahore’s layered architectural identity—from Mughal grandeur to modern innovation—while highlighting the practices that continue to shape it:

- Kamil Khan Mumtaz & BKM Associates – vernacular wisdom and sustainable ethos
- Zaheer Alam Sheikh Associates – modernist contributions to urban form
- Shelters – human-centered and community-driven design
- Kalim Siddiqui Associates – contextual

responses blending heritage and modernity

- Imtiaz Ali Associates – bold and future-facing practice
- Ar. Sajjad Kausar – sustainability and the use of local materials

More than a series of lectures, this initiative has become a living dialogue between students, academics and practitioners, reminding the next generation of the enduring value of contextual, sustainable and innovative practice. The BAE-IAP invites all proposals from architectural institutes across the country to add on to similar initiatives, that go beyond the studio.



SHIFT: From Void to Value

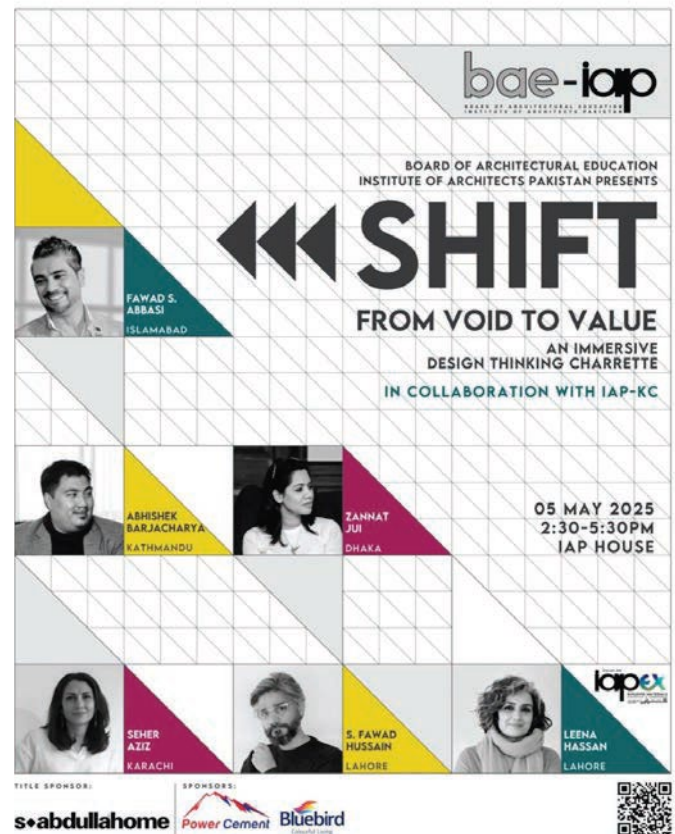
BAE–IAP, in collaboration with the IAP Karachi Chapter, launched **SHIFT: From Void to Value—an immersive design-thinking charrette** at IAP House, Karachi.

Over 50 students from leading institutions (IVS, UoK, NED–UET, DUET, NHU) reimagined neglected urban voids in Saddar Town. Guided

by distinguished mentors from across South Asia—Ar. Fawad Suhail Abbasi (Islamabad), Ar. Syed Fawad Hussain & Ar. Leena Hassan (Lahore), Ar. Seher Aziz (Karachi), Ar. Abhishek Bariacharya (Kathmandu), and Ar. Zannat Jui (Dhaka)—students engaged in reflective ideation, prototyping, and storytelling.

Their challenge was both urgent and humane: to design inclusive, sustainable public toilet solutions, **echoing IAPEX 2025’s theme, “Kaleidoscope of Architectural Life-scape.”**

The charrette generated cross-cultural dialogue and innovative proposals, reframing neglected urban spaces as opportunities for dignity, inclusivity, and community value. The students had the opportunity to receive guidance and feedback from senior architects across Pakistan and by Ar. Rafiq Azam from Bangladesh.



Recognizing Academic Excellence

BAE–IAP launched the Academic Awards for the cycle 2024-2025, a landmark program celebrating excellence in both student and faculty contributions.

By honoring academic rigor, creativity, and leadership, the Awards elevate benchmarks across Pakistan, reinforcing BAE–IAP’s dual



mission: to cultivate innovation and critical inquiry among students, and to support faculty as educators, mentors, and researchers. BAE-IAP looks forward to all the submissions, rigorous juries and the results announced later this year during an awards ceremony.

Pakistan at ARCASIA 2025

Extending its reach onto global platforms, BAE-IAP announced Pakistan's official student delegation for ARCASIA 2025 in Incheon, South Korea.

We received numerous submissions and following a rigorous two step jury process, 07 students were selected to represent IAP at the ARCASIA Student Jamboree. This delegation of 07 students, represents every province marking a milestone in Pakistan's presence on international stages, affirming the country's commitment to cross-cultural dialogue and architectural leadership across Asia.

Towards a Future-Ready Ecosystem

Looking ahead, BAE-IAP envisions a resilient and future-ready ecosystem of architectural education, one that is nationally relevant and globally connected.

Key Initiatives on the Horizon

- Structured Mentorship Network—connecting students with relevant professionals through a digital system
- Internship Database – ensuring transparent and equitable opportunities through a digital portal

- BAE-IAP Digital Repository – archiving research, projects, and dissertations
- Collaboration with Academic Journals – amplifying research output
- Expanded Academic Awards – with new categories for innovation and impact
- Research Grants & Scholarships – empowering both faculty and students
- National & International Exchange Programs – enhancing exposure and collaboration
- Interactive Summer Schools – immersive, practice-based learning experiences
- Annual Student Exhibitions – celebrating creativity and visibility of student work
- BAE-IAP Scholarship
- Launch of ASAP, an architectural student organisation.

Together, these initiatives position BAE-IAP not only as a guardian of tradition but as a driver of innovation in Pakistan's architectural education landscape.

BAE-IAP's renewed vision bridges foundation and future, ensuring that no student, educator, or institution journeys alone.

As the proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." In architecture, it takes a community to nurture the designers of tomorrow. BAE-IAP continues to be that community—the platform of possibilities, where students, educators and institutions come together to build a stronger, more inclusive and future-ready profession.

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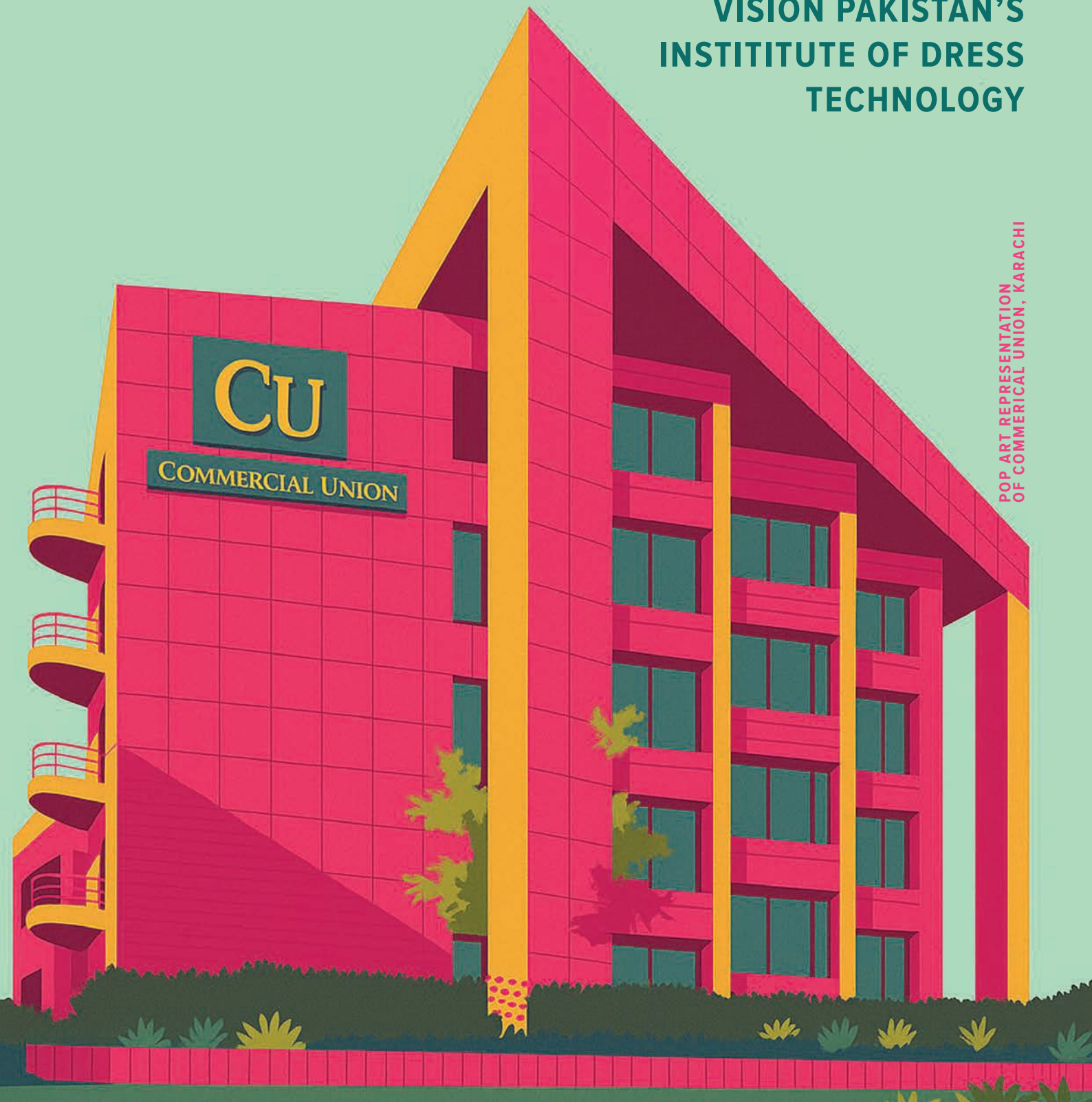
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DENSO HALL RAHGUZAR WALKING STREET

*Project shortlisted for the
Aga Khan Award for
Architecture 2025*



Dr. Yasmeen Lari
Architect for the poorest of poor

Cities worldwide are the frontline of climate change crisis. Whether located in the Global South or Global North, they share grave environmental challenges. Being responsible for 50% of global waste streams, 60-80% of greenhouse gas emissions, with highest consumption of natural resources, they suffer from urban flooding and formation of urban heat islands. These challenges are particularly acute in the Global South as a result of rapid unregulated growth and increased multiple environmental deficits.

Karachi, a sprawling megalopolis of 25 million, suffers from severe environmental pollution, dense urban development, inadequate infrastructure, persistent urban flooding and pronounced heat island affect. The city's environmental crisis is aggravated due to green grabbing of most urban spaces and loss of public commons. Karachi also possesses a large number of British Period historic structures—a few imperial structures by the colonial power and a vast number of charming Imperial-Vernacular eclectic structures built by native merchant princes that give Karachi its identity.

In the face of climate change—marked by rising temperatures and increasing urban flooding instances—and considering that the State seemed indifferent to the struggles of those residing in overcrowded, deteriorated culturally-rich neighbourhoods, I felt compelled to become a spatial activist. Knowing that spatial injustice is embedded in the built environment, causing social and ecological tyranny for under-resourced communities, however heritage-rich the environment might be, I needed to push for ecological resilience and spatial equity for public good.

Operating as some of us do, within the constraints of Less Developed Countries (LDCs), we are aware of the proverbial lack of resources, especially for initiatives seeking environmental resilience and people's well-being. To transform this vision into reality, I decided to work on low-cost community-driven methods in order to create public commons for the use by communities.

Denso Hall Rahguzar walking street is a sustainable urban intervention as a zero carbon, climate-smart, heritage-centred, and



nature-driven eco enclave. It was originally designed as the first segment of a thirteen-segment heritage and nature trail, which would connect the landmark Denso Hall in the East to Karachi Port Trust in the west. This was the pilot street to demonstrate how the other twelve segments could be taken up, thus humanizing the existing brutal environment.

After three years, the special combination of various elements resulted in reduction in ambient temperature of 12°C, and creation of zero flood and zero heat island, inclusive, bio diverse public space that has stimulated local economic activities through increased commerce and heritage tourism.

The Rahguzar was established in pursuit of my commitment to an ecologically resilient, nature driven, low-carbon future for Karachi. Although other twelve segments of the heritage trail have not been taken up by the government or the Municipality, the rahguzar has become a flagship project of the “One Eco-Street at a Time” initiative led by the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan. The third eco street in the process has been completed and another four streets are being taken up in one of the most congested sections of Karachi.

Initial Hurdles

Cities are of course complex entities with many stakeholders, who try hard to maintain the status quo. Some did advise, that it was fool hardy to try and bring about a shift in

people’s attitude. It was clear at the outset of launching the programme that introduction of pedestrianization itself would disturb the balance of dominance by powerful vested entities.

Since Denso Hall Rahguzar Walking Street, was taken up in a highly degraded area of the historic core of Karachi, there were several hurdles. In addition to environmental issues, the street suffered from congestion caused by unregulated traffic of delivery vans, cars, rickshaws, motorcycles and different kinds of pushcart vendors, where shoppers had to jostle for walking space. In the midst of this chaos, it was important to demonstrate how an island of sanity in the form of a zero carbon, climate-smart, nature-driven walking street with zero flooding and zero heat island could be achieved.

Basic Principles

I worked with a few basic principles: Zero Concrete, Zero Steel, Zero motorized vehicles. One of the most critical interventions was the removal of concrete, steel and asphalt—that are not only impervious but also high in embodied carbon and major contributors to urban heat. By eliminating these elements helps in reducing both carbon emissions as well as heat from the environment. In their place, we introduced terracotta cobbles—an age-old craft with profound environmental benefits.

Terracotta is permeable, and allows water

to seep through, and as the absorbed water evaporates, it naturally cools the surrounding air. Replacing concrete with terracotta, is a single transformative step towards water absorption and cooling the urban environment. Similarly, removing vehicular traffic is essential—not only to mitigate air pollution, at the same time transforming the street into a public space. Thus, reclaiming it as a safe, inclusive, breathable commons. What was once a no man's land, becomes a safe neighbourhood space that welcomes all visitors, including women and children.

Other Interventions

Another major intervention was the introduction of nature into the midst of the urban landscape. We planted 4 Miyawaki-style street forests with 600 trees, many growing more than 6 metres tall within 3 years. These mini-forests not only cleansed the air, and boosted biodiversity but also transformed the surroundings into a green environment. While trees offer benefits in any setting, we found that street forests create a remarkable impact—cooling the environment, and absorbing several volumes of stormwater.

For further ground absorption of flood water, we introduced sponge pavements, alongside permeable terracotta pavers. By laying terracotta pavers in carefully crafted patterns, we were able to absorb large quantities of flood water into the ground. This methodology

not only conserved water, but significantly improved soil fertility, thus turning all ground cover into instruments of urban regeneration. Recognising the magnitude of flooding—particularly from neighbouring lanes and the adjacent major artery of M.A. Jinnah Road, we also installed seven aquifer wells. These wells made sure that all incoming flood waters would be captured to replenish the parched aquifer of the area. Thus, we were able to conserve all flood water, rather than let it flow into the sea. As a result, the street became entirely flood-free without any heat islands, thus creating a healthier environment for residents and visitors alike.

While many of these strategies are familiar to urban environmental experts, our integration of street forests, terracotta pavers and sponge pavements, aquifer wells and removal of all concrete and asphalt surfaces has created a new model of eco urbanism – a model that can be replicated successfully in areas suffering from urban blight.

Partnership for Common Good

As with most pioneering efforts, venturing into uncharted waters often means walking alone—at least at the outset. In this case, once the contours of the walking street began to emerge, even its harshest critics joined hands to support it. The local administration, initially undecided, eventually came on board with full facilitation.





The rahguzar became a reality as a result of a powerful partnership for common good. Spearheaded by the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan—which also funded the entirety of civil works—the initiative drew its first official support from Commissioner Karachi, Iftikhar Shallwani, who endorsed the concept and notified the entire 13-segment trail for pedestrianization. Deputy Commissioner South, Irshad Ali Sodhar, played a pivotal role, providing hands-on input throughout the project. Although collaboration with government departments is often difficult, we have found that there are always principled individuals willing to do what is right.

From the corporate sector, Karachi Electric became a key partner. They undertook the entire relocation of their infrastructure—removing large, obstructive electric installations and relocating overhead cables into underground lime concrete ducts.

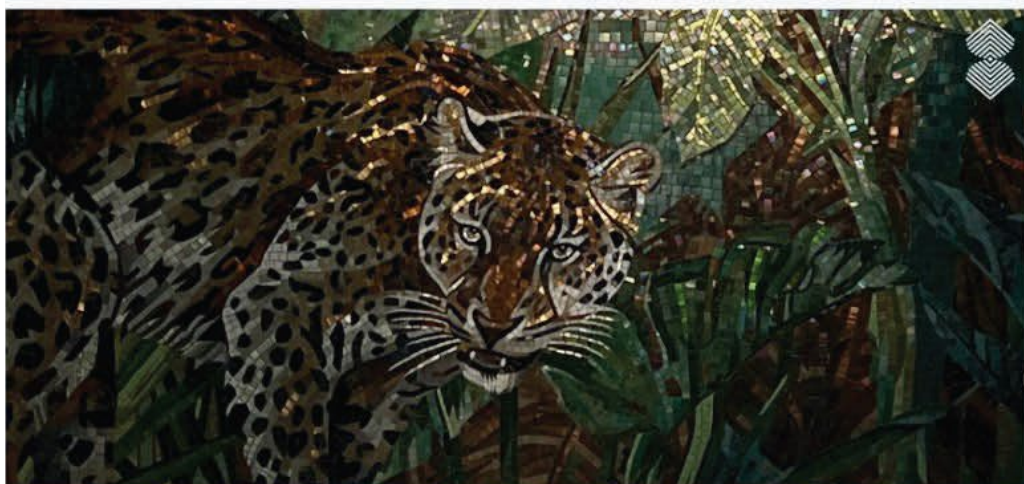
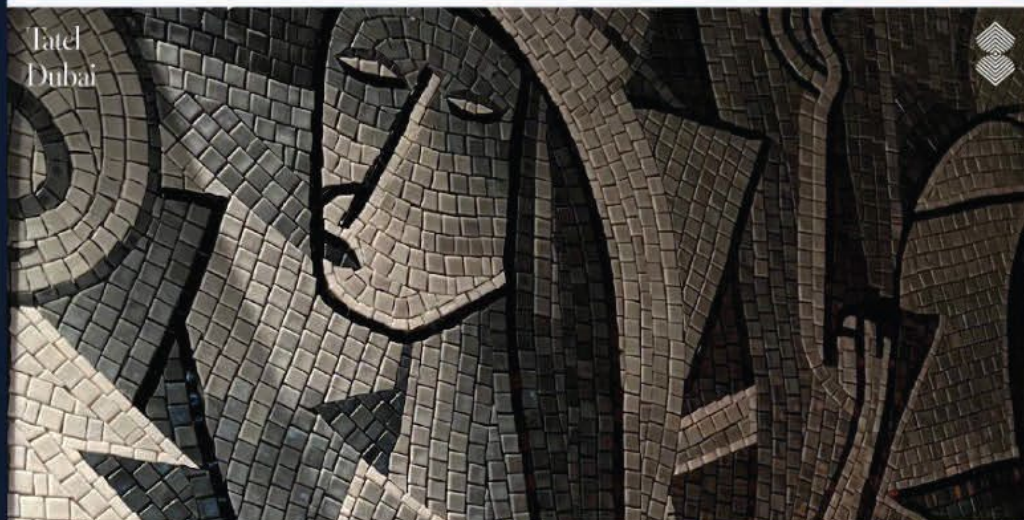
The most remarkable shift came from the shop owners along the street. Initially, their reaction ranged from skepticism to outright hostility and violent expressions. But as the project unfolded—especially with the installation of terracotta pavers and the cleaning up and restoration of heritage buildings—a wave of optimism spread.

Once the transformation was complete, commerce flourished, foot traffic increased and tourists began to visit, and even shuttered store fronts reopened. We soon saw a newfound sense of ownership emerge: shopkeepers began tending to the street forests, participating in the maintenance and planting, taking collective pride in their walking street.

Karachi is often labelled an orphan city, but eco streets such as Denso Hall Rahguzar demonstrate that a spirit of shared ownership can flourish—even in small pockets—by converting neglected streets into public commons for collective health, well-being, fostering the transformative power of the common good.

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Project shortlisted for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2025

Ar. Mohammad Saifullah Siddiqui

Vision Pakistan Welfare Trust, registered since 2007 and funded through Zakat donations, is dedicated to offering a “Second Chance” to one of the most overlooked segments of Pakistan’s youth—those aged 16 and above who have missed out on formal education or vocational training. Vision Pakistan provides them with a transformative one-year program with an opportunity to reclaim their future through education, skills training, and personal development. The integrated program equips young men not only to earn a livelihood but also to contribute positively to society with dignity, discipline, and purpose.

Vision Pakistan’s management recognized the importance of the environment in shaping young minds and made the strategic decision to build a custom-designed facility. They worked closely with the architect to create a building that was modest, cost-effective, yet beautiful and deeply inspiring. This thoughtfully designed building serves as more than a training centre—it is a transformative setting that bridges the gap between adversity and opportunity; empowering marginalized youth to reclaim their futures with dignity and confidence.

Designing Hope: Environmental and Social Sustainability in Harmony

The new building for the Vision Pakistan’s Institute of Dress Technology was completed in April 2023, with a total site area of 130.064 square meters. Located within a dense urban fabric characterized by informal architecture

and eclectic land use, the site offered a unique opportunity for context-sensitive and responsive design. Amid the apparent disorder, the area’s vibrant, energetic environment became an inspiration rather than a constraint. The design emphasizes functionality and flexibility, ensuring optimal land and space utilization. At the core of the layout is a central vertical circulation spine, which connects the institute vertically while allowing each floor to function independently, supporting a wide range of current and future programmatic needs.

The ground floor of the Institute is designed as a welcoming space, featuring a triple-height atrium that serves as the heart of the building. Flanked by the primary vertical circulation core, this 34-foot-high central void not only provides a dramatic spatial experience but also unifies the structure, seamlessly translating the design language of the façade into the interior. At the center of the atrium stands a tall anchor tree which offers a calm oasis and a green refuge, forming a symbolic and literal connection between the students and nature. This vertical opening provides visual connectivity across floors while supporting passive ventilation (stack effect) that promote natural airflow throughout the various floors. The resultant space is aesthetically uplifting and environmentally responsive.

Classrooms are strategically positioned on the eastern side of all floors to maximize access to natural light and cross ventilation throughout

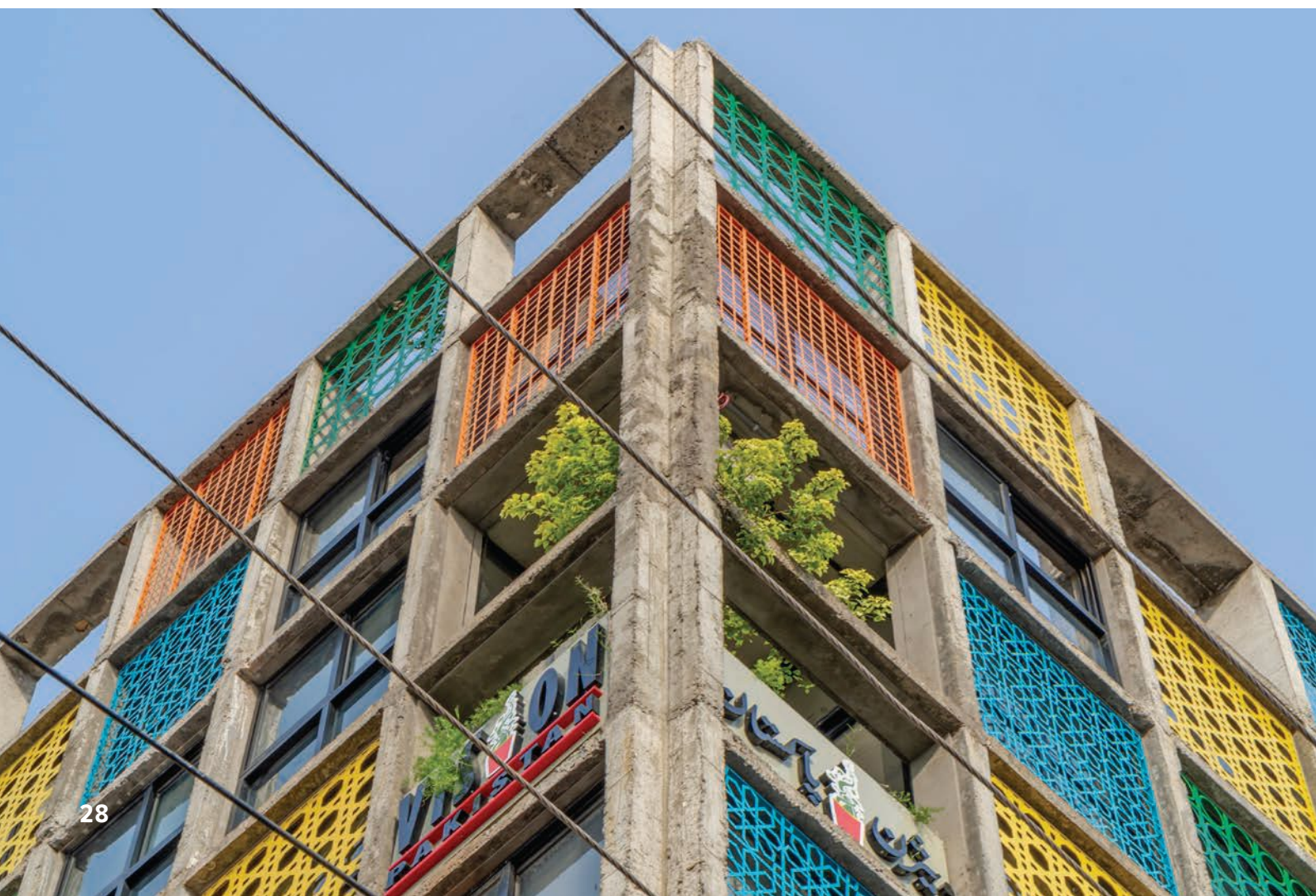
the day. Designed with higher-than-standard ceiling heights, these spaces promote stack ventilation and a sense of openness, enhancing both environmental comfort and cognitive well-being. On the second and third floors, multipurpose halls serve as flexible social and recreational zones, accommodating activities such as reading, multimedia use, fitness, and informal gatherings. These areas not only enrich the students' daily experience but also foster interpersonal skills and community building, with provisions for future spatial expansion. A standout feature of the third floor is a corner terrace housing a Sapium tree, offering a verdant pause point both on the façade and within the interior. Maintained weekly by the students themselves, this living element encourages environmental stewardship, creating a personal connection between learners and the landscape.

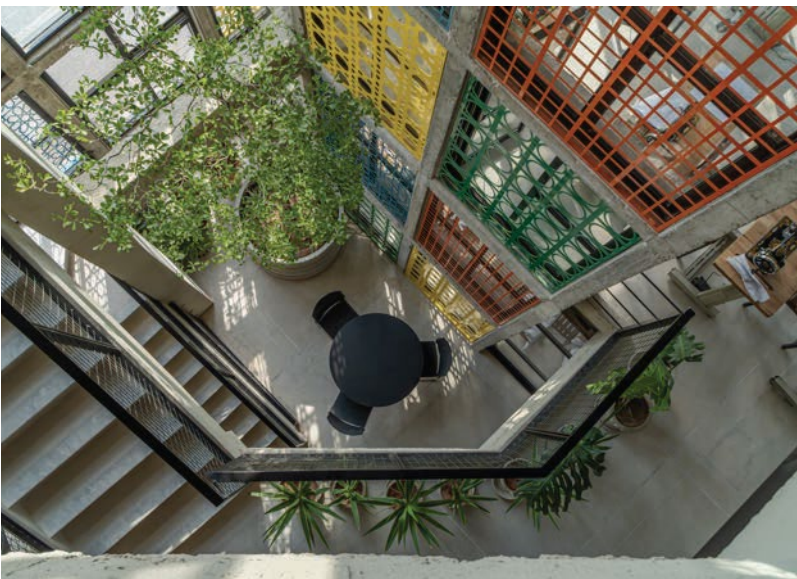
The top floor of the Vision Pakistan Institute is thoughtfully divided into three key zones, each supporting a holistic vision of community, self-reliance, and well-being. First, residential

quarters with a shared washroom offer accommodation, which are planned discreetly separate from the rest of the floor for privacy and comfort. The multipurpose dining hall is designed to accommodate the entire student body for communal meals also doubles as a venue for events and celebrations. It features openable glass and mesh shutters that extend the space out onto adjacent terraces, creating a seamless indoor-outdoor experience. Completing the floor is the rooftop terrace, which functions as an open-air prayer area, centered around a tall ornamental tree and a student-maintained kitchen garden. This garden not only softens the building's façade with visible greenery, but also teaches students the value of nurturing, sustainability, and self-sufficiency. The multiple functions of this floor reinforces human connections and brings together the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the learning environment.

Materials that Serve, Last, and Inspire

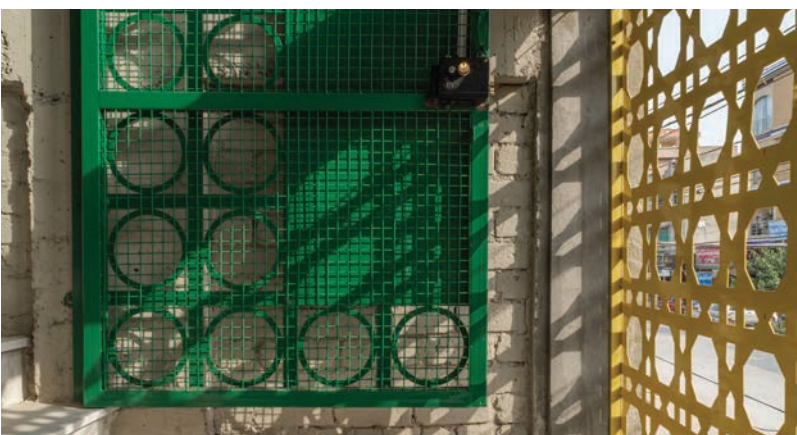
The building is constructed using low-cost, low-maintenance, and aesthetically durable





materials, selected to balance functionality, sustainability, and visual integrity. A structural system of reinforced concrete (RCC) moment frames with masonry infill walls forms the backbone, while fair-face concrete surfaces and locally sourced kiln-fired bricks add texture and regional character. Polished terrazzo flooring, exposed service lines, and colorful metallic screens (jaalis) on the windows contribute to the building's raw, expressive aesthetic, combining brutalist honesty with cultural nuance.

The jaalis, featuring symbolic geometric cutout patterns, are not merely decorative, but they animate the façade by casting ever-



changing shadows across the interior surfaces and serve as a cultural nod to traditional South Asian craft. This vibrant layering of color and pattern stands in striking contrast to the otherwise restrained concrete backdrop, creating a façade that is both playful and contemplative. Additionally, plant-supported terraces soften the geometry of the structure, enriching the visual experience with living green elements.

From the beginning, the design emphasized sustainable and practical decisions. The use of passive ventilation, natural lighting, and locally available materials was deliberate, reducing long-term costs and environmental impact. The modular layout and neutral finishes were chosen to give flexibility and adaptability, encouraging students to reconfigure or personalize their spaces while nurturing a sense of ownership, creativity, and empowerment.



Façade Design and Cultural Expression

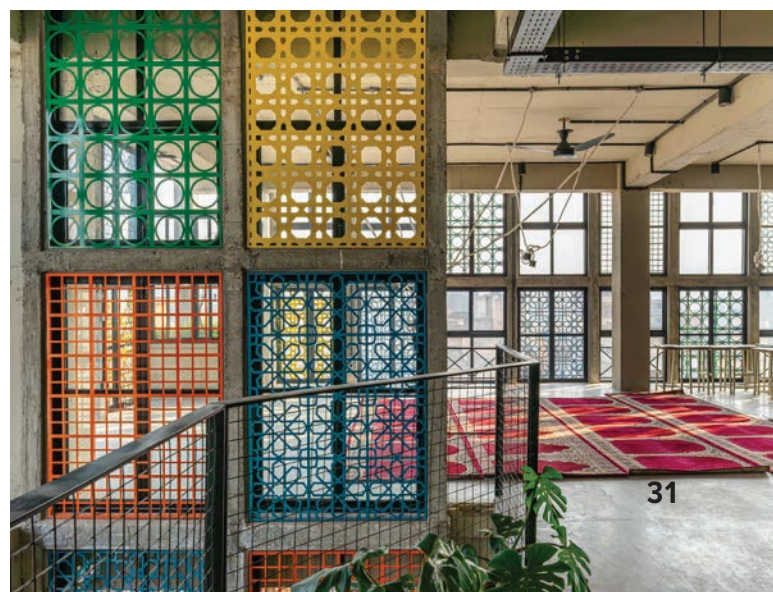
The playful exterior of the building speaks directly to its users, presenting itself as a space that celebrates cultural identity and community spirit. Within the surrounding streetscape, it radiates a sense of joy and optimism, standing out as a beacon of possibility and hope. The vibrant colors of the façade do more than simply brighten the environment; they infuse the area with festivity and positivity, establishing the building's distinctive character. Thoughtfully scaled and sensitively articulated, the building's form, color palette, and architectural language are designed to feel approachable and human, especially for the young students it serves. It becomes a place of belonging, where learners can feel pride in their environment—a space that supports not just education, but also the development of relationships, life skills, and renewed self-worth.

The building is thoughtfully designed for energy efficiency and long-term self-sustenance, with features that encourage active engagement and ownership by its users. The vibrantly colorful façade is not just an aesthetic statement, rather it has been carefully crafted to optimize natural daylight and ventilation, significantly reducing the need for artificial lighting and cooling. The punctures and perforations on the façade draw inspiration from local cultural motifs, integrating traditional design elements with passive climate strategies. By employing locally available technologies and construction methods, the design remains context-sensitive and minimally invasive, supporting both sustainability and cultural continuity.

From Vision to Relevance

Rooted in its immediate context, the design draws inspiration from the sights, sounds, and textures of the locality, blending them into a cohesive and relevant aesthetic. At the same time, it pays quiet homage to Islamabad's 1960s modernist architectural heritage, creating a meaningful dialogue between the past and future, and between tradition and transformation.





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LAHORE AND THE TRANS-CONTINENTAL CULTURAL DIFFUSION VIA THE SILK ROUTE

Dr. Samra M. Khan

The Silk Road was never a singular path but a sprawling network of interconnected trade routes that linked Asia with Europe and Africa for over a millennium. While its name evokes the famed silk caravans from China, the true legacy of the Silk Road lies in its facilitation of profound cultural, religious, and intellectual exchange. India, particularly its northern regions, played a pivotal role in this network, with present-day Pakistan serving as a vital bridge between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

These routes carried not only silk, spices, gemstones, textiles, and artworks, but also transformative ideas and belief systems. Buddhism, born in northern India, in the Gandhara and Mathura regions, traveled along the northern branch of the Silk Road, reaching Central Asia, China, Korea by the 4th century, and Japan by the 6th. Centuries later, Islam followed similar paths, bringing with it Sufi traditions that deeply shaped the cultural fabric of Pakistan, particularly in music, poetry, and spiritual practice.

The southern branch of the Silk Road

entered Pakistan through the Karakoram Pass from Kashgar, descending into Gilgit–Baltistan and flowing toward the fertile plains of Punjab. Urban centers like Lahore, situated along the historic Grand Trunk Road, emerged as bustling hubs of trade and cultural synthesis. Traders from Central Asia and China brought luxury goods including silk, spices, ceramics, and precious stones, which were redistributed to India's inland cities and coastal ports.

Yet Lahore's significance extended far beyond commerce. As a strategic node in this transcontinental network, it absorbed and reinterpreted influences from Hellenistic, Roman, Persian, Chinese, and Indian civilizations. These layers are visible in its architectural vocabulary, linguistic diversity, culinary traditions, and spiritual landscape. The city became a crucible where Buddhism, Islam, and later Mughal culture converged and evolved.

Steeped in antiquity and imperial grandeur, Lahore has long embodied the spirit of cultural diffusion. Its monuments ranging from the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens to the Wazir

Khan Mosque, bear witness to centuries of artistic and ideological exchange. Today, Lahore remains a vibrant urban center, echoing its historic role as a gateway between worlds and a living testament to the Silk Road's enduring legacy.

Lahore: A Timeless Crossroads of Empire, Trade, and Culture

Lahore, among South Asia's oldest continuously inhabited cities, has long stood at the confluence of trade, empire, and cultural transformation. With origins stretching back over two millennia, its ascent to prominence began in the late 10th century with the establishment of the Walled City, an urban nucleus that would shape its destiny for centuries to come. Strategically located along the River Ravi in central-eastern Punjab, Lahore became a vital node on the southern branch of the Silk Road, linking the Indian subcontinent with Central Asia, China, and the Middle East. Throughout the medieval period, Lahore served as the capital of successive dynasties, including the Hindu Shahis, Ghaznavids, and the Delhi Sultanate. Its golden age, however, unfolded under the Mughal Empire, particularly after Emperor Akbar declared it his capital in 1584. Under Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, Lahore flourished as a cosmopolitan center of art, architecture, and intellectual exchange. Monumental works such as the Lahore Fort, Shalimar Gardens, and Wazir Khan Mosque reflected the grandeur and syncretic aesthetics of the Mughal court. At its zenith, Lahore ranked among the largest and most vibrant cities of the early modern world.

The city's strategic location made it a bustling waypoint for caravans traveling between Kabul, Samarkand, and Delhi. Its bazaars teemed with merchants, artisans, and scholars, reinforcing Lahore's role as a cultural crossroads where goods, ideas, and spiritual traditions converged. In the early 19th century, Lahore entered a new chapter as the capital of the Sikh Empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This era further enriched its architectural and cultural landscape, blending Sikh, Mughal, and

indigenous styles. Following British annexation in 1849, Lahore was designated the capital of British Punjab, continuing its legacy as a political and administrative center.

Today, Lahore remains the cultural heart of Pakistan. As the world's largest Punjabi-speaking city, it is a vibrant hub for literature, education, and the arts. Recognized as a UNESCO City of Literature, Lahore hosts the country's leading publishing houses, universities, and cultural institutions. It is also the epicenter of Pakistan's Punjabi film industry and a living repository of Qawwali music and Sufi traditions.

Lahore's enduring vitality and diversity are a testament to its historical role as a gateway between civilizations—a city where antiquity and modernity coalesce, and where cultural exchange continues to shape its evolving identity.

Lahore: A Historic Nexus for Cultural Exchange and Contemporary Dialogue

Lahore stands as a city of profound resonance—where history is not merely preserved, but continuously reinterpreted. It exists as a nexus of civilizations, a place where trade routes, philosophical thought, and artistic traditions have converged for centuries. From the caravans of the Silk Road to the courts of Mughal emperors, from colonial administrators to contemporary creatives, Lahore has absorbed and redefined the influences that passed through its thirteen gates.

Its urban fabric is a living archive, with centuries-old gardens, Shalimar Bagh, Hazuri Bagh, Lawrence Gardens which enfold Mughal, Sikh, and colonial architecture in a dialogue across time and space. These landscapes whisper stories of patronage, poetry, and power. The city's built environment is rich with memory, ritual, and innovation.

Lahore is also a city of saints and seekers. Shrines like Data Darbar and Mian Mir serve as spiritual anchors amidst the bustling bazaars. Marketplaces such as Anarkali, Shah Alami, and Gumti are repositories of both material culture and intangible heritage, offering textiles, spices, and stories in equal measure. Here,

spiritual and commercial rhythms intertwine, creating a unique urban choreography that blends devotion with daily life.

In its modern incarnation, Lahore remains the intellectual and cultural heart of Punjab. It is home to leading universities, vibrant art galleries, and a growing discourse on sustainable urbanism and heritage-led regeneration. Its cosmopolitan spirit invites residents and visitors alike to engage with its layered identity, not merely as observers, but

as participants in an ongoing narrative of place-making and cultural exchange.

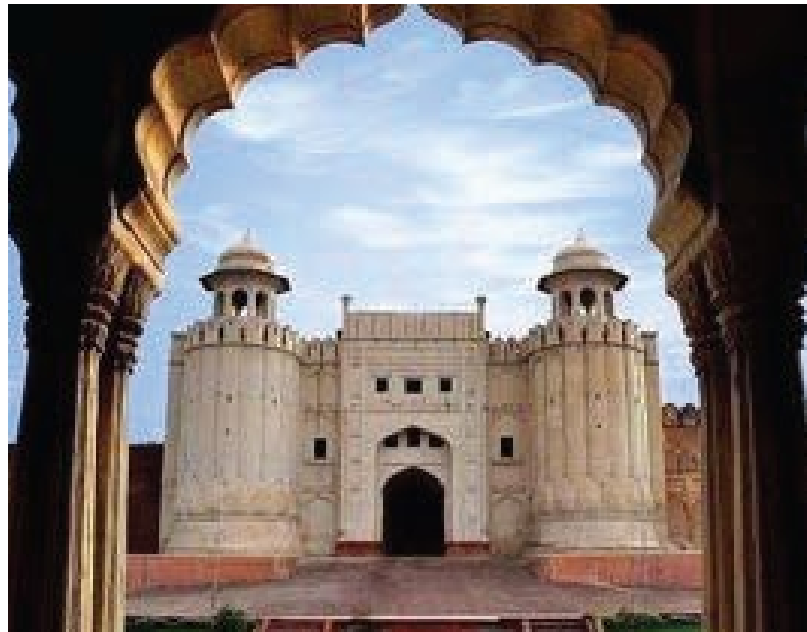
Lahore's story is not just about what has been built—it is about what continues to be imagined. The city offers fertile ground for those seeking to understand the interplay between past and future, tradition and transformation. Here, the past is not a relic, but a resource. Every street, courtyard, and skyline tells a story of resilience, reinvention, and possibility. As the famous saying goes:

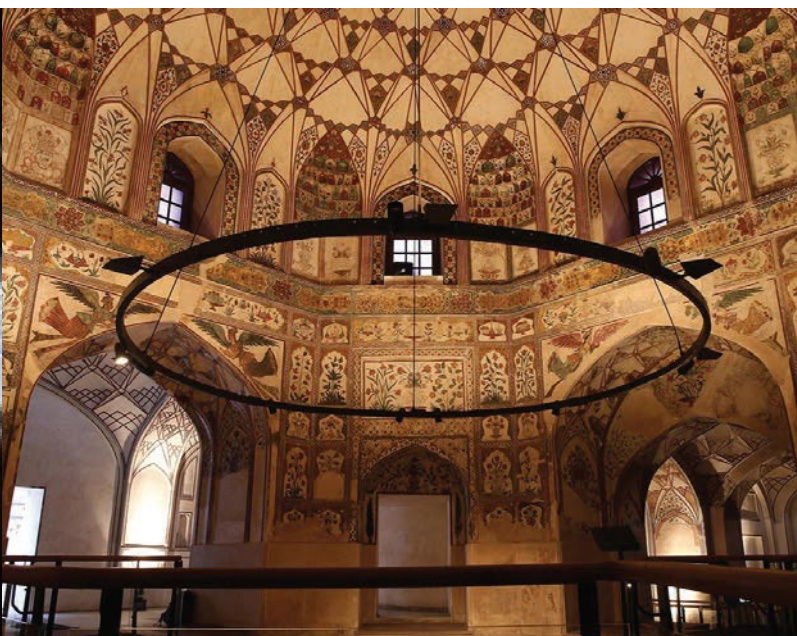
Jinney Lahore nahin vaikhya, oh jamya nahin

جنہ لاهور نہیں دیکھیا، او جمیا نہیں

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RECLAIMING HERITAGE: BHATTI GATE CONSERVATION

In Conversation with Ar. Sajida Vandal

Ar. Toobia Yousaf

The Bhatti Gate Conservation Project—spearheaded by the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) and the Punjab Tourism for Economic Growth Project (PTEGP), in partnership with THAAP Heritage—represents a critical intervention in safeguarding Lahore’s rapidly transforming inner city. While much contemporary urban development tends to erase the historical in favor of the new, this initiative has instead prioritized living heritage: not only preserving physical structures, but restoring narratives, social functions, and memory.

At the heart of this effort is Professor Sajida Haider Vandal (CEO THAAP), architect, educationist and one of Pakistan’s foremost experts in cultural heritage conservation. Working with historic environments across the region, Prof. Sajida has championed a model of conservation that is inclusive, community-led, and deeply rooted in local identity. Her leadership in the Bhatti Gate project has helped bridge the gap between architectural rehabilitation and cultural regeneration, engaging local communities as active participants and reclaiming narratives that have long been overshadowed or forgotten.

This interview delves into Prof. Sajida’s philosophies and experiences as a heritage practitioner. Through her lens, we explore the challenges of urban conservation, the ethical responsibility of restoring memory, and the fine balance between preservation and progress.

Tell us about your experience with tangible and intangible heritage and conservation

projects?

My experience with both tangible and intangible heritage has been rooted in the understanding that true conservation is not just about preserving objects or structures, but about nurturing the living essence of culture. Tangible heritage—such as historical architecture, urban fabrics, and physical landmarks—has always been a core part of my work, especially in terms of adaptive reuse and restoration that respects both material authenticity and contextual relevance.

However, I consider intangible heritage to be integral to conservation because it represents the living part of our heritage—the stories, rituals, languages, crafts, and collective memory that breathe life into our built environment. Without acknowledging and preserving these cultural expressions, conservation risks becoming a static exercise.

In my projects, I strive to interweave both aspects. Whether it’s engaging local communities in storytelling sessions, collaborating with traditional artisans, or integrating heritage education into public spaces, my goal has always been to ensure that heritage remains dynamic, participatory, and forward-looking. Conservation, for me, is about continuity—where the past enriches the present and informs a more meaningful future.

What are some of the key principles or philosophies that guide your approach to heritage conservation?

My approach to heritage conservation is fundamentally people-centric. I believe that



heritage is not just about preserving buildings or monuments—it's about preserving the lived experiences, memories, and emotional connections that people associate with a place. A space only holds value when it holds meaning for the community; as I often say, "Zinda hai jagah, kyun ke log wahan hain." A place is alive because the people are present—it has no significance in isolation.

This philosophy leads me to prioritize the human dimension of conservation. The importance of a space lies not in its physical form alone, but in how it is used, remembered, and valued by those who inhabit it. That's why I focus on engaging local communities as active stakeholders, not passive observers. Whether it's through storytelling, cultural practices, or collective rituals, these intangible layers form the soul of the space.

Conservation, for me, is not a detached, technical exercise. It is deeply embedded in the everyday life of people. Heritage must be experienced, lived, and shared—part of life itself. If the people are removed from the process, the space loses its essence. That's the core philosophy that guides every project I undertake.

How do you balance preservation with modern needs or development pressures in your projects?

Balancing preservation with modern development is always a delicate process, but for me, it begins with engaging the people and safeguarding the tangible heritage they live with and relate to. Before anything else, I try

to understand what the space means to the community—how they value it, how they use it, and what role it plays in their lives. That respect for people and culture forms the foundation of any conservation or development strategy.

On the technical side, we assess the scale and context of change carefully and treat each case accordingly. It's important not to become overly rigid or stuck in fixed ways of thinking—lakeer ke faqeer na banain. We must avoid blindly following rules without understanding their deeper meaning. At the same time, we must never distort the history of a place, its spaces, or its people just to fit modern trends or superficial aesthetics.

We all know the key principles of conservation—authenticity, integrity, sustainability—but often, we struggle with how to reach those principles in practice. That's where our role becomes critical: we must find thoughtful, creative, and locally relevant ways to connect heritage with the present, without compromising its essence.

What are the most important aspects of a heritage site or building to consider when undertaking a project?

The most important aspect, for me, is context—both physical and historical. Where the site is located, who lived there, how it evolved over time—these are critical questions. We must be very cautious not to distort the actual history of a place. Far too often, heritage projects repeat colonial narratives or overlook local truths. I strongly believe we need to decolonize historical perspectives and stop

viewing our heritage only through the lens of invaders—whether Mughals, British, or others. Understanding the local essence of a place is essential. The original interpretation matters. We must ask: whose history are we telling? Whose perspective are we preserving? That's where integrated site management becomes crucial—so that physical conservation is done alongside historical clarity and community engagement.

To illustrate this, I'll share an experience from Bhatti Gate, Lahore. During one of our early visits, a young local pointed out to me, "Madam, we've distorted the history here. The original residents were Sikhs and Hindus, but over time, even the street names have been changed." That comment made me deeply reflect on how systematic historical erasure has shaped our urban fabric. So, when we began our work there, we made it a priority to trace who actually lived in the area and what their culture and way of life was like.

We found places like Bazari Hakimian, but no one remembered why it was called that. After some research, we discovered it was named after Hakeem Vasti Ram, a renowned practitioner who had a haveli and samadhi in the area—both now nearly forgotten and in ruins. That discovery was not just about a name; it was about reviving a living memory that had been silenced over time.

Living heritage is not just about restoring buildings—it's about preserving memory. Whether the original communities were Sikh, Hindu, Christian, or Muslim, their stories matter. In places like Bhatti, we tried to reconnect with those stories and ensure that the conservation narrative was honest and inclusive. That's what makes heritage truly meaningful.

What are your more memorable projects?

Over the course of my career, I've had the privilege to work on many diverse and meaningful projects. However, a few stand out due to their depth, complexity, and emotional connection:

Labor of Love – Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore

This was not just an architectural intervention—it was a conscious act of engaging with history. We treated it as a sensitive reinterpretation of space within a historic institution. The project allowed us to reconnect with the spirit of the place and its community, particularly women who have shaped that space over decades.

Integrated Site Management of Sikh Gurdwaras

This project was memorable for the responsibility it carried. We developed a comprehensive framework for managing the historic Sikh sites in Pakistan. It wasn't just about preservation—it was about honoring memory, facilitating cross-border faith connections, and setting a respectful and sustainable management model.

Qila Kuhna Qasim Bagh

This was a particularly exciting project because it gave us the chance to delve into layers of history. The site has multiple narratives, and working there reminded us how archaeological and architectural heritage is deeply linked to regional identity and memory.

Bhatti Gate Project, Lahore

This was perhaps the most challenging of all—not just a project, but a confrontation with the realities of living heritage. *Jab aap bahar baith ke dekhte hain aik sheher ko, aik heritage city ko—lagta hai sab sambhal jaayega. Lekin jab andar jaate hain, samajh aata hai complexities kya hain.* Lahore is going through a process of gentrification, and Bhatti is right at the heart of that tension. Preserving memory, identity, and the cultural fabric of a living neighborhood while navigating bureaucratic, political, and social layers was incredibly difficult—but also deeply rewarding.

What are some of the most significant challenges you've encountered in heritage projects, and how have you overcome them?

One of the most pressing challenges is the increasing push towards gentrification of historic cities like Lahore. *Sheher revise ho raha hai*—and not always in thoughtful or inclusive ways. In many cases, there is a top-down attitude, and cardinal mistakes are made.

Decisions are imposed without understanding the community or context, and community engagement remains very poor. If this continues, these interventions will eventually become a burden rather than a benefit.

Another major issue is the lack of institutional mechanisms. We are dealing with 34 walled cities, each with its own heritage, complexity, and character—yet, there's no holistic or integrated framework in place to manage them effectively. This fragmentation leads to short-sighted planning and a disconnect from the real needs of these living spaces.

To overcome these challenges, I believe we need a shift in attitude. We must respond with humility, empathy, and sensitivity. Conservation isn't about control; it's about care. It's essential to engage with the local communities, listen to them, and reveal the true narrative of each site—not the version that suits convenience, but the one that carries the memory and spirit of ordinary people.

How do you incorporate sustainability into your projects?

The key point I want to make is that sustainability requires you to look beyond the obvious. If you want a truly people-centric approach, it's not something you do casually or superficially—you have to dive deep and search for clues in the history, culture, and everyday life of the place.

Sustainability is a gradual, ongoing process—an adventure into understanding complex layers. It's not just about percentages or technical measures; it's about embracing the complexities and connections that make a place truly alive and enduring. This slow, steady learning leads to meaningful and knowledgeable work.

What are some of the key skills or qualities that you believe are essential for a successful heritage architect?

First and foremost, you must be sensitive—to people, to place, and to history. If you're running after money, then this is not the profession for you. This work requires depth, patience, and purpose. It's not a fly-by-night

operation; it demands a long-term vision.

You need a strong understanding of materials, their behavior, and how they age. But just as important is being open to the rooted, layered histories of the site. A good heritage architect must go beyond the surface, with a people-centric approach, and the ability to truly understand and restore the original perspective—not just physically, but emotionally and culturally.

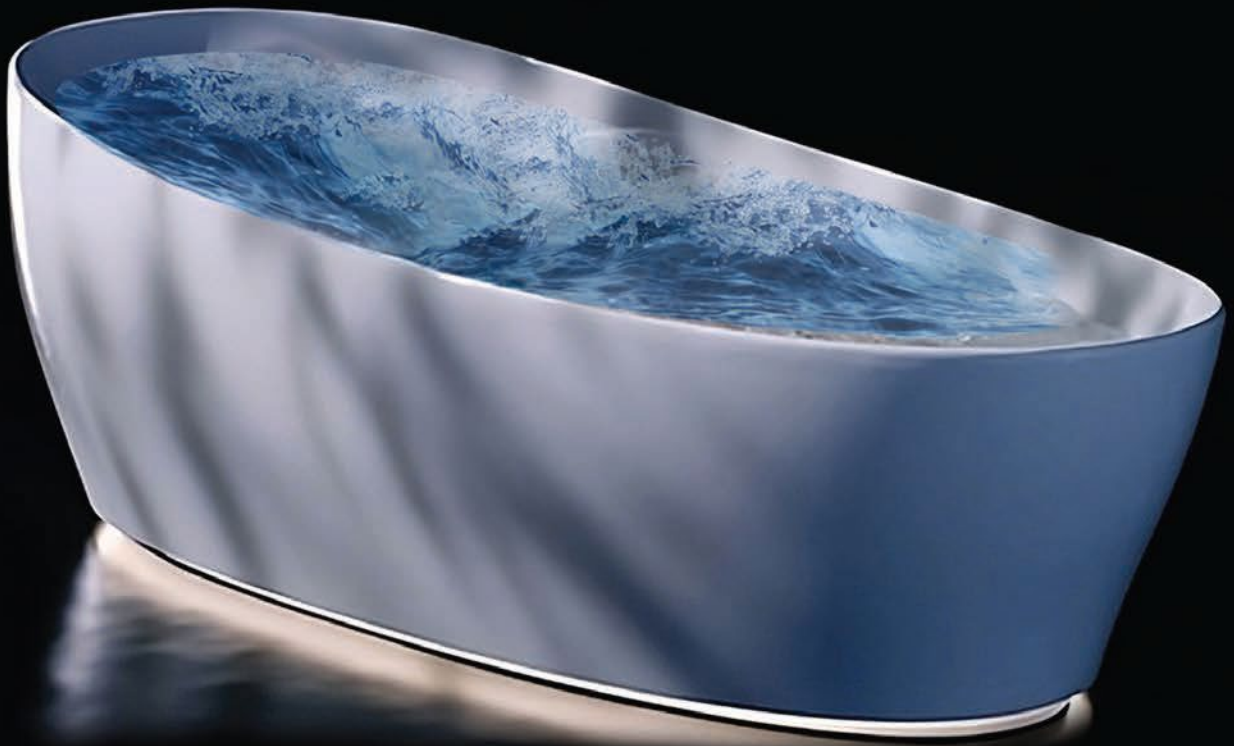
Heritage is not just about structures—it's about people, memory, identity, and the stories that spaces continue to hold. Ultimately, our role is to maintain and protect the legacy of those often forgotten—the everyday lives that give meaning to our cities. Without that, we risk preserving only shells, not stories.



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In the realm of architectural conservation, especially in post-colonial South Asia, restoration has too often been reduced to an act of cosmetic renewal rather than a nuanced exercise in cultural stewardship. Pakistan, home to a significant number of Sikh religious sites, presents a particularly stark case of conservation imbalance. With many gurdwaras falling under the purview of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), decisions about their maintenance or restoration have frequently been dictated by political expedience, religious disengagement, or funding availability rather

than contextual sensitivity.

This paper seeks to challenge the binary notion of whether heritage sites should be restored or not, and instead introduces the concept of purposeful restoration, a framework grounded in narrative continuity, environmental responsiveness, and historical authenticity. By narrowing the scope to three Sikh gurdwaras, Rohri Sahib (Jahman), Choha Sahib, and Kartarpur Sahib, we maintain religious consistency and allow for a deeper exploration of systemic patterns in conservation.

REVIVING HERITAGE WITH PURPOSE: TO RESTORE OR NOT TO RESTORE?

Rethinking Conservation & Restoration Through a Broader Lens

Ar. Rubab Fatima Chishti & Ar. Mir Shehreyar Nadeem

1. Theoretical Framework

Purposeful restoration emerges as a middle path between passive preservation and overly invasive restoration. It acknowledges that heritage sites are not static monuments but living entities embedded with cultural, spiritual, and historical significance. In the South Asian context, particularly in postcolonial Pakistan, religious heritage structures often exist at the intersection of neglect, political appropriation, and contested identity. A rigid, one-size-fits-all conservation approach fails to address this complexity. Purposeful restoration, therefore, emphasizes site-specific interventions guided by ethical restraint, narrative continuity, and material authenticity.

The theoretical foundation of this framework draws heavily from the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), which stresses that heritage conservation must be culturally grounded and context sensitive. Rather than applying universal standards, Nara allows for

a pluralistic understanding of authenticity, acknowledging that oral tradition, spiritual value, and communal memory are as important as architectural material.

This approach also engages with the Ship of Theseus paradox, a philosophical metaphor asking whether an object remains the same if all its components are gradually replaced. For heritage conservation, this raises critical concerns: if a building is restored with entirely new materials, stripped of ritual use and community relevance, does it remain the same site?

The writings of John Ruskin provide early critique of restoration that erases age-value and craftsmanship. In 'The Seven Lamps of Architecture', Ruskin argues that buildings should be allowed to age naturally, as restoration often leads to "a lie from beginning to end." His rejection of interventionism contrasts sharply with Viollet-le-Duc, who supported imaginative reconstruction. While Viollet-le-Duc's legacy

continues to influence state-led conservation in South Asia, it often results in decontextualized, aestheticized monuments, visible in the case of Kartarpur Sahib, where storms recently exposed fiberglass domes painted to mimic lime plaster, revealing superficial engagement with authenticity.

The Venice Charter (1964) also provides critical support for this approach, warning against restoration that moves into conjecture. It emphasizes the preservation of original materials and insists that intervention must stop where historical certainty ends. This aligns with the argument that purposeful restoration must be guided by documented evidence and ethical reflection, not reconstruction for tourist or political gain.

The relevance of Alois Riegl’s “age-value” is also significant. His essay ‘The Modern Cult of Monuments’, positions natural decay as part of a site’s significance. In Pakistan, where many heritage sites like Rohri Sahib are decaying due to neglect, purposeful restoration challenges us to ask: is it better to leave a site untouched, allowing decay to speak, or to risk unethical restoration by underqualified agencies?

This ethical debate becomes even more relevant when viewed against the actions of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), which controls many non-Muslim religious sites in Pakistan. Restoration efforts by the ETPB, such as at Jain Mandir in Lahore, have been criticized for their lack of documentation, inappropriate material use, and absence of community input. Conversely, projects like Gurdwara Choha Sahib, which included Sikh community engagement, use of traditional materials, and oral history documentation, demonstrate how purposeful restoration can be a tool of cultural continuity rather than aesthetic erasure.

Site	Restoration Approach	Institutional Oversight	Outcome
Rohri Sahib (Jahman)	Neglected; partial collapse	ETPB (no active oversight)	Loss of material and historical continuity
Choha Sahib	Corrective, narrative-led	ETPB (consultative)	Improved authenticity and stakeholder engagement
Kartarpur Sahib	Superficial, rapid reconstruction	ETPB (high-level state oversight)	Visual renewal with material compromise

2. Comparative Case Studies of Three Sikh Gurdwaras

2.1 Gurdwara Rohri Sahib (Jahman)

Rohri Sahib, associated with Guru Nanak’s travel and teachings, suffered a partial structural collapse during the 2023 monsoon. The dome and sections of the prayer hall gave way after years of neglect, drawing brief media attention but no substantive conservation response. With no religious stakeholders actively advocating for the site and limited diaspora involvement, the site languishes under the minimal custodianship of the ETPB. Its decline represents a cautionary tale: when restoration is absent due to institutional apathy, even structures of immense historical importance can vanish.

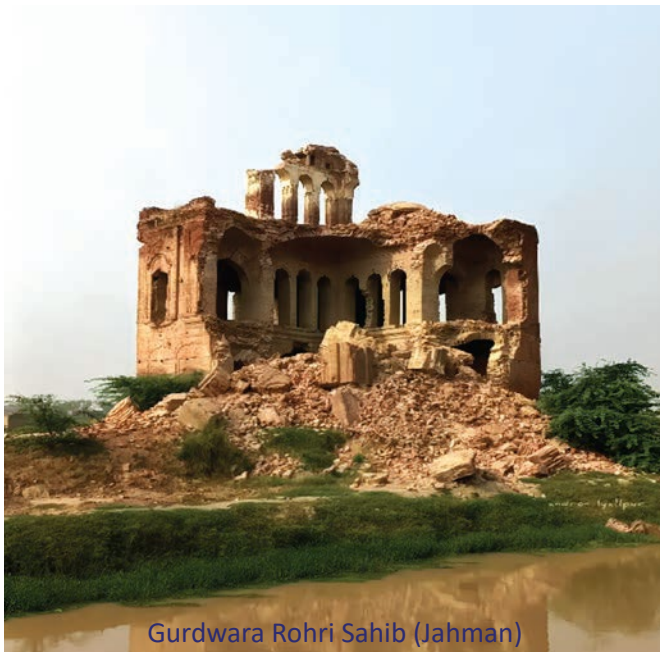
2.2 Gurdwara Choha Sahib

In contrast, Choha Sahib provides a rare example of restoration guided by contextual understanding and corrective intervention. Earlier renovation efforts had introduced cement plaster and removed traditional lime work, undermining the building’s breathability and visual authenticity. Recent efforts, however, involved reintroducing lime-based materials, engaging artisans skilled in traditional techniques, and documenting oral histories from the Sikh diaspora and local communities. This allowed restoration to become a continuation of narrative rather than its erasure.

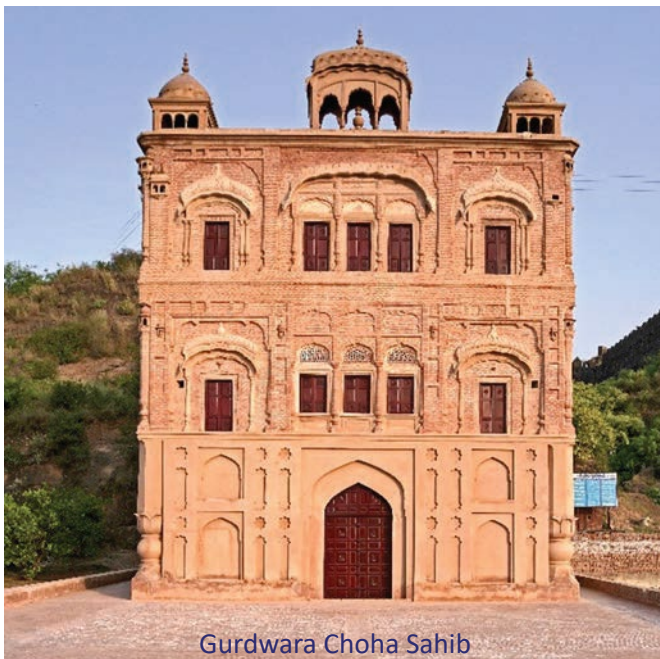
2.3 Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib

While Kartarpur Sahib has garnered global praise for enabling cross-border pilgrimage under the Kartarpur Corridor initiative, its restoration has been marred by speed and superficiality. In early 2024, a storm peeled away sections of the painted fiberglass domes, revealing the modern materials beneath and igniting criticism from conservationists. The decision to use fiberglass, likely due to its cost-effectiveness and light weight, undermines the site’s authenticity and signals a preference for spectacle over substance.





Gurdwara Rohri Sahib (Jahman)



Gurdwara Choha Sahib



Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib

3. Stakeholders, Documentation, and Material Integrity

Heritage conservation in Pakistan is deeply influenced by religious politics, institutional priorities, documentation practices, and material choices. Sikh gurdwaras, representing non-Muslim heritage, often face neglect or superficial restoration due to systemic bias, the absence of local custodians, and weak regulatory frameworks. A comparison of Gurdwara Rohri Sahib, Gurdwara Choha Sahib, and Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib highlights how these factors lead to vastly different outcomes. The lack of a resident Sikh community, historically responsible for ritual care and oral tradition, creates a custodial vacuum that institutions like the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) struggle to fill, hindered by limited expertise and cultural attunement. Unlike Islamic shrines, which benefit from active patronage, Sikh sites depend heavily on diaspora involvement or geopolitical significance. For instance, Kartarpur Sahib's high-profile restoration, driven by its diplomatic importance, involved controversial materials and limited transparency. Meanwhile, Rohri Sahib partially collapsed during the 2023 monsoon season without any prior stabilization or documentation, drawing little media attention due to its marginal political and religious status.

In this context, documentation becomes a critical ethical and technical tool. Advanced methods like photogrammetry, 3D scanning, and oral histories ensure restorations are grounded in evidence, prevent speculative work, and preserve cultural memory. Choha Sahib's restoration successfully used these techniques and diaspora consultation to replace harmful materials and restore architectural authenticity. Conversely, Rohri Sahib's collapse destroyed irreplaceable heritage, and Kartarpur's post-restoration fiberglass domes revealed a troubling disregard for material integrity, sparking widespread criticism.

Traditional materials such as lime plaster and timber, historically used in Sikh gurdwaras, are climatically appropriate and environmentally

sustainable, regulating humidity and temperature. Modern materials like cement and fiberglass, however, accelerate decay and compromise authenticity. Choha Sahib's use of lime mortars illustrates how ecological and cultural goals can align. Overall, these cases show that Pakistan's heritage conservation challenges stem less from technical issues than from institutional neglect, cultural insensitivity, and political bias, necessitating a shift toward respectful, well-documented, and material-sensitive restoration practices.

4. Policy Recommendations

As this research demonstrates, Pakistan's religious heritage, particularly Sikh Gurdwaras, faces complex challenges stemming from misaligned priorities, institutional neglect, political sensitivities, and inconsistent conservation practices. The following policy recommendations are proposed to shift from reactive, aesthetic-driven restoration to a purpose-driven, ethically grounded conservation framework.

4.1 Establish an Independent Heritage Conservation Authority

The need for an autonomous conservation authority in Pakistan stems from the repeated mismanagement of sensitive heritage sites by politically entangled institutions such as the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). An independent body comprising conservation architects, historians, artisans, legal experts, and representatives from religious communities would ensure decisions are made based on cultural, technical, and ethical merit rather than bureaucratic expediency. Such a body would develop and enforce conservation standards, provide oversight on restoration projects, and facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue. Its independence would allow for the consistent application of best practices and the insulation of heritage from political or sectarian pressures. This would be a vital structural reform to avoid future cases like the superficial and inauthentic interventions seen at Kartarpur.

4.2 Institutionalize Documentation as a Prerequisite

Conservation without documentation is conservation without accountability. Before any intervention begins, detailed documentation, comprising measured drawings, photographs, 3D scans, and oral histories, should be a mandatory requirement. This approach not only preserves the memory of a structure in its current state but also informs all future decisions by providing a baseline of evidence. Documentation respects the building as a historical archive and ensures that restoration is not based on assumptions or aesthetic preferences. Moreover, it makes the process transparent and reproducible, reducing the risk of irreversible mistakes, as was the case with the undocumented and hurried restoration of Jain Mandir in Lahore. Institutionalizing this practice would promote thoughtful, research-backed conservation.

4.3 Create a Conservation Ethics Charter for Pakistan

While international conservation principles such as those in the Venice Charter and the Nara Document offer broad guidance, Pakistan requires a framework tailored to its unique context, marked by postcolonial legacies, multi-religious histories, and political sensitivities. A national Conservation Ethics Charter would serve as a foundational reference for practitioners, government bodies, and community stakeholders. It would articulate core values such as authenticity, narrative continuity, minimal intervention, and respect for religious diversity. This Charter would also help mediate contested sites by offering ethical clarity and a shared vocabulary for conservation discourse. It would ultimately professionalize the field and guide restoration work away from ad hoc or politically driven interventions.

4.4 Promote Religious and Diaspora Engagement

In Pakistan, where the religious communities connected to many heritage sites, such as Sikhs and Jains, are no longer local majorities, the involvement of diaspora communities becomes

essential. Their emotional, spiritual, and financial stakes in heritage sites like Gurdwara Rohri Sahib or Choha Sahib are deeply significant. Engaging these communities can lead to better-informed decisions, culturally sensitive restorations, and sustainable funding models. Moreover, their input helps re-establish the ritual and narrative life of a site, making conservation more meaningful than just architectural preservation. Institutional mechanisms for regular consultation, heritage funding partnerships, and knowledge-sharing should be developed to embed diaspora perspectives in national heritage strategies.

4.5 Ban Incompatible Materials in Listed Heritage Sites

The use of inappropriate modern materials, such as fiberglass domes at Kartarpur or cement coatings over historic lime plasters, compromises both the integrity and longevity of heritage structures. These materials are not only incompatible in terms of thermal expansion, moisture retention, and visual texture, but they also erase traditional craftsmanship and mislead future researchers about original construction methods. A formal ban on such materials in listed heritage sites is therefore necessary. This policy should be accompanied by incentives for using historically appropriate materials and the revival of traditional skills. Preservation must be true to both form and substance, ensuring that the architectural language of the past is not overwritten by convenience or modernity.

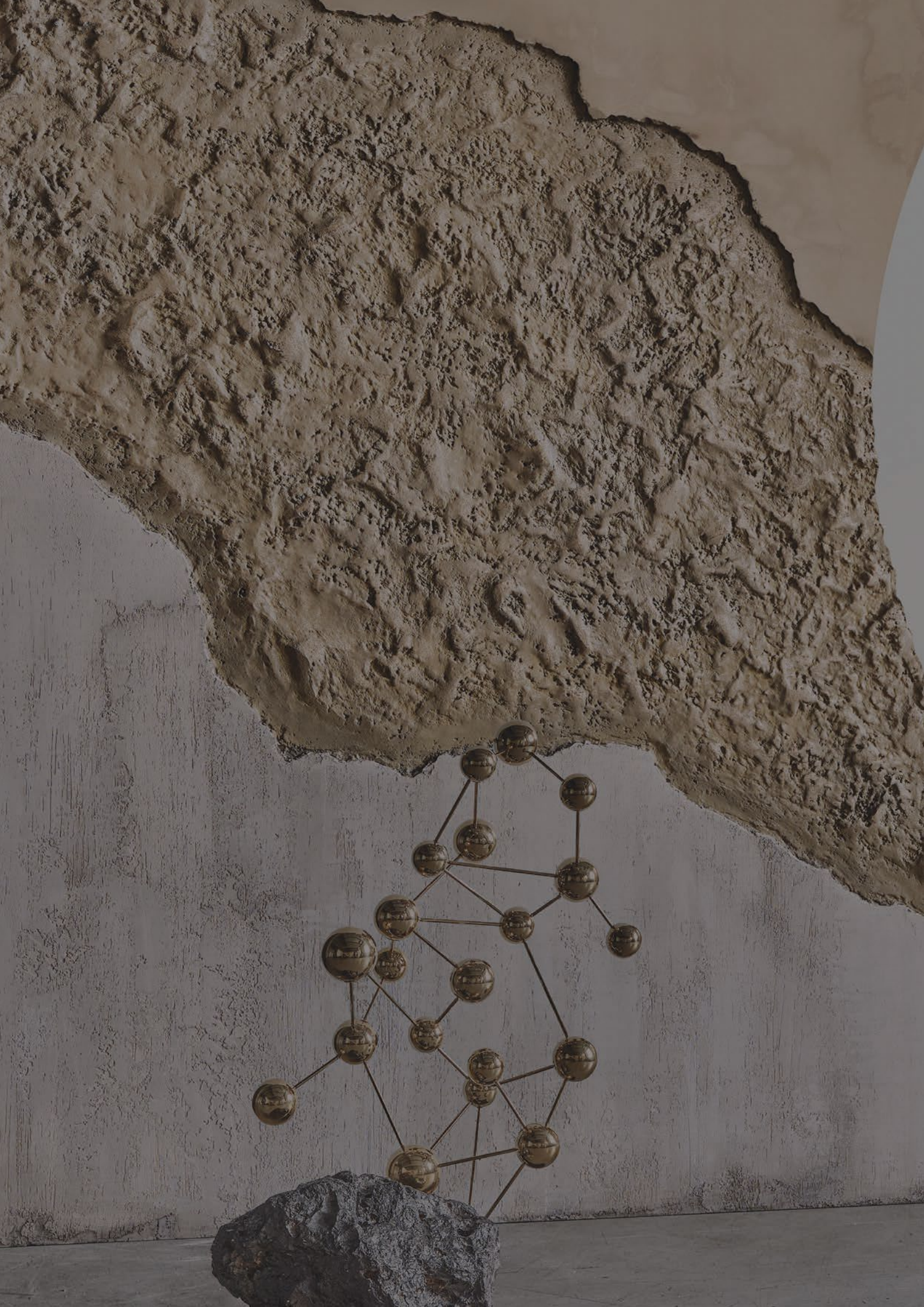
6. Conclusion

Choha Sahib, and Kartarpur Sahib serve as powerful case studies that illuminate the stakes involved. Rohri Sahib's partial collapse during the 2023 monsoon season lays bare the devastating consequences of institutional neglect and insufficient custodial preparedness, emblematic of a broader systemic failure to protect non-Muslim heritage in Pakistan. In contrast, Choha Sahib's careful and well-documented restoration illustrates how a methodical, culturally informed, and ethically grounded approach can not only reverse prior

damage but also preserve the authenticity and spiritual resonance of a sacred site. Meanwhile, Kartarpur Sahib, despite its symbolic reopening and international acclaim, reflects the pitfalls of aestheticized yet ethically shallow restoration, where expedient choices, such as the use of incompatible materials like fiberglass tend to produce a fragile illusion of grandeur that obscures both material integrity and historical truth. These examples underscore that heritage restoration, when done without ethical rigor, risks becoming performative rather than preservative, compromising the very values it seeks to uphold.

These case studies collectively affirm that restoration must neither be a reflexive response to decay nor a passive acquiescence to deterioration. Instead, it should be approached as a deliberate and principled act, grounded in a deep respect for a site's historical trajectory, material authenticity, and ongoing cultural relevance. In the context of Pakistan's complex heritage landscape, where diverse religious and cultural narratives intersect and often compete, there is a pressing need to cultivate a conservation ethic that transcends superficial aesthetics and geopolitical symbolism. Such an ethic must center on the preservation of collective memory, uphold the integrity of traditional materials and techniques, and honor the lived meanings these sacred spaces hold for both past and present communities.

Only through such a principled and contextually grounded approach can Pakistan's heritage sites move beyond their current roles as tourist destinations or instruments of diplomatic performance to become resilient, living vessels of cultural continuity. Embracing this responsibility signals a commitment not only to the preservation of architectural legacy, but also to the cultivation of intercommunal understanding and historical justice. In doing so, the nation takes a critical step toward shaping a more inclusive, self-aware, and reflective national identity which honors the pluralism of its past while envisioning a more equitable future.



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REIMAGINING ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

Ar. Umar Saeed

Chair – CAA Education Steering Committee, Commonwealth Association of Architects

Architecture, in every corner of the world, is being redefined by forces that demand deeper thinking and greater flexibility. Climate instability, rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, migration crises, digital disruption, and increasingly complex social needs have reshaped not only the built environment but also the expectations placed upon us as professionals. The role of the architect is no longer confined to aesthetics and spatial problem-solving; it is increasingly intertwined with questions of equity, ethics, sustainability, and systemic impact.

In this moment of transformation, the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) has emerged as a vital global platform for confronting these shared challenges collectively. Founded in 1965, the CAA was born out of a recognition that architecture as a discipline thrives when there is cooperation, dialogue, and solidarity across nations. Today, it represents over 35 member organizations,

spanning regions as diverse as the Caribbean, South Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and beyond.

What unites us across these regions is a shared belief in the power of architecture to shape not just buildings, but lives. And that belief is only as strong as the institutions, frameworks, and values we cultivate through education.

The CAA's Broader Mandate

Over the decades, the CAA has expanded its focus from professional liaison to policy engagement, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building. It works closely with governments, academic institutions, and professional councils to support the evolution of architectural practice across the Commonwealth. Among its core objectives are:

- Promoting professional mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications.
- Supporting climate-responsive and context-sensitive design practices.
- Encouraging sustainable urban development aligned with the UN SDGs.

- Developing frameworks for institutional accreditation and capacity enhancement.
- Hosting biennial congresses and workshops that facilitate exchange of regional innovations and concerns.

Crucially, the CAA serves as an advocacy voice for architects in regions that are often underrepresented on global platforms. It amplifies the needs of professionals working in contexts where resources are limited, urban pressures are extreme, or environmental threats are urgent.

But perhaps the most critical and enduring dimension of the CAA's work is its engagement with architectural education, a domain that not only defines the future of our profession, but shapes how architecture serves society at large.

Education as Foundation and Frontier

As Chair of the CAA Education Steering Committee, I have had the privilege of working at the intersection of tradition and transformation. Education is, to me, both the foundation on which our profession rests and the frontier where its next evolutions will unfold.

We need to address a series of pressing questions: Are we equipping future architects with the critical thinking, ethical grounding, and interdisciplinary tools they need to navigate the complexities of our time? Are our institutions agile enough to respond to societal needs and technological disruptions? Are we,

as educators and practitioners, listening?

These questions are not theoretical; they are the daily reality of hundreds of institutions across the Commonwealth. Some operate in well-resourced urban contexts; others in remote or rapidly urbanizing environments. But all share the same challenge: how to prepare architects not just for today's world, but for a future we can barely predict.

A Collaborative Vision, Underway

In response, we are planning to initiate a comprehensive educational survey of CAA-affiliated schools. This effort is currently underway and is focused on mapping trends across:

- Curriculum content and pedagogy
- Faculty qualifications and support systems
- Student assessment and studio culture
- Industry linkages and professional exposure
- Equity, inclusion, and access to resources
- Research and innovation integration
- Graduate readiness for real-world challenges

Our goal is not to compare or rank, but to understand, to create a baseline from which institutional self-awareness, peer learning, and policy support can emerge. The CAA is working to foster environments where schools can learn from one another, align around core principles, and celebrate educational innovations that might otherwise remain isolated.

Beyond Metrics: The Human Dimension

Yet data alone will not solve our problems. As someone deeply involved in both academia



and professional practice, I believe the human dimension of architectural education deserves equal attention. We must ask: Are we nurturing curiosity, empathy, and resilience in our students? Are we helping them engage with communities, rather than design from a distance? Are we fostering educators who inspire rather than instruct?

Too often, architectural education is taught in isolation, in conceptual or institutional bubbles, while the profession itself demands deep, interdisciplinary engagement. Architecture is not just about buildings; it is about people, systems, economies, cultures, technologies, and ecologies. Yet many academic environments treat design as a closed discipline, disconnected from the real-world forces that shape our cities and communities.

Studio culture, once a space of exploration, can become isolating or even exploitative without the right institutional support. In some settings, it risks becoming performative, emphasizing aesthetics or individual competition over relevance, collaboration, or social purpose. These are issues we must confront with honesty and courage.

We need to broaden architectural education beyond its traditional confines, to introduce students to economics, anthropology, environmental science, entrepreneurship, materials sociology, governance, and digital innovation, not as electives, but as core lenses through which architects understand their role. We must also encourage immersion, engagement, and responsibility: connecting students with real communities, real constraints, and real consequences.

The future we envision must place students, their wellbeing, their voices, their creativity, at the center of reform. Because ultimately, the goal of education is not just to produce competent graduates, but to cultivate thoughtful citizens and ethical professionals who can navigate complexity, serve society, and lead with imagination.

My aim is to position the Education Steering Committee as a catalyst for collective reform,

enabling institutions to collaborate, co-create frameworks, and exchange strategies that are adaptable, relevant, and rooted in local realities.

Looking Ahead

The work ahead will not be easy. It will demand patience, persistence, and above all strong partnerships. Yet, I remain deeply optimistic. Across our member countries, I have witnessed a genuine and growing commitment to reimagine and strengthen the architectural profession at its foundation. And without question, education is where that transformation begins. It is in the classroom, the studio, and the community that we must plant the seeds of change, cultivating future practitioners who are not only skilled designers but also thoughtful stewards of equity, sustainability, and ethical responsibility.

As Chair of the Education Steering Committee, my aim is to continue building bridges, between academia and practice, between regions and resources, between legacy and innovation. Through the CAA and its remarkable network of professionals, educators, and institutions, I believe we have the foundation, the mandate, and the momentum to reimagine architectural education, not in fragments, but as a shared, evolving narrative. And in doing so, we may well redefine what it means to be an architect in the 21st century—not merely as a designer of buildings, but as a steward of culture, a catalyst for community resilience, and a guardian of the planet's future.





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ORAD's ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE

Ar. Shajia Naveed

Office for Radical Architecture Disciplines (ORAD) is a multidisciplinary design practice based in Islamabad, Pakistan. Founded by three young architects; Affan Ahmed, Dawar Zia, and Muhammad Ali, who are all graduates of the Department of Architecture & Design at COMSATS University, Islamabad, ORAD approaches architecture as part of a broader cultural, historical, and urban narrative. With prior experience at some of Islamabad's leading architectural firms and academic involvement at institutions such as COMSATS and the School of Art, Design & Architecture (SADA), the partners bring a blend of professional rigor and pedagogical insight to their practice.

ORAD's work is rooted in research and guided by a commitment to designing spaces that are not only functional and contextually responsive, but also rich in aesthetic and cultural meaning. The studio's portfolio includes several award-winning and widely recognized projects, such as Khoka Khola, The Lamp House, Chikpat, Banana Leaf, and The Pet Project, each reflecting the team's innovative spirit and critical design sensibility. At its core, ORAD strives to challenge conventional boundaries, envisioning architecture as a

radical discipline capable of engaging with the complexities of contemporary urban life.

Can you tell us about your journey and the struggles that you faced to reach where you are now?

The journey has been layered with contemplation, critique, and an evolving engagement with the discipline. Architecture did not present itself as a profession to me, but rather as a lens through which to examine life, space, and society. The founding of ORAD with Dawar and Ali was not just an act of entrepreneurship. It was also a philosophical stance. We began without institutional privilege or economic advantage. What we had instead was a shared faith that architecture in Pakistan could be more introspective, more grounded in reality, and less obsessed with form for its own sake. The greatest struggle was not only external. It was also internal, as we tried to remain faithful to this belief in the face of market pressures and scepticism.

What qualities and skills should a good architect possess?

At the core, an architect must possess a profound capacity for empathy. It is not enough to imagine buildings. One must also imagine lives within them. The architect



must be simultaneously a listener, a critic, and a custodian of context. A sense of scale, proportion, and material truth is important. However, these qualities mean little without intellectual humility. Architecture is not about control. It is about slow, collective negotiation between space, history, and people.

Can you describe your most successful architectural project?

Success in architecture is not absolute. Nor is it tied to scale or spectacle. The Lamp House is one such project that reflects a deeply considered response to the needs of a small family and the limits of urban living. It was an invitation to rethink domesticity without excess. The Qubed retreat in the mountains further distills our ethos. It is a meditation on modularity, isolation, and light. Our TEDx stage design brought another kind of challenge. It required us to design a temporary experience with clarity and symbolism. Each of these projects, in its own context, reveals something about our inquiry into restraint, memory, and narrative.

How do you ensure the quality of your work under tight budgets or tight deadlines?

Constraints are not obstructions. We see them as invitations. A limited budget or a compressed timeline compels us to locate the essence of the idea. We do not think of quality as mere polish. Instead, we see it as clarity of thought and intention. A well-placed window or the right texture underfoot can elevate a project more than any ornamental flourish. Architecture, in these moments, returns to its most elemental values.

How important is technology to your work?

Technology is a tool, nothing more and nothing less. It allows us to simulate, communicate, and construct with precision. However, design is not born of tools. The sketch still precedes the render. The silence of a site still speaks more loudly than any software. Technology must serve the design process. It should never dictate it.

What role does culture play in your architectural designs?

Culture forms the unseen scaffolding of architecture. It exists not only in overt symbols or motifs, but in habits, rituals, and ways of being. We approach culture not as something to be represented. Instead, we see it as something that must be translated into space. A building that responds to the sun, encourages communal gathering, or honors material craft is already contributing to cultural continuity. We seek to articulate this presence without nostalgia or mimicry.

Which project provides an example of your design philosophy and showcases your attention to detail?

Tiger Temple stands as a spatial narrative. It is not merely a restaurant. Every surface, junction, and line was part of a broader attempt to create atmosphere rather than a singular object. The experience of the space unfolds through light, texture, and the rhythm of movement. It is in such projects that our interest in spatial storytelling, choreography, and craftsmanship comes together. Here, architecture fades into experience.

How do you handle the diversity within your team; disagreements with team members around design ideas?

Diversity is not only inevitable in practice. It is also necessary. We do not fear disagreement. Instead, we recognize it as the generative friction of a living studio. At ORAD, we have cultivated a culture where critique is both rigorous and respectful. We critique drawings rather than individuals. Often, disagreement leads us to design positions that are more nuanced than any one person could have imagined alone.

Have you worked on a project that did not go as planned? How did you handle the situation?

Yes, architecture, like life, resists perfect planning. Projects evolve, contexts shift, and clients change direction. In one case, a residential commission changed drastically during construction, challenging our assumptions. We paused, reflected, and then re-engaged. The solution did not come from

salvaging our original idea. Instead, it came from discovering a new one within the revised conditions. In moments like these, adaptation becomes a form of design.

Where do you see yourself in the next five years? Goals, Vision?

I see the practice evolving toward deeper engagement with fewer but more meaningful projects. Personally, I hope to carve out time for writing, reflection, and teaching. I view architecture as a public discourse, not just a private service. I also envision ORAD becoming a place of critical inquiry. It will be a studio that produces not only buildings but also ideas. The work should always grow beyond the office.

How do you incorporate narrative elements into your designs, and how do you ensure your buildings tell a story beyond their function?

Narrative in architecture is not decoration. It is structure. Every site speaks, every user brings a script, and every building exists as a dialogue between these layers. We choreograph experience through sequence, through light, and through thresholds. Our goal is not to impose a singular story. We strive to allow multiple readings. A good building, like a good book, invites people to return to it more than once.

What is your approach to collaborating with non-architects, and how does this shape your design process?

Architecture is far too important to be left only to architects. Our collaborators, such as Tehzeeb Hassan and Hidaya Zia, bring insights and provocations that expand the possibilities of a project. Working with artists and communities challenges our assumptions. It also opens up new forms of meaning. We approach these conversations with intellectual humility. Through shared authorship, the project gains richness.

How do you navigate ethical dilemmas in architecture, such as balancing creative freedom with social responsibility or sustainability?

Architecture is a profoundly ethical act. Every decision about what to build, where, and

for whom carries consequences. We believe that creative freedom is not the freedom to ignore context. Instead, it is the freedom to respond with care. Sustainability is not merely an aesthetic gesture. It is a moral stance. We strive to ask difficult questions before drawing the first line.

How do you incorporate historical context or a sense of place into your designs, while ensuring they remain relevant to the present?

We do not view history as a style guide. We treat it as a living lineage. To build today is to engage in a conversation with what came before. We extract historical logic, spatial patterns, and material sensibilities, and transform them into present-day configurations. Our goal is not revival. It is continuity. To build with a sense of place is to resist placelessness.

Beyond the use of sustainable materials, how does your firm approach sustainability in terms of cultural and social aspects of design?

We see sustainability as an ethical framework, not just a checklist. Cultural sustainability means designing in ways that reflect how people actually live rather than what trends prescribe. Social sustainability means creating spaces that offer dignity, access, and inclusivity. A building that welcomes, endures, and adapts represents sustainability in its fullest form.

How do you see architecture influencing or reflecting culture, and how do you ensure your designs contribute to the cultural dialogue of their time?

Architecture both reflects and shapes culture. The way we shape space expresses what we value, what we fear, and what we imagine. As architects, our responsibility is to listen carefully to the present and respond with depth and clarity. We design for memory, for ritual, and for relevance—not just for utility. When buildings participate in the lives of people, they become part of the cultural dialogue.



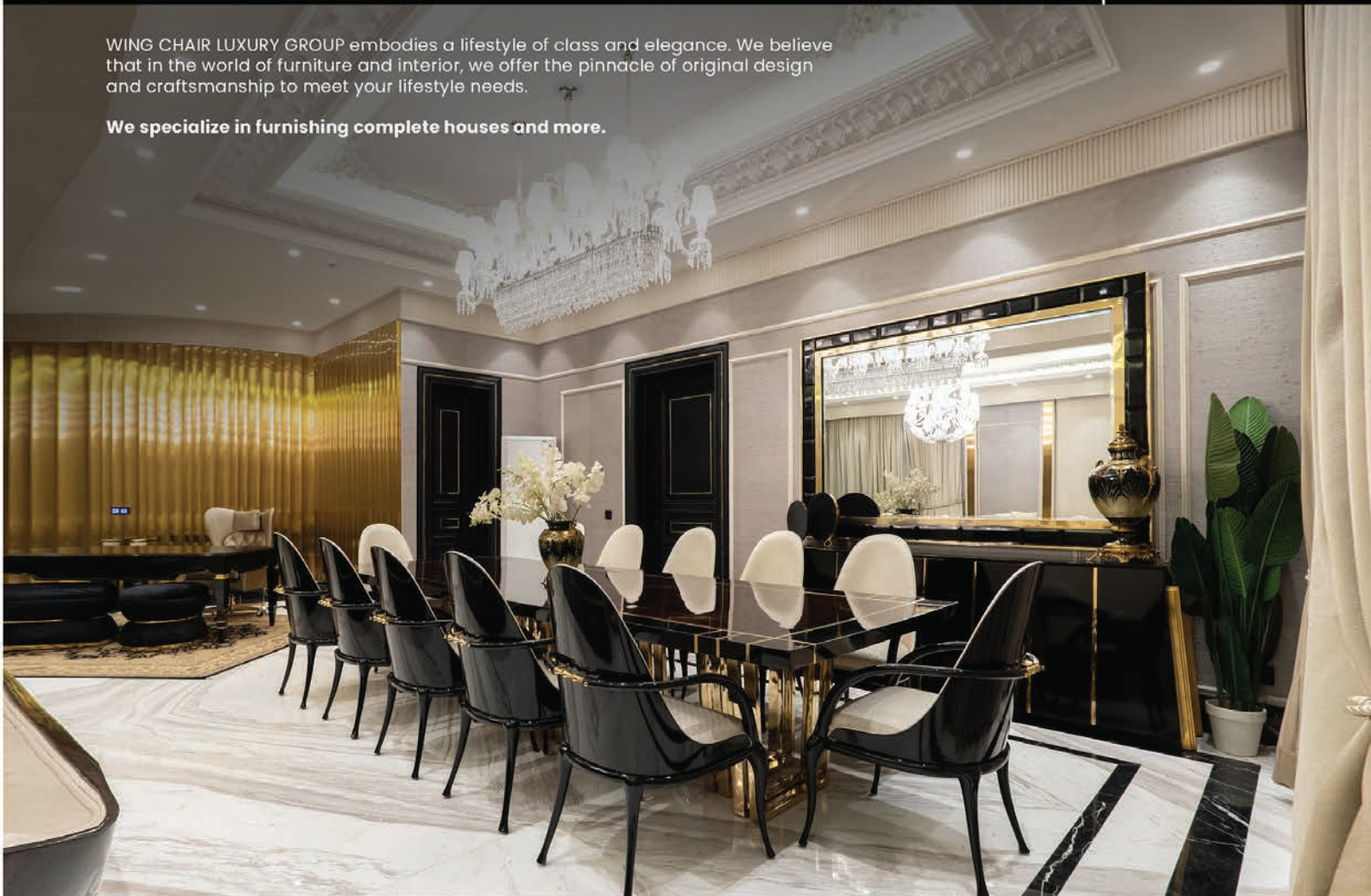


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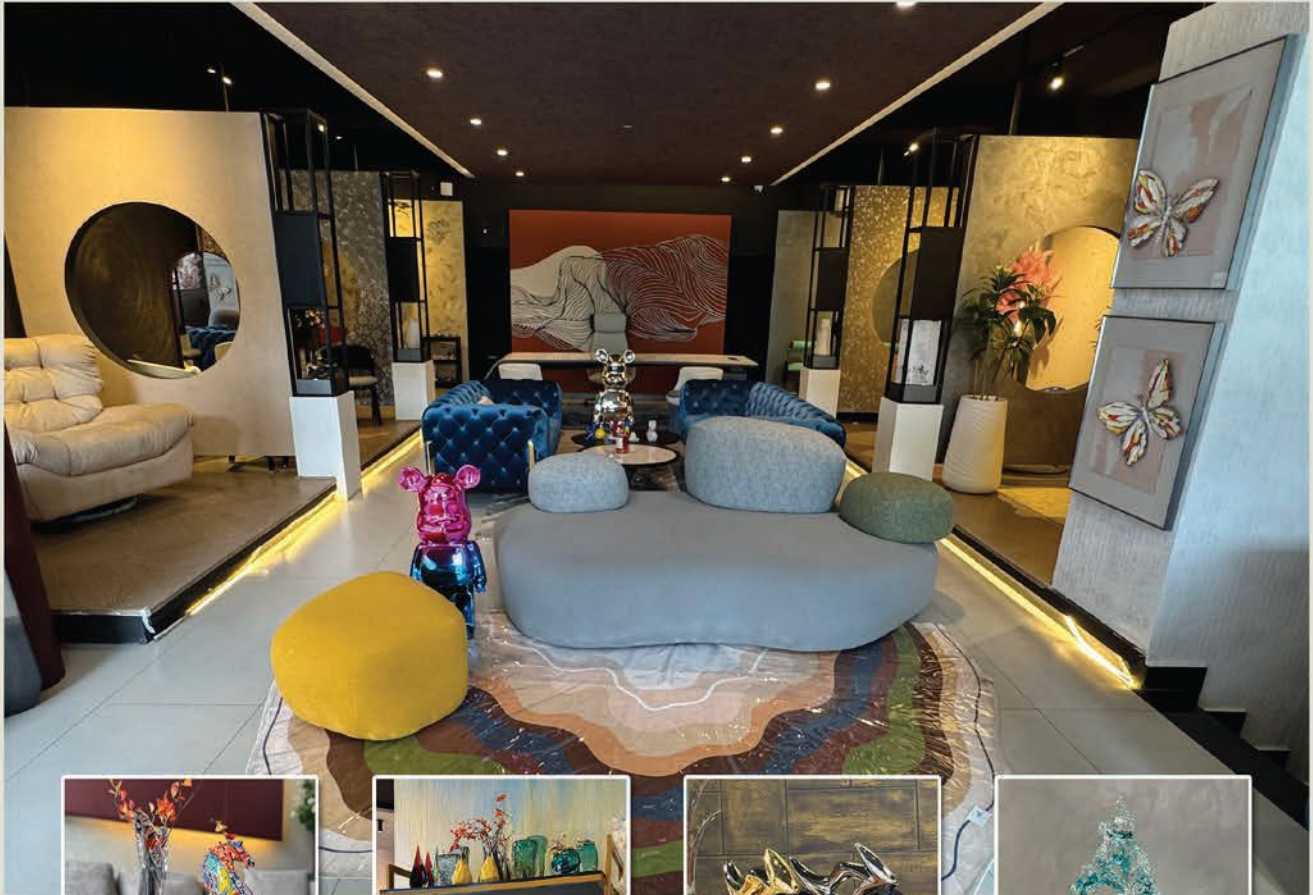
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Professor of Architecture & the Built Environment

1. Erased Legacies: The Unjust Demolition of South Asia's Modern Heritage

Many modernist buildings were built in the wake of independence (1947) across South Asia, they presented a bold architectural optimism for the future. These structures designed in the 1960s and 1970s, included civic institutions, academic campuses, housing complexes, or cultural centres and represented a departure from colonial forms and an embrace of progress, self-governance, and regional expression. Yet despite their symbolic and spatial significance, many of these buildings were later demolished under various pretences, often dismissed as outdated, aesthetically unappealing, or commercially unviable. Such decisions were frequently made without sufficient justification or transparent consultation and rarely accounted for the environmental consequences of demolition. Their erasure compounded environmental degradation while also disrupting urban memory and continuity.

There is a general apathy towards the modern architecture of Islamabad from the 1960s and 1970s and most buildings and their surroundings are being razed down or allowed to decay, often replaced by generic multi-storey developments. The Siraj Covered Market in Islamabad's G-6/3 sector was demolished several years ago by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), while landmarks like Melody and NAFDEC cinemas now stand abandoned and in disrepair. The iconic Hotel Shehrazad has been absorbed into institutional use by the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs. Such losses signal an urgent need to reevaluate heritage frameworks that neglect the architectural legacy of modernism in Pakistan. In many instances, the absence of legal safeguards, limited public awareness, and weak institutional stewardship have rendered these sites profoundly vulnerable.

The architectural heritage of Islamabad is distinctive, shaped by a vision of modernity and careful urban planning. Among its irreplaceable landmarks are buildings constructed during the 1960s as the modern capital city was being imagined. This architecture not only defines the city's aesthetic but also embodies its historical and cultural narrative. One of the most significant of these is the Pakistan Secretariat complex, built between 1962 and 1964. Designed by renowned Italian architect Gio Ponti, in collaboration with Antonio Fornaroli and Alberto Rosselli, the complex represents an essential chapter in Pakistan's modern architectural journey.

As these buildings age, the call for their careful restoration and conservation grows ever more urgent, ensuring that Islamabad's modernist identity is preserved for future generations. To prevent further attrition, there is a pressing need to reposition these buildings not merely as relics of a past era but as active cultural assets. Conservation, adaptive reuse, and public engagement must be viewed as foundational strategies—not optional interventions—to ensure that architectural legacy is preserved with environmental responsibility and historical sensitivity.

2. The Secretariat Complex: A Modernist Response to Climate and Context

The Pakistan Secretariat buildings in Islamabad form a thoughtfully designed complex of office blocks intended to accommodate various federal ministries. Conceived as two groups of four L-shaped blocks, the structures are strategically connected by elevated bridges, creating a unified yet open urban campus. Ranging from four to six stories in height, the blocks are oriented and staggered across the site to follow the natural contours of the land, responding sensitively to Islamabad's topography.

The design reflects a deep understanding of the region's climate, with careful attention to solar orientation, ventilation, and environmental integration. Set against the backdrop of the Margalla Hills, the Secretariat complex demonstrates how modernist principles can be harmoniously blended with local conditions. The surrounding landscape, designed by the renowned firm D. Lovejoy Associates, further enhances this integration, softening the built environment and anchoring the architecture within its ecological context.

The Pakistan Secretariat Buildings are exemplary representations of the International Style of the 1960s and stand as enduring landmarks within Islamabad's modernist heritage. With their clean proportions, minimalist forms, and thoughtful integration into the capital's master plan, these structures remain timeless icons of civic architecture. Their architectural clarity and historic relevance make them vital components of the city's cultural identity.

3. Heritage at Risk: Strategic Interventions for the Secretariat Complex

Decades after its completion, the complex now suffers from weathering and pollution that have damaged its façades, corrosion in structural components, deterioration of original windows and finishes, and unsympathetic modifications that undermine its design. The architectural integrity of these buildings is visibly compromised. The external facades, which were once crisp and expressive of their modernist ethos, now bear the weight of years of neglect. Weathering, pollution, and inappropriate retrofits have dulled the material palette and obscured original design intentions. Window frames are corroded or replaced with ill-fitting substitutes, disrupting the rhythmic fenestration and proportions that once gave the facades their character.

Internally, a similar pattern of erasure is evident. Functional layouts have been altered, finishes replaced, and heritage fixtures discarded, leading to a loss of spatial coherence and diminishing the lived experience of the architecture. These changes are not merely cosmetic; they sever the buildings' connection to their socio-political and cultural origins.

This deletion is both literal and symbolic and underscores the urgency for a sensitive and informed conservation strategy. The restoration of these buildings to their original form is not a sentimental gesture; it is an act of reclaiming architectural memory, reinserting erased narratives, and reaffirming a cultural and political identity embedded within the built fabric. The process demands an interdisciplinary rigor: it calls for the meticulous study of archival documentation, period-specific materials, oral accounts from users and craftsmen, and forensic analysis of construction methods. These sources together inform a framework not merely for repair but for respectful reinstatement.

Conservation in this context is not a passive freezing of time, but a critical negotiation between authenticity and evolution. It must grapple with the demands of contemporary





usability, environmental resilience, and regulatory compliance, while resisting the erasures caused by generic retrofits or commodified aesthetics. The buildings require careful and sympathetic rehabilitation, where interventions are guided by a deep understanding of original intent, spatial hierarchy, material expression, and climatic responsiveness.

All restorations of aging components, such as windows, fittings, and interior finishes, should be executed with an emphasis on compatibility in both material and proportion. This means replicating original profiles and textures where possible, while integrating modern technologies discreetly. Importantly, conservation must safeguard the design language; the rhythm, scale, and expressive vocabulary, which define these structures. Helping to ensure that they continue to function meaningfully within a contemporary urban ecosystem without losing their historical soul.

4. Sustaining the Legacy: The Imperative of Heritage Conservation

Environmental degradation and the effects of climate exposure have further accelerated the deterioration of the Pakistan Secretariat structures. Mitigating this damage is critical, not only for maintaining structural integrity

but also for honoring the legacy of modernist architecture in Pakistan. A thoughtful restoration would ensure that the Secretariat continues to serve as a symbol of civic dignity, architectural excellence, and national identity for generations to come.

Across the globe, the preservation of built heritage is recognized as a critical endeavour, which is pursued through carefully developed conservation strategies that aim to transmit cultural assets to future generations while safeguarding their authenticity. However, the conservation of built heritage is an inherently complex process, often confronted with diverse and site-specific challenges. Each project demands a nuanced approach that considers the material, historical, and cultural significance of the structure.

Given the finite nature of resources and the irreplaceable value of heritage assets, sustainability lies at the core of any successful conservation initiative. This includes not only the responsible use of materials and funds, but also the long-term management of restored sites to ensure their continued relevance, resilience, and integrity over time.

5. Conservation as Cultural Continuity; Restoring the Architecture of Modernity

Following independence in 1947, both India

and Pakistan embarked on an architectural journey to craft forward-looking identities, ones that symbolized progress, optimism, and autonomy from their colonial legacies. The 1960s bought the construction of the new capital city of Islamabad for West Pakistan and construction of new infrastructure for Dhaka a second capital city for East Pakistan. In India similar construction of modernist buildings took place in Ahmadabad (Gujrat) among others. These architectural structures (erected five decades ago) have experienced significant deterioration, attributable to prolonged neglect, environmental degradation, substandard maintenance practices, and incongruous modifications. The integrity of these buildings has been further undermined by ill-suited adaptive reuse and, in certain instances, architecturally discordant additions that compromise their typological coherence

and heritage value.

South Asia is undergoing a dynamic transformation. While it draws from universal principles such as material conservation, adaptive reuse, and climate-responsive design, its evolution is uniquely shaped by the region's postcolonial history, socio-economic constraints, and rich cultural hybridity. The conservation of Pakistan's modern architectural heritage stands to benefit significantly from the restoration practices adopted by neighbouring countries. Comparative analyses of initiatives in India and Bangladesh reveal strategic approaches to preserving postcolonial modernism; approaches that can inform and inspire locally contextualized efforts in Pakistan. Such cross-cultural learnings are vital to safeguarding a built legacy that encapsulates the nation's aspirations for a modern identity.



I. Modernist Preservation: The Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Dhaka

A powerful example of successful modernist restoration in South Asia is the National Parliament Building of Bangladesh, located in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka. Originally

commissioned by President Ayub Khan in the 1960s to establish Dhaka as Pakistan's second capital, the building was designed by Louis I. Kahn, who integrated monumental geometry, brick cladding, and water elements to reflect Bengali heritage and the riparian landscape.

Although construction began in 1964, progress was halted by the 1971 civil war and the independence of Bangladesh. In a remarkable gesture of architectural continuity, the new government resumed construction in 1974, remaining faithful to Kahn's vision and recognizing the structure not only as a civic space but as an emblem of democratic identity and postcolonial dignity.

The building's spatial composition, featuring recessed porticoes, geometric voids, and a lake encircling the main plaza, exemplifies Kahn's philosophy of poetic unity and cultural expression. In 2016, efforts were launched to restore the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban to its original form. Today, the Parliament complex stands as a landmark of modernist architecture in the region, its restoration affirming the enduring relevance of design integrity amidst shifting political narratives.

II. Modernist Heritage in Transition: Restoration of IIM Ahmedabad

The Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) has undertaken a landmark restoration of its iconic campus buildings designed by Louis Kahn—including the Vikram Sarabhai Library, Classroom Complex, Faculty Blocks, and 18 dormitories. Led by SNK Architects, the project integrates conservation, structural retrofitting, and modern upgrades such as accessibility enhancements and new MEP systems, all while preserving Kahn's architectural vision. Dormitory D15 serves as a pilot site, showcasing masonry repairs, roof restoration, and interior updates that sensitively reintroduce original spatial elements.

The initiative emerged from longstanding public concern over proposed demolitions—an outcry dating back to the 1980s. The deterioration of these buildings sparked



broader reflection on India's modernist legacy. In 2014 and 2020, renowned British architectural historian William J.R. Curtis publicly defended the campus, calling it "more than just a collection of buildings...a citadel of learning," and praising its poetic interplay of solids and voids, material and immaterial, light and shadow.

The advocacies gained traction across architectural circles and mainstream media, framing the restoration as a moral and cultural responsibility. The IIMA restoration now stands as a beacon of sensitive modernist preservation—demonstrating how thoughtful adaptation can honour original design ethos while meeting contemporary needs.

The restoration of modernist architecture in Bangladesh and India underscores the critical need for parallel efforts in Pakistan. These regional practices reflect a broader postcolonial pursuit of modern national identity, which catalysed the development of a distinctive architectural vocabulary. Revisiting and reinterpreting this legacy through context-sensitive restoration initiatives is essential for reclaiming its cultural and historical significance within Pakistan's built environment.

6. Pilot Conservation: A Phased Approach to Restoring the Pakistan Secretariat

To ensure the success and viability of the conservation proposal for the extensive site and multiple heritage buildings of the Pakistan Secretariat, it is essential to initiate the process through a well-defined pilot project. This pilot, focused on a single, manageable building within the complex, will serve as a testing ground for the proposed conservation methodologies.

The pilot project will adopt a multidisciplinary approach, bringing together conservation architects, engineers, material specialists, and heritage experts. Emphasis will be placed on preserving the building's original character, ensuring structural stability, and integrating sustainable restoration practices. By evaluating outcomes and refining strategies during this initial phase, the project will lay a strong foundation for the broader conservation

effort across the entire Secretariat complex. This phased model will also build institutional capacity and public trust in the long-term vision of restoring Islamabad's architectural legacy.

Aligned with traditional conservation methodology, the pilot project offers a unique opportunity to test and evaluate a broad range of treatment options under real environmental conditions on deteriorated building surfaces. This hands-on experimentation allows for a comparative assessment of techniques in situ, providing invaluable data on their performance over time.

By monitoring the effectiveness of various interventions after application, the project aims to identify the most promising and sustainable conservation procedures. This process will enable fine-tuning of key parameters, such as application methods, material concentrations, and exposure durations. This method will ultimately enhance the overall efficacy and longevity of the conservation work undertaken.

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7. Pilot Site as a Knowledge-Building Framework

The pilot site approach serves as a dynamic process of knowledge acquisition, progressively informed by multidisciplinary research inputs that shape the broader conservation strategy. It facilitates an evidence-based definition of

the conservation project by grounding design decisions in empirical findings. The pilot activity is structured into three key phases; preliminary knowledge building, testing and evaluation of treatment methodologies, and scale-up to the main conservation project are illustrated in the figure below:

	PHASES	OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
Pilot Project	1. Condition Survey	Knowledge Of the site/building characteristics	Identification of construction phases and of conservation history
		Knowledge of materials and state of conservation	Materials mapping and survey of deterioration patterns. Knowledge of deterioration mechanisms
	2. Assessment of Conservation treatments	On-site testing of conservation treatments	Selection and implementation of the best performing conservation methodologies
	3. Project Management Plan	Definition of conservation methodologies for the intervention. Monitoring and evaluation.	Conservation project with cost analysis and scheduling

8. Role of the IAP in Shaping National Architectural Discourse

The Institute of Architects Pakistan (IAP) as the representative body of architects in the country, has a multi-faceted role to play in the conservation, restoration and regeneration of heritage architecture. In response to the challenge of the restoration of the modern heritage of Islamabad, the IAP has convened a dedicated group of relevant stakeholders that can work with the Capital Development Authority (CDA). This multidisciplinary think tank includes representatives from UNESCO Pakistan, ICOMOS Pakistan, EAROPH Pakistan, the Italian Embassy, specialist architects from Italy, and numerous local heritage conservation experts. Multiple meetings and deliberations have been held to shape a collaborative approach that ensures the restoration of the Pakistan Secretariat complex is carried out in accordance with international

conservation principles and aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This initiative also aims to serve as a precedent for the conservation of other modern heritage buildings in Islamabad, safeguarding their cultural and architectural significance for future generations

9. Conclusion: Sustainability and Long-Term Vision for Modernist Heritage

Restoring the modernist architecture of Islamabad is not merely a technical endeavour, it is an act of cultural continuity and urban foresight. These structures, emblematic of a post-independence design ethos, carry within their concrete geometries the aspirations of a newly imagined nation. Reviving them affirms their enduring relevance in shaping contemporary urban identity and offers a counter-narrative to erasure and homogenization. In embracing restoration, Islamabad honours its architectural lineage

while charting a progressive path that bridges heritage and innovation. These modernist landmarks deserve not just preservation but must be celebrated as living testaments to design ingenuity, civic idealism, and spatial equity.

This project to restore the Pakistan Secretariat using a Pilot project methodology, redefines heritage conservation by positioning innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability at the core of modernist restoration. By embracing emerging technologies, such as advanced building performance monitoring, environmentally responsible materials, and adaptive reuse strategies, the initiative seeks to minimize environmental impact while enhancing the relevance and utility of the modernist heritage sites. Collaborations with academic institutions, conservation specialists, and environmental organizations will ensure that the project becomes a pioneer in sustainable architectural practice.

Equally essential is the recognition of economic sustainability. The initiative actively explores pathways for long-term financial resilience, such as heritage tourism, cultural

programming, and adaptive commercial reuse that transform restored spaces into productive cultural assets. This creates a regenerative cycle, wherein the value generated through conservation is reinvested into ongoing stewardship and enhancement of heritage environments. At the heart of the project lies an integrated conservation approach, one that is inclusive, contextually attuned, and responsive to the lived experiences of those who engage with these spaces daily.

Taken together, these strategies position the project as a benchmark for holistic urban conservation. In restoring the Pakistan Secretariat, we not only honor a pivotal chapter in our architectural history, we lay the foundation for a new paradigm in heritage stewardship, one which is rooted in innovation, inclusion, and cultural continuity.

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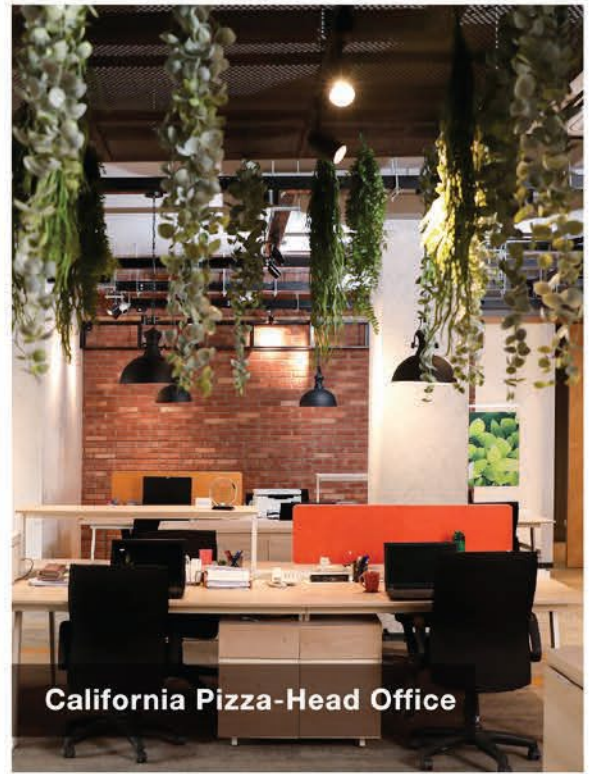
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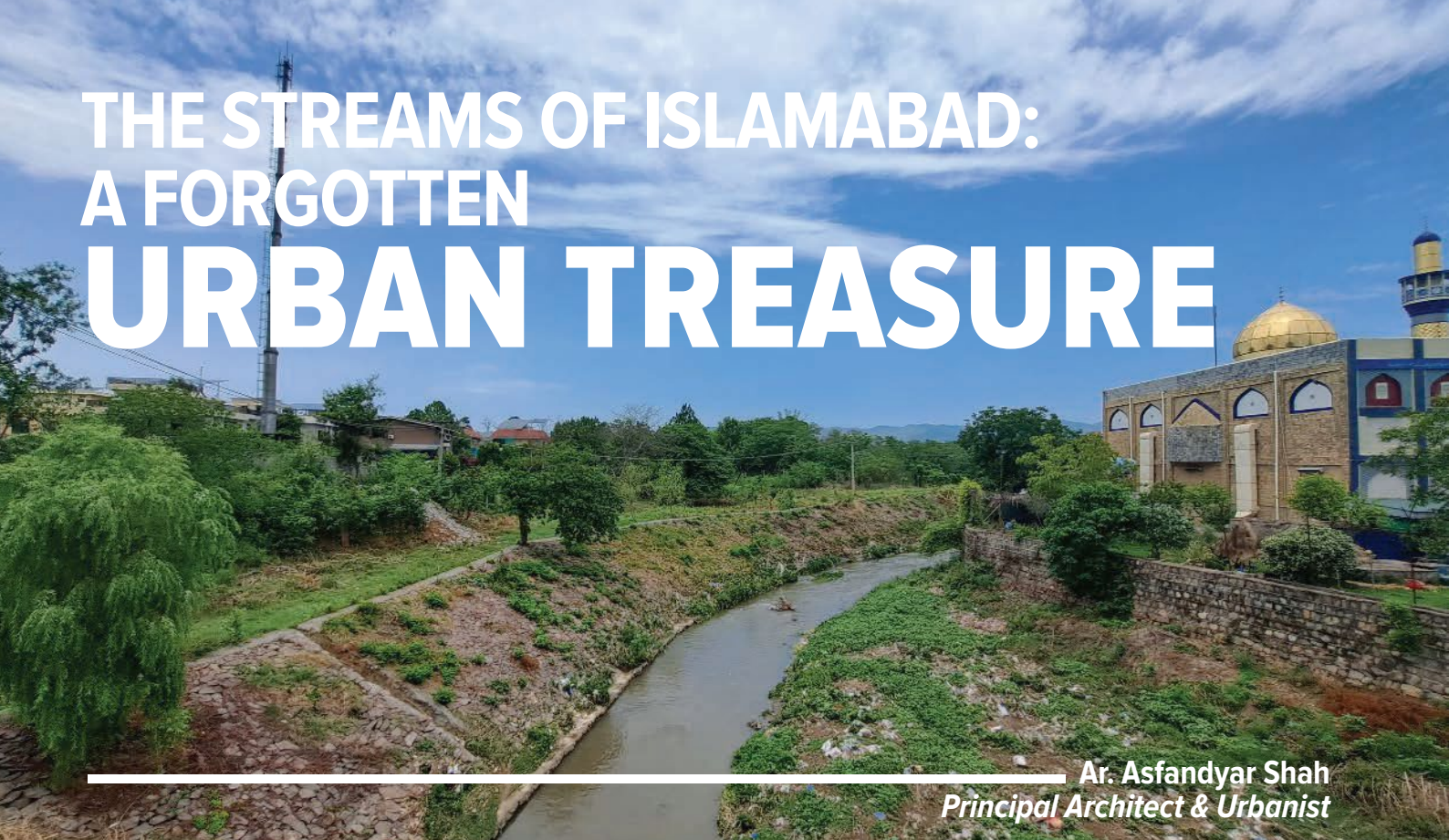
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THE STREAMS OF ISLAMABAD: A FORGOTTEN URBAN TREASURE



Ar. Asfandyar Shah
Principal Architect & Urbanist

Once, they shimmered... Long before concrete swallowed the earth and plastic clung to every edge, the streams of Islamabad ran free veins of water threading through green lungs, whispering life into the capital city. They carried not just water, but dreams. Children splashed barefoot, elders paused beneath banyan trees, and birds stitched songs through morning mist. These waterways were not just channels; they were memory, movement, and meaning, woven seamlessly into the city's very soul.

Islamabad was envisioned as a city of balance—where modern planning would exist in harmony with nature's grace. In the 1960s, the Greek architect Constantinos Doxiadis imagined a city where sectors and streets respected the rhythm of the land. At the core of that vision were the natural streams, meant to serve both function and form: draining storm water, yes, but also nourishing biodiversity, cooling the air, and gifting citizens with places of beauty and belonging.

But time, like floodwater, can be both builder and destroyer. Today, these once-lucid streams are choking. Their banks are littered with plastic, their waters dark with sewage. Once symbols

of vitality, they now groan under the weight of neglect—buried beneath construction debris, hidden behind encroaching walls, reduced to footnotes in urban reports. The nalas—those vital urban water arteries—have been relegated to the margins, dismissed as dirty drains instead of cherished resources.

Yet to give up on them would be to forget who we are.

Reclaiming the Streams: A Vision Reborn

The idea of restoring Islamabad's streams is not just a green dream—it is a necessity wrapped in opportunity. It is the chance to right a quiet wrong and to revive what could be the city's most transformative public spaces. This vision first crystallized for me in Frankfurt, Germany. There, I cycled along revitalized waterways—streams cradled in green trails, lined with bioswales, alive with dragonflies and laughter. These were not the untouched wilds of nature but lovingly designed spaces where ecology and community flourished side by side. It made me wonder: why not Islamabad?

Why not revive the stream that flows from Margalla Hills? Why not turn this neglected artery into a living, breathing corridor of renewal—a space where trees return, birds

nest again, and children can safely walk or cycle along the water's edge?

Reclaiming these waterways would offer far more than beautification. It would enhance stormwater management, reduce urban flooding, recharge aquifers, and reintroduce native species to an urban habitat increasingly stripped of life. More than anything, these projects would reconnect people with the land—offering places to breathe, reflect, gather, and imagine a greener, fairer city.

The Role of Streams in the City's Soul

Our streams were always more than infrastructure. They are part of our ecological heritage, drawn directly from the Margalla Hills, winding down to join the Korang and Sukh rivers before flowing into Rawal Lake. These veins of water were meant to support the city's hydrology, recharge groundwater, and host urban biodiversity. Nala Lai, too, is not just a stormwater drain—it is a historic watercourse, once a lifeline for the Potohar plateau, now choked by encroachment and waste.

Today, these water bodies are no longer signs of vitality—they are sites of rupture. What once connected landscapes and communities is now fragmented by neglect and urban pressure. With untreated waste pouring into them and development erasing their routes, we're not just polluting water—we're polluting possibility.

And still, there is hope. These streams can once again cool our neighborhoods, clean our stormwater, and cradle life. Their revival can be an act of healing—for both the land and the people who live beside it. A clean stream could become a linear park, a classroom without

walls, a habitat, a community bridge.

Perhaps even more important is what these streams represent in contrast to the rationalist, orthogonal grid that defines Islamabad's layout. The streams, with their natural curves and unpredictable routes, cut across boundaries, ignore sectoral divisions, and defy urban rigidity. They are the city's wild, ungovernable lines—meandering, living spaces in a land of rectangles and right angles.

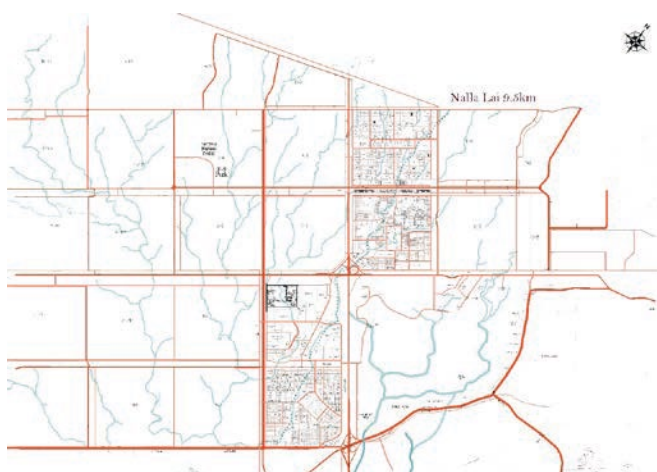
In a city defined by structure, the streams offer freedom. They invite detours, pauses, encounters. They whisper the poetry of nature in a language the grid has long forgotten. Where streets follow symmetry, streams follow storylines. Where the masterplan dictates order, the water meanders toward memory.

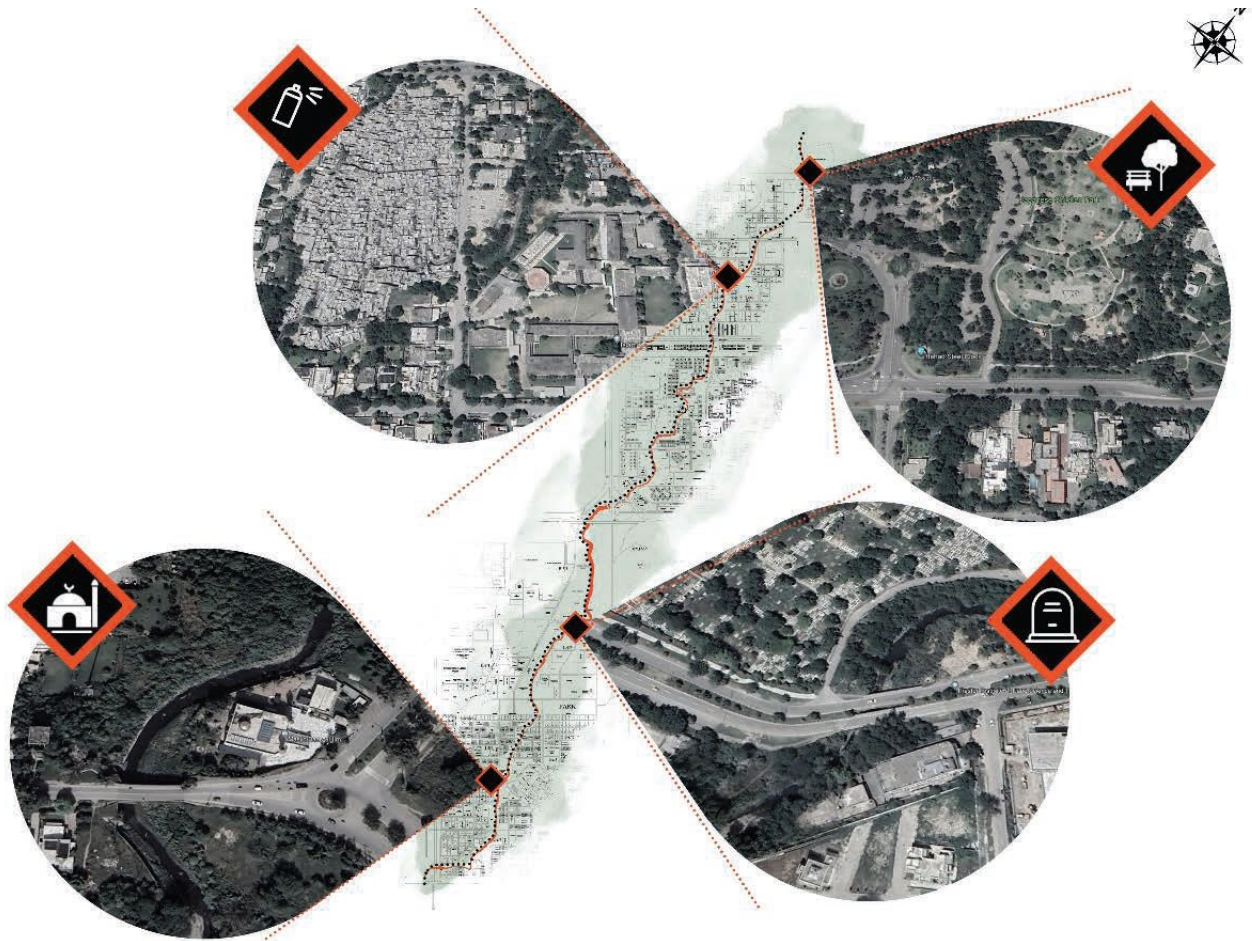
They are the only places in Islamabad where the city seems to breathe a little differently—less measured, more meditative. They cut diagonally through orthodoxy and invite people to walk a little slower, to notice. These are not merely utilitarian paths; they are possibilities. They do not follow rules—they follow rain, rock, and root.

Before we dive into the future vision, it's important to recognize that the stream we focused on at Saakht (an architectural and urban design firm)—from Sector I-8 through H-8 to F-7—is just one of many crisscrossing Islamabad. The city is laced with a network of such watercourses, some visible and many buried under urban sprawl. This particular stream was chosen not only for its centrality but because it touches diverse communities, institutional zones, and green spaces. Its restoration can become a prototype—a model that inspires similar interventions across the capital.

Seeing the Future: A New Kind of Public Space

The vision for restoring Islamabad's streams truly comes alive in the design renderings—conceptual blueprints that imagine what could be, rooted in what already exists. These renders are more than artistic illustrations; they are a response to lived realities, shaped by student's site visits, community observations,





and environmental constraints. Each one is a window into a better urban future, where social equity, cultural relevance, and ecological regeneration intersect beautifully.

The journey toward restoration begins with design. With vision. With community. Imagine the France Colony node—today overlooked, tomorrow a lively hub. Picture shaded paths, murals that give voice to the unheard, rooftop gathering spaces, and inclusive design that welcomes all. Envision the Graveyard node—not just a place of mourning, but of reflection—where trees offer solace and nature breathes gently around sacred grounds. At the Masjid node, community meets serenity with stepping stones across clear waters, gathering areas for evening talks, and prayer spaces kissed by breeze and birdsong.

These are not fantasies. They are detailed visions captured through a series of renders, each one thoughtfully conceived to respond to its location’s needs, cultural rhythms, and environmental constraints.

Take the France Colony node, for instance.

This area, historically underserved and socially marginalized, finds itself flanking a neglected stretch of the stream. In its current form, the water is choked with waste and hemmed in by dense informal housing. The render envisions a dramatic transformation: a restored waterway bordered by pedestrian promenades and native vegetation. Low bridges link both sides of the settlement, symbolic of both physical and social connectivity. Public art—particularly murals—lines the walls of adjacent buildings, offering space for residents to tell their own stories. Rooftops become vibrant gathering places, shaded by canopies, fitted with seating, and adorned with community gardens. Here, the render doesn’t just beautify; it reclaims space for joy, dialogue, and dignity.

Then there is the Graveyard node. This section of the stream snakes quietly past a cemetery, a place naturally attuned to silence and reflection. The current condition feels disconnected—overgrown on one side, barren on the other. In the proposed design, the water is treated like a meditative element: gently



flowing, clear, bordered by native grasses and flowering trees. Wooden benches and winding footpaths weave among the gravestones, allowing visitors not just to mourn, but to commune with memory and with nature. Planting choices are deliberate—fragrant species like motia and lavender to soothe the senses, and mosquito-repelling shrubs to ensure comfort. This is no longer a peripheral dead zone; it becomes a contemplative sanctuary.

Finally, the Masjid node brings spiritual architecture into harmony with ecological design. This render shows a mosque with a prayer courtyard that extends to the edge of a renewed stream. Stepping stones cross the water, encouraging barefoot transit and play. The stream becomes part of the ritual—used for ablution, reflection, or simply a cool pause after prayer. Shade structures curve like calligraphy above amphitheater-style steps, where community discussions or Quran classes can take place under the open sky. This is faith, folded gently into nature.

In each node, we see more than infrastructure—we see intention. These aren't generic public spaces dropped from a planning textbook. They're hyper-localized responses to how people live, where they gather, what they lack, and what they hope for.

Each of these nodes shows how urban planning, when infused with empathy and ecological wisdom, can break free of rigid models and become responsive, creative, and healing. These are places where children bike

freely, elders gather under neem trees, and migrants find a corner to call their own. The renders visualize not just improved aesthetics, but a complete transformation of how public space is perceived and lived in Islamabad.

These designs are invitations. Invitations to imagine not what is, but what could be. They offer a counter-narrative to the monotony of grid-planning—a more fluid, nature-led approach to living in the city. They remind us that public space is not a luxury; it's a right. And it begins, quite literally, from the ground up—by letting the water flow.

Each of these designs responds to specific social and ecological contexts. They offer spaces of dignity for the underserved, educational opportunities for youth, and cooler microclimates for increasingly overheated cities. The stream is reimagined not only as a waterway but as a social lifeline.

A green corridor flowing through the heart of the city—a masterplan that turns forgotten streams into the city's most vital organs. Not barriers, but bridges. Not waste, but wonder. These greenways will become much more than public parks. They will be sanctuaries—quiet, intimate spaces nestled within the grid, offering an escape from straight lines and traffic loops. They will break the monotony of planned uniformity and introduce the charm of unpredictability. They will allow the city to flex, to exhale, to feel.

Moving from Vision to Action

The challenge is real. Pollution must be tackled at the source—through better sewage

systems, stricter regulations, and thoughtful waste management. Encroachments must be reversed—not with force, but with dialogue, relocation, and planning that centers dignity. And above all, people must be empowered.

The restoration of these streams is not just a policy issue—it is a civic movement. It calls on students to design, artists to imagine, engineers to solve, and citizens to care. Clean-up drives, public workshops, tree plantings, storytelling sessions—these are the rituals of reconnection that can build a city that remembers its streams.

To support this shift, policy frameworks must evolve to incentivize ecological design and penalize polluters. Funding should be made available for pilot projects, and partnerships with academic institutions, international environmental organizations, and civil society must be nurtured. Above all, youth must be engaged—as guardians of the future.

The streams of Islamabad offer more than

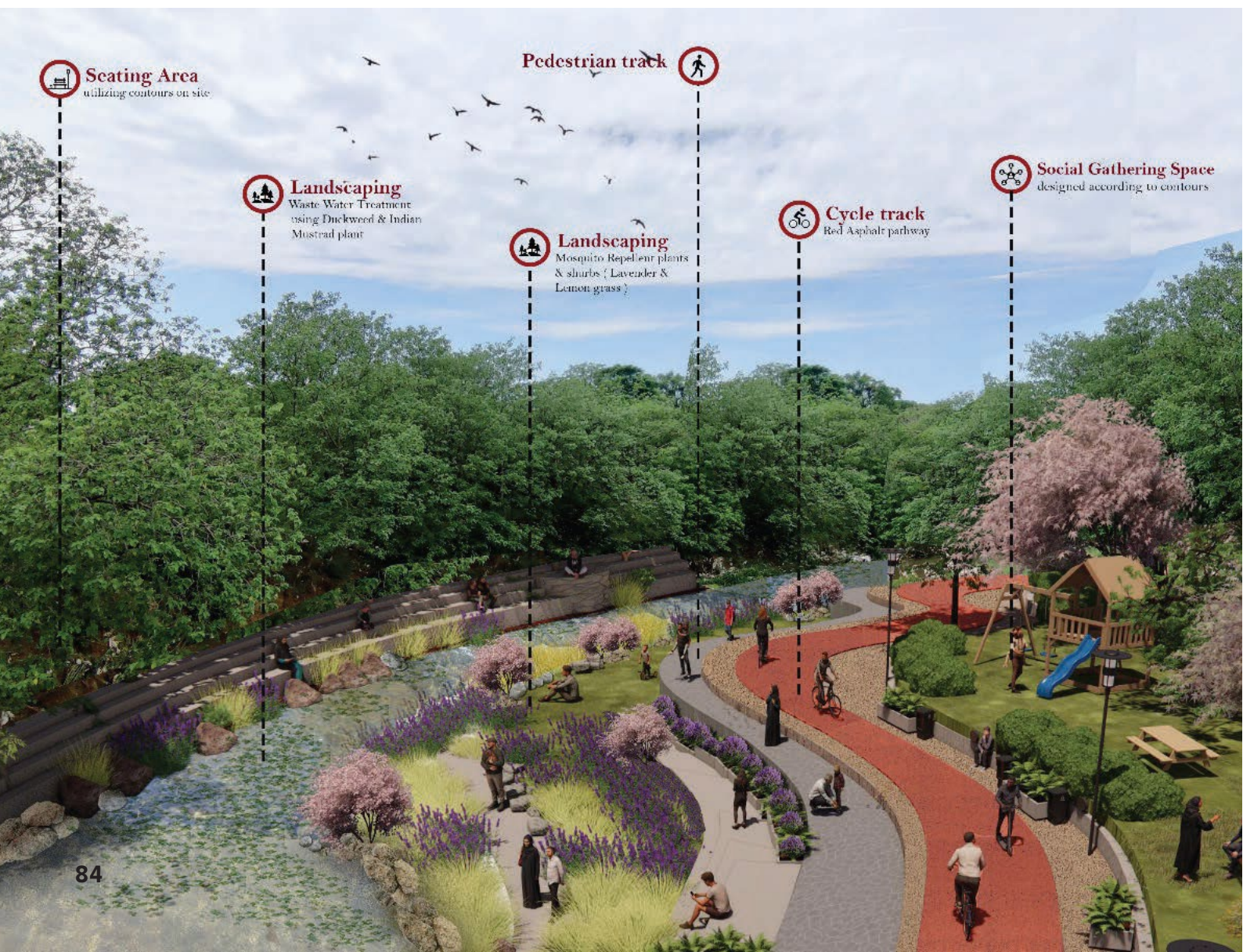
beauty or biodiversity—they offer a new way of thinking. They allow us to reimagine urban planning as an act not of control, but of care. A city that follows its streams will always flow toward equity, resilience, and joy.

Conclusion: The Stream as a Mirror

In every city, there are spaces that mirror who we are. In Islamabad, our streams reflect both our care and our carelessness. To restore them is to declare what kind of city we wish to be—a city that listens to water, that honors nature, that plans for life.

We still have the chance to turn nalas into nahars, drains into dreams. We still have a chance to let the grid be softened by green, the straight lines curved by flow, and the master plan guided not by cement but by the quiet wisdom of water.

Let us take it. Let us reclaim not only our streams, but our shared story—and through them, rediscover the city's soul.

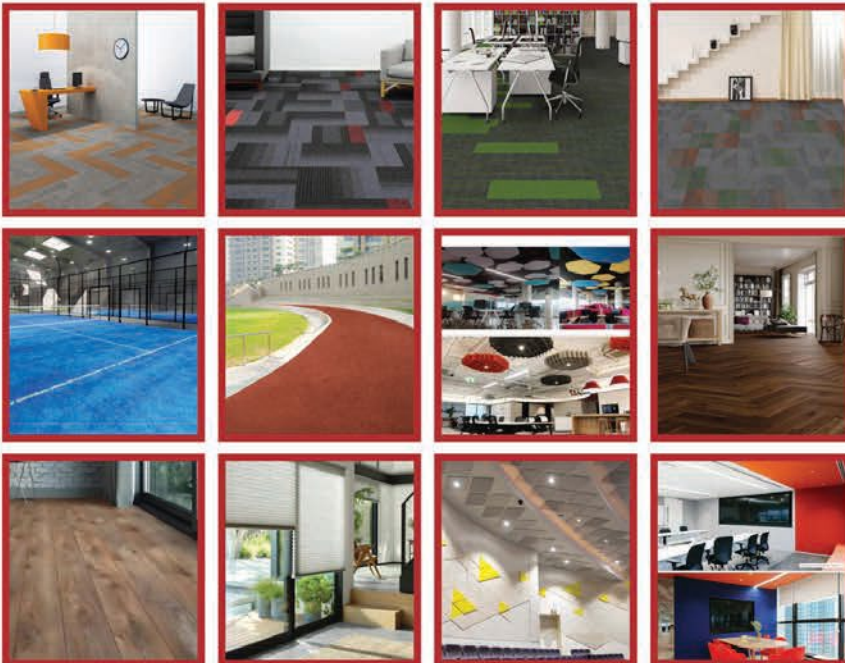




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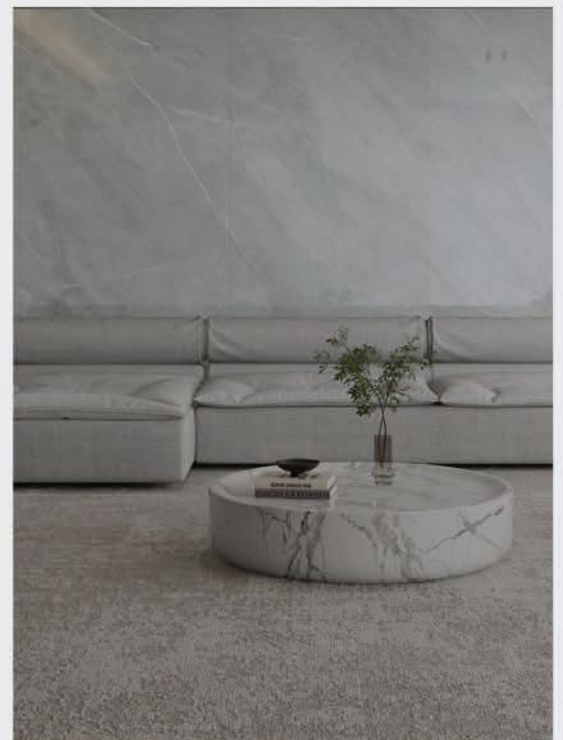
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WHERE LEARNING BLOSSOMS:

BAZEECHA AT JACARANDA PARK



Mehreen Azmat
Founder, Bazeecha

What was once a jungle of untamed land and neglected dumping ground is now a vibrant Eco-Park, thanks to the vision of Suhail & Fawad Architects. Located at the green belt between sectors F-11/1 and G-11/3 in Islamabad, this transformation began in October 2021, when the first trees were planted. Jacaranda Park, nestled in the heart of a bustling urban sector, now stands as a benchmark for thoughtful, inclusive, and sustainable park design. Spanning over 6.72 acres, the park blends natural beauty with practical functionality, offering a welcoming space for recreation, relaxation, and community connection.

The design integrates environmental priorities with urban needs, by featuring jogging and walking trails, play areas, seating zones, and carefully planned pathways for accessibility. Hard and soft landscaping elements work in harmony, while strategically placed benches,

bilingual signage, trash bins, and eco-conscious messaging encourage community awareness and environmental responsibility. At the core of the park's vision is afforestation, that is planting as many trees as possible to support biodiversity and nature conservation. The long-term dream is to develop a thriving urban forest within the park.

Adding to its purpose and identity, Bazeecha', a container-based school and library was integrated into the park. Thus the education of young children has found a home within Jacaranda Park. This space nurtures young minds while fostering a love for reading, learning, and nature. The park is not just a green space but a hub for growth, sustainability, and community engagement. Jacaranda Park and Bazeecha stand as living proof that with imagination, commitment, and community spirit, neglected urban spaces can be reborn into centers of hope, learning, and

*bāzīcha-e-atfāl hai duniyā mire aage
hotā hai shab-o-roz tamāshā mire aage*

*just like a child's playground this world appears to me
every single night and day, this spectacle I see.*

Bazeecha: A Garden of Learning and Hope

Bazeecha, a school for underprivileged children, began in 2015 with just one student. A young boy who was wandering the arcades of F-11 on a hot summer day, looking for customers to polish shoes. From that modest beginning, Bazeecha has grown into a symbol of hope and opportunity. In September 2023, thanks to the generosity of a kind “Friend of the Park,” we finally found a home, a container classroom placed in the heart of Jacaranda Park. This small space represents something far bigger: a safe haven where children from marginalized backgrounds can access the education they deserve. It is more than just a classroom; it is a place built with purpose, love, and belief in every child’s potential.

The journey started with me as a woman sitting outside coffee shops for years, teaching a handful of children of all ages and backgrounds. Those outdoor sessions, held under the open sky in all weather conditions, were my first real encounter with the struggles these children face daily. Yet, I learned that all they truly needed was a little attention, love, and respect. From one student to now over 35, that simple act of showing up for them made all the difference. At one point, during one of the more difficult days of outdoor teaching, a dear client asked me what was at the top of my wish list for Bazeecha. My answer was clear: a

space of our own to teach. That wish was soon granted in the form of a classroom container. And as if touched by more unseen kindness, a library was later donated by the Rotary Club of Islamabad Renaissance.

A Hopeful Future

Since then, Bazeecha has blossomed and has attracted not only more students from lower-income families but also volunteers who have witnessed the impact of learning in a nurturing environment. Today, classes are held under the shady trees, surrounded by nature, where children learn not just from books but also from the world around them. Bazeecha is more than a school. It is a testament to resilience, community, and the transformative power of education, which is rooted in love, shaded by trees, and growing brighter each day.

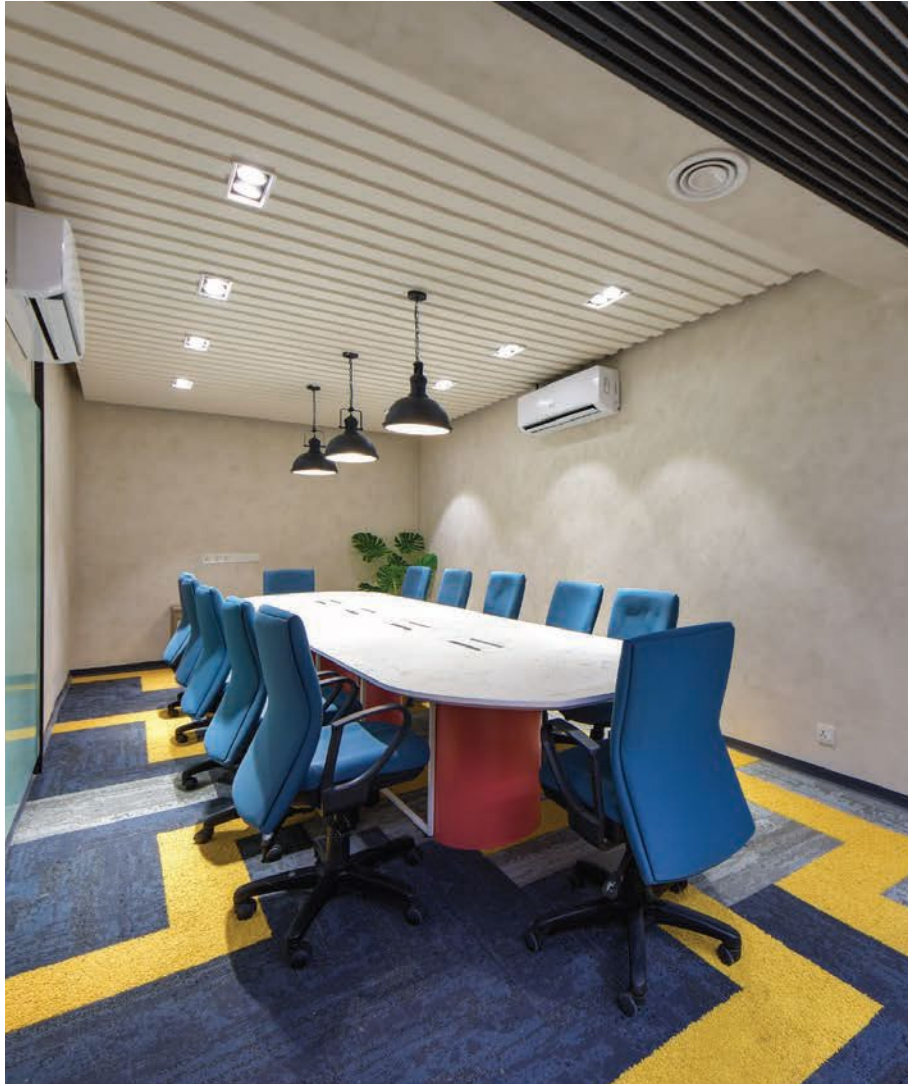
We all share a responsibility towards these children and towards our community. They are not just children of the present, but the future of our nation. If we can shift mindsets and provide them with access to education, they will no longer be limited to lives as kabaris (garbage collectors) or shoe polishers. They carry within them dreams, ambitions, and the potential to become so much more for society like teachers, doctors, artists, leaders. Let’s give them that chance. Let’s offer them the option to rewrite their futures. Futures filled with dignity, hope, and purpose.



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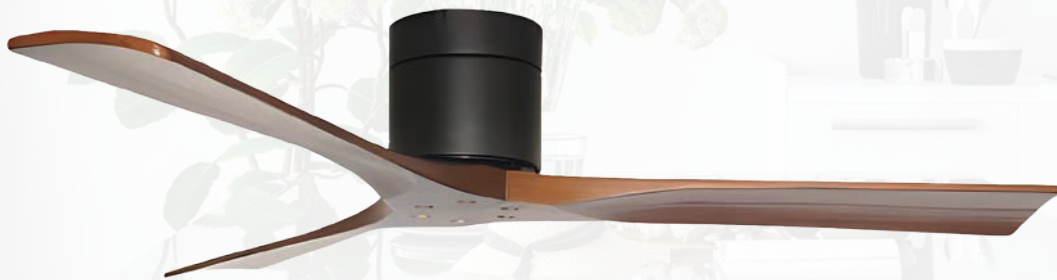
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TREE WITH A NAME:

SOCIALLY RESPONSIVE DESIGN FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Ar. Zulfiqar Ali

Immediate Past President and Advisor on Advocacy Committee

In an era where environmental sustainability is no longer a choice but a necessity, the Institute of Architects Pakistan (IAP) has launched a groundbreaking initiative to cultivate environmental stewardship among the younger generation. Spearheaded by the National Council of IAP, the Board of Architecture Education (BAE), and Ar. Zulfiqar Ali (President of IAP 2023–2024 and Advisor to the IAP Advocacy Committees), this initiative seeks to instill a sense of responsibility and personal connection to nature in architecture students through a symbolic yet impactful gesture: planting trees in their names. With active collaboration from all IAP Chapters, BAE, and architecture institutions across Pakistan, the program aims to raise awareness about

environmental accountability and emphasize that an architect's responsibilities extend beyond design and structures to the ecological health of the world they help shape.

1. The Concept: Planting Trees in Students' Names

At the heart of this initiative is the idea of planting trees in the names of students. Each tree will bear the name of a student, symbolizing their personal commitment to the environment. This act is not merely symbolic; it is intended to cultivate a deep sense of responsibility and ownership. By associating students with the growth and care of these trees, the initiative hopes to nurture a lifelong connection to environmental stewardship. This awareness is expected to stay with students as

they progress in their academic and professional lives, shaping them into responsible citizens who prioritize sustainability.

2. Preference for Fruit-Bearing Trees

To further enhance the impact of this initiative, IAP recommends planting fruit-bearing trees wherever possible. Fruit-bearing trees offer a unique opportunity for students to witness the tangible results of their efforts. Within their academic tenure, students can observe the growth, flowering, and fruiting of these trees, creating a sense of accomplishment and connection to nature. Additionally, these trees contribute to local ecosystems and provide nutritional benefits, making them a practical and impactful choice.

3. Environmentally Conscious Tree Selection

The success of any plantation drive depends on the careful selection of tree species. IAP emphasizes the importance of consulting with horticulture departments to identify trees that are best suited to the local climate and soil conditions. This ensures the long-term survival and ecological benefits of the planted trees. By choosing species that thrive in the local environment, the initiative maximizes its

contribution to biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

4. Call to Action for Educational Institutes

IAP has called upon educational institutes to take immediate action. Institutes with available land are encouraged to begin plantation activities without delay. For those without designated land, IAP has offered to coordinate with government authorities to secure suitable areas, including right-of-way spaces, for this purpose. This inclusive approach ensures that all institutes, regardless of their resources, can participate in this vital initiative.

5. Dedicated Support from IAP

To facilitate the smooth execution of this program, IAP has established focal persons and dedicated committees. These teams will assist institutes in coordinating with government bodies, provide guidance on implementation, and ensure that the initiative progresses seamlessly. IAP's commitment to supporting this endeavor underscores its dedication to creating a greener and more sustainable future.

6. A Collective Effort for a Greener Future

Ar. Zulfiqar Ali has spearheaded the program in various institutions of the KPK including



CECOS university and Hazara University, Comsats University Islamabad campus and Comsats University Lahore and National College of Arts Pindi campus. Ar. Zulfiqar has urged institutes to act swiftly and provide updates on their progress. He emphasized that this initiative is not just about planting trees but about fostering a culture of environmental responsibility and accountability. By working together, educational institutes, students, and IAP can create a lasting impact on the built environment and contribute to a sustainable future. The concept is to sensitize students towards not only the vegetation and trees but also the environment outside of their houses and holdings. It is hoped that students will be encouraged to act as stakeholders of the environment and learn about sustainable future for the planet.

This initiative is a testament to the power of collective action. It highlights the role of architecture and design in addressing global challenges and underscores the importance of engaging the younger generation in environmental conservation. As students watch their trees grow, they will not only witness the fruits of their labor but also develop a profound understanding of their role in shaping a sustainable world. Let us join hands in this noble endeavor and take a step forward toward a greener, more responsible future.



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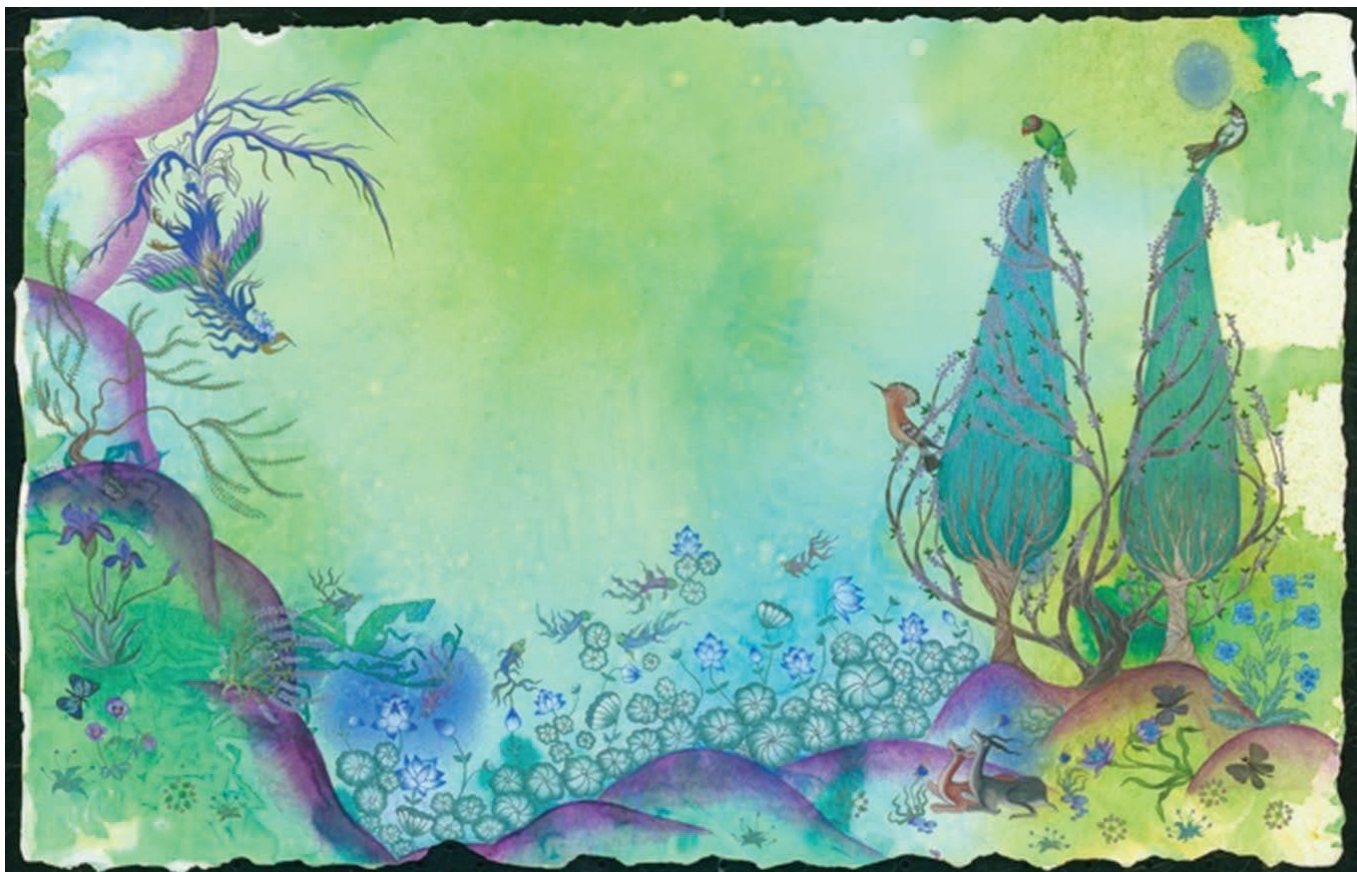


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The Gardens of Eternity: Bagh-i-Wah Series I, 2022
Watercolor and Gouache on Wasli Handmade Paper



The Gardens of Eternity: Bagh-i-Wah Series II, 2022
Watercolor and Gouache on Wasli Handmade Paper

THE GARDEN THROUGH TIME: VISIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Aisha Asim Imdad

As an artist, I am dedicated to painting gardens and nature, and to examining our relationship with the natural world in a contemporary context. Gardens, in my view, represent one of our most profound connections to nature. They are integral to any society and facilitate cultural integration, as individuals from diverse backgrounds can appreciate and relate to nature on some level. My interest lies in exploring this relationship and its evolution over time by studying how gardens have been represented historically across different cultures worldwide. In addition to the historical and cultural dimensions, I am also investigating the role of gardens within urban ecosystems.

I am studying four types of gardens through my art to explore their relationship with humans: historical gardens, literary/philosophical/poetic gardens, gardens affected by environmental abuse, and contemporary urban gardens.

As a contemporary miniature artist, my art practice utilizes traditional miniature techniques from South Asia. It incorporates elements from the histories, myths, and folktales of various cultures and origins. These symbolic elements are placed within contemporary settings to explore their relevance in modern contexts. My work is developed by reviewing historical texts, literature, and related artworks to analyse the current interpretations of the themes being addressed. The research process plays a crucial role in concept development and is integral to the final artwork.

Painting Gardens and Narratives

My painting series, 'The Gardens of Eternity: Bagh-i-Wah Series I and II', is inspired by the Mughal Emperor Jehangir's gardens in Wah from the 1600s. Reimagined through Mughal paintings and historical texts, these gardens in Wah, near Islamabad, Pakistan, were named after the emperor exclaimed "Wah" (meaning "Wow") upon seeing them. The central pool reportedly had royal fish with pearls in their noses.

The fish currently swim in the pools without the pearl nose rings. The intention is to depict the fish within a series of paintings featuring gardens, streams, birds, and Mughal-style botanical flowers. This painting series aims to create a narrative through imagery of gardens and incorporate various historical and folkloric stories to provide a deeper and multi-layered meaning.

In my painting, 'The Enchanting Shalamar Gardens Series I: Mehtabi Talaab', I draw inspiration from the historic Mughal gardens of Lahore, renowned worldwide and listed as a UNESCO world heritage site. The Shalamar Gardens feature three levels (upper, middle, lower), echoing the Persian Chaharbaghs. The centrepiece of the middle gardens is the mehtabi, a white marble pathway leading to a pavilion in the pond, designed for moon gazing. Surrounded by various shade and fruit-bearing trees and botanical flowers, this painting pays tribute to the mehtabi and its natural surroundings.



The Enchanting Shalamar Gardens Series I: Mehtabi Talaab, 2023 Watercolor and Gouache on Watercolor Paper.

The concept of my painting, 'A Garden in Time: Ten Miles Peach Blossoms Grove' takes inspiration from the stories associated with the peach blossom tree in Asian mythology and fiction. It examines the significant role that this tree plays in Asian culture, highlighting the connection between nature and various cultures globally. The painting delves into the narrative of the peach blossom garden from ancient times. The idea of such a place, which serves as a source of eternal love spanning thousands of years, formed the basis of this work. The inspiration for this painting comes from the novel by Tang Qi Gong Zi. In Chinese culture, peach blossom trees symbolize femininity and empowerment. According to myth, an ancient goddess's garden had a peach tree granting immortality to those who ate its fruit every 3000 years. My painting celebrates this beautiful garden and the myths surrounding it.



A Garden in Time: Ten Miles Peach Blossoms Grove, 2025 Medium: Watercolor, Gouache on Watercolor Paper

In my painting, 'The Moonlight Garden: Mehtab Bagh Series I', I examine the tradition of moonlight gardens. In South Asia, there was a tradition of creating these gardens due to the predominantly hot weather throughout the year. These gardens were specifically designed to enhance the experience of enjoying moonlight. As a result, the plantations included white botanical flowers that glowed in the moonlight and floral trees that emitted intoxicating fragrances at night.

Many Indian miniature paintings portray gardens in the moonlight featuring floral trees, botanical flowers, birds, and animals. The stars and moon create an atmosphere of wonder for viewers. The series "Mehtab Bagh" acknowledges the moonlight gardens established by various kings and maharajas centuries ago in the Indian subcontinent. These historic gardens provide insight into the past and remind us of humanity's connection with nature.



The Moonlight Garden: Mehtab Bagh Series I, 2023 Watercolor and Gouache on Watercolor Paper

Monsoon season is an essential period in the subcontinent, bringing heavy rains for nearly three months. The Koel's song welcoming the rains and the earthy aroma of rain are unique experiences. Mughal and Indian miniature paintings, as well as the memoirs of Emperors Babur and Jehangir, capture the essence of monsoon with vivid descriptions of flora, fauna, and the joy it brings. Monsoon rains are crucial for our ecosystem, and timely rainfall maintains its balance. Elders often hope for rain to bring

joy and happiness to all. I celebrate the rain as a source of new life on Earth.

Bulleh Shah one of the most famous Punjabi Sufi poets of South Asia examines the attitude of birds versus humans towards food in one of his famous poems “Vaikh Bandiya” (O Human Being). It has inspired me to examine the birds and their simple life in sync with nature. One of the main reason for global warming is

human greed and lack of respect for nature. The story of mangrove garden studies the habitat and life that it supports and sustains through its existence which is under threat due to humans neglect of not respecting nature and preserving it for future generations. And in consequence an entire habitat is under threat of extinction.



*The Monsoon Gardens: Megh Malhar Series I, 2024,
Watercolor and Gouache on Watercolor Paper*

Vaikh bandiya!
Asmaan te ud'day panchi.
vaikh te sehi ki karday ne.
na o karday rizq zakheera.
na o bhokay marday ne.
kadi kissay ne pankh pakheero.
phukay marday waikhey ne.
banday hi karday rizq zakheera.
banday hi phukkay marday ne.

O' Human Being
These Birds Flying
Do you see what they do?
They don't store any food with greed
And they don't die of hunger
Has anyone see flying birds dying of hunger?
It's greedy Human that store food
It's Humans that die of hunger.
(Translation)

Contemporary Narratives in Classical Painting

My current painting series explores contemporary gardens and is rooted in my research conducted at the Denver Botanic Gardens. These were created during my year-long Artist Residency with the Gardens. These works reflect my deep engagement with the site and the interpretation of its many layers of meaning. One painting in this series is called 'Monet Pond: Bagh-i-Denver III', and is directly inspired by the Monet Pond at the Denver Botanic Gardens. Discovering this breathtaking space, which is filled with vibrant water lilies floating quietly in the midst of a bustling city, felt like stumbling upon a secret garden. Amid the surrounding urban landscape, the pond offers a moment of stillness and serenity.

Water lilies, sacred in many Asian cultures, symbolize peace and harmony. At the Monet Pond, their multicolored blooms radiate a



The Story of the Mangrove Garden I, 2024
Watercolor, Gouache on Watercolor Paper

quiet joy, drawing hundreds of visitors who come to sit, reflect, and reconnect with nature. Dragonflies, butterflies, bees, and ducks animate the scene, adding to its sense of wonder and vitality. Through my painting, I sought to capture the sense of magic and tranquility evoked by the flowers and wildlife. To express the emotional atmosphere they created, and how they transformed an urban space into a sanctuary of beauty and meaning.

The decorative borders in Mughal miniature paintings are known as hashiyas, meaning a border and they form a prominent feature of South Asian art. They are used as ornate frames to give paintings a distinctively ornamental finish. Traditionally, real gold was often used in these borders to enhance their grandeur and importance. The more intricate and elaborately designed the hashiyas were, the more valuable and revered the painting became. In my painting, 'Monet Pond: Bagh-i-Denver III', I wanted to evoke that same sense of specialness and opulence. To do so,

I created elaborate, intricate hashiyas around the composition and incorporated 24-karat gold leaf into the design. As a central jewel in the Bagh-i-Denver series, and a highlight of the Denver Botanic Gardens, the Monet Pond was painted in this manner to underline both its visual beauty and its emotional significance.

Another painting in the Bagh-i-Denver series focuses on the importance of creating pollinator garden, which are safe, vibrant habitats for butterflies, bees, ladybugs, hummingbirds, and even rabbits, nestled among the colorful flowers of Colorado. As urban development continues to expand, these small yet vital creatures are rapidly losing their natural spaces. To preserve the ecological balance of nature, we must intentionally build green spaces dedicated to them.

I was particularly inspired by a circular labyrinth at Chatfield Farms, where a simple path outlined with stones invited quiet reflection and play. I incorporated the form of that pathway into my painting, alongside imagery drawn from the enchanting Butterfly Pavilion. These elements helped me imagine a space where humans and pollinators can interact, connect, and learn to coexist. The painting is a vision of a shared garden, one that reminds us of the beauty and necessity of caring for even the smallest members of our ecosystem.



Monet Pond: Bagh-i-Denver Series III, 2024
Watercolor, Gouache and 24 Kt Gold Leaf



Chatfield Farms Butterfly Labyrinth: Bagh-i-Denver Series II, 2023
Watercolor, Gouache and Engraving

Humanity and Nature: Reviving the Lost Dialogue

I paint gardens to reflect humanity's deep but often overlooked relationship with the natural environment; a relationship strained by neglect and urbanization. In a world where increasing numbers of people live amid concrete and steel, my painted gardens serve as imagined sanctuaries of spiritual well-being and emotional tranquillity. They celebrate the quiet, enduring beauty of Mother Nature.

These gardens are visual windows or portals

that invite viewers to pause, reflect, and immerse themselves in the delicate forms of botanical flowers and shrubs. Through this creative and imaginative reconstruction of green spaces, I aim to rekindle our long-standing connection with the natural world. Ultimately, my work is a call to action: to inspire a sense of care and responsibility toward our often-neglected natural wonders, and to remind us that nature is not just a backdrop to human life, but a vital gift which we must respect and protect for ourselves and future generations.

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