

inside outside

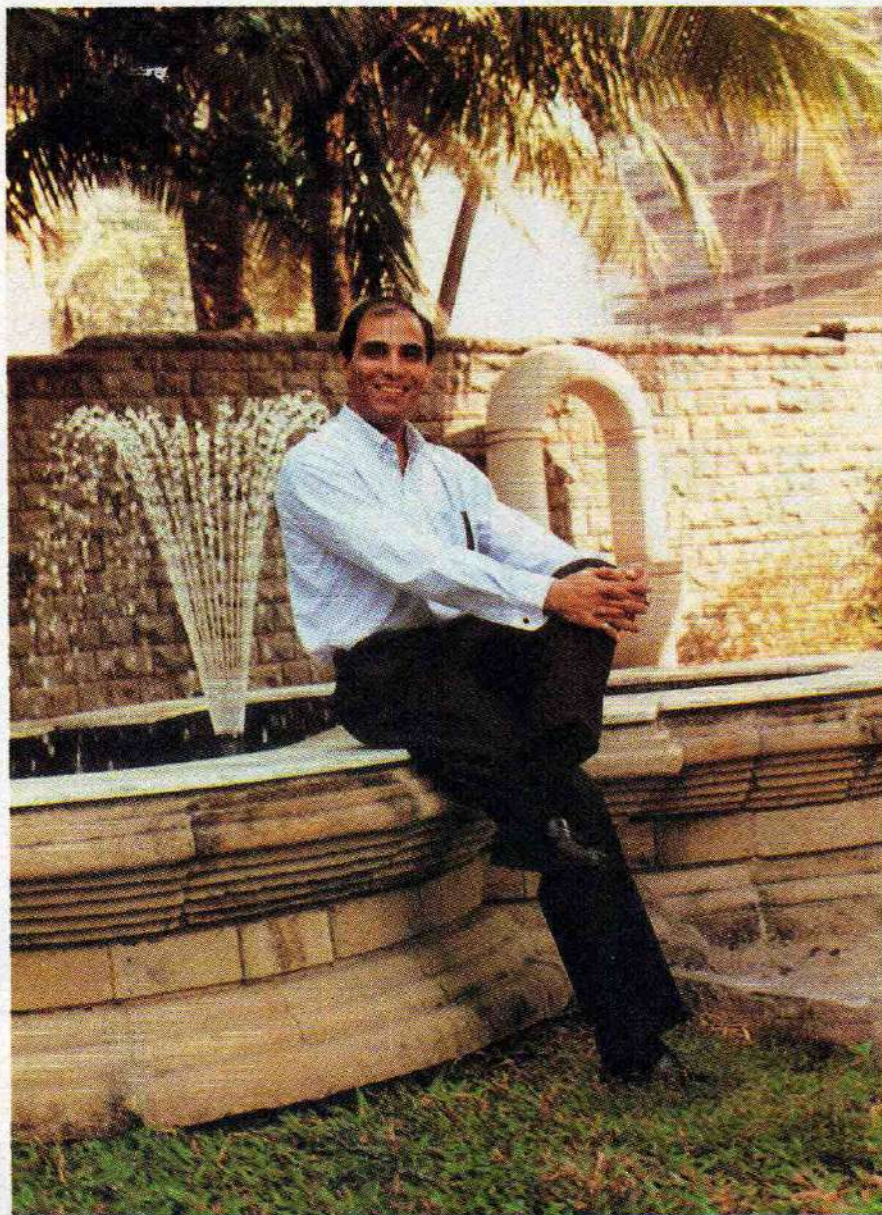
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A man called Hafeez

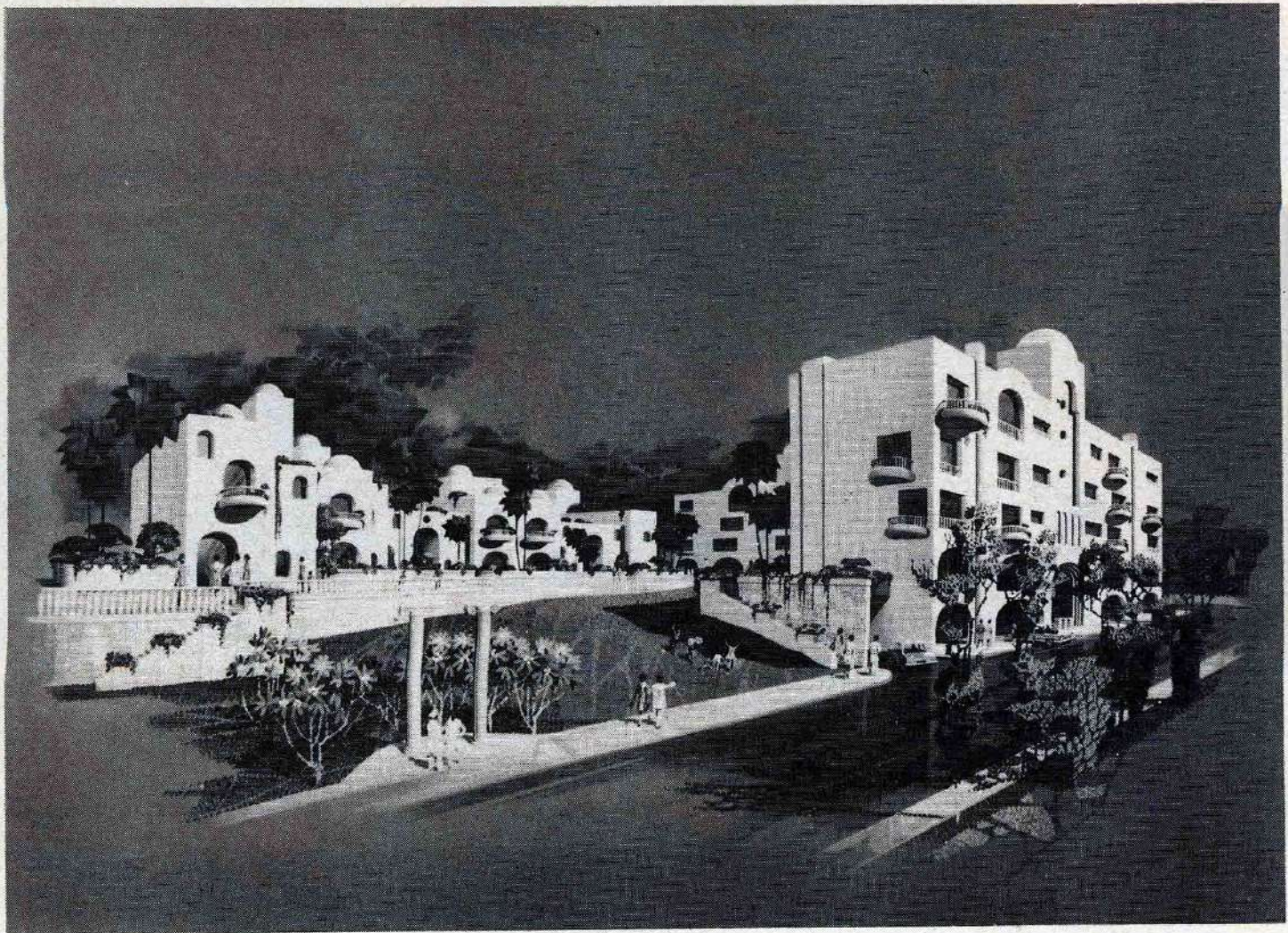


Text: Sheila Mohan
Photographs: Dinesh Gandhi and Bipin Mistry



Konark Nagar, Pune. The facades have been painted in different colours to add interest and break the monotony in this mass housing project.

Hafeez Contractor is here to stay! The last decade has been witness to the phenomenal rise of this Bombay based irrepressible maverick of Indian architecture and the city is going to bear testimony to his presence for a long, long time. His work, bizarre and brilliant has always commanded attention and invited, or should one say incited, comment. Either you love his work or you hate it but you don't ignore it!



Konark Enclave, Pune, comprises of three groups of row houses and a block of flats. Though the basic plan of each is similar because of functional and square footage constraints, the facades have been treated differently for visual relief.

Talented and versatile, Hafeez Contractor is widely imitated and much in demand. He is surrounded by a band of young associates who, inspired by his 'bold statements' and 'openness to new ideas', enjoy the challenge of working with this 'fertile innovative mind', that has grown and evolved into a formidable presence over the years.

Architecture has been defined as 'the science of building raised to a fine art', a concept, alas, that could hardly be applied to the architecture of Bombay of the sixties and the seventies. The mushrooming growth of box-like structures, squeezing as many amenities as possible into a minimum space, totally ignoring aesthetics, transformed this once beautiful city into a mindless, material ugliness. Stringent limitations of space and various acts and laws often forced the architect to work under very tight constraints.

Established architects like Kadri and Charles Correa managed to break this stranglehold over their creative abilities, to some extent. Of course, they were fortunate to have had large projects like Kadri's Ceat Tyre's office

or Correa's Kunchenjunga; but to break the monotony of the skyline and be able to 'play' with the 'outer skin' even in very small projects has been Hafeez Contractor's obsession. The reactions to some of the esoteric shapes of his buildings have been needless to say, mixed, varying from adulation to quite the opposite extreme!

Standing beside his 'new look' skyscraper, Vastu, at Worli Sea Face, Contractor expresses displeasure at the flak he receives, for the so called 'fad', he has ushered in. 'I try and make function into a form,' he says, insisting that an arched or triangular roof—besides visually streamlining the skyscraper, also reduces its waterproofing requirements. The triangular pitched roof has since become an integral part of the 'new look'.

Contractor's architecture has created waves and been widely covered, but he is equally well-known for his interior projects. We feature his renovations for the Times of India, a small office in Pune and two homes he has designed.



Above:
Konark Indraprastha, Mulund, Bombay, a block of flats, 14 to 16 storeys high. Virtually every flat has its own terrace. This is mainly a Gujarati locality and Contractor has tried to achieve that ambience in his form.

Left:
Vishwa Shanti, a building for three brothers. Each apartment is a duplex.



The Times of India

Contractor had earlier done a marvellous job of the Times Space Centre. When it was decided to do renovations on the rest of the massive Times of India building, it was inevitable that Contractor would be invited to do the job. He began with the Advertising Section, now called the Response Department, on the second floor of the building.

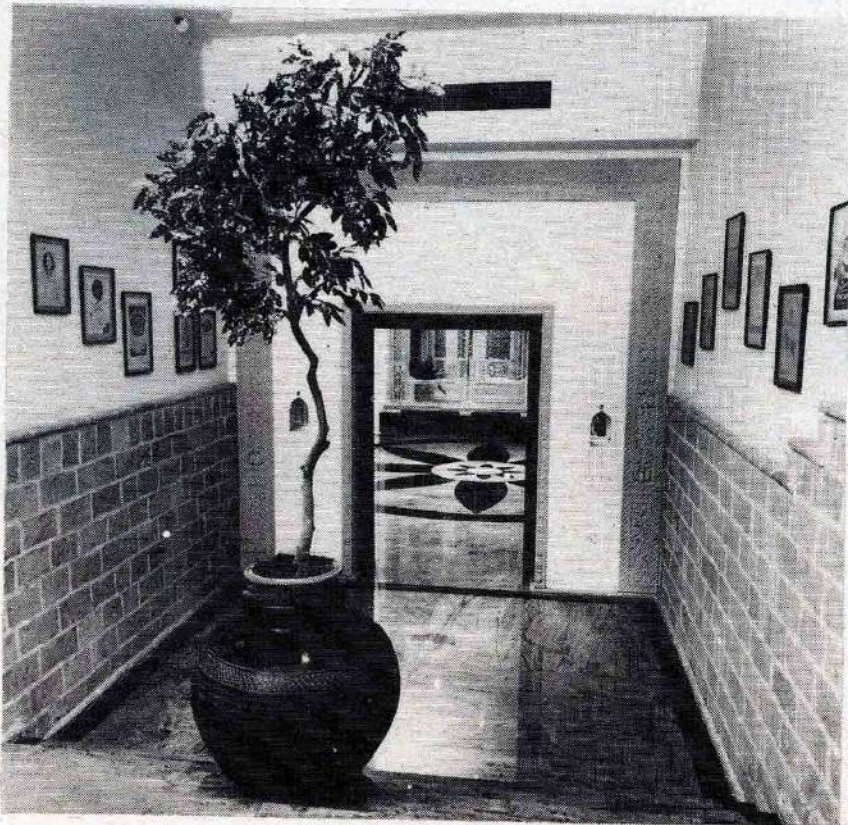
Opulence is the keynote of the Response Department. Granite flooring, exquisite Rajasthani *jharokhas* literally transplanted from Rajasthan, intricate metal latticework panels also from Rajasthan and paintings from the Rajasthani school of art, give this area a look reminiscent of the grandeur of Rajput India. Most visitors to the Response Department are quite struck with the ambience they find themselves in.

Facing the bank of lifts as you enter this floor, is the reception area dominated by an intricately carved *jharokha*. This is the area that caters to visitors from advertising

agencies as well as clients, so stress has been laid on making it comfortable and attractive. The seating here consists of a line of dark leather cushions placed on carved supports. A large plant, in a container made of panels of Rajasthani figures painted in bright colours, adds life to the room. Half partitions effectively cut off this area from the rest of the office and also serve as display boards for advertisements carried by the TOI group of publications. The flooring is of gleaming granite with a striking black motif inlaid in it.

As we go further inside, a slight difference in floor levels, delineates the senior managers' area from their juniors. Contractor says this change in levels is intended to break the uniformity, but I feel it must have been hazardous for the occupants initially, until they got used to the changes in height. Personally, I must admit, I was a bit wary of tripping and falling!

Moving inside, we find executive offices on the sides while the central area is an open-



*This page and facing page:
The interiors of the Response Department had to be eclectic to represent the variety of the news featured in the Times of India. Hence a mixture of elements — jharokhas and miniature paintings combine with cast-iron, modern furniture and open pipes and ducts.*

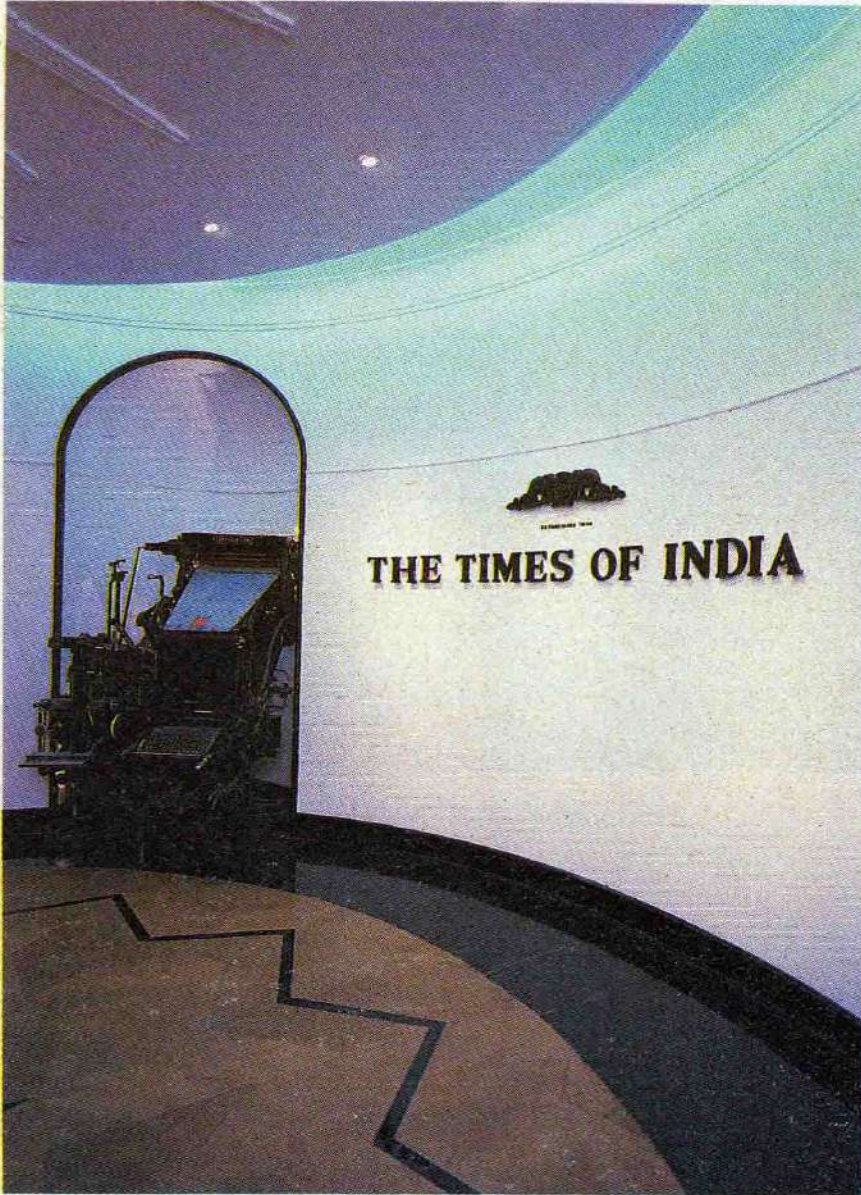


plan with half partitions ensuring privacy to the managers. The upper half of the partitions of the senior managers' cabins is of etched glass, which adds to the feeling of spaciousness.

Iron pillars in the hall faced a problem. Contractor has painted them white along with the ducts in the ceiling. The upper half of the walls is also white, while the lower half is made of exposed Malad stone, in continuity with the use of stone elsewhere. The only factor which jars a bit, are the garish colours of the Rajasthani paintings in the arches of the windows which could have been done with some subtlety. If you look carefully at a Rajasthani miniature, you will find the colours are usually subdued and gently co-ordinated, but here that finesse is lacking. It would have been much better had the original colour schemes been adhered to.

The other side of the reception leads to a large conference hall and offices on both sides of a narrow passage. The decor is

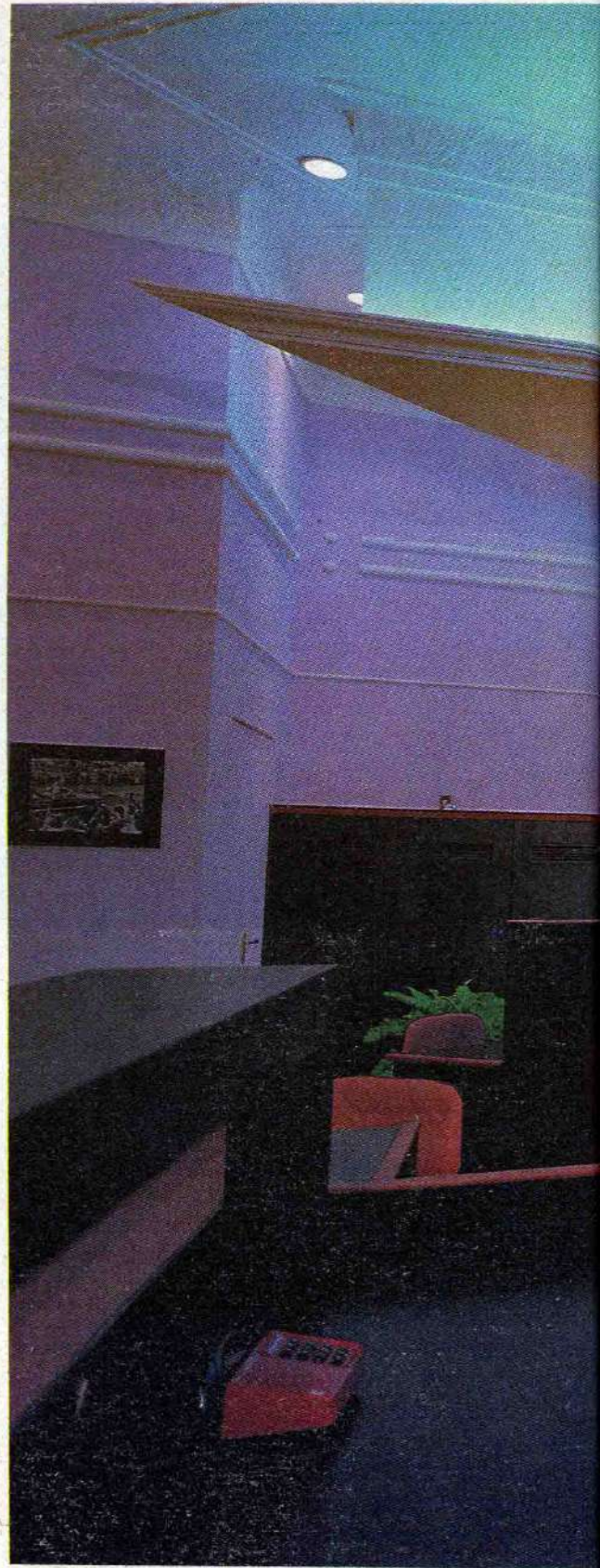


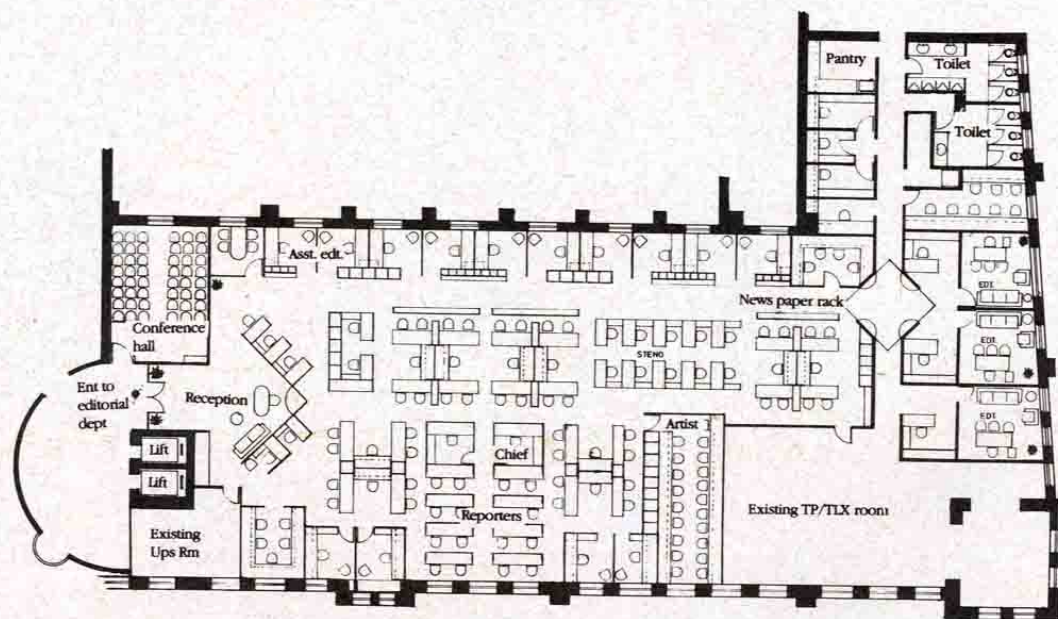


The art deco lobby of the editorial department, with an old printing machine in a niche, evocatively reflects the image of an established newspaper.

dignified and subdued, befitting the purpose of these areas.

If you are expecting a similar treatment in the Editorial section on the third floor, you are in for a surprise, for here the style is distinctly art deco, the style which was popular in Bombay in the late forties and fifties, when Eros Cinema was built! Eros and Regal cinemas are perfect examples of the art deco style. In fact, many of the buildings in the Churchgate area and facing the Oval, are







Above:
Stands in the passage hold newspapers for general reading.

Right above:
The reception area is visually segregated from the main office by a scalloped half-wall. At left are the cubicles for the sub-editors.



greatly influenced by the art deco style. There are no harsh angular lines and their facades have decorative edges, mouldings in plaster of Paris or panels in wood.

Like the second floor, the large hall to the left has an open plan in the central area with cabins on the sides and at the far end. Being a later construction, this floor did not have any iron support pillars which had posed such a problem in the Classified Ad Section and the Response Department. The basic theme is black and white relieved with lilac walls. Huge art deco panels form ornate doors for the editorial offices. The floors are made of cream Jaisalmer marble inlaid with black Cuddapah patterns. The impact of all this is dramatic.

However, the most striking feature of the Editorial section consists of laminated blow-ups of old newspapers on the black walls of the entrance and along the walls of the entire office. Your attention is riveted by the giant size blow-up of a banner headline screaming 'Mahatma Gandhi assassinated'. Cut-outs of

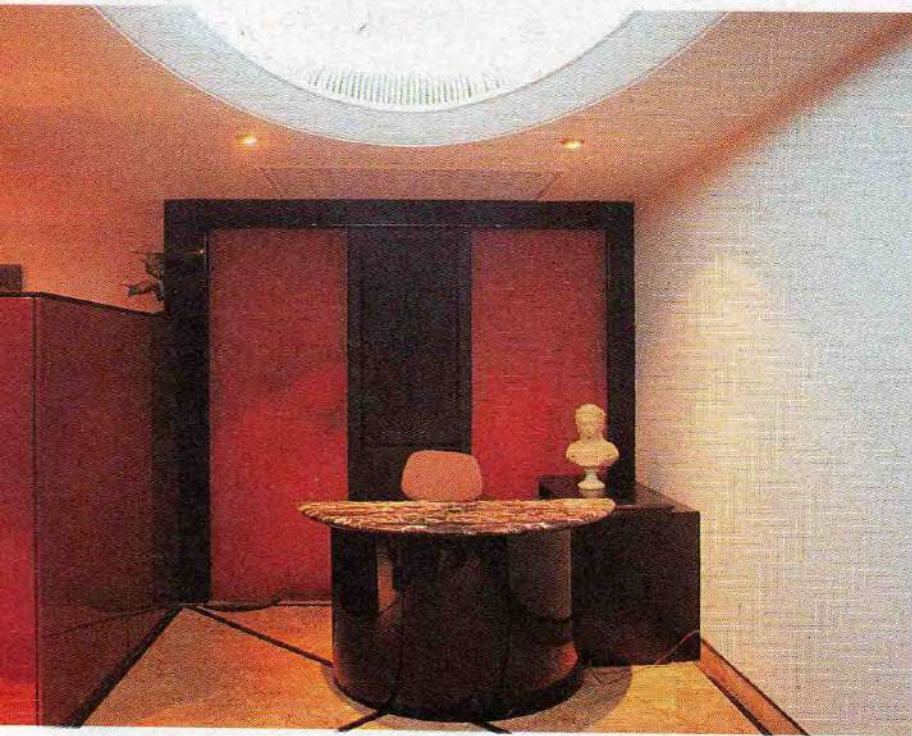
the TOI emblem have also been used to adorn the walls.

Along the passage are black newspaper racks holding current editions for reference. Once you enter this floor you know, you cannot be anywhere but in a newspaper office, quite unlike the floor below where you could imagine yourself to be in a Rajasthani palace or an opulent hotel. The unmistakable stamp of a newspaper office is manifest here.

The basic plan of the second and third floors is similar. The reception area is V-shaped and succeeds in blocking out most of the cubicles from the public eye. The entire area to the left of the reception is another department decorated in a totally different style. For some reason part of the floor was designed by another architect.

For those who have seen the Times offices before renovation, it must come as a pleasant surprise, if not shock, to see how a dingy-musty long-neglected office seeming to have outgrown its dimensions can be transformed

Jessel Constructions

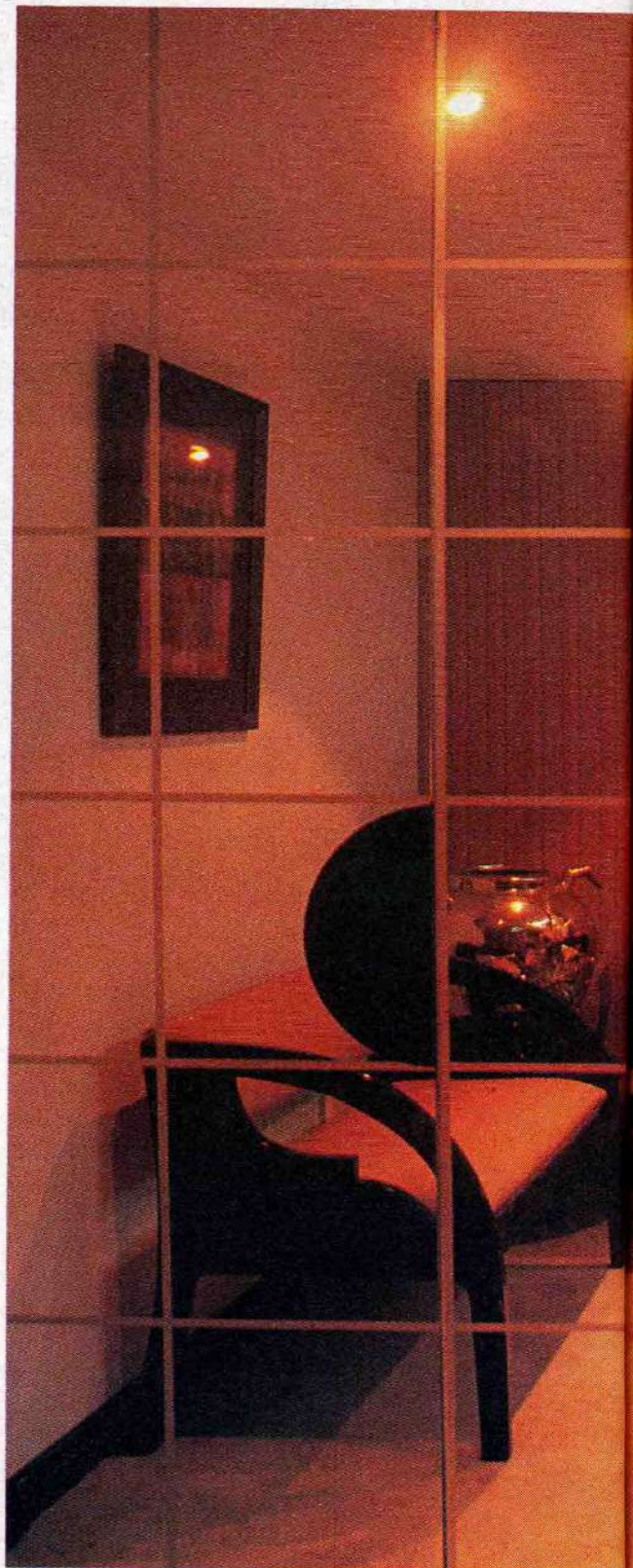


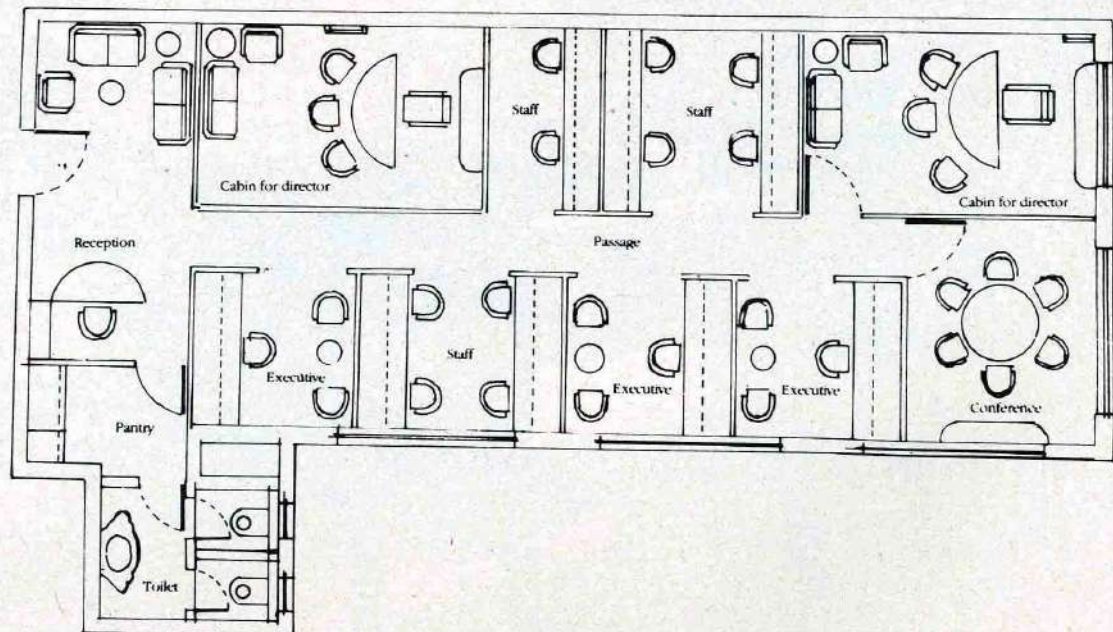
into a bright cheerful area with a distinctive character of its own.

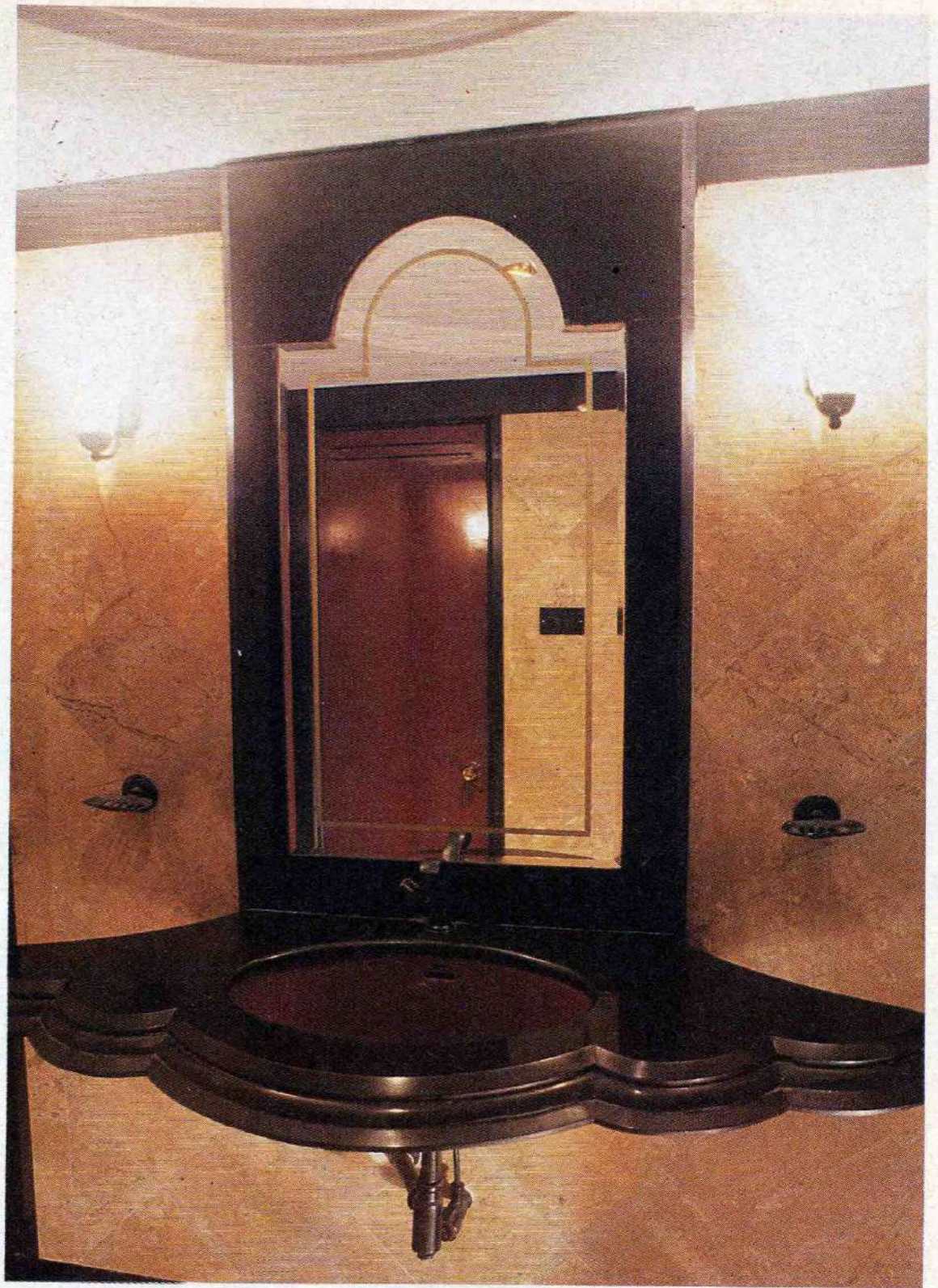
In the TOI offices, Contractor had plenty of room 'to space' himself out. The Jessel Constructions office demonstrates that Contractor is as adept at smaller jobs, handling them with equal diligence and finesse. A relatively small area of 1300 sq ft has been designed into a well-planned, functional and spacious looking office. Before Contractor took up the job, the cabins were positioned angularly so that there was considerable wastage of space.

Contractor also managed to visually double the size of the reception area by covering one wall with mirrors. To the right, is a small pantry and toilet. Earlier the toilet could be approached only through the main executive cabin. Now it can be entered without invading anybody's privacy. Beyond the partition is the chief executive's cabin which has a glass wall with blinds so that he can keep an eye on the office, as well as retain his right to privacy whenever required.

Above and right: The Jessel Constructions office. The smaller 'dwarf' cabins are laminated while the full size ones are partitioned with etched glass.







*The luxurious bathroom
in the office.*

The rest of the hall has an open plan, with mirrors in some areas, including partition walls, adding visually to the space. The partitions look elegant in burgundy, with a highly glossed lacquered finish which is tough, scratch-resistant and durable. At the far end is the small conference room with a circular marble table and six chairs upholstered in burgundy. The wall facing the door has a large picture window which is reflected in the glass wall opposite it, again

adding to the illusion of space. In fact, this is one wall in the office with mirrors on both sides! The surface of the outer portion of the wall is also covered with a mirror reflecting the entire length of the office. One would imagine that too many mirrors would dazzle the eye; on the contrary their clever positioning; just makes this 1300 sq ft office look that much larger. The flooring is of Nepali marble and coffers conceal fluorescent and incandescent lighting.



The flat is on three levels. The stepped moulding on the ceiling disguises the stairs to various levels. An oval cut-out on the ceiling sheds diffused light on the corridor.

A home in Bombay

Contractor has completely revamped a split-level apartment in Dadar. Earlier the living-room and one bedroom were at the lower level with other bedrooms and kitchen at a higher level. Hafeez broke down the lower bedroom and used part of it to extend the living-room while the remaining portion was taken into the kitchen. The erstwhile bedroom was converted into a kitchen and small utility room, while the three bedrooms were elevated to the higher level at the rear

In the living and dining rooms, the furniture is treated with mother-of-pearl inlay. The same motif is carried through in the etchings on the glass and ceiling, for consistency.



portion of the house. Since this is a ground floor apartment, grills have been installed as a measure of security. There are future plans to add a small garden on the living-room side and to one of the bedrooms.

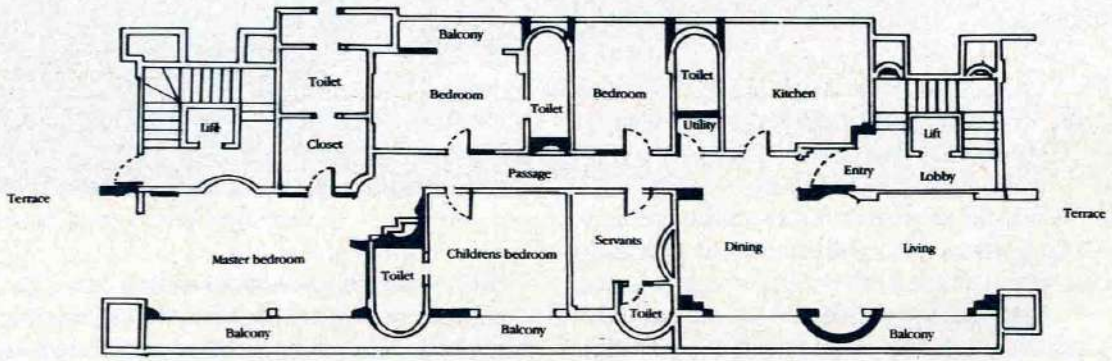
Beige and shades of brown dominate. The upholstery with a fine lurex thread running through it, has matching silk chairs and a rug

in maroons and browns on a Botchino marble floor. The woodwork is dark brown with the pelmets in a Rajasthani design.

A dining-table, with fine inlay work and a glass top, has interesting chairs with gold painted ram heads on the back rest. The inlay work on the marble-topped sideboard matches the dining-table, and the walls are



Painted panels and shutters by Rajasthani craftsmen adorn the bed frame.





*Above:
The blue and white
kitchen.*

*Left:
The bathroom with sink
set in granite.*

adorned with Rajasthani paintings. The mastery of the Rajasthani craftsmen is visible also in the exquisite wood panels inlaid with mother-of-pearl in the bedroom cupboards and beds. The dark wood provides a perfect background for the delicate motifs of flowers copied from old Rajput handiwork. Even the bedside tables have this exquisite work. Pale curtains, bedcovers and the marble only serve to emphasise the beauty of these panels.

The master bedroom has similar inlay work but here the material used is bone. Artisans

from Udaipur in Rajasthan were especially commissioned to execute these panels and it is a great credit to their fine craftsmanship.

A penthouse in Pune



This penthouse flat is on the fourth floor of one of Hafeez's favourite buildings in Pune, with the pitched roofs, which, initially horrified the residents of the city. Contractor has converted two flats to make one large apartment covering an area of 3000 sq ft. The roof is absolutely unique — a curved barrel vault, made possible by the outer pitched roof. It is hard to believe, looking at the curved ceiling, that one is in a flat! Statuturio marble covers the floor, most of it left bare with just a few rugs scattered around. It would have been a shame to cover such beautiful marble.



Left:
The monotony of the passage is broken with an alcove wherein stands a sculpture of a horse-head on a marble pedestal.

Above and right:
The huge living-cum-dining-room. A curved bar cabinet painted black with gold lines and inlay work, complements the arch in the background.

In the huge living-cum-dining-room, the theme is a striking black and gold against stark white walls. Dark velvet with a paisley design in blues and pinks has been chosen for the sofas which has arms shaped and painted to look like elephants' tusks. The tusk design is repeated in the white and gold coffee-table which has a round glass that shows off the rug underneath. Curtains in a pale blue and beige weave set off the dark upholstery of the furniture. To cut off the glare, net curtains have been provided. On the wall opposite the doors opening onto the balcony, is a huge etched glass with a design



of birds and flowers, which was custom-made by Mamajiwala of Bombay.

Between the living and dining areas is a curved bar cabinet painted black, with gold lines and inlay work. White and gold pillars support the etched glass dining-table, with cane-backed chairs, upholstered in velvet. The black and gold of the chairs complements the colours of the room, giving it a sense of harmony.

Potted plants are placed in corners. The lighting system, consisting of a series of spots along both sides of the room, and some supporting glass lamps, is all controlled by a dimmer

A sculptured head of a horse standing on a marble pedestal in an alcove cleverly lit from behind, breaks the monotony of the passage leading to the bedrooms. The black and gold theme extends to the bedrooms too with the beds and cupboards in the same colours.

It is obvious that Hafeez Contractor, both as architect and interior designer, is a force to reckon with. As a professional (he qualified from the Columbia University in Urban Design and Planning) he is able to correctly interpret his client's brief and translate it successfully into reality which is one of the corner-stones of his success.

Despite his rapid rise, Hafeez modestly says, 'What am I? I may do 10 or 100 buildings, but that does not amount to changing the architecture of the city. I am still small fry. The real architect is the bureaucrat who makes the laws. For it is he who decides when, how, and how much I can construct on a piece of land. So within the given limitations, all I can do is give my buildings form with a functional plan. The only latitude the architect is allowed to play with is the outer skin. For there is no law yet that prohibits the use of an extra plaster seal or vibrant colour schemes to deck up the building's outer skin.'

*Grey granite and
Arbescato marble make
for an elegant kitchen.*