BHARAT DARSHAN

India's largest continuing study of socio-cultural changes. An annual insight mining project by futurbrands consulting

Bharat Darshan unearths the fundamental socio-cultural changes in India. It helps us with sharper strategic thinking on brands.

EXPERIENCE

BHARAT DARSHAN

STRATEGIC PROJECT FOR BUSINESSES

Bharat Darshan is a strategic project for businesses. It discovers unique socio-cultural patterns examining consumers and culture; and creates large opportunities for brands in emerging India. The project provokes newer ways to think and creates compelling solutions for business challenges.

Companies commission Bharat Darshan to:

- Find new growth levers
- New product and revenue ideas
- Shift marketing paradigms
- Develop consumer vision for their future plans
- Create micro-market insights, product and marketing plans
- Build brand roadmaps

This compilation has been inspired by the experience of our travels across India, undertaken with the ambition of understanding the culture that shapes consumption and the meaning systems that inform brands. Bharat Darshan is Futurebrands' initiative to understand change in India. Every year, the entire office travels across India to spontaneously capture different aspects of the culture. Bharat Darshan is in its third year and over 60 cities & towns have been covered and there have been more than a thousand interactions and hundreds of hours of conversation with people from all walks of life. We have seen and understood people and their lives, because they have shared it with us. Their trust, openness and generous hospitality has made it possible for us to explore their lives and examine what different changes on the landscape really mean. 'In India' is an attempt to share a glimpse of the intriguing observations, patterns and questions that we encountered which made us wonder about the complex set of meaning systems that govern categories and consumers here.

At Futurebrands we believe that culture is the single biggest tutor to understand people and consumption. An understanding of cultural codes and a more pulled out way of framing categories can equip business heads and marketers to develop tools for their brands which are unique and meaningful to create long term equity of their brands in India. Many fortune 500 brands invest in cultural studies continuously to keep alive the ability to think radically about their businesses. This perspective examines consumers and categories in a fundamental way. It may not lead to neatly tied up 'insights' but cultural understanding allows for new principles, new language and new thinking to happen in organizations, leading to dramatic new ways to think about business and brands.

futurebrands

BHARAT 0 K.M.

CONTACT US

Futurebrands Ltd.
W4D-204/3 Keshav Kunj
Sainik Farms, New Delhi - 110062

Website: Futurebrands.co.in
Email: futurebrands@futurebrands.co.in

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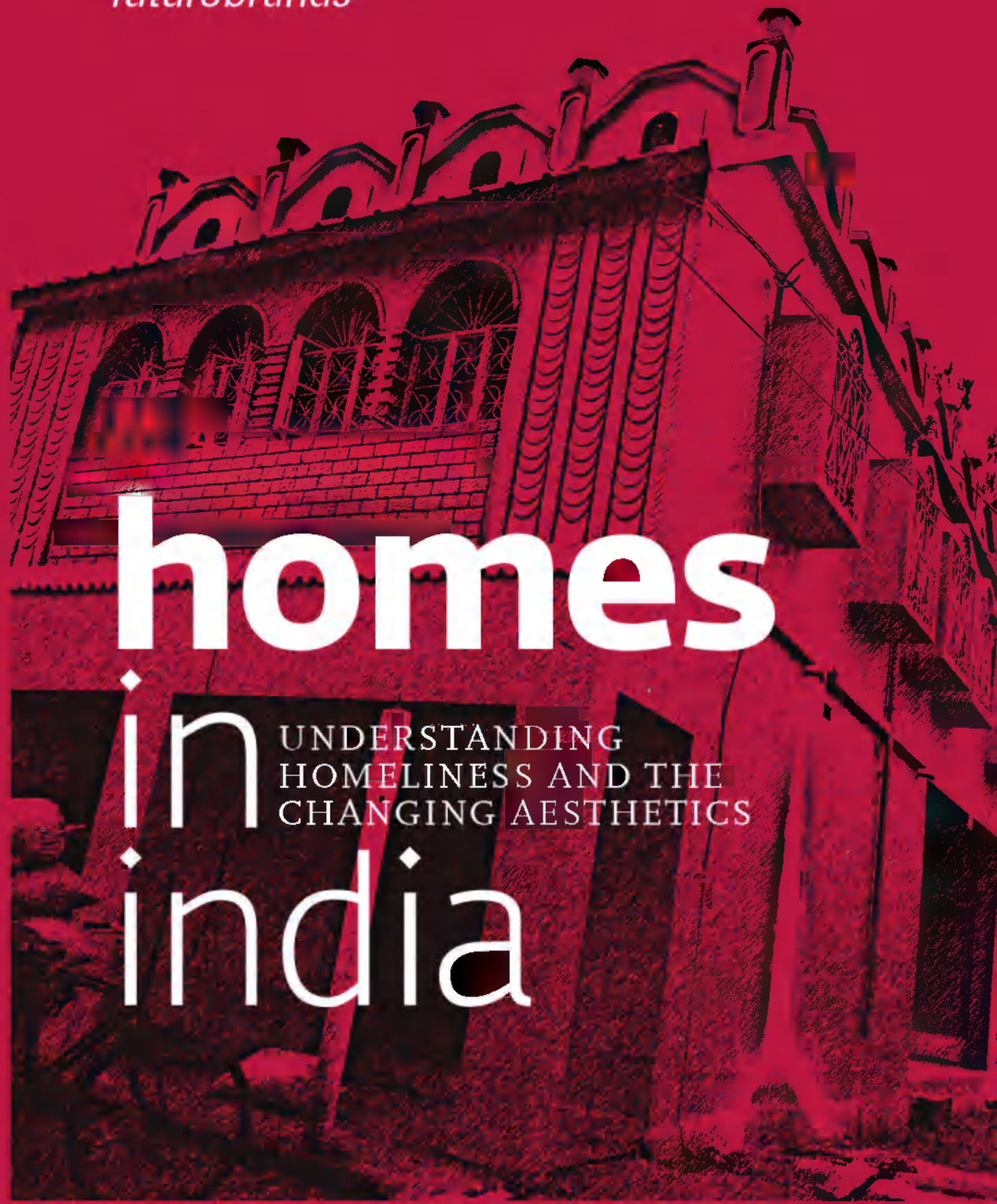

homes in india

UNDERSTANDING HOMELINESS AND THE CHANGING AESTHETICS

homes in india

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Santosh Desai who conceived Bharat Darshan as an annual event where everybody in Futurebrands travels across India to understand the cultural codes and how they are changing. Bharat Darshan has been in existence for three years and the team has gathered thousands of images, four hundred hours or more of conversations and some valuable nuggets of wisdom. The data was painstakingly analysed by the teams and patiently supervised by Santosh in an annual workshop, usually at a picturesque location in the hills which helped us to bring out the real insights. So a big thanks to everybody at Futurebrands for all the hard work.

The 'In India' series was conceived and edited by Sraboni Bhaduri. Project consultant. Mayank Mansingh Kaul help was invaluable in refining and coming up with this unique format. Simrat and Avantika of Ferris wheel design walked the final mile with us and their grasp of the content coupled with great design sense has given shape to this series.

In spite of regional differences social backgrounds and levels of prosperity, there is a certain unity in the way that homes in India look. These are spaces that we have all experienced and where we instinctively feel at home.
This is a space which allows us to let our guard down and still not feel judged. In other words; it is 'homely.'

What makes it so comfortable? Why is it quintessentially Indian? What does it say about our needs, our priorities and our social structure? How is this reflected in the way we use space and what are the typical artifacts that unite us in symbolic terms?

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For more information, e-mail
sraboni.bhaduri@futurebrands.co.in

HOME SPACE AS STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Homes in India are not designed. The home space is generally not self conscious. The space that the family uses is laid out in accordance with convenience and functionality. There is little attempt to embellish or assign fixed places. In Indian homes, lack of order can not be confused with lack of cleanliness. The seemingly random trail of objects tells a coherent story of the family members—how their day panned out, the times they were rushed, the nature of the conflict in choosing a shirt on a rushed morning. Many stories can be gleaned from the unique congregation of objects and spaces.

Cosmetics, decorative flowers, iron and other disparate items come together in one space, united by what can be a pastiche of convenient placement, history, emotional significance and simply space available. ■■

Unique feminine imprint in a room shared by two sisters. Separate ownership of hand bags and the distinct style statements of each of them tell the story of their equation.

Imprint of biker boys in the house, living without the fear of being admonished by their parents for excessive smoking.

Perpetually rushed mornings of a young working man

Wash basin and washing machine united by the logic of wet spaces. It needs the jharroo to mop up eventually. It clearly maps the work flow.

The unmindful untidiness of the home was the principal differentiator from the hotel, which was 'artificially' arranged. It demanded a certain behaviour code which was stifling and certainly not 'homely'. Will super shiny and artfully arranged spaces ever be home? ■■

The home has to only serve its function and therefore need not be anything more than a container.

SPACES FLOW INTO EACH OTHER

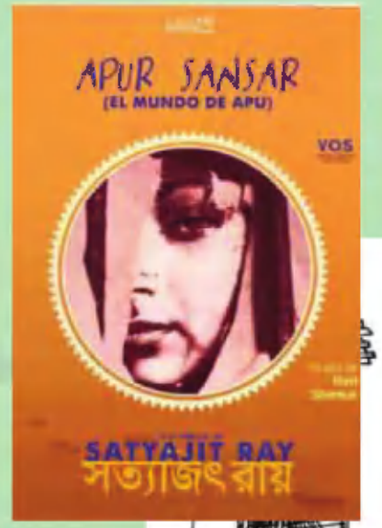
Designated spaces for objects, furniture and purposes in Indian homes are negotiable. Living room flows into bedroom and vice versa. Even the outdoor- indoor divide may well be breached. This flexibility in the structuring of space is perhaps a response to the flexible definition of the family. Long standing guests, nephews studying in the city, call for adjustments. The home above all has to accommodate needs of the occupants and be in accordance with life's priorities. Aesthetic rules occupy a subordinate position.

Undivided space with adjustable separators

Traditionally we have never divided space inside the home because privacy was never a priority in a largely collective society. The home was a testimony to higher order values, such as accommodating guests and being a secure space. ■■

The traditional roots of this mental model of home lies in the one room hut. The home space is essentially a one room container to hold the basic necessities. Decorative elements like rangolis are generally auspicious in nature and are outside walls or at the entrance. One room also means little personal space or privacy.

★ MOVIE ★ MIRROR



The one room concept has been depicted in films set in both rural and urban contexts, especially till the 70s.This is a sketch of Satyajit's Apu's room from Satyajit Ray's iconic film 'Apur Sansar'(The world of Apu). It depicts a typical living quarter of a middle class man. It is a very functional room, without any decorative element or any attempt to divide areas based on use.

MOVIE★MIRROR

The one room house in Bollywood: The simplicity of the one room house has persisted. The home is more about the story of the people who live in it. It was never meant to be a spectacle.

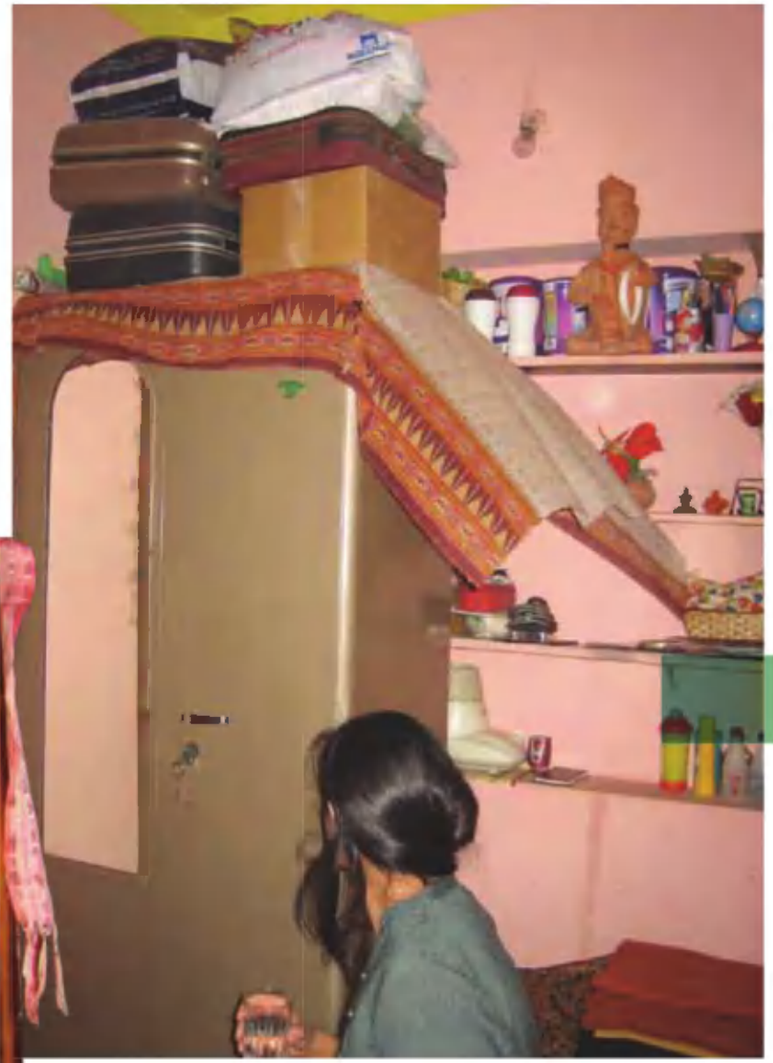
Division of space & orderliness yields in deference to more fundamental needs for a home. Security of a precious possession has to be priority.

HOMES SERVE HIGHER ORDER NEEDS

With increasing affluence, the number of possessions may have gone up. The fundamental principles however remain the same. In our travels across India, the average middle class home still has scant respect for super specialized usage and compartmentalization.

Providing security, having everything close at hand and being able to accommodate guests and family members are the fundamental purposes that a home needs to serve.

Security must be visible. It is meant to be a deterrent. It should intimidate anyone even contemplating breaking in, not to catch the person post facto. Security must be muscular. More modern security systems are stealthy but have no presence. ■■



THE GODREJ ALMIRAH ■

is a must give at weddings even today. It is a secure spot in the house. Every house needs one with a secret safe.

THE GRILL

gives the impression of a barrier. It might not prove to be an insurmountable barrier, but the area looks barricaded and that is important.

THE CHOWKIDAR

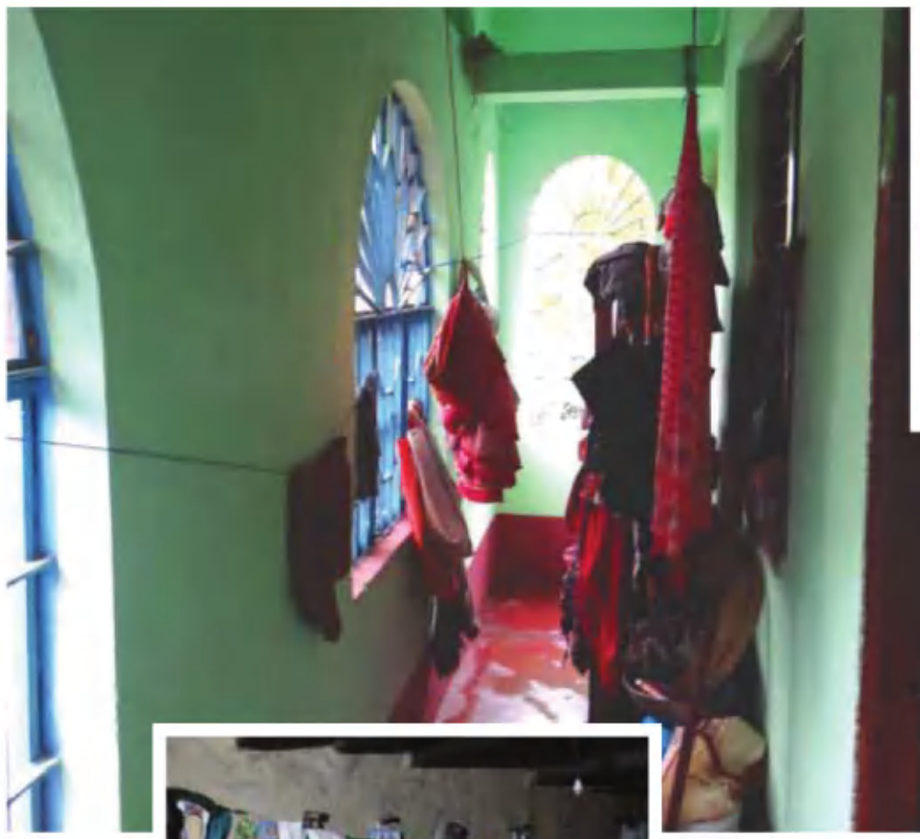
He is a comforting thought. The gun may never have been fired. However the presence is very reassuring.

NIMBLE HOMES

Importance of flexibility, lightness and being multi purpose

Home must have quick reflexes, be flexible and be versatile. They must be able to respond to an array of needs that arise from time to time. The drawing room becomes a bedroom when cousins drop by and the dining table works as a study table during its off duty hours. Every space and every object must perform various duties and avoid wastage due to over specialization.

Accommodating the wardrobe needs with easy access and flexibility to factor in guests or simply a clothesline that doubles up as a cupboard where clothes hangers can be accommodated. ■■

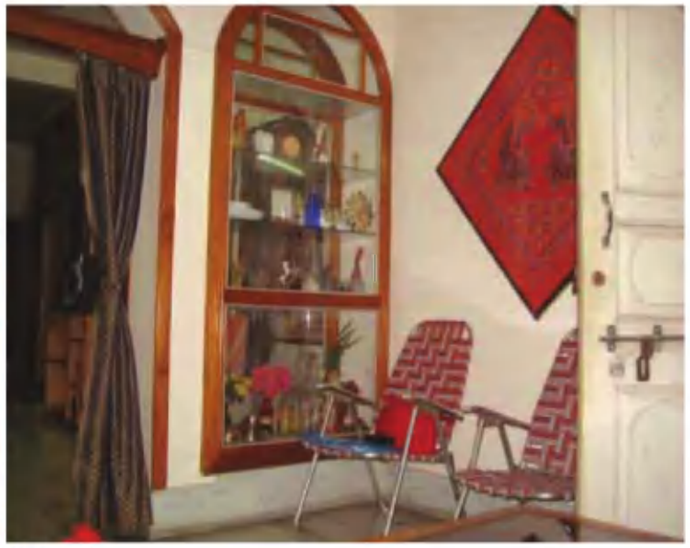


THE MULTIPURPOSE CHARPOY

The qualities that the charpoy embodies could be a lesson for all objects that desire a place in the Indian home. It serves as a bed, a settee, food can be served on it and it is a drier for chilies and wheat. It is light and moveable. When not in use it does not use too much space because it rests upright against the wall and it has a life that can be prolonged and refreshed. The side planks can be replaced and it can be re woven when it sags. And to top it all, it is low cost.

THE NEEL KAMAL CHAIRS

They are almost indispensible and indestructible. They can exist in large numbers and not take up too much space because they can be stacked. Folding chairs come close.



THE BOX BED

This device not only gives support and stability to the mattress but also serves as a secure storage space. The headboard space is not wasted either. It is storage space for odds and ends such as a flashlight, cough syrup and other such assorted requirements that can be anticipated.

The after life of things

The twilight zone of things, like empty cartons which are not immediately needed but promise to be useful at some point are stored away. This is a testimony to the guilt of throwing away something that is still physically whole. ■■

DRAWING ROOM

A conscious space with an emotional narrative

The quantum shift and the difference in the rules of engagement are evident in the character of the drawing room vs. the rest of the house. The social face is rule bound, starched and self consciously dressed in it's Sunday best. Typical artifacts like artificial flowers, showcase, pictures reveal an emotional narrative

A consciously designed space

This is the only space where decorative superfluous objects find a place. Symmetry, centrality of focus objects reflect a hierarchical structure generally seen nowhere in the house except the drawing room. ■■

MOVIE ✦ MIRROR

THE TWIN STAIRCASE: The staircase takes off from the 'drawing room' area ostensibly to the bedrooms above. Often through the entire movie, the camera only catches people coming down the staircase. All the action and key scenes take place in the drawing room.

Trophies, good looking family pictures & mementos are displayed proudly in the showcase. It is a mosaic of emotionally significant moments, people, achievements & the life journey of the family.

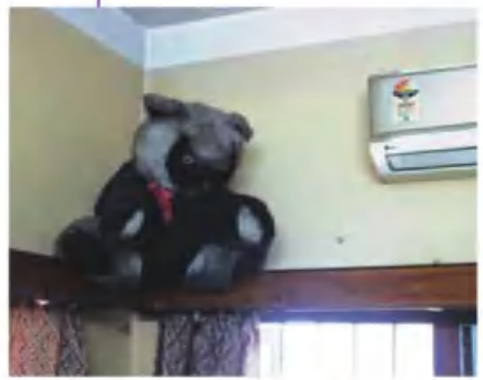
Everything that should be the social introduction of the family.

The drawing room is not only about status and the social face. It speaks of love, longing and fear which are deeply personal. It reveals a longing for the playful, simple and the innocent and the fear of losing the precious. It is the enchanted world of dolls, the comforting softness of stuffed toys and the simple innocence of babies . Feelings that are lost to the demanding social structure. The coloring book aesthetic principle that lovingly highlights an important object with a flower vase on either side.

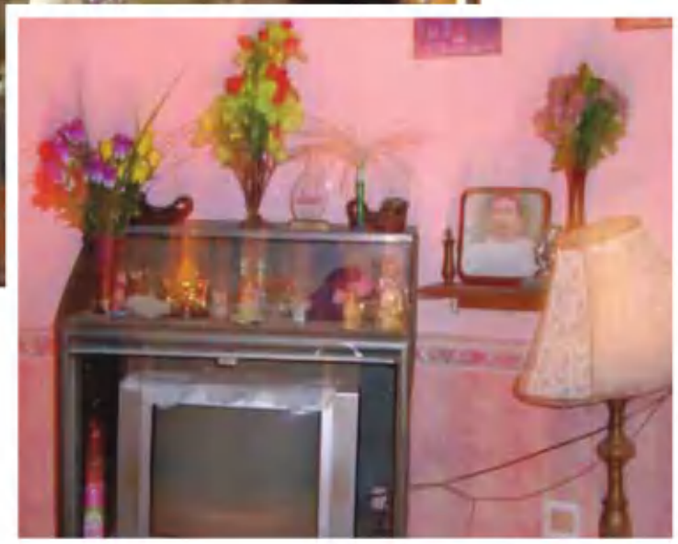
And the need to protect it with auspicious objects and talismans across faiths. ■■

TEDDY BEARS & SOFT TOYS

These have a ubiquitous presence. They are being sold on the street side, they are peeping out from the rear windscreen of cars and they are in drawing rooms, occupying pride of place. There seems to be a strong emotional connect with soft toys, which seems to cut across gender and age lines.



Pictures of babies, childhood pictures and children's old toys find a place in a showcase, in the drawing room which is all about the family's social introduction. Sentimentality around babies and symbols of childhood extend beyond the childhood of the children in the family. Is there a longing for everything that childhood means?■■

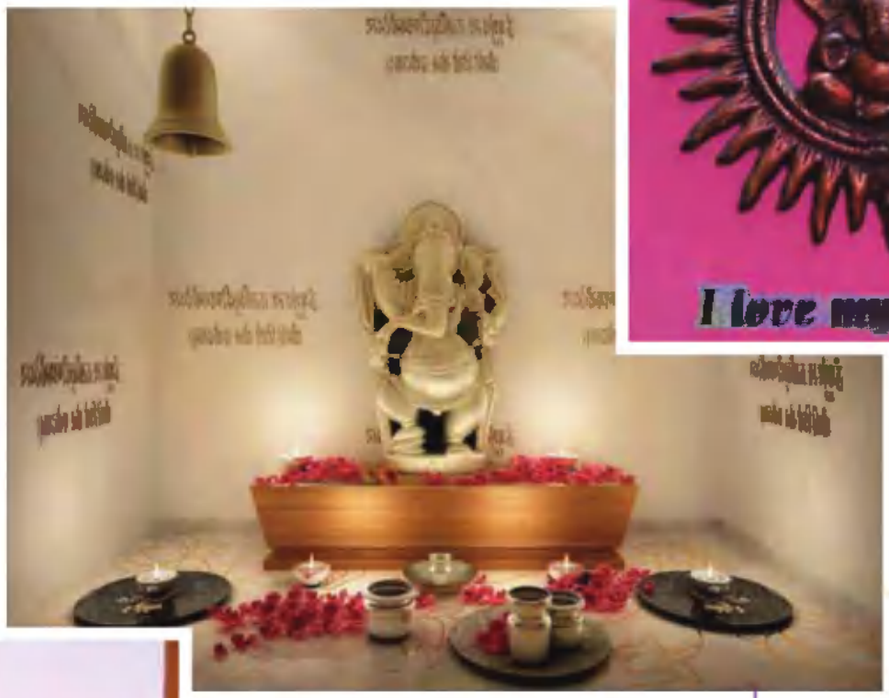


FLOWER VASE AND PLASTIC FLOWERS

These are the ubiquitous & single most important objects of decoration. Pure functionality in a dusty country demands that they be plastic, with at least the option of washing them even though such an option may or may not be exercised. The symmetry and the simplicity of the depiction once again references children's drawing.

Auspicious symbols

From the lucky bamboo to the Ganapati, auspicious objects are religion and culture neutral. The drawing room, because of its proximity to the street or the outside world, needs to ward off the evil eye. ■■



THE GANAPATI PHENOMENON

Turkish evil eye, lucky bamboo, laughing Buddha, feng shui crystals...

Propitious objects have no borders. Multiple and simultaneous co existence of these can only multiply the benefit. Ganapati has breached the boundaries of all categories, occasion and spaces

The sofa backs

The sofa back is perhaps a product of the dynamics contained within the *ghar ke log – bahar ke log* construct. There is a certain ambivalence about 'outsiders.' They are important enough for their approval to matter a great deal and guests are welcomed with the best. However there is a need to maintain separation and prevent them from leaving an imprint. ■■

BRAND TALK

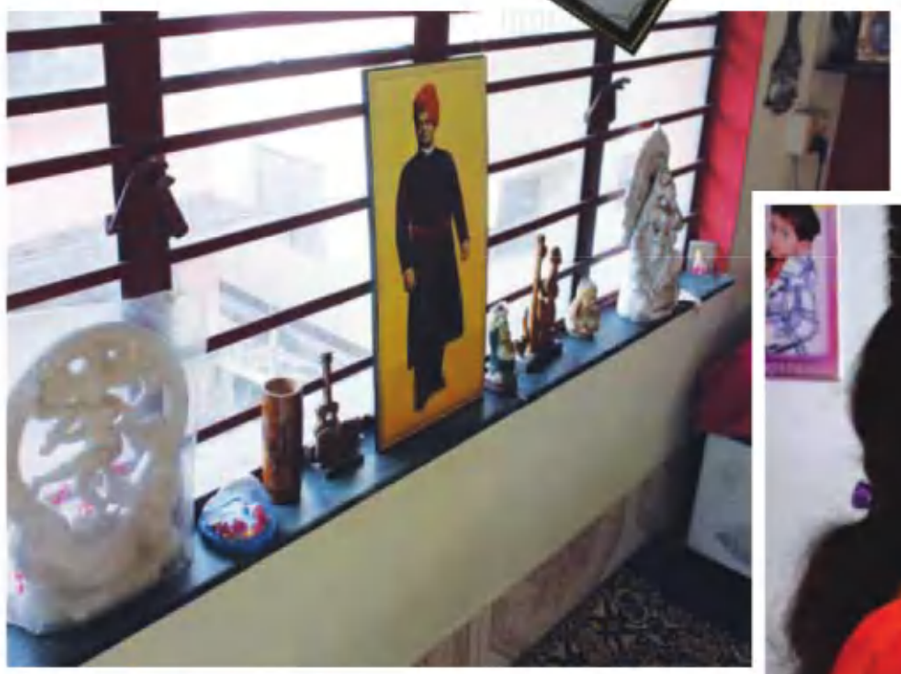
I LOVE MY CHEVY

The home is extending to the car. The soft toys, plastic flowers, sofa backs and ganapatis; have all made their way to the car. Will the car always reflect the drawing room anticipating the public gaze or will we become comfortable enough to start living in it?

Craft pieces and updesh

Craft pieces made by the housewife showcases her multifaceted talent and the fact that they are labour intensive and sometimes fashioned out of low cost material or waste further showcases her credentials as a capable and thrifty housewife.

The drawing room above all, showcases the values of the family. In India, this is perhaps the most precious of all belongings. Words of advice, pictures of ancestors, gurus and other inspirational figures, communicate the higher order pursuits of the family. ■■



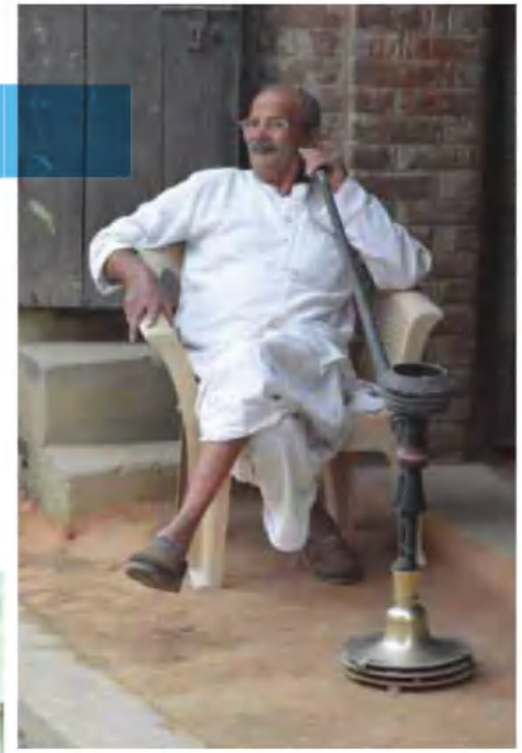
HOME, GULLY, MOHALLA & THE COURTYARD

The boundaries between the home and outside are soft. The home and the gully peek into each other without any discomfort. The felt security of the home extends to the gully and mohalla. The self is not limited to the home & family but is shared by the community and therefore the mohalla. It is overt in the case of boys & patriarchs but the sense of belonging is equally shared by the women. There is an inherent need to stay connected, peek into each other's lives where gossip can be generated organically.

The alien notion of privacy

The separation between the public and the private space is traditionally notional. Privacy is not really a priority. Being connected is clearly more important.

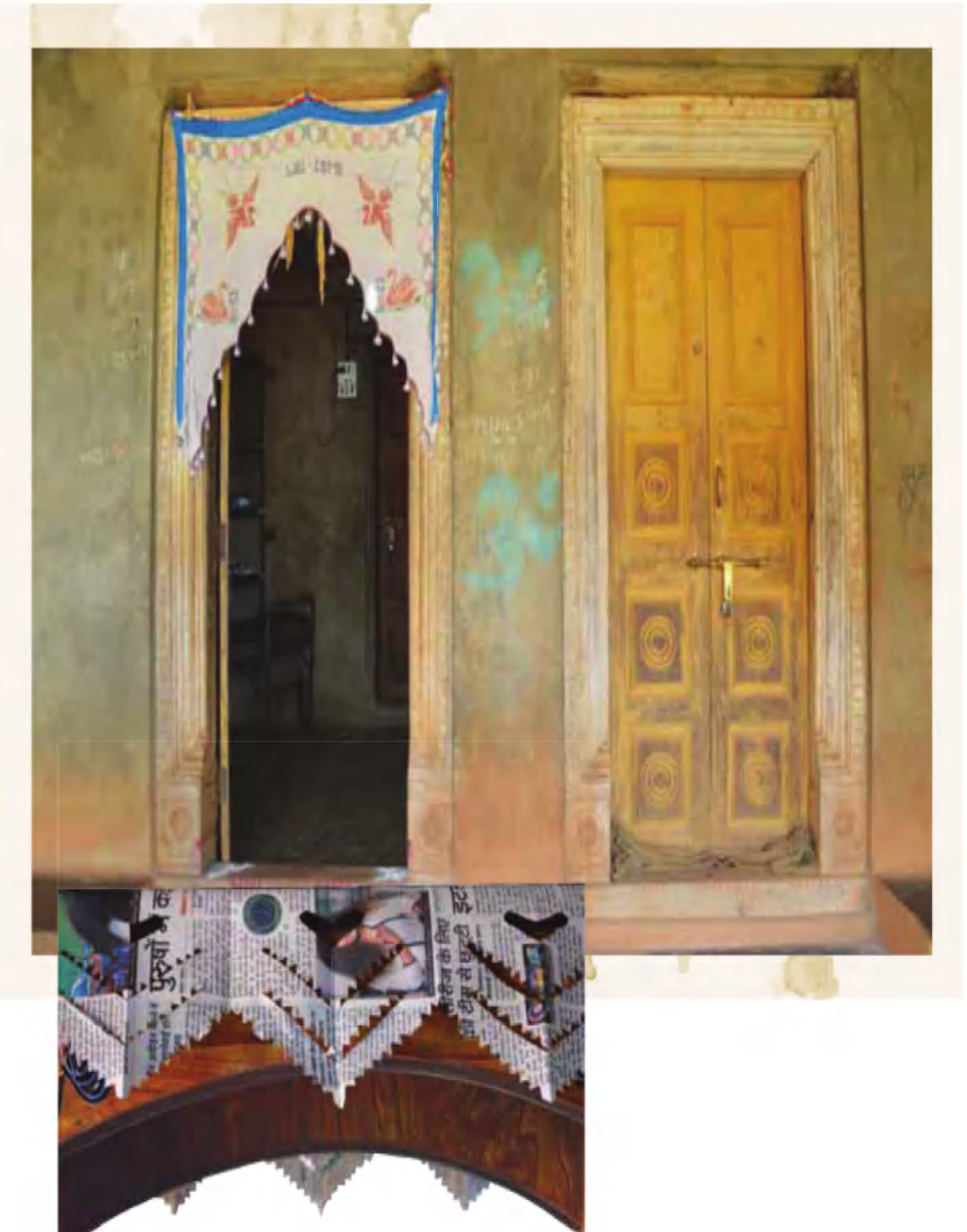
The home spills in to the gully. It is a space that can be used to connect with the mohalla, chatting, playing or just to see and be seen. ■■



Ambivalence and compounded identities

The relationship between the self & others, and between home & outside is simultaneously marked by suspicion, politics as well as a deep need to stay connected. Part of the identity belongs to the collective but that does not preclude protests about interference.■■

The courtyard: The rooms are side by side offering separation, but also the perfect view of each other. This caters perfectly to the desire to see and be seen. Homes built around the courtyard actually offer a space where these views can be exchanged on a relaxed afternoon. ■■



IN THE GULLY MOHALLA, THE THRESHOLD LAYS CLAIM

When the self spans both home and outside, the threshold gains importance. It allows the family unit to extract itself from the collective, by gently marking a boundary. The uniqueness of the front door and the auspicious symbols at the threshold stake claim to both identity & bounty for the self and the family.

Rangolis, bandhanwars and the decorative door

The self extends to the gully – mohalla and is embedded in this network; but at the same time the world outside the home is where the pollutants and the evil influences reside. The sanctity of the home needs to be retrieved from the outside world. Before anything enters this sacred space, it needs to be purified and only positive energy is welcomed in. The rangolis, nimboo mirchi and other such devices to ward of the evil eye sit guard at the threshold.

The main door talks back to the outside world, announcing the status of the family within. It is often the only decorative element and it faces the outside world. ■■

The relationship of the self with the world outside the threshold is complex and marked by ambivalence.

THE CHANGE

Modernization has changed the face of the urban landscape. Community structures, levels of prosperity have impacted meaning systems. Interiors of the homes especially those of young couples are markedly different. The home as one large container to hold the basic necessities of life is not really true anymore. It has moved far beyond being a shelter. Inside the home, the narrative does not seem to be just a stream of consciousness.

There is purpose, intent and design. It is a new currency and it signifies the needs that have now come to the forefront.

COMING OF AESTHETICS

Class mobility has kicked in.

Aesthetics is the currency that expresses mobility & the subsequent arrival. The old order has been rearranged. Mobility has created new positions and therefore a new currency is needed to signify the coordinates. The language of aesthetics is one such currency. It signals the values that need to be communicated. There is a new emotional narrative unfolding.

The gaze is not limited to the front door. The gaze has been invited into the home. 'Being seen' has traveled deeper. The home space is now a designed and conscious space, forever open to scrutiny. Taste announces arrival into the newly acquired social class.

The aesthetic of joy: The aesthetics of arrival is often a joyous one. It is about excess and a state of being hyper aware that every bit and every detail counts.

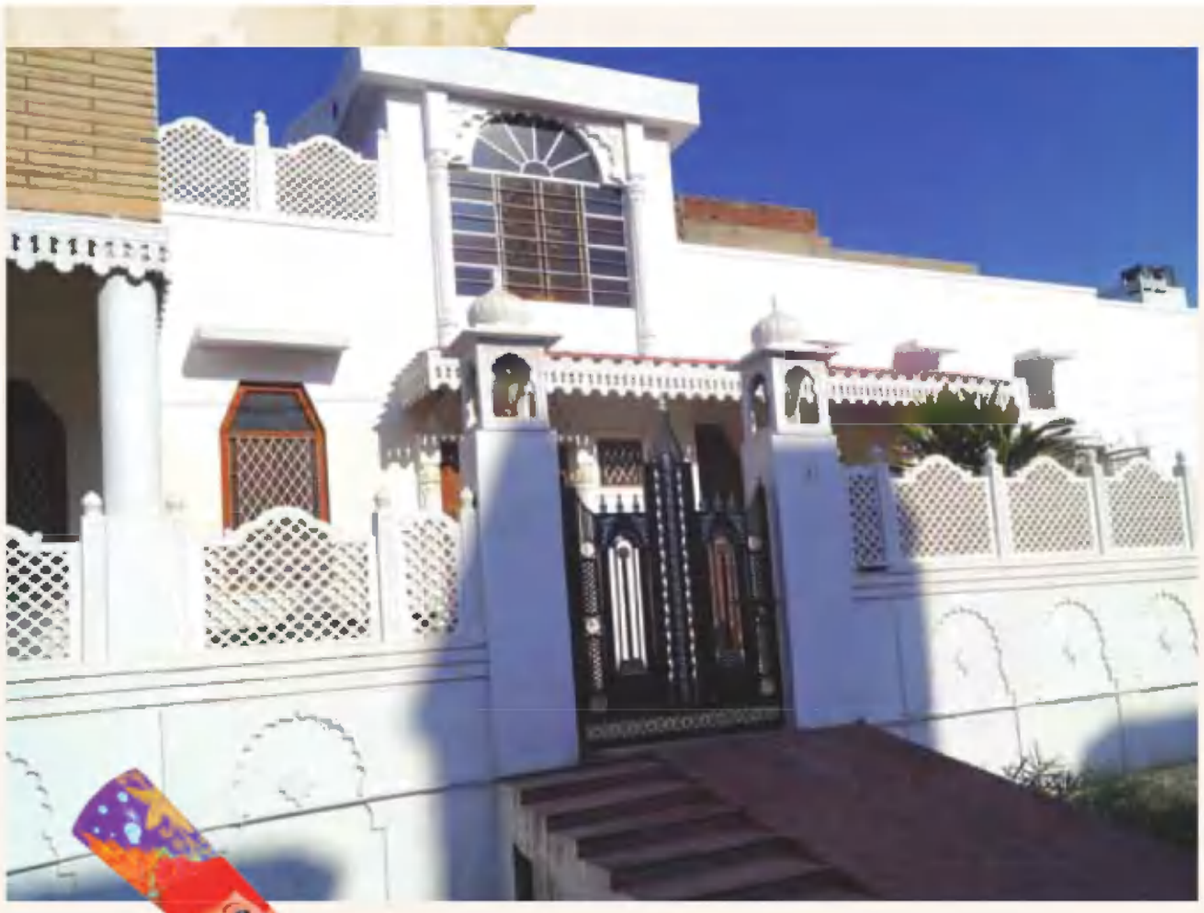
It is about colour and excess. ■■

BRAND TALK

ASIAN PAINTS

Har ghar kuch kehta hai, isme kaun rehta hai

There is bounty in the design elements. It is about fulsomeness and not about missed opportunities of negative spaces. ■■



RISE OF INDIVIDUALITY

The self is beginning to extract itself from the collective. It has much less to do with the gully & mohalla. Being an entity on its own terms is a statement of empowerment. Marking boundaries & securing what is yours is the confident statement of our times. It is perhaps also an indicator that the web of relationships is becoming more tenuous. You are on your own.

Grand gates, boundary walls, names and name plates announce the grandeur of the new coordinates and secure it against hostile forces.

Grills, gates, spiky boundary walls speak of the experienced hostility of the outside world. The relationship with the gully – mohalla is not ambivalent any more; it is decidedly one of mistrust. The individual seems to have cut himself off.

Kothis & bungalows with its high gates were once the preserve of the elite few. With rising levels of prosperity and class mobility , these symbols are being appropriated. However, the new class does not adopt it as it is. The aesthetic of the gates and walls is the new currency and is imbued with the emotional narrative of the times. ■■

Buildings have names. The individual that has just escaped the collective, needs to announce its being. Names and nameplates are carefully chosen as is font and the design. They need to say a lot. They also tell stories of where they would like to be. ■■

BRAND TALK

REAL ESTATE PROPERTIES

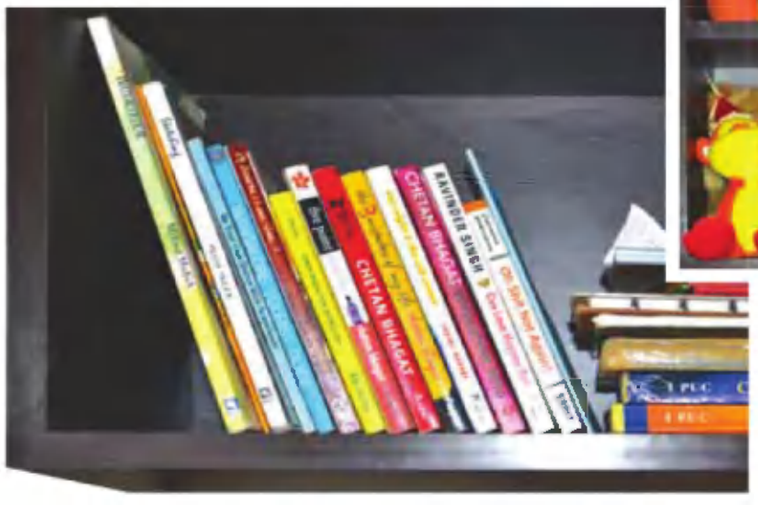
Names of real estate projects are about fantasies of identity and escape. The individual now has a bouquet of identities that he can choose from. In a new found land, there are a million degrees of freedom.

Thematic décor is a trip down wonderland. It is the multiplied joy of seeing the desired fantasy reflected on a hundred different surfaces.

It is the power of wielding a magic wand and imposing uniformity across disparate objects and surfaces. Somewhere the mind's eye sees an awestruck audience. ■■

Homes can no longer be unconscious spaces. They are designed and there is intent. They are in order and always gaze ready.

Order and symmetry which were limited to the drawing room now spills over. ■■



As the generation gets more settled into the new configuration, the expression of the aesthetic may change from a joyous expression to a more sober one with clean lines. Perhaps a product of exposure to the western sensibility and a certain assuredness.

Order however, is here to stay.

Chaos has clearly become very private. Everything that is not aesthetic has to be hidden away lest they be judged unfavourably. ■■

THE ARRIVAL OF PRIVACY

The applause for aesthetics and statements is heady but the incessant gaze is tiring. Need for privacy is now a heightened need. Privacy is a retreat for the individual into a space where he will not be judged, where things can just be. Once thresholds kept the evil influences out. Now there is a need to keep the gaze out.

The kitchen—open to view to closed box neatness

The kitchen has characteristically always been a orderly, neat and symmetrically arranged space. This is a space that is sacred and auspicious enough for gods to reside in. If there is no Puja room then the mandir is in the kitchen. Order and symmetry is the aesthetic of the sacred. From Puja ki thali to the rangoli, symmetry rules.

Materials have modernized consistently over a period of time, but the basic code has remained the same. ■■

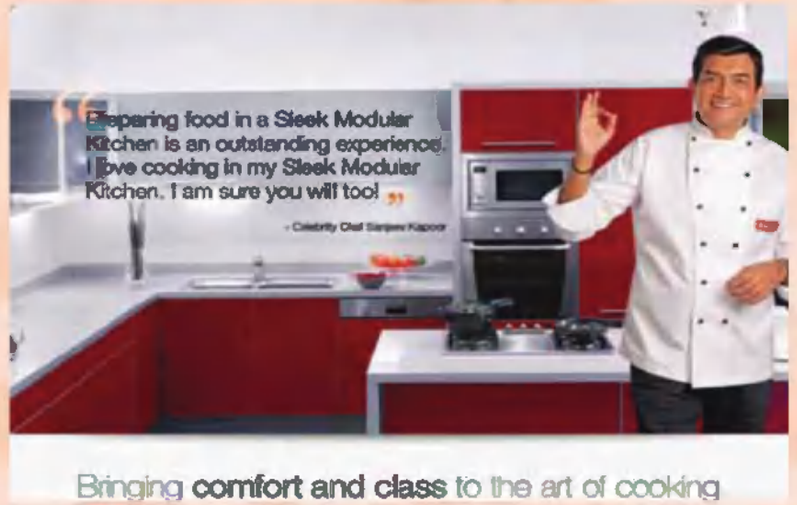
Brass gave way to steel and now Tupperware has taken over.

The transition to the modular kitchen—from open to concealed

The modular kitchen is not a break away change. It is continuous change on the same trajectory, where the shine and orderliness has been kept intact. Materials have always been open to modernization, therefore the adoption of the modular kitchen is not a surprise.

The concealment in the drawers: The drawers where everything is out of sight is the big change. Earlier the shelves were open to view and the prosperity of the family was showcased through the utensils possessed by the family. Now the modular kitchen itself shows that. Privacy has come into play even in the kitchen. While the social gaze continues to be important, some privacy is reclaimed by the drawers which keep things away from view. ■■

BRAND TALK



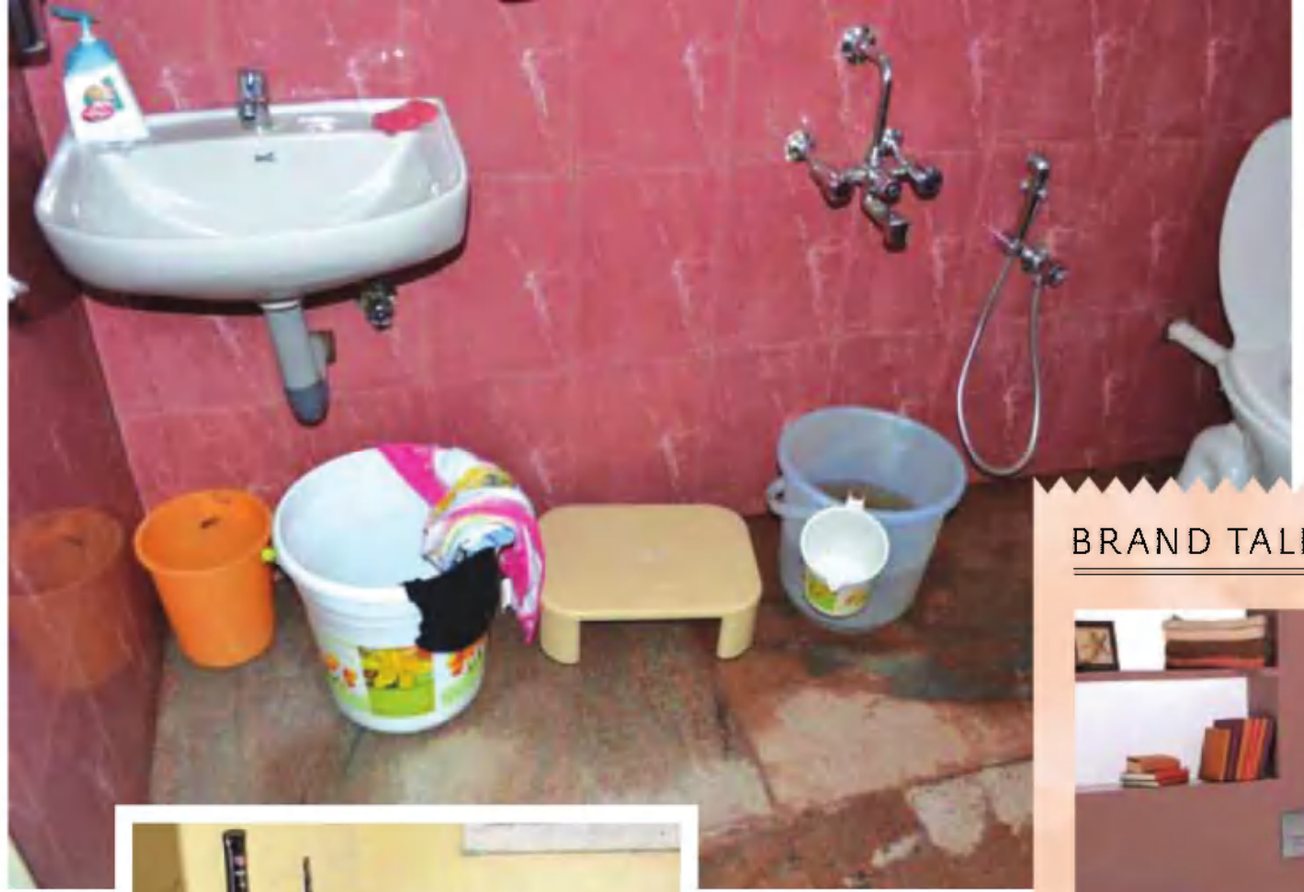
TUPPERWARE, MODULAR KITCHEN ADS

Only the value seeking Indian, has taken to branded storage containers which come with a fair price tag. The symmetry and orderliness of a Tupperware kitchen is no different from the same kind of order that was seen in grandma's kitchen. The brass containers were replaced by steel and now they are made of plastic. Nothing has really changed. Only the material is modern.

The Bathroom—the discontinuous change

From being relegated to being outside the house, the bathroom crawled into the house and then attached itself to the bedroom. It has perhaps traced the trajectory of our growing need for privacy. From being a polluting space it is space that we can escape to.

The look and feel of the real bathroom may not have changed drastically, but the imagination around it now, is very far from the functional. The Liril girl was the first to magnify the bath as personal time. The bathroom has triggered the imagination around personal space. ■■



BRAND TALK

THE BATHROOM

The bathroom is a room too was an early attempt to give bathroom some legitimate space in the house.
The language of the brands in thrs space ranges from fashion, to art to sensuality. When no one is watching these are some of the selves that we like to play out in front of the mirror.

The curtain

There is still an awkwardness about demanding privacy. The Curtain does the job very discreetly. A softer stand compared to the strong statement of the closed door. ■■

Homeliness is a unique Indian term for a need that is perhaps universal. It is a term that encompasses a sense of warmth and the cozy security of being in the fold.

Aesthetics however, is the new currency of signaling. It is so new that there is a need to be taught. Hotel décor, interior design magazines, real estate and paint companies, all assume the role of the teacher. ■■

These are the projected images of a home today

In the privacy of our homes do these images transform, as they deal with homeliness?

Aesthetics as a currency to signal the freshly rearranged class structure, has perhaps made us more aware how our homes look.

Hotel aesthetics now describe some of the newer constructions. It is so manicured and orchestrated that it is a far cry from the organically heaving mess that we called 'homely.' In fact hotel and home were traditionally opposed to each other. The new aspiration is to merge the social with the 'real' self wherein the social self ceases to be a façade.

Only time will tell whether we will finally cave in under the strain of striving for a picture perfect and orderly home. Will the ethos of the drawing room be driven out from the bedroom?