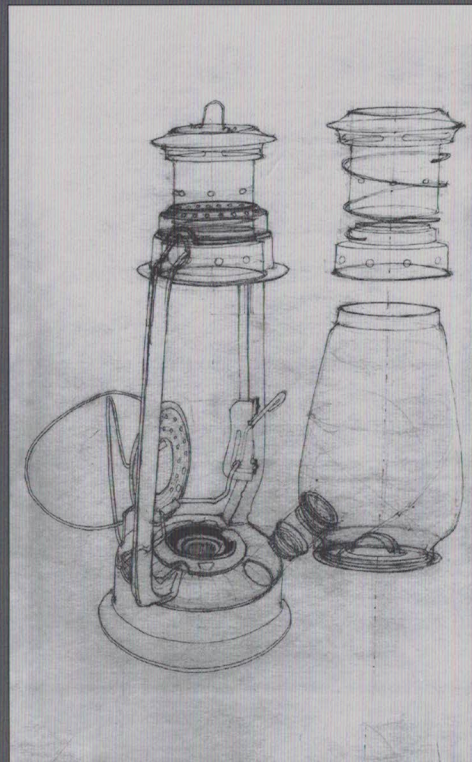


# Teaching Basic Design in Architecture

Exercises, Illustrations, Examples



Miki Desai



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**DC BOOKS**

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**DC School of Architecture & Design**



# FOREWORD

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For some fifty years now, students entering the School of Architecture at the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (now CEPT University) have had to take two semesters of the class called “Basic Design” in the first year of their professional Bachelor of Architecture degree. Looking over my own, somewhat fragile and torn, transcript, disinterred from a box of family certificates kept away somewhere in my basement, I am reminded of everything else that went into this first year of daily rigors, circa 1987, at what might be called an inflection point in the history of the School, as the first generation of teachers—Balkrishna V. Doshi, Anant D. Raje, Hasmukh C. Patel—were handing over the baton to a second: Kurula Varkey, Neelkanth Chhaya, Kulbushan Jain, and Miki Desai. Desai taught the Basic Design with the graphic artist Walter D’Souza for the bulk of its career, as was the case that year. The course was, this transcript reminds me, at that time simply called “Workshop,” one of nine courses that the architectural initiate would have to traverse in each of their first two semesters, each course with more or less similar weightage. Studio, Building Construction, Humanities, Drawing and Painting, Technical Representation and Drawing, and Miki Desai’s Workshop, all had three credits, while the following had two credits, Building Construction Drawing, Surveying and Leveling, and Fundamentals of Structures. Classes would be conducted, five days a week, from 7:30 AM to 5 PM, with the expectation that the bulk of the work would be done during class time and not late at night. This expectation my bleary-eyed class, in the time-honored, tradition of architecture students everywhere on this planet for the last three hundred years, was almost unanimous in belying. The question of the hour when basic design, such as it were, happened, remained, then as now, a mysterious one.

Barely a few months out of high school, much of the first-year architectural class found themselves there by mixed levels of choice, emerging out of a rote-learning, exam-driven school system whose primary objective remains, even today, to persuade the majority of aspirant Indian youth—already stratified by the ineluctable inequities imposed by caste, class and gender—of their absence of “merit” in a landscape of precious little economic opportunity. Choosing architecture as a profession was, in the stratified scheme of things of those days, a “low-merit” choice, a vocation with indifferent prospects and risks compared to the more assured returns of medicine or computer engineering for middle class aspirants for whose parents their hard-won, recent economic and cultural gains, often only a generation old, was a realm of considerable anxiety.

The predicaments of teaching “design” in this context thus inevitably entailed addressing an institutional and societal grain tuned against it, not least of this being economic expectations as to what were “useful” goods and services. A general hindrance with aesthetic education of any sort in most institutional contexts is the engineering bias that decision-making elites, and elites generally, revert to when in search of rationales to support policy-making in the education field. For reasons having to do very much with the peculiarities of the Indian system, an entering student in architecture would have to have graduated high school with a science (rather than commerce or arts) orientation. The reason why the Basic Design class was called Workshop in the early years owed something to this engineering bias: a Workshop course was required in the technical education format prescribed by Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), the governmental entity that bore the fiscal costs of engineering and architectural education at that time (students of my generation paid minimal college fees, a mere Rs. 250-300/USD 20 per semester). For the School of Architecture, offering such a course inevitably entailed a nomenclatural sleight-of-hand, the term “workshop” intended to conjure up in the eyes of government vague associations of a pedagogy employing band-saws, lathes,



metal-punching, stamping and punching machines and the like. These machines did exist on campus, dutifully installed in a shed called the Workshop, but were mostly used by the campus handyman, Jayantibhai, for routine maintenance tasks. The students themselves mostly stuck to folding paper.

At the same time, the procedural and cultural difficulty—institutional and epistemological at the same time—associated with “basic design” does beg the question to which this book appears as a response of some sort. What is basic design? A structural ambivalence presents itself here even if one reads this simple question in a purely lexical way. Is there something basic in design? Or is design something that is basic, i.e. a priori which one must imbibe in advance of garnering the other skills and necessary knowledges, also essential for the making of architects, such as those contained in the other courses listed above: drawing, structure, building construction knowledge, site surveys, history, studio. Does design provide the foundation, the ground, for all these other courses, or is there a foundation beneath design, some other legitimating ground, a *natura naturans*, on which design itself must perpetually rest and to which it must make itself hostage in projecting its values? Does the “process”—to use the nebulous expression whose virtues architects never tire of singing—of design itself represent the modality of control, of guiding activity towards some undefined end, or is process something that is in turn controlled from without, by something prior of which design is an end?

In the context of engineering and the material sciences, the economist and systems theorist Herbert Simon had famously described design as a “boundary science”, an ever shifting terrain wherein what was considered “essential” in knowledge would be continually re-evaluated and re-made as new challenges, emerging out of economic need, appeared in the market. What was considered basic for design, for artifice, in one context would not be basic for a challenge in other sector or context: one looks at very different characteristics of “matter” and materiality when, say, one designs a bridge as opposed to an insect-resistant strain of short-grained rice. If this insight appears somewhat obvious, a truism even, the brunt of Simon’s critique was far more severe and radical. Ultimately, for Simon, this insistence on contextualism—philosophers call this “epistemological regionalism”—undoes the very viability or adequacy of any singular idea of nature itself, some prior, uniform science of the universe or *natura naturans* existing beyond what is demanded by the needs of artifice in a given setting. In other words, there is nothing basic to design, some inner ground to which it can turn to validate itself. Design bears a markedly outward aspect, defined by the challenges confronting it rather than by some tradition of doing or knowing things in one way or another.

It is fair to say that what is called “design” in architecture schools, and in this book, does not comprise design in that radical, Simonian sense. What we see portrayed as basic design in this book has its antecedents in the formal pedagogies adopted in a range of design and technical education schools of the early twentieth-century, many of which evinced an interest in the study of formal plasticity with a distinctly elementarist and compositional bias, of particular importance here being, of course, the brief but parallel careers of the Bauhaus Vorkurs and the Moscow-based Vkhutemas. Certainly the Vorkurs affected a kind of engineering-envy of its own. We remember that Gropius had inveighed against the teaching of both history/humanities and studio-based teaching: the former suspect for its investment into tradition, the latter for its emphasis on drawing, equally distrusted for its idealizing properties and its penchant to lure students into flights of fancy. In the workshop, confronting lathes, textile looms, glass-blowing apparatuses, ceramic kilns, and the like, the imagination of the Bauhaus student would perforce confront the innate qualities of materials themselves, engaging in what was portrayed as an open-ended “process” of discovery. Needless to say, this ostensibly commitment to open-endedness went only insofar as the pedagogy in fact followed certain well-orchestrated, pre-ordained paths as to formal outcome. Design in the Vorkurs would come to mean very specific things. For one, this entailed a certain literacy in a grammar of forms, wherein the relationship to the material qualities of things and substances would be at marked variance from the sense in which engineers or material scientists construe them, i.e. with regard to their (largely invisible) physical and chemical properties and tolerances. For this type of design initiate, the study of “material” would entail rather a scrutiny of its forms of appearance, the apperceptive qualities presented by shape, color,



texture, flexibility when studied in isolation and combination. To a great extent, it is these kinds of exercises that we see presented here in this anthology of CEPT teaching. As for the students themselves, as Desai describes it, "The incoming students had no idea about arts and crafts, design and processes, materials, skills, and such. They were science oriented but had forgotten even the fundamentals of science that they had learnt."

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The pathways by which this "modernist," Vorkurs-type curriculum found its way into Indian architectural schools such as CEPT is complex and denies any single genealogy, involving a mix of individual as well as institutional routes of influence, from the colonial-era schools of art, to more "national" and indigenist pedagogical programs such as that espoused in Shantiniketan and Baroda's Faculty of Fine Arts, and elsewhere. These pathways cannot be described as formalized so much as driven by aura and influence, brief, pedagogical experiments carried over from one school to the other not only within national confines, but globally, by young students and practitioners traveling around the world in the search for an aesthetic education. Miki Desai's own resumé offers us a glimpse into how this modernizing aesthetic may have, in the first three quarters of the twentieth century, into protean and remarkable kinds of pedagogical experiments tied both to various "nation-building" efforts as well as maintaining, in theory at least, a good deal of openness and curiosity towards such experiments being carried out internationally. Until his eighth grade, Desai studied at Ahmedabad's seminal Sheth Chimanlal Nagindas (C. N.) Vidyalaya, a sprawling campus of 72 acres established in the early twentieth century and inspired by Gandhian principles. At CN (as this school was universally known) pupils were taught vocational skills such as carpentry, agriculture, arts and crafts to its pupils alongside the curriculum espoused the exam system. Desai finished his schooling in another experimental institution, the Shreyas Foundation established by Leena Sarabhai, a member of the storied industrial family that sponsored Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress, Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, and the Eames alike. At Shreyas, Purnendu Pal, a graduate of Shantiniketan, taught courses in sculpture, stage design, and drawing. A Frenchwoman, Chantal Christolholm, taught photography, sparking what would be a permanent interest in Desai's subsequent career, about which more soon.

Unlike the bulk of CEPT architecture students, Desai only entered the School as an undergraduate at a relatively advanced age, at 21, after having studied for two years at the Jesuit-run St. Xavier's College in 1967. CEPT was then only into its sixth year of existence, like many post-war schools at the time still very much in its experimental phase both from intent and necessity, its faculty composed of the rising architectural modernists noted above—Doshi, Raje, Patel—but also various transient but charismatic figures in the arts. Desai was particularly drawn to Anant D. Raje, an acolyte of Louis Kahn who had worked in his Philadelphia office and on the Indian Institute of Management buildings. Another strong influence would be Krishna Chhatpar, a product of Baroda, whose elective on sculpture Desai took no less than three times. An older educationist friend, Himmat Kapasi, introduced young enthusiasts to jazz and Kafka, and Desai remembers habitually listening to Willis Conover's Jazz Hour on Voice of America. Briefly, Madhu Rye, the Gujarati litterateur—author of Kimball Ravenswood, adapted into the Doordarshan classic Mr. Yogi—formed a group in Ahmedabad called Aakanth Sabarmati (1971-1974). Desai dabbled in absurdist theatre, read existentialist literature and watched auteurist cinema from Eisenstein to Fellini and Resnais. Rye had grown up in Kolkata and spent time at the University of Hawaii.

With the help of a recommendation from Raje, Desai was accepted into the graduate program at the School of Architecture at University of Texas, Austin, with a teaching fellowship, in 1975. In the 1950s, the Austin School, as some may remember, had served in as the venue for fractious disputes between proponents of an older, pre-war architectural curriculum based on engineering and the challenges of professional practice, and the so-called "Texas Rangers"—Colin Rowe, John Hejduk, Robert Slutzky, Werner Seligmann, Herbert Heische—following the School's first Director, Harwell Hamilton Harris' new, Bauhaus-inspired approach that the program no longer "be based on the mechanics of the professional occupation but only on the intellectual content of architecture." At the School, still beset by the turmoil of previous decades, Desai remembers the teaching of the young Michael Benedikt, trained in South



Africa at Witwatersrand and then fresh out of the M.E.D. program at Yale, in addition to attending lectures by Austin's legendary physicist and philosopher faculty Ilya Prigogine.

If Texas offered a window into the counter-cultural ideas espoused by E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* and Christopher Alexander, upon completion of his degree Desai would briefly, with little money and a rickety car, kick around the Bay Area. California, Desai recounts, at this time, was the "happening ground of Post-Modernism and we fell in the middle of it all." Living off of a low-paying job at Alfred A. Taubman's firm—his alma mater at Michigan is now named after him—specializing in designing shopping malls, Desai's weekends alternated between visits to the beaches and new post-modernist architecture.

Upon his return to Ahmedabad, Desai was taken on initially as a visiting teacher at CEPT, only the second faculty member with a post-graduate degree. This would—astoundingly—remain the case until his retirement from undergraduate teaching in 2010: the professional architect in India, in other words, was not seen as requiring any further specialization. Quite in the model of the Bauhaus, schools of architecture in the post-war period typically had little use for specialized, academic research or training in the making of architects. Design, in its totality, remained a "basic" activity, defined more by intuition rather than knowledge. Prior to Desai's taking it over, the Workshop course was taught by Ravi Hazra, who moved on to teach at the Industrial Design Centre at the Indian Institute of Technology at Powai, Mumbai. As a teaching assistant at UT Austin, Desai had been tasked with teaching a similar course, and he describes his path as somewhat auto-didactic in nature, although in retrospect we might consider his "findings" to be somewhat standard in what went into basic design curricula at most schools globally: a strong bias towards organicistic and botanistic paradigms, the arts and crafts tradition such as that espoused in the United States by the legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the gestalt/compositional approaches highlighted by, say, the work of M. C. Asher. As noted before, in fashioning his Basic Design course Desai was ably accompanied by the Baroda-trained graphic and print artist Walter D'Souza. Inspired initially by the unstructured pedagogy of Tagore's Shantiniketan, in the immediate aftermath of independence the Baroda school had, under the guiding spirit of Vice-Chancellor and Gandhian acolyte Hansa Mehta, made a concerted bid to formalize the art curriculum, bringing in the artist Markand Bhatt from the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. In the 1960s and 1970s, the school, with K. G. Subramanyan as its principal muse, had produced a redoubtable stable of alumni: Raghav Kaneria, Nagji Patel, Jeram Patel, Bhupen Khakhar, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Vivan Sundaram. Unlike some of the "art critical" inclinations of these Baroda stalwarts, however, D'Souza's berth at CEPT led to a career significantly more oriented towards pattern and figural exploration, specializing in mural-work carried out in collaboration with architects. In addition to Basic Design, D'Souza taught introductory and advanced electives in print-making and graphic design, working away from morning to evening at his studio on campus, a constant lure for architectural students making their way through the curriculum.

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Desai would claim—and as sometime student, I would agree—that his pedagogy was least oriented towards founding some kind of formalized, systemic approach. This writer would count himself as one of many who looked forward to Desai's appearance in the classroom, if only for the emotional hi-jinks that would often follow. Desai's teaching style can be described as driven by bouts of histrionic, volatile flashes of passion, where gasps of amazement aimed at some fortunate soul would be interspersed with mock derision (feigned or otherwise) at the work produced by others. Frustration would sometimes boil over into apoplexy, with Desai stomping out of the room, making visible efforts to calm down with a cup of tea at the cafeteria before returning to recommence a cooler version of the diatribe. Still, through all of this, students never had cause to lose the sense that the person facing them remained a fundamentally tender, caring, individual, with little hint of personal prejudice or bias. When "Miki" got mad—this American-returned faculty was the only one who insisted that students call him by his first name—it was as if a playful burst of temperament in a slightly older friend, who sought a certain equality with the student in working out shared goals, never power. If Desai cursed (he often did), a mannerism that we wrote off to his love of Americana, so could the students, in his presence and sometimes at him. It is hard to calculate the liberative force, in the India of those times and even now, of being able to say "f\*#k" in the



classroom. Certainly it left some of the students, borne in a society noted for its worship of hierarchies, mystified or at odds with this strange social churn in the classroom, but even amongst these—this I can attest from familiarity with several generations of CEPT students—there were none who found these encounters with Desai as anything less than enjoyable. Desai was, in most eyes, a “little bit crazy,” and students were expected to somewhat behave likewise as he took them on the road. Which he, literally speaking, did. There was/is something of the Kerouac in Desai, about which, again, more shortly.

Still, despite all the protestations against system, I would argue that Desai’s teaching style, even if it elided program, as evinced in this book, nonetheless displays certain consistencies. Put in terms of the questions raised above, what pours forth in all these protean, varied, and exuberant exercises and attempts at experimentation in this book is in fact a very specific formal approach and program, which goes simply to saying that Desai’s pedagogy implicitly does argue that there is something basic in design. Discovery is structured by a prospect of recovery, a return to something lost and whose values must be stated as binding before the exercise or experiment can even take root. There is an emphasis on education as a kind of un-education, a de-learning, and for various epistemological historical reasons that will, in this essay, remain offstage, I would define this recuperative ideology of design, as essentially phenomenological in its outlook. Desai’s program will not have been the only one in architectural or art curricula—in what can be described as a global trend—to bend towards that arc, and one could characterize this phenomenological disposition towards return as manifested in three very specific ways. I would list these three procedures as follows: unlearning or de-culturation; formal de-composition; and de-historicization or traditionalism.

Broadly speaking, the sequence of exercises laid out in this book follow this phenomenological progression. The student is first asked to query her own intuitions or pre-memory, transforming it into an “image” (Exercise 01). Following this she examines the compositional forms and techniques by which images emerge into materiality (Exercise 02-09, 11-24), involving a variety of combinatory techniques—collage, folding, weaving, knotting—to arrive at different appreciations of visual patterns. Lastly, these formal and pattern-making skills are employed to recognize and produce hieroglyphs in the built environment itself, abstracted according to certain traditional or rudimentary settlement types or patterns (Exercises 10, 25-31). There is the definite sense of what the German Romantics called *Bildung*: from having her eyes re-opened to looking upon the world as if born anew, the student will be introduced to particular claims about the nature of civilization and culture itself.

It might be helpful to expound further on this tripartite progression. First, as Desai argues in this book, the student must be persuaded to unlearn what he knows. As he writes in his description of the exercise titled “Landscape of the Mind, Memory Recall,” below: “As an intuitive tendency, we recognize our built environments and negotiate them, almost as an auto-response. The recognition of one’s living environment and affinities to certain spaces or places experienced in the past offer a cache of valued material that our subconscious mind stores away in the form of images, spaces and experiences that contribute to our development as individuals and eventually as architects.” Modern culture forces a forgetting which must be undone. Of course, this procedure will involve a host of presumptions of what the student does know, which in fact defines this supposedly organic process of finding one’s own genius into a mechanistic procedure in its own right, but for what it is worth in Desai’s thinking this “process” does revolve around a well-defined sensibility, which I could elucidate by recollecting a well-remembered scene: one of Desai’s public “lectures.”

As with most in his generation, Desai’s arrival upon the podium would inevitably follow much fretting and fussing with a particular form of technology now lost to present-day students but then an essential tool of the trade: the photographic slide. Desai would bring hundreds, carefully arranged in multiple trays, with much attention, as with most architectural lectures, paid to the sequencing of images. Slide would follow slide, with commentary progressively wearing thin and as the hour wore on, with Desai intermittently speaking out, “And then this happens!” followed by a few more slides, and then, “And then this!” It would be seldom clear what “this” meant, and if the audience might be forgiven to expect something like an “argument” in the course of affairs, such



would expressly be besides the point. What was being proffered, advanced in place of argument in this sequence of images was the “look,” the coup d’oeil or taking in at a glance which the novice aesthete or architect must train within herself on the path to professional self-discovery. Learning to look, to discover culture through a pre-cultural eye, is the first step in the methodology of basic design.

For Desai, an avid photographer since his youth, it might be said cultivating ways of looking—to use the title of John Berger’s classic work—has comprised a substantial part of his career. A key ingredient in Desai’s own ways of learning and teaching has been an intense love of travel, much of it into the little-known small towns and rural regions of India, from where he has over the decades garnered a documentary treasure-trove of buildings and artefacts, that awaits aesthetic appraisal in its own right. These decades of photographic activity and documentation, mostly self-financed, and very likely self-improving, presents us today with an archive of images running into the hundreds of thousands, bearing substantial witness in its own right to a fast-disappearing if not already disappeared epoch of material culture in India.

To return to the pedagogical point: each student must thus learn to “look,” compiling a similar archive of a fast vanishing world, learn to recognize and discern in it the workings of a certain primordial gestalt. But having found within herself this pre-cultural gaze, this recollection of a naïve marveling at the world, what Keats called “negative capability,” the last thing that the novice aesthete can afford to do is wallow in these mysteries. Rather, this innate ability must be subject to a process of modernization or cultivation: the novice must subject this ability to a certain defamiliarization, a stripping down and reflecting back by rigorously dismantling this gaze, and the objects it perceives, to a certain “decomposition.” Which is to say that the novice student must look upon objects as an assemblage of components or parts. In her mind’s eye she must learn to intuitively disassemble and reassemble in her mind’s eye at a fell swoop, comprehending it as built according to a schema or architectonic. Take for example the exercises provided below on the kerosene or “hurricane” lamp. What the student is not expected to do, in this case, is to figure out the mechanisms by which she can engineer a better working lamp—which in any case is a technological relic—under some changed environmental or energy-intake considerations, to comport with Herbert Simon’s definition of design. In other words, these objects do not represent technological prototypes so much as object-archetypes of lived-in, everyday memory, quite like the Cubists and the Purists looked at guitars, bottles and cigar boxes. In Desai’s workshop, these archetypes draw on what for most Indians are familiar scene: an Indian railway station, with train carriages (and their undercarriages), kiosks and steel roof alike examined in great detail, studied in terms of the anthropometry of ‘tight spaces.’ The student set herself to work mechanically dismantling the discrete elements of this scene, de-composing it not to study how this machinery “works” in functional terms but to understand it as a formal assemblage, as a set of recombinant, recursive patterns, which she must learn to observe and replicate.

Deculturation and formal decomposition thus represent two kinds of operation wherein the student is asked to work her way back to some kind of perceptual a priori or founding rubric of design. This brings us to the third feature, the final step in the catechism, not so much a separate part of the curriculum as its very objective or telos. The phenomenological emphasis on regression posits itself, I would argue, in Desai and in many others of his generation in India, in a penchant for dehistoricization, that is to say, the desire to tie back all aesthetic conception as springing from certain traditional or indigenous “roots,” or the predicament of forming an authentically Indian aesthetics. I will leave aside the rationales and institutional context owing to which Indian aesthetics took a turn towards indigenism in the 1970s—I tackle this in another book—but suffice it to say that this turn certainly had much to do with the post-modern turn that Desai found himself enticed by in the Bay Area scene in that period. To qualify this, for Desai what holds his interest is less the emphasis on cultural meaning and symbolism that most people associate with post-modernism. Rather what acquires salience is the equally post-modern emphasis on formal syntax or grammar as representing in itself the autonomous basis of aesthetic conception, for which the assembly techniques



used in traditional wood and earth-based construction provide vivid testaments. In the work of the New York Five, there was a tacit monumentalization of the traditional American balloon frame house that the "Greys" recognized all too well, and there is more of the "villa mathematics" of the Texas Rangers in Desai's recuperation of "Indian tradition" than one might allow for.

Some further biographical light on Desai might put this interest in perspective. The Desais were feudal officers, overlords vested with revenue rights in land. The word Desai comes from *desa* (country, land); those who held the title 'Desai' thus did so not as an indicator of their caste lineage but as an honorific appended to their office. As for Miki Desai himself, his grandfather had major holdings in tobacco farming and the family's widespread tobacco dealings carried its affairs far afield from Gujarat, and to Pune, Maharashtra, where it had a base. It was there that Desai pater decided to pursue a college education, at the city's renowned Fergusson College. This brush with liberal arts education spoiled him for the family vocation altogether, and he chose instead to set up a bookstore of some renown, Indradhanu Book House, in Bhadra area of the old city in Ahmedabad. Desai fils was the third of his children. He was named Miki after Mickey Rooney, a Hollywood favorite amongst the circle of his father's friends who spent time at the bookstore. All this to say that the civilizational passage from village to city, from agriculture to the arts, for many artists and aesthetes of Desai's generation in India and the ones preceding, remained well within the precincts of lived memory. One cannot therefore rule out Desai's passion for the Indian countryside and village architecture as itself a tracing back of memory, into childhood and into recollections of lost rural images which the raconteur in him often takes to vividly describing in words, conjuring up images and scenes that for the listener may often appear magical. For this writer, one such scene, narrated some thirty years ago at an hour past midnight on a rooftop in the tiny town of Idar in north Gujarat, remains etched in his mind, of Desai describing the image of a gypsy moving from village to village in rural Gujarat, with a flock of geese the size of a football field, a floating, bobbing, flying mass of white and grey against a backdrop of yellow grain and earth, walking away into the orange of a dusty western Indian sunset.

From the professional standpoint, Desai ascribes his interest in traditional building forms to a measure-drawing trip to Nepal undertaken under the direction of Kulbhushan Jain, another CEPT stalwart, which served as an eye-opener for him in terms of exposure to the wood and joinery techniques of the lower Himalayas, whose aesthetics bear strong affinities with traditional buildings in western India and Kerala, all of which Desai would undertake to study and document at great length over his career. At CEPT, Desai's leadership of measure-drawing trips of traditional settlements, taken every year with bands of students into small towns and villages, would become legendary in their own right, a formative ingredient in the School's approach to architectural training that over the decades has produced a substantial archive of fast perishing building types and ways of living. Looking over these studies, one gets a sense that with Desai it is the atypical, the aberrant, and the errant, rather than the typical that gains significance, as better representing the authenticity or autochthony in identity rather than conformity with any norm.

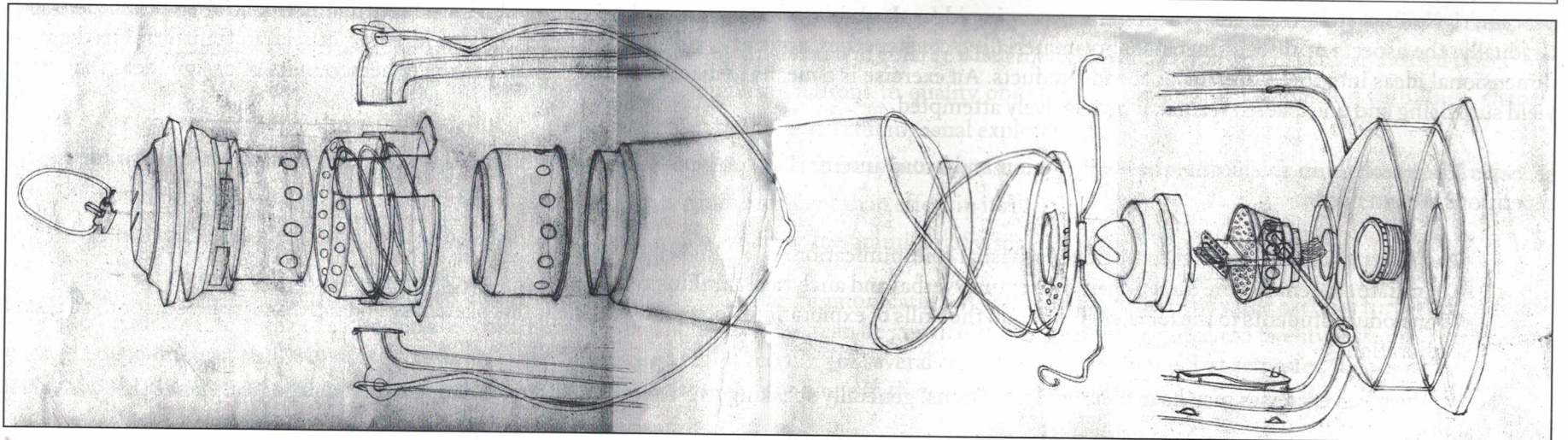
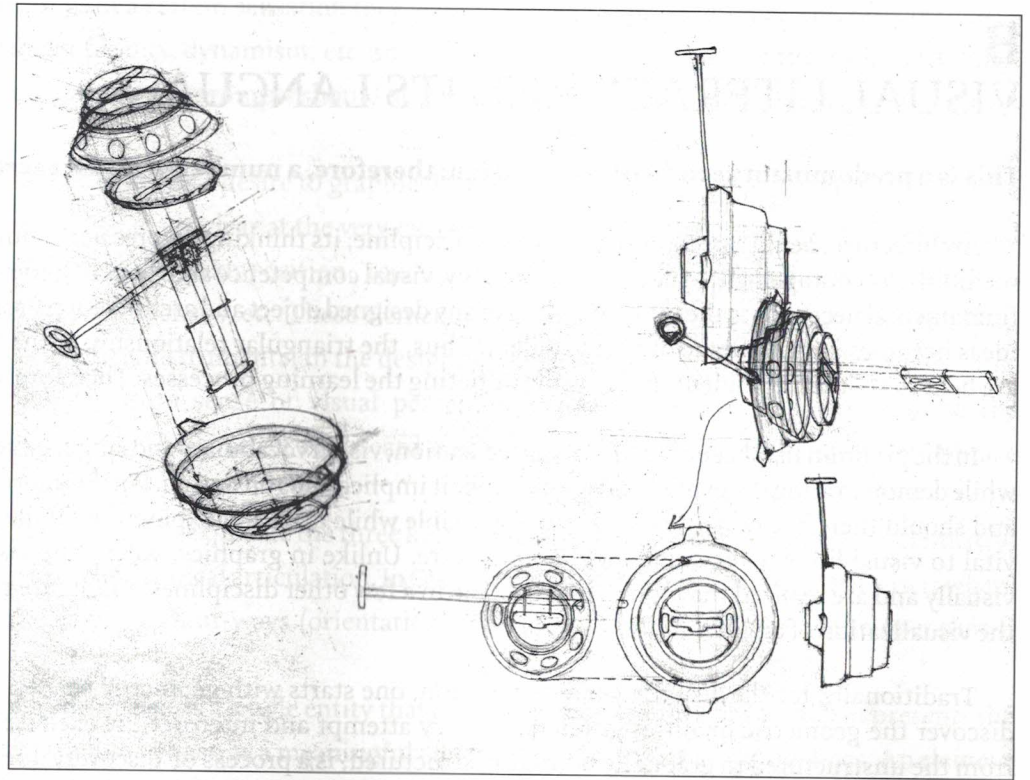
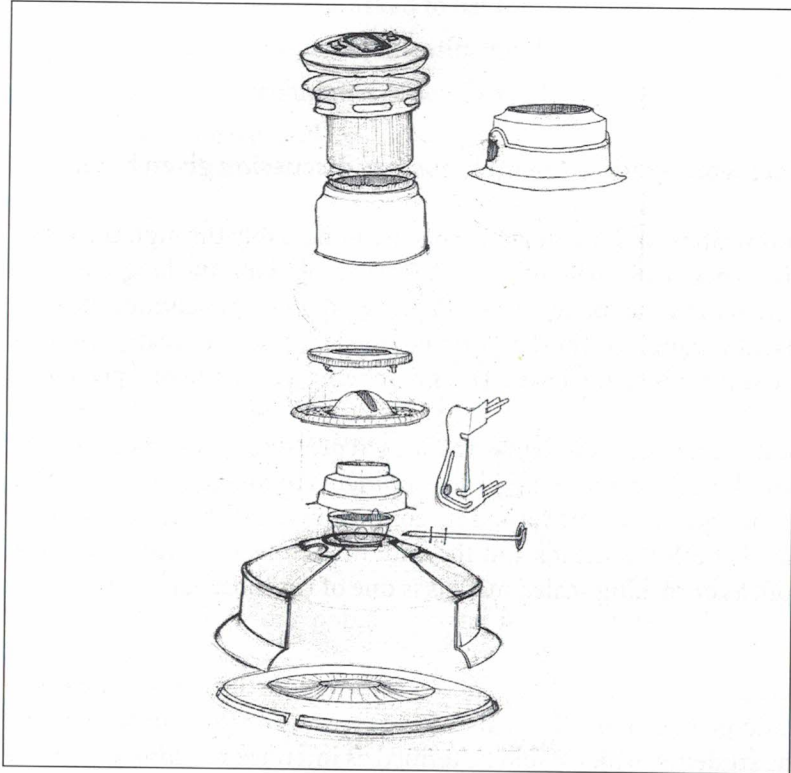
Desai's investment in searching for mnemonic ground in pedagogy has led, in association with his partner-in life and career-Madhavi Desai, and the Australian academic Jon Lang, to the publication of *Architecture and Independence: A Search for Identity, India 1880 to 1980*, a substantial textbook (soon to appear in its second edition) that taxonomizes the eclectic ways in which Indian architects, by way of validating their professional legitimacy, have confronted the vexed questions of tradition and indigenism. The Desais' support for each other's interest and careers makes for telling in its own right, not least because of Madhavi's investment in questions of gender within the architectural profession as in its relation to society at large, which will have to wait for another day.

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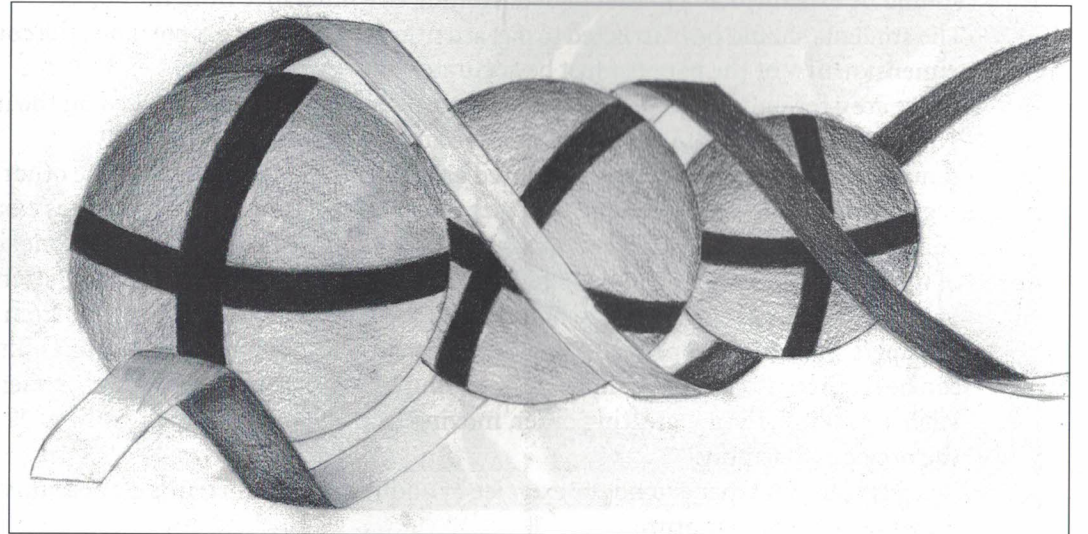
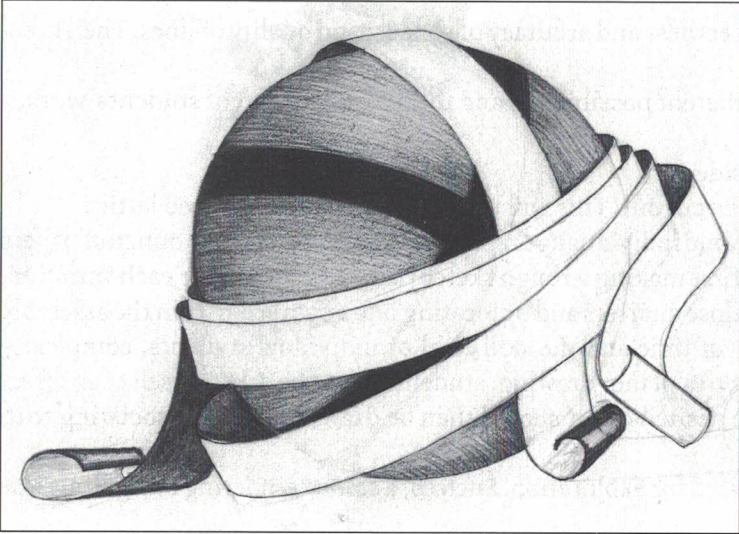
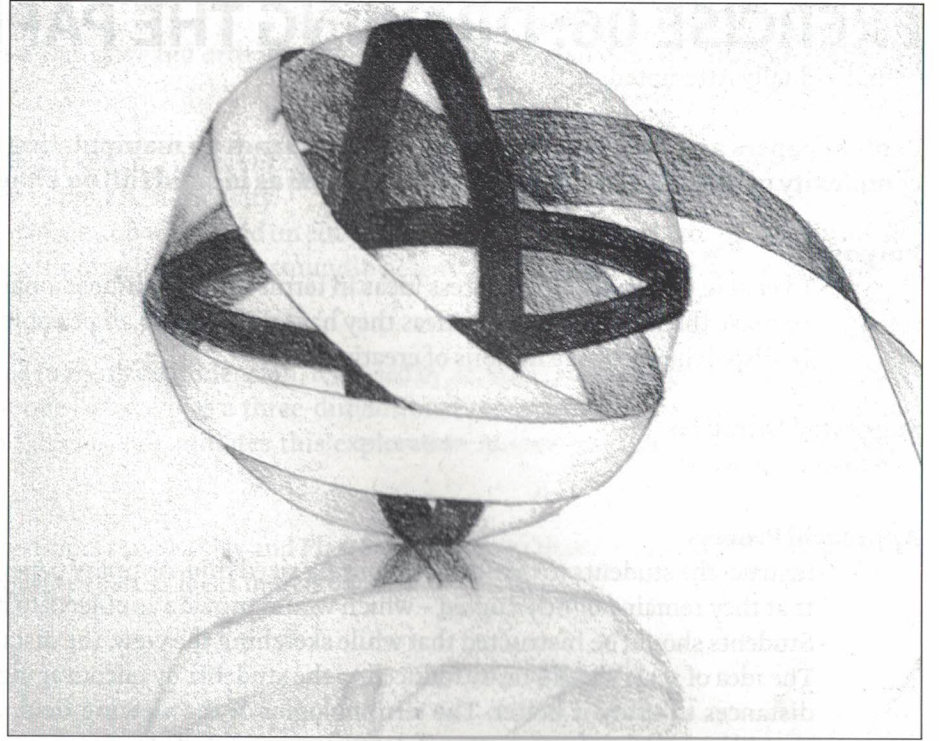
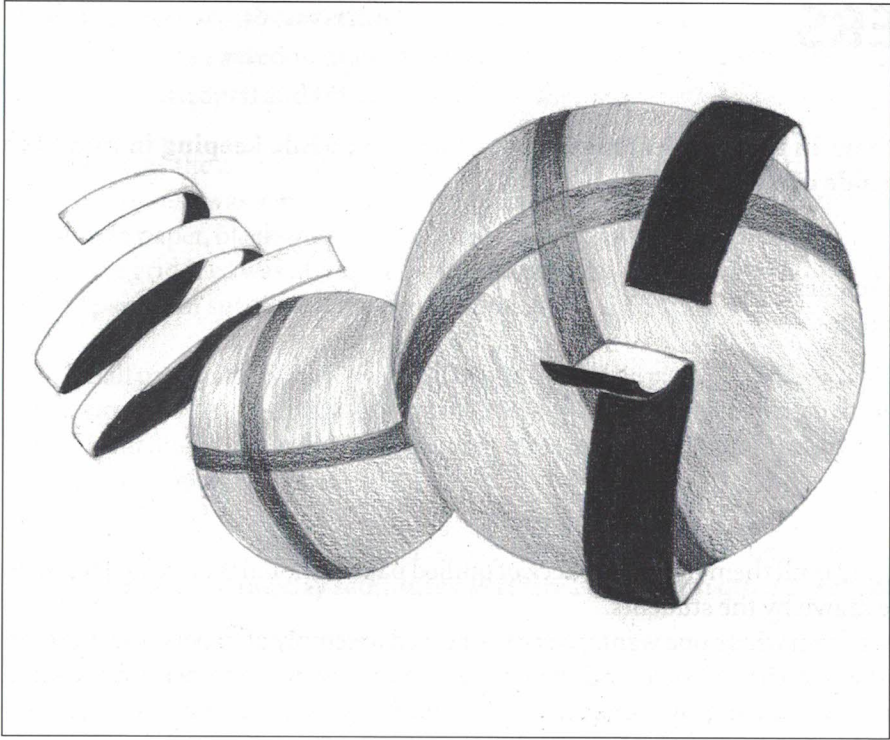


By way of concluding, it is tempting on balance, in looking over the approach taken in these exercises, to place it in contradistinction with what would be a somewhat differing pedagogical view, in this case this writer's own, based on a very different reading of architectural culture. Such a proposition would hold that, far from building worlds de nouveau drawn from peering into some prior, originary intuition, or primordial grammar of forms, architects learn to become architects through a process of mediatic enticement and emulation of practices already evincing some degree of cultural currency. The field, such as it were, comprises an encounter with these ongoing fashions or trends, driven in the old days by glossy magazines and nowadays through Instagram and Pinterest, which the neophyte student will inevitably bring into the studio in the form of an aesthetic fixation or infatuation. In other words, it is only when the architectural student evinces a will to imitate something à la mode and already in the air, one that she desires to imbibe into her own self, that an architectural and aesthetic education truly begins to take shape. The work of the teacher then becomes one of countering this attraction already at work in the student's mind and in her work, with the hope that, at best, the student can begin to recognize her own mediating role in these ongoing flows of media, fashion, and influence. Such a pedagogy would not revert to a language of primordial signs or some immaculate fount of pre-cultural aesthetic instinct, but see the scene of creativity as an agon, driven by influence, of finding a voice even if one recognizes that language precedes us. Design would thus carry the sense of an updating activity, in the sense that software programs nowadays update themselves, rather than return to something basic in design. Would such a proposition be entirely opposed to what we see unfolding in the pages that follow? Not entirely. But it would entail a very different conception of how one looks, and what one looks at.

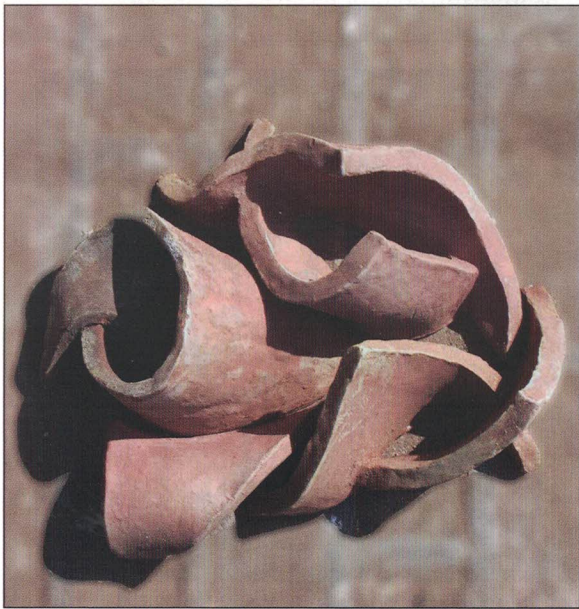
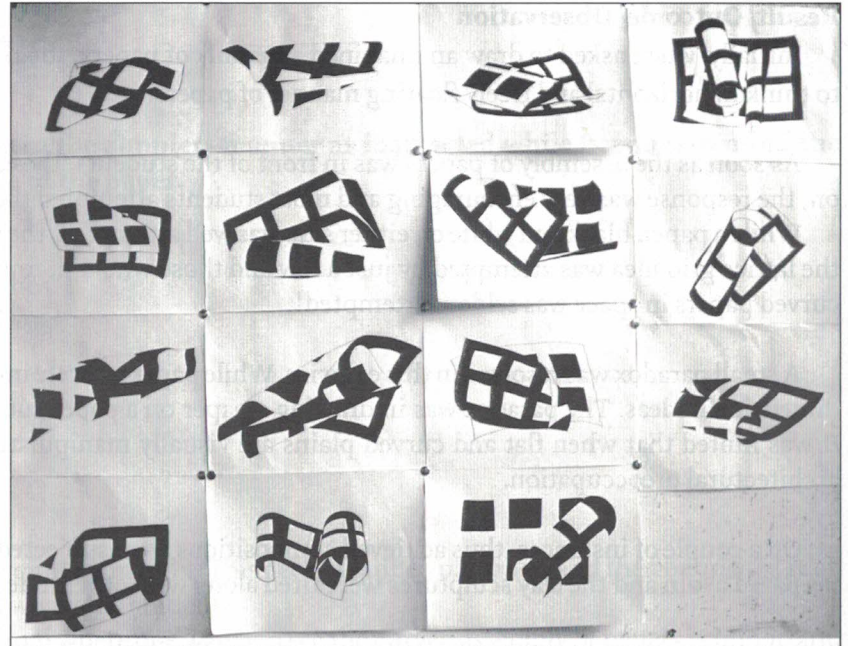
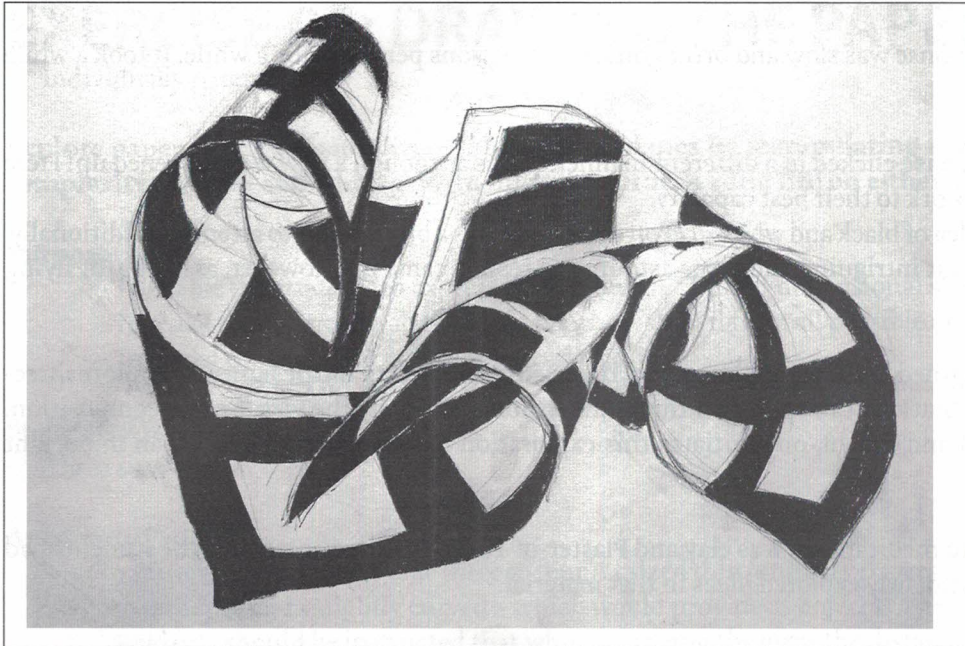




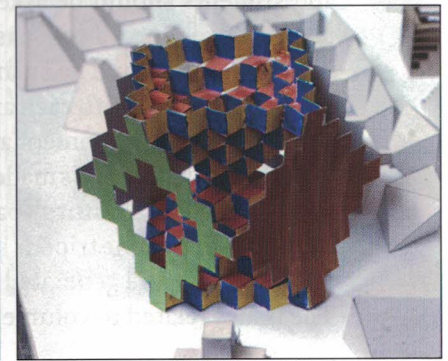
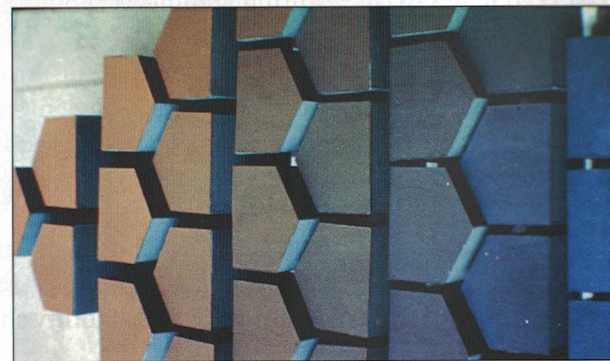
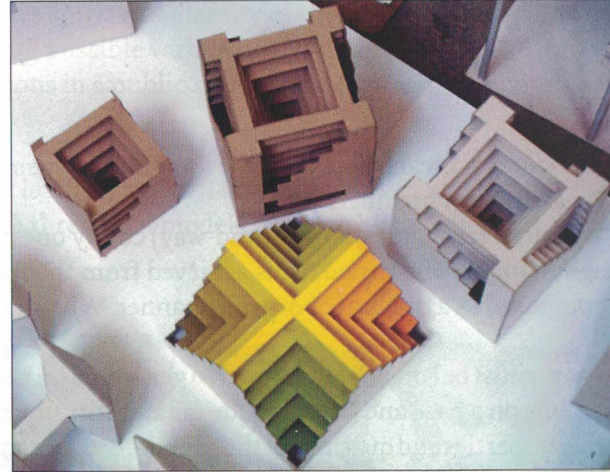
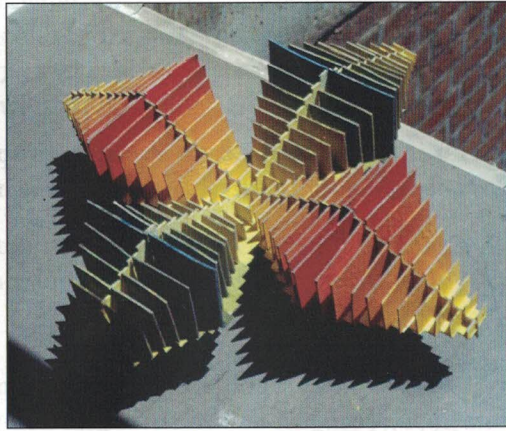
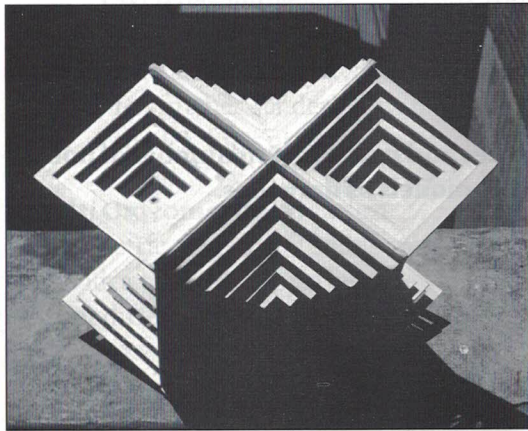




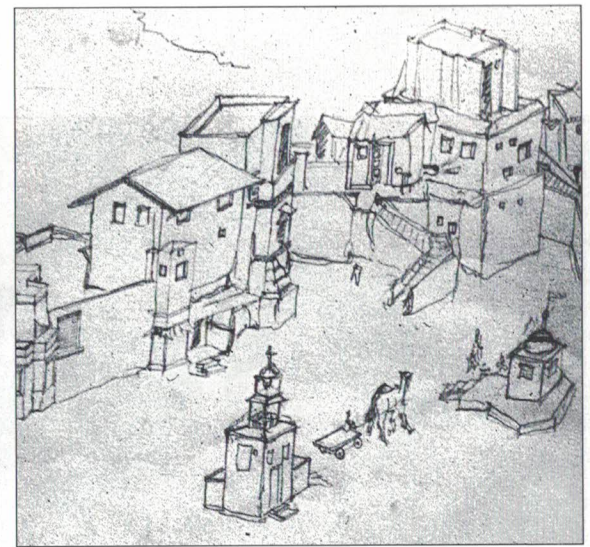
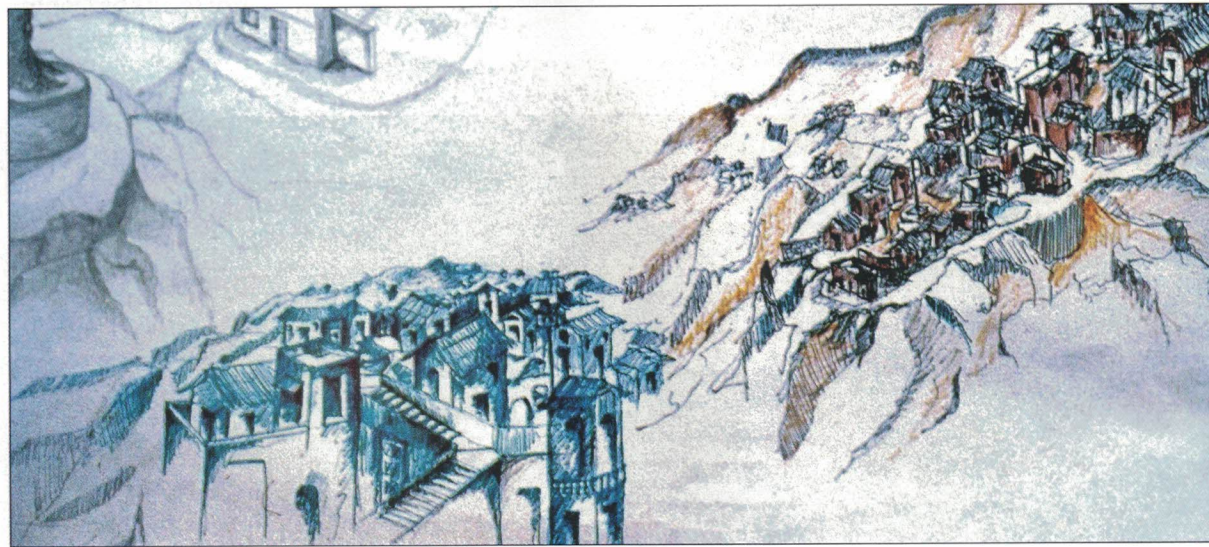
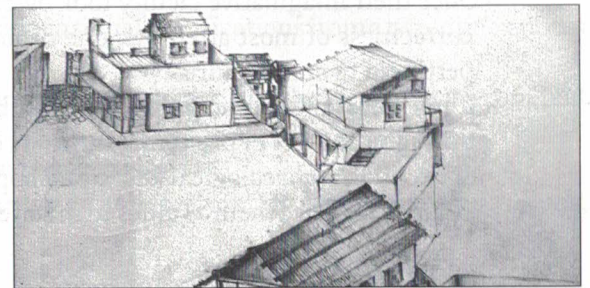
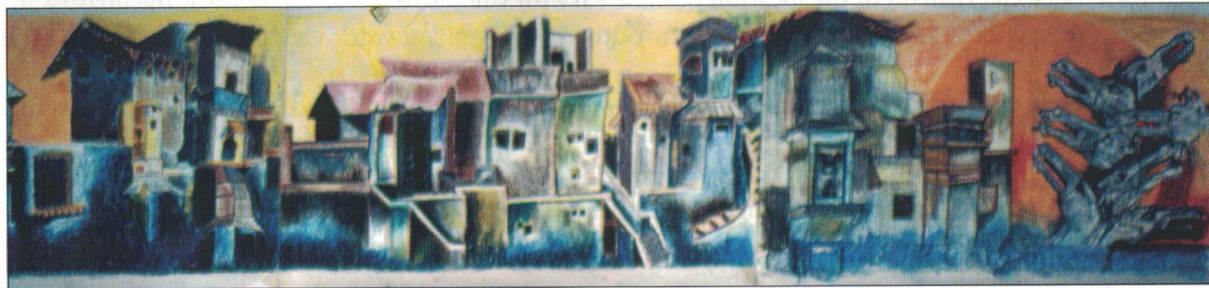
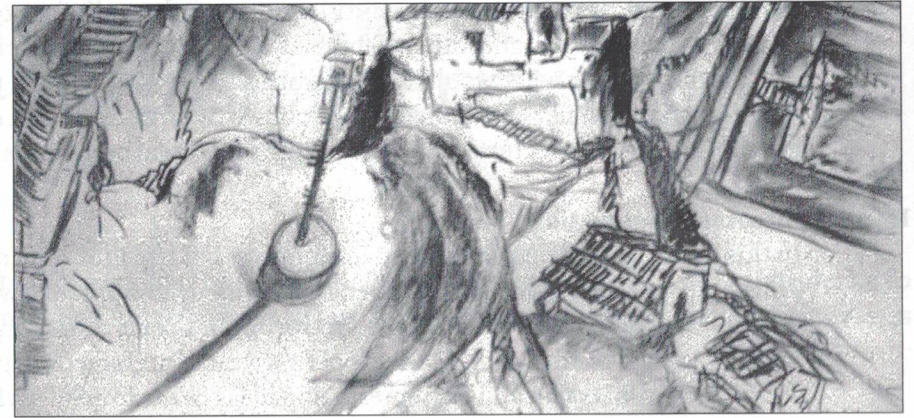
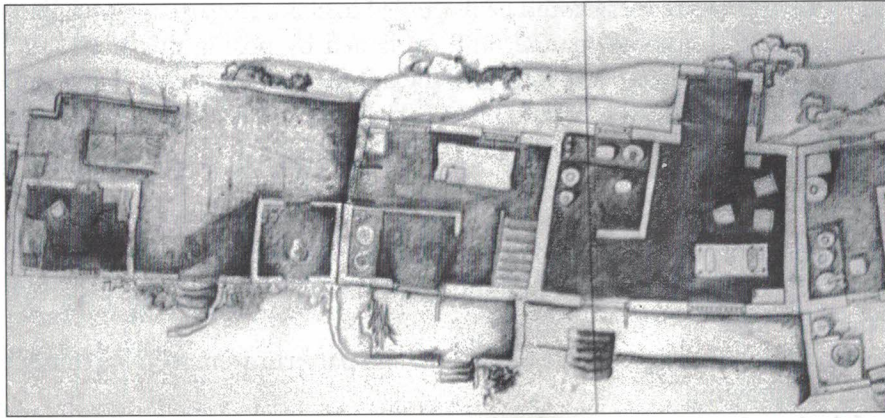




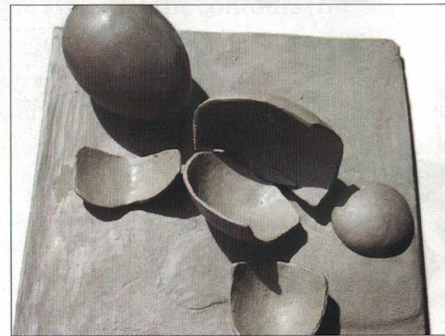
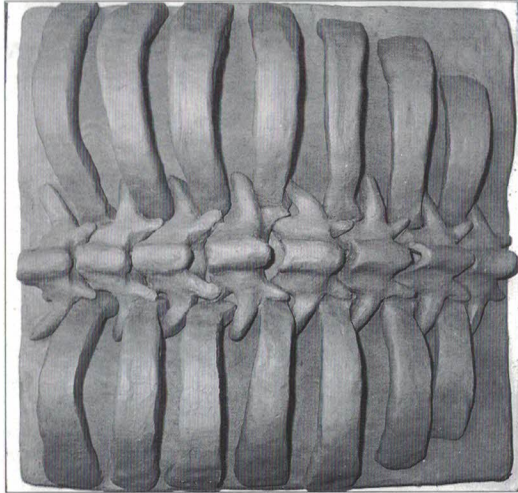
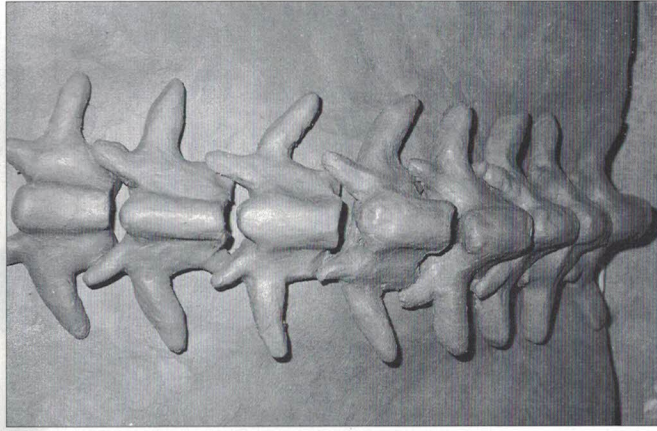
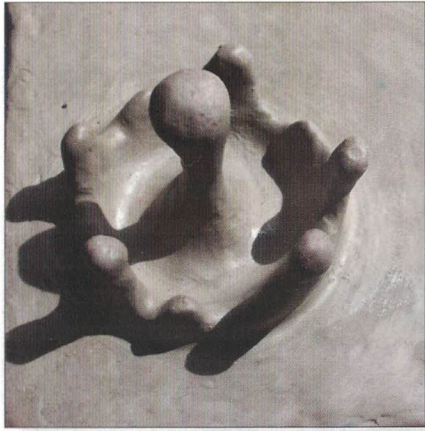








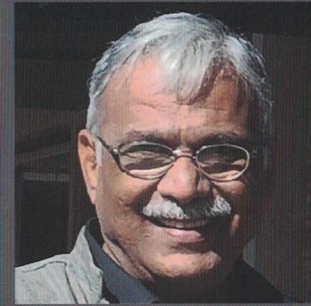












Miki Desai retired as a Professor of Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University in 2014. He is an avid documenter, has written books and held exhibitions based on his extensive drawing and photo-documentation, especially of the Indian vernacular genre.

Books by Miki Desai:

(Author) *Architektur in Gujarat, Indien: Bauernhof, Stadthaus, Palast* (translated in German), an Exhibition Catalogue, The Rietberg Museum, Zurich (1990).

(Co-author) *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity, India 1880 to 1980*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi (1997).

(Co-author) *Architectural Heritage of Gujarat: Interpretation, Appreciation, Values, the Government of Gujarat, Gandhinagar*, (2012).

(Co-author) *The Bungalow in Twentieth Century India: The Cultural Expression of Changing Ways of Life and Aspirations in the Domestic Architecture of Colonial and Post-Colonial Society*, Ashgate, UK (2012).

(Author) *Wooden Architecture of Kerala*, Mapin Publishing Pvt Ltd., Ahmedabad, (2018).