

# domus

INDIA

032

LA CITTÀ DELL' UOMO



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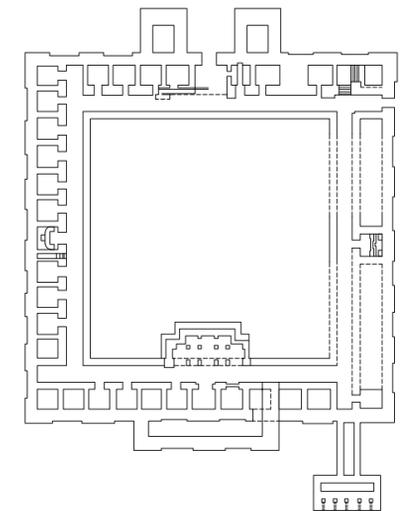
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Cover: As cities are being forced to undergo drastic changes under the banner of cluster development that wipes out the nature and structure of living that already exists, the implementation of incremental housing development has become imperative. This image from Urban Nouveau depicts how incremental housing is intended to grow within the urban fabric of the city.



The designs of the Lupin Research Park in Pune, as well as that of the Friendship Centre in Gaibandha, Bangladesh both draw inspiration from mandalas and layouts of ancient monasteries. This diagram of the Sitakot monastery at Dinapur, 7th-8th century CE was a special reference for the Friendship Centre in Gaibandha, Bangladesh

## CHURNING OF THE OCEAN Kaiwan Mehta

As we were closing this issue, and dealing with the pressures that go along with sending pages of a magazine to press, the respite every evening was to sit and listen to one of India's finest scholars, Dr Kirit Mankodi, lecture on 'Masterpieces in Indian Art' – which was a four-evening lecture series at Jnanapravaha (Mumbai) and the subject matter of the lectures was essentially sculpture from the pre-modern period. I say respite, as listening to the lectures became an occasion to slow down one's thoughts and engage softly (yet deeply) with the material at hand, as that was the tone with which a fine scholar like Dr Mankodi entered his series of lectures and engaged with every object he discussed. And in that smoothed and staid thinking process, one's thoughts begin to wander amongst the many alleys and bylanes in one's mind thinking of many questions relating to the subject and content of the lectures, but also the other issues that are pressing one at that moment; and every time one is closing an issue it is a dense period of not only physical activity (work and labour) but it is also a period intense thinking (weighing options, choices, sequences, evaluating, reading, writing). So one takes the theme of 'masterpieces' out for a walk, practically first looking at the situations at hand where anyway the intense activity is churning – the monthly 'samudramanthan'!

Evaluating and engaging with works of art, design, and architecture on a daily basis is an exercise in debates on what is the meaning of what we are looking at, and dealing with? Where does beauty lie and when will it evaporate, or never appear, but yet there is a sense of stress and disturbance (productive though) that leaves one thinking, and pondering? Where shall one find the conversation between beauty and meaning? And what are the ecosystems within which these objects float, and where do they extend to? Within this map of questions, one asks, 'what, then, is a masterpiece?' This question implies there would be a set of properties and characteristics that would qualify an object as a masterpiece. Would it be possible to individualise the question to specifics, where then every object answers the question for itself, yet belonging to the ocean called 'masterpieces', setting up possible dialogues between many masterpieces, but letting them live their own history and rendezvous in the world of objects, rather than streamlining a multiple range of objects into a straitjacketed structure of what a masterpiece should mean and do? In this way, the possibilities for a masterpiece open up, surely within the limits of an ocean that is a shared and discursive space, rather than closing down on a restricted set of properties and checklists. This ocean could also be that churning ocean where arguments are in constant action and production.

The magazine, month after month, is also that churning, debating objects and ideas, producing estimations and assessments as well as platforms for evaluating and rethinking questions – new and old. Every feature and every essay is a contribution to the question –

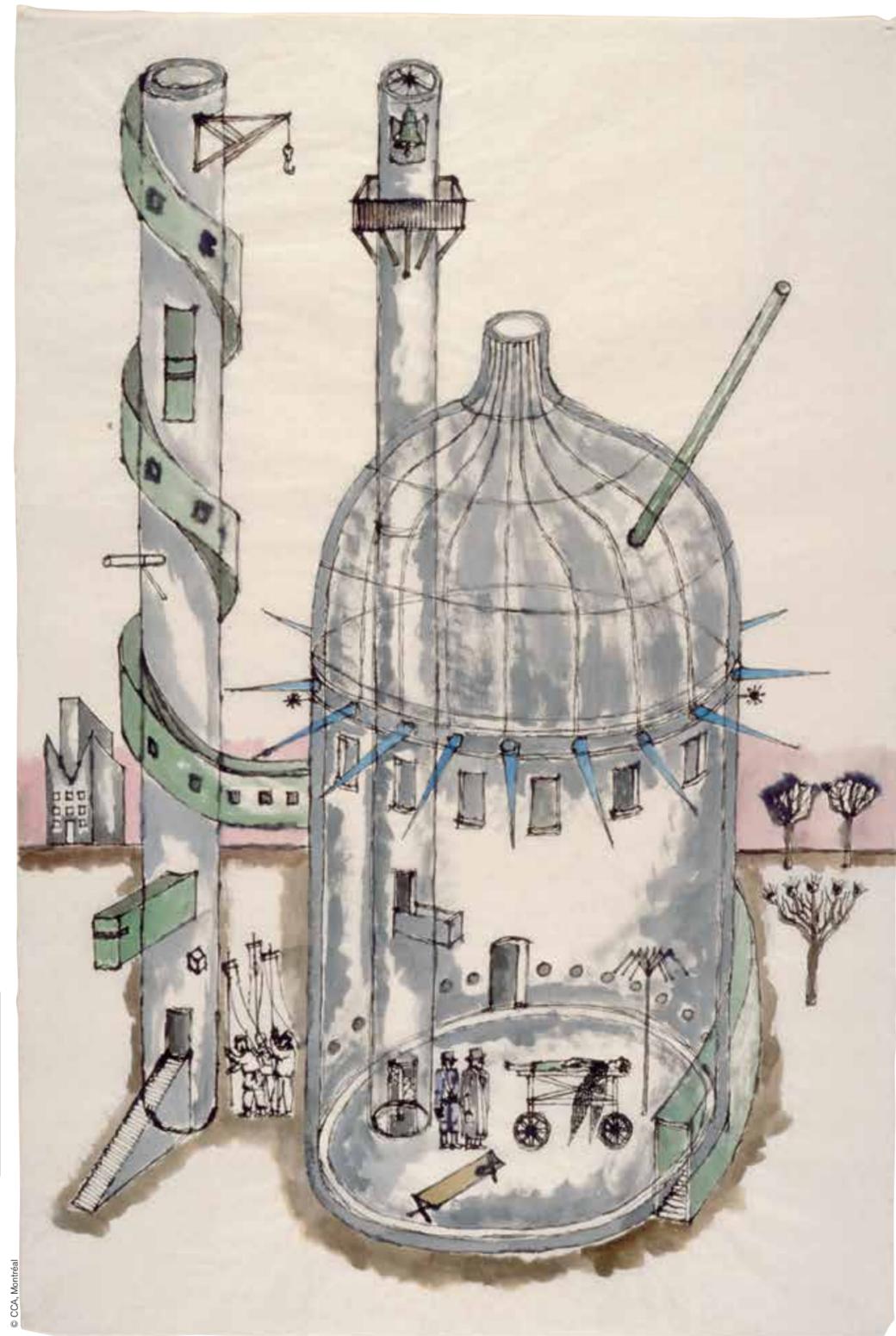
what is criticism? And further extended to the question – what is architecture? Which today could also be posed – where is architecture? I do not mean the latter in a way many people complain of 'no good architecture these days'; but the last question is more in the sense of where all are we talking about architecture besides the building-object. What qualifications are we dealing with in this realm that is architecture? The range of questions is vast, and always a work in progress, but one that stands the test of time every time an issue of the magazine is printed in the public sphere. Like the last few issues, this time as well we begin with an essay that evaluates or gets into a 'thick description' of the 'tools of the trade' – a discussion on Lina Bo Bardi and John Hejduk's contributions to the understanding of cities. The city and housing remain important for this issue of the magazine, as we look at Filipe Balestra's journey into India and the Indian metropolis where crowd and clutter turn from exotica to resource and methodology. His journey and the way it has now shaped his studio practice point to an important aspect that we need to pay heed to in India – incremental development! Development that is not seen as a wipe-out of what exists to give way to a shining new – that breathes a certain kind of arrogance in the way we discard inherent and accumulated knowledge in existing systems, structures and neighbourhoods, but a development that takes pains to identify and weed out the problems rather than decimate an entire way of life. Growing for a better tomorrow within what exists today is very possible, and in my own research work with older neighbourhoods within cities, one has always emphasised that the study of such neighbourhoods and their biographies is not to make a plea for material conservation of these areas, but in fact to identify and understand the knowledge and cultural value they are capable of holding and do hold yet, within their spatial configurations, that can be of value to human life and quality even as we develop towards newer ways and ideas of life.

Talking of value, and not nostalgia, we bring in two photographic investigations – one into mansions and institutions from a colonial period in metropolises like Mumbai and Kolkata, and the other around professions that newer economies are pushing out of our cultural ecosystems. In both these investigations we realise the interiority of spaces that these photographers land up capturing. Interiors in buildings and built spaces, and interior vis-à-vis architecture is a much abused and misused sphere of this field and its practice, and at *Domus India* we wish to recover that space, understanding it for the essential role it plays in spatial realities and the shape of our cultural make-ups. Interiors should not be reduced to flashy photographs and obscure assemblage of objects, but it has to be understood as the psychology of cultural spatiality, it has to be understood as a sphere independent of the exterior form and structure of a building (many times, if not always).

Deepika Sorabjee's text on the photographs by Christopher Taylor precisely grasps the weight of interiors and their capacity to hold values and memories through changing habitations. While in the works of Clare Arni, one encounters the urban interior as the ever-present testimony to its unnoticed existence. Urbanity exists much in its interiors; it is, in fact, at many times produced in its many hidden interiors, and spaces of work combine with the idea of space, the idea of labour that also produces the city, the idea of materiality and objects that make up the urban geography for us.

The Lupin Research Park in Pune, designed by Mumbai-based Malik Architecture comes at an interesting point here – where, as we explain in the feature, it has a series of double stories to tell, double stories always in some debate with each other. The exterior is a formal discourse with the texture of terrain, as nature, where architecture brings in a geometric sensibility to world and earth otherwise in chaos (at times productive chaos); while the interior is textures of elements and materialities producing a terrain of their own rather than the formal clarity of its exterior. The sculptural outside sits in dialogue with its textured domesticity of the interior. A building that navigates between more modern and some pre-modern habits and imaginations, as it plays its dialogue between architecture and nature, human need for utopia versus natural temperament. Simultaneously we bring in the Friendship Centre in Bangladesh by Kashef Chowdhury where the natural site and terrain are redrawn and pushed to produce themselves into an architectural geography of courtyards and bricks – one, a familiar reference from collective memories and the other, a visual guarantee towards (or simulation of) oneness with earth. The debate on architecture and nature, or exterior and interior is played out in a certain way here, formulaic at times, referential in the 'critical regionalism' mode also at times, but yet strong enough to keep the tussle going!

In talking of form and form-ness, questions of light and crafting interiors, the extension to the Glasgow School of Art also throws up another set of approaches to the question of architecture, interior and the inhabitation of form, the proposition to engage materiality. And finally talking of interior spaces and debates on beauty and meaning, and art and masterpieces, we enter the homes of five Italian artists picking on the magazine's 'unflagging and profound interest, in the subject of living, from home to the city'. Interiority as the aspect of living – as much as it is the aspect of cultural accumulation, as much as it is also the production of work and life – is something that comes across in full bloom in this beautifully detailed feature. The insides, the city, the home (and habitation) – themes that will keep us thinking as architects and designers, artists and urbanists, will continue to occupy the pages of this magazine. **km**



CONFETTI

John Hejduk, sketch of Chapel of the Dead Angel from Bovisio, 1986. Felt-tip pen, gouache and watercolour 94 x 63.2 cm. Fonds John Hejduk, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal

## CONTEMPORARY MUSEUM FOR ARCHITECTURE IN INDIA

## ARCHITECTURE EVERY DAY

We look at the journey and growth of an idea that shapes into a project, and then into a studio practice, trying to understand what everyday lives and urban dreams are made of, and developing a strategy that integrates private lives and city ecosystems. The idea of incremental housing development is something that needs attention as cities are being forced to undergo drastic changes under the banner of cluster development that wipes out the nature and structure of living that already exists often with much merit and experiences

## Filipe Balestra

This is quite special because I'm going to talk about my first project at my Urban Nouveau, a company that was "made in India". It all began in Mumbai and Pune in 2008 and yes, it's the deepest and the most emotionally engaging project we have done so far.

After working with my favorite architects - most of them the super-practical Dutch - I had an urge to experience the opposite. I had to get out of the office... I went to Rocinha, one of the largest favelas in Rio de Janeiro, to build a school and social centre, working in close association with the community. Rocinha means 'little farm'. This land used to be a farm with banana and mango trees, but now it is home to somewhere between 250,000 and 350,000 people. Also, something that is very interesting is to understand that the about 40 to 50 per cent of all urbanity is slum land, and most of us architects are working for the rich when we could be working for the poor. Say, what if, instead of building one house that costs 1 million, we could build 100,000 houses that cost 10,000 each? Perhaps we can widen up the angle of how we look into our cities, into their architecture and most specifically, into our business.

Arriving in Rio, I drew the map of Rocinha. I call this hyper-village map "acupuncture architecture" because if we zoom in towards the centre, we will see a small red rectangle which shows the exact location where we build the school. Here, we architects worked together with Guilherme Lima, the chief builder. Guilherme is multi-talented — an electrician, a stone mason, a carpenter, a plumber and a very good friend — all in one. I have a feeling that in future, the architect will get his hands dirty a lot more to learn the practical side of architecture. It can't be all about the theoretical, the emotional, the dream... learning to bring the dream into reality is the missing piece of the puzzle.

I reckon I came into this community almost as an anthropologist. I was not interested in changing the way people build; there wasn't enough time for that. This project worked as my final thesis — to complete my university Master's — something that I needed to graduate. The only thing I think I actually fought for was to build a double-height room with six windows. It was quite difficult to convince people since every height is kept to a minimum — maximum height I have seen was about 2.2 meters and one window per room, or at times no window at all. Six windows and 4 metres floor-to-ceiling height was almost impossible; but we did it. Some say it is the only double-height room in the favelas, others confess this school is more beautiful than the local church.

A few years later, I met Jockin Arputham in a press conference in Stockholm. Arputham had come to share his life with Swedish television. The leader of the National Slum Dwellers Federation of India and social icon in many cities all over India was sharing his life openly with the Swedish audience, explaining, for example, how life is when you have to share a toilet with 400 other people.

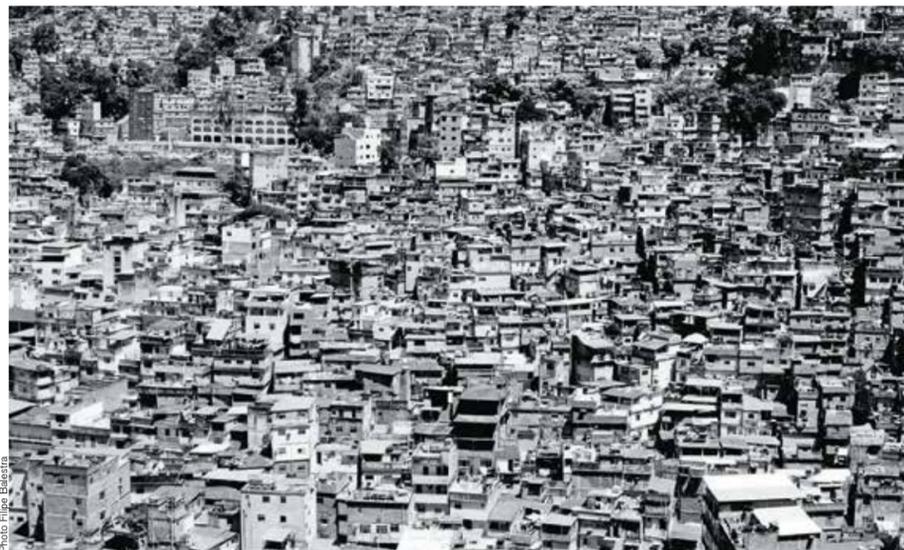


Photo: Filipe Balestra

**Above: view of Rocinha, one of the largest favelas in Rio de Janeiro, 2006. Below: the map of the Favela of Rocinha showing the location of the school and social centre in red. This drawing is part of Filipe Balestra's final thesis in Sweden's Royal Institute of Technology and it was exhibited in the gallery Botkyrka Konsthall. Opposite page, top: construction**

**process of the Sambarchitecture project. The image is a still from the Sambarchitecture movie. Middle: Guilherme Lima and the project architect working together in the construction of the school and social centre preparing the reinforced concrete structure. Below: a one-square-metre shop — the point of balance between micro architecture and product design**



After the show was over, we connected and discussed my previous project in Rio. At one point he said, "Filipe, come to India." And so I did. I had no idea there was a country as unbelievable as India or a city as unbelievable as Mumbai. I cannot understand why some people want to be astronauts to get to know another planet when all one needs to do is to come to India! For me, what was quite amazing was a one-square-metre shop; a genius typology bridging micro architecture and product design. If you could detail everything that this piece of architecture includes, you could go pretty far. Even the door is thick enough to contain tube lights inside. It is very easy to be seduced by the glossy side of architecture, however, it gets even more interesting to start dissecting glossiness to understand what's really going on: at that point one realises the mechanics of architecture and what's behind it.

You can learn a lot in your own city. I dream that one day, I'm going to do a project about Girgaon: it is an amazing neighbourhood which needs to be documented before it changes. The sound, the speed, the density, the informality. I'm very amazed with the fact that more than 90 per cent of India's workforce is informal; India being one of the leading economies in the world. So, what does this mean? Well, comparing with Europe, with the time the Europeans spend organising receipts, signatures and expense reports, Indians have made a large amount of cash transactions — liquidity is all over the place. Thus, I think it's very interesting to learn by comparing my roots to the practical Indian way of life these days.

Bombay was recommended to us to be more of a case-study city, while Pune was recommended as a potential implementation city. "Easier politics in Pune" was something I heard from many. When my partner Sara Göransson and I arrived in Pune, the Mahila Milan (women united) was waiting for us. We have to thank these extremely strong ladies for making us feel at home from the first moment to the very last. Also, they were very well informed about the opportunities and challenges regarding the political towards the urban villages in Pune. Long story short, the Mahila Milan leads community savings accounts, collecting money from different families for the family's benefit, keeping track of every transaction. There is a lot to say about community savings — for example, if we think of everyone in a favela with 250,000 people (like Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro) saving one dollar a day, after four months, they would have collected one million dollars! Enough money to build infrastructure, schools, nurseries, houses, etc.

The poor are organising themselves on what I perceive as some sort of a new, parallel tax system to bring positive change to their lives when promises from politicians are rarely fulfilled. This is happening all over the world. If one was to see the aerial picture of the Pune, with the river, and Koregaon Park in the South and Yerawada in the North. Neighbouring Yerawada is a golf course, one which benefits from having water 24 hours a





day, while the people in this underprivileged urban village receive water once or twice in the middle of the night. These are some of the discrepancies I wish that we architects can channel some energy into. To bring positive change into the lives of as many people as possible.

The Gandhi Memorial is on a mountain. Yerwada is the urban village around the memorial where we focussed our attention. On arrival, it was said that the average governmental budget for social housing was cut down to 30 per cent, a consequence of having the Lehman Brothers collapse. The Slum-Free Cities Programme, like the rest of the urbanised world, suffered from a little chop. We had to work with these limits, and I feel that this urban fabric — fractal, organic and "home-made" — is far more interesting.

For example, this is how Mexico has been dealing with Social Housing. I was in Mexico a few months ago and I've seen this built all over the outskirts of the city. I once met an architect who had lived in one of these houses. He told me a funny story: "One day, I arrived home, parked my car, walked inside, sat on the sofa and switched on the television — only to realise I wasn't in my own house!" I just want you to pay attention to what it means to follow rules, because if you say that one needs a street in front of every house and maximum two floor structures, with a specific height and maximum number of houses, you get this.

Let's be careful with the way we are programming architecture by making sure we are critical enough to be part of the re-programming of the architecture to avoid people sitting on a sofa which is not their own! So, back to fractal and organic urban fabrics, which is very interesting — no street is the same, no house is the same. Even though people are dealing with industrialised components, every house is unique. There is no design-repetition. I wish to work my whole life with this cosmic-geometry. You see, when the human being is free to build in whichever way he wants, humans do this.

The old town in Stockholm (Gamla Stan) used to be a slum too. And today it is one of Scandinavia's most expensive places to live. Villages are slums, incremented. Their geometric structure is the same. That said, my team and I are very interested in going inside this theme to create a collective understanding of how it works. This means before designing architecture, let's zoom out, let's look at the context, let's taste it, let's listen and let's understand what's really going on.

In one of the pictures you can see Savita Sonawane, the leader of Mahila Milan, Pune, explaining to the local women who these foreigners are and what we intend to do. My team measured many houses both inside and outside in detail. We measured the space in between houses and mapped the activities which were going on during our presence in the place. We want to understand at both rational and emotional levels how these places work — because they do. Women wash the dishes at the same time and they talk, "You know, my husband was not nice to me yesterday." And the other woman replies, "Slap him! You slap him and you don't let him get away." These alleys — these narrow pedestrian walkways

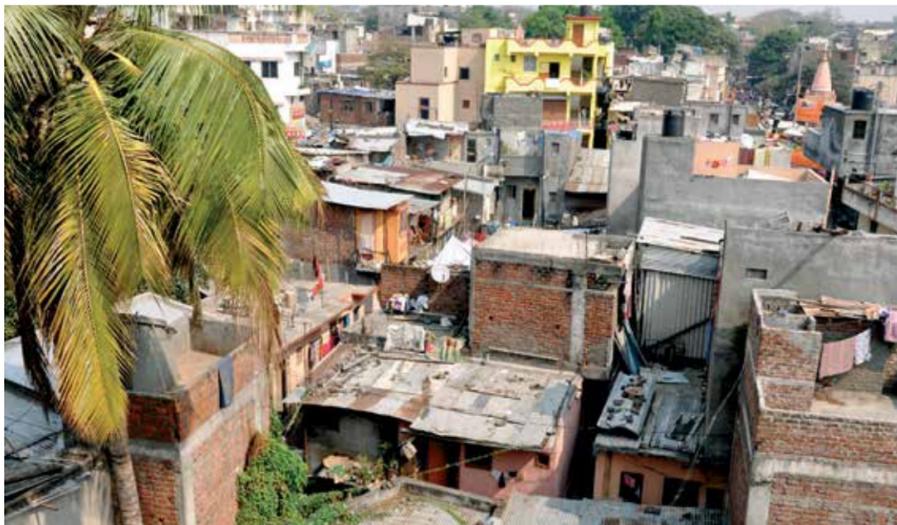
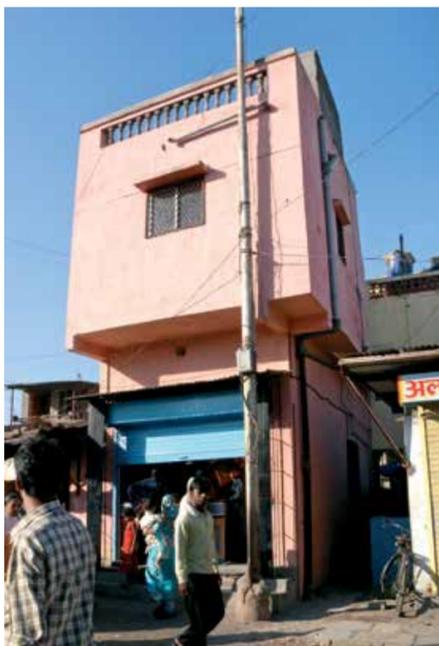
**Top left: the leftovers from the chopping of the vegetables become fodder for cattle. This urban ecosystem may work better at times than the city garbage removal system. Top right: women wash their vessels in the narrow walkways, which act as 'shared' as well as 'sharing' spaces. Middle: the ingenious typology of a 'shop plus one' and the organisation of space within. Left: a yellow pukka house standing out in the middle of kaccha houses**

— are not only walkways. They are sharing spaces. They are meeting rooms. They are connection centres, arteries of the whole. When an architect comes and says, "No, no, I know what's best for you," the whole point of community understanding is lost for an intentional lack of connectivity. This is the first thing that needs to change. People know what is best for themselves — and like my father always said to me, "We have two ears and one mouth to listen double than what we speak." We need more anthropology, more authentic curiosity. People come from the countryside to the city with a dream. Charles Correa said "Dreams are what cities are made of." People bring their goats. They bring their cows. They bring a dream — and repeat the same behaviour they had in the village, but now in a very compressed space. We are very interested in understanding how the leftovers from the chopping of the vegetables become the vegetarian menu for the goats, the cows and the sheep on a daily basis. This urban ecosystem works better than many of our formal/ legal systems such as the city's garbage removal. Being on site every day, listening and understanding, one quickly realises that in a typical urban village not every house is the same. With the locals we learned there are two types of houses in these villages: the kaccha house and the pukka house. The kaccha is temporary house that has been temporary for probably 20, 30 or 40 years. The pukka is a house of a family that either got lucky in business or, for example, a charismatic, talented businessman who creates a well-built house in his village. When your budget is small and your time is short, you have to focus on priorities. What were the priorities? Perhaps not fixing the pukka but channelling our energy into the old kaccha houses instead. The fact my team and I fell in love with India is what I believe made everything flow. We fell in love with your music, your food, and you people

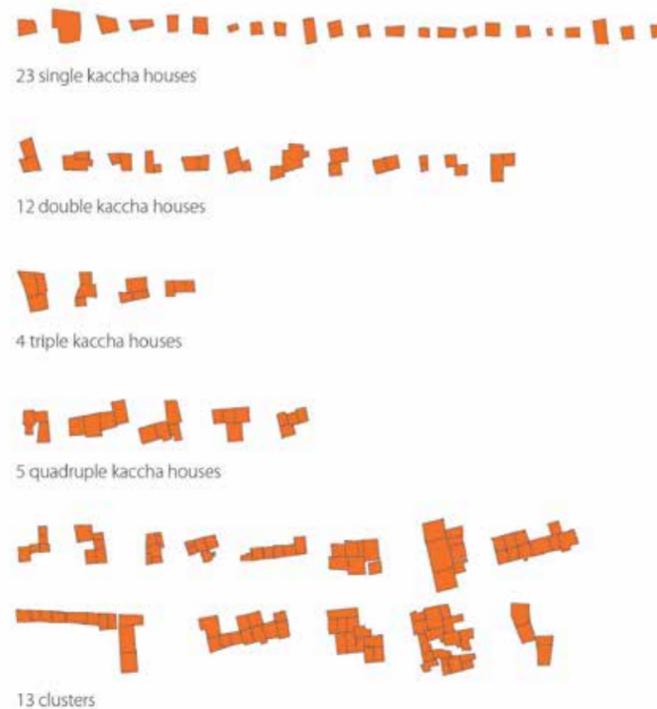
- along with the creative architecture and the surrounding traffic. I had the pleasure of driving a motorcycle on an everyday basis, and an increasing awareness that all this was happening for a reason... This typology "shop plus one" is genius. The family lives on the first floor and comes down to sell goods on the bottom floor to earn a living. This works. This needs no ornament. This is perfect. We also learned that this particular shade of blue used on the walls is a special colour which doesn't let mosquitoes come close. Acupuncture architecture again: first, the priorities. In the illustration below, in orange, you can see the kaccha houses and in white the pukka houses. We are not touching the pakka houses. One sunny day a successful businessman came to me and said: "Oh, look at my pukka house. Can you make it better?" I said, no. I had to. Netaji Nagar, Bhat Nagar, Mother Theresa Nagar, Yeshwant Nagar and Wadar Wasti — all of these neighbourhoods are organised in the same way. As you can see on the left of the map, the kaccha houses are organised into singles, doubles, triples, quadruples and even larger clusters. We receive community leaders in our office. They sit our chairs and they say, "Huh, this is very uncomfortable". The point is they look into our prototypes and give us their insights on a regular basis: "This outdoor staircase just doesn't work; they will rent out the space above and they will live downstairs, meaning they will not go to work. People have to go to work!" We go to the Mahila Milan office and we sit on the floor — after half an hour we start saying things like "Ah, my god, this floor is so hard and so uncomfortable..." They reply: "No, no, this is the way you should be sitting". This is the birth of our company Urban Nouveau. Our first project. We had no contract until later in the game. Without a contract, one has to develop the relationship to a higher level so that trust itself becomes the contract. That is exactly what



**Top: a kaccha houses without ventilation or direct light. Living conditions are in need of urgent improvement. Middle and below: Dwellers of kaccha houses in Netaji Nagar. A comfortable mattress cannot be placed on the ground for the possibility of rats infesting it. Far below: a typical acupuncture architecture map of a "pocket" of the urban village in focus. In orange, the old temporary structures to be improved. In white, the existing permanent structures to remain the same**



### Mother Theresa Nagar - 197 Kaccha Houses



50 meter



happened. We cooked dal fry with the Mahila Milan in their office above the community toilet that they built themselves. This is not so strange; when designing a house for a client in Sweden, we go out for dinner. But here you don't go out, you stay in. And if you are lucky, you end up cooking together and learning some secrets of Indian cuisine... while talking business. Amidst food and positive vibrations we developed three prototypes.

**House A** A basic two-level home with a small detail — it is structured to receive one more floor above in the future without bringing the risk of structural hazard.

**House B** Almost like house A, but on stilts. We reckoned that the "shop plus one" structure was ideal. However, the government would not invest housing revenue on a privately owned shop. The solution? To leave the ground floor free for customisation. By this I mean that installing a roller shutter door can help in turning the empty space on the ground floor into a shop. This empty space can also be used to park a rickshaw or for whatever is possible and necessary. House B is particularly appropriate to be placed in valley locations where the monsoon waters accumulate to a high level, thus in this case, not destroying the electric functions of the home in the floors above.

**House C** House C stands in between house A and house B. As you can see — and learning from Alejandro Aravena's practice — we are always trying to provide one-third more space to each family, since maximum areas for this kind of project are always super small. You can learn more about this project by researching on JNNURM & BSUP: Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission & Basic Services for Urban Poor. The strategy also aims at bringing infrastructures such as water, waste-water removal and electricity into every home.

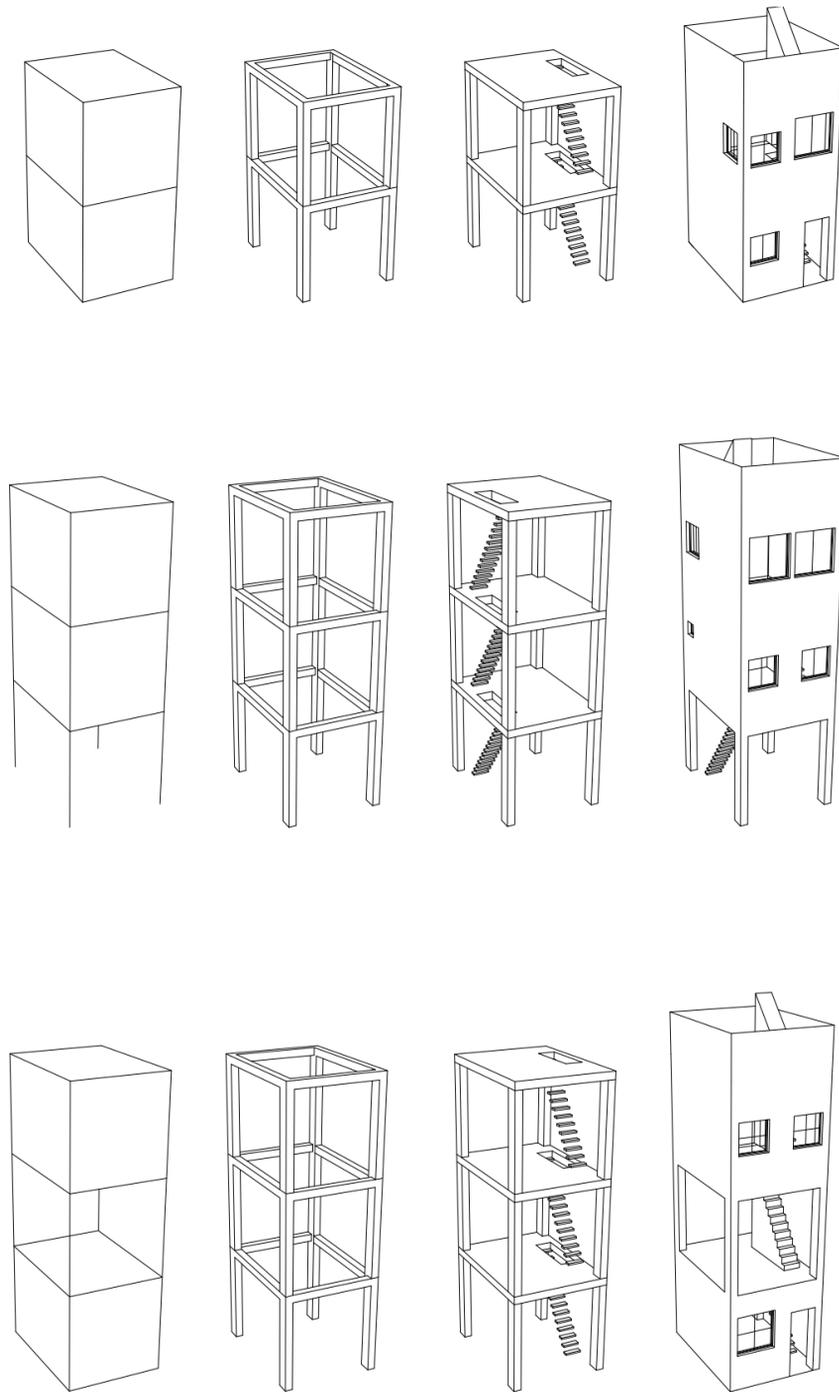
**Top: a lady with her unwell husband underneath her bed inside kaccha structure built using brick walls from neighbouring pucca homes. The situation is visibly difficult to resolve. Middle: "No matter what the circumstances are, we never loose**

**our pride," – Balestra's lesson from India. Below: What to do with a piece of marble? Celebrate by placing it in the middle of the room. Far below: locals explaining the architecture prototypes and their customisation principle to each other**



**Top: receiving Mahila Milan's community leaders in the Koregaon Park office. They were very uncomfortable sitting in our chairs. Middle: being received by the Mahila Milan in their office next to Pune's Municipal Corporation. During the first few weeks, the western team felt uncomfortable sitting on the floor. Below: cooking dal fry with the Mahila Milan members**





Top: process drawings showing the design development of the three prototypical single-family houses A, B and C. Opposite page: renderings of how incremental housing is intended to grow within the urban fabric of the city

In 2011, the government would supply a grant of about 4000-5000 Euros for each household —with the condition that each beneficiary family would give a contribution of 10 per cent. Because for many families this kind of contribution is impossible, the strategy featured a possibility for a sweat-contribution in which each family would help demolishing the old shack and rebuilding the new house. I'm very happy to be back in India after four years since the project began. Right now the strategy is moving forward with one thousand houses under construction.

This work would not be possible without a close collaboration between some very special people whom we had the honor to work together. Jockin Arputham, Sheila Patel, Jon Rainbow, Maria Lobo, Katia Savchuk, from SPARC; Savita Sonawane, Jyoti Bhende, Gulshan Shaikh, Lata Ghodke, Jyoti Dalvi, Dhananjay Sadlapure, Narmada Vetale, Sheela Tambe, Manda Hadwale, Padma Gore, Chaya Gaikwad and Shobha Adhav from Mahila Milan (Women United); the residents of Yerawada - specially the ones from Netaji Nagar; Municipal Commissioner Parveen Pardeshi and his network at Pune's Municipal Corporation; my urban design and architecture team Sara Göransson, Martinho Pita, Carolina Cantante, Remy Turquin, Guilherme Bivar, e Rafael Balestra from Urban Nouveau; and everyone else who directly or indirectly is contributing to bringing this idea into real life. I feel everyone did their best to work together towards an alternative to regularise informal settlements in an incremental way. The results are incremental too. @

The text is from a lecture by Filipe Balestra that was presented at the conference *Engaging Architecture in India: Localisation within Globalisation* held at IES College of Architecture, Mumbai in January 2014. The lecture was transcribed and edited into this feature. All images are courtesy of Filipe Balestra & Sara Göransson/ Urban Nouveau

