



# The Long and Short of Bambooz



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**I**t's hailed as 'the timber of the 21st Century' and for good reason. Bamboo is one of the world's best natural engineering materials and a viable alternative to conventional plywood. It's a renewable resource with over 1,500 documented uses — ranging from housing to household articles, biomass, transport, paper, and medicine. Little wonder Bangalore-based Bambooz has struck gold with what is also known as 'green gold.'

## GREEN STRIDES

Bambooz (previously Ken and Bambooz) lives the idea of creating a harmonious communion between nature and sustainable development. With a strong background in engineering, founders Indrani Mukherjee and Samrat Saha have established a company that uses bamboo for construction and manufacturing products.



Proposed restaurant at IIMB

Cutting-edge tools that are specifically designed to handle every aspect of the creation process – from sourcing to finishing – make Bambooz products and designs stand apart. The several structures created by Bambooz for prominent companies in and around India stand testament to their craft, skill, and expertise.

"Despite working with different MNCs for 15 years in the field of conventional construction, we've always dreamt of creating green and sustainable solutions that last," says Mukherjee, recipient of the Woman Entrepre-

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neur Award 2014 from National Foundation for Entrepreneurship Development. "Bambooz is an endeavour to welcome back that age of simplicity," adds Saha. Today, their enterprise not only generates business but also spreads awareness on long-forgotten possibilities of bamboo.

Returning to the roots, Bambooz has introduced bamboo flooring on buses for Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation and Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation. Though initially met with skepticism, Bambooz worked hard at this eco-movement to make it a runaway hit.



Proposed Garden Restaurant

These green buses are strong, durable, dimensionally stable, and economically-viable. The poster child of KSRTC's campaign for eco-friendly vehicles also received a big thumbs up from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. "A project of this magnitude called for tedious government permissions and specially designed tools such as cutting blades, drills, and drill bits," recalls Saha. Their exemplary work for Society and the Environment has won them the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Innovation Excellence Award 2014 from the Federation of Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Since then, Bambooz has answered many knocks on their door from the Ministry.

### WITH THE GRASSROOTS

Bambooz works on various projects and products that range from big utility projects such as resorts, houses, and car parking to small structures such as security rooms, doors, windows, and home decor. Drawing inspiration from different tribal and indigenous designs and patterns, Saha explains, "We have studied how tribal and indigenous people use different designs in their daily lives. Every tribe has their own unique patterns and styles of cutting, weaving, and binding. In Nagaland alone, we observed around 14 tribal groups and there are so many that we are still unaware

of. It is a joy to constantly discover and learn about new designs and techniques."

Much like setting the context for a good story, the location of a proposed structure plays a huge role in the creative process. "To give you a better idea, think of the design for a restaurant by the pool. Keeping in mind that the basic purpose is preparing food and serving customers, the design will be simple and economical. However, a five-star rooftop restaurant will require a fancier and more complex design that is finished with high-grade material," says Mukherjee.



Speaking of location, bamboo is an ideal material for construction in earthquake-prone areas. This wonder grass' tensile strength is 28,000 per square inch, while that of steel's is only 23,000 per square inch. This amazing quality opens up a world of possibilities in exploring bamboo's potential as a highly durable material choice.

After a design is finalized, a prototype is created by highly skilled artisans who have received training under various programmes on bamboo structures and products run by the government of India. Mukherjee says, "Richard Belho, a renowned architect and social entrepreneur, has also trained all our



Proposed Bus Parking At Drivers Training Center, BMTC

artisans." Bambooz maintains its stringent standards by dividing the artisans into two groups based on their expertise in structures and crafts, and assigning the right mix of both to their projects.

### THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF POSSIBILITIES

Their passion for this renewable resource that 'grows an incredible 1.6 inches an hour' has also left its mark on Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, with a unique truss system for their car-park shed. Their list of beneficiaries also includes Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams for whom various structures were built. The triumphant designers at Bambooz struck the perfect balance between their bamboo structures and the natural landscape, leaving the surrounding hills virtually untouched. "The handmade palan-

quins that we conceptualized and built were another highlight of this project," says Saha.

Bambooz sources the green gold from Shimoga region in Karnataka and the Northeast. "Northeast India's Balcoo bamboo is the best in the world for strong and durable structures, whereas Karnataka bamboo is used for products such as chairs and tables," says the duo who has worked with a number of developers, hotels, resorts, schools, government organizations, and private companies.

Bamboo is treated before use, either by drawing out starch or injecting oil. The 'wonder grass' is said to have quickly grown to royalty status in today's green market, where teak and rosewood are sold at twice the price. "We've begun creating prototypes of doors and windows with high-density bamboo

**INDRANI MUKHERJEE  
& SAMRAT SAHA**

Indrani Mukherjee is co-founder and managing director. Her work revolves extensively around environment-friendly engineering services, project management, and structural design. With emphasis on spreading awareness about alternative and renewable materials, she aims to set a process of change that meets both current and future human needs.

Samrat Saha is co-founder and head of operations. With various architectural designs based on out-of-the-box ideas to his credit, he is passionate about alternative and cost-effective construction projects. He lays emphasis on training and skill development of artisans to create sustainable solutions that ensure quality of life for present and future generations.



strands that look exactly like teak and can be polished directly," says Saha.

There is also an increasing demand for their vases, tables, ashtrays, pen stands, skewers, coffee mugs, and toys. "We make a wide range of toys, especially bikes and scooters," says Saha. While their unique crafts and utility products are already available on Amazon India, they are headed towards retailing on other e-commerce platforms as well.

With innovative thinking, they believe their company can grow to great heights, much like the bamboo they work with. "It's been a rollercoaster ride, but every obstacle we've faced is worth it," says Mukherjee. She quotes French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery to encapsulate all that Bambooz stands for: "True happiness comes from the joy of deeds well done, the zest of creating things new." **dd**