

# BETTER INTERIORS

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*Architect Shilpa Ranade, a key member of the DCOOP team that created a far from stereotypical workspace for **INDIGO CONSULTING** gives us the inside scoop on the layers of thought underlying the execution of a new - age office.*



*The unusual combination of corrugated metal and perspex creates an atmosphere of cool and restrained style.*

INDIGO CONSULTING WORKSPACE is an experimental project at two levels: aesthetics, kitsch and industrial imagery come together to create a spatial experience that is hard-edged yet ephemeral, while at the design level, the approach employed is radical to the core.

## THE RATIONALE

The interior design practice in India is still in a fledgling state. Despite the prevalent rhetoric of differentiating 'decorators' and 'designers', interior design is still delimited by stylistic concerns. As architects tend to complain, the discourse of interiors often lacks the intellectual rigor and contextual rootedness of architecture. This project is a consequence of our concerted attempt to go beyond this chimera of the visual and the tectonic, and draw in other currents to inform the design; to ask if it is possible to evolve an interior design method that does not start from a particular aesthetic but result in an aesthetic that is a logical (and therefore perhaps a more 'authentic') product of rigorous analysis and situating the program in current socio-economic processes and realities of construction in India.

## THE BRIEF

Our client, Vikas Tandon (CEO, Indigo Consulting), outlined the requirements of the office. He wanted an office that would be inspiring to work in and project this young dynamic software development firm, whose focus is designing websites, as a place with attitude. This typical rectangular bay in an Industrial estate in Central Mumbai needed workstations for about 20 people in various departments in addition to the CEO's cabin, a small meeting/reading room, storage, washroom and pantry facilities.

## DECODING AN IDEA

While the modalities of the program were specific, when analyzed in a larger context, the client's requirements were representative of a pattern that has been developing in Mumbai over the recent years. The growth in the software and services industry has encouraged a spurt of young firms. Subscribing to the inherently fluid, indeterminate and highly competitive model of the contemporary market, the mantras of this business - Efficiency, Flexibility and Attitude are characteristics that reflect in the process and product of designing spaces for them.

*The metal cladding is peeled from the walls to make partitions that create intimate workspace.*





*The patch-on aesthetic as seen in this view of the office is made up of multiples forms, layers, materials, textures and even aesthetics.*

Many companies prefer to lease instead of investing in real estate. Since construction time translates into rental outflow, the space must be then done up in compressed work schedule. Mobility and adaptability of furniture and other assets is also important to minimize wastage while moving to another space, and accommodate the constantly growing, evolving nature of business. While these requirements can be easily satisfied by using prefabricated modular furniture systems, it often results in the relation of a work-environment which is nondescript and thus counter-productive.

Analyzing the parameters of time, budget, flexibility and growth potential, we decided to view the project as a challenge and not only complete it within the specified time and budget but also experiment with the evolution of a design language that would thrive on these limitations. A clue to this end was provided by research on street markets and industrial architecture in Mumbai that is being carried out in the studio. The result was a concept inspired by design in popular culture - the 'patch-on' modus operandi.

## **PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER**

The patch-on involves multiple forms, layers, materials, textures and even 'aesthetics' which come together in ways that cannot always be pre-controlled. The product of these somewhat accidental encounters between independent entities is accretive and non-stylized. The junctions between elements are not concealed but revealed and sometimes even exaggerated. Yet, the overall effect is not that of violent disjunction but of a smooth and pragmatic, if unexpected, coming together of objects. At the skin level, the existing shell was conceived and crafted as a separate layer attached to the walls. The skin was then peeled away at select locations to create partitions within the space. Corrugated GI sheets were chosen for skin because of their cost, prefabricated availability, fixing ease and industrial references. After the GI panels were screwed on, fluorescent perspex acrylic was selectively introduced into the skin to offset the opacity and coldness of the GI paneling. It also serves to give enclosed spaces a translucent depth. The acrylic panels were 'patched-on' to a raw wooden frame. This not only scaled the surface of the partition but also exploited the relatively unknown 'glow' characteristic of perspex - its edges glow sharply when exposed to light from a particular direction.

The components (i.e. tables, chairs, storage units, pin-up boards and other loose objects that inhabited the skin) were designed as modular units and given out for prefabrication. Both large and small storage units were color-coded.

The assembly was the final coming together of the components in the skin. In coherence with the patch-on method, the nuts and bolts, screw and metal clips that held the components together added their own random punctuations to the space along with the color-coded storage boxes. Light fittings were similarly left exposed and distributed in the space giving it raw dynamism.

*To achieve this through design, the project was conceived in three segments: skin, components and assembly.*





*Kitsch and industrial imagery come together to create a spatial experience that is hard-edged yet ephemeral giving the office an inimitable attitude.*

## A SUCCESSFUL GAMBLE

This experimental design would not have succeeded without our client's willingness to take chances with unusual materials and not get caught up in safe clichéd ways. The patch-on method resulted in a combination of modular and custom-made elements in distinctive work environment that, although prefabricated, has none of the repetitive indifference of the modular system. In fact we realized that once we shed that baggage of standard interior aesthetics of stylized detailing, the patch-on gave us immense freedom of design. The chandeliers we designed for the cabins are but expression of this freedom. Nicknamed "The FLWannabes" for their obvious Frank Lloyd Wright aspirations, the three chandeliers, constructed overnight out of left-over pieces of perspex screwed on to light aluminum frame in way that would catch and reflect light, added a touch of irreverent glamour to the office.

## IN CONCLUSION

The process followed in the Indigo Consulting project, and the resultant product, confirmed that there is much more to interior design than has been explored. Particularly in the Indian context, where there exists a plethora of events and images such as the streets in urban systems that demand a deeper engagement from designers.

## FACT FILE

Client: Indigo Consulting (Vikas Tandon)  
Design Team: DCOOP - Shilpa Ranade,  
Quaid Doongerwala, Sandesh Mehetre  
and Rakesh Nitore  
Carpentry: Firoz Mistry  
Electrical: Itesh Misal  
Civil: Vishnu Kale  
Fabrication: Arun & Co., Kishan Bishoni  
Painting: Dadarao Atpadkar  
Air conditioning: Unique Group of Companies  
Project Area: 1,150 sq ft  
Construction Time: Six weeks  
Year of completion: 2004

