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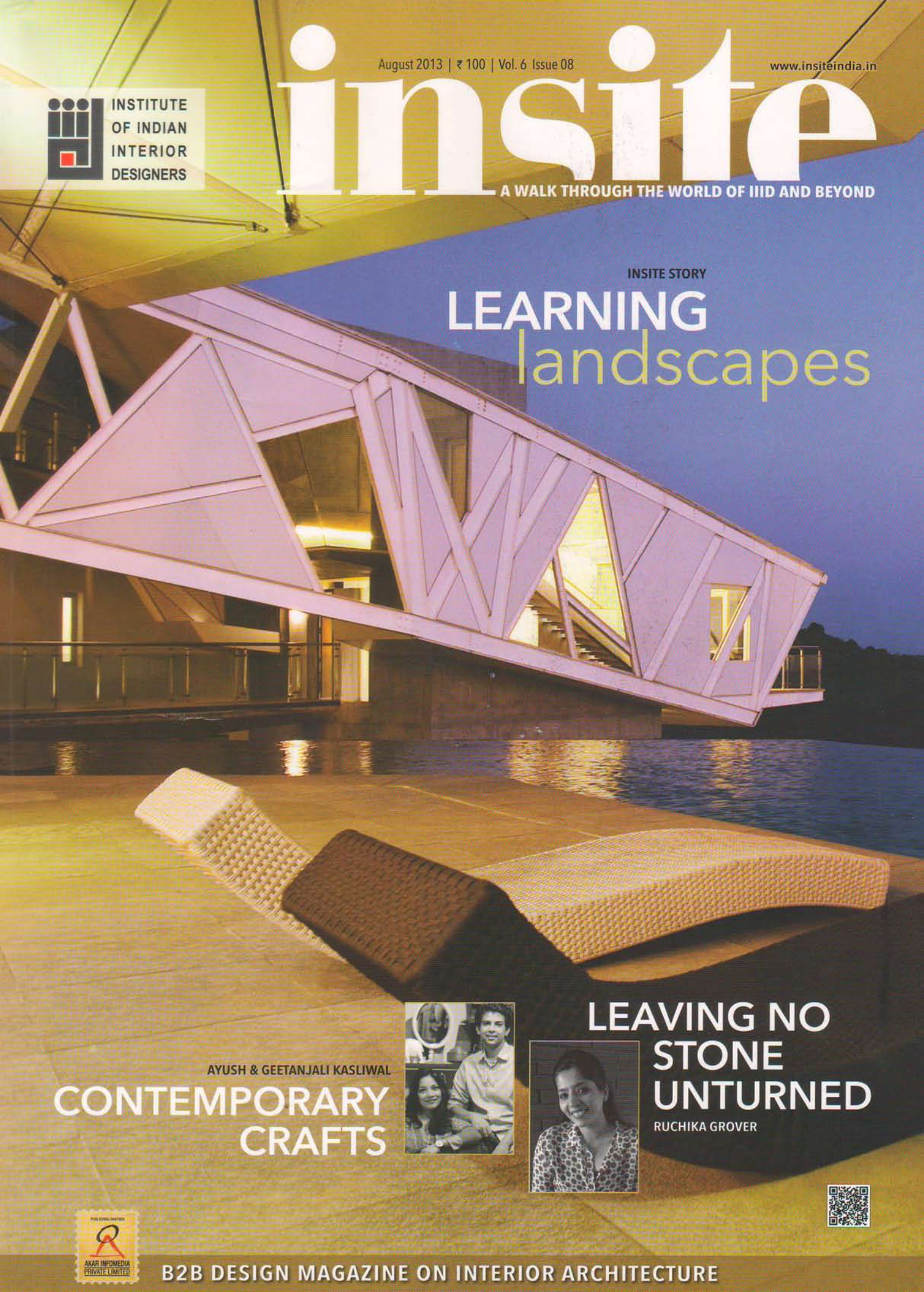
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A WALK THROUGH THE WORLD OF IIID AND BEYOND

INSITE STORY

## LEARNING landscapes



AYUSH & GEETANJALI KASLIWAL

### CONTEMPORARY CRAFTS



### LEAVING NO STONE UNTURNED

RUCHIKA GROVER



B2B DESIGN MAGAZINE ON INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

# leaving **N** **STONE** unturned

*The use of stone as a building material spans centuries. But Ruchika Grover, of Odyssey, has given this building material a contemporary spin and is committed to fully realize its design potential.*



TEXT: Swati Nitin Gupta | PHOTOS COURTESY: Odyssey



*Odyssey (noun): An extended adventurous voyage or trip; an intellectual or spiritual quest.*

Ruchika Grover certainly set out on the voyage of a lifetime when she got involved with stone. An alumnus of the Sri Ram College of Commerce, Grover today heads business development initiatives at Odyssey, a firm that specializes in stone architecture and design.

A brand of Natco Exports Pvt. Ltd., Odyssey offers myriad stone applications for interior and exterior design and is well known for its creative in-house design team and workforce of skilled masons. The firm's range of services includes sculptures, lattice, relief work, bathroom designs (including tubs and basins), building frontages and facades, hardscapes, planters, water features, mosaics, inlays, masonry, furniture and accessories.

Grover believes that stone and stone design are in her blood. She grew up watching her father deal in stones for his export company Natco. "My father was exporting random slabs and tiles of Indian marble, granite, slate and sandstone to numerous countries including Hong Kong, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, USA and Indonesia. Often, he took me along as well and that's how I learnt about stones and their characteristics," she says.

Soon, Grover was experimenting with stones and realised that there was a huge market for what she was capable of delivering. The time was ripe to set up her own venture, but Grover was sure about one thing. "I wasn't ready to do run-of-the-mill stuff. I wanted something different, and wanted to present stone differently," she says.

The journey wasn't easy. "For first four years, we (me and my sister who partners me in the firm) took customised work and although it was kind of repetitive, I feel that going through that journey was very important. It was those four years that helped us in becoming what we are today," she reminisces.

In the last five years, Odyssey has collaborated with government organisations, builders and architects, Indian as well as international, on several prestigious projects. The firm's body of work includes hardscape projects for Hyatt Regency, Pune; Ritz Carlton, Bangalore; Indira Gandhi International Airport, Terminal 3, New Delhi; Kempinski, New Delhi; and a 32-foot-high pylon for a bio-diversity park in Hyderabad.

Many mistakes occurred – some of them expensive – but Grover took them in her stride, looking at them as learning lessons.

Keen to make Odyssey "different", the firm worked on and launched CROSTA, its first in-house collection of facade and vertical surfaces. "I wanted complete control on the designing process and set up a factory just behind the head office from where Odyssey started its own

stone-designing unit," she recalls.

CROSTA is designed using Indian sandstone and granite and manufactured with the help of latest CNC milling and water-jet techniques. "The collection has 10 designs and each is unique in its own way. We have been able to bring cutting-edge digital design and stone fabrication technology to the Indian market," she says.

Grover has a preference for Indian stones and would rather choose them over Italian marbles or granites, but admits that explaining this to clients is tough at times. "It does get a little difficult to explain that Indian stone is good enough and will be cost-effective too, as compared to imported stones," she says.

After CROSTA, Odyssey launched its second in-house collection – Kinetic. Grover says the collection has its roots in the Greek word kinesis, meaning motion. "Through the Kinetic Collection, we explore 'energy in motion'. Each pattern in the collection appears to be moving and provides the surface with a three-dimensional effect. The play of shadows on stone, coupled with an appearance of movement, adds life to the expression of natural stone and creates one-of-a-kind surfaces. Each panel of this collection can be adjusted in proportions, to create a stunning facade, a mural or a feature wall," Grover says.

From the humble beginnings of restoration services and made-to-order products in gemstones and solid stone to an increasingly diversified portfolio, Odyssey has come a long way. "We are proud that today Odyssey's offerings are unique, and most of the time, custom-made to suit a client's needs and budget," Grover says.

INSITE takes a look at some of Odyssey's recent projects:

#### **Bio-diversity Park, Hyderabad:**

Odyssey's first project was a bio-diversity park in Hyderabad. "The majestic monument for the bio-diversity park, built on the Gachibowli-Mehdipatnam

*Our design style [is] minimalist and contemporary; we have always tried to ensure that our designs are simple and uncluttered*



Road, has become a landmark in Hyderabad as an artistic expression of the great mystery of life on earth and its creation. Architecturally, it depicts solid, liquid and gaseous forms," Grover says of her first project.

*[Our] offerings are unique and most of the time custom-made to suit a client's needs and budget*

Odyssey collaborated on this prestigious project with well-known Hyderabad-based architecture firm, Genesis Planners Private Limited. "The project involved procuring, sawing, processing and polishing 165 tonnes of stone at our production facilities in Udaipur and Noida, and then shipping it for installation to Hyderabad," she says.

The main attraction of the park is a 32-foot high elliptical bio-diversity pylon, depicting the evolution of species – starting from an atom, evolving to molecules, protons, various life forms



and – ultimately – a human being. "The base of the Pylon is composed of concentric circles representing the five elements – Earth, Air, Water, Fire and Aether," she says. Black and red granite, Jaisalmer yellow stone and Etah gold stone were used for this project.

**Hotel Kempinski, New Delhi:** The scope included 22 water bodies, ranging from reflective and overflow to cascades (clad with 50 mm and 100 mm thick curved coping in various profiles) and two swimming pools across the two towers of the hotel. Odyssey also did the facade for the towers by cladding them with a combination of Irish brown, Bianco Marfil and Gwalior white in 30 mm thick stone. A total of 105 sculptures were supplied, including 39 lotus fire bowls carved from solid black granite blocks and polished by hand. Each fire bowl weighed between 400-750 kgs. The artwork also included stackable block sculptures made of a combination of black granite and semi-precious stones including African carnelian, grey agate, red onyx, Indian agate and lapis lazuli. The swimming pools have solid skeletal fish sculptures, carved from solid dark grey granite and overlaid with lapis lazuli, which appear to be floating on water.

**Hyatt Regency, Pune:** Principal architects Bilkey Linas Design and landscape architect Joel Burega envisioned a tropical feel for the external area of this hotel. About 5,000 sq. m. of Jaisalmer flower limestone in an antique finish has been dry clad on these twin towers. Black granite and Jaisalmer cobble stones cover the driveway. At the centre is a raised reflective pool where water cascades down from grooved tropical green granite slabs. The entrance to the property is covered with antique finish forest brown. The artwork at this site includes absolute black granite arches, tropical green granite sculptures, hand-carved white marble lotus, water-jet-cut black galaxy lattice and black galaxy and brass lanterns.

**Guest House, Hyderabad:** All the floors of this guesthouse overlooking the Hussain Sagar Lake are laid with water-jet-cut mosaic in Crema Marfil and Dark Emperador. The hand-carved lotus mural at the entrance overlooks a lotus pond. The powder room has a solid stone sink with an ammonite carved out by hand, flanked by pietra dura mosaic on the floor and the wall. The master bathroom is clad with polished silver grey slate, highlighting the variation in the veins with inserts of mother-of-pearl roses inlaid in the slate.

**Water Body:** Grover's latest project is a water body – a swimming pool installation where the idea was to replace the ordinary plastic drain and replace it with something more aesthetically appealing. "Usually we see an ordinary plastic drain that's used to drain water. We decided to merge the two requirements to create a stunning yet subtle pool grating," Grover says. The grating, carved from 50mm-thick slabs of Nero Marquina marble, gives a ripple-like effect at the edge of the pool. The grating is cut with water-jet in a spiral form at regular intervals to ensure hassle-free maintenance. The result is an art form at the edge of the pool, one that adds a whole new dimension to the pool.

Apart from the many projects on hand, Odyssey is also involved in

experimenting with landscape accessories, stone furniture and bathroom equipment. As a parting shot, Grover says: "As long as there is a demand for stone we will keep on experimenting and create new designs." ●



**1.** At the bio-diversity park in Hyderabad, the main attraction is a 32-feet high elliptical pylon depicting the evolution of species

**2.** Odyssey has designed as many as 22 water bodies such as this one at Kempinski Hotel, New Delhi

**3.** The artwork at Hyatt Regency, Pune, includes green granite sculptures and black granite arches

**4.** Ruchika Grover's recent project involved replacing the ordinary plastic drain in swimming pools with an aesthetically appealing element

