Form and Function

Designing duo Anand and Ashish Kulkarni's Designex provides architectural and interior design solutions for multiple sectors. Here, the father and son dissect the design process that helped them create a comfortable and functional four-bedroom home—one that explores the synthesis between architecture and interiors.

Photo Courtesy: Anand Kulkarni & Ashish Kulkarni

It was in 1976 that Anand Kulkarni started his firm, Anand Kulkarni & Associates, in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. He began with small residential projects and moved on to large projects such as townships, industrial and residential structures, etc., with two other partnerships in Kolhapur and Sangli. While working as a panel architect for Karad Municipal Council and Gadhinglaj Municipal Council, he completed large government proposals like Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT) for Imphal, Sangola, Kurundwad, Kagal, Gadhinglaj, Karad, Pandharpur, Sangli, Kolhapur and Sawantwadi.

Twenty years later, in 1996, he decided to focus only on his own work. His son, Ashish, after receiving his bachelor's degree from SPSMBH's College of Architecture, Kolhapur, in 2005, worked with his father for a year, and then headed for Dubai to gain international exposure. Over there, he worked for 2 years with Karani Interiors and Dubai Consultants— one year with each of them. Further, he went on to complete his Master of Advanced Architecture at Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC), Barcelona. In 2010, the father and son decided that the time had come for a new beginning. And Designex was born!

Designex provides design solutions in architecture and interior design, and deals in multiple sectors such as residential, commercial, institutional, hospitality, health, sports, townships, religious, industrial, etc. "Our firm is dedicated to providing clients the best of functionality and aesthetics. Our vision is to create sustainable built environments, to create iconic buildings that stand out in their simplicity, functionality and aesthetic appeal," Anand says. His son agrees, stating that though Designex may be a new star in the architectural universe, the "goodwill and experience" of his father have "laid a strong foundation".

The duo speaks about a recent project, a four-bedroom house designed for a family of five in Kolhapur. The wedge-shaped plot
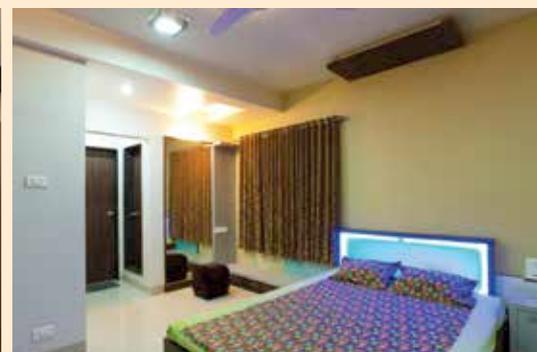
was spread over 3,600 sq. ft., faced the south-east, and was narrow towards the front. The requirements were clear: 4 bedrooms, bathrooms, family hall, living room, dining area, kitchen, terraces and basement.

The house was being designed for a family head who was in the business of decorating. So the basic need was large volumes and a dramatic ambience to the spaces. The client was also keen that the oldest member of the family should feel a part of the family, rather than having been relegated to a room. This unusual request set the designers thinking, and the result was the double-height living room and the overlooking gallery from the family room—something that allows a natural interaction between the two storeys.

"This is a deceptively simple house and we wanted to explore the synthesis between the architecture and the interiors," Anand says.

But another challenge was awaiting them. The client, with a village background, was against spending money where it wasn't necessary. So the designers had to work within a tight budget, ensuring that the home they designed was the best they could for the client.

The area and shape of the plot made converting the client's dream into reality very tough. "The site influenced the planning approach. It has a contour slope of nearly 1.2m above the road, so we placed the bedrooms on the rear side at a level higher than the common areas to give enough headroom and use the slope as a basement for common functions," Ashish says.

To create a home that weds comfort and function, natural light was tapped. It flows in through the large windows in all rooms and from the skylight in the living area. In the evening, mono-point light fixtures provide multidirectional sources of illumination. Ample cross ventilation, easy access to terraces and the views of the greenery outside ensure that the residents feel close to nature. As far as colours, materials and textures go, the father and son decided to keep the design as simple as possible and so went for a limited palette. Initially,

anand & ashish kulkarni

the plan was to clad external walls with natural stones, but, keeping the budget in mind, Shahabad and stone-finish tiles were used.

Beyond the spacious family hall on upper floor is a terrace with rustic flooring. A sliding folding glass door opens up to connect the two spaces, while ivory vitrified flooring helps the space to open out. This room has a home theatre and comfortable floor seating with a raised platform suitable for informal get-togethers. The flight of steps continues to the level above, leading to a large open terrace—ideal for relaxing or having a party. This house is well protected with security systems; and multi-function detectors are installed on windows and skylights.

"For living room, dining room, staircase and kitchen, we have used Italian marble—to give them a lavish touch and to make the areas more inviting. The family-hall and all the bedrooms have ivory vitrified tiles to seemingly exaggerate the volume of the room," says Ashish. The courtyard in the living room is clad with locally available Shahabad stone. Their patterns lend a trendy look. At the living room level, a water body with three water umbrellas, provides a peaceful ambience. The image of

Lord Panduranga etched on glass, with a backlight, lends a tranquil feeling at all times of the day.

The client also had another request: He wanted the home to be as eco-friendly as possible.

"We started by ensuring that natural daylight was tapped to the maximum so that the use of electricity could be reduced. We have a courtyard with a skylight (covered with toughened glass for security) and large windows. The double height and the courtyard location ensure that there's ample light in all rooms," Ashish says.

Anand says that they opted for LED lights, which consume much lesser energy than conventional lighting

systems. "We also installed a solar water heating system, but with a great deal of thought. We used two solar systems of 100 litres instead of installing one system of 200 litres. The reason was that usually if hot water is removed from the tank, more water is let in to maintain the level, which leads to a drop in temperature. With two tanks, the scenario can be made different: When water is used from tank 2 (which has outlets in bathrooms), then to maintain the water level, hot water is drawn from tank 1. Normal water then flows into tank 1. This saves energy loss and also saves the amount of water generally stagnant in pipelines," he says.

Water harvesting was also adopted after discussions with the client. Rain water from all roofs runs through a system of channels and flows into the underground water tank.

"By integrating the design elements, we have brought a sense of cohesiveness to the spaces. The eco-friendly aspects work as the icing on the cake," Anand says.

The clients are extremely happy with the open and clutter-free spaces, which merge to create a comfortable and functional home.