Getting candid with

Smita Thomas

FOUNDER, PRINCIPAL DESIGNER, MULTITUDE OF SINS

The former lawyer takes us down memory lane, detailing her path to the present and how she has managed to carve a niche as one of India's most avant-garde designers

From top: Smita Thomas, founder and principal designer of Multitude of Sins; This Mumbai apartment, christened King's Landing, features a kaleidoscope of whimsical colours and shapes

Of all her memories growing up, Smita Thomas's most significant are those of her mother. "Specifically, her fingers. She was always very creative, making intricate dolls, painting with oils and watercolours, doing needle art and conjuring up the most exquisite puppets," recalls the founder and principal designer of Bengaluru-based design firm Multitude of Sins (MOS). "I never appreciated her then, but as I reflect back, I realise she was so much more creative than I could ever be. I am a designer, but she was an artist." Today, MOS is a manifestation of her flair for the outré, where projects aren't just projects; they are whimsical experiments with each having a story to tell.

What was your childhood like, and what role did it play in your career choice?

My mother was a teacher and playwright, and my father was an officer at a government bank. They were complete opposites: she was affable and gregarious and had many friends. He was a loner and nomad who liked disappearing into the mountains for days. But what they had in common was the ambition to provide my brother and me with a good education. I think I draw equally from both their personalities. I have inherited my father's seclusive sensibilities and my mother's creative streak. When it came time for college, I was conflicted between fashion and law. I ultimately wrote the entrance exams for both NIFT and law school and, as luck would have it, qualified for both. Inspired by a friend's mother who was a lawyer, I decided to pursue

From top right: Project Ironman, a monochrome apartment in Mumbai, was the firm's maiden project in the Maximum City; The Circus Canteen, a farm-to-table eatery in Bangalore, was designed with 90% recycled materials.

the latter. Seven and a half years later, however, I realised I was destined for a more creative path.

What was the genesis of your practice? How did it all start?

My parents were busy people and so my brother and I had to figure things out on our own from a very early age. I was allowed to dream and given the freedom to pursue what I wanted, but I was expected to make it happen on my own. After quitting law in 2013, I began a deeply explorative journey in a bid to glean my interests. I helped launch an online fashion marketplace, took yoga instructor courses from around the world, started a blog focused on creative narratives and tried my hand at three interior styling projects. It took several years for me to fully surrender to my creative calling and launch MOS as a full-time design studio in January 2019.
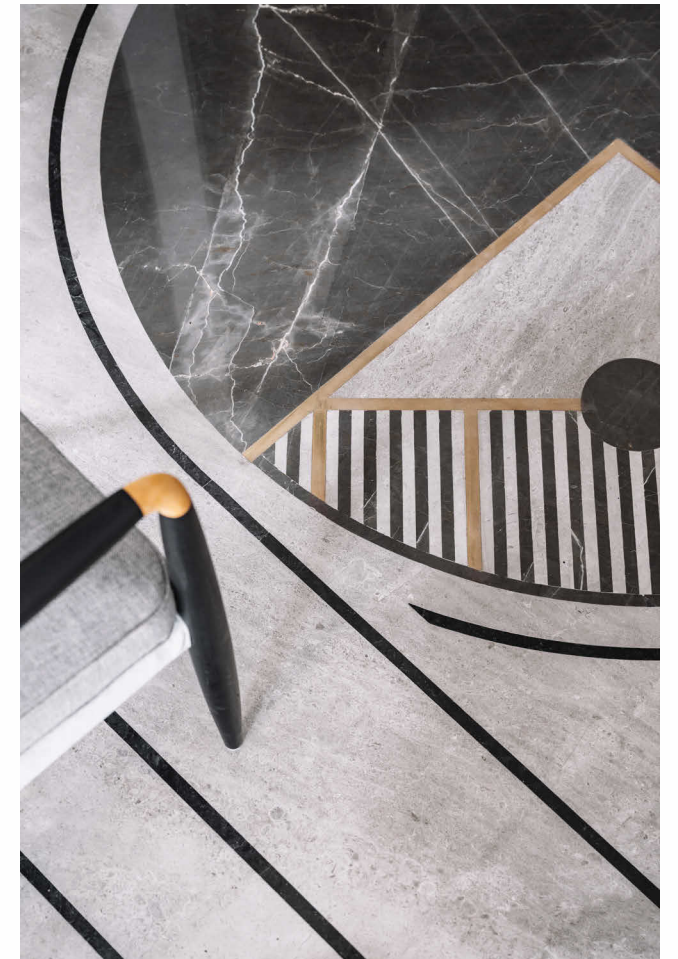
What is your design philosophy?

As someone who hasn't studied design formally, I am not one for convention. I like to be fearless at whatever I do. As a bit of a happy loner, MOS is my place to escape reality, a playground where I can freely experiment. As a firm, we design with a sense of abandon, veering away from the mundane. I like to think of all of us as mad hatters whose bold, fantastical and wonder-filled ideas are rewriting the rulebook for alternative design. I also don't want MOS to ever get labelled as an interior design firm: I see us as a pack of creatives with a restless aesthetic. We explore all mediums from spaces, sculpture and furniture to art, lighting, graphics, textiles, objects and installations.

What have been some defining moments of your career?

Being invited to Raw Collaborative to participate in 'Playground' as one of nine designers, where we had the opportunity to launch our first retail collection definitely features in the top order. Another great achievement is having Project BigTop—a sustainable restaurant design that involved transforming waste into functional elements. ◆ multitudeofsins.in