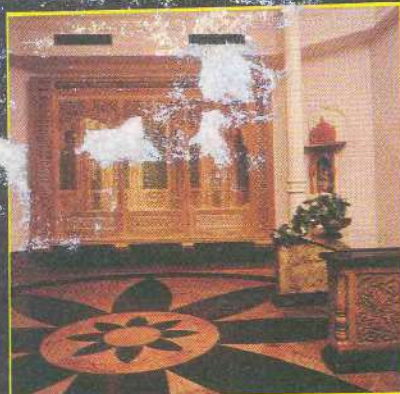


# The Fountainhead

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Hafeez Contractor's  
Trend-setting Aesthetics



Sen Kapadia's WALMI

the journal for better environment

## Hafeez Contractor

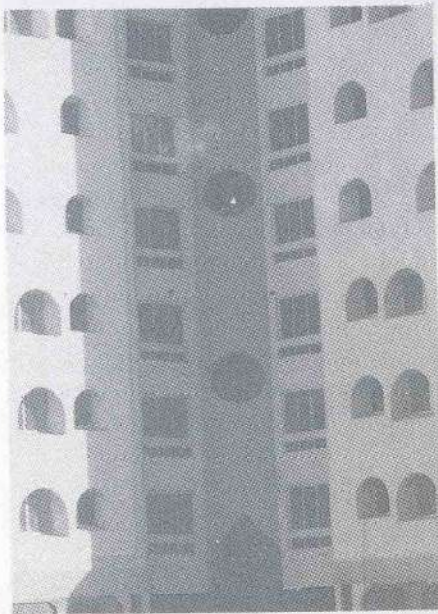
# Trend-setting Aesthetics

The outburst of creative ideas still continues despite scepticism from fellow professionals.

**F**rom the florid Gothic and Baroque styles of the British Era, Bombay's architecture took a full turn to humdrum modernism, reaching its apotheosis with ugly, bland and unimaginative box like structures without any form of ornamentation whatsoever.

Then, a few years ago a series of monoliths in playful, pastel shades highlighted by domes, pitched roofs and spires, circular windows, crescentic balconies and atriums literally sprung up turning their creator, Hafeez Contractor into a celebrity.

Vastu Apartments, Beach Classic, Oxford Towers in Bombay and the



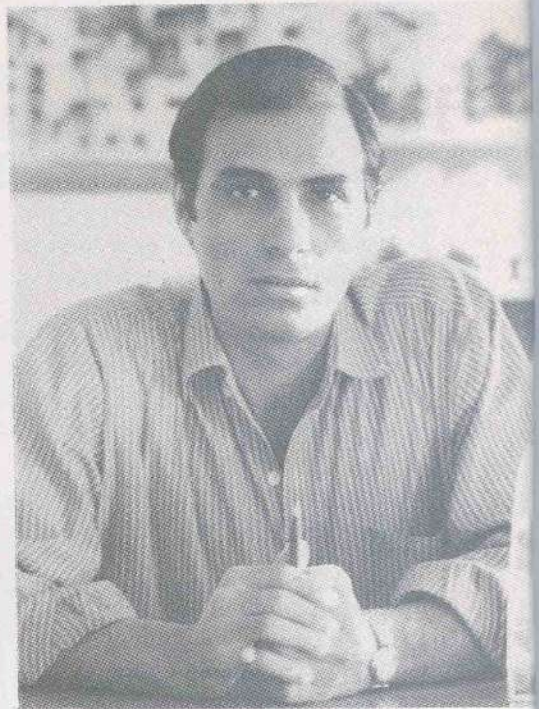
*Green Fields—A low cost residential apartment comprising flats of only 310 sq. ft. carpet area. The total building is divided into two pieces and connected together with an atrium. This makes it look lighter and very interesting.*

*Above: Details of Green Fields.*

Konark series in Pune soon became imposing landmarks and evoked endless comment and controversy with their dramatic design.

Architects were shocked and many found his work pretentious, bizarre and even dangerous. But, Contractor's uncanny outburst of designs continued getting better and more dramatic. Since his zany touch gave his building that special designer look it wasn't long before he was the blue eyed boy of the builders in Bombay. Professional acknowledgement was not very far too, Contractor's designs soon started setting trends and provoked imitations.

**H**afeez Contractor's style of work is very unorthodox and embodies different trends. Fresh from Columbia University and greatly influenced by the Post Modern trend in architecture, his work reflects its emphasis on classicism,



ornamentation, symbolism and on richness of form and colour. But, he however also makes cross references with all different styles of architecture. Infact, personally Contractor describes his style as "eclectic".—He claims he has no clear cut style but digs into a little of every architectural style from Pop to Post Modernism with vernacular deviations if and when required.

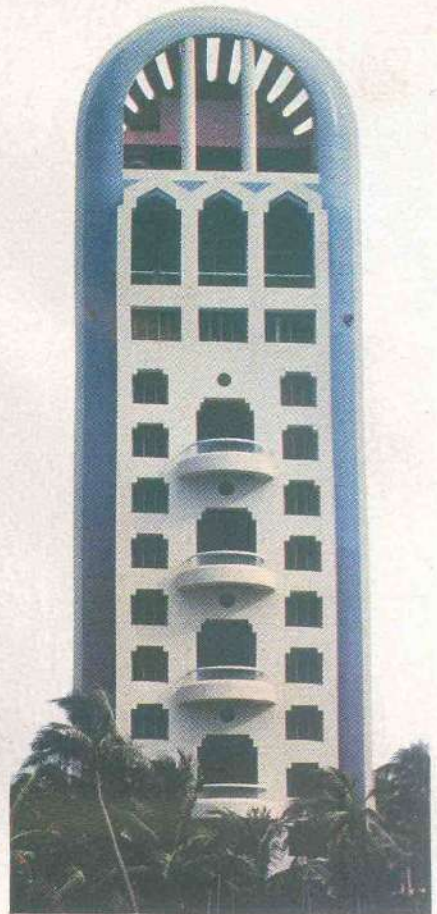
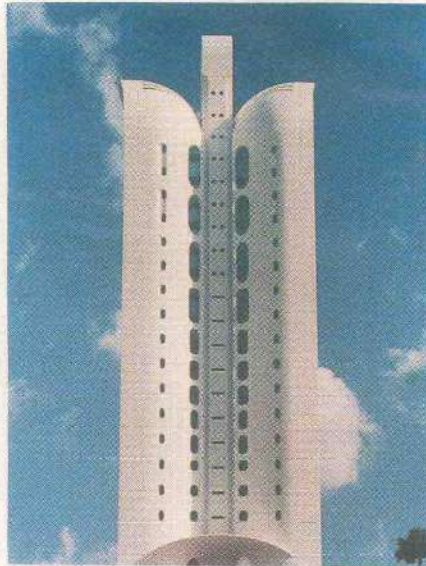
"Architecture", he stresses "is something I do for the people. There are 1,000 million different kind of people with different kind of





*From Left:*

*Beach Classic: The eighteen storeyed residential tower stands tall at Bombay's Versova beach.*



*Oxford Towers: Contractor's ethereal bird like beauty almost soars into the sky at Andheri.*

*Vastu Apartments: Contractor's earlier surprise that sprung up at Worli. With his pastel coloured obelisk-lingam trademark, it soon became an imposing landmark evoking comment and controversy with its dramatic design.*

*The Times of India  
Response Department.*

*Contractor's interior decor style is as bold and dramatic as his buildings.*



*The Fountainhead*



*The Konark series of projects in Pune dispel the notion that Hafeez Contractor has no qualms about being an architect only for the super rich. There is literally room for all kinds of budgets in these fashionable yet optimally functional residential complexes.*



*Clockwise*

*Konark Park—Residential buildings evidently displaying the Contractor touch.*

*Konark Estate—For requirements ranging from one bedroom flats to terraced houses.*

*Konark Nagar—A sprawling township of eighteen buildings and 104 row houses.*

*Konark Vihar—Row Houses and a block of flats make up this lovely complex on a beautifully landscaped site of approximately one lakh sq. ft.*





*Unit Trust of India*

*V.T. Station  
Ticket Reservation Centre*



*Gulf Air-Ticketing Office*



*The Fountainhead*



budgets. I chalk and change according to each person. There is no specific style or philosophy. A good design is what makes people happy. I believe that all styles are good. A particular style tends to stifle creativity. It is best to be bold and free of the burden of any one style."

With his unusual sense of aesthetics coupled with uncanny finesse, Contractor's work is considered upmarket, projects that come with his exclusive designer label.

Beyond the attractive facades Contractor's architectural vision strives for sculptural form. He tries to express mass and power through light almost fragile ethereal forms.

Contractor uses marked ingenuity to provide innovative, architectural and engineering solutions demanded by the unusual design of his buildings thus writing off critics who dub his work dangerous.

**C**ontractor enjoys designing super luxurious extravagant apartments for the super rich. The press has lapped onto these designs and concluded that he has no qualms about being an architect only for the rich. But, Contractor differs, he gets very excited, when talking about his low cost projects. "In our country if you do something for the poor you go into a chawl, break it down and make another chawl instead. You get a good price for it, you may even get an award if it is a Government or Housing Board sanctioned project!



*The fantasy and dream like collection from Hafeez Contractor's fashion shop.*

*Lok Puram—Phase III—Contractor's zany touches bring his distinctive style to these small, three room flats in Thane. The buildings are linked together with an atrium—another popular feature in most of Contractor's buildings.*

*Lok Puram Row Houses*

*Below:*

*Konark Indraprastha.  
Mulund, Bombay*

*A massive residential apartment built on fantasy in a stunning design incorporating all of Contractor's trademarks—domes, pitched roofs, spires, crescentic windows and of course the torn paper look.*



Why? he questions, "should this be so." The explanation often received, he opines, "is too many constraints."

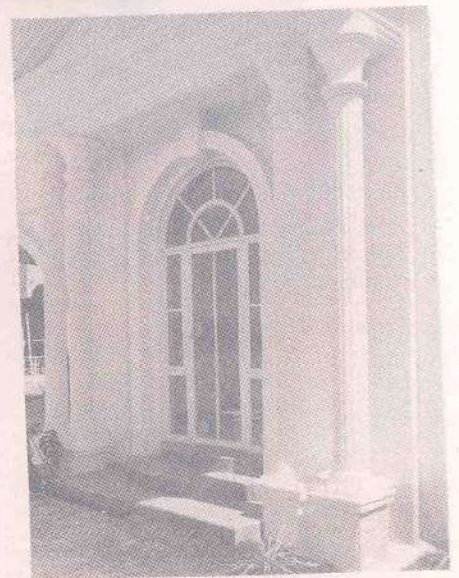
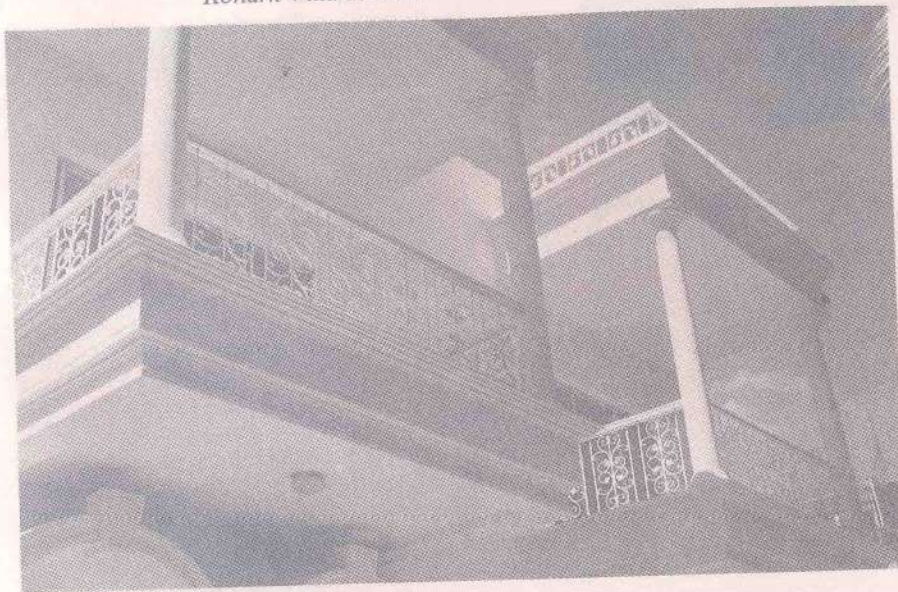
"But, when we do it with so many more constraints, nobody is willing to recognise it! It passes off as expensive and frivolous!"

The 310 sq. ft. carpet area flats in Green Fields, Andheri is Contractor's best example of how he has blended aesthetics with functionalism, with absolutely none or very little increase in cost. According to Contractor "You cannot separate the two, whatever the constraint. Colour does not cost money, does it? And luckily, we don't have any government restrictions on paint yet!"

"You don't have to glamourise a building, but its the small details that make the difference. I believe all my buildings are superior, each and everyone looks beautiful."



*Konark Villa at Pune*



Contractor's housing complexes especially some of the Lok Group and Konark projects are not exactly for the poor, but they are affordable to the middle income group. In context to the prevalent real estate prices, home owners feel they get a better deal when buying homes designed by Contractor. It must be psychologically satisfying to know your small, one-room kitchen unit is designed by the same celebrity who designed those zany structures spotted around in Bombay, Pune,

Delhi and elsewhere. Contractor claims he just wants to be a good architect and puts equal interest into all his work.

Contractor's interior decor style is as bold and dramatic as his buildings. His distinctive eclectic design is very evident in the brilliant renovation of the Times of India offices in Bombay. He deviates into multiple styles and the result is a dramatic post-modern, yet classical,

ornamental column clad interior with hints of Rajasthan and Mughal decor! The Gulf-Air decor on the other hand is simply post-modern sophisticated chic, agleam with polished surfaces.

Contractor is fast and practical. Brilliantly coloured, voluptuously curved, toy-like designs are rushed to anxious builders who keep making demands on his creativity. This is because buildings designed by him fetch a higher price. Besides,



*Left:  
Megh Malhar, Goregaon*

the real estate boom has created a competitive streak in the housing market pressurizing builders to construct attractive buildings.

With a back up of over forty associate architects his firm handles nearly seventy-five projects at any given time, all very different from each other and all experimenting with so many designs. Interaction between associates is easy and results are fast.

Contractor's practice though dominated by residential apartment blocks and bungalows now spans a wide variety of projects. A massive housing colony for Bharat Petroleum, factories for Sumeet and Kedia, an amusement park called Fun Fair Land and a Hyatt Regency hotel in Mauritius are a few from his long list. Contractor has also undertaken interiors for the British Deputy High Commission, Nestle India, Bharat Petroleum, Unit Trust of India, Bombay Mercantile Co-operative Bank, Bombay Hospital Deluxe, Khyber Restaurant, Times of India, IDBI and a host of private and airline interiors.

*ZCD*

*Konark Puram—2-3 bedroom row houses skillfully designed around a central professionally landscaped lush green garden, a club house and a swimming pool.*

