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September 14 – 27, 2012

Next issue on September 28, 2012

Cover story

Art of living

In our last issue we encouraged you to discover our city's great outdoors. This fortnight, we invite you inside. *Time Out* got an all-access pass into the homes of some of Delhi's best, and best-loved artists, who graciously entertained all our queries. We asked for the whys, wherefores and whos of their owl collections, demanded to know the history of their flooring, and wheedled a free tour of their Picassos and Paul Klees. We hope you have as much fun as we did.



MANITBALMIKI

Nice rack Mithu Sen and Samit Das' kitchen



The art of living

Elsewhere, there are surely artists toiling away in garrets (or barsatis). But the handful of established Delhi artists we visited recently have made their homes extensions of their creativity. Enjoy the tour.

The 60-year-old flooring at Amitava Das and Mona Rai's home. Photograph by **Manit Balmiki**

The collector's crib

Manisha Gera Baswani's home is an Aladdin's cave of beautiful objects. Photography by **Manit Balmiki**.



Even before you step into painter, sculptor and photographer Manisha Gera Baswani's spacious apartment in Gurgaon, you get a taste of her involvement with the arts. Prints hang from the lobby walls of her building in Central Park (as well as the 11 other buildings in the complex) – part of a permanent exhibition on the history of modern Indian art that Gera Baswani set up. “These projects are a way of showing that Gurgaon has more than corporate culture and is a great place to live in,” she said.

Gera Baswani and her husband Rahul moved into their apartment two years ago. The large rooms are crammed with artwork and kitsch – we were a little scared to sit down, lest we upset something. The drawing room holds the bulk of stuff that Gera Baswani and her husband have been collecting over the past 15 years. There are several paintings by A Ramachandran, Gera Baswani's teacher and primary inspiration, including a silkscreen wedding card he made for his disciple. There are paintings and sketches by Himmat Shah, Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij, Sheila Makhijani and others;

and a striking bronze bust of Ustad Allaaddin Khan in one corner of the dining room, which is an extension of the drawing room. In another corner is an eye-popping phulkari shawl that was made by Gera Baswani's great-grandmother for her daughter's wedding. The couple collect traditional art as well – an array of reverse glass paintings of women from the late 19th century hangs on the wall leading out to the veranda. These were bought in Jew Town in Cochin and Baswani has made minor restorations on some of them. High art is not the only thing on the couple's radar. There are abandoned bird's nests and starfish on a small round table, and life-size statues of Saint Francis and Saint Peter.

With such a lot of eye candy all around, it's no wonder that Gera Baswani often rearranges stuff. And her living space influences her own art. “My earlier work was very enclosed; my current work is all white and open spaces,” she said. “I used to have a huge aquarium, but I removed it and it created a lot of space. How you make your space in painting and in real life is a two-way process.” **Kingshuk Niyogy**

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**My
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- 1 **Saintly pleasures** A plaster statue of St Paul, bought at the old Jewish quarters in Cochin. The Baswanis also have a similar statue of St Peter. The two are distinguishable by the objects they hold: St Peter has a key; St Paul, a scroll.
- 2 **Close, but no soup** Abandoned birds' nests are part of the "non-art" items that Gera Baswani has collected. She will collect anything and everything, and even these nests are "collectors' items" for her.
- 3 **Protect and serve** An armoured Rajput helmet bought from Sharma Farm near Chhattarpur. This and an armoured suit are part of a forthcoming art project.
- 4 **Star watch** Starfish on a table near the veranda bring a little of the ocean into the house.

- 5 **Good omens** Gera Baswani's husband Rahul is obsessed with collecting owl figurines from many parts of the world. According to his wife, he shot an owl when he was young and collecting owls is "almost like penance".
- 6 **Classic pose** A bronze bust of legendary Hindustani musician, Ustad Allaiddin Khan, the guru of many well-known musicians – including his son Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and Pandit Ravi Shankar. This bust was made (from a passport-size photograph) by Sarbari Roy Chowdhury, a friend of Baswani's guru, A Ramachandran. Roy Chowdhury, an avid fan of Hindustani classical music, would often bring clay to baithaks and make portraits of musicians while they performed. The Baswanis also have another Roy Chowdhury bust of Siddheshwari Devi.

The antique store

Achutan and Chameli Ramachandran bring history and nature together in their home. Photography by **Sushant Sinha**.



Houses are often extensions of their occupants' personalities, and Achutan and Chameli Ramachandran's residence make this connection amply visible. In leafy Bharati Artists Colony, their ochre residence stands out; it's the same shade Ramachandran uses to prepare his canvases. Inside, the three-storey house is airy, with windows on each floor overlooking gardens – a reflection of the inspiration both take from nature, and the educational philosophy of Shantiniketan, where they both studied and where they met.

The house also testifies to the changing fortunes of its owners and the art market. The neighbourhood was founded through the efforts of Bharati Cultural Society, an association of artists, musicians and dancers. In 1981, when the Ramachandrans moved in, its residents included Devyani and Kanwal Krishna, Laxman Pai, GR Santosh, Om Prakash and Ram Kumar. Initial construction was determined by the Ramachandrans' budget of ₹1.2 lakh. It gradually expanded to include a small studio for Chameli on the ground floor, a larger one for Achutan on the first, with a special door for transporting his big

canvases, and guest rooms above. "I had more leisure time, and my status as a painter changed and my earnings went up," Ramachandran explained.

The interiors are tastefully decorated with antiques: furniture, clocks, Biblical statues and wooden chests. There are paintings from the Bengal School; Abanindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose and Benod Bihari Mukherjee share space with Picasso. "I am not a collector. I am a student and these are my textbooks," Ramachandran said. "I respond to old monuments, sculptures, paintings, textiles... people whose lifestyle is not affected by urban cultures, like the Bhils."

The shift to this house marked a stylistic change in his art, from urban scenes to a focus on rural life. The first painting Ramachandran made here was his masterpiece "Yayati", developed from sketches of Gaudiya Lohars – a gypsy blacksmith community that lived just outside the colony, along Vikas Marg, in the 1980s. Much has changed since then. The road is now one of the busiest in Delhi, and many of the artists have moved out or passed away. But inside, the house continues to be a quiet haven for art and artifacts. **Sonam Joshi**

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**I am not a collector.
I am a student
and these
are my textbooks**”



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- 1 **Hot seat** This seating arrangement in A Ramachandran's studio comprises of artifacts collected over the years. The wood figurine in the background shows one of the three wise men holding baby Christ in his arms, and stands in front of a sliding wooden partition that opens into another room. There is a 16th-century wooden frieze of a koodiyattam performance above it.
- 2 **Long time** This clock, one of three antique timepieces in the house, is one of A Ramachandran's earliest possessions. "My memory starts with this clock," he told us. When his family was forced to sell his childhood house, Ramachandran remembers leaving it with the clock on his lap. It travelled with him to Shantiniketan, and while it doesn't work perfectly now, it has a special place in his heart.
- 3 **Interior decoration** The mantelpiece of this chest in Ramachandran's studio has two framed paintings of Shrinathji from Nathdwara, among the several in his

collection. Next to them is a bronze head of a girl by Sarbari Roy Chowdhury; Ramachandran exchanged this for one of his own sculptures. Above it is an unsigned oil painting by Raja Ravi Varma that he believes is a portrait of the artist's wife.

- 4 **Article of faith** There are several wooden religious statues on the stairs connecting the three floors of the Ramachandrans' residence; this Syrian Christian votive of Jesus Christ, bought in Trivandrum, is unique for its life-sized proportions.
- 5 **Bed spread** This bed originally belonged to a princely family in Kerala and was purchased from an antique shop ten to 15 years ago. It is modular, without any joints, and can be taken apart and reassembled.
- 6 **Fly on the wall** Garuda mobiles like this one were traditionally hung from the doorways to the sanctum sanctorum in temples in Kerala. This one hovers below a wooden frieze of birds from Gujarat.

The showpiece shelter

Satish Gupta's working home blurs the boundaries between gallery, studio and living space. Photography by **Manit Balmiki**.



The highest compliment we can pay Satish Gupta's house is that, even though one half is a designated gallery space and the other a living area, there's hardly any difference between the two. Every corner of this South City bungalow, just off National Highway-8, yielded treasures – mostly Gupta's own paintings and sculptures, but also curios he's picked up during his travels abroad.

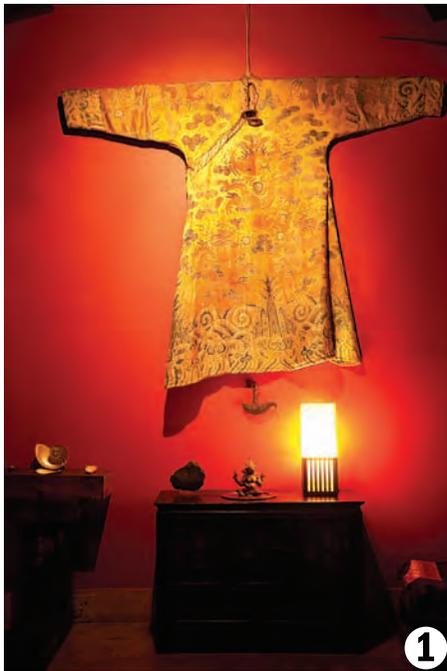
"Everything in this house has a meaning," Gupta told us at the beginning of our tour. He then led us through a gallery space, a Japanese garden-style bathroom, a delightful courtyard where sculptures and remnants of a torn-down Rajasthani haveli mingled with plants and wooden chairs, a master bedroom with several paintings from his "Transformation" series, and a study full of strange artifacts and books on art, photography and science fiction. Motifs central to Gupta's work – water, the moon, yin and yang – recurred as we moved from

room to room.

Gupta bought the plot in 1974, long before the Gurgaon we know came into being. He then spent years on further construction; it isn't surprising to learn that the polymath artist designed the interiors himself, with the help of a French architect friend. Finally, by the early '90s, it was ready. He uses the flat primarily as a work space; his other home, the one in which he stays with his family, is in Jor Bagh. That's a difficult trek to make on a daily basis, but Gupta not only finds the space he needs for his massive installations and sculptures here, but also the tranquility that's necessary for their creation. Despite the perpetually buzzing NH-8 a couple of kilometres away, the only noise in the house is from the CD players, one in every room, playing woodwinds and nature noises. "I conceived this [house]," said Gupta, "as a sculpture to be lived in." To us, it felt like a tour of a small, very friendly museum.

Uday Bhatia

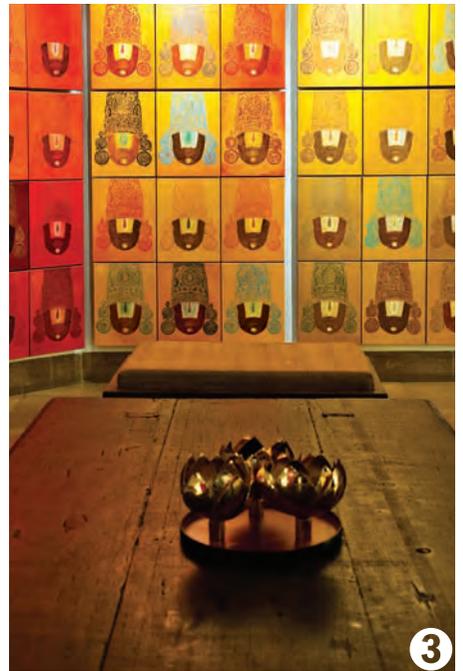
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- 1 **Shaadi suit** A Tibetan nobleman's outfit from the late 19th century. When Gupta got married, this was the inspiration for his wedding suit, designed by JJ Valaya.
- 2 **Buddha** Gupta planned to make this corner of the house an installation 18 years ago, when he planted the banyan tree that now threatens to take over the area. For years, a massive sculpture of Vishnu watched over the courtyard. For the last four years, a Buddha statue has taken its place, with a panel of 1,000 miniature Buddhas in the background.
- 3 **Grand design** This installation, titled "The Thousand Names of Vishnu", is for a forthcoming exhibition. Three hundred and sixty-five Vishnus are rendered in various colours and shades to represent the changing of the seasons. These will be accompanied by etchings of 1,000 different names by which Vishnu is known.

- 4 **Urn it** Gupta picked up this urn in Myanmar, just before the by-elections held there in April this year. Despite its solid appearance, it's made of bamboo – lacquered, polished and covered with gold leaf. The level of craftsmanship involved requires one to place an order two years in advance.
- 5 **Collector's choice** Three objects Gupta picked up during visits abroad. From left, a Nepalese sculpture of Vishnu in his turtle avatar; a Buddhist travelling temple of the sort pilgrims carry on long journeys; a leaf from the Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar, off a tree that's said to have been transplanted from the bodhi under which the Buddha sat.
- 6 **Flight of fancy** A copper sculpture of the eagle Garuda, Vishnu's celestial ride, which Gupta created for a show next February.

The happy home

Madhvi and Manu Parekh's home is full of colours as vibrant as their paintings. Photography by **Manit Balmiki**.



“I’m quite good at acting, and sometimes I also paint”, said Manu Parekh. We were sitting in his studio – a huge, airy space – as he demonstrated how he poses for shots. “Satyajit Bhatkar made a documentary about me”, he explained, “for which there was a lot of posing. One time, he wanted to have me painting at sunrise to catch the light, so we set up this elaborate shoot and then realised that no one had got any colours. So for 30 minutes I pretended to work without any paint.”

This, along with the fact that he often poses for his son-in-law, a photographer, means that Parekh is most comfortable in front of the camera. Besides, his home breathes a friendly, relaxed vibe, made for happy living. “It’s not fancy, but then, it’s not made for other people to admire; it’s for our comfort,” Parekh said matter-of-factly. Manu and his wife Madhvi moved into the large, modern ground floor of a Sukhdev Vihar house two years ago. Madhvi’s studio is on the ground floor, while Manu’s is in the basement.

The house is full of large, open spaces, with brightly coloured sofas and cushions and enormous windows which, unencumbered by grills, let in the diffuse monsoon light. Downstairs, the studio is large, with an empty wall splattered with paint and nails to hang canvases. Five tables, some cluttered with paints, brushes and drawing books and others with sculptures and artwork dot the room, and two of the walls have floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. “I’ve always believed that a workroom has to be a warm, happy space” Parekh says. “I spend five or six hours working, so it has to be a place in which I’m comfortable. In fact, the studio space was a large part of why we got this house.” He’s swinging gently on a wooden swing, with a metal frame hooked to the ceiling. “I had this swing in my house in Ahmedabad. I remember swinging on it when I was four,” he said, slipping into the past. That house is now gone, but the jhula was brought to Delhi and stands as a reminder of his childhood home. **Vilasini Roy**

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- 1 **String song** The shape of a rough-hewn Kenyan stringed instrument caught Parekh's eye on one of his trips abroad. It lies in his studio, as a study in form.
- 2 **Snap happy** Encouraged by friend and fellow artist Ram Rahman, Manu has occasionally dabbled in photography. Two framed triptychs of Madhvi, taken at Chittaranjan Park's Durga Puja celebrations and at the temples in Khajuraho, are near his bedside.
- 3 **Charmed life** Nimbu and mirchi to ward off the evil eye, but in mixed metal form, are tied at the entrance of the Parekh home – a gift from a friend.

- 4 **The Kali concept** One of Parekh's sculptures, titled "Goddess", has pride of place in his studio. Black, blue and red, it alludes to Kali through its abstract form.
- 5 **His father's son** Chittaranjan Giri, Parekh's assistant, is a portrait painter. Giri made three likenesses of Parekh's father, Mohanlal, from black-and-white photographs.
- 6 **On the shelf** The bookshelves in Manu Parekh's studio are stuffed with art books. Inspirations Rabindranath Tagore and Paul Klee feature heavily. Pablo Picasso, of course, gets his own row.

The museum of belonging

Mithu Sen and Samit Das' snug apartment radiates cheer.

Photography by **Manit Balmiki**.



In Mithu Sen and Samit Das' living room in a DDA apartment in Alaknanda, one cushion stands out from the whole caboodle on the overstuffed couch. It's a retro self-portrait from a digital print (part of Sen's 2007 exhibition *Half Full* in New York) that she had made as a present for Das. The Sen pillow-portrait is completely at home with an Uglydoll plush toy, also from New York, and another cushion with a parrot motif and the word "Mithoo" – given to Sen by her gallerist friend Shireen Gandhi.

The Sen-Das living room is imbued with the same cheerfully excessive aesthetic that defines the rest of their cosy, two-bedroom set-up, which they share with two cats Chorchori and Kalo Aabha. The centrepiece of the living room are several vitrines stuffed to the gills with objects from the world over: sushi replicas from Japan, dolls that are tinier than a human nail, broken doll arms, fake penises and bananas. The latter reference the playful sexuality that informs much of Sen's work (as in her acclaimed show *Black Candy*, which won her the 2010 Skoda Prize trophy, just barely visible atop a cupboard). The entire home

is a microcosm of another show: 2011's *Museum of Unbelonging*, in which Sen stuffed a large circular showcase with tchotchkes. "Samit is all about the big things, like the acoustic system or the hidden electrical wiring," said Sen, "And I am all about the little details." By contrast, their sprawling studio in Charmwood Village, Faridabad is an oasis of peace and necessary emptiness.

The couple bought the flat overlooking the Jahanpanah forest in 2007 from the brothers that own Niyogi Books. Their decision was as much practical – the South Delhi location is conveniently close to most galleries – as a reminder of their early days in the capital, living in barsatis and working in schools. The couple still has a divan in the lobby fashioned from several crates that became their second bed – a significant bump up from the newspapers they glued together to insulate their mattress in the winter. "But we have always been very happy with whatever we have," said Das. "If someone asks me what my life lacks, I am forced to think hard." That feeling of contentment pervades all the rooms of their home too.
Karanjeet Kaur

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details



- 1 **Banana republic** *Black Candy*, the show that won Sen the inaugural Skoda Prize, had multiple allusions to the erotic in the form of black, phallic chillies. She has bought and been given bananas from all over the world, including a wax-coated one from Europe and a heat-resistant one from Switzerland.
- 2 **Chairs to that** Kumar Kanti Sen, Mithu's brother, designed this special three-legged chair for her, after an orthopaedist advised her to sit on chairs with armrests, to prevent recurring pain in her upper back.
- 3 **Hand job** Sen's interest in sexuality is evident in the wooden and plastic penises she has aggregated. She also has a de-stressing ball in the shape of a human breast and a brass masturbating figure.

- 4 **Fly by night** Sen likes to create stories around her collected objects. An example of the playfulness that permeates her work is a plastic fly from India, which sits atop the sushi replicas from Japan.
- 5 **Floral throne** Shopping for the house in 2007, the couple chanced upon these wonderful, floral seat covers in Greater Kailash-II. Sen's bathroom has one in yellow, while Das' loo has blue.
- 6 **Voodoo child** Sen spotted this doll at a church sale in Chicago. "I felt she was looking at me, and had to buy it," she said. The nun at the counter also thought the doll was smiling at her. "For me, these aren't just objects. They are like my children." The doll's godfather is David Ross, former director of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and a friend of the couple.

The treehouse for two

Paramjit and Arpita Singh line their sunny nest with warm reds and leafy greens. Photography by **Manit Balmiki**.



When artists Arpita and Paramjit Singh first visited their house in Nizamuddin East, it was in 1975, for chai with barsati resident Bhaskar Kulkarni (a “hippie-type”, as Paramjit put it) who was responsible for popularising Madhubani art. Little did the Singhs imagine that just over three decades later, they’d be moving into the three-floor home, built in the 1950s – and by that time in a state of utter disrepair.

Renovating the house was a challenge, not because of the actual work (the Singhs count several architects among their friends), but because of the ASI permissions needed to build within range of Arab Ki Sarai around the corner. They managed to work within the parameters quite well, incorporating the verandas to build a ground floor for living, a first floor studio for Arpita and a second floor for Paramjit. An advantage of the ASI restrictions, and the colony’s original planning, is that there are unhindered green views from almost every picture window.

“They designed [this colony] strangely,” Paramjit said, “there are three houses, then a park.” It’s easy to see how he keeps images of woods and fields in his mind while working with such a view for a backdrop.

As far back as the 1970s, the Singhs’ Tara Apartments flat was featured in a foreign magazine. Many of the objects, like the simple settees constructed in a Kashmere Gate shop (“We were never sofa people until we came here,” said Paramjit), have followed the Singhs from that flat to their Chittaranjan Park home – designed by Ram Sharma and often cited as an example of good living in a small space – and then here. Nizamuddin East has an arty reputation: Anjali Ela Menon is a neighbour, and BC Sanyal used to live nearby. The sense of being part of a creative community is evident from objects inside too: a table from A Ramachandran’s house, stacked with brushes; stools by ’60s designer Shona Ray; and work by friends in every corner. **Sonal Shah**



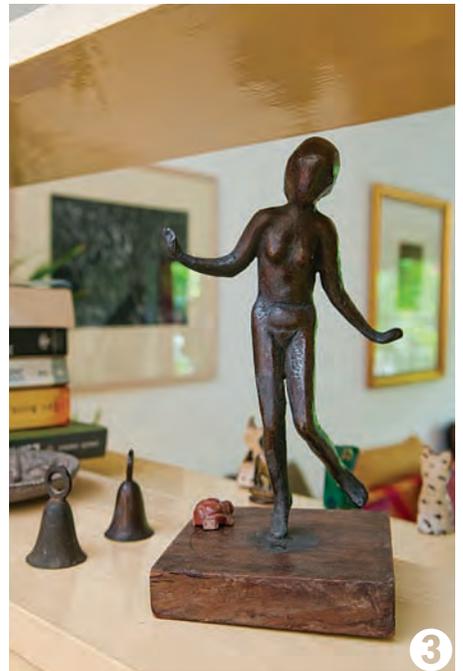
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- 1 **Freudian print** The Singhs purchased this print at a 2007 Grosvenor show of Lucian Freud's work in Delhi. It stands out (along with a Pablo Picasso linocut of Christ with a crown of thorns) among the abstract works by Arpita and landscapes by Paramjit on the living room walls.
- 2 **Red frame** The fire engine-red gate to the house is carried through in every window frame, banister and other border accent. Unable to afford teak in their CR Park home, the Singhs used hollock wood, painted red. They liked the combination of this bright border with gray stone so much that they replicated it here – though now the frames are aluminum to avoid termite damage.
- 3 **"Skipping Girl"** A statuette by Sarbari Roy Choudhary (who died earlier this year, and whose sculptures dot

the artists' homes we visited). Paramjit purchased this from the artist for "something like ₹1,000" in 1984.

- 4 **Nature study** Piled up on a yellow stool are the distinctively sunny spines of a collection of *National Geographic* magazines. Arpita is the enthusiast, who takes inspiration from the wildlife and maps for her own paintings.
- 5 **Coke studio** Upon further inspection, what looks like an oversized Koosh ball on a table is part of daughter and artist Anjum Singh's installation "Cola Bloom" (featured in *Time Out Delhi*'s January 2011 issue).
- 6 **Silk roots** Draped on one bench is Paramjit's grandmother's phulkari. His family is from district Wazirabad in Pakistani Punjab, but was settled in Amritsar from the 1920s.

The animal kingdom

Artists Amitava Das and Mona Rai fill their home with reminders of friends and foreign lands. Photography by **Manit Balmiki**.



Though Amitava Das and Mona Rai are both well-known Delhi painters, you'll find very few of their own works displayed in their Bengali Market home. Instead, their house is a showcase for artist friends' sculptures and paintings, and small animal sculptures from their far-flung travels – for example, to South Africa, Cameroon and China.

In their living room, the artists' own work is evident in the architecture: glass screens have etchings based on Das' drawings. The floor features a modernist abstract tile designed by Rai's father, studded with pieces of mother of pearl. They fought with their contractor to keep their ceiling beams exposed. "He wanted to put in a false roof!" Rai exclaimed. "We wanted to keep the high ceilings." Now the beams are painted in luminescent gold and silver. The building is Rai's family home and it retains other

remarkable tile floors that are over 50 years old. One has a half-moon Islamic pattern; another is an MC Escher-like optical illusion in green and black. One less traditional accent is a vertical neon blue light, between two sculptures, that seems to undulate when switched on. "We thought it might be fun for parties," Rai said.

Upstairs, Das designed much of the modern furniture, including the ridged teak doors. Das and Rai are dog lovers – their first dog, named Boto, used to sleep in a corner in their room, coating the wall in dirt. Das layered the financial pages of the newspaper on as wallpaper, and had it laminated. In his upstairs studio, the walls are bare, except for postcards from travels and friends. The treasure in this home is the work of friends and the memories of happy travels. **Simran Bhalla**

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- 1 **One style tile** The abstract living room floor was designed by Rai's father and perfectly complements the bold, bright abstractions on the adjacent floors, tiled by the previous owner. ("A Muslim chap," Rai remembers.) The tiles, Das said, are from Syria.
- 2 **Partitioned print** Das and Rai have two works by their friend, the Pakistani-born, New York-based Zarina Hashmi, in their living room. One is a small white-and-gold papier mâché sculpture enclosed in plexiglas; the other, a cream-and-black print that looks like an aged map.
- 3 **Wall street** Das' bed sits against a wall that he coated in aged newspaper prints that tally the rising and falling stock markets of many years ago.

- 4 **Animal farm** Das displays his curios in a glass shelf between the foyer and the living room. There are mechanical toys from the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Dali lips from the MoMA in New York and, in the middle, cows and leopards of various shapes and sizes collected on Das' various travels.
- 5 **Iron horses** These scrawny iron horses are on the first-floor stairs leading to a balcony, placed along the edges in order of increasing size. Das picked them up during a trip to Bastar.
- 6 **Burma cheek** In addition to animal figures, Das also collects tribal masks (often animal masks). He found this one in Yangon. Pull a string at the back, and the tongue goes in and out.