

A tale of two cities

ARCHITECT DR NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

ARCHITECTS have taken inspiration from nature, the built environment and from each other ever since the second 'architect' began his practice in an era lost to time. In more recent times, Louis Sullivan's Chicago School and Frank Lloyd Wright have been motivating architects all around the world, often to the extent of veering them out of context, as their critics would like to argue.

Today, in addition to bringing our readers the recommendations of the workshop on 'Apartment Culture in Bangladesh: The Future', we take the opportunity to take a look over our shoulder at what truly is one of the fountainheads of architecture. The workshop on 'Apartment Culture in Bangladesh: The Future' was an amalgamation of a host of expertise to seek ways and means of addressing the growing concern about the problems faced and created by an industry in one of the largest cities in the world.

While the need for appropriate law, education, backward linkage industry and fiscal incentives was stressed with varying weightage, the most significant outcome of the workshop was perhaps the comprehension that developers need to be seen as service provider that benefits the buyer.

It is not for the developers alone to put right every conceivable problem that emerges due to their products and by-products. The government bodies entrusted with guarding the Building Construction Act and Rules have an equal responsibility. Concerned ministries, LGED, RAJUK, DESA, DWASA, Titas Gas and DCC (not necessarily in any order) have to find their 'ace' instead of behaving as a pack of playing cards, incessantly trying to trump each other. No wonder the house is falling.

Whereas it is arguable why Dhaka and Chicago should be discussed on the same page, being poles apart as they are in history, society, culture, religion

and economy, there is no doubt that both are great cities in their own realms.

The Chicago School, as the style is dubbed, is primarily characterised by concrete/terracotta encased steel members, clarity of form, repetitive windows and lack of ornamentation. Much of those attributes we are striving to achieve albeit in our own vocabulary. Visiting Chicago and the icons of the school can be a stimulating learning experience for someone involved in city development. The temples of architecture there bear witness to one of the great epics of building history.

Architects the world over, in their quest for innovative creativity with new materials and know-how, have taken stimulation from Chicagoans (thanks to a myriad of Western publications and publicity) not to imitate the form, the loftiness or the spatial qualities, but to respond positively to one's socio-economic, cultural, climatic and other environments as well as client psyche with emerging technology and material.

Qazi Muhammad Arif's drive has been exhilarating in the least and to some extent suffers from the risk of taking too much in too short a time, often referred to as dyspepsia in respect to the stomach. But then one has to have the stomach to sense the very soul of architecture, that which is palatable and visible only to the selected few.

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Apartment culture in Bangladesh: The future

Recommendations of the Workshop held by The Daily Star

31 January 2002 at BRAC Centre Dhaka

-BUET-Bangladesh Scouts in association with REHAB on

Legislation and Sanction

Authors
Prof Dr. Golam Rahman, Institute of Planners
ASM Ismail, Institute of Architects
Md. Najib, Planning Commission
Aminul Islam, Department of Environment

1.Existing Building Construction Act and Rules should be adhered to and implemented properly.

2.Land use classification and Zoning Plan should be formulated and implemented. This should be notified and should also be made public.

3.Building Construction Act and Rules should be updated periodically on the basis of the joint participation of professional bodies like the Institute of Engineers Bangladesh, the Institute of Architects Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, and development partners such as REHAB and others.

4.In housing delivery systems REHAB should provide legal securities and compensation if any buyer is exploited in any manner. All developers should be members of REHAB, as REHAB will have to ensure the quality of their products.

5.Enforcement of building construction law should be made effective and transparent providing all support for monitoring and follow-up.

6.Housing societies, which deal with selling of plots within DMDP area should come under rules and regulations regarding planning and environmental norms.

Design and Documentation

Authors
Lt. Col (Retd) Mahtabuddin Ahmed, Developer

Prof Md. Khairel Enam, BUET

Prof. Dr. Salek M. Seraj, BUET

Faruk Ahmed

1.Standardisation of building services (staircase, elevator, electrical and plumbing lines, width of passage, area consumed by service facilities) and facilities, including parking areas.

2.Correct presentation (to scale) of furniture layout and car parking spaces according to standard dimension.

3.Standardisation of day lighting and ventilation.

4.Planning rules and regulations concerning apartment design should be according to Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR).

5.All future apartments (either moderate-high six-storied or high-rise) must be designed following Bangladesh National Building Code, 1993, as well as international seismic design specifications.

6.Quality concrete (3000psi or more) and high strength (60 grade) steel must be used in structural concrete construction.

7.All six or higher storied buildings must have shear walls. The parapet walls must be either of RCC, grill, or reinforced brickwork.

8.Soft-storey open car parks should be avoided, or taken into consideration during the structural design and seismic detailing.

9.All apartment buildings must be equipped with lightning arrester.

Buyers and their Psyche

Authors
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1.Buyers confidence can be greatly enhanced by a uniform declaration policy

·Standard Contracts by all developers.

REHAB has a major role to play.

·Standard terminology/ nomenclature, such as net/gross sft. as

already established by REHAB. ·Limited warranty and after sale service. Once statute of limitations is established, the buyer will feel confident and the playing field will be level.

·Building developers past performance

All bona fide developers want to create a list of 'good' projects since they want to be in business for a long term. Recommendation from past products will enhance the business. However, short-term developers (or overnight traders) are getting away with excessive profit and damaging the reputation of the industry.

Solution: Mandatory enlistment with REHAB, which is watchdog and peer pressure group.

2.Further enlightenment for buyers

Developers should be more creative in providing 'value for money', useable space (yield) vs. gross sft.

Which should the buyer go for? For example: a well designed/laid out plan of 1800 sft vs. a badly laid-out plan of 1900 sft.

3.Buyer's long term planning, i.e.

well before he has financial capacity to enter into a contract

Prospective buyers should be given a 'clear picture' of what the city will look like in 15/20 years time without the uncertainties and upheavals of the urban sprawl, as witnessed today.

Solution: Policymakers/regulatory body/RAJUK should openly exhibit the future city to the citizens. So that each prospective buyer can plan ahead of several years, before the actual purchase.

Finance and Marketing

Authors
Prof Dr. M.A.Rouf, BUET

Prof Dr. Sarwar Jahan, BUET

3.Supplier/importer should have

specific mechanism to control quality and price of building material;

1.Credit facilities on soft and long-term basis should be made available by private and overseas leasing companies guided by Government of Bangladesh policy.

2.For apartments low-cost registration fee should be adopted by making new rules, as being practised in neighbouring countries.

3.Transfer permission fee should be discontinued for apartment.

4.Registration of apartments on all government plots should be simplified and entirely done by RAJUK, by amending existing rules.

5.Housing sector has been declared as an industry in Industrial Policy 1999. Therefore, fiscal incentives like tax holiday, reduced tax rate and duty benefit on imports (on lifts, sanitary items) should be introduced.

6.The developer shall make aware clients and certify the design and construction quality of each apartment, that the apartment has been built as per BNBC, Building Construction Rules, etc.

Materials and Construction

Authors
Prof Dr. M. Shahidul Ameen, BUET

Engineer Mahmudul Hassan, Developer

Architect Akhil Akhter Chowdhury, Developer

1.The industry requires specialised professionals, because multi-functional complexes are being erected, professionals for architecture, specifications, foundation, plumbing, electrical-mechanical (increased automation) and so on.

2.Considering the size of the building, industry training facilities for skilled construction workers (mason, carpenter, electrician, plumber, etc.) should be introduced.

3.Use of double gas burner without meter to prevent misuse and avoid disconnection

4.All developers are brought under REHAB to ensure adherence to government policy, BNBC and rules.

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Safety and Security

Authors
Brig (Retd) AHMA Momen, Developer

Engr Syed Md Abdullah, Titas Gas

Md. Shahjahan, Dept of Environment

Md. Mesbah Uddin Bhuiyan Murad, Bangladesh Scouts

1.Segregation of solid waste at point of deposit/collection a.hazardous waste

b.waste glass

c.recycleable waste

d.food waste (decomposable)

2.Periodical monitoring of gas line joints to avoid fire and other accidents due to leakage.

3.Use of double gas burner without meter to prevent misuse and avoid disconnection

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feet beyond the masonry supports. Inside, the Robie House was revolutionary in having no walls or partitions to break the flow of space thru the common areas: living room, dining and central stairwell. Wright designed all the furniture, fabrics and fittings, including the globular lighting fixtures and the art glass of windows and French doors. In fact, the finished house does resemble an imposing steamship or *Dampfer*, which is what Chicago's German-speaking people call it. The Robie House did cost the then-prohibitive sum of \$60,000. Many students of modern architecture consider it the highest achievement of what has been called Wright's First Golden Age.

It was almost late afternoon by the time we were done with the guided tour. We wished we had enough time to step into the other houses. **Nathan G. Moore House (1895), Frank Wright Thomas House (1901), William G. Fricke House (1901)** are some worth mentioning examples among Oak Park houses.

Oak Park also features Ernest Hemingway's birthplace and a separate **Hemingway Museum**; the stark, concrete **'Unity Temple'** designed by Wright and built by Unitarians in 1905, a conservatory and a children's museum.

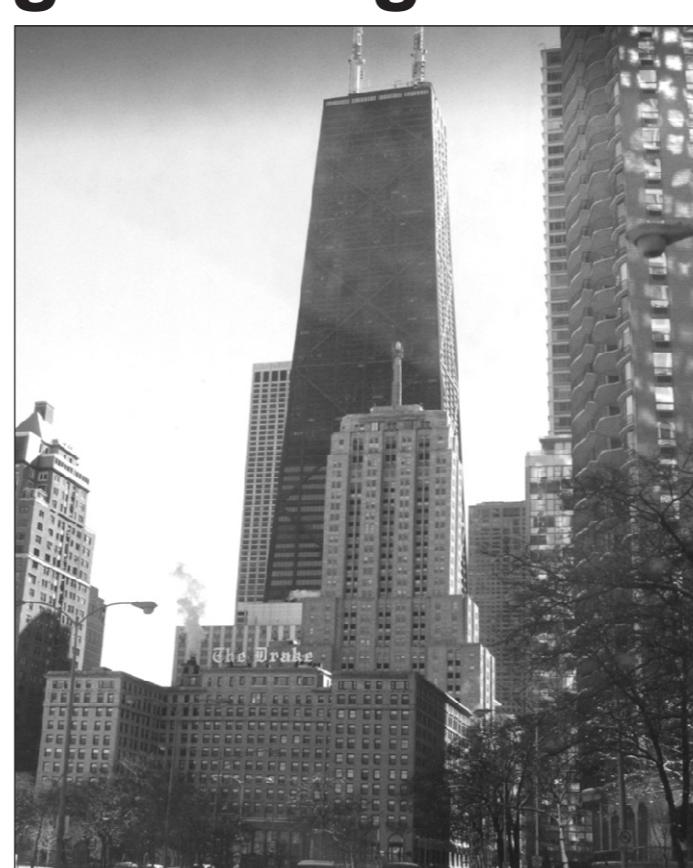
But we had to rush to visit the most superb of all the Prairie Houses, which was a little away from Oak Park. We could not wait to see this excellent creation of Frank Lloyd Wright, the **Frederick C. Robie House**. The best known of all his houses in Prairie style, this Robie house was built on a narrow corner lot. The house extends along a single horizontal axis, its most arresting feature being the cantilevered roof, which extends a full 20

feet beyond the masonry supports. Inside, the Robie House was revolutionary in having no walls or partitions to break the flow of space thru the common areas: living room, dining and central stairwell. Wright designed all the furniture, fabrics and fittings, including the globular lighting fixtures and the art glass of windows and French doors. In fact, the finished house does resemble an imposing steamship or *Dampfer*, which is what Chicago's German-speaking people call it. The Robie House did cost the then-prohibitive sum of \$60,000. Many students of modern architecture consider it the highest achievement of what has been called Wright's First Golden Age.

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"John Hancock Center" Architect-Engineer: Fazlur Rahman Khan, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, S.O.M. 1969

assumes only a portion of the stress. If bigger is better or at least not evil; then the Sears Tower is superb.

JOHN HANCOCK CENTER

Architect-Engineer: Fazlur Rahman Khan designed this 1127 feet high steel building in 1969.

"Big John" the John Hancock Center is all skin and bones.

A throw back to the structural systems of pre-skyscraper masonry buildings, the Hancock Center's outer supports serve the old fashioned role of load bearing walls with twentieth century twist. It's exterior-braced-framed tube design, in which the forces of gravity and wind are borne by the outer shell of the building, was one of the first in a rapid series of structural innovations that made the mega-structures of late twentieth century skyscrapers a reality.

Although it consumed the steel equivalent of 33,000 cars, its innovative structural system was economical, requiring half the steel of a building with traditional internal columns.

Downtown Chicago is the home of several other skyscrapers. Wrigley Building, Chicago Tribune Tower, Marina City Apartments, Water Tower, and a few others have acquired worldwide fame for the city.

Nevertheless, looking at a map of Chicago we are struck by the profusion of parks in every quadrant of the city: Peterson, Horner, Warren, Chase, Jensen, Humboldt, Garfield, Sherman, Hamilton, and on and on. Many are connected by a belt-line of boulevards that runs west from Lincoln Park, turns south all the way to Gage Park, then back east to Jackson Park at the Lake. It's little wonder that Chicago's motto is *Urbs in Horto: City in a Garden*. Inside it are myriad neighbourhoods not suburbs, but officially named com-

munities that resemble a patchwork of small towns locked within the city: Hyde Park, Lincoln Square, Rogers Park, Old Town and seventy others.

JOHN SHEDD AQUARIUM

— still the world's largest such facility—is famous for live sharks, sea turtles and tropical fish. It offers winding nature