Outside the LA Studio with HM Design

Speakers: Hitesh Mehta, FASLA and Hirsh Kabaria, HM Design

Moderated by: Todd Hill, ASLA, DTJ DESIGN

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Appreciate how development in this global age of heightened cultural and environmental sensitivity needs to be holistic in nature and sustainable in all aspects of the planning and design process.

2. Learn the techniques that integrate Physical and Metaphysical Analysis/Planning.

3. Understand the importance of cultural immersion and participation in planning methodologies and processes.

4. Explore out-of-studio techniques on how landscapes can be seamlessly merged with exterior and interior architecture to create all-encompassing experiences.

5. Observe the results of an innovative internship program focused on 5-12 year olds.

6. Gain knowledge on how landscape architecture is being used to help conflict resolutions in some of the most violent places in the world.

7. Learn how innovative participatory planning methods can create social empowerment and help alleviate poverty.
OUTLINE:

1. Todd Hill introduces and interviews Hitesh Mehta, President of HM Design. Interview includes:
   
   a. Brief firm history
   b. Inside and Outside Studio organization
   c. HM Design philosophy, ethics and psychology
   d. Merging academic and professional practice leadership.
   e. Discussion on approaches to mentorship and internships.

2. HM Design PowerPoint Presentation (40 mins.) that showcases a selected portfolio and which also illustrates project and geographic diversity:

   a. Visual History of past projects i.e. Aga Khan University Diagnostic Center, Kenya - 1995, China Projects etc. - 3 minutes.

   b. Indigenous community empowerment and poverty alleviation through planning - Minjerribah Camping and Ecoshacks - 6 minutes

   c. Conflict resolution using Landscape Architecture - Mannar Island, Sri Lanka - 7 minutes

   d. Protected Area Planning - Integrated Biodiversity, Pastoralism and Tourism Development Master Plan for Naboisho Conservancy - 7 minutes

   e. Immersion - Cerro Verde Ecolodge, Research and Interpretation Center, Galapagos - 2015 - 7 minutes

   f. Internship project presentation by 12 yr. old Hirsh Kabaria - Ecoairport - 5 minutes

   g. Surprise multi-media presentation - 5 minutes.

3. Discussion on firm aspirations, dreams for the firm and for the profession

4. Q and A
INTRODUCTION:

HM Design is an altruistic multi-disciplinary modern-renaissance practice that respects animals, native plants, local people and the spirit of the place. HM Design is a unique one-of-a-kind planning and design firm which practices it’s very own quadruple bottom line philosophy – one that balances economic, environmental, social and spiritual aspects for every project. The firm began in Nairobi, Kenya in 1990 as a traditional Architecture and Landscape Architectural practice but is now based in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and has metamorphosized into a specialty eco-planning and eco-design office which is amorphous in size depending on the projects at any given time. HM Design employs a team planning model that marries international knowledge and experience with local wisdom. It also carries out research (authoring books, articles etc.) and applies it on-site on various global projects.

The President, Hitesh Mehta (pictured to the left in an outside ‘ocean’ studio) has built projects and consulted in over 60 countries spanning six continents and is a multi-international award winner in the fields of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Environmental planning, Urban Planning and Design, Interior Design and Photography.

PLANNING AND DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Design in this global age of heightened cultural and environmental sensitivity needs to be all-encompassing and holistic in nature and sustainable in all aspects of the planning and design process. In every project, HM Design tries to create an eco-plan or eco-design that have never been created before. Each plan and design is a response to the local context: physical, metaphysical and cultural.
All *HM Design* projects have a respect for animals, plants, local people and the spirit of the place. The approach right from the outset is that of Low-impact development. This stewardship-motto of taking care of Mother Earth and all the species that inhabit on it begins right on day one and continues into Construction Supervision.

**QUADRUPLE BOTTOM LINE PHILOSOPHY:**

**HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PLANNING AND DESIGN:**
AHIMSA

non-violence: Allowing a living group to flourish

"Be the change that you want to see in the world" - Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Hitesh sees his Firm’s work as an opportunity to improve the earth for all. Greatly influenced by Gandhi’s spiritual and moral principles, HM Design strives every single day to be “the change it wishes to see in the world.”
**HM Design** professes:

- Egoless design – More eco, less ego!
- Integrated, multi-disciplinary and participatory approaches in the planning and design process and one which recognizes local knowledge and uses it wisely in the design. **HM Design** has over the years championed the concept of local empowerment through participatory planning.
- Substance over aesthetics— A Plan or Design that is not only beautiful design but which is also economically, socially, environmentally and spiritually sustainable.

**TEAM BUILDING AND PARTNERSHIPS:**

**HM Design** has associations with consultants from all around the globe and can bring onto a project any of the following depending on the size and type of the project: Architects; Landscape Architects and Planners; Deep Ecologists, Environmental Engineers; Biologists, Ornithologists; Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Product Development Specialists; Metaphysical experts (Vastu Shastra, Feng Shui); Illustrators; Evolutionary Biologists; Sociologists; Horticulturalists, Operators, Quantity Surveyors; Interior Designers; Graphic Designers; Community Liaison Officers; Pre-Project Planners; Marketing Analysts and Feasibility; Anthropologists;

**HM Design** projects also consider:

- Use of native plant species because exotics use up a lot of water and can be invasive.
- Use of environmentally friendly materials not only for the landscape and building but for the interiors e.g. recycled carpets, non-voc paints, organic 100% cotton for the linens etc.
- The spiritual energy that in embodied or flows through the site
- Use of alternative technologies – solar, wind, thermal, low-wattage light fittings, roof gardens, non-HFC air conditioners.
- Use of water conservation techniques – rainwater harvesting, grey-water irrigation, no-water toilets, low—flo showers, tap-aerators etc.
- Use of local labor and materials thereby helping benefit local communities and economies.
- Use of local indigenous wisdom and knowledge in the initial site analysis and planning stages.
- Use of environmentally friendly sewage systems that do not pollute the groundwater
- Use of the four principles of Solid Waste Reduction – Reuse, Recycle, Reduce and Refuse.

**PROJECT EXAMPLES:**

**A. PROTECTED AREA PLANNING :**

In the early 1990’s, **HM Design** developed an interest in the relationships between landscape architecture, environmentalism, local community benefits and tourism. His focus in landscape architecture shifted to fragile natural areas where tourism was uncontrolled and he led the way in developing new natural resource planning paradigms that empowered indigenous communities while at the same time protecting the sanctity of those places. This methodology of involving indigenous communities is becoming increasingly essential in Landscape Architecture in some of the most remote locations on the planet. **HM Design’s** case study of **Naboisho Conservancy** included:
An integrated planning process that involved the local community from day one.
A methodology that helped create a holistic location yet contributed to sustainable development.

**Naboisho Conservancy Master Plan**, Greater Maasai Mara, Kenya: **HM Design** was the Planning and Design Team Leader for the development of an Integrated Master Plan for Mara Naboisho Conservancy, which took on a new bold and innovative master physical planning approach to community based wildlife tourism. Mara Naboisho Conservancy is located within the Great Rift Valley and borders the world famous Maasai Mara National Reserve. Naboisho, which in Maasai means "coming together", is a community driven initiative to create a wildlife conservation and tourism area that supports the livelihoods of the landowners and surrounding communities. The core conservation area for the conservancy comprises of over 50,000 acres (20,628 Ha), which is dedicated to wildlife conservation. The program also includes 6 Tourism camps (maximum of 24 beds each), Research Center, Guiding School, Visitor Center, Wardens Housing, game viewing roads, walking trails etc..

**B. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATORY PLANNING:**

**HM Design's** community empowerment case study illustrates lessons learned working with aboriginal communities in Australia:
Minjerrribah EcoCamping, Stratford Island, Australia. **HM Design** is the landscape architect for a series of ecoshacks being located in four different camping sites in Stratford Island, Queensland. All the four camping sites are in fragile locations but with high visitor usage. **HM Design** is responsible for all services from Conceptual Planning to Construction Supervision. The master plan includes eco-camps for accommodations, cooking stations, restrooms, play areas, beach boardwalks etc. The first two ecoshacks (Amity Point campsite) have been completed and open to the public. (1/14 to present).

C. **CONFLICT RESOLUTION USING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

**Mannar Island Sustainable Tourism Master Plan**, Mannar Island, Sri Lanka. **HM Design** was part of the Consultant team that completed the Destination Master Plan for Mannar Island, Northern Sri Lanka. This part of Sri Lanka had experienced a civil war between the Tamils in the north and the Sinhalese in the south. The north part of the country is being finally opened up to visitors and **HM Design** used Landscape Architecture as a tool for creating peace and helping with conflict resolution. The program for development includes Visitor Centers, Waterfront experiences, accommodations, retail enterprises etc. **HM Design** also prepared with the help of the local Tamil community, (photo below) a Conceptual Master Plan for an Ecolodge and preliminary master Site Plans for the main Visitor Center and 3 privately-owned lodges by Palmyra House Property Group (3/14 to 7/14).

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

D. **IMMERSION - CERRO VERDE ECOLODGE, RESEARCH & INTERPRETATION CENTER, GALAPAGOS – 2015**

**Cerro Verde Ecolodge**, St. Cristobal, Galapagos. **HM Design** is the lead Consultant, site planner, landscape architect and design architect for a new ecolodge located in the island of St. Cristobal, Galapagos. **HM Design** is leading a consultant team that is providing Planning and Design services. The master plan includes high-end villas, main reception, dining and lounge building, Activity/ Education center, spa and fitness center, Meditation and Massage Gazebos, Solar Farm and Battery storage, Organic vegetable garden etc. **HM Design** prepared a detailed “Landscape as a Visual Resource Analysis” for this project which was one of four projects that won the “Award of Excellence” for the FLASLA 2014 awards (10/12 to present).
REFERENCES:


SPEAKER BIOS and CONTACT INFORMATION:

Hitesh Mehta  FASLA  FAAK  RIBA  Associate AIA - President

Hitesh, an internationally recognized award-winning author and world leader in ecotourism physical planning and ecolodge design, has over 28 years experience spanning 59 countries on six continents. In 2006, National Geographic identified Mr. Mehta as one of five Sustainable Tourism Pioneers in the world. Hitesh’s work represents a wide diversity of projects and he is currently working on “quadruple bottom-line” inspired developments in Australia, Puerto Rico, Tanzania, Galapagos, Ivory Coast, Dominica and Kenya. Outside the Studio - HM Design March 30, 2015

Hirsh Kabaria - Intern

Hirsh is a highly motivated and academically talented student at an IB (International Baccalaureate®) school in Tampa, Florida. Hirsh’s interest in global development and diplomacy has led him to attend in Canada, a People to People Student Ambassador Program (started by President Eisenhower). Last summer, at the age of 11, Hirsh participated in HM Design’s unique internship program that inspired him to plan and design an eco-airport, which he will present to the audience.