

A row house-turned advertising office, Aagey Se Right is not your average 9to5 work hub. From the moment you enter, you appreciate how the raw structure, with its Kota flooring and waxed scrapped wall is enhanced with bare minimum design interventions.

**RESEARCH.
PLAN.
CREATE.**

**TUMSE
NA HO PAYEGA**

“FALL SEVEN TIMES
GET UP EIGHT.”

Restrained Craft

In Surat, the office of Aagey Se Right exhibits how minimum intervention can create maximum impact thanks to the creative ingenuity of The Company of Design and their impressive approach to adaptive reuse.

TEXT: CAROL FERRAO; PHOTOGRAPHS: ISHITA SITWALA, COURTESY THE COMPANY OF DESIGN



In the row house typology of the site, the openings were scarce. So diffused light was brought in through a skylight in the staircase area.

ABOVE LEFT Budget constraints dictated the aesthetics of the office. The facade has been painted black in contrast to the neighboring white painted houses highlighting the brands signage.

ABOVE RIGHT The existing house was transformed into an office space by maintaining an open layout on the ground floor. Here a small waiting area for visitors opens into the double height zone with the stairs.

Very few have the thirst for the unconventional, a drive to set new benchmarks, an eye to see beauty where most don't and the ability to bring back the dead to life. This passion is most apparent in the world of design, which in its truest sense is a poetic journey undertaken by all the stakeholders involved, whether they realize it or not. The brand-new office space for Surat-based advertising agency Aagey Se Right speaks eloquently of this tryst. Executed by architects Pooja Shah and Niel Parekh of The Company of Design, for the client who has been a long-time collaborator on the firm's F&B projects, the venture is a result of a synergy between different creative fields.

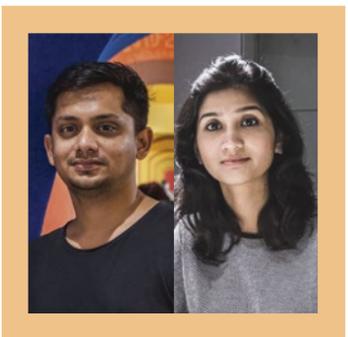
Could the 30-year-old load-bearing structure, originally a quaint Surat row house, be morphed into a dynamic, young office space? The first site visit painted a bleak picture: there were water leakage issues and the area was in poor condition because it had been uninhabited for the longest time. "Due to limited structural stability, no civil changes could be done," mention the architects. One would reasonably assume the opportunities to get creative were scarce.

Programmatically, the client wanted an eccentric office space wherein there was a clear demarcation of the working area and a good amount of room for entertainment on the ground floor. The row house was in a precarious condition, necessitating a complete renovation of the premise to meet the new typology. However, the lease was short term. These limitations necessitated minimum intervention, which encouraged an organic unfolding of materiality and aesthetics. "The design features an unfinished feel, combined with the plants popping up in areas, making the overall space rough and simple yet delicate," Pooja explains.

The essence of a house was blended in the commercial office space, keeping it open and informal on the ground floor. You enter through a narrow passage into an informal reception area that opens into a double-height space holding the stairwell, an access point for all the activities of the office. On the ground floor, there is a conference area, a small pantry and an entertainment room for the staff beyond which lies a backyard. The main working zone is on the first floor which limits visitor access.

Given the nature of the site and its inherent characteristics along with the budget

Strategically placed plants and art add a touch of warmth and simplicity to the otherwise raw, edgy office.



ARCHITECTS
Niel Parekh and Pooja Shah





In the double-heighted space with the stairwell, a faux grass carpet is fixed on the wall creating a cost-effective, lively "green wall" that is accentuated by suspended LED bulbs. It is mainly used as a backdrop for the company's test photo shoots.



Seen over the stair block are linear, custom-made lighting fixtures made from leftover strips of teak wood that were fitted with T-5 LED lights.

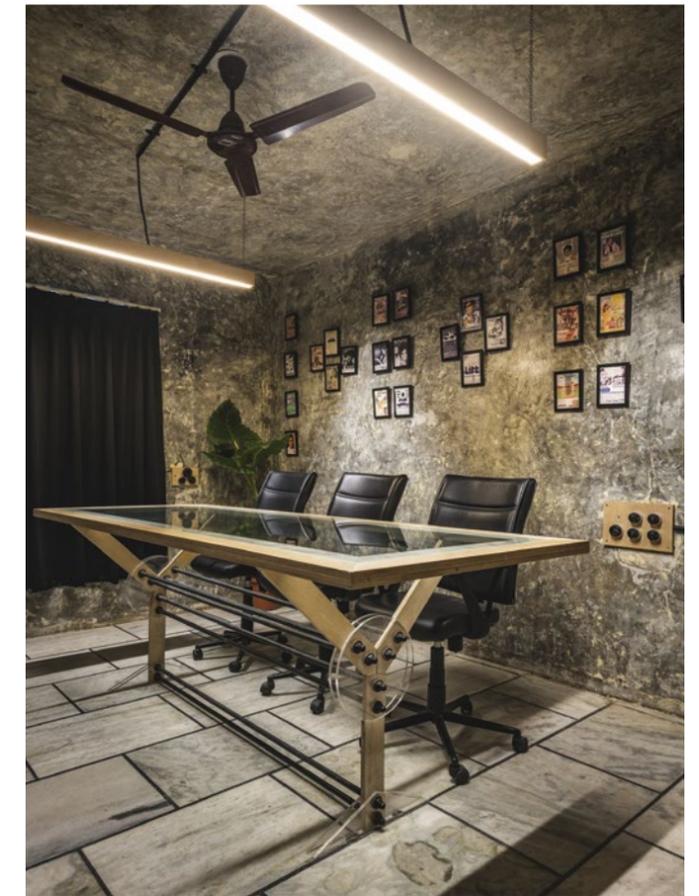
CONCEPT: A creatively stimulating office space that accommodated for work and entertainment zones within the site's structural constraints as well as a conservative budget.



constraint, the material palette emerged in an organic manner. The existing flooring of Kota stone and white marble was retained, saving money, time, labour and the creation of extra debris. Instead of repainting the entire house, which wouldn't take given the leakage issues, the walls were scraped and finished with wax rendering a beautiful textured feel and exposing the true material. "The constrained budget-driven approach ended with a brutal, edgy and raw result," point out the architects.

Such pragmatic decisions didn't stop the architects from coming up with creative, well-thought-out spaces. Take for instance the waiting area that is part of a bigger zone and sits on a raised level. A box-like penetrative framework has been created with typography as decor elements on the wall and the furniture. The concept, says Niel, was to make the person sit inside a box surrounded by different thoughts symbolizing being inside the designers' head surrounded by their ideas. "The person waiting would be a part of the activities of the office without actually entering the work zone."

Adaptive reuse of spaces come with the challenge of juxtapositioning the activities in a particular area intended for another purpose with a new hierarchy of spaces and function.



In this conundrum lay hidden a plethora of design possibilities, believe the architect duo. The double-heighted area with the stairwell would have been just a negative space with the sole purpose of filtering in daylight from the skylight. In its repurposed avatar, this cavity features a "green wall" comprising a faux grass carpet that is used as a backdrop for the ad agency's test photo shoots. A string of suspended LED bulbs accentuate it as well.

A hint of personalization breaks the monotony of the raw office space. The client loves Bollywood and finds it inspiring. Thus Bollywood posters and quotes from movies became an integral part of the design, though in a non-kitschy way. In the client's cabin, for example, you find the scene from the movie Barfi printed on a huge canvas. "He loved the feel of that one shot and wanted it displayed in his cabin to inspire him while he worked," mention the architects. Similar decor is seen in

ABOVE LEFT The entry to the first floor which houses the terrace, main cabin and the staff working space. A hand-painted quote adds character to the bare decor. It was selected by the client and reflects their working philosophy.

ABOVE RIGHT The meeting room for clients is strategically placed on the ground floor to limit access of guests to the non-working areas. The long meeting table was custom-made from acrylic and birch ply so as to appear lighter and compensate for the constrained floor space.

MATERIALS

Floor Existing kota stone and white marble
Walls Stripped Plastered walls finished with wax
Ceiling Exposed slab
Facade Paint
Lighting T-5 LED light



A good amount of breathing space and a common interactive zone ensures employee well-being. An entertainment area on the ground floor opens onto the backyard. Old, classic Bollywood posters framed and painted on the walls liven up the space.





ABOVE In the main cabin, the chalkboard wall constraints well with the waxed walls. Exposed electrical conduits are placed systematically and designed to be low-maintenance.

LEFT A reading nook has been created in the main cabin where a scene from the movie Barfi, printed on canvas, sets the mood for the room. It is the client's favourite cinematographic shot that serves to inspire him time and again.

the conference room, waiting area and entertainment room.

When you chalk out the limitations this project had to address, it amazes you how those same minuses were turned on their heads to create a quirky, youthful design language here. The secret, say Pooja and Niel, is that “even though there was a budget constraint, complete freedom was there in terms of exploration of design.” By being receptive to unconventional ideas (very few see the charm is rustic, waxed walls), the client found himself in a win-win situation where he saved on frivolous, cosmetic renovation and was still presented with a creative space that fits the vibe of an advertising company. Pragmatism meets poetic reinterpretation at Aagey Se Right and invariably shows how to repurpose a space in a sustainable manner that is also economically viable. Talk about a real winner! **BI**

FACT FILE: **Project** Aagey se right office **Client** Abhay Mehta **Location** Surat, Gujarat **Area** 1,350 sq ft **Principal architects** Pooja Shah and Niel Parekh **Design team** Khubchand Suthar **Contractors** Rajesh Painter