



DFI SAFA VALLEY
Design Forum International as Architects



View Gallery





When Ar. Anoj Tevatia talks about his recent designs for affordable housing, he is all praise for the central government, specially the Prime Minister's jibe with 'Housing for all' scheme that sets ambitious goals of providing some 8 million households by 2020. While there remains a lot of scepticism around the quality of the products, relegating such visions as hyperboles, there are the likes of Tevatia that have taken an initiative to use their experience to enhance the capacity of their practices to re-orient themselves to the changing market trends and find housing solutions that resonate well within the needs and desires of country's common populace.

His firm, design forum international is involved in design and construction of a lot of affordable housing projects in Delhi-NCR. The real estate in such dense agglomerations is balanced on a fine line between land value, project cost and ticket price. Here, design forum international incorporates affordability by utilizing building automation and information modelling to deliver housing projects within a year, with evidently better built quality and facilities. These projects are an effort to sustain the rising demands for good apartments amongst the lower middle class, a trend that is engulfing the real estate of all tier 1 cities.

Amongst, one of his housing projects is Safa Valley that strikes as a design programme not built for sustenance but change. Safa Valley is situated in Jammu where apartment culture hasn't really caught up. That doesn't mean it won't. By 2030, half of India's population is expected to be living in urban areas, which means that Tier 2 cities are going to face a space crunch.

The upper class in Tier 2 cities are able to afford their own plot, but modern housing concepts haven't really caught up, and thus buildings rely on traditional construction methods, materials and aesthetics that are not able to accommodate modern day lifestyle and perception. The middle class are confined to smaller plots of row housing, with no public amenities in their vicinity. Being in a place where they can't afford to purchase such amenities and with lack of public development projects, they do not get any personal value to monetary investment put into their own properties. The lower middle class lives in areas that have barely any scope of revival or upgrade, the settlements are dingy and cramped.

In case of Jammu, an area surrounded by verdant green hills, even lavish places did not house gardens, observed Tevatia. So DFI jumped in to introduce a modern condominium culture and contemporary lifestyle that was affordable and inclusive to all the classes, with a vision to leave the place with a productive pattern and vision for development. Social structure in Jammu is still closely knitted within the community, unlike megacities where people do not interact much with their neighbours. But in case of



Going three floors above ground exposes a space to a panoramic view of the valley, an experiential aspect that became the central idea behind the planning of Safa Valley. Built on the thought of providing visual ownership in the valley to provide a sense of place within the apartments, the planning was envisaged in shape of arc. Nestled along the edges of an elongated site, the convex surface of the buildings look outwards having been pushed along the boundary side, with a peaceful meditative outlook. Whereas, the apartments placed on the concave surface face the community center and park that has been created within, thus, not only getting a view of the beautiful scenery but a taste of the throng commune within the safely gated complex.

Another factor that demarcates the enriched visual experience through the apartment blocks are the balconies. For an apartment, a balcony is a ritualistic space, that involves participation of the user and forces of nature. It allows sun, wind, rain and dust inside its territory, which demands careful maintenance and timely retreat to interiors. At the same time, it becomes a point for an individual or a family to express themselves, reflect on their surroundings and find subtle meanings of existence. Spacious balconies often become terraced gardens housing small gatherings nestled amongst potted plants. Balconies are spaces that become places over time and enhance memorabilia. This play and pause is an evident feature for a sense of belonging which is often overlooked and missed by real estate.

The balconies of most housing colonies are thin and reductive that allow people to barely put up a chair outside. In Safa Valley, retracting the built volume to an additional 4 feet, the main balconies are almost 8 feet deep. Self-shaded, with wooden decks and manicured edges, they subtly invite the sun. Coupled with a glass facade composed of sliding panels, the interiors of the house are allowed to spill outwards. The visibly extrovert nature of the condominium enhances the functionality of compact spaces by increasing flexibility of use. Thus, it is not the amount of space that makes the apartment blocks affordable but the interventions that delineate the very use of those apartments.

Services and lift lobbies are placed at the core creating a courtyards and wells within the complex. This provides internal mediation and communication and much needed shaded zones. Local climate response, being at the heart of design process of DFI, all apartments get equal direct daylight time and access to the wells. This contributes towards creating a natural draft facilitating ventilation, and also modulates the temperature of interiors. This also promotes directionality, serviceability and temporality throughout the day, and changing seasons.



are provided at one of the corners of the site overlooking the park. It is an effort to provide the infrastructure that people cannot provide for themselves. The park and its amphitheatre, invites families with kids and pets a necessary open space to interact and enjoy, thereby promoting collective participation and lifestyle on ground. The park becomes a social heterotopia where all individual narratives converge to contest, reflect and merge with each other; and a carefully proportioned facade with a smart aesthetic sense, coupled with balconies projecting lifestyles, to become the genius locus of the site. Thus, the idea of putting an open space at center delivers its purpose of providing community feeling and collective memory.

Furthermore, Anoj Tevatia noted that the transition from open space to core of apartment blocks had to pass through stilt parking – a kind of spaces in housing complex that appear desolate and unsafe. Realizing that this transition had to be made amicable to invite people, all the vestigial spaces and corners were designed properly with affective seating and lighting, located around the courtyards and wells to create a larger ontological function. Serving as the last fitting piece of a puzzle, this intervention completes and defines the spatial hierarchy of the entire project, from the gate to the bedroom. The entire pathway is sprinkled with social function delineated by macro and micro-spaces with kids playing, people exercising, the aged playing chess. Even the servants benefit from the values of spaces by being given an equal share of experience in the open spaces. The story of Safa Valley is one of inclusivity where the ones who inhabit and the ones who maintain feel equally involved, informed and responsible to the scenario.

Such are the notions provided by Design Forum International that they have left the valley with an icon to strive towards a development that conserves the values of the landscape, of their society and a creative personal development, to shift to a contemporary lifestyle and thought of dwellings, while remaining accessible and equitable to everyone who aspires for a better home.

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