

INSIDE OUTSIDE

ISSUE 260

THE INDIAN DESIGN MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2007 Rs 50





Inventiveness, lateral thinking, and fresh perspectives – the team at Planet 3, led by Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo, believes that the key to addressing the needs of a client lies in asking basic questions. They aim to challenge a priori notions of programming, design development and actual construction. In spite of being a firm of architectural design professionals, they do not limit themselves to design only, but employ sociologists, behavioural psychologists, project management experts and MBAs!

‘We create cutting-edge design solutions born out of incisive programming and build these as well. The entire process – from research to programming to development of prototypes to design detail to the actual construction on site and post-completion services – is all handled seamlessly.’ They believe that as designers and constructors, they are ethically bound to answer for their creations, in contrast to the traditional separation between designers and contractors which often puts them in adversarial roles, acting at cross purposes. ‘As “master builders” we try to demonstrate that the way forward for architects in achieving high-end design may just be building it as well.’ No wonder their portfolio ranges from institutional architecture and corporate HQs to nightclubs. The Planet 3 team comprises Kalhan Mattoo, Santha Mattoo, Jyoti Gujarani, Dimple Toreskar, Prashanta Kumar Ghosh, Kanwaldeep Kapoor, Rashmi Pachgade, Hina Parmar, Himanshu Chavda and Vinita Podar.



asking the right **questions**



Three projects
by Planet 3,
two offices and a
nightclub,
show the versatility
and out of the box
thinking
that characterizes
this young
Mumbai-based
architectural practice.

The chic Indian office of US-based
Starwood Capital reflects their
international presence.





A radical departure from the usual staid corporate environment, Planet 3's design for the first Indian office of Starwood Capital is appropriately dynamic, reflecting the international reputation of its parent US-based global investment management firm. Since the company specializes in real estate-related investments on behalf of select private and institutional investors (including many of the world's leading public and private retirement programmes, university endowments, foundations, and high net worth individuals) they required their first office in India to reflect their international presence.

'Their corporate philosophy of transparency and openness had to stand out through the construct,' explain the principal architects, Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo. However, the site entailed several constraints: a nar-

row and split floor plate; high staff density, to be coupled with an ambience of lightness and space; and compliance with a 35-day schedule with no possibility of time and cost over-runs!

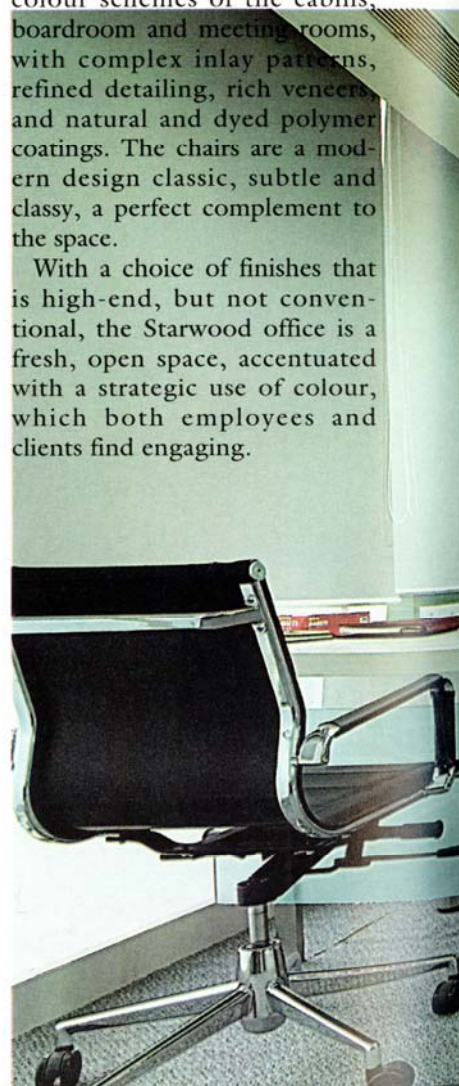
In line with contemporary design trends, the interpretation is straight line, clean and non-fussy. Since the staff tends to work in groups and clusters and interact with each other across aisles, the planning had to facilitate that dynamic.

The reception area is a stylized cube that allows separate access for employees and visitors, with a reception table designed as a continuation of the 'straight line' nature of the space and in the same material language. Behind the reception, the recreation zone and the canteen have been treated in a similar fashion, with the use of bright colour along the tables.

'Paying attention to the hierar-

chies, the cabins and meeting spaces were moved to one unit on the split floor plate while the workstations and cafeteria were moved to the other unit. Glass was used to demarcate different areas, thus increasing access to natural light within the narrow floor plate.' To escape the dull monotony of the usual off-the-shelf modular solutions, the workstations were custom-built, with high-end veneer skins and polish. Similarly, to avoid the design problem that storage cabinets often pose – featurelessness – material and strips of colour changes have been strategically inserted. Special attention has been paid to the detailing and colour schemes of the cabins, boardroom and meeting rooms, with complex inlay patterns, refined detailing, rich veneers and natural and dyed polymer coatings. The chairs are a modern design classic, subtle and classy, a perfect complement to the space.

With a choice of finishes that is high-end, but not conventional, the Starwood office is a fresh, open space, accentuated with a strategic use of colour, which both employees and clients find engaging.





STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

PHOTOGRAPHS: INDRAJIT SATHE

With a choice of finishes that is high-end, but not conventional, the Starwood office comprises transparent and uncluttered spaces, accentuated with a strategic use of colour.





Planet 3 were asked to design an office for Transline, a business that works closely with the airline industry, and the client wanted it to subtly evoke the feel of aircraft interiors.

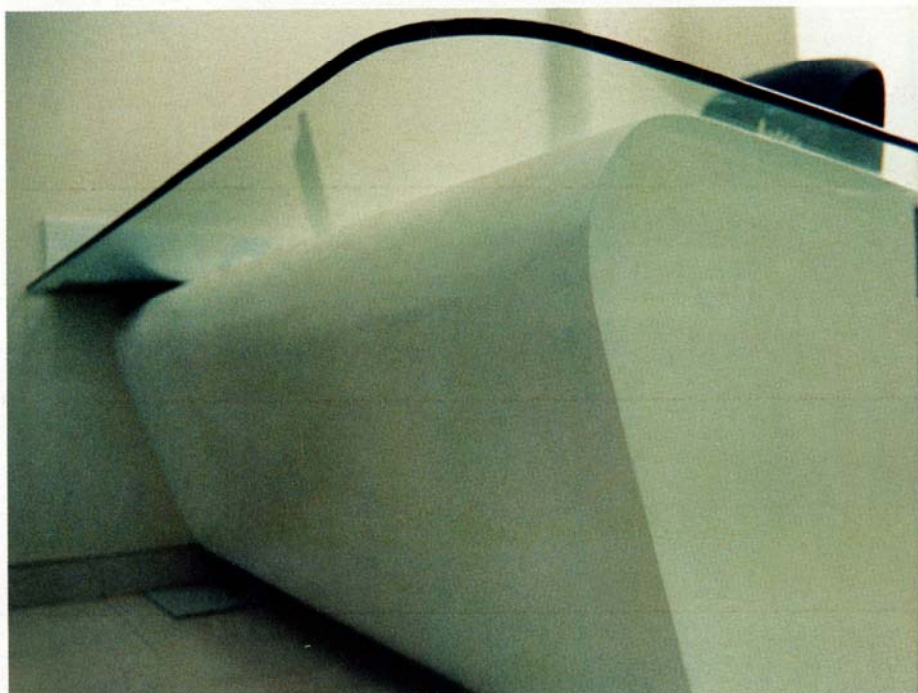
‘The challenge for us as designers was to achieve this without creating a ply and wood poor cousin of the real thing!’ explain Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo. Another constraint was that a large number of workstations had to be fitted within a relatively small space, thereby unintentionally restricting the design solutions.

The requirements of the design were fairly straightforward: many workstations in an open plan environment, a partially enclosed cabin for a manager, an enclosed cabin for the director, and a bathroom. The director needed a direct view of the work area as well as of the manager’s cabin. Other than regular storage requirements, the client also needed a display system for exhibiting objects such as aircraft models.

Within these parameters, a plan has been logically devised that provides the greatest possible ‘open feel’ and an optimal seating density.

A great deal of attention has also been paid to styling and treatment of furniture, fittings and fixtures. ‘We experimented with seamless forms and surfaces that bend and flow without material breaks. This “retro-neo” styling eased the constraints of irregular wall and ceiling alignments and enabled us to literally

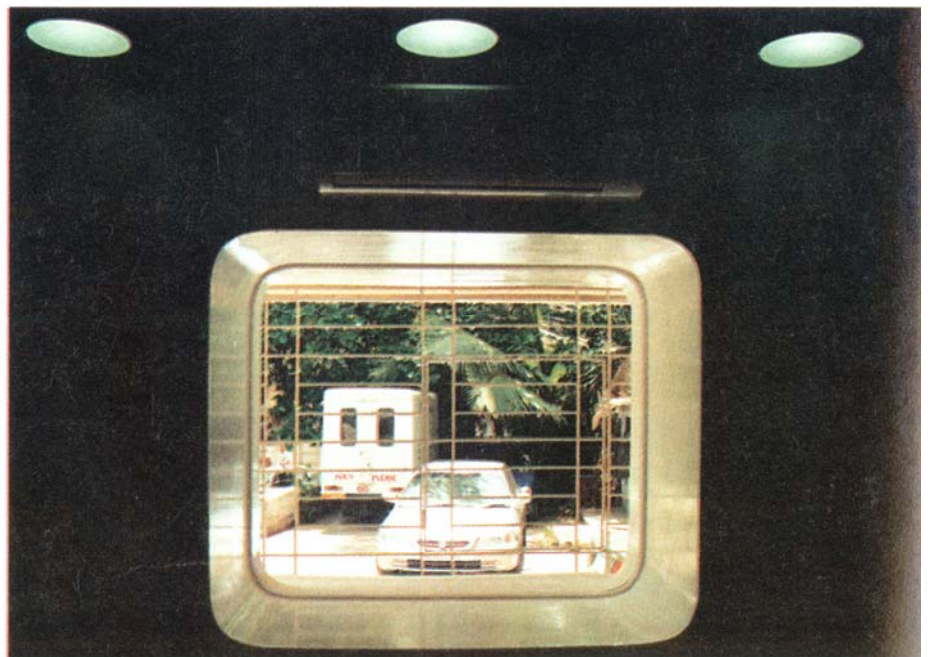
The Transline office subtly evokes the feel of aircraft interiors. A great deal of attention has been paid to styling and treatment of furniture, fittings and fixtures. In experimenting with seamless forms and surfaces, the architects were able to overcome many structural constraints.



FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS!

PHOTOGRAPHS:
COURTESY,
THE ARCHITECTS

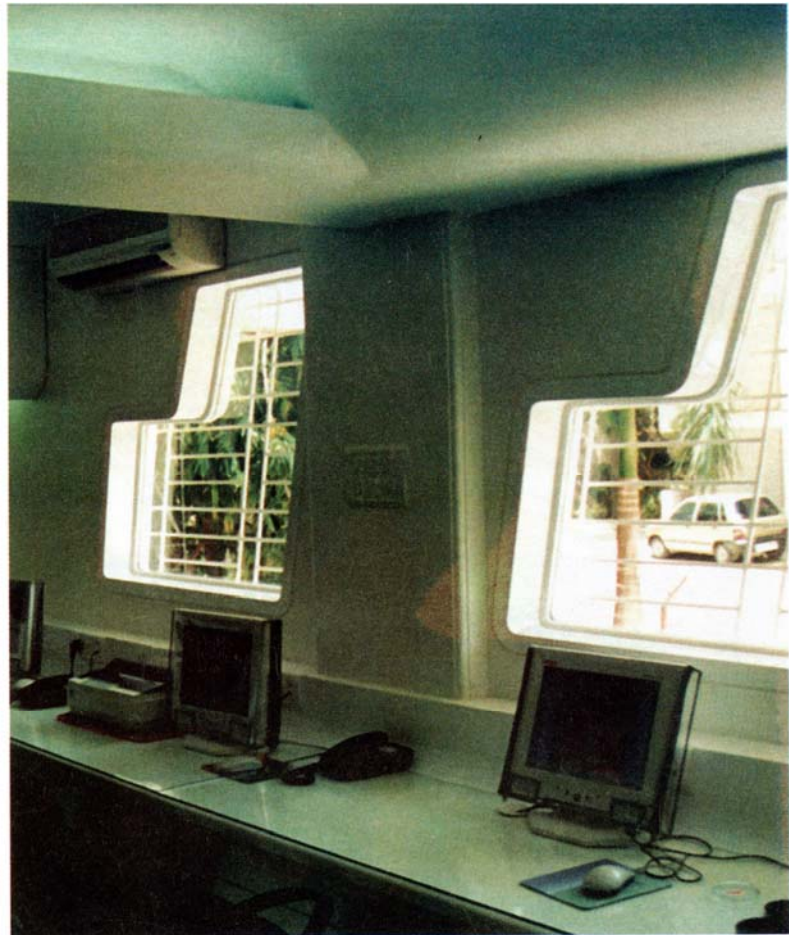




“go with the flow”. In this case, form followed constraint!

The colour palette chosen is in keeping with the youthful character of the organization, using cyan as a complementary colour within an overall scheme of bone white. Since tonal variations on this colour also distinguish the company stationery and logos, the office reiterates this brand image through its unusual architectural design interpretation.

Window details,
and storage cabinets
reminiscent of
overhead lockers,
all evoke the
in-flight
experience!

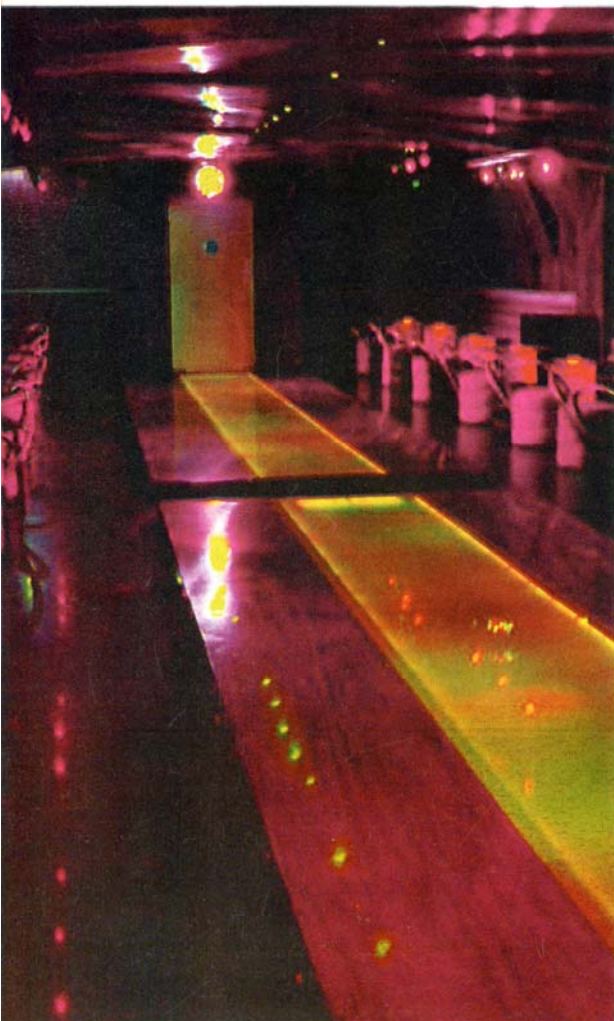




A hip nightclub in the heart of Bangalore, LN caters not to teenyboppers but to a mature and successful clientele.

The client had a clear vision in terms of the profile of the end users, and wanted a design solution that would appeal to refined tastes. 'We had to achieve a fine balance between novelty (minus funk) and that exclusive quality that builds loyalty. Once inside, our patrons had to be completely transported to an alternate reality, a complete disconnect from the outside.'

The architects proposed a



FEELIN' GROOVY!

PHOTOGRAPHS: VISHWAJIT SORAP & THE ARCHITECTS

'We were sold on the idea of altering perceived reality through manipulation of lighting. We love LEDs for their immense potential and novelty.'



deceptively simple arrangement of tables and seats on either side of a central aisle, which is like a dance floor linking the entrance lobby with the cabin for the DJ. This closely follows the linear form of the site. Basic services, a back office and a lounge for private parties have been accommodated in space available to the side.

'In a major departure from standard nightclub design, we proposed a space sculpted of constantly undulating and criss-crossing wooden beams that would descend on the walls as well. This polymorphic-looking construct has a contemporary architectural feel.' It required immense carpentry and workmanship skills that one can appreciate up close. Volumes of wood veneer have been used in the unlikeliest of applications, and the upholstery chosen for seating consists of easily maintainable synthetic fabrics.

This, however, is only the shell that houses the central theme. The whole dance floor and all the tables are constructed of

toughened glass, under-lit with programmable, colour-changing LED lights, capable of creating any of a million colours. Hooked up with some ceiling mounts, the entire system of glowing tables and stage works together to create incredible effects! Other lights (except effect lights) have been restricted to the bare minimum. With a host of programming options including time delay, the DJ can manipulate the mood of the moment, pace the rate of change to the beats of the music beats, and mix colours and effects by separately manipulating different sections of lit area.

'We were sold on the idea of altering perceived reality through manipulation of lighting. We love LEDs for their immense potential and novelty.' The feedback has been very positive, and the client is happy to have unusually low electricity bills, for the LED lights consume a minuscule amount of power compared to standard fixtures. They produce much less heat as well, resulting in a reduced requirement for air-conditioning. The client even expects to recover the entire

expense on the interiors within a year's time.

'As an unintended bonus, the crazy space sculpting we did with the ceiling and the walls helps achieve fantastic acoustics. The sound reverberates and scatters in a manner that eliminates most high or low pockets. The place truly rocks!' 