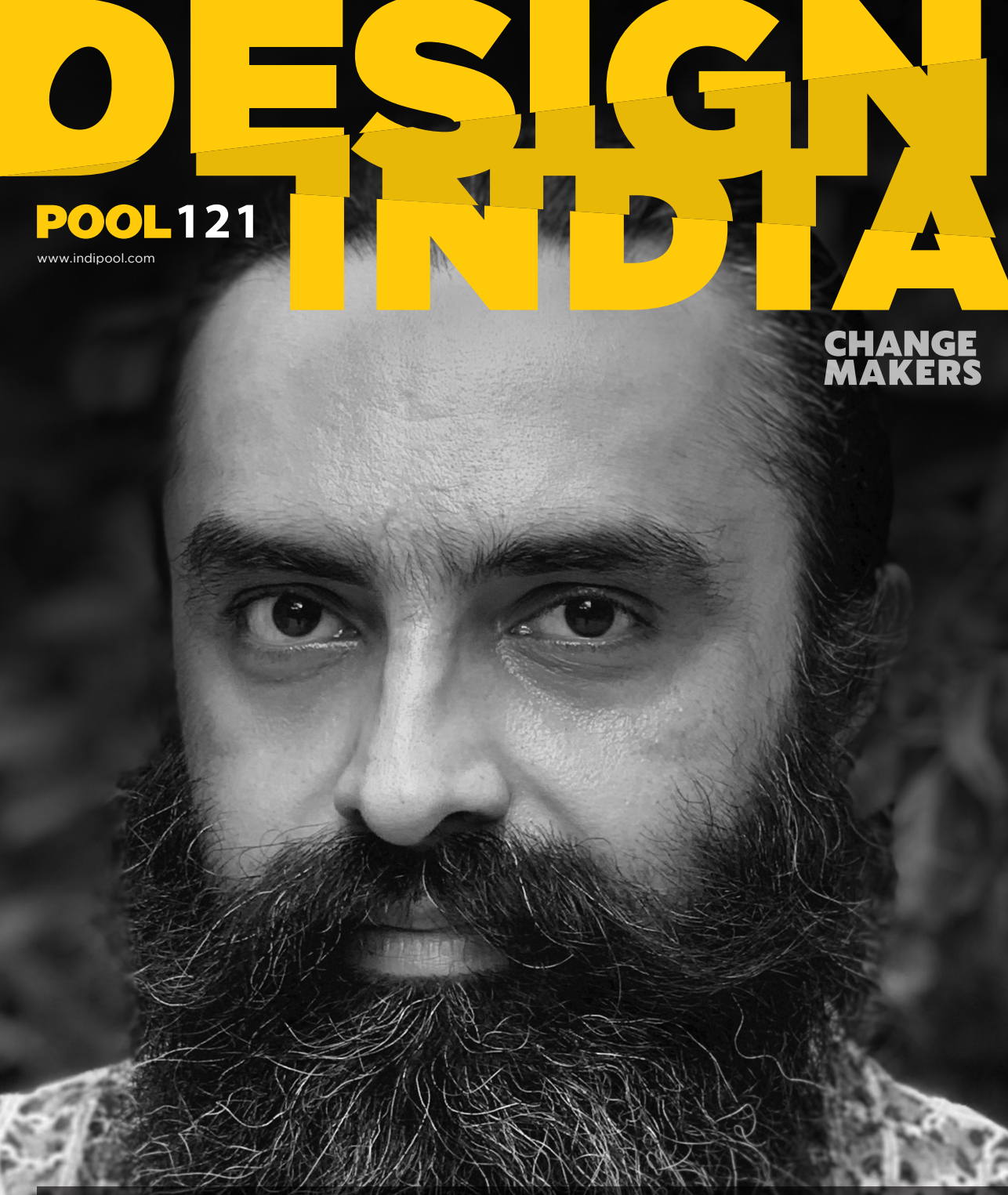
DESIGN INDIA

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CHANGE MAKERS



Mann Singh *pg 10* | ***Photographed by Niloufer Kaur***

Sebastian Gier **02** Hiren Patel **24** Yadvi Agarwal **30** Rhea Gupte **36**
Ujjawal Dubey **44** Anjali Shah **50** Sayan Chanda **58**

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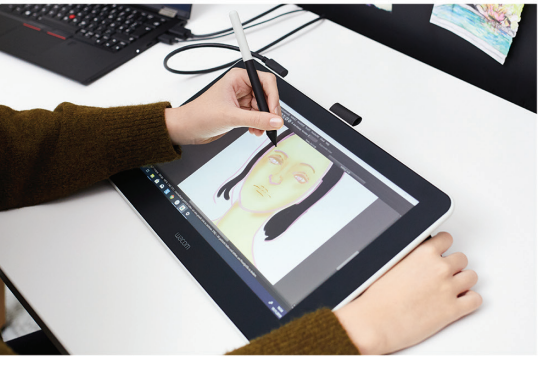
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Editor in Chief | **sudhir@indidesign.in**



At Khandala, during the monsoons and in the midst of the pandemic



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DESIGN INDIA

Designindia was founded in 2002. It was started as a platform for interaction for the design community in India and abroad. Over the years it has grown into a forum spread over many social and professional networking domains, linking design professionals into an active, interactive and thought leading community.

http://in.groups.yahoo.com/group/designindia

Before you judge

Judging creative work is a huge responsibility and is extraordinarily difficult to get right. Everyone underestimates how difficult this is because:

a) Everyone believes they have good taste.

b) They believe that because they look at quality work all the time, they can instinctively distinguish good from bad.

c) Deep down everyone is a frustrated designer.

If you become aware of these points, you could graduate to making sound creative judgments and even find a way to learn from them. Ask yourself the following five questions when judging any original work.

1. What is the idea?

Don't get distracted by colors, fonts, pictures, or form. Step away from what is visible and ask if there is a powerful, creative idea in what you are seeing. If it's not there, it is not exceptional work.

2. Is it unexpected?

Did it surprise you? Did you expect to see it in some other way? Perhaps you should take a closer look. There is something more to it than you see.

3. Does it make you emotional?

Do you have any human response to it? Does it evoke any emotions? Do you feel happy, sad, excited... anything at all? Or do you feel indifference?

4. Is it right for the purpose?

Does it do what it is supposed to do and how well does it do that? Does it feel right, and meet the purpose?

5. Does it cut through the clutter?

There is bound to be similar stuff around, if not in looks, in function. See how it is different from the competition. Is what you are looking at in any way different from what you have already seen?

Above all, don't be in a hurry to judge. Take your time and observe your reactions to each of the questions. Try this out and let me know if you were in any way surprised!

Sudhir

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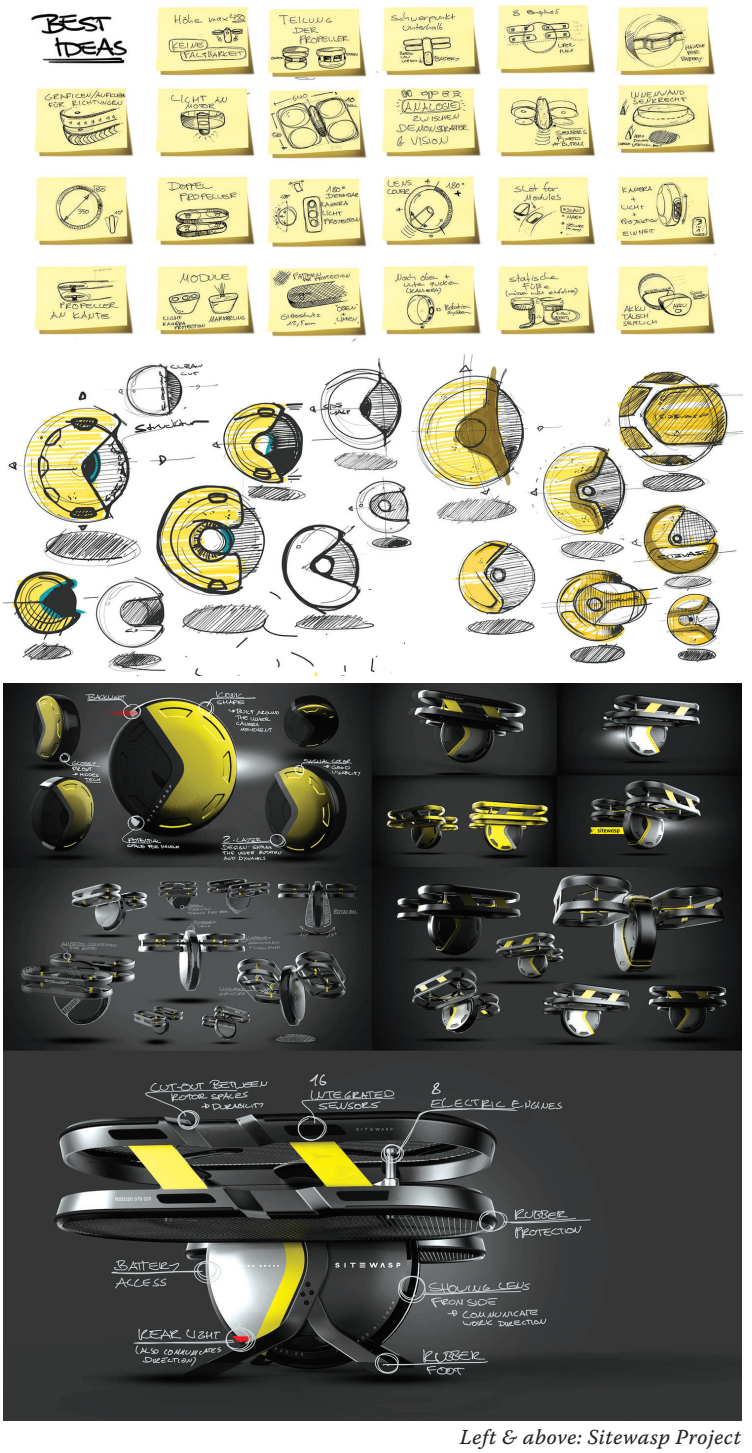
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THE DRIVE TO DESIGN

As Senior Designer for Design Strategy & UX/UI Design with the BMW Group in Germany, ***Sebastian Gier*** *has a very challenging job, but is still motivated to regularly connect with and mentor other designers*





Left & above: Sitewasp Project

What does it take to design a brand-shaping and positive human experience?

SG: In my personal view, products and services are the core of every brand and the best way to create a brand that people love is to design the best product and service experience. These products drive the brand and ultimately shape its perception. I believe designers should strive to create positive human experiences and emotions with every product and service and go beyond just rational needs and function. People might forget a feature and function but not how you made them feel. Ultimately, this will create a strong bonding between the brand and the people.

In the end, whatever you create should solve the problem or improve the situation. In my view, it all starts with values and the purpose you build something for. To achieve this, you need a strategic design approach: understand people and their rational and emotional needs, explore ways to improve a situation, test, observe the reaction and learn from each iteration. For break-through innovations, it is also important to keep an 'empty' mind and unlearn to learn again with fewer assumptions or changed assumptions.

How were you drawn to design?

SG: As a kid, I always loved to sketch, build, and create. This passion transitioned into digital creation as a teenager;

I loved to play with graphic design programs, build digital interfaces and even designed game systems as well as digital worlds for computer games. After discovering this passion, I moved in the direction of design early on and when I was 16 years old I had my first unpaid one-year internship at a communication design agency in my home town. Later, I started studying Industrial Design at the Folkwang University in Essen (Germany), did some more internships in Europe and the US, and afterwards pursued a Master's Degree in Advanced Product Design at the Umea Institute of Design in North Sweden.

How important is a formal design education?

SG: I feel design education is what you make of it - personally, it has brought me an incredible network of designers and friends all over the world. If you are interested in becoming great at what you are doing, look out for people who share a similar interest within your class or university. I have learned a lot by competing with other students when trying to deliver the best project results. The motivation as well as the different expertise from everyone in the group will lead to a better outcome in every project. Use design education as a canvas and space to develop yourself and don't stick around in one area for too long. Test and try out as much as you can and learn what you are interested in. Such a test will help you understand yourself, what you are good at, and what you enjoy the most. Besides, it will give you a more open and broader knowledge around many different domains. Towards the end of your study or during the first job, you will have to specialize in one field so it is important to know what drives you. I also felt that with each challenge I underwent and the new experiences when moving to a new city, I was growing as a person through challenges and aspects that were out of my comfort zone.

For me, this exploration phase had an incredible impact and helped me learn a lot. If you can combine your education with



living abroad, I would highly recommend it as the new insights, cultures and mindsets that you will encounter are going to help you design with a more open mind.

Share your experience of working with Bosch-Siemens Home Appliances. What are your major takeaways?

SG: I initially went to Bosch-Siemens Home Appliances for an internship in Industrial Design and later on for my Bachelor Thesis around 'The Internet of Food & Health'. At the Bosch Design Studio where I was working, I could experience the design process of their many home products and appliances. It was interesting to see the importance of a strong design strategy for their many products (vacuum cleaners, fridges, ovens, washing machines, and more) and how it is applied for their physical Industrial Design and the digital UX/UI design. It was amazing to see how brand values and design strategy play out on a physical interaction level: how interaction with the button, slider, nub, and more should feel like depending on the context. Tactical interaction design plays a significant role in delivering a quality product. Market needs and differences were an incredibly interesting and important topic: which interaction and design qualities are preferred in which cultures, for example.

How did your journey at BMW begin?

SG: During my first internship at MNML in Chicago I was approached by a talent scout from Designworks in Los Angeles (design innovation studio of BMW Group), who was looking for interns studying at the Umea Institute of Design in Sweden. After a successful interview I did a six-month internship with their Industrial Design Team in LA where I learned an incredible amount of designing at a larger scale (Plane Interior Experiences, Construction Machines, etc.) from outstanding designers.

Later I joined the BMW Group in Munich to work on my Master's thesis in UX, Service Design and Augmented Reality, which was recognized by many design awards around the world. I joined their design team directly after graduating in 2017. In the first two years I focused on designing long-term mobility futures in a more strategic setup and explored and prototyped these futures from a UX design perspective in collaboration with business and technology stakeholders. For one year now, I am focused on digital products and services inside and outside the vehicle in collaboration with digital strategy and software development stakeholders. I am incredibly grateful for my time at BMW so far as I am getting the chance to work in many different areas as well as on incredibly exciting and challenging projects with people I learn a lot from.

Tell us about a few projects that you are proud of.

SG: Talking about my time at the BMW Group I would like to mention my Master's thesis with BMW, called Xplore, where I got the chance to work on the area of future passenger experiences and leveraging Service



Left & right: Xplore



BMW Digital Key

Design, UX/UI and Prototyping. Another memorable project is the UX/UI design of the BMW Vision M Next, where we explored the future of the active driving experience together with a fantastic team.

From the time before I joined BMW Group, I enjoyed designing an underground mining machine system working directly with employees in the mining company; and in another project in collaboration with Gardena we explored the future of indoor farming. I enjoy contrast and keep myself balanced in terms of creative output.

How did the 'Designdrives' podcasts come about?

SG: After gaining some in-depth work experience I started to enjoy teaching and mentoring. Providing value and insights to others through lectures in different universities is very rewarding and having a positive impact on others feels great. After many lectures and conference talks, I wondered if there would be any other way to provide value to the design community and in 2019 I started to layout a podcast series called 'Designdrives', with the idea of interviewing the world's best designers. Sharing the impact and importance of design is something I am passionate about, so with



1



2



1. Push Conference (2017)
2. Spark
3. Designdrives Interview
4. Sebastian at IXDA





each podcast I dive into a different topic on why, how, and what design drives forward. We learn from other outstanding design minds, their journey, experience and insights on how to drive impact as a designer to people, businesses and society. In early 2020 I started DDX, which is the conference format of Designdrives. We had the first event in March, just before the COVID outbreak, during Munich Creative Business Week.

You're no stranger to receiving awards. What difference does recognition make to a designer?

SG: First of all, I think it is important to not overrate design awards and not consider the number of awards as the metric on how to compare designers. For me, design awards and competitions are a great way to get feedback on my work, learn how to communicate it sharply, and earn some recognition if the work was innovative. If you have the resources and time, it can be helpful

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EXPERIENCE

to apply for awards but in the end, they do not define you as a designer. I know many great designers with very few design awards.

What inspires you?

SG: Inspiration can come from everything: daily life situations, a documentary, experiences from the past and many other things. I think we learn with each project, life experience, failure and success. I draw a lot of inspiration in my work from human behavior, consumer trends and digital interactions. It's very interesting to observe how people interact and understand what interactions people are actually capable of integrating into their daily life, considering that everyone lacks time. I love to observe trends in design, technology and business, and to discover red threads.

Share your aspirations.

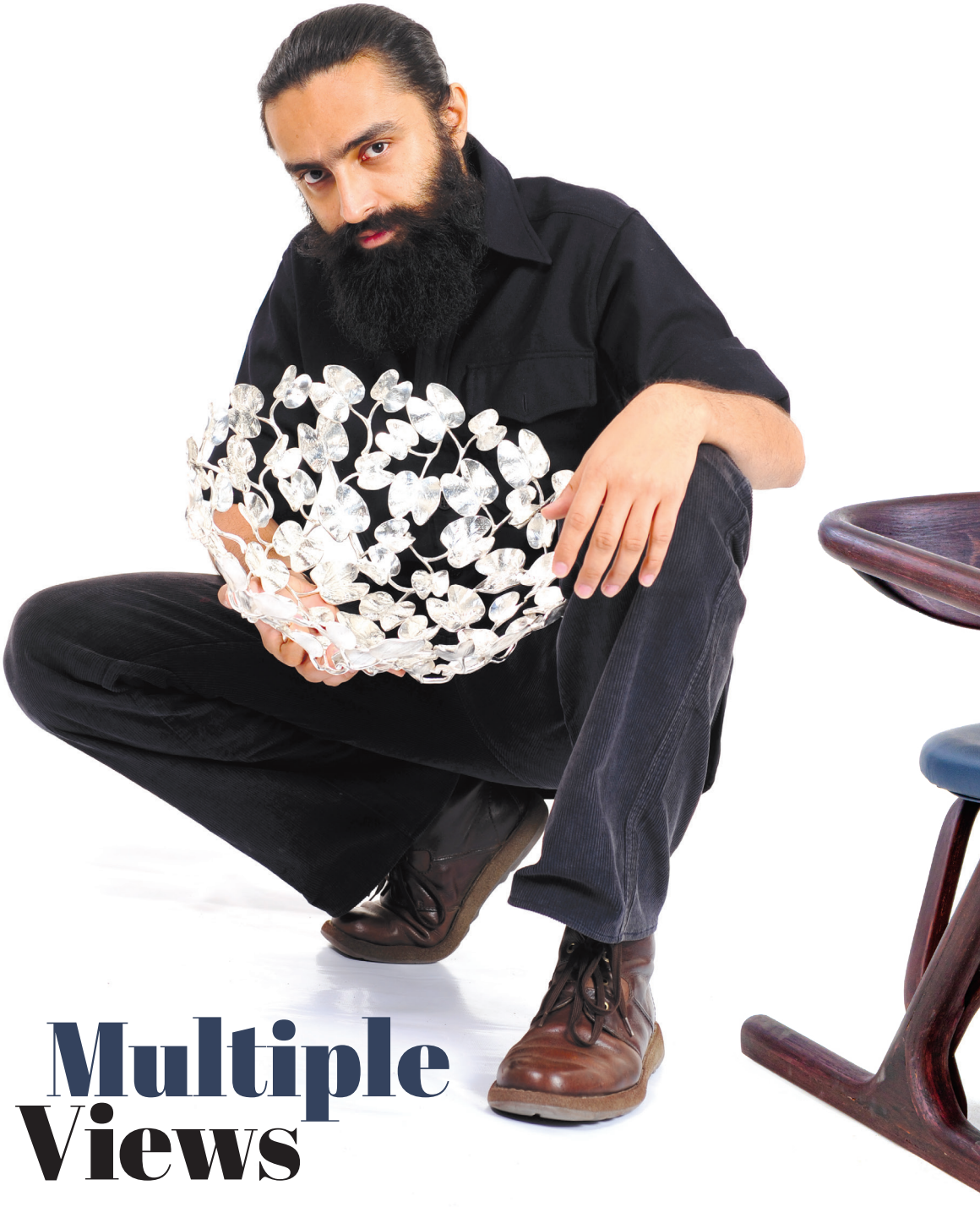
SG: I am enjoying my work at BMW Group where I get the chance to work on fascinating projects on the future of mobility with outstanding people.
I also enjoy working on the Designdrives podcast and conference. I am exploring the possibility of launching the conference again next year at the Munich Creative Business Week, depending on the COVID-19 situation. I am also working on a more regular live stream format where people can directly join the podcast episodes, so their questions are more integrated into the conversation. There are many more exciting episodes ahead to be published and I am exploring new formats.

Hopefully, I will continue adding value to people, provide mentorship and give lectures. I am using some of my spare time to work on some private design and innovation projects, specifically one in the area of sustainability.

info@sebastiangier.com



Above: Square Garden
Left: Ein & Zwanzig



Multiple Views





Left to right: Kachnar I,II

Though he opted for furniture design over product design as a student, ***Mann Singh*** *increasingly finds the lines between the two blurring. Designer, teacher and even onetime actor, he likes to call himself the perpetual outsider, peeking into all kinds of windows...*

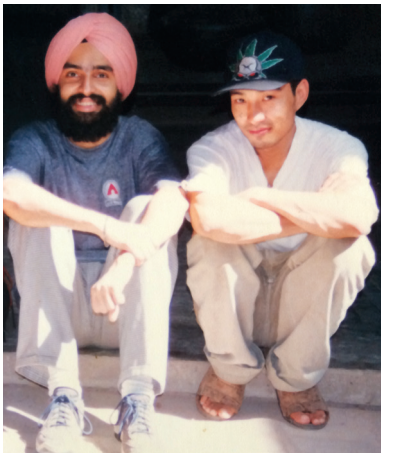
How were you drawn to furniture design?

MS: After completing the foundation program at NID we had to choose our discipline, and I knew I wanted to do something that involved making things. Product design was out because of the polystyrene models all the students seemed to be spending their existence making; meanwhile, the furniture lot was making furniture that was ready to use. The Furniture Design program was more diverse compared to the distinctly skewed gender ratio in Product Design and it had an exciting cast of characters in my year. It looked like it would be a fun ride! Furniture design sits quite comfortably on the intersection of architecture, sculpture, craft and design. What better use of my time than to make another chair?

What role has NID played in your career?

MS: Everything about my career is down to NID, warts and all. Not just my career, my entire life.





Above: Nirat
Right: Longri and Mann



Samnidhi

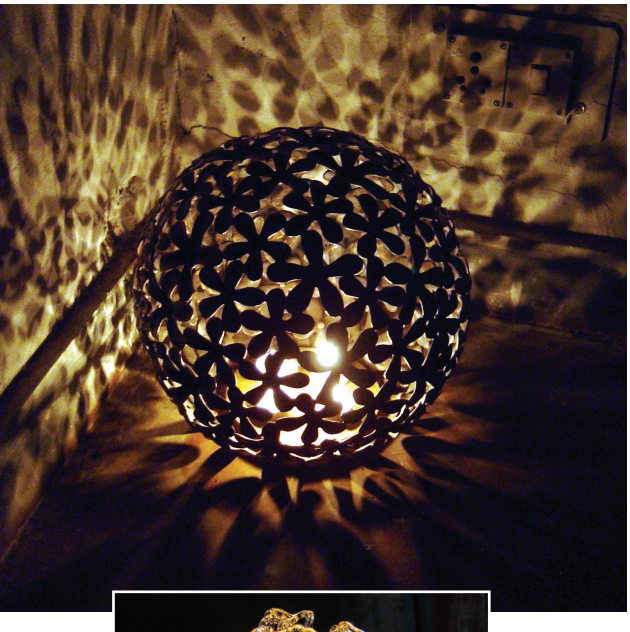
How did the experience of working in industry help establish your own practice?

MS: I've never planned or tried to control in what direction my work will go or take me; as a result it's been a varied mix of industrial projects, teaching, and working with craft. People from each sector I work in are very often unaware of my work in other areas, which is great. I think I'm a poor example of an established practice. It suits me to keep things open and whenever a new and different opportunity opens up that I like, I jump in!

I have only once been employed by industry in the regular sense of the word and that was when I was managing the show at Devi Design. My other engagements with industry, even when running internal teams, have always been as an external professional practitioner. It's an ideal situation for me where I'm not beholden to anyone and can operate outside the vertical structures. My engagements usually last till the point I'm effective, but it's always very illuminating and educational. I'm currently also the Director of Design at an up and coming furniture company based in Ahmedabad, Hof Furniture Systems, and the journey looks promising. I think what industry needs are inputs involving effective engagement with



Ksina





Above: Champa lamp sand cast; Left: Vilud

users individually and as a society and these inputs are best obtained from people who are out and about and learning and thinking. Sometimes the input succeeds and sometimes it's rejected.

Your designs reflect contemporary India. How do you achieve the perfect blend of the traditional and modern?

MS: My designs represent a small sliver of India - I cannot even pretend they represent anything more than that. Do they mean anything to a Kashmiri shepherd or a teacher at a government school in Yinkiong? I could argue quite successfully that they don't. I think the beauty of India is in the fact that she cannot be represented or reflected quite so easily, which is a blessing – it would be too heavy a burden. Pinning down contemporaneity in India is analogous to visualizing the tesseract, both of those things are beyond my abilities. The good thing is it allows one to get away with anything, which I find most useful. Tradition and modernity are ideas best explained by more qualified people (which is everyone). What I do have going for me is being the perpetual outsider, peeking into all sorts of windows. I have a



Pamposh

workmanlike grasp of three languages. I went to 10 or 11 schools in as many states in a career marked by its mediocrity. Even in NID I bear membership to two batches. My accent can switch in one conversation with two individuals. This peeping through windows allows you to really pick and choose and figure things out. My interest lies in the intersection of technology and skill - where do they intersect, how do they complement, what can I do with them?



Top to Bottom: Posch 1&2

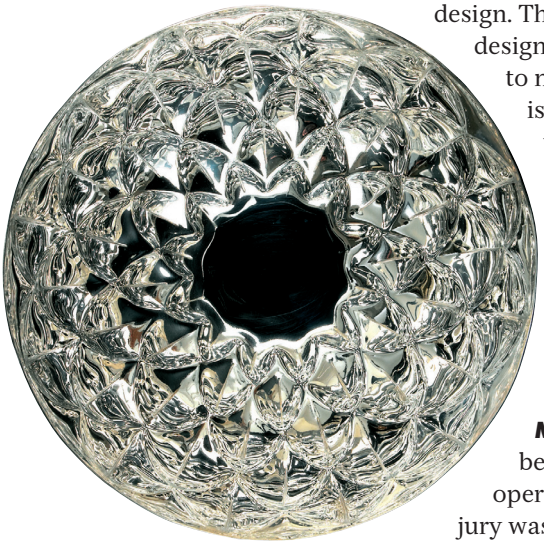
Which have been your most memorable projects?

MS: My systems project at NID was the first of my memorable projects; that's when I realized I could become a designer. MP Ranjan was our guide for a project using laminated bamboo. Many things came together for me at that point and pieces clicked into place. I ended up making 12 prototypes, which are still scattered around the institute, being

used in various departments. A paper on disaster management that I wrote as a student was also something I was pretty happy with. My projects for Driade, the Italian design company, both my own designs and those I engineered for other designers (Sipek and Novembre), were very memorable and challenging. Half the excitement was working with Enrico Astori, the co-founder of the company.

Share your experience of working with the Government of India.

MS: My work with the GOI has been limited to some projects for the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), and teaching. The government misses huge opportunities when it comes to meaningful engagement with design. There can be no argument regarding the value of design to society at any level. The government has to make sure that its relationship with designers is one of meritocracy and independence. It has to engage with design for the service of all segments of society and in many different ways. When Sharique Farooqui was director of the Craft Development Institute in Srinagar, they pulled off some projects in difficult circumstances, which have had an ongoing life and impact.



Muqarna

Tell us about your foray into product design.

MS: I once got our students to design seats to be used on public transport by passengers and operators. The industrial designer called for their jury was upset that furniture designers were doing



Shamadan

product design. I think what aspect of design one can engage with depends on one's ability to deliver an appropriate outcome. I don't subscribe to the notion that designers can do everything 'design' under the sun. A lot of non-designers do a better job of design than designers. I suppose what I'm trying to say is there aren't any effective boundaries.

For me anything which is produced and tangible is a product; any looser and the definition encompasses everything. The limitations are imposed by one's competence to design that product. I see furniture as a product. I would love to design a medical product if I get the chance.



Single Chitai large

Share your experience of exhibiting your work abroad. How, in your opinion, has perception of Indian design changed over the years?

MS: My work was first exhibited internationally at Milan at the Salone Satellite while we were students - the students didn't get to go though so I had no experience of it. When I designed for Driade, exhibiting at Milan was just one big party. I have many friends in Milan and love the Italians. I do remember that when I first went there, many were shocked because I was under 30, which here is old, but i got called kid all the time – *giovane*!

Do awards make a difference to business?

MS: Zero difference to business and life!

Have you faced many entrepreneurial challenges?

MS: We were never taught about setting up an organization or taxes or investments or anything like that. We had an entrepreneurial bent of mind with none of the background and skills, didn't even know how to ask for money for a job done. But, strangely, when I brought this up at CEPT the feeling was those who want to learn this should go to IIM. These are things that should be taught in foundation.



Dome tea set



1



2

You were instrumental in developing the pedagogy at CEPT, and have been teaching at various design institutions for years. What has the teaching experience taught you?

MS: In 2014 Krishnaben Shastri, who was dean at the School of Interior Design (now Faculty of Design), called me and said she wanted to start a master's program in furniture design. I was excited about the idea and we were off to the races. I was visiting faculty and Rachita Sareen was the program coordinator. Arthur Duff came on board as the Area chair. To me it's quite obvious; to start any education program which has applicability of a subject at its core one must look at the world just outside your



3

1. Mesh diya
2. Twist vase
3. Off center vases
4. Arpan





4



Treya natural



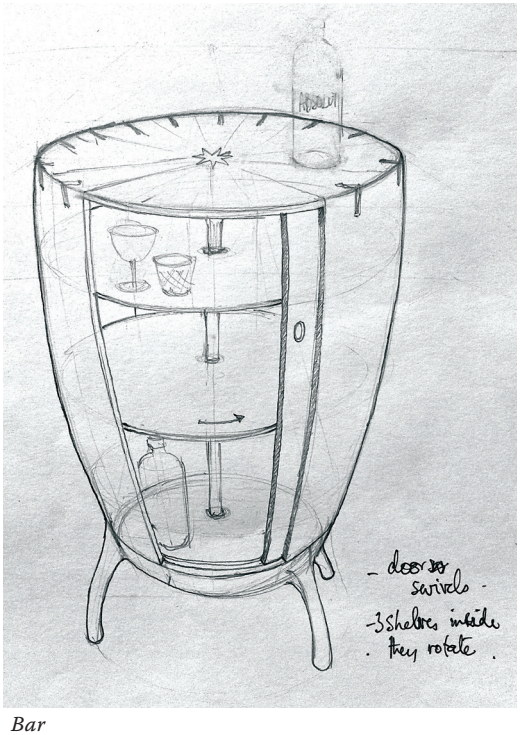
General purpose chair

window and then expand your horizons to distant shores. There are some really pressing challenges which while faced by the world at large are (or could be) severest here in India. There are other challenges unique to the whole or parts of the country. Add to that the backgrounds your students are coming from in a postgraduate program and many things which need to be part of the curriculum become self-evident. This was not how things have panned out at CEPT, which having now become a university has its own methods and logic.

My teaching experience has taught me that the word 'teaching' must not be used, that there must never be any sacred cows, that academia should not be a refuge. Reflection should be at the core of education. Design education should be built on exploration, discovery and rigor. Courses must be developed, run and revisited constantly. The content must be documented and reflected upon to make sure it's relevant. Prescriptive and procedural methods are a problem in



Aalamb



Bar



Vartula



Doab Milan

design education. The biggest problem facing design education is that the most progressive design program in the world (NID was that) has now firmly decided to go down the 'pedestrian' side alley. Sure, the program could have done with a ton of improvements, but the only thing that was done was to introduce a system of grades. Grades means formulae and design is anything but formulaic. Rigor has not improved, it has fallen. People are walking around with swollen heads because they have gamed the system and think that their fragile selves are somehow precious. Has structure, content and delivery improved? Awards introduced for best student? The best student is she who went out on a limb, tried really hard, maybe succeeded, most likely didn't, but will someday amount to something - not the gamer who had a slick presentation which impressed a completely unimpressive and convenient panel of jurors.



Syut Design is a curious field - it can be application oriented and completely, abstractly cerebral, all at once. All good design traverses the terrain of the hypothetical and the concrete - myth and storytelling to sometimes life critical actions and interventions. The education required for design thus cannot be patterned on existing modes which are too often designed not to change and keep structures and hierarchies afloat. There is a gradient of indoctrination, training, education and 'discovery and awareness'.

How can the gap between design education and the design industry in India be bridged?

MS: When it comes to industry (I mean industry in its broad sense), the best schools have to do two things:

- Not worry about what the industry says it needs. They are too busy to know. It's our job to figure that out. Most importantly the needs of industry can be opposed to needs of society and the earth itself. Design education has to find ways to engage with industry. It should focus on small scale enterprises which are better equipped to engage.
- Create a space where industry can interact with education but also amongst itself, but cannot call the shots. Education being in bed with industry is a conflict of interests.

What's next? Please share your aspirations.

MS: I have now discovered that my aspirations are subpar to what will appear by itself over the horizon. Conversations with people are the key. Things emerge from conversations which one might not ever have expected and these lead to new opportunities and challenges. In the past a chance conversation led to me being cast in a bit part in a television serial with director Sai Paranjpye tearing her hair out in frustration!



Toran

How will the COVID-19 pandemic impact furniture design in India?

MS: I hope to see the destruction of the office as we see it today. The way people sit and work is not dictated by health but by constructs of social behavioral norms. The design of office space and the office structure does nothing to improve its inhabitants' health. Hopefully it can be completely destroyed.

We have also seen that large manufacturing has been so easily disrupted by COVID, which suggests other ways of producing furniture on smaller scales and distributed setups. This is the time to look at micro enterprise. The question is how designers can fruitfully engage in such a setup. Entrepreneurship is what seems to be the answer. Furniture and industrial design more generally is currently male dominated and there are huge entry barriers for women to operate - maybe the dream of more distributed manufacturing will also see the barriers fall.

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Chaan



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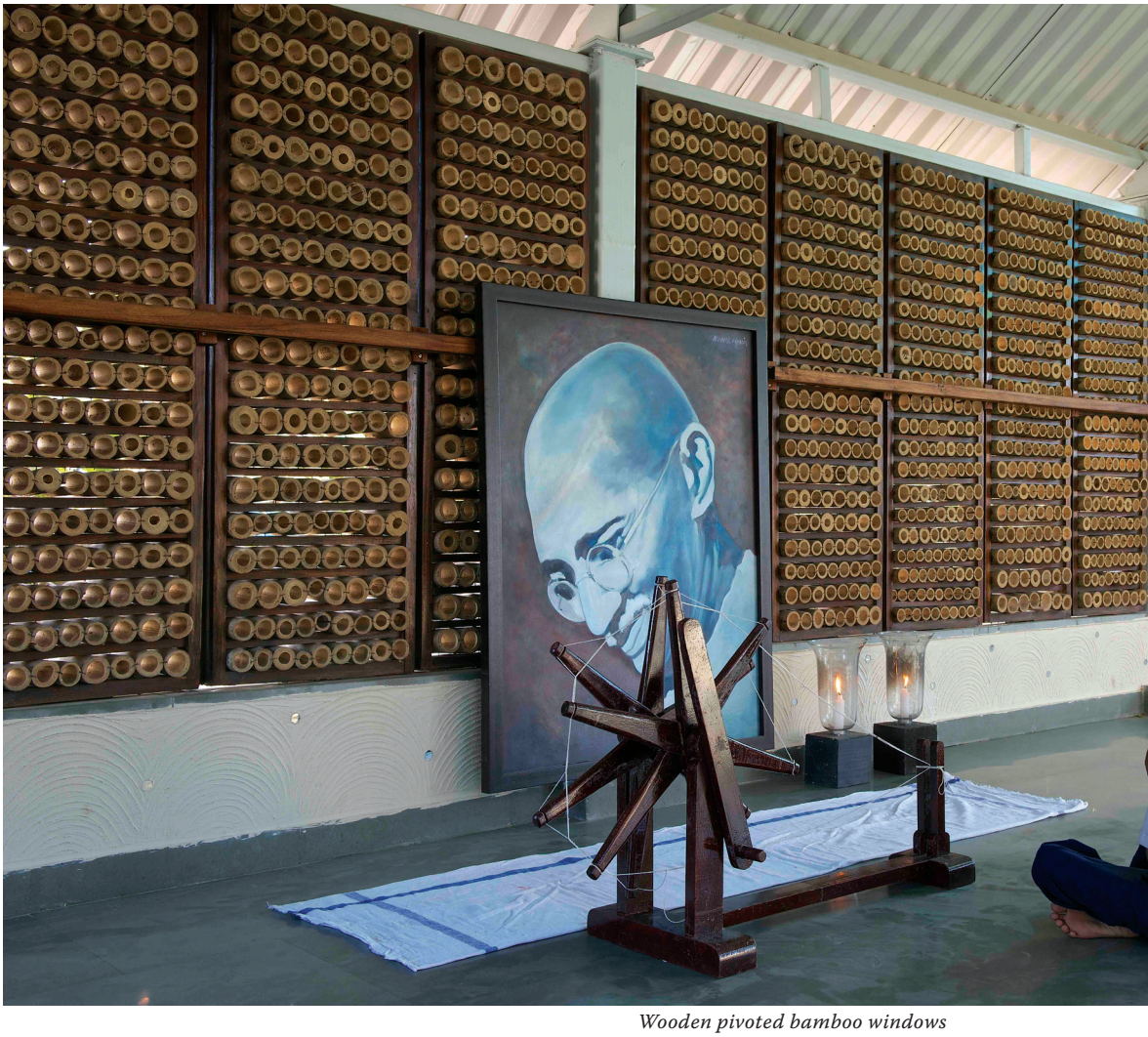
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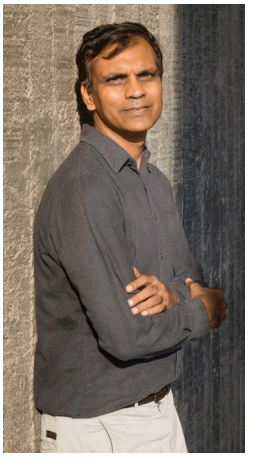
Going for Green

*Over a career spanning three decades, **Hiren Patel** has mastered the art of seamlessly blending built spaces with nature*





The amoeba roof



How did you realize architecture was your calling?

HP: My father was actually the second town planner of Gujarat state, and both my elder brothers were pursuing civil engineering. They introduced me to the word 'architect', telling me that while engineers made buildings it was architects who actually designed them.

At the time a beautiful, exposed brickwork house was being built near our home; I saw the owner, Kumar Vyas, and his friend Dashrath Patel visiting the site. Both of them were legends at NID. I think this house indirectly inspired me to choose the field of architecture. By standard ten, I was sure I wanted to be an architect. I was a good student and could have got into medicine or computers but I opted to study architecture at CEPT (Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology) in Ahmedabad.



Transparency in volume and spaces creates visual connection with the garden

Who influenced your journey in architecture? What inspires you?

HP: My father and brothers showed me the path to architecture. The faculty at CEPT was very inspiring, too; in particular, architects BV Doshi, Hasmukh Patel and Anant Raje and their beautiful buildings. The CEPT building itself is a great lesson in architecture. I was also inspired by the second generation of great architects such as RJ Vasavada, Kulbhushan and Minakshi Jain, for their design philosophy; and Gajjar Sir and others for their detailing. Kurla Varkey was my all-time favorite for his dedication. It was a blessing to learn painting from artist Piraji Sagra. We learnt many other perspectives of design from photographer PM Dalwadi and weaver Rajan. The work of master architects and designers brings a lot of inspiration and energy to do and perform well. My other forever inspirations include Charles Correa, Achyut Kanvinde, Bawa, and Norman Foster.



Nature is a permanent inspiration for me. The morning and evening light are so soothing and inspiring. Other fields like art, running, swimming and yoga are most inspirational to me. Somehow, I connect them with the design field in my subconscious mind.

Tell us about setting up your practice in Ahmedabad.

HP: I started practicing in 1985 and set up Hiren Patel Architects (HPA) in 1989. We offer architecture, landscape design, interior design and green building services. For us, HPA stands for 'happy-positive-accountable'. We have a philosophy of blending our work with nature and we strive for that with every project, whether it's a living space or work space. It's now built in our DNA. We look for a timeless quality in all our projects and nature plays a major role in this. Garden design and landscaping beyond mere decoration is something we aim for.

How has your cultural background impacted your design philosophy?

HP: I saw my father's love for gardening. His devotion helped build my perspective and philosophy of design. Honesty and hard work are other aspects that came from my family culture. Other aspects like seeing beauty in the simplicity of life and to find happiness from the smallest of things are deeply rooted in our family culture.



What is your approach to landscape design?

HP: We look for something meaningful when it comes to landscaping. We want to remove the barrier between architecture, interior design and landscaping. The relation between these three design fields has to be flawless - they have to be synchronized. We do fail to meet a client's expectations sometimes but over the years our skills have created many beautiful spaces as well. There is a lot to learn in landscape design and we want to mature in this field without losing the child in us.

Tell us more about your commitment to green buildings and sustainable design.

HP: Our heritage has always respected sustainability. Today, we measure it; earlier it was built into us. Our ancestors did so well in terms of green design. We need to get their sensitivity back. I am still a learner. Some of our projects have received green certification. It's always good to have such measuring tools to check how sustainable your design is.

What was the most challenging brief you've ever received?

HP: The Dada Miya mosque was quite challenging in terms of requirements. They wanted to accommodate 2,000 worshippers at one time. The small plot surrounded by tiny houses was a limitation. We had to create layers of floors with visual connections and create cross ventilations. At the same time we had to provide privacy to all the nearby houses. We made inclined walls to break the scale of the mosque. Even after so many years people love this space of worship and students take it up for academic case studies.

Which have been your most memorable projects?

HP: My first building was ahead of its time. It was a beautiful house of three vaults – great and powerful architecture - and it remains in my memories.

Working with real estate developers was always a bit challenging. We did a sample villa at a project with beautiful garden courtyards and people loved it so much. Every weekend it is full of visitors. It was kind of a dream house. People who loved that sample villa came to us to design their private houses.

When you work for community, you will have another level of joy. Working on the Dada Miya mosque, or a samadhi for a spiritual leader, or a community center for

underprivileged children brought a lot more satisfaction, and was more meaningful. It makes me happy to revisit such places and see people enjoying the spaces my team and I have created.

Working on town planning is a great interest for us. When one works on road layouts it's a final footprint on Mother Earth. It is going to stay forever. We love that challenge! I often wonder how to go beyond architecture, interior design and landscaping design. How to minimize it and create powerful design that is beyond visuals? How does one create something that hurts the eyes the least? No powerful form but powerful design that goes into the subconscious.

What challenges did you face over your three-decade long career?

HP: For me, after three decades, the work and challenges are the same. I still get nightmares! Some clients still bring tears to my eyes with their demands. I am driven to do even better to make them happy. So far, the journey has been slow and growing in terms of maturity in design. Going back and studying what you have done previously helps to minimize mistakes in future. The A in HPA is for accountability, so we have to be very serious about what do.

How has the architecture industry in India evolved over the years?

HP: In the initial years of my career, the real estate industry was huge but lacked a focus on good design. It was just a platform for profits. No respect was given to architects who worked for builders. Today the scene has changed drastically! Architects who worked consistently and displayed iconic works brought in the respect the field needed. Now, real estate developers want the best designs for their projects and they obey the architects. It's a big shift.

We also have so much now in terms of material availability and possibilities. The technology in India is evolving; while it is slow in architecture, it has already





The house with central lily pond



reached world class levels in interior design. Our local manufacturers are also at par with the rest of the world in terms of quality. I see massive shifts toward using local talent. This will improve the economy of our country as well.

How, in your opinion, will the current COVID-19 pandemic impact practicing architects?

HP: The pandemic has made us better humans for sure. We have started respecting nature more. We have become more conscious of family bonding and pursuing our hobbies. As designers, we will get more sensitive in terms of quality of design. We need to slow down especially in terms of design process. In the long run, architecture will not suffer as much as other industries like hospitality. There is an immediate financial crisis but that is unavoidable and we need to gear up to meet such situations.

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Formal living room

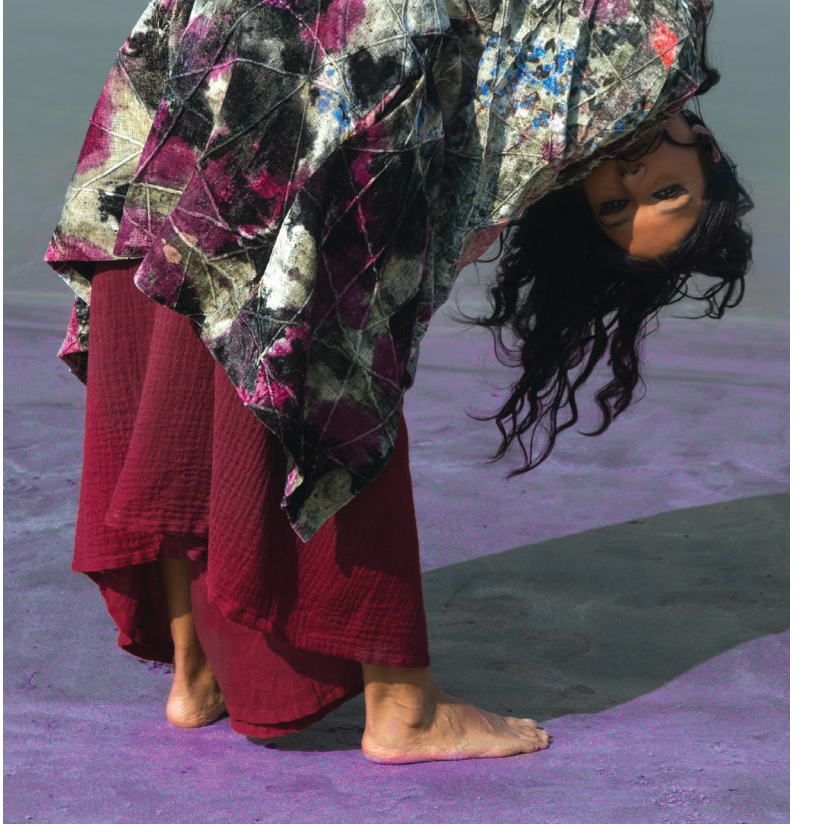
Lasting IMPRESSIONS

Initially inspired by the streets of Paris, ***Yadvi Agarwal's*** *fluid silhouettes continue to reflect the often unseen beauty around her*



Impressionist print dress





Above: Embroidered jacket
Right: Velvet jacket in impressionist print



How did your tryst with fashion begin?

YA: Since an early age all things creative have had a special place in my heart. Growing up around textiles and making decisions about decor, curtains and fabrics for my clothes and home at an early age kept me pleasantly engaged in all things textile. With a keen interest in design I decided to pursue a Bachelor's in Fashion Design from Pearl Academy of Fashion, where I was awarded a full merit scholarship through the four years. As I delved more into design, I realized it was indeed my true calling. To get a deeper understanding of textiles I went on to pursue my Master's in Textile Design from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

How has formal education in textile design influenced your career?

YA: During my years of study, I participated in many competitions and won many. I also worked with labels like Pero where I developed their beadwork language, and Eka; that gave me hands on experience of the design process and an insight into the fashion industry. Originally I wanted to understand textiles so that I could develop and weave my own fabrics and use them in unique and difficult to copy designs; however education at NID was more about unlearning everything we knew and learning that design is for a purpose and to solve a problem. The approach was more multidisciplinary and allowed me to understand design in a holistic manner across disciplines. I think I'm still at an early stage in my career and I'm sure the learning from formal design education will keep unfolding as we evolve as a brand and as I evolve as a person.

What is the story behind Yavi?

YA: After completing my Master's I was placed at Welspun, as the head of Spun, a CSR initiative to empower the Banjara women of Gujarat and create textiles for the American market. However, all my creative needs were still not satisfied and the urge to have my own label kept coaxing me to take a step forward. That was the beginning of Yavi.

In 2016, I moved back to Delhi and started conceptualizing Yavi, a fashion and accessories label. In 2010, I had visited Paris and it left a huge impression on me – the subway musicians, the paintings in museums, street cafes. Inspired by my memories, I made a small collection of textile jewelry and hand painted jackets that were eventually exhibited in top fairs in Paris. This caught the eye of the discerning and I found myself retailing out of prestigious museums such as the

One thread embroidered jacket





Impressionist velvet jacket

Victoria and Albert Museum London, MOMA SF, and boutique stores across France. This gave me confidence in my art.

The label's conscience lies in using traditional hand-crafting and hand-painting techniques, and evolving them to create a state-of-the-art esthetic in art. At Yavi, each creation is loved and nurtured by several skilled craftsmen at every stage, to create a conscious, unique and sophisticated end product. We

have a range that is meant for understated everyday luxury with impressionist linen and cotton ensembles, and a more lux silk line which is bold and can be worn for special occasions.

Describe the Yavi woman.

YA: The new age independent Indian woman who loves to travel and collect experiences is who a Yavi woman is. She is a conscious and mindful woman who understands the need of the hour is to be sustainable and buys clothes that support timeless slow fashion.



Easy wearability and comfort is what drives her choices. There is no age barrier - our clients range from the age of 25 to 65.

How do you incorporate sustainability in your designs?

YA: I grew up watching my mother being meticulous and innovative with waste and that has always inspired me. Sustainability has been important to me and has always been a part of my design ethos. I feel we need to respect and take care of the environment we live in. Sustainability can be social, economic or environmental. One way of being sustainable in the textile or fashion industry is by only using natural fibers so that the carbon footprint is limited. We work with only 100% natural yarns that are hand-woven.



Above: Patchwork jacket with kantha stitching
Left: Kantha jacket & jacquard woven floral jacket

Sustainability can also be about how one is relooking at the byproduct one produces, in any industry. In our case it was the waste scraps with which we made our upcycled jackets, textile jewelry, packaging, masks and coasters instead of discarding waste. Every Yavi collection explores the upcycled story - sometimes it's with patchwork using our scraps of fabric from production waste, sometimes it is interpreted in a fresh way like using discarded flower petals from temples for natural dyeing, and sometimes it is about making beautifully hand crafted textile jewelry.





Impressionist dresses

Sustaining livelihoods and crafts is also important. We try to work with at least one craft sector every season to be able to create a market for the designs produced together with skilled artisan communities; to create awareness of the craft as well as to create a market for the same.

How do you weave your knowledge about indigenous craft systems into your designs?

YA: It is important to understand the process, uniqueness and historic relevance of any craft system. I think it is a beautiful process to study a craft and then work with the artisan who can bring your imagination to tangible outputs. The whole process is enriching and exciting. Once you understand the craft technically and all the systems that work together in the process of its production from fiber to product, you have a set of rules you need to follow. There is a design inspiration that is chosen at this point and designs are developed intelligently keeping in mind the set of rules while interpreting inspiration and play of ideas and possibilities. These are then converted to swatches which are further tested for durability, esthetics, and production friendliness before incorporating the same in a final garment of the collection.

Tell us about Yavi textile jewelry.

YA: I like making things by hand. I like to make miniatures using cloth, fiber, and beads and then tessellate the newly designed element into a range of textile jewelry. I like to focus on details and treat

these pieces more like art pieces than mere pieces of textile jewelry. I explore new themes and materials each season.

How do you market and distribute your products?

YA: We showcase at various trade shows in Paris, Milan and London - that is where we meet the niche boutique owners who are our clients. We also have an active social media presence and tie up with relevant stylists, artists, musicians, photographers and celebrities; and host events to get likeminded people to follow us.

What challenges have you faced so far?

YA: A young designer faces many challenges. Competition is real and one is not only competing with the other young labels but also with the more established designers that have been in the industry for 20-30 years. Making a name for yourself does not come easy but the most important ingredient is originality and purpose. As a creative individual, design comes easy to me but when you're an entrepreneur it is a whole new ball game. There are so many skills you require, especially human resource management, business development, finance. These are all the areas in which I continue to learn and hopefully will master someday.

The biggest challenge for young designers in our country is the consignment model of the domestic market - the multi-designer stores want merchandise at exuberant commission rates of 40%–50%.

Where do you see your label in the next five years?

YA: In the midst of the pandemic, the next step for us is to go digital; we are working on our e-commerce website currently. In the next five years I plan to go with the flow and am open to various projects in more areas of design - a wedding wear line, home textiles, space design, documentation and working with crafts of the northeast.

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Patchwork jacket

Rhea Gupte's *creative process encompasses her varied interests, and through it she explores different facets of human emotion*



A MINDFUL PRACTICE



An ongoing self-portraiture mixed media series, 'Isolation'

What does living mindfully mean to you?

RG: It's about being conscious of how one spends their days, flowing with time at a pace that feels fulfilling, being in touch with emotions, feelings and thoughts, and being aware of the impact our actions cause to the people around us and our environment. My journey with mindfulness began gradually but at a time when I most needed it. It started with reading Arianna Huffington's *Thrive* in 2015. Since then I have been actively looking out for thoughts, philosophies, experiences, and books around this topic, allowing them to inform my ideas and consciously figuring out what works for me and the way I wish to live my life.

I try to translate these values not only into my art and writing but also in how I live, how each activity in the day flows after the other and gives me the feeling of having time on my side, going at a steady pace. I enjoy creating daily routines for myself and fitting in all the things I want to do, whether it is creating, reading, writing, cooking, or spending time with loved ones. Discipline allows me the freedom to pursue different areas and to grow in them.

The concept of living a small life is very dear to me and my partner. Living simply with as few things as possible, not requiring things as a measure of happiness or fulfilment, giving importance to living each day beautifully instead of having one big expensive experience, these have helped me be true to my art and also sustain it and thrive with it.

How do you achieve this through art and writing?

RG: With my art, I have set several rules for myself which allow me to be mindful in my practice. I update these rules often as I learn more. I try to create from minimal resources and generate minimal waste through my art. I try to work with clients in a conscious space so I know my work is being used in a way that is aiding change at some level. I try to engage in an authentic creative process that expresses my thoughts through my work. Currently I am struggling with being consistent with my writing, so I plan to take the next weekend to write about the blocks that are holding me back. I work through such blocks by writing my thoughts as they flow in my diary and really focusing on areas I need to work on. Sharing and having conversations also helps immensely. I am hoping to get into a nice rhythm with my writing.

How were you drawn to visual art? How has formal education influenced your career?

RG: I was drawn to art in general through anime as a child. The character designs, costumes and imagination of Cardcaptor Sakura, landscapes and emotional depictions of Studio Ghibli films and series, storytelling, color palettes, fantasy in various anime - they were all an inspiration to me. I read a lot of fiction as a kid. As I grew older, I became interested in creativity and art in the fashion industry. The work of Tim Walker and Prabuddha Dasgupta allowed me to see fashion photography in a light where fantasy and emotions took precedence over the frivolity and consumerism attached to fashion.

I studied Fashion Communication, as it seemed like a course that would collate all my interests, writing and creating. But, design education wasn't the best experience for me - it had its perils and perks. What I am grateful for from the





Campaign for the jewelry brand Eurumme

time spent at design college was developing brilliant close knit friendships. I feel my career has been highly influenced by having a supportive peer group and family and also putting in consistent effort into self-teaching and practicing.

What does it take for an artist to find a voice?

RG: I feel finding your voice as an artist is a lifelong pursuit. It is not something one arrives at, but is closely intertwined with your growth as a human being. The more one reads and learns the more they know about the world and themselves, so the pursuit is then to have that reflected in your art in a way which is authentic to you. With developing your style, it is about practice and being mindful of spatial, esthetic, narrative choices that resonate with you. I feel it develops gradually and a large part of it can also be subconscious. I think my work puts as much emphasis on negative space as it does on the subject. I have always enjoyed playing with color and I think how I use it is one of my strengths.





An ongoing still-life photo series, 'Compost'

What have been your most memorable projects?

RG: My 'Ethical Threads' series is one of my most memorable projects. It is an ongoing series that I have been developing since 2016. The series began as a reaction to doing something about the lack of knowledge about the ill-effects of the fast fashion industry and to educate people about ethical fashion. The idea behind the series was to create portraits of floating dresses that would make the clothes the protagonists of the series and portray them as vulnerable beings and objects with feelings. I started with sketching out my idea of what I wanted the frames to look like and then got into the technical aspects of how to make the clothing float in

a way that it looks natural and believable. Since I began the series I have been creating different interpretations of it and taking this concept further. I am hoping to create a new set of images for it this year as well.

Tell us about your role as a creative consultant.

RG: I work with a few clients, mainly in the sustainable space, on an ongoing or project basis, on developing a visual language, esthetic, brand voice and tone, online presence including website design and social media, imagery for e-commerce, and so on. I enjoy being part of enabling a brand to tell their story in a creative and honest way. I enjoy putting together teams of talented people who'd be able to execute the vision for the brand and also align with it at a personal level.

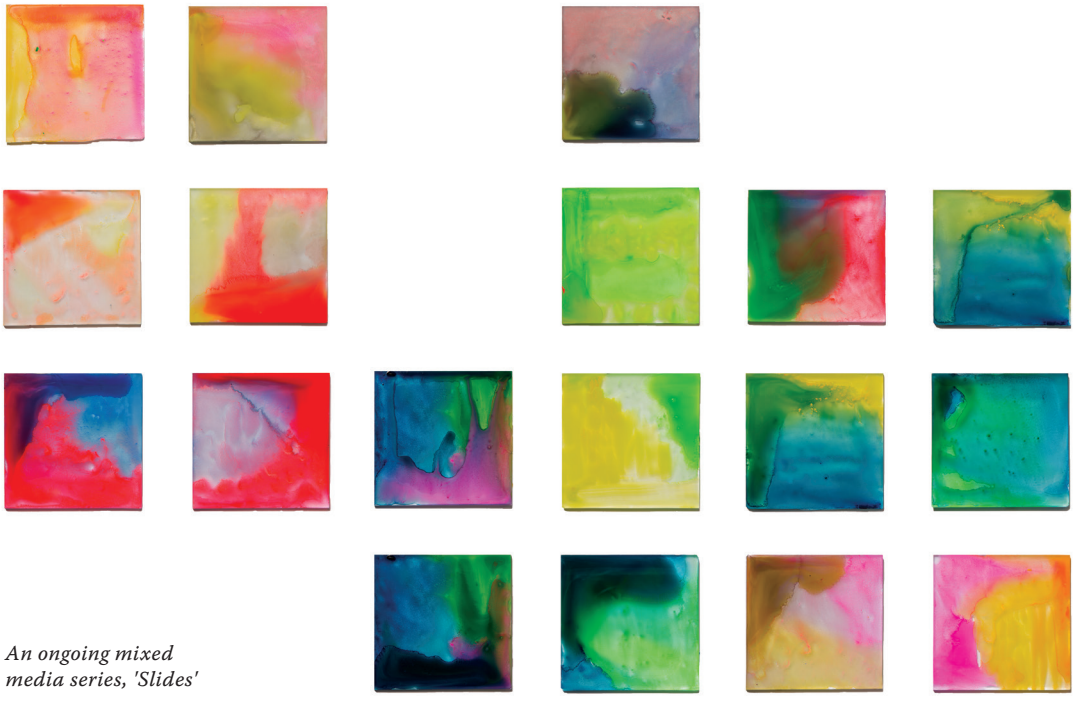
Some of the challenges we face are to constrain, and, at times, modify our ideas as per the budgets available and to be patient with how much can be executed at a given time. Clients at times want to do a lot with limited resources due to the nature and speed of digital media; it understandably stems from insecurity and competitiveness, and it is sometimes challenging to have them be decisive.

How do you balance the commercial and creative aspects of your work?

RG: For commercial projects, I find balance in communication and coming to a place of mutual understanding. It is important to make time to understand client requirements and what their vision is for their brand or the project we are working on. I prefer to have these discussions over email so the client can answer my questions in a thoughtful way and take time to reflect on the answers. Once we have that understanding I set out to conceptualize keeping their thoughts in mind and thinking of how they can be executed in a way that aligns with my



'Ethical Threads', ongoing series for sustainable e-commerce IKKIVI



An ongoing mixed media series, 'Slides'



'Cultures in Curd', commissioned artwork for Bhaane

creativity. During the conceptualization phase I am open to having my ideas challenged or tweaked and for the client to be honest and vocal about their thoughts. I feel that dialogue helps everybody be on the same page. Once finalized, I am particular about not changing the vision so we have enough time to work on it and execute it, unless something unpredictable comes up. Being equally creative with all my commercial projects as I am with self-initiated ones is very important to me.

What challenges have you faced in your journey so far?

RG: Freelancing is challenging. There is no rule book one can refer to, and hence one learns from experience and from making mistakes. Freelancing doesn't come with the security of a steady monthly income, so early on, I made it a practice to save at least 50% of my earnings from each payment no matter how small or large. Every project comes with its own unique set of challenges, but that doesn't compare to the challenge of not having enough work. I have learnt to be resourceful and preserve myself over time, and to rely on friendships to discuss problems and find solutions together. I have tried to make myself financially independent enough to decline certain kinds of work or certain kinds of clients and understand the difference between 'need' and 'greed'.

How did your tryst with writing begin?

RG: I began writing poetry at the age of seven or eight and have written since. It was not something I thought of doing, but always came as a bout of needing to write. Playing in a playground, I'd suddenly, frantically search for a piece of paper to write something down. As a teenager I wrote several chapters of novels, never to complete any. Writing was always a form of self-expression to me and many of my writings had imaginary characters and fantastical plot-lines, while always being rooted in emotions and feelings. For a while now I have been trying to develop my writing into a consistent practice and to slowly get my work published. I have a particularly long way to go in this department.

What role does social media play in your work?

RG: I enjoy sharing my work and my thoughts on social media. Since 2016 I strictly don't participate in any advertisements or paid promotions through my social media. I want it to be a personal space to organically share my work and inspiration as and when I feel like it without any external pressure or agency. I decided to make zero money through social media as I didn't want it to be a way to evaluate my work and worth as an artist. That said, I'm sure it still affords me benefits and privileges with its hierarchical nature and how it translates to opportunities, which I despise.

I often think of not being on social media but the community and conversations I have on the platform keep me motivated to be on it. During the pandemic and before it too, I have had heartfelt conversations with strangers and fellow creatives sharing their thoughts and experiences, seeking advice, finding some



'Wandering Mind' digital art series



Campaign for clothing brand Yavi

solace in something I wrote, giving me kindness or feedback to grow or a different perspective to think of. It feels surreal to be able to impact somebody's thoughts or actions, and to be impacted in the same way by something that somebody took the time to write to me. I feel grateful for that.

Tell us about your creative pursuits during the lockdown.

RG: This is the longest period of time I have spent at home, without traveling for work to other cities, so I am trying to make the most of this strange reality that we are living in. I have been working on a few art series at a steady pace. I began my 'Compost' series before the lockdown and have continued it at a weekly cadence. The series is a compilation of images of my wet waste photographed in the form of still life installations. I started my 'Isolation' series as a way to express and explore what being in isolation means. I have been exploring and learning some 3D software during this time too.

What's next?

RG: I am working on a digital art project, a photo-series, in collaboration with my sister, Neha, who is a brilliant botanical artist. This is the first time we are working on something together, I am very nervous and excited to see it come together and currently working on it with quite a bit of self-induced pressure. I am planning on starting an art print shop on my website where people would be able to purchase archival prints of my work for their homes and spaces. I am also working on a web design related project with my partner that we plan to finish before the end of this year. My aspirations are to simply be able to create, to keep learning and growing, and have my work reflect that growth, and to hopefully inspire, enable some change, and start conversations through my art and my writing.

gupte.rhea@gmail.com



Campaign for fashion brand Saundh


the LANGUAGE
of FABRIC







Left to right: SS'20

***Ujjawal Dubey's** designs are an attempt to find balance between the inner voice and the outer body*

What drew you to design?

UD: I don't recall being drawn to design during my childhood days, but I definitely recall being picky about certain things and products. I have always been inspired by architecture and I had unsuccessfully applied to a lot of courses in architecture. During that period I stumbled upon an NIFT application form and took up a course (specializing in textile design) at NIFT Kolkata. I went on to work with designers Shantanu & Nikhil for a while before starting my own label.

How did Antar-Agni come about?

UD: 'Antar-Agni' means 'the fire within'. It's all about the human self and the expression of emotions, psyche, behavior and experience. I started my label in Delhi in March 2014 and a lot has changed since then. I wanted to bring meaning through design and clothing wasn't the first choice for me, but I realized that whatever we do, if there is genuineness in each step you take, then it doesn't matter what medium you choose for self-expression. I had this massive urge to prove myself to myself. My first step then became to focus on my strengths and that's when I realized that clothing could be my first step. My first collection was showcased at Lakme Fashion Week in 2014.





Above: SS'19

Tell us more about the label.

UD: Antar-Agni is fluid, strongly non-conformist and unrestricted. Basically, we focus on menswear, which is often left out in the fashion department. Men are not able to experiment with new styles as there is very little on the shelves. Antar-Agni works with raw and Indian textiles, mostly in greys, blacks, pastels, and dirty linen. We believe that the fabric has its own character waiting to be explored and the label is a representation of the same. We merely help the fabric speak its language, adding nuance details, smart cuts, and relaxed silhouettes - as raw and natural as it gets. Apart from the studio and website, the label is also available at stores in New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, New York and Tokyo.



Drapes and antifit silhouettes have been your signature style. How did you find your voice?

UD: When I started to make garments I thought about what I would like to wear - something that made me feel just like myself, something that synced with my inner self. The first collection was inspired by the drapes of Afghanistan and it really got me into the feel and space of drapes and relaxed fits.

Give us a glimpse of your design process.

UD: I'm a moody person and have always followed my current state of mind. I usually don't have a particular design process but I begin with draping all the garments onto myself. I have always focused on making clothes that are personality-enhancing. Wearability has been an important factor and I have always worked around that and tried to interpret it in our clothing as much as possible. The fabric remains the hero; layers and drape, along with the graphic compositions that form a color block while making the garments help me get closer to the mood. My aim is to connect to my audience as much as I can, from the tiniest detail of skin exposure to the neckline and to the way the layers fall on the chest and the mystery around it. I have to be able to see people wear the garment and feel empowered.





SS'18

Introduce us to the concept of 'Restore Love'.

UD: The world has been obsessed with owning more and throwing the old away, a direct affront to our oldest Indian values of saving and passing on. Nature demands a course correction. I have always believed in the slow life and this idea has been brewing for a while now. Slow down life and let it grow on you; in this case, the evergreen nature of clothes. This inspired me to start 'Restore Love', where your old, damaged Antar-Agni garments are brought back to life or enhanced. This is one of our initiatives that supports the philosophy of reuse and promotes the idea of rewarding more and more.

How do you approach sustainability in your designs?

UD: At Antar-Agni we practice being conscious, be it in creation, sourcing or consumption. I think most Indians already have a conscious approach in our daily life. It's incorporated into our DNA. We try our best to reduce fabric wastage and are conscious about the consumption of paper and water. I prefer calling Antar-Agni a conscious label, as a holistic approach is the need of the hour.

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WF'18

What is your design philosophy?

UD: Through our clothes, we aim to sync that inner content with the outer skin. It's a state of mind, a balance between nothingness and everything, that we aim to achieve to make this world a better place.

How does social media influence the wardrobe choices of people in India?

UD: India has always adored and looked up to Bollywood for everything related to lifestyle and fashion; and that's why it is refreshing to see people who are influencing others and making them more conscious of what they wear. Social media is updating and making people more conscious about their choices and lifestyle.

What challenges have you faced in your journey so far?

UD: Challenges are what makes it all more interesting; they keep you more focused. In 2014, I applied to the Gen Next program at Lakme Fashion Week with two garments. I started working on the entire collection only after the results were announced. I was on my own at that point and I had to believe in myself more than anything to move ahead. I pushed myself to the limit and the results made me stronger, more genuine and ethical. Before starting my own label I wondered whether I should quit my job and at that point I clearly remember the words of my boss who told me, "If you have decided, then don't think of backup."As you move ahead in life, the type of challenges change but they are always there and that is what gets me out of bed every morning.

What is expected to trend in the fashion industry post COVID-19?

UD: There will be a change in the collective consciousness of the industry, makers and consumers alike. Seasons and trends will take a backseat. This will, we expect, have effects at a holistic level and lead to changes in production and consumption. Probably, people will spend on clothing with genuine stories linked to them, more than simply splurging.

studio@antar-agni.com



WF'19



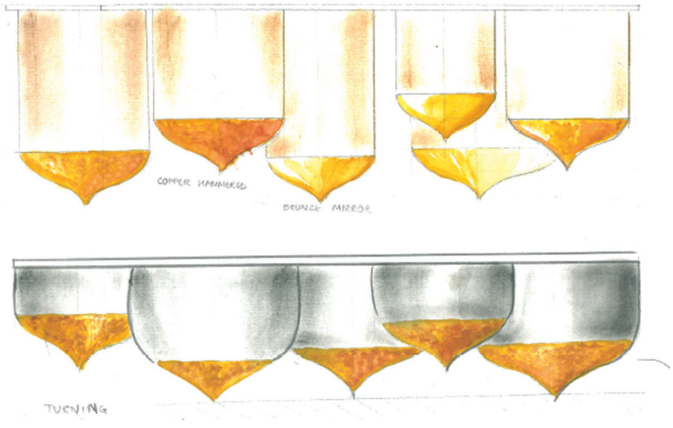
***Anjali Shah's** childhood curiosity about what made things work took her on a journey that evolved from product design to furniture design to kitchen design*

BLENDING FUNCTION & FORM









Left: All quartz kitchen with PU shutters (Runwal Greens, Mumbai)

What does it take to create designs that stand out?

AS: A good design takes care of the user's needs, and is pleasing to interact with. What makes it stand out is its ability to fill a gap, a need that is not identified at the first instance. The product should evoke an emotion in its user - a feeling of nostalgia or a sense of familiarity, or something that makes you feel comfortable and cared for. A good design is just like an appealing tinder date! How one presents oneself makes the date happen, but then it is the real, tangible, personal qualities that move things forward! Form and function are the yin and yang – both are equally important.

Brought up in a family of engineers, how were you drawn to design?

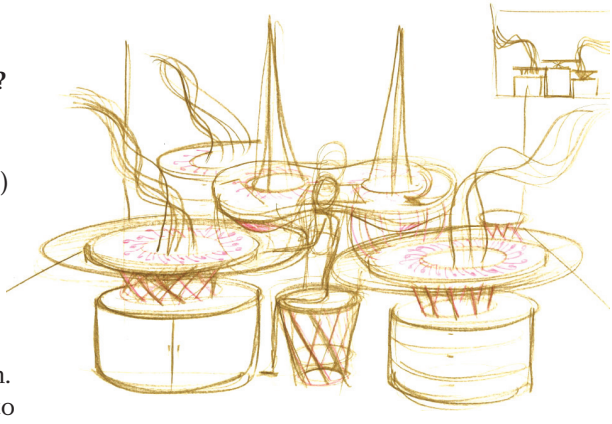
AS: It started with the realization that whatever we see around us is consciously designed; a chair, mug, or any other mundane object is made in a particular way for a reason. We take these things for granted. My imagination used to run wild as a child. I would create animated movies at the age of 13. A visit to a gallery in Milan however, sparked my interest in designing physical objects. Objects from daily life were displayed beautifully on a wall, capturing the changes in them through the years. It made a strong statement – it felt as if they were telling me a story. Product design felt like a logical step to feed my curiosity about how things work - how the function remains the same over the years, but it is form that makes the difference.



View of the kitchen from the dining area

How has formal design education in India and the UK impacted your career?

AS: I was lucky to experience both. My graduation in India (Product Design from Symbiosis Institute of Design, Pune) taught me the fundamentals of design - engineering, materials, wood working skills; my Master's in Furniture Design from Central Saint Martins, University of Arts, London brought about a radical change in the way I thought about design. I had to unlearn my previous education to expand my horizons. They were the toughest but most inspiring two years of my life! I realized design is not only about fulfilling a need or a function - it could be anything that sparks joy, generates an emotion in a person. I brought back that exposure as a topping on my fundamentals.



How did your foray into kitchen design begin?

AS: After graduation, while working with a leading design studio in Ahmedabad on varied projects from healthcare to furniture and FMCG, I realized that as designers, we can conceptualize and design but eventually it must pass the test of manufacturing and production constraints. Hence, I decided to join a manufacturing industry near Pune and worked under Ar. Snehal Vasani, the pioneer who introduced modular kitchens in India way back in 1988. Under his guidance I got exposure to the manufacturing sector and technicalities of furniture and kitchen design.



Laminate shutters with black granite top (Panchvati Heights, Mumbai)



White quartz kitchen with Slate laminate (Oberoi Splendor, Mumbai)

Share your experience of exhibiting your designs at 100% Design in Earl's Court, London.

AS: I was one of the few students chosen to exhibit my final year work at 100% Design after my college degree show. The show was an eye opener, drawing architects, designers, and tradesmen from across the world. It was a proud moment for me to have my designs exhibited with industry majors like Poggenpohl and Samsung. My designs were inspired from Indian architecture and the aim was to bring about haute couture in kitchen architecture. The project talked about relooking at how cooking could be made fun and entertaining. The unique designs attracted media attention, reviews, and feedback. This exhibit gave insights and reassured me that I was on the right path. There is a market and my products are loved!

How did 'The Kitchen Artisan' come about?

AS: The kitchen is one area in the house where functionality and form are equally important. Each user is different and has vernacular ways of working around this space, bringing in a lot of design challenges. I feel this space has been ignored by builders, architects and even homeowners. After I returned from London in 2016, I realized the kitchen industry in India was growing and people were gradually investing in kitchens. However, the industry was still standardized with a cookie-cutter approach. It did not understand the end user's needs and their dreams about having a custom-made kitchen. I started my own studio in Mumbai called The Kitchen Artisan in 2017 to bridge that gap, with the intention of blending Indian needs with glocal trends. No two clients are the same and hence no two kitchens can be same. We do a thorough activity mapping of each user and suggest a customized solution for the kitchen, which takes care not only of their functional needs but also esthetics. At The Kitchen Artisan, we believe cooking is a performance and the kitchen is the stage!

Which have been your most memorable projects?

AS: One of the most memorable projects was in Powai (Mumbai), where the client wanted me to convince her husband to invest in a kitchen versus buying a car! It was a family of seven, and I had to cater to everyone's requirements, right from the grandmother who wanted a Vastu compliant kitchen, to the wife who dreamt of every possible appliance in her compact kitchen, and the kids who wanted an all-black kitchen. To cater to all their needs and interact with all of them was a most memorable experience.

How do you bring sustainability into your designs?

AS: Firstly, by using high quality materials that withstand wear and tear through the years, and require minimal repairs or replacement. Secondly, while our solutions are suited for today's lifestyles, they are also futuristic, avoiding the need for frequent updates. Thirdly, proper planning and execution of projects optimizes the logistics and hence reduces the carbon footprint. We use plywood glues with lower VOC and formaldehyde emissions. The product being modular and transferable, with lifetime warranty, ensures less garbage in the landfills.

What entrepreneurial challenges have you faced so far?

AS: I think the question of when and how to expand the team is a challenge. It's like a chicken and egg situation - you need a team to take up more orders and at the same time you need more orders to sustain that team! The other challenge is delegation - finding the right workforce who will be equally passionate and emotional about your vision and brand. The third, and biggest of all, would be



Crockery storage cabinet in the kitchen (Lake Homes, Mumbai)

accounting and finance! As a designer, I just saw myself engrossed in innovation and creativity; but as an entrepreneur, it is quite different. Initially I would spend a lot of time trying to understand taxation, accounts and tackling expenses! I have the hang of it all now. I maintain my books, have weekly meetings with my team and keep boosting them to grow and take my place one day. To scale up your business, I think it's imperative to replace yourself with an able team so that you can see beyond and keep bringing newness to the business.

How do you plan to expand your brand? Share your aspirations.

AS: I want to be known as a go-to kitchen designer. We are looking at taking up projects in different cities to explore the cultural patterns and lifestyle of consumers across the country. I am not looking at converting my studio into a corporate set up ever. For me expansion would always mean taking up larger kitchens where my canvas to paint and create gets bigger and bigger. I wish for a time when everyone with a taste for luxury will want to buy my kitchens instead of some German or Italian brand!



Open kitchen with dining area (Raheja Vista)

Tell us about the latest trends in kitchen design.

AS: Compact apartments, working couples and increase in the dependency on domestic help has made us look at kitchens differently. Some of the latest gifts to kitchen design are shutters that open, lighting that changes color, retractable faucets and appliances that convert the countertop into a worktable, sleek pull outs and metal shelves, induction integrated countertops that could power a blender without a plug, and slicker and smarter built-in appliances. The future includes artificial intelligence that creates shopping lists and scans your refrigerator to offer recipes!

Wine cabinet that becomes opaque when inside light is turned off



What is the new normal for your line of business in the current pandemic situation?

AS: With work from home becoming the new normal, a lot of clients will want to invest in a comfortable home. While juggling between professional and household commitments, clients will prefer home food considering

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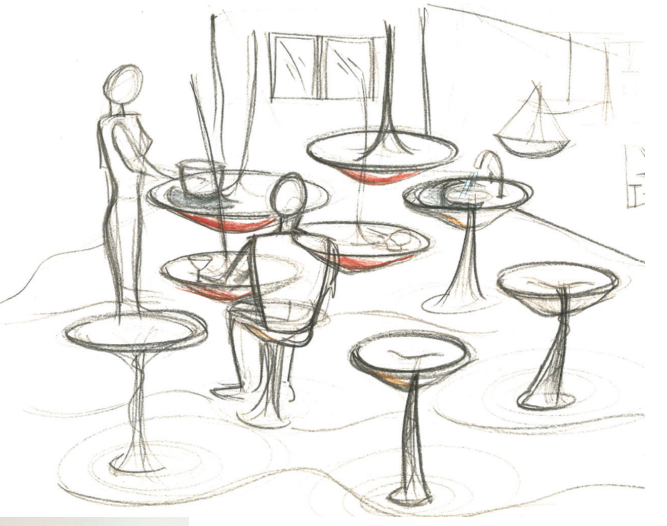
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the hygiene, safety, and financial constraints. Hence the kitchen will indeed be the heart of the home, with stress on storage that can hoard inventory, convertible countertops to switch between work and cooking, and maintenance-free and easy-to-clean surfaces. We will have to adapt to newer scenarios and demands of the consumers with limited workforce and supply, at least for the time being.

info@thekitchenartisan.com



Above: Kitchen at Amrit Nahar Shakti (Mumbai)

Right: PU finished kitchen shutters with blackboard and open shelves (Western Heights by Adani)

WEAVING *ENDURING TALES*

***Sayan Chanda** is using textiles to create fine art that celebrates folk traditions and indigenous legends and rituals*



What brought you to the world of textile art and how did you start?

SC: I am an artist and textile practitioner from Kolkata, living and working in London, UK. I graduated in Textile Design from the National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad) in 2013. Since then I have been working closely with handloom craft clusters and co-creating with artisans across India. Around two years back I started making a conscious shift towards art and set up my independent studio practice in London.

I draw from indigenous traditions and work intuitively with cloth; weaving it, stitching it, piercing it, deconstructing it, and creating a palimpsest of personal experiences, narratives and memories. I use mark-making and repetition as tools to signify change, the passage of time and retention and rejection of memory.

Growing up in Kolkata, surrounded by the starched wispy muslin Jamdani saris and dhotis, I always had an inclination towards textiles. Hence, working with textiles as a designer and now as an artist has been a natural progression for me. What sets textiles apart for me is how intimate a medium it is. It's fascinating how intrinsic it can be to people's identity. It is a critical marker in the broader context of visual and material culture.

What inspires you? Let's talk about your frameworks, references and process.

SC: During my visits to craft clusters, the stories, legends, and rituals surrounding a practice and its makers always fascinated me. These practices might or might not be directly related to the craft itself. From the practice of worshipping indigo vats to an iconic representation of local deities to a sect in deep Sundarbans that defies religious compartmentalization, such anecdotes have always been significant for me. Similarly, votive objects and related hyper local customs have always intrigued me. The narrative quality and anthropological clues embedded in such objects and customs are

potent references for me. My work is an ongoing exercise, often exploring meditative repetitive systems in such rituals.

Indigenous worldview is often marginalized and dismissed as archaic and irrelevant. It's surprising to me that folk traditions and practices rarely feature in contemporary art. Through exploring personal and community history I intend to demystify and contextualize such living traditions. I would like to mention here that my work has nothing to do with the popular idea of religion. In fact, I focus on folk practices of Bengal because they represent the last vestiges of syncretism unadulterated by organized religious influences.

What would you call your style?

SC: I have always adhered to a minimal esthetic and approach, be it in my woven wearable textiles or my wall-based work. I have preferred to work within limitations concerning material, form and color. However, my work is evolving and I am increasingly drawn to research and concept led work. I have noticed that when I am working within a rigid framework of a technique and its application, I try to control every related aspect and that often leads

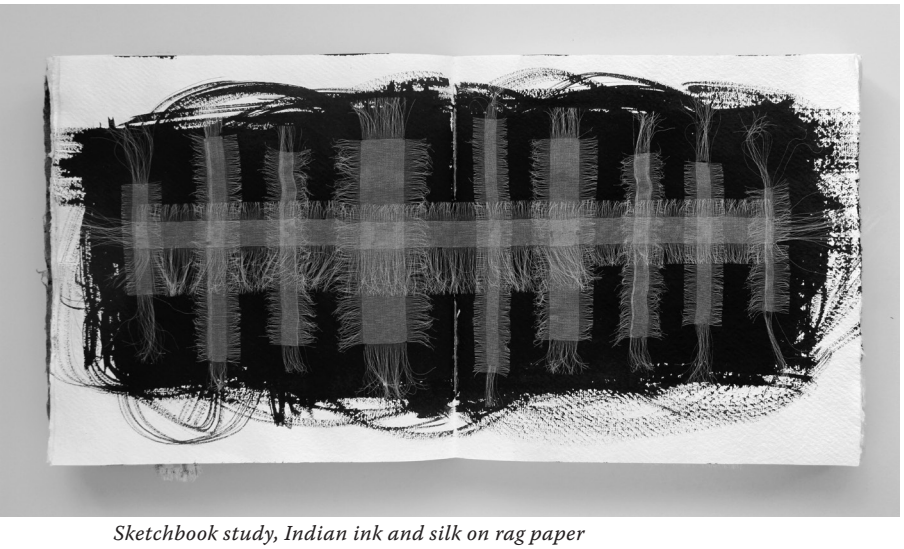


'Itinerant 1'. Cotton quilt, hand-spun cotton yarn (62 x 65 cm, 2020)

to self-doubt and anxiety. Therefore in my recent projects, I am taking a more instinctive organic approach. Textile is and will always be a big part of my work, be it as a material, a process, a philosophy or a metaphor.

How do you deal with the conceptual difficulty and uncertainty of creating work?

SC: My work is intuitive but it's labor intensive as well. Therefore, I might have an epiphany but the spontaneity and motivation can get lost while translating it through textile, be it through weaving, embroidery, etc. To counter that, I prefer not to overcomplicate at the stage of realization and stick to the most direct and simplest form of communication. I am most satisfied with works that are the closest physical manifestations of concepts or images in my head. Similarly, certain concepts might just remain as a hasty sketch in the pages of my journal and I'm okay with that. I also tend to work on multiple projects at the same time. Switching between mediums



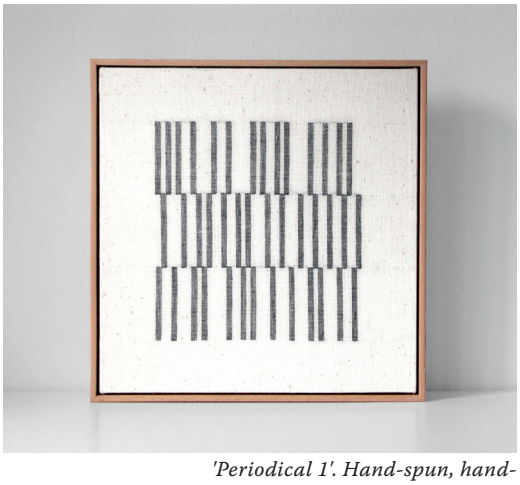
Sketchbook study, Indian ink and silk on rag paper

allows me to balance slower processes like weaving with more spontaneous ones like painting or embroidery.

What are you looking for when you look at the work of other artists?

SC: I am drawn towards brave, evocative, often seemingly un-modern and deeply personal work that defies trends, and stays relevant for a very long time. I find it interesting when artists draw from unpopular or obscure references. I am deeply influenced by the work of folk and outsider artists. Observing artisans at work or locals performing rituals have left lasting impressions on me.

Among the artists I look up to are Mrinalini Mukherjee, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Lenore Tawney, Judith Scott, Agnes Martin, Lynda Benglis, and El Anatsui. At the moment I am fascinated by Mrinalini Mukherjee's enigmatic hemp sculptures, the evocative thread totems of the extraordinary Judith Scott and Magdalena Abakanowicz's monumental 'Abakans'. The 2019 'Phenomenal Nature' exhibition of works by Mrinalini Mukherjee at the Met Breuer has had an enduring impact on me. A more recent memory would be seeing Alice Kettle's 'Three Caryatids' up close in the 'Unbound' exhibition at Two Temple Place in London.



'Periodical 1'. Hand-spun, hand-woven cotton (40 x 40 cm, 2019)

Think of the biggest professional risk you've taken. What helped you take that risk?

SC: Making an informed decision to transition from design to art was a significant move for me. Working in the capacity of a textile designer has been immensely fulfilling. I have been able to work with grassroots organizations doing important work like WomenWeave and have made enduring connections with weavers, spinners, dyers, embroiderers. While I wish to continue this work, my transition to art has been motivated by the limitations I faced while communicating exclusively through wearable textiles. Looking at textiles in a fine art context has broadened the scope for me, but the transition has also been a steep learning curve. To me, my work organically moved towards art, but the shift also meant I was entering a completely new world. Understanding the practical aspects of functioning as an independent artist is something I am still working on. But it has definitely been rewarding, allowing me more freedom to investigate, make and communicate.

What is the best piece of advice you've received?

SC: I was fortunate enough to be guided by Aditi Ranjan and Romanie Jaitley, my professors at NID. Romanie's advice to look at any situation with humor has helped me navigate through difficult moments. It is something I remind myself every day. Thinking back, Aditi's fascinating, sensitively detailed stories of her own experiences with crafts and traditions have influenced me to explore indigenous narratives and practices in my own work.

What kind of place is your studio? How would you describe your usual workday?

SC: I have converted a part of my home in North London into my workspace. I like to have everything within reach so my loom is right beside my work desk. I try to keep



Studio

the loom warped at all times since I might intuitively want to test out an idea and not having my loom ready might stall it forever. My sewing machine and embroidery tools are around as well. I use a soft board and my sketchbooks to record ideas spontaneously. Even though my work process is instinctive and organic, I keep my workplace extremely organized and structured. I feel much calmer and settled when my physical surroundings are in order. When the weather is right I wind the warp and set up the loom in my garden under a Cotoneaster tree. I try to divide my workday in a way that gives me dedicated time for active making as well as reading and research, although this is not something I follow rigidly.

Are you more a studio artist or naturally collaborative artist? How do you feel about commissions?

SC: I think I am more of a studio artist though for a major part of my design career I have worked collaboratively and I enjoy that as well. Co-creating with artisans and locals is something I have been doing since the last seven years and I hope to continue it in the future. I am definitely open to collaborations and commissions if suitable opportunities come my way.

What are you working on now? What's coming next season?

SC: I have realized that working on multiple projects simultaneously is a good way for me to function. I am working on a couple of projects at the moment. One of them is a series of small textile sculptures using hand-spun cotton and natural dyes based on a particular numerical value that is integral to specific folk rituals. I am also working on a series of soft sculptures with deconstructed vintage Kantha quilts. At the moment I am preparing for an upcoming group show in a South London gallery in August. I am also looking forward to my time at Thread, an artist residency in Senegal initiated by The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation; it is to take place sometime in 2021.

What were you working on when the lockdown was announced?

SC: When the lockdown was announced, I was in the middle of weaving a new wall-based series, which I'm yet to complete. Some of the residency and grant applications I was working on have also been stalled for now. An upcoming residency has been pushed to the next year as well. The lockdown did slow things down for me, but I am a domestic person so being at home has not been troubling in any way. I usually source fabrics, yarns and other raw materials from Madhya Pradesh and Bengal; not having access to them made me look at the materials that I already have with me and figure out a way to use them. It did result in some new interesting directions, which I am currently exploring.

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(Sonalee Tomar studied at NID and worked as the Editorial Director of Pool Magazine before founding 'The Asian Curator', a platform to support creative outliers with liberating resources)

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