



RETAIL MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS

More than 50 per cent of the world's population now live in Urban Centres, with the lure of employment, proximity to work, shopping, cultural activities and entertainment. And of course with all these asset classes on offer a stone through away from ones front door, a premium must be paid.

BY ZUBIN COOPER

The much coined "LIVE, WORK, PLAY" hubs are becoming more popular than ever and allow developers fortunate enough to acquire large prime city centre sites, a lucrative investment. With demographics changing, lifestyles and attitudes such developments are more popular than ever; more dispensable income and a live for the moment mentality.

Such developments have of course been around for centuries, arguably millennia!!! With the creation of the first cities and market streets in Mesopotamia, and now with successful models rising today all over the world. So why don't we see more of these developments in India? Well, surely we do.....at the heart of India's finance centre South Mumbai is a fine example of all the right ingredients; the creation and need for public

open space, colonnaded walkways, bazaars and markets, street retail with office and residential above, fine boulevards and places to be entertained.

Essentially it is well planned streets and public spaces/ that drive successful mixed use environments and of course putting the right amount of "mix" of use in the right areas is fundamental and needs the right market research. The "gel" of all these components coming together harmoniously is provided by the landscape, creating places for people to rest, to be and be seen.

CREATING SUCCESSFUL MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS

Active Edges

No vibrant street scape survives without what we call active edges. Providing front doors that face streets be they retail/food and beverage shops or entrances to commercial buildings.

The Landscape

The clarity of the master plan diagram developed is often reinforced by a strong landscape design. The very gel that reinforces the coming together of so many elements.

It defines public squares and reinforces primary boulevards and access routes. Indeed a “structured” framework and parcelling of the land is also defined by the landscape.

Variety In The Offer

Adding “spice, flavor and diversity of experience,” a mix of use and getting the right tenants in is fundamental to the longevity of any given development.

Understanding Demand

What drives potential sales and makes commercial development an economic success is vital.

Early feasibility studies, and understanding social demographics add value at all stages of the process. Not only ensuring the right tenants are in the right places but also informs and drives design philosophy.

The Car

This subject can be debated and thrashed around many times. But the importance of getting a car parking strategy right cannot be stressed. The number of adequate spaces often driven by the amount of “GFA” of any given asset class.

The strategy of organizing the parking and flow of vehicles into any given development has to be carefully monitored and directed. Whether the provision of parking is above or below grade, ease of access and proximity is paramount.

Now being a traditionalist I’m a firm believer of on grade surface parking. Great examples exist of providing well organized street parking. It provides a development with activity, security and immediate convenience. But of course needs to be supported by structured parking to meet the demands of numbers, and well-designed broader and safe street sections. Good modern examples exist in Rodeo Drive, Miami, and Melrose Arch, Johannesburg. Of course, variety and connectivity to public modes of transport need further consideration and integration into the master plan.

Phasing Strategy

A larger site needs great forward thinking and planning in the creation of a phased structured plan. That allows flexibility in its development with time.

Phasing broadly speaking allows dividing the master plan into developable areas that can be grouped and phased over different periods of time.

Environmental Graphics And Way Finding

Urban environments are bare and soulless without the details that make them legible and familiar.

Good signage design and there strategic locations add to user experience by giving clarity to finding destinations and important landmarks.

The theme, positioning and brand of the development can also be reinforced by graphics and other street furniture.

Lighting

Adding not only to security at night but as attractive street furniture during the day, a good quality lighting strategy can change the mood of buildings and surrounding developments.

Used effectively good lighting brings new character to a development at night and changes the nature of the development and experience entirely. And

as with the introduction of graphics and signage, these are equally important design elements that should form an integral part of an urban designer’s vision. Specialised sub consultants working closely with designers ensure a holistic vision for the entire development is met at all stages of the of the master plan development; from the initial visioning, to the preparation of details.

Clear Vehicular And Pedestrian Strategy

Early and clear visioning of how different modes of transport are integrated allows for a well-designed development that caters for easy accessibility, ensures safety and working together with the landscape creates the very framework pattern of the development.

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Mixed use developments, since comprising different asset classes are more complicated in terms of how they need to be served. The mechanisms that drive a hospitality offer are very different to the nature of a residential building for example, where public and private realms have to be carefully considered and distinguished.

Creating clear visual corridors and physical connections/links through the site create legibility, experience, and commercial value.

A definitive servicing strategy normally as a feeder ring road to the periphery of such developments further helps segregate people and cars, ensuring easy servicing to various building typologies whilst ensuring safety and pedestrian friendly streets.

IMAGINING A TYPICAL BUILDING BLOCK, THE PERIMETER BLOCK IS ESSENTIALLY THE TERMINOLOGY GIVE TO BUILDINGS THAT HAVE STRONG EDGES TO ALL FOUR EDGES OF A ROAD AND PEDESTRIAN FOOTPATH. IT IS THE CREATION OF THESE BUILDING EDGES COMING TOGETHER THAT DEFINE STREETS.

The Perimeter Block

Imagining a typical building block, the perimeter block is essentially the terminology give to buildings that have strong edges to all four edges of a road and pedestrian footpath. It is the creation of these building edges coming together that define streets. Further sculpting of these edges carve out public squares/plazas.

As urban designers it is the very space between buildings that we try to define; allowing us to manipulate the scale of the space we want to create and the section of the street. The street section being informed by the width of the footpath, the size of trees, street furniture, on street parking, and the number of traffic lanes(if non pedestrian). All these elements have to be dimensioned and thought out to help us create a "section" that not only works but offers and enhances

user experience; from the canyon like scales of New York to the contrast of London's many high streets.

Creating A Heart

Integral to the very nature of successful mixed use developments is in the creation of a "HEART" for the development. A significant central space that brings together people and architecture that will create a memorable experience for all and a landmark for the development.

Be it a public square, a park, the use of water or even a significant landmark building for the development; such as a tower, a church or a cultural centre/public building.

Successful commercial hearts bringing life, colour and memories and can be found all over the globe; convert garden (London), Time Square (New York), Saint Peters Square (Rome) but to name just a few!

The Park

When we think of parks we think of New York's Central Square, London's Hyde Park or even a large scale singular experience such as the Chans De Lise in Paris; offering a myriad of experiences along its route, much like the Paseo de Castellana in Madrid.

A central breathing space, much described as the lungs of a city or development. Providing vital amenities and offering a space for people to rest and play. And of course adding commercial value to those residential properties with prime views looking over these spaces to the lucky few who can afford them.

The creation of successful mixed use developments be they part of an existing city fabric, suburban community, or on large pieces of available land with little or no context rely on the experience and skill sets of many consultants within the built environment working together to create a singular vision.

The Urban Designer working closely with the developer to understand this vision, his timelines and economies of scale are vital in understanding the nature of the challenge at hand. Appreciating the socio economic and political context of the site, further adds meaning and gives context to this process.

Ultimately, however complicated and involved the development process maybe, the underlying goal of the "designer" is to create lasting memories and experiences that people can take with them and share with the people they love.

Let us not forget beyond the ego of the architect or the 'greed' of the developer lies a fundamental utopian ideal for the user we all strive to achieve... that the "architecture be for the people." ...

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Bentel Associates is a joint venture between ICS Group, India and Bentel Associates International, South Africa

