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INSIGHTS
AFFORDABLE HOUSING



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Affordable housing need not be inferior in quality and design

Architect Gaurav Sanghavi of Pentascape Design Studio shares the firm's experience of designing affordable spaces in remote areas with character and without compromise

The term 'affordable housing' instantly makes one think of inferior quality, bland-looking constructions with no soul. Fortunately, changing times have introduced visionary architects to the industry who are trying to help change this perception. Based on his experience, Gaurav Sanghavi of Pentaspace Design Studio lists and explains some points to be kept in mind while designing affordable spaces efficiently.

Affordable designs with an element and purpose: It is not necessary for affordable homes to look affordable. As designers, we can incorporate elements without adding any overall cost to the project. For one of our projects – Nilaya, the chajjas and sun breakers were designed in a diagonal position so that the neighbouring building apartments won't look into each other. This differentiator not only enhanced the privacy of the inhabitants, but also added aesthetics to the low-cost budget project.

Façade to be fused with the surrounding: With a slight change in designing, the façade can help change the complete look of the building. For instance, in Augustine Enclave, the facade was designed to tone down the massing and make the building lighter with vernacular impression to complement the surrounding buildings and context. Geometric patterns used in repetition over floors create a sense of rhythm and generate interest in the facade. Recessed windows help to give maximise shade on the opening,, bringing in light but cutting off the heat.

Using materials wisely: Affordability means efficient use of resources and optimisation of aperture sizes by maintaining the window-to-wall ratio at 50:50. As the sill height of the windows increase, the cost of the aluminium, the glass and the railing is reduced. Moreover, cutting costs in areas that don't require spending - like using Kota in the stairwell from the first floor as well as the lift lobbies of the upper floor, gave us an opportunity to reduce the cost and spend in areas like the ground floor lobby. Instead of using MS railing on the staircase, we casted RCC pardi (non-loadbearing wall) to further reduce the cost.

Maximising natural light and ventilation: Creating a provision for ample light and free-flowing breeze only requires better planning. Simply by maximising windows in habitable spaces while leaving the non-habitable spaces (like toilets, for instance) towards the inside can create a huge impact. A well-designed open lobby area can even allow the building to breathe. The structure can be kept as lean as possible to avoid floating of columns to minimise construction costs.

The requisite amenities: Since affordable projects often don't have ground space, amenities can be offered across the building and on the terrace. In Nilaya, we created activity spaces around the stairwell and landing - like wall library, art wall, chalkboard on the wall, and puzzle wall for children. The terrace is designed with community sit-out spaces, gazebo, jogging /walking tracks. These community spaces add to the fabric of the area.