

# ADAPTIVE REUSE

How to elicit the hidden mysteries behind old buildings

**B**uildings have a history that is subject to constant change. They outlast people, ages and even civilisations. Old structures are often 'reused' in the present day. For instance, the Greek and Roman temples which were turned into Christian churches and monasteries were later used as country houses. This process is a tool to establish a relationship between the old and the new and secure the buildings' continuity in time.

'Adaptive reuse', as it's called, is a process that can be used to extend the life of a building. The value of a building as studied under conservation is of three types: Historic value (relating to a specific historical context), Age value (derived and understood with decay and time) and Use value (the utilitarian value of the building). Contemporary architectural intervention must therefore effectively enhance them—as seen in the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London. The architectural style of the new adaptations/additions/extensions may not be in the same erstwhile style but are subtly introduced to enhance their inherent nuances.

We explored the notion of adaptive reuse in the Rai ka Bagh garden in Jodhpur as a hotel and spa complex. Initially built as a garden, the property today has small structures and out-houses of varying styles, scales and dimensions, which have been added over time. The approach has been to respect the continuity and authenticity of the site and the existing buildings.

Adaptive reuse also enhances the value of a building. It is not only a solution, but also an unexplored answer to the hidden layers of a city. It is extremely essential to bring up the historic layer and integrate it with the present-day fabric. A huge advantage of adaptive reuse is that it costs nothing to preserve buildings that are frozen in time. If we do not start adapting ourselves to this concept, real-estate pressures will inevitably wipe out these ancient buildings in the city.

We need not concentrate only on the architectural and historical merit of threatened buildings,

but also on the entire stock of existing buildings which could be potentially useful for social, economic and ecological purposes. Within Delhi today, there exist various unexplored opportunities. The princely houses of Lutyens' Delhi can be put to better use than just being government offices; the CPWD barracks may be the perfect modules for shopping malls, or the old Dak bungalows may offer hidden challenges. Adapting these can prove to be a better architectural solution than incessantly building new structures.

The idea is not to ransack every unused built form, but to emphasise its rich past. If an office is being located inside an old palace, there is a more appropriate way to do it than simply putting in walls, partitions and carpets. What was intended to be a symbol of the state, power and ancient traditions, must be shown as it was intended to be and not as a deteriorating shack. The old heritage values must be enhanced and even if there is an insertion in the old, let it be treated as a new object which complements the old. The Tobacco Docks in Canary Wharf, London is one such good example.

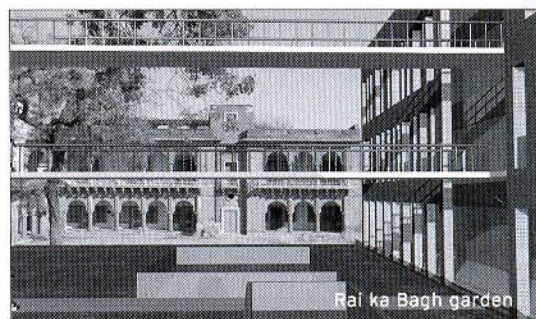
We can surely add to the old in a contemporary manner and inject it into the existing system. Ancient buildings are objects of reverence. Adaptive reuse is a way of making history pay for itself and also making history work for itself. The quality, richness and articulation of the built form is an asset which should be maintained and preserved. An old built heritage must not be forced to adapt itself to new interventions; instead new conversions must be in accordance with the old form. Adaptive reuse hence is a way of preserving the heritage of a building and bequeathing it with fresh a life and purpose.

—Co-authored by Tanya Kohli, Morphogenesis



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**ADAPTIVE REUSE SHOULD NOT BE TREATED IN ISOLATION BUT WITH RESPECT TO THE CITY AS WELL. IT OUGHT TO CREATE THAT DYNAMIC BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THE CITY FABRIC, WITHOUT TAKING AWAY FROM ITS HERITAGE AND VALUE**