

Offering Cutting-Edge Design Skills



Zubin Cooper
CEO, Bentel Associates,
India

Bentel Associates, an award winning architectural firm, is a Joint Venture between ICS Realty, India and Bentel Associates International, South Africa. Established in 1960, Bentel Associates offers full range of leading edge specialist design skills including master planning, architecture, interior design, graphic design and store planning for all building types. Bentel's focus is on developing innovative, functional and high quality design with an understanding of the unique needs of individual projects in Indian context.

Zubin Cooper was appointed as the new CEO of Bentel Associates in India. Zubin talks about the trends in façade design, innovative materials used for façades, and their projects in India. Following are the excerpts.

WFM: Please give us a brief introduction of your firm and few of your recently completed important projects?

ZC: Bentel Associates is a leading Architectural practice formed as a joint venture between ICS Group, India and Bentel Associates International, South Africa. We are a dynamic international design team, offering a full range of cutting edge specialist design skills including master planning, architecture, interior design, graphic design and store planning.

Some of our recently completed projects include – PVP Square in Vijaywada, Pacific Mall in Dehradun and Acropolis Mall in Kolkata.





Pacific Mall, Dehradun



ThaneOne, Thane

WFM: You have been working with international architectural firms like RTKL and SOM earlier in Madrid, Dubai, etc. How different it is to design and work on projects in India?

ZC: There are always cultural differences which can create obstacles to a quick understanding of what clients want and price sensitivities which vary globally. What doesn't change however in our experience is an understanding of the principles of good design. We are finding that more and more of our clients in developing countries seek for high quality innovative projects.

WFM: Tell us briefly about evolving trends in Façade & fenestration designs.

ZC: We are seeing a growing demand for prefabricated modules and construction techniques. This is driven by economy and speed of construction.

WFM: Please elaborate on innovative materials used for façades of your projects ThaneOne and Acropolis? Are the façade material and technology used for Indian projects different from those you are doing abroad?

ZC: The Façade for each of these projects have been designed with different materials, keeping in mind the design of the building. For ThaneOne (corporate real estate project with iconic office space at Thane), it was strip glazing, structural glazing,

vertical green wall and texture paint. For Acropolis (Shopping Mall & Commercial Offices at Kolkata), we have used polished Cera Granite - Colour Grey along with riverwash finish Black granite.

WFM: Is there a distinct preference in design and materials for façades of residential, commercial, public and institutional buildings? Could you please explain?

ZC: The façade material depends on design which is based on the category of the building being designed.

There is a slow but perceptible shift from the use of traditional masonry towards the use of new and innovative façade materials. The concept is fast catching up in India but it is not just for the aesthetic reasons. The new materials offer better natural lighting, air flow and are in line with the increasing adoption of green and sustainable building practices, an essential in current times.

Recent trends show an array of structural practices and lightweight building such as rain screen façades and sun breakers, dual wall façades and even building integrated photo voltaic though at a very small scale.

I also foresee parametric façade technology with Indian architectural concepts will be the next big thing for façades in India. The material being unitised glazing and high pressure laminates, zinc, copper and steel.

WFM: Double façade is being used in many buildings in west for thermal control, but not so popular in India. Why?

ZC: A double skin façade is predominantly used in the west to control thermal comfort levels, prevention of condensation and moisture to the interior of the buildings.

However adequate drainage, thermal control and the avoidance of damp ingress need to be thought about more carefully in India. Poor detailing and lack of careful drainage must be addressed in tropical monsoon driven environments.

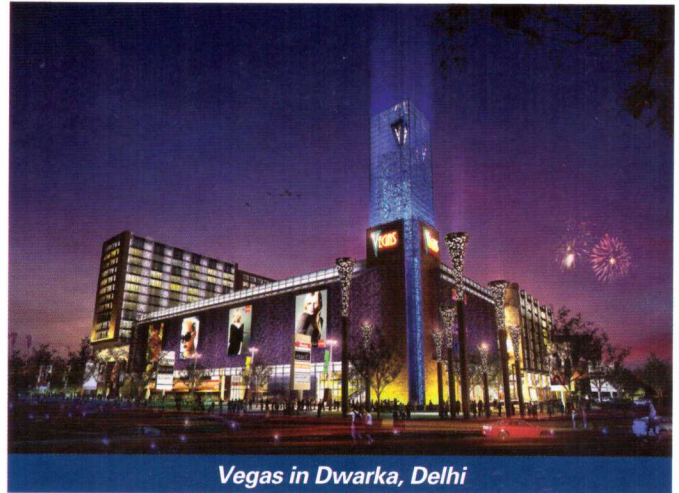


WFM: Other than glass, have you found any new materials used abroad which could be used effectively in India?

ZC: We are always looking for innovative materials to use for our façades. However we do try to keep costs down, to be resourceful and more sustainable we tend to source locally. The quality of building finishes and methods of construction are always being looked at; particularly the use of steel frame systems.

WFM: How are you looking at the plasticity of the material to mould the façade and then the colours and concepts?

ZC: There is an underlying beauty in creating simple façades detailed well. However, with retail designs



we do look at methods to clad our buildings in original ways, in particular, the decorative sun screens as in our award winning project Vegas in Dwarka, Delhi.

WFM: Tell us about your recent projects in India? How different are the façade designs of the projects?

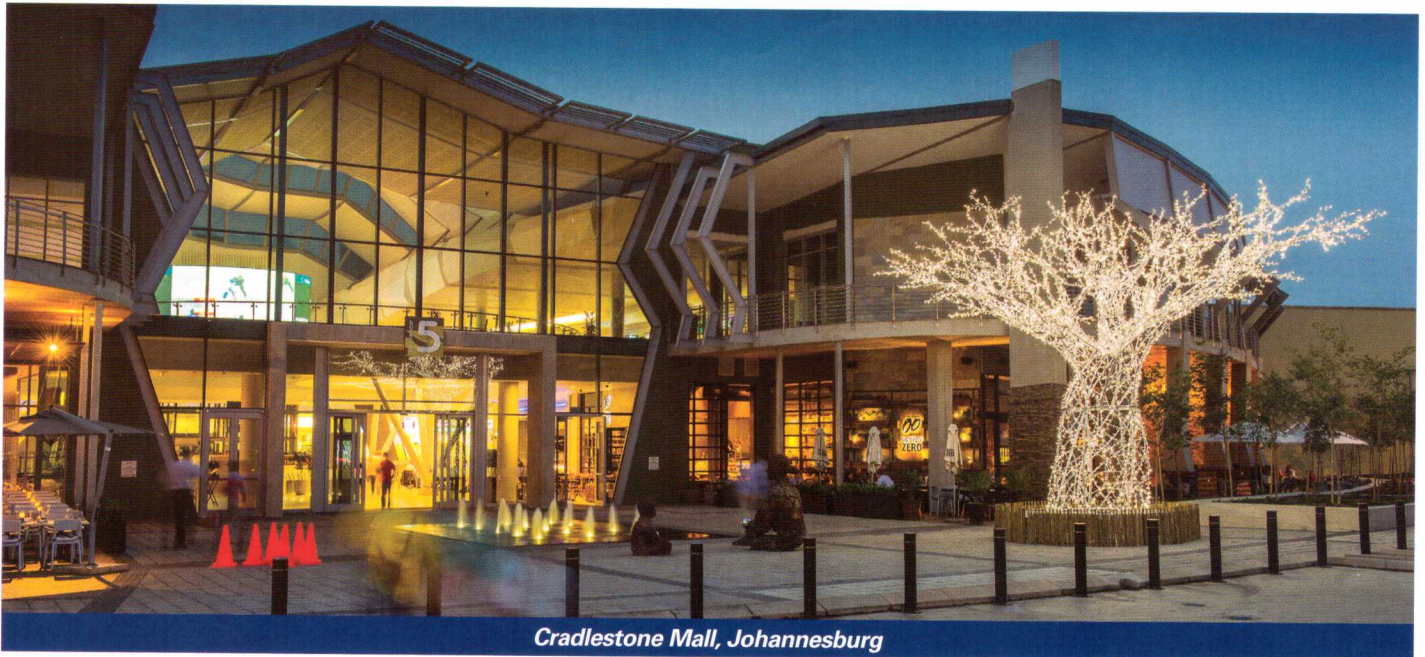
ZC: We try to be original in what we do. Each centre brings different challenges with it - from project size, site conditions to client expectations. In many ways, retail centres do have characters of their own driven by varying design concepts; however for any given retail centre, we work hard at controlling signage with the integrity of the architecture.

WFM: Considering quality control (QC), what all criteria you look for while choosing glass and other materials used for façades & fenestration for various projects?

ZC: We are generally seeing an overuse of glass in contemporary architecture in India; Glass is an efficient material with low U values, similar to masonry construction. Coatings used on the surfaces, laminates and secondary skins can help control uncomfortable solar heat gain and glare.

WFM: Talking about fenestration, the trends are changing. Could you please provide insight on this?

ZC: Easy to assemble prefabricated modular systems are increasingly used throughout the



Cradlestone Mall, Johannesburg

west, for speed and ease of construction. We will certainly see the use of more of these sophisticated panel systems in India.

WFM: In India, designers generally do not prefer UPVC for their projects; atleast for upper or upper middle size residential projects. What is your observation on this?

ZC: We also find this to be true. In these income classes we see more glass and masonry being used. This is more predominant in stone and granite clad, lower part of the building where people can see and touch the façade. And of course, the difference in material quality cannot be perceived on higher floors, where pre constituted stone and precast is preferred.

WFM: How important is positioning of Windows?

ZC: It is fundamental while considering the external aesthetic of the building façade. A simple harmonious expression is preferred, taking careful consideration of the activity or internal use of the building. The building should be an honest expression externally of what is inside - the servant and server space.

WFM: What are the hurdles faced by the building designer while collaborating the view of the façade consultant, fabricator, contractors, etc?

ZC: The coordination of different contractors is always challenging, and the challenges increase with the scale and complexity of the building. An understanding of phasing/timing of these different skill sets on-site and managing this process, both onsite and in our final construction documents, is essential to ensure a well coordinate final product. Not to mention one of the hardest challenges of them all, effectively managing many different people and personalities that come with it.

WFM: What advice would you give the fabricators/ manufacturers of materials and doors & windows, contractors and consultants in India in terms of the following: Upgrading knowledge, commercial variability, quality control and installation?

ZC: Our built environment is everywhere, we can all learn by visiting more places around the world to understand what makes quality buildings and urban centre. India is a rapidly maturing market and has the good fortune of learning from the best examples internationally. This is just why Bentel Associates International as well as other global consultants within the building industry (JLL, CBRE and L&T but to name a few) will always be busy in India.