

FOLIO 4

THE FLOORS WE LAY

# inscape

AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS

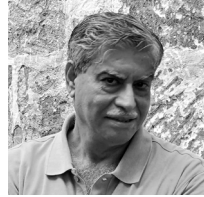


The cover sketch by Shirish Beri is a quiet meditation on space, light, and life. Inspired by the arrival courtyard at SDM Medical College, its fluid lines capture dynamic floors that open into green courts and skylit connections, fostering interaction across people, activities, and levels.

Echoing the theme, “The Floors We Lay,” the sketch becomes metaphor for the foundations we shape, the journeys we traverse, and the silent imprints design leaves on our collective experience.

The  
Floors  
We  
Lay

# Editorial Board



**Sarosh Wadia**  
President,  
IIID



**Jabeen Zacharias**  
Editor,  
IIID Inscape



**Shamini Shanker-Jain**  
Honorary Secretary,  
IIID



**Sajan Pulimood**  
Co-Editor,  
IIID Inscape

## Guest Editors Folio - 07



**Noshir Talati**  
Co-Founder and Principal  
Architect, TPA Mumbai



**Sandeep Khosla**  
Founder and Principal,  
Khosla + Anand



**Neelkanth Chhaya**  
Architect & Former Dean,  
Faculty of Architecture, CEPT



**Khushnu Panthaki Hoof  
& Sönke Hoof**  
Founders Studio Sangath

## Publishers & Knowledge Partners



**Dr. Rema S Kartha**  
Founder & Editor  
KBooks



**Sonam Ambe**  
Founder,  
Local Gyan



**Ravisha Merchant**  
Bureau Head,  
IIID Inscape

# Foreword

Dear Readers,

As the Indian Institute of Interior Designers celebrates its Golden Jubilee year, we find ourselves reflecting not just on five decades of remarkable design, but on the foundations we continue to lay for the future. This term has been one of extraordinary momentum, marked by landmark events, national initiatives, and most recently, the acquisition of a new national office space that adds permanence to the growing legacy of IIID.

It's in this context that the fourth edition of our Golden Jubilee Inscape Rainbow Series, *The Floors We Lay*, takes on even more meaning. The title itself evokes something primal and enduring, what we walk on becomes what we stand for. It is where architecture begins and culture embeds itself. In a time when we are physically expanding IIID's footprint, this folio serves as a symbolic and timely meditation on the spaces we create from the ground up.

This series as a whole has been one of our most ambitious and inspired undertakings, a collectible coffee table publication, yes, but more importantly, a deeply reflective document of design values. Each folio explores one elemental aspect of space, but through the lens of philosophy, materiality, behaviour, and time. The result is a layered anthology of design thinking at its best.

In *The Floors We Lay*, we see how flooring is not just about surface; it's about sensibility. It carries memory, movement, and emotion. It holds stories, sometimes quite literally, in its grains, textures, and patterns. This folio doesn't just look down, it looks deep.

I extend heartfelt thanks to the editorial team, led with passion and insight, and to the invited contributors, some of the finest design minds in India, for what continues to be a milestone series for the Institute. The quality of thought, writing, and design direction elevates each folio into a lasting contribution to our field.

I hope this publication will be read, revisited, and shared widely, not only through its printed form but also through our dedicated IIID Inscape website, which offers even more engagement and perspective.

As we step into our future, may we continue to lay floors that hold more than weight, they must hold meaning.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Ar. Sarosh Wadia'.

AR. SAROSH WADIA  
PRESIDENT - IIID

# Editor's Note



JABEEN ZACHARIAS  
EDITOR, IIID INSCAPE

## The Ground Beneath Final

One of my earliest memories is of summer holidays at my grandparents' home, tucked into the plantation hills of Kerala, along the Western Ghats. I can still see the little girl I was, eyes wide in wonder and resistance, watching as the floor was given a fresh coat of... cow dung slurry.

The smell was sharp, wet, earthy. The women's hands moved confidently, coated in green-brown paste, barefoot and chatting, sweeping the mix across the floor in graceful arcs. I felt a strange blend of amazement and honest disgust. How could something so unpleasant be part of a home?

But the next day, everything would shift. The smell would soften. The colour would deepen into a warm yellow-green. Within days, the floor would feel soft yet firm, grippy, grounded, and human. I began to notice the subtle prints left behind by fingers and movement. That floor wasn't just laid, it was tended, touched, loved as in a ritual. A quiet base prepared for life to unfold.

Six decades later, with nearly five of architectural practice behind me, after laying floors for mansions and five-star retreats, I've rarely seen anything surpass the quiet dignity of those dung-smoothened floors. Oddly enough, they remain my first and deepest understanding of what a floor truly is.

Before the walls speak, before the roof shelters, before any colour claims identity, it is the floor, its vital statistics that defines the space that holds us.

And it holds weight – both living and dead, of men and materials, and their stories too.

The Floors We Lay, this folio explores the solid ground on which we anchor space, including finishes, textures, techniques, and all regular ideas and idioms related to it. But beyond fundamentals, it is also about how it impacts us in seen and unseen ways. It is about what lies under every decision we take, and how that foundation defines and decides everything we do and how we do it.

We walk on floors without looking, but they look back and catch up with us even when we are long gone.

The scattered marbles of childhood.  
The urgent footfalls of adolescence.  
The tired return at dusk.  
The bare-footed prayer.  
The chalk-drawn game.  
The long-forgotten crack in a corner.

Floors bear witness to who we are!



*Hands that tend, floors that remember, a quiet ritual where earth, touch, and life come together.*

To lay a floor is to decide how someone will enter, how they will pause, how they will gather, and how they will leave. It is to choreograph our moves and memorise without words. It is to mark where rituals will happen and routines will be rooted. We lay floors, and to a large extent, they lay us too.

Folio 4 of Inscape, *The Floors We Lay*, brings you the wisdom of the legendary Noshir Talati, the seasoned insights of Sandeep Khosla, the academic depth of Neelkanth Chhaya, the innovative take of Khushnoo and Sönke from Sangath, the practice and philosophy of Dean D'Cruz, and the articulate hand of Shirish Beri. We walk the 'floor' to rediscover what it truly means to design from the ground up. Each voice here reminds us: floors are not finishes. They are foundations.

**To lay a floor is to decide how someone will enter, how they will pause, how they will gather, and how they will leave. It is to choreograph our moves and memorise without words. It is to mark where rituals will happen and routines will be rooted. We lay floors, and to a large extent, they lay us too.**

In a world moving faster than ever, where homes change, offices flex, and permanence becomes rare, the only honest way to design is to return to the base. To ask: what are we laying down, truly? What are we asking people to walk on and into, and what do we expect them to carry forward?

Floor could also be about the moral 'basement' and foundation we need to build on today. What do we lay beneath our design decisions? On what stilts of principles, ethics and considerations do we lay it? Are our floors laid to stand the shaky, shifting grounds which mankind treads today? They carry the weight of choices we make, not just for ourselves, but for the lives that will walk, run, dance, grow and age gracefully. Let us be mindful so that we do not stumble or fall.

There is an old proverb, "If you do not know the ground you stand on, how will you reach out for the stars?"

'The Floors We Lay' are the moral compasses we stand on. Let us lay them well.



## 03 Foreword

Sarosh Wadia

Marking IIID's Golden Jubilee, this foreword reflects on legacy, space, and the deeper meanings of the floors we lay.

## 04 Editor's Note

Jabeen Zacharias

A reflection on how the floors we lay shape our spaces, influence our choices, and quietly define the lives we live.

## 08 The Floor Beneath: Sensations and Structures

Noshir Talati

A reflective dialogue on how floors carry memory, guide movement, and embody culture from red oxide nostalgia to future-ready innovations.

## 16 The Quiet Beauty of Grounded Design

Sandeep Khosla

On stones, heritage tiles, and local craft, where climate, culture, and memory converge to shape floors as living anchors of design.

## 24 The Ground Beneath & Around, A Sketch-Narrative

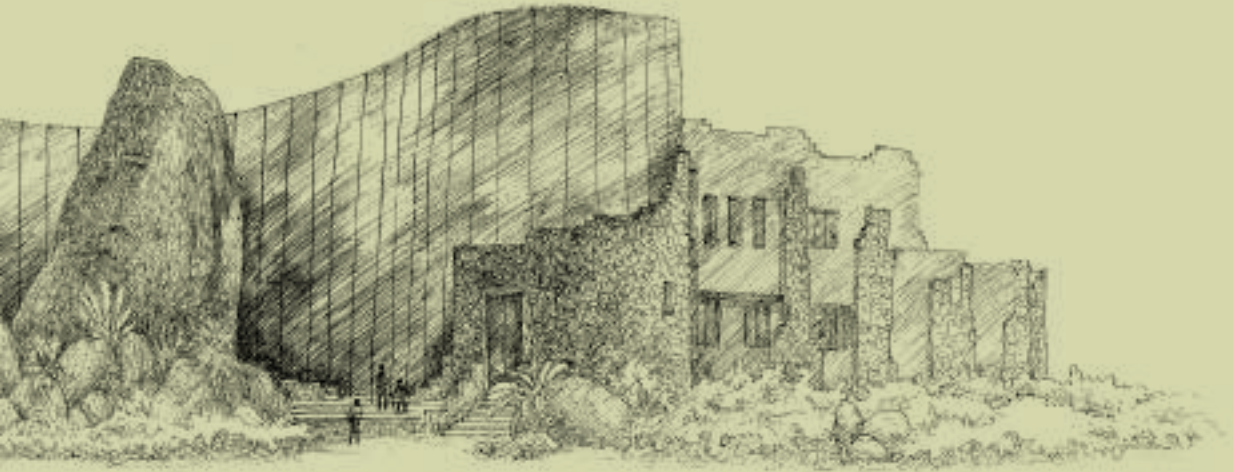
Shirish Beri

Through sketch-narratives, Beri reveals floors as living surfaces; breathing, rippling, and remembering, where earth, water, and spirit converge in quiet architecture.

## 32 Reality and Illusion: The Power of Spatial Perception

Neelkanth Chhaya

Exploring floors as signals of truth and deception, where play, culture, and perception blur boundaries between ground and sky, reality and illusion.



## 40 The Floor as a Beginning

Sanjay Puri

A spiral of stone and earth where floor and roof exchange roles skillfully, as shaded courts turn memory into movement, and community into belonging.

## 48 Grounding Architecture: The Floor as Threshold Between Body, Earth, and Space

Khushnu Panthaki Hoof & Sönke Hoof

On floors as thresholds of memory and meaning where plinths, otlas, stepwells, and pilgrim paths turn ground into experience, body into belonging.

## 54 The Floor is the First Line: Journey through Mozaic's Work

Dean D'Cruz

From courtyards to cathedrals, jungle camps to spas, D'Cruz crafts floors as journeys and thresholds, where land, body, and memory shape space from the ground up.

## 60 25 Moments That Defined Floors

Curated Research on Design Evolution

Explorations tracing pivotal moments where floors evolved from earth to illusion, shaping culture, memory, and the way we move through space.

# *The Floor Beneath: Sensations and Structures*

NOSHIR TALATI

**A CONVERSATION BETWEEN NOSHIR TALATI (NT) AND  
JABEEN ZACHARIAS (JZ), EDITOR- IIIID INSCAPE AT  
MUMBAI, 3 JULY 2025**

In this edition of The Inspire Series, we sit down with the legendary architect Noshir Talati, whose practice spans over six decades and whose work continues to shape India's architectural landscape. Known for his clarity of thought, material honesty, and enduring commitment to function-driven design, Talati invites us to look beneath our feet, quite literally.

In a conversation that spans memory, craft, culture, and innovation, Talati reflects on the humble floor, not just as a structure, but as an experience. With editor Jabeen Zacharias, he explores how floors hold memory, guide behaviour, signal transitions, and respond to climate and context. From red oxide nostalgia to underfloor cooling systems, from thresholds to temples, this dialogue reveals the poetic and practical potential of the floor in architecture.



*Noshir Talati is a pioneering Indian architect whose early years around the then Bombay's Victoria Terminus sparked a lifelong passion for design. After earning a G.D. Arch from Rachana Sansad's Academy of Architecture, he started his practice in 1964 in a 100 sq ft office in Bombay's Fort area. In 1968, he ventured abroad to pursue his Master of Architecture at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, and completed it with Distinction.*

*Influenced by Modernist Icons like Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe and others, he co-founded the firm, Talati and Shroff Associate Architects, and later founded the firm Talati and Panthaky Associated Designers (TPA), a reputed multidisciplinary firm known for its functional, detail-oriented, and fad-resistant approach. Notable projects close to his heart include Ceejay House and Palais Royale in Worli. Talati continues to inspire with his dedication, innovation, and unwavering love for the architectural profession.*

**JZ:** Let's begin with a simple question. When you hear the word floor, what's the first association that comes to your mind? Not as an architect or designer, but just in everyday terms, what does the word evoke for you?

NT: When I hear the word floor, I think of it simply, the surface beneath our feet. It doesn't need to be fancy; it just needs to work. And maybe that's what makes it profound. You rarely notice it when it does its job, but the moment it's uneven or slippery, it demands attention. A floor is about function. It supports, guides, and quietly carries the weight of everything above.



*In the home theatre of a private villa in Udaipur, the high-gloss black marble floor with intricate inlay work becomes the showstopper, transforming the powder bathroom into an experience of timeless elegance and luxury.*

**JZ:** Let's talk about floors not just as surfaces, but as starting points. When you think of the floor as the first element of a space, the foundation, how do you see its role? Does it influence how the rest of the space comes together?

NT: The floor is absolutely foundational, structurally and experientially. It's often where my design process begins. It connects everything: bearing loads, guiding movement, setting the palette. The choice of material, stone, tile, wood, or concrete, matters deeply. Each behaves differently with light, touch, and time.

In most projects, once the flooring is decided, the rest follows: walls, columns, furniture. Even acoustics respond to its surface. I see it as a silent anchor. It doesn't demand attention, but when done right, it holds everything together. You can sense when a space works, and often, it's because the floor got it right.

**JZ:** Do you recall any memorable floor or ground you encountered as a child that shaped your spatial memory?

NT: My earliest architectural impressions weren't shaped by textbooks, but by spaces filled with memory, many rooted in the floors I encountered. I was drawn to Frank Lloyd Wright's work even as a beginner in college, not for its complexity, but for the warmth and honesty in how his floors spoke to the rest of the structure. His use of stone and wood felt natural and integrated, teaching me early on that materials matter and how they meet the ground shapes everything.

I also remember traditional homes with smooth, cool red oxide floors, places where one could sit, play, lie down, and feel rooted. Floors are where children crawl, elders rest, and stories are shared. They carry memory in ways walls never can. Those early impressions still shape how I think about space today.



*The meticulously detailed stone flooring anchors the space with understated elegance, seamlessly blending durability with design while setting a refined tone for the arrival experience at Ceejay House, Worli, Mumbai.*

**JZ: I'm curious about your thoughts on floors in outdoor settings, courtyards, verandas, and walkways. Do you approach these differently? How do outdoor floors influence movement, scale, or experience?**

NT: Outdoor floors differ greatly in purpose, scale, and interaction. They aren't just extensions of indoor spaces; they stand on their own. Exposed to weather and wear, they must be durable and inviting. Courtyards, for instance, are spaces of pause; their flooring should welcome, yet withstand sun, rain, and time.

I often choose stone such as marble and granite, rough tiles, or exposed concrete, materials that feel grounded. Patterns matter too; a checkerboard or aligned joints can subtly guide movement. Outdoor floors mediate between built and natural, enclosure and openness. They're not just functional, nor merely decorative. Slopes for drainage, textures for grip, these choices shape how the space is felt. In the end, an outdoor floor should belong, connecting not just structures, but people.

**JZ: Let's talk about thresholds, those moments when the floor changes material, level, or direction. How do you approach these transitions in your design?**

NT: Transitions are more than functional; they're emotional cues. A floor change tells the body to pause, to notice. Steps become rituals, like stepping into a courtyard or up into a temple. Even in interiors, a shift from wood to stone can signal a change in mood or purpose.

I focus deeply on these seams, not just technically, but philosophically. The joint, the alignment, and the material shift all should feel intentional and graceful. Whether it's a slope or a shadow gap, these moments carry memory. They guide movement, mark ceremony, suggest hierarchy, helping people move through space without signs. Subtle, but powerful design.



*An outdoor floor is its own ground; in this private villa driveway at Udaipur, stone inlay and textured patterns transform function into invitation, seamlessly linking the built environment with the natural surroundings.*



*In the courtyard of a private villa at Lonavala, the seamlessly patterned stone flooring anchors the serene space, guiding movement while harmonising with the natural textures and tranquil landscape that surround it.*

**JZ: We've inherited such a rich vocabulary of traditional flooring in India, from red oxide and cow dung floors to terrazzo and hand-laid stone. How do you engage with these traditions in your work? Do they still have relevance?**

NT: Traditional flooring was deeply responsive to climate, culture, and local materials, and remains relevant today. Red oxide, for instance, is cooling, durable, and beautiful. Older homes used stone or terracotta in patterns that were both practical and resourceful, not trend-driven. In our practice, we try to revive these traditions with care, not as nostalgia, but as meaningful design. That could mean using local stone with a modern finish, or reinterpreting patterns with smaller sizes or mixed materials. A challenge is finding skilled labour with this knowledge, but when it comes together, it's incredibly rewarding. These floors aren't just aesthetic; they age well and carry stories. When clients enter such spaces, they feel it. The impact is visual, tactile, and emotional. That grounding, in material and memory, is worth preserving.

**JZ: You've always emphasised materials, their honesty, texture, and behaviour over time. When it comes to flooring, how do you choose materials? Is it a matter of aesthetics, durability, or something more tactile and experiential?**

NT: It's a mix of everything- function, feel, and emotion. For me, flooring is one of the most tactile elements in a space. It's what people are in constant contact with. You walk barefoot on it, you sit on it, and children play on it. So, beyond durability or visual appeal, I think a lot about how it feels- underfoot, under sunlight, even when it's wet. That sensory aspect is important.

Then there's the question of what the space demands. A home may ask for warmth, maybe wood, or something softer. A public building might require something more rugged, like a rough stone or hard tile. In one project, we used a sandstone with natural imperfections, and the client loved how it caught light differently at different times of day. Those subtleties matter.

I also think materials have memory; stone from a quarry, tile from a region, these aren't generic choices. They bring with them a certain rootedness. I don't believe in using materials just because they're fashionable. The floor has to belong to the place, the people, and the purpose. When that alignment happens, the material speaks, quietly but firmly.

**JZ: When designing for institutional or public buildings, say a school, museum, or cultural centre, does your approach to flooring shift? How do you see floors contributing to the collective experience in these shared spaces?**

NT: Definitely, the approach shifts. In public or institutional spaces, flooring has to manage a lot: foot traffic, acoustics, maintenance, and scale. But it also has to evoke a certain dignity. I think of it as setting the tone for how people enter, move, and pause within a space. For example, in schools, the flooring must be durable but also warm. Children sit on the floor, lie on it, and spill on it. So we've used everything from Kota stone to IPS with local aggregates, robust yet earthy.

In museums or galleries, the flooring often becomes a quiet backdrop; it mustn't overpower the art, but it must hold its presence. And in theatres or auditoriums, we're even more sensitive to sound; the floor affects how footsteps echo, how sound travels. So the material and finish become part of the acoustic strategy.

What I love most is when a floor in such a space starts showing gentle signs of use, a soft shine on a corridor where thousands have walked, or the slight darkening of steps leading to a library. These marks of memory matter. They remind you that architecture is being lived, not just looked at.

**JZ: Pattern in flooring, whether through layout, joints, or inlays, can often be the most subtle yet effective tool. How do you think about patterns when you design a floor? What does it add beyond just surface treatment?**

NT: Pattern is one of those quiet elements that can completely alter how a space feels, without shouting. Even when I'm working with a single material, I'll often use a pattern to create rhythm, direction, or a sense of pause. For example, a simple stone can be laid diagonally, or in a staggered grid, or with a border, and each variation suggests a different tempo.

Sometimes, it's not even about visual contrast. It's about how joints align, how sizes shift across a room. In larger spaces, I might use subtle pattern changes to break monotony or to signal functional zones, an entryway, a corridor, or a sitting area. In more expressive moments, we've also done brass or tile inlays, especially in threshold areas or transition zones. Those become moments of emphasis.

What matters is that the pattern feels intentional. Not decorative for its own sake, but meaningful. A pattern can guide your eye. It can slow you down or speed you up. It can add warmth or clarity. The floor, after all, is like a silent map, and the pattern is what helps you read it.



*In the driveway lobby of Avighna House at Worli, Mumbai, the simple stone flooring combines durability with design, creating a grand sense of arrival while seamlessly blending luxury with functionality.*

**JZ: Stepping away from the drawing board for a moment, do you have any personal memories associated with floors that stayed with you? Maybe from your childhood, or an early project? Something that shaped your relationship with space?**

NT: Yes, many, actually! But one that stays with me is from my home in the Dock area of Bombay. The floor was made of china mosaic, cool underfoot even in the peak of summer. There was an ornament, a pattern, and it had presence. As a child, I would lie on it, trace shapes in the patterns with my fingers, or watch the light shift across its surface in the afternoons. It was my first encounter with how alive a floor could feel. Even the floor of the terrace was in china mosaic, with colourful patterns and borders in different vibrant colours.

Later, as an architecture student, I worked on restoring a heritage house where the original Athangudi tiles had worn out at the centre but held strong at the edges. Instead of replacing them entirely, we designed a border around the old tiles and introduced a new material within, creating a floor that acknowledged time, wear, and care. That lesson never left me.

Floors carry more than weight. They carry memory, touch, wear, and silence. And they can be both timeless and tender, if we allow them to be.

**JZ: Craftsmanship is often most visible, and most vulnerable, in floors. From handmade tiles to intricate inlays, floors carry the imprint of the artisan. How do you see the role of craft in flooring today? Is it still possible to honour it in our fast-paced world?**

NT: It's true, floors carry craft in a way few other elements do. You can see it in the alignment of a tile, the edge of a joint, the polish of stone, or even the subtle undulation of a hand-finished concrete floor. These are not just surface effects; they're expressions of time, labour, and skill.

Today, that kind of attention is under pressure. Speed, budgets, and industrialisation have reduced opportunities for traditional craftsmanship. But I do believe there's still space to preserve it, and it's our responsibility as architects and designers to make room for it. Even when we use new materials or prefabricated systems, we can bring in artisans to finish, to detail, to inflect.

One of our projects used waste wood blocks to create a tessellated floor. Every piece was hand-cut and laid like a puzzle. It took time, yes. But the result was a floor that told a story, of reuse, of people, of place.

Craft is not about nostalgia. It's about presence. It's about bringing the human hand and heart to the surface we walk on every day.

**JZ: In India especially, the floor isn't just a surface; it's often a seat, a stage, a sacred space. People sit on it to eat, to pray, to teach. Do you think this cultural intimacy with the floor still influences how we design today?**

NT: It's one of the richest aspects of our architectural heritage. In many Indian homes, especially in the south, the floor isn't just beneath us, it's with us. We sit, draw kolams, celebrate rituals, all grounded in it. This gives the floor a dignity often missed in Western design.

I try to carry this intimacy into contemporary work. In one institutional project, we designed a sunken stone court for students to sit and talk, not furniture-led, but body-led. That shifts the experience of space.

Material matters too. Cool stone in summer, warm wood in cold, these are gestures of care. A floor that gleams too much can feel distant; one that wears gently invites touch. When we lose that body-floor connection, we lose something vital. So I always ask: Will someone want to sit here? If yes, we've done something right.

**JZ: As we design for the future, floors too must evolve, in material, purpose, and philosophy. Are you seeing shifts in how we think about floors today, in terms of technology, sustainability, or cultural continuity?**

NT: Floors are no longer just surfaces; they're becoming systems. We've explored underfloor cooling, radiant heating, and even integrated lighting. These aren't luxuries; they reshape how people experience space. Sustainability is key, too. Terrazzo, recycled wood, lime plaster, stabilised mud, these materials are returning out of necessity, not nostalgia. They're local, breathable, and beautiful.

But we must also honour cultural continuity. Older practices, like sloped courtyards or temple acoustics, hold deep wisdom. We don't need to mimic the past, but we should learn from it. Often, innovation means doing less, with more insight. The floor is changing, becoming more conscious of the body, the climate, and the stories it carries.

**JZ: If you were to offer one piece of advice to a young architect or interior designer beginning to think about floors, what would you ask them to consider?**

NT: I'd tell them, 'Never see the floor as just a finish'. It's the first surface people touch, the stage for daily life. Think about how it feels underfoot, how it will age, and what memories it will hold. A good floor doesn't just support, it grounds and connects.



*Bold geometric flooring in contrasting tones defines modern luxury, guiding the eye through a space where art and design seamlessly converge at the Lounge in Maison Inox at the Jio World Plaza at BKC, Mumbai*

---

*As the conversation draws to a close, what lingers is the quiet power of the floor, its capacity to hold weight and meaning in equal measure. For Noshir Talati, the floor is never just background. It is presence, pattern, and poetry. It is ritual, resistance, and rest. In a world often obsessed with surfaces that dazzle, Talati reminds us to honour the surfaces that endure, those that welcome bare feet, hold stories, and age with grace. His reflections urge young designers to see the floor not as a finished layer, but as a starting point, one that can ground people, spaces, and practice with equal care.*



*Sandeep Khosla is the Founder and Principal of Khosla + Anand (formerly Khosla Associates), a leading architecture and interior design firm based in Bengaluru, India. The firm, headed by Sandeep Khosla and Amaresh Anand, is known for its context-driven work, spanning residences, offices, hospitality, and educational institutions. They have been honoured with several awards, including The 'Education' Category winner at WAF/INSIDE Festival 2013 (Singapore), Winner of WAN 'House of the Year 2017' (London), and 'JK Architect of the Year' award 2024, and have been listed among the most influential designers by Architectural Digest for 12 consecutive years (2014-2025).*

*Sandeep has been a speaker at several international design conferences like 361 Degrees and India Design ID, ICA (London) and Archmarathon (Milan), and a judge and speaker at WAF (Singapore). Sandeep graduated in Architecture from Pratt Institute, New York.*



*At the Retreat in the Sahyadris, the rhythmic choreography of Kota stone flows from inside to out, turning the floor into a tactile bridge between shelter and cliffside sky.*

# The Quiet Beauty of Grounded Design

SANDEEP KHOSLA

My enduring relationship with Kota stone began in the early 2000s. At the time, it was widely regarded as an uninspiring, utilitarian material, most often relegated to the floors of railway platforms, service staircases, or restaurant kitchens. Its mundane use in these unsentimental settings had dulled its aesthetic appeal. That perception shifted for me during a visit

to Ahmedabad, where I saw the late Hasmukh Patel's trademark houses, which elegantly combined exposed brick and concrete with expanses of seamless polished Kota stone. The clarity of vision in those spaces, their material honesty and restraint, revealed a quiet beauty in Kota I had not noticed before.

That moment marked a turning point. I realised then that a material is only as beautiful as the care and creativity with which it is applied. The elegance of Kota isn't in the stone alone, it's in its context. When thoughtfully sourced from a consistent batch and laid by the same skilled craftsmen who usually handle Italian marble, the results can be surprising. What truly elevates the stone is the way it is used, we have often in our interiors juxtaposed grey Kota set against vibrant bursts of colour in upholstery, carpets, accessories and artwork, the contrast working so effectively.

My first use of Kota was in my own home. I chose large 5'x3' polished slabs of grey Kota and was thrilled with the seamless result, the effortless ease with which it complemented timber, and how it served as a neutral backdrop for other interior elements. Soon after, we began incorporating it into several Khosla Associates projects across the country. With time, clients in cities like Hyderabad and New Delhi, markets known for their affinity toward imported Italian marble, started requesting Kota stone as a deliberate and refined design choice.

We then began experimenting with the brown variety of Kota. Unlike its grey counterpart, brown Kota comes with significant tonal variation within a single batch. Some might consider this a limitation, but I find it to be its greatest appeal. The organic diversity of colour is particularly effective in outdoor applications like verandahs, pool decks, and sit-outs, where the earthy variations complement natural surroundings.

Our 2017 project, Retreat in the Sahyadris, exemplifies the kind of layered material experimentation that excites us most. Perched on a cliff overlooking Pawna Lake in Maharashtra, the home uses Kota in both grey and brown hues. Inside, we interspersed mirror-polished and river-finished slabs in a staggered pattern, alternating slab sizes with 10mm joints. The

composition was carefully orchestrated to be rhythmic. The flooring spilled out onto the pool deck, continuing the materiality outdoors in only a river finish, reinforcing the connection between interior and exterior spaces.

The tactile and thermal qualities of Kota proved essential in this project. The surface remained cool underfoot, an essential feature for tropical environments. Its earthy tones echoed the surrounding landscape, creating a strong visual and emotional link between the architecture and the Sahyadri hills. We paired Kota with other expressive materials like rough basalt, polished cement, and exposed plywood, curating a palette that was richly textured. The flooring in this project thus became an anchor for the entire architectural experience.

Climate has also always been a key driver in our material choices. In our recent 2023 Ahmedabad home, Abhikram, extreme summer temperatures shaped the entire design strategy. With the city often reaching 44°C in summer, we had to rely on passive cooling techniques to maintain thermal comfort. Shading devices like horizontal and vertical pergolas, controlled glazing, and optimised cross ventilation in this house were essential. But material selection for the flooring also played a vital role. Indoors, we opted for cast-in-situ terrazzo with large marble chips for its cooling properties. Outdoors, intelligent hardscape selection was just as critical. With landscape consultant Ashish Teli, we reduced lawn area, given the city's water scarcity, and incorporated hardscape areas and sitouts in Brick. Brick, with its low thermal conductivity and absorptive capacity, remains cooler than concrete or cement pavers. We laid it in a herringbone pattern to introduce visual interest and texture.



*Herringbone flooring at the Abhikram, from cool Kota to cast terrazzo and brick, the floor becomes the threshold where climate, comfort, and landscape flow seamlessly between inside and out.*

**We paired Kota with other expressive materials like rough basalt, polished cement, and exposed plywood, curating a palette that was richly textured. The flooring in this project thus became an anchor for the entire architectural experience.**



*alternated grey Sadarahalli granite and black Cudappah stone in striking stripes, blending materiality with modern.*

Over the past 30 years, both Amaresh and I have been guided by a contextual approach. Our design ethos is rooted in the belief that architecture must respond to place, culture, and available resources. Even in some of our most flamboyant hospitality projects, we've remained committed to using local materials and craft. 1Q1 Bar and Kitchen (2018) is a case in point. Housed in a 1950s Art Deco building in Bangalore, the project was a tribute to the city's past. We imagined a contemporary space layered with nostalgia. We created a dramatic interior using only local crafts and materials. Cement oxides, a fading craft, were revived. Furniture, fixtures, and finishes were custom-made locally in Bangalore.

The flooring in 1Q1 was bold and directional. We alternated grey Sadarahalli granite and black Cudappah stone in striking stripes, creating a graphic pattern that guided movement through the space. This material choice was not only aesthetic but contextual. Bangalore sits on top of a granite bed, making Sadarahalli a locally abundant resource. The contrast between light and dark stone further reinforced

the Art Deco geometry of the space. In a time when imported materials dominate hospitality interiors, this project demonstrated how rooted, local choices can elevate our design narratives.

Working in Bangalore has also brought us face-to-face with the loss of the city's colonial architectural heritage. Without a robust heritage act, many old bungalows are routinely demolished for high-rise development. We've had the opportunity, on occasion, to engage in restoration or adaptive reuse of these historic spaces.

One such recent project involved reimagining the Main Lawn area of the Bangalore Club, a landmark institution rooted in the city's colonial past. Our task was to masterplan and rejuvenate the club's 1-acre main lawn, a key space for dining and entertainment. Over the past 22 years, the lawn had been neglected, with random, incongruous additions detracting from its beauty. The brief required ample covered dining areas, a new kitchen block, and a redesigned 'Umbrella Bar' as the club's social hub.



*Heritage tiles underfoot in the Bangalore Club colonnade stitch elegance into the lawn's new social spine, echoing a century of footsteps.*

Our interventions were intentionally subtle to preserve the architectural prominence of the existing 100-year-old structures. In the L-shaped colonnade we introduced alongside the lawn, we laid heritage-patterned cement tiles to complement the timber ceilings and the Sadarahalli stone bases and capitals of the columns.

This thread of architectural memory continues in many of our residential projects. One such example is Library House (2013). The homeowners, who had grown up in old Bangalore, wanted

their new home to evoke the colonial vernacular they remembered from their childhoods: wooden columns, Mangalore tile roofs, an open courtyard, a swing in the entrance court. We leaned into these cues, but interpreted them through a contemporary lens. For the main verandah, we designed custom-patterned cement tiles, replicating a motif salvaged from a colonial home marked for demolition. These tiles complement the Mangalore and Kerala-tile roof and transition gracefully into a living room clad in Jaisalmer yellow marble.

**Materials have memory.  
When used with care and  
contextual understanding, they  
don't just form the backdrop;  
they become the story. Flooring,  
to us, is not just a finish. It is a  
canvas of memory, climate,  
culture, and craft, a silent but  
powerful expression of the  
spaces we inhabit.**



*Custom floors in Library House revive memory, where salvaged colonial motifs in patterned tiles anchor the past underfoot.*

# The Ground Beneath and Around

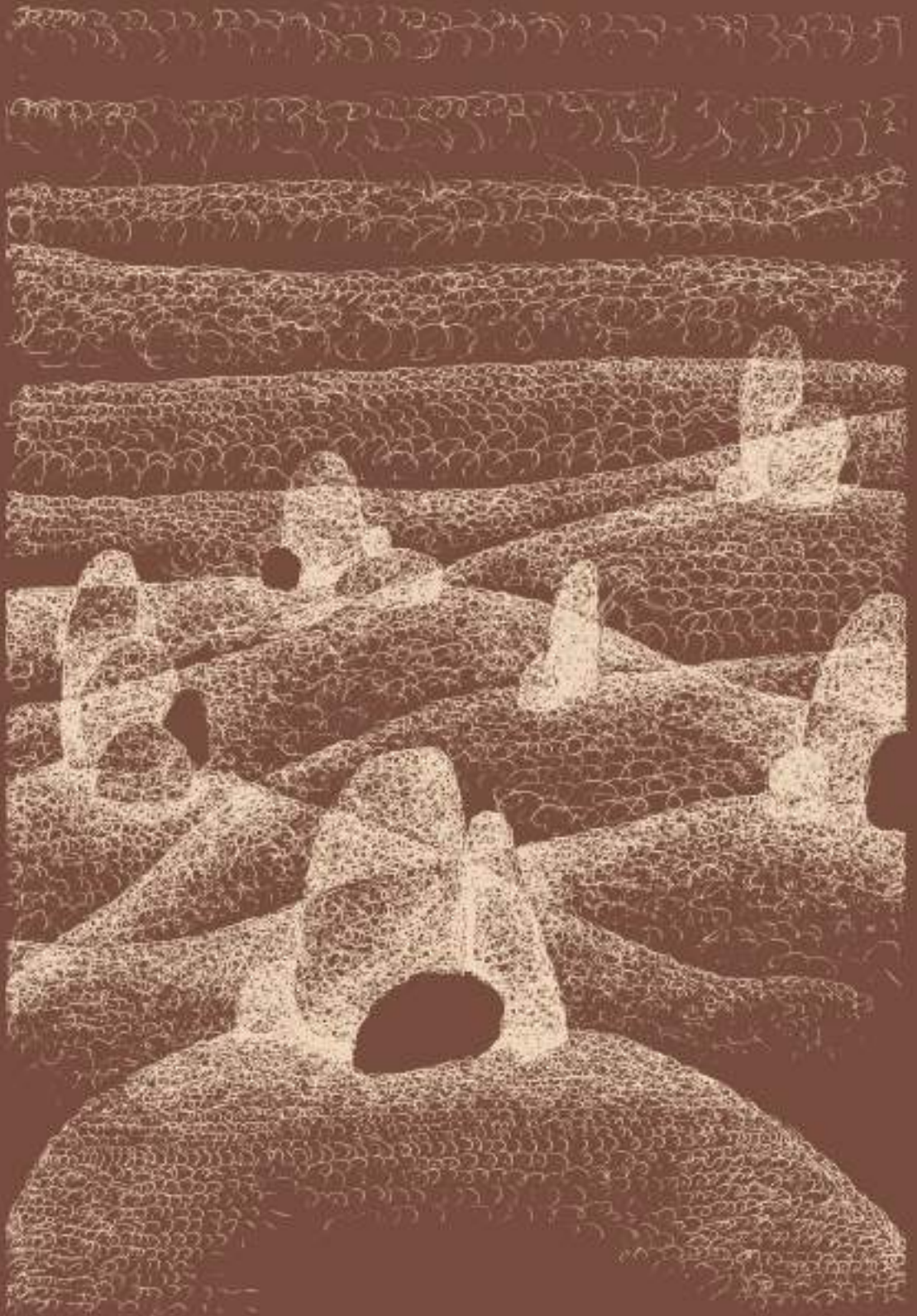


A SKETCH-NARRATIVE BY SHIRISH BERI

Not all floors are flat - some breathe, ripple, and respond. They shape how we move, feel, and belong. Some shimmer like water, others hold memory like earth. A floor isn't just support, it's a living surface of experience, shaped by both what lies above and what we carry within. Even our values and priorities create invisible floors that shape the ones we build.

---

*Architect Shirish Beri's work reflects his deep personal values and life concerns. Since graduating from CEPT in 1974, his architecture has stood apart for its spiritual, humane, and ecological grounding. His designs, across campuses, healthcare, and research institutions, seek a quiet harmony between nature and the built form. For Beri, even a floor is not just a surface, but a lived philosophy: a space to pause, reflect, connect with the earth and with oneself. His work has been recognised in over 150 publications and honoured with the J.K. Great Master's Award, Baburao Mhatre Gold Medal, and two ARCASIA Gold Medals. Through books, exhibitions, and films, he explores architecture as a journey inward. His Humane Equity and Dignity Fund furthers this ethos through grassroots action. A seeker of wholeness, he lives what he builds, through poetry, deep ecology, and mindful living at his farm.*





*Floors as undulating, shifting horizons with changing destinations*



*A "rooted" floor*



*The dynamic, interactive stepped floors of Varanasi*

In the quiet lines of Shirish Beri's sketches, the floor ceases to be a backdrop. It becomes the story itself.

Here, the ground is not something we simply build on, it is something we grow with. It listens and transforms with us, alive to time and touch. Sometimes, the floor becomes the beginning of a tree, rooting thought and reaching upward through creation. Sometimes, it carries the memory of a river, flowing beneath our steps, echoing what once was. These floors are not passive, they are witnesses and collaborators, shaped by place, by presence, by the quiet weight of dreams.



*The gorge in Launceston, Tasmania- A floating floor that bridges across two banks, landscapes and ideologies*



*Bridge of sighs, Venice.... soft, shimmering and mellifluous water also as the floor*

Some thresholds float, delicate bridges inviting us not just to cross land or water, but to enter new ways of seeing and being. More than connectors, they are portals of perception. To pass over or under them is to feel a shift in light, rhythm, and meaning. Suspended between the known and unknown, they blur boundaries and open possibilities. In their spanning, we are reminded that movement is not only spatial, it is emotional, intellectual, and transformative.

A rock outcrop is no longer an obstacle, but a stage  
, an altar, around which space takes form.

A patch of raked sand. A scattering of moss.  
A silent corner of stone.

Even the most minimal floor becomes a meditation.



*Floor as rocky outcrops at LaCONES, Hyderabad*



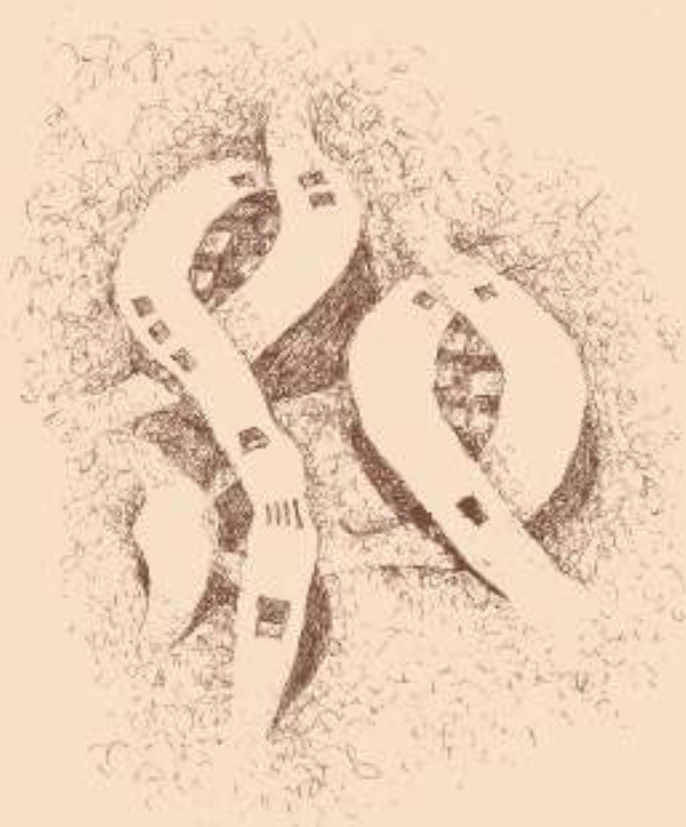
*Floor beautifully negotiating different levels at the Modhera Sun Temple kund*



*A graceful floor with landscape as a homage - Edna's grave*

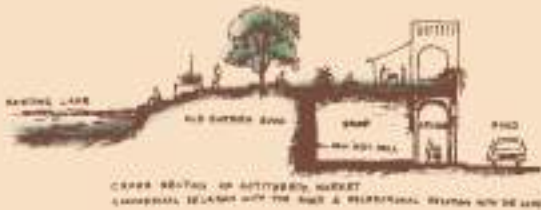
Stillness speaks, softly yet deeply, of return, of journeys ending in quiet grace. It is not absence, but presence distilled. Pattern, too, holds a voice, especially when formed from the broken or forgotten. In piecing fragments into rhythm, there is memory, healing, and care. A mosaic of loss becomes a testament to resilience, the human will to remake meaning. In stillness and pattern, life echoes, held, honoured, reimagined.

In these sketches, floors breathe, expanding and contracting like lungs, alive with the pulse of space and story. More than surfaces, they are sensibilities: embracing, sheltering, revealing. Some twine into the life of a place, visible or hidden, built or imagined. They hold both the weight of walls and the lightness of dreams, at once grounded and transcendent, reminding us that architecture begins not just from earth, but from the spirit that moves upon it.



*Waste and discarded pieces become the floor at Shirish Beri's residence*

*Interchanging roles of the floor and the roof at the Bramha residential school*



*Floor transitioning from water to ground to plants to terrace garden at Kotitirth lake*



*The wonderful variations in the floor levels at the Lingraj temple, Bhubaneswar*

Sometimes, the floor becomes the roof, rising from the ground to offer shelter. Sometimes, the roof descends to become the floor, a surface to gather, to stand, to begin again. In that quiet interchange, where roles dissolve and boundaries blur, a new architecture emerges, not just of space, but of spirit. It listens, adapts, transforms, a dialogue between what holds us up and what holds us close. Here, design becomes an act of humility and wonder, where every surface may uplift, and every limit holds the seed of beginning.

*Variations in the sizes and shapes of different floors  
create amazing spaces at SDM Medical College*



These are not just drawings.  
They are invitations,  
connected by floors and levelled by needs.

To walk more lightly.  
To build more humbly.

To recognise that even what lies underfoot, the ordinary, the overlooked, is sacred ground. In each grain of dust, each worn tile, lives a quiet history, a presence that calls not for grandeur, but for grace. When we see the floor not just as support, but as story, as soil, memory, and offering, we begin to design with reverence. We begin to honour the earth beneath our feet as our first teacher, our quiet companion, the true foundation from which all else rises.

If we are sensitive, we can feel its breath and its pulse on our bare feet.

**Floors ground us,  
anchor us, the first  
touch each morning,  
the last each night.  
From sleep to aeon,  
they layer time and  
memory, holding the  
weight of our days  
and the drift of our  
dreams. They gather  
footsteps, silences,  
rituals; becoming more  
than surface, becoming  
witness. In their quiet  
constancy, they remind  
us that to be held is  
to belong, and every  
foundation, however  
humble, is part of a  
larger unfolding.**

SHIRISH BERI  
WORKING WITH THE

# REALITY AND ILLUSION: THE POWER OF SPATIAL PERCEPTION

NEELKANTH CHHAYA

*Neelkanth Chhaya has been an academic and practising architect for nearly forty years.*

*He taught at CEPT University, Ahmedabad, from where he retired as Dean of the Faculty of Architecture in 2013. Subsequently, he has been associated with Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Bangalore, representing it for a UNESCO Chair in Sustainability, Heritage and Livelihoods.*

*He has participated in many International and National conferences in the fields of architecture and human habitation. Over the last few years, he has coordinated the Gandhi Heritage Sites Documentation project.*



*All photos are courtesy of the author unless mentioned otherwise.*

A floor can be the cause of war!

In the Mahabharata, the demon-architect Mayadanav built a great palace called Mayasabha for the Pandavas. Their rival cousins, the Kauravas, attended the great celebratory gathering of invitees to the palace. At a particular point, Mayadanav had created a polished floor that shone so much that Duryodhana, the eldest of the hundred Kaurava brothers, thinks that it is water that he is about to step into, and lifts the hem of his garment to keep it dry. A little further down, there is a further shining area, and confident that it is a floor, Duryodhana nonchalantly walks onto it, only to step into actual water this time! The Pandava Queen Draupadi and her companions, on seeing all this, cannot stop giggling. Duryodhana feels highly insulted, and thus the use of reality/illusion of firm-ground/water can be said to be part of the causes of the Mahabharata War.



*Fatehpur Sikri. Photo by Sagar Trivedi*

Thus, perception can lead to confusion between reality and illusion. And the aesthetic of architecture is grounded in perceptual experience. The floor, in particular, is perhaps the strongest signal of reality, but can also be a puzzle, an illusion that can be playful or even, at times, the basis of deception.

Children love to play sitting or lying down on the floor. Stretched out on the ground, they need not worry about balancing their bodies; they can face up or down, they can roll over and over. In winter, the floor is cold, but that discomfort is preferable to the strain of standing upright or sitting straight-backed on a stool or chair. A toddler would have just started exploring the upright posture. Till very recently, it was cheerfully and efficiently moving around, crawling on all fours. So, both for the young baby, the toddler and the child, for all of them, the floor is the most important and most vividly experienced architectural element.

The floor has always been the primary feature of spaces that human beings demarcated for inhabitation. In many cultures, the floor is used for sitting on when working or socialising or relaxing. The floor is also used for sleeping on, using only a mat or a thin mattress to lie down on. This is true for most Asian, indigenous American, African and Australian societies. Further, this preference for the posture of the body-on-ground applies to nomadic peoples as much as to their sedentary counterparts. Even in Europe, raised seating artefacts such as chairs were only for important people and became customary fixtures used by everyone only during and after the Renaissance.

This low-level body posture of sitting, being seated on a carpet, a cushion, a mat or squatting on two feet, all ensure that the eye level of the inhabitant is low, changing the experience of space. The horizontal plane of the floor occupies far more of one's cone of vision, the space appears wider, and the material of the flooring is much more tactile in its effect, not merely visual. Being seated, that is, being nearer to the floor plane, means that the tactile, olfactory, thermal and auditory sensorial impacts are much more vivid than in a standing posture. The floor or the ground seems to stimulate a far more ancient, more directly sensuous, embodied response to being situated in the world.

### **Working with Geometry**

Floors can emphasise or clarify, or bring about a sense of mystery about the geometric order that a work of architecture is based on.

We stand on the ground. Two feet planted firmly, our bodies position our heads somewhat above the ground, allowing our eyes to scan the space in which we stand. On uneven ground, we stand or walk with great care so as not to lose balance and trip or fall. If sitting or lying down are postures that complete the tendencies that gravity suggests for the human body, standing and walking challenge the body to confront gravity. That is why, when we shape a place, we try to make it such that it is not excessively difficult to use, nor excessively difficult to balance oneself while moving around.



*Private Residence near Ahmedabad, Neelkanth Chhaya Architect, photo Sohan Nilkanth*

When this ground is levelled and irregularities and interruptions of its surface are removed, we call it a 'floor'. Sometimes such a relatively smooth surface is offered by nature itself, as when we talk of the 'forest floor' or 'sea floor'; at other times, such a surface has been made by human action. So, the relative flatness of the ground is one of the conditions for a floor.

Such a smooth, defined surface normally has a boundary or limit, from which the ground condition changes. So, the second condition for a 'floor' is that it is a defined and bounded space.



*Private House near Ahmedabad, Neelkanth Chhaya Architect.  
Photo Neelkanth Chhaya*



*Udayan Housing Kolkata, Mandala Design Services Architects,  
Photo Sohan Nilkanth*



*Ruins at Hampi, Karnataka. Photo  
Kartikeya Chhaya*



*Temple at Hampi, Karnataka. Photo  
Kartikeya Chhaya*

**Ambiguity about the Horizontal and the Vertical:**

A floor is horizontal, a wall vertical, at least normally! Sometimes, a floor can become thick, can suggest a vertical dimension, and it can start containing interstices. Then the simple, straightforward reading of 'floor' is replaced by a statement playfully suggesting more than one possibility.

Especially if such a 'floor' is outdoors, but even when indoors, it may be necessary for the floor to have a slope to drain away water and be slightly higher than the surrounding ground to remain dry for use. Also, such a well-defined area is easier to clean and keep free of various disturbances. Thus, a 'floor' creates appropriate conditions for use by human activities. Therefore, the third condition for a 'floor' is level or slope.



*Ruined temple, Polo, Gujarat.  
Photo Sagar Trivedi*



*Katsura Palace, Kyoto, Japan.  
Photo by author*

In short, when thinking of places that we inhabit, we try to take care of all the conditions that would make it difficult for us to use such places or move around in them.

The 'floor' then is a condition created by human beings for their ease and safety.

In my childhood, when I was about eight years old, one of my pastimes was to walk about with a mirror held horizontally in my hands. In the mirror, I could see the

ceiling, or some clouds, or the foliage of a tree under which I was walking, and I got the sensation that I was no longer walking on the ground but was moving on whatever was visible in the mirror. Looking continuously at the reflection in the mirror, I felt that I was walking on the ceiling, or the clouds, or on the tree leaves! As I moved around, I felt I was floating, weightless! After a while, I would feel dizzy and disoriented and would have to stop using the mirror. Yet, despite the discomfort at the end, I played this little game of inversion time and again.



*Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, Mandala Architects. Photo Kausik Srestaluri*

Play is one of the strongest urges that we humans have. It is the activity with which we test our capacities, we test and gauge the phenomena of the material world, we organise our sense data, and we build up a tentative model of truth. Yet the enjoyment of building such 'truth-models' is greater if there is some mystery and possible misreading! We love to be true, capable of dealing with the world, but we love being challenged by its difficulties or possible illusions even more!

It is not, therefore, the true, factual dimensions of meaning that art carries to us. We look to art to tell us truths that cannot be conveyed in words, that are too complex and multidimensional to put down in statements. Art works with messages which 'make sense', work on our senses, bodily postures and felt realities.

#### **The Depth of Space Dramatised**

A floor, light and shadows falling on it, textures and colours working to enrich it, lines and planes suggesting continuities, all these effects help to make the floor suggest greater depth of space.

The floor as an artistic expression is then an endless source of aesthetic delight – sometimes confirming what we think is the truth – and often creating a mystery about the real. The ground or floor, then, is our most powerful aesthetic experience – of the mystery and power of 'the real'.

**A floor, light and shadows falling on it, textures and colours working to enrich it, lines and planes suggesting continuities, all these effects help to make the floor suggest greater depth of space.**

*Private House near Ahmedabad, Neelkanth Chhaya Architect. Photo Kartikeya Chhaya*



# THE FLOOR AS A BEGINNING

Nokha Village Community Centre

BY SANJAY PURI ARCHITECTS

In the desert expanse of Nokha, Rajasthan, where 144 small villages are scattered like beads across a parched landscape, a floor has been laid that is more than a surface. It is a stage, a garden, a gathering, a memory. It is the foundation of a shared future.

The Nokha Village Community Centre began as a memorial. The brief was simple yet profound: to honour the memory of Padmaramji Kularia, whose life and work were rooted in this region. But memorials are not only for looking back, they can also lay the ground for what comes next. As the design took shape, the vision grew beyond a singular remembrance into something living, evolving: a space that could hold the footsteps, voices, and stories of people from every one of those 144 villages.

---

*Sanjay Puri is an acclaimed Indian architect and the founder of Sanjay Puri Architects, a Mumbai-based firm established in 1992. Renowned for his innovative and contextually responsive designs, Puri has completed over 600 projects across various typologies, including residential, commercial, hospitality, institutional, and urban design. His work emphasises sustainability, cultural sensitivity, and the creation of spaces that foster human connection and well-being. Puri's designs have garnered numerous national and international awards, solidifying his reputation as a leading figure in contemporary architecture.*

*His Nokha Village Community Centre in Rajasthan began as a memorial and evolved into a hub for 144 villages. The curvilinear design features a rooftop garden, amphitheatre, museum, and children's library, all crafted with local materials. The centre addresses harsh desert conditions while fostering learning, social interaction, and cultural expression; a testament to Puri's vision of architecture as both functional and deeply human.*



# ING

In this desert, where the ground is both a giver and a taker, offering stability but often resisting growth, the idea of “floor” acquires layered meaning. Here, the floor is not merely built upon; it is cultivated, inclined, carved, shaded, and given to the people to walk, gather, learn, and belong.

*From rooftop to floor, a green plane tilted and terraced into a garden for the community.*



## A Spiral Rising from the Sand

From the north-eastern corner of the site, a sweeping, curvilinear volume begins its journey. It loops across the land, rising gently until it meets the north-west corner, creating a north-facing open courtyard. This spiral gesture is not just form; it is movement solidified, a continuous ramp of possibilities.

At 9,000 square feet, the main building's rooftop becomes a sloping garden. Two gradients, each with its own rhythm, invite different uses. Children run along the gentler slope; elders gather on the higher one, where the desert stretches out to the horizon. This is a floor that rises to meet the sky, where a person's gaze can travel uninterrupted from earth to air.



*A spiral of earth and stone rises from the desert, its rooftop garden a floor that meets the sky, sheltering memory below, nurturing possibility above.*

Under this living roof, spaces are quietly nested. On the lower eastern side sits a small museum; on the higher western side, a children's digital library. The decision to place them beneath the garden is not simply spatial; it is philosophical. Knowledge and memory here are not imposed like monuments; they are sheltered, protected, cooled, and made approachable.

## The Floor that Shelters and the Floor that Witnesses

In a climate where temperatures remain between 35°C and 40°C for most of the year, the building's southern edge is held by a grass-covered earth berm. This green slope is more than insulation; it is the land folding over to shade its own. The north-facing courtyard, by contrast, opens outwards, drawing in light without heat. Between them, a rhythm of shelter and exposure emerges, making the courtyard an ideal place for music, talks, and the informal gatherings that stitch a community together.

The ovoid library wears a skin of natural sandstone screens, quarried from the surrounding area. This is not just a nod to tradition; it is a direct conversation with it. In the villages of Rajasthan, stone jaalis have for centuries filtered light, tamed heat, and patterned the passage of time across a room. Here, they do the same, but for a new purpose, casting shifting shadows over books, children, and quiet conversations.

The museum, lit indirectly through scooped recesses in the berm, is a place where the community's stories can be laid down like careful tiles in a mosaic, each one adding to the pattern of collective memory.

*Between earth's embrace and light's gentle touch, the floor becomes both shelter and witness, holding stories in shadow, in stone, and song.*



## An Expanded Ground

A linear amenity block along the northern entrance houses a cafeteria, toilets, storage, and parking, practical foundations for large gatherings. Yet the true measure of the centre is in the multiplication of its usable ground. The 9,000-square-foot building generates an equal rooftop garden, a 27,000-square-foot open amphitheatre, and shaded and sheltered pockets throughout. In total, the spaces created are nearly four times the size of the built footprint.

This is a lesson in what a floor can be: not a limit, but a launch. Here, the act of laying one surface leads to the creation of many more, horizontal and vertical, physical and symbolic.



*One floor, many possibilities, what begins as a foundation multiplies into gardens, amphitheatres, and sheltered havens, turning ground into a launchpad for life.*



*Every floor rests on deeper choices, crafted with local hands, rooted in respect, and laid with care for both people and the land.*

## The Moral Ground Beneath Design

Every floor, literal or figurative, rests on something deeper. In Nokha, the choice was to build with local stone, to engage local craftsmen, and to work with contract labour from the villages themselves. Materials were sourced from the region, reducing environmental strain. Rainwater harvesting and water recycling were integrated from the outset, not as afterthoughts, but as foundational ethics.

In a place where scarcity defines daily life, these decisions are not mere sustainability features; they are acts of respect. They acknowledge that to lay a floor here is to intervene in a delicate balance, and that such an act must give back more than it takes.



*A floor that invites, transforming into a classroom, a stage, a quiet corner, shaping how we pause, gather, and share our stories.*

## The Floor as an Invitation

Perhaps the most profound aspect of the Nokha Village Community Centre is not its form, but its openness. The space has been laid out in such a way that people come not for one specific activity, but to inhabit it in ways the designers could not fully predict. A floor becomes a stage for a festival one day, a shaded classroom the next, a quiet corner for reading on another. For the children from schools without libraries, the ovoid sandstone-screened space is their first contact with shelves of books and digital learning. For elders, the amphitheatre and courtyard offer places for oral histories to be shared and new friendships to be made. For musicians and speakers, the shaded steps become a platform from which to send words and melodies into the desert air.

This is the choreography of space that floors make possible: the decision of where a person pauses, where they gather, and how they leave.

## From Memorial to Movement

What began as a private gesture, a memorial to one man, has become a public ground for many. It draws people from across 144 villages to learn, to rest, to celebrate, and to imagine. It is proof that when we lay a floor with care, material, climatic, cultural, and moral, we are laying down more than stone and soil. We are laying the terms on which future generations will meet each other.

In the shifting sands of Rajasthan, permanence is elusive. But here, on this spiral of earth and stone, a different kind of permanence is taking shape, not in the walls or the roof, but in the patterns of use, the habits of meeting, the traditions being born anew.

The Nokha Village Community Centre is a reminder: the first promise of space-making is not in what rises, but in what is laid down. And when that first promise is made well, when it is made of ethics as much as of earth, it becomes the ground not only for a building, but for a community to stand, move, and grow.

*A floor laid with care becomes more than stone; it becomes the ground where a community meets, learns, and grows across generations.*



Sanjay Puri





**PROJECT NAME:**

Nokha Village Community Centre  
**LOCATION:** Silwa-Mulwas, Nokha, Rajasthan

**CLIENT NAME:** Padam Interiors

**START DATE:** April 2022

**COMPLETION DATE:** Feb 2024

**GROSS FLOOR AREA:** 13,000 SQ.FT  
(1208 sqm)

**COST:** USD10,85,816 (INR 9 Crores)

**FIRM:** Sanjay Puri Architects

**Lead Architect:** Sanjay Puri

**DESIGN TEAM:** Omkar Rane, Madhavi Belsare,  
Arjun Gupta

**INTERIOR DESIGN CONSULTANT:**

Sanjay Puri Architects

**STRUCTURE CONSULTANT:**

Vijaytech Consultants Pvt Ltd

**LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** Sanjay Puri Architects

**MAIN CONTRACTOR:** Jagram Suthar

**PHOTO CREDITS:** Mr. Vinay Panjwani

# Grounding Architecture:



All photos are courtesy of the authors unless mentioned otherwise.

## The Floor as Threshold Between Body, Earth, and Space

KHUSHNU PANTHAKI HOOF & SÖNKE HOOF

*Studio Sangath is an architecture studio based in Ahmedabad, India, founded by Khushnu Panthaki Hoof and Sönke Hoof. Shaped by their close association with Balkrishna Doshi, their practice reflects values of empathy, restraint, and deep contextual engagement. Their work spans homes, retreats, exhibitions, and community spaces across India and Europe. Each project is rooted in place, guided by climate, materials, and the lives it touches. Blending innovation with tradition, their designs emphasise sensory experience and quiet endurance. Beyond architecture, the studio is involved in conservation and archival work, continuing Doshi's legacy through thoughtful restoration and critical inquiry.*



*The floor at Amdavad ni Gufa, co-created by B.V. Doshi and M.F. Husain, meanders and curves, gently altering one's gait as they move through the space.*

People often don't talk about the floor because they see it as just a flat surface under our feet. This perception overlooks its true importance. The floor is not just a part of the building; it is also a threshold, a foundation, and a living memory surface. It serves as the intimate mediator between the body, the earth, and space, creating the deepest point of contact between human experience and built form. The floor tells us where we are, keeps us grounded, and brings abstract architectural ideas to life. We need to look at the floor again, not just as what holds us up, but also as what shapes us, to fully understand architecture.

The floor is always in contact with the body, unlike walls and ceilings, which are mostly seen from a distance. It is never inactive. The body feels it first when entering a building. The temperature, texture, sound, and movement of the floor all speak to us subtly and unconsciously. A floor made of warm stone, cold concrete, or soft tatami mat all make you feel different things. They tell you where you are and what the material is without you having to say a word. We stand,

move, and interact with space in different ways because of subtle slopes, uneven surfaces, and different textures. These physical interactions cause small changes in balance, rhythm, joints, and muscles. Our bodies are already moving through space before our eyes can fully comprehend it.

Phenomenological thinking is what makes this deep, personal understanding of the floor possible. Philosophers like Gaston Bachelard told architects to put lived experience ahead of abstract ideas. Bachelard calls the floor in 'The Poetics of Space' not a limit or boundary but a threshold, an origin in experience, the ground where dwelling begins. Juhani Pallasmaa and Peter Zumthor have taken this idea further by stressing how important it is for architecture to engage all of the senses. Their work reminds us that buildings are not just things we look at; they are things we touch, walk on, hear, and feel. In this view, the floor connects architecture to the human body and the passage of time, grounding it both physically and emotionally.

This perspective isn't new. In many parts of the world, the floor has long been seen as more than just a place to walk. The tatami mat in Japanese homes not only sets the size of the rooms, but it also sets the rules for how people should act. Its proportions tell people how to sit, walk, and interact with each other, choreographing how they do all of these things. In Indian vernacular homes, floors made of lime and cow dung are cool and clean, and they also have symbolic and ritual meaning. These floors are cultural and ecological artefacts that are shaped by the weather, customs, and how people live. They embody everyday wisdom and give the ground we walk on a deeper meaning.

The floor we lie on also shapes how we come to know space by being an epistemological foundation. It builds a physical knowledge that comes before intellectual understanding through movement, ritual, and repetition. This kind of embodied cognition turns the floor into a metaphysical

surface, which is the first and often most lasting act of architecture. This is where memories build up, wear and tear show the passage of time, and places become more interesting. A smooth wooden threshold, a hollowed stone step, or a worn patch of earth all show that someone was there. The floor knows us.

Traditional South Asian architecture makes the strong connection between the floor and the body very clear. Architectural elements such as plinths, otlas, and stepwells articulate how a building interacts with the ground in a planned way. The plinth is a raised platform that supports buildings. It raises the structure both physically and symbolically. It sets apart the sacred from the ordinary and encourages a slow, thoughtful climb. Climbing the plinth is not only a shift in elevation but also a change in state of mind and a move into a sacred or meaningful space.

*The floor of a mountain was carved to make way for the beauty of the Kailash Temple at Ellora.*



The ota, on the other hand, is a semi-public platform at the entrance to homes where people can talk and negotiate about space and social issues. It is in between inside and outside, private and public, and it invites people to stop, gather, rest, or talk. The ota blurs lines and shows the rhythm of everyday life. It shows how architecture helps people connect with each other, how the floor supports relationships, and how even a few inches of raised surface can change how people interact with each other and with space.

Stepwells invert this choreography, inviting the body to descend rather than ascend. Each step down into these huge underground structures is a slow movement into the earth. As you get closer to the water source, the space changes from open to closed and from bright to dark. Getting water becomes a ritual of going down, and the floor becomes a journey. Stepwells like Rani ki Vav or Adalaj ni Vav are more than just useful; they are stories told in stone.

All of these ground-based forms demonstrate that the floor is not static or finite. It is scripted and responsive, how we move and how to live. The floor is a living landscape that has social, spiritual, and climate meanings. It serves as a stage for bodies to interact with space and for space to reveal itself to the body.

Artist M.C. Escher's drawings show how the conceptual elasticity of the floor is represented in different ways. Escher questions the fixed orientation of floors and ceilings in works like *Relativity* and *Metamorphosis II*. His recursive geometries turn floors into walls, stairs into paths, and points of view into puzzles. The viewer's sense of direction is constantly destabilised, which makes the body and mind question and reconsider assumptions about gravity, position, and form. These aren't just tricks of the eye. They provoke curiosity, awareness and suggest that the ground is not a given but something that can be negotiated and reimagined.



*From flat tiles to living forms, Escher's Metamorphosis turns the floor into a world in motion.*

This notion of the floor finds a profound expression in Indian architecture. For example, the Kailash Temple at Ellora was not built; it was an act of extraction. Built from a single mass of basalt rock, here the act of building becomes one of revealing. The floor is not put in place but discovered. Each descending step is a journey inward, toward the sacred. The floor becomes both the beginning and the end, a meeting place of geological and spiritual depth.

Palitana, a Jain pilgrimage site in Gujarat, is a different but complementary experience. There are more than 3,800 steps up Shatrunjaya Hill, and the floor becomes a path to the top. Each stone tread is a part of a ritual, and doing it over and over again makes the journey sacred. The floor is not just a place to stand; it is the place. Architecture here is not just a part of the pilgrimage; it is the pilgrimage. The line between built form and natural topography fades away into a story of movement, devotion, and endurance.

Architect Balkrishna Doshi's work brings this link between floor, body, and land into the present. The floor at Amdavad Ni Gufa is undulating, with curves, gentle slopes, and dips. You have to pay attention to each step and re-establish balance as you walk. At Sangath, circulation is guided by sunken floor, terraced steps, and walkways that make it hard to tell where the building

ends and the landscape begins. The floor turns into memory, topography, and engagement. It shows that architecture starts with the ground, not the elevation, and that designing is like listening to the land.

In the German language, the word for floor, "Boden," has philosophical and moral meanings. It means more than just physical ground; it also means belonging, origin, and home. Boden and Grund (ground/foundation) are especially important in Martin Heidegger's work because they reflect metaphysical grounding. They ask not only where we are, but also how we are and why. Heidegger didn't think of the floor as just a place to stand; he thought of it as the place where things happen. For him, to dwell meant to be grounded not only in structure but also in existence.



*In Doshi's architecture, the floor listens to the land, guiding the body through memory, topography, and mindful movement.*

Architecture that honours this idea sees the floor as a moral, sensory, and symbolic interface. Putting down a floor is an ethical choice that lays the groundwork for the rest of the house. In the moments of uncertainty, we instinctively look down to find our footing and remember what keeps us going. A floor made of fear or convenience is not stable. One who is full of empathy and responsibility helps not just themselves but also the community.

The land we inherit is shaped by our cultural traditions, our own histories, and the places we all live. But we also have to look at that ground, fix it, and, if necessary, rebuild it. Not only do we need to know where we stand, but we also need to know how and if the ground we stand on can support others. Escher's fluid geometries show us that the floor is never still; it is always evolving, in constant flux and changing.

At Ellora, the floor is a place that was extracted out with care and effort and at Palitana, it becomes a pilgrimage, through movement. In Doshi's buildings, the floor isn't a platform or a pedestal; it's a place where people can interact and initiate dialogue. The floor is a landscape of participation. It is not just what we walk on; it's also what we walk with.



*At Sangath, Doshi lets the floor flow with water, cool, sunken, and alive, blurring lines between path, place, and pause.*

# The Floor is the First Line:

## *Journey through Dean D'Cruz's Work*

DEAN D'CRUZ



*Dean D'Cruz is an architect, educator, and environmental advocate whose practice with Mozaic Studio explores architecture from the ground up, quite literally. With over 250 houses, 50 hotels, and numerous institutions to his credit, his work reflects a deep sensitivity to terrain, culture, and context. From sunken pathways to elevated decks, stepped plinths to barefoot experiences, his floors are never mere surfaces; they are journeys, thresholds, and acts of engagement. A long-time design educator and sustainability champion, Dean continues to influence architecture through thoughtful design, academic leadership, and his belief that every building must converse with the land it stands on.*

In interior design or architecture, the floor is more than a surface; it's the beginning of spatial experience. It sets the rhythm of movement, defines thresholds, and quietly shapes how we feel within a space. In the work of Dean D'Cruz and Mozaic Studio, the floor is never an afterthought. It dips to hold water, rises to frame a view, curves to echo the land, and steps to mark ritual. Here, design flows from terrain to tread, crafting interiors where body, memory, and material meet. This is spatial storytelling rooted in the ground, where the floor is not a backdrop, but a protagonist.

### **Informal Courtyards: The Floor as Common Ground**

In projects like Haldu Tola in Pench and The Village Square in Anjuna, the courtyard becomes a spatial centre, but it is the floor that anchors this centre. At Haldu Tola, the rooms are clustered like village homes, with bathrooms and service spaces forming buffers between them. Yet it is the courtyard floor, raw, sun-warmed, textured, that creates cohesion. The floor connects the built to the wild, opening out onto low decks facing the jungle. It is not paved to perfection, but purposefully grounded, an invitation to linger, converse, or just listen.



*In Haldu Tola in Pench, this lodge recalls the village cluster, rooms encircling a courtyard, buffered by service spaces, and opening onto low decks that merge seamlessly with the surrounding jungle. Photo by Riyad Gandhi*

In The Village Square, the central courtyard becomes an activated interior landscape. The floor here is layered: tiles around the pool, paved paths linking rooms, soft lawns, and a raised pavilion edge. While guests gather socially in this shared space, each room steps back into a private garden, a retreat with its own ground story. The courtyard floor holds a delicate balance between intimacy and interaction, enabling multiple kinds of occupation through its spatial texture.



*In The Village Square, the courtyard floor layers tiles, stone paths, lawns, and pavilion edges to create a textured ground that balances social gathering with private retreat. Courtesy Holiday Village Management.*

### **Formal Courtyards: The Floor as Frame for Thought**

The Palloti Institute in Goa takes the courtyard further into conceptual space. With permanent buildings on two sides and garden classrooms on the other, the floor becomes a metaphor for openness. The unbuilt edge frames possibility, and the courtyard floor, part grass, part earth, grounds the act of reflection. It is where philosophy meets soil. Ideas are not only exchanged across rooms but anchored in the very land where they are spoken.

The Thomas Stephens Konkani Kendra articulates the floor as a platform. The courtyard is a performative space, with a stage at its heart and verandas all around. Each academic or administrative wing spills into this central floor, which serves as a visual and physical bridge. Its openness is democratic; its function, multifold. The courtyard floor becomes a space of pause, procession, and performance, one that unites distinct functions into a singular spatial whole.

### **Streets: The Floor as Shared Journey**

In the resort Club Mahindra Assonora, the street is more than circulation; it is an event. Between river-view and water-park-facing rooms runs a central spine, not just lined but shaped by the floor. Changes in flooring texture and levels define programmatic pauses: shaded seating, gardens, and gathering nodes. The floor here is not merely a connector; it is the community. It stages the social life of the resort through its spatial choreography.

At Captain Lobo's River Hideaway, the street is a narrow yet vibrant underfoot thread, weaving together individual units into a larger whole. With each home distinct in layout, the floor holds its conversation. The shared street subtly varies in material and slope, slowing walkers, inviting interactions. Here, the floor is tactile, cobblestone, brick, laterite, and personal. It becomes the spine of a domestic neighbourhood, offering continuity without conformity.

*At the Palloti Institute in Goa, the courtyard floor of grass and earth becomes a metaphor for openness, grounding reflection where philosophy meets soil. Photo by Dinesh Mehta*



*At Captain Labo's River Hideaway, the cobbled street binds distinct homes into a shared neighbourhood, its varied floor guiding pace, interaction, and connection. Photo by Dinesh Mehta*



## **Elevated Floors:**

### **The Floor as Retreat and Reveal**

In Jungle Camp Tadoba, the entire floor plane is lifted 12 feet above the ground. This elevated deck is not just a structural decision but a spatial one; it creates a new underworld of shaded recreational zones while elevating rooms into a vantage of wild vistas. The floor here detaches, floats, and expands vision. What lies below is sanctuary; what lies above is spectacle. The underfloor becomes a cool refuge, while the upper floor becomes a stage for wilderness theatre.

*At Jungle Camp Tadoba, the lifted floor creates two worlds, a shaded refuge below and an open stage above, framing wilderness as spectacle. Photo by Vazir Nadaph*



Kanha Jungle Camp takes elevation further, embedding metaphor into its floor levels. Guest units range from underground to fully elevated, reptilian burrow to avian perch. The floor becomes narrative: one sleeps at the level of what one might encounter. Moving between units, guests move through levels of the forest itself. Inside, the design layers floor height with furniture platforms, mezzanines, and floating beds. The floor, here, is never flat; it is a vertical story, sensory experience, and layered retreat.

### **Stepped Floors: The Floor as Ritual Terrain**

In the Karwar Cathedral, the floor orchestrates movement through a sacred sequence. You enter high and descend toward the altar, then ascend again toward the Tabernacle. The stepped floor invites procession. Chapels and niches are tucked into its folds, and the slope makes space without ever dividing it. The stone underfoot is cool, silent, and slightly uneven, encouraging slower steps, deeper attention. This is not merely flooring; it is terrain of belief. The Kannada University Campus draws its stepped floors from the monumental heritage of Hampi. Its library rises on broad plinths, steps into templesque tanks, and wraps

itself in deep colonnades. The floor moves the body through scale, wide for walking, tight for threshold, sunken for reflection. It uses tradition not as style but as spatial logic, and the experience of climbing, pausing, or descending is inscribed into memory through stone.

### **Curvilinear Floors: The Floor as Flow and Form**

The Sea Side Hotel in Goa turns its tight coastal site into spatial poetry. With no space for wide facades, rooms are tiered in waves, each one cresting above the last, facing the sea. The floor here becomes the landform itself. One can walk from rear rooms over the green roof of front rooms, a literal translation of flow into form. The floor is a curved section, a walkable slope, a soft undulation that holds views, breezes, and water all at once.

The unbuilt Goa Airport proposal extended this logic of flow into public infrastructure. Sloped tiers, curving lounges, and tiered ramps replaced static gates. The floors guided passengers like rivers, rising for departure, falling for arrival. The interior experience was imagined as fluid choreography, designed to ease stress and elevate encounter.

*At Kanha Jungle Camp, the floor becomes a vertical story, from burrow to perch, it layers retreat into the very levels of the forest. Photo by Vazir Nadaph*





*In Karwar Cathedral, the stepped floor becomes the terrain of belief, guiding descent and ascent, slowing steps, and deepening attention in sacred procession. Photo by Dinesh Mehta*

### **Underfoot Experiences: The Floor as Sensory Memory**

In the Taj Spa Goa, the floor is sacred ground. Inspired by Kerala temple architecture, every detail underfoot is intentional: from the carved stone plinth at entry to the polished stone wash in the lobby. Visitors walk barefoot through spatial transitions that shift subtly, cool stone to warm wood, earth to water. Each couple's therapy room links to a thematic element: air, water, fire, earth, and each transition is felt first through the feet.

The underfoot experience in this spa is not just about luxury; it is about consciousness. The floor teaches slowness, awareness, and reverence. It is through this daily contact that design becomes ritual.

### **Grounding the Practice**

Across all of Dean D'Cruz's work, a design philosophy takes root: start with the floor. Let the land lead. Let materials speak. Let bodies move intuitively. In Mozaic's projects, the floor is not an afterthought but a first principle. It holds the memory of the site, the behaviour of its users, the rhythm of its rituals.

In an age of hyper-visual design, where ceilings dazzle and walls compete, D'Cruz reminds us that profound spatial experience begins with what we step on. His floors gather water, shape courtyards, trace forests, and honour thresholds. They are slow, generous, and adaptive. They ask us to listen, not just with our eyes, but with our soles [souls].

# 25 MOMENTS THAT DEFINED FLOORS



Floors do far more than carry our weight. They gather our footsteps, cradle daily life, and shape how we dwell, gather, and dream. From the pressed earth of Çatalhöyük to the mirrored illusions high above Manhattan, every floor tells a story of human craft and quiet invention.

Under our feet, clay, stone, wood, and glass become more than mere materials. They hold warmth in winter and cool the heat of monsoons, whisper like sentinels in watchful castles, map royal gardens and playful courtyards, or vanish each spring like the melting floors of Sweden's Icehotel. Some invite us to drift above the clouds while others root us gently in the soil.

These 25 moments remind us that the ground is never only ground. It is culture flattened into pattern, memory pressed into clay, and vision anchored beneath our soles. With every step, we touch the past and the possible future, carried forward by floors that quietly shape our way through the world.

# 01

7400 BCE

## Compacted Earth Floors of Çatalhöyük Türkiye

### The Crafted Grounds of Dwelling

Beneath the clustered homes of Çatalhöyük, the earth was shaped into something more than ground. Layers of clay, soil, and ash were compacted by hand, pressed smooth under countless footsteps, and renewed in quiet cycles of care. These compacted earth floors turned bare soil into an intentional surface that anchored walls, cradled the dead beneath hearths and beds, and held the weight of gatherings and daily life. The ground, once open and formless, was transformed into a living surface that holds memory, defines dwelling, and sets the stage for all that rises above.



*A dwelling at Çatalhöyük*

*Verity Cridland*



*A reconstructed room at the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations*

*Dosseman*

# 02

4000 BCE

## Rammed Earth Floors Mesopotamia

### Earth Underfoot, Civilisation Takes Root

In the dawn of settled life along the Tigris and Euphrates, early houses were built from the land itself, mud brick walls rose from floors made of tightly compacted earth. These rammed-earth floors were layered, beaten flat with stones and tampers until hard and smooth underfoot.

Similarly, Earth was fired into brick and set in careful courses in Mohenjo-Daro, turning soil into a measured ground for an entire city. These brick floors traced streets, courtyards, and ritual baths, giving shape to daily life and a silent order to movement and gathering.



*Ruins of Babylon, Mesopotamia, Iraq*

*Osama Shukir Muhammed  
Amin FRCP(Glasg)*



*The Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro*

*Aakashaliraza*

# 03 100 CE

## Roman Opus Tessellatum Italy

### The Scripted Ground of Empire

In the villas of Pompeii and Herculaneum, Roman floors became lasting canvases of life, crafted not in pigment but in stone. Using Opus Tessellatum, artisans arranged marble, limestone, and glass into mosaics of myths, sea creatures, and Latin phrases set into the ground. Unlike wall paintings, these were made to be walked on and remembered. Like the Cosmati Pavement at Westminster or the gleaming tesserae of San Vitale, they turned walking into witnessing. Even now, they speak of empire, belief, and a civilisation that saw the floor as a powerful expression of identity.



Floor mosaic, detail of the gorgone Medusa, opus tessellatum, found in Zea (Piraeus)

Jebulon



Tesserae floors of San Vitale guiding the path

Bradhostetler

# 04 800 CE

## Kolam Floor Art India

### Sacred Patterns Beneath our Feet

Since at least the 8th century, floors in South Indian homes have been daily transformed by Kolam, delicate, geometric designs drawn at dawn with rice flour or chalk. Created mostly by women at thresholds and courtyards, these transient floor patterns invite prosperity, protect the home, and offer food to tiny creatures, weaving care into every step. Dots and loops repeat ancient mathematical rhythms, turning the humble floor into a sacred canvas renewed each sunrise. Kolam makes the ground a living mandala, proving that floors can hold both footprints and faith, ritual and welcome, all in a few graceful lines.



Kolam in a South Indian home

Sirensongs

# 05

1200 CE

## Terrace Floors of Angkor Thom Cambodia

### The Enduring Grounds of an Empire

In Angkor Thom, the great Khmer capital, laterite blocks form vast terrace floors that carried the weight of an empire. Quarried from iron-rich earth, these reddish stones were laid in broad, stepped platforms that lifted temples, gateways, and royal processions above the jungle floor. Weathered yet resolute, the laterite terraces bound architecture to the land, channelling monsoon rains, supporting carved towers, and gathering pilgrims under the gaze of serene stone faces. Here, the floor is not hidden but monumental, proving that even earth can be carved, fitted, and set to endure centuries in silence.



*Ruins of a terraced laterite floor*

*Marcin Konsek*

# 06

1300 CE

## Felt Yurt Floors Mongolia

### Rolling Grounds of the Steppe

Nomadic Mongols laid thick felt over lattice frames, turning open grasslands into warm, portable floors. Dense wool trapped heat, shed moisture, and softened the ground for resting riders. Patterned appliqués stitched clan stories into each layer, carrying identity wherever the yurt travelled. When it was time to move, the floor rolled up with the walls, collapsing the divide between ground and dwelling, architecture and furniture. In these felt floors, the earth itself became a companion to migration: always ready to gather warmth, hold memory, and vanish into the steppe at dawn.



*A yurt home*

*Garagoz88*



*Felt floor inside a yurt*

*HaSe*

07

1499 CE

## Adalaj Vav

India

## Stepped Sanctuaries Beneath our Feet

Beneath Gujarat's sun, Adalaj Vav draws people down through five tiers of intricately carved floors, each platform a pause on the journey to water. These floors are sacred thresholds, terraces for gathering, resting, and prayer. Patterns of stone guide feet in a gentle descent, while carved motifs underfoot mirror the latticed roofs above. Sandstone floors stay cool even in fierce heat, welcoming villagers, travellers, and pilgrims to linger. In Adalaj, every step is a step into coolness, story, and survival, proving floors can be as profound as the water they lead to.



Adalaj Vav of Gujarat



View of the stepwell stairs

Karthik Easvur

Karthik Easvur

08

1575 CE

## Pachisi Courtyard

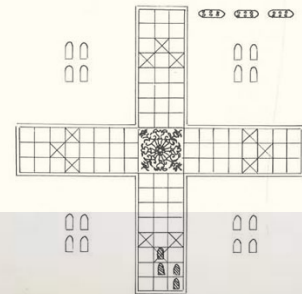
India

## Playful Floors

At Fatehpur Sikri, Emperor Akbar turned red sandstone into a playground of strategy and spectacle. A vast courtyard was inlaid with black marble squares to create a life-sized pachisi board, where royal harem members, clad in flowing silks, became living game pieces. From his white throne stone at the centre, Akbar tossed cowrie shells, watching tactics and flirtations unfold under the open sky. This playable floor blurred the line between leisure and power, turning architecture itself into a living game. Long before digital sensors, these inlaid squares remind us that floors can invite us to move, think, and play.

Pachisi board drawing

Courtesy of Penn.museum



Courtyard of Fatehpur Sikri

Dirklaureyssens

09

1603 CE

## Nightingale Floors

Japan

### The Whispering Grounds of Watchfulness

In Kyoto's Nijo Castle, the polished wooden planks of the *uguisubari*, or Nightingale Floors, sing with every step. The floors were crafted with hidden metal joints that chirp softly under the lightest footfall. What seems accidental is deliberate: a security measure that turned the ground itself into a sentry, alerting guards to intruders with each creak. Beneath the castle's painted screens and gilded chambers, these whispering floors remind visitors that even silence can be guarded by sound. In Nijo Castle, it is a living instrument, patient and watchful in its song.



*Bracket from underneath that supports the floorboards*

*Courtesy of somejapan.com*

10

1684 CE

## Parquet de Versailles

France

### The Patterned Grounds of Prestige

The Parquet de Versailles is a geometry mastered and laid at the feet of kings. Oak and walnut interlock in precise rhombi and squares, each panel cut and joined by hand into a quiet pattern of power and grace. First laid in the Hall of Mirrors and royal chambers at Versailles, it replaced cold stones like marble with warmth and measured beauty. The same motif unfolds across the Petit Trianon and Château de Fontainebleau, echoing royal splendour in salons and ballrooms. Sunlight drifting through tall windows turns these floors into stages for diplomacy and desire.



*Flooring inside the Hall of Mirrors*

*Dennis G. Jarvis*



*Geometric pattern with marquetry*

*Fanny Schertzer*

## Kampung Houses

### Southeast Asia

#### The Breathable Ground Beneath

From the 1700s to the early 1900s, Southeast Asian kampung houses perfected the bamboo mat floor. Thin strips of split bamboo were woven into flexible panels and laid over timber frames raised above damp ground. The result is a floor that breathes. Gaps between the weave let air and moisture move freely, cooling interiors during monsoon heat. Soft under bare feet, these mats bend slightly, absorbing impact and easing daily chores. When worn

out, they're simply rewoven from fresh bamboo. Here, the floor itself becomes a climate tool, porous, light, endlessly renewable, turning a simple woven ground into one of vernacular architecture's quiet masterpieces.

Around the same period, villagers across India crafted floors directly from the earth beneath them, mixing soil with ash or cow dung to create smooth, resilient surfaces. Packed by hand and polished with stone or gourd, these floors stay cool under scorching sun and warm through chilly nights. Burnished smooth and re-layered every few years, they resist



*Split-bamboo flooring on outdoor veranda*

*Nick Enfield*

pests and mold naturally. This floor is not just laid once, it lives, renewed by hands that sweep, mend, and polish it back to shine.



*Earthen floors of a vernacular kitchen in India*

*Varun Thautam*



*Cow dung floors*

*Biju Bhaskar*



*Kampung Houses of South East Asia*

*Arabsalam*

# 12

1900 CE

## Moving Walkways of Paris Exposition France

### Endless Walk Made Effortless

At the 1900 Paris Exposition, visitors stepped onto the world's first moving walkway, the *trottoir roulant*, and found the ground carrying them forward like magic. This horizontal conveyor belt glided people through grand pavilions and gardens without effort, a floating carpet powered by hidden machinery. The walkway offered more than convenience; it was a marvel of the Machine Age, a glimpse of a future where cities might hum with moving streets and mechanical sidewalks. For fairgoers dressed in top hats and corsets, it was an encounter with a new kind of freedom: to stand still yet drift ahead, letting the floor do the walking.



*Paris Exposition reproduced from official photographs*

*Courtesy of Paleofuture.com*

By the 2000's, that same idea found a permanent home in many of the world's busiest transit hubs. The modern traveler transformed vast terminals into conveyor-belt corridors, saving weary travellers steps and seconds between gates. No spectacle now, just silent utility, a convenience taken for granted. Beneath rolling suitcases and sleepy feet, the ground becomes a gentle machine, an invisible companion turning long distances into a quiet glide through the architecture of transit.



*Travelator of the Sportivnaya subway station in Saint Petersburg*

*Florstein*

13

1906 CE

## Panot Cement Tiles

Spain

### The Paved Poetry of Modernisme

In Barcelona, even the sidewalk breathes with design. The Panot cement tile, humble, hexagonal, and cast in simple moulds, transformed the city's streets into quiet canvases. Gaudí's version, swirling with marine motifs of algae and shells, ripples like seafoam beneath countless footsteps along Passeig de Gràcia. Originally used in Casa Milà, these tiles outgrew their doorway, spreading Catalan modernism into the city's daily life. Each patterned block gathers rain, light, and shadow into soft, shifting geometry. Underfoot, the Panot proves a floor needn't stay indoors to inspire. Here, the street itself becomes a living ground for Barcelona's restless imagination.



*Pavement of Passeig de Gràcia*

[perceptivetravel.com](http://perceptivetravel.com)

*Panot hexagonal tile pavement*

*Andreuledoux*

14

1951 CE

## Zebra Crossing

UK

### Stripes of Safety

In 1951, Britain painted its first zebra crossing, simple black-and-white stripes stretching across busy roads. This modest design turned asphalt into a democratic floor where pedestrians hold the right of way. Its bold pattern commands drivers to yield, making streets safer for everyone, children, elders, the sight-impaired. These stripes became a universal symbol of civic respect, a floor that moves with us from curb to curb. Over decades, zebra crossings have proved that even the simplest design underfoot can champion inclusivity, slowing down the city for the human pace, one step at a time.



*Zebra crossing, Leith Walk*

*Richard Webb*

15

1960 CE

## Hollywood Walk of Fame

USA

**The Paved Ledger of Stardom**  
 Along Hollywood Boulevard, the sidewalk itself glitters with fame. Pink terrazzo squares stretch for miles, each inlaid with a brass star that immortalises actors, musicians, and icons of the screen. Here, flooring becomes a ledger of celebrity, updated weekly, walked daily, polished by tourists' hands and camera flashes. Fans kneel, pose, and sometimes scrub their idol's name, turning pavement into an interactive shrine. Beneath endless footsteps, the terrazzo holds fleeting stardom in patient stone and metal. On this ground, fame finds its longest life: a star beneath your feet, waiting to be seen, touched, and remembered.



*Hollywood Boulevard*

*Pierre André Leclercq*

16

1967 CE

## Modular Carpet Tile

USA

**The Systematic Floor of Modern Work**  
 In the precise corridors of IBM's 1960s headquarters, the floor embraced the logic of the machine age. Square carpet tiles laid out in clean grids mirrored the modular thinking of early computing, simple, repeatable, endlessly adaptable. Spilled coffee or worn patch? Replace a single tile, not the whole expanse. Muted colours, tight weave, and rational lines turned flooring into a system beneath systems, invisible yet quietly shaping the flow of work. These floors were coded for efficiency, proof that even underfoot, architecture could be as flexible and programmable as the machines that defined IBM's modern moment.



*Modular Carpet Tiles of IBM office*

*Courtesy of IBM*

# 17

1989 CE

## Icehotel of Jukkasjärvi Sweden

### The Vanishing Floor of Winter

In Jukkasjärvi's Icehotel, the floor is frozen and fleeting. Guests sleep on carved blocks of solid ice, softened only by reindeer hides and thermal bedding. Beneath fur and feet, the ground is seasonal, melting each spring, rebuilt anew each winter from the Torne River's frozen bounty. Here, the floor is not permanent but a ritual of return: a surface that disappears and reappears with the cold. Walls, ceilings, and beds are sculpted to melt too, reminding visitors that even what holds us up is impermanent.



Ice from floor to roof

Stephan Herz



Icehotel of Sweden

Cyr (Tom Corser)

# 18

2000 CE

## Smart Heated Floors Global

### The Invisible Warmth Beneath

Radiant floors have quietly evolved. No longer just warm slabs, but intelligent systems humming beneath wood, tile, or stone. Integrated with smart thermostats and sensors, these floors deliver precise heat room by room, adjusting to footsteps and seasons. Warmth rises invisibly, replacing radiators and vents with a hidden comfort that feels as if the ground itself is alive and attentive. Beneath polished planks or marble tiles, circuits and coils create a silent climate, one you never see but always feel. In this quiet innovation, the floor becomes an invisible hearth, wrapping living spaces in warmth from the ground up.



Underfloor heating installation

Olyplu

# 19

2006 CE

## Mercedes-Benz Museum Germany

### The Spiral Pathway as Floor

In Stuttgart's Mercedes-Benz Museum, the floor becomes the journey. Designed by UNStudio, gently sloping surfaces spiral upward in a seamless ribbon; no stairs, no landings, just a continuous flow. Visitors drift along these floating ramps as cars, stories, and decades unfold beside them. The floor is circulation itself: part path, part exhibition, part unfolding timeline. Like a road suspended in the air, it blurs the line between architecture and motion. Here, to stand still is to move, and is a proof that a floor need not be flat or fixed to carry us forward. In this museum, the ground is a graceful drive through history.



Section of Mercedes-Benz Museum

Mercedes-benz.com

The flow of horizontal and vertical surfaces into one another

Mercedes-benz.com

# 20

2010 CE

## Dune Installation Netherlands

### The Floor That Lights Up to Your Touch

In Daan Roosegaarde's Dune, the floor becomes a living, glowing terrain. Installed in public spaces across the Netherlands, this interactive artwork embeds light-sensitive fibres and tiny sensors into the ground. As people approach or step through, delicate reeds of light flicker to life, reacting to motion and sound, like grass whispering underfoot, but made of light. Dune turns a simple path into a poetic encounter where every footstep becomes a brushstroke, every movement a spark. Here, the floor is not static; it's an illuminated canvas, pulsing with the presence of people passing through.



Daan Roosegaarde with 'Dune' Shanghai

Studio Roosegaarde

LED fibres that respond to the sound and movement of passing visitors

Studio Roosegaarde

21

2013 CE

## Omnidirectional VR Treadmill Floors

Global

### The Floor Without End

The Virtuix Omni launched the first widely known omnidirectional VR treadmill floor, a ring-shaped platform that lets players run endlessly through digital worlds while standing still in their living rooms. Clever slip-resistance, harnesses, and curved bases make walking feel natural, while your steps power your journey through virtual cities, battlefields, or alien planets. The floor becomes an endless loop that folds space underfoot. Soldiers train for urban combat, gamers roam fantasy realms, architects test buildings yet to be built. In this early metaverse, the floor breaks its oldest rule: that the ground is fixed. Here, you walk forever, but never leave the room.



*Omnidirectional Treadmill Ground*

*Courtesy of virtuix.com*

22

2014 CE

## House of Mamba

China

### The Court that Coaches Back

In Shanghai, Nike built the world's first full-size LED basketball court, dubbed the House of Mamba, as part of their RISE campaign with Kobe Bryant. Beneath players' feet, a reactive floor of embedded LEDs and motion sensor lights up with dynamic graphics, real-time stats, and personalised drills. The court shifts underfoot, guiding players through Kobe's training moves while tracking every sprint and pivot. Fan messages flicker alongside practice cues, turning hardwood into an interactive coach and scoreboard. The floor is alive by reading the game, shaping the workout and pushing young athletes to rise higher. A true fusion of sport, spectacle, and smart design.



*LED Basketball Court of Shanghai*

*Courtesy of Dezeen*

**The Mirrored Illusion of Altitude**  
In Manhattan's One Vanderbilt, the SUMMIT experience dissolves the ground into sky. Mirrored floors stretch out beneath the city's tallest views, reflecting the skyline in endless repetitions. Walls and ceiling echo this illusion, multiplying Manhattan in all directions until visitors drift between cloud and concrete. Tourists lie down just to watch themselves hover in the reflection, shoes in the sky, heads in the clouds. Here, the floor isn't solid but psychological: an infinite shimmer that flips perspective and untethers the senses. At SUMMIT, the ground itself vanishes into a dream, turning every step into a surreal walk through mirrored air.



*Mind-bending observation deck at One Vanderbilt skyscraper*

*Corsario CL*



*Zhangjiajie Glass skybridge (2016)*



*Sunyiming*

High above China's Zhangjiajie Canyon, the world's longest glass bridge dares you to step into the void. 300 meters above forested cliffs, its transparent floor vanishes underfoot, forcing you to trust what you know but can't see. Some crawl, some run, some freeze. Here, the floor is a test of faith, a thrill ride, and an architectural feat all at once. Together, these sky floors remind us: the more a floor disappears, the more power it holds over the mind.

# 24

2024 CE

## Floating Glass Museum Italy

### The Suspended Surface of Wonder

As seas swell and climates shift, Luca Curci, with Giulia Tassi Design, reimagines our next groundwater itself. The Floating Glass Museum is proposed to be like a lucid dream above the lagoon, ephemeral yet anchored in Venice's centuries-old glassmaking craft. Inside its 3,800 sqm sanctuary, kaleidoscopic displays, hovering floors, and suspended sculptures blur boundaries between sky, sea, and structure. Buzzing with glazed colour, the museum invites deep reflection on our fragile future. Planned for cities like Dubai, New York, and Hong Kong, places where tides creep ever closer, this floating floor is more than architecture; it's a shimmering call to adapt, to stand weightless over water and wonder what tomorrow's ground might be.



*Floating floor of the Floating Glass Museum*

*Courtesy of Luca Curci Architects*

# 25

2030 CE

## Smart Biophilic Floors Tokyo & Amsterdam

### Back to where we started

In the near future, the floor won't just warm our feet; it will breathe with us. Experimental offices and pavilions in Tokyo and Amsterdam are exploring 'living floors': modular panels of moss or micro-plant trays laid over smart underfloor climate systems. These soft, green surfaces filter indoor air, regulate humidity, and harvest footstep moisture to keep themselves lush. Sensors beneath the soil adjust the temperature room by room. Employees walk barefoot through a carpet of quiet growth, a ground that softens stress and cleans the air as they pass. Tomorrow's floor promises more than comfort underfoot- it promises life, rooted in the very ground we tread.



*Conceptual biophilic floors over a smart climate system*

*Cottonbro Studio*

# inscape

An official publication of the  
Indian Institute of Interior Designers



## **Invited Editors Folio #4**

Noshir Talati, Sandeep Khosla, Neelkanth Chhaya,  
Khushnoo Pantaki and Sonke Hoof

## **IIID Inscape Committee**

Jabeen Zacharias, IIID Inscape Editor  
Sajan Pulimood, IIID Inscape Co-Editor  
Ganesh Wable, NEC Coordinator  
Sarosh Wadia, President, IIID  
Shamini Shanker-Jain, Honorary Secretary, IIID

## **Publisher and Knowledge Partner**

KBooks Team: Dr. Rema S Kartha, Farhaan  
Mohammed, Mary Jiya, Nakulgovind

## **Content Developer and Coordinator:**

Sonam Ambe

## **IIID Office Address**

109, Sumer Kendra,  
Pandurang Budhkar Marg, Worli,  
Mumbai, Maharashtra 400018  
Write to us at [connect@iiidinscape.com](mailto:connect@iiidinscape.com)

Visit our website at [www.iiidinscape.com](http://www.iiidinscape.com)

Follow us on social media for daily inspiration:  
[@iiidinscape](https://www.instagram.com/iiidinscape) | [#desinscape](https://www.instagram.com/desinscape)

All content © 2025 IIID

Reproduction without permission is prohibited.

Printed in Mumbai by Hira Prints Inc.

ISBN:978-81-964873-6-2

Folio 4, September 2025

*The opinions expressed by contributors are their own and do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of IIID Inscape, its editorial team, or publishers. Photographs have been appropriately credited unless provided directly by the author/s. Inscape and the publishers bear no responsibility for individual content or ownership.*

# Inscape Magazine Navigation and Participation Guide

## **The Golden Jubilee Rainbow Series**

A tribute to design culture and innovation! Discover the design world's Zenith through seven meticulously curated folios from IIID Inscape, each delving deep into a unique and profound design theme. Guard these treasures in an exclusively crafted sleeve, uniting the seven folios into a coveted, collectible coffee table edition- a testament to design brilliance. This folio explores floors—not just as the solid ground we build upon with finishes and techniques, but as subtle elements that shape our spatial

## **Your Voice Matters**

Participate actively in this design odyssey! Contribute through invited articles, engage in enlightening polls and surveys, and showcase your creativity in spirited competitions and contests. Connect with a diverse community of interior designers, architects, students, trade professionals, policymakers, leaders, press, media and people from all walks of life.

## **Digital Design Legacy**

Embark on a digital expedition! Explore our cutting-edge web-based design library and archive, meticulously curated to aid seamless searches and in-depth research design topics. A reservoir of knowledge at your fingertips.

## **Drive the Design Revolution**

Be the change! Witness the grand release of each folio of Inscape in the illustrious Rainbow Series. These editions embody “Hope and Happiness for a Better Tomorrow”, forging a path to a brighter future through design.

## **Empowering Awareness Campaigns**

Empowering Awareness Campaigns  
Join us as we spearhead lively events and dynamic awareness campaigns nationwide, championing the seven visionary design themes through our extensive network of 33 chapters with a network of 40 reporters spanning the length and breadth of India.



Check out  
[www.iiidinscape.com](http://www.iiidinscape.com)



follow @iiid.inscape  
on Instagram.

ART BY SHIRISH BERI

