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# 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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CURATOR  
OF  
*Style*  
APARNA  
KAUSHIK



**BESPOKE  
SPACES**

*By*

ABHIGYAN NEOGI

**AJAY ARYA**

ASHA SAIRAM

**CASPER MORK ULNES**

RAHUL MISTRI

**SMRITI RAHEJA SAWHNEY**

SHIVANI GUPTA AND

AYUSH MITTAL

**VIHAR FADIA**

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**COVER FEATURE**

CURATOR OF  
**LUXURY**  
APARNA  
KAUSHIK

With her inimitable sense of style and her flair for luxury residences, Architect Aparna Kaushik has created a distinct niche for herself.

FEATURE: **SEEMA SREEDHARAN**

PROFILE PHOTOGRAPHS: **ATUL PRATAP CHAUHAN & JAGDISH LIMBACHIYA**

“

*Design undoubtedly must be beautiful and aesthetic. Over the years I've realized that good design must exhibit a perfect balance of aesthetics and functionality. Functionality differentiates good design from great design.”*

—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK  
Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik  
Design Group





Contemporary furniture, sculptural lighting, textured fabrics and, of course art makes this expansive home a visual delight. As in all her projects, Apama makes nature an integral part of her design.

She's a perfectionist. We can see that in her office—a resplendent mansion spread across three floors. Her impeccable style shines through in her workspace—everything is aligned, perfectly proportioned; books, art, flowers, cushions, all come together in a perfect world choreographed by her. Architect Aparna Kaushik's space is evocative of her penchant for arts, her obsession with fashion, her innate sense of style. "Design undoubtedly must be beautiful and aesthetic. However, over the years I've realized that good design must exhibit a perfect balance of aesthetics and functionality. Functionality differentiates good design from great design," says the architect who is synonymous with upscale residential projects.

Good at academics and a national level skating champion, Kaushik was all set to pursue a career in medicine. It was providence that steered her towards design. "I realized early on that I didn't want to be surrounded by misery. Although I had appeared for my entrance, there was no natural inclination towards medicine. It was then that I started exploring other avenues and was naturally drawn to architecture. The monuments and palaces I saw during my travels would mesmerize me. I was in awe of the scale and the impact they had on the human mind. With my intuitive sense of aesthetics and proportions, I knew I could be an architect."

Most sought-after for her unique balance of both aspirational design and precision, Kaushik has lent her signature expertise to develop noteworthy projects; in particular, bespoke residential estates. She combines timeless architecture with inventive interiors through a masterful attention to detail. Like an artist, she intricately handles every component of the design process from conception to execution. From furniture and lighting to floor plans and elevations, her creations are inherently cohesive. Kaushik is fascinated by art and architectural history; her designs pursue a studied fusion of both contemporary and classical forms. "Design is a manifestation of a story. To tailor a space to the versatile tastes of discerning clients, I begin by assimilating a narrative that spans both functional and aspirational preferences in modern as well as classic style signatures."

"I'm a perfectionist. I never start on a project before I complete the design. That is the reason why we have moved on to becoming a design-and-build firm, so that we can be in control of the entire execution, from concept to execution. I need to be in complete control of my design," says Kaushik.

Kaushik attributes fashion as her creative inspiration. "I pretty much dress the way I design. You'd rarely find me in casuals. Muted colours, perfectly tailored cuts, statement accents...you get the drift. If I were not an architect, I would be a fashion designer."

We caught up with Kaushik at her uber-classic office space in Delhi. Here's the excerpt.

## LUXURY AND SUSTAINABILITY: FINDING A BALANCE

**Seema Sreedharan (SS): The House of Aparna Kaushik is synonymous with luxury. However, in the past two years, people have become more mindful and conscious about their choices. Luxury and sustainability, is it a difficult balance to strike?**

**Aparna Kaushik (AK):** Honestly, I feel sustainability in the real sense comes at the planning stage. We usually equate sustainability to materiality, but that aspect, according to me, comes at a much later stage. I've been fortunate enough to work on larger land parcels. When you work with this kind of land, you obviously have the possibility of having your outdoors as a part of your day-to-day living. I feel the initial concept itself should draw from nature.

When you start perceiving your client's design and that very moment, you ask yourself some very critical questions—how much natural light does the space allow? Will we be dependent on air-conditioning or will natural ventilation be enough? Will the design encourage my users to be indoors or outdoors? These questions come to me very naturally. I feel when a design is in harmony with nature, a lot of your issues, especially the ones pertaining to energy use, are already taken care of.

Now, coming to the second part of it, which is the materiality of it. As far as the materiality goes, ++selection of materials in luxury, which are also coherent with nature, is always a challenge. But I think, now, even brands are more conscious and more aware about how and from where they are sourcing the materials. Most brand catalogues explain the process, so it becomes easier for us to make an informed choice. Slowly, we are getting there as a society. The pandemic has been a real eye opener. It was an unprecedented crisis that jolted us from our reverie. I see the change even in my clients. A lot of my clients are now complementing our endeavour to give them a sustainable design, which used to be a struggle a couple of years back.

Clients are more open and supportive of ideas that help reduce their carbon footprint and are willing to invest in those kinds of systems. Take for instance, solar panels; clients are now willing to install solar panels even if it means a higher investment in the beginning.

**SS: That brings to mind an interesting observation. Technology and sustainability are never considered inclusive. Like you mentioned earlier, sustainability is often equated with just materiality. Don't you think technology should aid sustainability?**

“

***Design is a manifestation of a story. To tailor a space to the versatile tastes of discerning clients, I begin by assimilating a narrative that spans both functional and aspirational preferences in modern as well as classic style signatures.”***

—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK, *Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik Design Group*



Aparna Kaushik's office is evocative of her signature style — a subdued colour palette forms a stunning backdrop for the layered interiors. The perfectly curated space lures you in to explore and admire.

“

*I feel sustainability in the real sense comes at the planning stage. We usually equate sustainability to materiality, but that aspect, according to me comes at a much later stage.”*

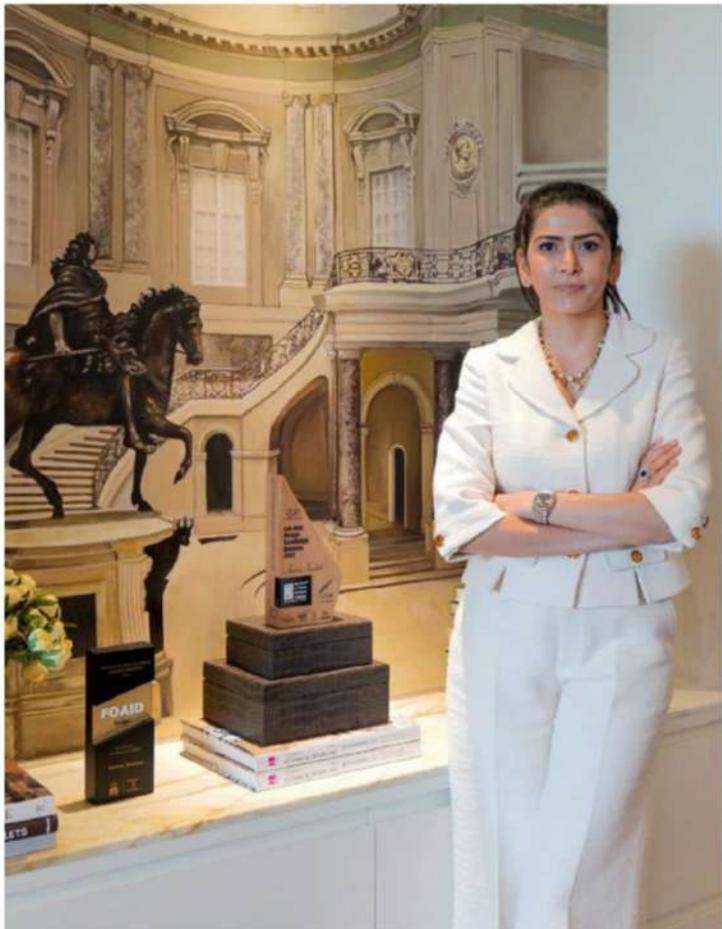
—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK, *Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik Design Group*



“

***I feel my aesthetic has evolved over the years. If you look at my architecture or interiors, I think it draws attention. But it draws attention in a way that it's not momentary. It's deeper, the design aims to draw you in and urges you to keep exploring. It's not in your face. It's subtle, subdued. There's a lot of detailing.***”

—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK, *Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik Design Group*



**AK:** I agree. It is important to understand the latest technology for you to implement it. For instance, earlier I used to rely on external vendors for solar panels. But now I have a consultant on board who guides me about the exact electrical load on the building versus what we'll be able to generate through solar panels. As architects, sometimes we get carried away with design. So, it's always better to have an informed consultant on board who's really guiding you through the process, whether it's making use of excess wastewater in the building or electricity.

**DESIGN SIGNATURE: SUBDUED MAXIMALISM**

**SS:** It's been more than a decade since you started your

**practice. How has your aesthetic evolved over the years?**

**AK:** When you are young, when you are just taking your first steps, you want to start with a bang, you want to be noticed, you want to do things that draw attention. I feel my aesthetic has evolved over the years. If you look at my architecture or interiors, I think it draws attention. But it draws attention in a way that it's not momentary. It's deeper, the design aims to draw you in and urges you to keep exploring. It's not right there in your face. It's subtle, subdued. There's a lot of detailing. I feel that my architecture, my interior spaces lure you in, gradually, rather than being there right in your face. I feel good design should encourage exploration and keep you engaged and enamoured throughout.

It's difficult to hold someone's attention for a very long time. I do a lot of residential projects and unlike retail spaces or hospitality projects, here, you don't rely on just eye-catching gimmicks. You must live in these spaces. You begin and end your days in this space. So, homes have to be really positive, the space should grow on you, rather than you growing out of the space. That's the balance we try to achieve in all our projects.

**SS: Your style is eclectic, exuberant, and richly layered. In your spaces, you've managed to achieve the rare phenomenon of subdued maximalism. How would you describe your style?**

**AK:** Our work blends European classicism with modernist tropical architecture, resulting in timeless structures with elegant, inventive interiors that showcase rigorous attention to detail.

Our projects comprise expansive luxury estates, stylishly intimate boutiques, immersive spas, chic restaurants, pubs and more. Without going mindlessly after trends, we strive to bring in the serenity of spiritualism as well as the calming influence of sustainability into our work. My main goal is to accentuate the natural qualities of a space, amplifying its beauty through seamless functionality and unique form.

I feel that when you are designing big homes and big estates, it's a little difficult to embrace minimalism. I feel it disappears into the whole volume of the space. So, you have to design and create accents that make a statement, which have a bearing on the space. At the same time, they don't interfere with your day-to-day life.

Both in the way I dress and design, I gravitate towards a subtle colour palette. Muted greys, taupe, shades of white. These colours tie the whole look together— putting together a cohesive design narrative.



Kaushik ensures that there's a constant connect between the indoors and the outdoors. Biophilia is a principle she follows in most of her projects, where she ensures that nature plays an integral part in the living spaces.

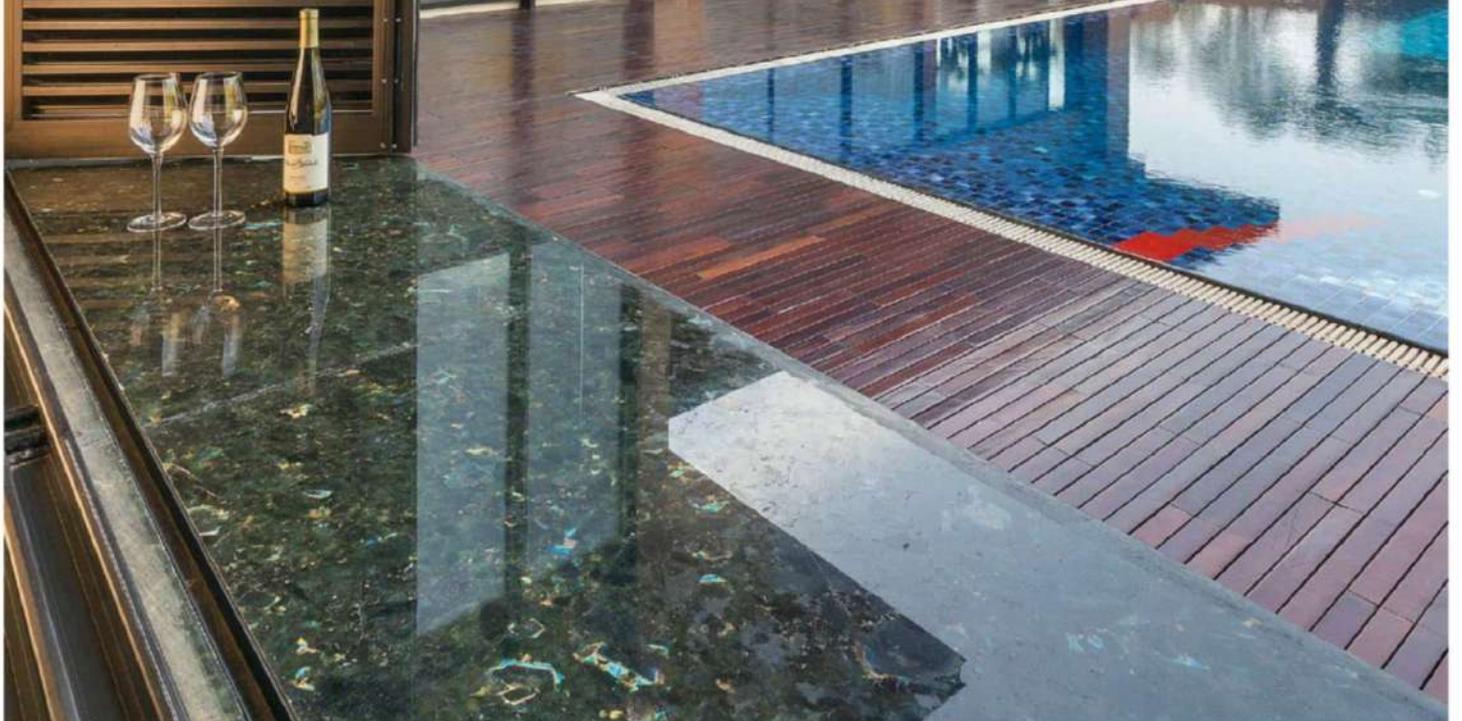


Kaushik's spaces exude a regal aura. The architect juxtaposes European classicism with modernist tropical architecture, resulting in timeless structures with elegant, inventive interiors that showcase rigorous attention to detail.

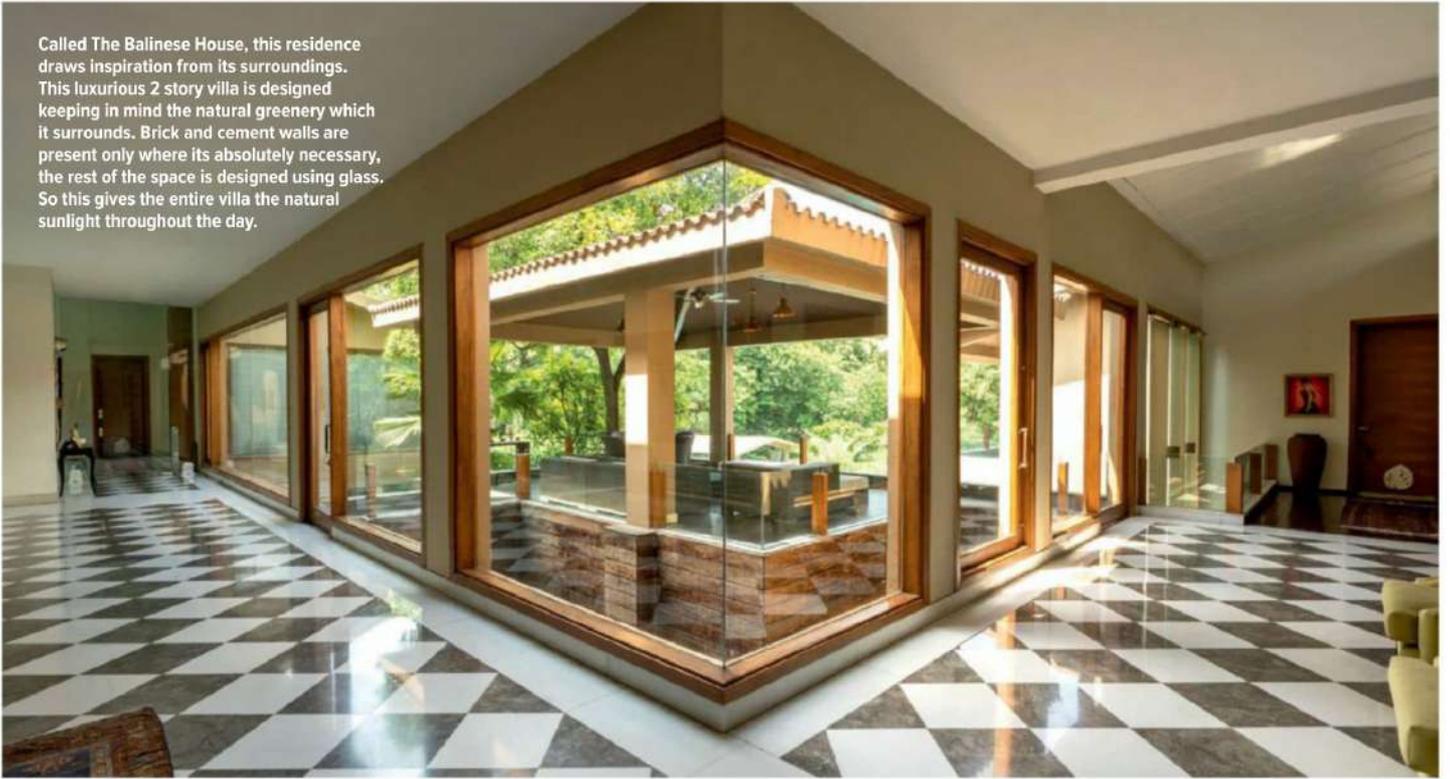
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*Creating the stage  
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Architecture  
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with artists and  
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—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK  
*Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik  
Design Group*



Called The Balinese House, this residence draws inspiration from its surroundings. This luxurious 2 story villa is designed keeping in mind the natural greenery which it surrounds. Brick and cement walls are present only where its absolutely necessary, the rest of the space is designed using glass. So this gives the entire villa the natural sunlight throughout the day.



Her design ethos is built on a studied balance of art and architectural history that fuses classical composition with contemporary flair and pragmatic precision to integrate the client's most explicit requirements and subtle preferences.

**SS: You mentioned that yours is a design-and-build firm. I feel that your work doesn't end there either. You seem to be equally invested in the interiors and the styling process. What we see is a completely curated look. Tell us a little about your design process.**

**AK:** Let me put it this way: When I design a space, I usually have a vision in mind. I work towards that vision. There are a lot of site visits and a lot of case studies done before we come up with the design plan.

A lot of it comes from meeting the client. I think in visuals. Words don't register, pictures do. When I meet a potential client, I have a certain image of their personality or rather, how I perceive them. There's a sort of image that gets constructed in my mind of how their space should be. That's my starting point. And I feel that architecture is the stage where you showcase your art.

Creating the stage to complement the art is also equally important. Architecture allows you the opportunity to imbibe a lot of art and collaborate with artists and artisans. I find it especially challenging when it comes to finding accents in the modern classic genre. You either get products that are too minimalistic or too classical. There is a dearth of design in between, something that marries the two worlds together.

**SS: A lot of designers and architects have ventured into product design. Since you already see a lacuna in your realm of design, do you intend to venture into that space?**

**AK:** Absolutely. I think it's a natural progression. Most of the accents and accessories in my projects are custom designed. Especially the light fixtures. When the space is grand, you look for equally dramatic accents. I end up designing most of them. So yes, eventually, I do think I will dedicate a team to product design.

**SS: Collaborations seem to be the buzzword these days. If you were to collaborate with someone, who would it be and why?**

**AK:** I wouldn't say collaborate, but I would love to work with architect Peter Marino at some point in my life, or maybe just get a sneak peek of his design process, because I feel he's the ultimate authority in luxury design. Marino is a connoisseur whose sensational interiors for a fleet of high-flying clients have made him the undisputed monarch of the design world.

The way he works with textures and materials, proportions and scales, it's amazing. 'Collaborate' is a big word, but I would want to be a part of, in some way or other, the projects that he is designing just to understand his approach, what he draws inspiration from, and how he works with his artists. Because right now, when we work with artists, there's always a gap between the science and the art part of it.

As architects, we are also very scientifically informed and

particular about how the sculpture would stand in the space, how it will be transported and lifted. And artists usually get carried away with the concept or the thought. How do you then find the balance? Yes, he's definitely one person I would love to work with or just observe.

I have been inspired by some contemporary designers, whose work I greatly admire. Bali-based architect Alexis Dornier is one of them. He is a very material-oriented architect who is also experimental. He uses wood to create astonishing fluid structures and curved forms, and is well-known for amalgamating the interiors and exteriors in an amazing manner. I strive to bring in a similar interaction between the interiors and exteriors creating, a natural habitat.

Among the legends, Zaha Hadid has made a tremendous impact on me, even though I do not relate to her fluid structures. It is her life journey that I'm most impressed with—her ferocious conviction in her dreams and her unflinching attitude when faced with challenges.

There's Richard Landry from California, who's known as the King of the Mega Mansion. It would be interesting to work with them...There's so much to learn from them.

**SS: Being a woman in a largely male-dominated field, have you ever faced any prejudices? Or do you think it's an overrated point of discussion?**

**AK:** Yeah, very overrated. I think women are doing excellent work and they've been doing excellent work. It is just that they are coming into the limelight now. And as a woman, if you really ask me and honestly, I think I've been privileged. You know, initially, when I started off as a kid, I would obviously make mistakes. And being a woman, nobody would scold me. But yes, bias does exist in some sectors of our society, but I think it's really narrowing down now. It's really disappearing. And also, a lot depends on the woman.

I choose to look at the positive side of things, like, I feel as a woman, I'm more design sensitive. I feel women definitely have a more feminine, sensitive side to the design while the men are more boisterous in terms of execution, in terms of everything. But yes, I feel, they complement each other. It's not a question of either/or. It's not a question of who's equally important or not important.

We have our very own functions to perform as human beings. We are made different, anatomically, physiologically and psychologically. We complement each other in a lot of ways. Fortunately, I've never faced any prejudices.

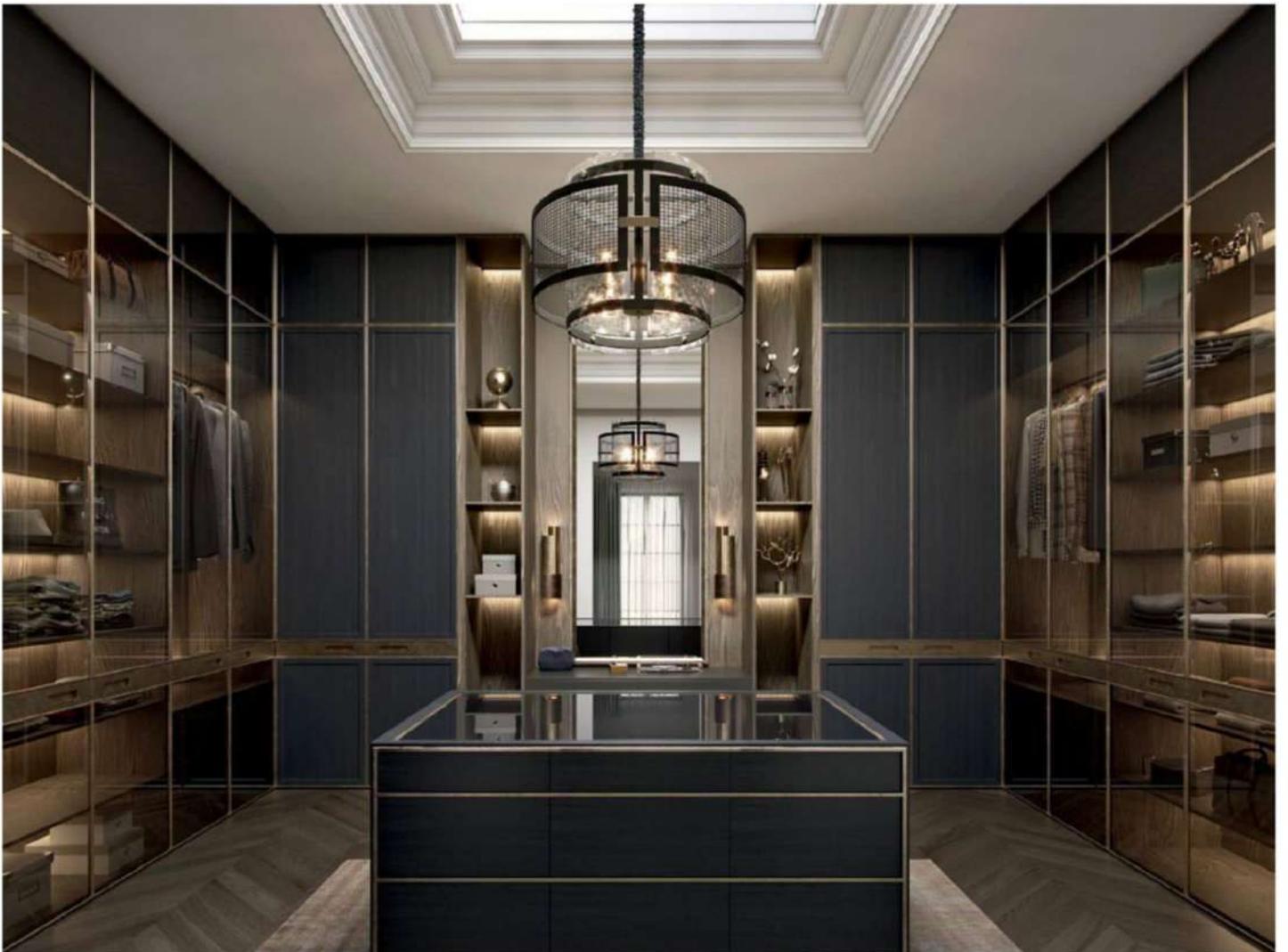
**SS: India is known for its handicrafts and craftsmanship. Do you think India will be known for its design?**

**AK:** Soon. Soon. Have patience. I think India is a young country

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***“For me, design is everything. Clarity of purpose and simplicity of line; purity of form and obsessive attention to detail. I strive for perfection.”***

—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK, *Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik Design Group*





Large vaulted ceilings, muted colour palette, intricately designed furniture and great art, these are cornerstones of Kaushik's design signature.

“

***I think India is a young country when it comes to design, I see a lot of energy when it comes to design. I feel privileged to be a part of the Indian design spectrum at this time, not ten years ago, not ten years from now. I think this generation of designers and architects are defining India's design identity.”***

—AR. APARNA KAUSHIK, *Founding Principal, Aparna Kaushik Design Group*

when it comes to design. I see a lot of energy when it comes to design. I feel privileged to be a part of the Indian design spectrum at this time, not ten years ago, not ten years from now. I think this generation of designers and architects is defining India's design identity.

Also, I feel that now the country has the money and, you know, an average person, an average middle-class person, has the exposure, the global exposure. I think design is something that usually comes to you when you're above your daily needs. You know, design is not a process that you will really enjoy when you are hungry, right? So, as a country, when our economy is doing better and we are above our basic needs and necessities, we start gravitating towards good design.

Also, as you see Indians are present in most of the international exhibitions as far as America, Milan and Paris are concerned. So, I think we may be at the best time for design in the country. In fact, I think we are going in the right direction because nothing needs to change. Like I said, it's a process.

If you see the Western world, particularly if I talk about Italy and France and countries that are known for their design, music, fashion, it didn't happen overnight. It happened gradually. I think that change is gradually happening in the country, and the more organic it is, the better it is.

I think we should not go out of our way and try to be like them. We should stay original to our own process and what we are going through and where we want to be.

**SS: As an architect, what's the one thing you would like to change in the city you live in?**

**AK:** I think we need to really improve our public infrastructure. In Delhi, it's impossible to walk on the streets, something I love doing in Europe, and I have these impressions and images while walking on the streets of Europe. In the cities you start observing small little details, enjoying and absorbing the mundane workings of the day.

But our cities are not pedestrian-friendly. This is something that I would really like to change, and that would come a lot from how we do our public gardens, how we do our streets, the roads and basic infrastructure should be pedestrian friendly.

**SS: Where do you see yourself ten years from now?**

**AK:** I can't really pinpoint what is next, so to speak. But I would say that, yes, if you ask me where I would be ten years from now, I think I would be designing a lot of conscious projects where the process is as nurturing as the product.

**SS: A word of advice to the next generation of architects?**

**AK:** I think one thing that I would really like to tell the youngsters



out here who are joining the design industry, well, it's very commonly that you hear people saying, 'Do what you want, stay true to what you want'. But I truly believe that now because, having such a global exposure working with artists abroad, they will not make an object to please anyone.

The artist will make an object because he wants to make it. And he's really passionate about it. He believes in making it. And whereas in India, when we attempt to design, we are really worried about a lot of acceptance. So, I think a true design which is appreciated at large, is the one which is not made for anybody.

What I'm trying to say is that you really should attempt to inform yourself; you must educate yourself in every area. I'm not saying that. Just do what you want to be. And while I mean to inform yourself with every nuance and aesthetic, at the end of the day, stay true to yourself, believe in what you're doing, and stick to it.

Stay true to yourself and be consistent. +