



Architecture, interior design, exhibitions, set design, graphics and branding... architects Prashant Chauhan and Anu Tandon of Zero 9 have handled them all.

Text: Deepa Nair | Photographs: courtesy Zero 9



GROWING UP IN MUMBAI, PRASHANT Chauhan would gaze at towering buildings and wonder about the thrill of designing lofty edifices, and about people creating homes for people they'd never met. In some part of the same city, young Anu Tandon wished there was some way she could draw and sketch forever.

For both, 'architecture' seemed like the right path to achieve a dream — so what if they had to face stiff opposition from parents who thought engineering and medicine were better career options. While Prashant came back home without filling the engineering forms, Anu decided to pursue architecture even after applying for engineering. They met at the Rizvi College of Architecture, when Prashant was in his third year and Anu in her first. "We had similar thought processes in terms of design; we both like the minimalist approach to interiors. And yes, both of us had the drive to do something radically different to make an impression in this field. Everyone struggles to get to a certain level; we knew we wouldn't

be spoon-fed. The drive and the interest is what brought us together as a team," the architects tell me.

Zero 9 was conceived one lazy afternoon when Prashant had enough time on hand to think about matters other than the projects he was handling at that time. By then, he'd already worked for a year with architect Hafeez Contractor, six months for Talati and Pantaky and had assisted architect Jeena Shetty with art direction in movies. "I was already doing a lot of graphics by then. The work was appreciated by friends and clients, so I thought of going independent. I was reading numerology then and it occurred to me that zero was the beginning of everything and nine was the end — everything after that was just a repetition. That is how Zero 9 came into being."

1. Prashant designed these graphics for Tanuja Chandra's next directorial venture: *Hope & A Little Sugar*

2. *The Engine Room* for the *Road Raja* show was designed as a glamorized junkyard

3. This graphic panel was designed for Ram Gopal Verma's movie *Gayab*, where Prashant was the assistant art director

4. Zero 9 was instrumental in developing the branding and graphics for the *Nirvana* music lounge, a division of V One Entertainment

5. Architects Anu Tandon and Prashant Chauhan

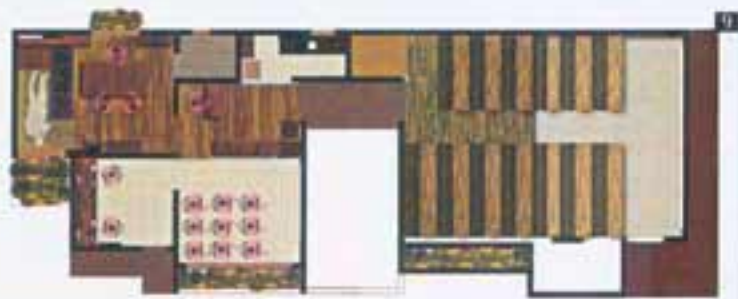
6. The 7 ft x 8 ft panel created for financial securities company *Finquest*

attitude



initially wanted a huge 7 ft x 8 ft panel at the reception which spoke about the company's ideology, Zero 9 ended up doing a series of graphics for wall and glass panels of the cabins.

Given that the company was part of the financial sector, Zero 9 generated a composite panel with visuals and words based on this sector. "Since the company was into stocks, overlapping a rising graph over the entire panel gave us the sense of the positive emotions of the market. The crisp blue and grey logo of the company was incorporated into the design with some black and white swatches to highlight the brand colours," says Prashant. If



7. The writing board and the bench-top were given the same medium, frosted glass, to make them look like they belonged to the same family

8. The private den for Mukesh Jodhani also features a dual purpose Zen-like sofa for him to rest during lecture breaks

9. The layout plan for Jodhani Tutorials

10. Mukesh's son's office sports a young fresh look with its use of vibrant colours

explains Prashant. Anu who interned with architect Kiran Kapadia, soon joined Prashant and the team was on a roll.

Zero 9 has churned out interesting projects in architecture, interiors, graphics, branding, set design... A selection culled from their diverse body of work is featured here.

Finquest Securities

Shweta Mashruwala, who designed this 4,750-square-foot space, wanted Zero 9 to handle the graphics in the office. Though the company



the large panel does not catch the visitor's eye, the typography, with phrases like *anticipate earnings ahead of the market*, sure does.

The design progressed into the office a few days later, with the clients wanting to stylize the interiors using graphics and paintings. The clients wanted some privacy in their glass cabins, but not a 'closed' look. The architects used a matt laminated barcode vinyl print across some parts of the glass in the two corporate colours. The digital paintings



(depicting various geometric designs) using the corporate colours of blue, grey and white, was placed against a utility corridor.

Jodhani Tutorials

A chance meeting with Anu's chemistry professor, Mukesh Jodhani, on a busy Mumbai road landed Zero 9 the job of designing the interiors of Jodhani Tutorials. "They were going to finalize a particular site for the tutorials and they asked me casually to take a look at it. That was just the start. Then they wanted us to



design the site," says Anu.

The 850-square-foot space, which was actually two rooms in a residential building, were joined to accommodate a classroom for 100 students, a mini classroom for laboratory tests, a reception area, a private room with an attached pantry for Mukesh Jodhani and a small office for his son. The architects, armed with the client's brief, segregated the main class area from the rest of the space. "We thought a lot about how the classroom should look, whether we should add more colour, keeping in mind the young crowd, or keep it simple and neat," says Anu. They went with the latter. Students enter the classroom through a dark wood passage (almost like a tunnel with the classroom board playing the part of the light at the end of the tunnel). The star of this show is undeniably the backlit frosted glass board. The benches were specially fabricated

11 & 12. The Nirvana music lounge

13. A row of graphical paintings line up on a mundane wall in the Finquest office





with glass desks to complement the huge glass board. The backrests of the benches were made of perforated metal sheets which folded to become 'bag holders' for the bench behind. "The glass on the bench and the board becomes the binding medium between the student and the professor. The bench (the horizontal surface) and the board (the vertical surface) automatically signify the student-professor relation, the authority of one over the other," they explain.

The walls have been treated with wenge to simulate the serious look of a library, offset by splashes of mint-green frosted glass. Light traps were added around the existing beams for diffused, reflected lighting. The main classroom has also been equipped with an AV set-up, taking into account future developments in audio-visual education.

The main cabin has been provided with a rest area for Mukesh Kashani who has long work hours. The sofa in the rest area doubles up as seating for visitors. Mukesh's son's cabin speaks a different design vocabulary – if the rest of the coaching class is mature, this space is peppy and brighter.

D-line Exhibition stall

Prashant, who had proposed a design for the office of D-Line India (a leading name in the Indian hardware market), received an urgent call requesting him to design an exhibition stall for them. The company intended showcasing their access control systems and hardware for washrooms, bathrooms, signage and wardrobes. "The clients made it clear that the stall had to be modular, able to stand alone and be

fit independently. It had to be designed on a back-and-forth concept," says Prashant. The stall space was a decent 3 m x 7 m (21 sq m), with one 7-metre side functioning as backdrop. The client didn't want a very free-flowing design and hence Prashant planned a basic 1 m x 1 m grid for the stall, which was made to define the "order" in design. Thus, the rear wall became the main backdrop and the other three free-standing panels articulated the stall as a very easy to move space.

The backdrop panels, being a single side display, were divided into seven equal parts 1 m in width and 2 m in height. The central panel was utilized to screen presentations, three were dedicated to hardware and washroom products and the last three panels constituted access control systems.

Three other free-standing panels were made into double-side display panels with a height of 2 m each. To maintain the "order", two panels were glazed at the first and the last squares of the stall, marking the enclosure of the space. The centrally located third panel (dedicated to staircase railing) was made of glass creating a visually open stall.

The backdrop and self-standing panels were then individually lit with a light-trap assembled at the top end of each panel, with yellow tubes. Each of the panels displayed a combination of products and their photographs, creating awareness about the product's potential.

Custom made 1 m x 1 m satin-finish stainless steel sheets were laid on floating on the periphery of the stall while clear and frosted glass sheets of 1 m x 1 m in a chequered



pattern with an underlay of white foam coat the rest of the stall floor.

Road Raja

When the famous Sky One channel from the UK came visiting India for a one-of-a-kind road show "Road Raja" in 2004, little did Prashant think that it would take him places. The show featured celebrities from the UK taking to the Mumbai roads and attempt to ride anything from a bicycle to a motorcycle, and even an elephant, before they raced their cart from Jogeshwari to the Gateway of India and back for the final session. "I was working with architect Jeena Shetty then and she was handling the set design of the show. She designed all the rooms for the celebrities, but she left one room, The Engine Room, from where actor Javed Jaffrey anchored the show, to me," says Prashant.

The Engine room featured a bonnet grill cut out from thermacole and cut-outs of cars lined up on one wall. A PVC pipe which indicated a signal on the wall runs down the floor forming a road divider. A small ledge actually had an original car bonnet with drawings of the carburetor, steering wheels, number plates, gaudy Stop/Move signs all

over the walls... the room looked like a glamorized junkyard. Javed Jaffrey was given a throne made from tyres and glass to sit on. Thick foam was stuck on the asbestos roof of the room to solve acoustic problems and Prashant stuck hubcaps over it to complete the look.

The work at the Engine Room was so well appreciated that the producer and director of the show wanted Prashant to design the graphics and a trophy for them as well. The brief was to make the trophy "heavy and noticeable" and the graphics to bear an "Indian trucky" look. For the trophy, Prashant decided to gather all possible items from the garage... horns, steering wheel, nuts, bolts... composed and welded them to mount them on to a wooden plank. Gold and red finishes were later added to the trophy which now weighed about 9 kg.

Setting out to change the world by the work you do is not a goal for the faint hearted. In the design profession, those committed to improving the lives of their clients know that their goal is lofty but attainable. An idea manifested in Zero 9's original and thought-provoking designs. >

16 & 18. Zero 9 has also designed some graphics for a child's bedroom. Seen here are the graphics for the computer table with pointer arrows and comic texts all around (16) and the toilet door which was treated as an illusory panel and gives a sense of someone trying to peep out of the toilet.

17 & 19. Institutions like the Gujarat Research Society also flock to Zero 9 for their expertise in graphic design.

14. At the D-Line exhibition stall, products along with their photographs were displayed side-by-side to make an individual aware of the various possibilities of the product.

15. The enormous 8 kg trophy Prashant designed for the Road Raja show was a big hit.