

SAURABH MALPANI: What kind of person are you? If you are given a choice, which one will you pick?  
 I think, therefore I am...  
 I am, therefore I think...

**ALVARO SIZA:** *Well given the choices I will go for both as it is to and fro for me. I can't take a strong position on any one aspect. It has very mutual interaction, when I criticize, that time – I think, and when I hypothesize – I am. It is just impossible to make a stand on one*

SM: In 1978, you said, 'My professional experience is not sufficiently rich and global to allow me to theorize on what I do... I have the desire and pre-occupation to build. Writing text has little relation with my work.' What do you think after 24 years and having global experience?

**AS:** *Well in that sense I had global experience, but today's life (century for that matter) is not easy to theorize as Palladio or Vitruvius did in previous centuries. The informative world is too large and it is impossible to theorize information to context, culture, and countries are enormous and difference is too much. Amounts of diversities exist; the prefixed approach is not practical to work with. In present time, working on large scale projects, various disciplines are involved (e.g. from acoustics, air-conditioning, structures to wind load calculations and so on...) in such an environment more than theories... co-operation and getting work done is basic and essential task*

SM: What does architecture mean to you in 4 decades of practice?

**AS:** *Very fundamental thing is architecture should pay so as to continue work and office. It is necessary to earn to run a practice... For me, it's passion, innovation, co-operation, interaction and sacrifice.*

*Today, two things dominate architecture. At one side is 'excitement-exhibition' culture and other side is 'banality and speculation'. It is getting difficult to work with both. Our city/town outskirts are badly developed. If we see around the world, architects do not build most of it. Popular (vernacular) architecture doesn't require architects. Whereas in excitement-exhibition part of architecture, the political influence play a very important role. Economy is very important. Built spaces, forms are directly related. Inviting foreign architects to build in local context is a way of publicity for politician and vice-versa. Before this century globalization existed in the form of Imperialism, only difference was it had its own limits. It was an imposed one and today it is with freedom.*

*'In a way architecture is a fight if you have conviction.'*

*Since last 8 years I was working on an extension of Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam. In that I made two schemes due to change in program, put in a lot of effort and a month back the city government changed and they decided not to go ahead with the project. So... there was big engagement and at the end nothing got realized.*

SM: There are more than 100 projects that you have worked on, which one do you regard as your favorite and why?

**AS:** *Though I worked on 100 projects, all did not get build. Talking about favorites, I don't have one as each of them had its own history, idea, development. All projects are memorable. But there are certain which are more memorable as interaction between project and great support from client results into certain outcome. If you have good patronage you can do good architecture. Healthy support from client is very important.*

*Pleasurable thing is when you can work on a building, as well as on its surrounding, landscape. Because the environment for building is very significant, it does not become object, rather its part of the whole.*

SM: While designing do you think how the project will look like in the dark night?

**AS:** *As Kahn said, - I also think natural light is primary for designing. When we see houses in Morocco/ North Africa or in Alhambra, there is a courtyard then layer of verhandah, which filters light and rooms get working light then there are spaces where there is less light. So since history there is hierarchy and it helps to make comfort. Play of natural light is more dramatic than artificial one*

*I spent too much time with artificial light as in this field the pre-concepts are very strong and people/industry have strong position to sell their products and energy. It becomes difficult to convince the client.*

SM: There are small elements jutting out from main mass/form of building. Sometimes it is for entrance, sometimes for weather shade. Can you elaborate on that?

**AS:** *If you see human body is not regular. If we see the face, the nose, lips, ears are projecting things while the mouth, ear hole are depressions. So its uneven and that gives character to the face. For me these elements are extensions to the building. How do we welcome our friend? With open hands.... At the entrance, these elements work as welcoming gestures. These elements are part of the building. They help for movement. They are signs.*

SM: What about courtyards and wall planes?

**AS:** *Obsession for courtyard comes from visits to Morocco and India. It acts as the place of interaction. At my brother's house in Santo Tirso, in a small courtyard we had breakfast, food and family gathering. In Setubal, the courtyard is with a tree and made by two wings of the building. It has also same sense of open hands for hugs.*

*Alvar Alto travelled in Spain and Morocco, he made a courtyard at Sanythsilo, which is not common/ obvious to Northern country like Finland. I suppose it is an evolution and transformation of different cultures and countries.*

*About the wall plane, they make space extroverted as well as introverted, give shade, protection from wind. In my work for wall there is a strong influence of Mediterranean cultures. It helps for movement too. It is like two sides of a coin, one surface of wall make interior space and other exterior form.*

SM: What do you think about water as an Architectural element?

**AS:** *A person who is from coastal region, for him it becomes difficult to live without the sea. I was born in Matosinhos where I spent my childhood. I used to go for a swim in the sea but now due to pollution, the edge is becoming dirty and non-hygienic. For me, water in my work is the sea. For me it is vast and perfect landscape. It is unchangeable. To use water in architecture you need space. Barragan used it boldly, and he had a space for it. While working on Evora in Alentejo, such a beautiful town but there is no river and it's far away from sea. I use to miss both when I was there. With natural rainwater drainage and water cycles of swimming pool I made a small water body and I had space. Other place I used water is Gardens behind Santiago de Compostela gallery. There the old water is revitalized. Other than that there is water in swimming pools.*

SM: Other than white and natural colours of material, very few painted colours can be seen in your work. What do you think about colours?

**AS:** *I prefer natural colours. I like colours of stone, bricks and concrete. White colour in Portugal helps to keep heat away. But it is true that I have very less 'painted colours' as compared to 'white'*

SM: You draw a lot of human figures... sometimes look like angels, your human figures have deliberately drawn faces. What is their relation with the design process?

**AS:** *As such there is no direct relation. Basically I like to draw human figures. The face reflects the character of the person.*

*Architecture by large is social life and the human being is primary element. Figures generate forms and sometimes unconsciously get transformed in design.*

SM: Do you think, one should have 'Guru' in Architecture?

**AS:** *When we begin (career), the need of Guru is there to initiate. After initiation, guru may get multiplied as our beliefs grow. The known world is too big so one guru is not sufficient. The Guru is inspiration or inspiration is Guru. You don't make a copy. Follow your own way, integrate the knowledge and transfer it, it becomes yours*

SM: What advice will you give to students?

**AS:** *Travel! Go around the world. Well it is not a very new message Corbusier also said the same thing too. Learn to see, observe. Draw, make sketches – it is the best way to see, scan and best training to the eyes and memory. Give full concentration to what you are doing. Make an effort to have a good dialogue with the people involved in the process of making architecture. Learn to work with the engineer and theories of relation*

*If you want to keep enthusiasm travel is a must. Fresh mind receive these inputs. It discovers much more than books. If approach is fixed to architecture, it will be very annoying. Architects are like kind of detectives... the search never ends.*