

# OPEN IMPRESSIONS

It's yet another season of new courses and curriculum in Indian design schools and institutes.

Last year, same time, we discussed the state of Indian design education with industry seniors and brought their opinions in the form of an article. We present glimpses of that article right here.

Carrying forward from where we left, this time, we decided to discuss few key issues with the top names of the industry. Here are excerpts from the conversations.



**Dilip Chhabria.**  
An automobile designer of repute, he founded DC Design in 1993. He is also at the forefront of Dilip Chhabria School of Design.



**Anant Kulkarni.**  
He passed out from Sir JJ Institute of Applied Arts. Later, he joined the same institute as faculty, a decade ago.



**Naved Akhtar.**  
One of the respected names in Indian advertising, he co-founded The Shop in 2004. He has about two decades of experience in advertising.



**Archan Nair.**  
Visual artist, illustrator and art director, he has worked for many reputed brands like Nike, Vogue and Canon to name a few. He runs his own studio at New Delhi.



**Salil Shail.**  
An animation filmmaker, he trained from the Bristol School of Animation. Presently, he heads the animation studio at UTV Movies, producing many children's classics.



**Nithin Rao.**  
Illustrator, caricaturist and communication designer, he spent considerable years in advertising after venturing out on his own. As a freelance designer, he has worked for many top brands.

**CG: So much ado about schooled talent. How much of it is really necessary for the Indian design industry?**

**Dilip Chhabria:** Only up to a point where it helps in enabling good business practice. Beyond that, schooled training may actually harm the spirit of free-thinking.

**Naved Akhtar:** Design Schools give one a basic framework and direction. Without a commercial pressure, it allows freedom to think and explore individual creativity. But then, that's only at a basic level. Once in the industry, everything else feels new.

**Archan Nair:** There is no rule or a method that makes someone ready for design. It is all about practice and love. Institutions may help but it is entirely up to us to carve our own path.

**Nithin Rao:** There is a huge disconnect between the current design education standards and the expectation of the industry. What is taught in design colleges is a laborious process to ensure matured design output but what the industry actually demands is quick turnover and sharp deadlines ←

Design colleges teach a laborious process to ensure a mature design. Whereas, the industry demands a quick turn over with quality

**CG: Fair enough. But then, is the Indian design education system prepared to hone talents and produce game changers for the industry?**

**Dilip Chhabria:** Absolutely not. Unless the academic preparation is reduced to 30% and the vocational practice is hiked to 70%.

**Anant Kulkarni:** Curriculum in visual art/design stops right after VIIIth standard in most schools. When these students land up in design schools, all they get to face is confusion.

**Naved Akhtar:** Except few schools, the system in general doesn't do that job. The schools and teachers must constantly revamp their outlook and methods to keep up with the pace of the industry.

**Salil Shail:** Indian design education system is marred by invasive and didactic government policies. Even with an abundance of talent in educators and students, lack of infrastructure and poor funding are posing major hindrances ←

**Vinay Vikram Singh** From March/April 2011 issue

**The Indian design schools lack greatly in terms of latest technologies and tools. The technical know-how that is imparted is not up-to-date or of best industry standards. This is primarily because the lecturers and professors at these institutes are not from production background.**

Providing good learning material, tools, latest production methodology and educators who have good industry experience are the key to improvement. Apart from these developmental changes, one great way to ensure the production of talents is multiple screening of the candidates. Where not only the talent and aptitude but also the attitude of the candidate is judged ←



## CG: Does that mean that students should look abroad? What differentiates an Indian design school and its international counterpart?

**Dilip Chhabria:** Being at a nascent stage, the scene is quite chaotic and disappointing at home. The West had the fortune of an industrial revolution. Along with that, decades of design legacy have trained the schools abroad to treat human capital preciously.

**Naved Akhtar:** The design schools in developed countries are more closely linked to the industry over there. One more key difference is the use of technology. And it definitely depends on the infrastructure available.

**Salil Shail:** Research is the key area where Indian design schools are behind their international counterparts. The participation of Indian schools at international research forums is either zero or very limited ←

## Vaibhav Kumaresh From March/April 2011 issue

**As far as education in animation is concerned, it is crucial to become a good storyteller than a technician. Learning on the job is only facilitated by basic education. D-schools in India act more like training institutes than educational institutions. Like learning typing doesn't guarantee education in the language, learning the techniques is not similar to learning the art.**

The D-schools should focus more on developing filmmakers, rather than specialist animators or modelers or lighting artists. Every student has an individual style of telling a story. The schools should encourage those traits and create more storytellers and not merely skilled technicians ←

## CG: Looking ahead, what are the areas in which the Indian design schools should improve to contribute in the Indian design movement?

**Dilip Chhabria:** Vocational training must be stressed more upon and academics can take a back seat.

**Anant Kulkarni:** More industry experts and specialists to take up teaching. Appropriate data, maximum information and study material for the students to learn from.

**Naved Akhtar:** We should develop a unique Indian design sense that takes after the best of tradition while being contemporary. Indian design should have a language of its own and the schools should propagate that.

**Salil Shail:** Schools should improve upon checks on the plagiarism as a part of their evaluation process. The emphasis should be more on research based assignments. Also, interaction with top practitioners of the industry can also help in growth.

**Nithin Rao:** A faculty which is trained in the industry. Also, collaboration between students with industry professionals to come up with projects can be of great help ←

## CG: International education is good. But then, the designers finally come back. What are the problems and opportunities back home?

**Dilip Chhabria:** The most apparent problems are lack of professionalism, dearth of courage and vision in the decision makers. What definitely feel good are the energy, the diversity and the sound with smell of India in everything.

**Anant Kulkarni:** Designers trained abroad are used to diverse facilities and technology. That's what they are definitely going to miss in India.

**Naved Akhtar:** The design schools in developed countries are more closely linked to the industry over there. One more key difference is the use of technology. And it definitely depends on the infrastructure available.

**Archan Nair:** Clients, to start with. The understanding nature, open-mindedness and respect for creativity are hard to find out here. But then, we have all kinds of challenges. That may definitely add spice to the experience.

**Salil Shail:** The greatest challenge lies in creating a solution that suits the Indian sensibility. The homegrown industry is still taking shape. And therefore, the designers trained abroad have an opportunity in trying out newer things and set a trend.

**Nithin Rao:** There is a great mismatch of attitude and ego between the foreign—returned and the home grown. The former tend to preach a new design process which is not the norm of the industry ←



The cover page features Goddess Saraswati, a symbol of the multi-faceted creative mind, more than any religious pretext. The image talks about purity and seamless experience of universal knowledge surrounded by us. While the Lotus represents the intricacies of art and design, the protagonist puts it forward for the devotee.

## Ishan Khosla From March/April 2011 issue

**In contrast to the West, most Indian design educators are not practicing professionals. They usually lack practical and contemporary knowledge about this dynamic profession and industry. Moreover, Indian D-schools tend to 'produce' students who have similar style, an antithesis of a good creative education.**

A way forward for design education in India is to start it right at the school level. D-school teachers need to widen their perspective and impart new techniques to their students based on this knowledge. Design students should be challenged to be thinkers before they become doers. D-school curriculum should incorporate our uniquely Indian contexts rather than merely following the successful western techniques ←

While the industry is warming up to a design movement, the present educational system doesn't really present a bright picture. But then, optimism is the underlining tone of every practitioner of the industry. With many areas being positively worked upon, we are sure the coming days will see a result-oriented system in place. We are all waiting for that rising sun in the design education horizon ←

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**Sameer Kulavoor** From March/April 2011 issue

**There is a major gap in the strength of concept and quality of execution in our industry. I believe the responsibility lies with the schools to impart effective technical knowledge to its students. And re-think about a curriculum which is as broad as visual communication, instead of teaching specific disciplines like illustration or typography.**

The design schools should have a more intense basic training where the students get exposed to the best practices and trends of the industry. For this, more and more people from the industry, who have had a substantial exposure of craftsmanship, should come in as educators ←

What's your opinion?  
Do write in to us at [Knock@CreativeGaga.com](mailto:Knock@CreativeGaga.com) with  
'Indian Design Education' as the subject.