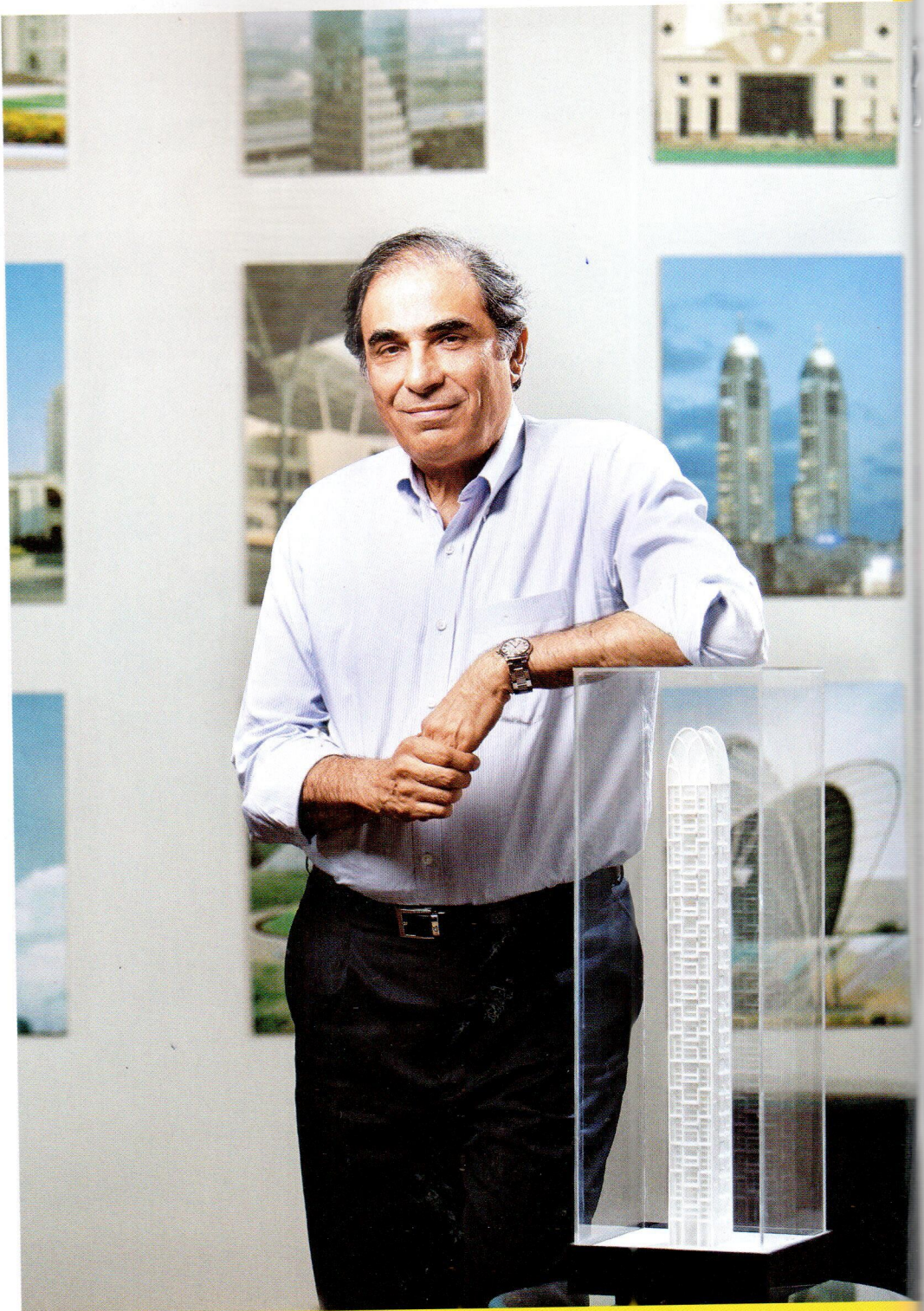


# this & that

Architect of the Month

Photograph by DANESH JASSAWALA



**THE MAVERICK**  
Architect Hafeez Contractor standing tall in his office (right); the ONGC Campus (next page)

# “WE CAN CHALLENGE ANY PLAN AND SHOW A WAY TO DESIGN IT MORE EFFICIENTLY WITHOUT ANY COMPROMISE”

Legendary architect, Hafeez Contractor's career spans more than three decades with over 75 national and international awards for excellence in architecture. He shares his vision and philosophy.

By **ADITI PAI**

**A** *New York Times* article has famously described Hafeez Contractor as the “Man who draws India”, a befitting title for an architect who has shaped and changed the urban built landscape of the country through his provocative and unpredictably revolutionary ideas in executing a wide range of architectural projects. Sitting at his sunny worktable with multicoloured pens to sketch his plans and drive home his ideas, Contractor heads one of the largest architectural practices in South Asia with millions of square feet of projects. He is the man behind the business district DLF Cybercity, mixed use private development in DLF Phase II, III and V at Gurgaon and the popular Hiranandani Gardens at Mumbai. A Padma Bhushan recipient, Contractor likes to explore projects of all sizes and personally works on every project his firm takes up. An alumnus of the Academy of Architecture in Mumbai and New York's Columbia University, the soft-spoken and affable architect is a sought-after brand whose name sells projects.

## **What is your signature style?**

The essence of our work is that there is no signature style. We believe that architecture should be based on current demand, should be honest, should respond to the spirit of



# This & that

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## SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

Some of Contractor's renowned designs include the Imperial Towers, Mumbai (right), and 23 Marina, Dubai (below)

time and should be for the people. We have worked extensively on common man's housing and have tried to make it special. We have championed the art of residential architecture, be it affordable or luxury. For us, the most important is design efficiency, and we have reinvented ourselves with time. We can challenge any plan and show a way to design the same more efficiently without any compromise. We have improved already designed master plans with 30 per cent lesser infrastructure, bigger green area and better plot sizes. We always challenge our own designs to do something better. We call this 'zero waste architecture'.

### What does Mumbai need?

Mumbai being India's financial capital is way short of being a world class city. There are three major problems that concern Mumbai including mass housing to address the slums plaguing the city, better infrastructure for faster connectivity, and more accessible green open spaces for the city deprived of public greens. The main reason for housing shortage is restricted floor space index (FSI), height and coastal regulation zone (CRZ). We need more FSI so we can go taller and then people will pay for the right product. So far, prices have been determined by the scarcity of space in a city like Mumbai. Now that CRZ has opened up, we should have more area. All over the world, the tallest buildings are along the coast or along a big open park. Even here, we should be allowed to build along the coast so more people get better ventilation and views. In my view, the CRZ rule is a good policy which was wrongly implemented.



### What is the need of the hour?

We have to find out new ways and have a new approach towards designing our cities. For the past 25 years, I have been propagating that we need to expand vertically and not be restricted by limited FSI. Although everybody likes to live in a bungalow, this extravagant use of land is a crime; we need to use land judiciously. We need sustainable compact tiered cities, and we need to use water very sparingly. Special emphasis should be on social housing to eradicate the housing shortage. For me, a sustainable, compact tiered green city is what we need.

### Your thoughts on architecture education?

Along with other subjects, the concept of 'zero waste architecture' should be taught in colleges to young budding architects/ urban designers. We can save natural resources, use less building material and preserve land. This would set new standards and the pave way for sustainable development. We can show the world how development can be done while preserving the environment.

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