

# INDIAN & ARCHITECTS

## ULTRA-LUXURY APARTMENTS: PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

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Gone are the days when luxury and grandeur were seen in terms of beauty and comfort only. The meanings of these words seem to have extended to remarkable accuracy and wondrousness, announcing the arrival of something utterly luxurious. Welcome to the world of ultra-luxury architecture where splendor and comfort have given way to uniqueness and precision reflecting the tastes inspired by foreign architecture. Conventional yardsticks of luxury have ceased to satiate the clients who have travelled far and wide, and have found solace and comfort in the lavish hotels. The fluctuating mindset has effected many changes, with people demanding creativity and originality in every square inch of space they reside for people desiring ultra-luxurious homes.

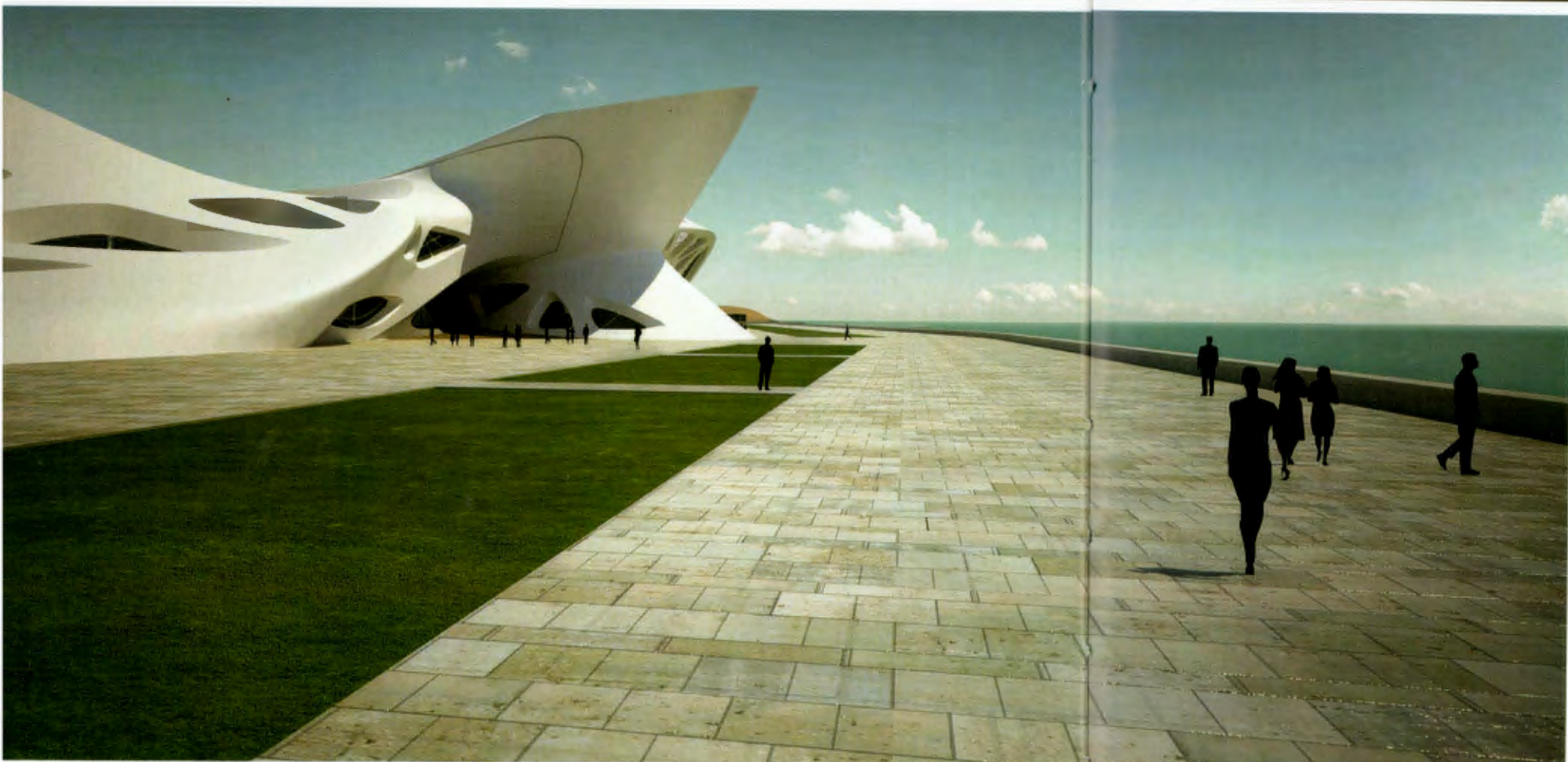
This trend received impetus during the last decade, when well-travelled clientele flooded the designing companies with specific standards inspired from overseas visits. From large-scale architecture and interior designing to even minute customized details like modular kitchen, bathroom fittings, furniture among others, inspiration is gradually tending towards showy and pompous. Imported products like Italian tiles, German bathroom and kitchen fittings and Chinese lighting systems were outmoded. Moreover, the realisation of huge costs incurred during import made the clients decide against it.

The clients thus, in an effort to achieve their newfound standards of beauty and luxury, are turning to consulting or hiring foreign architects. This trend seems harmless, but the importance of getting work supervised by a local accustomed to the Indian conditions is rather undermined. As a result, these architects hire locals who are well versed with the Indian requirements and anthropometric standards to overcome any problem in the designing stage. This trend doesn't seem to pose any problems even now. But this consequent multilayered exercise has its own set of complications. Foreign designs cannot be expected to easily internalize local conditions, while the hired Indians often find themselves venturing in the unknown territory. Hence stranded at a certain stage.





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This article, therefore, focuses on the problems that hinder Indian architects who brave the challenge of designing ultra-luxurious homes based on international standards and products.

Take the case of an independent home or exclusive housing complexes: Indian developers contact foreign architects with their requirements. The demands include some of the most advanced interior products coupled with gadgets: a remote controlled chair, sofa with inbuilt music system, a wall with LED lights, in a nutshell, some high end and exclusive products developed by reputed international brands. While there is nothing incorrect at aiming high, it is essential to realize that very specific requirements and ultra niche demands accompany such high end products. This needs a careful consideration of sanitation, plumbing and electrical works at the drawing stage. Once the issue is sorted the drawings are sent to resident architects for further approval.

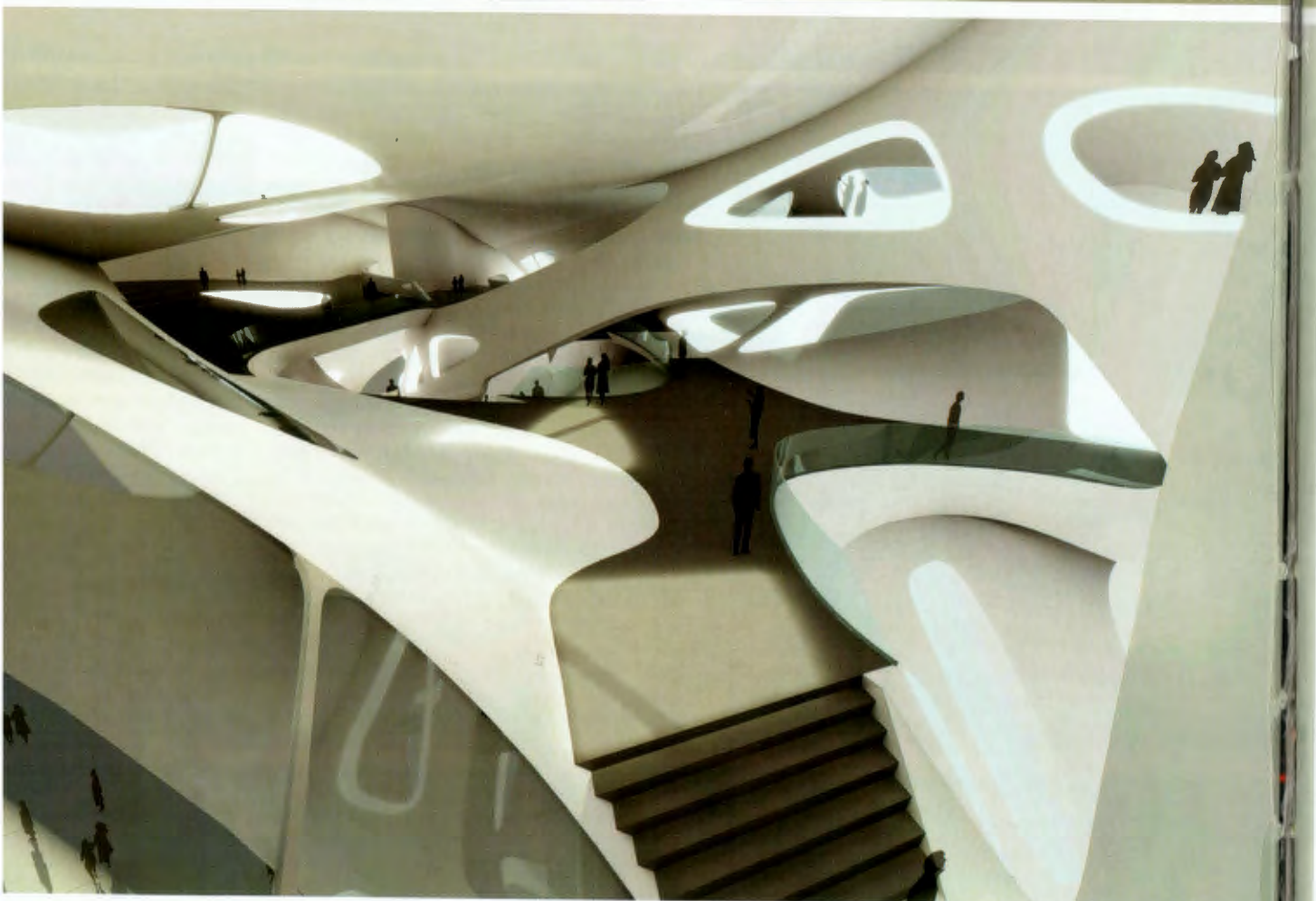
Indian architects admit that it is difficult to comprehend these drawings, and there are high chances of mutual misunderstanding of standards between the two parties involved in designing. Most of the times foreign architects are at fault due to their lack of effort in understanding the scheme of things at work in India. Local standards and requirements have to be taken into account while designing any building here. While this issue gets sorted out after some

discussions, the amount of time expenditure and ensuing confusion cannot be ignored. It is recommended that the client makes a justified choice of consulting a foreign architect who is well versed with the Indian conditions, well before the planning stage.

Another problem is clients' obsessive interest in exclusive international brands. These brands do not meet our standards. Custom made products can be procured once the requirements are sent, but time matters. Nonetheless, the Indian brands lose out on competition, who offer the same goods, with same standards, adhering to Indian requirements, all at a reduced price. This might result in minor tiff with the architect who insists on using the Indian products to lower costs, and these meet the luxury requirements as good as their foreign counterparts. The after sale services and costs too will be affected by this choice.

Loss in revenue by the Indian architects and companies is another accompanying pressing problem that is highly undesirable. When equally competent services can be procured locally, it is surprising that clients prefer international services, just to satisfy their ruling passion for luxury in the garb of non-Indian goods. The lost capital cannot be easily made up, with wastage of time being yet another bothersome fact.

These above mentioned problems hinder the construction process, which is based on some



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fixed parameters. Discussions, arguments, queries, counter queries as a result of communication gap can have unsuccessful consequences, as time wastage negatively impacts the cost production as well as the reputation of the builders. Nothing can compare to the joy of producing a culturally opulent and unique design, borrowing from more than one culture, any time consuming process is appreciated neither by builders or buyers.

A positive feature that can be borrowed from our foreign equivalents is their effective planning techniques. Indian builders have a practice of leaping directly onto the construction stage, without substantial planning. This perceived 'time saved' becomes time wastage in near future, which assumes unimaginable proportions in the form of losses. If given time and opportunity at the planning stage itself, Indian architects can do as good as and better than their competitors.

Similarly, it is time that the Indian brands too are given their due importance and buyers should start acknowledging them as equally competent. Companies with indigenous products have improved their level, and if given a chance and encouragement by the

Indian buyers, they will surely flourish with state of the art Indian luxury products that can give the foreign companies a run for their company. The Indian companies need that impetus to establish themselves and make a mark, their potential can be witnessed only if the buyers give them the chance.

But an encouraging dimension of this problem surfaces, that in a bid to cater to such clients, Indian architects are trying to gain more knowledge and insight into the nuances of the foreign inspired luxury architecture, which prepares them to take on their counterparts. It is said that there is a very thin line between inspiration and imitation. Borrowing heavily from the international luxury architecture scene under the garb of extravagance is nothing but imitation. It is high time that we realize our own potential, and inculcate inspiration from the foreign infused with the Indian zeal and creativity.

(The author is a highly acclaimed architect with almost three decades of experience in designing housing. He is a recipient of several awards for his contribution and designs. He is also known as the architect with golden touch).