

# Not a block, it's an aesthetic partition



Garden space in a recently promoted commercial complex in an upmarket area of the city.

A SCREEN wall, as we saw in our last column, essentially segregates spaces within a site and also helps block from view some not so viewable areas. But the screen wall also helps segregate you from common areas. In other words, instead of blocking off areas from the user's view, it effectively blocks the user from the glare of the open world. This functionality of the screen wall is growing in popularity these days, essentially because buildings are happening in very restricted spaces and if this should be

commercial space, then the need to cordon off the areas for recreation from the hustle and bustle of the office environment is very essential.

In the photograph published alongside, you are looking at garden space in a recently promoted commercial complex in an upmarket area of the city. At the outset, it must be pointed out that the open area in this site is very restricted. Needing to provide maximum parking within the premises, the building has accommodated a large parking bay on the ground floor, with

most of the open spaces around the building being taken up by the drive. However, the need to green at least a pocket, in this case a corner, was so pressing that the architects totally cordoned it off, and by this mean took a firm decision to dedicate a portion of the ground area, even though it was essentially small at about 1200 sq ft., to a green pocket.

I classify this decision as firm because, in the context of the building, roadside parking is a premium proposition. If the area we are about to dis-

cuss had merely been a patch of green, it would have very easily and quickly fallen prey to 'parking grabbers'. By effectively using a screen wall — one solid and the other natural, an elevated space that is also a recreational zone for the office goers has been created.

First let us look at the screen wall that cordons off this area from the parking lot. The wall has no access points and since it needs to provide some privacy, is solid except for two four-inch openings. These are both a part of design and also synchronise with the level differ-

Screen walls help in isolating yourself from common areas. Instead of blocking off areas from the user's view, it effectively blocks the user from the glare of the open world.

been exclusively designed for the employees to spend a few refreshing moments before getting back to work. The small water body, a part of the green belt, has also been created to this effect.

To place the same space in a different perspective, if the building was to house a residential block then the solid screen wall would have been opened up. And in the absence of no other areas being available for children, the green area would have also housed a small play pen, a gazebo perhaps and maybe more access points.

This is basically because in residences it is very unlikely that there will be mounting pressure for more parking space and therefore one can assume that encroachment

ences built into the wall design. Relief has happened in the choice of material that decorates the wall. Shifting to the other wall, in this case a natural one, you will notice that this is in the form of



step-ups of about 4 ft width and less than 2 ft height. This is the only access point to the green zone and leads onto a pebbled pathway. Abutting the steps is a retaining wall in the form of a series of planter boxes. Palms that crowd these planter boxes provide an almost non-penetrable wall.

Both screen walls also house seating options. Since the entire green zone is on an elevation, it is again well protected from the road and its users. However, the green belt can be viewed in its entirety from the building.

Restricting access from one point only and providing a solid wall on the other side can easily screen persons using the area. In other words, drivers will find it difficult to saunter into this zone which has

into green areas will be very remote. The point to be noted is that while the architects would have stuck to the use of a screen wall, he would have definitely changed its shape and contours and would have redesigned the space it encloses to suit the end user.

What you will notice in this strip of green is that it has a pathway opening out into two seating zones on both its ends.

This brings us to the subject of our next discussion — pathways — a feature that finds a place in very landscape design, big or small, residential, commercial or recreational. ■

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