

AD100 2026: Insights into Contemporary Indian Architecture and Design

Executive Summary

The AD100 2026 list represents a definitive cross-section of India's most influential talents in architecture, interior decoration, and innovative design. The cohort is characterized by a profound shift toward **contextual consciousness**, where projects are no longer isolated structures but are deeply integrated into their local ecologies, climates, and histories.

Key trends identified in the current landscape include a surge in **adaptive reuse**—transforming construction debris or heritage ruins into functional spaces—and a rigorous commitment to **sustainability** that moves beyond aesthetics into engineering (e.g., carbon-neutral structures and load-bearing masonry). Materiality remains central, with a notable move away from standardized industrial finishes toward tactile, "honest" materials like lime plaster, reclaimed timber, and pigmented concrete. Simultaneously, the integration of traditional Indian artforms into modern interiors is being facilitated by specialized platforms like MeMeraki, which bridges the gap between master artisans and contemporary designers.

Detailed Analysis of Key Themes

1. Sustainability and Ecological Integrity

Modern Indian architecture is increasingly defined by its relationship with the land. The current discourse prioritizes "building with nature rather than over it."

- **Engineering-Led Sustainability: Wallmakers** (Kochi) demonstrated this with the Bridge House, utilizing a suspension bridge to connect parcels of land divided by a stream, using a "pangolin-scale" thatch layer for insulation.
- **Climate-Responsive Design: andblack Design Studio** and **Earthscape Studio** focus on thermal buffers and self-sustaining forms that reduce carbon emissions. **Studio Sangath** utilizes recycled compressed bricks from kiln waste to ground structures in the earth's palette.
- **Rewilding and Conservation:** Projects like the **Malabar Hill Forest Trail** by **IMK** (Mumbai) highlight a commitment to urban ecology, creating public interfaces with nature without disturbing existing ecosystems.

2. Adaptive Reuse and "Material Honesty"

A significant portion of the AD100 winners emphasizes the "life" of a material before and after its primary use.

- **Waste as Wealth: Kanan Modi Associates** transformed construction debris into "The Pavilion" in Hyderabad, using crushed concrete for walls and excavated earth for bricks. Similarly, **SJK Architects** are experimenting with "poured debris concrete" using demolition waste as aggregate.
- **Reclaimed Narratives: Studio ii** (Surat) constructed the Kara House entirely from reclaimed village elements—doors, windows, and rafters—without using steel or cement.
- **Authentic Material Palettes:** There is a recurring "obsession" with materials that offer tactile and emotional resonance.

Table: Prevalent Material Obsessions Among AD100 Talents

	Material Category		Firms Obsessed		Purpose/Application		:---		:--
-	:---		Lime & Plasters		Field Atelier, Studio Lagom, Ritu Nanda		Tactility, traditional Moroccan techniques, breathability.		Natural

Stone | _OPOLIS, Abha Narain Lambah, DADO | Grounding the structure in its context; durability. | | **Metals (Brass/Steel)** | ZZ Architects, Tushant Bansal, Mangesh Lungare | Adding warmth, precision, and "distinction in detail." | | **Earthen/Brick** | A Threshold, Anagram Architects, Studio Archohm | Thermal mass and vernacular aesthetics. | | **Concrete (Pigmented/Sand-blasted)** | 23 Degrees Design Shift, Samira Rathod | Contextual connectivity and "honesty." |

3. The "India Modern" Philosophy

Designers are actively reconciling heritage with global contemporary standards. This is not merely decorative but involves a "deep understanding of history" to create "timeless spaces."

- **Heritage Restoration: Abha Narain Lambah Associates and ns*a Architecture** are leading major restorations, from the Mumbai Port Authority museum to 19th-century colonial bungalows in the Nilgiris.
- **Craft Integration: Renesa Architecture** (Delhi) exemplifies this with the "House of Gond," which integrates traditional South Indian crafts (Chettinad columns, Karaikudi tiles) into a modern Pune residence.
- **Artisan Collaboration:** Many firms, such as **Iqrup Design** and **Khosla + Anand**, collaborate with local craftsmen to create bespoke furniture and lighting that elevates traditional skills.

4. Commercialization of Traditional Arts (MeMeraki)

The demand for "India Modern" interiors is supported by the availability of authentic, handmade decor. Data from the MeMeraki platform highlights the diversity of artforms currently influencing interior design.

| Artform | Region | Medium/Theme | | :--- | :--- | :--- | | **Tholu Bommalata** | Andhra Pradesh/Telangana | Leather puppetry, mythological themes (Ramayana/Krishna). | | **Pichwai** | Rajasthan | Religious/Folk art, often featuring lotus and cow motifs. | | **Gond** | Madhya Pradesh | Tribal art, nature-inspired patterns. | | **Cheriyal**

Scroll | Telangana | Narrative storytelling on canvas/masks. | |
Lippan Kaam | Gujarat | Mud and mirror work, traditionally for walls. |

Important Quotes with Context

On Design Philosophy

"At every stage of design, we simply ask: is it necessary? This approach helps us filter ideas and strip them down to their essence." — **Rahul Gore & Sonal Sancheti (_OPOLIS)** *Context: Explaining their focus on clarity and balance in the narrow, linear "Long House" in Pune.*

"Architecture is less about monumentality and more about memory—about crafting spaces that people can inhabit with emotion and ease." — **Samira Rathod (Samira Rathod Design Atelier)** *Context: Regarding her approach to intimate single-family homes and large-scale master planning.*

On Sustainability

"The greatest form of sustainability is to create work of lasting value." — **Samuel Barclay (Case Design)** *Context: Justifying the use of reclaimed stone and handcrafted copper tiles in the "Shakti Prana" project in the Himalayas.*

"The most sustainable house is the one that was never built." — **Meetu Akali (Studio Momo)** *Context: Describing the "Timeless House" in Alibag, which eliminated concrete entirely in favor of load-bearing stone and brick.*

Actionable Insights

- **Prioritize Adaptive Reuse:** Developers and homeowners should look at on-site materials (excavated earth, demolition waste) as primary resources for construction to reduce the carbon footprint and enhance contextual relevance.
- **Shift Toward "Indeterminate Places":** As noted by **Hundredhands**, spaces should aim to be "both old and new, Indian and foreign." Designing for "indeterminate" use allows structures to evolve with the inhabitants.
- **Invest in Artisan Welfare:** Following the **MeMeraki Promise**, ensure that artisans involved in custom projects are paid fairly and promptly. This "artisan-first" commitment ensures the longevity of the crafts used in luxury design.
- **Design for Microclimates:** Instead of relying on mechanical cooling, projects should utilize porous forms, north-facing terraces, and "in-between spaces" (as seen in **A Threshold's** City Pride School) to facilitate natural wind flow and glare-free light.
- **Leverage "Optimalism":** Move beyond the aesthetic of minimalism toward **Kunal Shah's** concept of "optimalism"—extracting the maximum functional and emotional value from the minimum number of resources.