

let's partner



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Japanese architect Kengo Kuma has won many prizes both in Japan and abroad. Today, he has some 50 buildings to his credit putting him among the major architects of his generation. His leitmotiv is 'to erase architecture' and calls for the virtual disappearance of architecture in its environment, natural and urban alike, thanks to buildings coming across like open structures and changing with external variations, as attested to by the Kitakami Canal Museum (Miyagi, 1996-99). For his so-called 'weak' buildings, Kuma uses vernacular materials, earth, wood, bamboo and stone, but conceives of them as innovative constructive assemblies. Whence his use of '*washi*', Japanese paper, for the Ando Hiroshige Museum (Bato, 1998-2000) and stone for the Stone Museum (Nasu, 1996-2000), whose façade turns into an openwork structure through the linear repetition of thin stone blocks. The One Omotesando building (Tokyo, 2001-03) consists of a series of wooden strips, perpendicular to the façade: with its continuous skin, when seen obliquely, the façade, head on, becomes completely transparent, punctuated by voids and solids. For Kengo Kuma the material is thus always a construction principle, giving rise to the architecture's aesthetics and symbolism.

Sarita Vijayan, Editor & Brand Director, Indian Architect & Builder, in an exclusive interview with the architect who thrives on 'naturalism' about his works and inspirations.

SV. What motivated you to become an architect?

KK. I lived in an old small house in the suburbs of Tokyo in childhood and often discussed with my father how we could re-work on it. Also, when the Tokyo Olympics was held in 1964, I got a strong impression from the stadium designed by Kenzo Tange and learned the potential of what architects could do.

SV. How have you best used traditional materials?

KK. In the 90s I was fortunate enough to work with local carpenters of various different provinces in Japan and I learned a lot from them about traditional materials such as wood, stone or earth. Our relationships still go on and whenever I work with natural materials I go back to them for advice.

SV. How do you acquaint yourself with a site before considering a design for the building?

KK. I make it my golden rule to visit and study the site carefully before working on the project. I walk around the site again and again to get an idea.

SV. Are there certain materials that inspire you more than others?

KK. Materials themselves are not inherently the source of particular inspiration. Other than at some moments, in specific conditions, where materials are brought to the fore of the decision making process through particular environmental conditions, requirements of difficulties. I am consistently intrigued by the bewildering combination of processes though. The process and application of effort to various materials can

render a single material into a series of completely different products and effects.

SV. How has your work evolved over the years?

KK. I emphasised in the past that the architecture should be erased, or buried in the ground — I avoided 'massive continuation' of materials. It has evolved in recent years that the architecture being harmonised with its surroundings, as if they were in a dialogue.

SV. Every architect has his own version of today's 'ism'. What according to you is the 'ism' for the architecture of the present?

KK. Naturalism

SV. Do you have any personal favorites among your own and from somebody else's canvas of works?

KK. All are my favourites, but working on the Museum of Ando Hiroshige was a great experience.

SV. Are there certain materials that inspire you more than others?

KK. I like wood.

SV. Any creative expression is always open for criticism. How do you handle negative criticism?

KK. Not all such criticism is correct, but there are comments inspirational enough for me to make a shift towards a new direction. ■



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