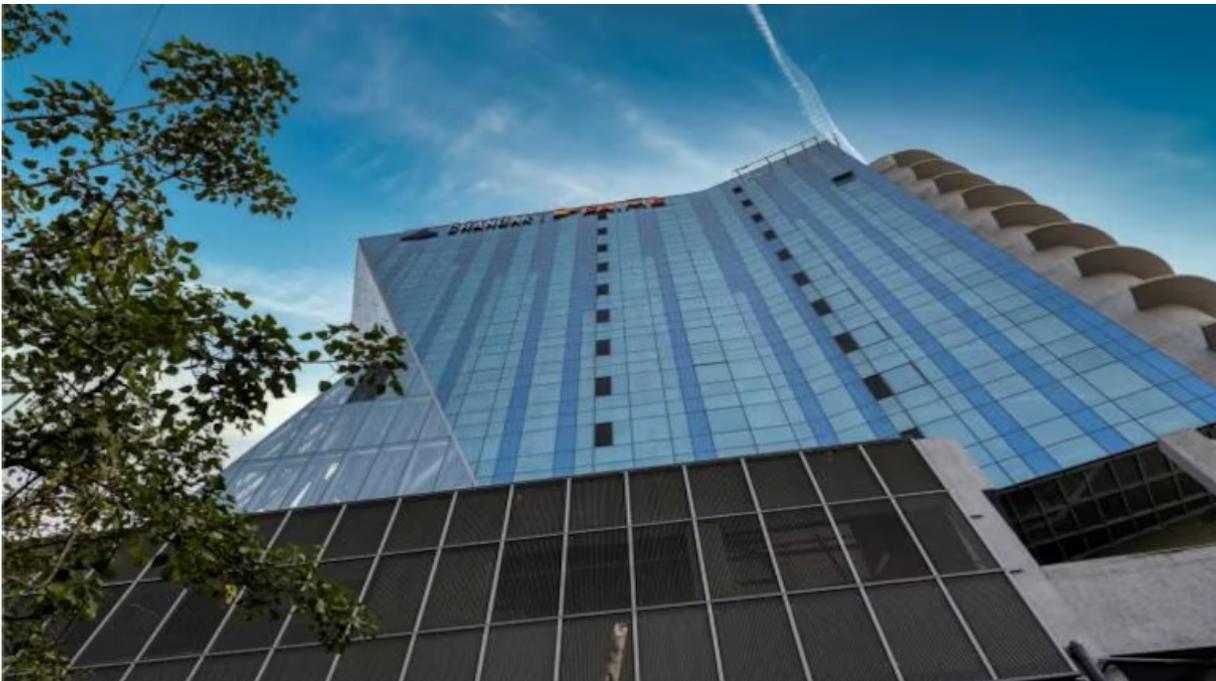


Women's Day 2023: Unfazed by complex architectural briefs, digging of basements or fixing seepage

Meet three women for whom raising a building in a densely packed area, tweaking the orientation of a structure or creating space for one are all in a day's grind.

AYESHA BANERJEE |



Imagine playing your own game in a bustling, tightly packed arena, with very little room for manoeuvre, deadlines looming like threatening cumulonimbus ready to splash down hard on you.

For an architect or designer, it's all about the minutiae of building a hospital in a densely packed area, fitting a commercial structure on an oddly shaped plot, or even dealing with seepage issues in a brand-new store.

But then trials and tribulations are a part of anyone's work-life, no matter what the gender, say architects Pragya Sanghavi, director, Pentaspace Design Studio, Mumbai; Alpana Gupta, partner, Vijay Gupta Architects, New Delhi; and, Roshni Kshirsagar, partner, SJK Architects, Mumbai.

Trial without errors

One of Sanghavi's most challenging projects involved the transformation of an old structure in Mumbai, which housed retail establishments, before facing the ignominy of a status downgrade to a storehouse (for construction materials for the Mumbai metro project) but later finding glory as Chambers, a glitzy commercial building.



The project was conceived in 2008, at a time when “conversations” were happening around the Mumbai metro. The design of the building, which was completed in 2022, had to be worked around the Western Express Highway metro station, which was virtually within a kissable distance (in the adjoining road to be precise).

Modifications to municipal and construction rules and firefighting solutions slowed things. Sanghavi had to deal with an odd-shaped, curvilinear plot ringed by fire-fighting corridors that had to be moved within the business centre premises because of the metro station. The structure also had to be reoriented with its façade towards the Western Express Highway.

Constant fire-fighting

Sanghavi's team came up with a unique design proposition for the frontage of the Chambers building that had been compromised. The building elevation was turned diagonally north-west at a 45-degree angle, to open it up to the busy highway and the surrounding cityscape.



Despite the hurdles, however, the design that was initially conceived could be retained. The building now has two retail levels with a transparent façade. The lower part of the building has three parking levels. The atrium with a multi-cuisine restaurant is on the recreational floor at the metro level and offices are located on the levels above – all the way up to the 13th floor and topped with a terrace.

The composite structure has been built with glass (high performance and DGU), concrete and steel. The iconic diamond-shaped façade encapsulates a grand double-height driveway for free circulation of vehicles within the premises. From the atrium, extending angularly towards the sky is a 12-metre cantilever that forms the top half of the diamond.

Differently sized floor plates of around 5,000 sq ft support this configuration on the inside, extending gradually to a freestanding triangular edge.

Keeping sustainability in focus

Energy-saving measures have been put in place at Chambers. Daylight streams into the atrium and through the glass façade, naturally illuminating the interiors and limiting the use of artificial lighting. “The service and circulation cores sit in the tapering south facade, absorbing the heat that flows in from this side,” says Sanghavi

Takeaways

Sanghavi says she has learnt over the years to have immense patience at work. Gupta learnt to be extremely hands-on with all aspects of the project. Weekly site visits for almost over a year took a toll, but “it was the greatest learning experience of my life. There is indeed no substitute for hard work and you have to understand the pulse of the site to make timely and correct decisions,” she says.

AYESHA BANERJEE is a Chandigarh-based freelance writer.

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