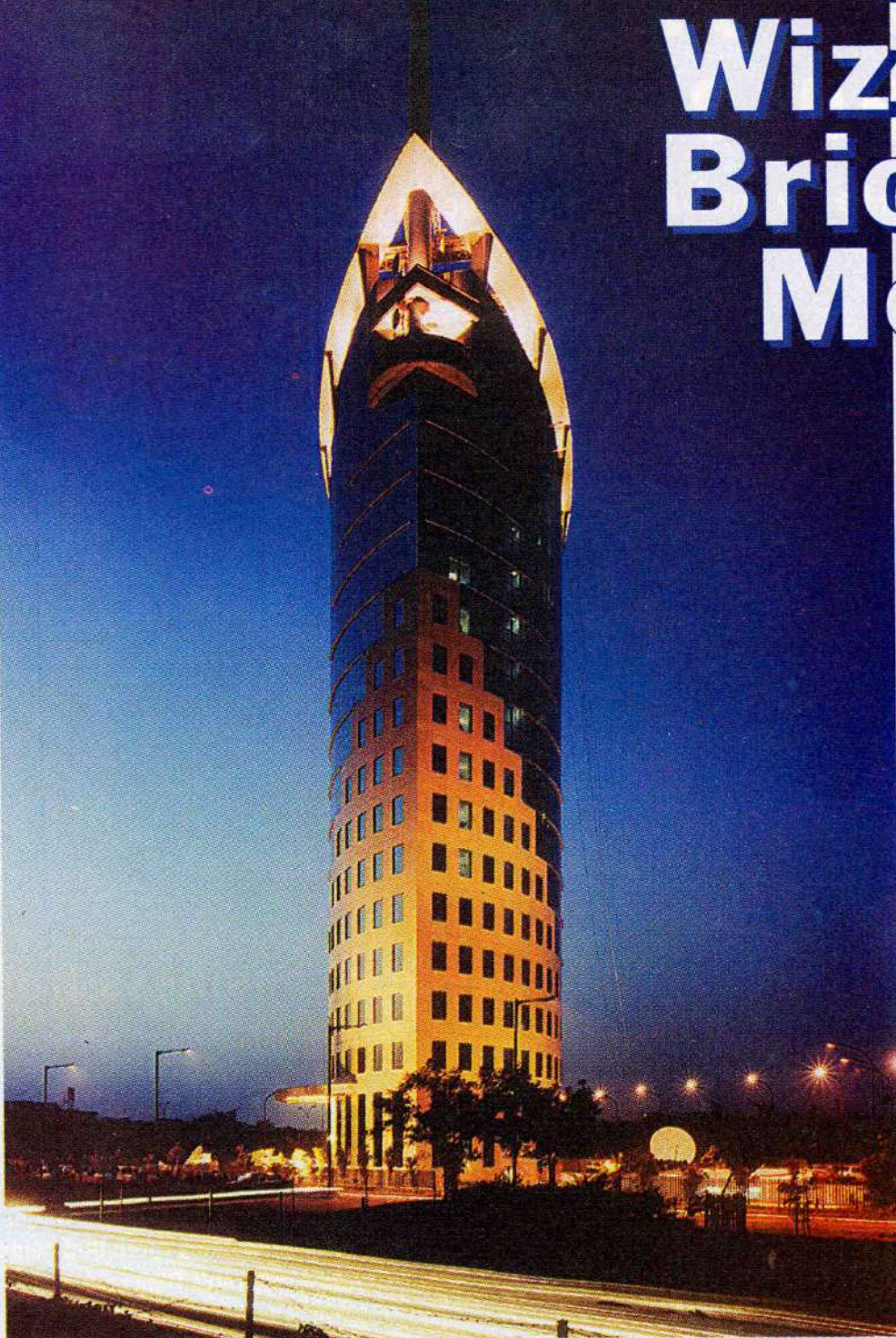


TOUCHING THE SKY:  
Gateway Tower, Gurgaon, Delhi



# The Wizard of Brick and Mortar

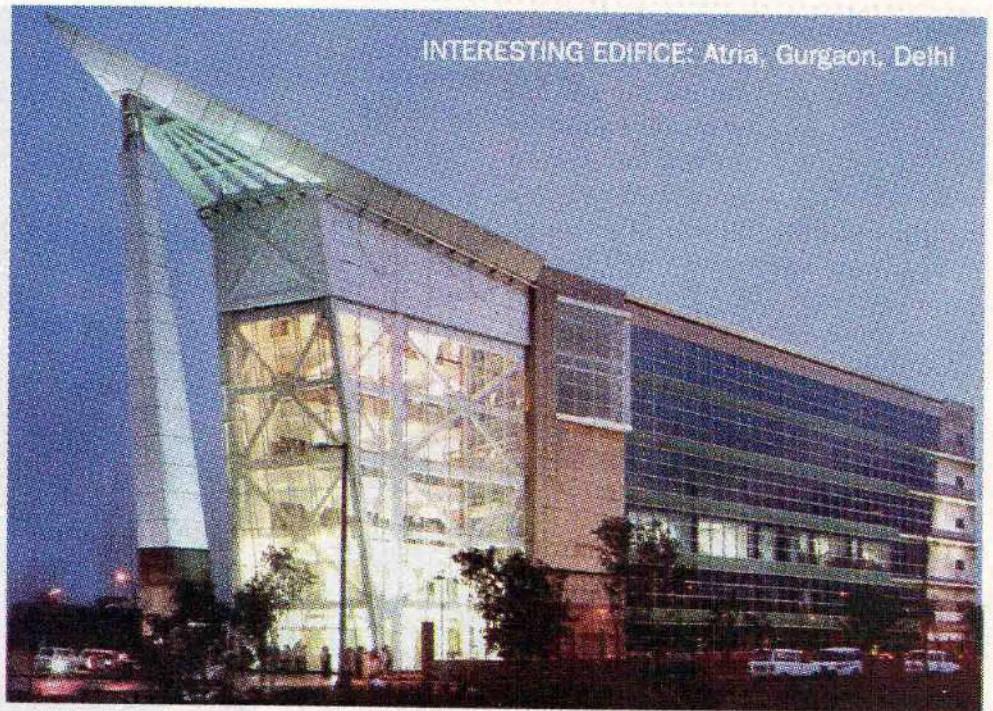
**P**IERCING eyes accompanied by a typical Parsi accent, welcome you on board what looks like a conference table headed by Hafeez Contractor himself, while unluckier mortals wait for their turn for a word with this wizard of brick and mortar.

If you want to know the real man behind Hafeez Contractor - the brand, all you have to do is just talk to him. Generally portrayed as being pompous and unreachable, if you expected to find him behind shut, soundproof glass doors, you are sadly mistaken. An open door culture prevails and you will find him, well, in the midst of his office with all his work happening around him.

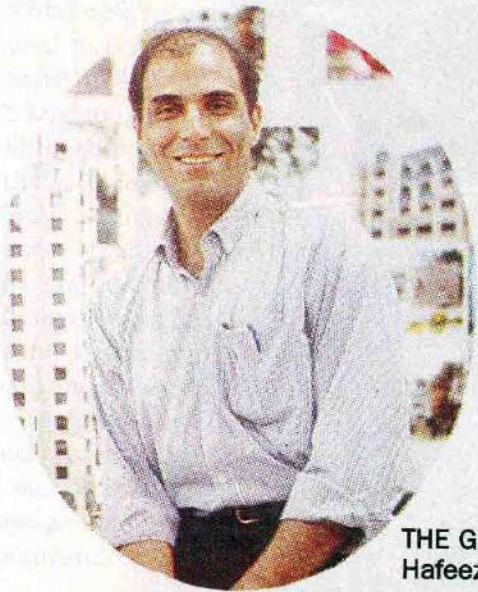
So, what's your specialisation, you hesitantly ask, confounded by the myriad kinds of architecture displayed in abundance around his office. His innocuous reply almost shocks you especially when you are expecting a verbose speech on Indian architecture - "It's the 'variedness'. Look, one is in the business of making buildings for people. So no two buildings can be alike. Though architecture is an art, I look at it in a slightly different way - I feel the 'art' part has to be kept to myself but when it comes to people, it is an absolute functional element and the person's needs are to be catered to and this supersedes art. What I feel is that when a client comes to you he has thought of his problems in a much more in depth manner than you have, as an architect. So all you have to do is consider that and then take the lead from there."

**Hafeez Contractor, the man behind juggernauts like the Atria at Gurgaon in Delhi, is somewhat like his buildings - no frills only concrete reality**

For those who don't know Hafeez, you may be quite amused at finding him doodling away on his notepad for hours together, little knowing that each doodle may be the beginning of a magnum opus. It's only when you understand the man behind the architect that you realise that here's a person who finds architecture to be more of fun than



INTERESTING EDIFICE: Atria, Gurgaon, Delhi



THE GENIUS BEHIND THE SMILE: Architect Hafeez Contractor,

work. Reveals Hafeez, "I enjoy designing, I feel a part of it and I actually move into my buildings while I am designing

them. Writing letters and other such things is something, which I leave to my associates. Therefore today, I find myself in a very happy situation." And a lucrative one at that, for why else would

builders charge that extra bit when it comes to buildings designed by him?

Says Hafeez, "I am the guy who can give you the cheapest building and I am the guy who can give you the costliest and the most fabulous of buildings. It's a question of what you want. There is an image doing the rounds that I am the most expensive guy. There is a very wrong concept among us Indians to criticise anything good looking. It's like when you are in college and you see a good looking girl it's almost natural for guys to say 'yar chalu cheez hogi'. Which is not true. Good does not mean that it has to have some aberration. We must not have these pre-conceived notions. You ask anyone about Hafeez Contractor and he is most likely to say, 'he is too busy, he will not see you'. But the fact is, I see each and every craftsman and each and every salesman or for that matter anyone who comes to meet me."

Ask him about the exclusive features that he offers his clients and he unabashedly confesses, "I offer my clients timely service, work as per budget, as per brief, and make good workable buildings. You will find that any product used in my buildings anywhere will be top of the line to fit in the said cost. It's like you can't combine an apple with a pineapple. In some buildings I spend very less and in others I have over flowing funds, then naturally the difference will be apparent. So for working with limited funds and yet coming up with a wonderful building I should get 200 on 100 whereas in a building where there is no paucity of funds, I should get 80 on 100."

So does that mean low cost housing for example, would mean less amenities? Explains Hafeez, "A lot of people misunderstand this concept. If you don't do plastering, flooring or don't put windows - that's not low cost, that is living without amenities. A lot of people do that with buildings. Low cost means you have to economise, you have to engineer your buildings, it does not mean less amenities." And talking about public space in a city like Mumbai, he says, "Millions of people are on the street

**VERTICAL LIMIT:**  
Thapar House, Worli,  
Mumbai



and every second person is doing business on the street so you can imagine the need for built environment. The cost of construction here is X but our land price is X +. So the first thing we have to do is reduce land price and the second thing is you have to reduce taxes. Now to do all that you have to change laws and make your cities richer. The trouble in India is that architects are not taken seriously. All our laws are made by non-architects. If architects are taken on

advisory boards of governments, housing for instance can benefit."

As for inspiration required to build and deliver exactly what a client requires, all Hafeez does is to observe his client minutely, deciphering from every detail. And he swears that this has never failed him - "Whenever I have done this, the client has never ever said no, this is not what I want."

So does he cherish any memory of working with a special client?

Apparently there seem to be many and stumped just for a second, Hafeez looks down memory lane and finds himself groping for answers. But sooner than you think he comes up with a juicy tid-bit, just for Ambience.

“When I designed the building for the Rajneesh ashram in Pune, Osho refused to meet me, because they said, ‘Osho never meets anyone’. His people used to brief me on ‘this is what Osho wants’ and all his ideas came to me from a second person. I was unable to satisfy his requirements and ultimately I told them to ask him to give me a direct brief. So finally, he sent me a big book and a small photograph to look at and he said look at this, meditate and then design. I designed the building and suddenly I got a message saying Osho loves you and Osho wants to meet you!”

Ask him how he plans to surpass all his present creations and he says, “This one, definitely will. I am entering a design competition for the office of the software company i-flex. I enter a com-

**MINI PINK CITY: Konark Puram, in our very own Pune**



petition every second month. I hope I get it.”

And going by his track record of constructing some of the finest buildings across the country which include, the Bayer India House, the IL&FS corpo-

rate office, Beverly Park, Le Meridien, the Russi Modi Centre for Excellence to name just a few, he is bound to give other contestants a run for their money if not come out a winner all the way.

**MEERA NAIR**