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DESIGN DIARY

INTERNATIONAL

Jason de Caires Taylor

THE SCULPTOR
WHO LET THE OCEAN
FINISH THE WORK

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DESIGN DIARY
INTERNATIONAL

Founder's Note

The third issue of Design Diary International is anchored by our cover story, an exclusive conversation with **Jason deCaires Taylor**, whose work continues to challenge how we understand sculpture, environment, and permanence. Working beneath the surface, his practice collapses the distance between art and ecology, reminding us that design today must engage with responsibility as much as expression.

That sensibility carries through the rest of the issue. Architecture is approached not as image-making, but as cultural record and lived practice. We examine Chaco Canyon as a carefully planned ceremonial landscape shaped by collective knowledge, return to rock-hewn churches carved directly from stone where structure and ritual are inseparable, and study Taos Pueblo as a living settlement sustained through material care, repair, and continuity rather than preservation alone. These places resist authorship and trend, asking instead what it means for architecture to last.

Contemporary work sits alongside this history with equal restraint. Projects by **Norm Architects**, **Trung Tran Studio**, **RK Malik & Associates**, **Workshop for Metropolitan Architecture**, and **Apoorva Shroff** are read through material choice, spatial clarity, and the everyday rhythms they support, rather than through stylistic gestures. Each reflects a measured approach to building, one that prioritises longevity over visual noise.

Design, in this issue, is allowed to move freely across scales. A long-form interview with **Femo Wong**, **founder of Femo Design**, traces a practice shaped by collecting, making, and close engagement with craft. **Elena Salmistraro's** work follows a different trajectory, crossing product design, art, and illustration without settling into a single discipline. History enters through a study of early throne chairs, where furniture functioned as authority and symbol long before comfort became its concern.

This issue brings together practices, places, and ideas that share a commitment to depth, context, and thoughtfulness. The intention is not to present answers, but to offer space for reflection, where design is understood as something shaped over time, through use, care, and consequence.

Thank you for reading and for supporting a publication shaped by independence, curiosity, and a sincere respect for the world of design.



(Founder—Design Diary International)

DECOR

FURNITURE

ART

DESIGNER

PROJECT

BRAND PROFILE



IN THE FRAME

SHARAAB STORAGE CABINET BY BERNHARDT

The Sharaab storage cabinet is defined by its surface and construction. The front elevation carries a geometric pattern worked directly into the two push-to-open doors, creating depth through repetition and form rather than applied ornamentation. The cabinet is finished in German silver with an antique treatment that keeps the metal subdued and matte, allowing light to move across the surface without glare or reflection.

The proportions are tall and vertical, supported by a solid plinth base that keeps the piece visually grounded. At 73 inches high, the cabinet works well as a storage unit in living spaces, dining areas, or study settings where vertical storage is required without occupying excessive floor area.

Inside, the cabinet is finished in a painted interior and arranged for flexibility. Two adjustable shelves and one fixed central shelf allow it to accommodate different storage needs, from barware and tableware to books or objects used daily. The push-to-open mechanism keeps the exterior uninterrupted, maintaining the clarity of the door pattern, while adjustable glides ensure level placement. An anti-tip kit is included for stability.

With a width of 38 inches and a depth of 20 inches, the Sharaab cabinet balances capacity with restraint. The design relies on material choice and proportion rather than decorative detailing, making it suitable for contemporary interiors where structure and finish are prioritised over visual excess.

www.bernhardt.com



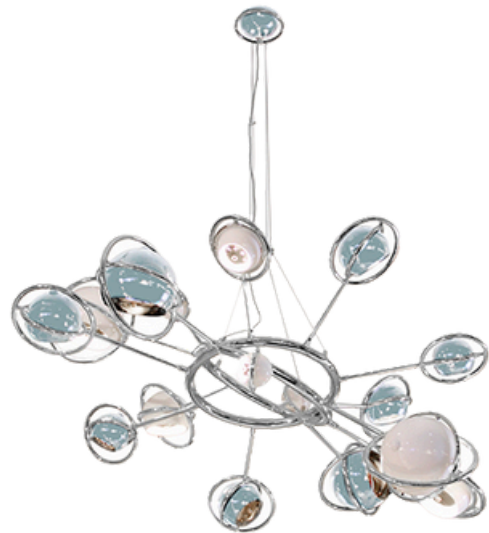
Where Imagination Lives

INSIDE THE WORLD OF CIRCUCU

In each issue, we step into spaces where each design tells a story and creativity feels limitless. This time, we spotlight Circu, a brand based in Portugal, dedicated to transforming children's furniture and decor into immersive worlds of imagination. Known for its playful forms, dreamy details, high quality furnishings, and storybook-inspired designs, Circu creates pieces that go beyond function. Each creation invites children to dream, explore, and grow, turning everyday spaces into magical environments where fantasy and comfort live side by side.



Fantasy Air Balloon Bed



Cosmo Suspension Lamp



Bubble Gum Gym



Cloud Lamp



Sky Rug



Magical Market Playroom



Moon Rug



Dream Desk

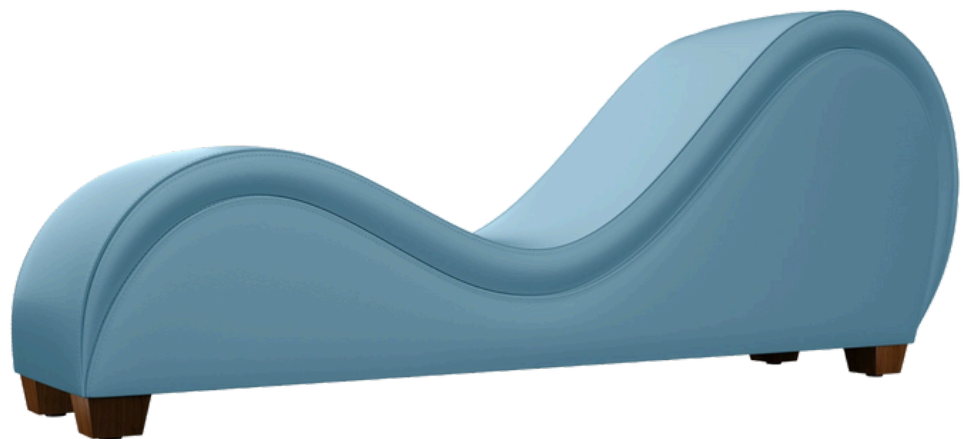


This section explores furniture and accessories designed to deepen comfort, closeness, and emotional connection within intimate interiors. Rooted in softness, ergonomics, and thoughtful form, these pieces go beyond aesthetics to support moments of rest, conversation, and shared presence. From sculptural seating and gently contoured loungers to tactile materials that invite touch, the focus is on creating environments where couples can slow down and feel at ease together.

Rather than making bold statements, romantic furniture today works quietly through curves, proportion, and materiality. It enhances the bedroom as a private retreat, one that balances design sensibility with warmth, discretion, and understated luxury.



Originally conceived in 1970, the Bocca® sofa stands as one of the most iconic expressions of Pop Art and Surrealist design. Created by **Studio65**, this sculptural piece translates the sensual form of lips into a bold seating object that blurs the line between furniture and art. Once available only in its signature red, Bocca® Unlimited introduces an open edition in a wider palette of rich, expressive colors, while preserving its radical spirit and unmistakable silhouette. Crafted in soft polyurethane for comfort without compromising form, the sofa has been celebrated by leading photographers, fashion icons, and collectors, and is part of the permanent collections of major international museums. Bocca® remains a symbol of expressive luxury, femininity, and design rebellion.



Handcrafted using the world's finest eco-friendly materials, the **Tantra Chair®** is designed to bring together comfort, durability, and refined craftsmanship. Upholstered in premium synthesized leather, the surface is exceptionally soft to the touch while remaining stain-resistant, anti-microbial, and effortless to maintain. Engineered to be moisture-resistant and impervious to everyday elements, the material retains its elegance over time without compromising on performance. The design can be customised with pewter nail heads for a contemporary edge, antiqued brass for a more classic sensibility, or a seamless finish with no nails for a sleek, modern look. Thoughtfully constructed and consciously produced, the Tantra Chair® balances form, function, and sustainability with quiet confidence.



The Heart Cone Chair by **Vitra** takes its name from the expressive, heart-shaped silhouette of its sculptural seat. Designed by Verner Panton in the late 1950s, the chair reflects his belief that furniture could carry emotion as powerfully as form. Generously upholstered for comfort, it is anchored by a refined satin stainless steel base that lends balance and restraint to its playful geometry. Equal parts romance and precision, the Heart Cone Chair remains one of modern design's most recognisable expressions of love rendered in furniture.

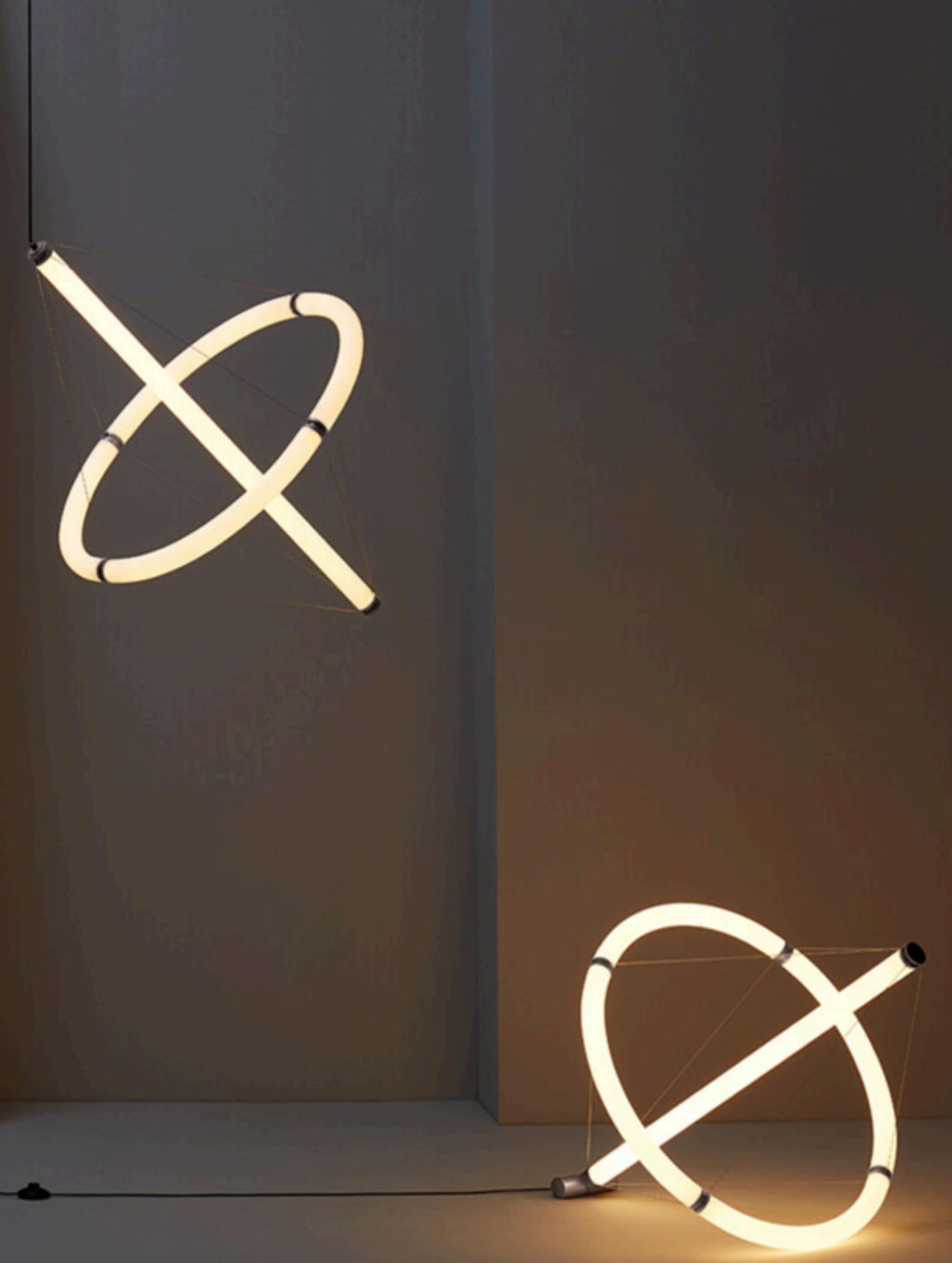
Naked Truth by **Seletti** is a collection of surreal mirrors that celebrates natural form and the quiet freedom of the human body. Drawing from universally recognisable anatomical shapes, the series places the body at the centre of decoration, stripped of taboo, shame, or provocation. There is nothing concealed and nothing exaggerated. Human anatomy is presented as it is: instinctive, familiar, and inherently beautiful. In doing so, Naked Truth reframes the body not as subject or statement, but as art in its most honest form.



The Gladis Love Seat by **Aqua Creations** is inspired by the intricate topography of a human fingerprint. Conceived as an intimate two-seater, the piece unfolds through fluid, organic lines that echo forms found in nature. Hand-stitched with meticulous attention to detail, the loveseat feels tactile and deeply personal, inviting closeness through its soft contours and enveloping presence. It is a quiet celebration of individuality, touch, and the poetry of natural form translated into furniture.

FEMO DESIGNS

*Over the past decade, **Femo Design** has quietly built a reputation for original furniture rooted in restraint, material intelligence, and long-term thinking. Based in Shenzhen, a southern Chinese city known for its manufacturing depth and evolving design ecosystem, the studio operates at the intersection of design, craft, and production. Founded and led by Femo Wong, an architect by training and an active curator of furniture exhibitions, Femo Design approaches furniture as a process rather than a product. **In this interview with Shweta for Design Diary International**, Wong reflects on authorship, craftsmanship, material experimentation, and the realities of building an original design studio in today's global landscape.*



Femo Design has a quiet confidence to it. What was the initial impulse behind starting your own design studio, and what did you feel was missing in the design landscape at that moment?

The core motivation for establishing Femo Design was actually to translate our understanding of “good design” into tangible products. My shift from architecture to furniture design was driven by the appeal of the complete creative process of turning a sketch into a physical product. This sense of accomplishment, of having full control and rapid execution, is something you can never get from working as a mere “cog in the machine” at an architecture firm after graduation.

When I started collecting original furniture pieces in the early days, I noticed that the domestic market was either flooded with blind copies and imitations or filled with “internet-famous designs” that overemphasized flashy aesthetics. Truly original works that balanced functionality, craftsmanship, and aesthetics while conveying the warmth of design to users were extremely rare. Meanwhile, many manufacturers underestimated the value of design, seeing it merely as “icing on the cake.” A severe information gap existed between designers and manufacturers.

Therefore, in founding the studio, we had two goals: on one hand, to create original designs that we ourselves believed in; on the other hand, to build a bridge between design and manufacturing, enabling good designs to truly come to life and gain recognition in the market. This vision of “filling the gaps” has endowed Femo Design with that inherent understated confidence. Our assurance does not stem from gimmicks, but from our unwavering commitment to the essence of design.



Your work often balances restraint with character. How do you personally define “good design,” and has that definition evolved since you began your practice?

To me, the core of “good design” has always been “form follows function, and details reveal warmth.” Specifically speaking, first and foremost, it must address actual user needs, such as the comfort of seating and the proportional harmony of furniture; this is the non-negotiable baseline. Secondly, it should respect the inherent properties of the materials used, avoiding unnecessary ornamentation. Finally, within a minimalist framework, it should convey uniqueness through details. That is the balance between restraint and individuality you mentioned.

Take our “Danish Chair” as an example. It is crafted by bending two solid wood pieces into shape with no redundant structures, yet the subtle cutting treatments on the backrest and leg joints make it both sleek and memorable.

While the core of this definition has remained unchanged, its scope has expanded. When I first entered the industry, my understanding of “good design” was largely confined to the form and craftsmanship of the product itself. Later, after collecting over 2,700 original furniture pieces and curating numerous exhibitions, I gradually realized that good design also needs to embrace long-term value and industry significance. It should not only be functional and aesthetically pleasing, but also stand the test of time and even inspire more people to appreciate original design.

Now, I pay greater attention to the reasoning behind a design: why choose this material, whether the structure can be optimized, and what small improvements it can bring to the user’s life. These considerations have made the definition of “good design” more comprehensive.



Growing up and working in China, how has cultural context influenced your understanding of form, proportion, and materiality?

The pursuit of a “sense of propriety” and “authenticity of materials” in traditional Chinese culture has been subtly influencing me all along. For instance, our understanding of “proportion” is easily linked to the concept of the “golden mean” in traditional Chinese furniture. It is not rigid symmetry, but a dynamic state of equilibrium.

Take our “Tree Branch Table.” The angle of the branching legs and the size of the tabletop were repeatedly adjusted to achieve that comfortable sense of proportion. This sense of balance echoes the idea of “negative space” in traditional Chinese spatial design, which is uncluttered and unassuming.

When it comes to materials, I have a particular fondness for natural materials such as solid wood and stone, which stems from the Chinese pursuit of harmony between humans and nature. Our “Mushroom Stool,” for example, uses solid wood with knots and natural cracks as its base. Instead of deliberately concealing these so-called imperfections of the material, we preserve them to showcase the vitality of nature. This is actually a modern interpretation of the traditional Chinese philosophy of unity between man and nature.

Additionally, the supply chain advantages of China’s manufacturing industry have also influenced my material choices. Mature domestic craftsmanship in solid wood processing and stone cutting, for example, allows me to more easily explore the potential of these materials, translating the material aesthetics of traditional culture into reality through modern techniques.

Many of your designs feel intentional rather than trend-driven. How do you protect your creative process from the pressure of fast-moving global design cycles?

The key is to stop competing with peers and only measure ourselves against masters. I have always believed that trends are short-lived and fickle, while good design is enduring and refined. I spend over ten hours every day researching materials and studying original furniture pieces, benchmarking our work against designs by masters such as Hans J. Wegner and Arne Jacobsen.

I ask myself, “Will my design still be relevant in ten years?” rather than “What is trendy this year?” This long-term mindset allows us to rise above the pressure of rapid iteration. My habit of collecting has also helped me stay grounded. Many of the thousands of furniture pieces in my collection are classic designs from decades ago. Their enduring popularity is not due to fleeting trends, but to their solid functionality and timeless aesthetics. Whenever I hit a creative block, I spend time in the collection area of our studio, feeling the curves and textures of these vintage pieces. It always reminds me that the core of design is to solve problems and deliver value, not to chase hot topics.

Moreover, our creative process is deliberate. From concept development to prototyping and craftsmanship refinement, we never rush through any stage. For example, the curvature of a chair seat may go through over a dozen rounds of prototyping before finalization. This dedication to detail is, in itself, a resistance to the fast-paced mindset.

Craftsmanship plays a visible role in your work. How important is the dialogue between designer and maker in your studio, and how hands-on are you in that process?

The collaboration between designers and craftsmen is the key. Without exaggeration, it is the only way to turn great ideas into great products. More often than not, a designer’s concept is idealized, but craftsmanship has its practical limitations, such as the bending limits of solid wood and the precision requirements of stone cutting. These all require constant communication with craftsmen.

I have always believed that designers are not directors, but collaborators. The experience of craftsmen can help us avoid many pitfalls and even inspire new creative directions.

Our level of participation in this process is 100 percent. From the initial discussion of craftsmanship plans to the first round of prototyping, detail adjustments, and finally mass production, I personally visit the factories and work closely with the craftsmen every step of the way. Only through hands-on involvement can we accurately grasp the craftsmanship details and ensure that the original intent of the design is not diluted.

Furthermore, I firmly believe that craftsmanship is not a simple combination of a designer’s ideas and a craftsman’s execution, but the result of a collision between the two. The skills of craftsmen make designs more feasible, while the ideas of designers expand the possibilities of craftsmanship.



What role does material experimentation play at Femo Design? Are there materials or techniques you are particularly drawn to at this stage of your journey?

Material experimentation is the wellspring of inspiration for our creations, so much so that many of our designs actually start with material experiments. Different materials have distinct characteristics, such as the warmth of solid wood, the coolness of stone, and the flexibility of rattan. We never force a material to fit a preconceived design. Instead, we develop designs based on the inherent properties of the materials.

I am genuinely interested in all types of materials. I believe that no material is inherently superior or inferior. Any material can be used to create excellent designs as long as its intrinsic attributes are fully leveraged. Recently, I have been working on a series of products using rattan weaving and bamboo, which will be unveiled to the public in a month's time.

Your collections often feel personal, almost introspective. Do your designs reflect your own life experiences, or do you consciously separate the personal from the professional?

I believe that every designer's work is inevitably linked to their personal learning journey and life experiences. Additionally, the cultural environment you grow up in exerts a profound influence on your design sensibilities. I do not see design as just a job; it is an integral part of my life.

Spending over ten hours a day researching materials is both accumulation and daily routine. Even discussing design with friends or visiting factories are all part of my life. This state of integration between study, career, and life allows my personal emotions to blend naturally into my creations.

As a young designer building a brand, what challenges have been the most defining for you, both creatively and commercially?

The core challenge has been balancing the purity of creativity with the feasibility of business, a hurdle that cannot be avoided in either dimension. On the creative side, in the early days, I often fell into the trap of self-satisfaction, creating works with overly complex craftsmanship and high production costs. Although I was personally satisfied with them, they failed to gain traction in the market. This experience made me realize that great creativity cannot be divorced from commercial reality; otherwise, it will remain merely a prototype, unable to deliver real value.

On the commercial side, the most critical challenge was getting the market to recognize the value of original design. When we first launched the brand, many clients would compare our products with counterfeits and label original designs as too expensive. Furthermore, some factories, seeing the popularity of our designs, resorted to direct plagiarism, which disrupted our market position. These two issues nearly derailed the brand.

Later, through curating exhibitions and participating in industry trade shows, we continuously promoted the concept of original design, helping more people understand that the higher price reflects superior craftsmanship, innovative design, and intellectual property rights. At the same time, we established in-depth collaborations with reliable manufacturers to optimize the supply chain, controlling costs while ensuring product quality.

This journey made me understand that creativity is the soul of a brand, but business is the vehicle that brings that soul to life. Both are indispensable.

How do you see the role of designers evolving on the global design stage? Is there a distinct voice emerging, or is it still evolving?

The role of designers on the global stage has evolved from followers to participants, but a distinctive design voice is still in the making. It has not yet fully taken shape.

In the early days, many designers were focused on learning Western design concepts and craftsmanship. Today, with the upgrading of manufacturing capabilities and the improvement of the original design ecosystem, a growing number of designers are presenting their work at international exhibitions, and more global brands are collaborating with designers from this region on product development.

At present, there is no single, clearly defined identity comparable to the simplicity of Danish design or the luxury of Italian design. Designers are exploring different paths, some drawing inspiration from traditional culture, others pushing the boundaries of material craftsmanship. This is a process of continuous experimentation and accumulation.

I see this as a positive sign. It suggests that the design voice emerging today is not rigid or monolithic, but diverse and evolving. Over time, with the accumulation of more original work, a clearer identity will emerge, rooted in cultural context yet accessible to global buyers.

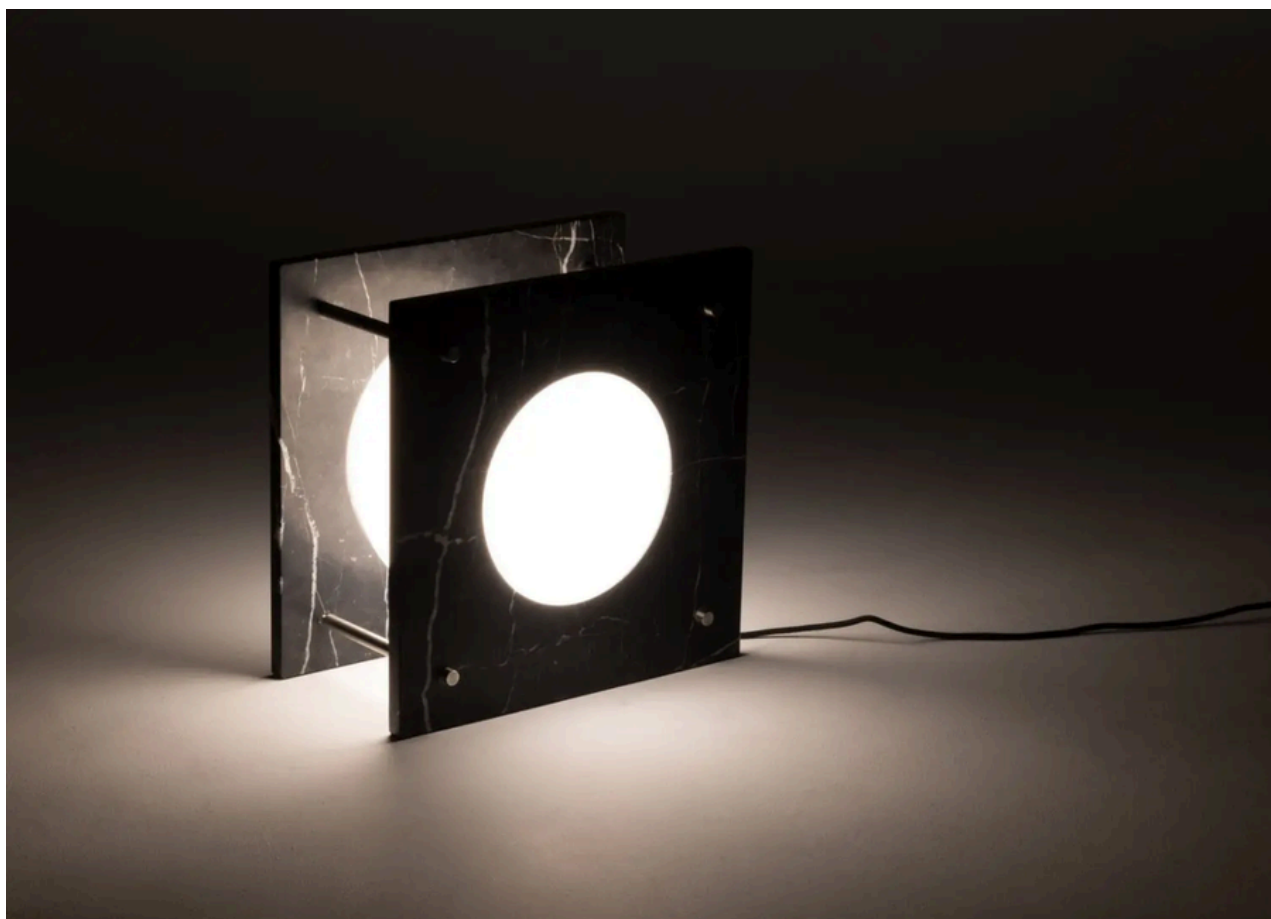
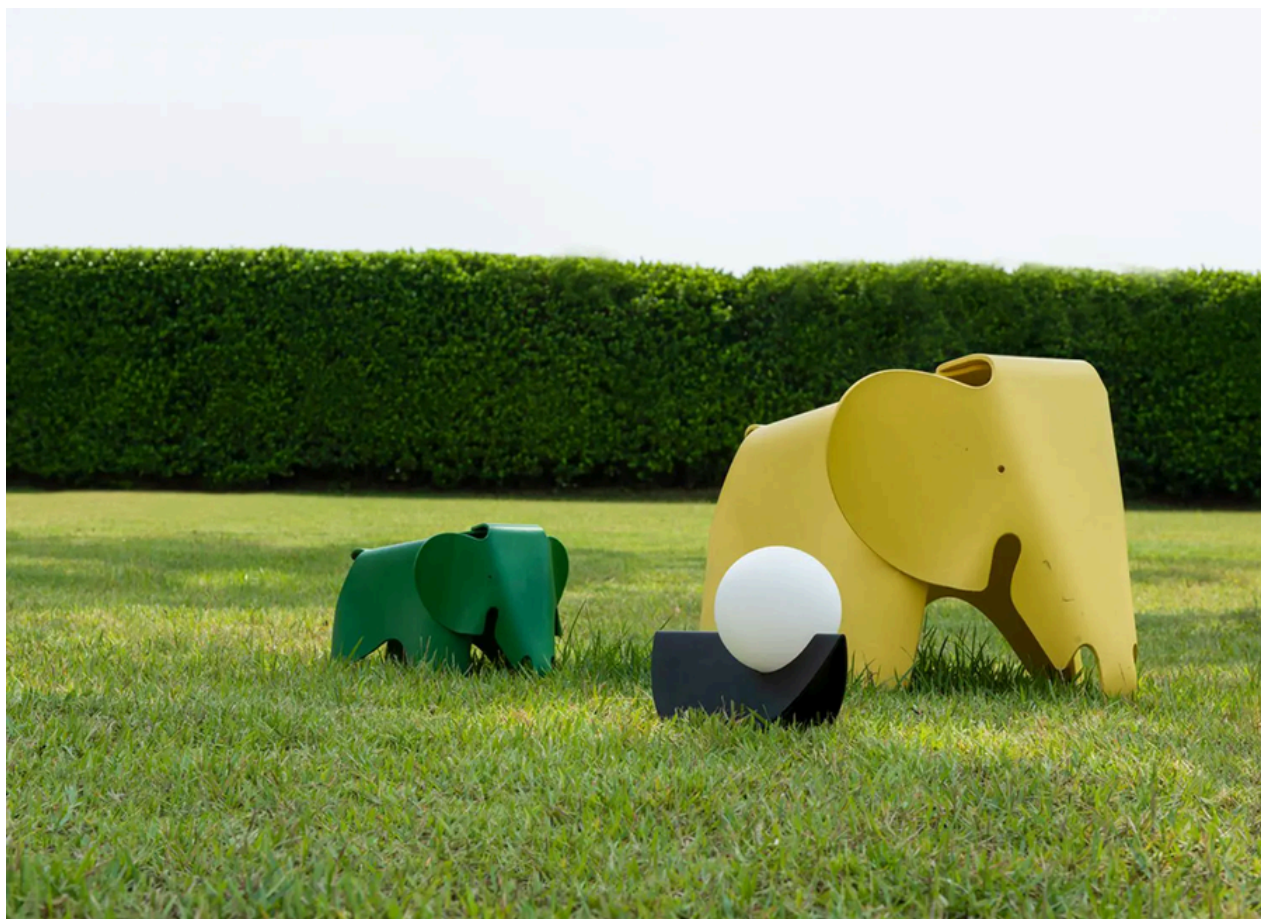


Sustainability is increasingly discussed in design. How do you interpret responsibility and longevity within your own work, beyond labels and certifications?

To me, sustainability is not about labels, but about longevity considered from the very beginning of the design process. Creating products that stand the test of time reduces waste, while respecting materials and optimising craftsmanship helps minimise environmental impact.

We adhere to the philosophy of quality over quantity. We do not release new products simply to chase trends. Instead, we focus on refining long-lasting designs. For instance, our “Danish Chair” and “Shell Chair,” first introduced in 2018, have been continuously refined and remain popular today. A piece of furniture used for decades is far more sustainable than fast-changing products.

We also focus on material conservation and craftsmanship optimisation. Our “Half-and-Half Table,” for example, achieves zero material waste through precise cutting. We prioritise FSC-certified timber and design furniture with disassemblable structures to support transport, maintenance, and longevity. These practices may not always carry formal certifications, but they reflect a tangible commitment to responsibility.



What kind of spaces do you imagine your furniture living in?

I do not want my designs to be confined to a specific type of space. Instead, I hope they integrate naturally into users' lives, whether the environment is bustling or calm, becoming part of everyday routines and offering practical value and subtle warmth.

Collaboration is often a turning point for designers. Are there disciplines or industries outside furniture that you would like to explore?

Absolutely. I am particularly interested in collaborating with professionals in materials science, as furniture design is closely connected to material technology. I am also keen to work with ceramic and textile artists, whose expertise can enrich material expression and introduce new layers of texture and craft.

Looking ahead, how do you envision the future of Femo Design?

Our future focus will be a three-part strategy: deepening craftsmanship as the foundation, expanding product categories as an extension, and developing a stronger brand narrative as the soul.

Craftsmanship will always remain central. We will continue to work closely with skilled craftsmen and manufacturers while exploring new technical possibilities. Product expansion will be measured and aligned with our core philosophy. At the same time, we aim to communicate design culture more actively through exhibitions, publications, and eventually a private design museum dedicated to original design.



Finally, when someone encounters a Femo Design piece for the first time, what feeling or thought do you hope it leaves them with?

I hope their first impression is comfort, whether through visual simplicity or user-friendly functionality. After that, I hope they feel curiosity, wanting to touch the materials, examine the details, and understand why the design was made the way it was.

On a deeper level, I hope our work helps people appreciate the value of original design, not the fleeting excitement of trends, but the dedication that comes from patient refinement. Ultimately, the goal of design is to enhance life, and I hope Femo Design's work becomes part of those small, lasting moments of everyday joy. **DDI**

BLUEPRINTS



1 Hotel Copenhagen, DENMARK

*Material,
Continuity,
and Calm in
Copenhagen*



Team: Norm Architects

Design Firm: Norm Architects

Photographer: Jonas Bjerre-Poulsen
& Karl Tranberg Knudsen

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark

Set within a modernist building from the 1930s, 1 Hotel Copenhagen is located close to the city's historic centre and reworks an existing structure through a contemporary interior approach. The project prioritises material restraint, sustainability, and spatial continuity over overt stylistic expression. Reclaimed timber, stone, greenery, and understated upholstered elements form a consistent palette across public and private spaces, applied as part of the architectural framework rather than as decoration. The result is an interior language shaped by longevity, practicality, and a measured balance between heritage and contemporary hospitality.







The interiors of 1 Hotel Copenhagen are set within a modernist building from the 1930s, close to the city's historic centre. The project works within this existing structure rather than trying to override it, and the design approach stays relatively restrained throughout. Instead of relying on strong stylistic moves, the focus is placed on materials, scale, and continuity across spaces, with sustainability and longevity forming part of the broader framework rather than being treated as separate ideas.

Across the hotel, natural materials dominate. Reclaimed timber, stone, planting, and upholstered elements appear consistently in both public and private areas. These are not used as decorative features but as part of the interior construction itself. Surfaces are left visibly textured, with grain, variation, and wear intentionally retained. Finishes are kept simple, allowing materials to age naturally over time.



A staircase in reclaimed wood connects street level to the atrium and becomes one of the more defining architectural elements inside the building. Its presence is functional rather than symbolic, and planting has been integrated alongside it as part of the overall spatial planning. The lobby is organized vertically, bringing together timber, stone, fabric, and greenery in a way that avoids focal points. The space relies more on proportion and material contrast than on individual objects to establish its character.

Planting is used throughout the interiors in a direct, almost structural way. Tree trunks are positioned as fixed elements, and greenery runs along circulation paths and across different levels of the building. Materials are finished with minimal intervention. Timber retains its natural grain and variation, stone remains largely untreated, and surfaces prioritize durability over refinement.

In the reception area, reclaimed timber continues to define the space. Artworks are integrated into the architectural surfaces rather than introduced as separate visual elements. These include woven fiber works and timber-based compositions that reference craft processes. A work by Copenhagen-based artist Sara Martinsen is included as part of this sequence, aligning with the wider emphasis on tactility and material consistency rather than visual contrast.

The interiors have been designed by Norm Architects, whose approach here avoids dramatic spatial moments. Spaces are organized through gradual shifts rather than strong transitions. Changes in material are subtle, lighting is controlled and even, and proportions guide how areas relate to one another. This creates a consistent interior language that carries through the hotel without calling attention to itself.





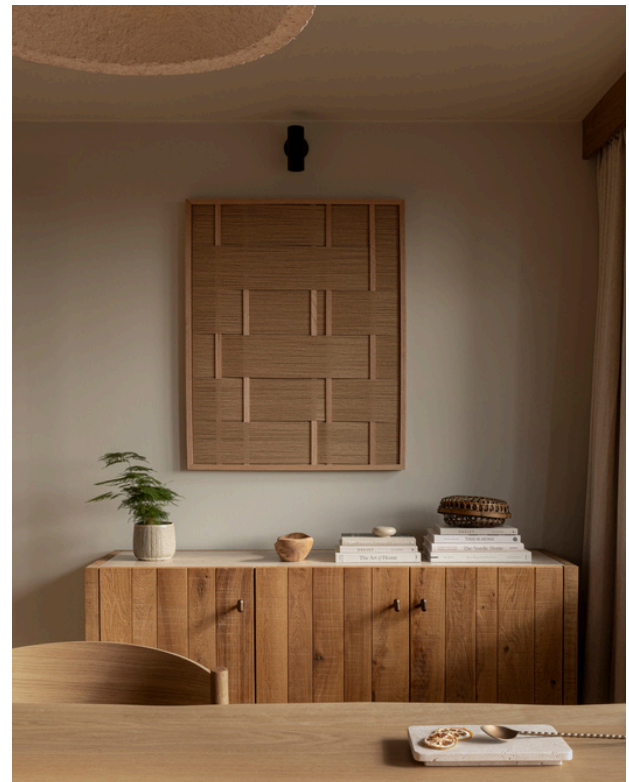
Guest rooms follow the same general approach, though the focus shifts toward privacy and everyday use. Large windows look out onto the surrounding city, and daylight plays a significant role in shaping how the rooms function across the day. Inside, the palette remains neutral. Finishes and materials are kept deliberately quiet and are intended to recede rather than stand out.

Room layouts are straightforward. Sleeping, dressing, and bathing areas flow into one another with minimal visual separation, relying more on changes in material than on partitions. Furniture choices prioritize use. Beds are substantial, seating is compact and practical, and storage is integrated to keep the spaces visually clear. Bathrooms include walk-in rain showers and stone surfaces, with detailing kept intentionally minimal.

Greenery appears in the guest rooms in limited quantities. It supports the hotel's broader environmental intent without becoming decorative. Reused and recycled materials are incorporated across different elements, though these choices are not highlighted or signposted. Sustainability is treated as part of the construction and material logic rather than as a visible design statement.

Where kitchens are included, they function as simple extensions of the room. Open shelving, integrated appliances, and muted finishes keep these areas low-key and usable. Glass partitions are used where some separation is needed, but they are kept light so that visual continuity and daylight are maintained.

Bathrooms are enclosed but not isolated. Stone and glass define the spaces, supported by soft, controlled lighting. The transition between bathing and sleeping areas is handled through material changes rather than physical barriers, keeping movement through the room clear and practical.







The same restrained approach continues in the hotel's shared areas. Lounges, circulation spaces, and informal seating zones are designed for regular use rather than visual impact. Courtyards and semi-outdoor spaces extend the planting strategy and material palette, creating quieter pockets within the building.

Overall, the project maintains a deliberate distance from the surrounding city in visual terms. Rather than referencing Copenhagen directly through form or motif, the interiors establish a calmer counterpoint through consistency, material control, and spatial order. Working within an existing modernist structure, the design introduces a contemporary interior language that remains practical, controlled, and astonishing. **DDI**

This feature is based on the official project release and images shared with Design Diary International by the design team. The article has been developed through editorial interpretation of the materials received.



Nang House, Hanoi, VIETNAM



Ar. Trần Mạnh Trung

Project Name: Nang House

Architect: Trung Tran Studio

Lead Architect: Trần Mạnh Trung

Location: Me Linh District, Hanoi, Vietnam

Area: 270 m²

Photography: Trieu Chien





Located in Me Linh District, an area experiencing steady urban expansion, the house responds to changing settlement patterns while retaining the spatial logic and material sensibility of traditional rural homes. Designed for a three-generation family, the project prioritizes continuity, climate responsiveness, and everyday use over formal expression.

Built on a garden site with several mature trees, the design preserves all existing vegetation. Rather than clearing the land, the house is arranged around the trees, allowing them to influence circulation, roof profiles, and open spaces. This decision shapes the overall character of the project, positioning the house as an extension of the landscape rather than an object placed within it.

The plan is organised with a clear front-to-back sequence. The main living spaces are set back from the street, allowing the front of the site to accommodate a garden, a garage, and a small tea-drinking area that acts as a transitional zone between public and private life. Deeper within the plot, the core of the house brings together the living room, worship room, and dining area as a shared centre. From this central zone, four bedrooms and supporting spaces extend toward the rear of the house.







All functional rooms are connected through narrow intermediate spaces that allow daylight and ventilation to reach deep into the plan. A corridor runs along the length of the house, linking front and back while subtly shifting in perspective. This variation introduces moments of privacy and creates ventilation slots that feed air into adjacent rooms. The layout avoids rigid separation, instead relying on layered thresholds and small spatial adjustments.

The house is primarily single-storey, with one additional bedroom placed on a mezzanine level. This compact vertical expansion allows the building to remain low and visually recessive, particularly beneath the canopy of the surrounding trees. During the summer months, when temperatures in Hanoi frequently exceed 40 degrees Celsius, the trees provide shade and help regulate the internal climate.





Material choice plays a defining role throughout the project. The entire structure is built using brick, which serves as both construction and finish. Brick appears in walls, corridors, arches, and openings, establishing a consistent material language across the house. Variations in brick patterning and surface texture introduce subtle changes without relying on additional finishes.

Interior spaces are finished in darker tones and furnished with reused objects and salvaged materials. Old timber sourced from demolished houses is used alongside reclaimed elements that retain visible signs of age. These choices contribute to an atmosphere that feels quiet and familiar rather than newly constructed. The interior does not attempt to appear contemporary in a conventional sense; instead, it draws from memory and continuity.

Light is carefully controlled throughout the day. Sunlight enters through clerestory openings, skylights, and narrow apertures, shifting across brick surfaces as hours pass. The intensity of light is moderated rather than maximized, ensuring that spaces remain comfortable and visually stable. Wind is guided along the length of the corridor and distributed into individual rooms before exiting through roof openings, reducing reliance on mechanical systems.

Outdoor spaces form an integral part of daily life within the house, the brick arcades, planted courtyards, and shaded seating areas extend living functions beyond enclosed rooms. Openings in roof and floor plates allow tree trunks to pass through the building, turning natural elements into spatial markers that assist orientation and movement.



Rather than presenting a singular architectural statement, Nang House operates through accumulation and adjustment. Its form suggests a structure that has grown gradually, shaped by use, climate, and site conditions. The project reflects an approach that respects rural architectural traditions while accommodating contemporary family life.

At a time when rapid development continues to reshape Vietnam's suburban landscapes, Nang House offers an alternative model. It demonstrates how new construction can work with existing environments, reuse materials, and maintain spatial practices rooted in everyday rituals. The result is a house that feels grounded, adaptive, and deliberately modest in its architectural ambition. **DDI**



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BLUEPRINTS

AVIARA Residence, INDIA

Name of the Project: AVIARA

Location: Sundar Nagar, New Delhi, India

Architects: Ar. Bhuvan Kapila &

Ar. Gagandeep Dua

Design Firm: Workshop for Metropolitan
Architecture (WMA)

Area: 10,900 sq.ft.

Photography: Jeetin Sharma

Set in the tree-lined neighborhood of Sundar Nagar, New Delhi, AVIARA is a private residence designed by Workshop for Metropolitan Architecture (WMA). The home explores a balance between classical restraint and contemporary living, shaped through proportion, material clarity, and a steady relationship with its surroundings. Framed by the greenery of Lutyens' Delhi, the architecture prioritizes light, openness, and continuity, resulting in a residence that feels composed, enduring, and quietly resolved.



Ar. Bhuvan Kapila & Ar. Gagandeep Dua

From the outset, the residence was envisioned as an extension of its landscape rather than an isolated object. Framed by the dense greenery of the Delhi Zoological Forest, the site plays an active role in shaping the home's spatial logic. The outdoors is not treated as a backdrop but as a constant presence, visible and felt across floors and rooms. Openings are positioned to maintain continuity rather than drama, ensuring that movement through the house remains visually connected to gardens, trees, and filtered light.

The dialogue between inside and outside defines the project at multiple levels. Expansive windows, carefully aligned openings, and deliberate sightlines frame views that shift gently through the day. Light enters in controlled ways, creating subtle changes across surfaces rather than sharp contrasts. As shadows move and daylight softens, the house responds quietly, allowing time and climate to shape the experience of the interiors.









Material choices follow the same philosophy of restraint. The palette is minimal yet classical, composed of soft contrasts, muted pastels, and finely textured finishes. The surfaces are calm, details are precise, and transitions are handled with care, resulting in an interior atmosphere that feels settled and enduring, aligned with the client's desire for a home that remains calm, elegant, and timeless.

Craftsmanship plays a central role throughout the residence, though it is never foregrounded. Wood, light, and surface detailing form a quiet narrative that runs through the house. Every element appears thoughtfully placed and proportioned, crafted to support openness and spatial clarity rather than draw attention to itself. The architecture relies on continuity, thus, allowing spaces to flow into one another without visual interruption.







The ground floor adopts an essentialist approach. Clean lines, muted tones, and subtle detailing define the living areas, which remain closely connected to the surrounding landscape. Large openings blur the boundary between interior and exterior, allowing natural ventilation and daylight to guide the ambience throughout the day. Even functional spaces such as the kitchen are designed to feel warm and integrated, maintaining visual links to greenery and ensuring that daily routines remain connected to the outdoors.

The ground floor is easy to move through. Rooms connect naturally and nothing feels forced or staged. You understand the layout simply by using it. Daylight moves through the house as the hours pass, without being made into a design feature.







The first floor introduces a more layered sensibility. Here, classical proportions are paired with contemporary finishes, creating an interplay that lends the spaces a lived-in character. Accents are introduced sparingly, adding personality without disturbing the overall calm. Bedrooms on this level overlook planted areas, reinforcing privacy while maintaining a quiet visual connection to the landscape beyond. These rooms function as retreats, shaped by light, proportion, and view rather than decorative emphasis.

The second floor marks a noticeable shift in scale and atmosphere. Designed as a space for gathering and informal entertainment, it is defined by a dramatic thirty-foot-high ceiling that expands the volume without overwhelming it. The height brings a sense of openness, while expansive openings extend the interior toward the terrace, allowing the architecture to engage directly with the sky. Despite the increase in scale, the space retains a sense of intimacy, continuing the home's fluid relationship with light, air, and surroundings.



Throughout the residence, sustainability is embedded as a core design principle rather than an added feature. The house is powered entirely by solar energy, and its planning prioritizes natural ventilation, thermal comfort, and daylight optimization. These strategies reduce reliance on mechanical systems, allowing the home to function efficiently while maintaining comfort and ease. Sustainability here is not expressed through visible technology, but through orientation, material choice, and spatial planning.

Every detail across the house reflects intention. Openings are placed with care, views are revealed gradually, and materials are allowed to age naturally. The architecture values proportion over excess and authenticity over display. There is a deliberate avoidance of showmanship, with decisions guided by longevity rather than short-lived trends.

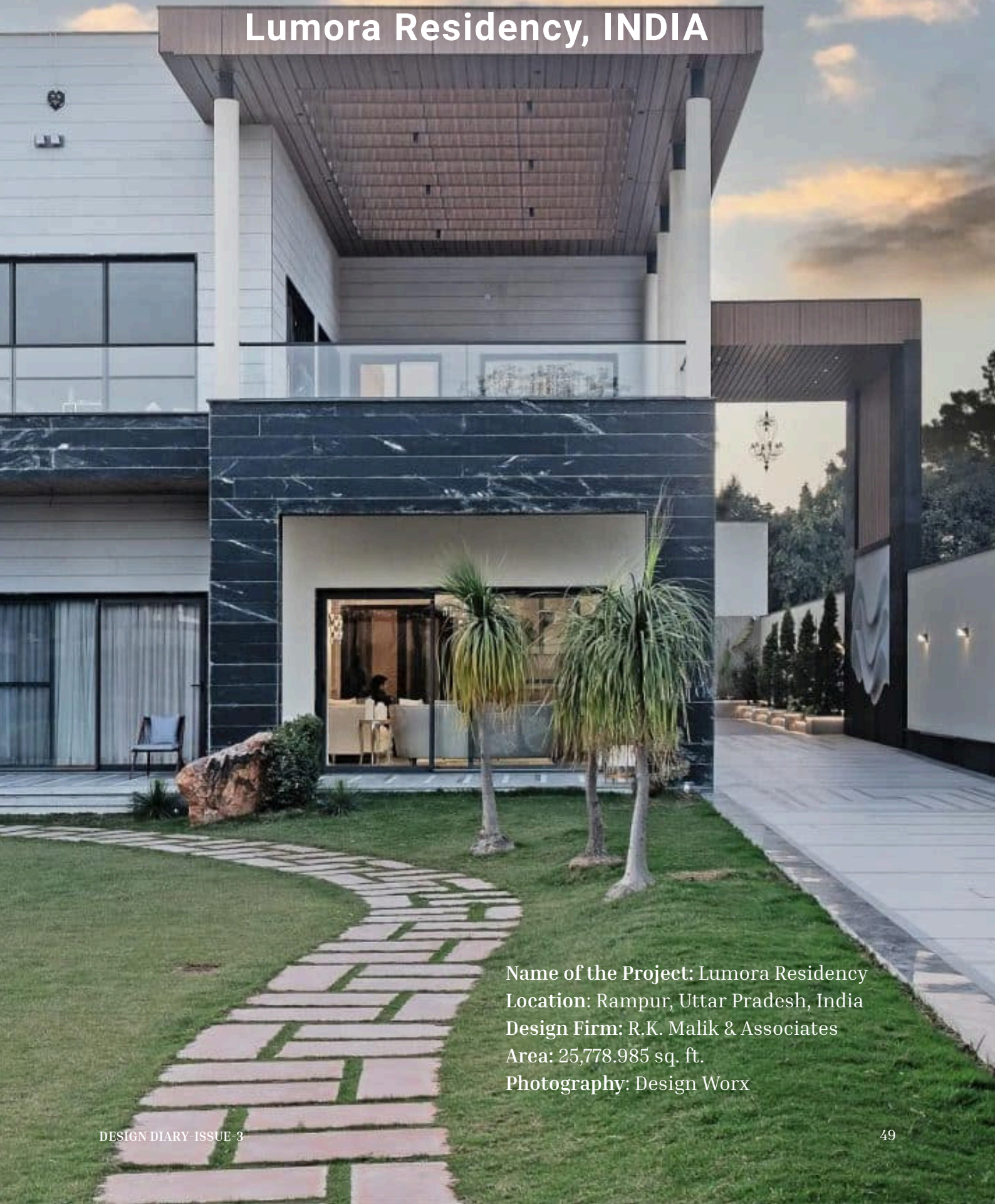


Drawing from new classical, eclectic, and modern classic influences, AVIARA reinterprets tradition through a contemporary lens. The design does not replicate historical forms, nor does it attempt to make a statement through contrast. Instead, it absorbs references quietly, translating them into a language that feels current yet rooted.

In essence, the AVIARA Residence is not simply a dwelling but a lived environment shaped by light, material, and memory. It demonstrates that luxury can exist without excess, that elegance can be quiet, and that architecture can remain relevant by staying grounded. Here, design unfolds with patience, allowing the dialogue between built form and nature to evolve naturally over time. **DDI**

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Lumora Residency, INDIA



Name of the Project: Lumora Residency
Location: Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, India
Design Firm: R.K. Malik & Associates
Area: 25,778.985 sq. ft.
Photography: Design Worx

Lumora Residency is conceived as a contemporary home shaped by clarity, openness, and a deliberate relationship with its surroundings. Located in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, the residence is planned as a response to modern living that values spatial ease and visual calm over complexity. The architecture is direct and restrained, allowing form, proportion, and material to establish character without relying on overt gestures.

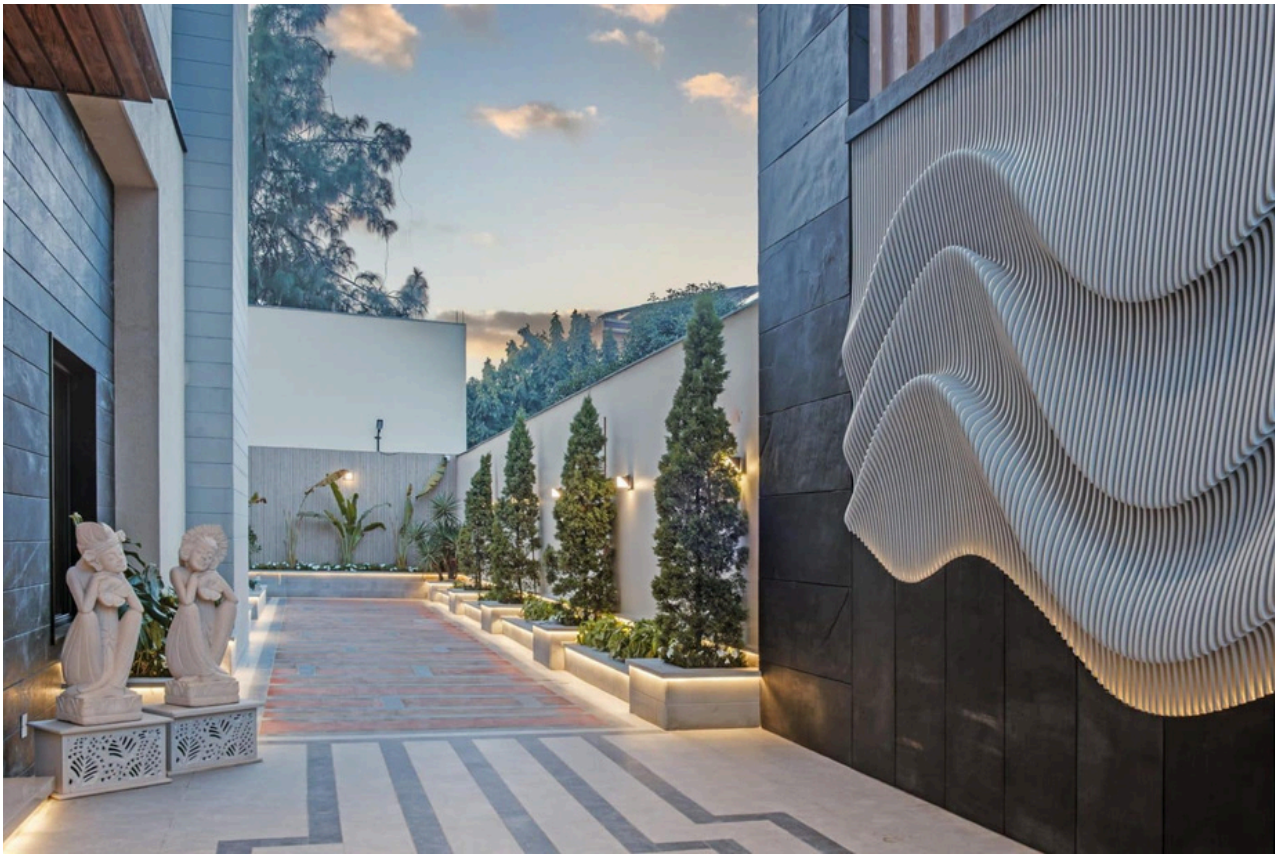


Ar. R.K. Malik

The overall composition of this project is defined by clean geometric volumes and an emphasis on horizontal continuity. Flat roofs anchor the structure visually, while large, uninterrupted openings allow the house to open outward. Floor-to-ceiling windows are used generously, not as a display feature, but as a practical means of bringing light deep into the interior and maintaining a constant visual dialogue with the exterior. The boundary between inside and outside remains porous, reinforcing a way of living that feels open rather than enclosed.

Movement through the house is guided by openness rather than corridors or partitions. Spaces are allowed to flow into one another, creating a layout that supports everyday use without feeling rigid. The plan prioritises comfort and functionality, ensuring that each area connects naturally to the next. This sense of continuity is central to the experience of the residence, where rooms feel related rather than isolated.









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Wood, concrete, and glass run through the house in a steady, uncomplicated way. Their presence is consistent from one space to the next, creating a sense of continuity rather than contrast. Nothing competes for attention. Surfaces remain calm, allowing the proportions of rooms and the way light moves through them to shape the experience. As the day progresses, spaces shift subtly with changing light, giving the interiors a natural rhythm without relying on visual effects.

Daylight plays a central role in how the house functions. Large openings bring light deep inside, keeping interiors bright and comfortable for most of the day. The planning supports this ease of use, reducing dependence on artificial lighting and allowing rooms to feel naturally tempered. Systems that control lighting, temperature, and security are integrated quietly into the house, present when needed and unnoticed when not. Daily comfort is supported without altering how the spaces look or feel. Inside, the colour palette remains restrained. Neutral tones form the base, creating a calm backdrop across rooms. Accent colours appear sparingly, adding variation without disrupting the overall balance. Textures are layered carefully, bringing warmth to the interiors while keeping surfaces visually clear. The spaces feel lived-in and practical, shaped for regular use rather than visual display.

Furniture follows the same approach. Pieces are clean-lined and functional, scaled to the rooms and arranged to preserve openness. Storage is largely integrated into the architecture, keeping floors and surfaces uncluttered. This order allows the spaces to remain flexible over time, accommodating change without feeling crowded. Lighting is handled with equal restraint. Natural light defines the mood of the interiors, shifting gradually from morning to evening. Artificial lighting is layered where required, supporting daily activities without overpowering the space. Feature lights appear only where they add focus, never becoming the main event. The overall atmosphere remains even and comfortable throughout the house.

Planting and natural elements are introduced quietly, softening edges and adding depth to the interiors. These elements are woven into everyday movement through the house, reinforcing a connection to the outdoors without turning it into a theme. The effect is subtle and grounding. Throughout Lumora Residency, the architecture holds together through consistency rather than emphasis. Rooms relate to one another through proportion, light, and material continuity. Nothing feels overworked or overstated. The house reads as composed and functional, designed to support daily life with ease.

DDI

**The Hungry Caterpillar
A Bamboo Pavilion by
Ar. Apoorva Shroff
at Ashoka University, India**



Ar. Apoorva Shroff

At Ashoka University, a new bamboo pavilion titled The Hungry Caterpillar introduces an alternative way of thinking about campus infrastructure, material responsibility, and everyday student spaces. Designed by Apoorva Shroff, the project takes the form of a pavilion rather than a conventional building, allowing it to function as both an architectural intervention and a lived-in environment.

The pavilion spans approximately 650 square metres and is constructed entirely from bamboo. Its name and spatial language draw from the image of a caterpillar within its cocoon, a reference to continuous learning, growth, and transformation. Located beneath an existing canopy of trees, the structure reimagines the campus food street as a shaded, porous landscape rather than a fixed enclosure, encouraging informal gathering and movement.



Shroff's engagement with bamboo is rooted in hands-on learning. After enrolling at a bamboo school in Bali to study the material in depth, she translated that knowledge into a large-scale, functional structure suited to an academic setting. The bamboo canopies, executed by Jans Bamboo with structural design by Atelier One, use lightweight gridshell systems formed by slender bamboo members woven at 45-degree angles. These canopies span up to 19 metres and are topped with crushed bamboo mats that provide natural shading and ventilation. Architectural detailing was resolved with support from Jurian Sustainability.

Supporting elements within the pavilion extend the project's material logic. Modular kitchen units were 3D printed in concrete by Micob Pvt. Ltd., reducing material waste and enabling precise, prefabricated construction. Furniture designed by Placyle is made entirely from recycled plastic waste, reinforcing the project's emphasis on circular material use.

Rather than operating as a static installation, The Hungry Caterpillar functions as a daily-use space where students eat, meet, and move through the campus. It demonstrates how natural materials, structural innovation, and contemporary fabrication techniques can coexist within an educational environment, offering a practical example of sustainability embedded into everyday life rather than treated as a symbolic gesture. **DDI**

Exclusive Interview | Jason deCaires Taylor





Jason deCaires Taylor: The Sculptor Who Let the Ocean Finish the Work

The first thing you notice about Jason deCaires Taylor's work isn't scale, or novelty, or even the uncanny experience of encountering human figures beneath the sea. It is restraint. His sculptures do not compete with the ocean. They wait for it. Over time, they soften, darken, and disappear into growth, allowing marine life to overwrite the artist's hand. Where most monumental art insists on permanence, Taylor's practice is built around surrender.

In an [exclusive interview with Shweta of Design Diary International](#), Taylor speaks with unusual clarity about authorship, control, and time. Trained as a diver before formally establishing himself as a sculptor, he occupies a rare position between art, environmental science, and public space. His underwater works are not conceived as finished objects, but as beginnings. "I see my sculptures as catalysts rather than completed works," he explains. "Once they are placed on the seabed, the dialogue begins."

That dialogue unfolds gradually, with algae forming first, fish beginning to take shelter, and sponges and corals settling into the crevices, until the surface itself starts to change and, with it, the meaning of the work, reaching a point where Taylor steps away from any idea of ownership altogether, acknowledging that "the ocean becomes both the curator and the critic," reshaping intention so decisively that what remains is not control, but collaboration.



Taylor's work resists easy categorization. It is sculpture, but it is also infrastructure. Each figure is cast using pH-neutral, marine-safe cement formulations developed in close collaboration with marine biologists and environmental engineers. Mineral content, surface roughness, and porosity are calibrated not for visual effect, but to encourage colonization. These choices are not peripheral to the work, they are the work.

Material, for Taylor, is message. "From the beginning, I've been mindful of what I place in the marine environment," he notes. "The materials have to give something back." Over time, the sculptures transition from inert forms to living reef systems, supporting biodiversity while drawing human attention away from fragile natural reefs. It is this long arc of transformation that defines his practice more than any single installation.







One of Taylor's most emotionally resonant works, *A World Adrift*, brings this philosophy into sharp focus. The installation depicts children poised on fragile, origami-like boats drifting across the sea. The imagery is deceptively simple. Childhood innocence sits alongside precarity. Wonder exists next to unease.

Taylor speaks of the work as a meditation on inheritance. "Those paper-like vessels represent the delicate balance between our ecosystems, our climate, and our future," he says. The children are still, observant, resilient. They are not depicted in crisis, but neither are they safe. The sea around them is calm, but uncertain. It is a portrait of a generation navigating the consequences of choices it did not make, while still holding the capacity for imagination and direction.

The power of the piece lies in its refusal to resolve this tension. Hope and fragility coexist. There is no conclusion offered, only presence.







Over the past two decades, Taylor has expanded his ideas to an unprecedented scale, creating entire underwater museums and sculpture parks across the world. Early projects in Grenada demonstrated how submerged sculpture could operate as both attraction and ecological intervention. Larger initiatives followed, including the Museo Subacuático de Arte (MUSA) off the coast of Cancún, one of the largest underwater art installations ever created, and monumental single works such as Ocean Atlas in the Bahamas.

These sites are often described as museums, but Taylor is careful with the term. They are not repositories of static objects. They are evolving environments. “I hope they become more than tourist destinations,” he says. “My vision is for them to act as marine sanctuaries, places where art, science, and conservation meet.”

Technology is increasingly part of this future. Virtual dives, real-time ecological monitoring, and scientific partnerships are beginning to shape how these sites are experienced and studied. Culture, in this context, is no longer separate from nature. It is embedded within it.

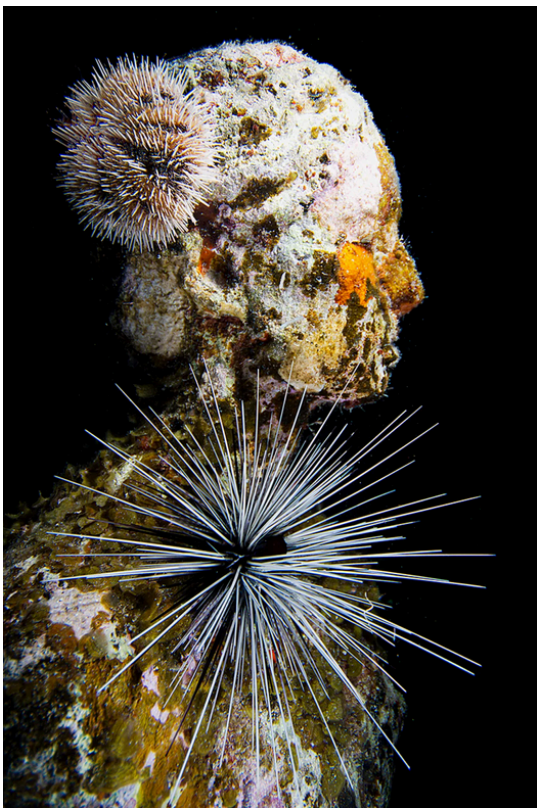


Working at this scale, and in public space, inevitably invites scrutiny. Taylor is candid about the controversies that have accompanied some of his installations, including *Alluvia* in the UK, which sparked intense debate around interpretation and public art. He does not see this as failure. “Public art exists in dialogue,” he reflects. “People bring their own histories, beliefs, and emotions to it.”

Discomfort, for Taylor, can be productive. It signals engagement. It asks questions rather than offering reassurance. The ocean itself operates in a similar way. It is powerful, unpredictable, and often misunderstood. Placing art within it is not an attempt to tame it, but to acknowledge that lack of control.

When the conversation turns to India, Taylor speaks thoughtfully, avoiding easy projections. India’s coastline, he notes, carries not only ecological richness but deep cultural and spiritual significance. Any work placed there would need to listen first. “The ocean has always been both a provider and a sacred presence,” he says.

He imagines a series of works rooted in renewal and coexistence, drawing from coastal communities and traditions rather than imposing an external narrative. The goal would not be spectacle, but resonance. A living gallery where coral and culture are allowed to grow side by side.



What ultimately distinguishes Taylor's practice is its refusal to chase immortality. His sculptures are not designed to remain as they were made. They are designed to change, to erode, to host life, and eventually to disappear into the environments they inhabit.

In a world that often equates monumentality with dominance, Taylor offers a different proposition. Art can exist without conquest. It can support life rather than displace it. It can be temporary without being insignificant.

For Design Diary International, Jason deCaires Taylor represents a shift in how we think about space, authorship, and legacy. His work does not ask to be preserved in pristine condition. It asks to be used, altered, and absorbed. In doing so, it quietly redefines what monumental art can mean in an age that can no longer afford permanence without responsibility. **DDI**



COLLECTIBLE

The **Freeze Frame Birds Ceiling Lamp** by Lladró is a beautifully crafted lighting piece that combines design and craftsmanship. Made from blown glass, it features small handmade porcelain birds placed around the lamp, adding a distinctive and playful detail. The careful handwork reflects Lladró's expertise in porcelain art. When switched on, the lamp gives off a soft, warm light that works well in both modern and classic interiors. It functions as both a practical light source and a refined decorative element for the space.

Lladro





COLLECTIBLE

The Ghost Chandelier, designed by Kristian Sofus Hansen & Tommy Hyldahl, is a beautiful mix of art and light. Its flowing white acrylic tube creates organic, eye-catching patterns that change depending on where you view it from. Available in Neon, Burned Black, and Chrome, and in two sizes, it can be hung at the perfect height using adjustable stainless-steel wires. The chandelier brings a warm, inviting glow to any space and works beautifully as a centerpiece over a dining table, in a living room, or in an entryway, adding both style and a cozy atmosphere.

101 CPH





COLLECTIBLE

The **Multi-Lite Pendant** is a classic piece of Danish design that combines style and versatility. Its two opposing, movable shades let you create a variety of lighting effects, directing light up, down, or in asymmetrical patterns. Designed by Louis Weisdorf in 1972, the lamp breaks from traditional repeating elements to offer a more dynamic, personal approach. With its cylindrical shapes and surrounding metal ring, the Multi-Lite has a timeless, functional design that fits beautifully into any home, adding both character and adaptable lighting.

Gubi





COLLECTIBLE

Gold Moon goes beyond a traditional pendant, becoming a sculptural lighting piece for walls or ceilings. Its black, irregular discs with warm gold interiors reflect light in soft, shifting patterns. The layered composition creates depth and atmosphere, casting gentle light and shadow across the surface.

Gold Moon works as both a light source and a striking visual element in the space.

Catellani & Smith





COLLECTIBLE

The Knotty Bubbles Chandelier by Lindsey Adelman brings a sense of care and intention to sculptural lighting. Inspired by Japanese packaging, buoys, and the art of shibari, it is made from hand-blown glass bubbles gently bound together with knotted rope. The softness of the glass paired with the texture of the rope gives the piece a warm, grounded presence. Each bubble carries slight variations, a quiet reminder of the handcraft behind it. The result is a chandelier that feels considered and expressive, offering light while also standing confidently as a sculptural element in the space.

Roll & Hill



PRACTICE & PERSPECTIVE
FEATURING
AR. ABHINAV GOEL-
PRINCIPAL AT RMJM- MILANO & MANTOVA, ITALY

*Ar. Abhinav Goel, Principal at RMJM, belongs to a generation of architects whose practice has been shaped by movement across geographies rather than allegiance to one. His work sits at the intersection of technology, narrative, and place, informed by early experimentation, international collaborations, and hands-on exposure to diverse architectural cultures. In this conversation with Alisha for **Design Diary International**, he speaks about finding direction during uncertain beginnings, the importance of listening before designing, and why architecture, for him, is ultimately about belonging rather than authorship.*



You entered global architectural practice very early in your career. When you first chose architecture, what did you believe the profession was about, and how has that belief shifted as you've worked across different cultures, geographies, and project scales?

I don't think I consciously chose architecture in the beginning. I was more interested in the idea of serving people through design, of shaping environments that could quietly improve everyday life. Architecture, over time, revealed itself as the medium through which that instinct could take form.

Early on, I believed the profession was primarily about authorship and form. A client would present a brief, and the architect's role was to translate that into a building, a resolved object with a clear identity. That understanding was relatively straightforward, and in many ways, comfortable.

Working across cultures, geographies, and scales gradually dismantled that belief. I began to realise that architecture is rarely just about making a building. It has the capacity to act as a community generator, a social framework, and at times a cultural mediator. The focus shifted from producing an object to shaping relationships between people, climate, landscape, and time.

Today, I see architecture less as an act of assertion and more as an act of listening. Listening to the memories embedded in a place, the rhythms of daily life, and the silences that often go unnoticed. In that sense, architecture becomes a dialogue rather than a declaration, one that unfolds slowly and gains meaning through use rather than image



Your trajectory suggests patience rather than speed. Was that a conscious decision from the start, or did it emerge as you encountered the realities of practice, collaboration, and responsibility?

Patience was not a conscious decision at the start. It emerged through practice. Architecture has a way of slowing you down whether you intend it or not. Projects unfold over long timelines, shaped by collaboration, responsibility, and constraints that rarely align with urgency.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that for clients, time is money. Architecture operates within economic and commercial realities, and patience cannot come at the cost of indecision. I believe the real challenge lies in finding the balance, understanding when to slow down thinking and when to move decisively. That balance only works when there is trust and a shared understanding between client and designer, where both move forward together rather than in opposition.

Working within a highly competitive, often cut throat profession has reinforced this clarity. Speed alone does not create value, but neither does hesitation. Over time, patience became less about delay and more about judgement. It is about knowing which decisions require reflection and which demand momentum, always with the client's interest and the long term impact of the project in mind.

Was there a moment early on, perhaps a project that failed, stalled, or challenged you, that fundamentally changed how you think about architecture not as an idea, but as something that affects people, cities, and time?

This is not something I would place only in my early years. It continues to happen even today. Projects stall for internal reasons, briefs change direction entirely, or clients begin without a clear vision or an understanding of what architecture demands. These moments are not exceptions. They are part of practice.

What these situations have taught me is that the role of the architect extends beyond design. We are often educators, helping clients understand process, consequence, and long term impact. When expectations shift or clarity is missing, architecture becomes less about delivering a fixed outcome and more about guiding a conversation.

I have come to see these moments not as failures, but as constructive interruptions. They force reflection, adjustment, and often lead to more grounded outcomes. Architecture operates within cities and communities long after a project is completed, or even if it never is. Each stalled or challenged project becomes a learning curve, sharpening judgement and reinforcing the responsibility we carry toward people, place, and time.

RMJM carries a strong legacy and a global design language. As a Principal in the Milano studio, how do you navigate contributing to that lineage while also developing and protecting your own architectural voice?

I see legacy as something that offers direction rather than constraint. RMJM's strength lies in its global outlook, technical depth, and long experience across cultures and scales. One idea that resonates strongly with me is the studio's approach of thinking globally while designing locally. It allows projects to benefit from a collective international intelligence while remaining deeply aligned with their specific context. Within that framework, my own voice develops through approach rather than signature. It comes through how I read a place, how I engage with teams, and how decisions are guided from early intent to execution. In a global practice, individuality is not protected by insisting on difference, but by remaining consistent in judgement and process. As a Principal in the Milano studio, my role is to contribute to that shared knowledge while ensuring that each project responds meaningfully to its local vernacular, climate, and social fabric. When global perspective and local specificity are held in balance, institutional lineage and personal voice do not compete. They reinforce one another.

You've worked across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. When operating at this international scale, how do you ensure that your work remains rooted in place rather than becoming generic or transferable?

The risk of generic architecture increases as work becomes more international. The only real safeguard against that is attention. Attention to place, climate, material memory, and the cultural landscapes that exist beyond the immediate site. A project like the Sanko Headquarters in Turkey reflects this approach clearly. While the building is contemporary in its language, its spatial idea is deeply rooted in the local context. The central full height atrium draws inspiration from the fairy chimneys of Cappadocia, creating an internal wadi that brings light, air, and a sense of carved depth into the heart of the building. This was not a visual reference, but a spatial one, translating geological memory into lived experience.



Materially, the decision to fully clad the building in stone was equally intentional. In a business district dominated by glass boxes that follow convention rather than tradition, stone becomes a quiet but bold statement. It challenges its surroundings while remaining anchored in the material culture of the region. Working globally does not mean producing universal answers. It means developing a sensitivity that allows architecture to respond differently each time. When a project is truly rooted in its place, it cannot be lifted and placed elsewhere without losing its meaning.

In a large multidisciplinary practice, leadership is often less visible than design authorship. How do you personally define your role as a Principal, and where do you feel you make the most meaningful impact?

In a large multidisciplinary practice, leadership is often less visible than authorship, and I believe that is as it should be. Architecture, at its core, is a collective act. While strong ideas matter, they only gain strength through collaboration, dialogue, and shared responsibility. I do not see my role as separate from design. It begins with shaping the core concept of a project and continues through refining and polishing it as the work evolves. Design ideas are developed through constant exchange with teams, engineers, consultants, and clients, and my contribution lies in guiding that process, knowing when to push an idea



forward and when to step back and allow it to grow through others. Buildings may carry a name or a brand, but behind every project lies the work of many individuals whose efforts are often unseen. Architecture is never the result of a single author. Acknowledging the many hands behind the scenes is essential, both for the integrity of the work and for how the profession understands itself.

Architecture today is deeply collaborative and technologically complex. What does authorship mean to you in this context, and how do you decide which ideas must be protected and which must evolve through collaboration?

Authorship today is less about ownership and more about intent. In a collaborative and technologically layered process, the architect's role is not to control every outcome, but to remain clear about what a project is fundamentally trying to achieve.

Certain ideas need protection, particularly those rooted in place, spatial logic, and the core narrative of a project. These form the backbone of the work and give it coherence. Other aspects are meant to evolve, and their success often depends on collaboration with the right people. Selecting consultants whose expertise aligns with the ambition of the project is itself a critical design decision.

When collaboration is intentional, ideas are strengthened rather than diluted. Technical systems, details, and even spatial strategies improve when they are shaped through informed dialogue. For me, authorship lies in recognising where clarity is essential and where openness allows the work to grow. When that balance is achieved, collaboration becomes a source of strength rather than compromise.



Your work reflects a strong balance between digital precision, craft, and context. At what point does technology stop serving architecture and begin to dominate it, and how do you guard against that shift?

Technology stops serving architecture when it begins to dictate ideas rather than support them. Digital tools, including emerging applications of artificial intelligence, are extremely powerful in managing complexity, speed, and visualisation. The risk arises when reliance on these tools replaces human judgement instead of sharpening it.

We are increasingly seeing practices lean heavily toward AI generated imagery and automated processes. While these can be useful, they can also be deceptive. Visually compelling images may suggest depth or innovation, but without critical thinking, material understanding, or contextual grounding, they risk diverting projects away from meaningful ideas. At that point, technology begins to lead rather than assist.

I try to guard against this by constantly grounding digital decisions in lived experience. Every tool must translate into light, material, climate, and human use. Architecture ultimately exists beyond the screen. When technology is treated as a means rather than an authority, it allows precision and efficiency to coexist with intuition, craft, and responsibility.

Sustainability is frequently discussed at a conceptual level. In your everyday practice, what are the principles or decisions you refuse to compromise on when it comes to responsible design?

While certifications and standards play an important role, sustainability cannot be fully understood through checklists alone. These frameworks are valuable because they set benchmarks and hold the industry accountable, but stopping there misses the deeper essence of what makes a building truly sustainable. For me, sustainability is a way of living that people should

feel in their everyday lives. Shade on a hot day, air moving naturally through a room, a garden that becomes part of daily routine, or a plaza that invites people to gather. These are forms of sustainability that are experienced rather than measured. I sometimes think of this as emotional sustainability. It is about creating spaces that people want to return to, that offer comfort, ease, and connection over time. These qualities may not always appear in a technical audit, but they are what allow architecture to endure, both in memory and in use.

At the same time, responsible design also requires discipline. Orientation, passive comfort, material longevity, and integration with landscape are decisions I do not compromise on. Many vernacular traditions carried this wisdom long before sustainability was formalised as a term. Our task today is to bring those lessons into the present, combining them with contemporary innovation and established guidelines, so sustainability remains both practical and cultural, both technical and human.

Inevitably, there are moments when budget, regulations, or client ambition collide with architectural intent. How do you approach these points of tension without diluting the core idea of a project?

Many of the buildings we admire most, churches, monuments, and civic landmarks, were born from ambition rather than limitation. They remind us that architecture has always aspired to reach beyond the immediate. At the same time, contemporary practice operates within very real economic and regulatory frameworks, and acknowledging those realities is part of being responsible.

The challenge is not the presence of limits, but how clearly they are understood. I believe it is crucial for budgets to be discussed openly and early in the design process. When architects are asked to imagine freely without an understanding of financial boundaries, and those boundaries emerge later, it can create unnecessary tension. Expecting the same architectural ambition to survive unchanged under newly revealed constraints makes

the process volatile for everyone involved. I have found that projects often gain strength through this process. Constraints force focus, and focused ideas tend to endure. By engaging openly with clients and authorities, and by explaining the long term value of certain decisions, it becomes possible to navigate these pressures while preserving the essence of the architecture.

As an architect of Indian origin working within a European studio, has cultural duality shaped how you read space, material, or social behaviour, even when designing outside familiar contexts?

Cultural duality has shaped the way I observe more than the way I impose. Growing up in one context and practicing in another makes you aware that space is never neutral. It carries social codes, rituals, and expectations that are often unspoken but deeply felt.

Coming from an Indian background, I am perhaps more attuned to density, informality, and the layered use of space, how public and private often overlap, how architecture accommodates life rather than controls it. Working within a European studio, on the other hand, has reinforced clarity, precision, and the discipline of structure and process. The dialogue between these perspectives has sharpened my sensitivity rather than pulling me in one direction. This awareness also becomes important within a team. What feels common or ordinary in one cultural context may carry very different meanings in another. Part of my role is often to bring that awareness into the design process, to question assumptions and encourage conversations around how spaces are read and used differently. When teams understand these nuances, architecture becomes more informed, respectful, and resilient across contexts. When working outside familiar settings, this duality encourages caution and curiosity. Instead of assuming what a space should be, I spend more time observing how people gather, pause, or move through it. Cultural duality does not offer ready answers. It trains you to ask better questions, which I believe is essential when designing anywhere in the world.

Have there been instances where working in an unfamiliar cultural or geographic setting forced you to unlearn certain assumptions about design, and what did that process reveal to you?

Yes, very clearly. Working in unfamiliar contexts has often required unlearning assumptions that felt solid at a distance but dissolved once I was physically present.

I remember an invited international competition in Ethiopia where I arrived confident in both the design approach and the architectural language we had developed. That confidence was quickly challenged. On the ground, it became evident that many decisions were driven almost entirely by financial feasibility. No matter how carefully or passionately a design was defended, the realities of cost, availability, and construction logistics ultimately shaped what was possible. That experience reinforced the importance of visiting the site. Drawings, data, and remote understanding can never fully replace physical presence. Being there reveals priorities, constraints, and cultural realities that cannot be sensed from afar. It also taught me humility. Architecture must respond to lived conditions rather than ideal scenarios.

What this process revealed is that unlearning is not a loss of knowledge, but a refinement of it. Presence forces architecture to move from confidence to clarity, grounding ideas in reality and making them more responsible and meaningful.

Architecture is often romanticised, but practice is slow, demanding, and sometimes invisible. What sustains you through long project cycles where progress is incremental and recognition delayed?

What sustains me is an understanding of process and time. Architecture does not unfold instantly. It requires trust, not only from the architect, but from clients, consultants, and teams alike. One has to believe in the process and reflect that belief consistently. Without that shared trust, long projects become difficult to sustain. I often remind clients and collaborators that the scale of ambition is directly



linked to time. Larger, more complex projects demand patience, coordination, and repeated refinement. A project we are currently working on in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, which is intended to become the tallest skyscraper in Central Asia, is a good example. The ambition is significant, and with that comes a long and demanding journey. That is simply the nature of meaningful architecture. What keeps me grounded is accepting that this slowness is not a weakness, but a condition of building responsibly. Progress may feel incremental, but it is cumulative. Seeing ideas mature, align, and eventually translate into spaces that people inhabit makes the waiting worthwhile. Architecture rewards those who trust the process and stay committed to it over time.

Outside of architecture, are there experiences, disciplines, or observations from everyday life that quietly influence how you think about space and design?

Much of what influences my thinking comes from everyday observation rather than formal disciplines. Watching how people occupy space, how they gather, pause, adapt, or make places their own often teaches more than any reference book or precedent study.

Walking plays an important role for me, particularly because it reveals how differently cities are designed for the human body. Many European cities allow walking as a natural part of daily life. Streets are scaled, connected, and safe enough to be experienced slowly. In contrast, large parts of the Asian urban context are still not equipped with continuous walking infrastructure or safe passages, making movement more fragmented and often hostile to pedestrians.

This contrast has sharpened my awareness of how deeply urban design affects behaviour and dignity. Literature, conversations, and moments of quiet observation further influence how I think about space, memory, and time. These everyday experiences remind me that architecture and cities should first serve the human pace, not just efficiency or movement.

Looking ahead, what kind of work are you most drawn toward now, whether in terms of typology, scale, geography, or unresolved questions you still want to explore?

I find myself increasingly drawn toward work that prioritises vision, creativity, and sensitivity over ego, power, or status. While architecture inevitably operates within business realities, what motivates me personally are projects that engage with human experience at its most vulnerable and meaningful moments.

Typologies such as education and healthcare are especially compelling to me. These are spaces that demand far more than spatial problem solving. They require emotional intelligence. How does a child feel when they step into a school or kindergarten, a place that becomes an extension of parental care? How does a person experience space in the final days of their life, when architecture must offer dignity, calm, and reassurance rather than spectacle?

At the same time, even large scale and high intensity projects can be approached with the same sensitivity. We are currently designing stadiums for an undisclosed client where the ambition extends well beyond sport or a single event. A stadium may host only a few games each month, yet remain inactive for the rest of the year. By integrating additional programs such as markets, health clinics, and eateries, these buildings are conceived to operate as urban generators. They remain active beyond match days, functioning not only as venues, but also as independent civic spaces woven into everyday life. Alongside this, there are unresolved questions that continue to keep me engaged. What makes architecture timeless rather than merely relevant? Are there limits to being limitless, or does restraint ultimately give architecture its endurance? And as design becomes increasingly reliant on artificial intelligence, how do we ensure that human judgement, empathy, and intuition remain central to the process? Looking ahead, I am most interested in work that treats architecture not as an object of power, but as a framework for care, continuity, and shared life.

Do you imagine your future continuing within large global practice, or is there a point where you see yourself building something more personal, rooted, or independent?

I don't see these paths as opposites. Large global practice offers scale, complexity, and the ability to engage with projects that carry long term impact. At the same time, meaningful architecture often demands intimacy, flexibility, and a deep connection to context. This is where I value the way our studio operates. RMJM functions as a global practice, but with the ability to work as a boutique studio when a project or context demands it, while still drawing on a wider international network when needed. That balance feels important to me. It allows ambition and sensitivity to coexist rather than compete.

Looking ahead, what matters most is not the label of the practice, but the freedom to work with intent. Whether within a global framework or a more focused setting, I am interested in environments that allow thoughtful engagement, continuity of ideas, and architecture that remains grounded in people and place.

When you look ten years ahead, how would you define success for yourself, and what do you hope remains consistent in your way of thinking even as your practice evolves?

For me, success ten years from now would not be measured by scale, visibility, or numbers alone. It would be defined by the quality of work produced and the integrity with which it was made. If the architecture I am involved in continues to feel responsible, grounded, and relevant to the people who inhabit it, that would matter far more than external markers of achievement. I would hope that what remains consistent is my way of thinking rather than any particular outcome. Curiosity, humility, and the willingness to listen must stay central, to people, to place, and to context. As practice evolves, tools change, and responsibilities grow, that mindset becomes even more important. If, over time, the work is able to balance ambition

with care, innovation with restraint, and global reach with local sensitivity, I would consider that a meaningful form of success. Architecture, for me, should age with dignity, and so should the thinking behind it.

Finally, when young architects look at international practice from the outside, what is the one misconception you would most like to correct based on your own experience?

One of the most persistent misconceptions is that international practice is defined by speed, glamour, or visibility. From the outside, it can appear decisive and image driven. In reality, it is built on patience. Projects unfold slowly, shaped by distance, dialogue, uncertainty, and responsibility long before they take physical form.

What is often underestimated is the weight that comes with working at an international scale. Greater reach brings greater expectation. Every decision carries cultural, social, and long term consequences, often in contexts far removed from one's own. The work demands restraint, consistency, and an acceptance that progress is rarely linear. Much of the effort remains invisible, but it is precisely that unseen labour that gives architecture its credibility.

I would encourage young architects to understand international practice not as an acceleration of success, but as an extension of responsibility. It is not about being everywhere, but about being attentive wherever you are. Those who endure are not driven by spectacle or recognition, but by patience, humility, and a commitment to learning over time. In the end, architecture that matters is not announced loudly. It is built carefully, sustained quietly, and understood slowly. **DDI**

*Land.
Ritual.
and Form-*
Indigenous
Architecture
and Cultural
Memory

ACROSS CULTURES AND CONTINENTS, SACRED ARCHITECTURE HAS OFTEN EMERGED FROM SHARED BELIEF SYSTEMS RATHER THAN FORMALISED POWER OR IMPERIAL AMBITION. THE SITES EXAMINED HERE BELONG TO INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS WHERE BUILDING WAS INSEPARABLE FROM LAND, RITUAL PRACTICE, AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY. SHAPED OVER GENERATIONS, THESE PLACES REFLECT WAYS OF CONSTRUCTING SPACE THAT PRIORITIZED CONTINUITY, ORIENTATION, AND MATERIAL INTELLIGENCE OVER VISUAL DISPLAY.

FROM THE CAREFULLY ORDERED CEREMONIAL LANDSCAPE OF **CHACO CANYON** IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST TO THE **ROCK-Hewn CHURCHES** OF LALIBELA, EACH SITE REVEALS A DISTINCT ARCHITECTURAL RESPONSE TO CLIMATE, BELIEF, AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. THE LIVING ADOBE STRUCTURES OF **TAOS PUEBLO** FURTHER DEMONSTRATE HOW SACRED SPACE COULD EVOLVE WITHOUT RUPTURE, ADAPTING THROUGH USE RATHER THAN REPLACEMENT. TOGETHER, THESE EXAMPLES PRESENT A BROADER READING OF SACRED ARCHITECTURE, ONE ROOTED IN MATERIAL RESTRAINT, SPATIAL DISCIPLINE, AND ENDURING CULTURAL PRESENCE.

CHACO CANYON



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CHACO CANYON

NEW MEXICO, USA



Chaco Canyon occupies a wide, arid basin in the high desert of north-western New Mexico. Unlike settlements that grow gradually from domestic need, Chaco emerged between the ninth and thirteenth centuries CE as a deliberately organised ceremonial and architectural centre, constructed by the Ancestral Puebloan peoples. Its isolation, limited water sources, and absence of nearby timber make the scale and ambition of its architecture particularly striking. Rather than accommodating its environment in a modest way, Chaco reshaped it through long-term planning, material control, and regional coordination.

Period and Cultural Setting

Major construction activity at Chaco Canyon began around 850 CE and continued in phases until approximately 1250 CE, a period commonly identified as the Bonito Phase. This era was marked by intensive building and the consolidation of Chaco's influence across a wide territory of the American Southwest. Chaco was not a political capital in the conventional sense, nor is there evidence of kings or dynastic rule. Instead, it functioned as a ceremonial and administrative centre, drawing people, resources, and ritual authority from distant communities.

Archaeological findings suggest that many of Chaco's buildings were not intended for permanent habitation. Instead, they supported seasonal gatherings, storage, ceremonial preparation, and ritual activity. This distinction is essential in understanding Chaco not as an urban settlement, but as a carefully planned architectural landscape shaped by ritual use.

Architectural Layout and Spatial Organization

The canyon contains more than a dozen major masonry complexes known as Great Houses, positioned along the canyon floor and linked through sightlines and engineered routes. These structures are notable for their scale, geometric clarity, and deliberate orientation. Several Great Houses align closely with cardinal directions, while others respond to solar and lunar cycles.

The largest and most extensively studied complex, Pueblo Bonito, developed incrementally into a vast D-shaped structure comprising more than 600 rooms arranged around central plazas. Spatial hierarchy is clearly expressed. Open plazas accommodate large gatherings, while movement inward leads to increasingly restricted rooms and ceremonial spaces. This layered organization indicates controlled access and ritual progression rather than open residential use.

Construction Methods and Material Use

Stone defines Chacoan architecture. Builders quarried sandstone locally and employed a core-and-veneer construction technique, with rubble fill enclosed by carefully shaped exterior stones. Over successive building phases, masonry became more refined, with thinner and more regularly cut stones laid in precise horizontal courses.

Walls often exceed one metre in thickness, providing both structural stability and thermal regulation in a climate marked by extreme temperature variation. Roofs and floors were supported by timber beams, primarily ponderosa pine, transported from mountain ranges more than 70 kilometres away. The acquisition and movement of this timber required sustained organization, underscoring Chaco's reach and regional integration.

Interior Spaces and Ceremonial Architecture

Interior space at Chaco reflects a clear functional hierarchy. Rectangular rooms dominate the Great Houses, many of them windowless and likely used for storage or ritual preparation rather than daily living. Circulation within these complexes is narrow and controlled, reinforcing spatial order.

The most distinctive interior element is the kiva, a circular, subterranean ceremonial chamber. Kivas were entered from above by ladder, marking a deliberate transition from open plaza to enclosed ritual space. Interior features typically include bench seating, wall niches, a central fire pit, and ventilation shafts designed to regulate airflow and smoke.



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Large Great Kivas, some exceeding 19 metres in diameter, served as communal ceremonial spaces and are often positioned prominently within the architectural layout. The contrast between rectilinear room blocks and circular kivas establishes a consistent spatial dialogue throughout the canyon.

Astronomy, Orientation, and Ritual Time

Chacoan architecture demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of astronomical cycles. Numerous buildings and landscape features align with solar solstices, equinoxes, and lunar standstills. The best-known example, the Sun Dagger on Fajada Butte, uses the interaction of light and shadow cast by stone slabs to mark seasonal transitions with precision.

These alignments suggest that architecture at Chaco functioned as a calendrical instrument, regulating ceremonial timing, agricultural cycles, and social order. Built form, landscape, and sky were treated as an integrated system rather than separate realms.

Surface Treatment and Architectural Restraint

Decoration at Chaco is notably restrained. Visual emphasis rests on proportion, repetition, and the precision of stonework rather than applied ornament. Where plaster or pigment appears, it is used sparingly and without elaborate figuration.

This restraint directs attention to spatial sequence and material presence. Shifting light across stone surfaces, the contrast between open plazas and enclosed chambers, and the tactile quality of masonry become the primary architectural language of the site.

Road Networks and Regional Integration

Beyond the canyon itself, Chaco is connected to an extensive system of engineered roads, many of them remarkably straight and wide. These routes link the canyon to outlying settlements, shrines, and resource zones across a broad region.

The scale and clarity of these roads indicate that Chaco was conceived as part of a wider regional framework. Movement of people, materials, and ritual knowledge occurred along these corridors, reinforcing Chaco's role as a central node rather than an isolated complex.

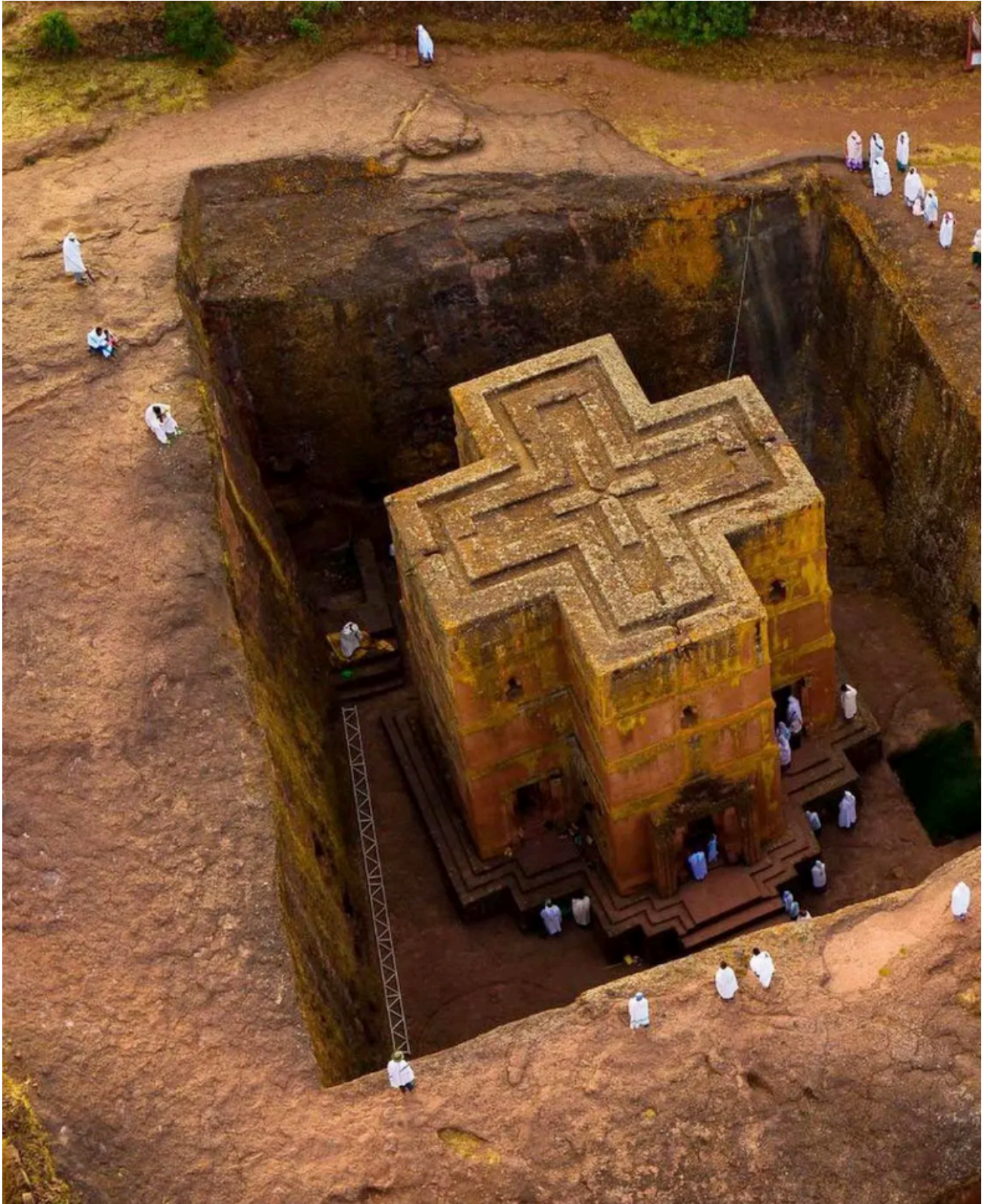
Decline, Abandonment, and Continuity

By the late twelfth century, large-scale construction at Chaco Canyon ceased. Prolonged drought, environmental pressure, and shifts in social organization likely contributed to this change. The site was not destroyed, but gradually left behind as populations dispersed to other areas of the Southwest. Despite physical abandonment, Chaco retained cultural significance. Descendant Pueblo communities continue to recognize the canyon as an ancestral place, maintaining spiritual and historical connections that extend beyond continuous occupation.

Chaco Canyon stands as one of the most accomplished examples of indigenous architecture in North America. Its importance lies not only in its monumental scale, but in the integration of planning, material intelligence, interior organization, and astronomical knowledge. Built without kings, written records, or ornamental excess, it reflects a form of architecture shaped through collective organization, environmental understanding, and long-term cultural continuity. **DDI**

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Images: Public sources / National Park Service archives

ROCK-HEWN CHURCHES OF LALIBELA





The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are situated in the northern Ethiopian highlands, within a rugged volcanic plateau shaped by erosion and seasonal water flow. Unlike conventional architectural ensembles, the churches are positioned below ground level, excavated directly from the rock rather than constructed above it. Access is gained through a network of sunken courtyards, narrow trenches, and carved passageways, making movement through the site gradual and controlled. From the surrounding terrain, the complex is largely concealed, revealing itself only as one descends into its interior spaces.

Historical Context

The churches were created primarily during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries under the Zagwe dynasty and are traditionally associated with King Lalibela, after whom the site is named. Historical and religious accounts describe the complex as a symbolic counterpart to Jerusalem, conceived during a period when Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land had become increasingly difficult. While legend attributes the project to divine instruction, archaeological evidence suggests a sustained construction process carried out over several decades, involving skilled craftsmen and a clear organizational framework.

Construction Method

Each church at Lalibela is monolithic, carved from a single mass of volcanic tuff. Construction began by cutting deep trenches into the rock to isolate solid blocks, from which exterior walls, roofs, and interior volumes were excavated inward. This method eliminates the distinction between structure and finish. Columns, arches, ceilings, floors, and openings are all part of the same continuous material body. There is no mortar, no applied surface treatment, and no secondary cladding. Architecture here is defined entirely by removal, proportion, and alignment.

Spatial Organization

The complex consists of eleven principal churches, arranged into two main groups separated by a seasonal stream and connected through a dense system of carved circulation routes. Movement through the site is deliberately indirect. Pathways narrow and widen, light levels shift abruptly, and views are revealed incrementally rather than all at once. There is no dominant axis or single focal approach and the orientation relies on bodily movement and spatial memory.





Interior Architecture

Interior spaces vary in scale and form. Some churches follow basilica-like layouts with longitudinal aisles and rows of columns carved directly from the rock, while others are compact, centrally organized volumes. Columns are simply proportioned, with restrained capitals and minimal carving. Light enters through small, high-set openings, producing interiors that remain dim and thermally stable throughout the day. The subdued lighting reinforces focus on ritual use rather than architectural display.

Bete Giorgis

Among the churches, Bete Giorgis (the Church of Saint George) is the most formally distinct. Carved in the shape of a Greek cross and sunk deep into the rock, it is fully visible only from above. Access is gained through a narrow trench that turns repeatedly before reaching the entrance. The building's clarity lies in its geometry and precision rather than ornament. Its isolation within its own excavated courtyard reinforces its ceremonial significance within the complex.

Surface Treatment and Symbolism

Surface decoration across Lalibela is restrained. Carved crosses, blind arcades, and shallow reliefs appear selectively, integrated directly into stone walls without disrupting their continuity. These elements function as symbolic markers rather than ornamental embellishment. Interior surfaces are largely left plain, allowing temporary textiles, icons, and liturgical objects to define ceremonial moments without altering the architecture itself.

Use and Continuity

Lalibela is not a dormant historical site. It remains an active religious centre, with daily prayers, seasonal festivals, and major pilgrimages continuing to shape the use of its spaces. Floors are worn smooth through centuries of barefoot movement, and edges bear the marks of repeated contact. The architecture has aged through continuous use rather than abandonment, reinforcing its role as a living environment rather than a preserved monument.

Environmental Response

The sunken construction of the churches provides natural thermal regulation, protecting interiors from both heat and cold. Thick stone walls stabilize internal temperatures, while narrow openings limit glare and direct exposure. Acoustically, the carved interiors amplify chant and prayer, allowing sound to resonate through enclosed volumes and reinforcing the ceremonial function of space.

Architectural Significance

The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela represent a form of architecture defined by material discipline and spatial control rather than assembly or visual excess. Land itself becomes structure, enclosure, and interior. There is no separation between building and site, no reliance on applied finish, and no emphasis on monumentality through height or scale. Instead, architecture emerges through subtraction, sequencing, and long-term ritual use. Lalibela stands as a rare example of an architectural system sustained across centuries, where belief, material, and space remain inseparable, and where continuity, rather than novelty, defines its lasting relevance. **DDI**

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Images: Public sources / UNESCO archives

TAOS PUEBLO- NEW MEXICO, USA





Taos Pueblo is located in northern New Mexico, where the high desert begins to rise toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and seasonal shifts remain sharp and immediate, shaping how land is used and how buildings endure. The settlement sits beside the Rio Pueblo de Taos, a narrow but reliable water source that has supported habitation here for centuries, quietly determining where walls could rise, where earth could be mixed, and how daily life could be sustained in an otherwise demanding environment. The surrounding landscape remains largely open, allowing the pueblo to retain a direct visual and material continuity with the land from which it is built.

Historical Continuity

Construction at Taos Pueblo is generally dated between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries CE, though oral histories place the community's presence in the region far earlier. What distinguishes the site is not a singular period of construction but the absence of a fixed moment of completion. Buildings were extended, repaired, reduced, and rebuilt as families grew and circumstances changed, allowing the settlement to evolve without rupture. Architecture here was never conceived as a finished condition but as something continuously shaped by use, memory, and necessity.

Despite Spanish colonial intrusion beginning in the sixteenth century and subsequent political shifts under American governance, Taos Pueblo retained its spatial organization, material practices, and communal governance, absorbing external pressure without dismantling its architectural logic. The pueblo remains inhabited today, functioning simultaneously as a home, a ceremonial centre, and a cultural landscape.

Settlement Structure and Massing

The settlement is anchored by two primary residential masses, commonly referred to as the North House and South House, which rise in stepped, multi-storey formations. Their profiles are irregular,



shaped by gradual accumulation rather than by symmetry or axial planning. Upper levels are reached by ladders rather than internal staircases, a decision that reinforces privacy, reduces interior circulation, and preserves structural continuity.

From a distance, the pueblo reads as a single earthen mass, its color shifting subtly with light, moisture, and season, yet never departing from the ground it comes from. There is no visual hierarchy imposed through ornament or façade articulation. Mass, proportion, and repetition do the work instead.

Material Logic

Adobe defines the architecture entirely. Sun-dried bricks are made from earth, straw, and water drawn directly from the surrounding land, binding the buildings physically and symbolically to their site. Walls are load-bearing and often more than a metre thick, providing thermal stability against heat, cold, and wind while also allowing interiors to remain compact and efficient.

There is no applied finish in the conventional sense. Surfaces are replastered repeatedly over time, creating subtle variations in texture and tone that record maintenance rather than disguise it. Material ageing is neither hidden nor corrected. It is accepted as part of the architectural condition.

Construction and Maintenance

Maintenance at Taos Pueblo is not treated as an occasional intervention but as a continuous, shared responsibility, carried out through regular replastering, roof rebuilding, and surface renewal that often involves collective participation. Walls are reinforced when required, roofs are rebuilt rather than patched, and surfaces are renewed without any attempt to return them to an imagined original state, because preservation here has never meant visual consistency but continued use.

What emerges from this approach is an architectural condition sustained through repetition and care, where permanence is achieved through attention over time rather than through fixity, and where repair remains visible as part of the building's life rather than something to be concealed.

Interior Spaces

Interior spaces follow the same practical logic. Rooms are compact, stacked vertically, and organized according to family needs rather than formal hierarchy, with low ceilings that help retain warmth during winter months and small, carefully positioned openings that regulate both light and airflow without reliance on mechanical systems.

Interiors remain subdued and utilitarian, shaped by daily routines rather than display. Fireplaces anchor domestic life as sources of heat and gathering, storage niches are built directly into thick adobe walls, and furnishings are kept minimal, allowing the architecture itself to support habitation without accommodating excess.

Circulation and Thresholds

Movement through Taos Pueblo takes place largely outdoors. Rooftops function as walkways, ladders provide vertical access, and terraces operate as shared circulation spaces that link households across levels. Entry points are deliberately modest, with low doors and narrow openings that control heat loss and reinforce privacy.

Thresholds are clearly defined yet understated, marking transitions without ceremony. This circulation system responds directly to climate, social organization, and security, reinforcing a collective spatial order while allowing individual domestic life to remain protected.

Ceremonial Architecture

There is no strict separation between domestic and ceremonial space within the pueblo. Kivas, circular and partially subterranean ceremonial chambers, are embedded within the settlement rather than isolated as monumental structures. Their placement reinforces the integration of ritual practice into daily life, ensuring that ceremonial and domestic rhythms remain intertwined.

Open plazas and shared spaces between buildings accommodate seasonal ceremonies, communal gatherings, and everyday interaction. Architecture functions here as a framework for collective life rather than as an object of individual expression.

Surface, Wear, and Time

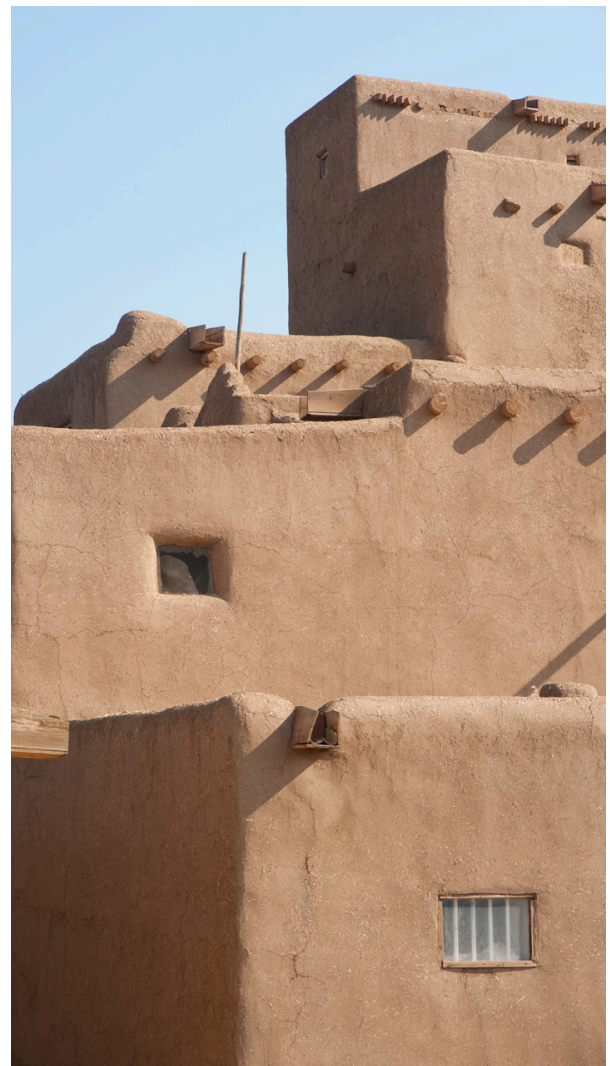
Surface wear is visible throughout Taos Pueblo. Walls soften at edges, plaster layers accumulate unevenly, and color shifts subtly with moisture and light. These traces are not treated as deterioration but as evidence of continuity, marking the passage of time through use rather than neglect.

Architecture here is shaped by time in a literal sense. Wear is accumulated, not erased, and renewal occurs without erasing memory.

Architectural Significance

Taos Pueblo represents an architectural tradition grounded in restraint, material honesty, and continuity. There is no emphasis on novelty, no separation between land and building, and no hierarchy between form and function. Architecture emerges through adaptation rather than ambition, sustained through daily life rather than monumental intent.

Its endurance lies not in preservation but in continued habitation, making Taos Pueblo one of the clearest examples of architecture as a living cultural practice rather than a finished artefact.**DDI**



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Images: Public sources / National Park Service / UNESCO archives

Seven Ascents: Staircases That Shaped Architecture

Stairs are the most physical of architectural elements. You do not simply see them; you submit to them. They dictate pace, posture, breath, and direction. Every ascent asks something of the body, and every descent reveals how a building wishes to be experienced.

Long before elevators flattened movement into efficiency, staircases shaped hierarchy, ceremony, climate response, and spectacle.

Some were designed to slow the body, others to discipline it, and a few to turn movement itself into theatre. Across cultures, the staircase became a place where architecture reveals its intentions most clearly.

This feature brings together seven of the world's most influential staircases, each representing a distinct philosophy of ascent. From ceremonial processions and geometric intelligence to climate-driven repetition and urban performance, these stairs are not connectors between floors. They are experiences in their own right. To walk them is to understand how architecture once taught us where to pause, where to look, and how to rise.

CHAND BAORI, ABHANERI, RAJASTHAN



Chand Baori stands in the village of Abhaneri in eastern Rajasthan and dates to between the 8th and 9th centuries, a period when water access determined the survival of settlements across the region. The structure was commissioned during the reign of the Nikumbha dynasty and built as a permanent response to seasonal drought rather than as an architectural monument.

The stepwell drops roughly 30 meters below ground level and is organized across thirteen descending tiers. Approximately 3,500 stone steps line three sides of the square well, arranged in tight, repeating patterns. There is no central staircase and no prescribed route. One can descend diagonally, laterally, or straight down, depending on where the water level sits at any given time of year. This flexibility was essential. As the water receded during dry months, access remained possible without altering the structure.

The steps are narrow, steep, and deliberately repetitive. Comfort was never a consideration. Stone was chosen for durability and thermal performance. As the well deepens, the temperature drops noticeably. Even today, the lower levels remain significantly cooler than the ground above. The stair itself becomes a climatic mechanism, creating shade, air movement, and thermal relief.

Chand Baori was not used only for water collection. It functioned as a social space, a resting place, and a point of daily congregation. Movement through the stair was constant and collective. There is no sense of procession or hierarchy here. What the structure demonstrates, with remarkable clarity, is how stair architecture can operate simultaneously as infrastructure, climate control, and civic space, long before such ideas were formalized in architectural theory.

SCALA REGIA, VATICAN CITY



The Scala Regia is the ceremonial staircase linking St Peter's Basilica to the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City. Its present form dates to the mid-17th century, when Gian Lorenzo Bernini was commissioned by Pope Alexander VII to transform an awkward, constricted passage into a formal processional route.

The stair occupied a narrow corridor compressed between major structures, a condition first addressed in the early 16th century by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger. Rather than enlarging the footprint, Bernini worked through proportion and perception. The stair rises roughly 23 meters, narrowing as it ascends. Columns along the walls reduce in diameter and spacing, while the floor tightens beneath a continuous barrel vault. This calculated manipulation creates a forced perspective, making the ascent appear longer and more monumental than it is.

Constructed primarily in stone and stucco, the Scala Regia is materially restrained. Ornament is limited and secondary to geometry. Light enters from the side, creating uneven illumination that emphasizes depth and rhythm rather than symmetry. The effect is controlled and deliberate, guiding pace and posture.

At the base stands Bernini's equestrian statue of Emperor Constantine, completed in 1670. Placed at the threshold of ascent, it introduces a narrative of authority and divine sanction before movement begins. Historically used by ambassadors and dignitaries approaching papal audiences, the Scala Regia remains a precise study in how spatial constraint can be turned into architectural power through proportion, sequence, and control.

TULIP STAIRS, QUEEN'S HOUSE, GREENWICH



The Tulip Stairs are located within the Queen's House in Greenwich and were completed in the early 17th century. They are widely regarded as Britain's first self-supporting spiral staircase without a central column. Each tread is cantilevered from the wall and supported structurally by the tread below, creating a continuous helical loop. This construction allows the center of the stair to remain open, admitting light through the void and reinforcing the visual lightness of the structure. The stair coils upward with mathematical precision rather than decorative flourish.

The balustrade, formed in wrought iron with repeated tulip motifs, provides contrast to the technical discipline of the stair itself. Materials were chosen for structural clarity: stone treads, iron railing, and plastered walls. There is no excess ornament competing with form.

The Tulip Stairs mark a pivotal moment when engineering logic allowed staircases to float visually, influencing later developments in modern and cantilevered stair design.

DOUBLE-HELIX STAIRCASE, CHÂTEAU DE CHAMBORD



The staircase at the center of the **Château de Chambord** was constructed in the early 16th century as part of King Francis I's ambitious Renaissance palace in the Loire Valley. Unlike the grand ceremonial stairs that would later define European palaces, this stair was conceived as an experiment in movement, visibility, and circulation. It occupies the very core of the château, rising through a tall vertical volume and acting as the organizational spine of the building.

The structure consists of two intertwined helical ramps wrapped around a hollow central shaft. Each helix functions independently, allowing one person to ascend while another descends without ever crossing paths. Despite this separation, the occupants remain visually connected through openings that face into the central void. Light enters from above, filtering down the shaft and illuminating the movement of bodies as they spiral upward. The effect is calm, continuous, and surprisingly modern.

Built entirely in stone, the staircase is structurally self-contained. Each spiral supports itself, and the central void serves both as a light well and a visual anchor. There is no theatrical emphasis on arrival or pause. The stair does not slow the body or enforce ritual. Instead, it prioritizes clarity of movement and spatial logic. Circulation here is not an afterthought; it is the architectural idea.

The staircase is often linked to ideas circulating within Leonardo da Vinci's circle during Francis I's reign, reflecting Renaissance interests in geometry, proportion, and mechanical intelligence. Whether or not Leonardo himself was directly involved, the stair clearly embodies a shift in thinking. Movement through a building is treated as a design problem worthy of invention.

For architects, Chambord remains a foundational reference. It demonstrates how circulation, structure, and perception can be integrated into a single architectural device, long before these concerns became formalized in modern architectural theory.

SPANISH STEPS, ROME



The Spanish Steps were completed in 1725 to resolve a long-standing urban problem: how to connect the low-lying Piazza di Spagna with the elevated church of Trinità dei Monti above. Designed by Francesco de Sanctis, the staircase was never intended as architectural circulation in the conventional sense. It was conceived as public infrastructure, a piece of city-making rather than a component of a single building.

The stair consists of 135 stone steps organized into a sequence of widening and narrowing flights, punctuated by generous landings. These changes in width are not decorative. They slow movement, create moments of pause, and allow the stair to absorb large numbers of people without congestion. From the outset, the Spanish Steps were designed to be occupied. Sitting, stopping, gathering, and observing were all anticipated uses, not later appropriations.

Materially, the stair is restrained. Built in stone, it relies on proportion, rhythm, and topography rather than ornament to assert its presence. There is no singular axial climb. Instead, movement is dispersed, allowing people to choose their pace and path. The stair functions as a social condenser, mediating between the commercial energy of the piazza and the calm elevation of the church above.

Unlike ceremonial staircases that reinforce hierarchy or procession, the Spanish Steps belong entirely to the public realm. They democratize ascent. Anyone can linger, cross paths, or simply sit and watch the city unfold below. For architects and urban designers, the Spanish Steps remain a benchmark example of how a staircase can shape public life, not by directing movement, but by accommodating it.

BRAMANTE STAIRCASE, VATICAN CITY



The staircase known today as the **Bramante Staircase** was built in 1505 during a period of intense reconstruction within the Vatican Palace under Pope Julius II. Donato Bramante was tasked with reorganising circulation between the papal apartments and the Belvedere Courtyard, a space intended for art, sculpture, and controlled movement rather than ceremony. The brief was pragmatic. This was not a stair meant to impress visitors, but one meant to work.

Bramante's solution departed completely from the stepped staircase. He designed a wide spiral ramp that coils around a central void, allowing people, horses, and carts to move continuously between levels. The slope is shallow and consistent, removing the physical interruption created by risers. Movement here is steady and unbroken. One does not climb so much as progress.

The ramp is built in stone, robust enough to carry heavy loads and withstand constant use. Its width accommodates two-way traffic without congestion, and the central opening allows daylight to filter down through the spiral, preventing disorientation as one ascends. There is no emphasis on arrival, no landing designed for pause. The architecture does not ask the body to stop, look, or acknowledge authority. It simply carries it upward.

This approach was unusually forward-looking for the early 16th century. Circulation is treated as infrastructure rather than ornament. Bramante accepted movement as a fundamental architectural problem and designed directly for it, rather than allowing it to be a by-product of form.

The logic of this ramp would resurface centuries later in large public buildings, transport terminals, and museums. For architects, the Bramante Staircase remains a quiet but decisive moment when architecture stopped choreographing ascent and began engineering it.

SPIRAL STAIRCASE, LORETTO CHAPEL, UNITED STATES



The spiral staircase inside the **Loretto Chapel** in Santa Fe was constructed between 1877 and 1881 to address a very specific architectural problem. When the chapel was completed, there was no access to the choir loft. The space available was extremely limited, making a conventional stair impractical. What was required was a compact, vertical solution that could be inserted without altering the existing structure.

The resulting staircase rises approximately 6.5 meters in a tight double-helix spiral. It has no central support column, a feature that immediately sets it apart from most spiral stairs of the period. Instead, the structure relies on two continuous wooden stringers that coil upward together, forming an inner and outer spiral. Each tread is connected using wooden pegs rather than metal nails or screws, and the stability of the stair comes from compression and precise joinery rather than mechanical fastening.

The entire staircase is constructed from wood, including the treads, stringers, and handrail added later. Its footprint is remarkably small, yet it supports vertical movement safely and efficiently. The rise is steep and the diameter tight, reinforcing the fact that this stair was never intended as a ceremonial element. It is a solution-driven piece of construction, focused entirely on access and economy of space.

Over time, the staircase has become surrounded by legend, often attributed to miraculous origins. From an architectural perspective, however, its significance lies elsewhere. It demonstrates a high level of material understanding and structural logic, showing how geometry and craftsmanship can replace conventional support systems. For architects, it remains a compelling example of how constraints can produce highly inventive construction without reliance on modern technology. **DDI**

Elena Salmistraro



Based in Milan, the practice moves easily between product design, art, fashion, and illustration, refusing to prioritise one discipline over another. Salmistraro's work is driven by an architectural understanding of form and a deeply emotional approach to objects, where colour, texture, and narrative are not applied as surface treatments but embedded into the design process itself. Her objects often feel animated, expressive, and intentionally imperfect, shaped by cultural references that range from mythology and ritual to street art and contemporary illustration. Over the years, this distinctive visual language has allowed her to collaborate with global brands and galleries while maintaining a clear authorial voice, one that treats emotion not as an afterthought, but as a functional component of design.

In this conversation with Alisha of Design Diary International, Elena Salmistraro speaks about how her studio navigates scale and authorship, why emotion remains central to her work, and how contemporary design can remain expressive without losing rigour.



You have often said that creativity surrounded you long before you chose design. When you look back, what were the first memories or objects that made you fall in love with making things?

One of the first objects that truly struck me was Aldo Rossi's La Cupola for Alessi. As a child, I used to look at it in the kitchen, and it seemed like a tiny, fantastic building, a miniature castle. I didn't yet understand what design was, but I felt that the object had something special, as if it were alive. It was a different way of seeing things: an everyday object that could also be architecture, play, and sculpture.

Then came ceramics, and through that I discovered that I could be the one building worlds, giving tangible form to my ideas. It was like discovering that imagination could live inside matter.

Growing up in Italy, where art and craft are woven into everyday life, how did your early environment influence your idea of beauty and proportion?

I believe growing up in Italy means absorbing a certain visual sensitivity without even realizing it. Everywhere you turn, you find beauty: in buildings, in the details of doorways, in the light of the squares. All this teaches you harmony, which is essential, because even the way you work with a material or design something follows a logic of proportions.

I've always had a kind of obsession with proportions, and it's not just an aesthetic matter but also an emotional one. When something is well proportioned, you feel it; it

gives you peace. It's like listening to a melody perfectly in tune.

When you joined Politecnico di Milano, did design feel more like freedom or discipline?

At first, pure discipline. I came from an art institute where expressive freedom was total: drawing, colour, creativity. At the Politecnico, I learned that behind every idea there must be structure, logic, and technical awareness. In the beginning, it felt like a cage, but later I realized it could be a greater form of freedom. Once you learn the rules, you can choose how and when to break them.

You move easily between art and product design. When did you first realize that emotion could live inside an object?

I think that moment goes back to my childhood. Looking at that famous coffee maker, I felt an emotion that went beyond its function. It was something simple, but it made me dream. Later, through my studies, I understood that design can and should have that power: to make us feel something. When an object can make you smile, evoke a memory, or create a sense of connection, it has gone beyond function. It has become something alive.

Your work has a rare mix of playfulness and empathy. Where does this emotional language come from in your creative world?

I think it comes from my need to be sincere. Every project reflects my way of seeing the world, my enthusiasms, and my vulnerabilities.







Some say a designer should disappear behind the project, but I don't believe that. Every mark, every choice inevitably carries a part of you. Maybe it comes from my artistic background, but for me, drawing and color are ways of communicating emotions, not just building forms. Empathy is born there, in the moment when someone recognizes a part of themselves in what you've created.

Many of your designs feature characters that seem alive and almost mythological. Do they emerge from your imagination, or do they carry personal meaning?

A bit of both. Some emerge spontaneously, as figures that appear almost on their own while I draw. Others come from my love of mythology, which I consider one of the greatest sources of inspiration ever. It's an ancient but still powerful language, full of symbols that speak about the human condition in all its shades.



You often revisit materials like ceramic, metal, and glass. How do you keep your sense of discovery alive while working with familiar mediums?

Every material has a voice, and the more you know it, the better you learn to listen. Ceramics, for instance, is a living material: it deforms, reacts, and changes. It forces you into an ongoing dialogue. Over time, I've realized that knowledge doesn't extinguish curiosity; it amplifies it. When you know what a material can do, you start wondering what it's never done, and how to take it there without distorting its nature.

You collaborate with leading brands such as Alessi, Moooi, and Bosa, yet your signature remains unmistakable. How do you preserve your identity while designing within another brand's world?

For me, the secret lies in dialogue. I don't work for a company, but with one. Collaboration must be an exchange, not a delegation. Every brand has its own identity and history, and my task is to enter that world bringing my vision, but without imposing it. When the dialogue is sincere, projects emerge where both sides are recognizable. That's when magic happens: the company becomes the context, but my voice remains.

You have described design as emotional and even spiritual. How do you hold on to that philosophy while working with commercial constraints and timelines?

It's one of the biggest challenges. The design world runs on tight schedules, budgets, and constraints, but creativity needs space and silence. I try to keep the emotional part alive despite everything by reminding myself why I'm doing that project. When you manage to hold onto that thread, even an object made for the market can have a soul.

It's not about ignoring limits, but using them as stimuli; sometimes that's exactly where the most poetic solutions are born. **DDI**

THE THRONE BEFORE COMFORT: WHEN FURNITURE BECAME POWER



**Medieval Throne Chair, Europe
(12th–14th century)**

Carved from solid oak, these thrones were conceived as permanent fixtures rather than movable furniture. Their height, rigidity, and weight reinforced authority through physical dominance.

The medieval throne chair did not evolve from domestic seating. It emerged separately, shaped by ceremony rather than comfort, and by permanence rather than use. Between the 12th and 15th centuries, across royal courts and ecclesiastical spaces in Europe, the throne existed as a fixed point within architecture, not as an object meant to circulate within it.

Most early examples were carved from solid oak or stone, materials chosen for durability and symbolic weight. Oak was slow-grown, dense, and resistant to movement. Stone, when used, eliminated the possibility of relocation altogether. These chairs were heavy by intent. Some were built directly into raised platforms or apse walls, others were simply too massive to be moved without dismantling. The throne was not designed to follow its occupant. Authority was expected to come to it.

Formally, medieval thrones borrowed directly from the architectural language surrounding them. Tall backs rose vertically, often echoing the proportions of nave walls or choir screens. Armrests were squared, rigid, and structural rather than sculptural. Bases were broad and grounded, reinforcing visual stability. There was little interest in refinement. What mattered was presence. The chair needed to be seen from across a hall and read instantly as immovable.

Comfort was deliberately secondary. Seats were narrow, backs upright, angles uncompromising. Upholstery was largely absent. Wood and stone remained exposed. The physical experience of sitting reinforced the psychological weight of the role. To occupy the throne was to remain alert, restrained, and publicly visible. Sitting was not private or casual; it was performative and witnessed.

In religious settings, this logic reached its clearest expression in the cathedra, the bishop's throne. Positioned within the apse of a cathedral, the cathedra established spiritual authority through placement rather than ornament. The word "cathedral" itself derives from this chair, underscoring how completely the seat defined the space around it. Decorative carving, when present, tended to be symbolic and controlled: crosses, geometric rhythms, or restrained figural references tied to doctrine. Excess was avoided.

Secular thrones followed parallel principles. In great halls, the throne occupied the visual center, often raised on a dais. Everyone else stood, knelt, or remained physically lower. Hierarchy was enforced spatially before a word was spoken. Unlike later Renaissance seating, there was no attempt to soften or personalize the chair. It stood for the office, not the individual.

Surviving medieval throne chairs are rare. Many were altered, destroyed, or replaced during political upheavals, religious reformations, or later stylistic revivals. Others were worn down by centuries of ceremonial use. Those that

remain are typically found in cathedrals, abbeys, or long-held royal collections, often with clear institutional records rather than private provenance. Their value lies less in craftsmanship alone and more in continuity of place.

The throne's influence did not end with the medieval period. Its core principles remain visible today. Elevated seating in courts, parliamentary chambers, and ceremonial settings continues to signal authority through height, centrality, and immobility. Even contemporary leadership spaces quietly follow this logic. Where one sits still matters.



Gothic Throne Chair with Architectural Backrest

The vertical back echoes cathedral architecture, blurring the line between furniture and built form. Thrones often mirrored the power structures they served.



Cathedra in a Medieval Cathedral

The bishop's throne, known as the cathedra, was the defining object of ecclesiastical authority. The term "cathedral" itself derives from this seat.



Stone Throne in a Coronation or Judicial Setting

Thrones carved from stone emphasised immutability and divine sanction. These were not designed for comfort but for permanence and ritual.

For Design Diary International, the medieval throne chair is not a historical curiosity. It is a reminder of a time when furniture was designed to shape behaviour, enforce hierarchy, and anchor institutions. Long before flexibility and comfort became design virtues, the throne defined an opposing idea: that a chair could govern.

Collector's Guide | Identifying an Authentic Medieval Throne Chair

Material

Primarily solid oak or stone. Oak should display dense grain, weight, and natural age-related shrinkage. Stone examples are uncommon and typically ecclesiastical.

Construction

Simple plank construction with pegged joints. Joinery is functional rather than refined. Sophisticated mortise-and-tenon detailing usually indicates later periods.

Fixity

Evidence of immobility is common. Look for bases designed to sit on platforms, irregular undersides, or signs of long-term placement.

Surface

Original medieval thrones were not upholstered. Surfaces show wear consistent with ceremonial use rather than daily domestic sitting.

Carving

Minimal and symbolic. Crosses, geometric patterns, or restrained heraldic elements. Overly ornate carving often points to Gothic Revival reinterpretations.

Proportions

High backs relative to seat depth. Narrow seating intended to enforce upright posture.

Patina

Deep oxidation, softened edges, visible tool marks. Uniform finishes usually suggest restoration or reproduction.

Provenance

Most documented examples are tied to specific cathedrals, abbeys, or royal sites. Clear institutional records are essential. **DDI**

A large, ornate crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling of a grand, vaulted hall. The chandelier is made of brass and crystal, with many lit candles. The hall has high ceilings with intricate carvings and arches. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a luxurious atmosphere.

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