



# PLUS

## A colourful statement

By Shaveen Jeewandara

*Testament to an architect's free flowing imagination, the vibrant SLIIT campus creates a relaxed atmosphere for study*

View(s):

When the Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology (SLIIT) opened up in Malabe in 2000 it was the talk of the town, with its multi-coloured facade throwing pulsating reds, greens and blues into largely mundane surroundings. Heads turned, eyebrows raised and criticism flooded in. But 14 years later, the SLIIT campus complex stands testament to an architect's free flowing imagination.

Asking Principal Architect Suchith Mohotti about the inspiration behind the building is quite fruitless. As he explains, "My designs don't have a background story, it just comes to my mind and I sketch it on paper, as simple as that." Suchith



Mohotti Associates had the privilege of working on the SLIIT project after winning a design competition in which architects were requested to submit designs worthy of a building that would spark conversation.

The team comprising Principal Architect Suchith Mohotti, along with architects Udula Bandara, Shantha

Somarathne and Sumedha Wijekoon had a stiff challenge to face as the building they were about to design would herald a radical change in the tertiary education system of the country with the emergence of private universities. "It was a brand new institution and we needed to create a lasting impression. We knew that our design would not only make a statement for the building, but also for the education sector," recalls Mr. Mohotti.

The Malabe campus is situated on a 25 acre site in a serene environment, overlooking the rolling hills of the mid-country. Just 10 km



Futuristic design: SLIIT's Malabe campus situated on a 25 acre site in a serene environment. Pix by M. A. Pushpa Kumara



Open entrance: The forecourt flanked by pillars

off the Colombo city limits Malabe is the designated future cyber city of Sri Lanka and the introduction of SLIIT saw it morph into a university village. "The design concept had to keep all of this in mind and look a few years into the future as well, in order to come up with a building that would last through rapid changes in society," says Mr. Mohotti.

The SLIIT campus has a set of aesthetically designed, modern buildings comprising a ten-storey building, a six-storey building and a large auditorium. The complex is divided into three main structural elements. You are greeted through a ceremonial entrance to the left of the building which leads to the forecourt area. Four adjoining pillars are built here so that it forms a haven over the courtyard creating a sense of security, while a glance upwards shows you the central ten-

storey building towering over.

"With students hanging around this area at almost any point during the day, the forecourt has created a relaxing environment for them to study in. The architecture needed to inspire them to work, and this could not be done with cramped spaces. The concept of open space was given much prominence," says Mr. Mohotti. This was primarily thanks to the luxury of having a vast area of land to work with and the other being the relaxing ambience that Mr. Mohotti envisaged.

Mr. Mohotti explains that most of these institutions in other parts of the world have open spaces where people can socialise even in the middle of the urban landscape. "Some of them are called pocket parks that are housed in between buildings where people can move out to relax." His reasoning is that architecture needs to allow people to be free and immerse themselves in nature.

SLIIT was one of the very first buildings to have had wall cladding on it, and although the budget was not enough to have cladding throughout the entire edifice, the architects ingeniously matched the wall colour to fill in the spaces that



The engineering faculty building: Colour plays a big role in the overall look of the SLIIT campus

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