

DIPEN GADA & ASSOCIATES

despite initial apprehensions from the fraternity, dipen gada turned reluctant acceptance into respect and admiration over time, with his minimalistic design and global voice

Dipen Gada's entry into the vibrant interiors and architecture industry was unorthodox. Though frequently addressed as an architect, Dipen Gada is a Civil Engineer, with a degree from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. With well-founded structural knowledge, a passion for striking design and a competent aesthetic sense, he runs one of Vadodara's best regarded interiors and architectural studios.

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auto-didacticism

Dipen Gada's diffidence had little to do with his own capacity, hinging mainly on the way inhabitants of this universe responded to his entrance into the industry. "Earlier people in the fraternity had their reservations about a civil engineer and felt it was wrong for someone to be in this industry without the education for it," he says. He found himself in a catch-22 situation where, though enthusiastic about learning interior design, he lacked the basic portfolio and qualifications to intern at an architecture-interiors firm. Dipen Gada strove for knowledge and exposure, while inhabiting the same world as professionals with degrees in architecture, embarking on a path of self-learning, grasping information from available resources honed by his own experience. "I often referred to magazines, rarely reading the text, but instead looking at the projects featured and deciphering the thought behind them," says Dipen Gada. He questioned the reasons and advantages a given design brought to the project, and improvised on those designs.

He constantly attended various seminars organized by IIID and others in his quest for information.

Dipen Gada learned by observation, saying, "I tend to observe things; those which are around me and which aren't," and kept himself updated on the design developments and happenings in other cities such as Mumbai and Delhi and overseas. He considers his lack of formal education a boon, referring to this as a blank slate that often helps him identify unnoticed errors, improving and building on them in his design process. He says, "The attitude of improvisation is a continuous process in my life, a constant upgrade on things known and unknown. This is an ideology we follow at DGA, and I think it is what has made everyone appreciate our work." He regards his tenure as the Chairperson of IIID Baroda Chapter as a great part of the learning curve, interacting with designers from across India and internationally; discussing philosophies, approaches to design, and styles of working.



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of structures and interiors

Dipen Gada's initial tryst with interiors started with a commission by his cousin and the remodel of a residence. "My instincts on the aesthetics of the space were appreciated by several people who visited their home. This led to the design of the interiors of a textile and garment retail space," he says. In 1993, he established Dipen Gada & Associates (DGA), taking advantage of the vacuum in the interiors space in Vadodara (then Baroda), where established architects were less involved with the interiors of the space, and there arose a need for more value than the local contractors offered. The boutique design studio catered to retail, residential and commercial interiors projects. Dipen Gada bagged his first architectural project after a decade of practice, an eleven-storied residential tower in Bombay (now Mumbai). "The client chose a designer who didn't belong to the city as he wanted a say in the design," he says, adding "A learning curve in my career, the project was beneficial to me, and helped develop me as a designer."

Today, Dipen Gada consciously avoids limiting the work he undertakes, saying, "Undertaking only the interiors of a residential project makes the project obstructive and monotonous. Sometimes the interiors just becomes a question of selection between furniture, materials, finishes, textures; this restricts your creative freedom to actually design the interior." He prefers creating designs that enable him to fuse the architectural elements of the project into the interiors of the space. This ideology is reflected in Dipen Gada's projects such as The Wall House, Bharuch, where the 34 feet high exterior wall, clad in raw unfinished kota stone* seamlessly merges the architecture with the interior of the project, avoiding the need for unnecessary interior embellishments. "The same wall that bifurcates the entire of the structure, nurtures the entire house on the inside," says Dipen Gada.

*a fine-grained variety of limestone, from the Kota district of Rajasthan



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work culture

Over the last two decades, Dipen Gada & Associates has constantly evolved and upgraded. "Someone once sprung a question about the architect who designed the Taj Mahal and I realized, no one really knows the name, it is only remembered for the person who commissioned the project. Though I was happy with the increasing number of projects we undertook, you realize how wrong I was. The slowdown geared up the practice and made us more performance driven. We invested more time in the finer details, and there was a comparable return in terms of recognition, clients and designs,"

says Dipen Gada. Having struck a fine balance between the number of projects undertaken and the quality of their design, Dipen Gada is firmer than ever on philosophy and working style. He adds, "I believe that focusing on one detailed project is equivalent to 100 standard projects. Today we, as designers, are satisfied with the design and details of 7 out of 10 projects that we undertake, much higher than what was achieved earlier."

Restricting the studio to a maximum of twenty designers, Dipen Gada works towards creating a

boutique identity of the practice as a whole, rather than individuals. "My interactions at Design Sutra, organized by the IIID in 2000 was a game changer. I came across a Swedish firm that operated years after the demise of the principal designer, based on the goodwill, values, reputation, philosophies and the work culture put into practice decades ago. I decided this was the way to grow." At DGA it is the functionality, usability, context and concept of the design that defines their work culture and makes the practice successful.



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looking ahead

Dipen Gada dreams of creating projects that are completely 'Made in India', with every high-quality material being locally sourced, and rues that he is unable to label a single project "100% Made in India". However, he does his bit, saying, "Several products manufactured in India are at par with those sourced from abroad in terms of quality and aesthetic parameters. As the design fraternity we are encouraging manufacturers to produce aesthetically stronger and functional products, however, Indian manufacturers are yet to bridge the demand-supply nexus in the interior industry."

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Optimistic about the future of Indian design on the global platform, Dipen Gada believes that diversity and culture is the key to capitalize on. With various designers fusing the past with the modern, he finds the younger generation of entrepreneurs and manufacturers proactive and quality conscious. "Though the resources are in place, we lack a system which will encourage these young designers. The cost of prototyping products is exorbitant, and there are no rigid copyrights, patents and royalty policies that safeguard the designs." Bearing in mind the changing scenario and the new government policies, Dipen Gada looks towards a revolutionary decade ahead. ¶¶

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