

SCMS VIBES



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April 2026



4 The spaces that shaped us



5 The architect behind SCMS: Binesh Sukumar



7 A vernacular home in Kerala



10 Kochi Muziris Biennale

SCMS at 50 Then, Now, Next



“The next fifty years will depend on the principle of a community that continues to grow alongside the institution it helped create. You are the family.”



“In the beginning, it was literally one table and two chairs. Mr. GPC Nayar, the Chairman would prepare the course material at night while an assistant typed the notes.”

Prof. Pramod P. Thevannoor, Executive Chairman, SCMS Group of Educational Institutions, reflects on five decades of growth, change, and vision

Fifty years ago, the SCMS story began in a room furnished with little more than a table, two chairs, and a typewriter. It was a modest setting for an idea that was anything but small. At its centre was Dr. G. P. C. Nayar, a mass communication professional who sensed, well before it became widely acknowledged, that India’s education system needed to expand beyond traditional disciplines and embrace professional training in emerging fields such as journalism, advertising, and public relations.

What began as a correspondence programme has since evolved into a multidisciplinary educational ecosystem, with institutions spanning management, engineering, architecture, biotechnology, and allied

fields. The journey reflects not only institutional growth, but a sustained commitment to relevance and reinvention in a changing educational landscape.

*Few have had a vantage point as close—or as consequential—as Prof. Pramod P. Thevannoor, Executive Chairman of the SCMS Group of Educational Institutions. In a conversation with **Rinette Nixon** and **Nandana Satheesh**, from the SCMS School of Architecture, he reflects on the Group’s formative years, its defining milestones, and the vision that continues to guide its future.*

You have been associated with SCMS since its early years. Could you take us back to those beginnings and

share how the institution has evolved?

Growing up, SCMS was not something separate from home—it was very much a part of our daily lives. I had the unique vantage point of watching my father, Dr G. P. C. Nayar, build it from the ground up. In the earliest days, it was literally just one table and two chairs. He would prepare course material late into the night, while an assistant typed out the notes.

The operations initially ran from our home, and as enrolments slowly increased, the house itself began to transform. Rooms were expanded, and additional spaces were taken on rent nearby. What started as a small academic initiative gradually evolved into a structured correspondence

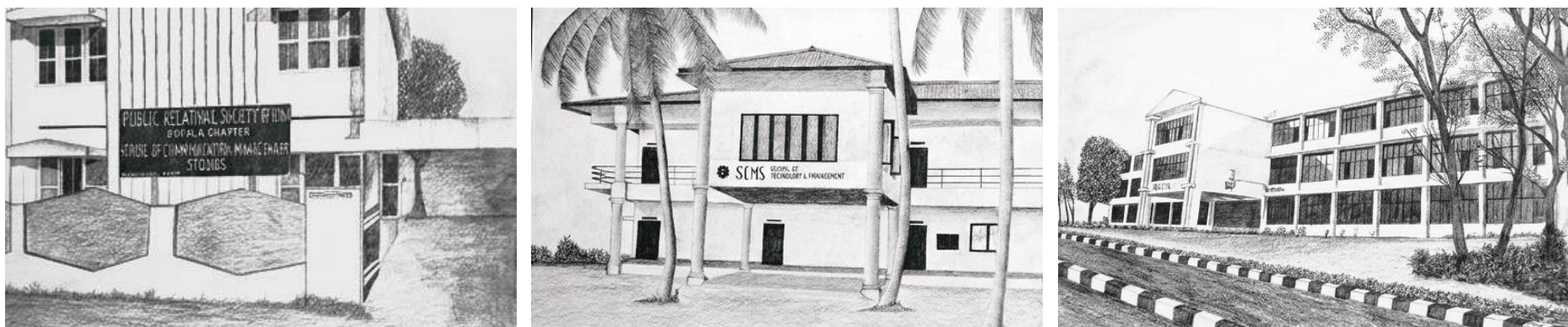
education programme.

As the years went by, the need for a dedicated space became clear. A significant turning point came in the early 1990s, when SCMS moved into its own campus at Kalamassery.

For us, that moment symbolised more than just physical expansion—it marked the transition of my father’s vision from a home-grown effort into a full-fledged educational institution.

What were the biggest challenges SCMS faced in its early years?

The early decades were certainly not easy. In the 1970s and early 1980s, private institutions offering professional courses were



“We expanded into engineering and professional disciplines”

often viewed with a fair degree of scepticism. Most recognised programmes were available only through government institutions, and independent initiatives like ours were frequently dismissed as “parallel colleges.” Establishing credibility, therefore, was one of our biggest challenges.

A significant turning point came when the Kerala government formally recognised our postgraduate diploma programmes. Until then, acceptance had been gradual and, at times, uncertain. That recognition gave us both legitimacy and confidence.

Another challenge was helping parents and students understand

the value of postgraduate diploma programmes in management. At the time, there was limited awareness about their equivalence to MBA degrees. It required consistent effort—through engagement, communication, and the success of our graduates—to build that trust. Over time, perceptions began to change, and with it, our standing in the educational landscape.

How did recognition impact the growth of SCMS?

Recognition changed everything for us. Student numbers began to grow rapidly, with thousands enrolling across multiple admission cycles each year. Our programmes were designed

“The real strength of SCMS lies in the people who have supported it over the years—our students, parents, faculty, and alumni.”

around emerging communication industries, with diplomas in public relations, journalism, and advertising, as well as interdisciplinary combinations of these fields.

To reach students across the country, we offered correspondence courses supported by contact classes held every six months in cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Bangalore. As one of the early institutions offering postgraduate diploma programmes, SCMS began attracting students from across India at a time when management education was still relatively uncommon. Over time, the PGDM programmes developed a distinctly national character.

Looking back, this phase was significant not just for our growth, but for what it represented. SCMS was among the early private institutions that helped create space for professional education beyond the traditional university system.

How did the economic liberalisation of the 1990s influence the growth and direction of SCMS?

The early 1990s marked a defining phase for us, as India entered an era of economic liberalisation. For SCMS, this shift reaffirmed a belief my father had held from the very beginning—that India’s growth would create a need for professionals across a wide range of domains. He was convinced that as industries expanded, every organisation would require trained communication professionals.

This foresight played a crucial role in shaping our next phase of development. We gradually

moved beyond correspondence programmes and evolved into a full-fledged academic institution. Management education, in particular, became a key focus, and we introduced postgraduate diploma programmes in management at a time when such offerings were still limited outside premier institutions like the Indian Institutes of Management.

In the years that followed, we expanded into engineering and other professional disciplines. When MBA programmes were eventually permitted for self-financing institutions in Kerala, SCMS launched its MBA programme in 2003. Each of these steps was guided by the same underlying principle—anticipating where education and industry were headed, and aligning ourselves accordingly.

How did the development of the SCMS campus and its expansion into new disciplines shape the institution’s identity?

Like many institutions, SCMS gradually began to be defined by its physical spaces. In the early years, we operated out of our home and later from rented buildings. The establishment of a dedicated campus gave us a visible identity within the city—it marked a transition from a growing initiative to a recognised institution.

One of the most significant decisions during this phase was the establishment of our engineering college. We have always tried to anticipate educational trends and act early, rather than wait for the sector to mature. Introducing engineering education not only strengthened our presence within the state but also expanded our academic footprint beyond management and communication studies.

At the same time, we believe that buildings alone do not define an institution. What matters is how those spaces are used to foster ideas and learning. One area I find particularly significant is the role of architecture within the broader academic framework. Rather than viewing it as a

From the EDITOR’S DESK

Dear Readers,

When the School of Architecture was entrusted with this issue of Vibes, it embraced the opportunity with imagination and vision, weaving together ideas that transform an edition into a cherished keepsake.

As SCMS celebrates its golden jubilee, the lead feature—a conversation with our Executive Chairman, Mr. Pramod Thevanoor—traces the institution’s growth alongside the evolution of its built spaces, echoing Winston Churchill’s timeless words: “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” A visual timeline within these pages captures this journey of vision, expansion, and achievement.

This issue also brings together conversations with pioneers in the field—architects Mr. Binesh Sukumar, Mr. Roy Antony, and Dr. Benny Kuriakose—whose work continues to shape spaces and lives in meaningful ways. Their stories reflect

the bold, the innovative, and the beautiful that define contemporary architecture.

Complementing these voices are stories on remarkable projects by our students and faculty. One on Conserving a Kerala Home, alongside a deep dive into the mega art expo, the Kochi Muziris Biennale.

Adding further depth and vibrancy, this edition features a playful comic that captures the spirit of the discipline, a lively exploration of the colours of cities, and reviews of popular TEDx talks.

Together, these pages reaffirm that the world of architecture is wonderfully multifaceted. It invites us to dream and to create—balancing the serious with the playful, the functional with the extravagant, and the ordinary with the sublime.

We hope you enjoy this rich mélange.

Happy Reading!

“We want our students to become job creators”

standalone discipline, I see it as the foundation for a larger design ecosystem—one that brings together multiple creative and technological fields.

Design, in many ways, is integral to everything we do. There is potential for architecture to evolve into the centre of a broader design school within the SCMS Group. This reflects a wider shift in higher education today—moving away from narrow specialisations towards more interdisciplinary approaches to learning.

How does SCMS approach international collaborations and global education?

Over the years, SCMS has built several international academic collaborations with partner institutions across Europe and Southeast Asia. However, we see global education somewhat differently from the way it is often perceived.

For us, it is not about borrowing knowledge from elsewhere and bringing it here. It is about sharing knowledge. Global engagement should be an exchange, not an act of imitation.

Through student exchange programmes and faculty collaborations, our students gain exposure to international academic environments. At the same time, these interactions also provide an opportunity to showcase the strengths of our own academic frameworks. It is this balance—learning from others while contributing meaningfully—that defines our approach to global education.

How is SCMS preparing its students for the future, particularly in



“Through student exchange programmes and faculty collaborations, our students gain exposure to international academic environments”

terms of innovation and entrepreneurship?

As we look towards the future, there has been a conscious shift in our focus towards research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. We have taken several steps in this direction. One important initiative is the creation of a dedicated department—RACE, which stands for Rankings, Accreditations, and Compliances for Excellence. It helps us maintain quality standards and benchmark ourselves against evolving academic expectations.

At the same time, we have introduced facilities such as a fabrication laboratory and an incubation centre to encourage innovation across disciplines. These spaces allow students to experiment, collaborate, and translate ideas into practical outcomes.

The larger goal is clear. Universities today must go beyond producing graduates who are only seeking employment. As we often say, we do not want our students to become job seekers—we want them to become job creators.

Another important milestone in this journey has been the move towards greater academic autonomy for some of our schools. It reflects the growing maturity of our academic systems and gives us the flexibility to innovate further in both curriculum and practice.

After five decades of growth, how do you define the true spirit of SCMS?

After five decades of growth—from a small correspondence initiative to a multidisciplinary educational group—it would be easy to define SCMS in terms

of infrastructure, rankings, or academic programmes. But we see it somewhat differently.

For me, the real strength of SCMS lies in the people who have supported it over the years—our students, parents, faculty, and alumni. They form the foundation on which the institution has been built. In many ways, SCMS is built by society.

I have always felt that the institution functions less like a corporate organisation and more like a community. When I address our students and alumni, I do not see them merely as stakeholders—I see them as part of an extended family. In fact, I often tell them, “You are the family.”

If the first fifty years of SCMS were shaped by this collective support, we believe the next fifty will depend on the same principle—a community that continues to grow alongside the institution it helped create.

Rinette Nixon (2023–28 Batch) and Nandana Sathesh (2024–29 Batch)
SCMS School of Architecture



Commencement Ceremony of the 7th Batch (2020- 2025) of Bachelor of Architecture Graduates

THE SPACES THAT SHAPED US

SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION & MANAGEMENT STUDIES

1976



Started in 1976, the School of Communication and Management Studies (SCMS) in Cochin stands as a hallmark of educational excellence in communication and management. Pioneering in Kerala with government-recognized postgraduate diplomas in Public Relations, Advertising and Journalism in the distance education mode, SCMS has been a trendsetter, accredited by the Public Relations Society of India (PRSI).

SCMS COCHIN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

1991



Since 1991, the School of Communication and Management Studies has been offering the Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) as a full-time programme. It was recognised by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) as an autonomous programme in 1992. The institution was later renamed SCMS Cochin School of Business, and its PGDM programme is accredited by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), USA. SCMS has consistently been ranked among the top 50 business schools in India since 2000.

SCMS SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY

2001



The college was established in 2001 with the objective of providing quality technical education and promoting innovation in engineering. The campus is known for its state-of-the-art infrastructure, laboratories, and research facilities. It has attained autonomous status and is affiliated with APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University for its B.Tech, M.Tech, MCA, and PhD programmes.

SCMS Group of Institutions

SCMS Group of Educational Institutions, established in 1976 by Dr. G. P. C. Nayar, is a leading higher education group in India, headquartered in Kochi, Kerala. Beginning with the School of Communication and Management Studies, it has evolved into a multidisciplinary cluster offering programmes in management, engineering, technology, architecture, biotechnology, commerce, and social sciences. The Group also hosts specialized centres such as the SCMS Water Institute and the SCMS Institute of Road Safety and Transportation, addressing critical societal needs through research and outreach. With a strong focus on academic excellence, industry relevance, and holistic development, SCMS integrates learning with research, innovation, and practical exposure. Its mission is "Holistic Quality Education for moulding socially responsible citizens." The Group envisions becoming an Institute of Eminence by 2040, driven by talent in research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, contributing to sustainable societal change.



SCMS INSTITUTE OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

2022



Established as SCMS College of Polytechnics in 2016, the institution initially offered diploma programmes in multiple branches of engineering. It has now been renamed SCMS Institute of Multidisciplinary Studies (SIMS), marking the next step in the SCMS Group's expansion of academic opportunities by bringing together polytechnic diploma programmes and a range of multidisciplinary degree programmes under one roof.

SCMS SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

2014



The institution offers the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) program and focuses on developing creative, socially responsible, and technically skilled architects. The program is approved by the Council of Architecture (COA) and affiliated with MG University. The school emphasizes sustainable design, contextual architecture, research, and practical learning. With studios, workshops, model-making labs, and digital facilities, the institution aims to train students to address contemporary architectural and environmental challenges.

SCMS SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY & MANAGEMENT

2003



SCMS School of Technology and Management (SSTM), affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Management, Computer Applications, Biotechnology, Psychology, and Commerce. The institution also hosts a recognised research centre for Ph.D. studies in Management, supported by experienced and qualified faculty. The Institute is accredited by NAAC with A+, and its MBA program is accredited by NBA and ACBSP, US.

SCENSER
SCMS Center for Socio-Economic Research

SCMSIS
SCMS School of International Studies

SIBB-R&D
SCMS Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology Research and Development

SWI
SCMS Water Institute

SIRST
SCMS Institute For Road Safety and Transportation

RACE
Rankings, Accreditations and Compliances for Excellence

SCMS CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

2003

2005

2007

2010

2023

2024

Credit: Nihad Puthiya Kandekkeel (2023-28 Batch) SCMS School Of Architecture

The Philosophy Behind SCMS Architecture

Binesh Sukumar, the architect behind the buildings that form the SCMS campuses, speaks with Arathy S. Nair and Francis Joseph Chiramel about designing the institution and what architecture means to him.

“You need to have a master plan for whatever ideas you are envisioning—for the next twenty-five, even fifty years,” says architect Binesh Sukumar, whose work has shaped the SCMS campuses as they stand today.

When he first began working on the campus, only the main block existed. “There was no master plan for the entire campus,” he recalls. That absence became the starting point of his approach. Instead of designing isolated buildings, Sukumar proposed a comprehensive vision—one that could accommodate growth, uncertainty, and change over decades.

The Karukutty campus began primarily as an engineering college, with little clarity about how it might expand. “There wasn’t a clear idea of what courses would come later. We never even had a hostel plan in mind,” he says. As new requirements emerged, the campus grew in response, its architecture adapting to shifting academic and social needs.

This evolution was guided by a careful organisation of space. The site’s low-lying topography informed key decisions, including an elevated entrance at the first-floor level. The engineering block was positioned as the focal point, reflecting its initial importance, while quieter functions such as hostels were placed along the periphery. Over time, the campus took shape not as a fixed composition, but as a layered and responsive environment.

A Campus for Exchange

In contrast to the gradual development of the engineering campus, the School of Architecture was conceived with a strong conceptual foundation. At its core was the idea of exchange. “Architecture education is a give and take,” Sukumar explains. “It’s not that faculty keeps teaching and students keep learning—it goes both ways.”

The design draws inspiration from the “open hand,” a concept associated with the French architect and urban planner Le Corbusier. The building itself takes on a hand-like form: a central core acts as the palm, with radiating wings extending outward. Between these wings lie open spaces intended



Architect Binesh Sukumar

not as voids, but as active learning environments. “These were envisioned as open-air classrooms,” he says.

Movement through the building is equally significant. A semicircular corridor doubles as an exhibition space, where student work is displayed, encouraging constant visual dialogue. Natural light plays a defining role, reinforcing the openness and permeability of the design.

Yet, as Sukumar acknowledges, architecture is never shaped by design intent alone. “There is always the influence of management, funding, and practical constraints,” he notes. The campus library, for instance, was originally imagined as a vibrant, interactive space centred around a courtyard—an idea that evolved in response to real-world considerations.

Architecture as Environment

For Sukumar, architecture is not a finished object but an ongoing

process shaped by its users. “You should never see architecture as something an architect builds and gives,” he says. “It is about creating an environment.”

That environment only gains meaning through participation. Students, faculty, and administrators all play a role in defining how spaces are used. Courtyards, corridors, and amphitheatre-like areas were designed with flexibility in mind. Their success depends not just on design, but on how people choose to inhabit them. “If a space isn’t used in that way,” he reflects, “you can’t simply blame the architect.”

This perspective reframes architecture as a collaborative act—one that continues long after construction is complete.

A Practice of Learning

Looking back on more than three decades of practice, Sukumar describes architecture as a field of constant learning. Much of this learning, he suggests, happens

The School of Architecture draws inspiration from the “open hand,” a concept associated with the French architect and urban planner Le Corbusier

beyond formal education—through experience, observation, and engagement with built work over time.

Revisiting completed projects becomes an essential part of this process, offering insights into how designs perform in real conditions. Each building, in that sense, becomes both a finished work and a lesson.

At the heart of this approach lies empathy. “As an architect, you are not designing what you aspire,” he explains. “You are designing what the client aspires. You have to learn to stand in someone else’s shoes.”

A Continuous Journey

For Sukumar, architecture is not defined by a single project or outcome, but by an ongoing journey. It is a discipline that evolves alongside the people and contexts it serves.

Reflecting on his career, he speaks not only of professional milestones, but of identity itself. “If I am not in my profession, I am nobody,” he says. “People recognize me as Architect Binesh Sukumar.”

Arathy S. Nair and Francis Joseph Chiramel (2023–28 Batch) SCMS School of Architecture



Colours convey meaning, shaping how we communicate beliefs, emotions, and identities. Their significance varies across social, cultural, and religious contexts, and nowhere is this more visible than in the cities we inhabit. A city's palette is influenced by its history, environment, architecture, climate, and culture.

While modern architecture often treats colour as a decorative or even flashy element, many cities have developed a distinct visual language through colour. These palettes are not arbitrary—they emerge from local folklore, symbolism, and even practical needs such as navigation.

For instance, the vibrant façades of houses on Burano are repainted regularly by residents. This tradition began when fishermen, returning from the sea, painted their homes in bright hues to make them easily identifiable through fog and distance. Over time, this functional practice evolved into a defining cultural identity.

In many places, harsh environmental conditions have also shaped urban colour. In tropical and equatorial climates,



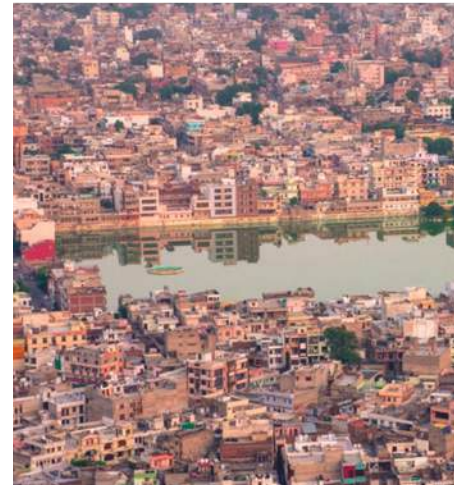
colour plays a role in managing heat and solar gain. The old city of Jodhpur, often called the Blue City, is a striking example. Originally, a Brahmin priest painted his house blue for its auspicious value, and others followed suit. The colour was also believed to help keep interiors cool in the desert heat.

Similarly, in parts of Bangkok, such as Khong Sam Wa, roofs are painted in lighter shades like yellow and red to reflect heat and reduce indoor temperatures, responding to the region's hot and humid climate.

Some cities owe their colour

identity to deliberate, large-scale decisions. The iconic pink of Jaipur dates back to 1876, when the city was painted in terracotta hues to welcome the Prince of Wales. The colour, symbolising hospitality, was later formalised through regulations that continue to preserve Jaipur's unique visual character.

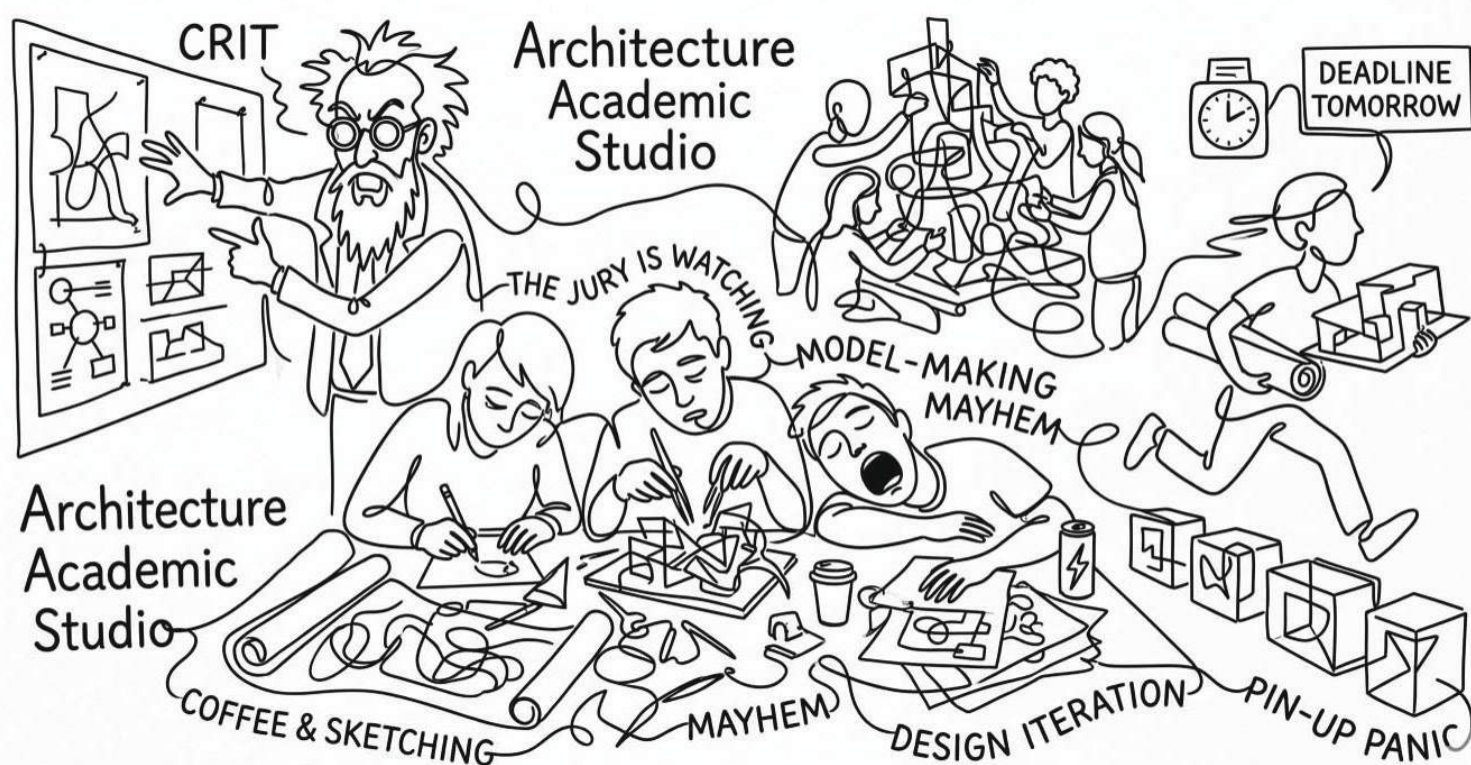
Ultimately, the colours of a city are more than aesthetic choices—they are expressions of history, environment, and collective memory. They shape not only how cities are seen, but also how they are experienced and remembered.



Hima J. Nair (2023-28 Batch) SCMS School of Architecture

INSIDE THE STUDIO

The Good, The Bad and The Crazy



Architecture studio is not just about lectures; it is about exploration. Rather than being confined to a single place, we move around freely, finding our own spaces to think—on chairs, the floor, or sometimes even on tables.

Open panel discussions in front of the entire class and professors, though often nerve-racking, gradually make us more confident and receptive to the architectural world. They teach us how to address larger groups and help us understand that

every individual brings a unique perspective to problem-solving. Listening to critiques of our work helps us grow, even when it feels challenging. At the same time, small moments—like listening to music while drafting or sketching together as a class—add warmth to studio life. There is something comforting about everyone being immersed in their own work, yet sharing the same space and energy.

But studio life is not just about aesthetics. It also comes with sleep-deprived students, last-

minute sheets, and projects completed after long nights. In those moments, we find ourselves sleeping anywhere—from chairs and stools to butter sheets spread across the floor.

Model making is another enjoyable part of the studio, where we work with materials like clay and oasis. Though messy and dusty, the process of cutting, shaping, and assembling is deeply satisfying. There is always a bit of chaos—glue-stained hands and thermocol pieces scattered everywhere—but

it somehow becomes one of the most memorable aspects of the experience.

In the end, architecture is shaped more in the studio than in the lecture hall. It is here that we truly learn—to experiment, fail, improve, and grow—not just as students of architecture, but as future architects.

Nandana Satheesh (Batch 2024-29) SCMS School Of Architecture

CONSERVING THE ORDINARY

A Vernacular Home in Kerala

Kerala's vernacular architectural traditions of Travancore, Kochi, and Malabar, located along the western coast and the windward side of the Western Ghats, historically evolved as climate-responsive systems. These architectural forms were closely aligned with locally available materials such as mud, laterite, timber, and thatch, resulting in construction practices that were environmentally adaptive and culturally rooted.

With the advent of modern architecture, particularly in the post-independence period, the need for larger institutional and public buildings initiated a significant transformation in the region's architectural landscape. Over time, this shift began to influence domestic architecture as well. Simultaneously, the rise of the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) economy reshaped local aspirations and lifestyle patterns, further accelerating changes in residential construction. As a result, domestic architecture increasingly transitioned toward reinforced cement concrete (RCC) construction systems, gradually moving away from traditional building methods. Consequently, vernacular construction practices and the use of locally sourced materials began to diminish within the contemporary building process.

Construction Methods

The project focuses on conserving a traditional vernacular outhouse in central Kerala. The 120 year-old Thennattillam Malikapura is a modest ancillary structure located within the premises of the main Illam. This initiative is significant for applying conservation principles to a modest vernacular dwelling rather than a grand palatial structure, highlighting how simple and logical traditional construction methods enabled such common houses in Kerala to endure for over a century. The original building, constructed with load-bearing mud and laterite masonry, follows a linear and highly permeable spatial arrangement composed of a sequence of interconnected rooms. Over time, however, the structure developed functional and structural deficiencies, largely as a result of age, prolonged weathering, and environmental exposure. Continuous rainwater ingress caused decay of the timber rafters and biological degradation. At the same time, capillary action



The 120 - year - old Thennattillam Malikapura

The principle of “as little as possible, but as much as necessary,” allowed the building to support contemporary living while retaining its original character and tectonic integrity.

led to rising damp in the mud-based walls, gradually weakening the structural integrity of the building. The west-facing façade was directly exposed to the southwest monsoon due to the absence of a protective verandah or roof overhang (chajja), leading to excessive moisture and heat exposure. The presence of multiple door openings resulted in a lack of visual and acoustic privacy. The layout also lacked clearly defined service spaces required for contemporary living.

The intervention followed the principle of “as little as possible, but as much as necessary,” allowing the building to support contemporary living while retaining its original character and tectonic integrity. Wooden rafters were selectively reinforced with steel sections, and a thin aluminium layer was introduced beneath the original Mangalore tiles to act as an additional moisture barrier. Surface cracks were stabilized using compatible lime plaster to maintain breathability, while the roof framework was strengthened where required with steel members. The original load-bearing mud walls were retained as they remained structurally stable; spatial adjustments were achieved by closing redundant door openings to create more private bedrooms and walk-in wardrobes. An underutilised verandah was enclosed and



adapted into a kitchenette and dining space. The material palette blends the house's vernacular character with elements of modern craft. Doors and windows were restored in a teal blue inspired by traditional timber protectives. Washrooms feature hand-polished oxide finishes and custom Athangudi tiles matched to the project palette. Doors removed during modifications were upcycled into furniture, including a dining table, while the leftover wall niches were converted into built-in shelves.

Social significance

Beyond its architectural intervention, the project reflects the social significance of conservation. In earlier times, the majority of Kerala's built environment was not composed of palaces or monumental residences, but of modest dwellings constructed by ordinary people using locally available materials and shared building knowledge. These houses embodied a collective wisdom shaped by climate,

culture, and everyday life. Their value lies not in grandeur or ornamentation, but in their simplicity, practicality, and deep connection to place. Conserving such structures acknowledges the lived histories of communities that often remain absent from formal architectural narratives. It recognises that vernacular houses were products of a socially embedded building culture where craftsmen, local materials, and climatic understanding came together to create sustainable and durable habitats. By preserving and adapting these modest buildings, conservation moves beyond elite heritage and embraces the cultural memory of common life, reinforcing the idea that the everyday architecture of ordinary people is equally important in shaping regional identity and continuity.

Ar Ajay Abey, Associate Professor and Ar Tara Pandala, Associate Professor, SCMS School Of Architecture, Principal Architect-CSBNE

The Champion of Climate-Responsive Architecture: Dr. Benny Kuriakose

Renowned designer and conservation consultant Dr. Benny Kuriakose has long been at the forefront of sustainable and vernacular architecture in India. Deeply rooted in Kerala's architectural traditions, his work is distinguished by a commitment to local materials, climate-responsive design, and context-sensitive practices. Influenced by the legendary Laurie Baker, Kuriakose has also made notable contributions to heritage conservation, most prominently through his role in the Muziris Heritage Project.



Ar. Catherine Gings, Assistant Professor at SCMS School of Architecture, engages with Dr. Benny Kuriakose in a conversation about his practice and philosophy.

Why is timber emerging as a sustainable alternative?

In this evolving discourse, timber emerges as a powerful and viable alternative, both from a sustainability and technological standpoint. As a renewable material, timber not only reduces environmental impact but also actively contributes to carbon sequestration by storing carbon within built structures. Unlike other materials, timber can be reused and recycled efficiently, making it significantly more sustainable over its lifecycle. The use of reclaimed timber, in particular, presents both ecological and economic advantages, often costing substantially less than new materials while preserving embodied energy. Despite the perception that timber construction is expensive, this is largely a misconception shaped by market conditions and reduced local availability. In practice, recycled timber and careful material selection can make construction more cost-effective than conventional concrete systems. Additionally, traditional buildings constructed with lime plaster and timber offer the advantage of reusability, unlike modern concrete structures that generate waste upon demolition.

Can timber compete with modern construction technologies?

Technological advancements are further expanding the potential of timber construction, with innovations such as Cross-Laminated Timber (CLT) and glue-laminated systems enabling large-span structures and even

high-rise buildings. Globally, multi-storey timber buildings are becoming more common, demonstrating that wood is no longer limited to small-scale applications. Contrary to common concerns, timber also performs predictably in fire conditions, with its outer layer charring to protect the inner core, while steel can lose structural strength rapidly under high temperatures. At the same time, there is a growing need to critically evaluate material choices, including the use of imported timber species versus locally suitable options, and to better understand lesser-used materials like eucalyptus, which offer structural advantages despite certain limitations.

How does timber address climate change more directly?

In the ongoing discourse on global warming and climate change, the search for solutions often oscillates between top-down policies and grassroots movements. However, a more grounded perspective suggests that the answer may lie in how we rethink and re-engage with materials—particularly timber. Increasingly recognized as one of the most sustainable building materials, timber offers a unique advantage in the fight against climate change. As a renewable



resource, it not only reduces environmental degradation but also actively contributes to carbon sequestration by storing carbon dioxide within its structure when used in construction. Unlike materials that release carbon when burned or left to decay, timber buildings effectively lock carbon in place, making them an environmentally responsible choice.

Is sustainability really expensive?

Historically, regions like Kerala have embraced timber extensively through vernacular architecture, which inherently aligned with sustainable practices. However, changing market dynamics and reduced local availability have led to a perception that timber construction is now expensive. This perceived costliness extends

to many traditional building methods. What was once economical and locally sourced has become less accessible, leading to the misconception that sustainability itself is expensive. In reality, sustainability can be cost-effective when approached through reuse and recycling. Reclaimed timber, for instance, can cost significantly less—sometimes as little as one-third the price of new wood—while also reducing environmental impact. The reuse of materials such as old doors, windows, and structural wood not only preserves embodied energy but also adds character and depth to architectural design.

What does the future of vernacular architecture look like?

Looking ahead, the future of architecture lies in the intelligent fusion of traditional knowledge and modern innovation. Vernacular principles, refined over generations, offer valuable insights into sustainable living, while contemporary technologies provide the tools to adapt and scale these ideas. Sustainability, therefore, is not about reinventing the wheel but about rediscovering and reinterpreting time-tested practices for a modern context. With rising environmental challenges, including sea-level rise and changing climatic patterns, especially in regions like Kerala, the urgency to rethink our material choices and design approaches has never been greater.

Timber, supported by evolving technologies and informed by vernacular knowledge, stands out as one of the most promising solutions, offering not just a material alternative but a fundamental shift in how we approach building in harmony with the environment.



“Architecture is about building responsibly”

Architect Roy Antony

Ar. Roy Antony Illampallil, is a distinguished architect and academician, currently serving as Design Chair at SCMS School of Architecture. A graduate of the College of Engineering, Thiruvananthapuram (1991), he has worked with leading architects in India and abroad. His work has earned wide recognition that includes the Malayala Manorama–Malabar Cements Master Designer Award (2004), multiple IIA Kerala Chapter Awards, the Golden Leaf Award (2010), and the IIA Silver Leaf and Vanitha Veedu Awards (2017). He was a finalist at the IIA National Awards (2019). In conversation with Nandana Satheesh



Learn yourself, learn yourself, learn yourself. Students must develop strong fundamentals before attempting ambitious ideas. Design schools can guide students, but true learning depends on personal effort and curiosity. Not everyone who attends prestigious schools or ranks at the top becomes the most successful architect. Growth comes from continuous self-learning.

Students must critique their own work. A design should never be accepted as perfect. Revisiting ideas, questioning them, and refining them is essential for growth. Since architectural drawings eventually translate into real buildings, they must be precise, practical, and buildable.

What are your views on AI in design?

While AI can generate numerous ideas quickly, many of them are derived from existing patterns, often leading to repetitive results. True architectural thinking requires human judgment, experience, and understanding.

Architecture is not just about concepts, trends, or digital images. It is about thinking deeply, understanding spaces, and building responsibly—skills that grow through reading, reflection, discussion, and experience far beyond the walls of the studio.

Nandana Satheesh (2024–29 Batch) SCMS School of Architecture

Do you view architecture as another professional course with a fixed syllabus and examinations?

Architecture is not something that can simply be taught—it must be learned through curiosity, observation, and personal exploration.

I believe architecture cannot be fully taught within the five years of study. Instead, it grows through books, peers, interaction with the environment, and exposure to different disciplines.

What are the major challenges in the current architectural education?

One of the major issues in architectural education today is the excessive focus on architecture alone. A good architect should not be confined to architectural knowledge. Exposure to music, literature, fine arts, and culture enriches one's thinking and eventually reflects in design. Students need time beyond the studio to breathe, reflect, and think freely. Ideas should emerge from one's own thoughts.

Another challenge is the overwhelming amount of information available. Social media exposes students to endless images, concepts, and references. While information is valuable, too much of it can be confusing.

A major concern is the declining habit of reading. Reading forces the mind to create images and ideas internally. Books provide cultural depth, knowledge, and perspective that quick digital content cannot replace.

Do good ideas necessarily produce good architecture?

Students must develop strong fundamentals before attempting ambitious ideas.

I do not fully endorse this view. Living in a largely virtual world, students often develop concepts without grounding them in practical reality. Architects must draw, analyze, and think practically, because the drawings created during design are meant to be built in the real world—not merely submitted as sheets in a studio.

I am wary of overly literal or “lyrical” concepts—such as designing a café shaped like a cup or a stadium resembling a soccer ball. Architecture should

focus on how spaces are designed and experienced rather than on superficial symbolism.

Tell us about your student days?

We had a culture of sharing ideas and debating with peers. Conversations, discussions, and reading shaped our thinking. Students also spent time reflecting individually—moments of quiet thinking often sparked the best ideas.

Today, however, such moments are rare. Whenever people have free time, they immediately turn to their phones. As a result, genuine reflection and meaningful conversations have diminished within studios.

What is your advice to students?



WHERE ART MEETS SPACE

The Kochi Muziris Biennale

“At the Kochi Muziris Biennale, the city itself becomes the gallery.”

Ar Catherine Gings takes a walk through art, memory, and the spaces of the mega art expo

Kochi held its first mega art exposition, the Kochi Muziris Biennale in 2012. A three-month-long exhibition of contemporary visual arts is held every two years in multiple venues across the city. It transformed the city into a living canvas where art, architecture, and history converged in unexpected ways. The streets, courtyards, waterfront warehouses, and quiet corners of Fort Kochi, which houses its main venues, revealed novel functionality and newer adaptations.

Weathered colonial buildings, spice warehouses, and old trading houses became immersive environments where contemporary art engaged with the layered past of Kerala’s coastal landscape. Visitors are not simply spectators here. They become explorers, discovering artworks while navigating the historic streets and spaces of Fort Kochi.

The theme: “For the Time Being”

This sixth edition, curated by multidisciplinary artist Nikhil Chopra along with HH Art Spaces unfolded around the theme “For the Time Being.”

Audiences reflect on the transient nature of time, memory, and artistic practice. Rather than focusing solely on finished works, the Biennale emphasised process, experimentation, and collaboration. Many artworks evolved gradually through performances, workshops, and interactions with visitors. It was not uncommon to find artists actively working on installations or engaging in long-duration performances. In these moments, art came alive—unfolding in real time.

Entering the Biennale: The experience began at Aspinwall House, one of the primary venues of the Biennale. Once a colonial-era trading complex overlooking



the Arabian Sea, the site hosts monumental installations and experimental artworks.

The buildings still carry traces of their past—aged wooden beams, uneven walls, and wide industrial halls. Visitors wander slowly through the spaces, pausing to absorb installations that transform architecture into part of the artwork itself. “The Biennale invites visitors not just to see art, but to move through it.”

Large-scale sculptures occupied the abandoned warehouses. Video projections animate cracked walls. Sound installations echo through quiet courtyards. Here art does not merely occupy space—it reshapes the way we experience it.



The city, an exhibition

What truly distinguishes the Biennale is that it extends beyond its official venues. To experience it is to experience Kochi itself. The exhibition venues scattered across the old trading hub of Kochi- Mattancherry- take visitors walk through narrow streets, old bazaars, cafés, heritage homes, and seaside promenades.

Art appears in unexpected places. A roadside mural, an installation in a decrepit structure, a performance in a courtyard that once dried coffee beans. Such discoveries transform plain walking into an artistic experience. Adding to these surprises are the everyday rhythms of the city—the aroma

of spices from local cafés, the distant sound of waves along the shore, and the sight of Chinese fishing nets silhouetted against the sky.

A space for emerging voices

Alongside internationally renowned artists, the Biennale also nurtures emerging talent through initiatives such as the Students’ Biennale. Art students from institutions across India present experimental works exploring themes of identity, memory, ecology, and social change. Workshops, lectures, and discussions create a vibrant platform for learning and exchange. For many young artists, this becomes their first opportunity to exhibit in an international cultural event.

The Biennale ultimately reminds us that cities are not fixed entities. They are evolving narratives shaped by culture, creativity, and community.

(The writer is Asst. Professor, SCMS School of Architecture)



TEDx Stage

The Power of Architecture Spaces That Shape Human Life

Canadian architect Bill Chomik is renowned for his human-centred approach to design, emphasising how architecture can profoundly influence well-being, behaviour, and the quality of everyday life. This is the TEDxCalgary talk titled “The Power of Architecture: Spaces That Shape Human Life”, part of the TEDx Talks series organized under TED.

Architecture is far more than the construction of buildings—it is a powerful, often invisible force that shapes how we feel, behave, and experience life. In his talk, Bill Chomik reframes architecture as a living environment that quietly influences human well-being, relationships, and potential.

The spaces we inhabit affect everything from healing and



learning to emotional balance. A hospital filled with natural light, calming colors, and views of nature can reduce stress and even accelerate recovery. Similarly, schools designed with openness, light, and connection to the outdoors can spark curiosity and improve student engagement. In contrast, poorly designed environments—dark, confined, or impersonal—can hinder both physical and emotional well-being.

The spaces we inhabit affect everything from healing and learning to emotional balance.

Architecture also plays a subtle but significant role in shaping human relationships. As suggested by modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, space can influence how people connect, communicate, or drift apart. Buildings are not passive; they actively participate in our daily lives.

At its best, architecture creates meaning. When spaces reflect culture, ideas, and human needs, they foster a sense of belonging and identity. When they do not, they remain lifeless and disconnected.

Chomik emphasizes that

responsibility for good architecture extends beyond architects. Communities must demand thoughtful, humane design and engage in shaping their built environment.

Ultimately, architecture works quietly but profoundly. It has the power to heal, inspire, and connect—shaping not just the spaces we occupy, but the lives we lead.

Here is the video link to Bill Chomik’s TEDx talk:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgvoUFlb1Nw>

Christo Paulson Pathrose, (2023-28 Batch) reviews the talk

ARCHITECTURE AS A LANGUAGE

How buildings communicate ideas, culture, and memory

Watching Daniel Libeskind speak about architecture feels a little like listening to someone explain the meaning behind a piece of music. You may not fully understand every note, but you can still feel the emotion behind it. His TEDx talk “Architecture is a Language” isn’t a technical lecture about floor plans or construction details. Instead, it feels more like a philosophical conversation about why buildings matter in the first place. And honestly, as architecture students, we often spend hours worrying about section drawings, deadlines, and whether our models will survive the journey to the studio. Libeskind reminds us that architecture is actually something much bigger than that. According to him, architecture works like a language—a way to communicate ideas, emotions, memory, and even history. Which means buildings are basically speaking to us all the time. Some are whispering politely, and some are shouting dramatically. Libeskind is definitely in the dramatic storyteller category.



18.36.54 House, Connecticut

House as Artwork

Libeskind also talks about designing a house for two art collectors in Connecticut. Their request was simple but slightly terrifying for any architect: They didn’t want art inside the house. They wanted the house itself to be the art. The solution he designed was a folded stainless-steel structure with a warm wooden interior. Outside, the metal reflects the sky and landscape; inside, the wood creates a cave-like warmth. Instead of a typical boxy house with predictable rooms, the spaces flow and shift in unusual ways. In other words, it’s not your typical “living room – dining room – kitchen” arrangement. It’s the kind of house where you probably discover a new perspective

every time you walk through it. Which is exactly Libeskind’s point: architecture should create experiences, not just rooms.

Designing Cities for People

Daniel Libeskind also discusses the challenge of designing high-density cities without losing a sense of individuality. Many large developments end up looking repetitive—identical towers stacked next to each other like someone simply copied and pasted them in a computer model. Libeskind proposes something different: residential towers that curve and shift slightly so each apartment feels unique, with bridges and greenery connecting them to create shared spaces high above the ground. A good example of this idea can



be seen in the Reflections at Keppel Bay in Singapore, where the flowing towers and sky bridges create both individuality and community within a dense urban setting. Similarly, in his city planning projects, Libeskind focuses on connecting buildings with public spaces, nature, and cultural activity. Rather than designing isolated structures, he sees cities as networks of experiences—places where people walk, gather, and interact. For him, a successful city is not defined by its skyline but by the life that happens within it.

Aryananda PR (2023-28 Batch) School of Architecture

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