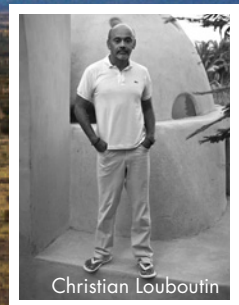


my SPIRITUAL — HOME —

From a European city where time seems to stand still, to the sweeping Australian outback—via a detour through one of India's rich design hubs—six creative mavericks talk to Neville Bhandara about the places that really speak to them

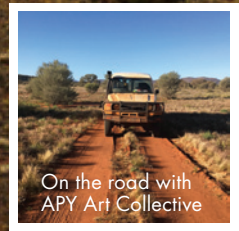
The surrounding
countryside of
Fregon, Australia



Christian Louboutin



Artist Yarithji Young



On the road with
APY Art Collective

Photographs: Mohamed Seif (Christian Louboutin), Rohan Thomson/courtesy of APY Art Centre Collective (Fregon, Australia), APY Art Centre Collective (Yarithji Young, On the road with APY Art Collective)

CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN FOOTWEAR DESIGNER

I recently visited Sydney with a friend, and met with the APY Art Centre Collective, a platform that supports emerging indigenous artists from the Aboriginal lands.

They took me to the APY Lands [Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, in the northwest of South Australia]. It was a long drive into the middle of the outback; the heat was intense and we got stuck in the sand. Aside from the unimaginable landscape, I met incredible people.

I was introduced to some of the artists the organisation works with, and we spent a few days discussing their art, ancestral techniques and ancient symbolism.

More and more through my travels, I am conscious of how much we need to protect our planet—the importance of being eco-supportive, rather than just eco-friendly. Being out there in the middle

of Australia gave me hope, because I went in not expecting anything but instead discovered a wealth of knowledge and experience. It was humbling as well as mind-blowing.

These artists live in the middle of nowhere and fight to survive, but they are so determined and dedicated to honouring the art and craft they have inherited from their ancestors—everything is made by hand, and alludes to the gods and legends that the Aboriginals have honoured since the dawn of time. It was sublime and unique, and I found the entire experience to be incredibly spiritual.

JEANNE DE KROON FOUNDER, ZAZI VINTAGE

There are certain places in the world where it feels like the universe has already planned it all out for you; she leaves little signs in unknown

“More and more through my travels, I am conscious of how much we need to protect our planet”

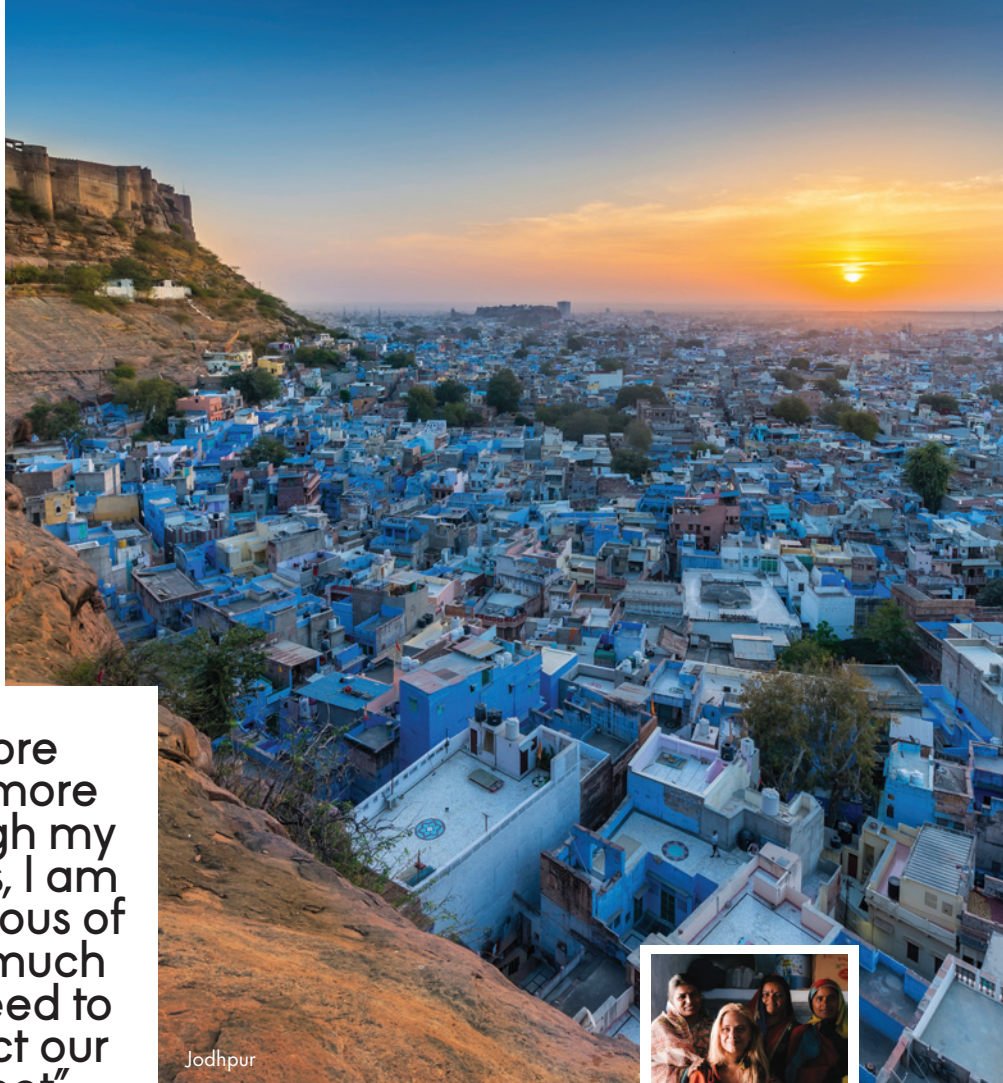
— CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

places, and presents you with situations that make you step out of your comfort zone and compel you to grow. For me, this is India and what she represents.

My moment came in Jodhpur three years ago, during a spell of chaos in my life: I had been on the road for many months; I had a broken heart, no direction, and no financial stability. When I first arrived in the blue city and met Madhu Vaishnav, I had no idea that my life would soon change dramatically.

But sometimes, even a chance encounter can alter your life forever, and it was in her eyes that I found my transformation. Purpose is a gift that life gives you when your heart is open and if you are willing to let go of the idea of security. For the past three years, Madhu and I have been working together at Saheli Women on women’s empowerment, sustainable development and ethical fashion. I had searched for answers for years, meditating in monasteries, seeking

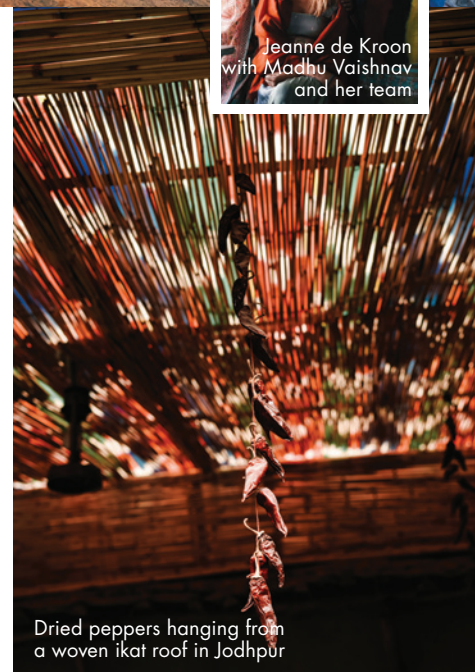
help from the babas on the ghats and the gurus in the mountains. But I finally found what I had been looking for in the simplest of places: in the sparkling eyes of a stranger. >



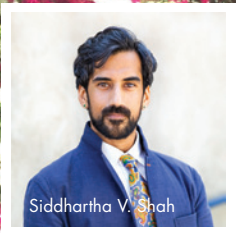
Jodhpur



Jeanne de Kroon with Madhu Vaishnav and her team



Dried peppers hanging from a woven ikat roof in Jodhpur



Siddhartha V. Shah

SIDDHARTHA V. SHAH
CURATOR OF INDIAN AND SOUTH ASIAN ART, PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM

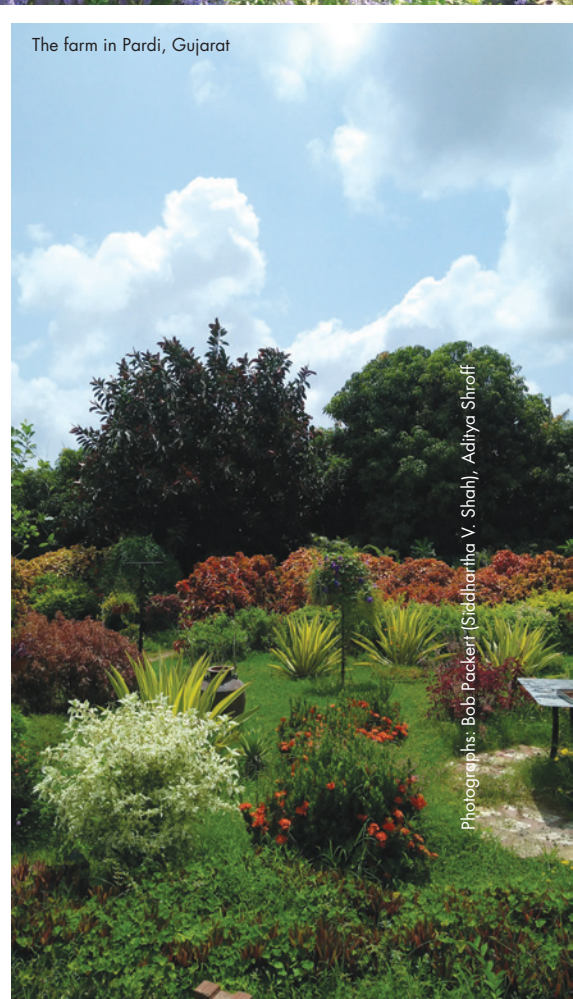
There is a pristine farm in the village of Pardi in south Gujarat that has belonged to my relatives for nearly fourteen generations. My mother went there as a child, as did her mother, and many ancestors before her, and we all share memories of its incomparable beauty and palpable power.

I was born and raised in the US, and our annual trips to India were always filled with social visits in and around Baroda, which I often found exhausting. But whenever we travelled to this farm, I felt instantly connected to the land, to my ancestors, and to a way of life so very different from my own.

As a product of the Indian diaspora, I have a very disjointed sense of home: I belong neither here nor there, always somehow different and out of place. But to watch the mango trees on this land transition from flower-laden to fruit-bearing, to feel the sweltering heat rise and finally break when the rains come, and to watch the sun rise over a vast field of lush orchards and palms has always helped me feel that I am a part of this land and its vibrant ecosystem, as well as a larger collective identity.

I have lived in many places throughout my life. And while I am grateful for what they have taught me, they have not helped me feel any greater sense of belonging. This farm in Pardi always embraces my spirit as a welcomed guest and a longed-for friend.

The farm in Pardi, Gujarat



Photographs: Bob Packert (Siddhartha V. Shah), Aditya Shroff



FILIPA DE ABREU

DESIGN CONSULTANT;
EVENTS STYLIST AND BRAND
AMBASSADOR,
TORY BURCH

I first came to Lisbon in the late '90s as a young adult, straight out of university, and I instantly fell in love with it. I was mesmerised by its architectural beauty and its proximity to water. There was a decadent feel about it that made it seem as though it had stopped in time. But my time here was short lived, and I left with a heavy heart.

Many years later, I was living in Paris, a married mother of two. My husband, who much like me has always lived a nomadic existence, felt it was time to move. We decided to spend a weekend in Lisbon to think about where we could settle next, but lo and behold—Lisbon became the choice to start our new lives.

I still don't know what made me want to come back over and over. I have lived all over the world; in London, Los Angeles, Paris, Athens and other cities... all fast-paced and action-filled, with not a moment to be wasted or unaccounted for.

Lisbon is the opposite of all that. My husband and I wanted a new start, a fresh outlook and a place to raise our children (I was pregnant with our third). We thought it would be a haven, a nest that would provide security,

family stability, and a healthier way of living.

It's been 11 years since we made that shift. Every year I would say, "Okay, it's been great but it's time to move again". But somehow, the courage to leave is always overwhelmed by the sadness of walking away from Lisbon's cobbled streets, the seven hills, the Tagus River that thinks itself the sea, the roar of the Atlantic Ocean, the kindness of my local shopkeeper, and the breathtaking light that suffuses everything.

Lisbon, you are beautiful. I'm still amazed by your beauty, your ethereal glow and the love that you so generously bestow upon us. Every stone in your sidewalks, every tile in your buildings, every wooden tram that climbs your hills and every baroque church altar is testament to the fact that God broke the mould when he made you. And while you may lack the grandeur of Paris or Florence and the magnetism of New York or London, you nail it with your humility and simple elegance. You are a daily source of inspiration. No wonder you are on the radar of every globetrotter—everyone seems to want to live here, visit here, invest here—but I selfishly hope they don't all discover you, because your magic lies in being discreet. >

"There was a decadent feel about Lisbon that made it seem as though it had stopped in time"

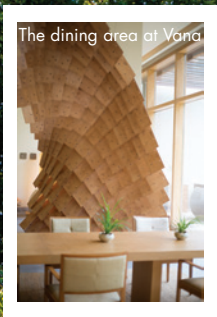
— FILIPA DE ABREU

Lisbon



Filipa de Abreu





The dining area at Vana



Poullices



Vivek Sahni

VIVEK SAHNI

CEO, KAMA AYURVEDA

I've been to many places that have resonated with me, but the most recent has been Vana in Dehradun. I'm not really a spa junkie, but I had heard great things about this wellness retreat. In need of a few days of quiet before getting back to work after New Year's celebrations, I decided to visit alone (a first for me).

I arrived in time for dinner and ate by myself in the dining hall. The next day, my wellness programme began. After a Buddhist meditation session, a lady came and sat next to me at morning tea and introduced herself. She was a gastroenterologist from the US, who was working on natural ways to heal the gut. Soon, another lady joined us. I learnt that she and her husband had been in skincare for 30 years.

One evening, out of the blue, a friend of mine told me that the head of the Chinmaya Mission was at Vana, and I was lucky enough to meet him. We discussed Vedanta, and it was illuminating: I discovered a whole new way of meditating. We had conversations about beauty, skincare, and natural healing techniques for the stomach.

By the end of my stay, I had had so many wonderful experiences—both physical and mental, and mostly unexpected. Vana is beautiful; it is a healing space, not just a spa. Its treatments (I tried a Tibetan one for the first time) are fantastic and the food, delicious. I realised that it is possible to sit for dinner at 7pm and not get up until 10pm, and talk without the need for a drink or anything else. It was truly an extraordinary time.

JADE JAGGER DESIGNER

I've visited Jaipur regularly ever since I was nine years old. My family would make frequent trips to India, and I remember the Pink City as a magical place.

Now, I work here, making jewellery, as I've done for the past 20 years. Jaipur brings me a sense of inspiration and creativity that I find nowhere else. I often visit with designs and sketches already planned, but once I'm here, I suddenly discover new ideas because I'm always surrounded by so much craft and such great workmanship, especially when it comes to gems.

When I have some time, I love to go out to the monkey temples to find some solitude, or go fabric hunting in Ridhi Siddhi. I also love the sunsets from Amer Fort...you can't beat them. I've tried to work in other countries—Thailand, Italy and the UK—but I constantly find myself coming back to Jaipur, because it's where I feel I am at my most creative. It brings out something in me that's quite indefinable; I just know that I love it here. 🍷

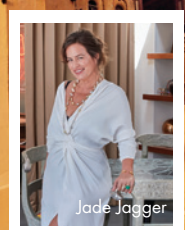


Photographs: Shutterstock (Amer Fort, City Palace)

City Palace



Amer Fort



Jade Jagger

