

This iconic 1986 image shows architect Joseph Stein walking up the stairs at the Ford Foundation office that he had designed.

by **Georgina Maddox**

Building of New Delhi in sunlight and shade

BEFORE taking a picture of architect Raj Rewal's house, photographer Madan Mahatta spent two days observing the light inside the room at different times as the sun travelled in the sky. He took the photograph only when he got the light he wanted, capturing that magical moment of luminosity, playing over glass windows and objects.

That was in 1975. Mahatta is 80, and is having his first mini-retrospective at PhotoInk Gallery, showcasing images that span the 1960s to the 1980s — three important decades of Delhi's architectural activity.

Pigment prints in six sizes of square and vertical formats capture iconic buildings such as the Escorts factory in Faridabad (1964-72), Hall of Nations at Pragati Maidan (1974-84), India International Centre (1962), Hotel Ashok (1957), The Claridges (1958), Jantar Mantar (1983-90) and the New Delhi Municipal Council building.

Working with a Hasselblad and Linhof camera, Mahatta was one of the first photographers to document the growing city of New Delhi, in close proximity with key architects such as Joseph Stein, Habib Rahman, Kuldip Singh, Ranjit Sibikhi, The Design Group, A.P. Kanvinde, and of course, Rewal.

The images not only capture the Nehruvian era of architecture influenced by the Bauhaus School and the German architect Walter Gropius, but they also shed light on the sheer beauty of architecture lit by serendipitous bursts of sunlight, which make them appear almost theatrical.

"I didn't know I was making history and I wouldn't have dreamt of showcasing my work. But [photographer-curator] Ram Rahman and [PhotoInk director] Devika Daulat Singh took the trouble of mounting this exhibi-

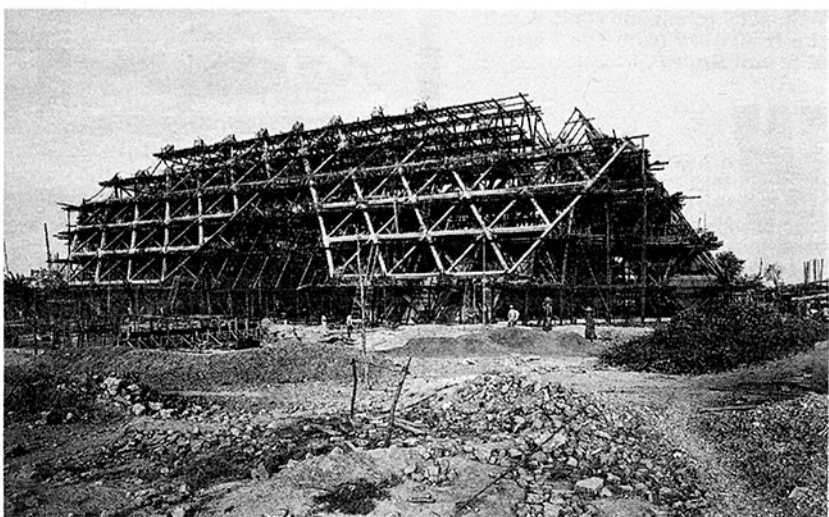
tion," says the Kashmir-born Mahatta, who was also the first Indian photographer to study abroad at the Milford School of Arts and Crafts in Surrey. And he was the first to bring colour printing back to India in 1954 when he returned.

"I started architectural photography because I was involved with creating images of models of buildings for architects. Soon, architects asked me to document their projects from start to finish," recalls Mahatta, whose father Amar Nath Mehta was also a photographer.

"I shot many of these from elevated positions from other buildings," Mahatta says. "The Escorts factory was the only one I shot from a helicopter. All are shot with a tripod because the cameras I worked with were heavy," adds the photographer who did everything, from portraiture and theatre to commercial and industrial photography. "I was Jack of all genres but master of one — photography," he says for effect. His pictures make this fact abundantly evident.

— Delhi Modern: Architectural Photographs of Madan Mahatta is on at PhotoInk Gallery, Rani Jhansi Road, Jhandewalan; April 26 to June 21. Call 28755940

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Pragati Maidan's Hall of Nations looks unrecognisable when it began in 1972. Mahatta was there to document it from start to finish.