

ANALOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Vadodara-based architectural firm Dipen Gada & Associates' design of their own office space acts as a public statement of their professionalism, with textural finishes enlivening a sustainable setup and a social, open working environment.

*Text: Moanasi Hattangada
Photographs: courtesy Tejas Shah & Dipen Gada Associates*



The reception with its imagery cast by designed details encapsulates a unique experience for the visitor.

"...the reality of architecture is not contained in the roof and walls, but in the space within." - Nari Gandhi.

Every office needs a space that reflects its own deceptions, its growing sensibility—a space that captures the essence of it. When the client is oneself, the contemplation presents an opportunity to be real in itself—to review and adopt a new philosophy. To this end, DGA's core ideas, notions of journey, spatial experience and interior/exterior transition, are all present in the design of their own office in Vadodara. It is conceived as an ambience conveyed through dark tones, lighting and furniture.

The fresh, modern fit out is seamlessly restructured to align with its existing 40 years old building in a suburban region of the city. Rather than mimicking the neighbouring fabric, the office, given its own character, juts out. Shedding light

on the reasons of not moving to a newer place, the architects say, "We did not want to leave the space, but at the same time we were looking for a functional and spacious office that could hold a larger staff. The building structure was load bearing and having structural wall which was creating rooms. We wanted more open spaces and needed to remove the walls. Also the slab was corroded, which was why we have taken the advice of a structural designer and broken the slab, plaster and walls". The result is a positive addition to the streetscape and broader public space. You would probably expect an office building to have a certain height and a futuristic look, but the architects over at Dipen Gada & Associates thought

The employment of a textural palette heightens the material sensibility.

of messing with this conventional pattern by conditioning a restrained palette of materials and finishes. The architects have worked out to provide a sense of space and volume to a small scale project with a floor area of 1000sqft, with detailing. The brief expounded on five interlocking but distinct functions like the reception, main workspace inclusive of the cabin, conference room, a discussion area and

a terrace garden, each combined with a strong internal quality. The sense of orientation and arrival speaks of a frank aesthetic of a collage of photographs of the office staff and associates—past and present that familiarises the visitor with the office's presence. The design unfolds as a continuous element composed of balanced features like a long mirror painted with 'shlokas', a narrow opening which



Section through the main studio

Section through the terrace water body



The walls of the Conference Room are rendered with different texture, eventually focusing on a black granite table etched with the designer's fingerprint.

travels horizontally as a cut, a water feature at its base, the slab modified with jute to suit a chequered texture and a bronze sculpture. The water feature casts a transient environment owing to the changing light patterns. To align with a more functional environment that remains sensitive to its agenda of creative exploration, the reception spills out into the main workspace that has a minimalistic approach. The conference room, tucked away to the left of the entry, is wrapped simply with variegating textures and a black granite topped table etched with the designer's thumbprint. The remaining area reveals an open-plan transparency. Falling out to an open work studio, the area visually and physically expands the compact space and blurs outdoor/indoor relationships. An intimate discussion zone is alienated from the main workstations, all which is embellished in plywood with colour finishes. A custom-designed clock, marking the focal visual interest of the room, overlooks the discussion table impressed with the abstraction of an architectural drawing. While the open plan and workstation design has capitalised on abundant natural light, the transforming gradation of light that seep in are enhanced by apt artificial lighting. In addressing the redesign of the rear areas of the office, the architects proposed the slabs not as a blank canvas but as a workscape wherein the firm's profile is engraved. The coverage of the cement sheet panelled false ceiling spans only 20 per cent of the area. The sense of discovery is expressed in the muted furnishings—from a coffee table made of ply and black granite; a bench formulated inventively of the basic componentry of sleeper logs and mild steel 'I' sections to the interior tables with imprinted ply and granite.



The office is structurally manipulated to unfold as an open plan workspace.

A hierarchy of privacy is provided by layering the spaces. The layout argues out the shortcomings of the previous design where the lead designer's cabin was isolated from the workspace and exposed to the reception. To give the space a creative edge, the interior plays on many juxtaposing shadow with artificial light and solid with void. The employment of a textural palette heightens the material sensibility. The ceiling height had been raised by two feet during the structural manipulation to smoothen a freer sense of space.

The terrace is framed sculpturally amidst lawn turf with a concrete screen etched with Rabindranath Tagore's profile. Sprinklings of flowers settle on a still water feature beneath it, flanked by two gazebos.



A custom-designed clock is hung above the discussion table, occupying a central place of visual interest in the open workplace.

The terrace garden, being an uptake on the idea of an introspection space, also has a swing suspended from a pergola structure. Overall, it defines an informal culture that allows the tired architects to engage and socialise in a setting apart from work or host clientele gatherings as a space which interacts with them and the clientele on an intimate level.

Supplementary considerations are also aspect—more so on the lines of energy efficiency, deliberating on use of cool coat paints, CFL lamps, re-used flooring and using materials like exposed concrete, IPS, scrap metal, slate, kota, granite and wood, in their truest form. The introduction of the terrace garden also provides insulation to the



studio below.

The depth of thought and the journey alone allows one to appreciate the effort and satisfaction that was put in to make a workplace to take inspiration from. It evolves as an exploration that investigates simplicity in form, colour and detail. A subtle architectural form is used to present the studios work, with a balance of materials, providing an honest interior that does not overpower the design ethos of the firm. Perfectly offsetting an exploratory dialogue, the DGA Studio Workspace is an exemplary notion on how the designers can connect to the sense of being one with their own work.



Overlapping, interplaying and intersecting surfaces compose the envelope of the internal spaces.

FACT FILE:

Project	: DGA (Dipen Gada & Associates) Designers Studio Workspace
Location	: Alkapuri, Vadodara
Architect	: Dipen Gada
Design team	: Dipen Gada, Yatin Kavaiya & Jiten Tosar & entire DGA Team
Landscape Designer	: Tulsiabhai Narola
Area	: 1000sqft approx + Terrace Development
Civil contractors	: Rajesh Patel (Rahi Construction)
Carpentry contractors	: Ultramarjji & Sumerji
Completion of project	: December 2009