

Making of Chandigarh: How Pierre Jeanneret's architecture shaped the city

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Written by Chitragda Sharma

When compared, Pierre Jeanneret's footprints in Chandigarh are as important as that of his globally known cousin who went by the pseudonym "Le Corbusier". Pierre stayed in Chandigarh as the chief architect of the capital project for 15 long years, creating a language of architecture through the art that gave the soul to his creations. Chandigarh, the "city beautiful", has been eloquently defined by Jeanneret's iconic works of art and architecture.

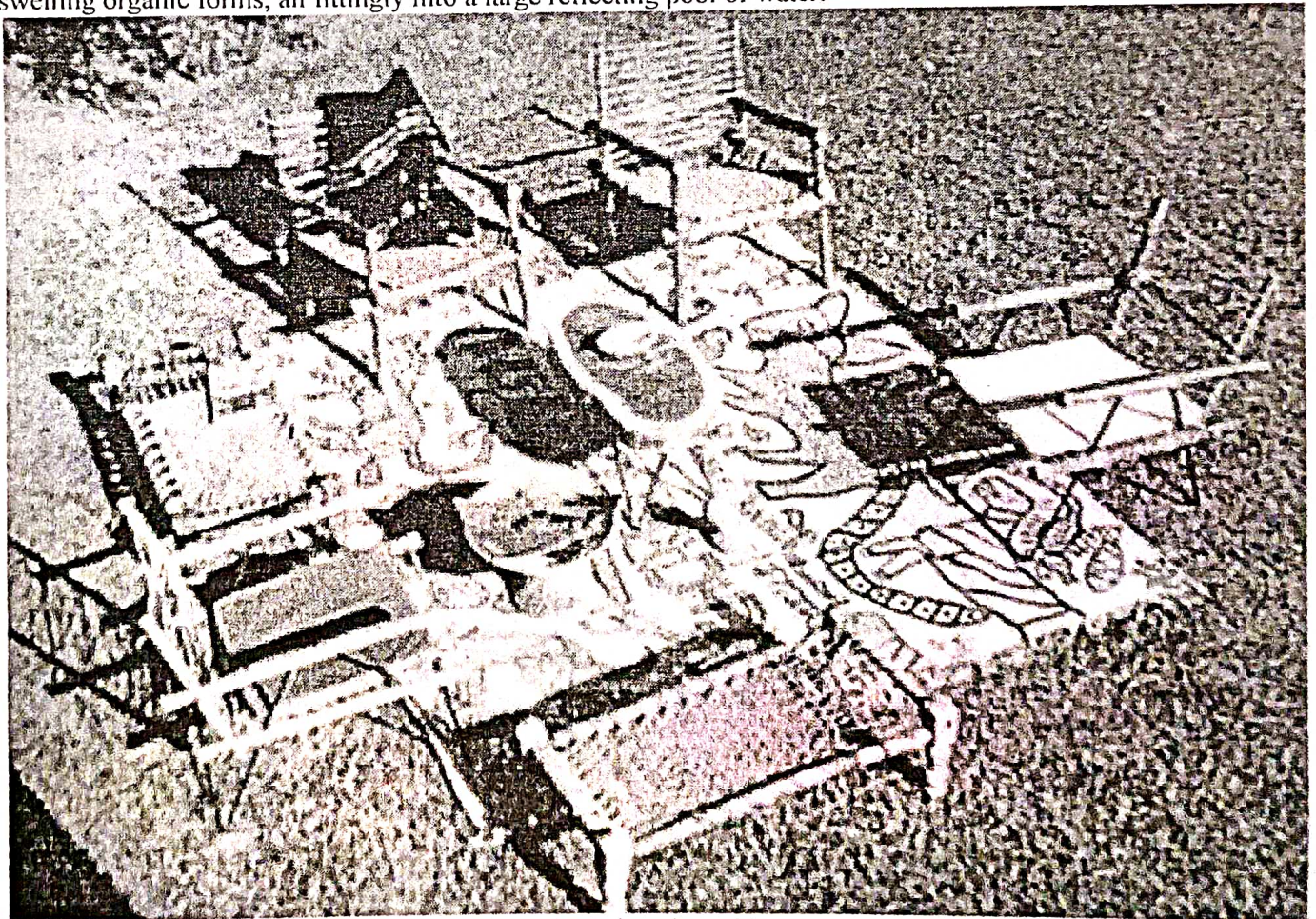
Jeanneret made extensive use of art an integral part of his designs in places such as Panjab University, MLA hostels, the town hall, schools, government housing and private residences to promote their aesthetics and beauty. Studying closely the buildings created by Jeanneret, one can see that he inculcated the understanding of texture, colour and form involving the use of exposed brickwork, stone masonry and concrete. Some of the iconic buildings created by him have now emerged as the hallmarks of art and architecture, locally and globally.

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Jeanneret believed that art possesses an important place in architecture. The beauty of the structure is that the elements of space, structure and form melt and merge into a single concept of grace and grandeur, synchronizing form with function effortlessly. His artistic style of porches not only serves a functional reason by keeping the place cooler, but it also serves an aesthetic purpose, glorying entry to the building.

The inverted arches of the portico contrast with the rectilinear rhythm of the front façade of the MLA hostel, vaulted roof structures of canteen block of 'Le Corbusier Centre' and sweepers quarters make their own architectural statement. In fact, the aesthetics of Jeanneret's designs are reflections of the beauty of line, shape and form.

The rare gem called Gandhi Bhavan is an example of him treating "the structure as a sculpture". Jeanneret used the innovative technique of casting concrete panels to evoke an abstract floating lotus, marrying angular lines with swelling organic forms, all fittingly into a large reflecting pool of water.



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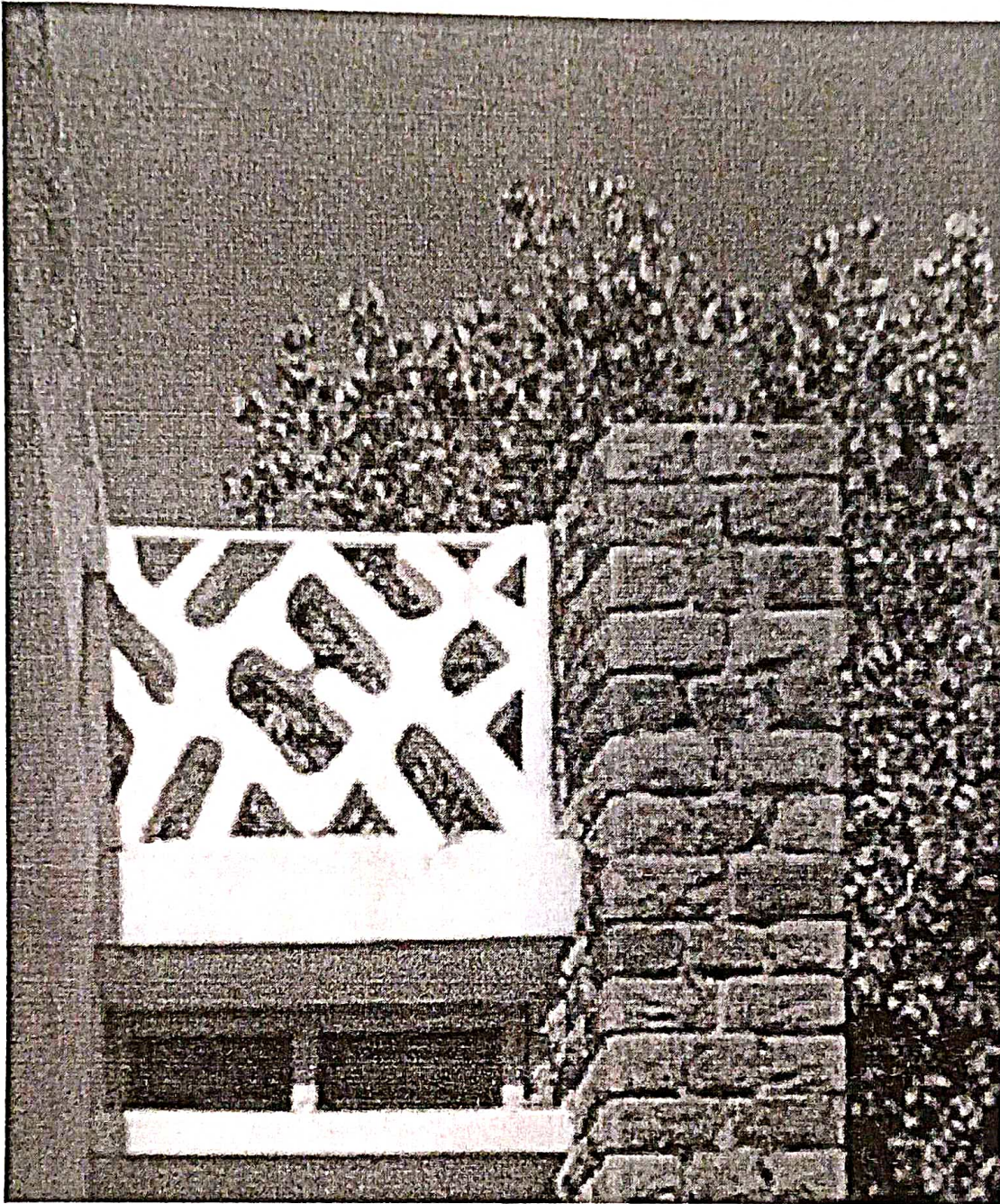
Numerous intricate and complex patterns that Jeanneret created in jalliwork, resulting from playing around with a brick, convey his understanding of use of brick as a valuable material of art and architecture. His method of using two or three materials like brick, stone and plastered surfaces in a single building drifted towards the Corbusian line of thinking which favoured monochromatic effects. As Jeanneret said, "There are no such things as big works or small works: there are only works with an aesthetic sense or without one."

His trademark windows, the beautiful spiral staircase of Jeanneret House, Brise-soleil, ornamental parapets in concrete, screen designs in a private house, teakwood handrail of the ramp concealed lighting fixtures, lighting fixtures, fireplace, the composition of windows and chhajjas creating the mural effect of the built-mass impart an active visual rhythm to the many and varied architectural forms.

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Jeanneret tried to distill the function to its fundamental shape. He designed lighting fixtures for private residences in an artistic way. The contribution that Jeanneret made to home decoration is that he led people's thoughts from the notion of luxury to that of culture and refinement.

The funnel-shaped fixture outside the structure contributes to the overall architectural significance of the Gandhi Bhawan. The fixture ensured the spread of the illumination to the entire ceiling and its dramatic effect, its reflection in the pool, acting as a "black mirror" at night. The technique of indirect lighting adopted by concealing the source of light is noteworthy.



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Jeanneret held Indian craftsmanship in high regard. He paid close attention to detail and material, creating his own mashups. He designed varied pieces of furniture like tables, chairs, tools, which are an integral part of Chandigarh Heritage. He stated furniture and buildings go together. Today, not only his furniture pieces express an essential and eternal depth, but also the pedal boat which he built for Sukhna Lake draws special attention.

Jeanneret displayed his artistic genius in creating wonderful murals with simple material like exposed brickwork. These murals adorn the blank end-walls of certain buildings in the city. Among them are the MLA hostel with a modular structure in the southeast wall and the masterplan of Chandigarh in the southwest wall. The sculpture which was designed for Nursery school in Sector-16 was inspired by the large horns of local buffaloes and developed with a stiff mix of concrete and simple scaffolding but no shuttering.

In the works of Jeanneret, it can be visualized that art and architecture have a high degree of connectivity and correlation which needs to be understood, appreciated, valued and promoted to make the profession of architecture more meaningful for society and the community. From the micro to the macro level of a city, "Jeanneretism" is still alive in Chandigarh in both his tangibility and intangibility. His art and architecture will be remembered forever by this city which he strived to build with a pure heart and spirit.

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Chitrangada Sharma is an assistant professor in Chandigarh College of Architecture. This is a part of the series of fortnightly articles by students and faculty of CCA on the Making of Chandigarh for the LCPJ forum.