

Tehelka

IS INDIA READY FOR THE DESIGN INDUSTRY

The capital city of India has established itself as a power centre for arts, culture and literature with successful fairs and shows happening all year round. It's now time to add design to that list as well. The recently concluded India design fair called ID2013 had about 60 well established design houses offering home decoration and design in furniture, lighting, bathware, tableware, bedding and upholstery to a consumer whom they now feel is ready for spending big money on their living spaces. It was the first of its kind fair spread across 8,000 sq mts of exhibition area which had the world's best known designers fly down for a dekko as well. Sahar Zaman speaks to some famous names of the design world to find out if India is ready to break into the world of design.



MARCEL WANDERS is an international award winning product and interior designer who first drew recognition for his famous knotted chair by Droog in 1996. Today, he designs for global brands such as [B&B Italia](#), [Cappellini](#), [Christofle](#), [Baccarat](#) and more recently [Alessi](#). His clients include Brad Pitti, Karl Lagerfeld and Beyonce.

Q. What interests you about the Indian market?

A. The Indian market is not alien to me. One of the companies of mine called MOOOI is active in India already and we are growing here at a consistent pace.

For me, it's nice to meet your design community here. I would love to do a designer hotel in here. And I am already in talks. So, I guess it will happen sooner than expected. I'm open to doing residential apartments too.

Q. What would you like to say about our design industry? Why haven't we made a mark internationally yet?

A. Indian culture has already made a huge mark in the world but more and more Indian designers need to find a way to merge their design with the contemporary. That would be a fantastic gift to the world. There's certainly nothing lacking with your designs but the right opportunities are available to you now. And we are very open to come to India and offer our designs here. You will see more of me here.

Q. Aren't you afraid that your designs would be exorbitant for most Indians and affordable to a very niche crowd?

A. I feel my products with MOOOI are very affordable. Also, the design I do for Marks and Spencer isn't expensive. You must understand that design is not about money! It's about what we can give to the world.

It's ownership of design that's expensive. When I design a building, it's not expensive for you. When people look at a design magazine, they look for new ideas and inspiration. And that is all on offer for free. I create design for all levels of people because I want everyone to enjoy my designs.

Q. That's interesting because most people are intimidated by design because they think its too expensive and its not for them!

A. Your most famous artist Subodh Gupta makes his utensil sculptures with all his soul. His installations in galleries and public spaces can be seen for free. Look at his works and enjoy! You don't need to own them. Its ownership that makes it complicated. My idea is to just focus on the joy of design.



FABIO NOVEMBRE, an Italian by origin, is known across the world for his controversial and risqué designs. For instance, the re-design of the Panton chair called The Him and Her in 2008 which continues to be a world wide success. He has worked with popular brands like [Casamania](#), Driade, [Bitossi](#), and Venini. His latest venture in architecture is the dream like design for the up market fashion boutique HIT Gallery in Hong Kong.

Q. What does it mean for a famous designer like you to come here and be part of a design fair?

A. It's a huge honour to be invited here. Your culture goes back to 5000 years. We are much younger than you and we have a lot to learn from India. There is no single culture in India. They're in layers and it takes time to discover them.

Q. Your expectations from working in India in the future.

A. I like to come with a blank slate so that I can absorb as much. I need to be filled by the atmosphere that surrounds me. That's what I'm doing here in India and I'm liking it. I'm interested in collaborating for a project here. That would be a challenge. We evolve with mini steps so for me it's like stepping forward and evolving if I collaborate with India. I'm pretty spoilt in a way, I don't go out and look for work but here, I'm interested in creating new connections in India.

Q. You are emotionally and artistically very excited about India but when we talk about factors that govern the market, are you open to exploring the design market here?

A. I often wonder why Italian fashion and design is exploding all over the world but entering India in a very limited way. I think the reason is because you are very individualistic with strong aesthetic codes. You have your own tastes and beauty codes. I think when a designer comes to India, we have to learn how to mix with your codes and work with those codes. And if we don't, we are being ridiculous. I can't think that I am coming to India and offering you a pioneering design. India is a country with 5000 year old culture, it has to be approached with much respect. But your market is self sufficient with 1.2 billion people.

Q. Any Indian names that caught your eye?

A. You know, the only Indian designer I really admire is Satyandre Pakhale. But he works in Amsterdam and has a studio in London. It's nice in a way, we are reaching a level of being citizens of the world. I am not perceived as Italian but as international designer. Look at Marc Newson, he is Australian but he's amongst the best in the world. I hate dividing the world along these lines. I believe in inclusion, hugging the world is a good idea!



JEAN MARIE MASSAUD specializes in industrial and interior design for European and Japanese companies such as Yves Saint Laurent, Renault and Magis. He also develops architectural projects and was almost about to design for Tata Motors till 26/11 stalled further plans.

Q. What do you think about the work you see of Indian designers?

A. I'm extremely positive about the potential here. It's the first of a kind and what caught my eye are the installations by Paola Navone using Indian crafts and art.

Q. But we have been neglecting design and not giving it serious respect as a profession and pure form of art. Don't we need names that are bigger in the industry?

A. I'm still not sure it's the right time for that because of the state of the economy. But I keep telling you guys that your culture has so much to offer. It's overwhelming. Why must you look at outside companies coming here?

Q. And are you as positive about exploring the market here with your designs?

A. Absolutely, but I don't like the term 'market'. I look at it as a huge ecosystem that already has a lot to offer with skills and talent right from craftsmanship to technology. It's not an occidental system. It's a breath of fresh air. You already have quality of life and you are making your own unique mark.

Q. You have worked in India before?

A. Yes, I do partnership with companies as a designer, like I work for work with the German company Axor Massaud and I am aware that they look at India as an exploding market. I'm quite sure partnerships will be part of this fair here. It's also important to exchange notes and expertise with local architects to create a synergy because in a globalised world, there is so many different cultures to merge with.

Q. Is pricing your products low for affordability an issue in India?

A. No, it's not. I've been here before, once to have a meeting with the CEO of Tata Motors to design a car for Toyota but it got interrupted with 26/11. It was designed for roads in India and Paris. Opportunities keep coming, I'm very positive and pricing isn't an issue at all.



RAJSHREE PATHY is an entrepreneur, art collector and the founder of IDF (India Design Forum) which debuted last year with the star presence of designer Karim Rashid. She also promotes performing arts and contemporary art and is in the process of establishing CoCCA (Coimbatore Centre of Contemporary Arts)

Q. As someone who promotes design and it's infrastructure in India, what do you think about ID2013?

A. It's a very significant fair and I'm happy that it's happening. It's a clear sign of our consumers being ready for something like this otherwise it wouldn't have been happening at all. Eventhough it's not at par with international fairs, but it's a great start. And I noticed there's more of home décor and not design. If you follow design, you will know what I'm trying to say. Unfortunately, most of our public looks at design, art , interior and luxury as the same industry.

Q. And you don't look at it as competition?

A. What I do a IDF is very different. We talk about design infrastructure and advocacy. We do a series of talks with professionals in the industry. We don't do a fair.

Q. What would be your take home from the fair?

A. There is a dearth of young contemporary designers. I don't know why must we always look up to international design. There are mostly just the Italian brands offering design. From India, it's just Klove and the Sunil Sethi Design Alliance.

Q. You did IDF 1 in Delhi last year. This March, IDF 2 moves to Mumbai. Why?

A. Isn't it better to reach out to more people? We had a great response in Delhi and now we want to tap Mumbai. Besides, I feel there are far more young designers in Mumbai than in Delhi. We want maximum outreach.



NIKHIL VERMA has been designing works of functional art and home products for more than a decade. His newly launched studio of about 5000 square feet in the capital is a rare space that offers limited edition pieces focusing on the convergence of art, design and home interiors.

Q. Do you think there's been a fair display of Indian design here?

A. This is a first of its kind platform for us designers in India. But because the fair organizers also looked at it as a commercial venture, we couldn't get a lot of good Indian designers on board since the booths are priced very high. I was expecting more Indian design on show. But this is largely dominated by foreign brands like Windfall, Dornbracht, Sicis and Paola Navone.

Q. How high?

A. Starting from 2 lakhs for 3 -4 sq metre. I bought a chunk of four booths which cost me about 10 lakhs and an extra 4 lakhs to set up my work here. Most Indian designers can't afford this kind of an investment in a fair. It's risky.

Q. But did you get good business?

A. Honestly, my target audience didn't turn up. No suppliers and very few trade professionals. The crowd has been largely of socialites or weekend visitors. It hasn't been very well publicized either. I was expecting architects and hoteliers who are usually our clients in such fairs. . Products by me are functional art and my range is 50k to 10 lakhs. I cater to the higher segment.

Q. What has been the saving grace?

A. Indian names like Sahil & Sarthak, Klove, Casa Paradox, Vibhor Sogani, Pinakin and Devi Design made me proud, apart from my works too! But we are just a handful. There is much more Indian talent out there who can't afford the booths.

Q. What would you like to tell your Indian consumers about design?

A. We don't like to own design for its beauty, we just buy a simple chair that will help us sit comfortably. And we always want customization. I am always asked to make copies of Cavalli or Fendi. So I would request them to please accept our design with respect.



PINAKIN PATEL, an architect and interior designer, is known for launching India's first lifestyle store in 1984, introducing India to a whole new concept in furniture. In 2010, he completed 25 years in design and marked it with designing India's first prefab Hara Villa which is a one bedroom retreat that can be erected anywhere and designed to have a low impact on its surrounding environment.

Q. Is design still a niche and exclusive segment in the Indian market?

A. Yes it is and will remain so for a few more years. In the first few years of consumerism in India, there were only general trade fairs. So a builder, architect, franchise for products – all went under one roof. Our fairs got bigger and more confusing. So in isle 1 you saw designer furniture, in isle 2 you saw cockroach traps, then air conditioning and so on. Now, it's nice to see just design being promoted. Globalization confused us. Now we're better settled in our own skin and we're proud of it. So we can flaunt our original designs

Q. Compared to the Indian art market, design has been very slow. Our contemporary art market is at least 5-6 years ahead of your design world.

A. Money. There was money to INVEST in art. The art market picked up only when it became an investment. But design is not an investment. You buy it, enjoy the comfort of design but you can't make more money out of it..I'm sorry to say this but very few people want to spend money on personal stimulation or creative growth.

Q. Can we expect ID2013 to get more visitors?

A. Don't expect as much rush of visitors like in the art fair. This design fair will grow multifold without doubt but not as big as art perhaps. And then we will need more investors to pump in money to sustain a design fair. So the flux in design fair will remain for a while.

Q. Will this remain an absolute upper class event or can we expect the middle class to have the purchasing power for this as well?

A. There is always a purchasing power in this country. Its just that now our needs are better synchronized with what's on offer. In western markets, infrastructure is created before any growth is visualized there. They make a township first and then people move in. They make a metro before there are people to ride in it. Here we have to wait for people to suffer, fall down from trains and buses and only then the metro is made. The fact is that changes and trends come from the top and filter down, so eventually, everyone, even the masses will benefit.

Q. How is your store, Pinakin, benefitting?

A. When I started 35 years ago, India had limited rich people with a taste to buy good design but now that segment has multiplied by lakhs. Now the simple word of mouth recommendation or party conversation

is not going to be enough for me to sustain myself. So you find newer markets through fairs. I need to persue this for my brand building. I don't believe in classes, masses and street kitsch. They're all an equal market for me When I step out of my space, who knows who I might bump into someone who wants to take my work to Chennai or Hyderabad. So I have more outlets then, I will manufacture more and then my price comes down and then I create a fresh affordable mkt.

Sahar Zaman is an independent newsanchor, arts journalist and curator. Her work can be seen at www.saharzaman.com