

# domus

21 • Volume 02 • Issue 10 • September 2013 / **BDP.Khandekar** sense of a place / **Mancini Studio** the space of the 'in-between' / **Flying Elephant Studio** cerebral analytical / **Architects' Combine** architecture is an emergence / **Kazys Varnelis** technology is our modernity / **Gregory** google glass / **Tan** collective power / **Hoskote** insurgent cosmopolitanism / **Vivan Sundaram** piecing a landscape / **Gobhai, Hoskote, Chatterjee** nothing is absolute

India

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# Contents



↑  
Cover

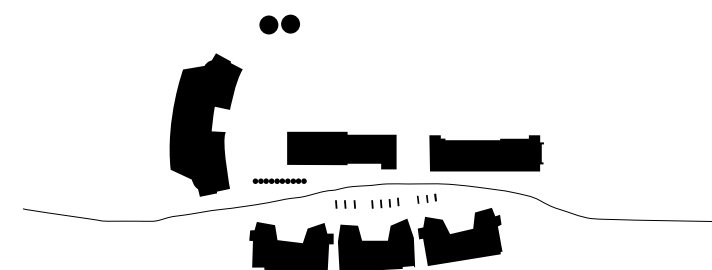
The image indicates the role planning visions and ideas played in realising a human and productive environment for the Nirlon Knowledge Park in Mumbai. Planning is not seen as a dogmatic approach but an orientation for the development of an urban space, and generating a public place through landscaping and design features

The mural on Issue 20 (August 2013) of *Domus India* cover was created by Orijit Sen

<b>Editorial</b>	11	Pelin Tan	<b>Collective power</b>	78
Joseph Grima		Ranjit Hoskote	<b>Insurgent cosmopolitanism</b>	82
<b>Shipping forecast</b>	22	Vivan Sundaram, Girish Shahane	<b>Piecing a landscape</b>	84
M Pravat		Banoo Battliboi, Hena Kapadia	<b>Folding reveals</b>	90
<b>Layout</b>	32		<b>Contemporary museum for architecture in India</b> curated by Kaiwan Mehta Mehli Gobhai, Ranjit Hoskote, Mortimer Chatterjee	94
BDP.Khandekar, Kaiwan Mehta			<b>Design, politics and the new rhetoric</b> Justin McGuirk	100
<b>Sense of a place</b>	34		<b>British Design Award</b>	
Mancini Studio, Suprio Bhattacharjee			<b>Cold Case</b> Luigi Spinelli	104
<b>The space of the 'in-between'</b>	44		<b>Istituto Italiano di Cultura</b>	
Flying Elephant Studio, Shilpa Ranade			Rassegna	108
<b>Cerebral analytical</b>	52		<b>Furniture</b>	
Architects' Combine, Kaiwan Mehta				
<b>Architecture is an emergence</b>	58			
Kazys Varnelis				
<b>Technology is our Modernity</b>	68			
<b>SuperNormal</b> Hannah Gregory				
<b>Google Glass</b>	72			



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# Sense of a place

The Nirlon Knowledge Park in Mumbai makes a case for micro-urbanism, which is not about promoting island urbanism but in fact displaying how the environment, architecture and human activities can be integrated through planning and landscape design

*Design*  
**BDP•Khandekar**

*Text*  
**Kaiwan Mehta**



**Sense of a site** Organisation of space demands an approach that understands the components that will occupy a space and the possible relationships that can emerge from this encounter. Planning predicts a set of relationships based on past experience, projecting a utopia. The utopia is forced into encounter with site and its histories, generating a sequence of new emergences. These new developments then reorganise the components that were put together in a site.

**Utopia** It is a condition of planning, a condition that is aspirational but one that can also be indicative of the need to organise and structure. Structure can be operative rather than prescriptive. Utopia is a desire to merge that with nature, which essential emerges overriding nature. The balance of need and want is human; the aspiration to achieve a natural posturing is utopia.

**Balance** Sites are conditions of imbalance; the planner enters to rectify the imbalance. The architect negotiates with the imbalance allowing a material culture to develop forms and images that indicate the presence of, and survival in conditions at the site. The urge towards a state of balance produces the conception of a vision.

**Vision** It is the quality of a planner – to establish vision, to produce methods of achieving this vision, as well as to be able to draw and share that vision. The drawing emerges on paper which otherwise draws a blank, but the site stares back with its complications of geography, persistent presences and pasts, and the economic

*This spread: the approach to the project is urban – not only in the sense that it is located within the city of Mumbai but in its attitude towards its site and its location within a metropolitan landscape; a model depicting the design proposal of the project*

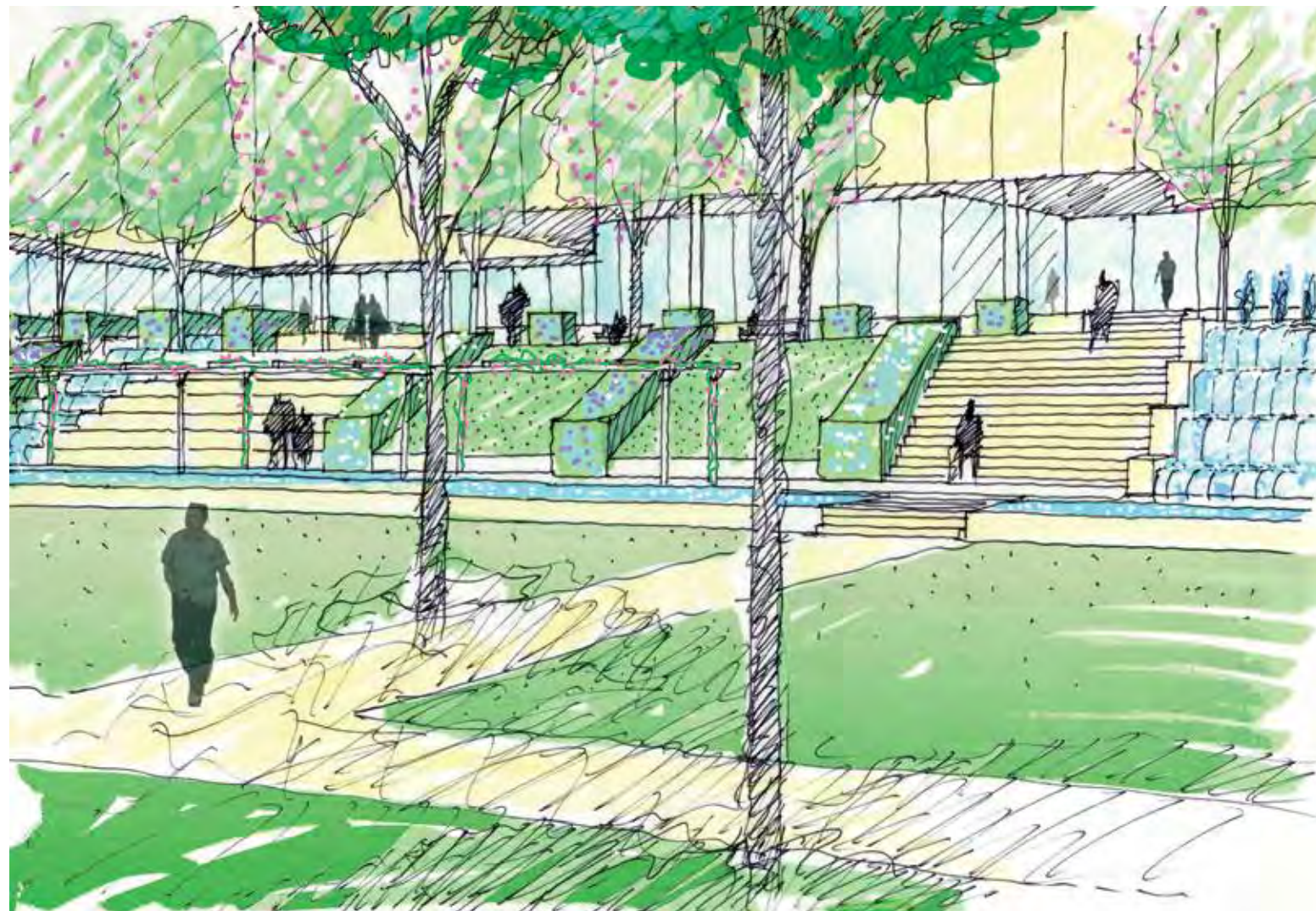


atmospheres. The vision is able, or unable, to draw within the atmosphere. When it is able, a condition of work and life emerges that we may refer to as human and sustainable. Otherwise, the vision, with its dominating nature, destroys atmospheres that exist, without producing new ones conducive to human life and work.

**Work** It is about the process; to search, to know, to sensitively act, and produce a productive site. To make a site productive factors, external and internal, need to converse and be in dialogue. If this dialogue is not possible, islands emerge – those that are productive, and those that identify a difference against the neighbour.

**Islands** Urban conditions; that are either forced to differentiate or emerge out of misplaced sense of security, differences and excessive inward contemplation. Islands can be dialogic, and need not be meditative to the level of introvertedness. Islands can be stories that treat the edges as conditions rather than frameworks or realities. Islands need to keep the aspiration to grow out breaking their fake boundaries, to meet and embrace other islands in the process of growing, breaking and making.

**Stories** Planners and architects work with stories that tie up characters (forms), plots (site features), climaxes (features of built volumes or objects in the landscape) and contexts (the landscape that needs to be re-stitched). To tie up objects, terrains, landscapes and material features into a storyline is the essential job of the planner – to build up relationships between objects; it is not to dominate through geometry or fake recreations of natural systems.



This spread: the master-planning centres around organising resources, developing new reserves in the form of site-greening, places for human interaction and existence, producing a sense of safety and community, yet devising systems that engineer the reserves and site productively, without interfering with the everyday use or visual sense of the site; the views of the campus, and the sketches - 'real' and the proposed (proposal sketches are by Shyam Khandekar)

**Project** The Nirlon Knowledge Park is a condition of converting a site from one use to another, and in the process, replenishing the life capacity of that site. The approach of planning is essentially to identify a vision that is not self-conscious, and hence image-centric, but one that allows for an incremental growth of the site, the buildings on it, the landscape that weaves around and the people that work and live within it. The approach to the project is urban – not in the sense that it is located within the city of Mumbai but in its attitude towards its site and its location within a metropolitan landscape. The project is a landscape and environment design undertaking – where the landscape is not a freshly green painted lawn, and the environment is no obligatory reference to saving a tree here and some ozone there. The environment is the atmosphere of conditions that are persuaded through design to produce and allow for conditions that make the world a better place to live and work in, grow and think in. The landscape is the skeleton of this atmosphere, as it is that which realises the potential of the built and the unbuilt, the soil and the concrete, the waterway as well as the walkway, and the persistent signs of memory with the conditions for innovation and reinterpretation. The approach is to develop a microcosm that maybe a kind of island urbanism, not out of any urge to be introvert, or self-obsessively exclusive, but to avoid damaging conditions that often unrealistic policies or laws create. The wall at the boundary in this project was built not with the aspiration to disconnect fashionably, but with the hope that one-day it will crumble and allow the

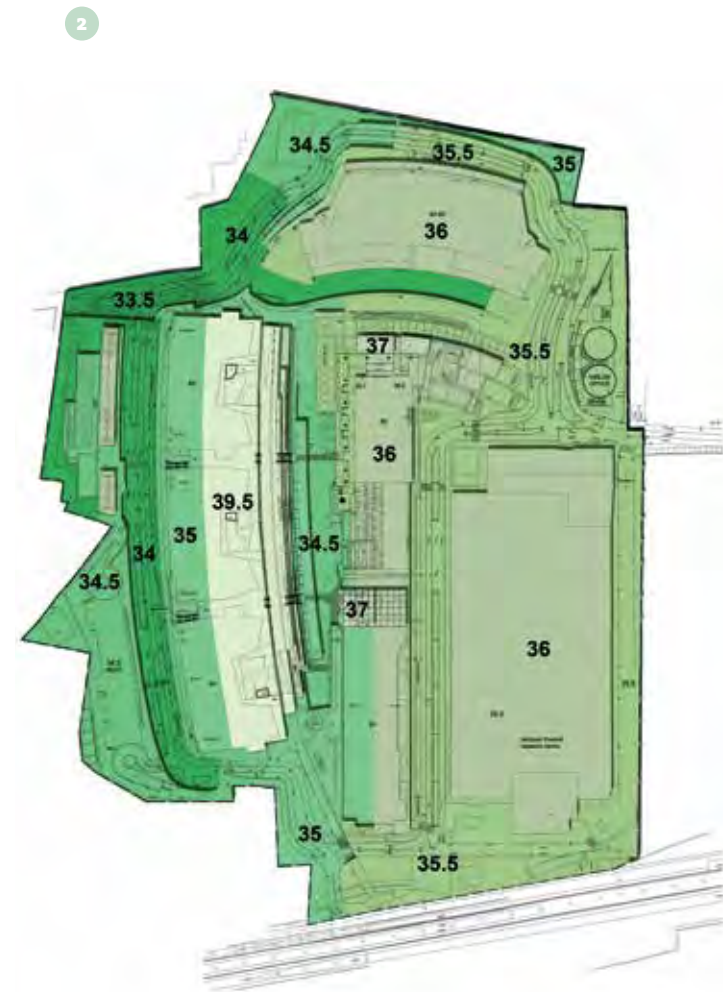


This spread: the project is a landscape and environment design undertaking – where the landscape is not a freshly green painted lawn, and the environment is no obligatory reference to saving a tree here and some ozone there; sketches of the walkway; sketch proposing the redesign of the old turbine hall into the cafeteria in the campus





0 50m



0 50m



Sketch and image of the walkway in the central core area which becomes one of the most important community and connecting spaces in the campus



0 5m

**NIRLON KNOWLEDGE PARK**  
 Urban Designer and Master Planner  
**BDP.Khandekar, Netherlands**

Landscape Architect  
**BDP.Khandekar, Netherlands**

Architect & Engineering  
**Venkatramanan Associates, Bengaluru**

Civil Contractors  
**M/s Talib & Shamsi Construction Pvt Ltd**

Carpentry  
**M/s Eleganz Interiors Pvt Ltd**

Client  
**Nirlon Limited**

Location  
**Goregaon (East), Mumbai, India**

**FACT BOX**

Area of the Campus  
**93,078 m<sup>2</sup>**

Total Construction Area  
**2,78,709 m<sup>2</sup>**

Construction & Design Phase  
**2006 - 2014**

**PROPOSAL DIAGRAMS**

- 1 Diagram of site distribution and circulation
- 2 Diagram of site levels

**PROPOSAL DIAGRAMS**

- 3 Diagram of the landscape design
- 4 Diagram of the landscape design (details)
- 5 Diagram of the section through the central core showing the details of the walkway



This spread: the central green zone with its water body is a fulcrum for the site not just in the planning diagram or the visual feel of the place, but is the zone for walking across the site and interconnecting across different buildings, as well as providing for the setting of the sequence and cluster of built volumes; an old temple that was retained on the site



microcosm to grow larger and that urbanity is synonymous with a condition of life rather than unruly development or disproportionate greed and purposeful decay. The project, in dealing with the site and its existing realities at the beginning of this development, as well as the projection of a future that will grow towards a utopia, actually sets out an example of what comprehensive planning can do. Understanding realities of the metropolis around, and the conditions within, allows for a diagram of planning and envisioning to emerge. Land and services are resources; although old and maybe peculiar, old buildings are material that can be reprocessed rather than wasted under the demolishing crane; and these become starters for the new to emerge with its own ideas and material preferences. The master-planning centres around organising resources, developing new reserves in the form of site-greening, places for human interaction and existence, producing a sense of safety and community, yet devising systems that engineer the reserves and site productively, without interfering the everyday use or visual sense of the site. Master-planning is to identify with opportunities and best practices, developing ideas and guidelines rather than rigid systems or policy that stifle human productivity, growth or interaction. The central green zone, with its water body, is a fulcrum for the site not just in the planning diagram or the visual feel of the place, but is also the zone for walking across the site and interconnecting across different buildings, as well as providing for the setting of the sequence and cluster of built volumes. The central park contains an old temple in the site to the new development as well as the memorial to the founder of the company; it also provides the setting and scope for a possible community gathering, where a wall projecting the history of the site and company forms the backdrop. The other end of this zone, one of the tectonically most interesting buildings from the previous history of this site is being converted into a new building, a new place for contemporary use as a cafeteria with the old turbine fans still defining a visual sense of the volume and place. The central zone does not sit closed within built volumes, but actually waits patiently for a time when urban conditions and policies outside the site would allow for the planning to extend beyond this microcosm. The microcosm sees itself as an example of good urban planning practices that can be extended to the metropolis and its everyday life, and not remain restricted to privatised urban settings. BDP.Khandekar were the urban designer and landscape architects who envisioned the whole project, and Shyam Khandekar continues guiding it including making the conceptual sketches for architecture. The architecture and engineering has been done by Venkataraman Associates of Bengaluru. The Nirlon Knowledge Park developed by BMP with Shyam Khandekar as its main planner is a story still developing, shaping ideas and places not for a limited use within a corporate campus, but aspires that this island urbanism can at some point extend further into public life, making visions of the good environment and human public places an aspect of everyday life.

**KAIWAN MEHTA**  
Architect and critic