

ABRAHAM JOHN ARCHITECTS

a multidisciplinary architecture and design studio with a gamut of projects spanning nearly five decades, that brings together the expertise of two generations of architects

Originally from a small town in Kerala, the young Abraham John ventured to Mumbai (*then Bombay*) in 1959 with a degree in science and no planned career. Hoping to find a job in the *city of dreams*, his encounter with architecture was mere coincidence. "I saw the foliage around the J J School of Art and Architecture buildings while passing by and walked in to inquire about the courses available," he explains. The school had a reservation of two seats for each state in India as there were no other architectural colleges in other parts of the country. Though he had no particular architectural aspirations, he enjoyed designing and drawing and applied for one of the seats allotted to the state of Kerala. "I had no exposure to anything spectacular, I depended mostly on the library and the buildings I saw around Bombay. During my Bachelors of Architecture, I interned at Gregson, Batley and King, who were the pioneers in most of the Bombay structures of note," says Ar. Abraham John.

establishing the practice

On graduation in 1964, Ar. Abraham John decided to start his own practice and spent a couple of years doing contractual work for interiors, which he says was not rewarding in terms of financial gain and stability. A handicraft showroom in the Victoria Terminus area of Mumbai became his first independent project. He says, "I enjoyed the process of achieving the result of my imagination. I wanted to be on my own and do things the way I liked. I had to earn a living and designing was my only forte, hence I started my own firm."

Established in 1967, Abraham John Architects, rapidly developed clientele by word of mouth. With one project bringing in another, they collaborated with several organizations like Tata Consultancy Services, Britannia Biscuit Co., Glaxo Laboratories, Canara Bank, United Phosphorous, YMCA and Oxfam International as well as individual clients. The Mumbai-based studio grew into a multidisciplinary architecture, interior design, landscaping and urban planning firm operating with a design intensive team of ten architects. Their portfolio ranges across diverse genres from luxury villas, high-end residences, corporate and commercial projects to hospitality, retail and institutional projects.

Today, Ar. Abraham John, along with younger son Ar. Alan Abraham head the studio, that is passionately involved in delivering high-end design with a sensitive balance of contextual response and elegant functionality. "Alan was working in the studio even while he was studying. Much of the design aspects and site handling are now left to him. I come in where technical and constructional details are required," says Ar. John. For Ar. Alan Abraham, architecture became a natural choice, "I grew up watching my dad enjoying his work in his studio. I was good at science and interested in arts." Ar. Alan registered directly through the Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) and worked along with his father, who taught him in practice. Speaking of his professional relationship with his father, Ar. Alan Abraham says, "We share a sound professional relationship. I have always admired his passion and hard work. Our practice combines the strength of experience with a contemporary perspective and a focused attention to detail."



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design approach

The team at Abraham John Architects is dedicated to unique design approaches and achieving a balance between functionality and aesthetics, context, climate, material, cost and time-frame. While their forte is attention to detail and customization; honesty to design, client satisfaction and sustainability; the ability to constantly explore and evolve are the driving forces of the studio. "My philosophy on design is that each job should dictate its own distinct style. Functional utility and aesthetic appeal are the key considerations while designing," says Ar. Abraham John. Ar. Alan Abraham, who travels extensively and is exposed to a variety of design styles and philosophies, says, "Abraham John Architects' design approach is to re-connect architecture with nature, make optimum use of

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space, natural materials, lighting and landscape to reinvent and transform living environments and urban spaces. We try to balance form and function, and stay inspired."

While not at his desk, Ar. Abraham John enjoys reading, music, theatre and is deeply involved with charity. Ar. Alan Abraham on the other hand indulges in professional photography. He says, "I have learnt to appreciate design a lot more, being both an architect and a professional photographer. There is a definite overlap between my passion and my profession: I design with the photographer's eye, and my architectural background is an advantage while taking photographs. It is all about angles, lighting and composition."

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in the public realm

In keeping with their value system, Abraham John Architects has rendered numerous charity-related architectural services. They have worked in several calamity-affected areas such as Latur, Maharashtra and Rajkot, Gujarat which were devastated by earthquakes and the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, destroyed by the tsunami.

Regardless of size and scale, the studio believes that architecture has the unique power to influence lifestyle and society. Ar. Alan Abraham says, "Our latest benchmark

project would be The Bombay Greenway Project* which tries to bring to the city a change in lifestyle." The Bombay Greenway Project is the spearhead of a series of urban renewal plans that Abraham John Architects has designed to positively transform the city. The project is a natural response to the present living environment in the city – lack of open space, road congestion, depleting green cover, poor air quality, overcrowded railway stations and trains, the east-west divide, and the lack of dedicated lanes for pedestrians and cyclists. Winner of the

International Urban Planning and Design Competition, Velo-city 2013, Austria, the design of The Bombay Greenway Project allows for a multiplicity of uses that a modern city like Mumbai should expect from its public spaces. Ar. Abraham says, "We have dedicated 30 percent of our time and a third of our resources to such proactive initiatives. We do these projects to encourage sustainable living environments, active modes of transport and healthy city living."

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plans for the future

Ar. Abraham John's future plans for the studio see it engaged in creative designing and urban and rural infrastructure projects which benefit society at large. He says, "Job satisfaction ought to be the prime driving force behind the ideals of the studio." Working at multiple scales and with various organizations allows Abraham John Architects to experiment and diversify their work. Ar. Alan Abraham shares that the future plans for the firm include more architectural, landscaping and urban planning projects. He says, "I took up architecture to make a positive and lasting change, and I look forward to projects that will allow us to do that."

The firm keeps pace with advancements in technology, adopting the Building Information Modelling (BIM) software, which they refer to as a milestone in the growth of the studio. The software has enabled faster decision-making, better documentation, and the ability to predict performance before the ground is broken, allowing the architect team to do more in less time, and cutting down construction costs.

Speaking of the future, Ar. Abraham John concludes, "There are two things one should know about an architect, he never finishes his education - it is a lifetime of learning, and being involved in the process of creative thinking, an architect does not retire." if

