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## HOME NAVI MUMBAI

The living room is a ruminative sanctum dominated by monochromes. The coffee table is Mahek's own design and features a pink Makrana marble top with teak wood legs. The rug and table lamp are from Akara Rugs and Stem Design respectively. The granite and metal side table is an SML Architects custom creation, while the artwork is the homeowners' own. A planter from Plant People enlivens the corner



# THE HOUSE OF PINK MARBLE

*With pink Makrana marble finishes, charcoal floors alongside an abiding spirit of zen, this brooding Navi Mumbai apartment by SML Architects is nothing like its neighbours*

TEXT BY **VAISHNAVI NAYEL TALAWADEKAR** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SURYAN//DANG**



A double-height lounge overarched by a skylight adjoins the primary bedroom. A coffee table by SML Architects occupies the heart of the space. The rug and table lamp are by Akara Rugs and Sumeet Nagi respectively. The armchairs are Pierre Jeanneret's iconic Kangaroo design reproduced by Mahek's studio



The striped window bench and integrated granite planter box in the primary bedroom lounge are custom creations by SML Architects. The space also has a skylight that illuminates the bedroom in abundant natural light

An airy staircase with wooden treads sneaks a peek into the kitchen. The kitchen is cocooned in pink Makrana marble with chairs that are Charlotte Perriand's design recreated by Mahek's studio. The client, being a restaurateur, requested that the kitchen be the 'beating heart of the home' and Mahek anchored it to the home's centre, visually connecting it to the living area, as well as the foyer, staircase and balcony

When Mahek Lalan first stepped inside the 1,500 sq ft duplex apartment that was to be his next project, he was enchanted by its double-height volumes, semi-hexagonal bedroom balconies and abundance of sunlight. "It almost didn't feel real," recalls the Founder and Principal of Mumbai-based SML Architects about the top-floor apartment with three bedrooms in Navi Mumbai's Belapur. Its architecture, executed in the late 1990s, was a departure from the Maximum City's matchbox-sized spaces. And for the architect, it was an opportunity to rewrite the (design) rulebook.

Though there were upsides, the interior – composed of a living room, a kitchen and three bedrooms – was dated, and the layout lopsided. Mahek recognised that the architectural equilibrium could only be achieved by way of structural changes. What followed was an exercise in additions and subtractions: redundant walls were knocked off and layouts were optimised. In a bid to invite natural light and cross-ventilation, Mahek pulled down the original concrete staircase, replacing it with a light and open metal stairway that lets light through.

"The homeowners, Reajul Islam and his wife, didn't want anything pretentious. What they did want was a clean, uncluttered space where form and function were given equal due," explains Mahek of the homeowner couple, who shares a teenage son. The interventions led to an evolution in volumes. The open plan was a double-edged sword. "It meant we had to be really intentional about designating a function to each realm," says Mahek. This was particularly important because Reajul's brief had a caveat: that the kitchen be the beating heart of the home. He was, after all, a restaurateur, and the ask was as practical as it was sentimental. By the same token, Mahek anchored the kitchen to the home's very centre, visually connecting it to the living area, as well as the foyer, staircase and balcony. >>





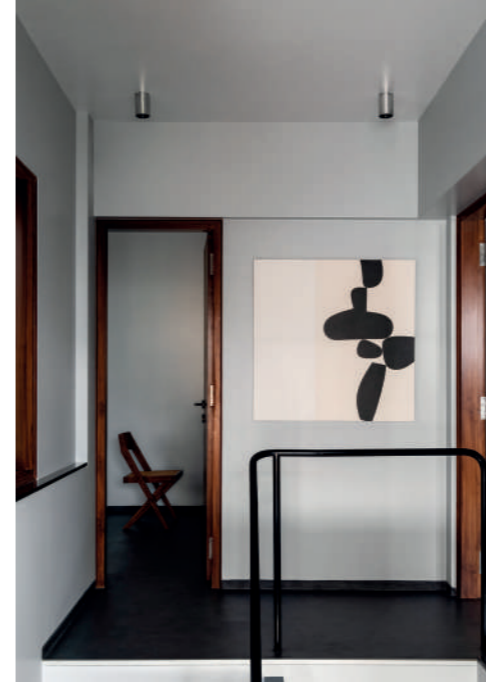
The kitchen is cocooned in pink Makrana marble, which exudes a marvellous glow by twilight. The accents on the shelves are by Ikai Asai



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Replacing the original concrete staircase with an airy stairway, the sunlight finds its way to the farthest corners of the house; The tour de force of the primary bathroom is the custom pink Makrana marble wash basin. Black penny tiles emblazon the walls; The guest bedroom, situated on the first floor, is pared-back and practical with an in-built teak wardrobe and wall art that is from the owner's personal collection



"Creating harmony between elements has always been integral to the studio's work. We wanted to craft a contemporary interior, while using materials familiar to our land"



**FROM TOP** The first floor landing serves as a quiet interlude between floors. The artwork is the homeowners' own, while the ceiling lights are custom brushed metal designs by SML Architects; The primary bedroom is ruled by muted tones with a custom designed bed by SML Architects. The wardrobe shutters, fashioned from teak wood, are infilled with marble **FACING PAGE** In the primary bedroom, the bed, bench and side tables are custom designs by SML Architects. A rock that they found in the vicinity underlines the aesthetic

The family has never been the sort to gather around a table for a formal meal, so a dining table was not a necessity. What was, was a spot for grab-and-go breakfasts and lazy Sunday brunches. So was born the idea of a kitchen breakfast counter: it was convenient enough for enjoying dosas hot off the griddle, yet casual enough for scarfing one down halfway out of the door.

Upstairs, the primary bedroom is a rare curiosity. With a double-height lounge and a luminous skylight with slatted members, it summons the elements while projecting a dynamic dance of light and shadow – one that changes by the hour, or sometimes by the blink. Whether it's the spaces or the furniture, the materials or the artworks, or even the objects and accents that inhabit the amorphous realms in between, there's something decidedly meditative about the home – as if everything was brought to life in a single breath and left there for all eternity. "Creating a sense of harmony between elements has always been integral to the studio's work. We wanted to craft a contemporary interior while using materials familiar to our land," avers Mahek. Of course, in his mind, there was no greater, grander or more beautiful material than Indian marble. Better still, pink Makrana marble.

In the same vein, pink Makrana marble serves as the home's crowning glory, appearing as a leitmotif across spaces and surfaces. In the kitchen, it takes the form of the dado; in the living room, it crowns the coffee table; it reappears on the first tread of the staircase; then again, on the custom in-built basin in the powder room. The pinkness is offset by monochromes – namely, black, charcoal, steel and grey – that make up the shell by way of the floor, furniture and finishes. Meanwhile, natural grain teak and cane, alongside rope embellishments bring a touch of rusticity to the dramatic cocoon. Most evenings, the family likes to unwind on one of the *baithaks* (window seats) that envelop the interior, swapping stories or snacks, with the breeze and some coffee for company. "It's the best place to unwind after a long day. With the people you love, at the place you love. What more could one want?" Reajul signs off. ♦

