a tryst with creativity...

Architect Prof Will Alsop visited New Delhi to deliver the inaugural lecture at the O P Jindal Design Talk organized by Jindal Stainless Ltd (JSL) in March. Architect Tanya Kohli spoke to him on his design philosophy and ideas...

Born on December 12, 1947, Prof Will Alsop is the founder of ZMC Alsop and the chairman of the Architecture Foundation. Internationally acclaimed as an architect, an artist and an author, his designs are distinguished by his use of bright colour and unusual forms. One of the well-known British architects today, he is responsible for several award-winning designs such as Le Grand Zen in Marseilles, the Perry Terraced in Hamburg and the Stereolining Pickhahn Library in London. He has held several academic posts and his artistic works have been showcased in various exhibitions all over Europe. He is also the author of the book 'Will Alsop's Superpods', where he innovates the notion of a 'Superpod' by envisaging a new vision of Britain's north-west cities as members of a larger singular entity.

Tanya Kohli: Your first impression of architecture and design in India today.

Will Alsop: I love India and everything about the country. I have been here several times earlier and each time I see a change in the architectural fabric. What I love most about India is its vibrant nature and the life that is existed everywhere. As I understand, architecture in India is seen more as a response to tradition. The design of spaces is very nice and especially in Delhi, this time around, I have seen the more creative nature of the city. It is clear there are parts of the city, which are chaotic, as well, but that is present in any city all over the world. Like the character of the streets, the roads and the roundabouts in central Delhi and I see a lot changing in the overall architectural character as well. The only thing I find in limited use is the use of materials and technology, which I hope, will change for the better with the development of economy. I feel India must open itself to new materials, new technologies and innovations that are being developed.

TK: Innovation and technology are key factors to a good design in today’s globalised world. Your comments...

WA: Yes. Indeed! Although they are key factors in designing a good building, one must not forget the basics essentials of a good design. The space and the region are very important when we begin to design and we must not forget that where we live is the principal basis. As I said, economies are getting stronger by the day, a balance has to be maintained between technology and tradition.

TK: Your design philosophy and in context to today’s architectural scenario...

WA: For me, the most important thing is that life needs to be reflected in architecture. My architecture has life, is vibrant and makes people a part of the built environment. I love listening to people and trying to build what they want and what they aspire.

TK: Being an artist and an architect at the same time, how do you think art contributes to the enrichment of the built environment?

WA: Ever since I was five, I wanted to be an artist. I started working with an architect when I was fifteen and while I was growing up, I also developed an interest in art. I like artists and really enjoy working with them. At times, I take weeks off and go somewhere to work with a painter and develop art and design. I think art influences architecture by way of its energy. In one way, it almost helps to invigorate the brain and generate new ideas and concepts. There are rules and regulations and art simply helps one to think beyond all the constraints.

TK: You use a lot of colour in your work – it is a part of your signature design. Is that a result of your influences from art? What does it symbolise?

WA: Yes, probably. I think colour is very essential. There is so much colour in nature. One cannot help but get influenced by the use of colour. People want colour and the use of colour. They do not realise that it is a part of our animal existence and adds so much life.

TK: You quote ‘in dreams, begin responsibilities...’ Where do you think your responsibility lies as an architect, a planner and a designer?

WA: I see that cities do not have a dream. They do not have a vision. I consider it my responsibility to help build this vision. It is important to consider the people and think about their needs, desires and concerns. For example, I am working with the people in Croydon to develop new planning concepts. This is done so that the vision for the city is developed for the people by the people themselves. It is almost like we, as architects should put noise in the system through ideas, concepts and opinions. Hence, it is very important to dream first and then take action upon it. It has to be a collective dream and even students must be involved in this process. I never give my students a design brief. I ask them to dream and design. This is how design gets developed and dreams get realised.

Tanya Kohli is a practicing architect based in London.

The Public, West Bromwich

Some of the buildings designed by architect Will Alsop.