

# Log

WINTER 2014  
Observations on  
architecture and the  
contemporary city

## 30

37° 00' N, 25° 03' E

Antiparos, Greece

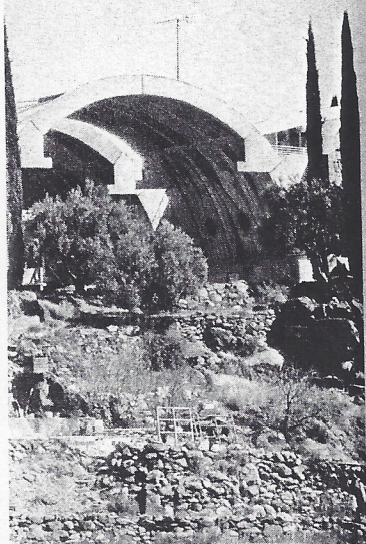
Take a half-day ferry ride southeast out of Athens to Paros, then a short trip across the Amfigeio strait and you will land on Antiparos, a hardscrabble Cycladic island that in 1981 was the unlikely site of a project by Elia Zenghelis, then of the fledgling Office for Metropolitan Architecture. Without the bigness or urban complexity that the firm had up to that point harnessed with vitality in its projects and drawings, the design and placement of 16 villas on the island begged the creation of some sort of fabric from the ground up; the site a blank canvas awaiting its first brushstrokes. In painter Zoe Zenghelis's oil-on-paper rendering of the project, 16 delicate shapes are scattered like confetti across an unearthly ground, barely hinting at the underlying composition by which the villas are arranged. Such a technique of representation led to what the architect today would call an emblematic image: a visual presentation that illustrates "architectural form juxtaposed with programmatic idealism" and "highlights the ideological features without relinquishing the real-life concreteness of a project." The project was not realized, but its image and idea endure.

\$15.00





# Chandigarh, Noted



PAOLO SOLERI, ARCOSANTI, ARIZONA,  
1970–PRESENT. PHOTO: YUKI  
YANAGIMOTO.

*to disappear in the desert sand,  
or half-moon apses that absorb  
heat in winter and provide  
shade in summer.*

*In 2011 the Cosanti  
Foundation, which administers  
the site, named architect Jeff  
Stein as its new president upon  
Soleri's retirement. Despite  
Arcosanti's shortcomings, and  
Soleri's death in April 2013,  
Stein still believes that an alter-  
native urban model will indeed  
emerge from the site. And one  
fact cannot be argued with: the  
questions Soleri raised in the  
1970s have only become more  
acute with time, and experi-  
ments like Arcosanti, even if  
they cannot provide a global  
answer, continue to provide  
insights into a different way of  
thinking about cities.*

— Antoine Vigne

In March 2013, hungry to travel, I planned a trip to India. At the time I worked for an architecture magazine, so in the box marked *Occupation* on the visa application I wrote *Editor*. Mistake number one. An agent at the New York branch of Travisa Outsourcing – “India’s official provider of visa processing services for residents of the United States” – informed me right away that editors of any kind must apply for a more expensive and more restrictive journalist visa, approval/denial of which can be withheld until up to 24 hours before the applicant’s departure.

I explained my trip’s intentions. I explained my journalistic ineptitude. I explained how I could swap my bona fides with any number of less threatening occupational epithets: graduate student, eBay merchant, aesthete. Sensing that the conversation might soon become a scene, I handed over my passport, paid the fee. Forty-three hours later an automated text message alerted me that my visa had been “successfully processed” and was “available for pick-up between 4:30 PM and 6:00 PM.”

Approved. Off to Mumbai and Chandigarh and Delhi and Ahmedabad (in that order). Tons of Le Corbusier. Lots of bread. High energy. Great weather. I recommend it. As for the visa, and whether it caused me any trouble during my travels – well, sorry, I can’t say. My visa, contrary to its title, forbade its holder to conduct journalism.

In lieu of a report, these notes on Chandigarh.

1.

The rickshaw deposited me shy of the gate. In front of a dusty guard hut, behind a slouched sandbag bunker, a Union Territory police officer kept vigil. The PO had a hat and a head, arms and a rifle; they pivoted together, according to my movement. As I walked I did rapid character development and a hammed-up performance of Nonhostile Tourist. An even pace, a cautious bob of the head, clearly displayed hands. While you don’t expect bullets to go astray, the thought of how severely cruel an error would be under those circumstances



effected that type of dread wherein death is imagined as a newspaper headline.

Fear not: I passed through unscathed. A cameoed officer flicked through my permission papers and passport and then, on sight of a bald eagle or the letters *USA*, apprised me of his son who lives in Indiana. Since I was either still playing Tourist – and so obliged to obnoxiously broadcast the obvious – or simply wanted to hear the two words together, I blurted: “From India to Indiana!” The officer nodded. We smiled.

What is the significance of such a revelation – that only two letters separate a South Asian country and a Midwest American state, Tata minitrucks and Indy cars, him, somehow, and me? Essentially nothing. But silly little details are diplomacy enhancing, and I take whatever I can get.

2.

After three days in Chandigarh, I was finally *in*. By which I mean *inside* the Capitol Complex, a bastion on the city’s northern edge that happens to contain three solemn buildings, a few monuments, and earthworks by an important modern architect. This architectural miscellanea being government facilities and Chandigarh being the frontier of some long-standing ethnic and geopolitical enmity make the visitation process an unanticipated tour of the bureaucratic state and an improvised lesson in statecraft. And the barbed-wire-and-jeep-patrolled perimeter is only the conspicuous part of some larger, more mazelike security effort that is ineffective in ways that make you expect to find a hole in the fence before an easy way through the paperwork.

Let me give you an example. Not only was attempting to secure permission to visit the Capitol Complex by email in advance of arrival and in person at Sector 17’s Tourist Information Centre and Sector 19’s Le Corbusier Centre, as the Department of Tourism’s Web site instructed, one big fat waste of time, but the DOT personnel seemed surprised that I even pursued such a course of action. Apparently all you need to do is get to DOT headquarters in Sector 9 – which in my case involved a football field-length detour from the wrong side of the Chandigarh Administration Additional Deluxe Building to the visitor’s entrance on the other – and wait on a bench while an older form of technology (office page) walks your passport across the hall to a newer form of technology (photocopier), returns seven or eight minutes later, and then repeats said reproduction once more (at what feels like 87 percent speed).



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The office was a dowdy ground-floor space. It was filled with a hoard of – you guessed it – paper, most of which is tied into bundles and piled atop bookshelves and beat-up steel cabinets. Presumably there was a large window along one wall, but the floor-to-ceiling drapes – taupe, patterned, black-out thick – were drawn mostly closed. A couple of severe fluorescents provided light. A fan rested. Two men worked from their respective desks. The boss – whose seniority I conjectured from his resolution to remain seated as Page and #2 Guy shuttled documents to his chair – was 50ish, beginning to bald. Though his interests were conflicted by the department's duty to maintain buzz around the Corbusier name, Boss showed what I considered sincere pride and affection for the city once we got talking. (I should add that Boss appended the honorific *Mr.* to every instance of *Corbusier*, the first and last syllables of which were pronounced like *car* and *air*.) Boss was guarded about the department's budget, but admitted to an edifice complex among Chandigarh's younger generation. The youth envy the big glass buildings in Bombay and America, he said.

After a half hour or so had passed, three A4 sheets materialized. The language on them gave my casual sightseeing the epic purpose of a quest:

PERMISSION MAY BE GRANTED TO VISIT CAPITOL  
COMPLEX TO MR. DAVID A HUBER FROM U.S.A.,  
WHO INTENDS TO VISIT CAPITOL COMPLEX ON  
28-3-2013 TO SEE THE ARCHITECTURE WORK OF LE  
CORBUSIER.

Onward!

3.  
Chandigarh is in the wedge of India that leans into the Himalayas and fastens to the continent. It is a 1,582-kilo-meter train ride northeast of Mumbai. A 50-minute flight away from New Delhi. A few-days drive from Calcutta via the AH1 (which supposedly connects Tokyo and Istanbul). And a bit south of where on Google Maps the solid gray lines dividing India and Pakistan and China become tentative and dashed, not because humans haven't developed satellites sophisticated enough to chart the steepest ends of the earth to the millimeter but because land – in this case Kashmir – is finite and we are bad at peacefully dividing it up.



"It is agreed! The world may burst! It is possible!" Or so the author of a yellowed artifact in the Le Corbusier Centre said. They are the opening lines of what a wall placard explains is

A descriptive note by Le  
Corbusier about the  
philosophy of the Open  
Hand, December 1954

and what an archivist's scribbles suggest is a letter addressed to Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The effusive note slips so swiftly in tone from apocalyptic to optimistic that by line three we're here: "The machinist civilizations [*sic*] for its hundred years of scientific and technical conquest will shortly have the fruits for its efforts. The balance sheet is eloquent." And then, after talk of atomic energy and aeronautics and television, at this conclusion: "India did not have to live the first century of the machinist troubles, passed today. On the contrary she is awakening, intact, at the hours of all the possibilities. But India is not a new country. She has lived the highest and most ancient civilizations."

Whatever injustice this fable of slumber does to whole generations of Indians, it perpetrates in a much smaller way with each visitor to the Centre. You can leave the context-sparse exhibition with a high from the story of the heroic scale and speed of the design, a laugh from the photos of Pierre Jeanneret playing gags, and even a souvenir sweat-shirt, but you are unlikely to leave with knowledge to assuage the tense hum of anxiety you sense around Chandigarh's government buildings.

At the Centre you learn that on August 15, 1947, after centuries of colonial rule, India became an independent nation. You will need to read elsewhere, however, that before independence was achieved a line was drawn. And before that a committee was formed. And before that a plan was made. And before that a radio address was broadcast.

On June 3, 1947, with muted voice and stolid tone, Viceroy Louis Mountbatten announced from a radio studio in Delhi that India would be independent within 72 days. Legislators in Punjab and Bengal, the most religiously mixed provinces, would first vote on whether to partition their territory between Muslim and non-Muslim areas.

To the Mountbatten Plan, Nehru responded: "It is with



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Nehru responded: "It is with

no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals." And  
Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on behalf of the Muslim League,  
said: "We cannot say or feel that we are satisfied or that we  
agree with some of the matters dealt with by the plan." And  
Baldev Singh, on behalf of the Sikhs, stated: "It would  
be untrue if I were to say that we are altogether happy."  
In London, which had by the *Daily Herald's* account given  
its "blessing" to the plan, Indian stocks ticked up. Winston  
Churchill was said to have been pleased.

Partition went ahead painfully. A boundary committee  
was formed with an equal number of delegates from each  
side; its chairman, British barrister Cyril Radcliffe, broke  
the ties. In a matter of weeks British India was parceled into  
the two new independent dominions of India and Pakistan.  
The border between them was drawn so as to leave most  
Hindus and Sikhs in the former and Muslims in the latter,  
but the Radcliffe Line ultimately left 14 million citizens in  
the wrong country. In the four years after independence,  
about seven million migrated into what became India and  
about seven million migrated into what became Pakistan.  
225,000 or 360,000 or 500,000 or 1,000,000 or 1,500,000  
people, depending on which source you consult, died in the  
ethnic violence and humanitarian disaster that ensued.

Chandigarh enters this narrative here. Radcliffe's line  
sliced Punjab in two. In Pakistan's possession was the for-  
mer capital, Lahore. The Indian state of East Punjab was  
without a capital. The need for a new capital was urgent,  
but the resources scarce. Refugees flooded across the bor-  
der. Displaced businesses threatened to decamp. Makeshift  
government offices were scattered helter-skelter across the  
province. Administrators were appointed to oversee de-  
velopment: Chief Administrator of the Capital Project P.N.  
Thapar and Chief Engineer of Punjab P.L. Varma led the  
efforts along with Officer on Special Duty A.L. Fletcher, a  
pragmatic Brit steeped in the workings of the Indian Civil  
Service. Feasibility studies were prepared. Interest in a new  
capital was assessed by government survey: potential resi-  
dents, business owners, and industrialists generated a torrent  
of data. The eight-member Committee for the Selection of  
the Site for East Punjab Capital was formed. Multiple sites  
were recommended; then they were eliminated. Too large a  
Muslim population. Too poor road infrastructure. Too ex-  
pensive land costs. Too close to Pakistan. Too industrial. Too  
crowded. Potential sites were narrowed down to two, and  
finally, by March '48, to one.



As the story goes, the selected site was initially discovered by aerial reconnaissance and later determined to have a good local supply of sand and cement and stone. Mango trees were abundant and drainage was sufficient. Upon visiting the site, Nehru said: "The site chosen is free from the existing encumbrances of old towns and old traditions. Let it be the first large expression of our creative genius flowering on our newly earned freedom." The comment turns out to be more than a little disingenuous. On the 28,000 acres of land acquired by the government were 58 villages and the temple of the goddess Chandi. According to Ravi Kalia's 1987 history, *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City*, 21,000 people were displaced. Political will waned as angry evictees protested and religious factions hardened. Years of waffling and indecision followed. Governor of Punjab, February '49: "In the existing circumstances it is out of the question to start planning a new capital." Nehru, September '49: "I would strongly suggest to you to go ahead with this matter." Governor of Punjab, January '50: "We have now reached what appears to be a final decision about the site of our capital. It is to be Chandigarh."

5.

If it is not Monday or outside the hours of 10:00 AM to 4:45 PM, you may visit the Chandigarh Architecture Museum in Sector 10. The museum is housed in a concrete rendition of the Heidi Weber Pavilion that, according to the wall-mounted bronze plaque near the entrance, was

INAUGURATED  
BY  
SHRI INDER KUMAR GUJRAL  
HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA  
IN THE PRESENCE OF  
LT. GEN. (RETD) B.K.N. CHIBBER  
PVSM AVSM VSM  
GOVERNOR PUNJAB & ADMINISTRATOR  
U.T. CHANDIGARH  
ON DECEMBER 17, 1997

and according to the PRish welcome note just past the door was "designed by architect S.D. Sharma" and is "very sculptural and Corbusian in spirit."

No one else was there the afternoon I visited. I paid admission for myself and half-admission for my camera. I took



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 Sharma" and is "very sculp-

ternoon I visited. I paid ad-  
 mission for my camera. I took

my time. Presumably the curators intended the exhibition to  
 begin with a black-on-white block of text in a square frame:

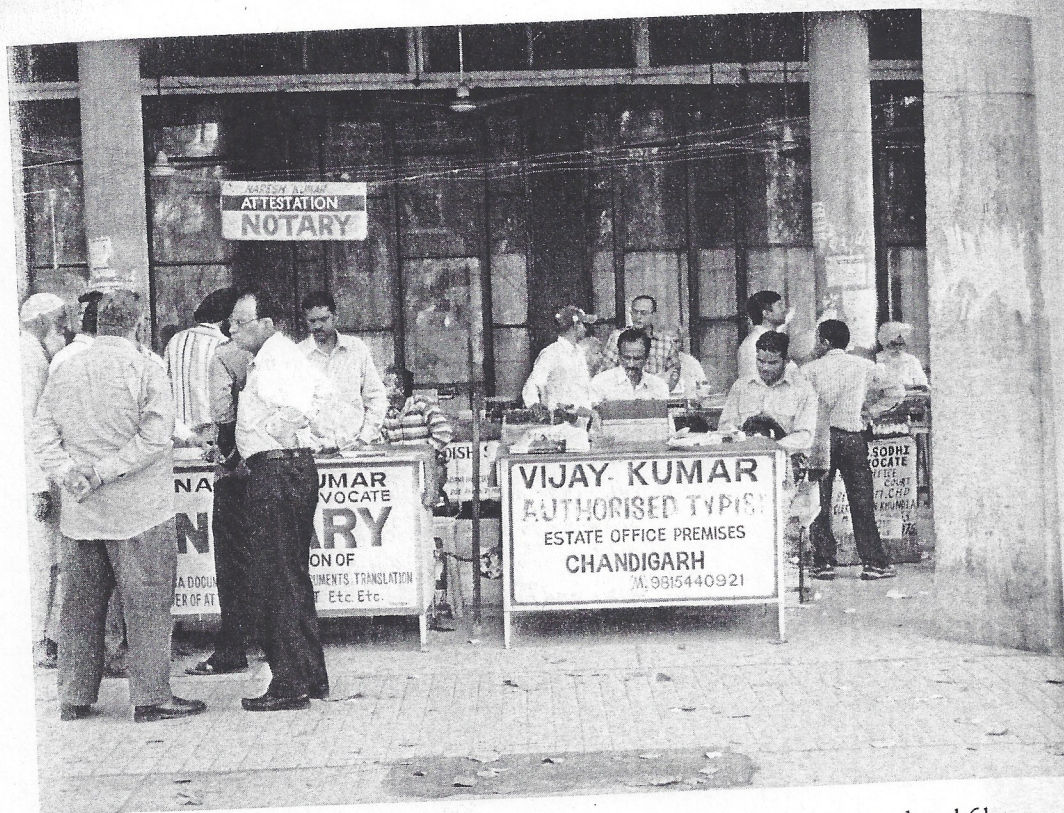
*I have welcomed very greatly one experiment in India.  
 Chandigarh. Many people argue about it; some like it,  
 some dislike it. It is the biggest example in India of  
 experimental architecture. It hits you on the head and  
 makes you think. You may squirm at the impact but it  
 has made you think and imbibe new ideas, and the one  
 thing which India requires in many fields is being hit on  
 the head so that it may think. I do not like every  
 building in Chandigarh. I like some of them very much.  
 I like the general conception of the township very much  
 but, above all, I like the creative approach, not being  
 tied down to what has been done by our forefathers, but  
 thinking in new terms, of light and air and ground and  
 water and human beings.*

Jawaharlal Nehru  
 (Speech, 17th Mar 1959)

I let the quotation sink in, filed it in my dossier marked  
 Suspicious Political Candor, and then proceeded along the  
 wine-colored wall, through the surfeit of communications  
 related to the planning and design of Chandigarh. Reports,  
 letters, budgets, memos, contracts, guidelines, itineraries,  
 speeches, telegrams, and on and on and on. The litany of  
 paperwork is punctuated by speech bubble-like frames and  
 backlit signs that convey terse statements like A NEW CITY  
 IS BORN and THERE WAS JARGON TO BE LEARNED and  
 THERE WERE NO PROFESSIONALS, BUT THE PROJECT  
 TEAM DID SOME QUICK HOMEWORK. Floating around  
 SIGNIFICANT PERSONALITIES WHO SHAPED THE  
 MAKING OF CHANDIGARH are official portraits of gov-  
 ernors, ministers, chief ministers, and chief commissioners.  
 Beneath THE TEAM are photographs of the three architects  
 responsible for overseeing the design of the housing and less  
 ceremonious buildings in Chandigarh throughout the '50s  
 and '60s: Chief Architect Pierre Jeanneret hoists a cigarette,  
 Londoners Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew crack smiles.

The museum is a keyhole into the machinery of the mod-  
 ern state. Document No. C-10720 (October 19, 1950) sanctions  
 Thapar and Varma's research trip to Europe and specifies  
 allowances for luggage (50 lbs.), emergency medical care  
 (Rs. 200), and entertainment (Rs. 500). A marked-up draft  
 agreement (December 1950) between the governor of Punjab





TYPISTS WORK ON THE PLAZA OUTSIDE OF THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE AND COLLECTOR OFFICE, CHANDIGARH, SECTOR 17, 2013. PHOTO: THE AUTHOR.

and Corbusier stipulates the services to be rendered (determination of the general style of architecture, preparation of the designs of principal buildings, development and detailing of master plan, etc.), time commitment (minimum 60 days every 12 months), remuneration (GBP 2000 per year honorarium, plus GBP 30 daily allowance during visits to India), and transportation (first-class railway and airfare), along with standard boilerplate clauses.

As it happens, the antipode to this austere down-to-the-pleasure rationalization of life is a trail of human error that was no doubt intensified by the difference in languages of the contractual parties. Reams of official letterhead are canvases of muddled English and overstruck typewriting. To wit: heaps of typos and excess scare quotes, jumbles of awkward syntax, ungainly translations, and odd lexical recategorizations. Some mistakes confuse meaning: "My wish? Is that no reductions should . . ." Other gaffs break age-old impasses like the incompatibility of the profession's noun and verb forms: "responsible for the architecturing of . . ." All of the errors, however, have the kind of unmalicious carelessness one is accustomed to from visiting the post office and reading Dostoyevsky or any other tale of bureaucratic woe. Think:



decapitation or as temporally distant as paleontology evade what is so frustrating and beguiling and confounding and compelling about Chandigarh. And judgments that invoke ghosts are too ethereal when the ridiculed object is a population-one-million city constructed of brick and concrete (never mind that the concrete cannot be painted without amending laws and stirring up debate locally and raising the threat of outrage internationally).

It's for reasons like Chandigarh *not* being a failure and its economy being in a particularly bullish moment now that the legacy of modern architecture today gets enacted in all sorts of strange, oblique ways. For instance: a recent Airports Authority of India brochure gives Chandigarh the tagline "A Profitable Destination" and hypes it as "the best planned city in India." In the midst of "hi-tech facilities and infrastructure" are "happy people" who can proudly claim the "highest per capita income" and "highest per capita car ownership" in the country. If you take the full-color glossy's word, Chandigarh is "the modern face of India" and has both a "tremendous tourist and business traffic potential" and a "healthy potential for medical tourism," since "a facelift in the USA costs about \$15,000 [but is] \$3,000 in India."

I am not licensed to practice architecture or medicine, but it looks to me like the Capitol Complex suffers – if it must be diagnosed – from a neck injury, a pinched nerve: the head is unable to arouse the body, the body cannot stimulate the head. The city goes on fine without those gorgeous, penned-in monuments, and meanwhile the cultured class sends up all kinds of red flags. Preservation nuts will have you believe that the enclosure and deterioration of the Complex is an atrocity. Tastemakers at the *New York Times* will, as they did when government office furniture salvaged from Chandigarh sold for 50 percent above asking price at Christie's in '06 and '07, write patronizing headlines like "A City that Sat on Its Treasures, but Didn't See Them." Must culture condemn a city to preciousness? Must treasure mean torpor? Comb life for finer spoils, I say.

7.

"Sector-wise it is easy to navigate here, because the sectors are in line," said my taxicab driver, Amarjit, as we hauled down the airport connector road and into midday traffic that he correlated to rising income levels. "Chandigarh is not like Mumbai. Mumbai is . . . mix. Mixture. You can't locate anything unless the local person is there."



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is] \$3,000 in India."

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ere."

He was right. It took more-and-more-proximate-but-never-definitive directions from five pedestrians to get my rickshaw the last quarter-kilometer to the hotel in Mumbai. Amarjit assured me he knew where Hotel Park Plaza was; he takes customers there often, he said. Amarjit, 50-something and upbeat, wore a navy half-sleeve over a gray full-sleeve shirt, which might have seemed odd if it were not a mild 21 degrees Celsius and the winds weren't blowing from the south-east that day. He invited me to ride shotgun, which in India means to his left. I had a good view ahead.

"And you're from?" he asked.

"New York. United States."

"Yes. United States."

"We also have a grid."

"I have seen that they have different sectors. Planned cities. New York is a modern city."

"Yeah. Like Chandigarh."

"Yeah, yeah. Like Chandigarh," he said with a laugh, through his graying beard. "You have come as a visitor? Or for a job?"

"Visitor. I studied architecture. I came to see the city. It's famous."

Amarjit was born in Delhi. His family moved north when his father, an officer in the Indian Air Force, was posted to Chandigarh. His parents owned a house in Sector 14, near the Patiala ki Rao Reserved Forest and the Gandhi Bhawan, the auditorium at Panjab University designed by Pierre Jeanneret. "The house," he said, "is near one of the buildings designed by Mr. Corbus . . . No, no . . . a Rus . . ."

"Someone who worked with Corbusier?"

"Mr. Corbusier. Yeah. We have one of the hands."

"The Open Hand?"

"Yeah. The Open Hand." Amarjit said as he rotated his left arm away from the steering wheel and extended his little finger and thumb in opposite directions. "The city was planned in this way."

Amarjit's too-slack middle fingers rendered the symbolism more akin to the sign of coastal bonhomie, the *shaka*, than Corbusier's ode to postwar harmony, but I understood the gesticulation. You do not need knowledge of *l'esprit nouveau* nor longer than a day in Chandigarh to become familiar with the Open Hand, and for that matter its authority in all areas of city brand enhancement. The Hand inks brochures and flies across TVs each time *The Chandigarh Report* runs its title sequence. It forms a silhouette on the Rotary Club's new



City of Peace Monument at Sukhna Lake and, augmented with Mickey Mouse-eyes and dimples, gives identity to ChandigarhGossips.com, a lifestyle blog run by an enterprising 19-year-old. The Hand also pivots like a weather vane above the Capitol Complex (it is under this ur-Hand, the Open Hand Monument, that the public has recently met to discuss the city's development plans, Amarjit alerted me). From a marketing perspective the Hand has real juice, a remarkable ability to "go viral." I was in Chandigarh for less than 30 minutes – nowhere near a gift shop keep in mind – and hovering under the rear-view mirror like a Car-Freshner was Amarjit's own Hand.

We crawled along with traffic. Auto-rickshaws hissed high-pitched beep-beeps. Motorcycles buzzed. Pedicabs made unheard sound. We drove past two stores selling tall wooden ladders (used for whitewashing, Amarjit explained), under the reflective WELCOME TO CHANDIGARH THE CITY BEAUTIFUL sign, around the first roundabout, and then into the grid, where any prejudices one had about the regularity of the roads, the homogeneity of the buildings, or the general depravity of life in modernist urban plans must be parsed for error and densely footnoted.

We drove past enough residential-type buildings for me to imagine how buoyant a modernist must have felt upon inventing a novel way to put a sunshade device on a Dom-ino box, or stagger and offset bricks to make a 40-percent-transparency screen. We drove past a mustard-color window on a blush wall. We passed slight extrusions of slabs and walls coded by maroon paint. And we passed enough slick new windows and sushi-bar wood paneling for me to hypothesize that the sport of Breaking Up the Regularity of the Box is now – for those with disposable income at least – more like custom-car culture.

We drove past a hand-lettered concrete sign pointing toward the Terraced Garden in Sector 33. Then, near the Garden of Fragrance in Sector 35, past a pole-mounted map, which Amarjit, less certain now of my hotel's whereabouts, stopped to consult. He believed the hotel was in Sector 24, but I recalled a different number from the reservation form. Amarjit, befuddled, stood akimbo in front of the map. I retrieved the reservation, cranked the window down, and read off the address: "Hotel Park Plaza, Sector 22, S.C.O. 3035-36."

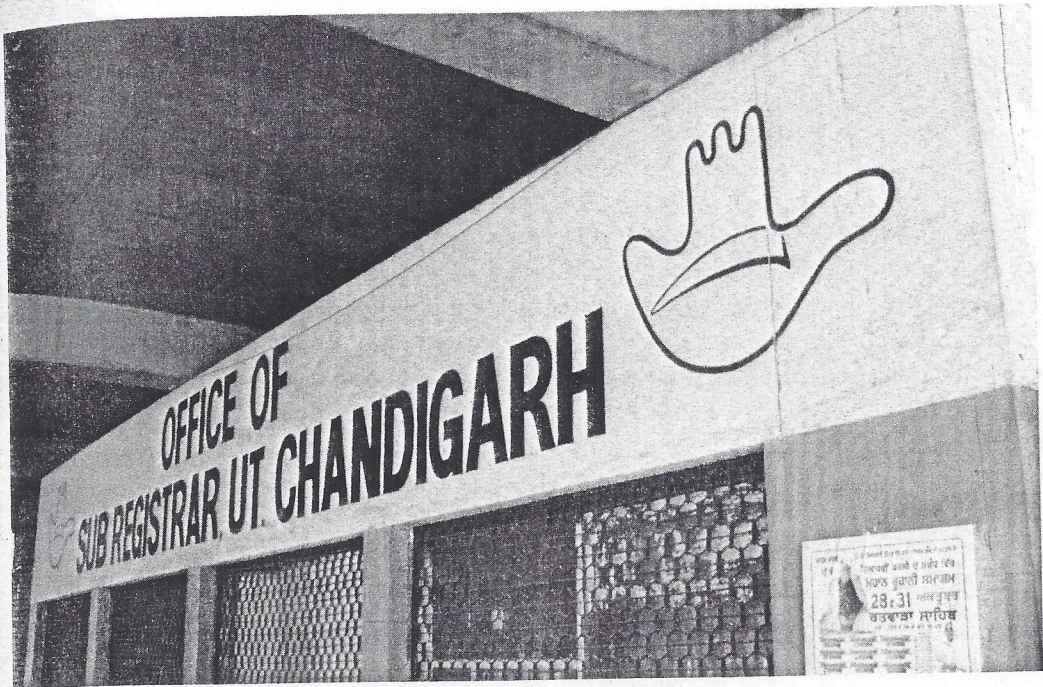
Let me explain the confusion. In Chandigarh, the words *hotel*, *plaza*, *vien*, and *park* can, depending on their order of combination, denote several things: A) top-of-the-line Park Plaza Hotel, which overlooks the Zakir Hussain Rose Garden,



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OFFICE OF SUB REGISTRAR, UNION  
 TERRITORY CHANDIGARH, SECTOR 17, 2013.  
 PHOTO: THE AUTHOR.

aka “Asia’s largest rose garden”; B) hard-to-surpass Hotel  
 Parkview in Sector 24, whose third- and fourth-floor rooms  
 catch glimpses of Bamboo Valley; and C) tastefully done-up  
 Hotel Park Plaza in Sector 22, where creature comforts are  
 reportedly on offer but elevators are nonexistent. I would not  
 know for a few more minutes how far down C) was on this  
 hospitality totem, so I could not yet be flattered by Amarjit’s  
 assumption that I was staying at B). Whatever the case, I was  
 enjoying our hunt and didn’t think any less of Amarjit’s ca-  
 pacity to initiate me in the city. The address nomenclature  
 felt like census data to me: a little overwhelming and a bit too  
 raw. Amarjit tried his best to demystify it.

“S.C.O. means Showroom-cum-Office.”  
 “Even hotels are considered offices?”

“Yes. Even a hotel is in an office. Because . . . it is not a  
 residence. You are not living there. You are only using it to  
 live temporarily. There is no Showroom-cum-Hotel.”

An explanation can be satisfactory but unsatisfying, and  
 this was one of them. The exquisite-corpse logic seemed to  
 mean that dinnertime would be spent in a showroom and  
 showers would transpire in an office. But for as unsavory as  
 the S.C.O. catchall was, it spoke of a greater contradiction to  
 bureaucracy and of a greater truth to Chandigarh: though  
 it is hard to find and difficult to access, office space is more  
 abundant than could ever be imagined.



8.

A quick note about my hotel. Although I didn't see a single other guest in four days, and even though there were 14 rooms over two floors, reception checked me into a room literally three paces from the front desk. Doubtless this was convenient for the staff, who hung out on a couch and watched TV in the next room over. My room was a good size and sufficiently furnished; there was a flat-screen and a strip window. Through the window I had the privilege of looking south across a parking lot and an eight-lane road, and toward, according to my complementary city guide, Sector 35's Topiary Park. Inside the park, children probably tugged at wire-sculpted bushes, threatening the flora's likenesses to bovine and predatory birds. A businessman was likely on his way to the bus terminal in Sector 43, perhaps with an orange-tinted soft-serve cone in hand. There were likely, as there are in Sector 10's Leisure Valley, molded manga-bear trashcans labeled with the imperative USE ME above their grinning slotted mouths. It is even feasible that the retired architect-couple from Scotland whom I toured the Assembly with – and whom I witnessed get pounced upon by one member of the gang of monkeys that has annexed the building's *brise soleil* as a gymnasium (true story) – was spending an hour of their golden years salivating over the ornamentals from a hard bench. I can't be certain that anyone was there, however. I couldn't see the park.

9.

One month before his death in August 1965, in a swan song entitled *Mise au point* – later brought to the US market as *The Final Testament of Père Corbu* – Corbusier wrote: "A good number of really good projects, let's be modest enough to admit it, were torpedoed by the bureaucrats."

That was before the 1965 assassination of Chief Minister of Punjab Partap Singh Kairon, which led to the state of Haryana being carved out of the eastern portion of Punjab and to Chandigarh becoming a dual capital with Union Territory status.

Before the 1995 assassination of Chief Minister of Punjab Beant Singh by a human bomb outside of the Secretariat, which caused more stringent and obstructive security measures to be imposed on the Capitol Complex.

And before the *Chandigarh Master Plan 2031*, a 787-page draft proposal released in July 2013 that is one of the most important events in the city's architectural development since the Rome-bound flight carrying architect Matthew Nowicki plunged 10,000 feet into the burning-hot desert north of Cairo



though I didn't see a single  
 though there were 14 rooms  
 led me into a room literally  
 Doubtless this was convenient  
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 looking south across a park-  
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one summer night in 1950, giving occasion for the Punjab government to discontinue Albert Mayer's services as master planner (Nowicki was responsible for “visualizing” Mayer's plan) and to anoint Corbusier as Architectural Advisor to Government, Punjab Capital Project.

Corbusier's master plan was designed to accommodate 500,000 people. The Union Territory Administration anticipates the population of Chandigarh will reach 1.6 million by 2031. In response to this growth, *2031* includes measures to expand the industrial area, promote group housing, and retrofit the existing road network for more seamless pedestrian and cycle movement. Parking space will be increased and moved underground wherever possible. The S.C.O. designation will be dispensed with. Government offices in Sector 17 will be removed from the ground floor. Additional office space will be allocated for Haryana and Punjab officials.

It would seem that *2031* aspires to make automobiles and bureaucracy less intrusive, housing more equitable. Plazas would be cleaner, traffic smoother, addresses simpler. And yet *2031* has generated all sorts of ridicule, beginning with a skirmish over the insufficient number of hard copies distributed to citizens during the 30-day public-review process. Community groups, industry lobbies, and architecture-preservation advocates have all weighed in. “The master plan is far removed from reality,” said one critic. “The master plan has nothing to offer to industry,” said another. “The master plan has miserably failed to fulfill people's aspirations,” said another.

One of the most perplexing criticisms comes from S.S. Bhatti, former principal of the Chandigarh College of Architecture. In a letter published in the English-language daily *Indian Express*, Bhatti faults the plan's lack of scientific fieldwork and expert involvement, and calls for solutions that avoid “reducing the name of Le Corbusier to a footnote of history.” His recommendation? That is the perplexing part. Bhatti proposes that the “Central Government adopt Chandigarh as a ‘National City’ [and] set up an autonomous Chandigarh Inter-Disciplinary Planning, Development & Monitoring Authority.” And he adds one more layer to this Russian-doll future: “The Department of Urban Planning and the Engineering Organisation would work under the stated Autonomous Authority.”

Hard to tell the architects from the bureaucrats. Hard to tell who is doing the torpedoeing.

DAVID HUBER LIVES IN NEW YORK. HE  
 WAS MANAGING EDITOR OF *LOG* FROM  
 2010 TO 2013.