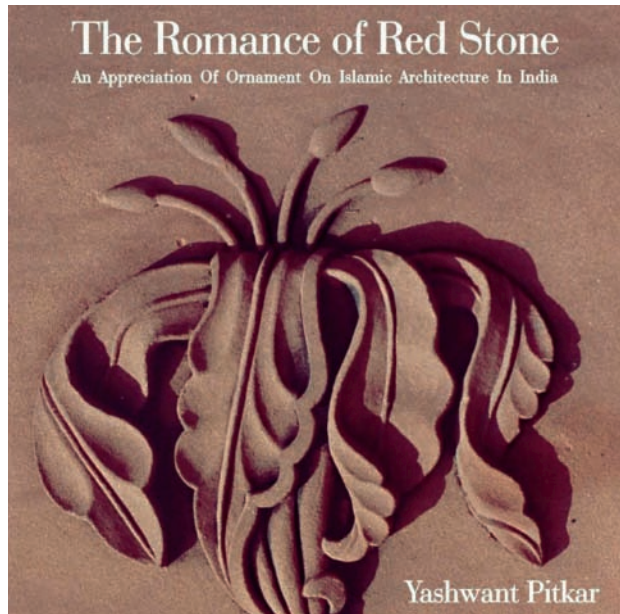


**Edition Axel Menges GmbH**  
**Esslinger Straße 24**  
**D-70736 Stuttgart-Fellbach**  
**tel. +49-711-5747 59**  
**fax +49-711-5747 84**



Yashwant Pitkar

**The Romance of Red Stone. An Appreciation of Ornament on Islamic Architecture in India**

With texts by Mustansir Dalvi. 256 pp. with 306 illus., 280x280 mm, hard-cover, English  
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*The Romance of Red Stone* is an appreciation of architecture of Islam in India. Indo-Islamic architecture is characterized by the prolific use of sandstone – red stone. It is the culmination of the long tradition of Islamic art that came into bloom right from the faith's first expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula in the late seventh century. All the great Mughal emperors were prolific commissioners of monuments and their architecture thus remained the finest representation of this syncretion. Mughal architecture has been rich in ornament, almost at times overwhelming the architecture itself.

With lively pictures, giving you a feeling of actually experiencing them, the book is divided into three major sections – Islamic ornament, Common forms in Islamic ornament, and Mughal architecture. Indeed a tribute to the Islamic architecture in India. A must-have book for all who love Mughal architecture.

The pictures present a feast of craftsmanship, as an enduring romance with shape and stone, in its unending variations. For a visitor to these buildings, the photographs allow a return, a recollection of architecture as a phenomenon, giving a sensual experience of the visit, a feel for the infinite craft.

Mustansir Dalvi's text complements Pitkar's photographs by guiding the reader to an understanding of the variety and symbolism of ornamental forms that grace Islamic architecture, especially in the Indian context. Ornament in its many manifestations transforms the architecture, dematerializing immense monuments into elegant jewel-boxes. Dalvi shows how artisan and patron came together in India in a unique integration of two divergent world views and cultures to create a lasting syncretism of Islamic and Hindu traditions that reached its zenith in the architecture of the Mughal period.

Yashwant Pitkar, a faculty member of the Sir J. J. College of Architecture in Mumbai, is an architect and a photographer of architecture. He has extensively traveled over the past two decades documenting buildings of India with his unique photographic gaze. From works of architecture in Mandu, Delhi, Agra and Fatehpuri Sikri to neo-Classical façades of Bombay's streets and the stepped walls of Patan and Modhera – Pitkar has captured all in his camera. Mustansir Dalvi is professor of architecture at the Sir J. J. College of Architecture in Mumbai. He has published many papers on architectural history, heritage and education. His particular interest is Bombay's development during its emergence as a vibrant metropolis.

Distributors

**Brockhaus Commission**  
**Kreidlerstraße 9**  
**D-70806 Kornwestheim**  
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**Australia**  
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**fax +61-1300-650 777**  
**orders@scribo.com.au**

### Yashwant Pitkar

Yashwant Pitkar is an architect and a photographer of architecture. He is Assistant Professor at the Sir J. J. College of Architecture, Mumbai, with qualifications in architecture and Indian aesthetics. He has traveled extensively over the past two decades documenting buildings of India with his unique photographic gaze. Pitkar has held many exhibitions of his architectural photographs, displaying the architecture of Mandu, of Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur-Sikri, the neo-Classical facades of Bombay's streets, the stained glass of Gilbert Scott's University of Bombay and his most recent- the stepped wells of Patan and Modhera. "Romance in Red Stone" is his first book.

### Mustansir Dalvi

Mustansir Dalvi is Professor of Architecture at Sir J. J. College of Architecture, Bombay. He has lectured, read and published several papers on architectural education and architectural history and heritage. He has written for monographs 'Buildings that shaped Bombay: the Architecture of G. B. Mhatre', 'Quiet Conversations: the architecture of Kamu Iyer' and most recently for a volume on Mulk Raj Anand (Marg Publications). He is published in Domus, the Journal of Design (Milan), Marg, Art India, A+D, Indian Architect & Builder. He is particularly interested in the development of Bombay's architecture during its emergence as a vibrant metropolis.



## The Romance of Red Stone

An Appreciation Of Ornament On Islamic Architecture In India

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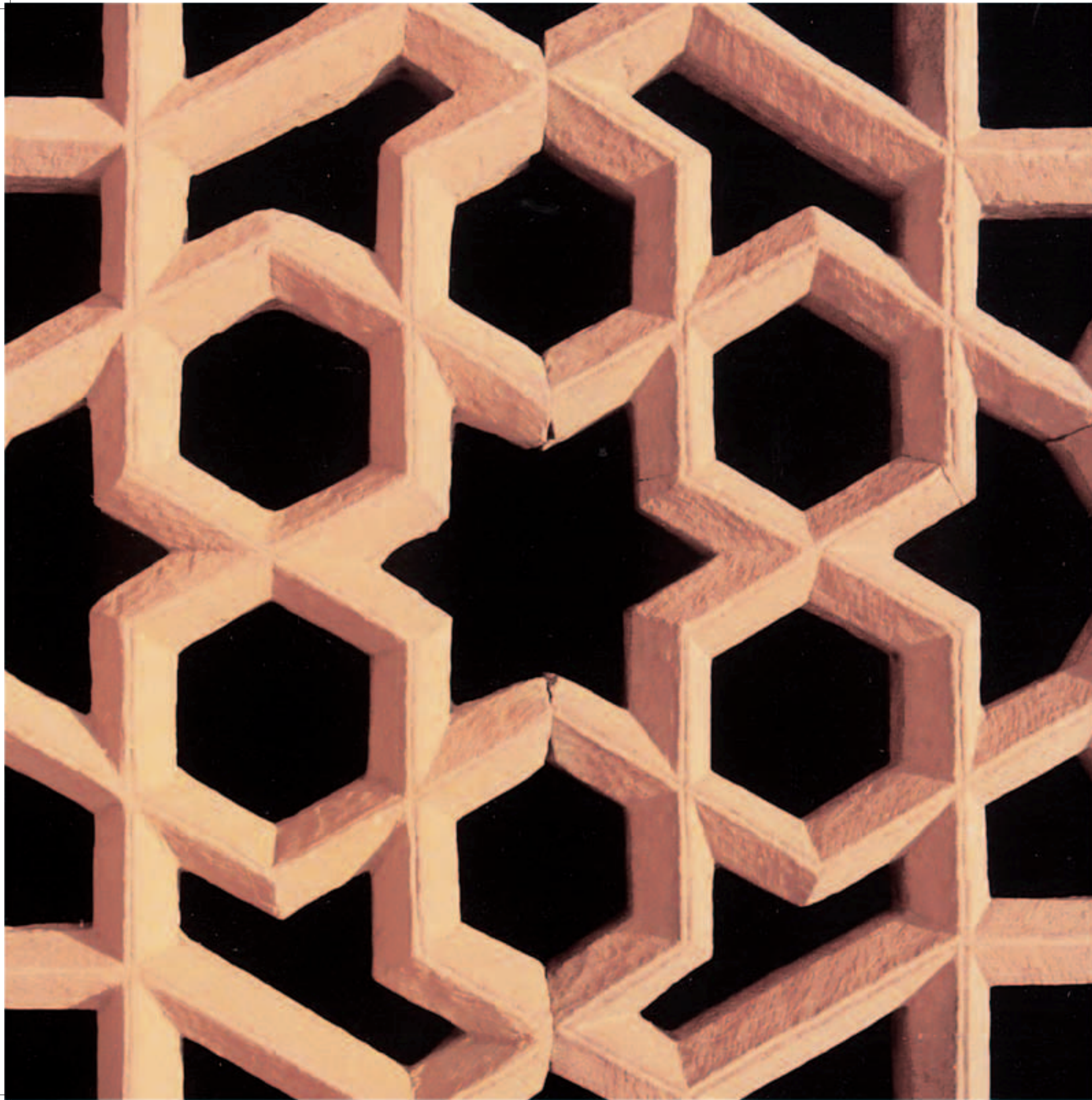
Yashwant Pitkar

Romance in Red Stone is an appreciation of architecture of Islam in India at a level removed from the formal, as articulated surface. In his photographs Yashwant Pitkar presents architecture as a feast of craftsmanship, as an enduring romance with shape and stone, in its unending variations. An architect first, then a photographer, Pitkar's images reflect his love and admiration for the buildings of Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, which he captures in a way he knows best, up close and personal.

Pitkar's unique photographic gaze identifies with that of a Mughal miniature painter, or a Company artist, taking the viewer close to the buildings, enough to shut out the dominating forms right into the aesthetics of surface. For a visitor to these buildings, the photographs allow a return, a recollection of architecture as a phenomenon, giving a sensual experience of the visit, here is an effective feel for the infinite craft.

Pitkar's images work at a deeper philosophical level. The viewer is made aware of the inner meaning of aesthetic representation, the different ways of inducing the immeasurable, The plays of multiple superimposed levels and of patterns continue beyond the photographer's frame suggesting the infinite.





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In its long journey Islamic art and culture assimilated every extant tradition it encountered and internalized it to form a unique culture, while keeping its religious underpinnings constant, even as the outward trappings showed variations and iterations on essentially Islamic themes. It's progress linked for the first time in history, such varied and peoples as the Spaniards, Africans, Persians, Turks, Egyptians and Indians. The uniting of so many diverse cultures under one religion had the advantage of quickly disseminating the latest and best discoveries to all parts of the Islamic world. Paper making from China, "Arabic" numerals from India, and translations of classical Greek science and philosophy translations were all shared. In medicine the Muslims enhanced Greek theory

by practical observation and clinical experience. Significant contributions were also made in chemistry, physics and mathematics. These diverse influences also encouraged new developments in the various fields of art.

The architecture of the Islam in India is the culmination of a long tradition of Islamic Art that came into bloom right from the faith's first expansion beyond the Arabian Peninsula in the late seventh century. At its peak Islam covered all the lands to the West of Arabia including Spain, Turkey, and North Africa and in the east spanned central Asia and Iran, and finally crossed the Indus to found the Mughal Empire. With the rise of the Mughals this rich culture came in contact with a tradition equally rich and a form of art arose that was uniquely syncretic. All the great Mughal emperors were prolific commissioners of monuments and their architecture is the finest representation of this syncretism. Mughal architecture is rich in ornament, almost at times overwhelming the architecture itself.

Indo Islamic architecture is characterized by the prolific use of sandstone- red stone. ►







The natural world blooms in monochrome- realistic depictions of nature abound in the art of the Mughals.



Blood red- semiprecious stones inlaid in pietra dura, ubiquitous all over the Taj Mahal.



A Bracket in Birbal's House in Fatehpur Sikri- ornament covers its every surface.

# An iconoclast aesthetic

*'O ye who believe, wine and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork; so avoid it and prosper.'*  
The Qur'an, surah 5,92

Islamic art follows a tradition of almost completely avoiding figural representation and this makes it unlike most other cultures anywhere in the world. The tradition stems from interpretations of passages in the holy book, such as the one quoted above, as well as certain of the Hadith, the traditions recording the life and words of the prophet Muhammad that he disapproved of images. Representations of humans and animals in art and architecture seem to have been proscribed right from the time of the early Caliphs less than a century after the prophet's death. Whereas this has not, over the centuries been followed with utmost rigidity by Islamic artists the world over, but it is part of the accepted tradition, and thus most works of art including architectural ornament are free from these representations.

The antipathy towards iconic representation opened out several directions for the Islamic artisan, who seemed to be liberated rather than stifled by this strict injunction. They exploited different aesthetic elements, which are used repeatedly, no matter which material is being used or which object produced. What is evidently perceivable in Islamic Art is a sense of hierarchy, a readiness to exploit symbolism, a love of lavish decoration (whose functions go beyond mere display), and a leaning towards the use of color. Artisans also used differences in texture by contrasting materials and developed harmonies in color. Instead of figuration they used abstract, geometrical or vegetal (arabesques) themes with enormous complexity, and gave a unique place to calligraphy and epigraphy in their design of objects, all of which were executed in many styles, incorporating many borrowed traditions. Islamic Art is displayed in a variety of and objects including manuscript illumination and calligraphy, metalwork, coins, rock crystal and glasswork, pottery, textiles and carpets, artifacts in stone, wood, ivory, tile work and ceramics and carving in jade. Architectural ornament in Islamic buildings, is influenced (in a scaled up form) from many of these smaller artifacts. It has been said of the Mughals that they designed like giants, and finished like jewelers. In Mughal Art, the ornament is seen in forms such as carving in wood, brick and stone, stone relief, mosaic and tile work, stucco, trellis work, and stone inlay culminating in the jewel-like pietra dura ornament (using semi precious stone) seen most notably on the Taj Mahal.

