

Getting candid with

Gunjan Gupta

ARTIST/DESIGNER OF
GUNJAN GUPTA
COLLECTIBLE DESIGN,
FOUNDER & CREATIVE
DIRECTOR OF STUDIO
WRAP & IKKIS

The prolific designer recalls her formative years, forging her own path, and how she did it all while being the best mother to her daughter



Growing up, Gunjan Gupta was her mother's accomplice in all things design. "Whether it was laying the table or matching her jewellery to her sari, my opinion was always considered. At a young age, my mother seeded in me the confidence to go against the grain. My father, too, had an egalitarian outlook and gave me complete freedom to pursue a career of my choice," she says. What she also remembers is that she had a mind of her own when it came to aesthetics, arranging the plates and crockery in her own signature style. But that was just the first glimmer the world would witness of the now-acclaimed designer rewriting the rulebook. More than two decades later, Gunjan's penchant for upending convention remains just as steadfast. Today, she helms three design verticals: her eponymous design studio which specialises in limited-edition collectibles, furniture and objects; Studio Wrap, her interior design and custom furniture firm; and Ikkis, her affordable furniture and object range. Her limited-edition pieces have been internationally acquired by renowned museums including the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany.

What was the genesis of your practice? How did it all start?

I began my career in Mumbai under the aegis of leading interior designer Varsha Desai, whose clients included such prominent families as the Ambanis. It was during this time that I discovered that while there was complete carte blanche over the design process—we were allowed to source pieces from around the globe—not one thing was made in India. When I moved to Delhi after marriage, that remained deeply etched in my mind—why was there a dearth of India-born furniture for discerning Indian clients? As I began travelling, I discovered ateliers and centres of excellence secreted away in nearby towns like Agra and Jaipur. That was when my career was given direction—I decided I wanted to tap that craftsmanship in pursuing my own path.

What have been some of your biggest challenges?

When my daughter was two, I decided to pursue a master's in design at Central Saint Martins, London. She and my mother would accompany me to the UK for

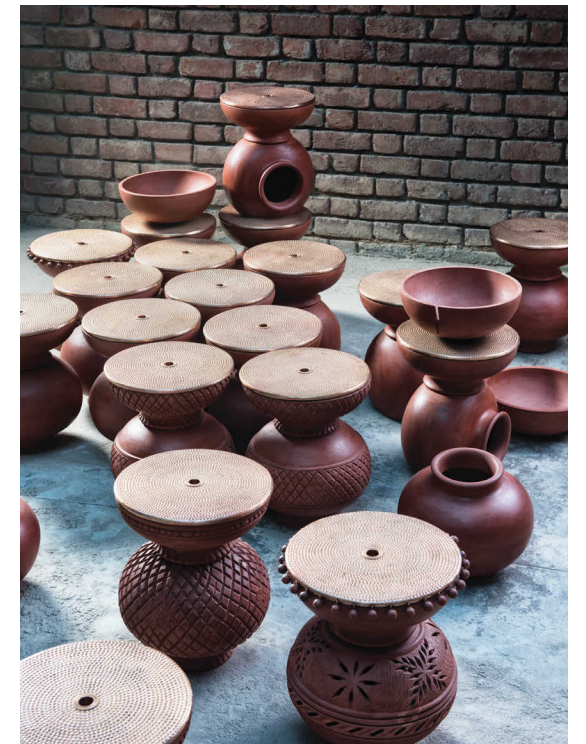


From top left: The kangan, a traditional Indian bangle, reimagined as an ornamental Kangan Bowl; Matka tables inspired by traditional Indian pottery (OPPOSITE PAGE) Gunjan Gupta, artist/designer of Gunjan Gupta Collectible Design; founder & creative director of Studio Wrap & Ikkis

short spells—we'd do 1.5 months in India, 1.5 months there, and back again. It was admittedly the hardest thing I have ever done. But in retrospect, if I hadn't done it, I wouldn't be where I am now.

What have been some defining moments of your career?

At Central Saint Martins, my master's thesis was titled Why Doesn't India Have Internationally Relevant Product Design in the 21-st Century? Of course, I had to seek out the answer myself. I suppose my practice was born as a response to that question. My graduating project was an ensemble of thrones wrapped in 24-carat gold and silver. I took it straight from college to 100% Design, an annual trade show in London. At the time, there was no business model, and it was a huge entrepreneurial risk. The fact that the idea was conceived in London and brought back to India was what made it so special. Another career highlight would be when I was invited by noted Netherlands-based design studio, Droog Design, to represent India at their international seminar, Urban Play. I was inspired by the streetscape in Amsterdam and designed and developed thrones from old, discarded bicycles—a project dubbed Cyclerecyclecycle. Last but not the least, I was also fortunate enough to present my collection at Sotheby's, London, which exponentially multiplied the visibility and interest in my work. ♦ Instagram@gunjanguptastudio



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