Living Home: India
Creating New Furnishing Solutions for the Living Environment

Art Center College of Design
Designmatters
USA
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Context.
An estimated 590 million people will live in urban areas of India by 2030. For millions of Indians, a “home” means one room. Designmatters at Art Center and Ashoka Innovators for the Public teamed up to explore design solutions specific to the needs of urban Indian communities.
The project.
Due to the reduced scale and high occupancy rate of the low-income housing units in India, students were tasked with creating space-efficient, transformable, and innovative furniture prototypes.
The design process.
The studio began with a field research trip to Bangalore where students gathered data to understand the needs of Indian users, craftspeople, and manufacturers. Upon their return home, they continued their research in the library and on the web. These paths of inquiry were used to design prototypes to address the unique living needs of their users.
Over one billion people live in urban slums with 500,000 more joining each week. Embedded in such population growth implications is the critical need for affordable and safe housing. In 2008, the nonprofit Ashoka launched its Housing For All India initiative, an innovative public-private sector alliance that puts local social entrepreneurs from several key cities in India at the helm of driving affordable and environmentally responsible housing development for India’s growing lower-income population.
Activism and Civic Participation

Ashoka played a key role in facilitating the student’s collaboration with local and regional constituents, and the activity sites were strategically selected to maximize Ashoka’s existing infrastructure of partnerships.
Field research in Bangalore included home visits, where students had an opportunity to speak directly with families in low-cost housing, as well as tours of a sustainable fair-trade toy factory and a silk manufacturing facility that helped them gain a firmer grasp of local production methods. While most of their research centered on gaining a deep understanding of the housing needs in the communities they visited, the course also offered them an opportunity to reflect upon the cultural views and habits that shape their own work as designers.
By inviting student designers from Art Center, Ashoka applied “fresh eyes” to focus on India’s current issues, needs and concerns and offer innovative housing solutions for a low-income user base estimated at 130 million individuals.
The students were asked to incorporate environmentally responsible designs and to develop the furniture in close collaboration with community stakeholders and local craftspeople in India to create sustainable, cost-efficient, and ready-to-market furniture prototypes.
The research process also included a visit with faculty from Shristi School of Art, Design and Technology and sessions with leading Indian design practitioners including architect V. Naresh Narasimhan, Principal at Venkataramanan Associates and the design team at Idiom.
From the start of the research process, students were introduced to local fair-trade furniture manufacturers and artisans to help them gain a firmer grasp of the readily available production methods. Designing furniture solutions with these manufacturing processes in mind allows for new job opportunities within the community.
During home visits with the local residents, students were forced to reconsider their American attitudes toward entertaining in the home. One student wondered, “How can we change our ideology to accommodate the needs and wants of a country where people have very different views on comfort?” Struck by the lives and dreams of the people they met in India, the students used their research to recount these individual stories within the context of design thinking.

**Storytelling and Visualisation**

- Multi-use furniture
- In-home co-design sessions
DESIS NETWORK
Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability

www.designmattersatartcenter.org/proj/living-home-india-creating-new-furnishing-solutions-for-the-living-environment/

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