"I agree that architecture has to fulfill a function, but it is not simply utilitarian. [The built form] can fulfill or challenge one at many levels — from the physical and the vital, to the mental and, eventually, if it is a good work to the psychic level," says Mona Doctor-Pingel.

Doctor-Pingel graduated from the School of Architecture, CEPT, Ahmedabad, and later obtained a master's degree in appropriate technology from Flensburg University, Germany. Settled in Auroville since 1990, now as partner of Studio Naqshbandi, she offers a personalized approach to holistic solutions for designing and building, while aiming to find the right balance between man, nature and economy. Her work integrates interior design and landscaping, lending a sense of place and materiality that responds to the climate and culture of South India.

From 1990-92, as a fresh graduate, she worked with Poppo Pingel on two projects — the Mukudvudha house and Udavi School. "My work involves designing and constructing with the principles of bioarchitecture, such as earth-energies, electromagnetic fields, natural materials which are ecological and sustainable in the long run," she says.

Doctor-Pingel has also been a core group member of the Dreamcatchers, a forum for envisioning and participatory city planning. She is currently a member of L'Avenir d’Auroville, Auroville’s Town Planning and Development Group.

One of the communities where bioarchitectural knowledge is being explored is Yantra, a group trying to integrate residences with workshops and offices in Auroshilpam, the industrial zone of Auroville.

With plenty of experience and exposure to international projects and architects, she has her own role models. "There are many architects' works that I like. Since no human being is perfect, the architecture created can never be perfect from every angle. However, I have studied at CEPT and I do realize that BV Doshi’s work and thinking has influenced me indirectly and, in recent years, more directly. Apart from that, the work of Poppo Pingel, whom she trained under in Auroville and later married, has also had a strong influence. Doctor-Pingel believes there is definitely a need for change in the field of architecture. "The need of the hour is a change in consciousness. We need to create a society, a collective that aspires to change the world as we see and experience it today. Sustainability has become a fashionable word today, but it means nothing so long as it does not change our lifestyles and our way of thinking and being," she observes.

She does not believe in using new materials for the sake of newness, and neither do imported products interest her. "I believe in 'think global, act local'. Recycling of waste products from our new-age lifestyle to build something modern would be challenging," she says.

Doctor-Pingel believes that architects must set good examples. In case of her work benefiting people in India, every project is a little step in this direction. She says: "I do see the role of architects as agents of change."

Declaring that her work represents everything about her since every building reflects the personality of the architect who designs it, she says that "architecture is not an end in itself, but a way of life and a means to evolve." Her most fulfilling project, so far, is her studio. And as for her best work, she says: "I like to think that the next one will be the best, or better."
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SPECIAL REPORT: APSDA
An international conference on Design for Changing Lifestyles was organised by IID as part of the Asia Pacific Space Designers Alliance in Goa this year.

INTERVIEW: PHILIPPE STARCK
On the occasion of his 20th anniversary with Duravit kitchen and bathroom sanitaryware, French designer Philippe Starck speaks about his inspirations.