

The Soapbox is an opportunity for our advisory board members to express their opinion on an important industry issue. This month, Bankim Dave maintains that while change is inevitable, it's the direction that counts.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER



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“You just have to look around India for five minutes. All the design you need is right here. What more inspiration could you ask for?” says Mary Fox Linton, an interior designer of international repute.

A person is born naked on this earth. The baby has no wish, no desire and no ‘needs’. As the baby grows, it starts ‘needing’ things – from the basic need of food to clothes, medicines, etc. When needs multiply, it calls for a change. To make this change convenient, suitable and comfortable, one needs a cook, a tailor, a carpenter, a doctor, etc. In short, one needs a specialist or a professional.

Change is inevitable. Take the example of clothing. In the early '30s, men used to wear dhotis, kurta and a topi. It was followed by trousers, shirt and a hat, clearly reflecting the British influence. The '50s and '60s showed a change in fashion from narrow pants to wide-bottomed pants; and then jeans brought about a revolution. The changes happened due to change in thinking and visualisation onset of new trends. A person always looks for something different, something new, something innovative. But this change has to be relevant.

Even buildings show a shift in character, depending on one's need: From small street houses (in rows) to an independent home known as a bungalow to a condominium to a flat in a storeyed building to skyscrapers, etc – thus requiring a professional called an architect. When people reached the limits of their imagination in conceptualising the idea of a ‘home’, they started thinking in yet another direction, about the interiors of a home. Change, undoubtedly, was inevitable, and one more specialist was invented – an interior designer.

Earlier, furniture meant a store cabinet, a divan, a pelmet, a centre table or a stool. But the concept of designing furniture pieces became a philosophy, what an interior designer calls ‘inner space’.

It is said that one wall is a divider; two walls form a corner; three walls make a segment; four walls create an enclosure; and the ceiling above adds to the concept of volume. It is this box and the space within it that has to be enhanced. A good interior designer would add a new dimension to the said volume and make the interior spaces come alive. So, from the concept of filling the space within with furniture pieces, the trend has changed to enhancing the space.

The designer was supposed to be skilled in the art of sketching both neat and proportionate

plans. The tools were a pencil, eraser and paper; the drawings were drafted or amended after days of effort; and tracings were converted to ammonia/blueprint later. But technology has brought revolution: pencils are replaced by mouse clicks, drafting boards converted to computer files and ammonia prints to printouts. This change has saved time, energy and, of course, added to the presentation and detailing.

If, in earlier days, it was about setting furniture pieces in a room based on the requirement, ambience and comfort; today, the trend has changed to designing an inner space with furniture that doesn't stand out as a single piece, but blends into the whole space. Words like function, space efficiency, aesthetics and comfort gained new meaning, thus giving rise to more scientifically-designed furniture considering sciences such as anthropometry and ergonomics. The materials of the past are used with innovation to create the present. In the great master Le Corbusier's words, “The past offers the pertinent lesson that nothing lasts, that everything evolves, and that progress advances.”

In earlier times, visitors were invited into formal drawing-rooms, and the living-room was reserved for the family. Today's shrinking spaces rarely permit this kind of demarcation.

Talent and training help, but they can't prepare you for the things that happen between the client's first telephone call and the wind-up. If a ‘designer survival kit’ has to be designed, I would suggest: pack of sense of humour, tranquilisers, vitamin B shots and tolerance in abundance.

Change is not to be denied. The transformation of our cities is not only probable, but also necessary. The mobile age demands it; and lets us do it with imagination and not simply for the sake of change. With the global climate changing, the time has come to be more socially responsible, use sustainable designs, recycled materials and nano materials, and create not only ‘green’ buildings but also ‘green’ interiors. The designer needs to become a learner, attend seminars/workshops and educational programmes to remain updated.

Let us change our practice in such a way that what we create exhibits harmony of all parts; that it is fitted together and designed with such proportion and in connection with Mother Nature; that nothing could be added, diminished or altered – but for the worse. In short, let us unite, work together and change to improve our profession and our society. **ASD**



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