

PALACE IN THE SKY

In this regal seafront duplex by Essajees Atelier, almost everything
is made in India

WORDS VAISHNAVI NAYEL TALAWADEKAR PHOTOS TALIB CHITALWALA



The foyer is a majestic median between the worldly and otherworldly. The walls wear a wallpaper from Good Earth. Imperial-style furniture from Nivasa dots the setting

The living room is an art gallery come to life. A Jaipur Rugs carpet underpins the seating area, characterised by furniture from Nivasa. The Klove chandelier and Raja Ravi Varma prints take turns seizing the spotlight. The wallpaper is by Ankita Arya

From the moment they first set foot inside, Ashwin and Bhagyashree Damera knew there was no mistaking the good vibes. “There was just something about the place. And in terms of the space and floor plan, it was everything we were looking for,” says Bhagyashree of the duplex the couple now calls home. But what it enjoyed in proportions, it certainly lacked in personality. And not just any kind, but the kind they’d experienced as children, in the homes of their parents and grandparents, and come to recognise as adults as the hallmark of an abundant home.

As interior designer Sarah Sham recalls, the brief may or may not have been more specific than that. “It was something along the lines of a ‘palace in the sky’ and they wanted something that riffed on royal,” says Sarah, the founder and principal of Mumbai-based interior design firm Essajeet Atelier, whom the couple, both ed tech entrepreneurs, had bookmarked many years prior and never had a chance to enlist. They also had another caveat: for a home made and designed in India, everything inside it had to be too. And so it was. Exhibit A: the larger-than-life Klove chandelier, evocative of an upturned tree, that takes pride of place in the living room. Other things impossibly Indian? The art, books and plants, which conjure an old-world, new-age kaleidoscope that perfectly embodies the couple’s collective spirit.

There are many words that come to mind when describing Sarah’s aesthetic lexicon. Elegant, of course. Understated? Maybe. But maximalist, on no account. “The clients really love

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maximalism, which forced us as a design studio to do things that we never have before: bright wallpapers in every direction, colossal chandeliers, endless art, layer on layer on layer. It was always a push and pull in figuring out how much is too much,” shares Sarah. Speaking of too much, the designer abstained from excessive spatial edits. “There is a quote by Carl Elefante that says, ‘the greenest building is the one that is already built,’ and in keeping with that, we minimised structural changes,” Sarah notes, citing the example of the perfectly good floor, which she wholly retained.

For Ashwin and Bhagyashree, the home forges a connection to the past, yes, but equally one to the future. “We enjoy a view of the sea as well as the racecourse, which is a rarity in Mumbai. It is lit up throughout the year and it always feels like a festival,” says Bhagyashree. Inside or outside, there’s always something to look forward to. ♦ essajeetatelier.com

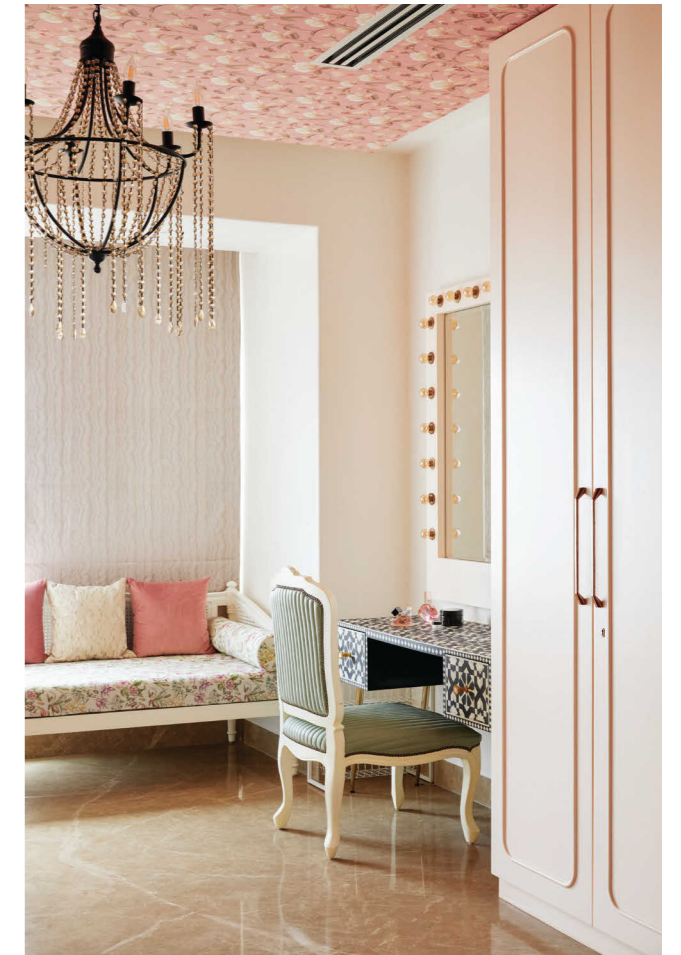
“There was just something about the place. And in terms of the space and floor plan, it was everything we were looking for”



Fit for a kingly banquet, the dining room dazzles in gold. The tour de force is undoubtedly the art, which comprises a tableau by Smita Moksh (centre) and paintings by Seema Kohli (left and right). The furniture is from Nivasa



The primary suite is a vision in navy blue. The Nivasa bed is flanked by side tables by the same brand, and enlivened by Pink Champa bedding.



From left: A Tanjore painting from the homeowners' private collection takes pride of place in the foyer; The walk-in wardrobe is a pastel pink fantasia with an Ankita Arya wallpaper on the ceiling. Nivasa was the brand of choice for the furniture



SARAH SHAM INHERITED HER KEEN EYE for design from her father and grandfather, whose century-old antiques, fine furniture and collectibles store Essajejes played a role in informing Mumbai's, and so too India's, luxury design firmament. That she had design in her own blood she would only come to realise after completing her undergraduate degree at Duke University and Oxford University with a major in Art History. She subsequently pursued a 2-year interior design degree at Rachna Sansad, Mumbai, and graduated top of her class, before founding interior design practice Essajejes Atelier in 2014. In the decade since, she has worked on the Ambani Home, Gautam Singhanian's home, and Taj Downtown, Dubai.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU DIDN'T DO IN THIS PROJECT, BUT WISH YOU HAD?

Because the building had facade restrictions, we couldn't change any of the windows. If we had a chance to do more interesting ones, the entire look would have been elevated.

IF THIS HOME WERE A PLANET IN THE UNIVERSE, WHICH ONE WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

Saturn, because it is so pretty, and has so many colours and textures.



The office, with wallpaper by Ankita Arya and furniture by Nivasa, glows in jewel tones.

DESCRIBE THIS HOME IN THREE WORDS.

Opulent, luxurious and fun!

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST SPLURGE WHILE DESIGNING THIS HOME?

Most definitely the 9 foot by 11 foot Klove chandelier.

AND THE BIGGEST SAVE?

Wallpaper, because it saved us from investing time and energy in hand-textured walls.



A Tyrian purple carpet and furniture by Nivasa add old-world character to the reading nook