

Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality

Thomas Barrie, Julio Bermudez, and Phillip James Tabb (eds.)

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Wonder, Wisdom and Mastery in Architecture (Chapter 16)

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CnT Architects: Ramaiah House, Bangalore, India. A quest for a timeless aura



Fatehpur Sikri, India (founded 1569). The detail and the whole resonate with the same spirit, creating a sense of timelessness as the aura remains the same whichever way the body or gaze may move.

Discussions on architecture within professional circles always focus on the architect as a personality. As a result, architects are schooled to believe that the significance of the architecture they create is a product of their intentions as architects. But unlike discussions in architecture schools or journals, in the actual experience of architecture the architect is absent, and therefore silent. How can architecture speak for itself?

Juhani Pallasmaa noted, “*We lend our perceptions to a space, and the space returns to us its aura*”. This dialogue between the aura of a space and the experience of its inhabitation is the primary generator of meaning in architecture, and our role as architects is to generate in the spaces we design an aura that compels an enriching engagement with the inhabitant.

The qualities of an aura are subtle and cannot be comprehended intellectually. We have to remain open, like the poet who sees life and energy in the entire world, and not just in animate beings. This is an understanding that can only be accessed experientially, through rigorous forms of practice – what Indian tradition calls “*sadhana*” or “*riyaaaz*”. To work in this mode, we must abandon our educational conventions where we seek to be considered sophisticated and successful in what we do. Instead, we must remain open in a state of wonder – a state that comes naturally to us as children, which we lose as we grow older.

Knowledge tempered by wonder leads to wisdom. Wisdom tempered by *sadhana* leads to mastery – a different state of creativity. And mastery is closely aligned with a quest that is no longer fashionable in architecture: the pursuit of beauty.