



SNEHA NIKETAN



A Home away from home

Bringing together a unique combination of the cumulative experience of a conservation practice and a vocabulary of adapted local features, the architects build a special space for destitute children, infusing light, air and a deep sense of familiarity into the building

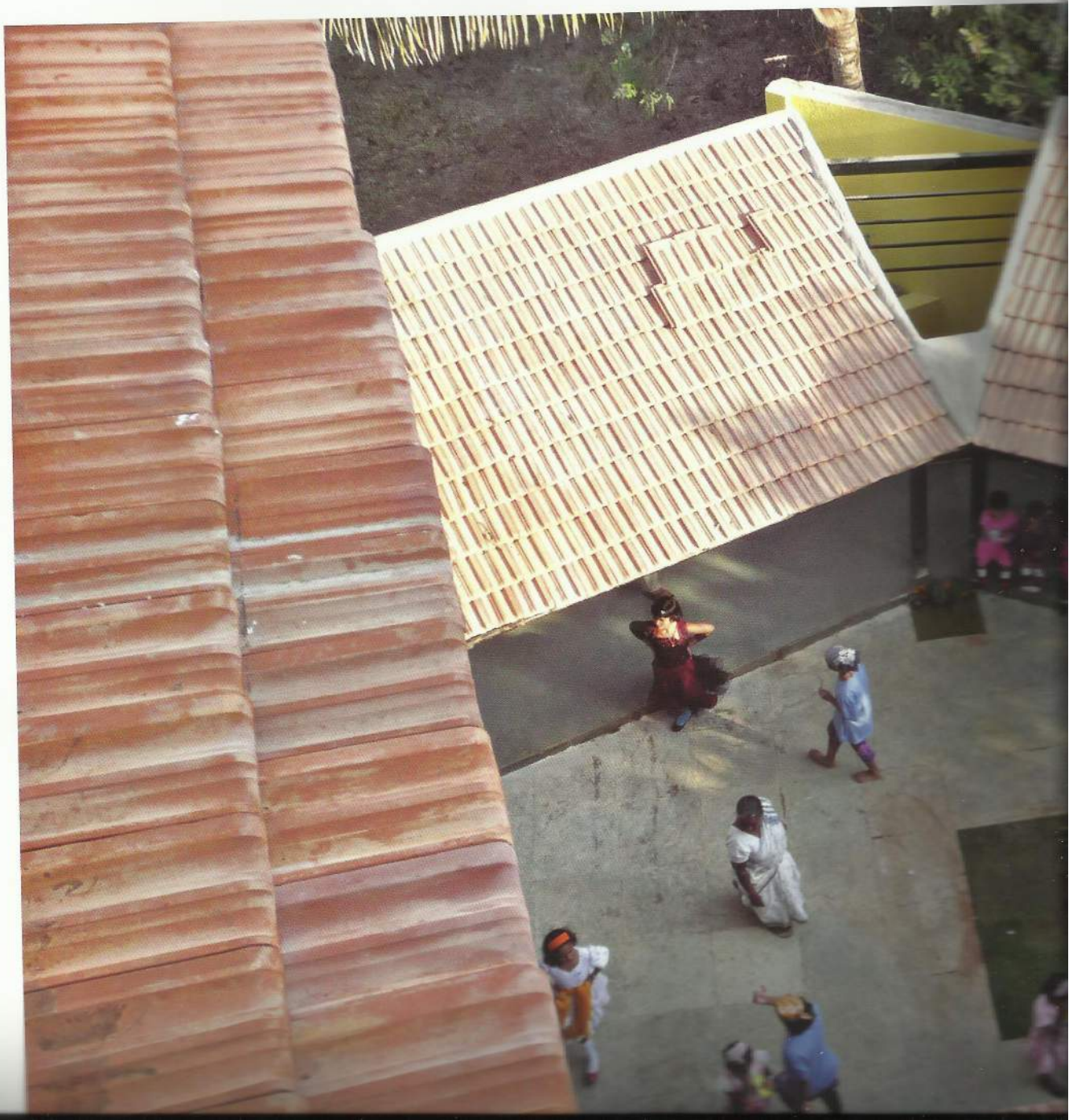




Photo Vikas Dilawari

An architect, noted for his conservation of heritage structures for the past twenty years, has just completed his first architectural commission. In 2006, the employees of JP Morgan Treasury & Security Services, India, adopted an orphanage run by Sneha Jeevan Kendra, a charitable organisation for the Handmaids of the Blessed Trinity, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility

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Exterior view of the orphanage

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Celebrations on the day of the inauguration in the courtyard of Snehaniketan

These renewed buildings, among several others, have contributed to an appreciation of the city as a continuum, an idea relegated to the wings in Mumbai's fin-de-siècle development boom

(CSR) Program. They then appointed Vikas Dilawari, who has an impressive body of work almost exclusively in architectural and urban conservation, as the project architect to design a building for the orphanage.

Dilawari is now an academic and a leading voice in his field. He has been feted internationally for the restoration of buildings such as the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, the Library of the University of Mumbai and the Archiepiscopal Palace at Old Goa. These renewed buildings, among several others, have contributed



Photo Sidhant Dave

to an appreciation of the city as a continuum, an idea relegated to the wings in Mumbai's fin-de-siècle development boom. How should one look at Dilawari's contemporary design for the Sneha Niketan Orphanage at Vasai, on the fringes of Mumbai? It is inevitable that, in the appreciation of his new design, there would be a certain spillover of his work with older buildings. In anticipation then, one searches for inspiration derived from classical lines, the expression of ornament and the craft of turning materials appropriately. Happily, Dilawari's approach to the creation of a place for the upbringing of disadvantaged children foregrounds the circumstances of the site. Sneha Niketan is

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located in the village of Giriz in Vasai, flanked with open fields, farmland and local houses. Working within the pragmatism of

on the ground. The wings have narrow cross sections, which, with windows on either side permit cross ventilation. The design does factor in the erratic power supply situation in the areas around Vasai and their frequent outages for load-shedding and breakdowns.

Dilawari and Dave have derived both architectural vocabulary as well as a sense of space from the erstwhile domestic architecture of the Konkan. This typology was once prevalent in towns along the length of the western coast of Maharashtra, and still exists here and there. These buildings can be identified by their deep overhanging roofs, rooms with high ceilings and floor length windows.

The upper floor of Sneha Niketan has a large dormitory with a double height. The reading room looks down into this space. The dormitory is well-lit by sentential windows that line either side that also, to use Claude Batley's elegant phrase, 'woo every breath of a breeze.' This space forms an enclosed counterpart to the courtyard below. The double-shuttered, wooden-louvered tall windows allow the children inside a safe but uninterrupted view of the outside. The terrace is enclosed by a sloping steel-braced roof with Mangalore tiles and overhanging eaves, fashioning a shaded enclosure where activities can happen without interruption. Continuous built-in seating along the terrace edge outlines a place for intimate performances. Rather than naming spaces, the several rooms for the children's use can be transformed readily to whatever its 60 to 70 children want them to be.

Sneha Niketan is the sum of the many 'places' that will inevitably define the lives of its inhabitants. The courtyard at ground level performs both the role of mentor and guardian. Shielded from the outside by a high wall and lean-to roofing that extends all along the edge of the plot, this al fresco space is a little haven, liberation, scaled perfectly for the little changes that it envelops.



Photo Sidhant Dave



Photo Sidhant Dave

The terrace is a multi-purpose space, adapted with a permanent roof and grilles to allow for activities to continue during the heat and rain

Below: View of the building from the courtyard showing the fenestration palette of the building



Photo Vikas Dilawari



The stairwell is punctured with glowing art-glass windows Below: Courtyard overlooking the rooms

Photo: Kiran Bheavkar



The building is about as self-effacing as its architect. Vikas Dilawari defines his earlier work as 'conserving other people's creations'. He has an awareness of the fragility of the past which he is ever-careful not to erase with an architect's imperative. In this building for 'other people's children', he has a quiet design expression. In practice, he merges seamlessly with his several collaborators, whom he insists on placing before himself: associate architect Siddhant Dave, structural engineer Kiran Bhanwar, Sister Paulette of the Handmaids, the team from IP

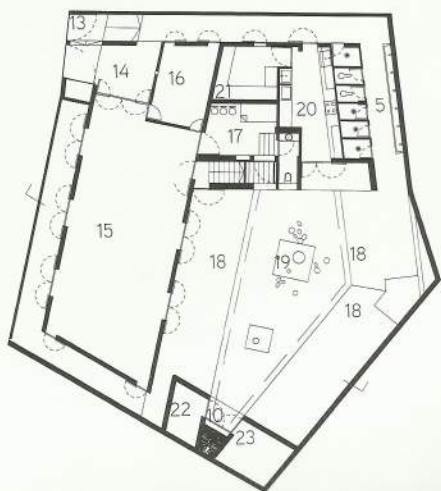
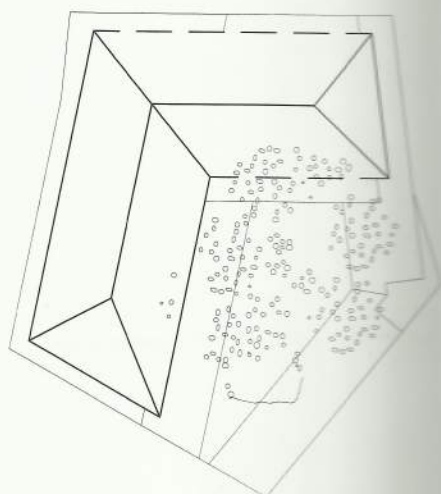
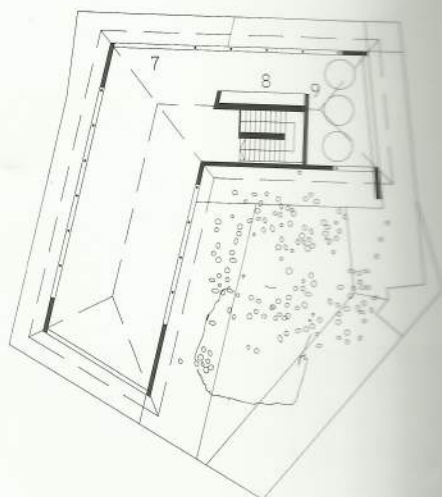
changes in levels, varying volumes, light and dark spaces, openings of various sizes and heights creating such multiple experiences as would excite a growing child's imagination and help develop a sense of self. Preservation and nurturing in a contemporary setting is a hard enough demand to make in a city where the impulse to globalise is so strong. That Vikas Dilawari is able to achieve this in his first project is both laudatory and edifying.



Photo Sidhant Dave



The main dormitory is full of light and air, and as a double-height volume adds an unexpected sense of space and openness



1 Study & library
2 Balcony

3 Dormitory
7 Multi-use terrace area

11 Washroom
12 Toilet

16 Prayer room
17 Store room

21 Store room
22 Electrical room
23 Porch

SECOND FLOOR PLAN
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



Photo Vikas Dilawari



Photo Kiran Bhavsar



- I Entrance to the orphanage
- II View of the immediate surroundings of Sneha Niketan in Vasai, north of Mumbai
- III Children at play in the courtyard, which is the heart of the building
- IV MS structure for the Mangalore-tiled roof which shelters the terrace during inclement weather
- V Outdoor wash area
- VI Art-glass window features in the stairwell
- VII Window openings under construction

Design Architects
VIKAS DILAWARI
SIDHANT DAVE

Principal Architect
VIKAS DILAWARI

Structural Engineering
KIRAN BHAVSAR

Electrical and plumbing consultant
J. K. SHAH

Contractor
SEAN NORONHA AND COMPANY

Client
THE HANDMAIDS OF THE BLESSED TRINITY SUPPORTED BY JP MORGAN CHASE

Total site area
390.2 m²

Total built area
499.1 m²