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COVER STORY

HERITAGE RESTORATION PROJECTS

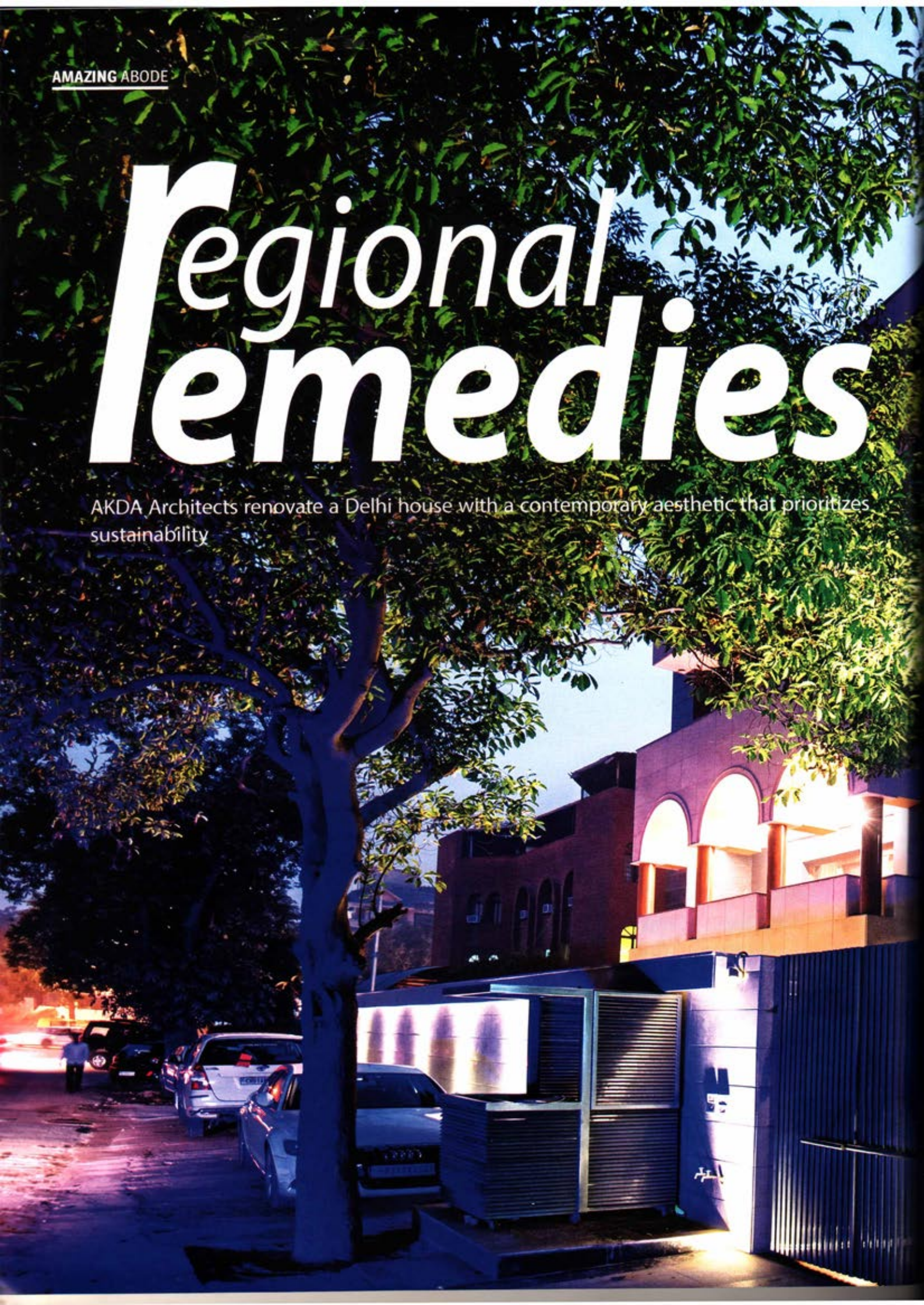
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DESIGN TALES
Ar. Nejeeb Khan

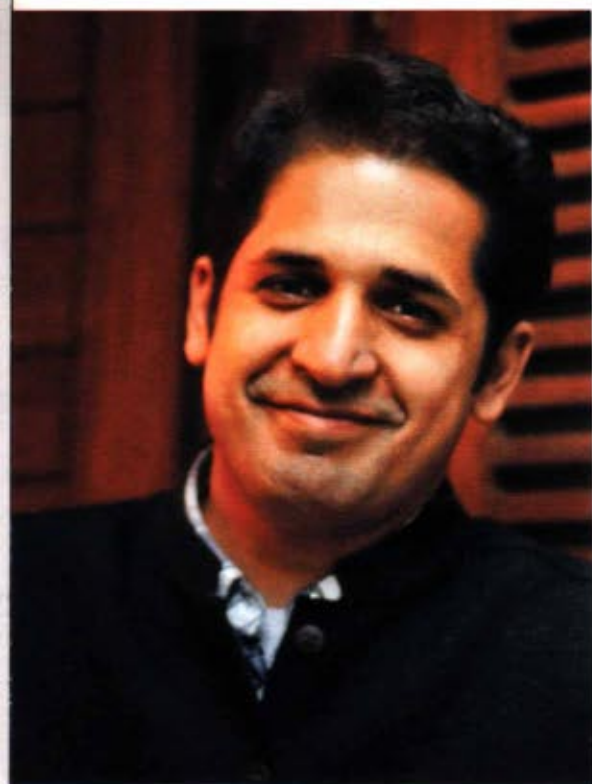
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Regional remedies

AKDA Architects renovate a Delhi house with a contemporary aesthetic that prioritizes sustainability







The subtle geometric patterns on the wooden false ceiling

“The buildings we inhabit are inherently soaking in a stew of ecological, cultural, and economic conditions of the region. Not only do the climate and topology of the geography shape our lifestyles, but also networks of access to material, social and personal networks, and logistics”

When the clients described their quest to renovate their ancestral home, it was, really, the ideal project for AKDA Architects. Founded by Ar. Amit Khanna in 2004, the studio is committed to sustainability, a commitment that is embodied in a regionally specific attitude to construction. The post modern shift has revealed the fallacy of looking at manmade constructions out of context, attributing to architecture an unrealistic power. The reality is that the buildings we inhabit are inherently soaking in a stew of ecological, cultural, and economic conditions of the region. Not only do the climate and topology of the geography shape our lifestyles, but also networks of access to material, social and personal networks, and logistics. The spaces we inhabit should embody these relations optimally, to enable a wholesome lifestyle that is grounded in the present, while also staying open minded to what the future brings.

The brief outlined the specific challenges that were priority for the client's family- the need to reinvent the forty year old ancestral home as a livable space for the extended family. Within a contemporary context, this meant the creation of a space that was distinctly communal in essence, while readily granting each member the privacy that is crucial to counter the pressures of a modern lifestyle. Logistically speaking, stripping down the entire structure was out of the question. Local bylaws necessitate the construction of special parking spaces for newly built structures. The whole business of adding the parking lot was distasteful for it “would detract from the sense of a single family home and make the structure appear like a series of stacked apartments”. As a result, the house was gutted from the inside out, with the exterior standing intact the whole time.

The forty year old load bearing walls on the ground floor were excavated out and the whole building



The central staircase cuts through the volume of the house

“The mix of the endemic and the contemporary shows a unique sensibility to respond to pressing local conditions”

was reinforced with a steel support structure. This modern and efficient solution was repeated with the steel clamps that were used to lock the newly wrought granite floors into place on the two and a half stories constituting the building. Two complimentary shades of granite in grey were chosen, sourced locally. This mix of the endemic and the contemporary shows a unique sensibility to respond to pressing local conditions, creating a comprehensive and organic dialectic between culture, the environment and the built surroundings. The granite floors were given a 30mm thermal clearance from the forty year old exterior wall. The see-through ground floor plan, enhanced by the continuity of the granite extending from the inside to the outside represents a blurring of boundaries between the inside and the outside that is truly contemporary in its imagination.

This relevant aesthetic also takes into account the now readily available research on the most optimum materials to suit the most specific needs. Extensive walnut paneling on the inside enhances texture. Considering the largely neutral palette that fills the house, this is a tactful move. The renovated house itself is centered around a staircase built of dark wood, in contrast to the lighter paneling. The textures are also playfully carried into several spaces, the beams in the corridor, for instance, and the checkerboard ceiling in the kids' room. Everything was made up along the way, each space tackled as it



The wooden louvers over the window bring in diffused daylight



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came, the materials and fittings molded in harmoniously, according to what was needed.

"Almost everything was custom designed, so there is very little that is NOT a design feature. From the main gate, to facade, to the curved staircase and windows, bespoke furniture, every little thing was agonized over."

This mindfulness is a healthy sign especially when adopting a self-aware ideology that embraces the full brunt of cultural, ecological and social context. The last we need is to be hungover with nostalgia triggered by fanciful imaginations of a glorious and harmonious past. Architect Amit Khanna mentions the studio's standard process of hanging out with the actual builders and craftsmen who will bring their designs alive. "Their early involvement acknowledges them as equal stakeholders in the process, and allows us as a studio to better predict construction outcomes and quality control", he says. And



The dark wood of the spiral staircase contrasts with light paneling



The terrace deck is backed up by a stone wall with varying niches



The two different types of stones in the bathroom wall are complimented by individually lit utility niches



“The idea is to honor a client’s perspective and fully understand their priorities”

this sensitivity is, of course, also extended to the clients, the actual inhabitants of the house. The idea is to honor their perspective and fully understand their priorities. “Rather than fight for control over the process, we embrace our clients’ awareness and allow them to participate in the evolution of the design. The focus is to deliver innovation that uplifts our environment, instead of allowing our built environment to be a mish-mash of private agendas- an outcome of vulgar misinformed aspiration.” After all, they are the ones who will be left to turn the house into a home. ■