

1: Buildings

**SRI AUROBINDO
INTEGRAL LIFE CENTRE
SURAT, INDIA
STUDIO NAQSHBANDI**

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At the inauguration of the Sri Aurobindo Integral Life Centre (SAIL Centre) in August 2023, the design presentation by its architect Mona Doctor-Pingel, founder and principal of Studio Naqshbandi in Auroville, moved everyone. It recounted her 13-year design journey as it came to fruition with a space that mirrored her way of being.

The SAIL Centre, spanning more than 1.1ha in Surat, western India, is a global spiritual hub for the study, research and dissemination of the principles of spiritual visionaries Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and The Mother. Their contributions include the elevation of yoga as a life art and the prominent international town of Auroville in south India. The centre sits on the 47ha campus of Earthspace, a mixed-use development initiated in 2011 by Shri HS Rama, a US-based Indian hotelier and one of their disciples.

As the soul of Earthspace, the centre is intended to become a source of wisdom, inspiration,

contemplation and introspection, fostering inner consciousness development. The centre's design brief to Doctor-Pingel in 2010 was simple yet broad: to create a space compelling visitors to delve within themselves. After five site changes and programme modifications, construction began in 2019. Doctor-Pingel significantly developed the brief, reflecting the wisdom she gained from three decades spent in Auroville, heading up her boutique firm there. 'I am steady and grounded in my pursuit of perfection, but I take things slow and give them time to grow. I am keen on letting people discover my work and me,' she remarks. The design of the centre is testament to this philosophy. Etched peacefully on the land without calling for any attention, it integrates the five elements of nature through a design stimulating the senses with intense narratives, simple materiality, nuanced expressions and subtle details. ● Ar. Apurva Bose Dutta

MONA-DOCTOR-PINGEL

