

Riddle of the grid iron pattern in City Beautiful

MAKING OF CHANDIGARH

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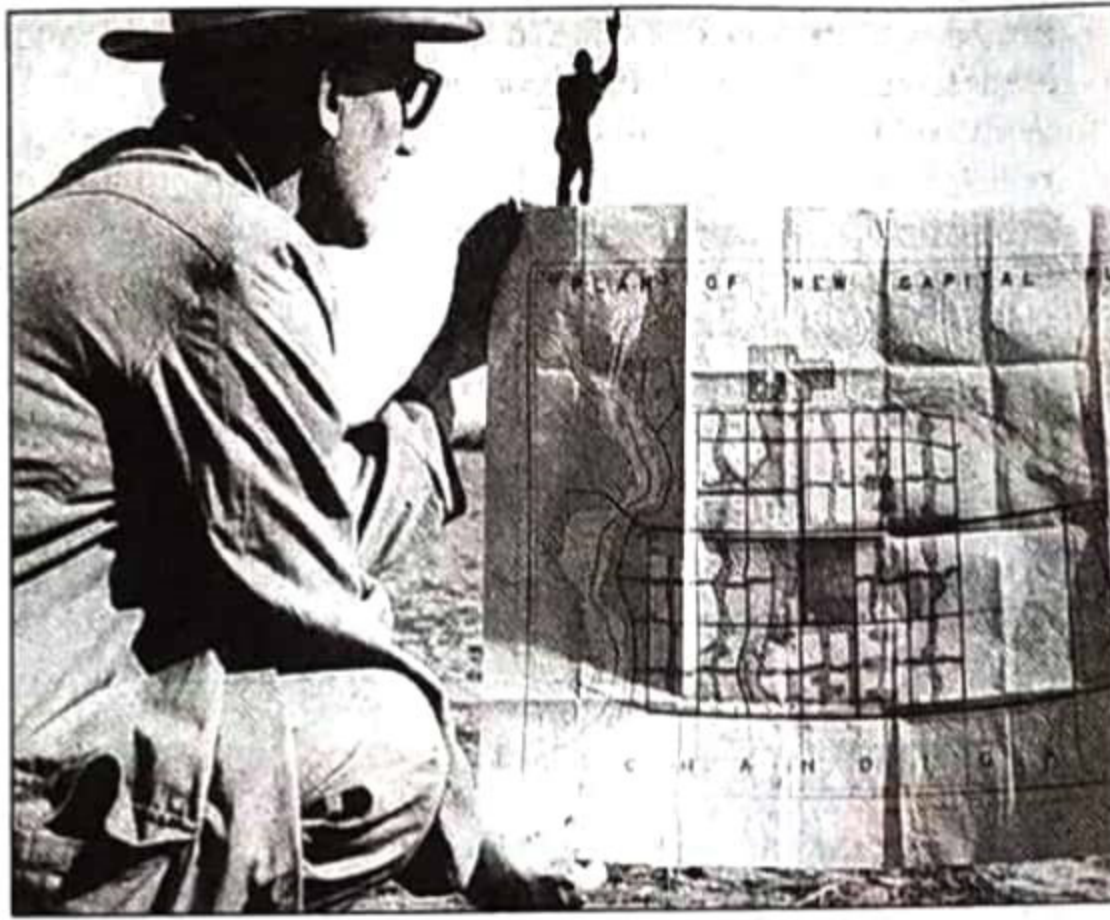
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PRIOR TO the design team led by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, another group of renowned architects were invited to chart the master plan for building the capital city of Punjab.

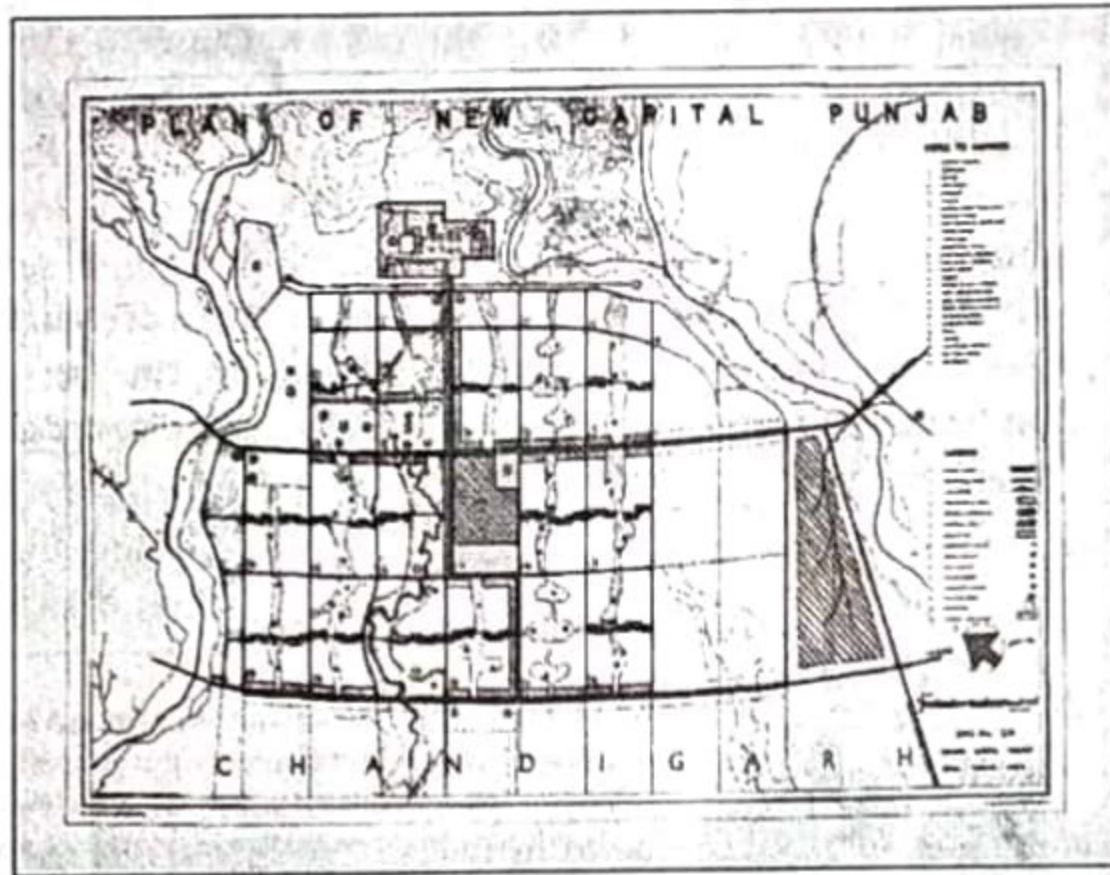
Then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru— who wanted to create a city 'unfettered by tradition'— had summoned Albert Mayer, an American architect and planner, to design the master plan of Chandigarh. Mayer, along with his team invited other designers to contribute towards the master plan of the city. Amongst those was Mathew Nowicki, a Polish architect who made significant contributions in the evolution of the plan for Chandigarh, but died in an unfortunate plane crash during the course of the design process.

At the foothills of the Himalaya, flanked by two seasonal 'choes'- Patiali Rao in the southeast and Sukhna Choe in the northwest, the site was ideal for the evolution of a new city. After careful analysis of the site, Mayer had proposed a plan for the upcoming administrative town to be 'fan-shaped', deliberately avoiding a geometric grid like pattern, for he believed that a purely grid iron pattern of the streets would be very monotonous.

Mayer stressed on achieving a solution for creating a 'beautiful city'. He fabricated a design in which he incorporated the concept of superblocks or neighbouring units, with the proposition of dividing the city into three superblocks with



Architect Le Corbusier with the plan of new capital of Punjab, Chandigarh. File



each block housing up to 1,150 families. The design provided the master plan with curvilinear street layout.

Meanwhile, Nowicki was responsible for handling the architectural control of the city. Disagreeing with Mayer's idea of designing a 'beautiful city', Nowicki insisted that the plan of a city should be governed by functional and recreational needs of its users, and hence proposed 'a leaf plan'. The or-

ganic form of the plan provided for a system where the stem would depict the commercial axis and the veins of the leaf would depict the circulation of the vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Nowicki's untimely death forced the government to look for a new architect for Chandigarh. Consequently, an invitation was sent to Le Corbusier to become the curator of the new capital city.



Corbusier, along with his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, and British architects Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew comprised the new design team for the city's master plan.

Le Corbusier had a revolutionary vision for the city— creating an urban environment through modern technology.

He conceived the grid iron pattern for the city. As per the modern principles of urban planning incorporated in Chandigarh, the functions of the city were categorised under four heads: Living, Working, Circulation, Care of body and mind.

The Capitol which would be the commanding force was placed at the head, the heart was the city's commercial centre, the industrial area formulated the hands, the intellectual centre and museums made up the brain and the vehicular and pedestrian circulation area depicted the veins. The city came as a breath of fresh air to the independent India and provided lush green avenues laden with foliage, which depicted the lungs of the city.

Chandigarh even after all these years prevails as a symbol of creativity, an architectural marvel delivered by a young and newly-independent nation.

(The writer is a seventh semester student of BArch. She wrote a series of articles on architecture, mentored by Assistant Professor Vipendra Singh Thakur, at Chandigarh College of Architecture)

