

SUZLON ONE EARTH

Between the Eternal and the Transformational

Christopher Benninger



Verdant landscape leading to various departments of the campus.

Waiting lounge at one of the entry portals.

Suzlon One Earth is the corporate headquarters of Suzlon Wind Energy Systems. The campus is a mirror of the values and vision of the patrons who commissioned it and who built one of the world's largest sustainable energy companies. Instead of a tall, glass box on a congested site, it is spread out in the form of a campus, centered on a generous garden, accented by water

streams leading to a magnificent water fall, nurturing a crescent reflecting pool that holds a contemporary Deepastambha, an obelisk holding hundreds of lamps emitting positive energy! Three glass chimneys, facilitated by "sky courts" suck air out from the basement. These iconic motifs, and the main corporate atrium, are all aligned with the Deepastambha, acting as focal points in the lush, green

garden. The Corporate Atrium reflects this idea with a large circular enclosed glass garden from which the campus water emanates and flows. While building a Green Building complex, was a matter of civic responsibility, the objective of the design was to make a great place to Work. This took the shape of a Land Scaper, opposing the idea of a Skyscraper! It is a counter blast to "the glass box."

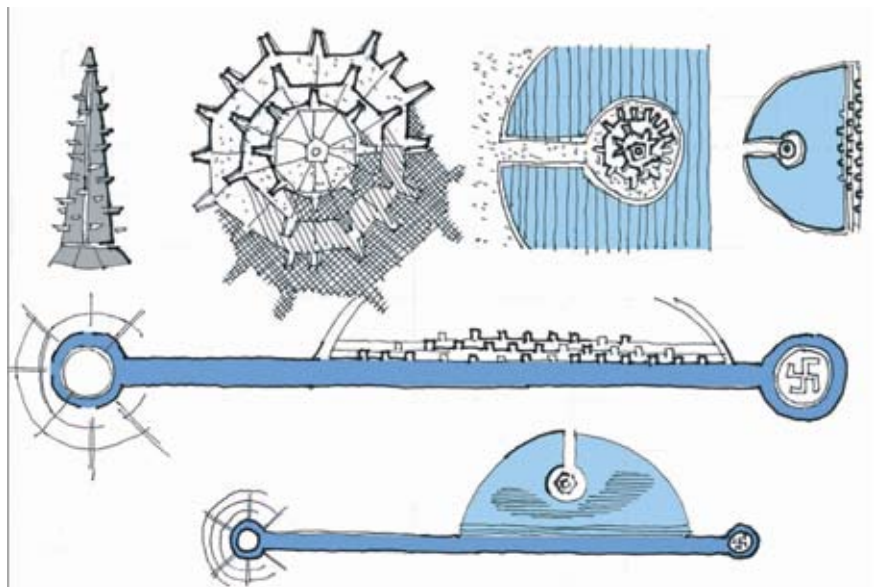
An exemplary model of tradition and modernity designed with adaptability and balance.

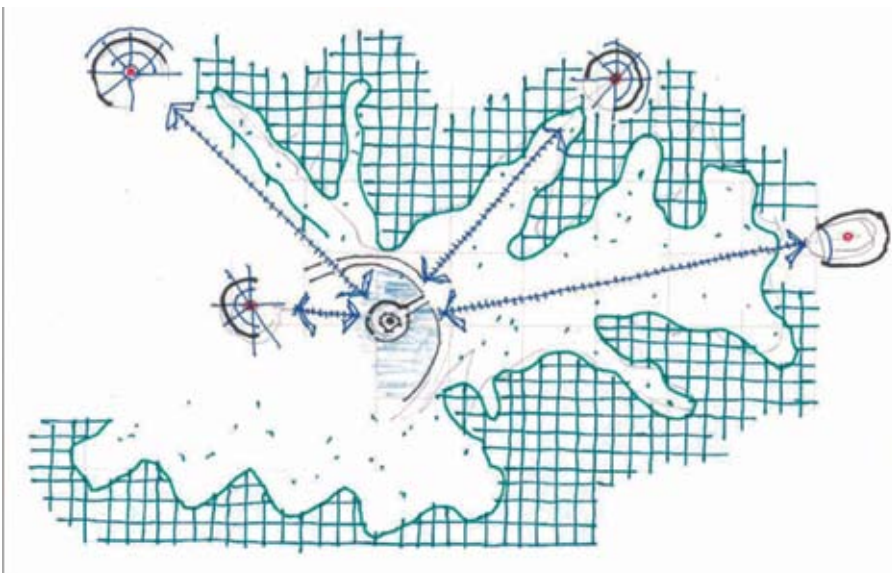


- 1. Sun Lounge
- 2. Sky Lounge
- 3. Tree Lounge
- 4. Aqua Lounge
- 5. Waterbody/ Cafeteria
- 6. Sky Cylinder
- 7. Suzlon Excellence Academy
- 8. Welcome Lounge
- 9. Electrical service yard

BALANCE WITH TRADITION

Suzlon One Earth derives its inspiration from large Indian historical campuses like Fatehpur Sikri and the Meenakshi Sundareshvara Temple complex in Madurai. Both employ an interpositioning of open and closed spaces that balances one another. Both have strong horizontal elements that tie the complexes together and accent features that emphasize quadrants and sacred places, like the gopura at Meenakshi. The Panch Mahal at Fatehpur Sikri is a multi-storied structure that maintains its scale through the employ-





ment of modular construction, whose components are expressed, imparting the structure scale and proportions. In these historical precedents there are also water bodies and open courtyards, as in Suzlon One Earth! Ground level pavilions and arcades open into the courts and allow “borrowing” of visual experiences. These great campus complexes inspired the architecture as a starting point. From their legacy of concepts I selected motifs, components and elements to build a modern garden campus, with a modern function. To these I transposed motifs like the Deepastambha, which is a tra-



Reflective pools not only connect the campus but also create a micro environment in the campus, cooling the air around.



The glass cylinder connecting the earth and the sky at various entry portals.



Solar photovoltaic panels form the roof of the atrium of the learning centre, generating green power.

Waterbody.





Welcome lounge at the entry of the campus.





Louvers and the cladding interplay creating a visual drama of the façade.



Waterbody.



The Deep Sthamb, or the central oblix reaching out to the sky as symbol of excellence and hope.



Work areas.

ditional “marker” in the Pune region. The glass cylinders began to line out auspicious, ordinate axis and gave sequences to intersecting axis that unite the complex into one whole.

BALANCE BETWEEN MIND AND SPIRIT

The design process started with a premise of creating a central gathering space, or Brahmasthan, with the sky

as its ceiling! I conceived it as a “secret internal garden” that gifts an exclusive and unique feel to the campus. It is a pedestrian, human and convivial space. Vehicles are relegated to the ex-



treme periphery and to the basement entry points called "Terminuses". This is very much compositional architecture on an urban design scale. It is like this: Suzlon is about sustainability; it

is about renewable energy; it is about wind energy. So also the architecture reflects these generic ideas and concepts! Let us not forget this basic fact though our ultimate objective is to

create a choreography of vibrant working spaces! Our ultimate goal is to raise imaginations from the day to day trivia of life into a special realm of creativity and inspiration. In this ambiance, or milieu, lies a zone one step outside the world of materiality and is the kingdom of the mind!

The Wind Lounge is one of the five "lounges" that connect exterior spaces with interior ones. This is the centre of the corporate learning centre, or the Suzlon Excellence Academy. Here one finds a wind museum and a wind library. There is a very traditional Indian Chowk here, with kund-like steps leading into a water pool shaded by photovoltaic panels allowing filtered light in, as if through an ancient jaali. This is a centre where wind meets humanity very emphatically through empirical analysis, exploration and education. The structure is not just a collection of rooms, but rather like an art gallery where one can explore on their own in a serendipity manner. One can step into the theatre and view a film; retreat into the library and read; saunter through the museum and learn something new each day; browse the Wind Shop and buy some interesting sustainable keepsake; or, just sit interacting with friends and colleagues in the central meeting Chowk. This is more like an informal gallery of the mind than like a corporate institute.

BALANCE WITH CHANGE

The needs of the client were growing and changing almost from week to week during the design process. We began with a requirement for one thousand inhabitants and ended up with about two thousand, five hundred people accommodated within the campus. The functions were changing just as quickly.

I realized to really solve this "transformational conundrum" I needed to



Cafeteria

create a transformational system that by its very nature was less specific and more general! So I created a simple arrangement of Server Spaces and Served Spaces. The Served Spaces cover the lion's share of the campus where people work. These are in fact flexible and adaptive cold shells that can accommodate modular walls and furniture systems. They can re-invent and re-define themselves whenever needed, almost continuously! These are served by more rigid cores that house wet areas, utility shafts, ducts, fire stairs, elevators, entry and reception areas that will not change over time. These fixed items are designed to be adaptable. So in my mind I separated these out. Then I invented "modules" like the silo fire stairs; the benchmark glass cylinders and the 8.4 by 8.4 meter modules that can be used like a Lego Set and moved

about in one's mind to create internal and external spaces. I more or less broke the complex problem down into its basic components. Then there were the elemental problems of enclosure, for which I selected horizontal louvers, APC cladding and glass; and, the problems of shelter for which I selected the over-hanging copper roofs. So the design analysis involved designing the motifs (cylinders, water bodies, Deepasthumb, and gardens); inventing the components or modules and creating elements that tie all of these together.

Like the historic campuses the ground level opens out freely to embrace the garden courtyards. There are also carefully articulated, design decisions like the Deepasthumb, Brahmasthan, the glass cylinders, the water channels and water falls and the lowered crescent food court. These eternal

components were all inherent to the design from the first week of my working and they carried through right to the end.

BALANCE WITH NATURE

I employed "earth design," not a branding exercise or symbolic gesture, but because it is inherent in every aspect of the work. By Earth Design we mean more than what is meant by just a rated Green building or a Platinum LEED structure! We mean a design that puts people first and close to nature. Everyone can sense the seasons and the time of the day from their place of work! There is visual access to the large central gardens from everywhere. There is a sense of connection between the various kinds of spaces right from the underground entries vide the sunlight that descends there from the Sky Courts

and the Glass Cylinders and the vegetation that flows from these elements, up through the cylinders into the main circulation nodes of the building.

As a designer I worked more like a choreographer of a film, working out sequential movements through space, inter-locking spaces, integrating spaces and seeing what the impact of a space is on the person kinetically moving within and through the spaces. It is really this "human-context engagement" that is the core of the design and this is what is "earthy" about it. We have maintained a strong primordial link between man and nature.

Synefra Engg & Construction Limited led by Mr J R Tanti, was responsible for the complete synergy of various designers from concept stage to completion of this one of the greenest buildings.

Benninger calls the Tanti Family true patrons of architecture comparable to

the Sarabhais, the Guggenheims and the Rockefellers. He considers Suzlon One Earth as his latest masterpiece after his award winning Mahindra United World College of India, built ten years ago. ■

Prof. Christopher Benninger - Born in America in 1942, Prof. Christopher Benninger has lived and worked in India for the past 40 years. He studied City Planning at MIT and Architecture at Harvard University. As an institution builder he founded the School of Urban Planning at CEPT, Ahmedabad in 1971 with Balkrishna Doshi, and there after founded the Centre for Development Studies and Activities in Pune, India (1976). He has prepared city and urban plans for Thane and Kalyan in India, besides other towns in Asia. He has won the Designer of the Year award (1999) and American Institute of Architects/ Architectural Record Award: 2000 for his design of the Mahindra United World College of India. He was awarded 'The Golden Architect of

the Year Award' instituted by A+D magazine in the Year 2007. He was conferred the Great Master Architect Award in 2008. Recently he has been conferred ArchiDesign Architect of the Decade Award. The firm's projects have been finalists in the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (2001) and the World Architecture Awards UK. (2002, 2009). Several projects have won A+D award, AYA awards, IIA awards and Archidesign awards in the past ten years. Prof. Benninger is on the Editorial Board of CITIES (U.K); and a Distinguished Professor at CEPT, Ahmedabad. As an internationally known 'design house' Christopher Charles Benninger Architects create products ranging from capital cities and new towns; educational campuses and corporate headquarters; housing estates and complexes; hotels resorts and hospitals; down to the design of individual chairs and art works. Some of the firm's best known projects are Suzlon One Earth Global Headquarters, IIM-Calcutta, Bajaj Corporate Tower, Kochi Refineries Corporate Building, Supreme Court of Bhutan, YMCA International Campsite, CDSA and Mahindra United World College.

Photos: A. Ramprasad Naidu, Harminder Singh, Owen Raggett, Ritesh Ramaiaha

ARCHITECTURE TRIVIA QUIZ

1. Which architect designed Villa Savoye (Poissy, France)?
 - a. I.M. Pei
 - b. Le Corbusier
 - c. Frank O. Gehry
 - d. Richard Neutra
2. Which architect was part of the team that designed the Centre Pompidou (Paris, France)?
 - a. Richard Rogers
 - b. Walter Gropius
 - c. Le Corbusier
 - d. I.M. Pei
3. Which architect designed the Farnsworth House (Plano, Illinois)?
 - a. Walter Gropius
 - b. Mies van der Rohe
 - c. Richard Neutra
 - d. Tullio Ingelse

Answers: 1. Le Corbusier 2. Richard Rogers 3. Mies van der Rohe

THE CALIBRATED VIEW

