

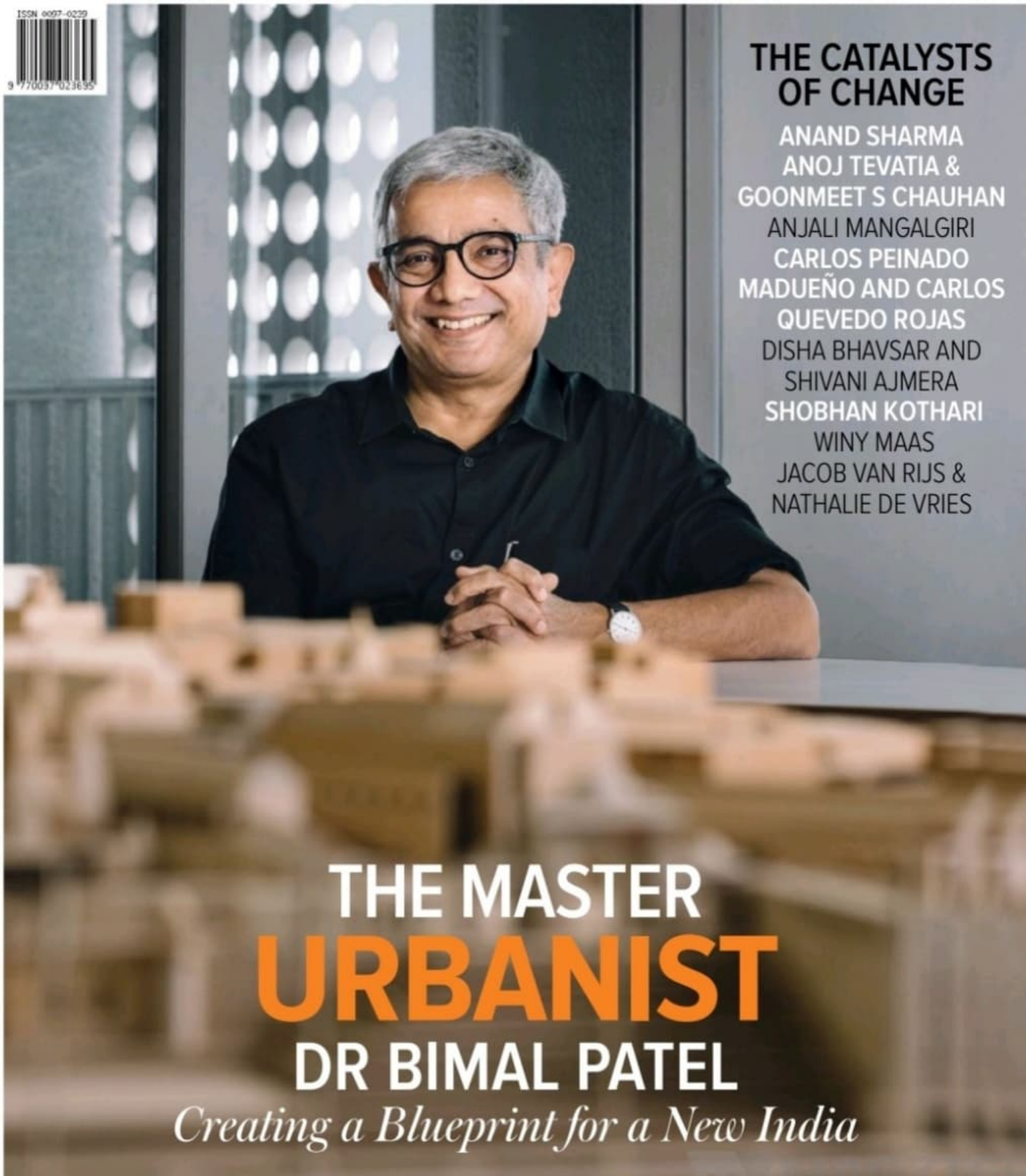
ARCHITECTURE+DESIGN

A N I N D I A N J O U R N A L O F A R C H I T E C T U R E

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THE CATALYSTS OF CHANGE

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Creating a Blueprint for a New India

Design Thinking



THE NEW MINIMALISTS

Disha Bhavsar and Shivani Ajmera
of Quirk Studio talk to us about friendship,
passion and profession

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: KUBER SHAH

Quirk Studio was founded in 2013. In a rather short span of time, the founders Disha Bhavsar and Shivani Ajmera have created a distinct identity for themselves. Their signature is spaces with a minimal ethos but with a complex narrative. Their passion for design and the poetics of spaces brought them together. "Setting up a practice was a spontaneous decision. We didn't dwell on it too much; we didn't overthink it. I think it's our spontaneity that sets us apart, even today," says Shivani.

We catch up with the dynamic duo to know all about them, and their intuitive and innovative approach to design. Here's an excerpt:

How did design happen to you? Shivani, you specialised in mass media but decided to pursue design? How did this shift happen? Disha, what inspired you to pursue design?

Disha: Since my childhood, I was inclined towards art and design. My dad has always had a keen eye for design and detail, which came naturally to me. I have an aunt who is an interior designer, and while growing up, she was a big influence and inspiration to me. It is through her that I learnt and realised the potential of Interior Designing as a profession

and a business. I learnt what one could do with it, and that opened a whole new world of possibilities for me as I was naturally drawn to design, which further concretized my decision to study Interior Design after I finished my schooling.

Shivani: While I was in the early years of my undergraduate programme in advertising, I happened to get a chance to design my cousin's bedroom. It was then that I discovered the world of design can be made into a career, and I also realised that this was something I really loved. This serendipitous realisation led to the switch, but I did finish my degree, after which I went on to study Interior Design in Italy, formally.

When did you both realise that you nurture the same passion for design? Take us through your initial days.

Shivani: While working on a large event together, we happened to have a conversation about what our future goals were, and realised that we were very aligned in what we wanted to create for ourselves. While working, we had already developed an inherent rapport. This conversation grounded our understanding of how each of us

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The Fancys Pants



The Mill



The Mill



WE ADMIRE THE WORK OF A LOT OF DESIGNERS. SHIVANI HAS ALWAYS LOVED PHILIPPE STARCK'S WORK, AND I HAVE BEEN FASCINATED WITH GEOFFREY BAWA'S WORK EVER SINCE I DISCOVERED IT. THESE AND MANY MORE CONTINUE TO INSPIRE US TO DATE."

serves together, from which bloomed the idea to partner and create something larger than Disha and Shivani as individuals.

We didn't overthink anything, nor did we ask too many people for their opinions and suggestions. Instead, we took off from whatever knowledge and experience we had, taking a leap of faith in the truest sense, and figured out everything along the way, right from scratch. This has been a huge part of our story and our journey as individuals and as Quirk Studio, and we wouldn't change it for anything in the world. Spontaneity and instincts are what got us started, brought us here and keep us going, even today—it is our USP.

Quirk Studio has a distinct design signature, which I would call the new minimalism. It's about creating no-nonsense spaces, yet loaded with warmth and character. Do you agree?

Disha: Yes, absolutely! That is totally what our signature has become. All our spaces are

minimalist, both Shivani and I like clutter-free spaces, and we want each piece we use to have a meaning, a story and to add to the totality of the space. Additionally, the spaces must reflect the personalities of the people occupying the space.

As a practice and as a studio, we really steer clear from ongoing 'trends' and any sort of badge or title in general. We adhere to our authentic design sensibilities, the client's personality and the narrative that the site demands.

Tell us about your most challenging project? And why was it so?

Shivani: Every project comes with its own set of challenges; sometimes, it is the budget or a difficult client. But one of the most challenging projects, in a very different way, was the Mill Project that we did last year. The project is a commercial workspace in Erode, Tamil Nadu and had surreal handling and execution, having been conceived and realised in the middle of the pandemic. Most of the management happened

through communication, but there was also a language barrier. We had to send a team from Mumbai; however, we didn't get to see the site until after a lot of work was done, which is not how we would typically run a site. Despite the challenges, the outcome is exactly how we'd wished it to be, and we're delighted and very proud of the team's effort.

What inspires you?

Shivani: Both Disha and I find inspiration in our surroundings, because we believe that inspiration is everywhere. It is all about having the eye for recognising it and the inclination to get inspired. It could be through travels, a book we read, a film we watched or just something we came across on the internet. We believe that inspiration has no boundaries, no limitations, and we encourage our team to practice the same outlook.

In your learning days, which architect/designer inspired you the most?

Disha: We admire the work of a lot of designers. Shivani has always loved Philippe Starck's work, and I have been fascinated with Geoffrey Bawa's work ever since I discovered it. These and many more continue to inspire us to date.

These days, designers, brands, architects are all talking about collaborations. Given a chance, who would you like to collaborate with and why?

We love Jaime Hayon's work and would love to collaborate with him. He's experimental in his approach and does some really interesting and 'out of the box' work.

In a very short span of time, you have both created a niche for yourself. What would you attribute your success to?

Shivani: Intuition and gut are what we swear by, and it is what got us here. We have never over thought or second guessed our decisions and choices beyond a point. Neither have we asked too many questions. Without trying to sound too philosophical, we have always let our inner voice lead us, and that is our story.

Having said that, we are persistent and don't give up easily. We have gone through the toughest times where other people might have easily given up, but we always hang on, which contributes to our success and why we are here.

Do you think the pandemic has affected the way we design and live?

Disha: In the new normal, functionality has become a key to designing spaces. In fact, multifunctionality has become imperative today. With the pandemic,



The Mysa Home



The Mysa Home



“REGARDLESS OF WHOSE IDEA IT IS AND WHO IS ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE FINAL CHOICE IS WHAT IS BEST FOR THE PROJECT, AND THIS EXTENDS TO THE TEAM AS WELL—THE BETTER IDEA ALWAYS WINS AND IS TAKEN FORWARD.”

people are staying at home and working from home as well. So every space and every piece of furniture is thought of more critically, because now it is used not by one person, but by multiple end-users, all of whom use it differently. The bedrooms are used as workspaces, and the living room becomes a yoga room when needed. Even when things have started to open up, the concept of hybrid working, where people will continue to work from home, remains. Hence, it is essential that all elements of a home are multi-functionally adaptable.

What next?

Shivani: Currently, we have a whole mix of amazing residential spaces all of which are different in terms of client, the scale of the project and the designs. Every new project thrills us and keeps us motivated. We are ecstatic that now QS is working not just pan-India, but is also doing international projects. It is a big step in the right direction for Quirk Studio. All in

all, we are doing a great gamut of work in terms of style and creativity with a fantastic line of action, and we are thrilled about the bright times ahead.

Friends first? Or Colleagues first?

Disha: Colleagues first, and then friends—stuck together forever and we won't have it any other way! We believe that our partnership at Quirk Studio worked and has come a long way because we were aware of each other's temperaments since the beginning. This experience was foundational to the great camaraderie that we share on the work front today. So essentially, we are colleagues turned partners, who became great friends, and today we are like family to each other.

One thing we practice as individuals and also imbibe in our team is that we don't count. Everybody is doing what they can, to the best of their abilities; someday one person has a bad day, the other day someone else does. The idea is to take the vision forward and balance each other and not be petty.

Who amongst you is a control freak?

Shivani: Both of us have a very keen sense for detail and are very particular about finishes, but Shivani takes the cake. I believe I do a better job at hiding the instinct while she struggles a little, which also makes her a perfectionist.

Has there been an instance when you completely disagreed on a particular project?

Disha: There are disagreements and days when we might not be on the same page, but we have a rule that we go by, which is that the better idea always wins. Regardless of whose idea it is and who is on the other side, the final choice is what is best for the project, and this extends to the team as well—the better idea always wins and is taken forward.

The one thing that you admire about each other?

Shivani: Disha is genuinely one of the most balanced and in-charge people I have ever met. She is steady and rooted like a strong tree, standing and blooming, and can withstand a storm in all its glory and come out victorious.

Disha: Shivani is a perfectionist with an impeccable eye for detail and smaller details that other people might miss, but not her. We would not be Quirk Studio without that.

One thing you don't.

Disha: I do wish for Shivani to have a better work-life balance.

Shivani: I wish Disha were a phone person. ☺