

# Hotel TALK

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## Redefining tradition

### Context-centred hospitality

Designers play a vital role in creating context-centred and environmentally sensitive spaces, fostering holistic growth in the hospitality sector.

WORDS BY MITU MATHUR

Infrastructure augmentation in India has unlocked hidden locations, boosted tourism and created a demand for unique hospitality avenues. This presents opportunities for Indian communities to tap into this expanding realm. However, if not managed properly, this could disrupt the authenticity of a region. Today, visitors seek unique experiences and luxury tourism is redefined by responsive and responsible design, focusing on cultural immersion while respecting ecology.

#### Designing experiences

The development strategy of hotels or recreational enclaves must consider the 3Cs—Context, Culture, and Climate. Designers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between existing and proposed spaces, economic

and ecological, and surreal and tangible. They embrace the concept of 'Heterotopias of Change', which suggests creating transformative spaces and environments that offer an alternative experience. There is a shift from traditional design, which focusses on aesthetics, functionality, and comfort, to incorporating a deeper consideration of the impact on individuals, communities, and ecology.

#### Context-centred approaches

For us, an interesting opportunity presented itself with a unique contoured site at Rishikesh for a resort, offering a pristine visual connection to the river. Infusing the location's spiritual centrality, we used Vastu as a guiding principle to design the spaces. The Spiritual Heterotopia of this resort will offer a series of terraces, highlighting activities for the congregation, arrival, Yoga, Ganga Aarti, celebration and relaxation, creating a place that encourages diversity and alternative perspectives.



Contextual heterotopia offers alternative spaces that develop unique characteristics by integrating design elements and local practices. In our project, JW Marriott Resort & Spa Shimla, we used the challenging site as an opportunity to integrate some critical traditional construction details into the concept design by Principal Designer, Smallwood Architects, ensuring a seamless methodology, minimising disruption of natural ground and maximising longevity of the built structures. Without compromising on the vision of the designer, strategies that respect the landform and existing water channels are incorporated to help the project become a sustainable model.

#### Green wave in hospitality design

The Northeast is gaining momentum in sustainable tourism, focusing on fragile ecosystems and environmental conservation. This development is expected to involve local communities, preserve traditions, and promote economic empowerment. At GPM, we believe in going Global, promoting local as the new

global. Island Heterotopia is another example of sustainable tourism, avoiding westward models that disrupt marine ecology. Lakshadweep, an island tourism destination, must adopt a sensitive approach, combining architectural practices and technological advancements to harmoniously balance progress and conservation, setting a precedent for responsible tourism.

#### Capacity building

Capacity building is crucial for creating environmentally responsible and socially beneficial spaces in the hospitality industry. It involves equipping architects, designers, and

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stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to integrate indigenous elements into projects. Collaborative work on projects is essential for growth and change. Architects can evoke compelling narratives and translate them into memorable experiences for visitors.

At the heart of it, the key is to know that built form is constantly in dialogue with the outside world, enabling heterotopias of change in hospitality design, where spaces evolve and adapt to foster the impactful and transformative 3Es—Ecology, Economy and Equity!

#### About the author

Mitu Mathur is an award-winning architect and urban designer with an aptitude for crafting hospitality, public, institutional, housing and master planning projects. She holds the position of Director at GPM Architects and Planners. <https://gpmindia.com/>

(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same)

