

# OPEN ACRES

THE SPIRIT OF REALTY



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**MODERN  
MINDS:  
INSIGHTS  
FROM REAL  
ESTATE  
EXPERTS**



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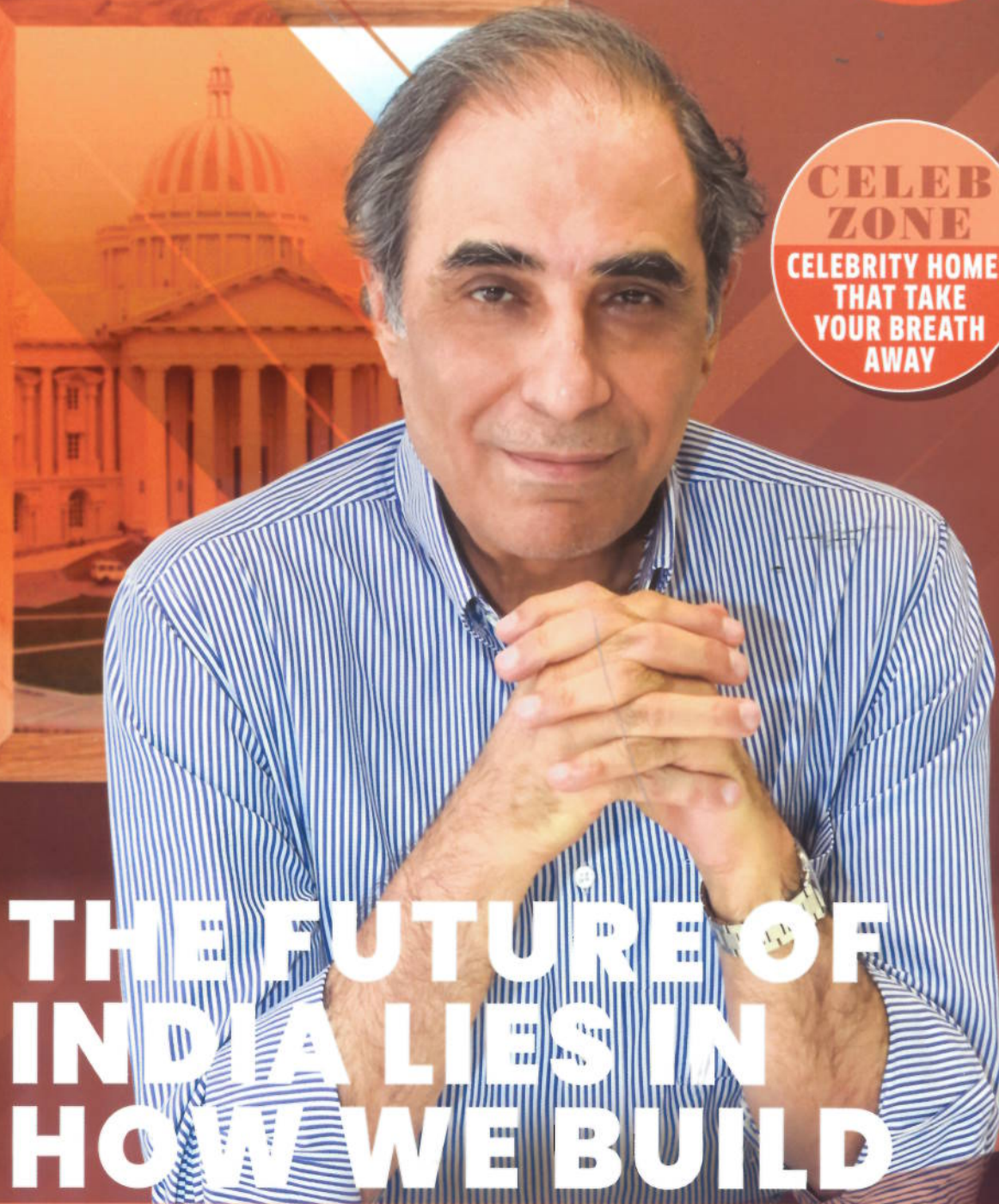


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**CELEB  
ZONE**  
**CELEBRITY HOMES  
THAT TAKE  
YOUR BREATH  
AWAY**



**THE FUTURE OF  
INDIA LIES IN  
HOW WE BUILD**

**HAFEEZ CONTRACTOR**

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INTERVIEW



**THINK  
SUSTAINABLE  
NOW, ELSE  
INVENT A LAND  
PRODUCING  
MACHINE!**

THE REALTY LANDSCAPE OF METROPOLITAN INDIA BEARS THE UNMISTAKABLE IMPRINT OF **HAFEEZ CONTRACTOR**, GIVEN THE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT HE HAS MADE TO THE COUNTRY'S SKYLINE. SWANKY MALLS, HIGH-TECH OFFICES, PALATIAL BUILDINGS, AND EVEN FUTURISTIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WOULD SEEM INCOMPLETE HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE SIGNATURE STYLE OF THIS ARCHITECT. RIGHTFULLY HAILED BY NEW YORK TIMES AS INDIA'S 'STARCHITECT', THE 72-YEAR-OLD PADMA AWARDEE HELMS INDIA'S LARGEST ARCHITECTURAL FIRM WITH ITS 7.2 BILLION SQUARE FEET OF PROJECTS SPREAD ACROSS FIVE COUNTRIES AND OVER 2,500 CLIENTS. IN A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH **OPEN ACRES**, CONTRACTOR POURS HIS HEART OUT ABOUT HIS CRAFT AND THE NEED FOR REAL ESTATE SECTOR TO ADOPT TECHNOLOGY. URBAN PLANNERS CAN ALSO DO WELL TO PAY HEED TO THE SECRET MANTRA FROM OVER FOUR DECADES OF HIS EXPERIENCE WITH CITYSCAPE PLANNING. EXCERPTS:

**Q** Most of your projects have been hailed as architectural marvels – like the **DY Patil Stadium, The Imperial building, Mahindra World School, the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, Sarala Birla Academy, Ideal Topsia in Kolkata, or the Hiranandani project in Powai, Mumbai. How difficult was it in your initial days to leave a signature impact?**

**A** During the initial days of my life, I was looked down by the architect community. I was known as a builder's architect which was not considered to be good thing in those days. But I did an honest job as an architect working for not just builders, but also some of the comen, mad men, and even godmen of the world.



## Hafeez Contractor

**W**ith a wide range of projects under his belt, Hafeez Contractor has demonstrated his expertise in virtually every aspect of construction, including bungalows, residential developments, hospitals, hotels, corporate offices, banking and financial institutions, commercial complexes, shopping malls, educational institutions, recreational and sports facilities, townships, airports, railway stations, urban planning, civic redevelopment, and infrastructure projects, as well as low-cost housing.

Since 1991, Contractor has been the brains behind several beautiful structures in the country, such as Infosys' Bangalore campus, Pune's first software-development park, and the corporate educational facility near Mysore. He is renowned for Hiranandani Gardens, a township in Powai, Mumbai. In 2010, his 254m-tall Tower I of The Imperial was crowned India's tallest residential building – a title it held until One Avighna Park (266m) took over in 2017. This record was later surpassed by 'The 42' in Kolkata, another project designed by Contractor, standing at 260m. He is also responsible for 23 Marina in Dubai, which used to be the world's tallest all-residential building and nowadays is third in line behind Princess Tower and 432 Park Avenue in New York City.

With over 75 national and international awards in recognition of his contributions to the field of architecture, including the CWAB Architect of the Year (2006 to 2013) and A+D Hall of Fame for the Decade Award, Contractor is undeniably one of the most powerful figures in Indian architecture today. He has earned numerous accolades for his impeccable residential, commercial, educational, and hospitality projects throughout India. In 2016, Contractor was bestowed the esteemed Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian honour.

PROJECT: DLF ARLIAS, GURGAON



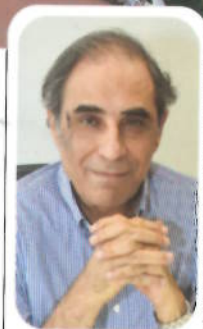
**Q Affordable housing is a social need but has several realtors worrying about the cost implications. Do you think it is possible for Indian realtors to supply quality in affordable housing category?**

**A** Why not? The idea of affordable housing could be easily converted into a possibility. In fact, it should be a dream to construct houses in the price range of Rs 15- 20 lakhs. And, with proper planning everything is possible.

Apart from comprehending the possibilities on the supply-side, we also need to understand why affordable housing is a concern in India. Given the population of 1.3 billion people in the country, nearly 75 percent of it has no access to appropriate housing. In fact, almost 55 percent of people live in slums and dilapidated structures in unhygienic conditions. A lot of productive time of human resources gets wasted by falling ill in such inhuman conditions.

**Q But, how we have commenced building properties at Rs 15-20 lakhs when the land rates are steep in a city like Mumbai?**

**A** We need to expand vertically instead of horizontally for that. Three decades ago, I was invited to be a part of a discussion on deciding the floor space index (FSI) for Mumbai. Mr. Manohar Joshi, the then chief minister had called the entire



**Q** We inherited land from our grandchildren and must return that in a better condition.



industry for an open discussion where everyone, including the bureaucrats shared that 1 to 1.25 was a good number for FSI. My recommendation was to start with at least 4, which left everyone shocked.

I wanted to suggest 8, but settled at 4 with a logical explanation that given its rapid pace at which a city like Mumbai has expanded, it has ended up losing forest land and green cover in a huge way. It is, therefore, important to counter that with desperate solution like vertical expansion and not horizontally.

**Q But even with vertical expansion, don't you feel paucity of land dissuades architects from adding architectural innovation?**

**A** Land paucity, according to me, is a man-made problem as the land taken by the developers for development is not utilised fully. We need to ensure that every bit of land is used efficiently. Instead of using the whole area, there is a need to free up more space, thus reducing the spread of land cover.

PROJECT: INFOSYS GEC MYSORE

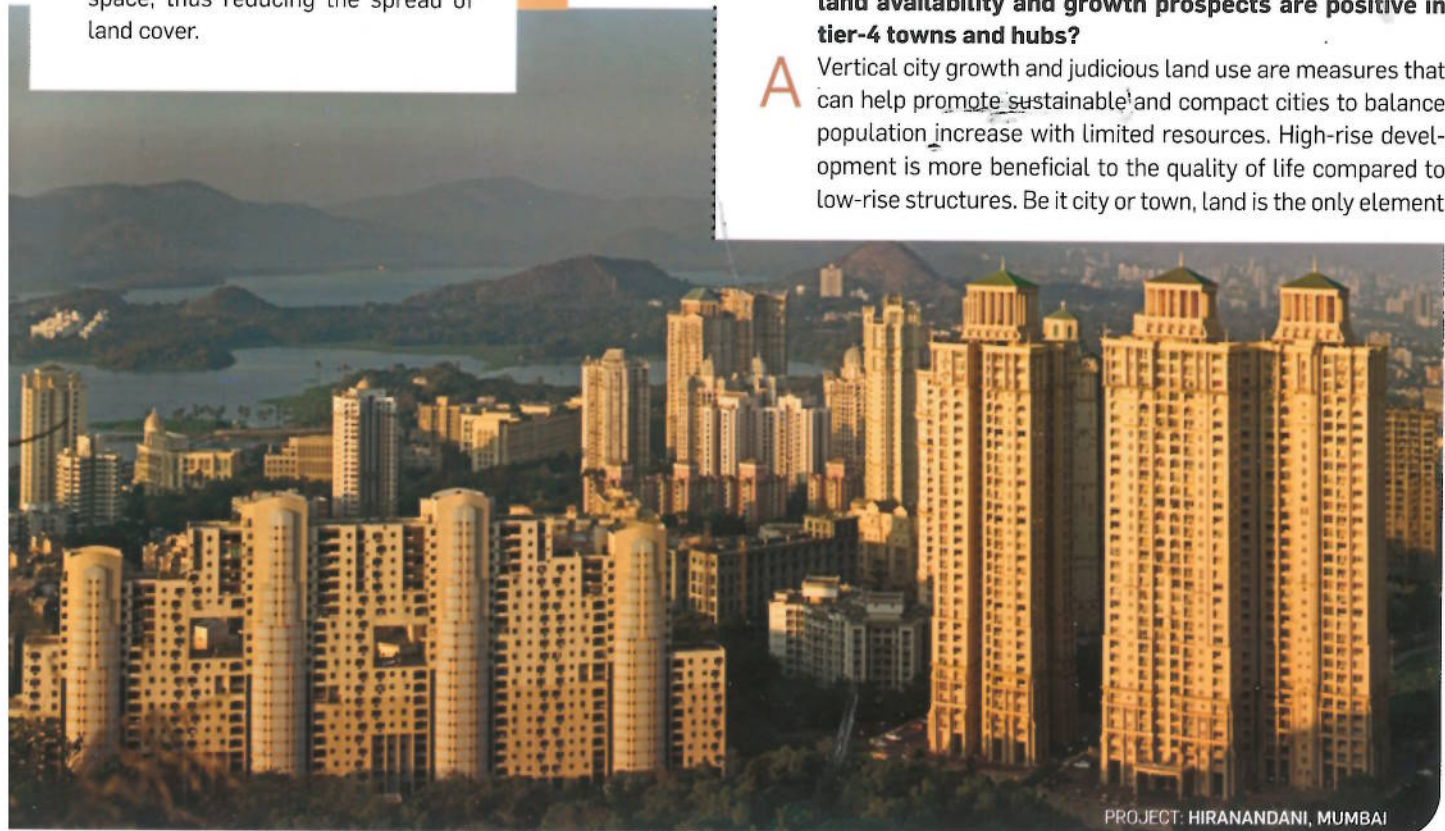


**Q How can real estate development project also ensure the upkeep of green cover in cities?**

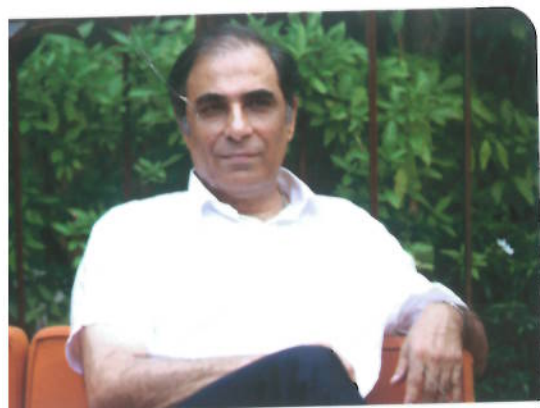
**A** To increase the forest cover in the country, there is a need to reduce the urban cover. We need to seriously think about sustainability and increasing green cover. One needs to understand that we did not inherit this land from our parents but from our grandchildren, so it is our responsibility to give it back to them in a better condition.

**Q You have been a staunch advocate of judicious land use through vertical growth. Has your stance changed given land availability and growth prospects are positive in tier-4 towns and hubs?**

**A** Vertical city growth and judicious land use are measures that can help promote sustainable and compact cities to balance population increase with limited resources. High-rise development is more beneficial to the quality of life compared to low-rise structures. Be it city or town, land is the only element



PROJECT: HIRANANDANI, MUMBAI



Had it not been for my mother, I would have joined the Indian Army or Police Force

that cannot be grown or generated. One can deplete resources like water and still think of recovering it back from the atmosphere. Or in the case of power, we have techniques today such as solar and wind that can reduce the pressure on fossil fuels. But how does one grow land again?

**Q How can realtors leverage from latest technology?**

**A** I am of the strong opinion that technology can be used to reduce the effects of unchecked construction on environment. Look at construction in Africa rather than US or Dubai, which are coming up with sustainable projects. Adopting latest technology enables developers to increase the forest cover to at least 30 percent. We also need to leverage technology to manufacture cheaper building materials and reduce the time taken to build homes. Principles of Zero-Waste-Architecture allows reducing the amount of concrete and waste-generation by utilising light-weight, resource-efficient systems and constructing with fewer raw materials. This would have a positive impact on the environment.

**Q Given your illustrious career, what is it that led you to pursue architecture?**

**A** If I remember correctly, I was always hooked to building bikes and miniature fort models since my second



PROJECT: BITS PILANI, RAJASTHAN

grade. Mrs. Gupta, my class teacher, rued that although I was a useless fellow, I would surely become an architect. But the poor marks that I received quashed all my hopes of pursuing a career in architecture. Had it not been for my mother's insistence on completing education first, I would have attempted to join the Indian army or the police force to serve the nation. An interesting incident occurred at my cousin's company where I did part-time work while completing my



PROJECT: DLF CREST

education at Jai Hind College. A junior architect was drawing window-detail and I told him in Gujarati 'aaje baarish hai' (it is raining today), 'the window won't open!'

Bemused, the young architect promptly reverted - 'What the hell do you know!' He bet that my drawings were incorrect, but my cousin, an architect himself, inspected my ideas and was mildly taken aback. He was curious to know how I could craft a window design so correctly. I told him that drawing window-designs had been my pastime and that I had been playing with designing forts like these. He asked me draw window details and an axonometric - a top-down view of anything. I didn't know the technical parameters or abbreviations, but the design-details were correct. My cousin felt that I was wasting my talent and asked me to join an archi-

itecture school immediately.

Although forms for architecture school admission were unavailable, another cousin called up Mr. Dalas the President of the Mumbai's Academy of Architecture and convinced him to have me enrolled. Mr. Dalas dashed off a letter to Mr. Wandenekar, the academic at the architectural school. Though Mr. Wandenekar was not convinced he gave me a fair chance - If I cleared the entrance test, I could get an admission. And, when the test results came out, I was all over the moon.

My college administrators appreciated my designs by allocating a separate 8x10 feet area to showcase them. But the biggest surprise was seeing JJ College, a rival college, showcasing all my designs from the first year to the final year. There's simply been no looking back since.



Land paucity is a man-made problem because existing land is not utilised fully.

PROJECT: IMPERIAL 1, MUMBAI

