



# THE PASSING OF A LEGEND:

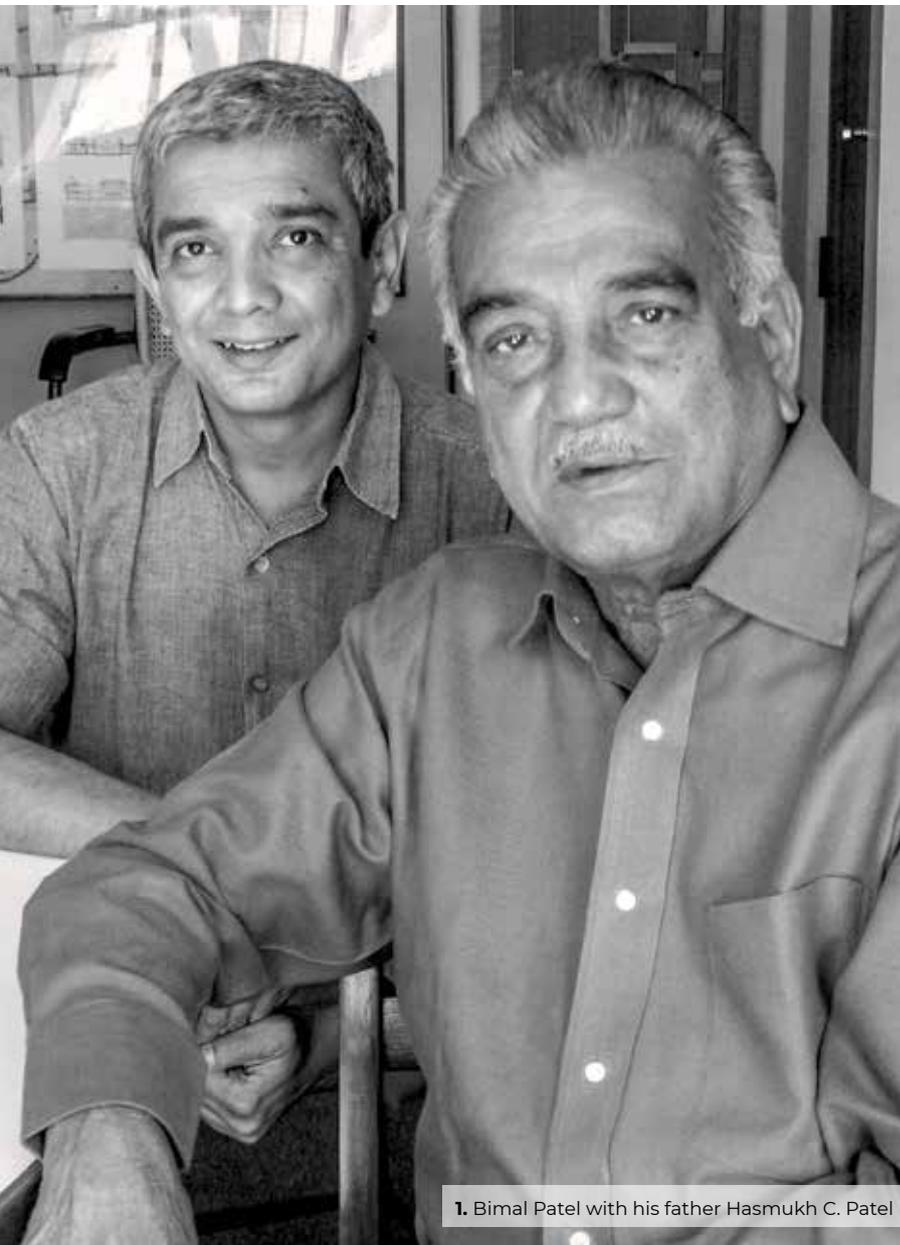
HASMUKH C. PATEL IS NO MORE

TEXT & PHOTOS COURTESY: Bimal Patel & Christopher Charles Benninger

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*I don't think I have in mind a particular theory or philosophy that helps me design buildings. The human being is at the centre of my creative efforts. I only believe that my designs must create humane environments that generate vitality and the joy of being. This is the only thing I understand and the only thing I practice*  
**Hasmukh C. Patel, Architect, 1933 – 2018**

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1. Bimal Patel with his father Hasmukh C. Patel

Hasmukh Patel did not often speak about his architectural philosophy. When he did speak, he preferred to focus on how his buildings pragmatically solved the practical problems of client requirements or the technicalities construction of building posed. Perhaps as a consequence of this, he is admired first and foremost as a conscientious and skillful professional, and his architecture is applauded for being deeply pragmatic and well-constructed. As his works clearly show, Patel relished exploring how the many programmatic and technological challenges that his widely differing projects posed to him could be creatively, deftly and economically tackled.

Patel rarely, if ever, discussed his aesthetic quest or his architectural style. Yes, his designs, besides being explorations in pragmatic problem solving, were also investigations in aesthetics and style. They explored how complex programmatic requirements could be cleverly met by plans that were strikingly clear, highly rational, aesthetically spare and geometrically elegant diagrams. They investigated how form, proportion, placements, colour and other such devices could be used to make the austere and abstract language of modern architecture intuitively understandable and aesthetically

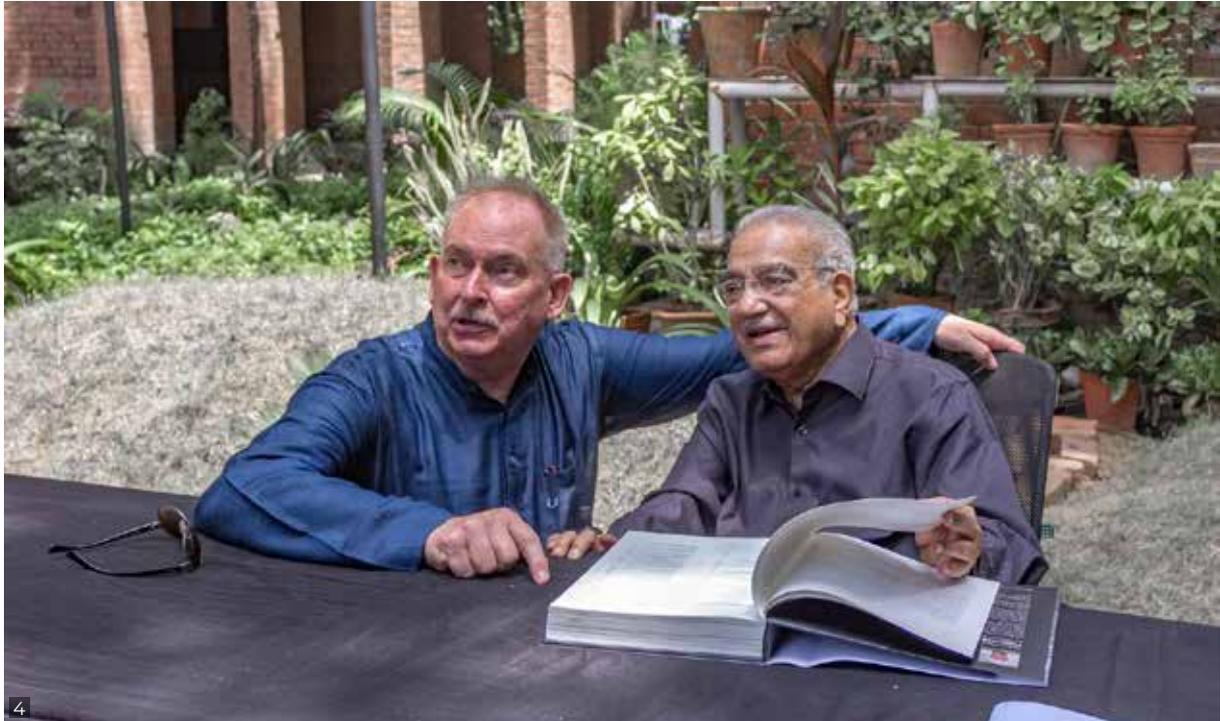


2. House for Bhaktiben & Hasmukhbhai

pleasing. Like many architects of his generation, Patel was highly committed to the rationalism and abstraction of modern architecture and preferred to stay away from the use of vernacular idioms. Patel and his peers all seemed to want to develop a locally rooted but secular, universal, modern and internationally recognisable architectural lingua franca that could replace the many historical, vernacular or formal architectural languages of India's numerous aesthetically insular communities. Regardless of whether resources were ample or constrained, or whether he faced unforgiving commercial considerations or enjoyed the freedom that typical public sector commissions of that time allowed, formal rigour and restrained aesthetic play remained the mainstays of his architecture. Patel's unspoken commitment to architecture's formal and civic ambitions was central to his work. ■

3. Dena Bank building





TEXT &amp; PHOTOS COURTESY: Christopher Charles Benninger

4. Christopher Charles Benninger with Hasmukh C. Patel during the Book Launch.

We have lost a great light in the sky revealing paths of truth, rational thinking and the force of love in shaping human endeavours to create a better world.

Hasmukh C. Patel, or Hasmukhbhai, as we all have known him, passed away quietly, after years of service to society and to the profession of architecture, focused on creating a new India, a better world and a vision of what a 'new man,' a citizen of democratic India, could mean.

My friendship with Hasmukhbhai, that began in 1968, was not easy in the beginning. He had an intrinsic doubt about the sincerity of foreigners who were on 'a trip,' and who may be using India as an escape from reality, as opposed to an engagement with reality. As the years passed, he gradually understood that I'd be here for a long time, and that I was indeed a part of his journey. Soon we were sharing our life's stories, sitting in his backyard chatting, while his young son, Bimal worked under the directions of a competent mistry, learning things with his hands. Hasmukhbhai often told me of his childhood, about his father who built real buildings, and his site visits as a boy,

engendering a love for construction and making things.

When Hasmukhbhai returned to India from his post-graduate studies, sixty years ago, the architectural profession in the subcontinent was just establishing itself, lacking clarity of what it should be. In this scenario, there was a great deal of leeway as to how one would envision themselves. One could work for society, or for personal greed and material gain? I suppose this challenge mirrored the predicament of the entire nation, and it was a time for introspection and for futuristic thinking rolled into one. Young architects were looking at the huge mercantile opportunities new India offered, while Hasmukhbhai pondered over the meaning of life, and how he could integrate a strong professional career with social contribution.

Hasmukhbhai clearly wanted to be a great architect, but he had sorted out a path that was steeped in professional principles. He saw the meaning of greatness as gifting the entire profession a role model of what an architect should be. He knew the word professional meant to profess values unique to the practice of architecture.



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Studying Hasmukhbhai's amazing portfolio of completed projects, it is clear that he was not trying to create high drama, attracting attention. On the other hand, he was surely cognisant of being original and of standing on his own feet as a unique creator. He was aware of the need to craft intricate spaces that stimulate the mind, and he knew the evolution of rational prototypes could lead to the creation of better urban patterns. He had clear ideas of sustainability and of integrating buildings into holistic environments.

One can decipher in Hasmukhbhai's work formative elements that have persisted throughout his lifetime as a charter of values and principles. He lived by clear commitments to three interwoven professional contracts between: (a) himself and his clients; (b) himself as a businessman in a hurry, and himself as a creator allowing himself time to strive for perfection; (c) and most of all, as himself, an architect, working for the public at large, seeing his professional responsibilities as working within the public realm. These three "contracts" clearly grounded the way Hasmukhbhai worked, designed, built and lived.

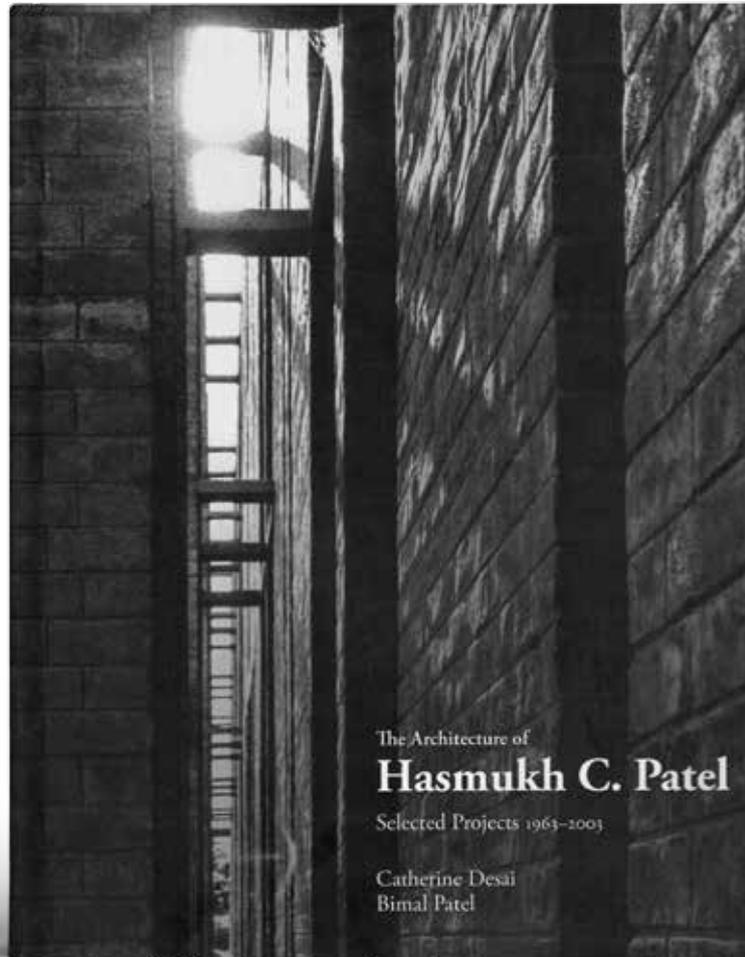
Through his extensive commitment to teaching he amplified his value-based model into the work culture of the students he taught, into the minds of the hundreds of young colleagues who passed through his studio, and into the working habits of his contractors and construction managers! He tempered the spirits of those of us who were honoured to call themselves his friend, observing him over decades, learning from him moment to moment.

In his own lifetime, he has become a celebrity architect and a famous professional. Hasmukhbhai's creations are important and remarkably beautiful places, that are about how one makes good cities by getting the small things right, in the urban fabric, that add up to a greater whole. In today's context that is the important benchmark in architecture. It is the founding principle of regional modernism in India.

Hasmukh C. Patel stands out as one of India's greatest creative master architects along with Charles Correa, Balkrishna Doshi and Achyut Kanvinde. ■

4. Hasmukh C. Patel launching Insite magazine with Nitin Killawala and Kamal Khokhani.

## The Architecture of Hasmukh C. Patel Selected Projects 1963 – 2003



Hasmukh Patel's architectural practice spanned the transformative latter decades of the 20th century. Patel navigated the political and economic changes of his time and brought his talents to bear equally on institutional, private and speculative development projects in a way that was rare amongst his contemporaries. He recognised that with every commission, regardless of budget, scale or type, came opportunities to further architecture's formal, civic and social agendas.

Patel rarely spoke about his approach to design. And yet, each of his projects is a built manifesto, an exploration of how architecture might enrich the lives of India's modernising citizens. His buildings are the result of profoundly practical deliberations combined with an intuitive

appreciation for the power of form and space. They belong to a deep tradition of 20th-century modernist thinking, where the legibility of the architectural diagram is a primary concern.

Included here are 51 of Patel's buildings, many published for the first time. Each project has been meticulously redrawn from material in Patel's archive and is accompanied by photographs and text informed by his recollections from practice. This book is both a tribute to Hasmukh Patel and a contribution to the ongoing documentation of modern Indian architecture, the gathering of a canon of works to inspire and inform the next generation.

With 264 photographs and 150 drawings. ■