

'It is important to gauge impact of buildings on environment'

Ceramic, one of the most ancient materials, is now an integral part of almost every building across the world.

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*Ceramic tiles are an extension of the human endeavour to find an object that would enhance the functionality and aesthetics of homes, offices and all designed spaces. As Dinesh Vyas, Building Material Expert and Advisor at H & R Johnson (India), says, "With new technology and innovations, tiles became large in size, stronger, affordable and versatile to perform in all challenging usage environment for residential, commercial as well as industrial buildings...innovative players like H & R Johnson have further added value by creating unique tiles." Like the anti-bacterial **Germ-Free tiles** and **Stain-Free tiles** promoting hygiene and cleanliness in the interiors. Vyas adds, "Architects and designers favour the usage of tiles not just for hygiene, low maintenance and aesthetics, but also as they are very much concerned for the environment; tiles avoid wastage and consume much less material per square meter of floor or wall and minimise the damage to the environment due to mining of stone blocks (marble) or cutting trees (wood) as their natural alternatives.."*

For Delhi-based architect Tarun Walecha, it is precisely for these reasons why he insists on quality and eco-friendly tiles for the buildings he designs. No wonder, he is very passionate about leaving behind as little carbon footprint as possible when he is working on his

passion projects. In a candid interview Walecha talks about the need for using the right materials in the right space to make the living space an experience of a lifetime.

Q: What all considerations come to your mind when it comes to designing any project, taking care of the environmental aspect?

TW: The starting point while exploring any design solution is its functional utility. As a designer, when I dwell on that, I layer my options with various other constraints such as vernacularism, sustainability, aesthetics, and eco-friendliness. Each of these aspects, to various scales, resonates with the impact the design may have on the environment, both micro and macro. Hence, each of the aspects, be that planning, site location, or the extent of each of the materials used, must respond to these concerns.

It is pertinent, that we gauge the impact on the environment, not only in terms of origination or manufacturing but its sustained usage. A built space becomes an integral part of users' life, it is almost a biological participant as it affects the quality of life one lives within. I am personally, therefore, very particular in this evaluation and gauge various parameters in detail, referring to the manufacturing process, usability, local availability, etc.

Q: When it comes to the interior, while aesthetic is of paramount importance, how do you strike a balance between aesthetics and environment?

TW: Undoubtedly the first thought that comes to our mind when we deal with interiors is the visual impact and the aesthetic enhancement that product may offer to the space. What we need to realise is that the spaces we design are not just a display, they become a participant in the users' life. Every material used to put them together has a journey before it acquires the final shape. To me, as someone who's environmentally very conscious, that journey plays a role in decision-making. I evaluate the origination of raw material, the process involved in the manufacturing, and even a seemingly innocuous issue like the travel point. All these not only make a product economically sensible but identifies the carbon footprint left behind. It may not appear to have a direct impact on the users, but let's not forget, the environment we live in is a result of every little contribution we make.

I would say we are fortunate to have some of the tile manufacturers address those concerns and offer us product which not only addresses those environmental concerns but offer us a wide array of product, be that in terms of design, size, thickness and what not. This certainly makes our lives easier as a designer as we get an eco-friendly product without having to compromise on the aesthetics of the space.

Q: In the current scenario, we see a huge awareness/importance of hygiene, what is your take on the same and how do you incorporate the same in your project designing?

TW: Hygiene lately has surfaced as a top marker when we make decision regarding our choices while designing a build space, and rightly so. As I mentioned earlier, these spaces aren't just an exhibit, but they are lived in. It is thus important that they address to the hygienical needs of the occupants. And this should not be restricted to only healthcare facilities, but each home, shop, office, every space occupied by humans must address the hygiene requisite. We are, thus, very careful while picking up the material used, particularly for the finishing work. Their properties to attract or hold dust, their

ability to avoid germination or something as simple as maintenance required to keep them clean, are the points we keep in mind.

In our selection process, we evaluate the product on these benchmarks and prefer the ones which comply. These things play a vital role in final selection of finishing material, and they go a long way in ensuring the users have a healthy and clean environment.

Q: What is your opinion and preference in selecting surface covering options?

TW: In today's time, we have a deluge of options when it comes to finishing layer for walls and floors. While this certainly stands to the client's advantage to choose from, as a professional it makes our job a bit tedious to ensure they make the right choice. Besides the primary need for functionality and aesthetics, we consider the impact on users' health, hygienical maintenance, environmental damage and carbon footprint the product leaves behind, etc. These issues play a vital role in the decision making process.