

AD

THE
ART
ISSUE

STUDIO
MUMBAI
IN
PARIS

AD100
2024



JAIVEER JOHAL'S CHENNAI HOME IS

FLANKED BY
THE ADYAR RIVER ON ONE
SIDE AND THE BAY
OF BENGAL ON THE OTHER,
AND ANCHORED IN A SEA
OF ART AMIDST WHICH HE LIVES
IN THIS BOLDLY DESIGNED ONE-
BEDROOM APARTMENT.

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THE DINING ROOM IS A MONOLITHIC SHELL ENHANCED BY AN ARTWORK FROM SURENDRAN NAIK'S 'CUCKOO NEBULOPOLIS PROGRESSION'. ORIGINAL NAKASHIMA GRASS-SEAT CHAIRS SOURCED FROM HOUSE OF YALI SURROUND AN ASHWOOD BURN'T TABLE BY WOOD'N DESIGN. A COLUMN OF DECCAN PALANQUIN HEADS, ORIGINALLY USED AS BOOKENDS, GRACES THE ENTRANCE WALL.





A SCULPTURE BY RAVINDER REDDY SITS SENTINEL AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE DEN. THE EAMES EASY CHAIR IS OVERARCHED BY A 1970S ABSTRACTION BY SH RAZA AND A NUDE BY FN SOUZA. THE OTHER BUST IN THE ROOM IS A GANDHARA-PERIOD BUDDHA, A BIRTHDAY PRESENT TO JOHAL FROM HIS MOTHER. THE SIDE TABLE IS A FAISAL MANZUR DESIGN. *FACING PAGE:* THE DEN BRIMS WITH VINTAGE OBJETS D'ART. LIGNE ROSET WAS THE BRAND OF CHOICE FOR THE SOFA.

THE SITTING ROOM IS AN ECLECTIC WUNDERKAMMER. THE EXPOSED CONCRETE WALLS, ENLIVENED BY STUDIO TYTO, CEDE THE SPOTLIGHT TO THE PAINTINGS IN THE FOREGROUND, NAMELY KG SUBRAMANYAN'S *THE BOMBAY ALTARPIECE* (1991) AND AN UNTITLED WORK BY RAZA, BOTH BOUGHT IN AN AUCTION. THE SCARLET CARPET WAS PURCHASED FROM A DEALER IN DELHI OVER A DECADE PRIOR, WHILE THE MID-CENTURY MODERN BOOKCASE, SITUATED TO THE LEFT OF THE PHANTOM HANDS SOFA, WAS RECEIVED AS A GIFT BY THE FAMILY AND HAS BEEN AROUND FOR GENERATIONS. THE CHAIR AND COFFEE TABLE ARE BY WOOD'N DESIGN.





ABOVE: A DISPLAY UNIT IN THE PRIMARY BEDROOM PLAYS HOST TO A PICASSO POSTER ACQUIRED BY JOHAL DURING HIS COLLEGE DAYS, A STAPLE-PIN SCULPTURE BY CONTEMPORARY ARTIST POOJA IRANNA, AND CHETTIAR HAT BOXES (BOTTOM SHELF) PURCHASED DURING A TRIP TO CHETTINAD. ABOVE RIGHT: AN ORIYA GARUDA ADORNS A WALL IN THE DEN. THE SHELVES HOLD OBJECTS DEAR TO JOHAL'S HEART, CHIEF AMONG THEM ARE AN ANTIQUE BURMESE SHIVA (MIDDLE SHELF) AND A BULL BY B VITHAL (BOTTOM SHELF). RIGHT: ONE SIDE OF THE PRIMARY BEDROOM IS RESERVED FOR REFLECTION AND RUMINATION. THE DAYBED, DESIGNED BY MANZUR, IS ACCENTED WITH CUSTOM KOLLAM-THEMED CUSHIONS BY CHENNAI ATELIER JULIA & SITA. AN ARTWORK BY ATUL DODIYA TAKES CENTRE STAGE, TIPPING ITS HAT TO LATE ARTIST TYEB MEHTA'S TRUSSED BULL OEUVRE. AN OLD CAMPHOR CHEST FROM CEYLON MASQUERADES AS A CENTRE TABLE, UNDERPINNED BY A RESTORED AGRA JAIL CARPET MADE BY PRISONERS IN BRITISH INDIA. THE POT IS OF BURMESE ORIGIN.

"I wanted the home to be designed around the art, not the other way around." —Jaiveer Johal

ABOVE LEFT: JOHAL SEATED ON A LIGNE ROSET SOFA IN THE SITTING ROOM. THE COFFEE AND SIDE TABLES WERE DESIGNED BY MANZUR. THE ENGLISH CAST-IRON LAMP WAS SOURCED FROM A DEALER IN KOLKATA. ABOVE RIGHT: OVERLOOKING THE ADYAR RIVER, THE DEN IS A TRANQUIL SPACE. JOHAL ACQUIRED THE PIERRE JEANNERET CHAIR FROM MOORTHY'S IN MUMBAI AS AN ODE TO HIS ANCESTRAL CONNECTION TO CHANDIGARH. ON THE WALL, A LARGE UNTITLED PAINTING BY RAM KUMAR SITS NEXT TO A SKETCH BY MV DHURANDHAR. THE CARPET WAS PURCHASED DURING COVID FROM A DEALER IN TURKEY ON THE BASIS OF PICTURES ALONE. THE CANE FOOTSTOOL IS A VINTAGE NOVELTY, WHILE THE CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURES ARE BY ATELIER ASHIESH SHAH AND DESIGN TEMPLE. RIGHT: THE PRIMARY BATHROOM HOLDS A MIRROR TO THE BEDROOM WITH EXPOSED CONCRETE WALLS AND SLATTED WOOD CABINETRY. THE ETCHING ON THE COUNTER IS BY SURENDRAN NAIR AND THE LAMP IS A 19TH-CENTURY FIND FROM KERALA. THE MIRROR REVEALS A REFLECTION OF GOLD ETCHINGS BY CHICAGO-BASED ARTIST SHAURYA KUMAR.



JOHAL ALWAYS KNEW HE WANTED THE BEDROOM ORIENTED TOWARDS THE RIVER RATHER THAN THE SEA. "I WANTED TO WAKE UP TO A WATER BODY THAT WAS TRANQUIL, NOT TURBULENT," HE SHARES. A JUTE WORK BY MANISH NAI HANGS ABOVE THE SOUK BED. ON THE ADJACENT WALL IS A WORK FROM BAARAAN IJLAL'S *HOSTILE WITNESS* SERIES. A ROTATING CABINET JOINTLY DESIGNED BY MANZUR AND JOHAL HIDES THE TELEVISION. THE VINTAGE PAPIER-MÂCHÉ TIGER IS FROM HERITAGEBLEND THE STUDIO. FACING PAGE: A TAPESTRY OF TRIBAL OBJECTS ANIMATES THE POWDER ROOM.



THE BALCONY OVERLOOKS THE BAY OF BENGAL AND WHAT IS COLLOQUIALLY CALLED "THE BROKEN BRIDGE." THE CAMPAIGN CHAIR WAS SOURCED FROM SOUK AND THE ARTWORK IS A PHOTOGRAPH ON CANVAS BY VIVEK VILASINI.



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Ask Jaiveer Johal how he came to be a collector and the Delhi-raised, Chennai-based entrepreneur instantly answers, “I’ve done it for as long as I can remember.” He recalls, as a child, he’d squirrel away pretty things: crystal bowls, beautiful briefcases, silver plates. “If anything ever went missing, people always knew where to find it,” he adds, quickly clarifying that said thieved objects “were limited to the confines of my own home”. Before him, no one in the family—Johal’s grandfather, Sardar Darbara Singh was a former chief minister of Punjab and his father was a scion of a successful conglomerate—devotedly amassed art. “They bought it to fit this wall or that. If there wasn’t space for it, it was out of the question,” he recalls of his parents and grandparents, who frequently purchased idiosyncratic pieces on their travels.

As he grew up, so did his interest in collecting. First it was books, then antique maps, and afterwards, during his years in London where he moved to study global politics, piquant art of all manner. He notes that he doesn’t use everything he buys. “Being surrounded by books you haven’t read shows you how little you know. It keeps you humble,” he says of his “anti-library”, named after the eponymous term coined by author Nassim Nicholas Taleb. It’s no different with art; Most of his collection is in storage. A glorious gallimaufry in his apartment in Chennai’s MRC Nagar is but a microcosm of his artistic expression. Many of his

pieces—among them Zarina Hashmi’s *Home is a Foreign Place* (1999), displayed opposite the bar—are informed by a spirit of displacement, of a sense of isolation, sentiments that have haunted him through the years.

By the time he moved to Chennai for college in 2004, his love of art was possibly the only absolute in his life. His father had just passed away, the family business had been divided, and his mother had been designated the southern share of the operation. The family subsequently bought an apartment in the leafy precinct of Harrington Road, which they continued to maintain after his father’s demise. It was only years later that Johal decided to move further afield. “I knew this was it when I saw it,” he says of his current abode, a one-bedroom concrete cocoon with mottled walls. “It was framed by the Adyar river on one side and the sea on the other—it was the best view I’d ever seen.”

He didn’t just buy that apartment; he also bought another two floors below it. “My mother was so taken with the location that she decided to move too,” he says. But he was clear that his apartment would be true to his sensibilities, and as he puts a finer point on the subject, “the antithesis of my mother’s”. The stars aligned when he met architect Faisal Manzur at the party of a mutual friend. “We started a conversation and ended up finishing each other’s sentences,” he reports. “I asked him if he was interested in putting together a mood board for the house.” Manzur said yes, and then yes again, a few months later when Johal asked him to take up the design reins for a full home remodel.

As far as design considerations went, Johal knew three things for certain: that the walls should wear concrete, that there should be no straight lines, and that the bedroom should overlook the calming river rather than the sea. “I wanted the home to be designed around the art, not the other way around,” says Johal, whose acquisitions for the home included no

new art. He already owned everything he needed and brought in stylist Samir Wadekar to curate the collection and oversee the art hang. Johal imagined a space that was fluid and amorphous, something that evolved to suit the occasion.

Manzur’s first sleight of hand was eliminating the extra bedroom. His second? Designating a gallery wall between the sitting room and bedroom by way of deep wood panelling. “I didn’t want the view to jump out the moment you entered the house, so we framed it around the art,” says Johal of the selection. True to his words, the home unfolds in parts: first comes the sea, then the river, and beyond, a view of the magnificent Chettinad Palace and the gardens of the Theosophical Society.

Johal rotates his art every few months, albeit, as he notes, “It is done with great thought, never flippantly.” The Manish Nai in his bedroom, for example, has been eclipsed in recent weeks by a pensive canvas by Gieve Patel. In the sitting room, where there was once a black Raza, now hangs a vibrant yellow painting by Laxman Shreshtha. And a short way away, a 1968 Sadanand Bakre canvas depicting a London street at twilight contrasts the MV Dhurandhar drawing that came before it. The only place where nothing changes is the bedroom. “I wanted to bring in a sense of stillness and comfort, a feeling of familiarity, of waking up in the same place every day,” he notes.

Despite the kaleidoscope of art, the home feels comfortable—like the kind of place where you could hang up your boots and become temporarily invisible. “I always knew that there would be a lot of museum-quality art, but I didn’t want it to *look* like a museum,” he says. What he did want, and got, was a warm space where he could do as he pleased—host intimate soirées on some days and hibernate undisturbed on others. For someone who enjoys going out and exploring new places, staying home has never been easier ▀