



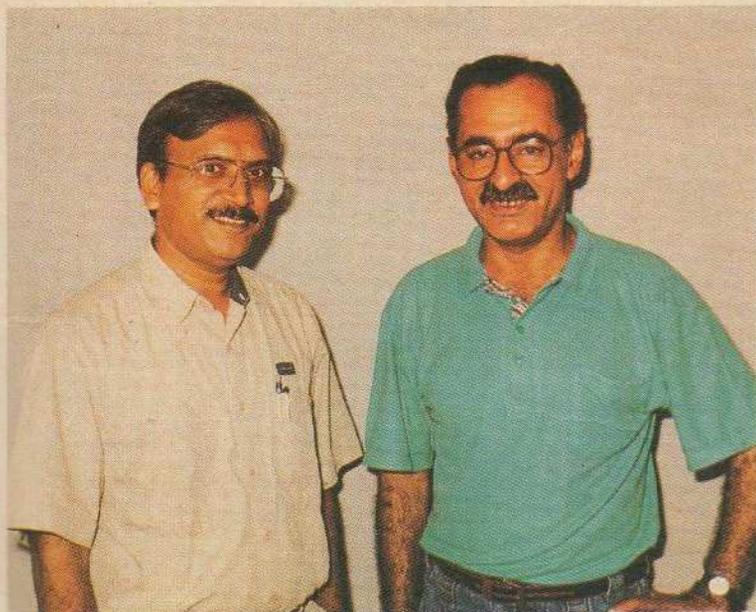
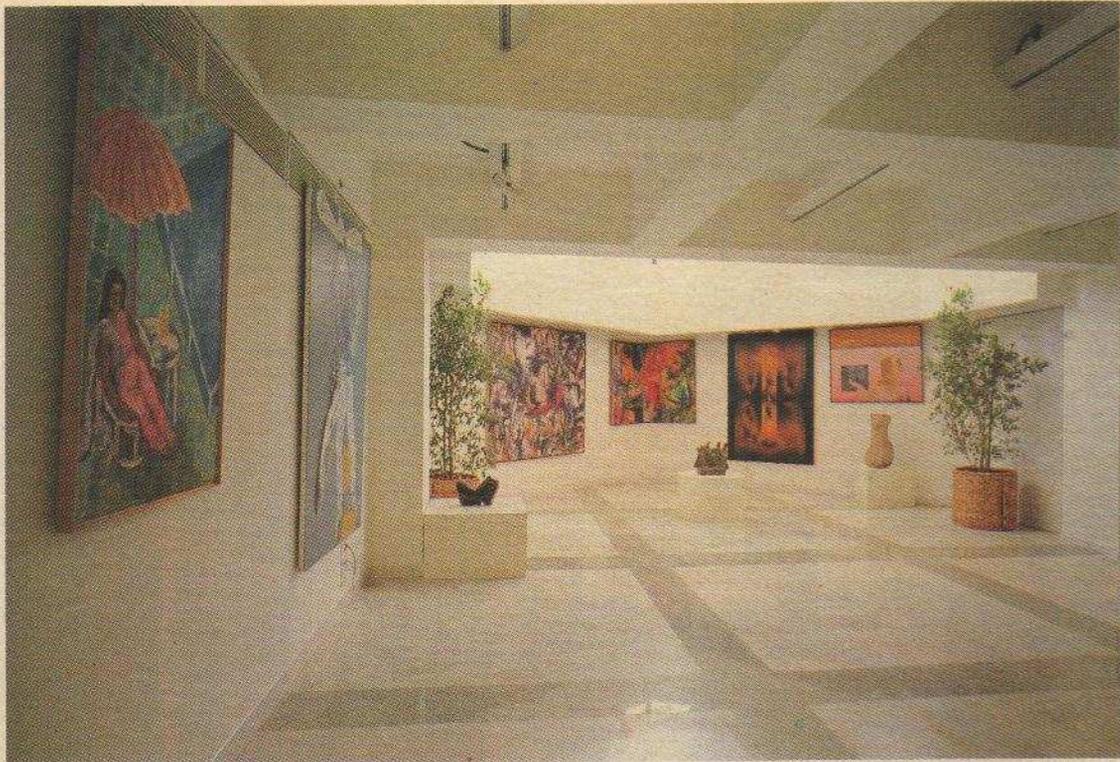
*From the entrance lobby itself one gets interpenetrating views of the different levels inside. Unfortunately, when we took the photographs, the pool in the atrium was hit by the city's water scarcity and was dry!*

The building stands out among the squatting rows of government offices in Bandra, its modern dark glass facade glinting at you like an unfriendly mechanical monster in a sci-fi film set. Inside, the marble floored foyer gives you no indication where a visitor might wait; instead, while security guards ask you half a hundred questions, you take in a pool and boulders in the atrium, and artist-turned-sculptress Suruchi Chand's suspended sculptures of human forms floating right up to the roof of the building. The atrium, around which the interiors spiral, lets in so much of natural light that artificial lighting is only supplementary, unlike the typical city office that takes no advantage at all of the abundant tropical sunlight.

The atrium opens up the building, so you can see three or four levels from wherever you are. 'That's the primary idea behind it,' says architect Vinod Gupta, who with Rasik Bahl, of Space Design

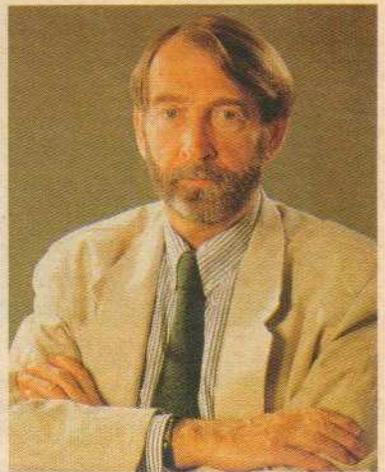
Associates, New Delhi, designed the building, 'to keep a feeling of continuity, with this view of floors open. You can wave to friends on other floors...' 'Levels' instead of floors enhance this feeling of interaction. One can walk up to any floor, even the topmost eighth, without feeling the strain of it, because you walk a maximum of five steps before you come to a landing, which, Gupta says, is meant to encourage people to walk. Offices are, therefore, linked by a series of split levels rather than floors. One office to the next is a difference of just four steps. A visitor will be flummoxed by the lift signs that say A, B, and C instead of 1, 2, and 3, and, on emerging, he has to figure out whether he wants to go to C2 or C3 ahead, D1 up the stairs or B3 below!

The reception on the first floor is a pleasant foretaste of things to come. Full of light, expansive, on two levels, with one end overlooking the building's permanent art gallery on the ground floor. It makes an exemplary break from

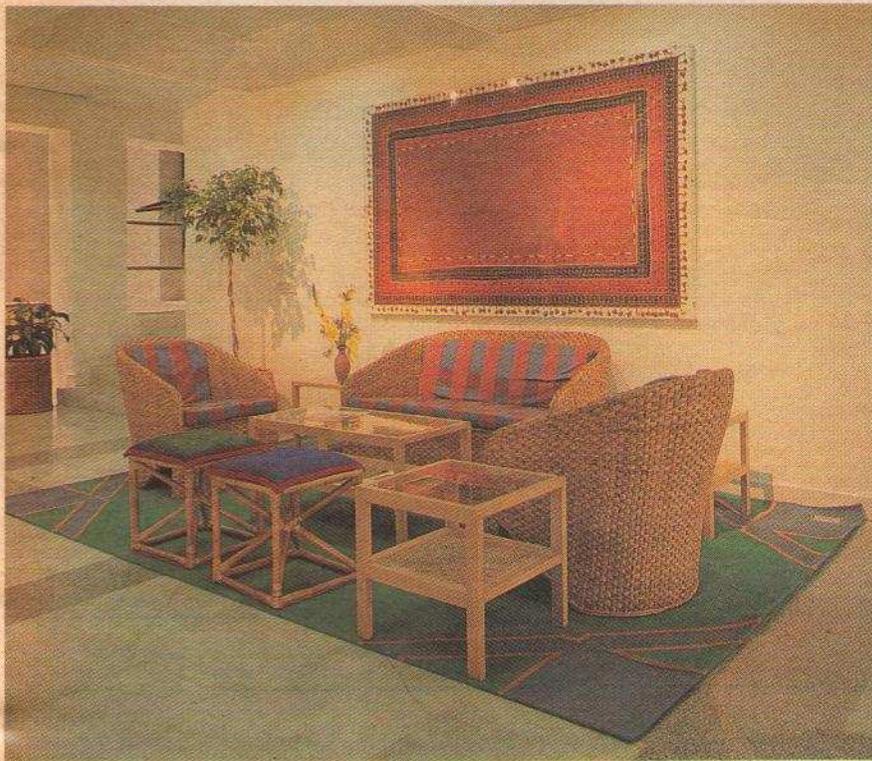


*Architects Vinod Gupta (left) and Rasik Bahl*

*The art gallery on the ground floor, well lit by the sunlight streaming in from the windows on the reception level above.*

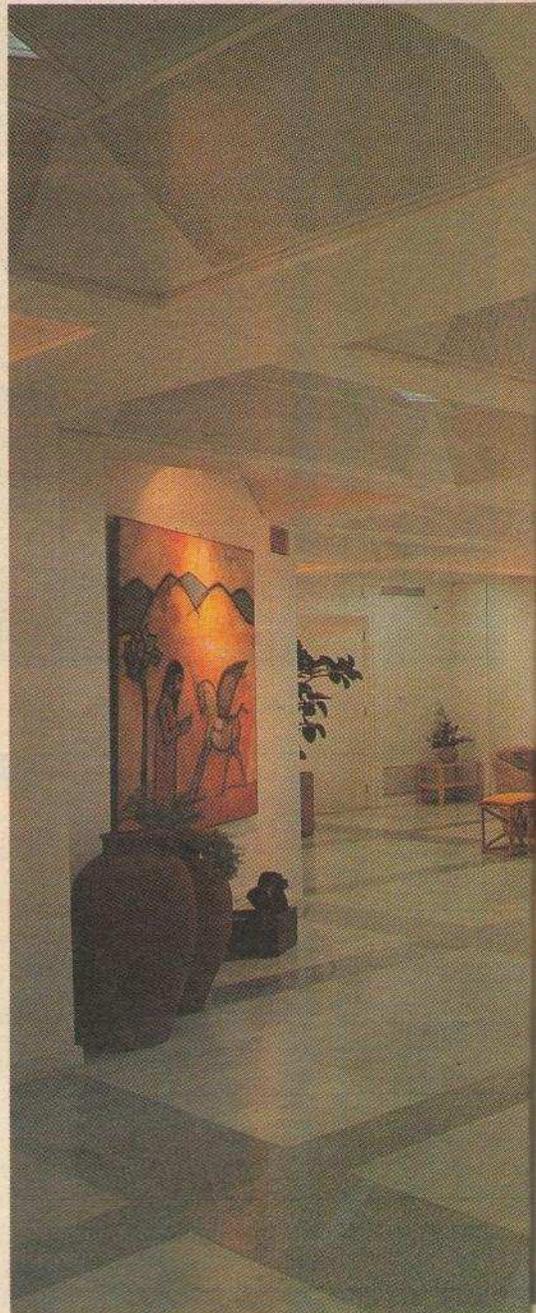


*Interior designer Carl Christiansson*

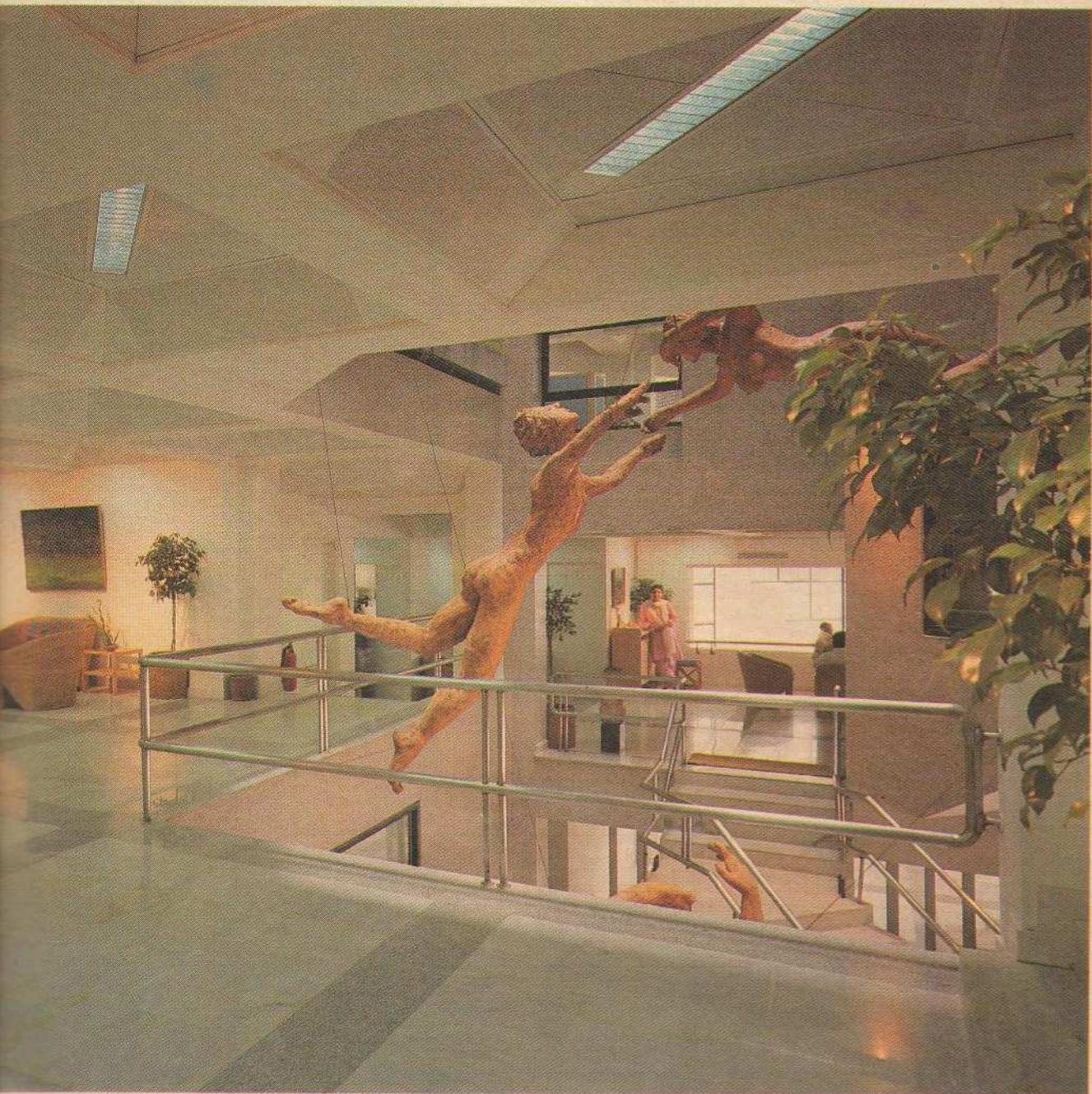


*A closer view of one of the seating areas in the reception — not just rich in colour, but extremely comfortable.*

stuffy rexin sofas and thick carpets. Cane instead of steel frames, durries rather than pile carpets. Renowned Swedish designer and architect Carl Christiansson who designed the furniture has opted for natural materials that complement the bright relaxing textiles designed by Finnish textile designer Irma Kukkasjarvi, in an extremely attractive design scheme that lends the CMC office much of its charm. Foam, laminate, plastic make way for cane, rope, leather and wood. The light and elegant rubberwood that Christiansson has used throughout the office for tables and office partitions, is a 'measure of conservation', as rubberwood, once it has outlived its productive life, normally goes to waste. The flooring used in all the upper levels is a cheap wood called benteak with a coffee colour that goes well with the lighter colours around. Throughout the office are paintings and Kutch tapestries on the walls, cane planters with greenery, vases on tables, little cane stools with



*The expansive reception is on two levels. The seating area at the furthest end in the picture overlooks the art gallery on the ground floor.*

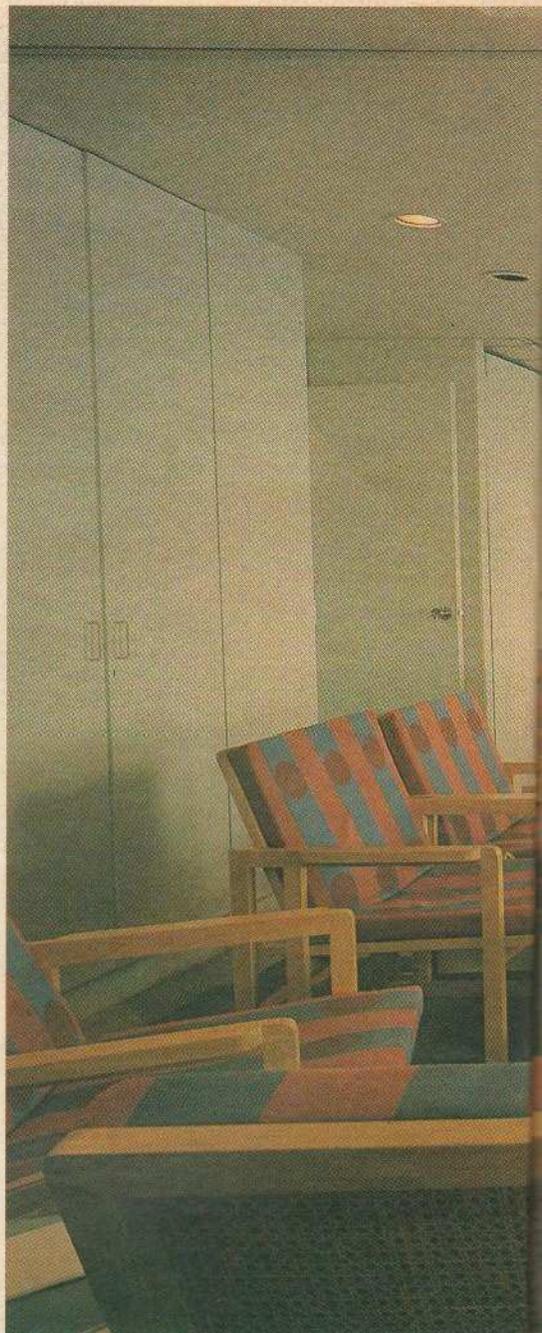




*The 'demo' room, on the level just above the reception. The sunlight coming in is more than adequate here at this time of day.*

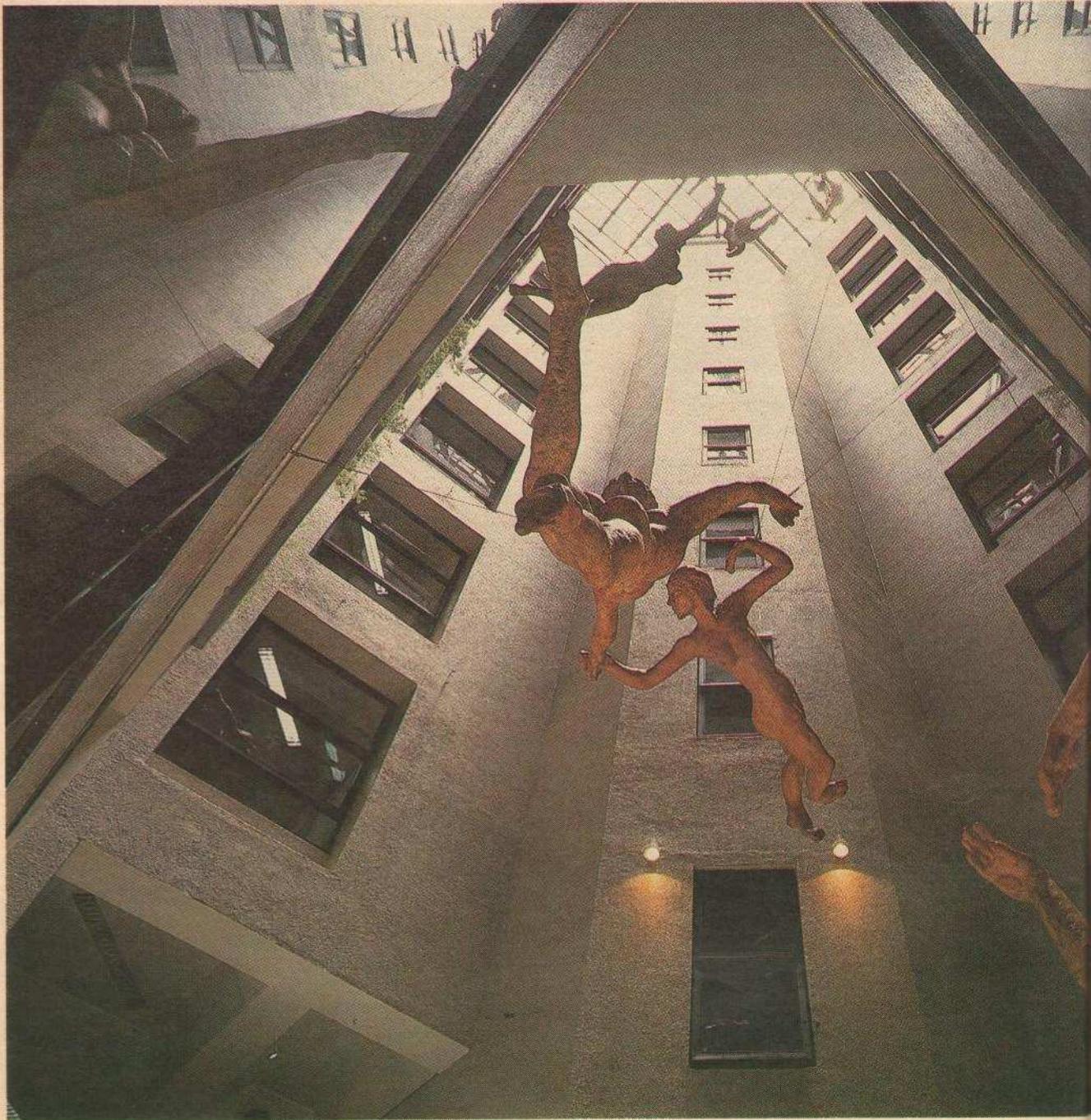
cushions covered with Indian prints in rich colours — everything makes for casual and vibrant good taste and emphasises the airiness of the interiors.

Conference rooms and visitors' rooms lead off from the reception, and a typical such room is flooded with the sun from large glass windows, and upholstered in Kukkasjarvi's vivid palette of colours. On the level above, visitors can help themselves to refreshments in a buffet room, which is more an open corner of the floor. From anywhere you sit in the reception, a sculpture will be in view. 'I wanted some art work in this building tying all the floors,' Gupta explains their presence. Initially, an eight-storey high mural was mooted, then artist Suruchi Chand turned to free floating forms which she has titled 'Search for the Divine', representing a yearning to reach higher, beginning with a family at the lower level and ending in Buddha at the top. The seven figures were made in

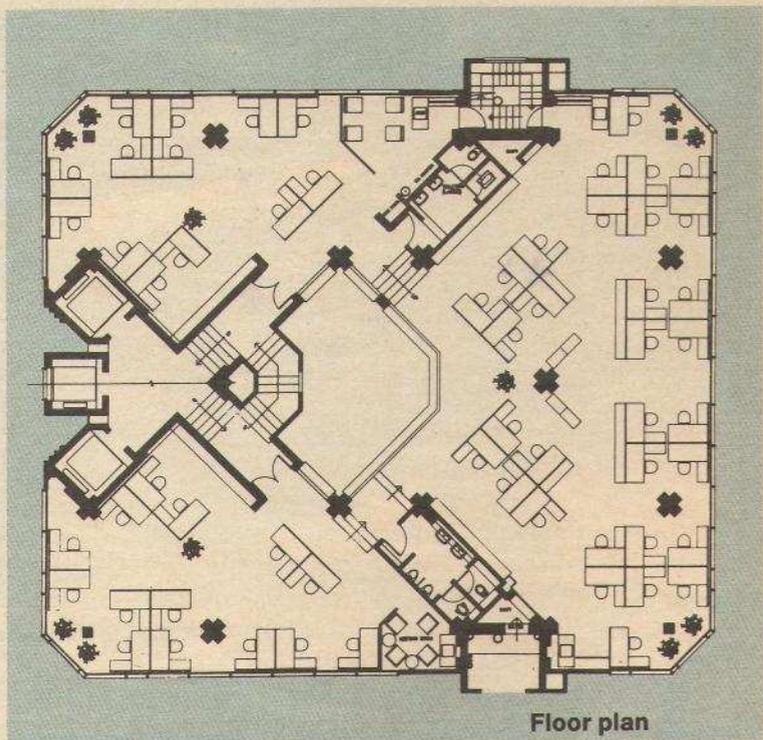




*Collapsible doors can divide this big conference room into three rooms. Each chair has a pouch on the side holding a writing board and a note pad.*



*The atrium, with circulation routes around it, floods what would have been the dark core of the building, with light.*



Ahmedabad with a team of assistants helping her, and the whole process was video taped. It took nearly eight weeks to erect scaffolding and string them up on steel wires, and then they had to contend with the ire of those who were outraged at having to look up from the sanctity of their work stations to the nudity of the human form.

The rest of the levels above are identical office spaces, where CMC democracy is on display with everyone including the MD working in open work stations with identical desks and chairs and roll-top cabinets. 'It makes a tremendous difference when the MD is so easily accessible,' Gupta avers. The offices have 'chat corners' near a window, for employees to have any private discussions necessary between work. Sound-absorbent fabric on the partitions reduces noise, and all cabling is under the rope carpet, the computer cables connecting to the terminals through the wooden partitions.



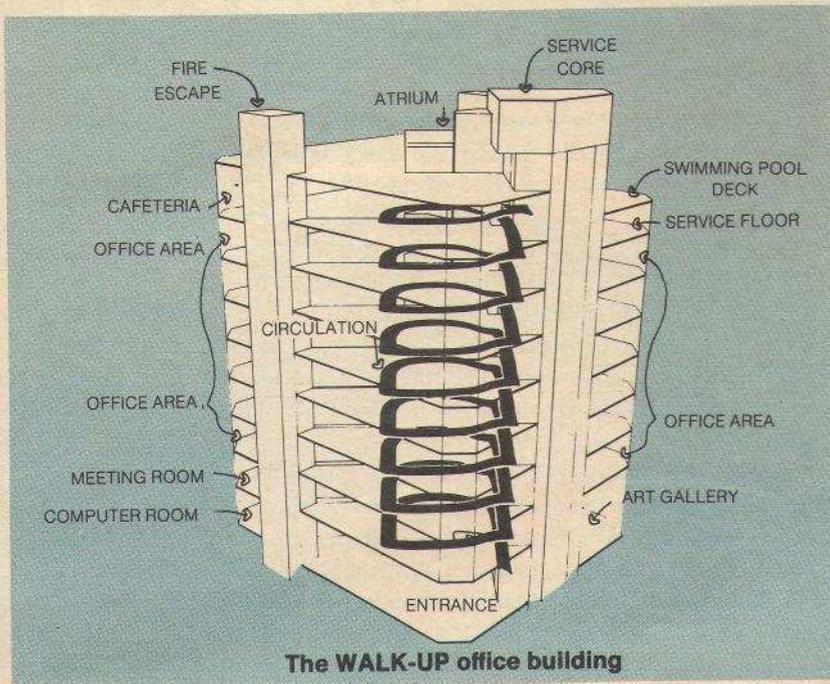
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*A typical office area with identical work stations. The angled and flat ceiling panels are designed to disperse daylight from the large windows.*

These automated offices have aroused enough public interest for CMC to set aside a day in the week to show curious visitors how they work! Lighting and air-conditioning in the offices (and throughout the building) is computer controlled — measuring the angle of the sun and the amount of daylight, pyranometers in the offices signal the microprocessor which tilts the venetian blinds accordingly. The top half of the large glass windows have these mirror-coated blinds which are entirely computer operated, while the lower half can be manually adjusted. Light reflects from the mirror coating to the specially designed false ceilings which scatter the light to every nook. The recessed artificial lights, which go almost unnoticed, are also dimmed or increased by remote control, and the result is optimum, glare-free light which creates no harsh spots on the computer screens. The lighting level here is about 200 lux,

compared with around 300 in many offices. The power saving is expected to be a remarkable 50%, and this reduces the load on the air-conditioning as well. The lift lobbies too receive daylight from slits in the wall and through the stairway doors which are always open.

Energy conservation extends to air-conditioning too, which is similarly under remote control, with temperature sensors from all air-handling units feeding in information about existing temperature levels, and the microprocessor making decisions about the required temperature, depending on factors like occupancy, lighting and so on. While the controlled lighting reduces the cooling load in the office, it is further reduced by double glazed windows, and insulation in all exposed roof and wall surfaces. Since the energy consumption of lights and air-conditioners is monitored by energy panels, it becomes possible to gather



**The WALK-UP office building**

data on consumption levels and patterns and rationalise energy spending.

This automated building management system extends to fire control and water management. In the event of a fire, alarms sound, the fire doors shut to isolate escape routes from the rest of the building, mains power is switched off while critical equipment receives emergency power. Ventilation fans circulate fresh air in fire-free areas, and

the main stairway of the building is immediately pressurised by a fan right at the top, to keep it free of smoke. The fire escape staircase could prove a security risk and therefore is fitted with an alarm that sounds should an unauthorised person use it to enter the building.

Water management consists of the computer monitoring of water levels in the overhead and basement tanks, and the activating of pumps accordingly.



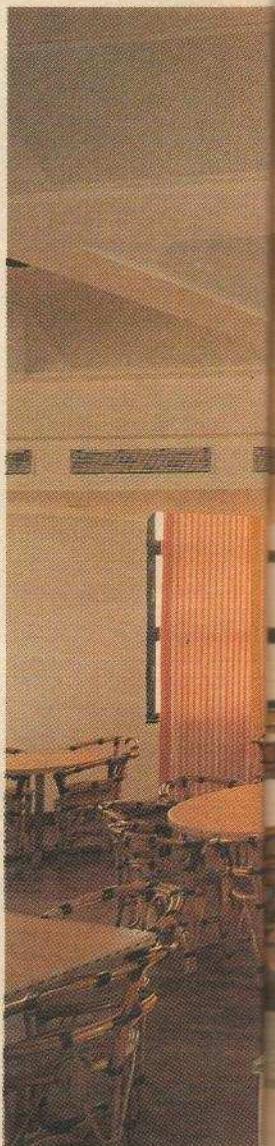
Artist Suruchi Chand talks about her sculptures for CMC, a much publicised move away from her medium of canvas and paint.

'Initially, the CMC management wanted me to paint the 80-ft wall of the atrium, which was not feasible, so I decided to use sculptures. It was possible for me to do so because a painter's imagination sees floating (as against fixed) sculptural forms. I've called the theme 'Search for the Divine', starting off, at the bottom of the atrium, with the difficulties and disappointments of a family, and then the figure of the woman of the family showing the way ... she's pointing

upwards.... I believe it is the woman who points the way, she teaches you the values of life — be she wife, lover, mother. Right at the top of the building is Buddha's face — one hand of his appears to question, which expresses the reality of today's world, the other hand is raised in blessing, it indicates a state of calm that the mind has evolved to.

'Yes, the whole concept is in counterpoint to computers, which use only intelligence; a freedom from a mechanical lifestyle. The human form was deliberately meant to contrast with the clinical nature of the building. I always paint figures. I decided to have the sculptures suspended because of the space that was available to me. At the inauguration, Mrinalini Sarabhai performed a dance that incorporated all the poses of the sculptures; that was the first time she was inspired by modern sculptures, normally temples are her inspiration.

I have a very good relationship with CMC, so I was agreeable to working with them. They promote the arts with lectures, awards, they have a culture that inspires freedom. I couldn't have done this for a callous organisation.'





**Left:**  
*Cooling off at  
the poolside*

**Below:**  
*The cafeteria, bright  
and airy and  
delightfully furnished.  
The swimming pool is  
a few steps above.*

