On February 8, 1931, *The Statesman*, the Indian English-language newspaper, reminded its readers of the background of 20 years earlier that would lead to the formal inauguration of India’s new capital, opening on February 10 and lasting two weeks: “New Delhi can be said to have been born at two o’clock on Tuesday, December 12, 1911. The great Durbar [in Calcutta] was drawing to its interminable close. Homage had been paid…. An immense strain must have been imposed upon Their Majesties [King George V and Queen Mary, Emperor and Empress of India, a title that was presented first to Queen Victoria, the king’s grandmother, at Delhi in
1877]…. At the end, His Majesty rose and made a short announcement: ‘We have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the Government of India from Calcutta to the ancient Capital of Delhi’…. The secret had been extraordinarily well kept.”

The subject of moving the capital of the “Crown Jewel” of the British Empire had been under discussion since 1868, though there had been resistance all along. A more central location for the vast country where government could be carried on year-round without the more severe equatorial climate of Calcutta that caused yearly interruptions. In addition, by 1911, the move would ease the installation of certain political reforms that had been resisted by Calcutta’s elite – thus the reason for secrecy. On December 15, Their Majesties laid two simple stones near the new site outside Delhi, thus giving “material effect to the important announcement.”

An empire needed grandeur. New Delhi was the selected place and Edwin Landseer Lutyens and Herbert Baker would be the chief architects to carry through the creation of one the world’s great urban establishments – as one London newspaper headline would eventually read, “The New Delhi: A City to Rival Paris and Washington.”

Lutyens was sought after mainly for his great English country houses while Baker was recognized for the government buildings in South Africa, as well as for projects in Australia, France, Belgium and Britain. Lutyens was the first to be chosen (the monumental project met a long-sought desire), and Baker, who had been a friend and colleague, was to follow. Walter George, Robert Tor Russell and others became part of the larger architectural team that also included members of the Delhi Town Planning Committee.

When Lutyens signed on, he had one proviso, and that was to design some of the main buildings. Because of his excellent professional and social connections (for one, his wife, Emily, happened to be the daughter of Lord Lytton, the first viceroy of India), Lutyens was able to obtain the commission to design Government House, the viceroy’s palace and the premiere building, which would turn out to have 340 rooms, 35 loggias and 37 fountains among quantities of other
features, brilliantly incorporating both Mughal decorative features (the elephant, temple bell, lotus, shell and cobra fountains) and Western elements (the column, the arched opening and classical symmetry) and concluding with a unique hybrid style.

Baker designed the two secretariat buildings, named North Block and South Block (now offices for the prime minister and the cabinet) and framing Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan or President’s House), as well as a hexagonal plan for Council House, which was rejected for Lutyens’s circular plan (now Parliament House, 570 feet in diameter). Baker also designed houses beyond the confines of the Viceregal Estate.

Government House would be given prominence on Raisina Hill at one end of the ceremonial avenue called Kingsway (now Rajpath) and at the other of this dramatic vista would be the All-India War Memorial (now India Gate). Just beyond was the statue of King George V located in the center of Princes Park. Bordering its hexagonal sides were the mansions of some of the maharajas of India. Lutyens was the architect for these, including Hyderabad House (now used by the prime minister for entertaining officials), Patiala House, Jaipur House (now the Museum of Modern Art) and Bikaner House.

Because of his years of collaborating with Gertrude Jekyll, the great English garden designer, Lutyens was able to take on such tasks as overseeing the lining of the broad avenues with
indigenous trees, creating mini-gardens at rotaries and above all, planning the Mughal water gardens at Government House with its canals and layered lotus fountains. These and other landscape features within the geometric grid of the urban scheme were thoughtfully created and laid out, making them all part of the greater plan. To this day New Delhi is considered a garden city despite the vast increase of buildings.

(Top l.) Entrance Gates to President’s House; (Top r.) All-India War Memorial (now India Gate).
(Bottom l.) Hyderabad House; (Bottom r.) Jaipur House (now Museum of Modern Art).
Sir Edwin Lutyens, Architect.

Within Government House, Lutyens designed Durbar Hall, the circular throne room located beneath a central dome inspired by the Buddhists stupas, a State Dining Room (now Ashoka Hall), a ballroom decorated with rich frescoes in the Indo-Persian style, subsidiary public rooms, private apartments for the viceroy and his family and a multitude of guest suites and service rooms. Carpets, copies of magnificent Mughal floor coverings, were custom woven in Kashmir. The furniture was designed by Lutyens using teak from Burma and central India, ebony and Kashmiri walnut and other regional woods. Indian artists were hired to paint the murals and frescoes. Lutyens oversaw all of this, as well as fireplaces, lights and chandeliers, paintings, upholstery and so much more.

Author Elizabeth Wilhide’s description of the architect’s work overall rings true with his achievements in New Delhi, “…Lutyens’s work displays a remarkable synthesis of function and artistry…[His] brilliance was to breathe new life into traditional forms and themes…The notion of taste – an intrinsic sense of rightness in design – informed every creative decision…marrying
the vernacular with the classical, the formal and the natural, the result is an important and enduring legacy of design…”

Imperial Hotel (1931), D.J. Blomfield, Architect, an associate of Sir Edwin Lutyens.

The Institute of Classical Architecture & Art is proud to announce an extraordinary exclusive seven-day tour of Sir Edwin Lutyens and Imperial New Delhi, exploring under special aegis the architecture and wonder of this fabled city. Experts from the Lutyens Trust and The Indian National Trust for Art & Culture Heritage will give us exclusive entrée to government and other buildings and sites with accompanying lectures. Fully arranged five-star accommodations have been reserved at the legendary Imperial Hotel. **The tour land cost is $6700.00 per person with a $1000.00 single supplement. A fully tax-deductible donation of $500 per person is required in order to participate. Registration deadline is August 10, 2015.**

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