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AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2023, ₹150

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ELLE DECOR brings you in-depth articles and insights into design, architecture, decor and culture. Introducing our special contributors



SAMIIR WHEATON

FOUNDER
WHEATON DESIGN

Samiir Wheaton, born to Jaya Wheaton (a professional painter) has lived amidst design, sculpture and art since time immemorial. He graduated from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad in 1994 and founded Wheaton Design in 1995 with Bhawna Wheaton, an architectural, interior and furniture design practice.

On my bucket list... To sculpt life-size figures like Auguste Rodin

My living room essentials... Music, more music and coffee

Design to me is... All about energy and sensory

I'm currently reading... The Sky Below by Scott E Parazynski

A historical place I'd like to visit... Angkor Wat

In this issue, he engineers a colossal second home located within New Delhi in Quiet Getaway, Pg 146



SHABNAM GUPTA

PRINCIPAL DESIGNER AND FOUNDER
THE ORANGE LANE AND PEACOCK LIFE

A designer by profession, a thinker by habit and an inventor by choice, Shabnam believes in finding the extraordinary in the ordinary. She and her team have been instrumental in revolutionising interior design in India with their charming and endearing spaces. Their phenomenal vision has culminated into not just national but international recognition.

On my bucket list... Sledging with the huskies in Rovaniemi, Finland

My living room essentials... Great art and comfy sofas

Design to me is... Like breathing

What am I currently reading... The Fabric of Our Lives: The Story of Fabindia by Radhika Singh

A historical place I'd like to visit... Taksang Monastery

In this issue, she crafts a global yet India-inspired home in Mumbai with Modern Roots, Pg 158



KETA AND VARUN SHAH

FOUNDING PARTNERS
WORKSHOP INC

Keta and Varun Shah, graduates from CEPT University, Ahmedabad, are founding partners at Workshop Inc, a design practice operating within the fields of architecture, interior design and exhibition design. The practice takes a holistic and researched-based approach to spatial design and focuses on seeking out narratives behind each project.

On our bucket list... Travel to the Balkans to see Spomeniks

Our living room essentials... A nice, warm throw to snuggle into

Design to us is... Addictive

What we're currently reading... Press Here by Herve Tullet with my daughter

A historical place we'd like to visit... Samarkand

In this issue, they take us to a tranquil home right in the middle of the busy urban city of Ahmedabad, Pg 168

QUIET GETAWAY

With exposed concrete finishes and tapered walls, this weekend home in New Delhi by Samiir Wheaton gives its owners' art collection pride of place

TEXT BY VAISHNAVI NAYEL TALAWADEKAR PHOTOGRAPHY BY TANUJ AHUJA
PRODUCED BY MRUDUL PATHAK KUNDU



The carved solid wood doors are etched with sketches of parrots and sunflowers, by the Late Jaya Rastogi Wheaton, Samiir's mother **FACING PAGE** With a bronze sculpture by Jayasri Burman and a wall art by Dinabandhu Marndi, the curved concrete stairs lead the user into the living and dining areas



The dining room that opens onto the lawns is akin to a modern art gallery. It has a bull head from South India, a dazzling painting by artist Longshan, and an 18 ft long solid paddock table with brass legs, designed by Samiir himself



FROM LEFT The gathering table in the lounge and conference room is suited for meetings and discussions in the space that does not feel overly formal. The waved ceiling crafted in solid wood holds a mirror to the owners' love for the sea. The painting is by Shridhar Aiyer; Veiling the lounge and conference room from the staircase vestibule is a customised free standing cabinet made in solid wood which is designed and manufactured by Wheaton Design FACING PAGE Another peep into the lounge and conference room, where a scarlet console by Wheaton Design takes centre stage. The painting is by Ravi Kumar Tekam

As I make my way up the Bahls' garden path, past the lake, lush greens and a trail of tiny ducks, a previously unseen tower slides into view, complete with a 200-year-old front door engraved with falcons that seem poised to spring to life. "It channels a brick kiln. It's a little hat-tip to the once-upon-a-time pottery site that existed here," says Samiir Wheaton, Founder of Jaipur-based Wheaton Design, referencing the newly built tower, which evidently acts as the home's axis. We're seated at the bar counter, seven feet below ground level, where floor-to-ceiling glass windows frame the glistening garden beyond. And yet my attention is drawn inwards, to the massive volume in front of me.

When Samiir took up the project, the terrain that spans across three acres was sloped, yet he was committed to accommodating the architecture without flattening the land. For him and the team's other half, architect Monish Pandey, the landmine-like landscape provided an opportunity for discovery. And so, with nature as their point of departure, the two were motivated to go against the grain. Where some people start by trimming down the foliage, they started by building around it. Many would immediately level the ground. They sought to preserve the natural slopes, even highlight them.

What followed was an exercise in topographical retrofitting: the main home — designed to measure 12,000 sq ft — was conceived on one slope, the staff quarters on another. Some others were envisaged for the garden, the swimming pool and the lake, although the latter, Samiir insists, was born of its own accord, thanks to the natural flow of rainwater. The two-storey blueprint included a living room, a dining room and a bar downstairs, two bedrooms on either level and a recreation space upstairs. >>



The living area is steeped in serene tones as the ceiling wears a lime finish and ash wood panels. All the furniture is by Wheaton Design, while the painting is by Suresh Pushpangathan



The bar (opposite to the dining area) is a smorgasbord of curiosities. The mirror frame is the engine coiling of an Airbus A380 aircraft, while paintings by Banoj Mohanty moonlight as cupboard shutters. The columns are clad in solid oak. The art deco bar cabinet is Samiir's own design FACING PAGE The welcome vestibule parlays into a staircase that envelops a capsule lift. A luminous skylight crowns the exposed concrete wall with artworks by Sanju Jain

Inside, the walls wear exposed concrete, serving as a backdrop for the Bahls' prized art collection – an eclectic mix of larger-than-life bull busts, oriental paintings, rainforest canvases and works by lesser known artists. The medley of ancient crafts, antiques and artworks serves as a characterful overlay to the modern shell, delivering an object lesson in understated elegance. "Since artworks and collectibles dictated the design, one of the caveats was to create enough scale and depth for the art to be perceived from a distance," Samiir says, gesturing to a set of watercolours masquerading as petite cupboard fronts behind the bar.

In a bid to create depth and to offset the 13-foot high ceilings, Samiir and Monish played with proportions, tapering the walls in some places and inclining them in others. They also designed a configuration that would project a sense of infinity, in the way of a volume that would appear endless when viewed from front to back. "The moment you turn a corner, everything looks different," avers Samiir. "So you have multiple micro-spaces in close proximity to each other. The only thing that doesn't change is the flow of light," he observes, adding that he and Monish strove to ensure that the presence of natural light was equal across spaces.

His words ring true in the smorgasbord of realms that appear as we make our way around: the bar parlays into the dining room, which, in turn, meets the living area across a series of gloriously carved pivot doors bearing sunflowers and parrots – each unique – based on sketches by Samiir's mother, late artist Jaya Rastogi Wheaton. Most days, the doors are kept open, he suggests, turning each of them 90 degrees to demonstrate, "And when they are, the distinction between spaces is magically blurred."

Samiir's fascination for planes, boats and nature finds expression in the details: a curvilinear stainless steel shelving unit by the bar recalls the engine coiling of an A380 aircraft, the main door hinges mimic a jet's tail fin, and the roof's crowning slab resembles the hull of a ship. Upstairs, in the 3,000 sq ft entertainment space, a sweeping hippo-headed bench holds a mirror to his love for animals. >>



"Since artworks and collectibles dictated the design, one of the caveats was to create enough scale and depth for the art to be perceived from a distance"



FROM LEFT The entrance is marked by a soaring tower in exposed concrete with a 200 year old door; A solid oak antique door, overlaid by a panel of carved falcons leads the user into the home. The panel holds a deep meaning: to view the world as a greater being. The mammoth hinges were customised by him and create a contrast between the old and new FACING PAGE The primary bedroom is an earthy bolthole with greens shrouding in from all sides. All furniture is by Wheaton Design

His signature is writ large across the home in other ways too. Sunlight finds a way into every room. Skylights and stained glass illumine the bathrooms, while windows stand in for walls across most other spaces. The cylindrical foyer at the heart of the home (situated inside the central tower) contains a spiral staircase and a glass capsule lift that serves as a dazzling light-catcher. The curiosities continue in the private realms. In a bedroom downstairs, tuning keys from an old guitar serve as handles for a series of bijou windows, while a curvilinear wall envelops the tree outside in the primary suite next door.

The sun is overhead as we step out for a stroll, but despite the soaring mercury, the front yard appears in full bloom. As we turn the corner and cross the swimming pool, a curiously small staircase stands before us. It seems almost impossible to me that such a short flight of steps could lead to the first floor. But indeed it does, suspending the laws of spatial proportion, if only for a moment. It's clear by now that the landscape isn't linear: the levels, light and greenery are all intertwined. Where one elevation ends, another begins. Though to a first-time observer, where and when is a question up for discussion.

Most weekends, the home brims with people and everyone is welcome everywhere. "There's always someone ziplining or swimming, jogging or golfing," says Samiir. Of course when they aren't outdoors adventuring, they like to knock back with a tippie or two – in the winters, on the patio; in warmer weather, by the pool. "I always say one should live with the windows open," says Samiir. Indeed, for the Bahls, there has never been a better time to crank them out all the way. ♦