

Communicating Architecture & Design

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# YOUNG DESIGNERS

# Group Ø Architects & Designers

Text: Darpana Athale  
Photographs: Courtesy the architects



**Spearheaded by architects Hemant Mahajan and Prashant Shah, Group Ø Architects and Designers is a Pune-based firm. With a staff of just ten members, the firm has handled a variety of projects ranging from architectural and interior designing of bungalows and residential complexes to institutional and industrial campuses, in and around Pune, Nagar, Kolhapur, Mumbai, Indore and Sangamner.**

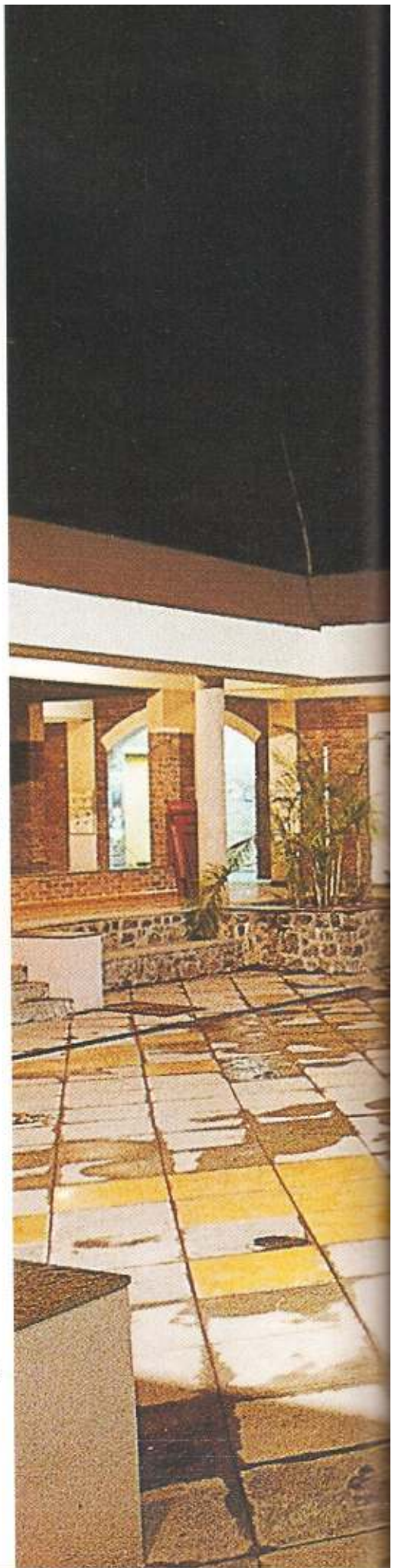
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**Fact File:**

**Project** : Proposed pre-primary, primary and secondary school at Bal Shikshan Mandir, Mayur colony, Kolhruud, Pune for Maharashtra Education Society.  
**Client** : Maharashtra Education Society  
**Design Firm** : M/s Group Ø Architects & Designers, Hemant S Mahajan (Partner), Prashant P Shah (Partner)  
**Design Team** : Hemant S Mahajan (Principal) Godbole, Pandurang  
**Site Area** : 3.36 acres, I & II Phase - 21000 sq ft.  
**Total Cost of Project (Phase I + II)** : 193 Lakhs  
**Structural Consultants** : C E Godse, Shrikant Shrotri  
**Contractor** : M/s Omkar Constructions Shrikant Sewak  
**Landscape Consultant** : Vikas Bhosekar

**1.** The square grid is emphasised by the solids and voids at the entrance gate and also in the internal planning of the school building.  
**2.** All the four wings with individual courtyards converge into a main court that forms a central gathering space for all.





**3.64.** The building façade depicts modern elements brought out of traditional elements like exposed brick with arches in proportion to the main framework, thus breaking the monotony of straight lines.

**5.66.** Primary colours are used to create focal points and give distinguishing characters to different elements inside the building, thus highlighting features like staircases, doors, railings and colonnades.

The Bal Shikshan Mandir is a school campus of 3.36 acres that began in 1981 in a newly developed residential area of Pune city. With a rectangular plot having a 12.0m wide road along the eastern side of the campus, this site does not boast of sizeable contours and is a plain tableland with *murum* and *shadu* type of soil.

At present, there are around one thousand students in this school, so the existing building was quite inadequate for such a large number of students. Hence the Maharashtra Education Society planned three separate buildings for the pre-primary, primary and secondary schools.

The brief given to the architects was to design classrooms that would seat only 40 students each, so that the teachers

could pay individual attention to the students. This would also ensure better control over the quality of educational and recreational proficiency. The facilities had to include a water pond, sand pit, landscaped areas, partially covered pergolas, paved pathways and a good playground.

To produce a natural environment, the designers decided to create as much open space as possible. Says Hemant, "The main school building is designed around a hierarchy of open spaces as courtyards and conceived as an extension to the teaching activity. The four wings are self-sufficient and are interlocked with these courts bringing in natural light and air." These courtyards allow visual





**7.** Sufficient light and air enters the building due to the open courts, skylights and pergolas.  
**8.** Each classroom has been worked out to seat a maximum capacity of students, while ensuring a lightness and openness of design and space.

communication and continuity to other areas.

All the four wings with the courtyards converge into a main court that forms a central gathering space for all. The building facade depicts modern elements brought out of the traditional elements of exposed brick with arches in proportion to the main framework, thus breaking the monotony of straight lines.

The arrangement of interior and exterior spaces is worked out so as to get the necessary shady areas by creating pergolas at places that connect the buildings visually and to provide the required visible depth to the building at various points. The new building is connected to the existing ones by means of a pergola that extends to the dining hall, while a multipurpose hall binds the two buildings, forming a space for parking underneath. Primary colours are used to create focal points and give distinguishing

characters to different elements inside the building, thus highlighting features like staircases, doors, railings and colonnades.

The main building is set to the rear end of the campus, making way for the playground and swimming pool. This provides the space required for a proper appreciation of the building façade, and at the same time, facilitates the various school activities whether they be sports or extra-curricular.

Prashant concludes, "Any project, whether it is architectural, interior designing or campus planning, works out successfully only if the client gets total satisfaction. This is possible only if one gets deeply involved in the project and studies all the client's requirements, from the initial stage of planning to designing for the ultimate user." In the school project we felt we have come close to achieving that elusive balance between 'appropriate design and 'acceptable' design. ■

