



Time capsule

With 200-year-old serveware, antique pots and authentic Naga panels, Tahir Sultan's concept decor store in Jaipur is a nod to the subcontinent's rich artisanal legacy, finds VAISHNAVI NAYEL TALAWADEKAR.

Photographed by REMA CHAUDHARY

About 10 minutes from Jaipur's City Palace is a store that mirrors it in spirit. Naga panels emblazon the walls, hand-thrown crockery occupies the shelves and 350-year-old earthen pots, originally used on trade routes, whisper stories of fallen fiefdoms. For a place that is only a few months old, Makaan seems frozen in time, as if someone bottled up its parts centuries ago and preserved them for posterity.

For designer and chef Tahir Sultan, the self-designed store was born serendipitously during the lockdown of 2020 along with a series of other life changes: a new country, new ventures

and new philanthropic endeavours, to name a few. And yet, none of these were part of the plan. "I happened to be in India, more specifically Jaipur, when the lockdown was imposed and I just took a liking to the city," confesses the half-Kuwaiti, half-Indian entrepreneur. "I also had access to all this amazing stuff that was not being stocked anywhere at the time."

When Sultan, who was raised in Kuwait and has since lived

A MAESTRO'S LAIR

Tahir Sultan wears a suit of his own design outside Makaan's main entrance

“My family was all about culture, education, exposure and initiating social change by inspiring people”



all over the world, brought the concept store to life, it was nothing more than a one-and-a-half-room rental set-up. Today, Makaan's charm extends well beyond its earthy red facade. With a discerning clientele that spans the globe, its one-of-a-kind decor, furniture and artefacts have found a home in some of the world's most beautiful properties. Still, for someone once synonymous with fashion, launching a concept decor business in Jaipur was a move that few expected from Sultan. “As a creator of products and sculptures, Makaan seemed like the logical next step in my career,” the aesthete explains of his decision to put down roots in the Pink City.

Not many know that the store's basement is a secret dungeon of treasures. “The store is only a front to a much more successful and interesting platform: one where interior designers, architects and landscape designers can source key pieces for projects they are working on,” shares Sultan. “Most of it is not for sale. Rather, it is to showcase the kinds of items we can source for clients. The response has been great, and has pushed me to go out and find as many wonderful items as I can.” The brand maintains an air of exclusivity, with objets d'art that exude a museum-esque

OBJECTS OF TIME

Clockwise, from top left: A 350-year-old earthen pot originally used on trade routes sits beside a sculpture made of old truck tyres designed by Sultan. An African tribal mask enlivens the store's basement gallery. Clothes hangers fashioned from traditional Rajasthani harvesting rakes adorn the wall, amidst other objets d'art





A CAVE OF TREASURES

The store's basement is a trove of rare finds, where Sultan curates private showcases for interior designers, architects and landscape designers. It features art deco chairs, Naga panels and an African mask, amongst other novelties

quality. "We don't stock run-of-the-mill items. There are mostly large statement pieces for either decorative or functional use in everyday homes, holiday homes, hotels or restaurants."

Makaan is the prism through which Sultan undertakes diverse design projects. "We sometimes design properties ourselves. But those are projects I undertake only if I feel the synergy is right. Supplying to architects and designers lies at the heart of what we do, and is something we really enjoy, as we often get unusual requests and then have to find a way to source those pieces," says the maverick entrepreneur and newly minted Jaipuri. He has grand plans for the future too. "I would like to add a restaurant, a bar and a collaborative workspace where we can brainstorm with clients on projects and ideas. We are growing Makaan so it becomes a multifunctional platform that serves not only designers and walk-ins, but also people who actually want their spaces designed by us." In creating objects prized for their provenance, Sultan is mindful of rooting

his practices in sustainability. "We are trying to partner with women's empowerment programmes and use traditional artisanal techniques to maintain a minimal carbon footprint." Sultan curates his collections himself, often traversing the desert on foot in search of ancient gems.

Ingenuity runs deep in his family. His father, Ghazi Sultan, was a Harvard-educated architect who studied urban planning under German-American architect Walter Gropius. His mother was a ceramicist, and later, a landscape designer, "who was credited for single-handedly making Kuwait greener. I grew up going to museums and galleries, visiting ruins of yore, and exploring cultural and historic monuments all over the world. My family was all about culture, education, exposure and initiating social change by inspiring people. It's something I resonate with and it has become part of who I am," says Sultan. A global sensibility seeded in local sensitivity, then, is perhaps his greatest inheritance of all.



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