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# Living

The PARK Magazine



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LIVING spotlights global trends, glimpsed through the unique lens of The Park Hotels. It reflects on contemporary lifestyles by examining shifts in design, cuisine, technology, business, media and more.

This issue of LIVING is an investigation into the bespoke. It scopes the high degree of customization that the world wants today, in search for the ultimate, differentiated encounters and experiences.

# مقياس

**02** **Made to Measure: Bespoke Experiences at The Park**

**20** **A Slice of The Park**

**22** **Made to Measure in the Modern World / Tom Dixon**

**28** **The Park Explorer / Navi Mumbai & Bandra**

**32** **Bespoke, The Way I Like It / Anaheeta Pinto**

**36** **Park People / Grace Jones**

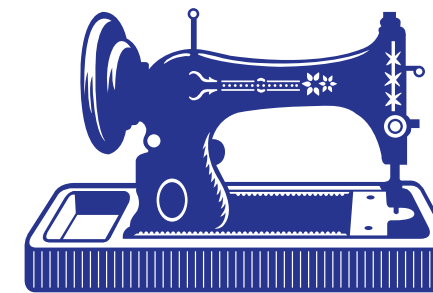
**38** **The Park Spotlight**

**42** **The Park Scoop**





# MADE TO MEASURE



## Bespoke Experiences at The Park

**“Show me a lobotomist who can work to the sixteenth of an inch using ten inch shears.” Richard Anderson, Master Tailor, Savile Row, London.**

The term bespoke was birthed at this high altar of gentlemen’s fashion sometime in the 1800’s, when cloth for a suit was ‘spoken for by an individual customer’. It represented taste, elegance and timeless quality, each garment produced with creativity and precision, made to measure for a specific customer’s size and preferences. A life of luxury was a life made to measure.

The definition of luxury has since gone through several transformations ranging from that which is highly priced to that which is pure indulgence. But in the midst of this flux, for some, the idea of luxury still harks back to bespoke: it’s not just ownership or consumption of an expensive object, but an enriching, individualized personal experience. Along with wrapping the user in tailored well-being and customization, it also gives birth to a strong perception of a brand as high-end and luxurious, which stays with the user for posterity.

In the world of hospitality, made to measure offerings are as varied as the people who want them – people who are well travelled and exposed to so much that they know exactly what turns them on. From providing all the bells and whistles, to stripping down the stay to a few choice luxuries for the Zen traveller; giving the green thinking opportunities to be involved in the ecology of the places they visit, to cyber buffs who want to be plugged into the cloud constantly... today’s wanderers want to be surprised and delighted, on their own terms. The Park Hotels entirely embody this philosophy, aiming to fulfill the diverse and particular needs of their guests through innovative differentiation: customized offerings with a one-size-fits-one attitude. Each member of our staff acts as a concierge to fulfill guests’ needs. From offering ‘one touch service’ where the guest can, with the touch of a button have any requirement fulfilled – to personalizing whole events and itineraries, the focus is on making the customer feel super-special. Understanding the profile of our guests allows us to gauge what is relevant to them, and lets us anticipate their needs in an intuitive way – a knowledge that is then played out in our services and offerings, our design and spaces.

Left A dramatic, fragmented light tunnel forms the entrance to Kismet, the glittering nightclub at The Park, Hyderabad



## *Spa Customization for Lisa Ray*

Actor and TV presenter Lisa Ray experienced an age-old ritual of the ladies of the Nizam's household – customized just for her at our award-winning spa Aura. She soaked in a luxurious, therapeutic Pearl Bath fashioned from shimmering pearls immersed in milk for 36 hours. Laced with essential oils and extract of rose, this calcium-rich bath makes skin, bones and hair strong and healthy.





In our rooms and suites, guests engage with a variety of products tailored to our specifications and standards. Exclusive Kama products in the bathrooms are a result of deep research into the Ayurvedic tradition. What emerges, are a variety of experiences made from wholly natural, very Indian sources like lotus, vetiver and basil, bringing their healing properties to our guests. Also in bathrooms at The Park, Hyderabad, the exotic Bath Menu gives guests a chance to enhance their relaxation with essences like rosemary and mint, henna, aloe vera and vanilla beans, which combat fatigue, rehydrate, soothe and leave behind lustrous skin. After their baths, guests can envelop themselves in cotton bathrobes immaculately crafted by Abraham and Thakore according to The Park Hotel's parameters of design, softness and comfort.

Our spa Aura treats guests to a mixture of emollients and oils in the Spa Range, redolent with jasmine and lavender, made for us by experts, in combinations and treatments fashioned for every guest. In Kolkata, the Hotel arranges luxury cruises down the Hooghly, focusing on the colonial history of the city, on the vistas of the old city, or simply to watch a glorious sunset, whatever takes the fancy of the guest who enjoys all of this from the decks of Skydancer, The Park's luxury cruiser. In our restaurants and for our parties, cuisine is created or transformed to meet individual tastes, out-of-the-box requests and guests' dietary restrictions. In Hyderabad, at the restaurant Aish, the chefs have gathered traditional heirloom recipes from the homes of keepers of these gastronomical secrets to create a menu of authentic Nizami & Hyderabadi delicacies. Interested diners can get a private glimpse into the unrevealed methods of this fragrant cuisine in our kitchens and by interacting with our chefs and staff. In another bespoke offering, our top chefs and service staff from the Chennai Hotel travelled to Coimbatore to cater our signature Thai cuisine for a well known industrialist's 60th birthday. All these offerings work seamlessly to form a cohesive brand that our guests instantly identify with, making their stay memorable and satisfying – and truly luxurious.

At our newest property, The Park, Hyderabad, Indian and international designers have translated their art to create a kaleidoscope of experiential offerings. No matter what the guest's current mood, they discover a space that complements it. After a day spent city-watching, they can sink into the cozy feel of the cigar bar Sicca Lounge or chill outdoors at Aqua by the pool. The intimate lounge bar Carbon is the perfect antidote to a rushed workday, while the pulsating vibe of the nightclub Kismet lifts spirits sky high. The designers of each of these spaces, (Conran and Partners, SOM, Khosla Associates and Black Sheep respectively) created bespoke offerings for The Park, Hyderabad, reflecting its design paradigm in their own unique ways. Suites designed by Bharti Kher, Subodh Gupta and Jean-Francois Lesange; Aish, the exclusive Hyderabadi & Andhra speciality restaurant conceived by Tarun Tahiliani; uniforms for Verandah, the all day dining restaurant by Lecoanet Hemant; lighting installations by Preksha Baid and Viya Home... all these are made to measure exactly to The Park's philosophy and desires, which in turn, are a studied, reflection of our guests' unique preferences.

Right From 'Bollywood Bandwagon' by Anurupa Roy, exhibited at The Park's New Festival. Roy employs a traditional form of puppetry to tell contemporary stories about Indian cinema with its exciting, dream-like quality, as well as its harsh behind-the-scene-realities



## *The Park's New Festival*

Our involvement in the cultural fabric of the region gives guests an inside look at the performance and art forms of India. Organized by the Prakriti Foundation and hosted by The Park Hotels in Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai and Kolkata, The Park's New Festival is one such initiative: encouraging emerging talent, revisiting our rich heritage and providing a platform for Indian and international artistes of both classical and experimental genres to share their work. This year, the festival had a line up that included Maya Krishna Rao, the Parijat Desai Dance Company, hip hop heroes DNOAX, Short +Sweet, a series of short plays, and museum theatre by Arun Pfaff. [www.theparksnewfestival.com](http://www.theparksnewfestival.com)





*Cutting Edge Design: Carbon*

Designed by Khosla Associates

“Central to the theme of the bar is the creation of an over scaled and dramatic labyrinth that boldly references the multiple facets of a black diamond, to evoke the feeling of being inside its heart. The concept thus interprets the central theme of the hotel, the Nizam of Hyderabad’s jewels, in a completely abstract and futuristic way.”

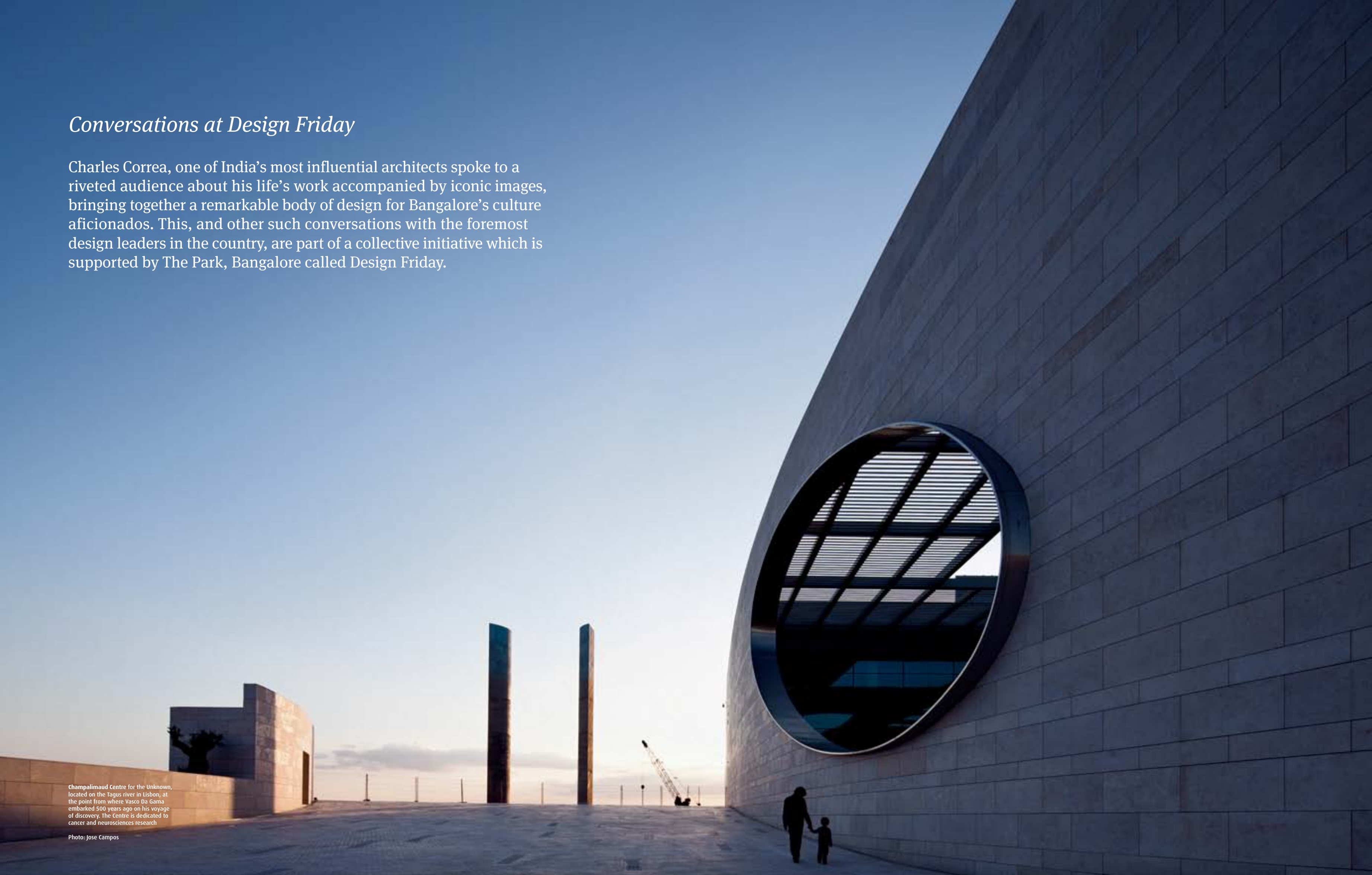


## *Conversations at Design Friday*

Charles Correa, one of India's most influential architects spoke to a riveted audience about his life's work accompanied by iconic images, bringing together a remarkable body of design for Bangalore's culture aficionados. This, and other such conversations with the foremost design leaders in the country, are part of a collective initiative which is supported by The Park, Bangalore called Design Friday.

Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown, located on the Tagus river in Lisbon, at the point from where Vasco Da Gama embarked 500 years ago on his voyage of discovery. The Centre is dedicated to cancer and neurosciences research

Photo: Jose Campos





## *Experience the Hooghly*

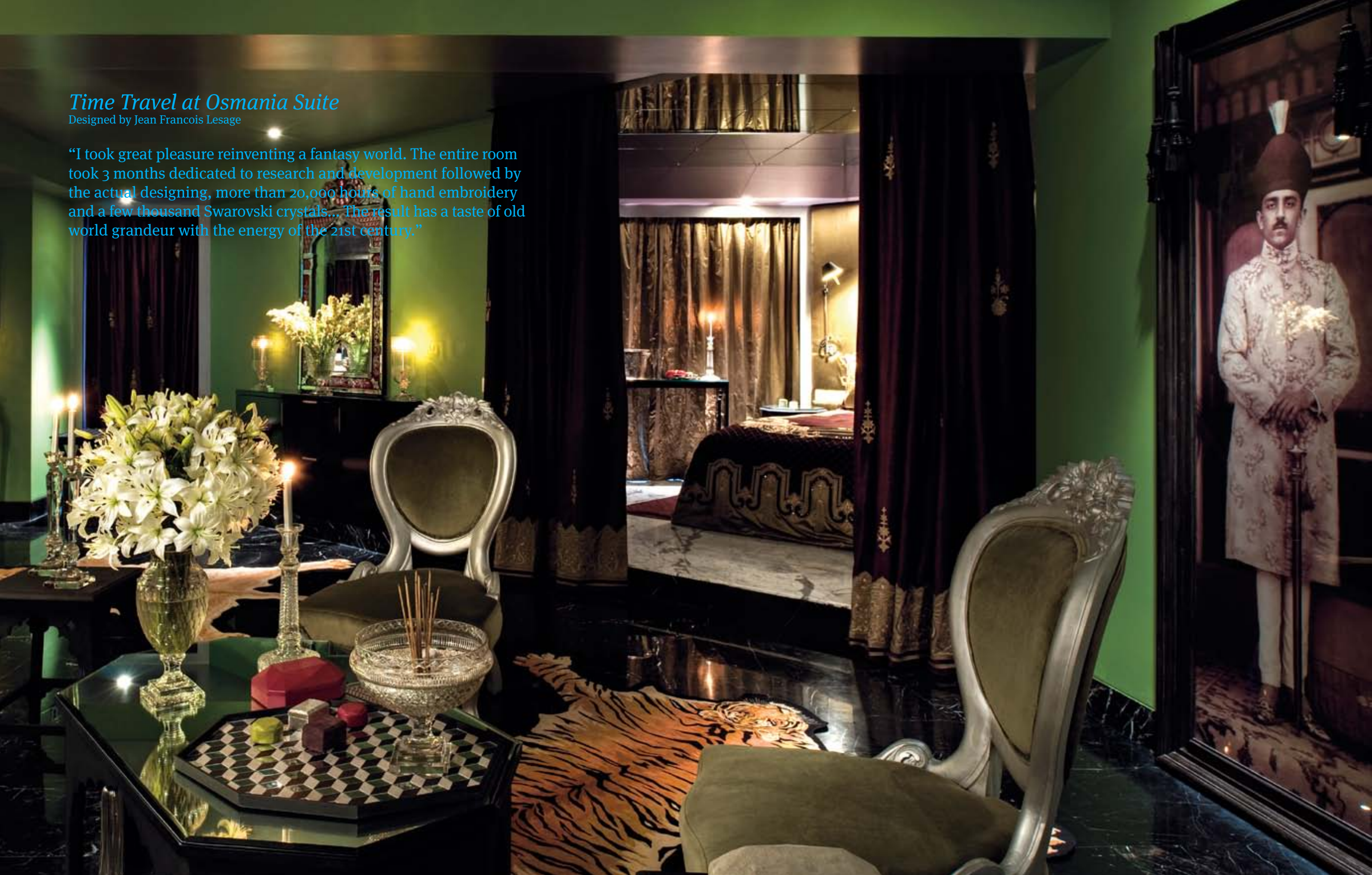
Experience the languid Hooghly on our luxury yacht, Sky Dancer that takes guests through the heart of the city of joy, Kolkata. Floating on the Hooghly River, they watch local boats silhouetted strikingly against a brilliant sunset, carved, crumbling temples and the vestiges of a bygone colonial era passing by, while being served by the butler in attendance. State of the art features and communication systems rub shoulders with colourful history to create a unique voyage through time.



## *Time Travel at Osmania Suite*

Designed by Jean Francois Lesage

“I took great pleasure reinventing a fantasy world. The entire room took 3 months dedicated to research and development followed by the actual designing, more than 20,000 hours of hand embroidery and a few thousand Swarovski crystals... The result has a taste of old world grandeur with the energy of the 21st century.”





## *Kaleidoscoping at Kismet*

Designed by Blacksheep, UK

“Our vision was to transport guests into a fantastical and escapist environment, where the spaces created fused the old and traditional with the ultra-modern – just like the city of Hyderabad itself. I was instantly struck by the iconic facade design and its references to the Nizam’s jewellery. We wished to respect this and use local craft traditions: 80% of the materials and commissions displayed within Kismet have been sourced or made locally.”







01



02

01 Uniforms by Tarun Tahiliani (for Aish), Lecoanet Hemant (for Verandah) and Payal Jain (for Aqua). The uniforms for The Park Hotels, New Delhi and Bangalore by Rohit Bal and Manoviraj Khosla respectively.

02 Bathrobes by Abraham and Thakore Immaculately crafted by Abraham and Thakore according to The Park Hotel's standards of fabric softness and comfort.

03 Ashtray custom designed for The Park Hotels.

04 Kama Bath and Moisturising Products Specially formulated for our guests for a rejuvenating in-room experience. Our signature fragrances created specially for The Park include Tulsi & Kamal Shampoo, Khus & Tulsi Body Cleanser for inner peace, Brahmakamal Body Moisturiser with anti-aging properties. And the essential Gulab Jal or rosewater, made from the special roses of Kannauj, a natural astringent.

05 The Park's Peace & Dream Aroma Oils Placed on the beds and public spaces for a soothing ambience.

06 Aura Spa Products Serenity guaranteed with 'Freedom' and 'Happiness', the two ranges of spa products including jasmine and lavender infused incense sticks, pillar candles and massage oils offered by Aura, the luxury day spa at The Park Hotels.

07 The Park's fragrant Incense Sticks + Holding Stand. Specific fragrances include Nag Champa which evokes a calm and meditative feel.



03



04

05



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07



## The Bespoke Connection

I think customization is the most natural thing to do in any creative field, and more so in the creation of cuisine. This is probably because food is a personal choice, and it relies heavily on the kind of conditioning the palate has been through.

Also, wherever chefs have a personal connect with the guest, something special is always in the offing. In restaurants it's common to customize menus for clients depending on the occasion, personal likes and dislikes, dietary requirements, culture and belief – or just the mood for the day!

## New Ways the World Likes to Eat

What's interesting is that customization extends to every aspect of food in hospitality – packed breakfasts and bento boxes for early flights, picnic hampers if you're out on a jaunt, special meals for dvd-watching in rooms, even chefs actually coming to your house and planning the whole week's chow – for a price of course!

## Making Guests Happy

From gluten free foods, kosher meals, food sans onion and garlic, eggless and sugar free dishes, formal sit down dinners, polymenues, low GI diets, protein rich diets to super spicy or very light food, a lot of emphasis is laid on making the guest experience a happy one. On many occasions our regular guests have come and asked us to make a certain dish that was on the restaurant menu some years ago, and the team has been more than happy to make it just the same way – it takes us on a nostalgic trip too! Often, a guest describes a dish that his friend has recommended and we then scramble our minds trying to find out the exact dish that had been served. Sometimes the dishes need pre-ordering, but our guests gladly make the effort.

## The Park Hotel's Food Philosophy

Our approach to food at The Park Hotels is warm and friendly and I think each of the chefs in our team embodies that in mind and spirit. Our chefs are at the forefront of most operations instead of just being behind the curtains. They directly speak to the guest to understand his/her requirement, and this has forged very special relationships, where the guests call the chefs or check with the restaurant team on who's cooking and make reservations accordingly! So I wouldn't hesitate to say that the chefs at The Park are more than happy to plan and plate up something made especially for the occasion.

## Improvisation to Measure

On one occasion we noticed that the weather was great outside and guests who were enjoying cocktails at Aqua were reluctant to come into the restaurant for dinner. That's when I decided to serve dinner in little bites – tiny versions of all courses including really small breads and qormas in miniature crockery! The guests were delighted as they enjoyed the evening and continued their cocktails while dinner was served alongside! This made for a fun evening of conversation and laughter instead of the formal sit-down that it was meant to be. The improvisation did the trick and ever since we have been doing miniaturized dinners where the guests get to taste a lot of different food, creating the ultimate play between conversation and dining.



## From The Park Hotels' creators of cuisine

*Chef Mandaar Sukhtankar (Executive Chef, The Park Hyderabad) describes how the food at The Park Hotels is often made to measure.*

## The Unspoken Secret of Bespoke Food

I think it's important to get a sense of the occasion: it could be a quiet dinner for two, a surprise party for a friend, a business meet over lunch or dinner, a celebration, or sometimes just a peaceful meal alone. The occasion decides the mood – is he feeling flamboyant or just homesick and looking for some comfort? Once we have a sense of the occasion, we then look at other aspects that need to be addressed like tastes, diets, age groups, cultural and ethnic profiles, budgets and more.

Right *Patthar ka paneer*. A twist on the classic mutton recipe. This unique dish features a special *malai paneer* that beautifully balances the sharp flavours of ginger-garlic and complements the earthy notes of lichen, otherwise known as *patthar ke phool*, or stone flowers



Tom Dixon

# MADE TO MEASURE IN THE MODERN WORLD

*Tom Dixon dropped out of the Chelsea School of Art to play bass in a band before teaching himself furniture design. Progenitor of iconic designs like the 'S' chair and Jack, his polypropylene "sitting, stacking, lighting thing", he went on to become Creative Director of Habitat, rejuvenating the brand. Later, with his own eponymous company, he produced some of the world's most remarkable lighting designs like Mirror Ball, Copper Shade, Wingback chair and the Beat light. Tom Dixon's award-winning work is exhibited in the permanent collections of the V&A in London, MOMA New York and Tokyo, and Centre Beaubourg (Pompidou) in Paris. In 2000, Tom was awarded an OBE.*

The overwhelming expansion of manufacturing, distribution and consumption world-wide has resulted in an overwhelming surfeit of goods at increasingly affordable prices. More and more people have access to similar looking goods with ever more features.

For manufacturers and designers, the belief had been for a long time that the only way to go was mass market: high volume production in an increasingly global market.

The reality for us has been slightly different – as a relatively small and rapidly growing independent company, we can take advantage of all the swiftly evolving technologies that give us access to communication with our partners worldwide. Whether they are a new nightclub in Hong Kong that want us to design a custom bar or a favourite factory in Moradabad enquiring about a small order of lampshades, the future for us is about fast to market, and close to the client, with extreme flexibility and custom ideas that suit the client perfectly.

That could be called the new bespoke, and it suits perfectly the emerging technologies in digital manufacturing. But even more important, it's now demanded by the discerning customer, who wants something different from their neighbour.

So for us, our business model depends on creating a complex balance of domestic and international influences, high-tech and handmade, mass production and one-off. It means tapping into the whole world of manufacturing skills, and an entire globe of possible customers, offering a service or product which is a mix of innovative mass production and tailor-made interiors and objects.

This attitude is illustrated by a recent commission for a private members club in Central District, Hong Kong. The client was a huge James Bond fan, so the scope to create one-off dramatic pieces was immense. We drew inspiration from the traditional British games rooms and created a wall lined with plaster castings of books on a shelf. We also made a faceted mirror corridor that led from the street and into a sharp rock cavern. One of the spaces was a pool lounge by day and a night club by night. Our solution was to have the pool tables on winches so they could be pulled up to the ceiling to make room for the midnight dancing.

At the start of the year we refurbished the restaurant at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. The challenge there was to reference and respect the long and illustrious history of the academy and its existing architecture, whilst injecting a strong sense of world-class contemporary operational elements. There were already some dynamic bespoke pieces on display including the giant frescos on three of the walls. We looked at the structure of the existing environment and created unique pieces and finishes using materials appropriate to the space including velvet, brass, marble and lava stone. We spent considerable time and energy researching and learning about the environment before we made our own mark. We divided the restaurant into different zones, each inspired by some of the Royal Academy Greats: Turner, Sir John Soane and Paolozzi. For the Paolozzi inspired area, for example, we created a bespoke counter top using the oldest brick producer in England.





Restaurant at the Royal Academy of Arts in London (refurbished) by Tom Dixon creating bespoke installations using ancient sculpture sourced from the museum and frescoes that reference great artists



## The new bespoke is now demanded by the discerning customer, who wants something different from their neighbour.

During our research we gained privileged access to an amazing archive of art in the basement of the gallery. We unearthed a selection of sculptures from the RA's permanent collection and created a contemporary cubic glass unit to house them in the middle of the restaurant.

A recent commission for Audi for the launch of the A8 on Miami Beach got us involved in making 200 lightweight LED lamps that were designed, rapid manufactured, assembled and shipped all in six weeks using the highest tech digital manufacturing processes which really demonstrated the potential of the modern world of manufacturing.

I think every step of the way I want to try to work out what I can do that isn't bland, that isn't ordinary, that isn't the same, that isn't trying to mimic stuff and that has a strong point of view. I think the point of view, still, for me is the most important thing. So bespoke design gives the designer and the client an opportunity of being unique when increasingly most people look for the either super-affordable or super-mass produced, and people get more and more scared of being different...



Right Tasmania Ballroom, a private club in Hong Kong, designed with whimsical lighting and innovative materials used to theatrical effect for a James Bond theme



# THE PARK EXPLORE THE

## Navi Mumbai & Around

### Karnala Bird Sanctuary

Pick up your binoculars, slip on your hiking shoes and drive to the beautiful Karnala Bird Sanctuary and then trek to the medieval Karnala Fort for a spectacular view of the valley. Spot the elusive Ashy Minivet or Malabar Trogon among 150 species of resident and 37 species of migrant birds, besides animals like wild boar and four horned antelope.

### Belapur Creek and Fort

Picnic by the beautiful mangrove-fringed Belapur Creek before it is completely lost to illegal sand mining. While you're there, walk up to the Belapur Fort that was once the pride of many a powerful empire of the Siddis, Portuguese and Marathas.

### Pandavkada Waterfalls

From June to September, visit these cascading waters set among lush hills for a lovely day trip, complete with splendid views and a clean swimming hole. Frequented by rappellers in the dry season, the Kharghar Hills are also home to remarkable Buddhist caves. (do check with us about the right time to go)

### Inorbit Mall

If it's a day at the mall you're in the mood for, head to Navi Mumbai's biggest and most popular, Inorbit Mall. Over 130 shops, an atrium abuzz with live entertainment, and a food court serving up bites from around the world, it's a fun place to hang out.

Inorbit Mall, Sector 30A, Vashi, +91 22 6777 7666, 11am-9.30pm (for shops), 11am-11pm (food court)

**Pune** Only 1 ½ hours from Navi Mumbai lies the city of Pune. Having grown from a quiet cantonment town to a cosmopolitan university city and now the country's eighth largest metropolis, Pune still has a nostalgic small town air about it. Famous for its Osho Ashram, Shrewsbury biscuits, and colleges, the city is a growing business hub. It is also home to The Park's next landmark hotel, opening in 2013.

## Hill Stations & Holiday Spots Nearby

### Lonavala and Khandala

Drive 96 km out of the madness of Mumbai to the lush hill stations of Khandala and Lonavala. Trek up the Duke's Nose or hike to the steep Tiger's Leap. Drive around the winding roads and visit ancient Buddhist grottos while you munch on the famous Lonavala Chikki.

### Matheran

There's one big difference between the typical Indian hill station and Matheran. In this picturesque little town, the only way to travel is on horseback, hand drawn rickshaws or on foot – because private cars are not allowed on its laterite lanes. Fresh air, sylvan woods, a racecourse, misty lakes, adventurous treks and a quaint toy train: Matheran is a journey back in time.



BANDRA

**Bandra**

Mumbai's most happening suburb, Bandra is a heady mix of charming colonial bungalows, swanky restaurants and clubs, high street shopping, labyrinthine lanes lined with boutiques and cafes, Bollywood homes and the great Arabian sea. When in Bandra, don't miss out on our picks, listed alongside.

**The Art Loft**

Everyone's invited to this artists' loft! Get in touch with your creative side through workshops in everything from painting to belly dancing and photography to wine appreciation. There's art in everything and everyone – their lofty ideals bring art right back down to earth.

Valentino Rest 1st Floor, Mehboob Studios, Bandra West, +91 99304 83966, Mon-Sat 10am-7pm, Sun 11am-7pm

**MadoWat**

Funky. Quirky. Totally off the style charts. MadoWat is among the country's coolest unisex salons run by celebrity stylist Sapna Bhavnani. And yes, if that familiar face in the mirror next to you has an uncanny resemblance to John Abraham, it's most likely really him. No trespassing – by appointment only.

Ground Floor, Hemkund Society, Plot No. 450, 14th Road, Bandra West, +91 22 6529 0288 / 6529 0289

**Pali Village Cafe**

Refreshing Sangria, authentic pizza, piquant Greek salad, creamy risotto and sinful chocolate fondant in a quaint European bungalow. As the sun streams in through the latticed windows and you sip your wine, Nina Simone croons that she's Feelin' Good, and you wish everyday could be a Sunday.

Ambedkar Road, Pali Naka, Bandra West, +91 22 2605 0401, 12.30pm-1am

**Just Phat**

If it's in, it's at Just Phat. Get your hands on the trendiest boots, belts, bikinis and baubles at Bandra's own Bangkok bazaar. And, what's more, it's easy on the wallet. Wardrobe makeover, anyone?

5 Shantivan Bldg, Manuel Gosalves Rd, Bandra West, +91 22 2644 1488

**Hawaiian Shack**

Chill out with some good ol' draught beer and retro beats from Elvis to Dire Straits at this watering hole with a boat-shaped bar. It's packed, noisy and a whole lot of fun – every day of the week. For a change of scene, you can clamber upstairs to its contemporary hip-hop-meets-lounge avatar. A Bandra institution.

Plot No. 339, 16th Road, Khar, Linking Road, Bandra West, +91 22 2605 8753 / 2604 1749, +91 80 99672 11694, 6pm-1.30am

**The Attic**

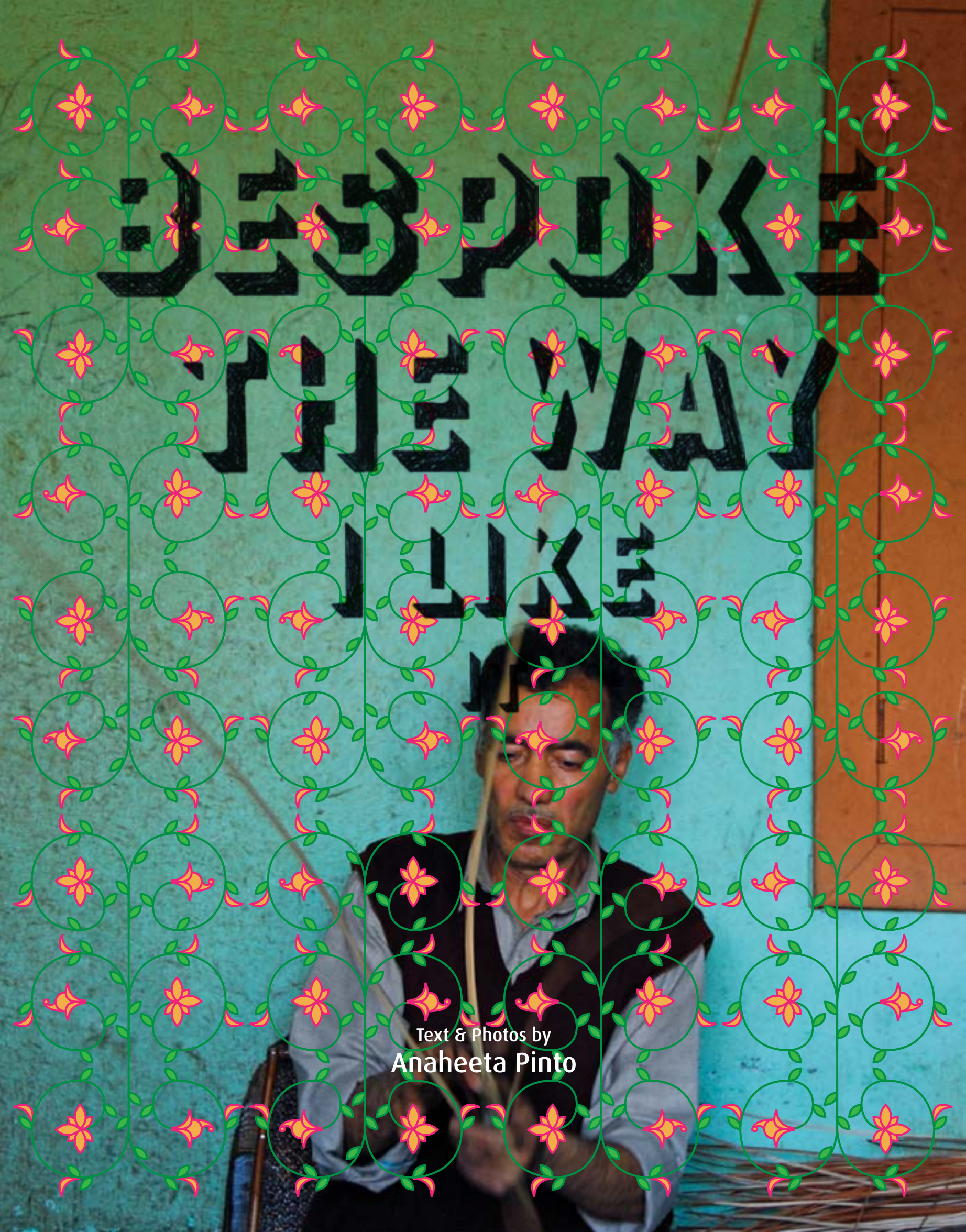
A collection of curious in-home accessories and bric a brac, from bucket-turned-stools to illustrated cushions, Putomayo world music to designer pret and the classic to the avant garde.

Bir Sagar, 396/20, Flat No.1, End of 17th Road, Santacruz West, +91 22 3216 9292, 11am-8.30pm

**Linking Road**

Browse and shop your heart out here, among makeshift stalls brimming with clothes, *chappals*, junk jewellery and haggling customers interspersed with wayside *chaatwalas* and juice vendors. Further up the road lie the usual cookie-cutter brand showrooms. But the street's where the deals are at. Bargain away!





Text & Photos by  
Anaheeta Pinto

*Anaheeta Pinto is a compulsive traveller, part-time freelance writer and full-time mom. Here, she writes about a unique travel experience that represents a new wanderlust: highly customized travel. From eco journeys to women-only tours, from explorations of specialized food regions to itineraries like Anaheeta's that specifically follow the path of craft traditions, travel is being made to measure to people's particular longings and interests.*

This summer, my two children and I joined a small group of like-minded travellers for 5 days of immersion in Kashmir's crafts heritage. The itinerary: to visit master craftsmen, in their homes, at their workshops, to talk with them, eat with them and if we wanted, buy from them. This was a perfect plan for me, but the kids... hmmm... they had no idea what was in store for them. For that matter nor did I.

So, I did what any i-mother would do. Put them on a course of Kashmir + wikipedia. 'This is crewel!', I excitedly declared to my 8 year old footballer. 'Kashmiris use this hook-needle to embroider cloth'. Crewel you are, I thought I heard Messi mutter, this line of thought doing nothing for his wii imagination. Hopeful, I turned to my daughter. 'You see this leaf my darling, it may resemble the maple but belongs to the magnificent chinar of Kashmir.' Summoning all her twelveteen wisdom, her reply came swift and firm: 'Errrr... So??'

Was this the hubris of an overzealous mother? Was it too much to expect the kids to appreciate travel through the prism of crafts and the artisan?

The first day at the willow basket makers gave me the answer. The workshop, attached to the store, was tiny. The 9 of us on tour, settled on gunny sacks, sheaves of willow, a broken ledge, the window sill... and watched the craftsmen at work... spellbound by their wan, chiselled faces, their nimble fingers splitting each reed into three with effortless ease.

Messi was transfixed. One of the men sensed his attention and their eyes briefly met. No words exchanged, just a nod, a smile, and my football hero was sitting beside him... a reed in one hand, the splitter in the other. First, he watched, then he imitated. He worked the willow again and again, till all at once, it split. Into a delightfully uneven bouquet for me... as the morning sun latticed through that room full of baskets and the crisp mountain breeze brushed my back, I watched in wonder how craft became a leveller. Young or old, rich or poor, artisan or not, the instinct to create with your hands is so powerful and so natural.

Next stop, the Pashmina weaver's home, deep in the heart of troubled Srinagar. But on the way, visits to two mosques, both completely unexpected in style and architecture. No dome but pagoda-like spires. No whitewashing, all earthy wood and brick. How telling, that these places of worship are also edifices to Kashmir's little told history of cultural confluence. Engulfed by a 15th century old bazaar, daily life was normal. Or so it appeared. Not far from there, we strolled into an abandoned monument, apparently meant to be a mosque but never was because, we were told, it was built not for God but to glorify the vanity of a queen. By the looks of it, we were the only ones there. Quiet and beautiful, some sat in the grassy courtyard and others wandered. Caught up in my thoughts, I dreamily walked in. All of a sudden, the silence broke with horrible shouting. 'Get out of there! Have you no respect? Walking in with your slippers, would you do that in your temple? How dare you insult a place of worship!'...I froze. No one stirred. Not knowing what I should do first, run out or take off my footwear, I did both. Scrambling into the sunlit open, I cried, '*maaf karo bhaisaab, bhool ho gayi.*' Forgive me, I made a mistake. I said it over and over again.



He was unmoved, staring me down with defiance, power and complete self-righteousness. The gunman of the Central Police Reserve Force, who I hadn't noticed earlier, stiffened. Quickly gathering our things, my children, we hurried out, frightened, humiliated and hurt.

From there, a short walk through narrow lanes separating high brick walls, we were warmly greeted by Jan Mohammed and his extended family of 20+ brothers, wives and children. Weaving is in their blood, he told us. The women spin, the men weave. From fuzzy bales of *pashm* we watched Jaansaab's wife spin yarn so fine, you couldn't see it. For that matter, nor can she! Her work done, the little children help in winding one ply into two. Then comes the dyeing, preparing of the loom and finally, the masterful weaving... in the chill of winter, when snow falls relentlessly, the weavers remain in small lofts warmed by the heat of their moving looms and the gradual forming of cloth above their thighs. As each weaver keeps time and schedule to the count of his prayer beads, work becomes meditative. One bead, one beat. When the *misbaha* is done, they take a break.

**I see a broader definition of luxury and customization emerging in travel. The luxury to meaningfully enter and maybe, participate in local culture. The ability to customize travel that ventures beyond the beaten path to get under the skin of a people.**

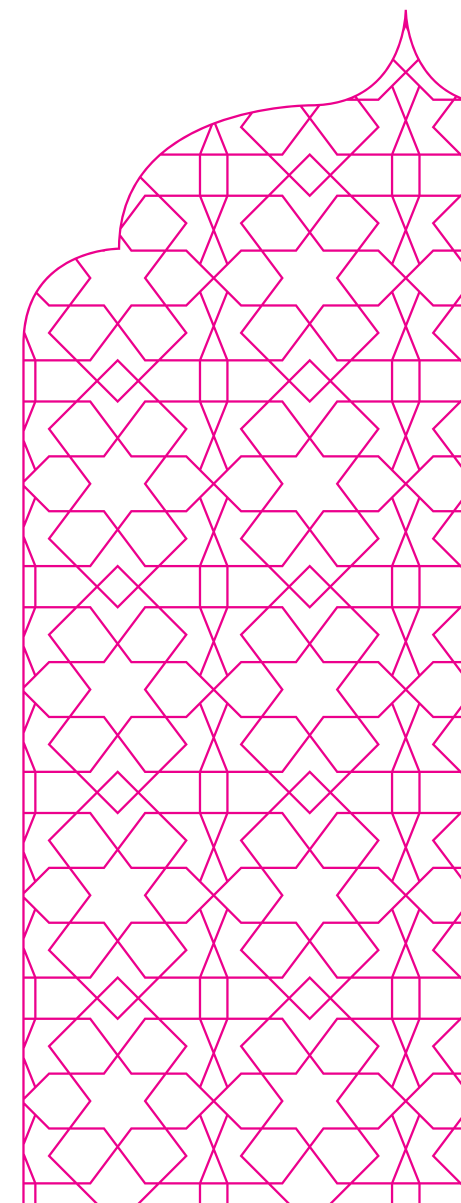
The next day, a visit to the carpet weavers. I would have thought they'd give us a grand introduction... sort of roll out the red carpet(s) from their prized collection. But instead, they led us to a small loom - on it, an incomplete carpet, barely 2 ft high and already three years in the making. Yes, I was enormously impressed with the Romeo-Juliet-like fable unfolding on one side and an exquisite floral pattern that simultaneously developed on the other. And yes, the density of knots, the fineness of thread and the sheer complexity of the weave were, without a doubt, unparalleled. But what caught my eye was a bundle of long sepia paper strips, replete with wondrous symbols, carelessly bundled on the loom. Could it be a weaver's score? Indeed it was! A language of notations that only composer and executor can interpret. How wonderful to imagine that each carpet is first imagined in symbols before it is created in knots!

Like this, we met copper smiths, walnut carvers, *kani* shawl weavers, *sozni*, *kani*, *ari* embroiderers. My twelveteen recognised the chinar leaf in doors, on shawls and along the Dal Lake. Messi had to be torn away from polishing a walnut bowl and what do you know! We actually bumped into Juan Marcos, the Brazilian footballer who came to the valley four years ago and stayed on to open a football academy for Kashmiri youth! Juan happened to be at a crafts mela we were visiting.



You should have seen Messi's expression that evening. It had 'awesome' written all over it! When asked to write about my bespoke travel experiences, I have to admit, I was reticent. Was my tour to Kashmir really bespoke? What is bespoke anyway? For the most part, it's a word that implies exclusivity and tends to link luxury to the wallet. But if you take away the affectation and even put aside the word, I see a broader definition of luxury and customization emerging in travel. The luxury to meaningfully enter and maybe, participate in local culture. The ability to customize travel that ventures beyond the beaten path to get under the skin of a people. And perhaps most significantly, an opportunity to not 'go and see' but 'travel and experience'.

Our crafts tour to Kashmir was, for me, the perfect family travel experience. We saw and learnt so much in such little time. From everyday insights, encounters both planned and chanced, fulfilling and frightening... to intimate local and family moments. From small realizations about the deep predicament of people living in uncertainty... to the supreme resilience of craft in the face of Kashmir's religious and geopolitical complexities. My children now speak of *ari*, *sozni* and *gushtaba* with delightful familiarity. When Srinagar is in the news, they tune in. As for me, the memories of an unforgettable journey will remain etched in my mind. Almost as deeply as the carvings on my precious walnut treasure box.





Voted among VH1's 100 Greatest Women of Rock and Roll, singer-supermodel-actor **Grace Jones** is one of many international guests who loves The Park Hotels. This Grammy nominee of Conan the Destroyer fame was never the typical '80s icon: she defied and redefined her era. Her unapologetically wild live acts (it's not just the lions and leopards we're talking about) and quirky costumes could give Lady Gaga a run for her money. A distinctly androgynous image complete with her signature short-cropped-flat-topped hair and unique sound won her a cult following, earning her the nickname 'Queen of Gay Discos'. The feisty sexagenarian continues to thrill audiences around the world, including at The Apeejay Centenary celebrations at The Park, Hyderabad.

People who  
love The Park

# THE PARK HYDERABAD







A birds-eye view of the monarchs of style

# انڈین اسٹائل

# ازبک اسٹائل



**01 Rohit Bal** India's undisputed king of couture, Rohit Bal's ensembles have draped Uma Thurman, Naomi Campbell and Anna Kournikova. His collections, flamboyant yet always exquisitely elegant, grace ramps in the fashion capitals of the world including New York, London and Paris. Handcrafted to perfection, every Rohit Bal creation exudes sophisticated grandeur in its texture, embellishment and style. Starting his exclusive label way back in 1990 when India was thought of as a garment production destination, he has been instrumental in putting the country and its glorious embroidery techniques on the fashion map of the world. A peek into any of his boutiques will tell you why Time Magazine called him 'The Master of Fabric and Fantasy'.

**03 Yodhaka** Nigerian street drums, Algerian Rai, Brazilian Samba and a generous serving of Hindustani classical, all stirred up with a contemporary transcultural beat – Yodhaka's music is a global curry of sounds, where every flavour is distinct but every dish a complete delight. The Chennai based band features a motley crew of musicians and dreamers like Darbuka Siva (drums and percussion), Pradeep Vijay (vocals/guitar), Subhiksha (vocals), John Antony (guitar) and Keba Jeremiah (bass). Since 2006, this young and experimental quintet has played across the country's music festivals, steadily acquiring a loyal following among the musically evolved.

**04 Bickram Ghosh & Greg Ellis** When a new-age tabla maestro from India and a critically acclaimed Californian percussionist meet, you can expect instant magic. It took a decade for Bickram Ghosh and Greg Ellis to record an album together – and it has been worth the wait. Widely recognized as the current face of Indian percussion, Ghosh's impeccable rhythm and skill has transfixed aficionados at venues across the world like Royal Albert Hall and Carnegie Hall. He is a prolific soloist who has worked with the likes of Pandit Ravi Shankar (featuring on his Grammy winning record). Ellis, besides working on soundtracks of movies like Matrix, Narnia and 300, has collaborated with an eclectic range of musicians from Beck to Ustad Zakir Hussain and now, his teaming up with Bickram Ghosh makes for exciting experimentation of beats beyond borders.

**02 Papa CJ** To this MBA from the hallowed halls of Oxford University, laughing is serious business. Papa CJ is a Delhi born, Calcutta bred, Oxford educated international stand up comic. In 2008, he was among the top 10 in NBC's Last Comic Standing. In a world where political correctness is taken too seriously, he nonchalantly makes digs at everything from racism to sexuality and has had people across North America, Europe, Africa and Asia laughing along. All proceeds from his comedy acts go to Papa CJ's charity, One Child.

**05 Warsi Brothers** The Warsi Brothers need no introduction to those with a penchant for the unique musical genre of *qawwali*. Hailing from Hyderabad's first family of music, the current generation of Warsi Brothers traces its lineage to the royal courts of Mughal India and later, Hyderabad's Asaf Jahi Dynasty. The young brothers Nazeer and Naseer Ahmed Khan Warsi have ably carried on the tradition of the *Qawwal Bachchon ka Gharana*, keeping the Sufi art alive in contemporary times. Their purist Sufiana *qawwali*, *thumri* and *bandish* has entranced audiences all over the world from Mecca to the US.

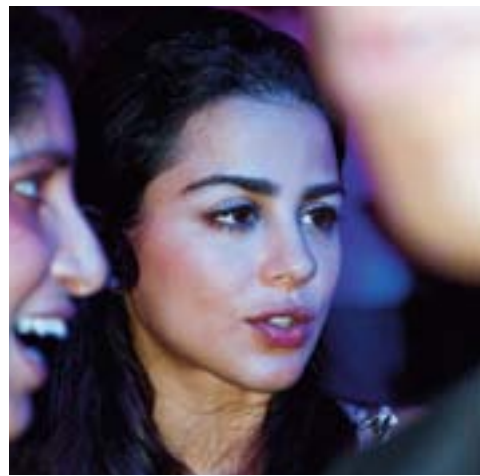
The Warsi Brothers performing at the courtyard of The Park, Hyderabad at the 100 year celebrations of Apeejay Surrendra Group

*We usually raise our caps to a new crop of artists, designers, performers and other young achievers. In this issue of the magazine, we celebrate some icons, the greats who have paved the paths of creative and musical genius, inspiring those to come. The Apeejay Surrendra Group celebrated its centenary with a two-day party at The Park, Hyderabad, the newest and hippest of our hotels. With a star-studded guest list and a celebrity entertainment line-up of these iconic performers, it was hard to tell whether the show was on stage or off! This edition, we shine the spotlight on our favourites from the show.*



# 100 Years of Apeejay Surrendra Group

The Park, Hyderabad hosted a 3 day party bringing together of some of India's brightest, most creative, and influential people to celebrate the 100 year centenary of the Apeejay Surrendra Group. Adding chutzpah to the event was a line up of outstanding performances by international and Indian artistes.







Artiger  
The Park Hotels

WITH  
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Art + Craft + Culture + People



ARTIGER  
— arts for the tiger —

*Artiger* The Park Hotels are part of a new initiative which looks to involve artists in the fight to save the magnificent tiger. *Artiger* was conceived by Aparajita Jain, Anandita Baig and Swapan Seth. A tiger trail was laid across India, with 50 life-size fiberglass tigers created by 58 of the country's finest artists like Paresh Maity, Manu Parekh, Anjum Singh, Suhasini Kejrwal and more, all on a pro bono basis. First displayed at Rashtrapati Bhavan, each tiger has been adopted by a leading corporate house including The Park Hotels. The proceeds go to the Ranthambore Foundation, towards the conservation of India's national animal.

The Park Hotel's tiger is displayed in all its majestic beauty in the lobby of the Hyderabad Hotel.