



Hospitality at work

Delhi-based Via Design creates an office for Ernst & Young in the Gurgaon that looks more like a swanky hotel.

TEXT: APURVA BOSE DUTTA | PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY ARCHITECT RAM JOSHI

A boutique-hotel look in an office space is what architect Ram Joshi has managed to attain in the new branch of acclaimed brand Ernst & Young (E&Y) at the Gold View tower in Gurgaon. Spread over ground-plus-nine floors, the office is suave and chic. Subtle and warm in its feel, it “is a merger of different business activities including the tax advisory and consultation which had to be taken care of in the design,” says the architect, who is the partner and founder principal of New Delhi-based Via Design, an architectural firm specialising in interior design.

The alluring reception with its slanted feature wall showcasing the logo of E&Y and its dictum of “Quality in Everything We Do” serves as an introduction to three kinds of visitations the office has: casual, corporate and business. “The double-height entrance presented both a design challenge as well as an opportunity for us. The client’s directive for this space was to provide a ‘semi-hotel’. This space has the formal reception lounge, meeting and interaction spaces for the E&Y clients. And it facilitates interactions in an area that is a boutique-hotel in its look and feel,” says Ram with a sense of pride in his voice.

A conglomeration of flame-finished granite flooring, this space gives way

to an almost-20-foot-high atrium. The overhead bridge here, which connects the meeting rooms on the mezzanine with the lifts, wasn’t part of the original design. It came up as a means to segment the double-height reception area obtrusively into a formal reception and an informal meeting and lounge space, besides being the obvious circulation connection. Regarding the lighting effects used, Ram says, “In lighting terminology, the lamp refers to the ‘bulb’ itself whereas the luminaries refer to the fixtures which house the ‘bulbs’ or the lamps. In the atrium, the lamp itself is not important as are the luminaries (iGuzzini make Le Peroquet model) which conceal the lamp from the view below, hence producing less

- [1] The underside of the overhead bridge segregates the formal sitting and the informal coffee lounge
- [2] A glance at the formal seating area and interactive spaces near the reception
- [3] The slanted wall at the reception is an appealing feature of the office





glare." A mix of quartz tungsten lamps and HID (metal halides) were used to light the space uniformly which avoided the use of too many luminaries. The existing luminaries in themselves provided a floating effect, leading to the creation of a unique architectural ambience.

A line of stainless-steel bamboo near the lift lobby serves a dual function: it screens the lift lobby from the main area, and retains the privacy of the main area itself. Pivoted glass doors lead to the cafeteria, which is a vibrant mix of hues. Here, you once again notice the emphasis on lighting, in the form of CFLs

with a warm colour rendering. Locally procured Chinese-make luminaries add to the glistening effect. Nearby, the comfortable and elegant client lounge serves as a break-out area (such spaces, I am informed, have been provided on all the floors).

The mezzanine has been designated as the business centre where meeting rooms (from four-seaters to ones which accommodate 24 people) have been carved out. Ram adds, "A consistent theme was replicated in the meeting rooms with respect to colours, design and materials." The walls have an indulgent touch of

- [4] The atrium in all its glory, from the first floor
- [5] Chinese-make luminaries impart a sparkling touch to the cafeteria
- [6] The client lounge area is a welcome retreat in the form of comfy chairs accessorising the wooden look of the space
- [7] Clean lines mark the contemporary board room. Mannington carpets complement the suave taste of this space





provided only for 980. Further, the size of the building diminishes from the fifth floor onwards, which is manifested in the reduction of workstations.

The hierarchical order which was being initially followed in E&Y was a source of slight distress since, design-wise, it would lead to stringent planning to account for cabins created keeping hierarchy in mind. The architect and the client simplified the numerous levels that would have resulted had the hierarchy been maintained to just two — cabins for the partners and workstations for the rest. With this, the daily organisation could be made easier and a flat space-planning could be achieved.

[8] The space in the front of the Country Manager Partner's office

[9] A view of the conference room used by the Country Manager Partner adjacent to his cabin. The outside space has an elegant and classic touch of expertise

[10] A chic and stylish break area

“The double-height entrance presented both a design challenge as well as an opportunity for us. The client’s directive for this space was to provide a ‘semi-hotel..”

[conceptmaterials]

>CONCEPT

To create the look of a ‘boutique hotel’ for the corporate office of the E&Y group keeping in mind the structural challenges involved.

>MATERIALS

Flooring	Mannington Commercial
Walls	Gypsum, veneer, glass
Ceiling	USG Ceiling Tiles

module of workstations at 120 degrees works more in sync with the modern design,” elaborates Ram. “The 90-degree workstation is suitable for CPU-style work, but now with laptops coming into the picture, the 120-degree workstation results in better utilization of space.” The architect also adds that a special effort was required in working with the hot desking practice. (The hot desking method of working emerged in the 1990s. It is location-independent, ie one is not allocated a specific desk, but can use any desk that is free as one steps into the office.) So, though the total number of people in the Gurgaon Branch of E&Y is around 1,200, space was

Indian-looking fabric while Mannington carpets blend in totally to create a dignified look. Higher floors house Y-shaped workstations and executive cabins. “The



- [11] Indian looking fabric on the walls blend effortlessly in this meeting room
- [12] The break-out areas in the form of a small pantry add the functional touch on all the floors
- [13] A distinctive lounge area for the clients segregated by its wooden flooring glistens under the stylish luminary
- [14] A typical view of the Y-shaped workstations
- [15] The interiors of the workspace reveal the dynamic touch of the designer

About the challenges faced in this project, Ram comments, "There was a structural challenge imposed by low heights and the difficult location of the Mechanical and Engineering (M&E) cores. We solved this by carefully working out the M&E designs, and closely integrating them with the interior design schemes. For example, the false ceilings in the office floors are designed to virtually follow the ducting layouts so as to scoop out the maximum possible ceiling heights. In the end, the maximum clear height that we could achieve for the workstation area was 2.5 m."

Natural light does filter in here and there, but artificial lighting has still been stuck to diligently in this project. Though natural light penetrates the core of the office owing to smaller floor-plates, it receives a small helping hand through the use of glass partitions.

done in close consultation with the clients," reveals Ram.

Irrefutably, it is the handling of the public spaces interspersed with the functional in this office, which remains a paradigm to reckon with. It imprints its indelible mark on everyone visiting this E&Y office. **B**

[factfile]	
Client	Ernst & Young
Location	Gurgaon
Area	1,38,000 sq ft
Architect	Ram Joshi
Design team	Priya Bishnoi and Ramya Iyer
HVAC consultant	Panasea Technologies (Rajiv Prabhakar)
Electrical consultant	Ampower Consultants (Vivek Jain)
Project management	Cushman & Wakefield (Jasmeet Ahluwalia and Ahmed Kashif)
Date of completion	Aug 2008
Duration of project	Six months

Though the architect was given a free hand in the design and didn't have to follow the way other branches of the office were designed, he does acknowledge the crucial inputs given by Ram Sarvapalli (partner, E&Y) and Anuradha Mukherjee (associate director, E&Y). "The project turned out to be what it is because it was