1. You have established your studio recently. What were the early challenges and learnings? What drives your design decisions?

My interest in tradition and culture mainly drives my design decisions. After working in the field, I realized the importance of sustainability and how it is mandatory for future generations. So, I spent over a month in Auroville learning different building techniques and from there I knew I wanted to start my own practice.

I think I am very fortunate to have landed up in a profession like architecture. It opens up infinite horizons of creativity and is so more than just a clever arrangement of bricks. I came to realize that the practical and artistic aspects are intertwined, constituting a continuous manifestation of substance. Leading a multifaceted team properly presents a major challenge.

1. Being a fairly young practise, you have not followed the technological sway like your peers. You have carried forward the yesteryear art of pen-paper sketching. What inspires you to pursue this tactile form of presentation for architectural drawings?

Yes, I begin every design with a blank paper and a pencil. My design priorities are place, relationship, and sequential experience. Walking on site, sketching plans and sections, making block models, and preparing mood boards are all crucial parts of my design process.

There comes a time when we need the abstraction of paper to think beyond the confines of the present. Handwork also allows us to be holistically and artistically involved in the process. We are taught to make perfect shapes when we start drawing on computers but it compares nothing to the hand-drawn lines. As you draw, you feel the turns and different intensities of the lines. I am inspired by art and I have seen pieces described as that which make your skin prickle when you see them. That is close to my definition of art, the experience that leaves you never the same again.

1. Your work cites the importance of traditional soulful architecture. How did vernacular architecture design become the heart of your practice?

As designers, we are introduced to spaces that are empty and spiritless. We are called to add individuality and breathe life into dull spaces. A building's material influences its message. We have become used to this idea that money may be spent to beautify spaces of leisure but that places of work should be shaped first and foremost by utilitarian considerations. In this new age, we have forgotten about ensouling spaces and replaced natural finishes with alien materials that merely connects us with nature. Therefore, the more natural materials we use, the more we feel at home. The process of making and building things in this stage of idea to the material can either compromise each other or reach a higher level through fusion.

1. What are your favourite materials to work with? Could you explain the techniques and strategies of working with the same?

There are a lot of resources that nature gives us for free, all we need is our sensitivity to see them and the creativity to use them. I like working with brick and mud. The rammed earth technique is reviving its place for building walls, using raw materials like earth, chalk, lime or gravel. It is a simple to construct, non-combustible, thermally massive, strong, and durable method of construction. Modern strategies also involve using lime, cement or asphalt emulsions for stabilizing mud construction. I also like to add coloured oxides to it. One can also use other items such as bottles, tires or timber pieces. To be harmonious the new needs to be an organic development of what’s already there and not an imposed alien.

1. What health advantages does earthen construction bring with it? How does it help in eliminating toxins and purifying indoor air quality?

Earth construction is the single lowest environmental impact building system. Rammed earth has potentially low manufacturing impacts depending on cement content and the degree of local material sourcing. It can control humidity between 40-60% and improves indoor air quality. It also contributes to the overall energy efficiency of buildings. The density, thickness and thermal conductivity of rammed earth make it particularly suitable for passive solar heating.

1. What are you working on at the moment?

We are currently working on residential and hospitality projects dealing with alternative building construction techniques.

About the studio:

We at B A S I C S  Studio are a team of young design enthusiasts with expertise at different aspects and a mutual inclination towards sustainability, materials that are environmentally safe, and creating an experience with our design rather than flooding an empty space with various materials and forms.

We focus on taking inspiration from the past i.e. practicality, building for the present i.e. the context, surrounding, and client requirements, and sustaining into the future which states, use of sustainable building materials so that a building can breathe reducing the carbon footprint.

Khushboo Kakkar is the principal architect at BASICS Studio, Raipur and a passionate enthusiast of sustainable construction methods and materials. To her, design is not about materials and forms of space, but rather about the end experience provided to the user. The past is a source of inspiration for her as these archaic techniques were based on practical solutions to real-life issues. Focusing on sustainable space development, she talks to Biltrax Media about ways in which one can build traditional and soulful architecture.

Khushboo Kakkar – In Praise and Practice of the Past

Focusing on sustainable space development