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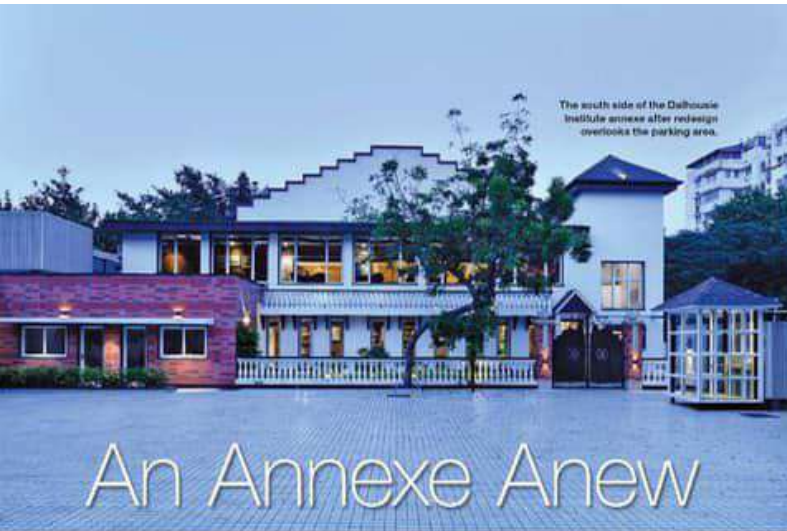
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**A complete makeover of
Dalhousie Institute annexe, Kolkata,
by architect Bipratip Dhar**





TEXT: BRUNO GIL
PHOTOGRAPHIC: RANI KARAOE

At the Delhi Durbar of 1911, in one of the best kept secrets of British India history, King George announced the transfer of the 'seat of the Government of India' from Calcutta, now Kolkata, to Delhi. The unexpected shift shocked the residents of the Kolkata that had been the capital of British India since 1772, been

regarded as the second city of the British Empire after London, and had developed as a city of culture, business and administration, graced with majestic buildings, gardens and broad roads.

Over a hundred years have passed since that fateful move, yet the core of Kolkata retains the grace of an imperial city in its buildings, some with a patina of the passage of time, in its heritage museums and academic institutions; its

roots anchored in culture; and its cosmopolitan populace. Among the many institutions with a historic past is the Dalhousie Institute whose annexe recently underwent a complete makeover by the design team of Esslon Architects, headed by principal architect Bipratip Dhar. And it emerged as Incoor@DIC, a warm and welcoming recreation centre, a wonderful synopsis of the city straddling old-world charm and a modern style.

A panoramic image of the dining area Family@DIC. This area, has a mural stretching across the inner wall, featuring images of people, that have been painted by street artists.

The Dalhousie Institute: A Great Heritage

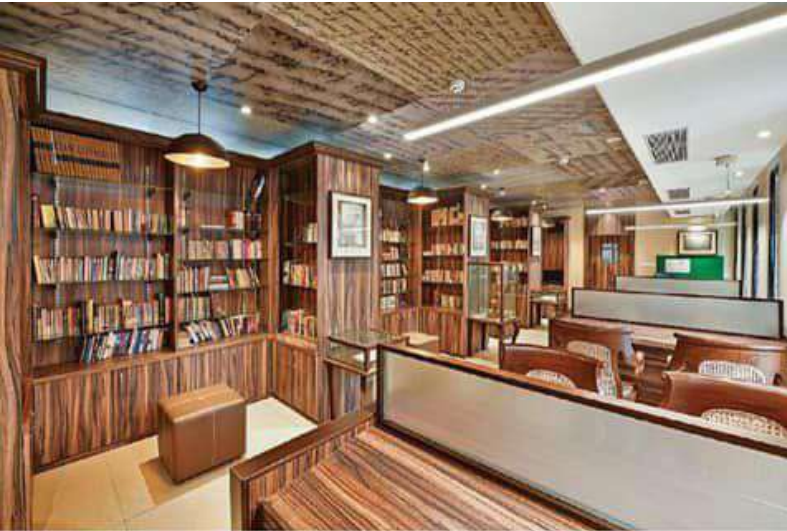
The Dalhousie Institute, founded in 1865 as an institution for scientific and literary pursuits, was originally located in a grand classical style building at Dalhousie Square (now B30 Bagh). During World War II, the building was requisitioned for the use of US troops, and it was unfortunately demolished in 1948. In 1956, the institute moved to its present



Family@DIC before the redesigning.



Seating along the intersection of Dineggi Dr. the dining area, offers a view of the limestone court with the panels offering a picture frame effect.



The library has been internally divided into two sections lengthwise with wooden bookshelves along the inner wall and reading desks with chairs towards the outer wall. The ceiling has panels bearing the imprint of pages of old documents.



The transformed Dining@DI, the family area, offers a view of the outdoors on the outer side and of the badminton court on the inner side.



The library area before redesign. It was previously the dining area.

location at 42 Jhohalla Street, Ballygunge, which was once the garden house of Gen. J.N. Chowdhury.

The institute's original building houses a canteen, a club, the main bar and administrative offices, while its annex building, a ground floor plus one storey, which came into existence later, accommodated badminton courts, a dining hall and multipurpose spaces. It is surmised that the badminton court area possibly had a broad verandah hemming it that was subsequently enclosed. Over time, additions and alterations in the structure, external electrical wiring and air-conditioners, seepage and structural problems had changed its bearing and it was in need of drastic restoration.

The Annex: A Promise of Potential

Facing structural problems as well as increase in usage from the growing number of members and increase in requirements of facilities for them, it was felt that the annex should be demolished and replaced with a new building. However, due to various constraints, the institute decided to upgrade the existing premise along with a touch of the facade and the surroundings to restore and enhance its original character.

With architect Dhar asked to work on the restoration, he and his team undertook a thorough survey of the structure, its existing spaces and their functions, and the surrounding area. Reviewing their findings, they felt that



Dining@DI, the family area, before the redesigning.



To open the badminton court to multiple uses, the stretch of wall to its east side on the ground floor was fitted with sliding, folding panels so that it could easily be linked to the adjoining area that could serve as a pre-function area during events.



The badminton court (below) took on a completely different look after it was redesigned (top).



the building could undergo a drastic makeover to emerge as a vibrant space serving multiple functions with a lobby, cards room, family and dining rooms, and badminton court which could also be used as a multipurpose hall when required.

The Project Gets Underway

The team decided to open up spaces as permitted by the construction (as it was a load bearing structure); retain yet remove its functional areas; completely rework its electrical fittings, lighting and flooring; and provide central air-conditioning to the entire structure. They also planned to redesign the exterior by



Principal Architect Biprasit Dhar

FACT FILE

Location
Ballygunge, Kolkata
Area
28,065 sq ft
Year of completion
2018

Design team
Biprasit Dhar, Biprasit Poddar,
Jimit Raichowa Bose, Sourav Biswas

Associations
Council Of Architects (COA)

Tiling

Kajaria

Marble

Marudhar Marbles

Laminate

Century

Wall coverings

Home Fashion, Shera Board

Paints

Aolen Paints

Lighting

Mardi

Furniture

Creative Design, Glen's Artwork

Bath

Kohler

Basin

Kohler

Flooring

Kajaria, Pavé (outdoor)

False ceiling

Indian Gypsum,

Rubberwood, Ply, Laminate

Mirrors

Sartt Goban

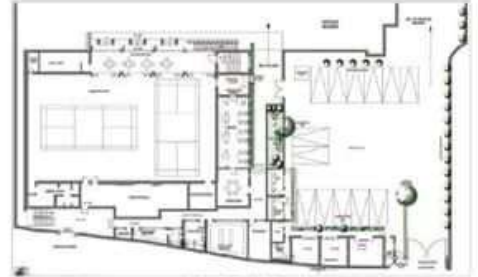


removing the external air-conditioners; designing large glass panels along the sides to bring in natural light and outdoor views along with an enhanced sense of space; and redesigning the balustrades stretching along the east and south façades. Another balustrade was planned as a partition – set slightly away from the building on the south side skirting the green patch in front of the library – to separate the parking area from the green zone. Further, it was decided to remove the small hutments that had been built for staff and services around the building, and redevelop the surrounding area by parking it on the south and east sides and creating a green patch on the south side.

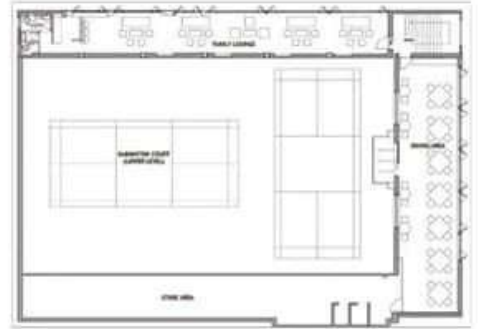
In this way, as the project progressed, the structure was strengthened, sections of non-load bearing walls removed, and functional spaces demarcated. While the double-height badminton court retained its place in the heart of the building, the kitchen, cards room, library and a pre-function area were located around it on the ground floor, and the services, Dining@DI (the dining area), and Family@DI (the family area, with a bar counter at one end) were located on the upper level, and the staircase set in the southeast corner.

Enlivening spaces

With the civil works underway, the reassigning of individual spaces commenced with an aim to give the ambience a young, vibrant vibe. The badminton court, the cynosure of the building, was redone with hardwood flooring, wooden wall paneling and wooden



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

ceiling with slats to enhance acoustics and conceal services; lights in the ceiling and walls for balanced and adequate lighting for the game; and appropriate acoustics to make it ideal for the sport while giving it a warm and welcoming character.

The extensive treatment for acoustics was rendered in the form of angled and pyramidal ply and acoustic panels along

the upper section on the longer sides of the hall, surfacing of the internal surfaces (with sound absorption material and wooden panels to absorb sound and for better acoustics), and laying out the wooden floor. A panel on the sides was engraved with the names of the members of the Institute, giving the space a personal touch. And to open the court to multiple uses, the



stretch of wall to its east side (on the ground floor) was fitted with sliding, folding panels so that it could easily be linked to the adjoining area (that could serve as a pre-function area) during events.

To balance freshness with old-world charm, and the quietude of a reading room with an unspoken sense of community, the library space was metamorphosed by creating large windows on the outer wall for natural light to stream within; informally dividing it into two sections lengthwise with wooden bookshelves along the inner wall and reading desks with heavy wooden chairs towards the outer wall; fitting the ceiling with panels bearing the imprint of pages of documents dating back to the 1860s penned in beautiful flowing handwriting; and placing artwork on the walls and old journals of the institute in elegant glass cases.

On the upper level of the annexe, the flat false ceiling was removed and a dual pitch ceiling crafted, with wooden rafters, to instantly elevate

the space and its character. While Dining@DI was given a slightly formal air with cane furniture and its inner wall marked with glass panels to offer a view of the badminton court, Family@DI took on a relaxed ambience with sofas with colourful cushions and a colourful mural, of images of people painted by street artists, stretching across the inner wall.

Transformation: Around and Within

The exterior of the building was aesthetically repaired and redone with a shingled roof, old-style balustrades and wooden rafters; the façade painted white; and one marble plaque from the original Dalhousie Institute and a replica of the same (bearing a dedication of the facilities to all the members) embedded in the wall to the southeast.

The area enclosing the annexe underwent a complete change to complement the transformation of the structure as well as to organize spaces and streamline the movement around it.

Separate service entrances and corridors, mechanical and electrical service rooms, and accommodation for staff were planned thus de-cluttering the area and avoiding interference with guest movements. The orderly arrangement of service areas resulted in unblocking the façade, larger entrance gates and parking area as well as facilitating easy vehicular and pedestrian movement.

When Indoors@DI was completed and opened its doors to members, they were amazed by the transformation within and around it and started looking forward to spending time, and attending programs and activities here. In the tranquillity of the library infused with the grace of old-world study; the elegance of Dining@DI ideal for savouring afternoon tea; the verve of Family@DI, an ideal hub for the young and young at heart; and the inviting warmth of the badminton court, they are delighted to relive the charms of a genteel way of life that Kolkata takes pride in upholding.

The badminton court was redone with hardwood flooring, wooden wall panelling and wooden ceiling with slats to enhance acoustics and conceal services. Lights in the ceiling and walls provide balanced and adequate lighting for the game.