

REVAMPING CLASSICS

In a world where progress is defined by technology, Rooshad Shroff declares the importance of craftsmanship in the legacy and evolution of design.

BY CHITMAN KANWAR AHUJA



Rooshad Shroff

Popular for designing the luxury stores for Christian Louboutin and Kunal Rawal, architect and product designer, Rooshad Shroff has garnered interest in the world of design for his curiosity for craftsmanship and experimental style. At an age when most young adults are wrapping up with their graduation, Rooshad was busy honing his skills at the internationally acclaimed office of Zaha Hadid in London. The young architect believes that he really has evolved over the years, by working with luxury projects that gave him a chance to do some out-of-the-box thinking and move out of his comfort zone of designing contemporary furniture pieces or planning interiors, by choosing the experimental side of it all. He unravels his upcoming projects of collaborating with fashion designers, foraying into the world of marble in-lay and a lot more in this tête-à-tête. Edited excerpts...

Tell us a bit about your background. In what ways have your architectural style and design philosophy been guided by your upbringing?

I come from a family of architects, my father has been practicing since the past 40 years, my mom used to practice before she had my brother and me. I used to visit my father's office when I was younger and would design consciously or subconsciously, before indulging in some sort of art. Whenever we used to travel, we would visit galleries and museums, so I believe design was always engraved in my DNA. Ever since I've attained my education in architecture, I think I've deviated to different streams of design, giving it a holistic view of interiors, product and furniture development. I believe in engaging people in projects right from the micro to the macro level.

Who has been the biggest influence on your work to date?

I wouldn't give the credit to any one person in particular, but of course I've had great mentors and professors while I was studying in Cornell and Harvard, throughout my academic life. I consider myself fortunate to have worked with the world's leading firms such as Boheme and Zaha Hadid, and I think that they are poles apart in the way in which they design. They both have heavily influenced my work ethic, though specially Boheme due to their process driven approach.

What are your thoughts on the architectural culture of India?

We are lucky to have an amazing lineage of historical building and diverse culture within our nation, from north to south we have different influences even in terms of the vernacular architecture. And for modern architecture too we have a great database of traditional crafts, and that's something that I have adopted within my practice. Especially in furniture, as I believe that we need to present it in a more contemporary form and make it relevant for future generations.

As we all know, we're in the era of the 'iconic building' and the 'starchitect'. How would you describe your signature style?

I still have a long way to go, till I establish my personal style. As we are still pretty much in our early years of practice. I adhere more towards a rigorous process, and it is more consistent in every project, it's a more varied than a conceptual idea. And as I mentioned earlier, Zaha and Boheme had an enormous part to play in my style of work. Zaha had more of a formal direction, and I believe in following a more process driven ethic. There's always material research that I do and look at the commonalities of a bespoke project, with the R&D done and looking at the nitty gritty of the finishes, so I think that would be something that could be cultivated into a personal style.



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"WHILE DESIGNING FURNITURE, I TAKE ART AS MY INSPIRATION. AS YOU CAN BE INFLUENCED BY IT IN MORE THAN ONE WAY."



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1 & 5. Good Earth, Jodhpur
2. Christian Louboutin, Bangkok
3. Private Collection, Doha
4. Carved Marble Bulbs and Pringle Table



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You were inspired by the late architect Zaha Hadid, do you have any elements of her design genius in your compositions?

While I was pursuing my under-graduation course, I tried to get an internship or placement at her office every year. And I am glad that I got an opportunity there. I got to work on different scales, from massive scales to looking at developing different furniture and products too. And taking on furniture in that case I would say, it all added up to pushing the boundaries of how far you can push a material to a certain extent and that is something that we have done quite beautifully in our practice.

As a contemporary architect, what has been your curatorial legacy?

I am yet to find that out, too early to decide for now.

The architecture of the past allows us to witness past worlds in the present. What will remain of our civilisation in the future?

There is an appreciation of craft globally and there is a lot of focus on India when it comes to hand-painted products and hand-made products per say. And I have noticed that the audience is ready to wait for longer periods of time when it comes to dealing with something bespoke and one-of-a-kind. So, in that sense I think that the craft of India makes its rightful place on the global map. And what makes me different from my contemporaries, who I also went to study with in America, is my access to craft.

Also, I think that if craft is made more contemporary it would be the defining point of the shift in terms of working in design, which is our USP. And that's

6. Kunal Rawal store at Kala Ghoda, Mumbai
7. Colour Sanding Dining Table
8. Embroidery on Wood Lounger



“I BELIEVE IN MAKING THE TRADITIONAL CRAFT MORE RELEVANT WITH MODERN TIMES, THEREBY RE-INTERPRETING AND RE-EVOLVING IT.”

Marble bulbs, resin art and embroidered chairs, you are an art aesthete in all ways. But do you think that art and architecture go hand in hand? How does art influence architecture?

They both complement each other, but there is a fine line between the two. For furniture I would pick art, as you can always be inspired by it in more than one way. You can step into the history, time period and era of art to experience its relevance. It also speaks of a more contextual idea, and reflects a certain thought process. For me it's an important aspect to understand art in all its ideology, rather than making it just a decorative item.

Your work often embraces new forms of technology and materials, how important have these advances been in allowing you to fully realise the full scope of your creative vision?

One cannot deny technology at this point. I've worked with technology immensely during my time at Zaha, and that has been used immensely since I started out my own practice. We use it in terms of the thought process or a certain approach, of making it very hands-on and handmade. We've used technology in the design process while we were working on a collection of carpets with Cocoon Fine Rugs, for which we had scripted designs and patterns on the computer that helped us morph particular shapes which could only be done with a degree in computation. By doing so, it also allowed us to deliver a better pattern.

Hence, we do use technology while designing but there are always handmade components which make it more fruitful.

What do you feel is the greatest challenge when it comes to designing for environmental sustainability?

At some point we all need to be conscious of the materials that we are using and the amount of wastage that takes place in the whole process. We need to give thought to the idea of construction, space usage and climatic approaches. We should join spaces from earlier vernacular architecture, specially for smaller homes so as to not step into that area in this era. Sustainability is not something we should ignore at this point, rather we should be more conscious of the materials that we use and how we construct our projects.

how I started out my practice too, where I saw different crafts and integrated them in my designs. As an in-depth know-how of the craft is also extremely important while designing rather than just re-creating and re-purposing it. I believe in making the craft more relevant in the modern times by re-interpreting it and re-evolving it.

From Christian Louboutin, Hermès, Oberoi Realty, La Folie to Kunal Rawal, you are a luxury favourite all over. But what is your ultimate goal when it comes to your work? What do you want to be remembered for?

I do enjoy luxury projects, as they find a balance. They actually have the liberty to experiment and invest in craft. And for me, luxury patrons let you explore that realm efficiently. They allow us to play with different materials and be more experimental than that of residential projects. When it comes down to what I would want to be known for, would be for a rigorous process driven approach whilst, pushing and sustaining the crafts of India.