

# TRENDS



## Designs Dialogues and Art by

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**Rollo Studio**

Sanjay Puri Architects

**Studio 415**

Studio ThusThat

**The Purple Ink Studio**

# DOUBLING THE EFFECT

Shivani Ajmera and Disha Bhavsar on navigating the Indian design scene



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#### ON THE COVER

Shivani Ajmera and Disha Bhavsar  
Image: Meetesh Taneja





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# UNCONVENTIONALLY MINIMAL

Meet Shivani Ajmera and Disha Bhavsar, the dynamic co-founding duo of Quirk Studio, who have forayed their way into the world of interior design with their quirky and unconventional ideas...inspiring many young designers to follow in their footsteps

Feature **NEERJA KAPADIA**

Profile images **MEETESH TANEJA**

Project images **ISHITA SITWALA**



ON DISHA: DRESS - ZARA, SHOES - ALDO ACCESSORIES - RADHIKA AGGARWAL, VIARI, ZARIN  
ON SHIVANI: SUIT - LITTLE THINGS STUDIO, ACCESSORIES - AYANA, RADHIKA AGGARWAL



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*Quirk Studio was conceived on the landing of a staircase, where Disha and I, having been colleagues for a couple of years, had a chance conversation about our passion, love for design, and a shared vision to start a design practice of our own. Our perspectives resonated, dreams collided and we kickstarted the studio with determination and vigour.*

– Shivani Ajmera, Principal designer and Co-founder, Quirk Studio

**M**eet Disha Bhavsar and Shivani Ajmera from Quirk Studio, a boutique design studio based out of Mumbai, which over the last decade, has designed many people-centric spaces across major cities in India as well as the UK. The dynamic powerhouses that lead the show, started their entrepreneurial journey off Disha’s dining table. Reminiscing those days and their journey, the duo recalls the triumphs, the milestones, the struggles and the abundant learnings....

“We were young women with a dream of owning a design studio that had a distinctive style and aesthetic that resonates with who we are. We were sure of our long-term goal...to create spaces that inspire. As first-generation design entrepreneurs, we were on our own, with no mentors, no legacy, but a consolidated experience of seven years each, and the sheer determination to do it all ourselves. So, when we started Quirk Studio in 2013, we went guns blazing to spread the word. We left no stone unturned, reaching out to family and friends, networking amongst peers and making rounds to get the exclusive fraternity door to open slightly for us.

As first-generation designers, we took everything that came our way, working round the clock to build a solid portfolio of work that would lay the foundation of what Quirk Studio is today. Initially, we had different verticals including ►



interior styling...a transitional phase that eventually transformed into full-fledged interior design practice. A decade later, our design ethos is still the same.

Our way was not short of prejudices, judgements and struggle. Getting past the notion that we are just two girls with a passion project was frustrating, but it gave us the drive to prove ourselves even more. Apart from these external tribulations, we juggled between designing sites, logistics of running a business, client contracts, paying rent, maintaining accounts, and more...

We did it all by ourselves in the formative years...be it figuring out how to register a company, getting our first client, our first site visit, or even paying taxes. Looking back, in hindsight, if we had the chance, we would still do this all over again. Through our journey, we have embraced each of our failures and celebrated every win together... which has been the most fulfilling part of the journey.

Distinctly difficult, but now a fond memory, the real challenge was to get our clients to believe in us and our ability to translate their vision. Starting out by ourselves, it took us a couple of years to have our clients give us an open hand to work with. They played a larger role in our trajectory by helping us navigate the route to our goal, decipher the types of projects we wanted to work on, and the kind of clients we wanted to work with.

It took us couple of years to get there. We knew what we wanted to achieve, and hence, each step strategically led us to where we are today. Every move through the years matters today...be it pivoting when the time calls, entering the world of social media to make our work accessible to the fraternity and fellow design entrepreneurs, or collaborating with like-minded individuals along the way. Our dream was wholesome...a facet of which was to build ►

Apartment 303 vouches for a design aesthetic that sustains functionality while being classic in its appearance. Styling – Samir Wadekar





a safe space for the people who work with us. We set out to offer a healthy work culture and bring about a sense of belonging, which would incubate learning and joy.

As we grew, we became a team that learns from each other, has a strong work ethic and loves design. Each member who works with us leaves their mark on what Quirk Studio is, be it our interns, designers or administrative staff. In our field, things seldom go according to plan, and one needs to be an all-rounder to deal with alarming situations and trials in the office and on-site. Our team feeds our vision, fuelling our zest and hence, for us, finding the right people is extremely important.

Despite being part of a male dominated industry, we are in the 21st century with a foot on Mars... so there is absolutely nothing women cannot do. Both men and women are equals... however, what impacts our growth sometimes, is the inadequate facilities and support infrastructure that is available to women on sites, such as basic sanitation and toilets. That being said, our team of girls are fierce and has executed some of the most notable Quirk Studio projects. The Mill Project in the outskirts of Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, is a commercial office amalgamating rustic and luxury. Being a pandemic project, the conditions were adverse, and there was a stark language barrier. An all-girl four-member team led the project from Quirk Studio, and each of us rose to the challenge, successfully accomplishing our vision with a flare.

Realistically, we have always maintained a certain standard for ourselves, vouching for a ▶



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*We had clarity on what we wanted to achieve from day one, and that direction helped us get where we are today. We have put blood, sweat and tears into building Quirk Studio, which was only a two-person show for the first couple of years.*

– Disha Bhavsar, *Principal designer and Co-founder, Quirk Studio.*





Having found its place under the sun with several projects, Quirk Studio paved its way for what is today their signature style...meaningful and minimalistic... as can be seen in the Melange home.

design aesthetic that sustains functionality while being classic in its appearance. Hence, while our approach is client-centric, the process drives us to learn and unlearn with every commission, resulting in an ever-growing and evolving practice. What, however, remains unchanged, is our determination to prioritise quality over quantity. We have never aspired to be a commercial practice or a factory. We have always wanted to be a boutique firm that designs people-centric spaces.

Another platform that helped us become popular was the prevailing influence of social media and the digital world. We joined Instagram when it launched. We have continued to put our work out there and make it accessible to our

audience, while giving them an insight into our process, offering sneak peeks to our inspirations and successfully creating a community that loves design as much as we do. It has never really been about the number of followers or likes, but always about sharing knowledge and information. We are grateful to have been rewarded with appreciation, thanks to social media.

While designing writer-comedian Rohan Joshi's home in Mumbai in 2017, he documented and shared the complete experience with his Instagram followers...the selections, site visits and the final turn around. A couple of years later, we experienced a similar phenomenon while designing a home for celebrity couple Anushka and Aditya Seal, which was widely acclaimed on ▶





Quirk Studio's distinct process of brainstorming and driving a design ideation is different in each project they undertake, distinctly visible in the Garden 6 Apartment ...functional, yet aesthetically unique.







the leading publications, digital platforms and social media.

We often talk about the importance of pivoting, and our own perspectives saw a marginal shift during the pandemic. Disha and I started our individual journeys during the burn-out time, where creative productivity was directly proportional to the time spent behind it. This led to an all-work and no life balance. During the lockdown, we realised the importance of quality over quantity in our personal lives, and since then, we have been striving to achieve that balance for us and our team. Each of us pursues what we love...for Shivani, it is her music, and for me, it is my travels or spending time with my dog. We promote hobbies and passions at our studio, which has made our team more invested in us, also allowing us to connect at levels that extend beyond what we do every day.

During the first decade, we were all about building a solid foundation, and today, our vision continues. Our next decade is dedicated to being a practice with a purpose. We want to use the voice we have worked hard to get and make an impact...be it through sustainable projects, meaningful collaboration, giving back to the fraternity, steering the correct balance for our teams or expanding to two-tier and three-tier cities.

What makes it work? - we're often asked. It is the partnership, the collaboration, the shared desire to continue learning and growing, the willingness to put ourselves out there with every single project and our unending love for design. We have come a long way and yet have miles to go. Slow and steady does win the race, after all." **H&DT**

ON DISHA: DRESS - LITTLE THINGS STUDIO, ACCESSORIES - RAOHKA AGGARWAL, AVANA, VIARI  
ON SHIVANI: TRENCH-BE TRUE, SHOES - CHARLES & KEITH, ACCESSORIES - AVANA