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# I A & B

focus: interior architecture

 **Jasubhai**  
M E D I A



# INTERIOR URBANISM

The work of Mumbai-based Mobile Offices (MO-OF) helps us explore the relationship between Interior Design and Urbanism, helping identify methods in which both fields can inform the development of the other.

*Text : Namita Dharia*

*Photographs : courtesy the architects*

Manisha Agarwal and Shantanu Poredi, principals MO-OF Architects, use the term 'Interior Urbanism' to introduce their recent work. They argue that the term 'Interior Urbanism' allows them to situate the public realm as an important locus in the design of the interior, simultaneously allowing the holistic design of both the interior and the exterior. Taking inspiration from their work and their conceptual approach to interior design, this article discusses some primary notions of how 'Interior Urbanism' can propagate both a better interiority and a better urbanity; in other words, how can the coupling of two seemingly oppositional terms of Interior and Urbanism allow for innovation in both fields.

This article shall look at three of MO-OF's projects - the Bose Residence, the Lemon Grass Café, and the Worldsport Group Office, using them as sites to address the nature in which 'Interior Urbanism' can problematise interior design.

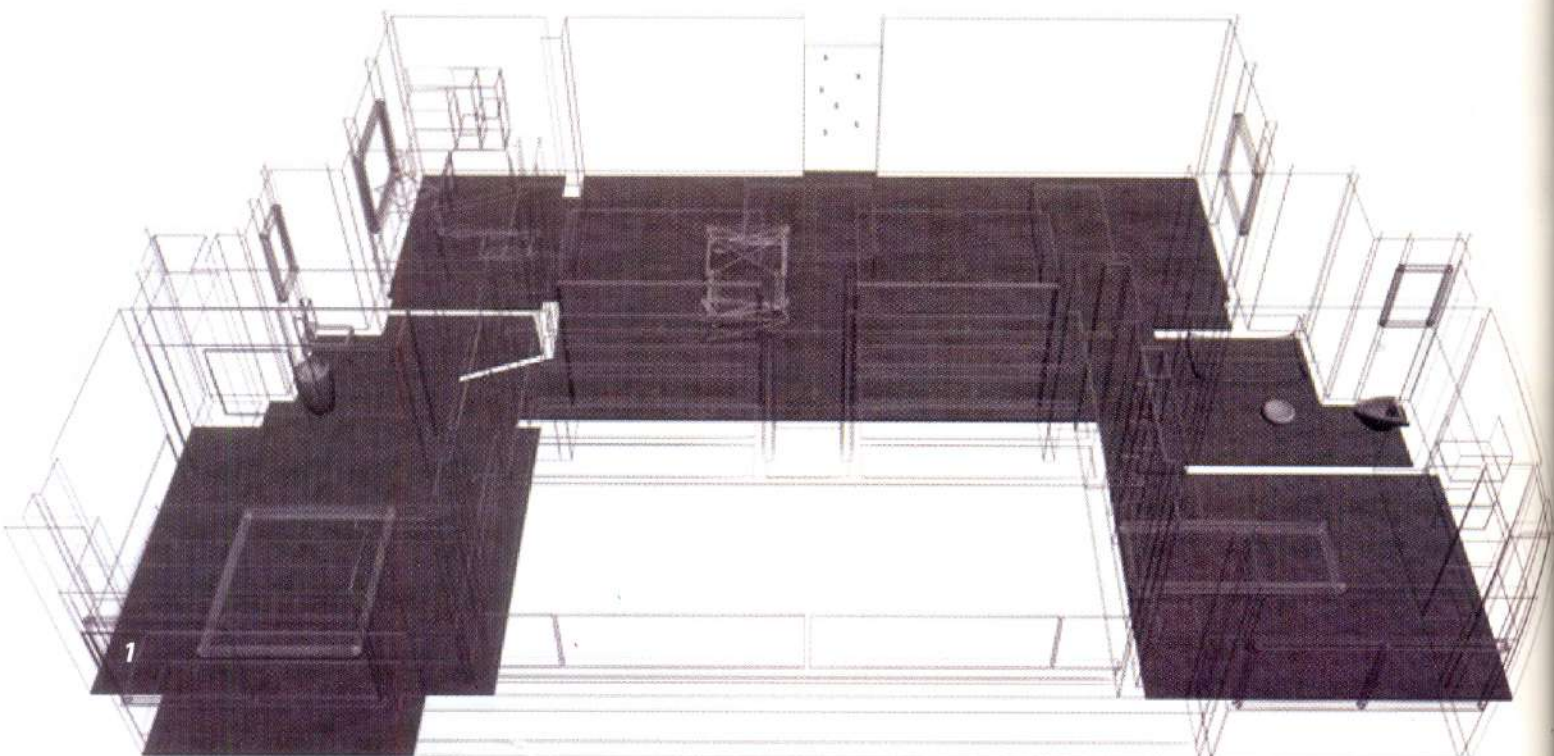
## Urbanism and Interiority

Urbanism encompasses an expansive historical trajectory of stylistic movements and approaches to the design of cities. It not only speaks of the built form and organisation of the city but also the invisible flows- finance, technologies etc. that allow for the functioning of a city. The humble interior

forms a by-product of this urbanisation. It is formed by the planning of areas and programs of a city, and acts as a microcosm of the city, expressing the same ideas of publicness, environment, and socio-cultural behaviour that the city sustains.

The three projects selected here help us link environment and behaviour by allowing us to address the basic functions of the human in the city: working, living, and recreation; and thus act as agents to discuss crucial linkages between urbanism and interior design. All three projects, as well as the MO-OF practice, are located in Bombay.

The Bose Residence is a two-bedroom apartment, for artists Radhika and Bose Krishnamachari, which addresses changing modes of living. The Lemon Grass Café is the design for a South East Asian restaurant that alludes to the cosmopolitanism of the city. The Worldsport Group Office, a workplace for a sports company working in entertainment, production, management, and advertising, displays the importance of the creation of a public environment in the interior. Each project helps us address broader questions that link interior design to urbanism: How does the workplace manifest the economic and social foundations of a city? How does a living environment reflect an urban lifestyle? How do new sites of recreation reflect a changing nature of urbanism?







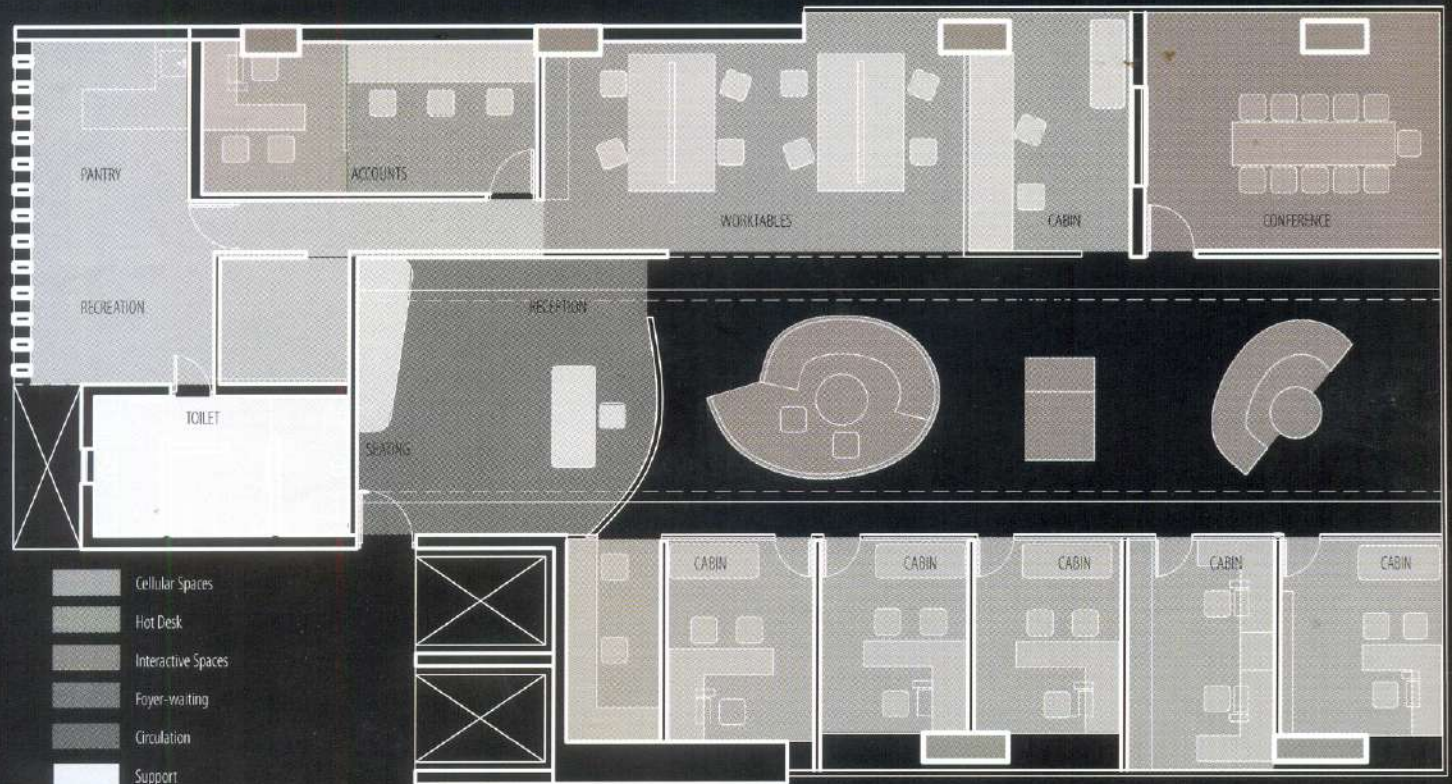


The Lemon Grass Café, on the other hand, creates a public realm with a single, simple organisational strategy: the long linear bar becomes the keystone of public activity in the restaurant around which multiple activities take place and unites the entire space. In all three projects, privatised spaces are available within the public realm, through subdivision in the Bose Residence, through the small cellular spaces in the Worldsport Group Office, and individual tables in the Lemon Grass Café, tying to the concept and scale of the individual in urban society.

Thus, all three projects offer varied solutions for the creation of an interior public realm - be it in the design of the central corridor in the Worldsport Group Office as a series of flexible timeshare spaces; the extension of the living room into the bedroom, terrace and kitchen in the Bose Residence; or the use of the bar as the pivot of activity within the Lemon Grass Café - each becomes an important space that allow for distinct types of interaction which help drive a distinctive interior and urban experience.

2. A pivoted television and sliding partitions enable the creation of large open spaces from subdivided rooms.

3. A library, conference room, and discussion space, form varied elements of the central public forum in the Worldsport Group Office.



PLAN OF WORLDSPORT GROUP OFFICE

## Infrastructural Maneuvers

Infrastructure plays an invisible, but nevertheless important role in the creation of both an urban and interior environment. Services such as water supply, ventilation, and systems of lighting are not only backbones of the functioning of a space but also act as central elements of the design. At the scale of smaller interior projects, these gestures can be far more subtle but equally important.

While in the Worldsport Group Office, the mechanisms of working (such as hot-desking, individual cabins, timeshare spaces) become the primary infrastructural gesture of the space, the Lemon Grass Café uses lighting and water as an element within the design to ensure a continuity of ambience and the Bose residence adopts the work of the artist's work and colour palate to unite the apartment into a cohesive space. Thus, all the three projects contain primary elements that unite the project conceptually and physically.

## Tactility of Environment

The urban environment also builds a certain experientiality that is not only dependent on its organisation and infrastructure but also the tactility and materiality of the city. Within the interior, these are of an even greater importance as the scale of the experience is to that of the individual and the contact, one to one.



## Program

In any scale of space, the first step of creating an urban order is the overall organisation and the programmatic allocations of the various components. Within urbanism and interior design, the allocation of functions and choices of program are sensitive to the real-time practices of inhabitants thereby, helping transform space into a place where citizenship or community can be constructed.

The Bose Residence's programmatic choices reflect the choices that its residents and indeed several residents in the city of Bombay make. A lack of space and increasing 'work from home' lifestyles require the house to become an adaptable space that can be deployed for a variety of functions- working, sleeping, entertaining etc. This method ties to the broader context of 'mixed-use' programming of areas in the city. In the Worldsport Group Office we see a similar adaptability of program, created by concepts such as 'hot-desking' that allows for multiple users to book need-based workplaces. Interactive time shared spaces, conference rooms, meeting rooms, seating; and an open-plan system of working also add to the adaptability of space in the Worldsport Group Office.

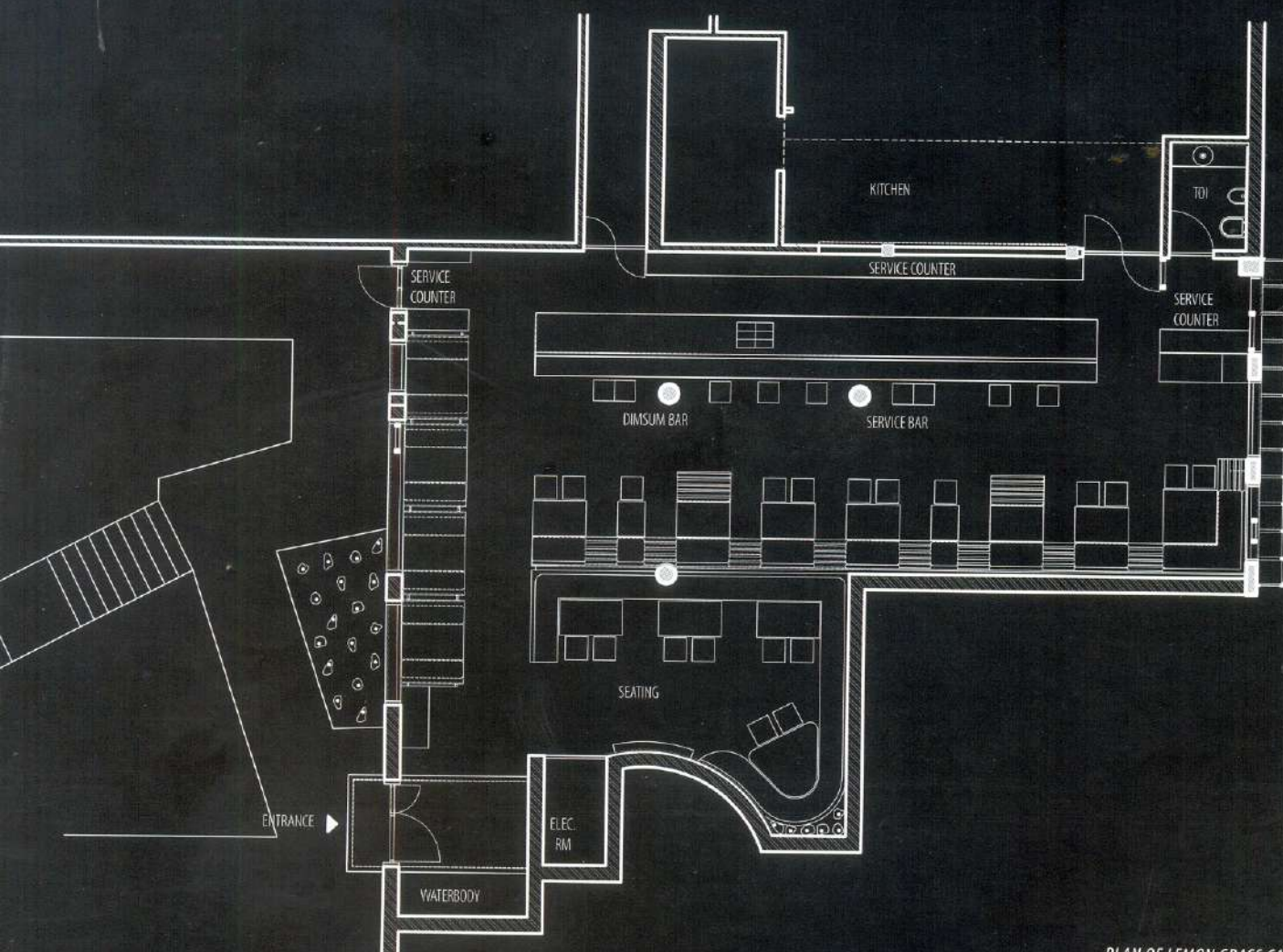
1. Axonometric view of the Bose Residence.

## The Public Realm

The creation of a public realm forms a central focus for urban design, as it is through publicness that notions of citizenship, nationalism, community, and identity are formed. Public relationships and how we define spaces for the building of community are primary to the approach to urban design and affect basic social constructs, such as family, friends and business groups. The three projects demonstrate gestures that address the building of a public realm and community within a privatised, interior space.

The flexible plan of the Bose Residence allows for the conversion of the home from a single, large, open public space down into more privatised working and living spaces. This is done through a system of pivoted objects (TV, doors), and folding furniture. These systems transform the Bose Residence from a site for building social ties to a privatised place for an individual.

The Worldsport Group Office too embeds similar transformations by mimicking the spatial organisation of a beehive and creates spaces that can hold different sizes of groups. Spaces such as the den (for group processes), the club (for transactions), the hive (for individual processes), the cell (for concentrated study), allows for the users to interact in varied settings and conditions, again building publicness at different scales.



PLAN OF LEMON GRASS CAFE





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In the Worldsport Group Office, materiality becomes important in the construction of a brand image for the company. Translucent materials such as glass, polycarbonate sheets, set against a stark white surface are used to achieve the same. The refractivity and reflectivity of these surfaces is enhanced by the careful use of natural and artificial light, creating a luminous and ephemeral identity. Floating bats in a light box, and a media wall of stacked T.V screens, further add to the creation of an ethereal ambience.

In the Lemon Grass Café, the branding strategy is more eclectic. Colours form an important element. The floor is an orange-pigmented IPS, the walls white or aqua green, set against a rough white ceiling. The furniture is built out of solid wood; the water wall is rendered with brass bowls on a backdrop of gray slate; thin silk wraps form light sources, and a water void with floating rocks, together set up a laid back, hip and 'oriental' environment.

The Bose Residence works with the specificity of Bose's art... the art, acting as its spokesperson through the use of dull metallic colours, natural and artificial lighting techniques, silver leaf work, backlit translucent glass, earthy copper metal sheet flooring, and the use of original paintings by the artist for the front door.

4. The linear bar forms a central organisational element in the Lemon Grass Café.

5. The palate of the Bose Residence arises from the work of the artist.

6. A combination of brass bowls, slate walls, fibre glass rocks create an eclectic interior in the Lemon Grass Café.

7. Diffused light and glass partitions create a distinct aesthetic in the Worldsport Group Office.



## Interior Urbanism

The term 'Interior Urbanism' allows designers to evade the division of the interior and exterior design into a binary condition. The term, evokes the fact that both are an extension of each other and allows us to design them as one cohesive entity. In addition, the term makes us aware that basic ideas such as a public realm, construction of community, infrastructural gestures, programmatic developments, experientiality, and tactility are essential to and connected with both fields. Interior Urbanism encourages designers to be conscious of the fact that the design of an interior impacts the urban condition as it has the capacity for influencing the patterns of living, working, eating, sleeping.

The Bose Residence, Lemon Grass Café, and the Worldsport Group Office are representative of a series of interior design projects in this country that try to marry good design values with the broader ideas of changing program and lifestyle. What is important is to move beyond what are fast becoming standard material and detailing strategies to treat the interior and develop the broader aspirations that these projects attempt, building a strong public realm to transform overall organisation and modes of living and inventively using elements or infrastructural systems, to create an exceptional interior and indeed an exemplary urbanity. ■

### FACT FILE:

Project:	Bose Residence
Location:	Borivili, Mumbai
Client:	Radhika and Bose Krishnamachari
Architect:	MO-OF: Shantanu Poredi and Manisha Agarwal
Design Team:	Mangala Shetty
Project Area:	1300sqft
Contractors:	MO-OF Team
Initiation of Project:	January 2006
Completion of Project:	July 2006

Project:	Lemongrass Cafe
Location:	Phoenix Mills, Mumbai
Client:	Nitin Tandon, Mihir, Vivek
Architect:	MO-OF: Shantanu Poredi and Manisha Agarwal
Design Team:	Charu Shah
Project Area:	2400sqft
Contractors:	Mahesh Interiors
Initiation of Project:	April 2007
Completion of Project:	July 2007

Project:	WORLDSPORT Group Office
Location:	Linking Road, Mumbai
Client:	Venu Nair AND Rahul Guha
Architect:	MO-OF: Shantanu Poredi and Manisha Agarwal
Design Team:	Vrushali Pavaskar and Charu Shah
Project Area:	3000sqft
Contractors:	Mahesh Interiors
Initiation of Project:	December 2006
Completion of Project:	March 2007

