

Studio Lotus
GPL Design Studio



MEMORY WITH CONTEMPORARY FORM

A former co-generation plant in suburban Mumbai is reinterpreted as the gateway to a transformative urban renewal masterplan in a post-industrial landscape to offer the city a glimpse of what is possible with its industrial heritage – and, an affirmation of what has been lost thus far. A new design aesthetics emerges where forms and structures evoke elements that existed on site in the past, and yet have contemporary sensibilities and sensitivities

Text Suprio Bhattacharjee
Photos Edmund Sumner, GPL Design Studio

Photo GPL Design Studio

Left: the Boiler Room Cafe. The boiler here becomes a 'fascinating object' on the terrace of the cafe. This terrace provides a vantage point to view the changes unfolding within the transforming site



Photo Edmund Summer



Photo Edmund Summer



Photo Edmund Summer

The eastern suburb of Vikhroli in Mumbai is synonymous with the industrial complex of Godrej – a place that for many in the city brings back memories of school trips where children spent the day in glee, gawking at the making of household goods (I remember spending a delightful afternoon witnessing a plastic moulding machine that popped the innards of refrigerators – this must have been the late-1980s) by one of India's most well-known and revered brands. At other times, before the city's real estate boom, the vast industrial sheds offered place for exhibitions – I remember tagging along with my father rather excitedly to a machine tools exhibition; the only grouse at the time being the distance from the (then) city – and the eventual thrill of being caressed by the dappled light through the vast tree canopies and the expanses of greens that acted as a balm to anyone who had taken the trudge to this distant landscape.

Vikhroli now is roughly at the geographic centre of what the metropolitan system of the city and its extended suburbs is considered today – manufacturing has shifted (largely) to the outlands of Bhiwandi and other such towns, and real estate is booming. Across the city, former industrial

settings that once characterised the city's landscapes, its experience from the street, as well as the spirit of the place and its people, have disappeared over the past decade into placeless and gated symbols of an increasingly polarised city as the forces of economics unfortunately supersede the need for insightful urban renewal strategies that create a future without erasing the memory of an urban past and its built and natural heritage. One is well aware of the disaster unfolding in the city's former industrial heartland of Parel, and thus it is even more pertinent now that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

The soap manufacturing unit of Godrej has now moved out, and in its place is now envisaged a masterplan that envisions a non-gated community with an emphasis on retaining the heritage of the place – large trees especially (and thus the former road network) – that also gives the renewed mixed-use complex its name. Anchoring the new masterplan is a future public heart consisting of low-rise retail, leisure and cultural spaces, with the rehabilitated co-generation plant buildings as sentinels, and the chimney stack totemic of the places' rejuvenation. A pair of large portal-framed sheds – the



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BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Previous spread, clockwise from top left: the chimney stack between the Studio and the Boiler Room; the Chimney stack is totemic of the place's rejuvenation; the water tank and the three market silos that encapsulate the company's journey over the years, and act as exhibition spaces; two silo benches near the legacy silos overlook the water tank; the Studio building and the Boiler Room; the Chimney stack across a large open space with shaded walkways. As opposed to typical curtain wall architecture, a more nuanced and tectonic exploration of the reused site can be seen in the project. Opposite page: a set of repurposed silos, the legacy silos, encapsulate a short history of the company past and present, through installations by artists such as Ali Akbar Mehta and Vidha Saumya. This page: 3D view of the entire complex (left) and execution (below). The memory of the site blends seamlessly into the altered state of the present.



Photo Edmund Summer



Photo Edmund Summer

Above: interior space of the sales and experience centre, the Studio. Right and opposite page below left: the sun-shading devices are adorned with an appliqué of 'brise-soleils'. Their articulation and layered patterning creates a moiré effect as well as recreates the dappled shadows reminiscent of the light filtering in through the tree canopies. Opposite page, right: the memory of objects such as silos and boilers become the defining elements within the space, with a raised central volume housing a projection room shaped as one, around which a staircase winds up to the upper levels

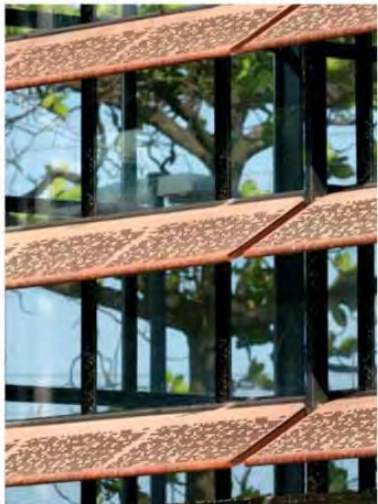


Photo Edmund Summer

narrower one on the north, the other, wider one towards the south – flank the aforementioned free-standing chimney stack across a large open space intersected with shade-giving canopied verandahs, with a third, lower and diminutive building (the former boiler house) creating an edge towards the west. This public plaza builds a sense of entry into what will be the aforementioned cultural and retail heart towards the west. Today this ensemble of buildings forms a setting for an imaginative sales and experience centre that provides prospective buyers and thus future occupants of the mixed-use complex a glimpse of the vision underlying the overall masterplan, whilst illustrating specific aspects of the site's environs and familiarising them with the site's history and its current process of transformation.

The wider south building houses sample flat constructions encased in a mock scaffold structure referencing the present construction site set against a large open volume with large communal tables and benches that becomes a place for interaction and exchange with large groups – a space aptly named the 'Workshop'. The robust nature of the former industrial building becomes evident here – stripped of any mechanical protrusions, one experiences a sense of scale and vastness not commonly found in contemporary buildings in the city. The facade is now a rhythmic progression of the stripped down reinforced concrete skeleton, infilled curtain walls and solid panels clad in weathering steel with brass-clad doors set into them towards the north-facing plaza. Towards the west, large pivoted doors afford a seamless spatial continuum during specific occasions with the 'market silos' – a set of three former storage devices repurposed as market kiosks – that in the future will continue spatially into the retail centre.

Across the plaza from the wider southern block past the totem-like chimney stack, the narrower volume of the northern shed incidentally casts a firmer presence, with



Photo GFL Design Studio

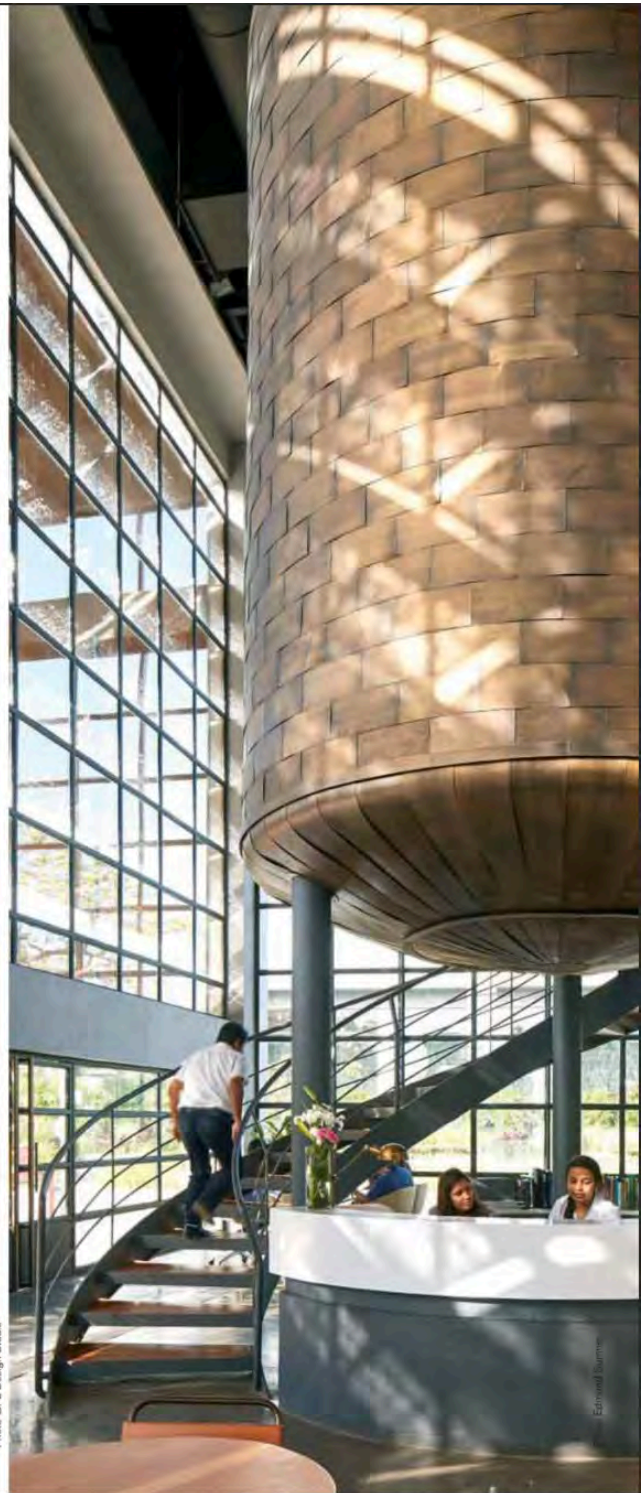
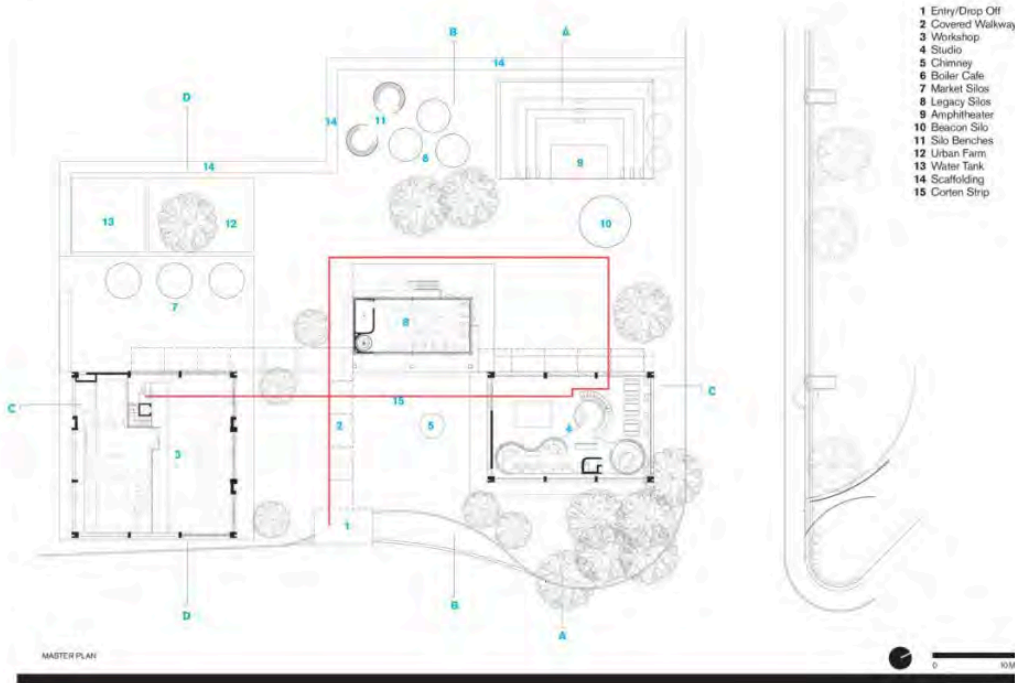
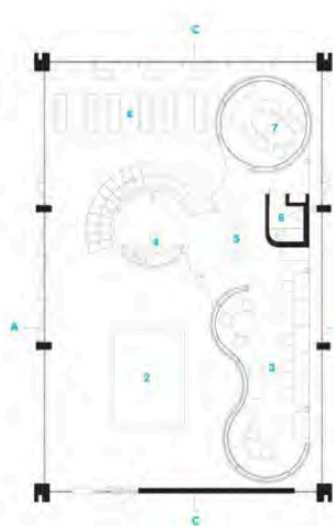


Photo Edmund Summer

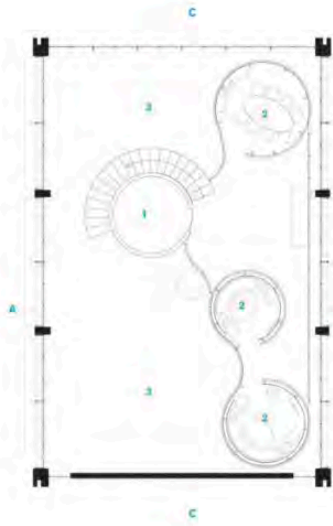


MASTER PLAN

- 1 Entry
- 2 Scale Site Model
- 3 Back Office
- 4 Reception Area
- 5 Coffee Counter
- 6 Toilet
- 7 Meeting Pod
- 8 Table



GROUND FLOOR PLAN - STUDIO



MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN - STUDIO

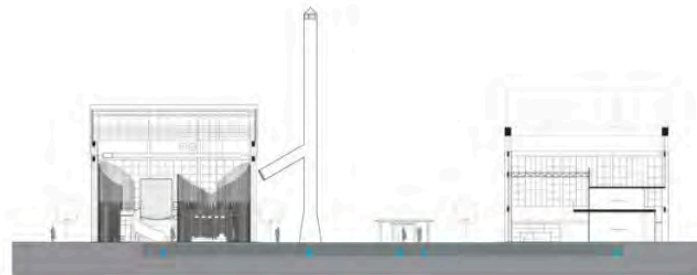
- 1 Entry/Drop Off
- 2 Covered Walkway
- 3 Workshop
- 4 Studio
- 5 Chimney
- 6 Boiler Cafe
- 7 Market Silos
- 8 Legacy Silos
- 9 Amphitheater
- 10 Beacon Silo
- 11 Silo Benches
- 12 Urban Farm
- 13 Water Tank
- 14 Scaffolding
- 15 Corten Strip

SITE SECTION AA

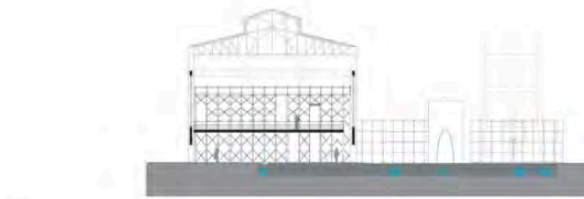


- 1 Entry
- 2 Covered Walkway
- 3 Workshop Sectional Elevation
- 4 Studio Sectional Elevation
- 5 Chimney
- 6 Boiler Room Cafe
- 7 Silo
- 8 Legacy Silos
- 9 Amphitheater
- 10 Beacon Silo
- 11 Silo Bench
- 12 Water Tank
- 13 Scaffolding

SITE SECTION BB



SITE SECTION CC



SITE SECTION DD

Location
Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
 Client
Godrej Properties Ltd
 Design Team
Studio Lotus
Amrith Arora, Ankur Choksi, Arun Kulkarni, Pankhuri Goel, Mira Asher, Sanjay Kumar GPL
 Design Studio
Anubhav Gupta, Namrata Mehra, Madhavi Sathe, Shradha Dasgupta, Karan Sharma (Legacy Silos), **Jyotika Purwr** (Urban Farms)
 Site Team
Amit Sharma, Shrish Kulkarni, Ninad Kocharekar, Santosh Gupte
 Lighting Design Consultant
Dhruv Jyoti Ghose
 LDP Landscape Consultant
Amod Shevde, AMS Consultants
 Structural Consultant
Pramod Shasrabuddha, Sterling Engg Consultancy Pvt Ltd
 MEP Consultant
Rakesh & Rahman Shaikh
ECOFIRST
 QS & Costs
Turner & Townsend
 Structural Contractor
Kalpesh Chawda, Pooja Architectural System Pvt Ltd
 Interior Contractor
Parag D Sangekar - Technic
 Construction Commencement Date
February 2013
 Completion Date
September 2015
 Area
1000 m² covered area set in 1 acre



Photo Edmund Sumner



Photo Edmund Sumner

its upright silhouette and proximity to the chimney stack. This block is more porous and transparent, baring the plaza side on its south, where a lone brass-clad door leads one past this opaque face into an interior flooded with dappled light and a large northern vitrine that extends one's vista onto the glazed facade of the adjoining office building over a landscape of water and ground hugging vegetation. This northern shed, dubbed the 'Studio' in its current avatar, is a lantern-like volume, a light collector during the day, and at night, a luminescent marker. The memory of silos become the defining element within the space, with a raised central volume housing a projection room shaped as one, around which a staircase winds up to the upper levels where open cabins within sinuous enclosures ensure enough spaces for discussions and sealing of a sales deal. Similarly one can wander into the office spaces (there are no doors, so to speak) – thus the image of a porous and transparent building volume drives home. Remnants of its previous industrial past are evident – a pair of large pipes that plunge down from the roof and exit out onto side are retained as forceful and vivid tokens. Weathering or Corten steel becomes the defining material here as well, and the expansive vitrines towards the east and the west are adorned with an appliqué of 'brise-soleils' in the same material that through their articulation and layered patterning create a moiré effect as well as recreate the dappled shadows reminiscent of the light filtering in through the tree

Above: the Studio (left) and the Boiler Room Cafe (centre) with the chimney stack in the background. Left: the chimney stack seen through the glass walkway of the Boiler Room Cafe. Opposite page: interior spaces of the Studio (above) and the Workshop (below). Following spread: the staircase leading to the upper levels, wrapped around a silo-shaped projection room

canopies. Here too, the western aspect has large pivoted doors that opens up into the landscape of what will become the social and cultural heart of the future setting – a set of repurposed silos encapsulate a short history of the company past and present (through installations by artists Ali Akbar Mehta and Vidha Saumya), with the landscape stretching beyond into what will be a future museum and urban forest-like landscape. Weathering steel takes to the ground as a haptic narrative with bands of the material winding their way through the hardscape of the plaza – weaving through the overlay of steel pergolas that form shaded verandahs. The third building of the boiler house towards the west of the plaza becomes a cafe – its industrial past proudly celebrated in its crown and its innards – the boiler at the crown becoming a 'fascinating object' in what will be a future terrace to be used by the cafe – while also offering a vantage to view the changes unfolding within the transforming site. Throughout the site industrial remnants are celebrated, and new additions finished in weathering steel demonstrate the sense of decay and rejuvenation. The landscape plays an important role here, becoming an important binder between what are essentially fragmented volumes – and evoking the future landscaped culture axis.

As a project within a developer setting, one can see this as a successful collaboration between Architect and Client – and as such becomes a poignant one when one considers an alternative would-have-been future of a post-industrial Bombay that one lost to contemporary Mumbai. This project as such marks a significant addition to the few successful examples of adaptive re-use and urban rejuvenation that one finds within the city – especially where the memory of the site blends seamlessly into the altered state of the present. What is crucial to understand and look forward to though, is how this exemplary set of rehabilitated buildings leads an after-life once their individual functions become redundant. Perhaps the north volume will anchor one end of the cultural axis – one hopes as a new home for the Godrej Culture Lab – with the planned museum on the other – thus becoming a focus of cultural activities and events not only for the future mixed-use complex, but for that part of the city as well – that would sit well within the larger agenda of making this a non-gated entity. The southern volume will probably be absorbed as the foreground and entrance to a future hotel block. One hopes that there will be more trees in the sun-burnt plaza and the adjoining landscapes as well that will over time stand in equal stead with the majestic volumes of the sheds. Whatever the transformations, one hopes that the buildings retain their original purpose – of becoming emblems of a social and cultural heart in a still evolving urban landscape, thus metaphorically powering a vision based on a transformative approach to how one deals with post-industrial sites, as well as becoming a much needed future social and cultural engine for the urban region. @

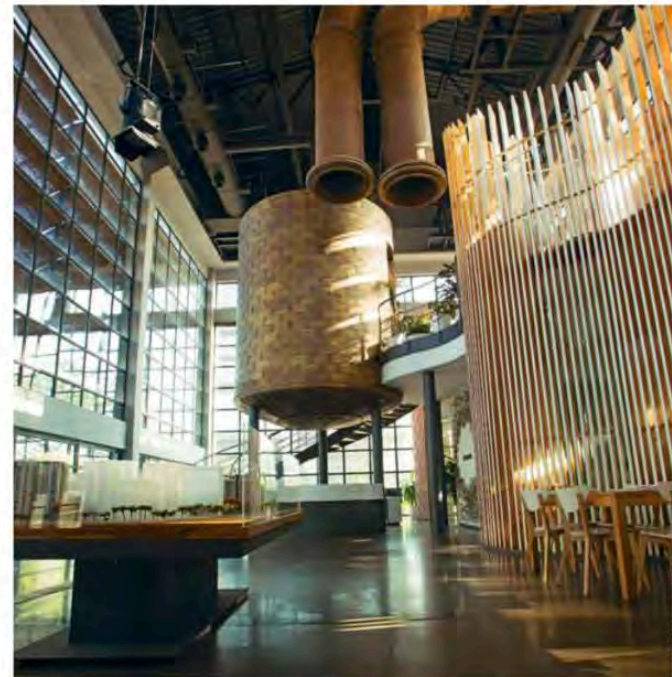


Photo GPT Design Studio

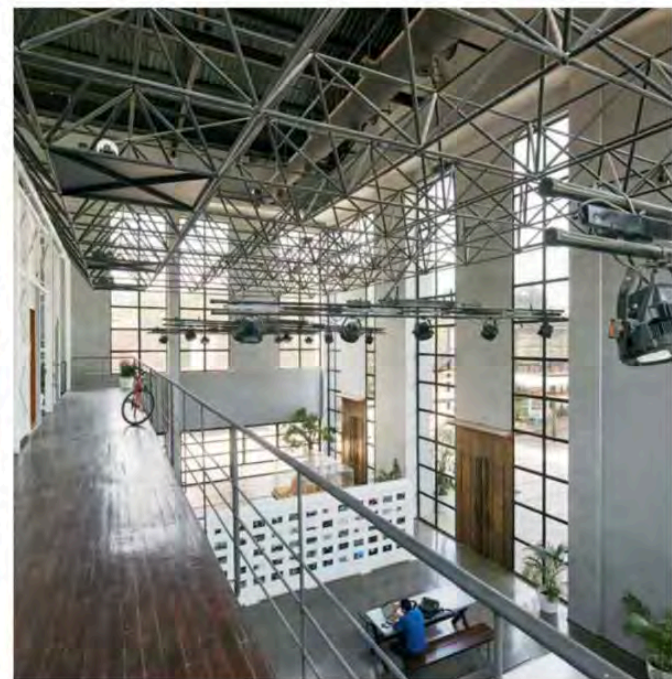


Photo Edmund Sumner

