

A L A Y D E S I G N S

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ARCovid - A new challenge

Covid-19 has brought about a new situation for the industry & architects. This insight looks at the current scenario and what architects can do during the challenging times.



WITH the pandemic affecting every segment of our economic backbone – no one, literally no one – is left untouched by that overtly protein-ised spikes of Corona. Even essential items, the agro industries,

FMCGs have suffered – though to a varying scale. Eating out and restaurant industry has given way to **"sidha saadha ghar ka khana"**. No gourmet dishes – unless the chef in you peeps out of boredom. Life has come back to basics – and that seems to be the new normal.

Automobile, Hospitality, l u x u r y purchases are nil and of course – the area we are focusing on – h o u s i n g ,



architecture, interiors. The purses have become conservative. Cash flow is only one way - with nothing coming in. Service industry is no more a priority. Penny saved is penny earned (+ GST).

When that's the reality, where do architects fit in?

Am I going to appoint an Architect to build a mansion that's anyway not going to be built for now because there are other important things I need to provide for me and the family in the times when I have taken a pay cut and business is bad and and moreover get some Interiors planned for my bedroom and the washroom that I love so much spending the time at..... (punctuate as u like) – would be like shredding 2000 and 500 notes.

Right! Architects as a service sector is no ones priority! Even where it's subservient to the ailing real estate industry, it's too dependent on the market dynamics.

Being in a non priority service, in a non priority industry, has its own challenges. We have hit rough weather, if not turbulent. The worst I have seen in my three decades of practice. This service sector, which was anyway, over populous, will – to my assessment, be the worst hit. It would go through its marginalisation of sorts.

- For the **ailing housing sector**, that never fully recovered post demonetisation, this would be the pre-final nail. Pre-final because final is too dreaded.

- The **real estate industry**, that already was witnessing sluggish sales, would lose its buoyancy. The numbers have already shrunk. Sales targets not met. On-going projects need continuous funding with low sale figures, & RERA watchdog, & the ones on the drawing board are being put on back burner. New launches on hold and those in the pipeline – well the pipe has only become longer. The industry has never seen a crisis, at this scale. And the phenomenon is global. And additive.

- Foreign Investors are pulling out huge sums – estimates are around 20B USD.**

- Occupancy figures in **hotels and resorts** have nose-d i v e d . Expansion plans and acquisitions



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have been put on hold.

• **Individual bungalows** will go through a budget cut and specs reduction. **Interiors** are going to be so-called minimalised not minimalistic.

• Not all is bad – **industrial architecture** would see a surge as the Govt targets India to be a manufacturing hub. Hopefully.

• Banks too, are feeling the pinch. There is money to lend but who is borrowing? With or without collateral – there is a fear psychosis that has set-in due to the crash in various sectors, job losses, salary cuts, and the borrowers are wary of the EMIs.

• Covid has not only damaged the sentiments but has killed people's aspirations and ambitions too.

• Govt spending would be on decline after the stimulus package.

• WFH – the new jargon – would be the new normal. That would cut the commercial space requirement and leasing and demand.

Commercial spaces requirement is going



to be cut by a third.

• The Demand side is expected to fall by about 30-40%.

Industry experts are unanimous that everyone is on a survival mode and industries like housing, automobile, tourism, and to some extent travel are of the least priority and would be so for another 12-18 months.

Architects need to survive and weather this uncertainty, as everyone. Indeed, the consultancy would bear the brunt. Projects that were on the drawing board have been put on hold indefinitely, projects on launch have been deferred and projects on the run, have slowed with no inflows. Architects are digging on their reserve and staff strength is being trimmed. What makes it worse is that the lockdown came at the onset of the new financial year.

With the current scene not improving for another 6-9 months, going would become difficult. A few tips, to mitigate the damage and brain drain, that I could suggest:

For established consultancy firms:

• Reduce your expenses, cut expenses and stretch your funds. Reduce liabilities and debts.

• Hold on to the work at hand. Don't be fee sensitive. Work out a deferred payment plan with your client.

• Switch to survival mode.

• Defer GST to June 30 timelines or as per GOI.

• Seniors above 65+ should WFH or even consider taking a sabbatical.

For Mid size Consultancy firms: Apart from what is mentioned above

• Re-invent, re-strategise, re-work, re-design.

• Have a Plan B & C – relook at design options even if you have closed the design stage.

• Focus on service integration (if you don't do).

• Devote time to professional orientation of your work force

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For Freelancers & beginners: Apart from the points above

- Build your custom library.
- Improve your skill set. Add new skill set like structural design, 3D, walk-throughs, Electrical routings etc.
- Get Hands on Experience and further your understanding of Architecture and Interiors.
- Get involved with your skilled labour be it carpenter, painter, mason, electrician plumber anybody.
- If you are employed – don't be salary sensitive. Just work for whatever u get. Cling on to your job. Resilience is the key here. Take

a cut of salary if you would need to but hang on. The things will revive and your patience will pay u then.

- Study the market forces, macro economics of building industry and materials.
- Hobbitise and do what you always wanted to do: [WATCH THIS ON YOUTUBE](#)

Remember in tough times only tough ones last. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Patience & Perseverance is needed.

Disclaimer: The author has expressed his opinion on the basis of his experience of being in architectural Consultancy for three decades. However, these are his views and the situation may differ for many. Use your discretion & use your time judiciously. The author will not be responsible for any decisions made by anyone whether inspired by the above writeup or not. You are the best judge of your environment. The author will at all point of time stands indemnified for any consequences whatsoever of your decisions. All building images used are projects designed by the Architect.



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