Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad
1958-1963
Architect Charles Correa (1930-)

Background
Gandhi resided at the Sabarmati Ashram from 1917 to 1930. He began, as a protest on British salt tax, the Salt March to Dandi in March of 1930 from there. The community is made up of the main ashram pavilion, two guest houses, an open prayer ground, and a museum. Handcrafted paper and fabric are produced here and are a main attraction for tourists. Charles Correa's design for this “memorial institution” of Mahatma Gandhi was designed and built there from 1958 to 1963. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, inaugurated the building. It preserves and makes available tens of thousands of books and documents concerning Gandhi, his philosophies, and India’s independence.

Context
Charles Correa, born in India's Goan region, attended the University of Michigan and MIT from 1949 to 1955. His work may be understood like that of Oscar Niemeyer. They were both sympathetic to European modernism, and when they returned to their native countries, were interested in adapting the movement to local situations. Correa's work is recognized both locally and worldwide as an innovative and refreshing synthesis of this combination.

Correa's eagerness to adapt Modernist form to local materials and spatial ideas.

The Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalaya and Correa's later projects provide example of combining the Hindu architectural/cosmological idea of isotropy and Modernist functional planning. The concept of isotropy (similar to fractals) refers to an infinitely scaleable structure and can be seen in the repetition and manipulation of the decorative elements in Hindu temples. In the Smarak Sangrahalaya, the modular pavilion unit is designed for easy extension and emphasizes the accumulation of a single element to make a whole. Correa placed five distinctly programmed interior spaces within the asymmetrical grid plan.

The plan of the museum has also been compared to village houses in India’s Banni region. Instead of a single volume, the houses consist of five huts each with a different function, which surround to make a courtyard. The inhabitants walk back and forth across the outside space to use the different rooms.

Location
The Sabarmati Ashram is located along the west bank of the Sabarmati River on Ashram Road, in the north of the city. It can be reached by busses heading north from the center on R C Road (Wada) bus stop is approx. 1.5 km from the Ashram. Open everyday 8:30 to 12:00 and 14:00 to 19:00.
Gandhi Smarak Sangrahalya at Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad

Spaces

The site on the Sabarmati River bank is part of the larger ashram complex and is integrated into its gardens.

Five interior rooms contain the collection of the museum. The rooms are enclosed by brick walls and wooden louvered screens. All five rooms are part of the 6m square module. Correa’s subtle changes of the enclosure allow for variety in the module’s lighting, temperature, and visual permeability.

A square, uncovered shallow pool is located between the five rooms.

Construction

The museum uses a simple but delicately detailed post and beam structure. Load bearing brick columns support concrete channels, which are both support the wooden roof and direct rainwater. Boards are nailed underneath the joists and tiles are placed atop the joints. The foundation is concrete and is raised about a foot from the ground.

The monumental and archetypal structure of the museum recalls the well-known work of Louis Kahn, who began two projects in the region shortly after Correa’s museum was built.

Wooden doors, stone floors, ceramic tile roofs, and brick columns are the palette of the building.

References

Indian Institute of Management
Ahmedabad, India

Architects: Louis I. Kahn, Balkrishna V. Doshi, National Institute of Design

Commission: November 1962
Design: 1963-70
Completion: 1974


General Description:

The IIM consists of classrooms, faculty offices, and a library surrounding a main courtyard and dormitory wings organized at 45 degrees. Louis Kahn states: “Orientation to wind and shade from sun has given architectural elements to the composition;” each dorm room has a screen porch that overlooks a courtyard. These many fragmentations lead Kahn to call this “a building within a building: one open to sun, the other to life.” Built out of concrete and brick, Kahn describes: “the plan comes from my feelings of monastary,” and feels the dormitories proximity to the school as similar to Harvard Business School.

This building is part of a 100 acre campus that also included buildings by Doshi and Anant Raje. The Institute, in the Vastrupur section of Ahmedabad, attracts the best business students in India.

Plan

“The Fullness of air, so welcome, is always present as the basis for architectural shapes”-Louis Kahn
I use the square to begin my solutions because the square is a non-choice, really. In the course of development, I search for the forces that would disprove the square” - Louis Kahn

Diagram of Dormitory Wing

Sections through main plaza

Additional reading:


Balkrishna Doshi
School of Architecture, Gujarat University
Ahmedabad, 1968

Doshi's concept for the School of Architecture was to create "an open place with hardly any doors." The L-shaped plan is configured around parallel bearing walls on a north-south axis to direct prevailing breezes through the building. The short, solid elevations face the hotter east-west axis. The hard-surfaced plaza draws cool air from the garden by convection into the shaded, open classrooms.

North-facing, angled glass monitors capture light and bring it into the studios below. In contrast, the south face is clad in brise-soleil which shade the side of the building and the rooms within.
Plain brick walls meet over-hanging slabs and verandahs based upon concrete cantilevers. The materials were selected to be cheap and easy to maintain. The bricks have suffered from the hot, humid climate, but the concrete has held up well.

Doshi wanted the students and faculty to have "free scope to learn and teach anywhere" and "no feeling of restriction to the exchange of ideas." These outdoor classrooms facilitate the easy transfer of information when interior conditions become too oppressive. Doshi also sought to activate the "spaces between." The steps in the plaza and the north-south corridor allow free movement and join disparate places.

See: Rethinking Modernism for the Developing World: the Complete Architecture of Balkrishna Doshi by James Steele

Balkrishna Doshi: an Architecture for India by William J.R. Curtis

Ecological Architecture: a Critical History by James Steele