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TRENDS!
POSTMODERN
MIDAS
MATISSE
BLUE

FOCUS ON
FABRICS

HOTLIST

18

BLACK
MUST
HAVES

OFF DUTY
GLAMOUR

SUBTLE HOMES THAT STEAL THE SHOW



IN CONVERSATION WITH
KUNAL MANIAR

The landscape architect elaborates on his memorable journey, comprehensive works and constructive thought processes

TEXT BY SHRIYA GOYAL PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHISH SAHI

“VISION OVER VANITY! LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO REACH THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL AND WORK AROUND WHAT IS EXISTING”

Who knew growing up amidst lush greenery in urban Mumbai would inspire his choice of practice for landscape architect and founder of his namesake practice, Kunal Maniar. Reminiscing those days, he says, “Being raised in the city, a concrete jungle, and still being surrounded by trees informed my belief in the importance of integrating nature even within the most urban environments. This eventually translated into an interest in planning greenscapes and placemaking.” Following his calling, Kunal attended some summer courses in Singapore. He further enrolled in a Master’s program in Landscape Architecture at the University of Melbourne. Soon after his post-graduation, Kunal chose to begin his design journey at home and started Kunal Maniar and Associates in 2002. He recalls, “This was a time when landscape architecture was given little recognition in India, even within the design fraternity.” Earning acceptance in the industry, he worked alongside eminent architects and designers including Noshir Talati and Nozer Panthaky, Nozer Wadia and Pinakin Patel, which led to crucial learnings during the early stages of his career.

Kunal considers that landscape needs to be handheld with interiors and architecture from the commencement of any project. Experiencing that opportunity through the design and execution of a private terrace garden at Ceejay House in Mumbai, he divulges, “It is one of my most cherished projects. The owner trusted me and made me a part of the design journey from an early stage. We transplanted 40 year old trees that weighed a ton each. The space has stayed exactly how it was from

the start.” His innate design language extends beyond vegetation to include outdoor products. Exemplifying this, he designed an outdoor bench for a residential project located in the upscale precinct of Shanti Niketan in Delhi. Representing his idea of ‘shanti’, the white concrete bench is long enough to host a family gathering, while predominantly serving as a seat of solace and introspection. With product design comes materials. He states, “I’m obsessed with using metals in my landscapes with brass being my all-time favourite. I also enjoy working with glass, exposed concrete and brick.”

Beyond aesthetics, Kunal’s overarching goal is rooted in ecology. Planning interventions to mitigate the environment, he worked extensively with xeriscaping in his Alibaug projects. Pursuing the consciousness further in his current project, Kunal wishes to bring back the Mohenjodaro and Harappa way of living through barter of commodities without exchange of money. For his landscape project in the villages of Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, his studio has shortlisted 10 yielding trees and grown only those around the villages. Why? “Planting five native and beneficial trees around each village allows an exchange of commodities between them. Also, choosing specific trees to optimise carbon capture, integrating rain gardens and bioswales into the urban fabric and maximising permeable surfaces can increase flood resilience in cities. This is the definition of landscape for me. It has zero percent vanity, but a lot of constructive thinking,” reasons Kunal. He quips, “Many feel that landscape design is just about rolling out lawn carpet

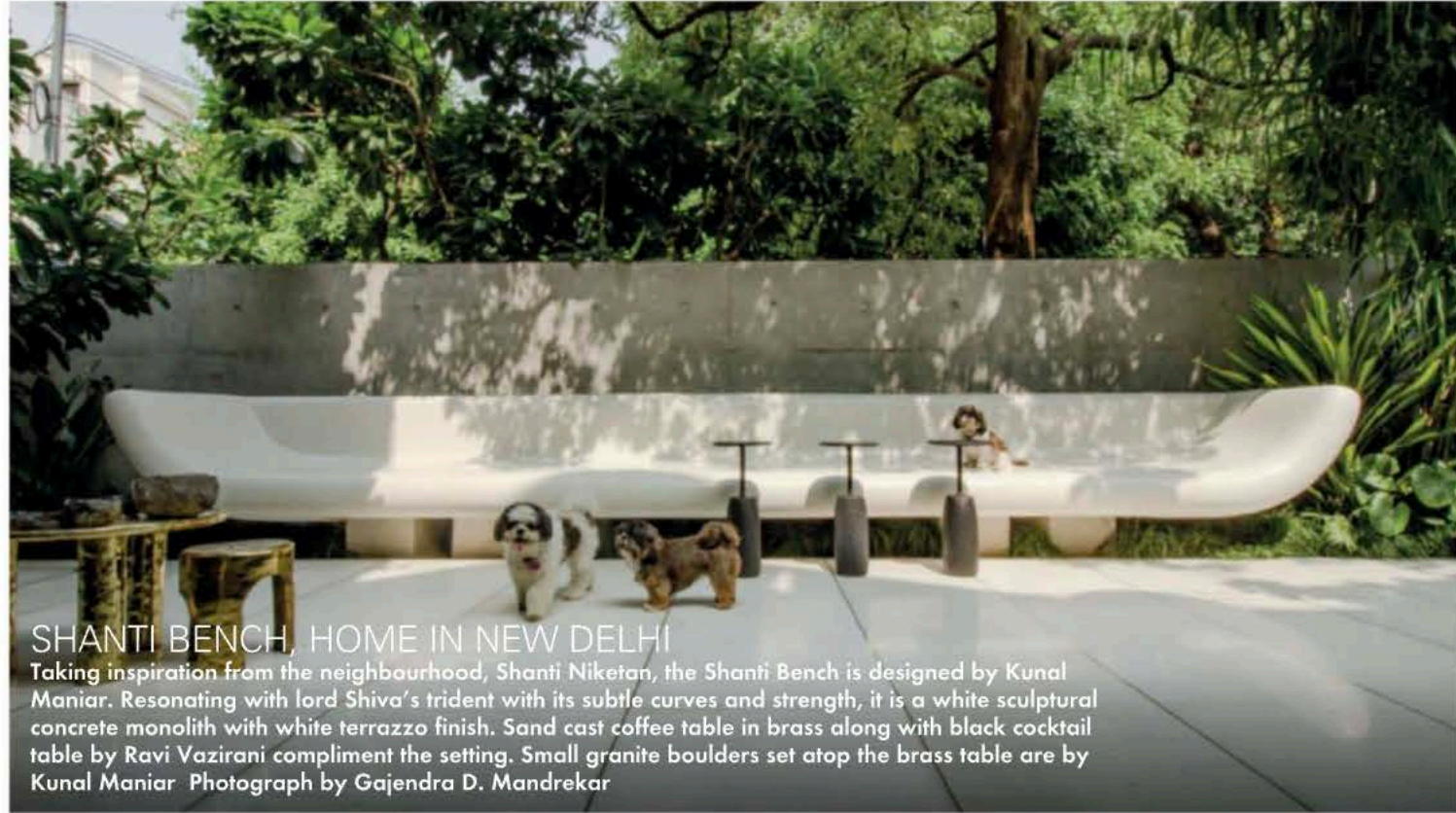
and adding some plants. I think it’s a shame that more often than not this field is treated as an afterthought, or a last minute fix to add cosmetic value to a space.” Along with misbeliefs comes dealing with perishable entities. He elaborates, “There is always an element of uncertainty with softscaping—what is alive today might unpredictably be gone tomorrow.”

From plazas and pocket parks to small rooftop gardens, outdoor spaces have played an instrumental role in improving mental well-being, providing sanctuaries and alleviating stress levels in fast paced environments. Bringing design sensitivities into existence, the question thus arises—what is the outlook towards a sound landscape design? Kunal simply answers and concludes, “Vision over vanity! Landscape architects have to approach spaces, not just public parks or gardens, they should be able to reach the grassroots level and work around what is existing. That’s when I feel the country will come to an equilibrium.” ♦

ON PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

“Nature follows no principles and neither does my work! I try to imbibe ‘studied negligence,’ wherein nature is allowed to assert its own design statement freely”

Kunal Maniar, Mumbai
Instagram: @kunalmaniarassociates



SHANTI BENCH, HOME IN NEW DELHI

Taking inspiration from the neighbourhood, Shanti Niketan, the Shanti Bench is designed by Kunal Maniar. Resonating with lord Shiva's trident with its subtle curves and strength, it is a white sculptural concrete monolith with white terrazzo finish. Sand cast coffee table in brass along with black cocktail table by Ravi Vazirani compliment the setting. Small granite boulders set atop the brass table are by Kunal Maniar. Photograph by Gajendra D. Mandrekar

SNEAK PEEK INTO

The nuances of landscape design and some projects by Kunal Maniar



BEACHFRONT ALIBAUG HOME

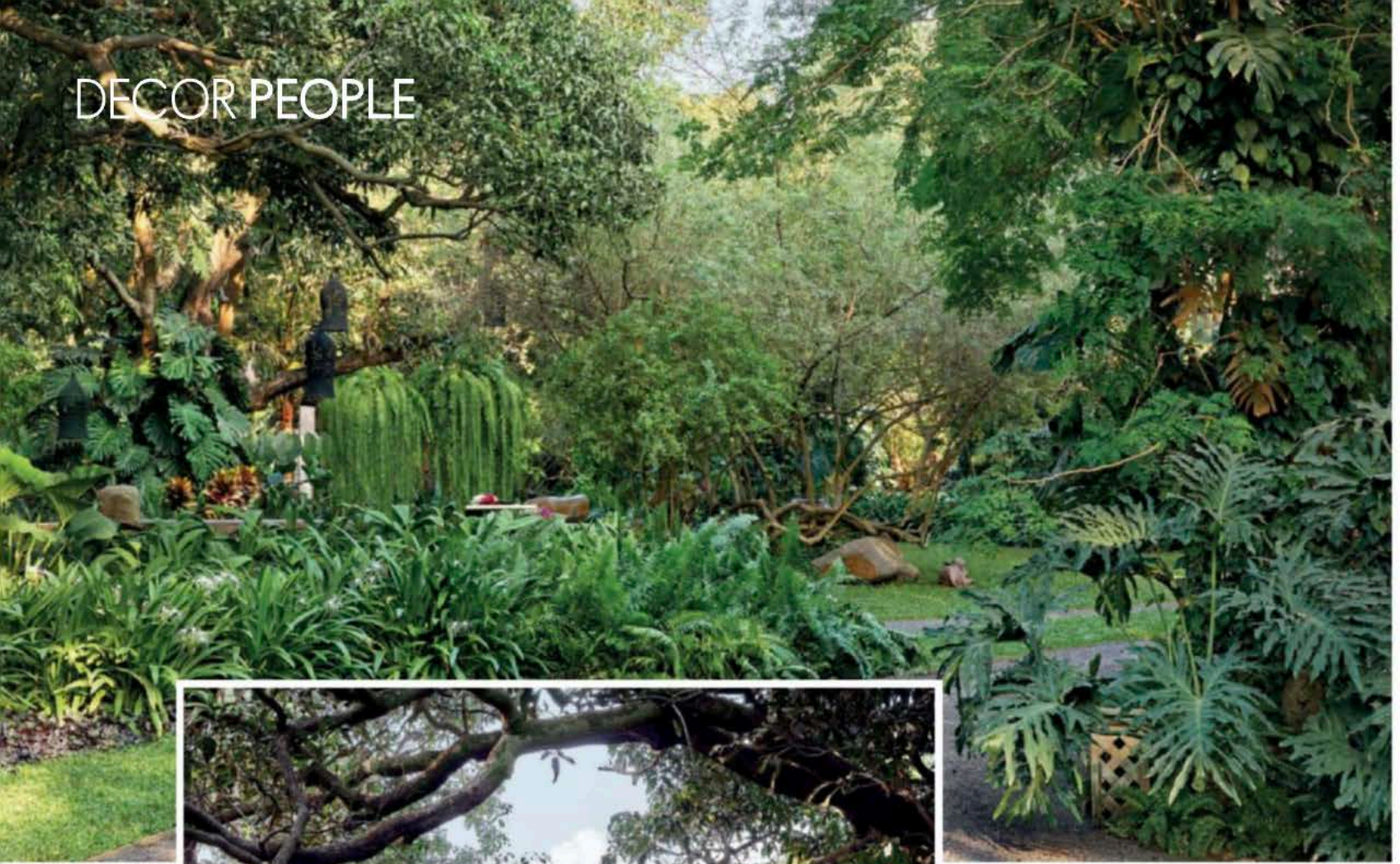
Executed with cacti, succulents and other xerophytic plants, this sustainable garden in Alibaug brings in an arid appeal. Photograph by Ashish Sahi



HOME IN NEW DELHI

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Nestled below a ficus tree, the sunken seating is ideal to sit back and savour the surrounding landscape. Photograph by Gajendra D. Mandrekar; A hedge with closely packed plants craft a home for bird sculptures by Hamza Barafwala; The caged garden is designed with a water feature and vintage style benches. Photographs by Ashish Sahi





QUICK WORD

A QUOTE THAT HAS STAYED WITH YOU... Creativity cannot be compartmentalised

IF NOT A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, YOU'D BE... A chef

A PROJECT YOU WISH YOU HAD WORKED UPON... The Highline, NYC

A TRAVEL DESTINATION THAT INSPIRES YOU... Italy, for the art, but more importantly, for the food

INTUITIVE DESIGN OR FORMULAIC DESIGN? Logical, strategic frameworks that leave room for intuitive decisions

TROPICAL GARDEN IN ALIBAUG

A perfect example of 'studied negligence', this planned yet organic tropical garden in Alibaug showcases a variety of Indian species. Bloomed in a couple of years, the plants have asserted their own design statement unlike any manicured aesthetic
Photograph by Ashish Sahi