

# inside outside

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**The CMC office**  
**Where computers take control**





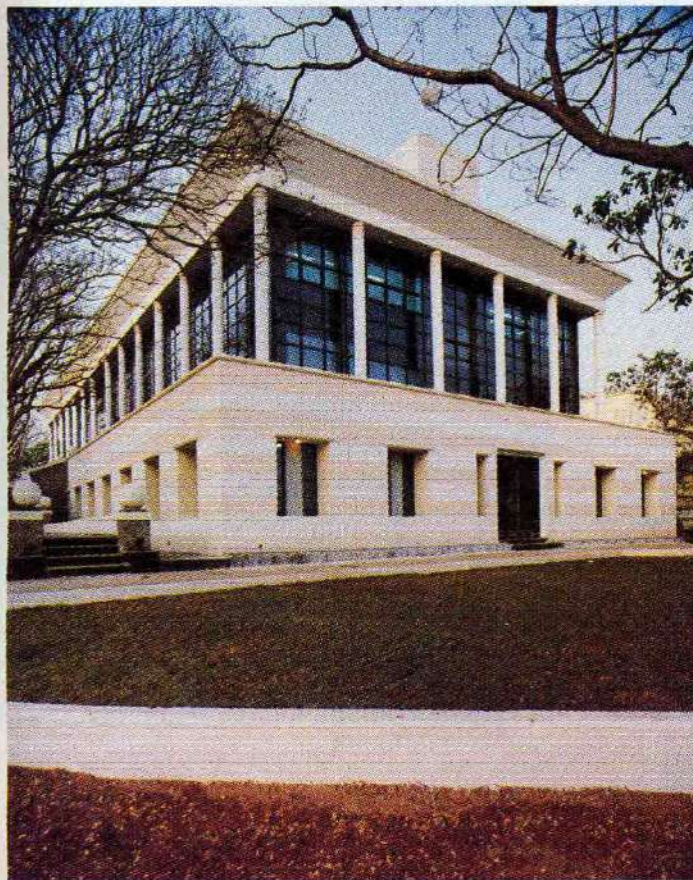
## Geometric journeys

*A few years back, architect Hafeez Contractor carved out for himself, prime media space. Design magazines, society and city magazines and weekend colour sections of newspapers featured him. He proved good copy as he brought a flamboyance and a controversial non-conformism to the profession. But many purists considered his work gimmicky — a combination of triangular roof profiles, circular windows, crescent-shaped balconies and so on. Hafeez vehemently refutes the criticism. 'Why don't they realise that their barbs should be directed at those architects who have been imitating me, and badly too. When I designed a pitched roof for the first time in Pune, it was clearly in response to the beautiful, old bungalow next door. It is the*

*other architects who copied it indiscriminately and reduced it to a senseless cliché.'*

*The controversy apart, Contractor infused a street-smart business instinct into the staid profession which enjoyed abstracting into superior-sounding design philosophies. He, in many ways, admitted to a commercialism in architecture, accepting and enjoying his role as a supplier of facades and finishes, underpinned of course, by functional and efficient plans. As he claimed, he built for the people — for the growing consumerist middle and upper middle class — and not for the architectural theoreticians.*

*And to this he added a brash and confident*



*media profile, terming his designs as an exclusive 'Hafeez' style, almost suggesting that his works could not be categorised. I remember him saying in an interview 'I've reached a stage where I am trying to defeat myself. Today, I am trying to defeat the Hafeez Contractor of yesterday and tomorrow I'll try to defeat the Hafeez Contractor who is today.'*

*This was four years ago. Now, how many Hafeezes has he beaten in his successful upclimb? How differently does his work speak? We cover here his exciting new extension for the Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPC) Administration Building and Training Centre in Mahul, Bombay, and his dazzling buildings for the Osho Commune (Rajneesh Ashram) in Pune.*

*Text: Prakash Rao*

*Photographs: Noshir Gobhai*

## BPC Administration Building Extension and Training Centre



**Above:**  
The two wings are at right angles to each other, with the entrance in the middle at a 45° angle. The curved area is the staff dining room, its windows overlooking the parking lot.

**Previous page, clockwise:**  
The old BPC administration building on the left, and the new extension on the right.

The pyramids of the Osho commune viewed from the garden.

The new training centre. The entrance is up the flight of steps, on the upper level.

The new extension is distinctly different from BPC's existing L-shaped building, yet maintains a quiet and harmonious relationship with it, as it conforms with the height and dimensions of the old structure.

Setbacks in the facade of the new structure allows for each floor to look out onto a narrow, green terrace, which enhances, rather than disturbs the frontage. The most striking feature of the building is the large entrance lobby. Entered through a vault puncturing the sloping front wall, the lobby, which is planned as an atrium, links the old and the new structures.

'Obviously, to cater for the 70,000 sq ft extension and the already existing 1,25,000 sq ft L-shaped office building, a bigger, spacious and more comfortable entrance lobby was essential. The atrium not only gives it volume but provides a focal point for the entire building. In a way, it sets the mood for the interior





**Above:**  
*On entering the door,  
you look up to see  
balconies running  
from the old building  
on the left to the  
new extension on  
the right.*



**Above:**  
*The camel bone door  
that leads to  
the executive  
dining room.*



spaces,' says Contractor. Semi-circular, balcony-like bridges on the second, third and fourth floors, along and around the lift block, connect the old and the new floor levels. They offer an interesting view of the reception area and the atrium, their sweeping, curved profile adding to its aesthetic appeal.

At the first floor, the link is through an enclosed passageway tucked behind the front facade wall, allowing a clear void upto the second floor of the atrium. The atrium, essentially a public area, is finished in deep lilac and black granite, the vertical surfaces in white Renovo. Small graphic abstracts by Nisha Mehta break the monotony of the rear wall. At the ground floor level, a waterfall over black granite spans the entire rear wall, creating additional interest.

The 75 ft high, curved walls of the front (entrance) and the rear (waterfall), are supported with RCC buttresses and connected at the plinth and terrace levels,

**Above:**  
The open plan offices of the general staff occupy the first, second and third floors of the building.

**Below:**

On the fourth floor, down the passage, are situated the directors' and general managers' offices, the conference room and dining room. The receptionist's desk, in sandstone and glass, is seen in the corner.

**Far below:**

A look into the executive dining room, through an interesting window with decorative frosting on the glass.

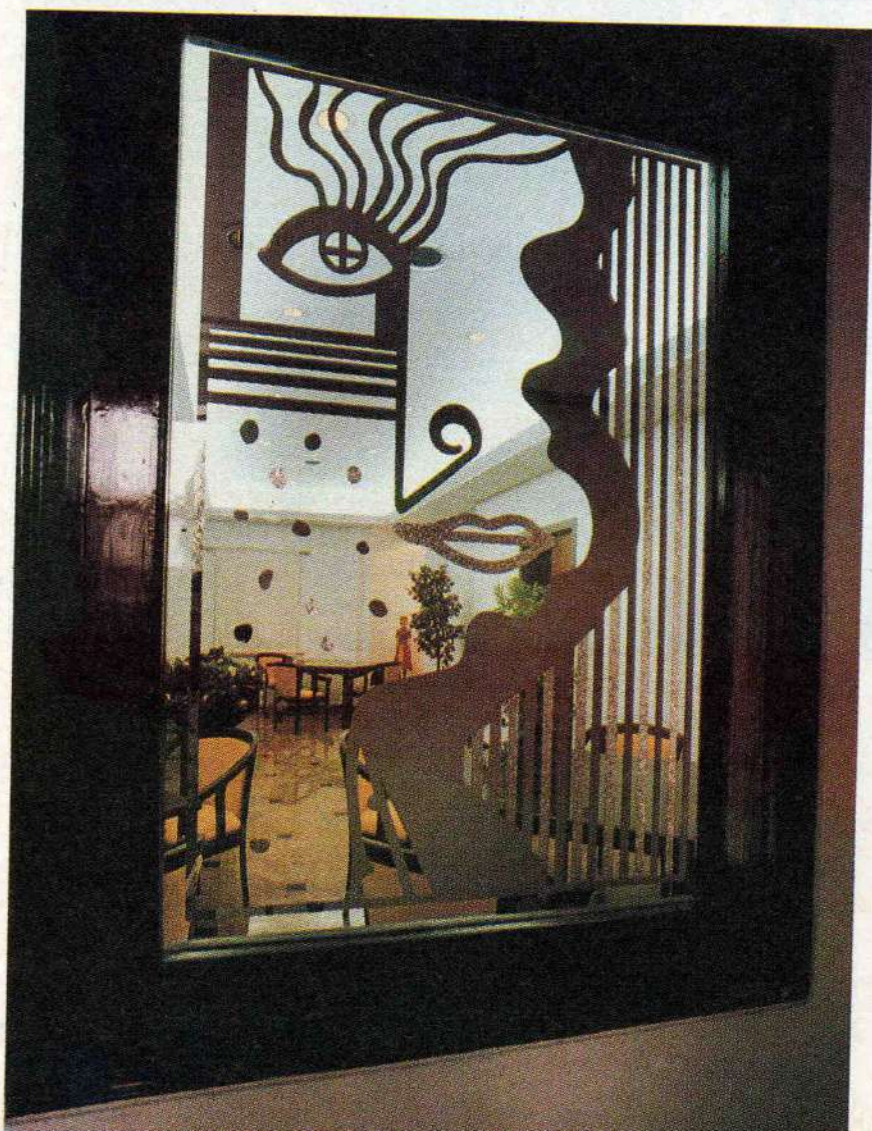
**Right:**

A view across the balcony of the new building to the offices of the old.



with beams. The roof of the atrium is a space-frame with a fibreglass dome on top.

On account of the site dimensions, the building could not be planned wide enough to offer an interesting weave of open areas and enclosed cabins. So Contractor has placed the cabins for senior managers on both the sides, at the two ends of the floor length, allowing for central corridor-like spaces leading to the open office areas. Here, the open offices are demarcated with half-height, glass partitions along one wall, with units for the secretarial and junior officers in front. The floor plan at each level is planned in accordance with the organisational hierarchy of the company. As against the curved walls and arches of the atrium, the stress here is on straight lines and rectangular units. The walls, laminated furniture, carpets are all in soft pastel shades — mostly in peach, sea green and bluish grey.



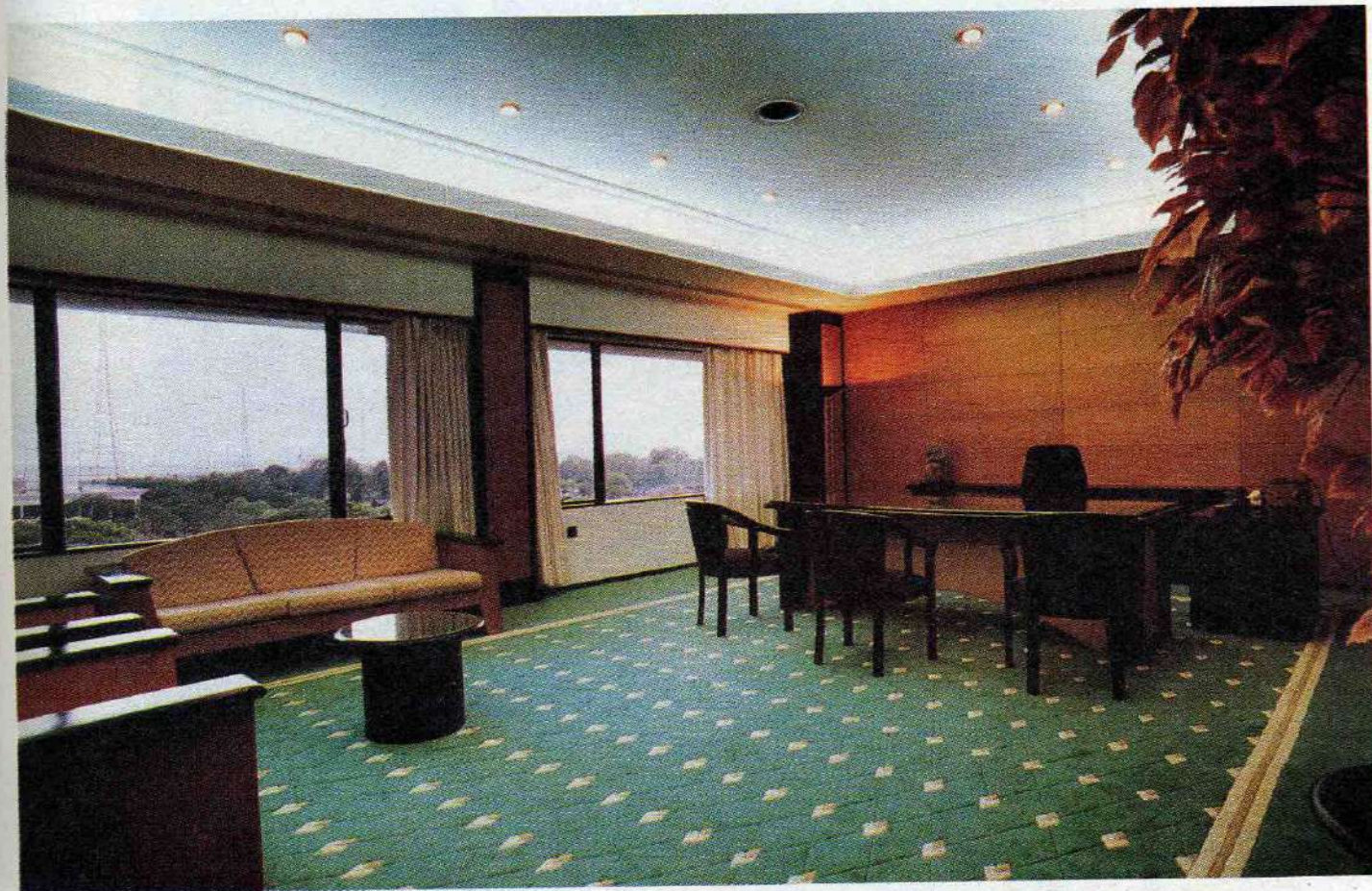
The fourth floor of the building is the senior management floor. Spacious, carpeted and finely finished cabins are planned on both the sides of a central, corridor-like approach which has pink and black granite patterned flooring. A combination of modern and ethnic artefacts, sculpture, and designer ceramic pots, enliven the spaces. The cabin walls are in natural, melamine-polished veneer, and fabric. Small cosy lunch rooms is another special feature of this floor. The boardroom, also located here, is elegantly furnished and has a special acoustic design so that even softly uttered words are audible in the entire room without any microphone system.

On the ground floor, an executive dining room with exquisite door panels carved



**Left:**  
The directors' private dining room.

**Left below:**  
The conference room.



in camel bone, and an arched ceiling, prefaces the staff dining area. The staff dining area consists of two semicircular spaces designed around a central kitchen and connected by an underground tunnel. A combination of contemporary paintings, etched mirrors, graphics and traditional Indian handicrafts against granite flooring and modern furniture create an ambience of interesting contrast. A forced ventilation system with large fans draws in fresh air into the kitchen, while a suction exhaust from hoods and a chimney at terrace level, ensure that fumes and odours are forced out.

The entire building is centrally air-conditioned with the main AC plant located in the basement. Separate air handling units take care of each floor, the

atrium, and the dining halls. The ceiling height throughout the office is maintained by running the ducts through the box above the windows, created by the drop RCC pardis.

Spotlights have been used to illuminate the atrium, corridors and the management floor. Office areas have tubelights with mirror optic fittings for general lighting, and task lights with individual control switches service work surfaces in the open office. The wiring runs through galvanised iron pipes as plastic cannot be used in the refinery. The power, computer and telephone cabling is in galvanised iron traps which run along the floor. The entire project cost came to Rs 6.16 crores which works out to approximately Rs 880 per sq ft.

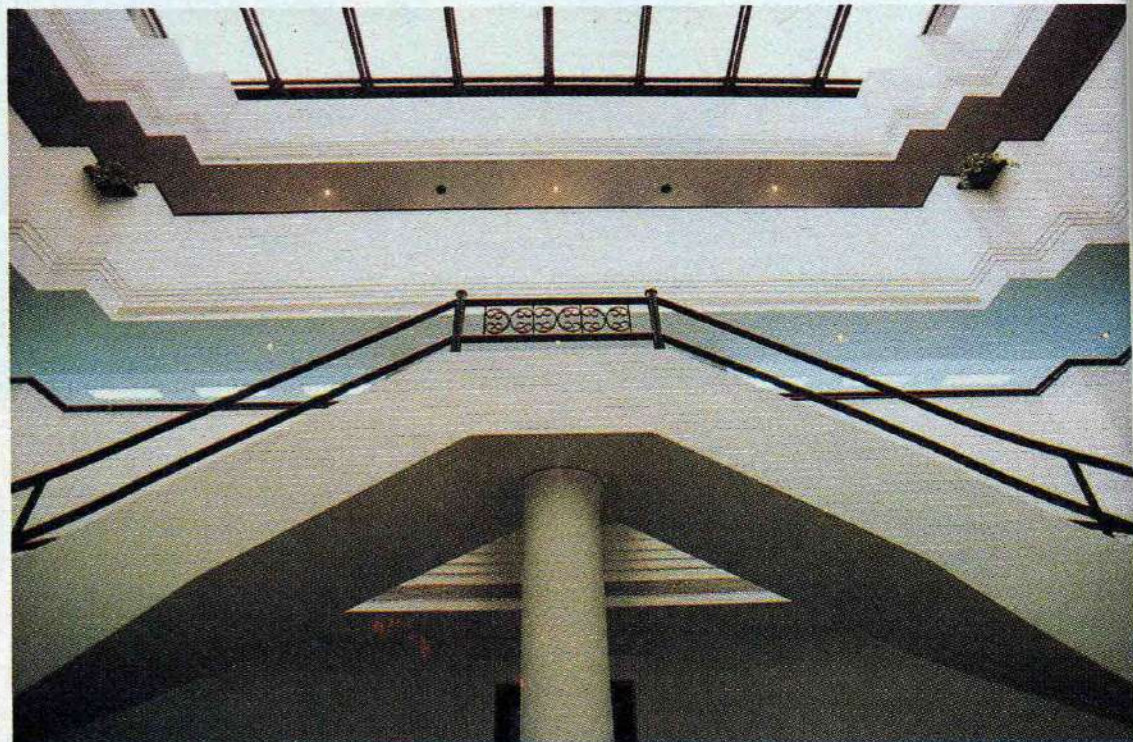
**Above:**  
A typical director's cabin, with his table on the right and the visitors' seating area on the left. The training centre can be seen through the window.

*The tinted glass facade of the new training centre.*



**Right and facing page:**

*On entering, you come onto the first floor landing, that looks down onto the ground floor. The staircase seen here is used only for going down to the lower floor. One has to use other staircases to reach the upper floors.*



The adjacent Training Centre, a curtain-wall structure with tall, three-floor-height columns, has a dignified and imposing presence. Its external staircase, rising gradually and leading onto the first floor, was so planned that the existing tall trees would skirt it on one side shading the rising stairway.

The interior consists of classrooms and laboratories grouped around a central atrium. Models of the refinery at the

entrance, and photographs on the walls, create a mood conducive to learning and generate a feeling of pride in belonging to the organisation.

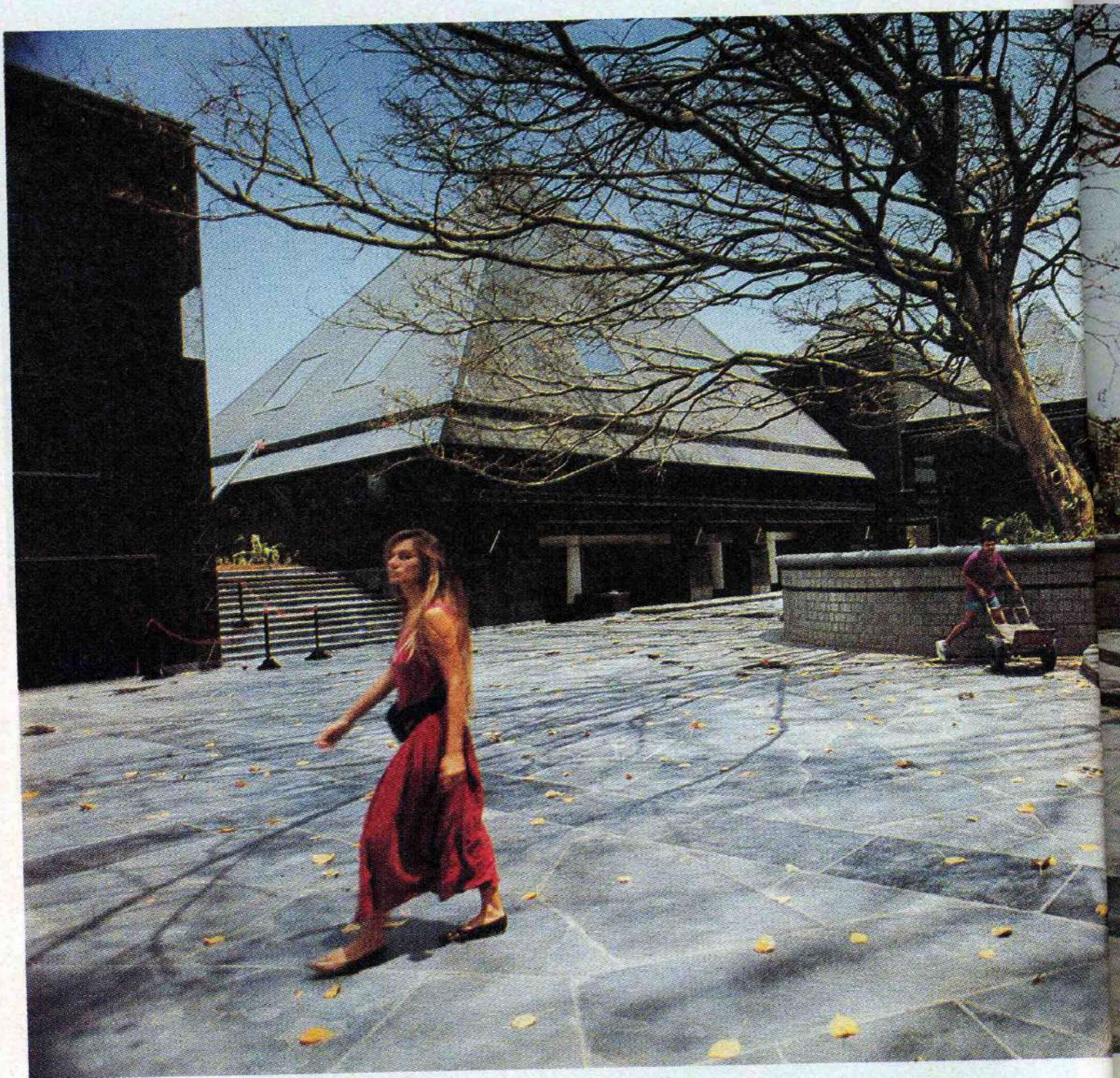
In such institutional projects, free from developers' pressures to maximise FSI or create flashy consumerist facades, Contractor's forms seem to come comfortably to terms with the site, the context as well as the image that the building should ideally project.



**Above:**  
The auditorium.

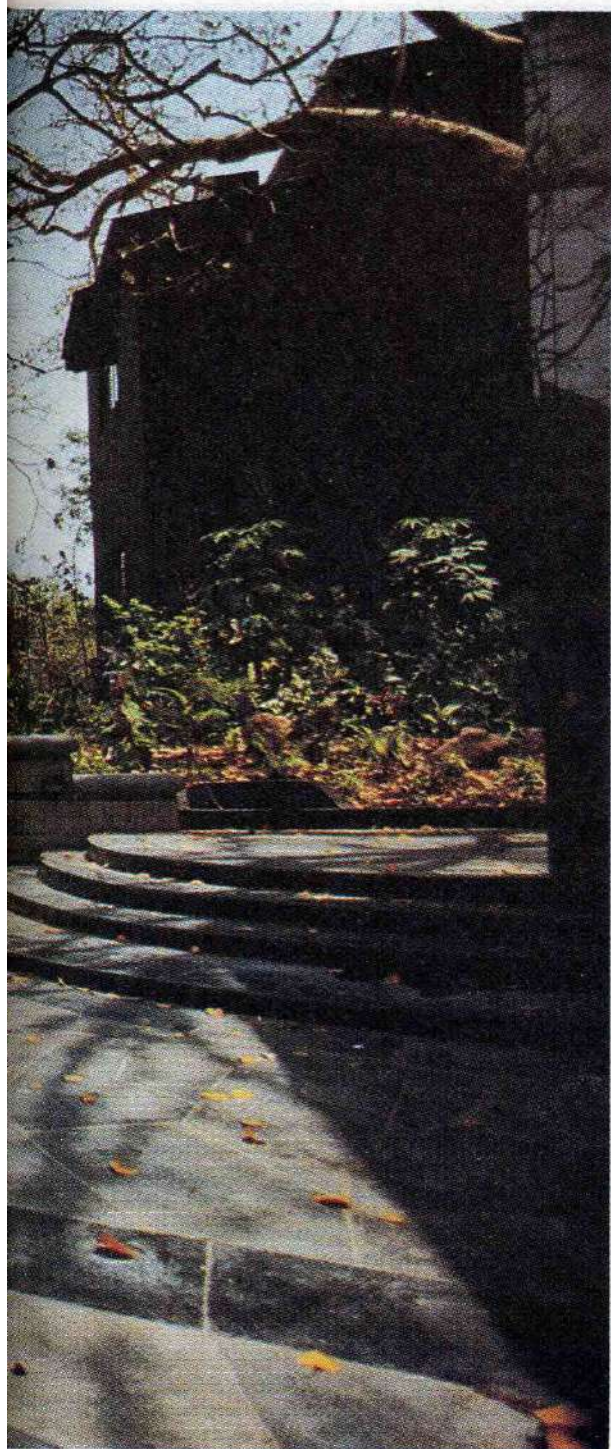


**Left:**  
The visitors' area, to  
the right of the  
entrance and opposite  
the auditorium.



*A front view of one of the pyramids, from the courtyard.*

## Osho Commune, Rajneesh Ashram, Koregaon Park, Pune

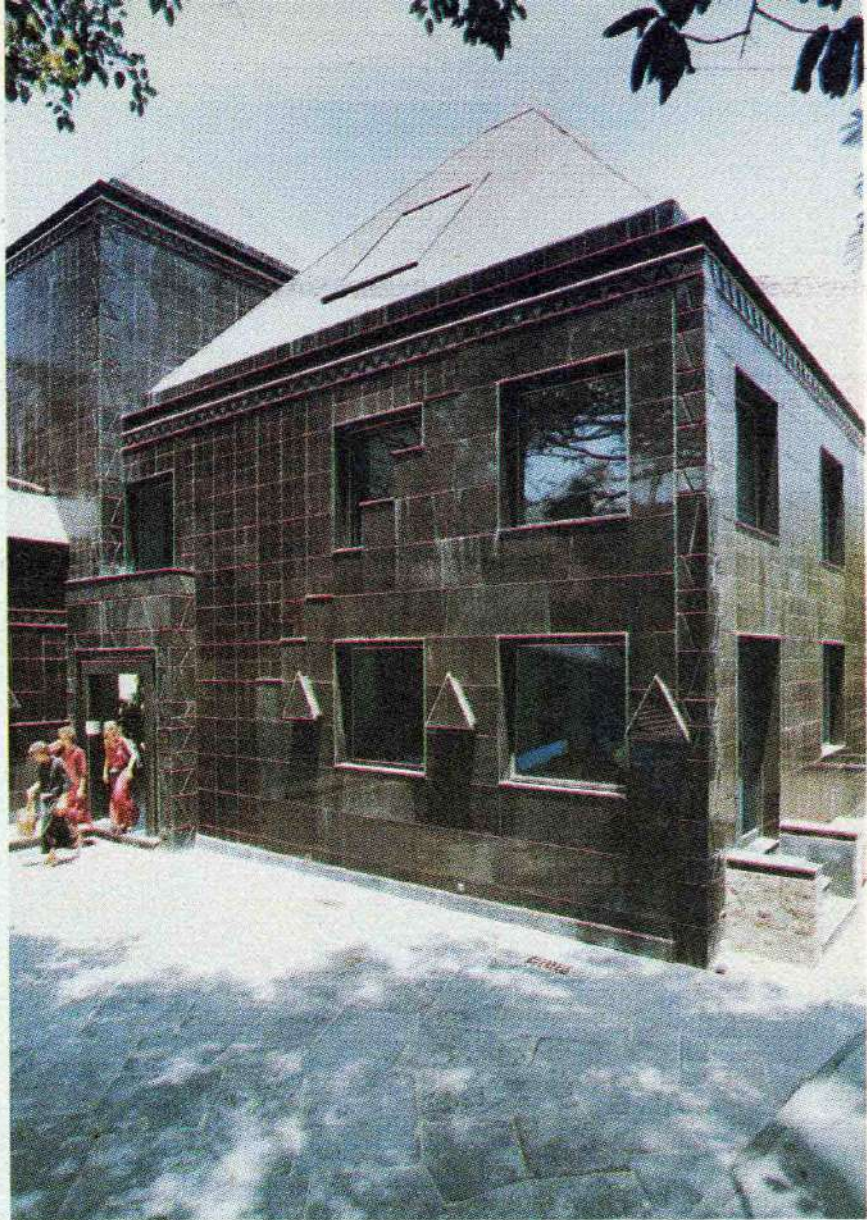


Osho Commune, Rajneesh Ashram Koregaon Park, Pune. Osho's brief was mysterious. All it included was a book with a small photograph of an old barn house and a little note which read: 'Black, black and black with blue tinted glass' — and Hafeez Contractor's by now clichéd triangular roof design — suddenly found its nirvana. It transformed itself into black pyramidal forms for the Osho Commune.

*Above and overleaf: Different views of the 'B' pyramid, which is a residential block.*



...the building's design is a reflection of the architect's vision of a modern, functional space. The use of dark materials and geometric forms creates a sense of depth and contrast. The courtyard, with its irregular paving, serves as a central gathering place, blending the old with the new. The woman in red, walking away from the camera, adds a human element to the scene, suggesting a sense of movement and life within the space.



If these all-black pyramids (black includes all colours) suggest rising energy and an indrawn meditative posture, the blue tinted glass windows and skylights symbolise enlightenment. The windows, clear glass with blue film, subdue and enrich the quality of natural light in the spacious meditation halls inside the pyramids. They are essentially simple, clean spaces done up reasonably well with the flooring in agglomerated marble and the walls in plaster of Paris, painted white.

Some of the structures are residential spaces, done essentially in the same clean style and provided with basic amenities like wardrobes, kitchenettes, etc.

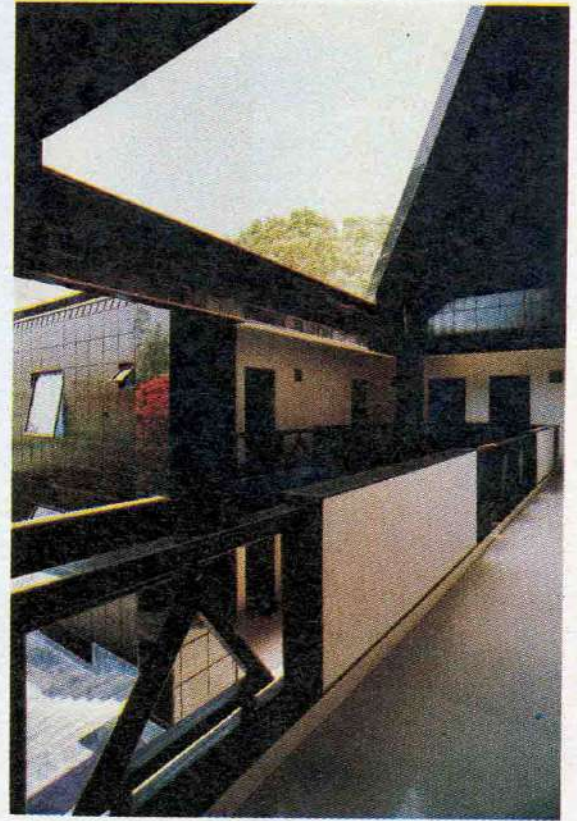
What heightens the impact of the facades, is the variations in the depth of the black and in the textures of the different materials used. The walls of the pyramids are in semi-gloss black ceramic tiles with

*A closer look at pyramid 'A' shows that the two smaller pyramids are joined to the main one.*

**Facing page:**  
*The meditation hall  
inside pyramid 'A'.*

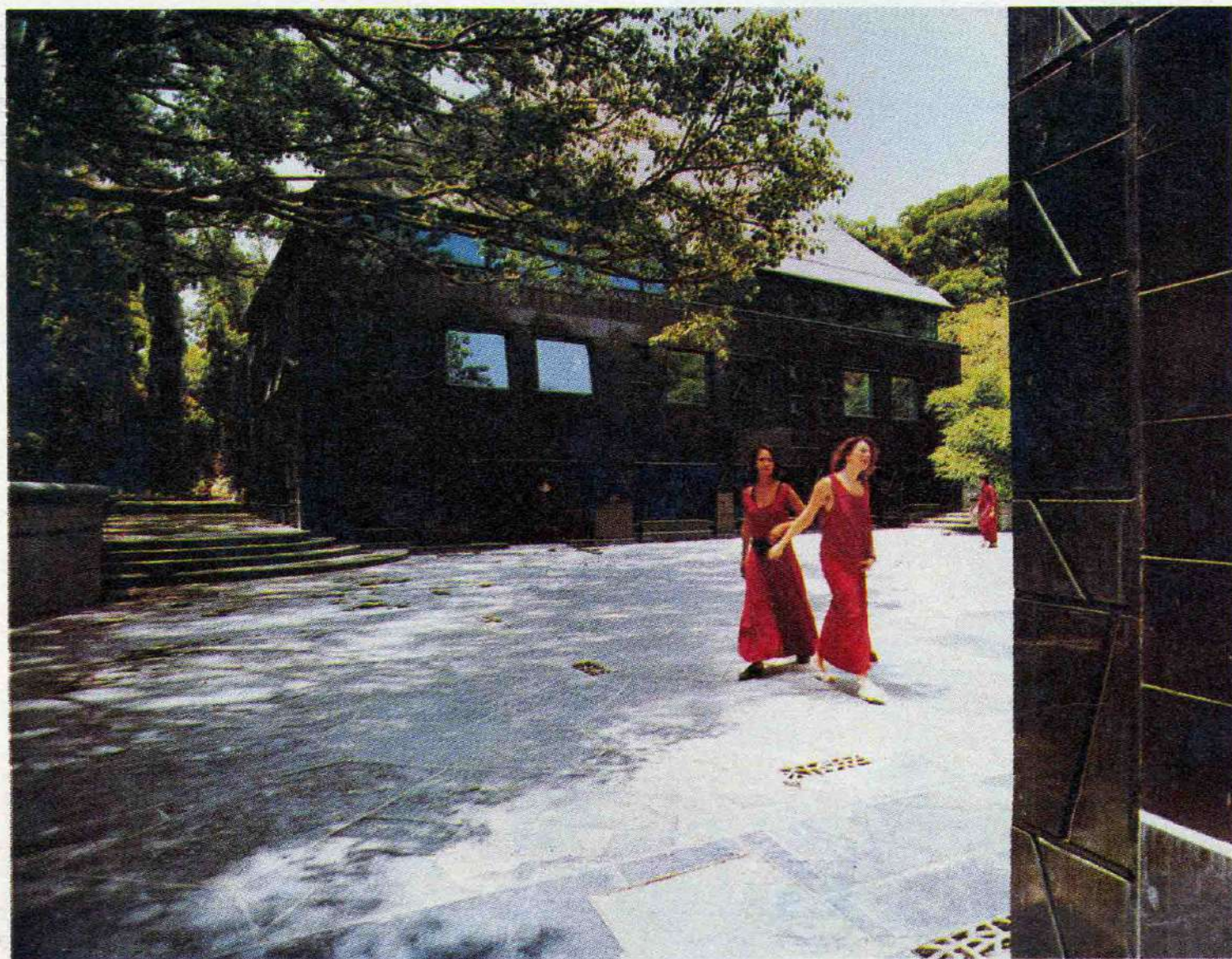


*The ground floor of pyramid 'B' is an open quadrangle, and on the floor above, rooms lead off from the passages. The triangular skylight is open to the elements, and when it rains, the rain falls through the skylight into the quadrangle below.*



borders and corners in black granite. The windows have black aluminium framing around blue tinted glass. These architectural forms stand out against the rough black Cuddapah paving and the greenery around. A large tree near the entrance, shades the central open public space. It dominates the Commune and visually holds the cluster of pyramids together.

While the double-wall exteriors and the high pyramidal volume insulate the interior spaces from the outside heat, the black materials did pose problems like excessive absorption of heat in the beginning! The temperature on them rises to about 80°C in summer when the atmospheric temperature is about 40°C and, initially, some tiles popped out. But these problems have now been



surmounted by using appropriate resins and, in addition, metal clamps are placed internally, to hold down the granite pieces used at the corners.

Waterproofing compounds were used before cladding the structure in tiles and granite.

An adjacent dirty, stagnant municipal *nulla* has been cleaned up and converted into a waterbody at the architect's suggestion. The area around it has been interestingly landscaped with green mounds, plants and fountains that create small streams flowing down to this water body. Amidst this greenery, the 39,000 sq ft Osho Communes's all-black pyramidal forms appear mystically beautiful. They

recall the historical Egyptian monuments and remind us of the mysterious powers of this geometrical form. □

BPC new administration building  
Interior contractors: Jayant K furnishers  
Civil contractors: B J Mistry Pvt Ltd

New training centre  
Interior contractors: Intercom India  
Civil contractors: Arnico Builders

Osho Commune  
Senior Associate: Rachna Amin  
Interior contractors: Jayant K furnishers  
Civil contractors: Faroukh & Associates