Engagements in the Courtyard: Restoring a Haveli in Old Delhi

Aishwarya Tipnis

Engagements in the Courtyard:
Restoring a Haveli in Old Delhi

Aishwarya Tipnis

With a postscript by Michiel Schwarz

Reinwardt Academy
Amsterdam University of the Arts

Contents

Preface

by Riemer Knoop

The 2019 edition of the annual Reinwardt Memorial Lecture was delivered by Aishwarya Tipnis, a New Delhi-based conservation architect. Her remarkable story recounts how she managed, more or less singlehandedly, to rekindle popular interest in architectural heritage in her home town New Delhi, and beyond. At the centre of the story is a 160-year old 'town house', a haveli in Old Delhi, whose historic restoration turned out to be the first private one in the city. She did not achieve this by a preservationist campaigning or a PR offensive. Rather, for close to a decade, she had engaged herself with a family, the owners of a 'heritage building', as well as its neighbourhood. Invited first to overhaul their traditional town house which had gone in bad repair for more than 40 years, she set out on an impassioned journey to restore it both to its former glory and give it a new, contemporary life. As her personal account in this publication shows, she brought them her own zest, expertise and professionalism, plus her network of students, whilst engaging local artisans and crafts people. What struck me most in her fascinating story are two things. First, how, by her own account of the eight-year process, she became more or less a daughter to the family. And second, how she succeeded in slowly transforming the family's original idea of just technically modernizing the old building into a different kind of collective exercise which

would bring out its historical qualities, revitalising long-lost traditional crafts in the process.

The story Aishwarya Tipnis has to tell first came to us in 2018 when my research partner Michiel Schwarz and I had the pleasure of meeting her visiting the Academy as a guest of Dutch Culture, our government agency for international cultural co-operation. Instantly we realised how much her 'haveli story' resonated with key issues in the research we did at Reinwardt: engagement, embedded activism, slow time, genius loci and human agency – social heritage. We had been trying to understand and give new words to the social processes underlying what we subsequently called heritagemaking. Using the lens of sustainism to make sense of today's shifting values and cultural practices, we developed this notion in the context of the Reinwardt-led multi-institutional research project Street Values (Dutch: Straatwaarden). In addition to a number of workshops and publications, it led to a thriving community of practice with a network of co-creators, across the country and beyond. Previous presenters of the Reinwardt Memorial Lectures had in fact contributed to that network, lastly and most of all Linda Malherbe, of Rotterdam's 'Belvédère' Story House, who had presented the 2018 edition (a complete list of Reinwardt Memorial Lectures and publications is provided at the end of this volume). In the Postscript of this publication, Michiel Schwarz reflects on how the haveli story from Old Delhi connects to our own Street Values research into social heritage.

The text that Aishwarya Tipis presents in this book is not a literal transcript of her 2019 lecture. She goes well beyond, choosing the form of a playscript to tell the multi-facetted story of her dealings with heritage in the context of place, time and social setting. Hence the disclaimer 'based on,' as it reads on the title page. She has turned her story into a play for three actors – the owner, the architect, the City authority – which unfolds in five Acts, between an opening Prologue and a closing yet open-ended Epilogue. The action of the story-within-a-story covers more than a decade and the scenes are set not only in Delhi but in Amsterdam too. With a bit of a Shakespearean flourish, each Act ends with the protagonist commenting, in an aside to the audience, on what has just happened on stage, including the narrator's own contributions.

As responsible editor for nine of the twelve Memorial Lecture publications, I'm thrilled by the originality of the playscript proposed by Tipnis, and highly appreciative of her choice for such a theatrical form. It does justice to the local realities in both an apt and an urgent way. Apt, since in a sustainist ethos the three parties are acting on an equal footing and are here given the stage even-handedly; and urgent, because it acknowledges that the Haveli Story is co-owned by all the actors. Which drives home an important message, underpinning our social perspective: Heritage is never to be a single thing that is set by just one social actor.

Riemer Knoop, professor Cultural Heritage,
Reinwardt Academy AHK 2011-2019
Amsterdam, June 2020.

Engagements in the Courtyard:

Restoring a Haveli in Old Delhi

by Aishwarya Tipnis

Prologue

The Haveli Project is an eight-year long journey to restore a 'Grade II A' listed building within the walled city of *Shahjahanabad*[1] (Old Delhi) in Delhi, India. The project, the first private historic restoration in the city, has a fascinating story. When I shared it with Riemer Knoop and Michiel Schwarz over multiple cups of coffee on a sunny April morning in Amsterdam in 2018, magic happened. It was almost serendipitous to discover that we had been working along similar lines in different parts of the world. While I had been implementing a restoration project in India that involved a radically different practice of local design and heritage, Riemer and Michiel had been developing a 'sustainist design' approach to heritage, which reflected many of the qualities and values that I had been advocating. We felt the synergy almost instantly and thus came out this collaboration.

The Haveli Project is not a project for me, it's a journey: the journey of a family, the journey of an architect and the impact of that journey on a megapolis. They say that even the smallest intervention can bring about a sea change. This story is something like that. Every time I tell it I discover something deeper about it, something that makes it richer to share.

This text is a development from the Reinwardt Memorial Lecture on 7th March 2019 in Amsterdam and reflects, in the end, on the various connections with the principles of Sustainism.

After much thought, I felt that the essence of this story can be shared only through an immersive engagement with the subject. Therefore, I chose to tell it through the lenses of three protagonists: the first being the owner, the second myself as the architect, and third the municipal authorities, the City. This text looks at the Haveli Project from these three perspectives and gives the reader the multiple layers and nuances of the project. The owner's perspective is founded on the many conversations that he, Mr. Bagla, had with me over the course of the project, spanning eight years. The architect's perspective is the sum of those conversations in my head, while the city's perspective is the collected narrative of the decision and policy makers that has come up time and again in every contact with the authorities. It is written in simple, non-technical conversational language to make it accessible to a larger audience. I chose to write some parts in Indian English in order to bring forth the emotions of the owner more authentically. Each section ends with an introspection.

[1] Shahjahanabad was the name of the imperial capital of the Mughal Empire, established by Emperor Shahjahan in 1639. It is also called the Walled City of Delhi and continues to be the hub for trade and commerce.

Act I: The Proposition

A hot and sunny afternoon, March 2010

Part 1: The owner's perspective

Hello *Beta*.[2] My name is Deoki Nandan Bagla. I am a merchant from Kashmere Gate[3] in Old Delhi. I export stainless steel utensils across the world. I have a factory in Wazirpur and offices in Nairobi and Dubai. I have three sons and thanks to the grace of God, we have everything and are doing well in life.

This is the *haveli*[4] of my maternal grandfather, or *babaji*, Seth Ram Lal Khemka. He was a very respectable cloth merchant in Delhi early in the last century. He was the president of the Delhi Hindustani Mercantile Association for many years. He didn't have any children and my *dadi*[5] was his sister. We have lived in this house our whole lives, we've seen much here and this is our home. This haveli was bought by *Babaji* in 1905 from an illustrious family that owned Prem Motors, a premium automobile shop in

those days in Connaught Place. Next to our house were the once grand mansions and estates, one such is that of Sardar Sultan Singh, who started the Modern School.

In the 1950s, the haveli was partitioned: while the front portion belonged to one section of our family, the rear went to our other cousins who don't maintain it at all. *Babaji* was a very generous man, he had given the lower portion to a school for young *Marwari*[7] girls. After much persuasion while the School has left, the space has had no repair for the last forty years. The first floor belonged to our cousin who now lives in Bombay, he sold it to someone in the 1990s. The new owner doesn't have any association with the haveli and has abused it by not maintaining or repairing it and uses it as a godown[8] for car bumpers. I have been trying to buy him out to consolidate the whole haveli for my family, but he is being difficult but one day I will get there. The room and shop in the front belong to another cousin, he doesn't want to live here but he doesn't want us to have the whole thing either, he's filed a case against us and we are fighting that in the court of law.

My sons are now of marriageable age and we must start looking for alliances for them. But when prospective brides and their parents come here and they see this dilapidated haveli, they think we are not well off, the house is not comfortable and they decide against the alliance. I just want to spruce this space up, tidy it up so that we can welcome the daughters-in-law into the house. Can you help?

---

2 An affectionate way people in North India address people younger than them in Hindi.
3 A locality in the northern part of Shahjahanabad. The walled city had twelve gates, and the gate that faced Kashmir was called Kashmere Gate. It was through this gate that the British Army marched in 1857 and declared themselves the rulers of India.
4 A large courtyard house or mansion belonging to the merchant or elite class, mostly in the northern part of India.
5 Paternal grandmother.

6 One of the elite private schools in Delhi.
7 A mercantile community in India that hails from the Indian state of Rajasthan.
8 A space used for storage like a warehouse.

Part 2: The architect's perspective

What on earth was I thinking coming back to live and work in India? My life in Scotland was so comfortable and the projects were so much easier. Not only were all processes clearly laid out, restoration materials were available off the shelf and the client, craftsmen as well as professionals were on the same page. Yes, I had asked for a challenge, but here in this crazy unprofessional country no one wants to give a project to a young female architect! I desperately need a project, something to do with my life. Let's hope this meeting with Mr. Bagla doesn't turn out to be another abortive attempt. Did I do the right thing by agreeing to come all this way with this short, stout man whom I don't even know? These are, after all, the by-lanes of Old Delhi. Where are we even going? This looks like the wholesale car spare-part market in Chhotta Bazaar. Oh my God, is this it? A grand mansion with such a large street frontage with bay windows, by the looks of it this must have been a very grand haveli in its heyday.

I gather all my random thoughts and ask Mr. Bagla, "Is this haveli listed?" A bewildered look appears on his face, "'Listed' - what is that?" I go home and look up the register of freshly listed buildings as of February 2010 - the first list of heritage buildings compiled by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.[9] I can't seem to find it on the list, but something keeps nagging me: it seems impossible that such a grand building has been missed out in the listing. I borrow the listing report created by INTACH[10] from my mentor and flip through the pages to stumble upon the

photograph of a haveli with a similar gateway. It looks very similar so I investigate it a bit more and realise that the person who was listing got the address wrong. Instead of the actual address, House No 743, Chhotta Bazaar, Kashmere Gate, it is listed as No 39, Residence opposite Shop No 1242/5, Chhotta Bazaar, Kashmere Gate. How will someone ever find this?

"Mr. Bagla, your haveli is listed as a Grade II heritage property,[11] would you consider restoring it?"

Part 3: The city perspective

This is *Shahjahanabad*, the seventh city of Delhi, built by the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan in 1639. Designed on Islamic architectural principles and modelled on the Persian city of Isfahan, it is characterised by tree-lined avenues on the N-S and E-W axes, with gardens and orchards as well as the majestic havelis of the nobles. This was a mercantile city, linking to the Silk Road - the heart of trade in medieval India. The city suffered heavily in the uprising of 1857, when the British troops stormed

---

[9] Until 2012, the MCP was the largest of three autonomous municipalities in the Indian capital.

[10] INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) is an autonomous NGO set up in 1984 that works across India for the safeguarding of non-protected heritage. It has been responsible for compiling a list of heritage buildings in most cities and has been instrumental in lobbying with the Government for their protection. It is considered the go-to body for anything related to heritage.

[11] The Indian government grading system of heritage properties, grafted upon UK traditions, is set out in https://cpwd.gov.in/Publication/ConservationHertwBuildings.pdf (2013). It comprises three grades.

into the walled city through Kashmere Gate and destroyed everything on their way to seize control of the Red Fort, the seat of the Mughal Empire. They captured the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and exiled him to Burma, setting up their own enclave towards the northern part of the city. St James Church was built on the site of Dara Sheikhon's garden.[12] Major James Skinner built a large mansion opposite it, which was later used as the Hindu College where the Municipal Commission's Nigam Bhawan now stands. Located nearby is the first building of St Stephen's College, now used as the Election Commissioner's Office. With the arrival of the railway from the eastern side via Salimgarh in the 1860s, the city is divided into two. The Northern part, where Kashmere Gate is located, is largely the British enclave. The city suffered tremendously during the Partition of India in 1947. With the influx of refugees from Pakistan, a city designed for a mere 60,000 people housed as many as 425,000 people as per the census in 1961. The first masterplan for Delhi in 1962 declared *Shahjahanabad*, or the *Purani Dilli* [13], as a slum. A degrading environment and overpopulation with unsanitary living conditions forced a large number of residents to move out of the city towards the suburbs. The havelis they left behind were mostly converted to commercial establishments, some housing small-scale factories, some godowns and warehouses. Several havelis continued to be degraded by the increasing number of tenants and no repairs, while others faced dilapidation due to ongoing property disputes. As per the 2011 census there

were 375,000 people living and working in the Walled City. Most havelis are in a serious state of disrepair and therefore are being pulled down to be replaced by generic concrete buildings and blocks. Many scholars have been researching the unique architecture and planning of *Shahjahanabad*, its people and its economy. In 2010, a formal list of buildings of heritage value prepared by INTACH was endorsed by the Delhi Government, giving protection to 783 heritage buildings within the Walled City.

The Walled City is a complicated place, it is the place of commerce, a place of wholesale trade. It is here that the country's largest cloth market, spice market, electrical, paper, stationary, wedding markets are located. The deterioration of the environment and overcrowding are still forcing people to move out. Our city has a lot of potential for tourism, look at how Lahore has promoted its heritage and culture. It is almost our twin city, having been designed by the Emperor Shahjahan during a similar time period, in fact people who have visited Lahore say it is a prettier and better preserved version of Old Delhi. We, as a city, have been discussing for years moving all business outside *Shahjahanabad* and making the city for foreign tourists, they will come here and soak in the culture of Old Delhi, enjoy the food, revel in the dance and music of the Mughal era. We want tourists, particularly the overseas foreign tourists to explore the rich culture of our city, we are encouraging and developing a tourism policy to convert old buildings into hotels, guest houses and art galleries.

---

[12] Older Son of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan, who was killed by his brother Aurangzeb.
[13] Old Delhi in Hindi/Urdu.

[14] In India families are very large and contestation of share in the inheritance amongst the multiple heirs often leads to property disputes.

Introspection

The Indian context is complicated. While at one end there is a rapid rate of urbanisation, at the other there are nascent laws to protect heritage as well as conflicting development policies. The city formally adopted the idea of conservation of its everyday heritage buildings in February 2010. Thus the restoration of the Seth Ram Lal Khemka Haveli, Mr. Bagla's family property, serendipitously became the pilot project for heritage conservation in the entire city. A private initiative by a local citizen to improve the quality of his family's life showed the city that there were many possibilities other than standard, tourist-oriented solutions.

Although now it is well accepted that the sense of place for a historic city is rooted not just in its material fabric of buildings and streets but also in the dynamic activities that take place there, at the time the project was initiated the focus was still on authentic restoration of the built fabric. Our project, however, took a different route. The needs of the family and their heritage were being put at the centre of the decision-making process, which was a rather fresh approach in 2010.

This project demonstrated by practice that every drop in the ocean counts. If every stakeholder takes responsibility for their own heritage buildings and spaces, it is possible to bring about change.

Act II: So what does heritage mean to us?

March - August 2010

Part 1: The owner's perspective

"Heritage? What is heritage? Oh you mean like Taj Mahal. But *Beta*, forts and palaces are for Maharajas and tourists, not for common people like you and me. There is nothing heritage here, this is our home and we are just a regular family in Old Delhi. I want to live here, not make my house some museum. What do you mean it is listed? Is the government going to take it over? Do you think they are going to give us money to repair this? But how can they declare our house as heritage without even consulting us?"

"Like I told you last time, I don't want to get into this heritage business. We have three sons and, of course, we are going to live together in this haveli. I would like to create within the haveli three separate apartments for my sons. But remember *Beta*, the kitchen has to be common. It is inauspicious to have two kitchens in the same house. We are religious people and *Vaastu* [15] is very important to us, so remember whatever you do it must be Vaastu compliant. Do you practice *Vaastu*? No issues,

[15] Vaastu Shashtra is a traditional India system of architecture based on the cardinal directions. It is much like the Chinese Feng Shui.

we have our own *panditji*[16] to guide us, he will teach you. My wife has one more concern, no using black colour in the kitchen, it's inauspicious. Rest you can do what you like. Just spruce it up, let us add some nice vitrified tiles, make it like the new builder flats in South Delhi.[17] By the way, my brother has just moved there,[18] they have a very posh and comfortable house there. I will take you there someday to see. You see, he has two daughters, we all lived here together, but you see we have responsibilities, our daughters have to be married into good homes so we have to ensure whatever we can do we will do for them. Just remember *Beta*, I want at the end of the day that we have a nice comfortable home to welcome our daughters-in-law into."

Part 2: The architect's perspective

The year I spent in Scotland studying European Urban Conservation (2007) made it clear to me that heritage is about more than monuments; it is about cities, streets, urban spaces. All the buildings that contribute to the image of a city are an integral part of the historic fabric. Conservation areas are about a special collective character, each building in the area matters. Now this is a Grade II A listed heritage property, nestled in the

[16] Reference to a Hindu priest.
[17] In very profitable ventures in the early 2000s, old houses throughout Delhi were made into smaller flats and sold by developers ('builders'), giving the owner a free flat in exchange.
[18] South Delhi is not just a geographic location, it is also the most affluent part of the city and linked to the social status of the person.

wholesale car market of Chhotta Bazaar, Kashmere Gate. Most of the neighbouring havelis have already been converted into commercial establishments and people are leaving. If it wasn't for the property dispute the Baglas too would have left for 'better' localities in Delhi.

Of course, this building is in a state of disrepair and clearly there are multiple layers of history within this structure. This haveli definitely seems to offer clues to understanding the medieval history of Old Delhi. Some late Mughal elements are quite prominent, such as the grand gateway, as are the Colonial interventions like the fireplaces and grand living spaces. Here is an opportunity where we could convert this building into a comfortable home, using restoration as a tool for intervention. While this building will definitely get a new lease of life, we shall also show that it is possible to live comfortably in old homes. It does seem like an uphill task, but I love challenges…

Part 3: The city perspective

We, as a city, like to imagine Delhi as a palimpsest: it has been home to seven ancient cities within what we consider the modern city of Delhi. Beginning with Lalkot (1052 AD), Quila Rai Pithora (1180 AD), Siri (1303 AD), Tughlaqabad (1321 AD), Jahanpanah (1325 AD), Firuzabad (1354 AD), Dinpanah (1533 AD), Shergarh (1540 AD) and Shahjahanabad (1639 AD), followed by New Delhi in (1911 AD) and Modern Delhi (1961 AD). All these historic cities

are part of the urban metropolis of Delhi. Each city has its own grand edifices and monuments scattered over the entire megapolis. The city is known for its World Heritage Sites: Qutub Minar, Red Fort, Humayun's Tomb. As city, we have so much heritage that it's a problem of plenty! INTACH has been compiling a list of buildings of heritage value since the 1990s. Although we have been protecting heritage through our Delhi Building Byelaws [19] and its Clause 23 for over a decade, it was in February 2010 that we finally passed the first Gazette Notification [20] for the protection of 783 heritage buildings in Delhi. We have followed the model regulations for heritage buildings applied in Mumbai. Our Master Plan for Delhi 2021 [21] includes a chapter on heritage. We have also set up the Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation and a heritage cell within the Municipal Corporation.

'What happens to a building after it is listed as heritage? What kind of question is that? Do we inform the owners?' Of course we do, we make a public notice in the newspaper for suggestions and objections and if they make a representation we hear the case; if not, their building is listed. What do you mean, 'Is there a benefit to the owners from the listing?' We are working on a proposal to exempt them from property tax. Heritage of Old Delhi should look

[19] Delhi Building Byelaws are the rule book or codes for new construction in the city. The chapter for heritage, Clause 23, was introduced in the book in 2001.

[20] The Delhi Legislative Assembly officially passed the notification of the buildings of heritage value in 2010.

[21] The Masterplan for the City is prepared by the Delhi Development Authority which is the Metropolitan Planning Authority. The first Master Plan for the City was prepared in 1962.

like the Mughal era, all buildings with their glorious facades highlighted, no signage, no wires, no cycle rickshaws. We plan to pedestrianize the whole city and we also plan to relocate all the commercial activities outside the Walled City, so we can have free space for the tourist. Commonwealth Games are coming up in October this year, we are making a policy to allow people to convert their homes to Guest Houses and Art Galleries. Our officers have been on visits to Singapore etc., we are going to adopt their model here. Very soon you will find an Old Delhi that is perfect for the tourist, we will have the heritage type furniture, heritage type food, heritage type signage and every tourist will love to come here.

Introspection

Heritage is differently interpreted, based on the lens that you view it through. Every single person's association with the site is based on his or her personal experience. The technical definition of 'heritage' is that which one has inherited and what one wants to pass on to the next generation. In the case of the owner, Mr. Bugla, it was the memories and association of his family, their possessions and their association with their house which was heritage. The spatial, built form of the haveli was of little value, and if it had not been for the listing and ongoing litigation, there was genuinely no guarantee that the haveli would have been restored.

As an architect trained in urban heritage, for me the haveli didn't exist in isolation. It was an integral part of the street, of the mohalla [22] and of course of the city. The

spatial planning was representative of a way of life in the late 19th century, the socio-economic setup and gender segregation as well as the lessons in sustainability around the courtyard planning. There was a lot of value in what existed, value not just in aesthetic or associational terms but also in terms of principles of sustainability that inherently exist within our historic settings.

The city's narrative is always determined by the political situations and circumstances. Each government boasts about the perfect conditions, policies and systems that they have put in place. Everything looks right on paper, but in reality it is another story altogether. As a society, we tend to pretend that everything is perfect about our lives and problems, and issues can always be resolved. No one in this country will accept that everything is falling apart.

The big gap between policy and the on-ground situation is what the Haveli Project was able to bridge. It demonstrated that when things matter, ordinary citizens do take charge to protect their heritage, a heritage that they connect with. It was almost unbelievable that a city as rich as Shahjahanabad, with its high concentration of heritage buildings, did not have any grass-roots level initiative for heritage conservation until 2010.

[22] Urdu word meaning neighbourhood.

Act III:
Let's do this – but how?

October 2010 - February 2013

Part 1: The owner's perspective

October 2010

"I finally understand what you mean, *Beta*. If my haveli can become anything like the design you are showing us then yes, this is exactly what we want. I am glad you understand what we need now. And you are absolutely right with this grand house, it will definitely impress the parents of the prospective brides. You are quite right that we would look *khaandani*.[23] To be very honest *Beta*, when you were telling us about restoration Mrs. Bagla and I were very sceptical and we did feel that it was not what we needed. But now that you have explained to us the impact it will make, we really do want to do this. Mrs. Bagla always wanted a nice *mahal*[24] and we are so lucky that we found you and you promised us that our home can become a palace in our constrained budget. You are godsent and you tell us *Beta*, whatever you need we will give you."

[23] Khaandani is the Urdu word that means well born, of good or upper class lineage. In a class-based society in India, it still matters which section of society one comes from.
[24] Hindi or Urdu word for a palace associated with the rich nobles or royalty.

May 2012

"Hello *Beta*, you remember me, Deoki Nandan Bagla from Kashmere Gate? Yes, yes from the haveli, how are you, *Beta*? Sorry we couldn't take the project forward at that time, we had some issues to sort. But now I am fully ready, my funding is sorted and we are ready to begin work. So now let us talk business, who should we get to do this job? Yes, do send us the contact of the *Sardarji*[25] who did your other project at Sujan Singh Park.[26] That was heritage too, right? I like the photos you showed, if you want him to do this project we have no issues *Beta*."

August 2012

"Hello *Beta*, I have some news, I met this really nice *Sardarji*, Gurpreet Singh, he was installing the heritage plaque outside the haveli. Actually, after you showed me the listing, I went to the Municipal Corporation and demanded that they put a plaque outside the haveli stating it is heritage. I even offered to pay for it, but they decided to put it anyway. *Haan*,[27] so this Gurpreet, he says he knows you and says that he is the contractor of the Aga Khan at their Humayun's Tomb Project.[28] He invited me to see it *Betaji*[29] what lovely work they are doing. You should go and see it. Anyway, he is ready to do our work too. *Accha*,[30] so you prepare the details and we will ask him to quote."

September 2012

"*Betaji*, your *Sardarji* is way too expensive, just look at the quotes he has given us. He knows this is Kashmere Gate, what does he think giving me these South Delhi rates? They just want me to spend more and more money. Such a commercial approach he has; he is just trying to fleece me. I am not some ignorant South Delhi farmhouse owner, who will pay whatever he asks. He must know that *Purani Dilli* is different, doesn't he understand that? I don't think we want to work with him, can you find someone else? Oh Gurpreet, he has just gotten married and has gone on honeymoon to Australia - he will be back after three weeks, let us see what we can find till then."

October 2012

"*Betaji*, I think Manish and Shilpa Jain are just the right people for us. They are from Old Delhi, I can see that *Shilpaji* is from a very good family. She told me her family house is in Darya Ganj,[31] and Manish is also from Old Delhi, but so so[32] family. Now they live in very good area of Ghaziabad[33] and Mrs. Bagla said they are Jain and vegetarian that's most important. See, *Beta*, Mrs. Bagla

---

[25] A title used before the name of a Sikh gentleman with respect. The Sikh community is known to be very hardworking and many are tradespeople and contractors for building works.

[26] Sujan Singh Park is an elite housing estate in New Delhi, that is the home to the most illustrious Sikh families in Delhi. Designed by Walter George it is listed as Grade II heritage property.

[27] Hindi word meaning yes.

[28] Humayuns Tomb is a World Heritage Site in Delhi and it has undergone a ten years' extensive restoration programme spearheaded by the Aga Khan Foundation for Culture.

[29] Adding *-ji* as a suffix to a name is a way of giving respect in Hindi.

[30] Hindi word to denote agreement like Okay. Its literal meaning is good.

[31] An affluent area within the Old City, where the elite businessmen built their bungalows in the 20th century.

[32] Local parlance which means average not elitist.

[33] A satellite town of National Capital Region of Delhi.

also likes them, let's finalise them for the job. Tell Manishji to bring his labour from tomorrow let us start breaking the plaster."

"Hello, *Beta*, Mrs Bagla this side. Mr. Bagla has been arrested, this guy from Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) came along with the police and said the construction is illegal. He asked for an NOC [34] etc. and took Mr. Bagla to the police station. Can you do something?"

Morning of the next day
"Hello *Beta*. Arre [35] you don't worry, I have found out what all needs to be done. I have spoken to my friends who know the Municipal Commissioner, everything will be okay. We just have to make a plan and get it passed. You come with me we will go and meet the Officer of the Competent Authority; he will tell us the paperwork we need. Yes, yes [36] it is at Safdurjung's Tomb, you just meet me there then we will see."

November 2012
"Hello *Beta*. I have good news, ASI has given us the NOC but you were right, we need to go to Municipal Corporation, they have written that in the letter. Let me see and find someone there, you come with me, we will go and see what needs to be done. These Corporation people are like this only, so corrupt they won't move a finger without a bribe. You don't worry I will sort them out. You just prepare

---

[34] No Objection Certificate from the Municipal Corporation.
[35] Hindi word for saying Hey.
[36] In Hindi to emphasise the word sometimes it is used twice.

all the technical documents and the presentation for the Heritage Conservation Committee. These people have told me what happens in the Committee no one can predict, so you have to find out and deliver on that. Of course, I trust you *Betaji*, I know if anyone, you will."

December 2012
"Very good *Betaji*, this is so impressive, the model looks fabulous. I am sure with God's grace the haveli will too. Now you handle this committee!"

February 2013
"Congratulations *Betaji*, I am so proud of you, the whole committee was saying this is a super impressive project, provided we are able to execute it. The good thing is now we have a letter with a permission to complete this in three years. I know you worked so hard, you can call Manishji and Shilpaji to be prepared - we will start work soon."

Part 2: The architect's perspective

No matter what I tell Mr. Bagla, he continues to think that conservation is an elitist preoccupation. He insists that there is no value in restoring this building. I have tried everything from authenticity to sustainability, to how this project can be important for the city but he doesn't seem to care. Let me try this one last time. Oh my God, it actually worked! *Khaandaniyat*, the feeling of being from a good family and having old money is what eventually resonated. Agreeing to the idea of restoration simply because it

enhances their image, it reinforces their family's illustrious history and helps them bring home 'better' brides. All's well that ends well, whatever the motivation, in the end we both want the same thing; he wants a comfortable house and I want this building to be restored.

How does one restore a house and not pay for it? He finds every contractor expensive! He feels they are all making money. How can a contractor be not for profit? It's a profession! At least he likes Manish and Shilpa. I realise there is a risk though; they have never done any heritage work. Shilpa is interested in conservation and the rest we have to figure out anyway. Frustration seems to be the underlying emotion in everything. What does peer support mean when no one wants to share anything? Why direct us to books that make no sense on the ground? I genuinely don't understand why these established professionals can't help young professionals like us. Why does it have to be competition, why can't it be mentorship? Why do we have to reinvent the wheel every single time? I cannot believe we are the first private restoration project in *Shahjahanabad*. How toxic is this environment where everyone in your fraternity is just waiting for you to fail! The two bits of wisdom that I have received from all senior professionals makes this even more challenging: "A project in Old Delhi, how naïve is she?" and, "It will never happen!" Well then ladies and gentlemen, maybe it's time to show you how it is done. Challenge accepted!

It is incredibly frustrating that when I tell him that there are rules to be followed, acts and regulations to comply with,

he seems to believe that everything can be 'managed'. At least now after being arrested he is taking me seriously, maybe a trip to the Police Station was what we needed. I am amazed at how clueless everyone at the Municipal Corporation actually is, how quick everyone is to pass the buck on to someone else, how no one wants to take the responsibility of accepting our file. Clearly going by the book is not what anyone has ever done, clearly the officers responsible for implementing the book don't know what's in the book. Well this is our context and doing the right thing is what we need to focus on. Even if it is challenging, tough and a road less travelled!

It is funny how they all went from being clueless to giving me the go-ahead and saying, "This is the model project for this city". Sometimes it's nice to have a carte blanche because this gives me the opportunity to set the benchmarks. It gives me the opportunity to do it right and set the precedent for others like me to follow. How exciting is that!

Part 3: The city perspective

All our systems are in place, we have our processes, we have a newly established Heritage Conservation Committee. So Madam,[37] what are you changing in the haveli? Nothing? What kind of a project is nothing? If it is just repairs you want to do, then why have you come here

---

[37] A way to address a professional lady in India.

asking for permissions? You don't need permissions for repairs. Are you serious, we have not heard of any such rule, please show it to me. You are the first person who has come asking for permission, let me find out. Okay so what do you want from us? We will discuss it internally and then send your file to the Heritage Committee. If they give an okay we will issue you the NOC. The Heritage Committee evaluates every project on its individual merit, please submit your conservation plans, drawings, models etc. They want to see what changes will be made and how it will impact the heritage.

Do we have specific criteria for evaluating projects? Not as such, we have esteemed members of the committee, they use their judgement and experience. Do we go and see the project site before, during or after the work? Well it depends, we haven't so far. If we need to we probably will. Our technical experts are INTACH and they advise us on what to do. We don't have any guidance documents on how to carry out a conservation project in the city. We don't have a list of contractors and craftsmen either. If you make one do share it with us, we will put it on our website.

Introspection

Working within a democratic setup, where multiple departments of the Government are operating in silos, I find conflicting laws and policies only end up in confusion. The tradition of adopting a top-down approach leads to further isolation from the actual ground situation. The rhetoric is always about inclusivity and community participation, but the reality is about ticking the boxes and not really about genuine interacting or incorporating constructive feedback from the community into the policies.

In this case as well the gap between heritage policy and the ground situation was appalling. While politicians, bureaucrats and experts sat in closed-door meetings and decided the fate of heritage in the city, the custodians of this heritage were not made aware of what this listing meant for them. The official narrative was that all systems were in place, but the staff was not even trained in operating those systems. No one was equipped to move into implementation. The system was set to fail, thereby encouraging more people to beat the system and to follow unscrupulous ways and methods that suited them but did not necessarily align with the goal of heritage conservation.

How does a city then bring about a change when the climate is not conducive for heritage conservation? The battle was profound at multiple levels, primarily from convincing a stakeholder why conservation is important to convincing the authorities that this was the right thing

to do and to test the systems that had been prescribed by policy. The most important struggle was to give shape to the ideas on the ground, given all the constraints of time, energy and logistics. The entire project had to be executed while the family continued to live in this haveli. There was high pressure to create a benchmark project that the city could follow, and to adopt and develop methodologies that were bespoke to the local environment; to find like-minded professionals and craftsmen who believed in the project equally; and most importantly to find the courage and resilience to work professionally in a completely unprofessional environment.

What could an isolated project achieve? The project did not have any political or institutional patronage. All it had was individuals driven by passion, invested in the project for their own reasons. Could this small bottom-up initiative make the change the city had been waiting for?

*Mortar, traditionally just a slurry of mud and water, binds stones, bricks. In advanced construction, limestone was added to the mud for greater strenght. Last century, the worldwide addition of portland cement resulted in a much harder mortar that also dried more quickly. It replaced traditional, 'breathing' mortars such as lime-mortar that were permeable, flexible and, requiring much less energy to produce, more sustainable.
See: http://thehaveliproject.blogspot.com/2013/11/why-lime.html

Act IV: Chalo,[38] let's show the results now
March 2013 - February 2016

Being the very first private heritage restoration project in the city came with its own set of challenges, the first one being that it had no precedence. The second was that our project did not have any political or institutional patronage; it was to be self-funded by the client. 'Every penny saved was a penny earned,' was to be the underlying principle at all stages of the project.

Part 1: The owner's perspective

Battle 1: Lime vs Cement*
"*Betaji*, I have heard all your arguments about using lime mortar and plaster, but don't you think it's outdated? In the olden days, everyone used to build their houses with *chuna*.[39] I have seen the bullocks running the chakki (mortar mill) and all that. But *Betaji*, it is a time-consuming process, the world has moved ahead now, there is so much more technology available to us. It is the poor people who live in the villages who use these traditional methods of construction, we can afford to use better materials. Why don't you consider that? I read all the links you have sent

---

[38] Hindi word meaning come on, as a way of encouragement.
[39] Hindi word for limestone.

me to the technical papers from Scotland on the use of lime vs cement, but *Betaji*, I am still not convinced. I went to see the work that was happening at the various monuments across the city and the contractors told me that they just use white cement, it looks like lime so when there is an inspection it appears to be lime. Let us save time and just do white cement. That restoration mortar link you sent me *Betaji* it is too expensive we cannot afford to get that. Tell me how are we going to make this lime mortar and where are we going to make it? Where is the space? I saw at the Humayun's Tomb site they had set up this large *chakki* but we just have this small courtyard. I offered their contractor to sell it to me the ready-made mortar, but he said by the time it arrives here it would have set and would be of no use to us, so I guess we have no choice but to make it on site. I spoke to Manishji, he is prepared to make a miniature version of that *chakki* in the courtyard since you insist that is the only way forward. Just make sure it is not expensive, I don't want to waste any money."

Battle 2: Handmade Tiles
"*Betaji*, as I told you on the very first day, I need a really nice kitchen and bathroom. You know that Mrs. Bagla believes in *Vaastu*, so no black colour please. Let's go to the market and see what's available. I want it to look really nice and posh. Those vitrified tiles were looking really nice *Beta*, why are you insisting on these small ones? The German website making these heritage tiles is really nice *Beta*, but one small tile of about 4" x 4" is costing 20 Euros (Rs 2000) that's 180 Euros per square feet (Rs18000 per sq ft). I checked with my friends, they are exporters, if we could get it cheap,

but nothing is less than Rs 1800 per piece, it is very very expensive *Beta*, please think of something else."

"Hello *Betaji*, after your assistant Vaibhav told me about the guy from Khurja[40] who can make these tiles for us, I made my own enquires, and by the grace of God we have a long-distance[41] relative who stays here. I am in the process of finding his contact number, then the three of us can go there this weekend and we can see what is possible. *Beta*, I tell you it is always good to know people and that's the thing about relatives, no matter how distant, relatives always help. See how else would he sell us that tile for Rs 27 which is his cost price and not his market price of Rs 54. *Beta*, doing business in India teaches you a lot, and look how much money we saved where you wanted me to spend Rs 2000 and how I got you the same for Rs 27."

Battle 3: Reusing and refurbishing timber
"But *Betaji*, why you want us to use this old wood, it is decayed and rotten. Let us just make new doors and windows. And this time we should use nice imported wood.[42] Why should we do the local *sheesham* wood, it's cheap *Beta*, what will people say - that we could not even afford teak? My business partner's son-in-law's friend has a timber business in New Zealand, he will give us good kwila[43] wood at a good rate. I have checked online:

---

[40] A place about 50 kms from Delhi which is a hub of blue pottery, with many factories and large-scale export firms.
[41] Meaning far removed relative.
[42] Some people value imported more than local, assuming that if it has come from abroad it would be better quality.
[43] Variety of South African hard wood.

kwila has such a high Young's modulus[44] as compared to teak. My friend just built a farm house and you know he imported all the timber from Canada. It was really good quality, Indian wood is not even seasoned. No, let us not argue about this now, when I can afford why should I make the compromise?"

Battle 4: Local Lights
"Why do you want to go to Khan Market[45] to buy lights? It is all these rich South Delhi people who go there and pay unnecessarily three times the price. I will take you to Bhagirath Palace, it is the wholesale market for lights, all your Khan Market people come here only. And when we are done there is a very famous *chaat*[46] shop, I will treat you to some mouth-watering chaat. So it's settled, we will meet tomorrow in the market, you just bring your inventory of all what we need to bring. I am very keen to have a nice chandelier in the centre of this drawing room, like you saw in that movie *Devadas*. That's what I want."

"What did you say, this guy gave a forty percent discount to the other client! No, no, how is that possible, he needs to give us the same. So what if our order is not bulk like theirs, customer is God, he has to listen to me. *Arre Beta*, I have been a businessman for over thirty years, just watch how I bargain now, I am not leaving this shop till we get that discount. Hello *Beta*, where are you, the lights have arrived, come and tell them how to fix it. What do you

mean? Of course I got the forty percent discount, I sat there for two more hours after you left. I felt bad that you didn't even eat the *chaat*. Eventually we found some common connections and then we got the discount. *Arre Beta*, you must learn, never pay full price ever, everyone has a profit margin and no one even buys vegetables without bargaining. Come on *Beta*, you know that, every penny saved is a penny earned."

Battle 5: Refurbishing Old Furniture
"*Betaji*, I was thinking that we can just order the furniture from IKEA, I can buy it in Dubai and have it shipped here. I just went to China with my friend, have you ever been there? There are streets of warehouses where they are ready to make whatever you want. I got their contact details too. *Arre Beta*, they told me all we need to do is show them a photo, they can make everything for us. *Betaji*, since you are insisting so much on buying Indian things only, I saw on TV Modiji[47] has just launched the 'Make in India' campaign.[48] I have been doing some research, did you know there is a huge market for antique furniture in Jodhpur?[49] Now that the haveli is almost ready, let us go to Jodhpur to find some suitable furniture and get the royal look. I know someone there who has a warehouse. *Arre Beta*, look at this, let us buy this silver sofa, I love the lionhead armrests on this. Just look at this four-poster bed, actually my grand *dadi* used to have such a bed, you know

---

[44] The Young's modulus is a measure of timber stiffness.
[45] An upmarket neighbourhood in Delhi where boutique lights are sold.
[46] Indian street food.

[47] Prime Minister Modi is called Modiji in local parlance.
[48] One of the projects of the Modi Government was called 'Make in India' where Indian manufacturers were encouraged through economic and industrial policies.
[49] A place in Rajasthan, which has a global furniture market of antique furniture.

she sat on it all day and kept watch on the daughters-in-law. I think this looks perfect, can you ask the price – what, Rs 200,000?! But this is old not new. Just a second, let me call Mrs. Bagla she needs to be sure too. Actually *Beta*, Mrs. Bagla is not comfortable with old furniture; she feels it may have some associations with the previous owners, what if someone had died on this bed? Let us do one thing, Mrs. Bagla is saying we have some old furniture similar to this in our store, maybe we can take a look at that and see if we can repair it.

Part 2: The architect's perspective

Every coursebook that we read talks about the need to use lime mortar in traditional building construction and restoration. The special course I did at the Scottish Lime Centre made it seem so easy, buying restoration mortar off the shelf. Never once when I was working in the UK were we ever faced with this question of where to get the lime mortar! And now we've done a complete market survey, there is only one company, in Gurgaon,[50] that can procure this restoration mortar for us but the economics just don't make sense. All my conversations with peer architects and mentors feel so convoluted, it seems like everyone knows the rhetoric, but no one is giving me a straight answer. I don't begin to understand what the big deal is about lime mortar, the way it is being projected is as if it is some nuclear code that one needs to crack.

Come to think of it, it is simple traditional knowledge, every single person knew how to make it, the last fifty years just seem to have changed everything. Every mason or craftsmen believes in the dogma that cement is what we need for strong solid buildings and not simple traditional materials. There is an entire blanket of social conditioning that associates traditional and vernacular with 'old fashioned' and 'regressive', while promoting industrial materials as 'progressive'. Never once had I imagined that as a conservation architect in India, I would also have to be a social scientist and activist in the same breath. After running around in circles it has taken us two whole months to get this lime business right. Somewhere I always knew it couldn't be as complicated as it was being made out to be. This has been common sense and common people have always known how to do it. A bit of innovation and *jugaad*[51] from our structural engineer Ummed, contractor Manishji and the electrician, a visit to the second-hand motor part market for the motor and two solid stone wheels to run the mortar mill, several revolutions of trial and error and finally we've got it right. The amount of struggle that it took to get a simple thing right is simply frustrating. We are not shying from hard work, but the way we were misled by our own peers is just appalling. Shilpa agrees too: while we have never heard of two architects fighting over cement we wonder why conservation architects in this country are obsessed with lime mortar?

---

[50] A satellite town within the larger National Capital Region of Delhi.

[51] An innovative solution using limited resources.

I am going to make my learning public and share this with everyone, so that next time people in the Old City want to restore a building they know what they need to do. Its 2014, The Haveli Project Blog [52] has just made its debut, chronicling the trials and tribulations of getting a real project off the ground. We've shared everything from why it happened, the process we followed, the permissions needed and, more importantly, all our restoration experiences. The Lime Story is getting popular and Shilpa agrees that the gap between theory and practice is large and has suggested bringing her students here to show them how it is actually done. We are very excited: social media posts and enthusiasm of the four young architects that work with me have led to a successful hands-on workshop on Lime Mortar. We've accommodated some hundred young architects already and there is just no space for more at the moment. Word of mouth and social media have brought so many interested students into the haveli to experience in real life what conservation means. I think the Baglas are indeed extremely generous people, who have opened the doors of the haveli to students to learn. Every single time they have come forward and supported our educational initiatives, sometimes by even sponsoring the refreshments. This is what makes this project successful in my eyes.

I was tired of people telling me that it was impossible to incorporate modern kitchens and bathrooms using traditional materials. Is it not hypocritical at many levels to then allow the use of cement in the building? If breathability is such an issue, how can you use cement just because tiles don't stay with lime mortar? Discussions with art conservators and architects and further research brought about a significant fact: historic buildings always used small tiles. We all know lime mortar is not as strong as cement, and therefore our regular tiles are falling off. But what if we use tiles with a smaller surface area? This correlation could only be tested by samples, letting them stay for two weeks and test and bingo we found the solution! Keeping the cost down has also led to several innovations. A field trip to other havelis within *Shahajahanabad* has revealed a particular kind of Italian embossed tiles in almost all of them. We found some of these tiles as salvage, but there weren't enough and then there was Mrs. Bagla's belief of not using anything from someone else's property. Maybe innovation and jugaad are going to be our partners through this process. Measured drawings of the tiles of the illustrious Chunnamal haveli, a vector drawing and trial and error with the tile maker at Khurja[53] achieved the desired result at a fraction of the cost.

I now realise that there is a line between being prescriptive and being pragmatic. This project definitely has helped me see the world beyond my professional opinion, where 'We ought to do this' and 'We should do that' are changing to 'How do we get what we need?' The constraint of cost while keeping the conservation ethos has led to innovation

---

[52] http://thehaveliproject.blogspot.com/p/about-project.html.

[53] A small town 50 kms east of Delhi which is famous for its blue pottery as well as tiles.

guided by curiosity to find a certain type of solution. This is something we all do in India, we use jugaad to find solutions that solve our problems within our constraints and yet we have never recognised the power of jugaad in promoting sustainable practices. Social conditioning to have new, swanky and fashionable things over the used, run-down and reused stuff we have is tough to break in one go. While it works with young, upmarket elite millennials as a 'cool' thing to do, regular people need to see the possibility. After all these years the only logic that makes sense is control of the cost, the ease of availability, and the skill of the craftsmen to implement the jugaad.

In this project we did everything: we reused all the old timber doors and windows after refurbishing them, used the local stone, used local carpenters to fit in the kitchen on site rather than use a factory-made one, used locally made light fittings instead of Chinese ones. Yes of course it is sustainable practice but Mr. Bagla did it because it made economic sense and it added value to his house and his family. Maybe it is time to get off the high horse of the professional expert and speak the language that the regular people, people like Mr. Bagla, our clients, understand. We both wanted the same thing yet we were communicating on two different planes. A lesson in communication and how to deal with people is critical to working in the field and unfortunately our training in conservation does not include this. So how are we expected to make a real-life difference on the ground when we are not even equipped with the right set of tools?

Part 3: The city perspective

We do have a heritage cell in the Municipal Corporation and the Delhi Development Authority, but at the moment it is not functional. A meeting will be convened only if there is a project. We do not have any technical expertise within our institutions. Usually it is about working with external consultants. We do not have any system of quality control, that's the job of the architect of the project. Yes, sometimes things do go wrong when people didn't get the right expert, but we don't have a directory of such experts or craftsmen. You see, restoration is a very complicated job and it is best you hire some expert to help you – what can we do?

We have recently set up the Delhi Heritage Management Secretariat. Shahjahanabad is also part of the Dossier being prepared by INTACH for the listing of Delhi as a World Heritage City. When we become World Heritage, lots of funds will come. INTACH has been working very hard, they made this entire listing of heritage places in Old and New Delhi. Maybe a coffee table book will be published, the Member of Parliament from the area is very interested in havelis and heritage. He is making a heritage hotel in one of the havelis, you must have seen it, it's a very good project, all tourists will love it.

These heritage owners are all notorious and rowdy, they are just making all this noise about not being included in the process. We don't know about that. INTACH made the listing and we have published it - what more can we do? We organised a stakeholder meeting, they all came there

angry and just created a ruckus. All these Old Delhi people are like this only, never wanting to do anything positive, just derailing any good initiative.

Introspection

Bridging the gap between theory and practice is one of the most challenging tasks when working in the dynamic and complex set up of Old Delhi. The rhetoric of conservation practice is possibly the very reason why people do not want to walk the path. Expert-led methodologies discussed in university classrooms and forums use parlance that is alien to the common man, the custodian of this heritage either as an owner or as a government official. The apathy, the neglect and the total disregard for heritage occurs simply because the stakeholders feel suffocated by the rigid laws that hinder their lives. With no handholding, it is intimidating for most people to even own a heritage property. Most have no idea how they found themselves on the list in the first place and, secondly, what their rights are and how are they going to continue to live and work in this heritage property. It doesn't help when the Government adopts the freeze approach, not wanting to adapt to a change. It doesn't help to have a nostalgic lens to look at the old city as a romantic Mughal City rather than a dynamic city of the 21st century with its own needs and concerns. It doesn't help that the policy makers are either academic or too ignorant of how these policies would work on the ground. All in all, at the moment heritage conservation does not make it to the priority list of the Government, given the various other social and economic priorities of the State.

The Haveli Project proved by example that it was possible. The only ingredients needed for success were passion, curiosity, conviction and courage to experiment. It was based on collaboration and co-creation between the owner, the architect and the craftsmen as well as on the revival of a hands-on approach to restoration. It demystified the concept of restoration from high technology, expert-led to something understood and implemented by regular people. It was successful in demonstrating the innovation that was achieved through creativity and local knowledge. Each solution was pragmatic, apt for the given situation and achieved with locally available materials within a constrained budget. With the aim of keeping the costs down, local businesses and craftsmen were preferred over industrialised and branded products and contractors.

This felt like swimming against the tide, the only way forward was to try and fail and learn from failure. One of the most significant and pathbreaking methodologies of this project was that of open sharing. The project opened its doors to students and anyone interested in learning about restoration. This was a welcome change from projects behind high walls. Sharing the trials, errors and failures through social media and a blog engaged a broad range of diverse people with this project. What worked in favour of the project was not some large-scale communication campaign but the collaboration around real, honest and authentic experiences. The story reached many people as mainstream media in India and the world wanted to write about it. It was covered extensively as a story of how, when all the odds were against it, love and passion can conquer even the most invincible

odds. It was evident that this story had to be told, it had to inspire others.

The Haveli Project also proved that there were no right answers, no ideal case scenario about what worked or was right for the situation. The tool was negotiation rather than enforcement. At every point, even on technical issues, there were negotiations between the client, the architect and the craftsmen to collaboratively reach a solution. The solution respected their cultural beliefs and was economical but, more importantly, it was also within the purview of accepted conservation practice. The project redefined the traditional role of the architect from that of a designer to that of a facilitator.

Aishwarya Tipnis at Sethram Lal Khemka Haveli, Old Delhi.

Sethram Lal Khemka Haveli in the Chhota Bazaar neighbourhood, Kashmere Gate, Old Delhi.
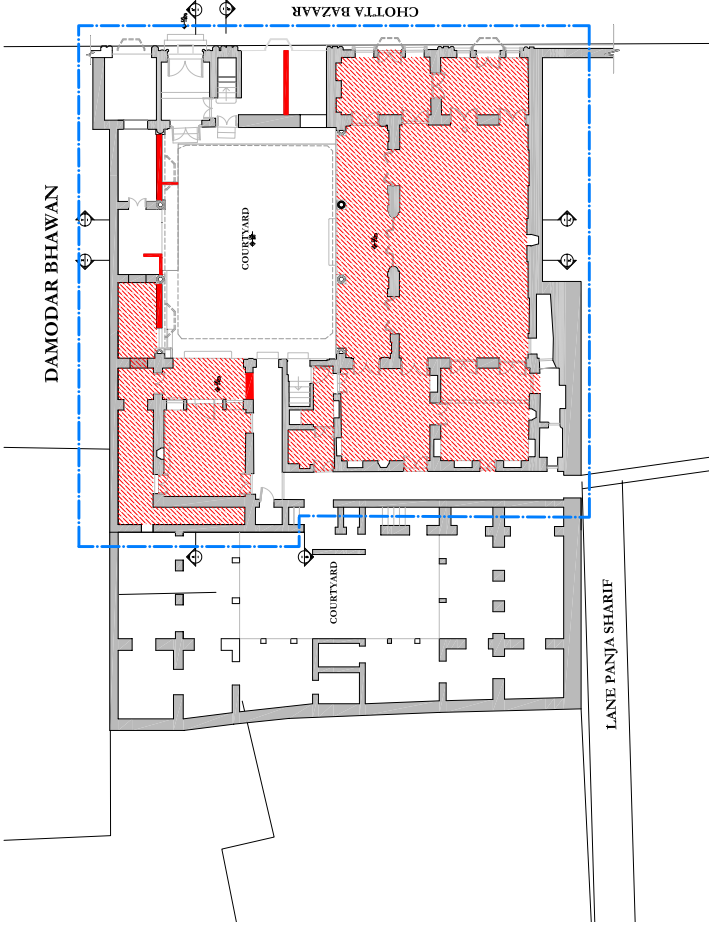

Delhi old city (Shahjahanabad)

Architect Aishwarya Tipnis with owner client Deoki Nandan Bagla.

Bagla family in front of their 19th century ancestral home.

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS GROUND FLOOR PLAN

SITE PLAN

KEY:

BOUNDARY OF THE AREA FOR INTERVENTION

Existing structure that is of historical significance and is therefore to be protected and retained

Material in section (ie walls & partitions)

Material in elevation (ie floor slabs)

Existing fabric to be carefully dismantled subject to further investigations

TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH CONDITION MAPPING MATRIX

AREA STATEMENT:
Total Area of Entire Building: 854.47 sq m
Total Plinth Area of Entire Building: 1090 Sq m
Area for repair (GF+Mezzanine): 515.89 sq m

CHOTTA BAZAAR

DAMODAR BHAWAN

COURTYARD

COURTYARD

LANE PANJA SHARIF

HAVELI, CHOTTA BAZAAR, KASHMERE GATE
DOCUMENTATION & MAPPING

Reviving the craft and technology of making lime mortar with architecture students.

Cross-fertilisation of ideas: client, artisans, professionals.

Aishwarya Tipnis with students at the haveli.

Act V: The aftereffects

March 2016 – April 2018

Part 1: The owner's perspective

"*Betaji*, this restoration project has really made a huge difference. People in the neighbourhood know me now. They say hello and give me *salaam*,[54] I feel like the *Seth*[55] of this haveli again. We get visitors from all over the world, that day Subhash Ghai[56] the Filmmaker came here wanting to shoot here. We are happy our daughters have been married into good families. The Member of Parliament also came to our house to see the work, he has invited us to his official bungalow in Lutyens' Delhi[57] too. Because of the newspaper features people within our larger community know us now. Our oldest son is getting married now and you have to come."

"Do you know Shahjahanabad is going to become a World Heritage Site? The INTACH people came the other day with their International Experts from ICOMOS. They have invited me also to come and talk about the project from the owner's perspective. And do you know that Manish and Shilpa, the contractors we threw out from the project,

[54] Urdu word for Salutation with respect.
[55] Hindi word for Rich merchant.
[56] A very famous film maker in Hindi Film Industry.
[57] The most affluent part of the city of Delhi where the cream of the city live.

they came with this very famous author, what is his name, William Dalrymple. Shilpa I like, she is from a good family but Manish he is a scoundrel, swindling my money. I am glad we got rid of them and did the rest of the work ourselves. How much money we saved!"

"Even that *Indian Express* journalist came that day, she also took our interview.[58] I am still waiting for the first floor owner to sell the space to me, it looks like we might be able to crack the deal soon. I will of course be calling you, I want to do something nice over there. We will talk about that when the time comes."

"You want to use this haveli for your student workshops? You are most welcome to, we like it when these kids come. This is your home too *Beta*, we have adopted you as our daughter. We know you did this project like your own house, without any commercial mindset. We are lucky to have you. Aunty[59] has made something special for you, come and have lunch."

Part 2: The architect's perspective

I started this project as a naïve young architect, I believed I could change the world. I believed in idealism, I believed in going by the book. It was a road less travelled, an uphill task, and in retrospect if I hadn't been so desperate to

prove myself as a heritage architect and as naïve as I was, I would have given up a long time ago. It was also a journey of self-discovery. I had not even realised the amount of resilience I had within me. I also realised that projects and learnings are meant to be shared and not locked up somewhere. I learnt that to succeed in a real-life situation requires much more than technical skills, it requires social skills, it requires the need to listen to people and not just to preach to people on what is 'right'. It taught me humility to accept that I could be wrong, that a failure was not a setback but a lesson to move forward.

There was never a masterplan, never did I think that this little project would go on to make history and would become the showcase not only for me and my practice but also for the city. I had never imagined that I was creating a benchmark, inventing methodologies and processes that would lead to such outcomes. It was only when I began talking about this project with various people that I realised the depth and nuances of the project. One such random conversation was in April 2018 with Riemer Knoop and Michiel Schwarz in the Reinwardt Academy, Amsterdam, showing parallels across cultures. They introduced me to the idea of Sustainism and sustainist design which led me to reflect on the Haveli Project from a different perspective. This meeting also led to the invitation to present the Reinwardt Memorial Lecture in Amsterdam, which became the basis for the Haveli story as told above.

Leading up to the Amsterdam lecture, I took the initiative to organise a student workshop about sustainist design

---

[58] https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/bringing-the-past-back/, December 27, 2015,
[59] Reference to Mrs Bagla.

principles and the Haveli Project. This workshop in turn led us to form a student-led initiative called *Jugaadopolis*, part of a series of workshops on innovative ways of experiencing, discovering and appreciating the old city. In the Epilogue, below, I am taking up both the Sustainist Design Principles and Jugaadopolis, as part of the continuing Haveli story.

Part 3: The city perspective

No one noticed old buildings, they seemed to just exist while everyone went about their daily activities. But as the scaffolding went up along the street façade of the Seth Ram Lal Khemka haveli at Kashmere Gate, people took notice of this grand building for the first time. As work progressed and the façade went through painstaking restoration, the neighbourhood began referring to the haveli as a landmark. Local communities started recognising it as a palatial house within their neighbourhood that brought them a sense of pride. The level of cleanliness around the building increased, people thought twice before parking their vehicles against its façade. It inspired many other people to relook at their own houses or to acquire such properties. The use of the courtyard within the haveli for workshops for students suddenly popularised the idea of having events and functions within these havelis. Popular cinema and web series started shooting within the old city in search of authentic locations; suddenly heritage became fashionable.

The world now looks at us and how we have achieved heritage conservation in our complex city. International

TV shows and articles in media across the globe have described how owners and occupiers are working to restore their own heritage. Although we did not become a World Heritage City, what started as an idea with the Haveli Project fanned other people's imaginations and inspired them to restore their homes, open fancy cafes and retail shops in historic buildings in the Walled City. Airbnb is helping many people to utilise the rooms in their houses and rent them to others who want to come here and have the authentic Old Delhi experience. In 2018 we published *A Manual for Owners for Heritage Conservation in Shahjahanabad*,[60] rich with our experience. It is meant as a how-to document to help other owners in conserving and adapting their heritage. Many big projects are being undertaken, like the Redevelopment of Chandni Chowk, where all the electrical wires are going underground and a pedestrian plaza is being built on the surface. A similar project is being made for the Jama Majid as well.

---

[60] https://www.intachdelhichapter.org/CONSERVATION-OF-HERITAGE.php http://www.aishwaryatipnisarchitects.com/preparationofhandbookforconservation ofheritage-45ba115b-66a6-11e5-851c-3417ebe479a0.html.

Introspection

The Haveli Project is about relationships, the relationship that the owner had with the haveli and over the eight years of the project developed with me. Looking at me first as a young architect to becoming part of their family, we embarked on a journey together where most of the time we diverged in our thoughts but agreed to come to the middle ground eventually. It was the human relationships between the owner, the contractor, the craftsmen and their disagreements that led to me taking on the role of the facilitator, working with the inherent belief system of the family in finding technical solutions and innovations to bridge the gap between needs and heritage value. It is about speaking a common language, one that is understood by all stakeholders, one that is humane and not full of expert jargon.

In the case of the Haveli Project, it was the connections and social networks that helped things happen. There was always a relationship, a connection made with a local business or enterprise, with the aim of getting value for money — and discounts. Most of the craftsmen and contractors came through existing social connections, while new social connections were established as professional relationships gave way to friendships. Each student and visitor who came to the haveli built their own special connection with the place.

The project almost became a pilot for the city. The Haveli Project set a precedence in sharing projects, in sharing

learnings and failures - which has a large impact on its scalability as a prototype. The impact it had was not only in the neighbourhood, but in the entire city with regards to the understanding of urban heritage conservation in the Indian context.

Epilogue –
The Story Continues

April 2018: Arranged Marriages

Arranged marriages are quite a remarkable concept - it has always baffled me how strangers come together and suddenly find a common ground. There's always a third party, a mediator, a match-maker that brings two people together and then watches as they set off on a new journey. And no, I am not talking about Mr. Bagla's three sons and their arranged marriages.

As luck would have it, I was invited to speak on a panel in Brussels for the European Commission on international perspectives as part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage in April 2018.[61] It had been a rough year, a lot of hard work, lots of ups and downs and I desperately needed a holiday. When presented with this opportunity, I decided to also take a short break to see the tulips in bloom, my first ever trip to the Netherlands which led me to the doors of DutchCulture.[62]

It was a beautiful spring morning, that 18th of April 2018, incidentally the International Day for Monuments and

---

[61] https://ec.europa.eu/culture/content/international-dimension-european-year-cultural-heritage-2018_en.

[62] DutchCulture is the Dutch network and knowledge organisation for international cultural cooperation https://dutchculture.nl/en.

Sites, celebrated worldwide as World Heritage Day. I boarded the train from The Hague to Amsterdam, full of excitement to be spending this day in the World Heritage City of Amsterdam. As I stepped out of the majestic Amsterdam Central, I was greeted by Floor Vierenhalm, from DutchCulture. She said to me that she had planned a super day for us, to meet some interesting people, then go for a Dutch lunch. I followed her from the tram as we walked into the city, crossing the bridge to the newly restored Reinwardt Academy. We walked into the 1920s building, a former school, and as I was admiring the new atrium and the extension, Floor led me through the sunlit café into the backyard to introduce me to two of the most interesting people I have ever met. Sitting at a small, white, round table, were two Dutch gentlemen, Riemer Knoop and Michiel Schwarz. I don't know what Floor had told them about me, but the brief she had given me was that their research was concerned with cross-overs between heritage practices and design of urban environment in a new society dynamic. As soon as we met and exchanged friendly smiles, I realised DutchCulture and Floor were fantastic matchmakers!

An hour and three cups of coffee later, we had found plenty of common ground. As we approached the subject how to connect heritage and people I found myself sharing the story of the Haveli Project blog. I saw their eyes suddenly light up, as I went on with my storytelling and histrionics. They looked at each other and told me about the emerging 'culture of sustanism' that marked their research perspective on heritage and urban design. Excited that my

story mirrored what they had been saying about 'sustainst design' and heritage, they asked me if I had heard about Sustainism. As we parted they handed me a small A5-sized book, entitled *A Sustainist Lexicon*.[63] That was my introduction into their world, and their way of looking.

November 2018: Yet another Proposition

A few months had passed from our first rendezvous, and I received an email from Riemer asking me if I would like to go back to Amsterdam and speak about the Haveli Project at the Reinwardt Academy's annual Memorial Lecture in March 2019. I thrilled at the opportunity of sharing my story, and I was excited to connect the Haveli Project to their 'sustanist' perspective. It gave me an opportunity to revisit my experiences and re-view them through a 'sustanist lens'. I read through the *Sustainist Lexicon* and delved into the *Sustainist Design Guide*[64] which Michiel Schwarz had co-authored some years earlier. Both publications set out socially sustainable qualities in the way we collectively shape our living environments and present a series of 'sustanist design principles', including such values as sharing, social connectedness, human scale and local qualities. The richness of every idea took me in multiple directions, it was as if my brain started ticking all these boxes. With each page I turned, each principle I explored, the voice in my head kept saying, "Hey, but

[63] Michiel Schwarz, *A Sustainist Lexicon: Seven entries to recast the future — Rethinking design and heritage*. With field notes by Riemer Knoop and sustainist symbols by Joost Elffers. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 2016.

[64] Michiel Schwarz and Diana Krabbendam, with The Beach network, *Sustainist Design Guide: How sharing, localism, connectedness and proportionality are creating a new agenda for social design*. Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2013.

we've done this in the Haveli Project, too." I slowly began to understand the excitement I had seen in the eyes of Riemer and Michiel on that April morning. Although having developed it independently, the Haveli Project highlighted essential qualities that were implied by the sustainist design principles - I'll come back to this later. It felt like a journey of self-discovery, as I began to peal the various layers of the stories, beyond the brick and mortar and the technical details of the restoration project. Evaluating the process of making heritage, the people and their relationships, the meanings and emotions that were attached with the project, was deeply introspective. My understanding of sustainist culture was that it is about coming together, about collaborating, about pooling resources and knowledge and about achieving outcomes within our given means or constraints. The thoughts in my head were, "But that's what we always do, that's what middle class Indian values[65] are all about". This germinated another thought, "What are hallmarks of *Indian* sustainist culture?"

The more I thought about it the more I asked myself whether there is something special that we in India are doing, something that is central to how we deal with our lives and our living environment that is inherently sustainable. Growing up in India, we all know the stereotypical middle class Indian person. He would be one who never wastes anything, not even a drop of water, always repairs gadgets rather than replace them, often visits the second-hand market for good deals, washes

and reuses all plastic containers that come with take-away food, gives old rags to get stainless steel utensils in return, always carries his own cloth bags to the weekly fruit and vegetable market. But in the consumerist era of the 1990s, we made fun of these practices and embraced the American dream, decided it was cooler to shop at the supermarket, decided it was fashionable to go in a car rather than walk even the smallest distance, decided that having a shower was better than a good old bucket bath, throwing away grandma's copper and stainless steel boxes and bringing in trendy plastic. Reading this it seems as though we've gone from smart to stupid in twenty years. Therefore, the idea was born to seek out these sustainist practices in our everyday lives and propagate them for the millennials. It wasn't going to be through preaching, it had to be something innovative, something that caught their attention and imagination. Thus *Jugaadopolis*[66] was born.

January 2019: Flirting with Sustainism

Having planted the seed in my head, I was curious to explore sustainism and the Haveli Project was the first place to start. I had begun to see the connections and join the dots with the sustainist design principles, but it wasn't just about casting the Haveli Project into the mould of sustainism. Looking through a 'sustainist lens' I wanted to encourage and inspire a new way of thinking. What if I organised a student workshop around the idea of Jugaadopolis, and integrate the results in the upcoming Amsterdam lecture of March 2019? Quickly bringing

---

[65] Middle Class Indian Values are about making the most of what is there, every penny saved is every penny earned.

[66] Jugaadopolis is a student-led movement for understanding the inherent sustainability in our Indian cities, an initiative of Aishwarya Tipnis Architects.

together some young energy through social media, our good relationship with the Baglas helped make the haveli the venue for this workshop. But what would we actually do? Hold up a 'reflecting mirror,' said Michiel in a preparatory skype call: tell the students the story as you told it to us in the Amsterdam courtyard, lay out the sustainist design principles, and then let them explore. In the Jugaadopolis workshop this led us to ask, "What *Indian* addition could we make to the principles of sustainist design?"

February 2019: From Courtyard to Courtyard

According to the ancient Indian practice of Vaastu, the courtyard is the centre of all cosmic energy in a household. Scientifically, it is the courtyard that enables the passive cooling of houses in hot and dry climates across the world. It is the courtyards that all the activities of the family spill into, it is the courtyard which is the epicentre of the house: every marriage, every death, every function happens here. It is here that children play, elders sit and chat while women of the house do their daily duties.

On the first of February 2019, the Courtyard of the Seth Ram Lal Khemka Haveli transformed itself into an experimental lab, a space for co-learning, a space for sharing. A group comprising of young professionals who worked in my studio as well as fourteen students from different architectural colleges in and around Delhi who had applied to participate in the workshop gathered in the nice afternoon sun. As we sat on the courtyard floor sipping chai and eating locally made samosas we explored what makes the Haveli Project an endeavour of sustainist design.

Mapping the Haveli Project

What I began to see is how the principles advanced in the *Sustainist Design Guide* and *A Sustainist Lexicon* could act as a canvas for highlighting some essential features of the Haveli Project.[67] Using four of these principles – sharing, local quality, connectedness, human scale[68] – enabled to revisit the Haveli story and bring into focus particular experiences, even lessons, that can be gauged from the Haveli Project. Below I draw together some observations and conclusions from the now decade-long story of the Haveli Project.

Principle 1: We are what we share
In 2010, when the Haveli Project began, being open about professional work wasn't heard of in India. People were very guarded and secretive. Facebook hadn't taken off yet in a big way and Whatsapp or Linkedin didn't exist; smartphones were not popular. So when was it that you could actually talk about your work? Either you went to lecture at the University or you met friends and peers for lunch. In my own personal journey, I found people didn't trust young professionals and there wasn't anyone willing to mentor us. The difficulty in finding a simple recipe for lime mortar became such an ordeal and thus the frustration of not finding information led to us start the Haveli Project Blog. It

---

[67] *A Sustainist Lexicon* (note 69) lays out seven keywords that are effectively entry points c.q. principles for (design) interventions in the living environment: Placemaking, Connectedness, Local, Commons, Circularity, Proportionality, Co-Design.

[68] The four subheadings below are taken from the *Sustainist Design Guide*, corresponding to the design principles of Local, Sharing, Connectedness and Proportionality (Schwarz and Krabbendam, 2013).

was to share, to seek comments, to seek feedback, to learn about other examples. I had no idea that one blog would start so many conversations, that would give inspiration to other owners and occupiers of heritage properties. It allowed people to find us, to visit the haveli and share the experience in their own networks. We had students coming from France, Germany and the UK who took the story home through academic conferences and their seminars. Sharing meant open discussions, where the client, craftsmen and architects would discuss what possible technical solutions could be. Each person brought their own experience which was valuable in finding innovative solutions. It attracted print media from across the world to write about an authentic tale on how restoration can change lives. The first time the students came into the haveli it seemed daunting, a huge responsibility to help them make sense of what they saw. The Haveli Project made it cool to live in an old house, it made restoration a cool profession, it helped demystify heritage conservation for a lay-man. I hope it made the younger generation of heritage professionals and architects a bit more open, a bit less secretive and more willing to share their stories with each other to build their own peer groups and networks.

> The Haveli Project was pathbreaking as it allowed people access to what goes on in a restoration project through social media. It allowed students to get their hands dirty and learn on the job through visits and workshops. There was open exchange and collaboration between the diverse experiences of the owner, architect and craftspeople. These experiences ranged from making the system work, to using the 'right'

> conservation techniques and approaches, to making by hand and using the resources available. The sharing of the courtyard space for student workshops was also a new and very rare phenomenon in Old Delhi. The story of the Haveli Project has inspired many spin offs and projects, and has led to learning in the form of the Manual for Owners of Havelis in Shahjahanabad.[69]

Principle 2: Local is a quality, not a geographical marker
Back in 2010, in local parlance if anyone said, "It's local", it was considered to be a bit derogatory. It meant that it wasn't valued or appreciated, it meant something wasn't good enough, wasn't standard, probably inferior if it wasn't branded. Social-economic perceptions have a huge role to play in the understanding of sustainability in India. Vernacular is considered to be regressive, so people felt ashamed to speak their local language, people aspired to want branded goods, to have 'modern' houses rather than heritage ones. Our struggles in this project included overcoming this perception, enabling the use of local materials, hiring local craftsmen and getting work done locally. It was quite a step to appreciating hand-made and locally crafted furniture and fittings over Chinese replicas. What tipped the scale in favour of local was, in the end, its affordability. Another intangible aspect of the local culture that aided the implementation of the project is *jugaad*, the street-smart way of getting things done. Street smartness is a desired quality and the core values of being a *jugaadu* is having a network, sharing knowledge, ideas

[69] Footnote 64.

and contacts. People love to give free advice, even if no one asks them, so in finding solutions everyone has their two cents to contribute. This was valuable in the process of the Haveli Project as each one of the stakeholders brought in their own creative thinking to help us innovate solutions.

> The Haveli Project is rooted in its local context, in the understanding of the social and political connections and relations with people. The Haveli Project presented a case where the gap between policy and on-the-ground situation had to be dealt with. The creativity of navigating the corners and doing the right thing in the given circumstances stems from a deep-rooted understanding of the local culture, while in some places the influence of the people in power had to be used. Personal relationships with friends and colleagues became the first port of call for reflection and finding solutions. The pragmatic approach of the Haveli Project has appealed to several other owners as well.

Principle 3: It's all about relationships
As one of the most populous countries in the world, people are plenty in India. In a close-knit society, everyone has their own social networks, actual rather than virtual. People in general are always interested in the other person's business, there is no isolation, all relationships, good, bad and ugly, are everyone's problem. The Haveli Project navigated people and their relationships at multiple levels and often it was these relationships that were the real reason this project materialised. It was the emotional connect that superseded monetary aspects, it was what

blurred the lines between personal and professional and what brought in a collective sense of ownership.

The Haveli Project has been about a family's identity, enhancing their social image and improving their quality of life. It was about adopting a pragmatic rather than a prescriptive approach to a traditional subject. The project created meaning at multiple levels, at the level of the end users, their neighbours, their community, their city as well as within the fraternity of architects and decision makers. The diversity of the meanings it has created is what makes it such a rich project.

The Haveli Project propagated the do-it-yourself model for heritage conservation that allowed for a pragmatic shift from expert driven to a community led way of thinking. The project is the sum of the innovation and creativity achieved through collaboration of the client, their needs and belief systems, with the architect as the designer and craftsmen as the implementers. We ended up creating a product in which everyone was invested. The diverse experiences of each of the stakeholders added to valuable knowledge building. It showed that the architect is not necessarily the decision maker, but a facilitator of change between the many stakeholders within given social and economic circumstances.

> The Haveli Project directly and indirectly touched many lives: the people living within it, the people living around it, and the people living in the rest of the city. The primary idea of the project was the Indian joint family living

together in a shared space, where togetherness needed a spatial definition. Design solutions were developed to meet the nuances of these relationships whether it was having a large kitchen or spiritual concerns such as Vaastu. The relationship that the family had with their space, their memories, and associations with the space became a design determinant. On the other hand, as an architect, I could see the myriad connections that this one building could make with the city, its relationship with all the dynamic activity that happened in its vicinity, the car spare-part market, vendors and local tea shops. The project was implemented purely on the basis of the web of relationships, connections, and interdependence. The owner used his personal connections with his friends and family to bring shape to our ideas. The connections that this project developed with the larger narrative of conserving and restoring heritage havelis in the Walled City, was possible only through the sharing of the experience. Stories connect people, the family found brides and new friends and strengthened the community. Taking the story to new places connected a diverse audience with the do-it-yourself model of heritage conservation in the walled city of Delhi. It inspired students, it inspired professionals, and more importantly it generated local economy and jobs.

Principle 4: Proportionality rather than scale
Every drop in the ocean counts – in this sense the Haveli Project is one small initiative that has managed to bring about a sea change. The restoration and reuse of the haveli into a 21st-century home demonstrated that it was possible to live comfortably in the Walled City. It also showed that possibilities of non-tourist uses for these old homes could help protect the sense of place, diversity and dynamism in the Old City. A small project initiated by a local citizen to improve his own way of life: it was a small project of human scale about the needs of a regular family. The restoration of the haveli not only reinforced the identity of the family but also that of the neighbourhood, while the project inspired many other projects within the Walled City as well. The craftsmen who were trained on the project went on to work in similar restoration projects in the city. The project was slow and took eight years to be completed. This allowed time for working out the process, involving more people and making it truly collaborative. A small-scale project with local resources, both physical and economic, using restored and refurbished material. The project led to the publication of *A Manual for Owners of Heritage Buildings* on how to restore, the basic dos and don'ts, published in English and Hindi with the help of the local government. It had an outreach to other people living in historic homes. The project also inspired the development of an app called *WeConserve* [70] by the School of Planning & Architecture. The app will to be launched in 2020 and is a DIY guide to owners on renovation issues and tells them, step-by-step, what to do next. The Haveli Project became the test case for the app, as we openly shared all the details. The app is expected to help dealing with 2000 other listed havelis in Shahjahanabad.

[70] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/app-to-tell-you-havelis-heritage-as-you-tour-walled-city-ruins/articleshow/64142200.cms.

> The Haveli Project became the training ground not for just young architects and designers but also for the craftspeople who went on to work on other restoration projects in the city. The knowledge transfer that was achieved out of this collaboration added value to each of the professionals and craftspeople. The methodology developed as part of this project became a benchmark for other similar projects in Old Delhi. The Haveli Project has been about people and their relationships, its humane and authentic vibe has echoed with multiple audiences, and the story of one family in Kashmere Gate in Delhi is now a global story of sustainism.

The story is continuing

The ethos of 'sustainist design' is rooted in network, connections and local solutions, with people at the centre. Building on our experiences of the Haveli Project and inspired by the idea of sustainism, we launched a student-led movement called *Jugaadopolis*. It aims to explore, recognise and propagate sustainist practices that exist in our environment. It aims to engage the youth to change their way of life and thinking, and to help making the city a better place, to live through a combination of the real and digital experiences. The first workshop of Jugaadopolis conducted on sustainism, in January 2019, became very popular among the students which is why we held a second workshop in June 2019, titled Connecting Courtyards. What started as a movement, an awareness campaign from one courtyard of the Seth Ram Lal Khemka Haveli, was upscaled to five courtyards in the next edition. Fifteen students explored the stories hidden in five havelis

and presented these in an AV format. They shared the results via skype with Michiel Schwarz and Riemer Knoop in Amsterdam. Jugaadopolis enabled students to engage and develop their own authentic experiences of the Walled City and of sustainable construction to understand that havelis are more than bricks and mortar. More importantly it helped them understand the city's history, its people and their connections with their environment. The idea of engaging with the residents was to tap into local networks, to spread the ideas of how heritage can make their lives better.

It's March 2020 and I am probably as naïve as I was in 2010, believing that though bringing about change is never easy, brick-by-brick and one initiative at a time it is possible. As I write this concluding remark in these testing times I can't help drawing a parallel with the ongoing calamity of COVID-19. It took just a few people to spread a global pandemic. As an optimist, I still believe that, similarly, good practices, attitudes and methods can also become global.

Arranged marriages lead to alliances where is it is not just two people, but the entire extended families that come together and become one cohesive family. In this case, with Jugaadopolis, I think we have already embarked on a new way of thinking, a new approach where India and Europe can meet, a pathway to a new way of living sustainably, building on our traditional wisdom and innovation in these changing times.

Postscript:
From Heritage to
Heritagemaking
by Michiel Schwarz*

Places are geographies, but not just in a physical sense. They are also social sites and vantage points for gauging our surroundings. Places are central to our perceptions, our relationships and the values we live by: they are at the heart of our cultural engagements.

The Haveli story is steeped in place. Aishwarya Tipnis takes us to the walled city of Old Delhi. She leads us into the courtyard of the house, introduces us to the inhabitants, and layer by layer she unearths how this place is embedded in local community and the urban fabric. But it would be misguided to view the Haveli Project simply as just a local and parochial affair, as being merely another 'case study' of conservation and restoration in India. In my reading, her story harbours significant insights on the relationships that give meaning to the places we inhabit. It reveals some of the dynamics through which socially embedded values inform

*   Michiel Schwarz is an independent sociological thinker, curator and consultant interested in how the future is shaped by culture. He is currently developing cultural projects and collaborations from his Amsterdam-based Sustainism Lab. From 2016 to 2019 he was research partner in the Street Values project of Reinwardt Academy, Amsterdam University of the Arts.

heritage and shows us how we can 'design' heritage in its real-life settings.

How does the Haveli story relate to similar stories in other geographies? Taking it beyond its original place means locating it in a broader perspective. We can view the Haveli Project as part of the current 'social turn' in our dealings with heritage in the built environment, putting people and their contexts at the centre. As Tipnis says,"It was the connections and social networks that helped things happen." This is 'social heritage.' With its socially embedded and participatory design approach, the Haveli Project can qualify as a successful case of 'placemaking' – even though Tipnis herself doesn't use that particular term.

But most significantly, I consider it to be an exemplar of what we may call 'civic heritage practice' – embedded in place and involving citizens and communities. As such the Haveli Project fits perfectly in the research domain of the Amsterdam Reinwardt Academy's *Street Values* project, an exploration of new forms of local engagement at the intersection between heritage and the design of our living environment.[I] In this postscript I will try and build a bridge between the Haveli story and our Street Values research.

Comparing notes
Shift geography: from Delhi to Amsterdam. It was in the court-yard of the Reinwardt Academy that we first met Aishwarya Tipnis. We, that is Riemer Knoop (editor of this volume) and I, found her story inspirational. Instantly we were struck by how much it resonated with what we were working on. In the

Street Values research project our focus was on newly emerging social heritage practices, especially those involving local participation by citizens and communities. In the Dutch context we had been looking into new forms of 'engaged heritage,' and here came along an Indian conservation architect who was doing it! Even more: our 'sustainist design' approach to heritage was actually being put into practice in an Indian urban setting some 7,000 kilometres away.

The more we learned about the Haveli story, the more we recognised how it reflected key features of our Street Values analysis of social heritage. Throughout the Haveli restoration process, yet unbeknown to her, Tipnis was embracing essentially a kind of sustainist view on heritage. In hindsight one can, as she does in the Epilogue, map her story onto a number of sustainist design principles, from the centrality of connectedness and relationships to human scale and co-design.[II]

[I]   *Street Values* (Dutch: Straatwaarden) is an interdisciplinary research project of Reinwardt Academy (Amsterdam University of the Arts) together with Lectorate Play & Civic Media (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences), Gordion Cultureel Advies (Amsterdam) and Sustainism Lab (Amsterdam). Core research group: Riemer Knoop (Reinwardt Academy Amsterdam, project lead), Martijn de Waal (Amsterdam University of Applied Science), Nancy van Asseldonk (Reinwardt Academy) and myself (Sustainism Lab). The research project (2015-2019) resulted in two publications (in Dutch) edited by Riemer Knoop and Michiel Schwarz: *Straatwaarden: In het nieuwe speelveld van maatschappelijke erfgoedpraktijken* ('Street Values: Into the new playing field of social heritage practice', 2017) and *Meer Straatwaarden: Een pleidooi voor erfgoedmaken als engagement* ('More Street Values: A Plea for Heritagemaking as Engagement, 2019), both published by Reinwardt Academie AHK, Amsterdam.
[II] The sustainist design principles are founded in my and Diana Krabbendam's work. See Michiel Schwarz, *A Sustainist Lexicon: Seven entries to recast the future — Rethinking design and heritage* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 2016), and Michiel Schwarz and Diana Krabbendam, *Sustainist Design Guide: How sharing, localism, connectedness and proportionality are creating a new agenda for social design* (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2013).

There are multiple levels where the Haveli story connects with the social heritage practices which we charted in our Street Values research. Viewed through our conceptual lens, we see the Haveli Project as an insightful situation where heritage and placemaking meet. The use of the word *situation* rather than *case* is significant here. In Street Values we put practice rather than theory at the centre, leading us to an embedded view of how heritage acquires its meaning within particular situations. Let me draw out below some key understandings from our research, as a way to elucidate particular features in the complex and multi-layered Haveli story. In doing so, we're turning the Haveli Project from an example into an exemplar.

Street Values: shifting the ground

The very title 'Street Values' reflects how our research embraced an unorthodox perspective on heritage in the living environment. The reference to *street* denotes less a physical location or urban scale but rather a public and social realm — even figuratively, as, for example, in the word 'streetwise.' And the notion of *values* gives credence to a plurality of social values that we deem relevant in the formation of heritage, thereby countering the conventional wisdom that heritage professionals are the sole experts in assessing the value of (potential) heritage.

Initially the Street Values project set out to explore the relationship between (urban) design and the formation of heritage ('heritage & space' was the established term). But over time, as we delved deeper into the social dynamics of heritage issues, the notion of 'placemaking' became the

operative word, both as analytical concept and as contemporary social practice. Together with a design perspective, and a 'sustainist lens' to view social and cultural qualities,[III] the project became an exercise in embedded research into new social heritage practices. Such practices typically imply various forms of engagement, involving citizens and communities in local issues of place-based heritage — hence our term 'civic heritage.'

Working from emerging practice rather than from theoretical concepts meant shedding the idea that we can somehow get 'heritage' onto the lab bench to dissect. Instead of establishing upfront what heritage *is* (and subsequently examining its features and social imprints), we began to focus on how heritage *becomes* heritage, and for whom. The essential implication of this approach is that it turns 'heritage' from a noun into a verb. Or rather: we shift focus from heritage to *heritagemaking*, taking explicit cues from the concept of placemaking as well as its practice.

The conceptual shift from heritage to heritagemaking is fundamental. As Teun van den Ende,[IV] a participant in one of our Street Values research ateliers, expressed it: "We go from *finding* heritage to collectively *making* heritage." Activating heritage turns it into a dynamic force, as something that can he shaped and is open to design. This paved the way for our active, if not activist design approach in Street Values,

---

[III] See the references in note ii. The notion of sustainism as a newly emerging cultural paradigm was first presented by Michiel Schwarz and Joost Elffers in *Sustainism Is the New Modernism: A cultural manifesto for the sustainist era* (New York: D.A.P./Art Book, 2010).

[IV] https://werkplaatserfgoed.nl/future-proof-erfgoed-vinden-erfgoed-maken/.

focusing on how both placemaking and heritagemaking can be understood as processes of social design. And once we are in the realm of social design, with different social actors coming to the fore, it becomes obvious that the entire playing field for determining what heritage is, and how to deal with it, needs be redrawn.

Weaving patterns

'Making heritage' is clearly an apt characterisation of what Aishwarya Tipnis essentially has been doing in the course of her eight-year long Haveli Project. At the outset her endeavour may have been addressed as a matter of conservation and restoration, but it soon turned into an exercise in renovation and design. One could call it a remaking (or a 'make-over', to use a contemporary word).

Our notion of heritagemaking considers it to be a social process whereby a multitude of social actors and communities interact and collectively attribute meaning to places and objects. What the account of Tipnis makes visible is that this involves not only different participants in the process but also diverse perspectives. In the various acts of her story — or rather, stories, in the plural — she masterly lays out three narratives: of the Haveli owners, of the Architect, and of the City.

Much of the process through which the redesign of the listed heritage building finally took shape was in essence a conversation and negotiation with multiple voices. In the situations we examined in Street Values we identified the multiplicity of participants, each with their particular

values, as one of the hallmarks of locally embedded social heritage situations.[v] But such features are never in isolation. They are closely intertwined with a number of other traits associated with 'civic heritage', such as citizens' engagement, community-lead, sharing platforms, and co-creation.

With a light reference to the sociological notions *urban fabric* and *social fabric*, we choose to use the metaphor of weaving to lay out our design perspective on heritage and placemaking. In that mode we sought to discern what we may call the generic 'fabric' of social heritagemaking. Our locally embedded research led us to four key patterns. In the belief that they have broader relevance, let me summarise them here:

#1. The power of RELATIONSHIPS, as basis for meaningful forms of engagements and community;
#2. the need for ORGANISATIONAL SETTINGS, creating a dramaturgy as well as platforms through which people and communities can meet, dialogue and collaborate;
#3. the acknowledgement of MULTIPLE VALUES AND EXPERTISES, requiring initially an open process, whereby no single actor imposes their particular position onto the situation;
#4. the importance of MAKING, turning heritagemaking and placemaking into an active (social) design process.

---

[v] Street Values phase 2 project examining two local situations: the Binckhorst area in The Hague (www.imbinck.nl) and the civic hub Verhalenhuis Belvédère ('Story House'), Rotterdam (belvedererotterdam.nl).

On all four counts these patterns can clearly be mirrored in the Haveli story. Take the first, concerned with building relations. "The Haveli Project is about relationships," Tipnis writes in her account. By engaging with different people and communities – including the Haveli owners, professionals, local inhabitants, craftsmen, and students – and by bringing them literally into the courtyard, she created the right encounters and mis-en-scène for a collaborative process of design. Whilst she was originally brought in for her expert knowledge as restoration architect, Tipnis opened up the space for other forms of expertise and know-how – think of the lime mortar discussion – and other values, well beyond conventional 'heritage value assessments'.

Equally, Tipnis created a coalition of people around the Haveli restoration challenge: a kind of community of practice and a commons. And perhaps most significant of all, she was able to activate the entire multi-facetted process of improving the Haveli, turning it into a collective challenge of co-creation and co-design. The Haveli story elucidates why and how we must acknowledge heritage as the outcome of an active social process, heritage as a verb: heritagemaking.

Threads and design strands

In this publication Aishwarya Tipnis skilfully weaves together the multi-patterned Haveli story. Her account gives texture and real-life qualities to some generic threads that we associate with civic heritagemaking. Viewing it through the sustainist lens of Street Values highlights how the Haveli Project embodies many of the key qualities of engaged social design approaches to heritage in the urban context.

The outcome of our research – paralleled in different ways in the Haveli Project – is both a recognition of newly emerging practices and of the need for a shift in perspective. We positioned heritage explicitly in relation to placemaking and social design. That turns heritagemaking into a design challenge. It calls for a design agenda. And hence we ask: What are the essential threads – the warps and the wefts – through which we create future designs of locally-sustained civic heritagemaking?

In our book *More Street Values: A Plea for Heritagemaking as Engagement* [VI] we formulate eight 'strands' for developing design briefs for social heritage. Each is encapsulated by a verb, signifying a shift in thinking and doing. These strands, summarised below, are capturing key findings from the Street Values research, whilst giving us some leads to reach out from the Haveli Project towards other geographies.

- ENGAGEMENT: From participation to inclusive engagements and active relationships.
- COMMONING: From heritage as object to collaborative heritage practices in community.
- DRAMATURGY: Organising relevant settings as integral part of heritagemaking.

[VI] Published in Dutch: *Meer Straatwaarden: Een pleidooi voor erfgoedmaken als engagement.* See note I.

- PLATFORM-BUILDING: Developing social networks and collectives around shared values.
- DIVERSIFYING: Making heritage qualities part of social valuations.
- KNOW-HOW: From heritage experts to multiple experts.
- DESIGNING: Treating heritagemaking as design challenge.
- CO-DESIGNING: Co-creating heritage with communities.

These strands are not exhaustive, but they give us some basic weaving threads for future modes of civic heritagemaking. Taken together they furnish a conceptual canvas, inviting new designs and patterns for connecting heritage and place.

Heritage as a verb

The rich and complex story of the Haveli Project is a source of inspiration for designing local forms of civic heritage. Aishwarya Tipnis gives us a real-life lesson in engagement, and shows us what it means to 'make heritage' in a sustainist mode. She does not only connect people to place, she turns the undertaking into a collective design exercise. And in doing so she connects the house to both its history and its future.

If I had to give two guiding concepts for extending insights from the Haveli story and the Street Values project into the future, they would be these: *commons and communities. Commons* because both heritage and place can only be meaningful if they are underpinned by common values and shared responsibility. And *communities* because they remind us that the values implied in both place and

heritage are embodied in practices *by*, as well as *in* a community. In fact both the Haveli Project and Street Values led to a community of practice around a new approach to heritage. Through our collaboration which led to this publication we are both enhancing communities and joining them.

A final thought: Let us not look myopically at 'heritage' as the object of the exercise. Bearing in mind Tipnis' story of the Haveli in Old Delhi, we may think that it's all about heritage, but ultimately what we are creating in the process of *making* heritage are relationships, shared values, and community. Common ground in meaningful geographies. We have come full circle: heritagemaking in place.

About
Aishwarya Tipnis

Aishwarya Tipnis (b. 1980) is an architect, educator and heritage conservation professional based in New Delhi, India. An alumnus of the School of Planning & Architecture in New Delhi, she obtained a Master Degree in European Urban Conservation from the University of Dundee, Scotland, in 2007.

She heads an eponymous award-winning architectural practice, Aishwarya Tipnis Architects (ATA) based in New Delhi, that focusses on giving new life to old structures. Their work philosophy is to use design as a tool to bridge the gap between the past and the future.

As a *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* (Knight of the Arts and Letters) she is the recipient of the highest French civilian honour in the culture sector, in 2018, for her outstanding commitment to preservation of French heritage in India. Recognised as a Global Cultural Leader by the European Union's Cultural Diplomacy Platform in 2016, she is also of the Commonwealth Professional Fellowship 2011 as well as the Scottish International Scholarship 2006. She has been awarded the UNESCO Award for Heritage Conservation in the Asia-Pacific Region in 2016 for two of her projects, Mahidpur Fort and the Doon School Dehradun.

The work of Tipnis epitomises a confluence of architecture, sustainability, conservation, and urban planning. Her experiences and findings have been used as a tool to inspire and educate younger designers and architects through innovative workshops and low-cost digital technology. Her stylistic trademarks include invisible design interventions, innovative technical solutions, and collaborative decision making as well as involvement of students and youth in all projects.

Tipnis has been a consultant to UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank, the World Monuments Fund New York as well as the Vieilles Maisons Françaises, Paris, and both the French and the Netherlands Embassies in New Delhi. In addition, she is a visiting faculty to the Department of Urban Design at the School of Planning & Architecture, New Delhi, and has served on the board of ICOMOS India.

About Reinwardt
Memorial Lectures

Between 2008 and 2019, Reinwardt Academy used to annually honour its namesake by inviting renowned Dutch and international thinkers and innovators in the heritage field to present a public lecture. Highlighting our Academy's interests to its broader network, the lectures offered faculty and students alike opportunities to meeting extraordinary players in our field, from at home and abroad.

The 2019 lecture by Aishwarya Tipnis, originally entitled *Sustainist heritage begins at home: The Haveli Project, Delhi*, is the latest to date, and became the basis for this 2020 publication.

Previous editions and publications of the Reinwardt Memorial Lectures since 2008 are listed below.

2008 Ad de Jong (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands), *Warme gevoelens en koude rillingen over musea en odes aan de saamhorigheid.*

2009 Lynne Teather (University of Toronto, Canada), *Museology from the frontier: navigating the shifting paradigms of museum study and praxis* (not published).

2010 Rob van der Laarse (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands), *De oorlog als beleving. Over de musealisering en enscenering van Holocaust-erfgoed.*

2011 Laurajane Smith (Australian National University, Canberra, Australia), *All Heritage is Intangible: Critical Heritage Studies and Museums.*

2012 Michael Shanks (Stanford University, US), *'Let me tell you about Hadrian's Wall …' Heritage, Performance, Design.*

2013 Birgit Donker (Mondriaan Fund, Amsterdam, Netherlands), *Uit grootmoeders kastje. Erfgoed, een kwestie van keuzes en koestering.*

2014 Kavita Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India), *Museums, Heritage, Culture: Into the Conflict Zone.*

2015 Marcos Buser (Institute for sustainable waste management INA, Zurich, Switzerland), *Rubbish Theory. The Heritage of Toxic Waste.*

2016 Margriet Schavemaker (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands) *The White Cube as 'Lieu de Mémoire'. The Future of History in the Contemporary Art Museum*

2017 Salvador Muñoz Viñas (Universitat Politècnica, València, Spain), *The Transactional Nature of Heritage Conservation.*

2018 Linda Malherbe (Verhalenhuis Belvédère, Rotterdam, Netherlands), *De magie van Verhalenhuis Rotterdam. Over erfgoed, vertelkunst en nieuwe verbindingen*

In 2020, all English-language lectures published between 2011 and 2017 were translated into Chinese and, together with a selection of our own research papers, brought out in a single volume as 批判性探索中的文化遗产与博物馆: 来自瑞华德学院的声音] (*Critically Exploring Heritage and Museums: Voices from Reinwardt Academy Amsterdam*), by Riemer Knoop et al., translated by the Institute of Cultural Heritage and Museology, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press.

Recordings of the lectures can be viewed and publications downloaded on https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/en/research/publications/.

Colophon

Reinwardt Academy
Amsterdam University of the Arts

Engagements in the Courtyard:
Restoring a Haveli in Old Delhi

Aishwarya Tipnis takes us to the historic city of Old Delhi in a rich, multi-layered story of restoring a 19th-century heritage house, a haveli – telling the journey she made together with its inhabitants and the local community over an eight-year period. In *Engagements in the Courtyard* she recounts how what first appeared as a case of heritage restoration became a pioneering exercise in local engagement, crafts revival, and community-based heritage. The much-acclaimed Haveli Project – with ample attention in the Indian and international press – is shown as a pathbreaking example of social approaches to heritage and heritage conservation in the urban context. As Michiel Schwarz phrases it in his Postscript: the Haveli project is a source of inspiration for designing local forms of civic heritage.

About the author

Aishwarya Tipnis is a restoration architect, educator and heritage conservation professional based in New Delhi, India. In 2019 she presented the annual Reinwardt Memorial lecture at the Amsterdam University of the Arts. Aishwarya Tipnis Architects (ATA) is an award-winning architectural practice based in New Delhi. Their work philosophy is to use design as a tool to bridge the gap between the past and the future.

Reinwardt Academy AHK

The Reinwardt Academy (1976) is a faculty of the Amsterdam University of the Arts (AHK), with a 4-year Bachelor's programme in cultural heritage and a one year master Applied Museum and Heritage Studies. It prepares students to become all-round professionals in the field of cultural heritage.

www.reinwardt.ahk.nl