INI Design Studio

Expertise in Delivering Design Excellence

Sustainable growth is the demanding need of the hour considering the global environmental alarms. With the growing concern for the planet and its diminishing natural resources, natural design and living solutions need to be mainstreamed in all design procedures. It is a pressing need for developing countries like India where resources are scarce and poverty levels are high. A lot of strategies are being pursued bringing sustainable change with developing unique designs. One such company helping in this change is **INI Design Studio**. It stands for ideas that are driven by a number of I's such as Inquiry, Imagination, Innovation, Inspiration, and Inclusiveness, etc.

Given below are the highlights of the interview where, **Ar. Rakhi Rupani, Director of Architecture and Interior Design** of INI Design Studio talks about the dynamics of its operations:

Describe about your company/firm/profession in detail.

INI Design Studio (INI) is a multidisciplinary award-winning design firm with a diverse portfolio offering professional consulting services in Architecture, Engineering, Planning, Urban Design, Landscape Design,

Ar. Rakhi Rupani
Director of Architecture and Interior Design

> "The designs we create today are going to stand tall for years to come"

Sustainability, Interior Design, Design-Build, Research and Art. But most importantly it stands for Integrated Ideas, referring to the integrated and collaborative nature of our practice and out-of-the-box design ideas.

Brief us about the featured person and shed some light on her professional tenure.

I have been associated with the design, construction, and real estate industry for over 25 years and have catered to a diverse portfolio of projects across the country. As an architect by profession and Director of Architecture and Interior Design at INI for the last 11 years, my focus has been to employ my creative and managerial skills to bring effective integration of all disciplines; architecture, landscape, engineering, and interior, for creation of elegant and sustainable, planning and building designs.

Client and project management, strategy planning, business development are some of the areas, that fall under my purview along with designing. I believe in devising disruptive design and master-planning strategies to create sustainable, socially, and contextually responsive designs and the built environment.

What made you venture into the field of architecture?

Unlike today's children, who predetermine their career trajectory since a young age, I never planned to be an architect, instead, Architecture happened to me.

I come from Raipur - a very small town then. Our family was into business and the higher education of girls was not given priority. But I had one goal set for me, which was to study further and build a career for myself. I was a bright student throughout my school life and had demonstrated my creative skills umpteen times in school projects. But Raipur, being a small centre, offered limited career opportunities. In fact, during that time I was not even aware that a field called architecture existed. Once, I happened to visit a family member who was appearing for the Architecture entrance exam, and I decided on taking the exam with him and secured admission to design school.

Now that I look back, I can join the dots that led me here. Due to the lack of awareness, resources, and technology at that time, I did not have a plan in place but my hunger for creating an identity allowed me to make the best of the opportunities I got. With a definite flair for design since childhood and a strong academic and creative aptitude, the architecture profession fit me perfectly.

What kind of offerings do you provide to your clients?

I bring 25+ years of design and management experience to large scale diverse projects across the country. I have worked on many sectors of our industry – Public buildings, commercial buildings, housing, hospitality, healthcare, institutional offering services in master planning, architecture, interior design, and landscape etc.

With my creative skills and experience, I offer my client a seamless transformation of their vision to reality. This includes iconic projects such as Shiv Nadar University in Greater Noida, India's largest Aquatic Gallery in Ahmedabad, Aurum Township in Chennai, and Waste to Energy Campus in Jamnagar to name a few.

What kind of challenges have you faced while entering the architecture industry?

I faced challenges on both personal and professional fronts. I got married right after completing my architecture. Balancing my responsibilities as a homemaker and working professional was the most challenging part. My spouse has a transferable job, and with every change of location, I had to look for job prospects and settle into the new office environment. But I am grateful to have a supportive family who has always pushed me to pursue my aspirations and to have found myself working in leading design firms across India, which enriched my versatility.

On the professional front, the technology and software interventions, the computer-aided design was new to me and took a while to adapt but, I am consciously making efforts to learn and update myself constantly, as, in today's technology-driven world, there is but no option to learn these skills, which facilitate a better design experience for both architects and clients.

How was your firm/business affected in these pandemic times and what were the steps taken by you to curb the damages all the while helping your clients and maintaining the safety of your employees?

In the pandemic, we are no different and have been impacted on many fronts. To name a few:

We faced individual challenges in the health and safety of staff and family members. Professionally, interdisciplinary collaboration, WFH efficiency, cash flow management were the big challenges.

Some of the measures taken from our side were limiting the financial impact on staff and employees, managing lean operations, providing additional health insurance, and Covid coverage for staff and family for a sense of safety, helping with other resources, flexible work policy including work from home.

What would you like to advice the young generation of entrepreneurs and enthusiasts who want to venture into the field of architecture?

It is pivotal for one to develop a holistic vision, which allows you to create design marvels but also design buildings and master plans that embody the society we live in. We can effectively contribute to our society and environment by comprehensively incorporating sustainable practices and socially responsive thought processes while developing our projects.

Where do you envision your firm/business to be in the long run and what are your future goals? How do you plan to embrace the changes happening in your industry?

We at INI certainly believe that servicing projects in an integrated and collaborative way is highly needed and brings a unique position for us as a design and consulting practice and has a very bright future in India and South Asia. With the opening of the Indian economy, we have new international investments, which require multidisciplinary expertise under one roof to service MNCs and complex projects. Also, with huge spending in infrastructure and urban development/smart city programs by the government, we see huge opportunities for practice like us and we are excited and look forward to being part of building a new India.

What is the current industrial scenario of the architecture industry?

With the rapid evolution of available technologies and the integration of them into the profession, the role of an architect is changing faster than it ever has before. At INI, we believe that the best way to stay relevant in our changing profession is to always be considering what the future holds and pushing ourselves and the boundaries of the profession.

In order to effectively adapt to this future, we as architects, need to shift our focus to the end-user experience, environmental concerns, resilience measures, speed to market, the efficiency of programmed space, and efficiency of construction. In addition to aesthetically beautiful designs, there will be more emphasis on how a building operates and supports the end-users in an environmentally sensitive manner.

The architecture of the building is an extension of the client's business, a tool to enhance the occupants and the members of the community. Many architectural achievements throughout history have been driven by the art form and the ego. With the modern shift towards performance and the business necessity of creating a functional building for the client's need, the architect of the future must strike a balance between form and function, art, and science, as well as technology and soul. Only time will tell just how balanced these concepts will be but, at present, we at INI are exhibiting a synergy that makes it a truly fascinating time to be an architect.

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