

Art on land

HE is called the Father of Landscape Architecture in India. But mention this to Prof Ravindra Bhan, and he merely shrugs before taking you on a nostalgic tour of the pine-scented Srinagar, the city of his birth. "I learnt it there," he smiles, skipping over his 20-odd years in the US, first learning the ropes of architecture, and then teaching it.

It was finally in '72 that he returned home to set up the Department of Landscape Architecture in the Delhi School of Planning. Teaching was fun but it's hands-on landscaping that gives him a high. "I enjoyed doing the *Shakti Sthal*, a memorial to Indira Gandhi, as well as the Mughal Sheraton in Agra (it won him the Agha Khan award, highest in this field)," he says. Bhan likes the idea of playing God with Mother Nature as his handmaid. That's why he was thrilled to pieces when he was awarded the Golden Temple *Galiyara* project around five years ago. But getting the project to take shape was no cakewalk. One fine day, Bhan found



Bone up on the man who brought landscape architecture to India, and is now beautifying the Golden Temple galiyara

two water tanks sitting pretty on the corridor. "They were hideous, and one tank would have obscured Baba Atal Sahib, but SGPC men were adamant." One look at the montage Bhan made of the site and they pulled down the tanks.

Landscaping for Bhan is not mere beautification but value addition as well. That explains why he built a two-lane ring road, complete with a parking facility around the corridor besides revamping the sewerage, storm water drainage, electricity connection, phone booths, et al.

Today, parts of the corridor that've been completed are a picture of Mughal elegance with sunken seating spaces, fountains that dance to the tune of *gurbani*, and grassy carpet that plays hide-and-seek with wedge-shaped granite blocks with cast-iron lights glowing softly.

Bhan is keen to complete the five-phase project, but funds are a problem. "I want to meet the CM..." he muses. What's adding to his worry is the proposed flyover to the temple. "That will be terrible," he fumes. "We won't let that happen." We hope so too.

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