

Living

THE PARK Magazine



Texture

LIVING / Issue 9 / Texture

LIVING is a barometer of 21st century thinking, traversing the landscape of global shifts in contemporary lifestyle and choices. It reflects on a variety of inventive ideas, glimpsed through the perspective of The Park Hotels, which is 'Anything But Ordinary'.

As an element of reality, texture layers and augments experiences in design, cuisine, technology, art and more. In this issue of Living we examine the folds and levels into which textures transport us at The Park Hotels, and in life itself.

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Nerve Endings

Textured Experiences at The Park

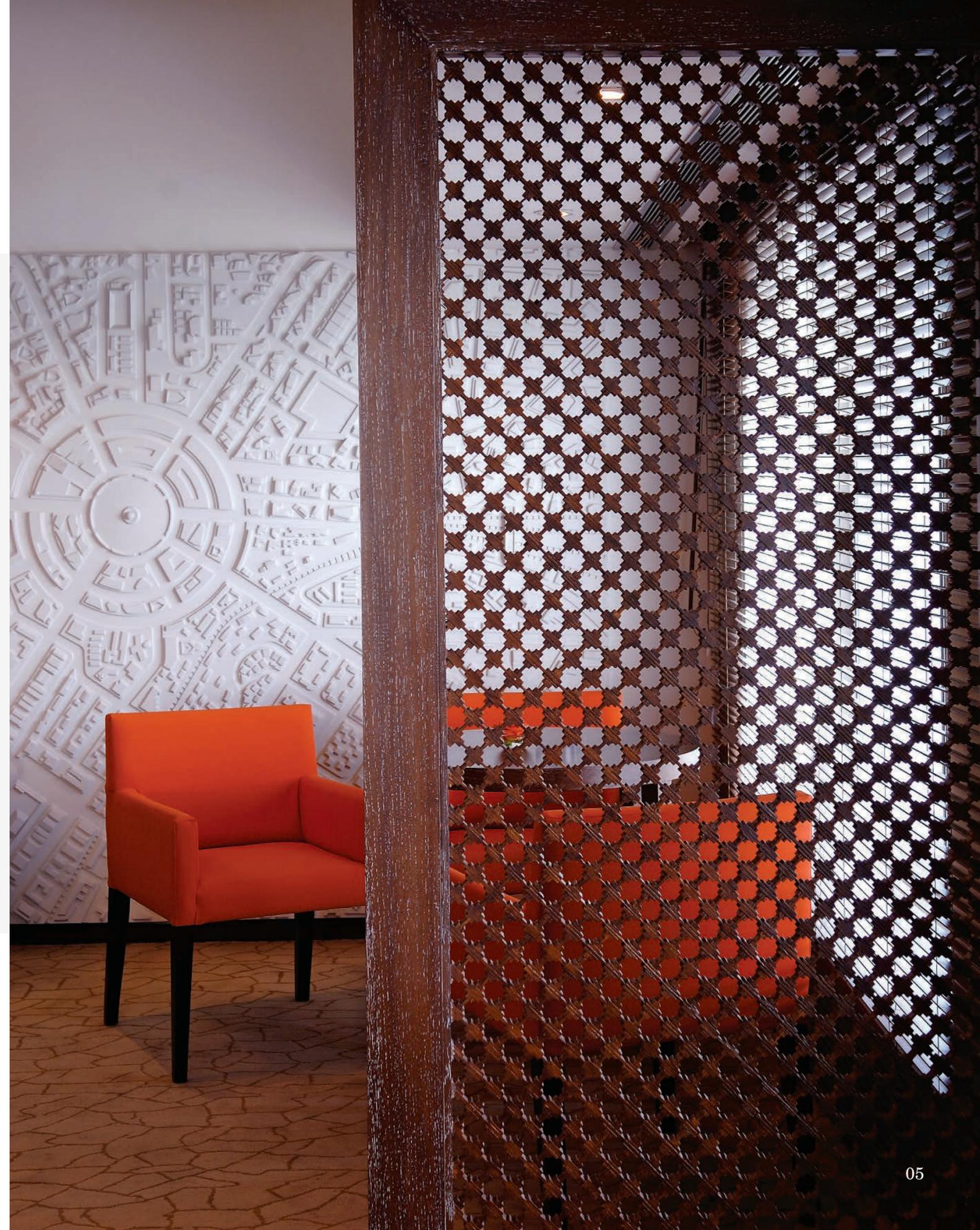
When a child is just beginning to wake to its environment, it uses all its senses in an exciting journey, circumnavigating its world, touching, feeling, hearing, tasting. New discoveries delight it, terrains and patterns enchant it — forming the texture of a unique, special universe. As adults, we tend to notice less of these visual, tactile or auditory inputs — perhaps that’s just part of growing up. But still, there are moments that move us more than others, fleeting encounters that shake us out of the normalcy of the everyday.

These encounters are not usually one-dimensional — they are more than the sum of their parts. They arise out of the unexpected, from a duality... a bump amidst the smooth, the slippery on the heels of the rough, the extraordinary round the corner from the banal. Someone famously said, *“Some people weave burlap into the fabric of our lives, and some weave gold thread. Both contribute to make the whole picture beautiful and unique.”*

The unpredictability of a rough, handwoven fabric under one’s fingertips is exciting, its fine texture punctuated with knots. And yet, this duplicity, these differing qualities, combine to make just one wonderful fabric, whether it is that of a weave — or of human experience. The Park Hotels tap into this idea and create a multi-faceted tapestry their guests can navigate through, converging into a unique expression of hospitality, cuisine & design.

Left: Charminar by Sudarshan Shetty by the poolside at The Park, Hyderabad, creating a visual layering as well as spinning a cultural thread that connects with the old city

Our lives are enriched when laced through with skeins of texture, physical or emotional. How much more is the pleasure of a carpet when besides covering a floor, beyond even just looking beautiful, it can be sunk into. In music, it is complexity in composition; in art, surface textures that add soul. *“Texture is the most enduring and ubiquitous underpinning of form... Certainly a calming, meditative and appealing world for both the eye and mind,”* said artist and photographer Lynda Lehman. A poem’s structure is enhanced by metaphor, imagery or rhyme schemes, which are the literary version of texture. From Kurosawa to Satyajit Ray, the best films are those that fill out the skeleton of the story with the fleshiness of nuanced characterisations and cinematography.



Right: Three dimensional relief map of **Connaught Place** created on a wall at The Residence Lounge at **The Park, New Delhi**





Texture is inherent in The Park Hotels. Priya Paul, Chairperson of The Park Hotels elaborates: *“The Park Hotels are where unusual experiences are possible. We are known for creativity and innovation which is ingrained in our collective DNA. As we continue to grow, we realised the need to communicate boldly, the strength of our brand. The fresh design language strongly reflects contemporary India and our ethos. It is strikingly bold and captures our personality perfectly.”* At The Park Hotels, guests are now offered a textured menu: three distinct categories of hotels within the brand architecture, replete with choices of style, budget and location.

‘The Park’ category includes the original city hotels in Kolkata, Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Navi Mumbai and Chennai, with their devoted following — urban lovers of style from India and abroad. In these properties, the hallmarks of The Park brand, cutting edge art & design, pulsing parties, serene spas and remarkable cuisine overlay guests’ visits, evoking moods that vary from the heightened electric to the meditative.

‘The Park Collection’ comprises boutique spaces that are intimate & eclectic. Small, high-end properties with just about 20-40 rooms, they go beyond superior hospitality. Vijay Dewan, Managing Director, The Park Hotels, expands on this idea: *“Generations of global travellers share a strong connection with our brand identity. With The Park Collection, we have created a brand that goes truly beyond the everyday, capturing the spirit of boutique destination hotels. It seduces our guests into a world of dramatic design and unrivalled leisure. Each hotel is intimate, personalised and tailored to transmit an inimitable guest experience.”*

The Pod in Chennai is located on a chic high street, yet exudes the charm of an urban sanctuary with stylised spaces that transform organically from night to day. Others are set in exquisite locales, like The Park on Vembanad Lake in the backwaters of Kerala. Surrounded by lush mangroves and paddy fields, presented with local delicacies and performances, the guest feels one with the beauty and culture of Kerala.

Adding to the diversity of the brand are the trendy new hotels, ‘Zone at The Park’. Says Priya Paul, *“As we grew our brand, we saw the need for a new kind of hotel, one that has the essence of The Park, but is more affordable for customers in tier-two towns and suburbs of larger cities around India.”* These hotels are distinguished by spaces that are dynamic yet welcoming, and also catalyse social synergies, their defining characteristics being ‘social’, ‘nimble’ and ‘at ease’.

The Zone’s hotels are chameleon-like in character, fitting the needs of various types of people, at various times of day. They offer a buzzing atmosphere for eating, drinking and networking, whether for work or pleasure. These hotels are liberating and multifunctional environments — truly the hospitality hubs of the future.

Understanding how nuanced environments can suffuse people with pleasure, The

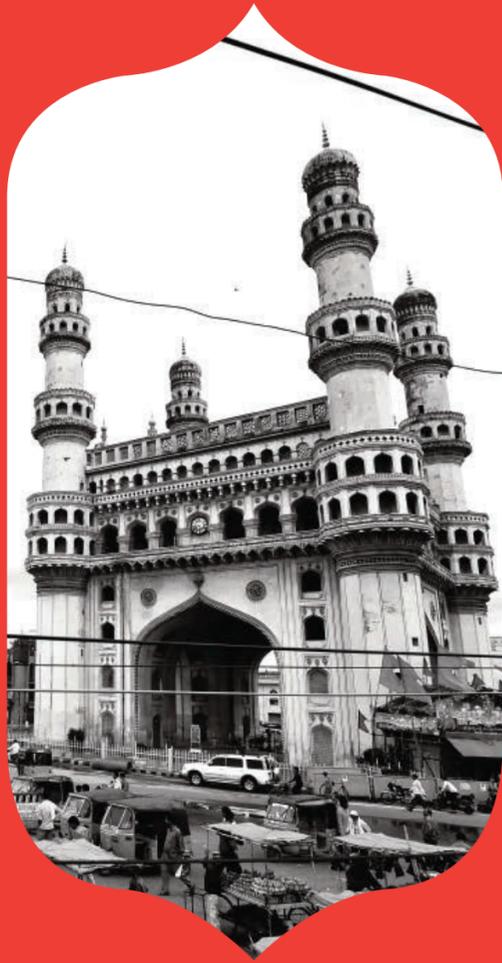


Park Hotels carefully craft guest experiences by employing hand-craft and folk art in rooms, in furnishings, as design elements and as inspiration. There is also a drive towards cultural responsibility and building awareness of fading traditions that provokes viewers. Artists and creators are given due recognition and the artistic capital of each region is built up by the Hotels: they are more than just loci of hospitality, they are the conservers of cultural hybridity.

By adding rich details upon commonplace engagements, The Park Hotels allow limitless possibilities for guests to rediscover that child-like exuberance of the senses, and experience a stay that is Anything but Ordinary.

Anything but Ordinary.

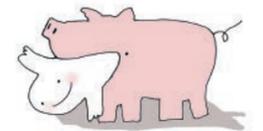






Consumed

Marije Vogelzang's Designs on Eating



Marije Vogelzang is a designer who is inspired by the origin, preparation, etiquette, history and culture of food. She graduated from the Design Academy in Eindhoven, Netherlands in 2000 and chose to explore what she calls 'eating design'. She has developed (and recently sold) two experimental restaurants called PROEF in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Now, Vogelzang works independently on restaurant concepts as well as initiating social projects and workshops to educate and inspire. She also does some extensive work for food companies like Nestle. She designs art installations and creates new food rituals. Her work and her book, Eat Love, have been published and acknowledged globally. Most recently she curated a large exhibition at the Designhuis in Eindhoven (NL) called Food Cultures: About Eating and Design. She is currently working on projects and menus at The Park Hotels.



You don't call yourself a food designer, but an eating designer. Tell us about what you do.

Food design is such a new field of design, which I think is funny because designers make everything for humans, and they have left the most important thing up to chefs! And chefs do a great job, it's a serious profession... but there is more to food than cooking it. You can also look at the experience of eating your food — this is what designers work on, together with chefs. I am not a food designer, because food is already designed by nature. I find the emotional part of eating very interesting and so I create works that make people appreciate food in a different way.

In a very basic way, how does texture play out in food and food design?

Firstly, I think of course it's the texture of food itself — the physical texture, whether it's soft or crumbly. The look of the food is important, and even smell — smell has a texture. You can have a heavy smell or a light smell or a zingy smell. In industrial food design, texture is being developed more. When they develop ice cream, they do all these tests for the sound it makes when you bite it, the texture in your mouth, of the surface. Take Japan for example, the texture of the food is very different. The food is much more gooey and chewy and slimy, things that people in the West would find appalling. I find that interesting, to play with the cultural narrative that people have, that they are used to. *What I like about Indian culture is that you feel your food with your fingers.* I think we are actually chopping off one sense in the West, losing a sensation because we don't eat with our hands. It's really sad.



Project: Vitra Bastard Bread, Germany



Project: **Bits 'n Bites** at the Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam
 Right: **The Roots Project**, at several locations

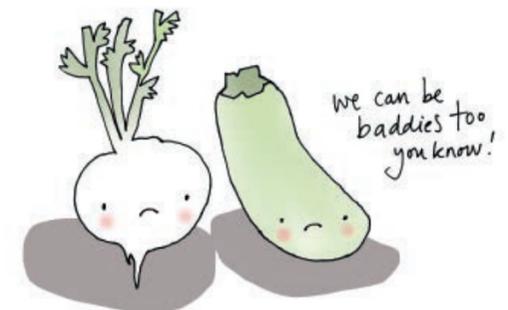
In India when we eat rice and gravy with our fingers, we know that the taste is different than if we ate it with a spoon or a fork... that difference has nothing to do with the food itself, does it?

Yes! I think that's a very nice thought. Even when we do eat with cutlery, it's always the same kind. You could do so much if you changed it! If you had a hole in the spoon, you could taste the rice but also feel your own mouth through that hole. So first it's the food and its texture and then the things at the table, the tablecloth, the chair you sit on... they influence how you feel about the food. For example, if you drink from an unglazed cup some people really don't like it while others do. *Like the chai tea in the earthen pots you get in India — I tried that for the first time here at The Park Hotel. It was a sensation for me that I had never experienced before.* The next layer is the purpose of the dinner — is it a business dinner, or are you having dinner with your grandmother, eating something she used to prepare for you when you were little which you hadn't had since?



You have done some work where you allow people to interact and play with their food — that adds another level of experience to the act of eating, doesn't it?

Yes, there was this one project I did with root vegetables. I covered the vegetables with clay, made sculptures and then put them in the oven to bake. The food inside is very humble food, not luxurious. So you had to make the decision — do you want to keep the sculpture or do you want to break the sculpture and eat the humble food? Everyone broke the sculptures with hammers we had provided. It's a very ancient way of cooking — wrapping something in clay. But to make sculptures of it, and have hammers on the dining table makes it very contemporary.





Texture is more than just what you can see or hear or touch... there is more. How does that feature in your work with food?

You have a very interesting 7-point philosophy on your site. Tell us about that.

Almost everything I do has these kinds of layers. Rotterdam was badly bombed during World War II, and at the end of the war there was a famine.

I want to show people how they can be inspired to work with food in creative ways. That's why I have these points. They include things like 'senses' — that is obvious.

I did a project in a museum there. I made food from the time of the war from old handwritten recipes. I used ingredients that were available at that time. When you came in, you got a coupon. When you presented that, you got some surrogate coffee and this food. I made very small little snacks. Some people who were children at the time of the war came to the exhibition. Some of them hadn't tasted this food for 65 years. So it was like a shortcut to their memories. Suddenly a lock opens in your brain and you have these memories of when you were children, and your parents were still alive... You don't just remember, you feel how it was. And even if the memories are not all good ones, they still have value.

Then there is 'culture'. Humans need to eat at least 3 times a day. But we all do it in different ways, there are different ways of preparation, different ingredients — there is a richness of texture. In India they tell me, every 5 km there is a new cuisine — that's a big discovery.

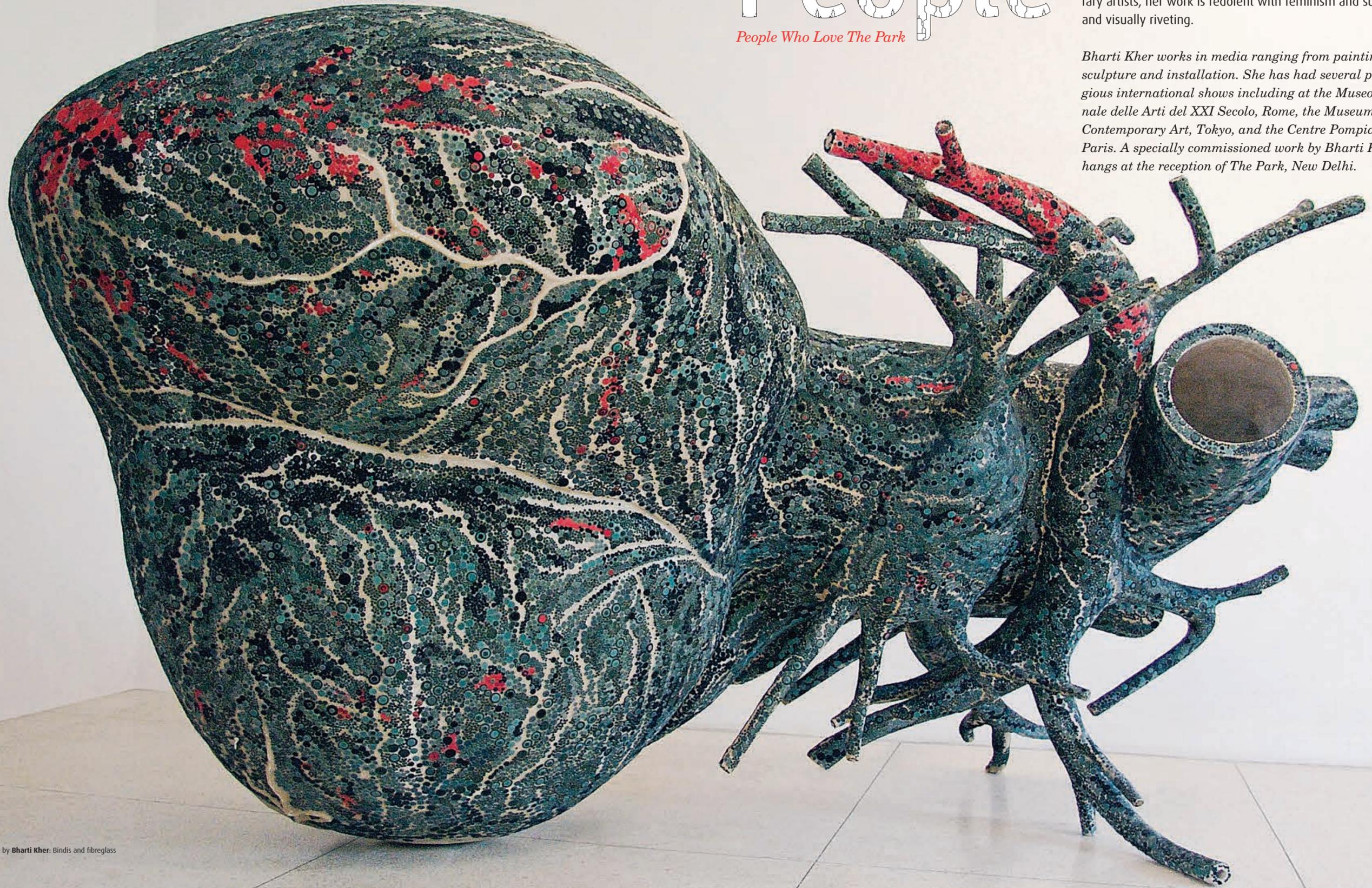
Then, there is a food 'history', a food tradition that has been lost and can be found and re-experienced. This includes knowing stories about food — like the monks in Europe would believe that if you ate or smelt beans you would get love crazy, so they weren't allowed to go near beans! This is food history, a kind of texture you cannot feel, but which adds so much to the experience.

The Park People

People Who Love The Park

The allegories that form the basis of Bharti Kher's work investigate the hidden codes of the cultural and conventional. Swathes of colourful bindis overlay painted canvases and whale hearts — studies of an Indian identity caught between twisting in on itself and focusing outwards. One of India's finest contemporary artists, her work is redolent with feminism and surrealism, and visually riveting.

Bharti Kher works in media ranging from painting to sculpture and installation. She has had several prestigious international shows including at the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, and the Centre Pompidou, Paris. A specially commissioned work by Bharti Kher hangs at the reception of The Park, New Delhi.





The Great Chase by Bharti Kher. Fiberglass, paint, mechanism and horn





The Park Explorer Bangalore

Ganesha in Making, Bangalore, SriBha Jain www.flickr.com/photos/sribz

Bangalore's IT industry has had a ripple effect. The diverse talent that makes the city an instant draw for start-ups and a booming entrepreneurial culture, seeks stimulation; and Bangalore provides it. Unwind with a host of delicious flavoured beers on tap at micro breweries or an exotic cocktail, or drive out to Nandi Hills for some wine tasting. Get your hands dirty canteen style, or work your way through a five course meal; catch a relaxed jazz or energetic house gig, or karaoke to some classic rock; and go shopping for anything from haute couture to laid back linen, to truly traditional silk. And in the midst of this busy metro, experience distinct elements of Bangalore's history and culture. There's something for everybody. Here is our list of favorites.

Tourism

Shiva Temple

A must visit is the mysterious Shiva temple uncovered in perfect condition from under layers of soil and believed to be thousands of years old. 17th Cross, Malleswaram

Freedom Park

Take a walk around the former Bangalore Central Jail, redesigned as a public space with exhibition and protest spaces, an amphitheatre, jogging track etc, while retaining the heritage structures. Seshadri Road (Opp Maharani College), Gandhinagar

Bangalore Heritage Walks

Discover Bangalore's secrets, hidden in the nooks of this pulsing metro, on a Heritage Walk with guides who are passionate and knowledgeable. www.bangalorewalks.com

Micro Breweries

Toit Brewpub

A relaxed brewpub on multiple levels, with a 'pet friendly' beer garden, a smoking floor and lounge seating. 298, 100ft Rd, Indiranagar 2nd Stage, Tel: 080 2520 1460

Shopping

Verandah

A night out on the town or an arty evening are enhanced by a Killol Datta or another of the store Verandah's unusual designer finds. 9, Haudin Road, Near Jasmine's Beauty Salon, Ulsoor Road, Tel: 098452 71006

Apalogy

The quirkily and nostalgically caricatured soul of Bangalore beckons you from the walls of artist Paul Fernandes' studio, capturing the collective memories of bygone days with humour. 15, Clarke Road, Richards Park Entrance, Richards Town, Opp Au Bon Pain, Tel: 081054 36700

Flea Markets

A variety of live performers at Sunday Soul Sante or Kitsch Mandi forms the perfect backdrop to shop at these flea markets which sell local indie-based products, along with art, craft and food.

Oxford Bookstore & Cha Bar

Lose yourself in a good book or a fragrant cuppa, or attend a book reading at the third Bangalore branch of this iconic store. 1 MG Mall, Upper Ground Floor, Opp The Park, Tel: 080 6570 4533

Food

Café Max

Take in the breezy ambience of this rooftop restaurant as you sample the wines and their European menu, followed by one of their scrumptious desserts. 3rd Floor, Rooftop of Goethe Institute/Max Mueller Bhavan, 716, CMH Road, Indiranagar 1st stage, Tel: 080 4120 0469

CTR (Central Tiffin Room)

Get into the groove of the city just like a local, and dig into the unbelievably delectable butter masala dosa that has been the talk of the town for almost a century. Not recommended for those watching their calories! 155, Ground Floor, 7th Cross Road, 3rd Main, Margosa Road, Malleswaram, Tel: 080 2331 7531

The Yoga House

Balance your trip out at this hip yet serene space, and feel inspired to eat healthy with their satvik style, fitness-oriented menu. 89, 11th Cross, 60ft Road, Indiranagar 2nd Stage, Tel: 080 4091 4888

Culture

Gallerieske

A cutting edge gallery that hosts regular exhibits of contemporary art and sculpture, installations, video art, photography and more, from new and established artists, as well as workshops and discussions on art. Berlie Street, Langford Town, Tel: 080 4112 0873

Music and Nightlife

Opus

Chill out Goan style with some live jazz and rock or get up on stage and karaoke at Opus. Be warned, it's raucous, but fun! 4, 1st Main, Chakravarthy Layout, Palace Cross Road, Off Sankey Road, Tel: 080 2344 2580

iBar

This intimate space is a sanctuary to unwind. Inspired by the Qutub Minar, it is a contemporary space fused with luxurious traditional Indian elements. At The Park Hotel, 14/7 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Tel: 080 2559 4666



At the Bangalore Karaga Festival, Melanie Dornier

The myriad-hued sarees the devotees wear are the famed Kanjeevaram silk weaves. Buy them at bustling Vijayalakshmi Silks or for a quieter experience, head to Kanya. Vijayalakshmi, Blumoon Complex, MG Road, Tel: 098451 65037. Kanya Saree Boutique, 32, 6th Main, Between 9th and 11th Cross, Malleswaram, Tel: 080 2334 5231



The Park Spotlight

*A Birds Eye View of
The Monarchs Of Style*

The Park's New Festival

The Park Hotel and Prakriti Foundation presented the seventh edition of this remarkable festival in August-September 2013, a definitive coming together of myriad cultural and global influences in contemporary performance, both classical and experimental. Artists have included contemporary dancer Akram Khan, playwright Ramu Ramanathan, H.R. Britton (US), Dr. Mallika Sarabhai, Zuleikha Allana and Park Hong Ki (Korea). This year the festival was held in Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Navi Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata. In this issue, The Park Spotlight profiles performers whose works featured at the 2013 festival.

01

Deepak Kurki Shivaswamy

A non-conformist, Deepak Shivaswamy believes that his art should be allowed to define itself. A contemporary performance artist from Bangalore with a post-graduate diploma in choreography from S.E.A.D in Austria, he created a collaborative group of like-minded individuals that focuses on experimental work in performance, training and design. From the Bodhi project in Austria, to Hausgemacht in Germany, he has showcased his work with artists across Europe. His pieces use physicality to address contemporary issues. A movement installation, H2Zero, used architectural space and umbrellas to create a strong visual of the scarcity of water. The NH7, 'a contemporary dance trio' is a project that explores the fallouts and confusions of sudden urbanisation. Bodies create moving images, which capture India's changing landscape, and peoples' coping mechanisms. Deepak Kurki Shivaswamy performed at The Park's New Festival, 2013.

02

Stray Factory

The lucky people who have discovered Stray Factory get to explore their creative sides after a dull day at work. An entertainment collective, Stray Factory helps passionate people with common interests collaborate, produce local and original content for stage and digital mediums, and travel with it globally. Their first collaborative production was a neo-noir mystery, based on the 1950's show Alfred Hitchcock Presents. At IIT Guwahati's cultural festival, the collective's 'virtual street theatre' sourced the storyline online, through students. Another initiative, Blogologues, picks blog posts and then stages them. Collaborations have seen a New Jersey-based set designer work with a Canada-based band and a writer in Colombo. The collective won 7 awards at the Short and Sweet Festival, and in three years, has performed over 20 pieces, at 30 venues in 5 countries. Stray Factory performed Osama, Cinema and a Whole Lot of Black Money at The Park's New Festival, 2013.

<http://issuu.com/strayfactory/docs/strayfactory>



Amit Chaudhuri

03

5 well-received novels, including the wonderful A Strange and Sublime Address, numerous academic laurels from premier global institutions, even more concerts of his unique experimental blend of music across the world — Amit Chaudhuri is truly the new-age renaissance man. His remarkable piece Moments of Mishearing was one of the highlights of this year's Park's New Festival. He grew up in Bombay, learning Hindustani classical music from his mother Bijoya Chaudhuri, and went on to become a disciple of the late Pandit Govind Jaipurwale of Jaipur. He read English at University College, London, and completed his doctorate at Oxford. A Professor in Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia, and an internationally acclaimed critic and writer, he was a judge for the Man Booker International Prize in 2009. The only Indian musician to have performed at the London Jazz Festival, his contemporary music projects for BBC Radio are some of the most critically appreciated projects to emerge out of India, elegantly marrying Indian music, both classical and popular with the blues, jazz, and Western pop classics. His book, The Immortals, brings together his two passions, music and literature. Amit Chaudhuri performed A Moment of Mishearing at The Park's New Festival, 2013.

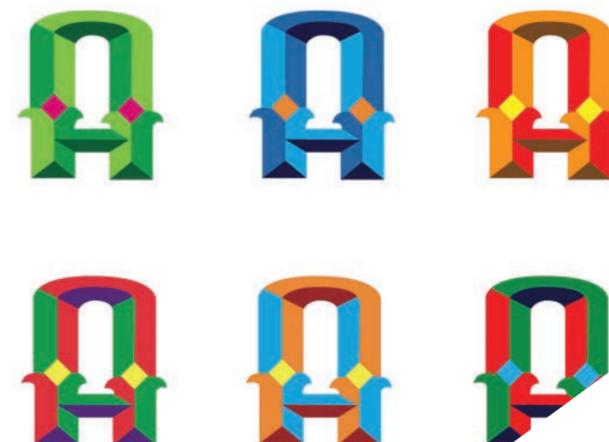
www.amitchaudhuri.com

04

Hanif Kureshi

While most of the world is out to replace the old with the new, one obsessed individual set out to celebrate the old. Founder of Gorilla, a new design studio in Delhi, Hanif Kureshi was born in small-town Gujarat. Growing up on streets emblazoned with the ubiquitous hand-painted advertising signs made him want to take up a brush and paint, and often, even had him working with street painters. By the time he graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda, cheaper, computer generated signage had taken over. So, Kureshi decided to combine the best of both worlds — he tracked down street painters, got them to paint their signature letters, numerals and symbols, and digitised them to sell online, under their own names. He also abandoned bold and italic forms and focused on layers of colors, staying true to the painters' style. So far, 35 fonts have been immortalised, and new fonts in regional scripts are in the offing. Kureshi has asked for readers to contribute fonts from street painters they find, too. The best part — 50% of the sales of these fonts (and all the credit) goes to the painter.

www.handpaintedtype.com



Himali Singh Soin

05

A poet and writer, this 26-year-old compares poetry to blue cheese in a fridge — both tend to take on a life of their own. Born to parents who run an adventure company, the world has been her playground. She writes poetry for art, but tries to stay away from traditional perspectives, with the aim of creating parallel texts. Contributing to journals like Art Forum and Bomb (New York), Artindia and Tehelka, among others, she also does 'whacky perspective pieces' for Artslant, her most recent being a comparison of 18th century painter Joseph Wright of Derby and contemporary painter James Turrell. Himali has also crafted a mini poetry book called Egg-notes. Currently the editor of The Fuschia Tree, an art-zine, she curates one text-based show a year, where her degree in English and Theatre comes into play — whether it's lighting a space, the way a piece of poetry is performed, or projecting an artwork as an experience.

Scissor Happy

A Design Dialogue

“Scissors are the tools of our trade, they are very close to us. They define and symbolise my individuality. We use the scissor motif on our clothes, and it has come and gone out of our visual reference several times, whether as an influence of rock & roll music, or in a different connotation, of the Aghoris in Banaras with whom I have spent time. It was a fascinating blending of two references in their graphic interpretation, which led to this design.”

— Rajesh Pratap Singh

“The brief from Rajesh was to create a simple white store. We took the idea of inserting a white translucent cube, a notional white lace box which frames the apparel, sitting within the outer cube, formed by the building shell. The question then was, how do we form this lace box? We took the metaphor of the artisanal approach that Rajesh has towards his clothes and thought we’d celebrate the tools of the trade. We saw that Rajesh had already been working with scissors to form sculptures. We found that a pair of scissors due to their flexible nature allowed formation into multiple motifs by simple variations of the degree they were opened to. We generated 12 compositions as motifs forming the ‘lace box’

There were thousands of scissors needed — Rajesh and his project team made initial forays for procuring the scissors into Old Delhi. When the numbers were not available his team found them by scouting every street in Meerut, which has a large cottage industry base — I think the city had no 10-inch scissors for a few months after the project was completed!

The layering creates a notional volume within a volume, allowing the buyer to be cocooned yet connected to the outside environment of the mall. It also increases the apparent scale of the store by creating the illusion of a dual layer. The pattern itself is something you perceive as a varying texture from a distance — it’s only when you come close you realize that it is generated using the tessellation of a single object — i.e. a pair of scissors.”

— Amrish Arora, Lotus



Rajesh Pratap Singh, Emporio Mall, New Delhi
Store designed by Lotus





Slice of The Park

In Conversation with Chef Rajesh Radhakrishnan

Chef Rajesh is Area Director, Food Production at The Park Hotels and is based out of The Park, Chennai. Here, he speaks about layers of flavours and the multi-sensory nature of cuisine.

Trending

The age old quote that 'you eat with your eyes' is completely true, but chefs and culinary experts around the world are getting more aware of the fact that crispiness, creaminess, spreadability and the feel of the food in your mouth are equally, or even more important than presentation and flavour. The food could look exquisite and smell amazing, but once you take the first mouthful, and if the texture is wrong, the dish turns out to be an absolute failure. Have you ever tried grainy ice cream?

Eating food is a multi-sensory experience; you tend to prepare for eating with your senses...

Perceptions

Texture has an important role in food psychology and its perception is highly subjective. For instance, research has proved that more viscous looking sugar syrup is perceived to be sweeter, even though the sugar content in the two samples may be exactly the same. This could have far-reaching uses for diabetics in India. A researcher, Dominique Valentin, from the European Centre for Taste Sciences, found that what people touch affects how they perceive texture. So a creamy yoghurt may appear to be creamier if you were to be stroking a smooth, silky surface and the same sample may taste a little gritty if you were rubbing your hand on sandpaper!

In-house Textures

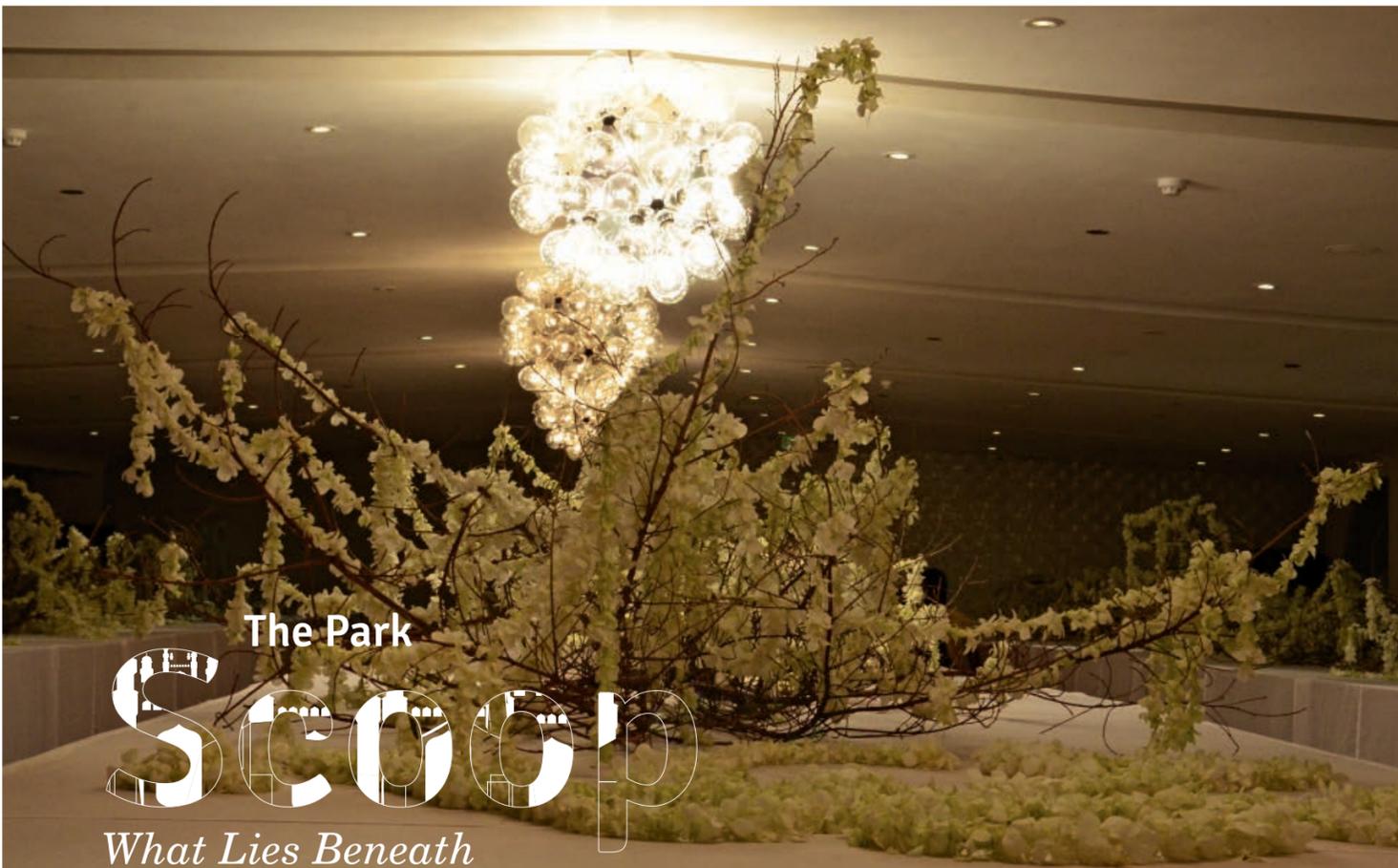
The depth and layering of flavours distinguish a great dish from an ordinary one. Chefs at The Park work on developing layers of flavours through innovative food combinations and cooking techniques. For instance, even classic dishes like Lamb Galauti Kebabs are combined with crispy mini-parathas or papdi discs to create interesting texture and flavour combinations. Foods that are sweet, sour, spicy, bitter or astringent are judiciously combined in perfect balance to create stunning taste results.

Surprises

At The Park, we work to create recipes or dishes with utterly desirable textures. We have worked out a signature recipe for Fish 'n Chips batter which is extra light and crispy, or special tempura batter that does not get soggy very fast. At The Park, we create surprise with dishes like the Trio of Cheesecake. Here, the Camembert cheesecake is a traditional baked cheese cake; the New York cheese cake is in a silky smooth liquid form; and the Baileys cheesecake is in a frozen gelato form with crisp graham crumbs sprinkled on. The Chicken Tikka Jelly we have developed is like a mousse to look at, but in your mouth it tastes like tandoor-cooked chicken! And the Liquid Rasam Ravioli is a bubble which resembles ravioli on a spoon. It bursts like paani-puri in your mouth, surprising you with the tangy rasam inside.

Collaborations

At The Park Hotels, we are exploring new directions in food. Through collaborations and experimentation, we are re-imagining what our guests eat and how they eat it. Going forward we will be introducing unique and signature dining experiences/concepts for our brand.



The Park

Scoop

What Lies Beneath

by Nikhil Khanna

Nikhil Khanna is the Founder and Managing Director of the specialist communication consultancy and PR agency Avian Media. Besides his decades of experience in public relations, he also writes informed commentaries on lifestyle, fashion and society.



Hosting a dinner for Delhi's smart set is one of the most difficult things to contemplate; never forget, Delhi was, and is an imperial capital, and with that comes a court with kings and queens, viziers, courtiers, wise men and women, ministers, court painters, court jesters and the like. Eunuchs too, abound. What you see at eye level, rarely is what you think it is, and below, well, forget about it! The sensitive hostess has to take in so much — who is to be invited, does he or she get along with the others — in fact, with *anyone*, was there an affair in the past that led to a messy ending in tears or did it end in a glorious burst of flowers and champagne, is it correct to sit that minister with that journalist risking a dogfight over cognac, will the policy wonk hit it off with the bleeding heart NGO in scratchy khadi, will the industrialist mind a chin-wag with the proverbial hot-shot lawyer representing his rival for bucks bigger than the industrialist can dish out? The hostess needs the skill of a diplomat, be charm itself, ("It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious," said that fine purveyor of all things social, Oscar Wilde) and be as ruthless as a Formula One boss. All this is when dinner is served on *top* of a table! So, when Priya Paul decided to host dinner *under* the table at a glittering event at The Park Hotel in Delhi, there was, putting it mildly, great consternation. The dinner put together by the Dutch 'eating designer', Marije Vogelzang — a statuesque beauty shimmering in blue — was to get people to 'start sharing, start conversing, bringing out their inner child — an art we lost when we stopped having meals around communal fires.'

The banquet hall at The Park was converted into five, thirty-foot-long parallel series of what appeared to be at first low, white columns. On closer inspection, they were 'tables' draped in white linen under which guests ducked, slipping under table covers, literally, to sit on small adorably sturdy white chairs. You were handed a cushion, which you placed on your lap. You then draped the cushion with a white table cloth, making a chic little dining spot right there. Runners of flowers — orchids, jasmine and marigold — draped the length of the 'under'. There were even baby fans, no bigger than a palm, whirring away busily, cooling one under the table. The effect was magical. Guests cooed in delight and surprise — it was like being transported back to childhood, to some wonderland embedded in the past. *"Under the table used to be the place where magic happened — away from adults and their boring rules. Under the table is where your fantasy could prevail,"* said Marije, a smile playing on her lips.

Meanwhile, under the table, dinner was being served. Tiered plates, like miniature tea cake stands, were tied with ribbon and hung to the table. They swayed lazily. On the plates were, variously, dips, breads, an assortment of nuts, (excluding guests) and tart, pickled vegetables. Glasses of Moët et Chandon appeared as if by magic by guests' elbows every five minutes. Then, cocktail glasses glistening with a sliced pear, a skewer of lobster, a light-as-air-puff of duck pastry and candy floss were handed to meat eaters. The vegetarians grazed on spun sugar, sweet corn and chickpeas done just right. A dash of candy floss added flair. Guests were then handed a white tile with grooves and in the grooves placed beautifully, not unlike a Tiffany box bristling with anticipation, were grilled sea bass, crab cake — an all-time hit — Canadian scallop, caramelised walnuts and a Kashmiri mushroom stuffed with cheese. Sublime. There was a summer roll, crunchy, light and fresher than a rude guest,



dumplings done from beetroot and miniature samosas for vegetarians. The lady next to me had, by this time, polished off a magnum of champagne and the effects of that and the setting were beginning to show — she was deep in her cups and proverbially, under this table, for sure. Two others had launched into a very vocal argument on important issues, (not handbags). This was clearly turning out to be more than a gentle lady’s picnic. More food followed in a heady parade; red peppers stuffed with corn-fed chicken kebabs with a truffle cream, cottage cheese kebabs and lamb risotto in adorable little pots. *This was food made first for the eyes, and then for the other parts.* For dessert, huge trays were set out with chocolates, squiggles of love notes running between them, and green coconut halves filled with divine coconut ice cream. There were no worries about guests being outraged — this being Delhi — at this wild new concept. Of eating out, or under. The execution was of the highest order and Marije, assisted by a very competent team from The Park, pulled out all stops.

After dinner, and over molecular B-52s, Marije, now happy and proud, said, “Food can nourish your soul, food is social glue, food is the soil of a country, food is money and pollution. Food is politics, food is the building blocks of your body. When I was a student I understood that we need creative thinking applied to the act of eating. Why do we eat the way we do? It’s important to question everything.” And what would be her dream meal, I asked? *“My dream meal would be eating outside in a forest on a beautiful day, without any bugs, served by birds flying in and out with small bites of delicious food. I would love to have this dinner with all the Indian Gods to ask them about life.”*

Meanwhile, guests spotted laughing, arguing and tucking in included foodies Guddu and Christina Patnaik, Shobhana and Shyam Bhartia, Shamit and Nayantara Bhartia, Vivek Sahni, Vikram Goyal, writer Reshmi Dasgupta, Rajdeep Sardesai and Sagarika Ghose, the winsome Sapna Bhagnani and her perennially cool husband, Deepak, fashion plate Priyaraje Scindia and Minister of State Jyotiraditya Scindia, fashion mavens Tarun Tahiliani, Manish Arora, Malini Ramani, Rohit Bal, Suneet Verma and Abhishek Gupta, the vital, vivid Madhu Trehan, Hari and Kavita Bhartia, Vikram and Seema Chandra, Timmy Sarna, Subodh Gupta, Pia Singh, art powerhouse Peter Nagy and many more.

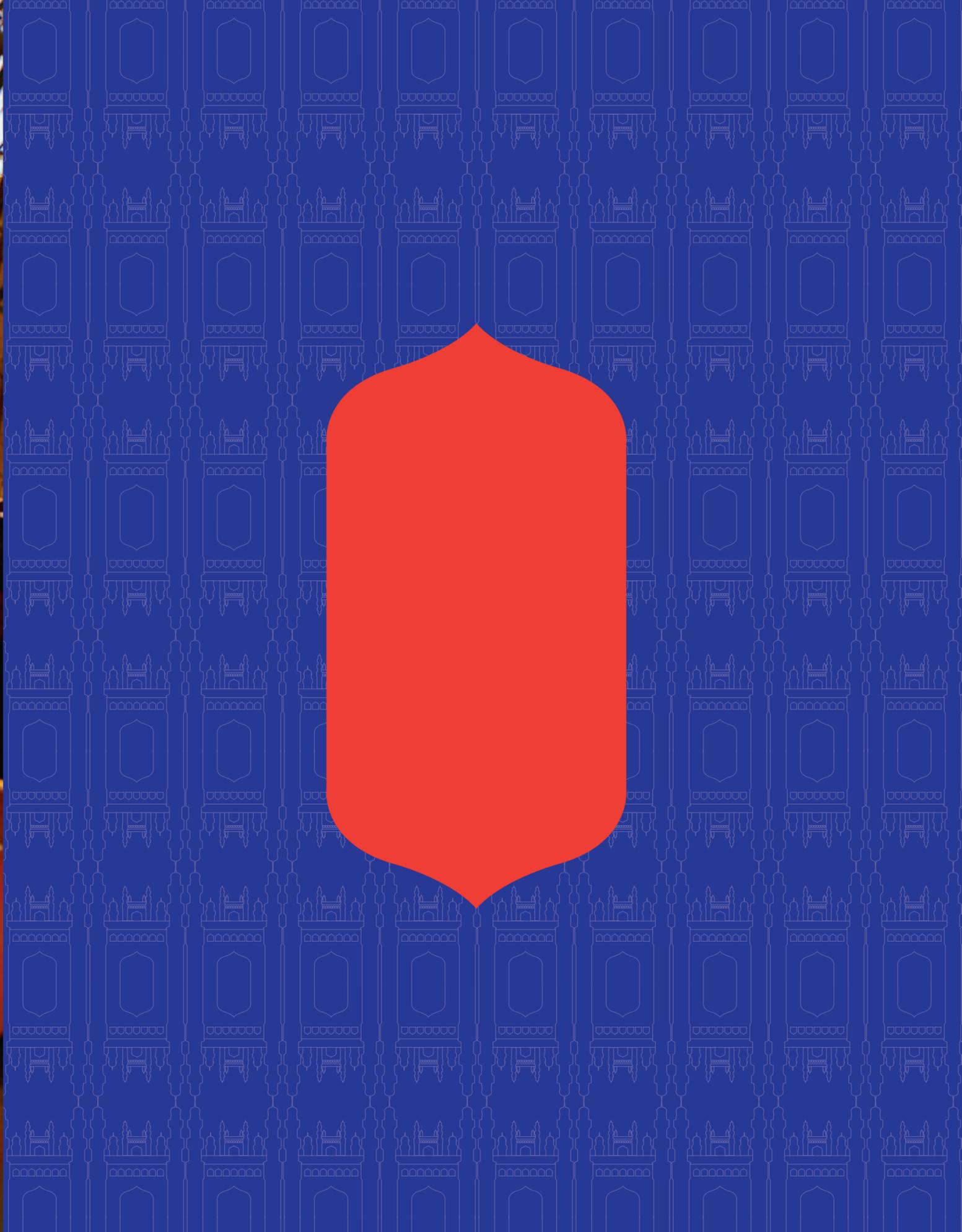


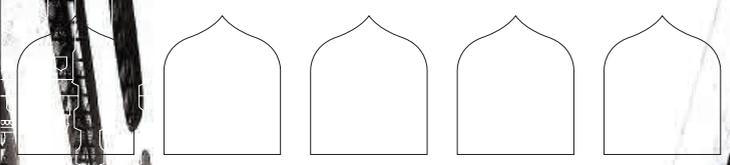
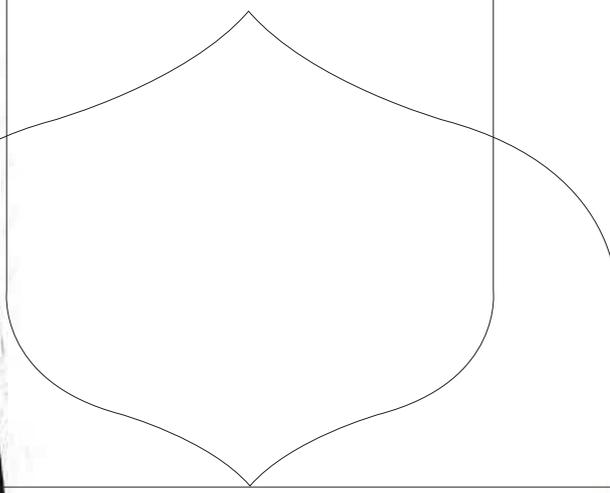
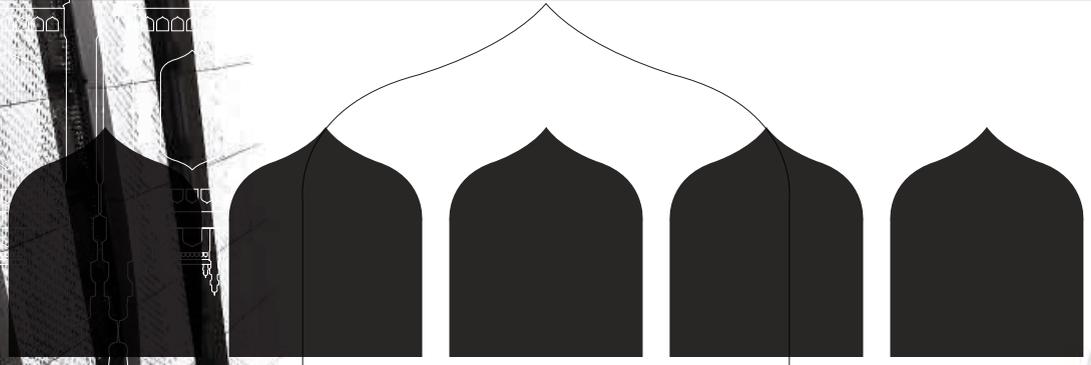
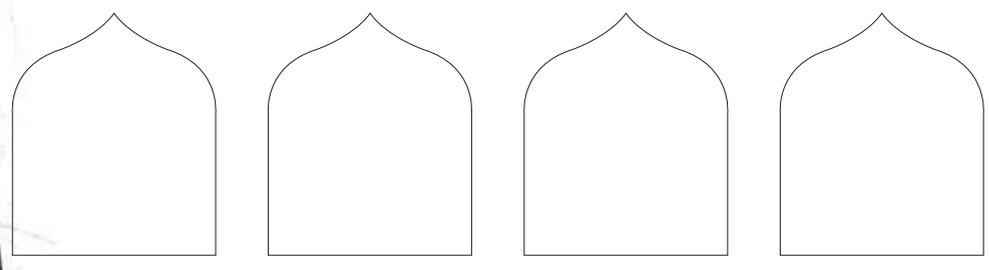


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