‘Indian architecture is a bitter disappointment’

By editor
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If being unconventional were one of the parameters to judge creativity, celebrated English architect Will Alsop would top the list. But Alsop is more than just unconventional. His numerous designs and buildings are a proof of his creative genius — be it the The Public in West Bromwich, England, which recently made it to the 1,000 architecture marvels, the Peckham Library in London or the Sharp Centre of Design in Toronto, Canada.

The English architect was recently in Mumbai to launch the Global Open Designs Show (GODS), an international design festival that will be held in Goa in 2012. The first-of-its-kind design festival will have architects, designers, animators, filmmakers and media experts from all over the world, discussing and promoting a design culture in India.

Alsop says that he was always interested in India and hopes to work on an Alsop project as soon as possible. He says, “India is a country of diversity, history and enigmas — in short, it’s very beautiful. But it is nowhere on the map of architectural marvels. In Mumbai, there’s a marvellous mid-rise tower by Charles Correa — and clearly there are other interesting new buildings in India — but sadly they are few and far between.”

While India continues to excel in the field of science and technology, the country has failed to leave any mark when it comes to designing, and this, Alsop says, was one of the reasons why India was chosen as the host of the festival. “In terms of contemporary architecture, India is what we might call a bitter disappointment, with one or two exceptions. As part of the emerging contemporary culture in India today, the festival will attempt to play a role in promoting the importance of design in the very broadest possible sense,” adds Alsop.

The celebrated English architect says that the country needs to focus more on creating quality-recognised schools. “India needs more design schools, but at the same time, they need to be recognised as part of the world community of good design schools,” explains Alsop, suggesting that India could follow the example of Europe, where there is a rapidly emerging first and second division of education. “The first division are schools that are open-minded, diverse and have global awareness,” he says.

One of Alsop’s latest designs that has generated a lot of curiosity is the Edessa Museum and Museum Centre, which is inspired from organic forms but is often criticised for its unconventional look. However, Alsop chooses to disagree. “To me, my work is not unconventional, but most of my projects have rather rectilinear forms,” explains the architect. On a lighter note, he adds, “There are many misconceptions in the press, both about me and my work. For example, I am rather fat, but I don’t eat that
much."
Alsop does not get particularly worried when people don’t understand his work. “I do not think that it is necessary to understand any work of architecture, it is about the joy of the experience — clearly, if this initiates further questions that can be interesting — but not always. Appreciation of architecture comes from love, not logic,” he says.
The architect believes that the main purpose of architecture as an art form remains to please its inhabitants, while also serving a functional purpose. “Human beings struggle for what pleases them the most. If that was not the case, sex would be very unpopular, but a functional appropriateness is part of pleasure,” he says, adding that as an architect, he sees himself more as someone who visualises a structure, and not if they get a physical form in the real world or not. “A finished building is not always the point,” he elaborates.
The 63-year-old architect says that he has designed several buildings, but is not yet satisfied with the work he has done so far. One can always do better, he says, and perhaps that is one of the reasons why he found himself inclined towards painting. While GODS was the main purpose for his visit to Mumbai, the architect also gave a live demo of his artistic skills.
Speaking on the current trends in architecture, Alsop claims he is as clueless as anybody else. However, the architect-turned-painter explains, “In 2011, there is room for many different architectural approaches, which will result in a greater diversity of experience and that may be a good thing. Maybe this is a clue to the future.”

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