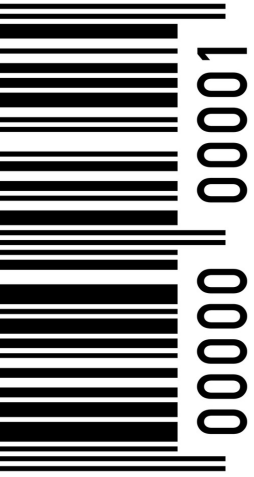


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Interview With

**PRAJACTA
SATISH**

@LIVPROCOMMUNITY



ABOUT HER DESIGN IDEOLOGIES

Prajacta is someone who keeps trying new things. She loves exploring and looks for opportunities beyond just her profession and her recent curiosity is towards User Interface and Experience Design. She is currently intrigued by the thought process behind the minds that design phones and electronics.

It's the learning experiences that matter more to her, beyond success, failure, or even expertise in the field of learning.

If given a chance to design something without any limitations, she would probably design a chair which can also be used to transport people from one place to another. It makes accessibility and mobility so much easier and transits become less complicated.

“A DESIGN ENTREPRENEUR DOES EVERYTHING FROM DESIGN TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT TO FINANCE TO ADMIN AND THAT’S THE MOST EXCITING PART OF BEING ONE.”

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THE DESIGN JOURNEY OF PRAJACTA SATISH

with Deepa Srinivasan



Prajacta, Founder and CEO of White Lotus Studio Design spoke to the LivPro community team and opened up about her journey as an Architect, her process in establishing a design studio in not just one but two cities in India. Her practice specialises in high-end residential and hospitality spaces, while she also consults for the design of educational spaces. She is an entrepreneur, a consultant with EDA, a classical dancer, and a mother wearing multiple hats as well as acing them.

She speaks about opening up her practice, the challenges she had her way, dealing with clients and finding the right vendors to cater to projects, whilst she advocates sustainability in materials, waste management and practices.

A journey of design that started with a few full-time jobs with architecture firms in Pune, Mumbai, and Gurgaon - led to the inception of a design Studio ArchAvenue in 2007, which later became White lotus when she moved her practice from Gurgaon to Bangalore. Prajacta got her initial projects across India, a few of which were also recognised and published on media platforms like *Home Trends*, *BBC Good Homes*, and *Prisma*. One of her notable projects is the Sauna of Westin Sheraton in Gurgaon.

ON RESTARTING HER DESIGN PRACTICE

It isn't easy to run a design firm, and it doesn't get easier to re-start a practice in a new location with new projects especially because of the lack of acquaintances with the market and the vendors. The most difficult part was to find how the market works, how varied the client's taste and expectations are, and most of all - to find the right vendors for the project all while being a new mother.

In terms of managing projects, I do not have a large team and try to outsource as much as possible from 3D services, project management, etc. I try to keep my team small to help me monitor and keep a close track of my projects. I try not to take projects beyond my bandwidth to justify my time to my clients. I ensure that I interact with my clients directly and that's how I develop my design.

ON HER ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

An entrepreneur does everything, she is a banker, project manager, designer, administrator, sales executive etc. All designers want to be focused on design but end up doing everything and that's the most exciting part of being an entrepreneur. In a small size studio, one can monitor everything in the office and in their projects. But it's completely different for a large-scale setup. The business is unstable and the journey is challenging and it won't forever stay smooth. I try to limit my project intake to selective clients only and work on unique projects and avoid template projects that have the same design repeated everywhere for ease of design and execution.

“A DESIGNER’S DESIGN PHILOSOPHY GETS DILUTED OVER A PERIOD OF TIME IF THEY ARE NOT ABLE TO GIVE ATTENTION TO EACH PROJECT AND ARE BUSY DOING THINGS OTHER THAN DESIGN.”

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ON DESIGN CHALLENGES

Watching your designs come to life is the most fulfilling part of this profession. To see how your client enjoys the space and how satisfied they are with the output or the concepts that are presented, is a true pleasure.

But finding the right labour is one of the greatest challenges of being a designer. I have a great team who are committed to the timelines and material agreements but there are some unforeseen situations where we almost lost some projects. I had to step in and get the situation sorted for the client and take responsibility.

Then comes the challenge of finding a trustworthy vendor for every product, material and service. Most of them are either too focused on the monetary aspect or are lethargic and it affects projects vastly. I try to educate my labourers and vendors about the consequences and repercussions when they work just for money but at the grass-root level, the industry is extremely unorganised and is very difficult to micromanage.

But, we have to agree that Covid has affected vendors and labourers a lot who previously worked on per-day wages or per-project involvement.

ON HER MOST MEMORABLE PROJECTS

I have worked on some very unique projects starting from a 7-bedroom penthouse in Nagpur. The clients had a very jazzy taste and preferred the presence of gold everywhere either as inlays, leafing or semi-precious stones like malachite, lapez etc. All the furniture was custom-made to suit their unique taste and was a personal challenge for me since it was a completely new style.

I HAD TO DO A LOT OF RESEARCH AND LOOK AT USUAL COLOURS, FINISHES AND MATERIALS FROM A WHOLE NEW PERSPECTIVE TO ACHIEVE THAT JAZZY FINISH.

I had another project in Indore which was a 6000 sq ft apartment which brought a huge change in my clientele and projects. This project was also published in BBC home trends in 2009.

THE CLIENT GAVE ME ALL THE LIBERTY IN TERMS OF MATERIALS AND FINISHES BUT WANTED EVERYTHING WHITE. IT WAS SUCH A FUN PROJECT TO WORK ON.

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ON DESIGNING EDUCATIONAL SPACES

Designing for schools is very different from designing for other spaces. It fundamentally has different forms, shapes, and colours. It's not as simple as designing residential spaces that often fall into a template. The last 2-3 years have also changed. Post covid, children's curiosity levels have changed and spaces now have to cater to that while also helping in knowledge retention.

A lot goes into designing spaces for children and making them interactive for them. With my association with EDA, I learnt a completely new system that not a lot of schools in India follow. The design standards of Educational Design International are into ICSE boards, where they encourage open, interactive and well-thought-out spaces. Even if it's just a corridor, they think of how the corridor creates impressions in students' minds.

The technical details of materials and concepts they consider, emphasise & focus on the proper development of a child in school. They use unique materials for this purpose and have a huge market where they could source such materials. India is yet to get there mainly because we often have to settle for a different material or for something that replicates or a copy of the materials we need.

ON BUILDING A BRAND IDENTITY

White Lotus will stand as a representation of sustainability with modern materials. We often associate sustainability with traditional or vernacular materials or recycling and changing plastics into building materials which are the ideals. But we need to start accepting the fact that modern materials and technology are not going to vanish and we need to think of establishing sustainability with these modern materials and practices.

A lot of materials are not well thought out and need research, recycling and reuse of things and I would want to make it a point to start that. Ours is one of the largest industries which generates a lot of waste. We don't try to see where all these wastes go and we should take an effort to reuse or recycle. Although the challenge is that clients would most often prefer having new materials and new elements in their homes.

“AS DESIGNERS AND ARCHITECTS, WE CAN START BY EDUCATING THEM ABOUT THEIR CHOICES AND THE CONSEQUENCES.”

ON EXPECTATIONS FROM COMMUNITY

The community has been very useful for every participant in it, especially in terms of finding resources, vendors and guidance. I would love for the community to have more social events (preferably in person) and to have a chance to meet and collaborate with my fellow designers and other industry professionals.