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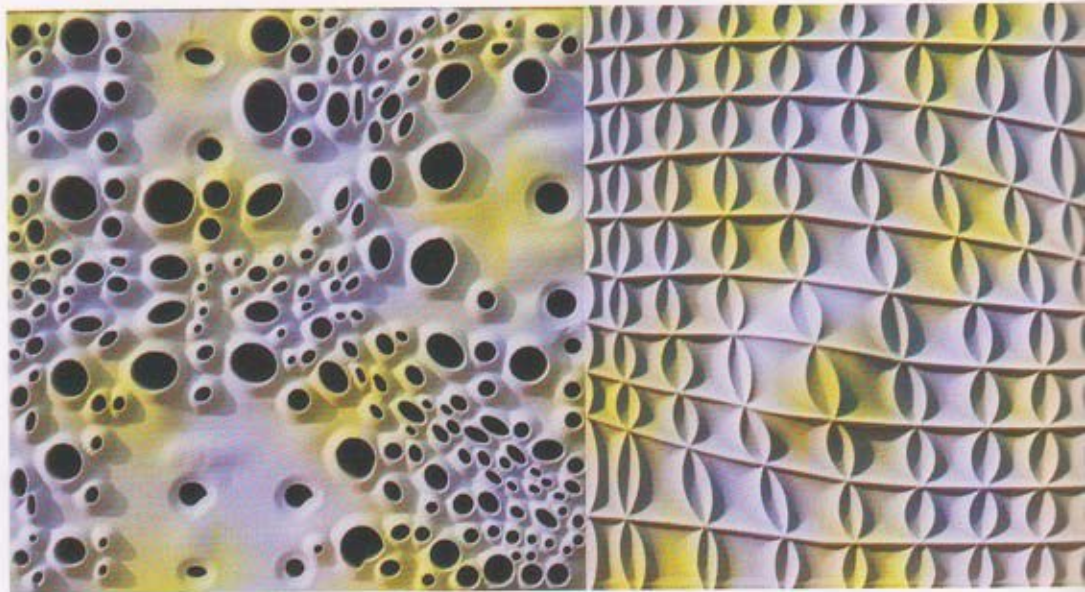


For Ruchika Grover, Director, Business and Design Development, Odyssey: Stone Architecture and Design, the journey so far has been quite memorable!

How did you get interested in design?

RG: Export of granite/marble blocks was a family business and I had traveled extensively with my father to many stone quarries and processing units all over the world. After completing my MSc in Entrepreneurship from the University of Nottingham in England, I explored several options that were available as a value addition to stone in India. In 2006 we set up Odyssey: Stone Architecture and Design in New Delhi, as a stone value addition unit to the parent company, NATCO Exports. Our vision was to be able to deliver something innovative to the stone industry, and maximize the utility of stone beyond its conventional applications.

My sister, Shruti, joined me soon after and together we experimented in carving sculptures, creating murals and exploring different surfaces. Of course, there were challenges and we even failed miserably a couple of times, but eventually, we were lucky enough to bag a few large projects such as the Hyatt Regency in Pune and the Ritz Carlton in Bangalore. Shruti left the company last year for her further studies and is now pursuing a Masters in Innovation, Design and Engineering at the Royal College of Arts, London.



How has the journey been so far?

RG: The name is symbolic of the journey we have embarked upon. Five years back, we could never have imagined doing what we are doing today, but we wanted to create stuff which excites us, and people around us, and inspires us to continue on this journey.

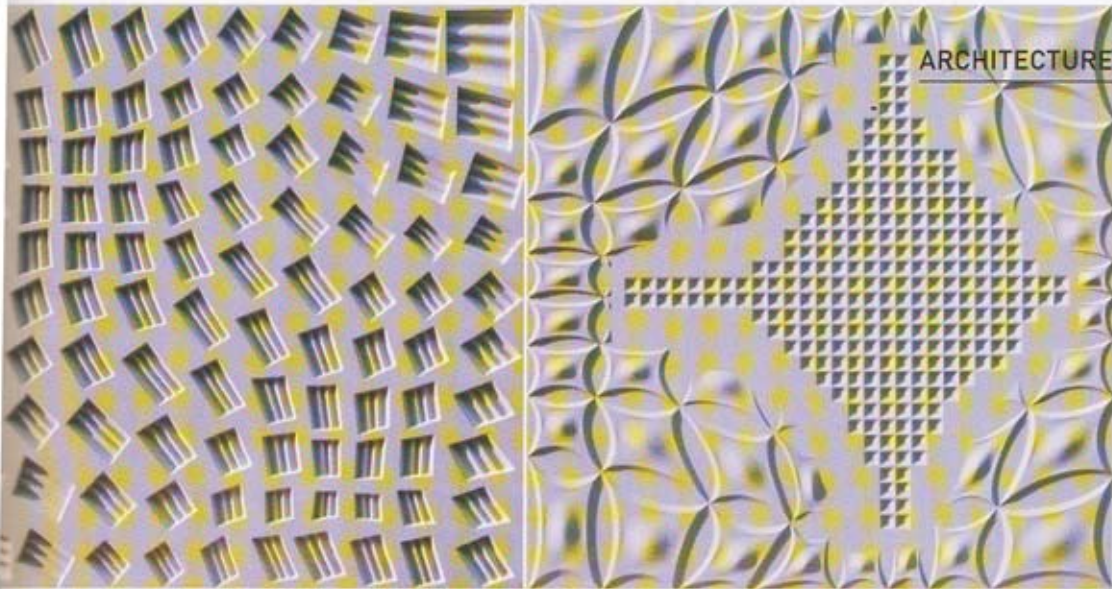
It has been very interesting so far, with many ups and downs, but we have evolved with innovation. My father's experience of 20 years in the stone industry has helped Odyssey emerge as a stone specialist and as the ideal partner for many large residential, hospitality and commercial projects developed in collaboration with architects and designers from all over the world.

Our team is constantly trying out new materials, techniques and their application. This R&D over the last six years has helped us explore the versatility of stone and enabled us to offer innovative solutions in stone for external and internal application. We have been able to develop our own collections of vertical and breathing surfaces (jaalis) for projects. These

are first-of-their-kind stone cladding solutions, easily accessible to the retail customer and available in modular formats.

Tell us more about what you do at Odyssey.

RG: Typically, people think of stone work as only being in the form of traditional patterns and floral inlays. Odyssey embraces the potential of natural stone as an architectural and design element and innovates on its application and versatility as a material. The audience is not informed about the adaptability of stone, and that is what we want to change. Through our collections, we want to bring stone as a versatile, contemporary material to everyone, including designers and architects. Bringing the tactility of stone as a material together with innovation in design, Odyssey provides unique solutions for facades, bathrooms, walls and floors, hardscape and artwork to complement both residential and commercial spaces. We offer services such as exterior and interior stone flooring installation, exterior dry cladding and stone restoration services, and made-to-order products



in gemstones and solid stone. We have a production facility in NOIDA, which is equipped with state-of-the-art machinery, including 3-axis and 5-axis interpolated CNC, water jet machines, operated by skilled artisans and an enthusiastic design and development team.

How do you approach a project?

RG: With hundreds of varieties of stone available in India and abroad to work with, every day is an experiment at our production facility. We believe in constant Research & Development, have invested in the latest technologies and consistently train our artisans/craftsmen to enable us to become leaders in this domain. We recognize the beauty and talent in Indian craftsmanship that continues to inspire us and motivates us to dream of the endless possibilities, when combined with cutting-edge technologies. We work with architects, interior designers and landscape consultants to understand their design intent and then propose appropriate solutions to the client in collaboration with the designer. Our collections, which have been designed in-house, are meant to

reach out to larger audiences. We guide the customer in choosing the right material, texture and applications, and depending on the clients' requirements and price points, we use a combination of machines and handcrafting to create customized work. The intent is always to inspire and not to impress.

What are the expectations from your team?

RG: Each project is conceived with an idea, which is then further developed and actualized. We want our work to not get dated, and hence, consistently strive for novel ways of working with stone. We strive towards designing the best for each and every project. For us, it is crucial to not let the process be repetitive, and hence, we are constantly working on something new.

How challenging is it to deal with stone?

RG: With time, the attitude towards stone has changed and people ask for more than just Italian marble. Slowly and steadily, people are getting informed about Indian stones as well. India has such abundant reserves of stone, but somehow Indian material



Bio Diversity Park, Hyderabad

is not given its due credit. We have introduced a lot of Indian stones and we attempt to reinvent traditional stonework. The challenges are multi-fold; there is exiting variation in the stone lots, the way stone responds to techniques, etc. A lot of decisions need to be made on the factory floor based on how the stone is responding to the design techniques.

What role does innovation play in Stone Architecture?

RG: It is imperative for us to innovate and not become redundant and repetitive. The model we are steering towards amalgamates both design and business. Besides the traditional hospitality and residential projects that we undertake, we have launched a new range called 'Collections' which have been designed and developed in-house. The intent is to take innovation in stone design to the next level, and optimize the versatility of stone as a material. The collections are designed keeping in mind natural stone, its versatility and technique, and elements of design,

resulting in a dynamic and pioneering approach to the utility of stone.

Tell us more about the Collections.

RG: Some of the Collections we are working on include wall/floor surfaces and sculptures using light, water and stone together to create art for internal and external spaces, gemstone chandeliers, etc. These are for the retail clientele and can be customized for specific applications.

For example, Crosta (Italian, derived from Latin 'Crusta', meaning crust) is designed keeping in mind the dynamic play of shadows on stone and helps in bringing out the beauty of the stone dimensionality. It primarily uses Indian sandstone and granite, and is manufactured with the help of CNC milling and water-jet techniques.

The Kinetic Collection is very exciting for architects/interior designers and even some 'hands-on' customers as it offers them the opportunity to truly customize the vertical surfaces of their



project. Developed with the help of generative and parametric software, each wall is truly unique and appears to be moving. It was launched at the beginning of this year and has already received a fabulous response.

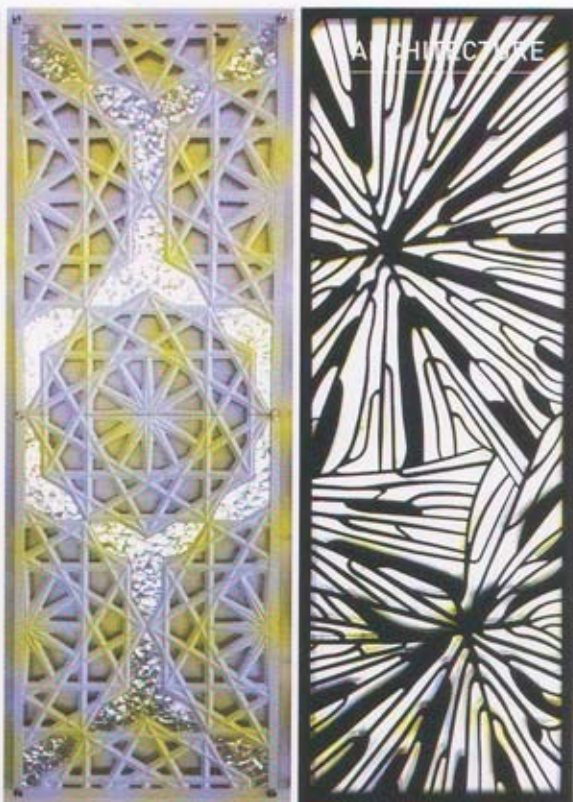
Breathing Surfaces is a step away from the typical, commonly-used *jaalis*. Inspired by designs from nature - Parametric Design, Nervous System of Leaves, Natural Fossils, and Architectural Forms - these panels can be modified with multiple options of inlay/overlay with shellstone/ gemstones and semi-precious metals. These surfaces can be used as architectural partitions, façade coverings, and exterior/ interior screens, and can be customized to suit specific requirements.

What has been your most memorable project?

RG: Our most memorable project would be the Bio Diversity Park Pylon in Hyderabad. We completed this project in just 40 days - from manufacturing in New Delhi to installation in Hyderabad. We processed over 160 tons of stone in 25 days and at one point our team did not sleep for four nights in a row!

What projects are you currently working on?

RG: We are currently working on Kempinski, Shahdra (New Delhi) and Ritz Carlton, Bangalore. We have launched



Breathing Surfaces Collection (L-R)

1. CERCO with Black MOP inlay
2. DAIRAA with White MOP inlay
3. XYLEM

a collection of dimensional stone surfaces and lattice panels for the retail clientele and are experimenting with the designs of many more Collections. We have partnered with other companies in South India, Singapore, Australia and Perth for our retail collections and projects. With various other collections in the pipeline, like water cascades and floor fountains, planters, and gemstone chandeliers, we would like to be reckoned as an Indian brand when it comes to stone architecture and design.

How do you see this Odyssey continuing?

RG: Odyssey has set its sights on expanding to newer markets, both within India and internationally, and is striving consistently in this direction. ■