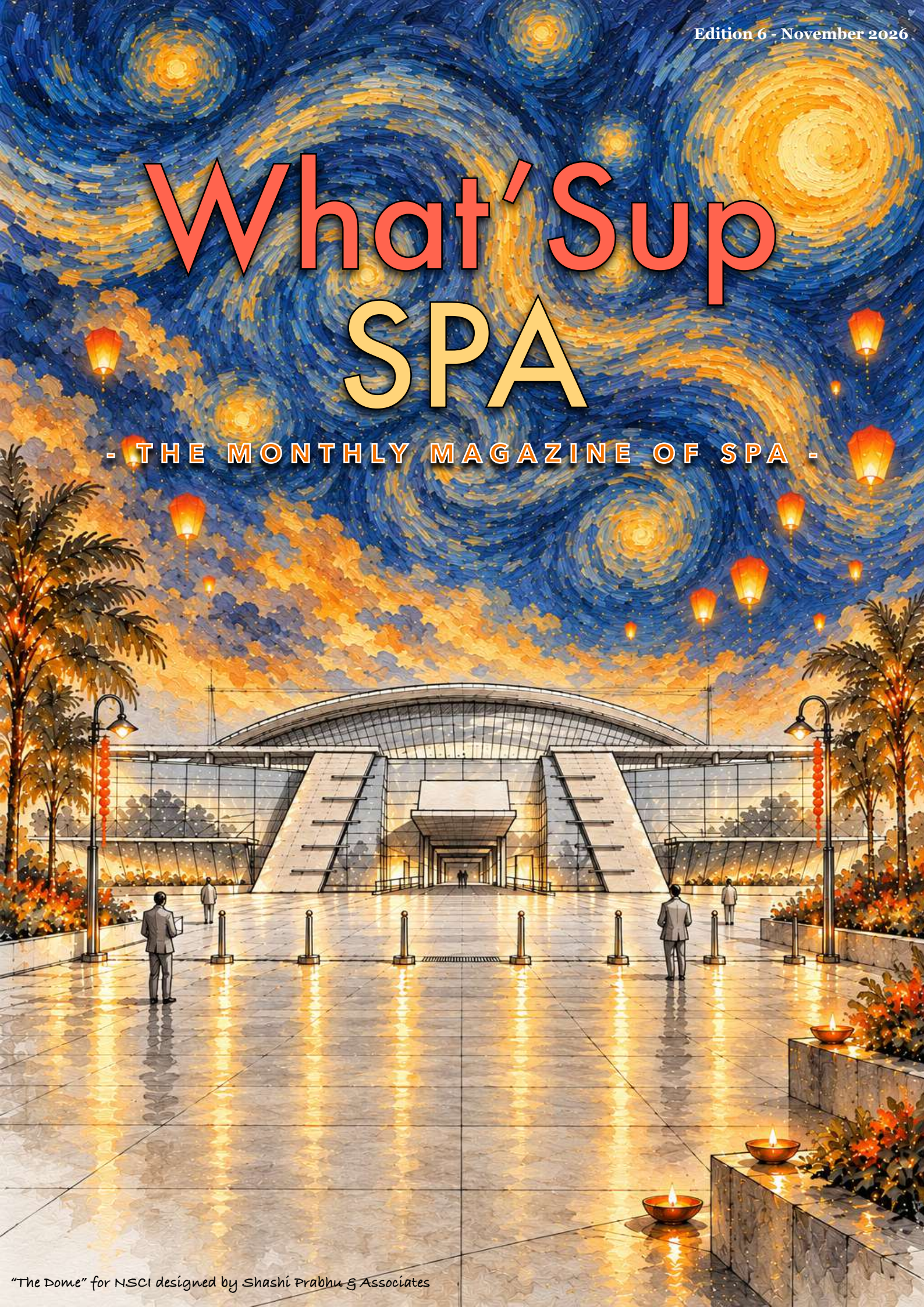
Edition 6 - November 2026

What'Sup SPA

- THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF SPA -



"The Dome" for NSCI designed by Shashi Prabhu & Associates



Dear all,

November at SPA is always a special month. Diwali arrives, the diyas come outside our doors, the rangolis go down at our entrances, and for a few days the studio smells of sweets and flowers instead of printer toner. For a practice like ours, which has spent decades lighting up our stadia, hospitals, club houses and institutions, the festival of light has never felt far from the drawing board.

It is also a season for looking back before looking ahead. In 1967, SPA started with a small team and a large belief: that good architecture should serve the life that happens inside it. Next year, we turn sixty. Six decades of stadia built against impossible deadlines, markets that reorganised a city, hospitals that serve thousands every day, and, above all, the people who made all of them happen. Over the coming editions, we will revisit some of those stories. I hope you will help us tell them, especially those of you who were there.

But, as one would know, it is the work we complete every day that builds the legacy of a firm worth keeping. The competitions we chase, the sites we walk in the rain, and the new faces joining our floors are what will make the next sixty years worth writing about.

So as you light your lamps this Diwali, take a moment to look around the studio at the people beside you. They are the real story of SPA.

Wishing you and your families a bright, joyful and safe Diwali.

Here's to Edition 6!

Warmest regards,

AMOL PRABHU

Partner

index



1. Studio Spotlight 5
2. Featured Project 8
3. What Keeps Us Busy . 12
4. Design Thinking 14
5. Industry News 15
6. Team Corner 18
7. Humour 18

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The Studio's 9-Day Navratri Palette

by The Editorial Team

For nine days, our studio swapped its usual palette of dull greys, whites and "client-approved beige" for a burst of festive colours. Taking Navratri to heart, the team followed each day's colour with the discipline normally reserved for a drawing submission. Every morning, wardrobes were checked against the schedule, and every shade was reviewed by colleagues with the scrutiny of a materials board.

While colour coordination itself is surprisingly recent trend, set by a Mumbai daily in 2003, our studio has adopted it with full rigour.

What begins as a festive tradition soon turns into the most anticipated meeting of the day. Between drawing milestones and site calls, the floor clears every afternoon for the team photo. Workstations empty, desks become bleachers, and the bays are filled with laughter, debates over who had nailed the shade, and heroic attempts to fit everyone into a single photo frame.

The nine days also proved something we always suspected: when it comes to colour coordination, our studios are flawless.







Dussehra Tradition in our Studio!

by The Editorial Team

In an architectural studio, Dussehra and the tradition of Ayudha Pooja carry a meaning that is deeply personal to every designer and engineer on the floor. It is that one day when the constant race towards deadlines gives way to quiet gratitude for the tools that turn our abstract thoughts into physical reality.







The studio came alive with marigold garlands strung across workstations, tracing tables, survey levels and high-performance render machines. Vermilion and sandalwood paste marked not just the thresholds but scale rulers, measuring tapes, hard hats, keyboards and the large-format plotter, which, for one day at least, was asked to print nothing. Every instrument through which lines become structural grids and concepts become habitable spaces received its due.

Amid the scent of dhoop, freshly laid rangolis and boxes of sweets travelling from bay to bay, the whole team gathered for the puja. The entire team stood side by side, a reminder that the integrity of our work rests not only on individual intellect, but on the instruments we rely upon and the collective hands that guide them.

Rumour has it that a few laptops were blessed with extra care, in the hope that they would finally stop crashing before the submissions.

Er. Ritesh Bagde Promoted to ES3

by The Editorial Team

Hearty congratulations to Er. Ritesh Bagde of our Pune Estimation Department on his well-deserved promotion from ES2 to ES3!



Ritesh brings over 11 years of construction industry experience, including 8 years of hands-on site execution. He specialises in estimation, costing, BOQ preparation and tender scrutiny. That combination makes him an invaluable bridge between complex drawings and what can actually be built, and at what cost.

At Shashi Prabhu & Associates, he has consistently shown exceptional technical rigour: translating architectural intent into detailed cost estimates, preparing tender scrutiny reports, and securing technical sanctions from PWD and other government authorities.

Congratulations, Ritesh! Wishing you the best in your new role.

HBD Swapnil!

by The Editorial Team

Technical Sanction, load calculations, and Site coordination at our Pune office were put on a slight pause as the studio gathered to wish our Electrical Engineer, Swapnil Nikhate on his birthday. Surrounded by colleagues, warm applause, and upbeat banter, Swapnil was toasted for his sharp engineering insight, dependable presence on high-pressure deadlines, and the collaborative spirit he brings to bridging architecture with engineering precision.



Wishing Jidnyasa's Continued Success

by Editorial Team



The studio gathered to bid a heartfelt farewell to Ar. Jidnyasa Girade, marking the conclusion of an impactful year with SPA.

Over the past twelve months, Jidnyasa brought dedication, a fresh creative eye, and an eager collaborative spirit to the drafting tables. Whether tackling tight design deadlines, untangling drawing sets, or contributing to spontaneous studio discussions, her positive energy and quiet persistence made a lasting mark on the team.

While it is always bittersweet to see a valued teammate move on, we are happy to have been a part of her professional journey. Surrounded by shared memories, parting treats, and warmest wishes from colleagues across the floor, we thank Jidnyasa for her contributions, craft, and camaraderie.

HBD Santosh!

by The Editorial Team

The Mumbai studio paused to celebrate the birthday of our Ar. Santosh Jadhav.

It has been quite a year for Santosh. He presented the Golden Jubilee Integrated Cultural and Sports Village masterplan to the Chief Minister of Sikkim, gave the MCA building a new face within the Wankhede campus, and rendered the IIM Mumbai academic building that graced the cover of our July edition.

But his birthday revealed a striking contrast in SPA's operating speeds. A single site visit to Gangtok takes Santosh three full days: flights, winding mountain roads, steep slopes to be read on foot, and structural queries to be resolved one contour at a time. A chocolate cake placed on a table in the Mumbai studio, on the other hand, took precisely three and half minutes to vanish. No site survey, no coordination meeting, no RFIs, just swift and decisive execution by the entire team.



Happy Birthday, Santosh! Here's to another year of bold ideas, and to cakes that never need a second thought.

HBD AP Raghesh!

by The Editorial Team

This month, the studio also gathered to celebrate the birthday of our Sr. Estimator, AP Raghesh.

Every studio needs two kinds of people - those who dream, and those who show the reality of this dream. Raghesh is firmly the second kind. While our designers walk with sweeping cantilevers and double-height atriums with Italian marble, Raghesh puts all of it in the box called "reality check" and returns it with a pink bow through excel worksheets and contract documents. He is also the reason our designs get built at all. Before any tender leaves our Pune office, he finds the missing items, the unpriced specifications and the wishful thinking. Designers may not always enjoy a conversation with AP Raghesh, but clients certainly enjoy the result.



So his birthday gave the designers a rare chance at revenge. They presented him with a cake that had no budget of calories, no BOQ and no value engineering. For once, Raghesh did not ask what it cost while simply enjoying the slice!

Happy Birthday, Raghesh! May your year be full of generous budgets and designers who read the estimate before they fall in love with the render.

The Dome, NSCI: How an Indoor Arena Reshaped Mumbai's Sport and Recreation

by The Editorial Team

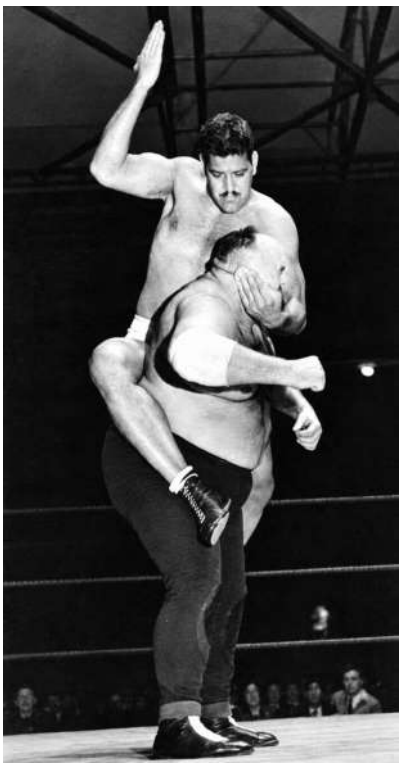
Sometime in 2002, the Managing Committee of the National Sports Club of India (NSCI) in Worli approached us with a dream: to build them a fantabulous water park in the heart of Mumbai. Most architectural firms would have jumped at the chance to design something so spectacular. Not us!

Since our inception, we have guided our clients towards creating public assets that are sustainable, environmentally as well as financially, rather than structures that are exciting only on the day they open. So instead of a water park, we advised the committee to build something less flashy, perhaps more iconic in hindsight, and certainly far more enduring: a multi-purpose domed structure that would bring all indoor games under one roof, in an acoustically treated, air-conditioned environment. A water park would have served one kind of visitor for part of the year, but under a constant cloud of controversy over its water consumption. A covered, climate-controlled arena could serve every sport, in every season, and, as it turned out, far more than sport. The committee agreed instantly, and the water park became what Mumbai now knows as **"The Dome"**.

A GROUND WITH A MEMORY

The story of the ground begins in 1950. That year, the National Sports Club of India, an institution founded under the patronage of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, set up its Mumbai branch on the Worli seafront. It started with just a single clubhouse and a large concrete plinth called the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Stadium. The foundation stone of the clubhouse complex was laid on 17 May 1957 by Shri Y. B. Chavan, then Chief Minister of Bombay State and later Maharashtra's first Chief Minister. In its early years, the club offered only a handful of sports: tennis, badminton, and regular freestyle wrestling bouts at the stadium. It was those bouts that made the ground famous. Crowds flocked to Worli to watch Dara Singh in action against King Kong, at a time when wrestling was one of the biggest spectator draws in the country.

Physically, the original stadium was simple: a large outdoor concrete pad surrounded by stepped concrete tiers, open to the sky and the sea breeze. Yet that simplicity made it one of Mumbai's most adaptable sporting grounds. Through the 1980s and 1990s, as the club itself began to transform in earnest, the open arena continued to host wrestling matches and, later, skating and ice skating until the end of 2001.



By then, however, the city had changed around it. An open-air ground exposed to the monsoon could host events for only part of the year, and Mumbai needed a venue that could host international events all year round. The memories, though, remained with everyone who had once filled those tiers, and any new building would have to honour them.

BUILDING ON THE OLD GROUND

Our first assessment of the large concrete pad took us back twenty years, to 1982, when we designed the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in Delhi. Then, as now, the challenge was not simply to build a new arena. It was to transform an existing sporting landscape into a contemporary one while keeping its ability to bring the city together in large numbers.

Drawing on our experiences of large indoor stadia and halls in Delhi and Surat, we decided to retain the existing concrete pad and its plinth as the datum around which the new programme would be organised. We proposed enclosing it with a high-performance, double-glazed curtain wall and an acoustically treated standing seam metal roof. The result would be a 90-metre-diameter open arena at the centre, ringed by tiers of luxurious auditorium-style seating. Sixteen large halls on the first and second floors would surround the arena as support spaces, ready to become banqueting and food areas during major events.

The arena was given a clear height of 18 metres, enough to host most international indoor sports competitions. Large steel girders carry the roof across the full span, without a single internal column, and the standing seam roof keeps the enclosure watertight.

STARTING UNDERGROUND

Perhaps the most critical decision we took while planning the stadium was to excavate

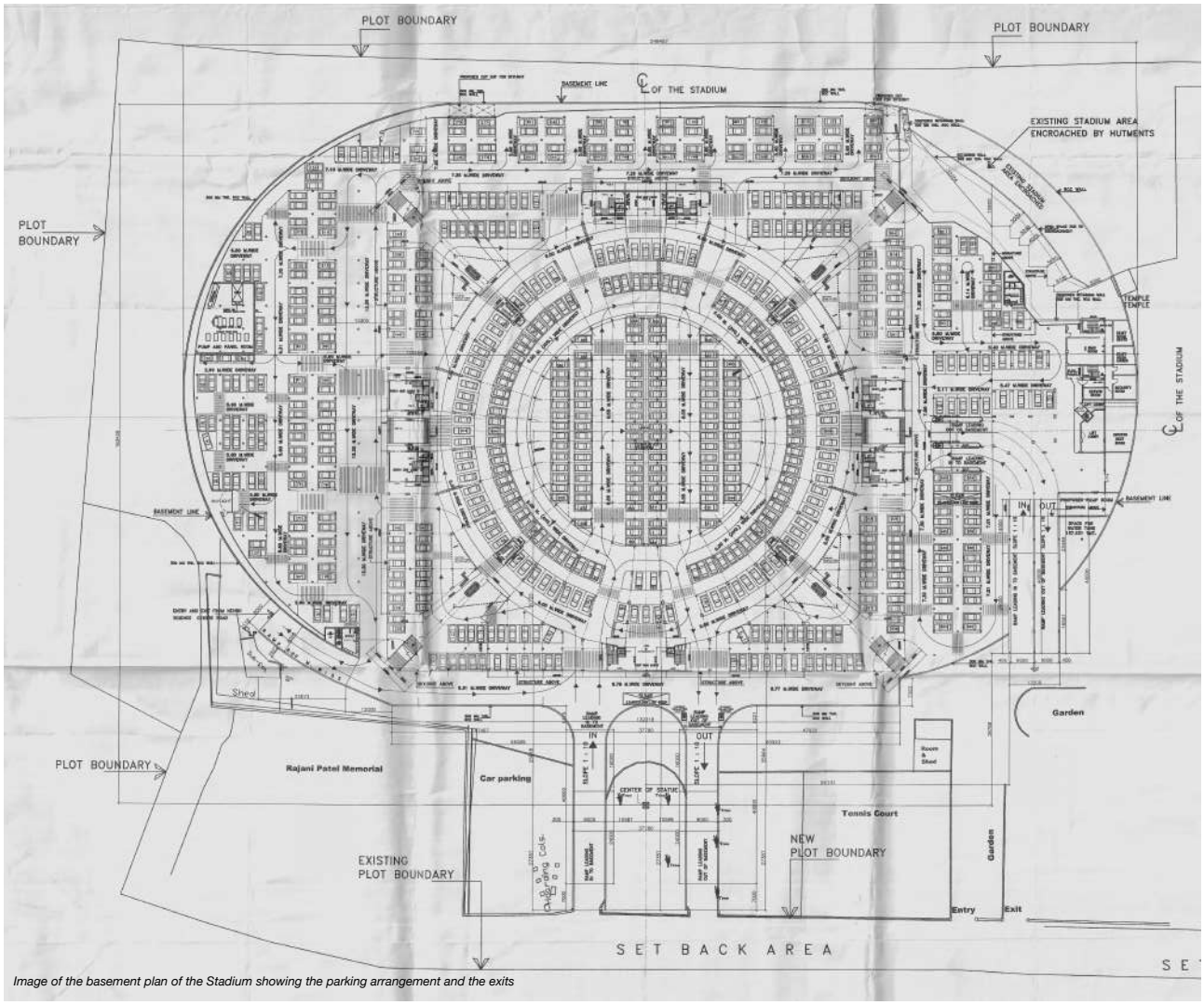


Image of the basement plan of the Stadium showing the parking arrangement and the exits

almost the entire 12 acres of land to create a basement for nearly 1,000 cars - in hindsight perhaps the most ambitious project we had ever designed. Placed next to the Arabian Sea, this basement was designed with four independent ramps so that every vehicle could leave within 20 minutes. At the time, it was one of the largest basements in Mumbai. Parking, services and back-of-house functions were all placed beneath the main public spaces, leaving the surface free for the arena and its programmes. In a district as dense as Worli, the basement is not an afterthought. It is what allows the building to handle large-scale events at all.

COOLING A CROWD

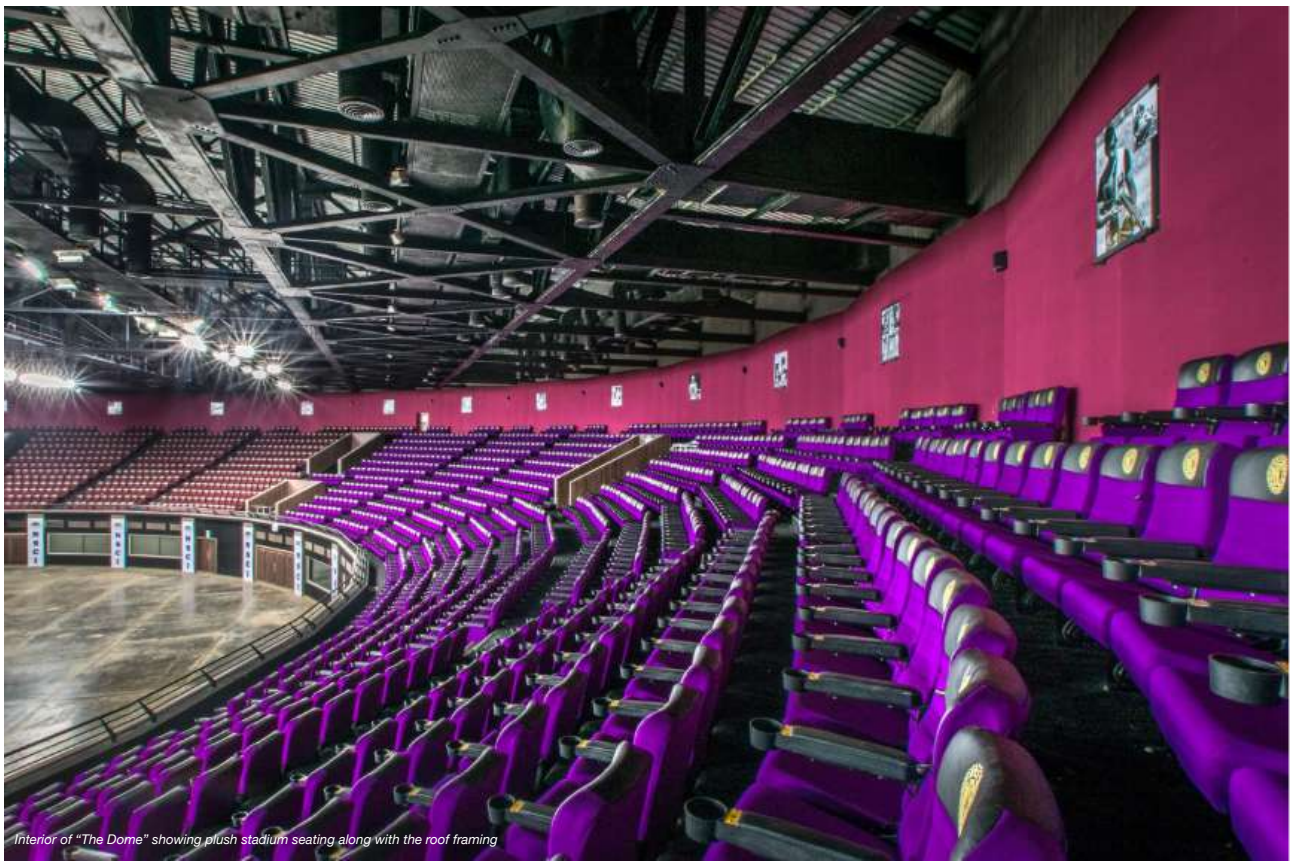
The entire complex is cooled by an air-cooled, chiller-based air-conditioning system designed in zones, so that sections of the stadium not in use can be shut down to save power. The air-conditioned enclosure was planned for events of up to 9,000 people. It would go on to host some of the city's most popular sporting events, including the Pro Kabaddi League and international badminton competitions.

ONE FLOOR, EVERY SPORT

The empty arena is the building's greatest asset. Rather than being designed around a single sport, it works as flexible infrastructure for sports such as badminton, table tennis, basketball, wrestling, judo, karate, gymnastics and other indoor games, simply by changing the equipment and court markings. The lighting was planned in the same way, so each sporting configuration could get the illumination it needed.

MOVING THOUSANDS, INVISIBLY

The architecture extends well beyond the playing field. Vertical cores in each of the four quadrants were designed to carry people straight up from the basement to the arena's upper tier, separating audiences by ticket category along the way. A continuous concourse organised the spectator movement around the arena, with sixteen large concourse zones acting as a buffer between the outside and the arena and doubling as F&B and pre-function spaces. Around them, ancillary halls would house athlete facilities, VIP areas, service zones and backstage spaces, allowing sporting and non-sporting activities to run at the same time. Public movement was kept separate from operational and service access, so the building could take large



Interior of "The Dome" showing plush stadium seating along with the roof framing



crowds without disrupting event logistics.

DESIGNED TO BE LOUD

As the design progressed, costs were rising, and questions were being asked about the long-term sustainability of such a large structure. During one brainstorming session, it dawned on us that a space built to host international sports competitions could also double up as a venue for exhibitions, concerts and trade shows.

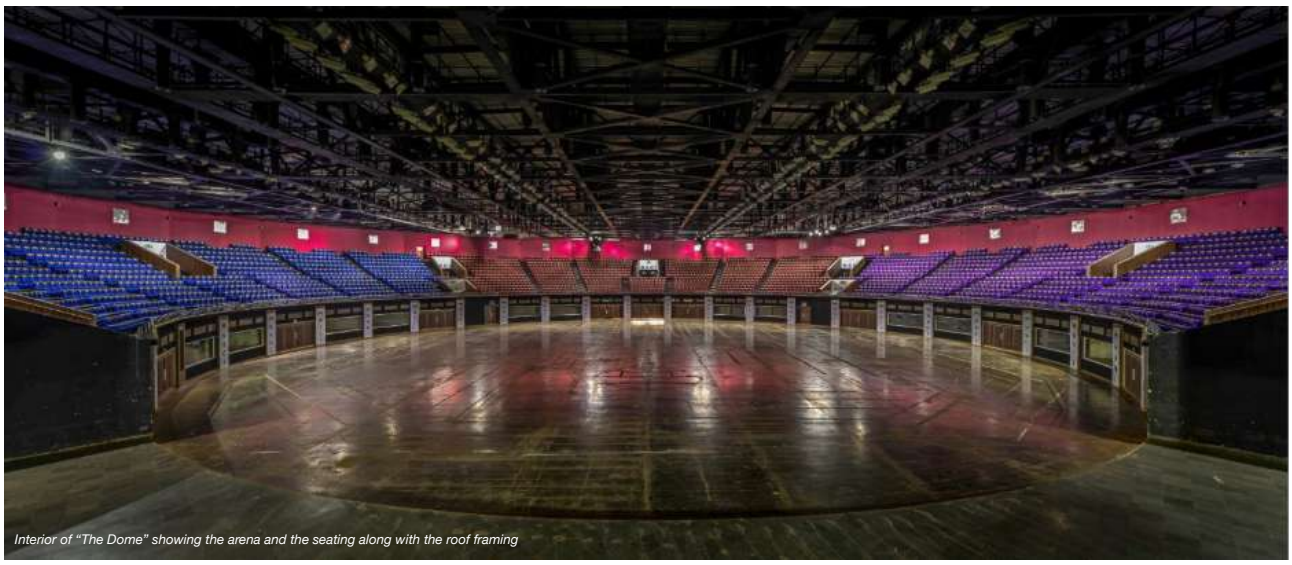
Most sports buildings are designed for crowds. The Dome would also have to be designed for amplifiers. The roof was upgraded to a seven-layer, acoustically treated standing seam system, capable of shielding the neighbourhood from the sound of concert speakers. Thirteen soundproof rooms beneath the seating tiers were planned for floor management, sound control, VIP enclosures and green rooms. The arena offers 3,500 cinema-style reclining seats, and a further 5,500 people can be seated on the floor for stage events.

SAILS ON THE ARABIAN SEA

The facade is where the building speaks to its setting. Its form takes its cue from the sails of boats on the Arabian Sea to the west. Its four double curved four petals are made of 2,300 double-glazed laminated glass panels, each facing a different direction and measured and cut in size individually. Low-e, toughened and laminated glazing reduces solar gain on the fully western, sea-facing elevation. Seen from the road, the building reads as light and maritime. Inside, it stays cool and controlled.

TWO LAYERS OF ARCHITECTURE

The Dome works as two architectures at once. The first is permanent: the structure, plinth, roof, concourse, services and circulation. The second is temporary: the sports equipment, seating, stages, exhibition systems and event installations that change with each programme. Concerts,



Interior of "The Dome" showing the arena and the seating along with the roof framing

exhibitions, conventions, cultural performances, corporate events and weddings can all occupy the same space, as temporary stages, seating and lighting transform the permanent framework.

WHY SPORT NEEDS A CONCERT

Sport is expensive to host and rarely earns its keep. A large arena has to be lit, cooled, staffed, maintained and kept safe all year, yet a sporting calendar fills only a fraction of those days. Badminton leagues, kabaddi seasons and basketball tournaments bring crowds and prestige. They almost never bring enough ticket revenue to cover the cost of keeping the building running.

The Dome is designed around that fact. Concerts, exhibitions, conventions, corporate launches, trade shows and public events earn far more per day than most sports do, and their income cross-subsidises the sporting programme. A concert on Saturday helps cover the cost of keeping the floor available for a kabaddi fixture on Tuesday. Commercial events are not a distraction from the Dome's sporting purpose. They are what makes that purpose financially possible.

This is why the architecture matters economically as well as spatially. The column-free arena, adaptable lighting, continuous concourse and below-grade services let the venue switch from a basketball court to a concert hall in days. Every idle day is a day of running costs with no income to offset them, so quick turnaround is part of how the model works. In a city where land is scarce and sporting infrastructure is chronically underfunded, a venue that can sustain its own sport is rare.

Most sports buildings are designed for crowds. The Dome had to be designed for amplifiers.

A STAGE FOR FIRSTS

The model has worked. The arena became home to U Mumba of the Pro Kabaddi League and to the Premier Badminton League's Mumbai Masters. In October 2019, it hosted India's first-ever NBA games. The same ground where crowds once gathered to watch Dara Singh wrestle King Kong now hosts international sport, under a roof.

The flexibility extends beyond the arena itself. The sixteen halls around it, planned as open support spaces, have each settled into a use of their own. Four now operate as full-service restaurants and four as banquet halls. Two house a permanent gymnasium and health club, and two serve as storage for the arena. The remaining four are a cinema, a billiards room, a card room and a lounge. What began as pre-function space has become a destination in its own right, keeping the building busy even on days when the arena floor is quiet.

WHY IT MATTERS TO US

Had we designed the water park, it might have made an exciting headline in 2002. Instead, the committee chose the less glamorous idea without hesitation. More than two decades later, the Dome is still doing exactly what we proposed: hosting every indoor game under one roof, changing its character every week without changing its structure, and paying for its own sport along the way. For a practice that has always believed buildings must serve the life inside them long after the ribbon is cut, that is the kind of success worth featuring.

Bhatye Beach Redevelopment

by The Editorial Team

Our Urban Design & Landscape team of Ar. Ayushi Pardiwal and Ar. Swarali Pasalkar recently met the District Collector of Ratnagiri to present our credentials and a conceptual proposal for the improvement of Bhatye Beach.





Our proposal reimagines Bhatye as a sustainable, community-centric destination that celebrates the region's coastal ecology, culture and tourism potential. Guided by UDCPR and CRZ Notification, 2019, it tackles unorganised parking, inadequate amenities, coastal safety and marine debris through low-impact, nature-based and reversible interventions.

Of course, the meeting also meant Ayushi and Swarali walking the pristine beach under beautiful monsoon skies, warm sand and seamless coastline. Colleagues have politely asked them whether they too could accompany the team on their next study tour.

Construction Milestones at MLA Hostel Manora

by The Editorial Team

Hon'ble Chairman of the Maharashtra Legislative Council, Prof. Ram Shinde, conducted a key site inspection at the upcoming Manora MLA Hostel near the Maharashtra Legislature, our team ...accompanied by our partner Atul Prabhu, Er. Pradeep Nalge and Ar. Siddhi Khade, along with PWD Chief Engineer Mrs. Pragya Walke and senior execution teams from the contractor, L&T..

With delivery slated before February 2028, structural progress is moving swiftly: Tower "A" stands fully completed at 29 floors, while Tower "B" has reached 34 of its planned 42 floors.

Appreciating the project's momentum, Prof. Shinde emphasised striking a clear balance between seamless utility and a distinguished aesthetic identity. Designed as an integrated civic hub, the complex will feature modern suites for MLAs, dedicated spaces for personal staff and visitors, administrative offices, conference rooms, canteens, and high-capacity parking—redefining legislative infrastructure in Mumbai.





Rajwadkar Street Ashray Yojana

by The Editorial Team

The Rajwadkar Street Ashray Yojana Project has reached a defining milestone as it nears completion, with the official handover scheduled this month. Built to provide quality, dignified housing for BMC's sanitation workers, the project reflects an uncompromising commitment to construction standards, durability, and livability.



Our on-site teams led by Er. Vijay Chavan is currently wrapping up the final touches—including architectural snagging, testing of essential MEP services, fixture fittings, and common area cleaning—to ensure a seamless transition. We are deeply privileged to anticipate the presence of the Hon'ble Chief Minister at the upcoming inauguration ceremony.

Topiwala Reaches Key Milestone

by The Editorial Team

Structural work is steadily progressing at the Topiwala Market site, as reported by our site engineer Vinayak





Sonawane. Critical execution milestones currently underway include an Auditorium & Stage (5th Floor). Shuttering and rebar reinforcement works are actively in progress for the stepped auditorium seating and stage slab.

Vehicular/Pedestrian Ramp (2nd to 3rd Floor): Reinforcement tying is moving forward on schedule to complete the intermediate transit ramp.

Kshatriya Dnyati Samaj Trust

by The Editorial Team

In Mumbai, redevelopment too often pushes long-standing residents out of communities they have lived in for decades. At Kshatriya Dnyati Niwas in Mahim, SPA has been appointed Project Management Consultant (PMC) and Transaction Advisor to help the owners rebuild while keeping the community intact.





The 4,777.62 m² site belongs to the Kshatriya Dnyati Sabha, a public charitable trust registered with the Charity Commissioner, which holds and administers its assets for the welfare of the community. Its four dilapidated buildings house 102 protected tenancies.

The Trust plans to appoint a developer under Regulation 33(9) of DCPR 2034, with the oversight of the Charity Commissioner. The developer will build new, self-contained apartments for every existing tenant. In return for the development rights, it will give the Trust a corpus and constructed institutional space, handed over at the end of construction.

The process has already begun with the community's backing: members recently voted to proceed with the selection of a developer. Our role is to protect the Trust's interests while making sure every existing family moves into its new home. Led by Ar. Enakshee Bhatia and Ar. Abhishek Gunjal, it is redevelopment that keeps the community it was built for.

Ganpatipule Masterplan



by The Editorial Team

Where deep-rooted faith meets the Arabian Sea, our Ganpatipule 2047 Master Plan sets out a sustainable future for one of Maharashtra's most revered coastal pilgrimage sites. Ar. Chaitaly Deshpande and Ar. Ayushi Paldiwal recently presented the plan to the District Collector of Ratnagiri.

The challenge is one of balance: a close-knit village of just 1,236 residents receives nearly 20 lakh visitors every year. The plan aims to serve both, bringing together faith, coastal ecology and community growth.

At its heart, the plan restores the sacred core. Pedestrian-priority pathways in a vernacular idiom, shaded pilgrim corridors and upgraded pradakshina routes lead visitors around the temple. The plan then reaches out to the sea, with stepped temple ghats, public boardwalks and a passenger jetty. To keep the temple precinct peaceful and car-free, traffic is diverted to an expanded 18-metre bypass network, with peripheral stacked parking hubs and zero-emission EV shuttles carrying pilgrims the last stretch.

Behind the scenes, the plan relies on circular infrastructure: an 81-million-litre rain-fed reservoir, decentralised wastewater treatment and solar-powered amenities. Beyond the temple town, it spreads the benefits of tourism across Ratnagiri district through wellness retreats, agro-tourism and eco-resorts, so that the pilgrimage strengthens the region rather than straining it.

Div. Sports - Jalgaon



by The Editorial Team

On the outskirts of Jalgaon, a stretch of red rural earth is slowly turning into what will be become the Divisional Sports Complex being constructed at a project cost of over 120cr.

Our PMC engineer, Er. Shashiranjan Shrivastava, recently visited the site to inspect the ongoing construction. Alongside the boundary wall, work is moving at full speed on the athletic track, the pavilion building and the indoor hall.

In the photo, the plinth beams of the Athletic Pavilion are seen being shuttered and cast, with steel bars rising from the ground where columns will soon stand. The next time we report from Jalgaon, the lanes of the athletic track may already be marked.



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"A drawing records a decision. A workshop is where the decision gets made, out loud, by everyone who will have to live with it."

One Building with Five Rooms

by Amol Prabhu

Every project at SPA passes through five rooms of scrutiny before a single brick is laid. They are not physical rooms but strategic workshops, held at five separate moments in a project's lifecycle when the cost of changing our minds is about to rise sharply.

Over the years, I have come to believe these five valuable brainstorming sessions shape a building as much as any drawing we produce. Projects rarely go wrong because of one bad decision. They go wrong through a slow drift: a milestone nobody owned, an assumption nobody challenged, an item nobody remembered to count. Our workshops exist to catch that drift before it hardens into concrete, or a commitment of steel through a tender accepted by the contractor.

The project's conception at SPA starts with a kick off meeting which we call **"Workshop One",** and is led by the project's Team Leader. This is where where the project is introduced to the entire team. Before anyone opens a single drawing, we decide four things together: who is on the team, what each person owns, which milestones we are committing to, and what our success will look like when the project is done. It sounds basic - but a team that agrees on the definition of success on day one argues far less on day two hundred.

Once the teams have put together a presentation of the concept design, and the client has approved the concept, the project stops being an idea and becomes a building. The second **"Concept Workshop"** brings in the people who will give the project its body: the MEP, the Interior and the Landscape Team Leaders along with the Structural Engineers. Here the architects explain not just what the project looks like, but what it is meant to be: its intent, its priorities, and the decisions that must not be lost along the way. Every discipline leaves the room knowing the story it is now part of.

These teams collaborate and sketches, visions and renderings into technical drawings. By the end of this stage, the buildings have a grid, MEP systems and dimensions, and every discipline has been working in parallel.

The third **"Schematic Workshop"** brings everyone together again for one purpose: to check that the work is being done correctly. Does the structure respect the planning? Do the services fit where they need to go? Does the design still match the concept the client approved? It is far easier to correct course here than after the drawings have multiplied.

Statutory approvals change the nature of a project. What was a proposal is now a sanctioned design, and every change from here on carries regulatory cost and delay. The fourth workshop is observed keenly by MEP and Interior teams, who now carry the greatest share of detailed work. Together they agree on how the detailed design will develop within the approved frame without straying outside it.

The final meeting is to find holes in the contract before the contractor does. We call this workshop the "**Turnover Meeting".** This workshop comes after the detailed cost estimate and tender documents are prepared, and it is attended by everyone, along with our estimators. Its job is to poke holes. Every discipline walks through the estimate and the tender line by line, looking for what is missing: an item drawn but never measured, a specification described but never priced, or a scope that falls between two teams. A missed item on paper becomes a variation claim on site. This meeting makes sure both the design and the cost estimate are complete before they leave our office.

Why we keep doing it:

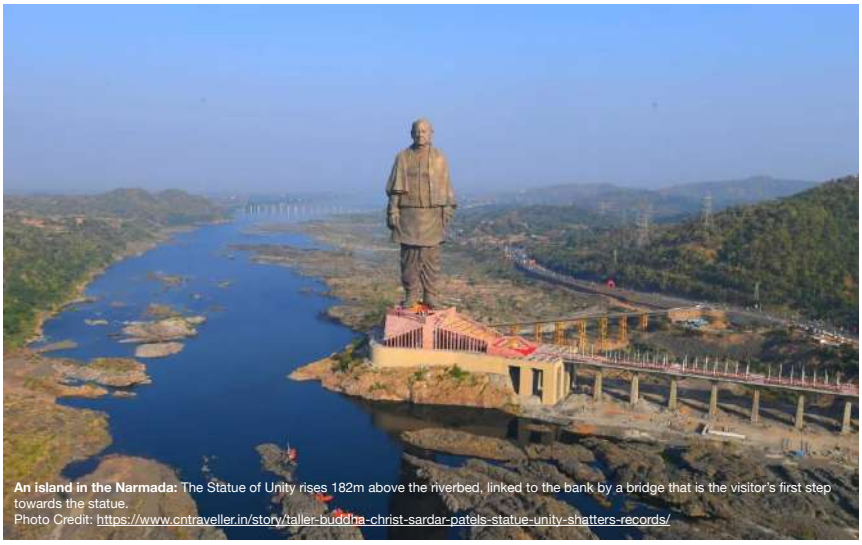
Five workshops take time and money, and time is always short. There are weeks when a deadline makes them feel like a luxury. But wherever we have cut these conversations short, we have paid for it later: on site, in rework, or in a client meeting none of us enjoyed. Wherever we have held them judiciously, the building has arrived closer to what we promised.

Design, at its best, is not one brilliant idea. It is a sequence of good decisions, made at the right moments, by the right people, in the same room.

Because a design is only as good as the conversations that shape it.

A Building Called Sardar

by Editorial Team



An island in the Narmada: The Statue of Unity rises 182m above the riverbed, linked to the bank by a bridge that is the visitor's first step towards the statue.
Photo Credit: https://www.cntraveller.in/story/taller-buddha-christ-sardar-patels-statue-unity-shatters-records/

Every year on 31 October, the nation gathers at Ekta Nagar for Rashtriya Ekta Diwas, the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, at the foot of the tallest statue in the world. Most visitors see a man: a face, a shawl, a stride. An architect sees something else, something we draw every day. There are two concrete cores, three layers of steel framing, a lift system, a viewing gallery and a facade.

A monumental statue today is no longer simply an object. It is first a building, with a complex structure, and its skin is a facade. The Statue of Unity is the clearest proof of that idea in India, and it is worth reading as we would any building we hope to learn from: its brief, its structure, its skin and the way it ages. For us at SPA, there is an added reason to study it closely, as we build the bronze statue of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar at Indu Mill.

The brief: a portrait, not an idea

The colossal statues of the past were mostly idealised figures: Buddhas, goddesses, a robed Liberty. Their loose drapery forgave a great deal. The Statue of Unity had no such licence. It had to reproduce a real man from real photographs, in a dhoti and bandhgala.

The late Ram V. Sutar and his studio studied around 2,000 archival photographs of Sardar Patel's face and chose a 1949 image to set his posture. Then they did something any good design team would recognise: they tested the design on its users. An 18-foot bronze model was taken to Karamsad, Patel's birthplace, so that local people, including some who had seen him in person, could respond to it. Their reactions shaped a second, 30-foot model. Only then was a full-size digital model made.

Three mock-ups, each cheaper than the mistake it prevented, came before a single panel was cast. It is a sequence we should know well.

The Structure

Strip away the bronze, and what stands is essentially a tower. At its heart are two reinforced concrete cores, each 127 metres tall, rising to the chest. They carry the load to the foundations and house the lifts that take visitors to the viewing gallery. Around them, the steel is arranged in three layers, a hierarchy any facade engineer would recognise:

- Primary steel transfers the load of the skin back to the concrete cores.
- Secondary trusses carry the weight of the cladding to the primary frame.
- Tertiary frames bridge the final gap between the skeleton and the bronze.

Because every bronze panel is unique, every tertiary frame is unique, and so is every joint. In an ordinary building, a cladding bracket may repeat ten thousand times. Here, almost nothing repeats.

The quantities read like those of a high-rise:

- 210,000 cubic metres of concrete
- 18,500 tonnes of reinforcement steel
- 6,500 tonnes of structural steel
- 1,700 tonnes of bronze

A figure that wants to fall over

Robed figures such as the Statue of Liberty stand on wide, stable bases. Sardar Patel's dhoti does the opposite: the statue is slender at the ankles and heavier at the shoulders, the exact inverse of how a tall structure prefers to be shaped. His walking stride also leaves a 6.4-metre gap between the feet.

The site added its own forces. Set on an island in the Narmada, the statue faces winds funnelled down the river valley. The answer came in two parts: two tuned mass dampers, each weighing about 200 tonnes, steady the figure against sway, and the structure is engineered for wind speeds of up to 50 metres per second, around 180 km/h.

Building it

The statue was as much a feat of organisation as of engineering. Work began in May 2015, and the statue was unveiled on 31 October 2018. It was built by a workforce of more than 3,000, including some 300 engineers from Larsen & Toubro, at a cost of roughly ₹3,000 crore. The design was led by the sculptor, then 93 years old.

Even getting material to the site required engineering. Because the island is cut off for much of the year, engineers built a rock bridge across shallow water and a temporary Bailey bridge for the monsoon. Most of the



Image showing the sheer scale of the state in comparison with human being
Credit: AI Generated from reference images

concrete, steel and bronze crossed the river this way.

There was symbolism inside the structure too. For a statue of the man remembered as India's Iron Man, part of the steel framework was made from scrap iron collected from farmers and villages across the country. A national memorial was, quite literally, built from fragments of the nation.

The skin

When the statue was being planned, no Indian foundry could cast a skin of this scale. A survey of 15 major Indian bronze foundries found none able to take on the work. The casting went instead to the Jiangxi Toqine foundry in China, after the sculptor made four visits to get the detailing right.

The making combined the oldest and newest tools of the trade. The design was refined through 3D scanning and CNC machining. Around 7,000 bronze plates were cast, then matched and welded on site into roughly 550 large panels, fixed to the frame as an 8 mm skin.

Three decisions turned that skin from ornament into engineering:

The skin was allowed to move. The panels overlap at flexible joints and can shift slightly in both directions under wind and earthquake loads. It is the lesson

	Statue of Unity	**Indu Mill**
Figure height	182 m	107 m on a 30m pedestal
Setting	Inland river island	Seafront
Structure	Two RCC cores, three steel layers	Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Prefabricated Steel Structure
Bronze	About 1,700 t	About 870 t of C903 tin bronze
Panels	About 550 large panels, from around 7,000 castings	About 2,650 panels, each about 2 m square
Skin thickness	8 mm	About 10 mm
Joints	Overlapping, flexible	Welded seams with designed movement joints
Casting	China	Ghaziabad, India



Image of The Statue of Unity during its construction, showing the two concrete cores with primary and secondary framing. Image Credit: Michael Graves Architecture & Design"

Eiffel taught at Liberty: the skin hangs from the structure; it does not grip it.

Coordination happened before casting. With every connection unique, a 3D BIM model was used to find and resolve about 70 clashes between the main steel and the cladding supports before fabrication began. Every clash found on screen was one fewer found 150 metres in the air.

The skin was meant to age. At the inauguration, the project team said openly that the bronze would go through a natural ageing process.

The visitor's journey

Like any good public building, the statue is designed as a sequence, not a single view. Visitors arrive at a visitor centre on the riverbank and cross a footbridge to the island. At the base of the statue, an exhibition hall tells the story of Sardar Patel's life and of modern India before anyone looks up. From there, high-speed lifts inside the concrete cores carry visitors to a gallery in the statue's chest, where windows look out across the Sardar Sarovar Dam and the Satpura and Vindhya ranges.

It is an architectural promenade in the truest sense: approach, threshold, story, ascent and view. The statue is not only something to look at. It is somewhere to go.

Ageing in the open

The Narmada valley has a hard climate: monsoon rain, dry heat and strong sun on dark metal. But it is inland, and salt spray, the agent behind the most damaging bronze corrosion, is largely absent. The patina at Ekta Nagar will grow mainly from rain, sun and sulphur in the air, slowly darkening the bronze towards brown and, over decades, the familiar statuary green. A seafront statue would face a far harsher test, as we are discovering at Indu Mill, but inland, the Narmada's climate gives the bronze room to age gracefully.

Even the lighting shapes how the material is read. The night lighting is set at a warm 2700K to bring out the bronze, and blue light is avoided to protect the surrounding ecology: a reminder that a bronze skin is designed for night as well as day.

A statue that built a town

One of the most interesting lessons one could learn from the Statue of Unity has nothing to do with concrete, the metal or its base. Kevadia, the dam side township where the statue stands, was renamed Ekta Nagar in 2021 and has now grown into a full scale tourism destination. In September, it hosted the 72nd National Film Awards, the first ceremony in the awards' history to be held outside Delhi. A new 600-passenger river cruise is now being introduced to meet rising visitor numbers. In 2024 alone, roughly 5.8 million people visited Ekta Nagar showing the impact it has on the tourism of the region. The statue brought roads, hotels, jobs and a pressing reason to visit a region that few outside Gujarat had a reason to visit earlier. As with the NSCI Dome we built, its success is measured less by its opening day than by everything that keeps people coming back.

What this means for us

The Statue of Unity and our statue of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar at Indu Mill share a sculptor and a structural idea, but their conditions are very different.

The last row of the table on the previous page may be the quietest milestone of all. Eight years ago, India had to send its tallest statue abroad to be cast. Ours is being cast at home.

The Statue of Unity leaves us with four lessons:

- Test the form on people before casting it. The Karamsad models were cheap. Recasting a face is not.
- Treat every unique connection as a design problem, and resolve clashes in the model, not in the air.
- Decide explicitly how the skin will move. Overlap or weld, the answer must be written into the bracket and the joint, not left to chance.
- Design for the climate you actually have. Ekta Nagar's details are a starting point; the Arabian Sea demands more.

The long view

Eight years after its unveiling, the Statue of Unity stands as more than India's tallest monument. It is proof that a statue of this scale must be conceived, engineered and cared for just like a building. Its bronze has begun its slow conversation with the weather of the Narmada valley, darkening year by year, as it was always meant to. On 31 October each year, as crowds gather at its feet, they see Sardar Patel. We see a lesson in how to build what deserves to last.

Birthdays!

Great structures begin with the people who build them. This month, we celebrate the birthdays of the people who draw our details, meet our deadlines, and eventually build the buildings that become the iconic structures that get posted on our website. Stop by, say hello, and make them feel special!

Akshay Parab
6th November

Aditi Ajay Joshi
7th November

Tushar Sawant
11th November

Amol Pawar
15th November

Swapnil Sandim
22nd November

Pooja Kharatmol
24th November

Ghanshyam Sonawane
25th November

Anniversaries!

At SPA, we have always believed in building lasting relationships — not just with our clients, but with our people too. Here are some of our members who have invested in the long-term vision of our firm, who grow with us, and who make SPA better each year. Their work anniversaries this month are a reminder to us of that shared commitment. The next time you see any of these colleagues, please stop and congratulate them in person. A simple acknowledgement goes a long way, and they deserve every bit of it!

Tanvi Badde
1st November – 15 years

Atul Kawtikwar
14th November – 34 years

Vijayalaxmi Gholse
22nd November – 5 years

Deepak Ghuge
22nd November – 4 years

Sources:

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Outlook;
DD India;
India TV;
The Quint;
Free Press Journal;
SPA material study and project records.

Full references available from canvas@spaaec.com.

Humour



AI Generated

Errata

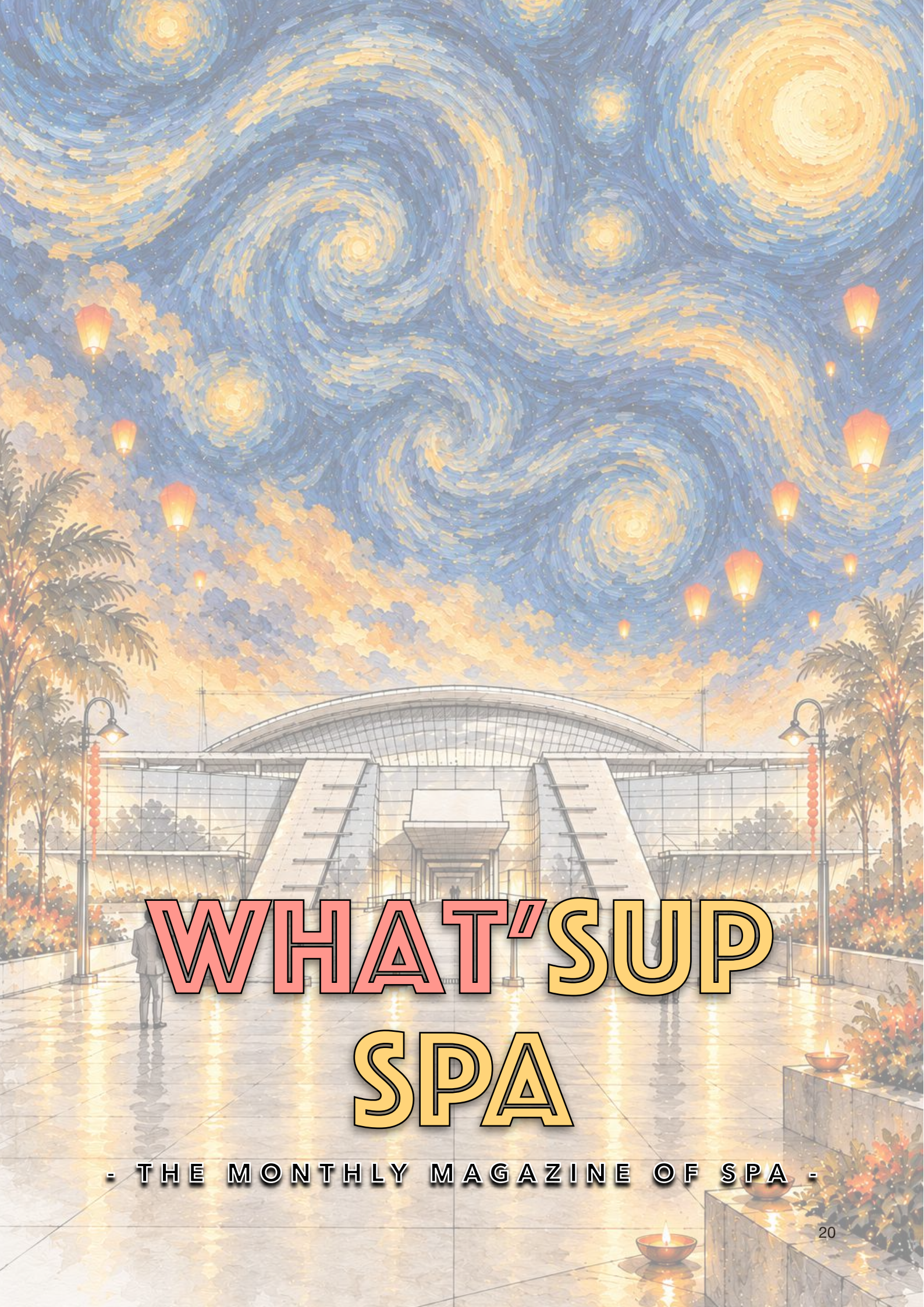
Better Late Than Never! We would like to make amends with an enthusiastic round of belated cheers and warmest studio wishes to our newest colleagues who celebrated their birthdays last month:

Mausam Das
6th October
Weedad Sonde
10th October
Ayush Deo
11th October
Prathmesh Yadav
19th October

We hope your special day was filled with fantastic memories, and we wish you all an incredible, milestone-packed year ahead in the practice!

Disclaimer

We've done our best to get every name, number and story in this edition right — but with a studio this large and this busy, we know something might slip through. If you spot anything we've missed, gotten wrong, or not quite done justice to, please write to canvas@spaaec.com or reach out to Team "Canvas" directly. We'll try to make it right in the next edition.


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