

A Conversation with an Iconic Building

Steven Holl Wins the Mumbai City Museum Competition



The decision to stage an international competition for a "North Wing extension" to the Mumbai City Museum had to be an interesting challenge for the organizers. The present building, also known as the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum (photos, left and opposite), was dedicated in 1872 and had a distinct English colonial flavor, with emphasis on the Victorian. It had recently undergone a major restoration, and the interior is certainly one of the major examples of architecture of the pre-modern age in India. With that in mind, the initial question for any structural addition—aside from space requirements—had to be: what should it look like, and how would it relate to the existing museum? The space program asked for an 8,000-10,000 sqm. (approximately 120,000 sf.) extension to include a conservation centre, library and archives, and a new museum shop and cafe. The new structure was to be freestanding, and thus, not simply a background building, but an architectural statement in itself. What kind of statement was somewhat evident in the choice of the short-listed architectural firms. Not one of those selected could be called a traditionalist, and some could obviously be connected to a certain style. In any case, the participating architects did not have to be concerned about a jury panel that might be leaning toward a traditionalist solution.

The short-listed firms were:

- **AL_A** with PK Das, Arup, Turner & Townsend, GROSS. MAX and Superflux;
- **Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos** with Malik Architecture, Arup and Empty;
- **OMA + S&K** with Meinhardt India, Houtman + Sander, GMD Consultants and Langdon Seah;
- **Pei Cobb Freed & Partners** Architects with Christopher Charles Benninger Architects (CCBA), Leslie E. Robertson Associates International (LERA), Buro Happold, WORKSHOP: Ken Smith Landscape Architect and George Sexton Associates;



- **Steven Holl Architects** with Opolis Architects, Guy Nordenson and Associates, AECOM, Dongre Project Management Consultants, Transsolar and L'Observatoire;
- **Studio Mumbai Architecture + Edifice Consultants** with Sterling Engineering Consultancy Services and Es-kayem Consultants;
- **WHY** with Ganti + Associates, Sterling Engineering, Sterling and Wilson, Magnusson Klemencic Associates, Buro Happold, Local Projects and Quantsoft India;
- **Zaha Hadid Architects** with Sameep Padora Associates (sP+a), AKT II, Max Fordham, Dan Pearson Studio and AECOM.

The competition jury may have been short on architects, but was heavily represented by institutional experts from museums. One interesting choice was museum director Martin Roth, whose Victoria and Albert Museum in London had been the subject of a controversial modern extension in the 1990s by Daniel Libeskind. Initially, the Mumbai Museum was named its London V&A counterpart, but later re-named.

The competition was administered by Malcolm Reading Consultants of London, a firm which has gained an international reputation for the organization of such events. The jury panel consisted of:

- Sitaram Kunte – Chair of Jury, the Municipal Commissioner of Mumbai and Co-Chairman, Trustee of the Museum
- Tasneem Mehta – Deputy Chair of Jury, the Managing Trustee & Honorary Director of the Museum

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 87)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 84

- Minal Bajaj, a Director of Bajaj Auto Ltd. and a Donor Trustee of the Museum
- Shyam Benegal, a Trustee of the Museum and a prolific filmmaker
- Homi Bhabha, Director of the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard as well as the Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of the Humanities in the Department of English
- Vishakha Desai, the Special Advisor for Global Affairs and Professor of Professional Practice in the Faculty of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University
- Rajiv Jalota, the Additional Municipal Commissioner, Projects, M.C.G.M., and Trustee of the Museum
- Sen Kapadia, founder of Sen Kapadia Associates
- Anand Mahindra, Chairman and Managing Director of the Mahindra Group
- Martin Roth, the Director of the V&A Museum in London
- Aroon Tikekar, the former President of the Asiatic Society in Mumbai, a prolific author, journalist and authority on Mumbai

The jury selection process lasted for three days, during which jurors examined the entries and interviewed the participating firms. In the end, the jury was unanimous in awarding the commission to **Steven Holl Architects**, with **Amanda Levette's AL_A** firm receiving an honorable mention.





As a conversation piece, it is easy to understand why the Steven Holl concept found favor with the jury. Immediately recognizable for having a similarity with some of his earlier projects, especially on the interior, Holl's design was based on a simple abstract formula, "Addition as Subtraction." Cuts in the original mass covering the site were inserted with a purpose: rooms were created with diffused light filtered in via the newly exposed surfaces. This may be a carryover lesson from Holl's winning Macintosh project, whereby light is brought into the various levels through light wells.

One feature, which the jury found especially appealing, was the reflecting pool stretching from the new North Wing, providing a visual link to the existing museum. The pool is also to produce up to sixty percent of the building's electricity through photovoltaic cells located below the water's surface.

As a sculptural element in the garden, the Holl design does not dominate the conversation, but is a subtle statement as juxtaposition to its Victorian era counterpart. It does not overwhelm, but does attract, thereby solving the delicate issue of context. -Ed

Mumbai's oldest museum garden in Byculla will have a 125,000 sq ft new wing. The Mumbai City Museum's North Wing addition is envisioned as a sculpted subtraction from a simple geometry formed by the site boundaries. The concept of "Addition as Subtraction" is developed in white concrete with sculpted diffused light in the 65,000 sq ft new gallery spaces. Deeper subtractive cuts bring in exactly twenty-five lumens of natural light to each gallery.

The basically orthogonal galleries are given a sense of flow and spatial overlap from the light cuts. The central cut forms a shaded monsoon water basin which runs into a central pool, related to the great stepped well architecture of India. The central pool joins the new and old in its reflection and provides sixty percent of the museum's electricity through photovoltaic cells located below the water's surface. The white concrete structure has an extension of local rough-cut Indian Agra stone. The circulation through the galleries is one of spatial energy, while the orthogonal layout of the walls foregrounds the Mumbai City Museum collections.

-Steven Holl Architects Competition Narrative

The Winning Design

Steven Holl Architects (New York) with Opolis Architects, Guy Nordenson and Associates, AECOM, Dongre Project Management Consultants, Transsolar and L'Observatoire

ABOVE

Pedestrian perspective

OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE

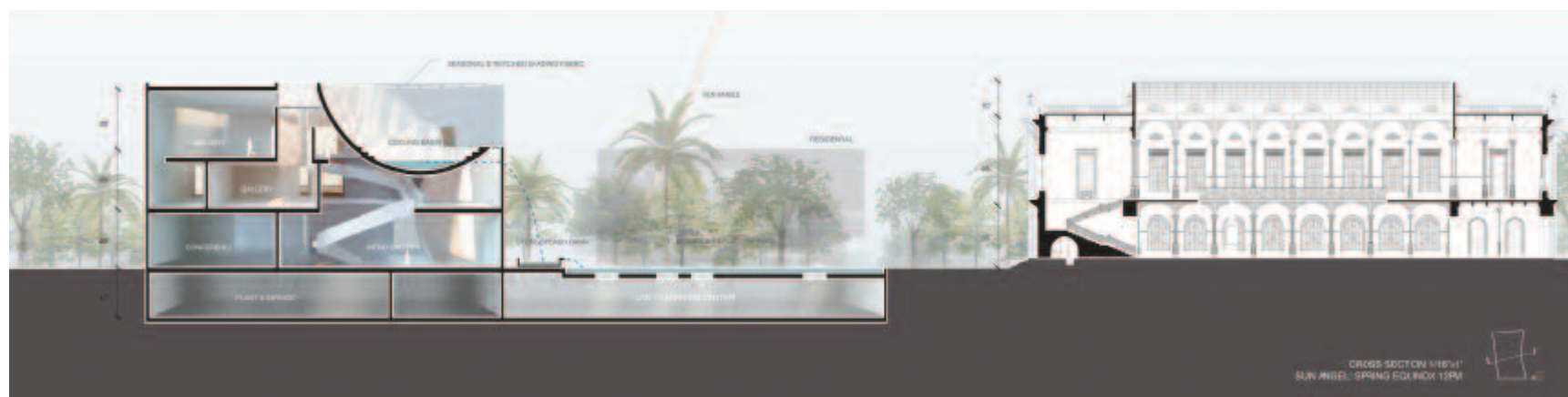
Steven Holl drawing of interior

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW

Section



All images: Courtesy: Steven Holl Architects





The Winning Design

Steven Holl Architects

with
Opolis Architects, Guy
Nordenson
and Associates, AECOM,
Dongre Project Manage-
ment Consultants,
Transsolar and
L'Observatoire

LEFT
View from existing mu-
seum to new
addition

BELOW
Grade level plan
OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE
View across pond
OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW
Lobby



