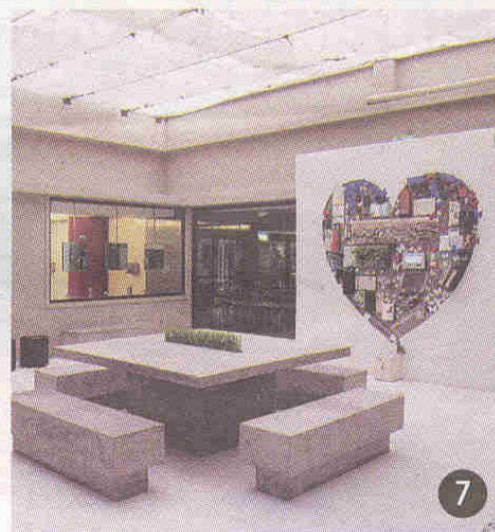


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## The Godrej Space office in Mumbai trades in the brand's conservative image for a fresh look that has been inspired by the scions of the family

BY APARNA PIRAMAL RAJE

**T**he Godrej township in Vikhroli, an eastern suburb in Mumbai, reflects many of its owners' attributes. It respects the unique ecology of the place—the mangrove wetlands—echoing the industrial group's century-old reputation for ethical business practices. It is vast and disjointed, consisting of offices, warehouses and manufacturing sites, in keeping with a Rs12,000 crore conglomerate whose disparate products include forklift trucks, animal feed, padlocks and hair colour. Several of its buildings are decidedly old-fashioned, correlating with a corporate reputation that rests on lineage rather than dynamism.

### Refreshed by youth

However, the new Space office—a suite of ground-floor workspaces in one of the cluster of buildings on the Godrej campus—offers a sharply contrasting view. With its gleaming white surfaces, cutting-edge gadgets and open-plan layout, the 8,660 sq. ft workplace is more Google than Good Knight. Part office, part showroom and part lounge, the multi-purpose space is the brainchild of Nisa and Navroze Godrej, two of the family's younger members. They hand-picked existing in-house talent—industrial designer Darshan Gandhi and architect C. Satyanarayanan—to design and execute the project.

"We wanted a showroom where we could explain the language of the brand and showcase our products in a more consumer-centric, design-oriented way. This is a different

way of representing ourselves, built into the office. Space is a working office and also a central point where people can meet and brainstorm in an open, collaborative way. It's a prototype of a future Godrej," says Nisa Godrej, executive vice-president (business development).

The area comprises 10 zones, connected by a stream of white moulded Corian, a high-end material which functions as both architectural device and work surface. Employees from any part of the group can sit cross-legged in the "baithak" seminar room, brainstorm in the informal "bodhi tree" lounge or confer in the "tool shed". They are free to grab CDs and books from the "oxygen bar", recline in a "hammock", or step outside into the "square".

There has been substantial investment in technology—lighting and projection facilities can be controlled by individual laptops in meeting rooms. The "polo room" facilitates video conferencing, and digital writing screens are placed in the "exchange". The liberal use of Corian binds the different zones, and its stylized curves balance the starkness of the white floors, walls and ceilings.

Space also serves as the permanent home for Godrej Industries' elite corps—the strategic market-

ing, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and strategy teams. Vivek Gambhir, chief strategy officer and a former Bain consultant, says: "I was amazed, I never imagined that a space within Godrej could look like this. I like its narrative nature; it is very well-choreographed and really brings the brand values to life. The location and the design are very comfortable and functional, fostering camaraderie and creativity."

### Towards a brighter future

"The reaction to Space has been unbelievable, very positive," says Nisa Godrej. "Everyone's proud of it, and how it has integrated with the new brand identity of Brighter Living." In fact, as a physical manifestation of the company's desired vision, it is far more progressive than the print version of the new brand identity.

As a driver of behavioural change, however, its effectiveness is debatable. When we visited the office, the occupants were mostly full-time residents. Widespread usage by other group employees, as its creators intended, will evidently take time. Its lavish budget and custom-made workmanship might also lead critics to dismiss it as a vanity project by enthusiastic family members, not replicable on a large scale for a mass manufacturer.

However, this assessment would overlook the project's biggest achievement—the fact that a young, well-trained and focused team could single-handedly deliver a radical and inspiring environment, setting an enviable benchmark for future innovation in the group. Watch this Space.

### FACT FILE

Interior designers: In-house  
Client: Godrej Industries  
Built-up area: 8,660 sq. ft  
Cost: Rs3.5 crore  
Location: Mumbai  
Year of completion: April

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1. A white palette of materials, finishes and furniture was deliberately chosen to emphasize simplicity and modernity.
2. Full-length windows allow users to experience the campus' greenery.
3. The "bodhi tree" lounge encourages informal brainstorming.
4. Stylized, moulded Corian adds softness and flow to the office.
5. Senior teams sit at open-plan workstations in the "palette zone".
6. Employees from across the group can experience a moment of tranquillity in the "hammock".
7. The "square".
8. The chaise longue.

Photographs courtesy Godrej Industries