

Public speak

"I know that most of social media is indulging in fear mongering but as a safety measure I am just staying off it for now. Even though it is so tempting, my husband and often use it in salad and swap it out as dinner during the summer season especially when it has been as hot as it is and we are on the verge of dehydration."

Vinam Bhagat yoga teacher and Navi Mumbai resident

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Fear mongering at its peak

DR EGURU SREENIVASA RAO, who is researching watermelons, says it's painfully obvious when a melon has been tampered with, making it an impractical scam

DR EGURU Sreenivasa Rao is the principal scientist (Vegetable Science) at the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) in Bengaluru and is currently studying watermelon.



DR RAO

Dr Rao, who has been keenly following the Kadar family case, is frustrated at the lack of awareness, and the havoc social media has caused to the produce sector in recent years.

"In general, there is false propaganda. Claims like 'people injecting fruits to make them juicier or more colourful' are absolutely false," he says.

In fact, Rao and his team have conducted experiments during the start of the summer at ICAR to verify these claims. "We did multiple experiments where we injected a food dye into the watermelon, but it just cannot be done without giving away that the fruit has been tampered with. As soon as you cut open the watermelon, the colourant accumulates in one place, and that is a dead giveaway. Additionally, because the pressure is so high in the fruit, whatever is injected will come gushing out," he says.

"Where is the time and money for people to keep injecting colour in the food?" Finally, he adds, "There is no food safety inspector who has come and said that there are colours, this is just fear mongering online."

But this is a real tragedy for the watermelon farmer who has been growing the fruit for three to four months, and is now being exploited by traders who are not giving them a fair price."

What was old is new again

Interior designer Mansi Mehta who recently led the restoration of a century-old Parsi bungalow in Bandra gives **Sunday mid-day** a walkthrough

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

"I **INITIALLY** said no," laughs interior designer Mansi Mehta when we ask her for her reasons for taking up the project to restore Green Gifts Bungalow, an elegant and spacious Parsi home with a plant nursery on Bandra's Turner Road. Officially known as Tehmi Terrace and originally built in 1916, the imposing bungalow has been frequently leased out for advertising film shoots in the past. But when Mehta first encountered it for the purpose of restoration, she found it riddled with structural concerns, including corroded metalwork, compromised walls, and damaged ceilings.

"I saw the space and it scared me. It was in a mess," she recalls. But owners Yasmine and Dhunrumi Patell had faith in the designer and artist who has studied at institutions like the Sophia College for Women and the JJ School of Art, and credits design firm Talati and



Yasmine and Dhunrumi Patell with their sons Rushad and Rustom, Rustom's wife Dilshad and their children Tiyaana and Vivaan. The family has restored the ground floor of Tehmi Terrace, a heritage property inherited by Dhunrumi and his sisters Heta and Jena

Panthaky for providing a strong foundation for her career.

About two years ago, Mehta set to work with a structural engineer on what would be her first restoration project, tackling the many challenges it threw up along the way. A space with two bedrooms and no attached bathrooms was converted into three bedrooms with three attached bathrooms — including one with a private entrance — to turn the ground floor space into a self-sufficient

unit for the family. A row of bathrooms, after decades of disuse, was adapted for modern living with contemporary amenities and overhead lofts, along with ornate tiles and mirrors for a chic look.

Mehta wanted a grand entrance, "something that would deliver an impact, a wow factor". And so, for the long, wide passageway leading into the house, she chose tile flooring with earthy tones, old Burma teakwood rafters, arches along the corridor, and tasteful light and fan fittings from Australia, while the white walls grace photographs of the bungalow's founders and those of the present owners along with paintings owned by the family.

Efforts were made to retain original proportions, period mouldings, patterned grills, windows, doors

Mehta studied Parsi homes from the early 20th century to guide the restoration which led to the visible focus on woodwork, ventilation, a feeling of openness and interconnectedness between spaces, and on period details like louvers and arches. **PICS/SAYYED SAMEER ABEDI**



and wardrobe furnishings and seamlessly integrate them with newer elements for functionality. "I made sure the family's memories [of an older way of living] were retained and old pieces of furniture were reused," says Mehta, pointing to units such as a wooden kitchen cabinet previously used to store root vegetables now repurposed as a book shelf in one of the bedrooms. Elsewhere, old cupboards were scraped leading to discoveries such as a carving of a set of initials and a delicate arrangement of motifs with flowers and dragonflies.

Mehta studied Parsi homes from the early 20th century to guide the restoration which led to the visible focus on woodwork, ventilation, a sense of openness and interconnectedness between spaces, and on period details such as window louvers, arches and long brass door stoppers, along with floral patterns for sofas and traditional door bells. But speaking of her negotiations with the space, Mehta insists that she couldn't "copy-paste despite seeing many Parsi homes. I had to work around the material that was given to me". The family's love of food and cooking also meant that the kitchen had to be given significant attention. In it, a massive old dining table now stands converted into a smaller table and a sturdy bench, the white walls complement a soothing sap green colour scheme, and there is ample storage, integrated appliances and cabinets stacked with traditional crockery. "Everything is modernised, yet a little traditional," says the designer.

A section of the home has been serving as the Embassy of Luxembourg in Mumbai, a space Mehta worked on in a span of 45 days. As we take a stroll through the Embassy's offices, the designer points to the tile flooring which has pockets of blue, a nod to the Luxembourg national flag, to pinewood rafters and a 125-year-old slab of granite that was reused in the pantry. But in spite of the demarcation, the arches and flooring patterns also serve to maintain this section's resemblance to the rest of the home, a point that we learn was part of the brief given to Mehta.

Although situated in a major thoroughfare, the Patells had asked her to design the home like a farmhouse, prioritising aspects such as leisure, space and a connection with nature.

"It took me a while to process that instruction because people generally think of farmhouses as being located outside the city. They trusted me with this whole space which was a massive responsibility," she shares. But Mehta has seemingly met all expectations, a fact indicated by the poster with "before" and "after" images of the bungalow that stands proudly in the front displaying her handiwork.