

## **Indian Architect and Builder, May 1995**

**Manu Rewal, son of architect Raj Rewal, is a film-maker. Here, he discusses his film on his father's architecture, how he has captured the essence and philosophy, with his own technical expertise.**

**SARAYU AHUJA**

Architect, Bombay

When I first met Manu Rewal it was in Bombay. He was handsome, fairly tall with a curly crop of hair and full of youthful enthusiasm. He was just back from France after doing a course in filming or so, his father Raj Rewal had informed me. But much later, Manu whispered in my ear, "Do you know anyone in the film Industry? Directors? I want to act in films".

I met him more than a year later in Delhi and he talked at length about himself, his choices, options; and the film he had made for the Work Bank project designed by his father.

"I finished my schooling in Delhi and then went to France. I was there for two years; I was interested in Biology but I also realized I was interested in films, in the theory of cinema. I read a lot and came to know that film making had so many different art forms and this was exciting. I joined a theatre course in the evenings and during the day, I was studying Biology at the university. After three months, I had nearly stopped going to the Biology class. I was interested in acting, and by then, I decided that I was really interested in making films."

"Then, I joined a university which had a course in plastic arts and cinematography. There they trained me in many subjects: sociology, psychology, psycho-analysis and liberal arts. Here, I got introduced to western music which I didn't know much about though I knew about Indian music; I had learnt to play the sitar. It was very important to understand music and its use in film-making. The third year was only about cinema and in the fourth year, I did my thesis on Satyajit Ray's films."

“Then my father needed a film of his buildings and at the university I had already worked on 8 or 10 small films. It was a great opportunity for me to put to use what I had learned. I had no idea about architecture. I filmed all of dad’s buildings, keeping in mind his views and ideology about each of them. I used a formal device which has been used millions of times in films. The dissolve. In movies, it is traditionally used for flash backs. You know like when a person is hit in the head and he connects to the past; he dissolves in to the past. I used it to make a connection with the past, with the historical buildings; to emphasize the courtyards and terraces in his architecture.”

“Also, I didn’t want a running commentary. So, the camera explored each project and at a particular point, the commentary would come on and talk about a specific feature. There would be only two features in each project that would be commented upon without going into the depth of each project. *The basic idea was that of resonance: the resonance between the past and the present and how its being used in the modern context.* In the part about the National Institute of Immunology, I used the image of a *haveli* which I dissolved into one of the clusters with the courtyard and I did the same thing with the terraces.”

“I just concentrated on small design elements and the commentary was related to the dissolution of images; and there was music throughout the film. Now, however, I think I could have done better with the music. What I chose as a backdrop, was quite well-known north Indian classical music; each project had a different soundtrack I used the tabla, a santoor and a guitar which sounded more like a sitar.”

“I used some workers from the site; making them walk through different spaces to give it scale. I didn’t shoot indoors at all. This film was processed in France. The production cost was about 45 lakhs for a duration of 30 minutes.”

“I got a lot of feedback. Some people felt using people in the film was distracting and only architecture should have been filmed. Others felt that if they were not the ones using the buildings, why show them. Just to make it exotic? Some commented on the sound track; they felt it; I should have included an interview with my father. He appears in the beginning of the film, just a small bit, I think that it is not well done: he

just comes says his line and disappears. But he didn't want to be interviewed at all; he only wanted that his work be shown

“In the World Bank film, I have gone into the details. As the titles run, there is the shot of the opening ceremony followed by some shots of Delhi. For an Indian, seeing the Lal Quila or Lutyens' Delhi or the Qutab Minar, may not be anything new, but for foreigners it would make a difference. The site is in Lutyens' Delhi so there are shots of the surroundings, then, there is a shot of the Lodhi garden.”

“At a point in the film, the architect from World Bank, explains how he selected the architect and the brief for the building design. Then my father appears in the film, giving a general idea of the design concept. I show him, making sketches and explaining how the design was done. I show him, talking to the model maker, who then works on the model. There are shots of my father meeting the senior architects and the engineers. And, then finally, the final image of the design appears on the computer screen. The idea was that the film would show the process of design to non-architects as well.”

“The next sequence is on the workers, the stone workers from Rajasthan – their traditions, master craftsmen cutting stone, carving and cladding them, we then zoom back and show the entire building in its finished state. Then, there is an architectural exploration of the outside and the inside, the courtyard the workstations, the sunken garden their connections, the idea of transparencies, miniatures, old buildings, I haven't done any dissolve in this; I have kept it straight because dissolves are very expensive. Then I show the building in the Lodhi Garden, the dome, vault, the curves and the comparison with the World Bank building.”

“ Finally, there is sequence on the technological aspect of the building its intelligent computerized systems and eventually the finished building with the furniture and the artwork. It ends with one of the secretaries in the building. She says it is very good “Manu laughs and confides, “may be the World Bank told her what to say.”

**Indian Architect and Builder, May 1995**

