



Serving up style

Whether it's houses, restaurants or offices, architect Sandeep Khosla refuses to settle into a niche, says **Shrabonti Bagchi**

He's just completed work on a couple of restaurants at the Bombay Dyeing mills compound in Mumbai. The projects on his plate range from a corporate office for textile major Himatsingka Seide, a cliff-top house in Kerala for the expatriate Manwaring family, boutiques and showrooms for fashion designer Ritu Kumar and her prêt brand Label — and a house for himself.

Top Indian architect and interior designer Sandeep Khosla refuses to settle into a niche. Retail spaces, innovative offices, beauty salons, top-of-the-line restaurants and pubs, expensive residential properties — it's all par for the course for the talented team at Khosla

Associates in Bangalore, comprising of Khosla, his right-hand man, architect Amaresh Anand and his graphic designer wife Tanya.

"Whether I am working on a house, a restaurant or an office, my design aesthetics remain the same," says Khosla. "I find change exciting and the idea of diversifying into various kinds of spaces challenging. So I don't see why I should be only a restaurant designer or an interiors guy," he adds. Having worked on several prestigious restaurant projects in the past year — the first Indian Hard Rock Café in Mumbai, restaurants Khyber and Shiro in the same city, lounge bar Touch in Hyderabad and the Roxy pub at The Park in Calcutta — Khosla admits he is looking forward to



Khosla has designed one of Bangalore's top nightspots, Spinn; (Right) The psychedelic interiors of Touch, a lounge bar in Hyderabad

cleansing his palate with non-hospitality projects.

But it's hard to escape your past and the restaurants designed by Khosla are dotted all over the Bangalore map. There's Blue Ginger at the Royal Orchid hotel, top nightspot Spinn and lounge bar Hypnos. Then, there are his offices — the quirky Indya.com and MTV offices, the spanking new ING Vysya corporate building and the Nike office that once made him the talk of the town.

When we step into his suitably chaotic workspace in a quiet lane off the busy Indiranagar area in Bangalore, Khosla is hard at work. In the middle of a hundred different projects to co-ordinate, what's really bothering him is the need to put up his own website, with photographs and write-ups on the projects closest to his heart. Ever the perfectionist, he will not hear of outsourcing the work. "The designing can be taken care of, after all my wife is a graphic designer, but I want to do the write-ups myself," he declares.

Khosla is visibly excited about the kind of work that's happening in Indian design today. "This is an exciting time to be associated with design in India," he says. He feels that Indians are increasingly becoming more comfortable with a changing design aesthetic, that perceptions, ideas and attitudes are all changing. "Clients want to innovate, be creative, and there's more challenging work than ever before," he says. This has happened, according to him, because Indians have become more global in their outlook — today, they are well-travelled, aware of global trends and aesthetics and are not afraid to move away from the tried and tested. "I take a lot of inputs from clients. They often amaze me with the kind of ideas they have," Khosla acknowledges.

While maintaining a universal outlook and creating spaces that would not look out of place in either Mumbai or Manhattan, Khosla is passionate about infusing them with an Indian sensibility. He recalls a project he worked on recently, a house for the Fernandes family on the outskirts of



Textile company Himatsingka Seide's corporate office



The Manwaring family's cliff-top house in Kerala

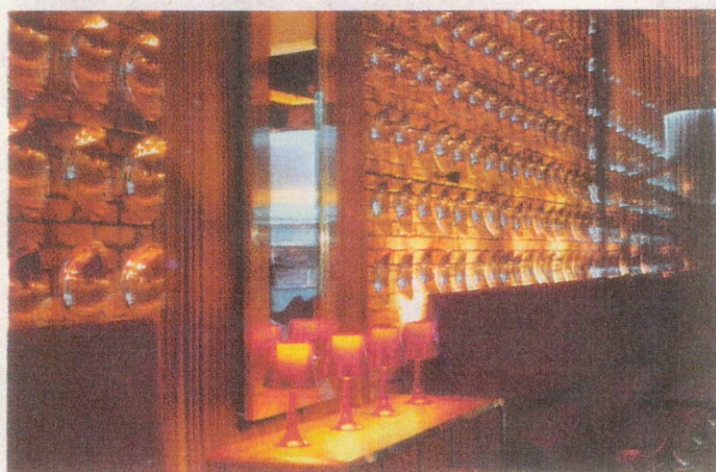


The new ING Vysya corporate office in Bangalore

Bangalore. While the house has a Spartan, uncluttered look and is built along clean lines that could almost be termed minimalistic, the framework of the house remains essentially Indian. There are numerous verandahs and balconies and a central courtyard — all important elements of an Indian architectural tradition. He also likes to work with natural materials as far as possible, another aspect of his work that evokes an essential Indianness.

Though Khosla started off primarily as an architect, he found himself getting more and more involved in the interiors of the spaces he built. "I have a holistic approach towards design. I can't build the bare bones of a property and then leave it in the hands of an interior designer whose ideas may or may not synergise with the space I have created," says Khosla. Today, he feels compelled to look at any project as a whole. "For me, the boundaries between architecture and interiors have blurred," he says.

Khosla started his professional life working as an associate with legendary architect Charles Correa after graduating from the Pratt Institute in New York and doing a stint with a design firm in New York. He was born in Calcutta and did part of his schooling in the city at La Martiniere for Boys before being packed off to boarding school at Doon.



Roxy, at The Park is another of Khosla's creations

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— Sandeep Khosla

Though his parents don't live in Calcutta any more, he still has strong ties with the city since his wife Tanya is also from there. "That's why the Roxy project was very special to me. So many of my memories of Calcutta are associated with Park Street and Chowringhee," says the designer.

Calcutta and Bangalore, the city where he's made his home now, have shaped his feel for design to a large extent, he says. They have also developed in him a love for old spaces and the passion to preserve them. Restoration and renovation work is an important aspect of his portfolio, and one that charges him up like no other. He is most passionate about the restoration work he has done on some old colonial structures in Bangalore, such as the Bible society building on busy St Mark's Road. This structure has been converted into a hip pub, 1912, and a prestige Barista outlet, the 50th in the country and perhaps the most striking of the prolific café chain. The nightclub Spinn is also housed in an old bungalow, lovingly restored and upgraded into a groovy retro joint by Khosla Associates. Apart from these, Khosla has also worked on restoration projects abroad, such as the renovation of a section of the heritage hotel Galle Face in Colombo.

Crumbling old Raj-era houses in Bangalore wrench his heart, he says. He would like nothing better than to restore them and put them to different, contemporary uses. "Anything is better than letting them be pulled down to give way to highrises," he reasons.

Right now, the project that's uppermost in his mind is one that's proving to be unusually problematic. It's a house he is building for himself and his family of three — wife Tanya and three-year-old daughter Mahika. "I never thought it would be so difficult to make a house for myself, but I guess it's like having two doctors in a family," he laughs, "they never agree on anything." ♦