



Architect of the Month

“Architecture has become knowledge based rather than craft based”.

says Ar. Iftikhar Azam

1) Was it patriotism that drove you back to Pakistan or is there another motive?

The reason for coming back was primarily a personal need of belonging. I lived, studied and worked in US till 1992 and then returned to Pakistan to work as a Partner at Ahd + Azam Partnership. In 2002 we had to move back to the US for personal and family reasons. However it was always our intention to come back. Hence we returned in 2007 shortly after which I started h3 Architects. I always felt that it is important for a person to have roots and that mattered. I have many other friends that moved to US or Europe and are very comfortable and satisfied living there and in some ways I envy them, but that is just not me.

“There are good buildings and then there are not so good buildings, but there are very few great buildings”.

2) How would you compare education, practice and techniques of architecture prevalent in Pakistan to those existing in the US and other developed countries?

You can't compare the two. These are two different worlds. The developed countries have their history and continuity of progress that is rooted and connected with their socio-political development. Architecture cannot be considered in isolation from the social, political and geographical forces that act upon it. We have our own history, however, it appears segmented.

There is a disconnect between the pre-colonial and post-colonial history of Pakistan. The geo-political forces have created a divide and a mind-set that is somewhat unique to our nation. Architecture in the developed countries is driven, to a large extent, by the technological developments.

The profession has become a knowledge based profession rather than a craft based one. We, in Pakistan, are still struggling with the notions of appropriate technology and other such concepts. It doesn't mean that we lack ability or the mental capacities in any way, but we have not yet made certain basic decisions about our direction as a nation.



Govt. Girls Higher Secondary School

3) The topography and climate should dictate the design and structure of high-rise buildings. Do you think buildings constructed in Pakistan's metropolis conform to this? Also whether sufficient space and other facilities as fire-exit are provided for children, disabled and senior citizens of Pakistan?

There are good buildings and then there are not so good buildings, but there are very few great buildings. We do have some very good buildings in our major cities but our present byelaws do not require our designers to address the issues of fire safety and accessibility in an appropriate manner. I frequently tell my students that all the exciting buildings by architects such as Zaha Hadid or Frank

ARCHITECT ON ARCHITECTURE



Development for Bahria.



Development for Bahria.

Gehry still have to conform to all the fire and safety codes and accessibility requirements. So it makes you appreciate their work even more as coming up with such exciting designs while fulfilling all the technical and safety requirements is no easy task.


We don't have any high rise buildings from US standards but we do have some midrise structures. I urge all our fellow architects to make an effort to conform to international safety and accessibility codes while designing major buildings. One quick observation regarding the concept of accessibility is that we should make our buildings accessible for the physically challenged to use them without assistance. Providing ramps that need assistance to use do not satisfy the accessibility requirement.

4) No doubt winning Pakistan's open design competition in Karachi is a notable achievement. But does this mark your highest in career or will you look for still higher horizons?

I am appreciative of my team that worked very hard on this competition but this is not the end all by any stretch of imagination. We continue to strive for bigger and higher goals and larger horizons. Even now (unfortunately) I have more constructed buildings in US than in Pakistan. I want to see that changed. I would like us to build not only large buildings but great buildings. As I.M. Pei once said that it is better to have 5 masterpieces than 100 large but ordinary buildings. I feel that we are still in our infancy and look forward to continued and meaningful contributions to our city scape.

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h3 Architects continue to strive for bigger and higher goals and larger horizons

5) A peculiar, which is also prominent strain is evident in old building structures of Moghul and other Islamic eras; this may be termed "Indian Islamic" or something similar. It has been admired a lot. Why is this not being copied even in high-rise buildings. For instance, door-entrances could be made in arched designs and so on?

An interesting thought, however I am a firm believer in functional aesthetics. As someone once said that the most beautiful artifacts are those which cannot be replaced, added or subtracted from Aircrafts are a wonderful example of this kind of aesthetics. The glider wing is an absolute personification of beauty itself. Symbols do have a place in architecture but the symbols need to be relevant.

6) Can you tell us about your ongoing projects?

We are currently working on a variety of projects. The diversity is of typology, size and geography. We are working on corporate head-office buildings in Lahore and Karachi. As well as some schools and health centers in Northern areas. There are some Pharmaceutical facilities in Karachi. We are also involved in some offices and banks' interiors and some residential projects. All in all we are trying to stay busy and help improve the built environment.



Proposed Head Office Building for AkzoNobel



Winning Entry of the Competition Project for National Investment Parks

7) What message would you like to convey to upcoming generation of architects?

This makes me feel really old; it's like receiving a Life Time Achievement award. Anyway, my message to the fellow upcoming architects is to strive for quality. Stylistic debates are for the art critics and historians. We as architects should concentrate on creating wonderful buildings and spaces that bring joy to the human spirit.



Pfizer Medical Building



HBZ Plaza