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INVUOTIE



The love for colour, local design is evident in the Khosla home

DOUBLES

Vantage point

non-stop for two days about our favourite artists and designers, which was so refreshing, given that all my friends were studying to become investment bankers," he remembers.

JOINT VENTURE

Nearly 25 years later, the Bengaluru-based Khoslas now work with some of India's top names. Tania, 43, who runs the brand and communication design consultancy TSK Design, counts firms as diverse as the Taj Group of Hotels, ING Vysya, the British Council and Asian Paints amongst her clients. Sandeep, 44, runs architecture firm Khosla and Associates and has worked on some of India's best known homes, restaurants, offices and schools, with clients ranging from Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Nike, MTV and Hard Rock Café to institutions like the Doon School. The couple share an office in Bengaluru's trendy Indiranagar area.

"Sandeep was and still is my best sounding board," says the vivacious Tania of the tough student days when she was studying graphic design at Yale and he was a student of architecture at the Pratt Institute in New York. Her feelings are reciprocated. "Architecture and design school is gruelling, and we got through it by spending hours on the phone, talking at two in the morning about our professors' critiques," adds Sandeep.

Meeting them in their striking house in Bengaluru, part of a luxurious gated community in the Yemlur area and the subject of many magazine shoots, it's clear that design rules their lives. The house, a labour of love that took them three years to build, boldly uses exposed concrete, utilitarian Kota stone and copper accents, yet remains cosy and inviting. There's art everywhere, from Atul Dodiya and Venkat Bothsa, to neon pink and orange sculptures by the Khosla children, Mahika (14) and Aryaman (11). The focal point of the house is a tranquil courtyard, with a pool and frangipani tree at the centre. The tree epitomises their determined pursuit of perfection; it was moved from another part of the city, then lowered into the courtyard by a crane when the house was already complete. It took 40 workmen to put it in place.

A day at the MoMA marked the beginning of their courtship—not surprising for India's first couple of design. Graphic designer **TANIA SINGH KHOSLA** and architect **SANDEEP KHOSLA** are each other's best sounding boards, finds KAVITHA RAO

"I had never met an Indian man with whom I could walk through MoMA before," says graphic designer Tania Singh Khosla about how she first met her architect husband, Sandeep Khosla, in 1990. "It was St Patrick's Day in New York, all very romantic. We went to St Patrick's Cathedral for the service. Looking up at the building, talking about its architecture with Sandeep, I knew he was the one." Sandeep feels the same way. "We talked

BRAND BUILDING

But all this—the beautiful house, the complementary lives, the thriving careers—has not come easy. While an undergraduate student at Mount Holyoke, Tania had an accident in the studio, injuring her hand seriously, then enduring six months of physiotherapy. With limited use of her hand, she moved on from her first love, printmaking, to studying art history and computer graphics. She enjoyed it so much that she went on to study graphic design, deftly converting possible tragedy into triumph. “That accident was a turning point for me,” she admits.

When the Khoslas returned to India, the learning curve only got sharper. Sandeep began working with Charles Correa in Mumbai, and inspired by Correa, BV Doshi and Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, he developed a style of his own, setting up his Bengaluru practice in 1996. He’s often lauded for his ‘tropical residential’ style spaces, which use local motifs, materials and colours, but he’s just as likely to employ global influences. On her part, Tania reminisces how graphic design didn’t really exist in mid-90s India, especially not in Bengaluru. “People used to ask me what graphic design was, and I used to say it’s like advertising but not really,” she explains. She recalls, laughing, an early incident where a set of laminated brochures—hours of hard work—shrank in the monsoon. But the Khoslas look back on those days of struggle with fondness. “The field was so new that I could start with a clean slate and do really exciting, experimental work,” Tania says.

In 1998, they worked on their first project together, the offices of MTV India. At the time, MTV was pioneering the East-meets-West sound—and look—using street art juxtaposed with the latest computer graphics. With a brief to “do what you would never do in a corporate office,” the Khoslas used bright colours and graphics of imaginary South Indian film stars to create a cool, young workspace. Today, while they deliberately keep their official collaborations down to two or three a year—any more would be too much—they say they are still integral to each other’s professional realisations.



Tania and Sandeep at their home office

What makes for a good working partnership? The couple say they share the same sensibilities: the use of local materials and colours, while keeping the essence of their work contemporary. They also share a love for customisation, working with a trusted team of metal workers, carpenters and even embroiderers on their projects. Over the years, they’ve learned to handle their own differing creative temperaments. “I am hyper and high-energy, Sandeep is calm and laidback. We found a common ground by meditating together,” says Tania.

HAVING IT ALL

After the early years of all-nighters and working weekends, the Khoslas have achieved what they think is a good work-life balance. “I work like a machine through the day,” says Tania, “and then I am back by 4pm to be with the children.” For his part, Sandeep no longer takes calls in the evening or on weekends. When it gets tough, they fall back, thankfully, on a partner who “gets it.” “After nearly 25 years of being together, I really cannot imagine being with someone who does not understand my creative life, what I have done to get here, what I do every day,” says Tania, her gratitude obvious.

When they are not working, they are often travelling, usually to cities like Berlin with strong visual cultures and plenty to feed their creativity. Now that the children are older, they take them along, on trips that often spawn art projects later. A trip to their old haunt, MoMA, introduced the children to Jackson Pollock. When they returned, Aryaman asked for a similar mural in his room, and the children painted their own colourful black-and-orange Pollock-inspired mural. Meanwhile, Mahika is deeply interested in hand-drawn letterforms and has written and illustrated a children’s book.

These days, they’re immersed in another bold joint project: tearing down and rebuilding their office space. “It’s going to be great,” says Sandeep, as he talks about 3D images, restructuring and materials, the excitement visible on his face. Going back to the drawing board—a chore for other couples—is pure fun for the Khoslas. ■