INDIAN
ARCHITECT AND
BUILDER

INNOVATE

I A & B

GOLDEN PAGODA:
A new Indian
Sky-rise

Jasubhai
MEDIA

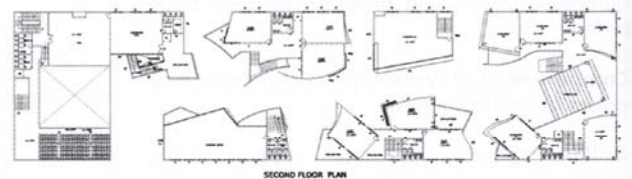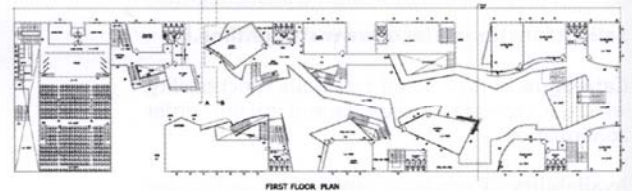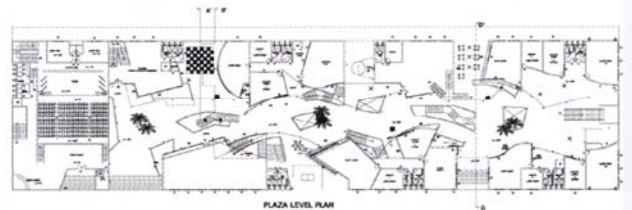# INVIGORATING STYLE

Mumbai-based Planet 3 Studios is a young design firm, which brings creativity, knowledge and attitude to the projects they undertake and this in turn makes the designs look smart and modern with a contemporary accent.

Photographs: Mrigank Sharma

PLAZA LEVEL PLAN

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SECOND FLOOR PLAN
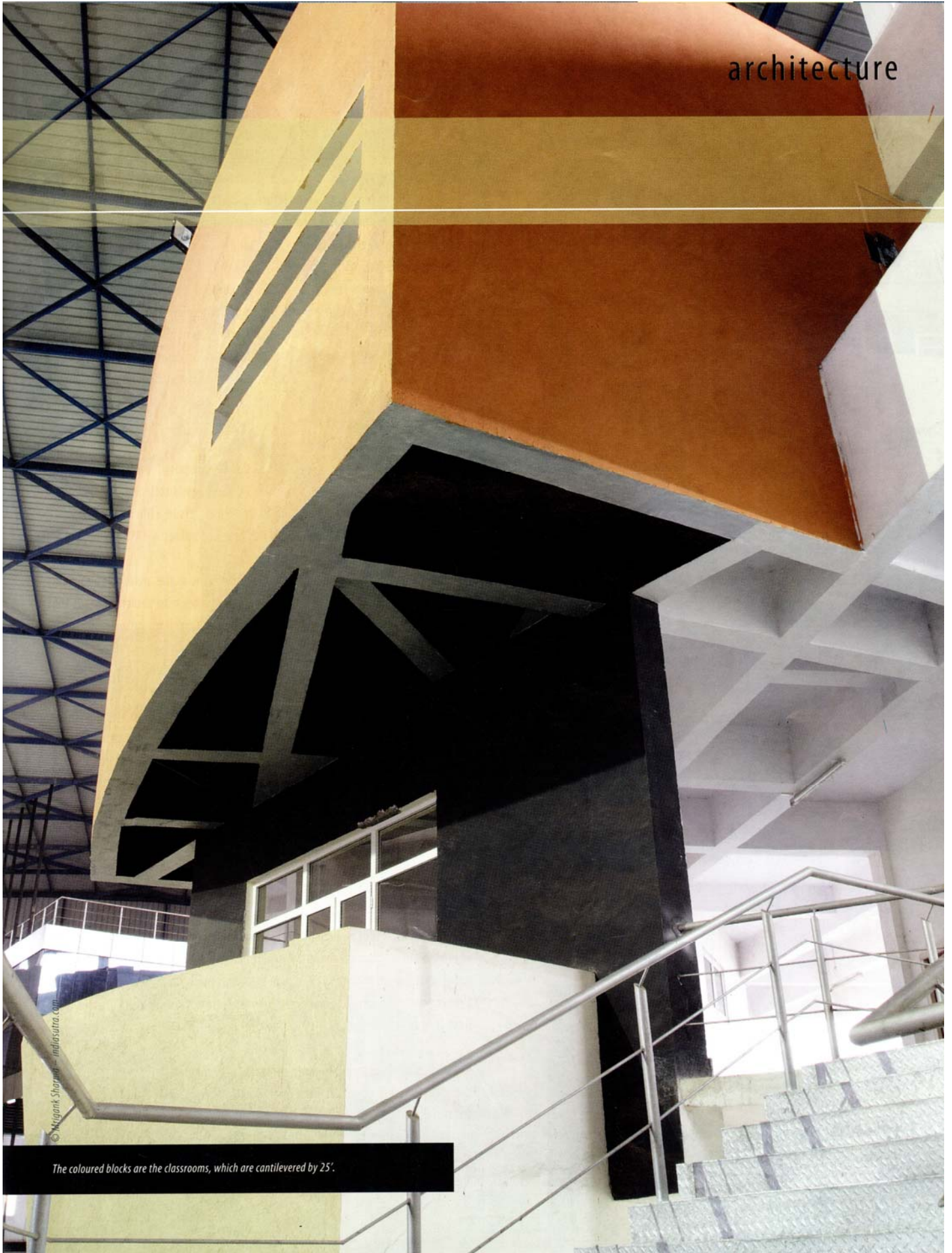
FLOOR PLANS

The coloured blocks are the classrooms, which are cantilevered by 25'. They give out a different perspective of new age institutional architecture.

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The curves and different forms juxtapose familiar with the unfamiliar, which resulted in an excited atmosphere.

Principal's cabin – one of the most exciting parts of the whole project. Hung from the roof trusses by the help of steel cables enables the head of the institution to keep an eye on all the activities happening down below.

Established in 1997, Planet 3 Studios has had their share of bittersweet experiences in one of the most influential professions, which today has the power and responsibility to shape the environment in which people spend their entire lives. But the firm started by Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo still has their main focus on developing core competence in design by infusing original ideas. In their very first architecture project, the Vidyalankar Institute of Technology, the firm established that architecture is much too important to leave and it not only reflects the society that builds it, but it also affects the way that society develops. The project—true to the efforts put by the creators—represents the very social and cultural background of the theme, which here is education. In a city like Mumbai, where myriad architectural styles scream for attention; a distinct architecture symbol was created for an educational institution. And the site offered an opportunity to the architects to energise an urban area that had long been unappealing. It demanded a 'transformational' vision of invigorating its decrepit urban presence and 'Vidyalankar', the client, had the vision to look beyond default modernist box architecture and did not find it necessary to measure the success and the ability of the young architectural firm to build the largest possible enclosure in least amount of money. As per the client brief, the proposed college building had to express the will of the institution for enabling progress in a liberal environment; to build a campus that best embodied its cherished values.

The boon here was that the client was as enthusiastic as the architects about this project. The shared design sensibilities helped the team to avoid decisions that smacked feasibility. The client and the architects agreed on not sacrificing the important aspects of the campus life to space or economies. The design team took Oxford and Cambridge university designs of campus development and learned from the time-tested models. They wanted to incorporate the best of both in this challenging project, which had various restrictions, though the project needed ability to engage a complex design programme. The challenge was in articulating the requirements of four distinct faculties within the same building and establishing network accesses to shared amenities. The design had to be simple and intuitive, of equitable use, flexible, involve low physical effort. It also had to work within context and constraint, communicate ideas visually, be experimentally satisfying and most importantly, conform to restrictive building codes. The design process was initiated with the audacious premise of re-engineering the basic campus build, which was to be a beta site for prototype testing. The architects chose to experiment with horizontal urbanism rather than going for vertical blocks, which is very usual when it comes to campus buildings. The hunt for options became an experimental, inventive and later, thinking game, as the team wished to challenge pre-conceptions and thus, hoped to affect a perceptual shift, which they wished to emerge from the modernist ghettos with fresh insights into the city.

After lot of brainstorming regarding making the campus unique and stand out, the architects hit upon the idea of building an educational village within an industrial container. This 'village' has various groupings of similar requirements in clearly definable structures with a main street as the central organising device as well as hospitable site for spontaneous student interactions. This complex of open spaces, enclosed semi-public spaces and private areas has the spatial
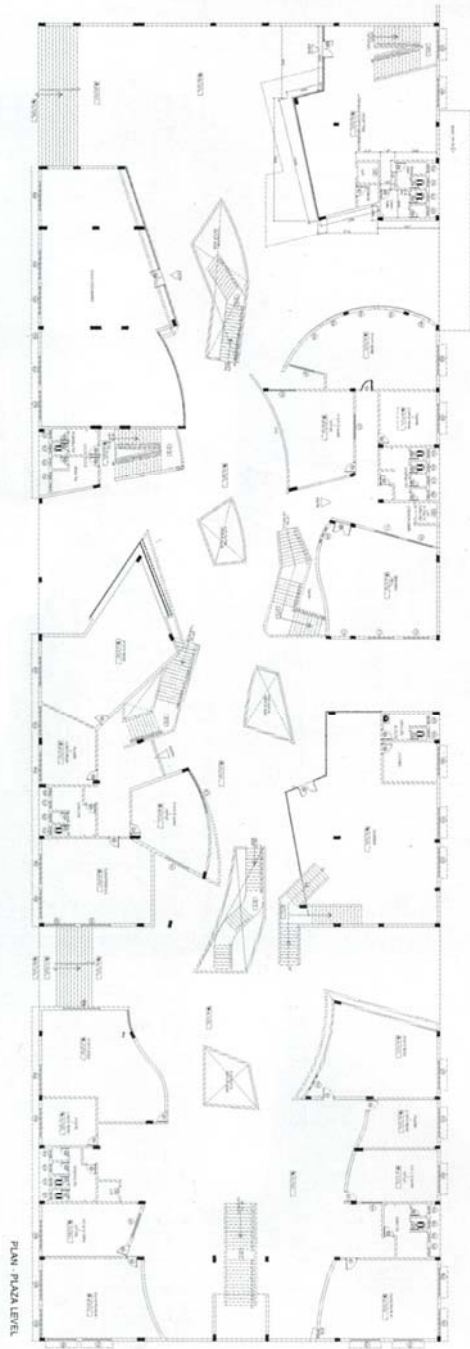
The blocks on the first floor overlook the campus streetscape below.

The campus streetscape, which is a first-time concept in India.

PLAN - PLAZA LEVEL

PLAN

ELEVATIONS

CONCRETE WARP DETAIL

connectivity of open interiors encouraging egalitarian and communal learning space. Each programming requirement such as administration, library, engineering faculties, canteen etc were arranged as individual blocks situated on either side of the inner street and each such block was envisaged to function as a self-contained facility, connected at various levels with adjacent structures. Certain blocks like the principal's cabin and administrative block were done as overhanging structures that defied gravity. The structural design had to account for warped R.C.C walls that were raised up to 20' in height, classrooms cantilevered by 25', principal's cabin supported by a truss and a seminar hall to seat 100 hung from roof trusses by the help of steel cables. On the inner street, signage was used to guide people to their destinations. Most individual spaces have asymmetrical layout plans, with a majority of walls tilted, curved or bent in three dimensions. An oversized sunroof brings in the sky and shields the insides from inclement weather. Thermal reduction coating on multi-wall polycarbonate panels ensures abundant natural light minus the corresponding heat load. Uses of materials in raw form intensified the sense of space and the rich palate of colours and textures engaged, excited and sparked up the senses. With the climate protection that the sunroof provided, the architects were free to apply interior finishes like veneer, laminates, aluminium plates, exposed brickwork, stone tile cladding, mirror, corrugated sheets, polycarbonate, glass, sleeper wood etc on the external surfaces of the individual blocks. The building's public face is a deceptively quiet, porous polycarbonate skin evoking the metaphor of its industrial neighbourhood. This understated gift-wrapping subtly conceals the avant garde, playful forms inside. The skin is engineered to ease glare and yet allow the building to be naturally aerated.

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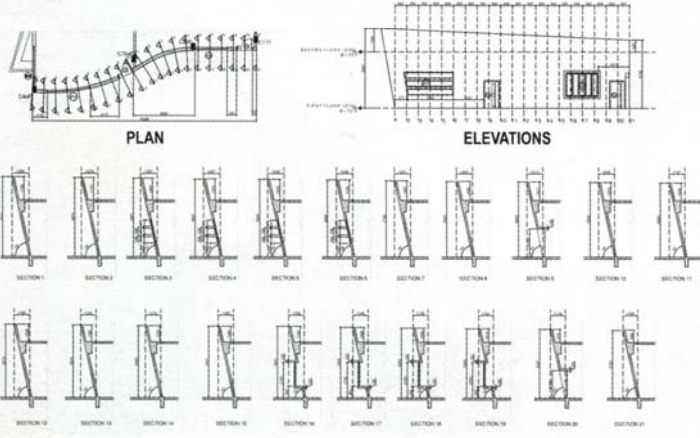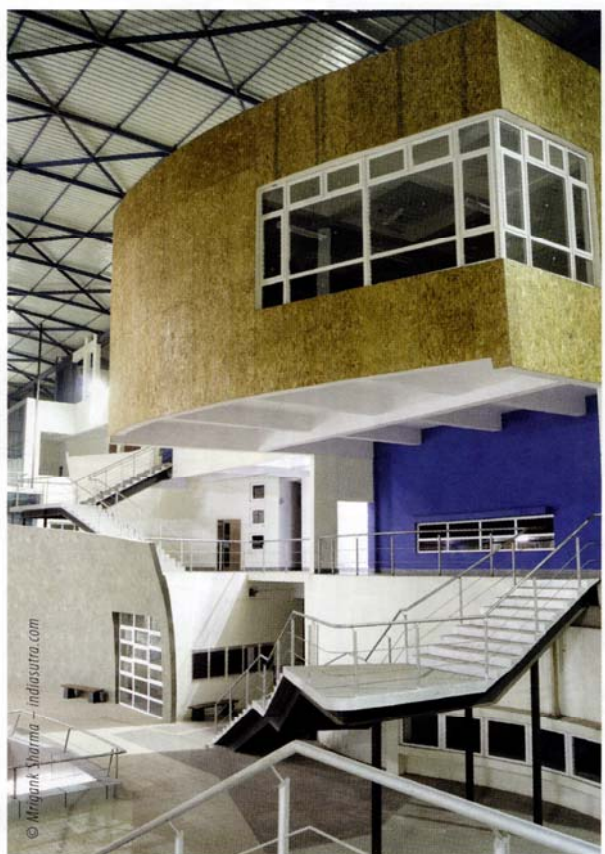
The staircase structure was adapted in a way as to give the whole place a unique shape.

The RCC wall that rises up to 20' in height is one of the components that architects induced to the educational village to add excitement to the environment.

court, a street side café with the canteen block, a couple of phone booths, a book kiosk and a graffiti wall, which indeed livens up the campus environment. The motive behind creating a campus environment within the confines of a building was to induce students to stay inside the precincts and thus becoming a source of cultural energy. All this created a kinesthetic experience of walking through spaces, which indeed is an escape from the orthogonal rigidity. "We hope this design to be an assertion of the fact that powerful design can affect human psyche and duly contribute to building a great institution. This significant physical artefact will challenge future campus architecture. With the commitment expressed by Vidyalankar Trust, we are confident that the dynamic forged in the original designs will not be subverted. Ultimately, our clients are the students and the faculty and only once they populate and embrace the institution as we have imagined would we be truly successful in the endeavour", enthuses Kalhan. ■

FACT FILE:

Client: Vidyalankar Dnanapeeth Trust

Architect: Planet 3 Studios Architecture Pvt. Ltd.

Design team: Kalhan Mattoo, Santha Gour Mattoo, Jainish Jani, Sawant Kaul

Interior Design: Planet 3 Studios Architecture Pvt. Ltd.

Municipal Approvals: John Dantas

Structural designer: S.N. Bhobe & Associates

Project Management Consultancy: S.N. Bhobe & Associates

Civil Contract: Nagarjuna Constructions

Electrical Consultant: Synergy

Services Consultant: Sunil Services

Project Completed: November 2005

Built Area: 1, 65,000 sq ft

Project Cost: 12 Crores

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