

Distinct + Design

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PHOTOGRAPHS: SEBASTIAN ZACHARIAH, COURTESY THE ARCHITECTS



Neesha Alwani and Shruti Jalan of n+s don many hats. They are qualified architects, consummate design professionals and meticulous planners. And going by the high profile names on their client list, they seem to be getting it spot on. We get them talking about their most recent work, two completely contrasting apartments in South Mumbai, each with a distinctive design aesthetic, albeit with a shared contemporary expression. The first is a Mediterranean style home that incorporates the essence of that region, while the other is a residence steeped in grandeur and luxury.



The floral theme resonates throughout the home. A lovely bougainvillea mural peeks through a wall edge, evoking the Mediterranean vibe at this quiet reading corner in the master suite.

The Teal House



Ever so often, one needs a vacation to rejuvenate the body and refresh the mind. That little break infuses us with a feeling of happiness, leaves us with a sense of serenity and often instills a wish to extend our trip just a tad bit. But alas, life beckons and we are forced to return to reality, with mere memories to recall and perhaps a plethora of snapshots to cherish. But what if you didn't have to end your holiday at all? Wouldn't you just love to continue living at your dream destination for as long as you desire, without uprooting your current life? It's not an improbable proposition in this day and age!

In fact it's exactly what a young couple in Mumbai decided to do. This entrepreneur-husband and writer-wife pair wanted to recreate the magic of the Mediterranean –

as they recalled from their travels to the region – at their urban abode, which they share with their little girl. That's when Neesha and Shruti jumped in, helping to transform their city pad into a charming little haven that evokes the quaint appeal and soothing setting of a typical Mediterranean home, right in the heart of the chaotic financial capital.

'We had visited Greece for our 5th wedding anniversary and fell in love with the classic simplicity, yet stark beauty of the Cyclades, Mykonos and Santorini,' says the lady of the house. 'We are fond of the traditional Spanish and Grecian architecture and prefer a rustic and minimalistic look, something we have explored in our new home.'

Located at South Mumbai's upmarket Napeansea Road, the two-bedroom apartment which spans 1,100 sq ft, is a compact space, characteristically representative of most modern-day homes. Neesha and Shruti have used every bit of that area optimally, ensuring that the layout appears open, fluid and inviting. The existing apartment was completely gutted and redesigned to suit the clients' needs. Starting afresh with a blank canvas, the architect-cum-designer duo set out to incorporate all the recognisable flavours of the Mediterranean palette in their design.

'Once a project is brought to the table, we engage ourselves in a manner that reflects our ideology. We treat each project as unique, since each client approaches us with a very personal brief. We need to understand their lifestyle and incorporate their every need in the design process. This means inventing ways of developing spaces as well as designing and building an environment that

addresses their requirements, both functional and aesthetic,' explains Neesha.

Striking shades of blue, synonymous with the Mediterranean, play a dominant role, with the most dramatic feature being the teal panelled doors, fitted throughout the flat, which connect its different parts and tie them together in a well defined theme. 'Blue accents in vibrant hues such as teal and aqua represent Mediterranean living in all its glory. These form the predominant colours in the décor, echoing the shades of the sky and the sea. We teamed them with whitewashed, textured walls to render a bright and airy feel to the space,' says Shruti.

Walking through the prominent aquamarine entrance door, you know from the outset that you are in for a treat. The living room has a regal cream marble floor, with the furniture done in an antique, natural wood grain and biscuit-hued upholstery. They form the perfect complement to accompanying accents, such as a wooden centre table with brilliant teal legs, a bright orange rug placed underneath it and a spray of pink bougainvillea found in a teal vase by the television console, all of which add a dash of vibrant colour to the space. Despite maintaining clean and simple lines, the architects have experimented with a play of textures, as with the book cabinet, which houses an impressive collection and is done in an antique white distressed finish. The walls are white washed, with one particular wall finished in a matte, undulated stucco plastered white tile that creates an interesting visual impact, further accentuated by the presence of built-in candle votives. Sheer drapes by



Walking past the prominent aquamarine entrance door, one steps into a bright living space filled with vivacious energy. The antique natural wood grain furniture, with its biscuit-hued upholstery, is brought to life by the addition of teal, orange and lime coloured accessories.

The Teal House



A striking teal door leads the way into a soothing bedroom space, where a natural grain, distressed wooden bed finds the perfect companions in teal accessories and a quirky criss-cross bookshelf that fits snugly into a wall.



The daughter's room is a picture in fairy white and girly pink. An eye-catching feature is the cupboard, an unusual blend of antique and contemporary, which has been painted on with a cherry blossom tree that has little birds perched on its branches.

the full-length sea-facing windows partially conceal Southern French-style wrought iron railings – custom-made with distressed patina paint and distressed wood tops – chosen because of the presence of a toddler in the house.

The dining area is highlighted by an impressive arch – think old world Grecian architecture – which is brushed with a rustic paint that is similar to the beams on the ceiling. ‘I fell in love with some Grecian tiles that were at a shop, but only wanted a specific set. So we waited months for a new shipment to arrive, stripped our original dining table of its frosted glass bottom and replaced it with these Grecian tiles. We also distressed the wood from its original smooth surface,’ the lady of the house tells me. In addition, wrought iron light fixtures and burnished bronze hardware have been repeated throughout the house. The rustic kitchen sees the use of dark tones, with terracotta tiles on the floor and blue-and-brown patterned hand-painted tiles on the dado – both reflecting a classic Spanish influence. Offsetting these components are beige cabinet shutters and turquoise crockery, which lend the kitchen a wonderful balance of elements.

Pop teal dominates, with a striking blue door leading the way into the stylish master bedroom, which also has cream marble flooring – chosen because the clients wanted a natural material that would keep the floor cool and provide a neutral base to the interior. Large windows flood the room with ample sunlight and fresh air, a rare, but essential factor at any urban residence. A lovely addition, which is reminiscent of the Mediterranean region, is the hand-painted bougainvillea mural



The rustic kitchen.

in the master suite, which acts as an extension of the outdoors, inviting them in. The daughter’s room is a picture in fairy white and girly pink. It includes an eye-catching cupboard – an unusual blend of antique and contemporary – that has been painted on with a cherry blossom tree with little birds perched on its branches. The master bathroom, like the rest of the house, uses a pleasant composition of teal, patina and cream, which brings a fun element to this otherwise functional space. As a result, even a bathroom fits in beautifully with the thematic ideology behind the design. There is not a single moment when Neesha and Shruti let the idea of the Mediterranean slip, at the same time not once do they overdo the charade.

‘We wanted each element of the house (including door knobs, basins and mirrors) not only to

come together as a whole, but also to have individual appeal. Even though the entire look was experimental at a time that everyone prefers a modern contemporary look, Neesha and Shruti were willing to take a chance and go with what we had envisioned. They were absolutely brilliant in understanding our extremely specific requirements and making sure they reached fruition so that we would have a house that we love coming back to – even after a vacation abroad!’ says the extremely satisfied lady of the house.

The architects believe that architectural design is a process, which involves composing a thought, concept, functional requirements, aesthetic sensibilities and finally realising the dream; thus creating a language that is unique to an individual. According to them, finding the right balance between functions, aesthetics and economics makes for a good design.

And Neesha and Shruti truly live their ideology. They managed to complete the entire apartment in nine months, without a single hitch. That is a hard to digest fact, even if one takes into account impeccable planning. But Neesha and Shruti seem to know how to make the impossible possible. If this chic pad is anything to go by, it’s a plausible thought that one can stay on vacation all the time. This stylised apartment is a gentle reminder that if you dream it, you can create it. Not only does the design reflect a sensible use of space and the incorporation of everyday function, it also trumps on the aesthetics’ front. Transcending time and geographical boundaries, Neesha and Shruti have fashioned an exquisite version of the Mediterranean region’s finest homes, right here in India.



The master bathroom in teal, patina and cream.

FACT FILE

Principal Architects:

Neesha Alwani and Shruti Jalan

Firm:

n+s architects, interior designers & planners

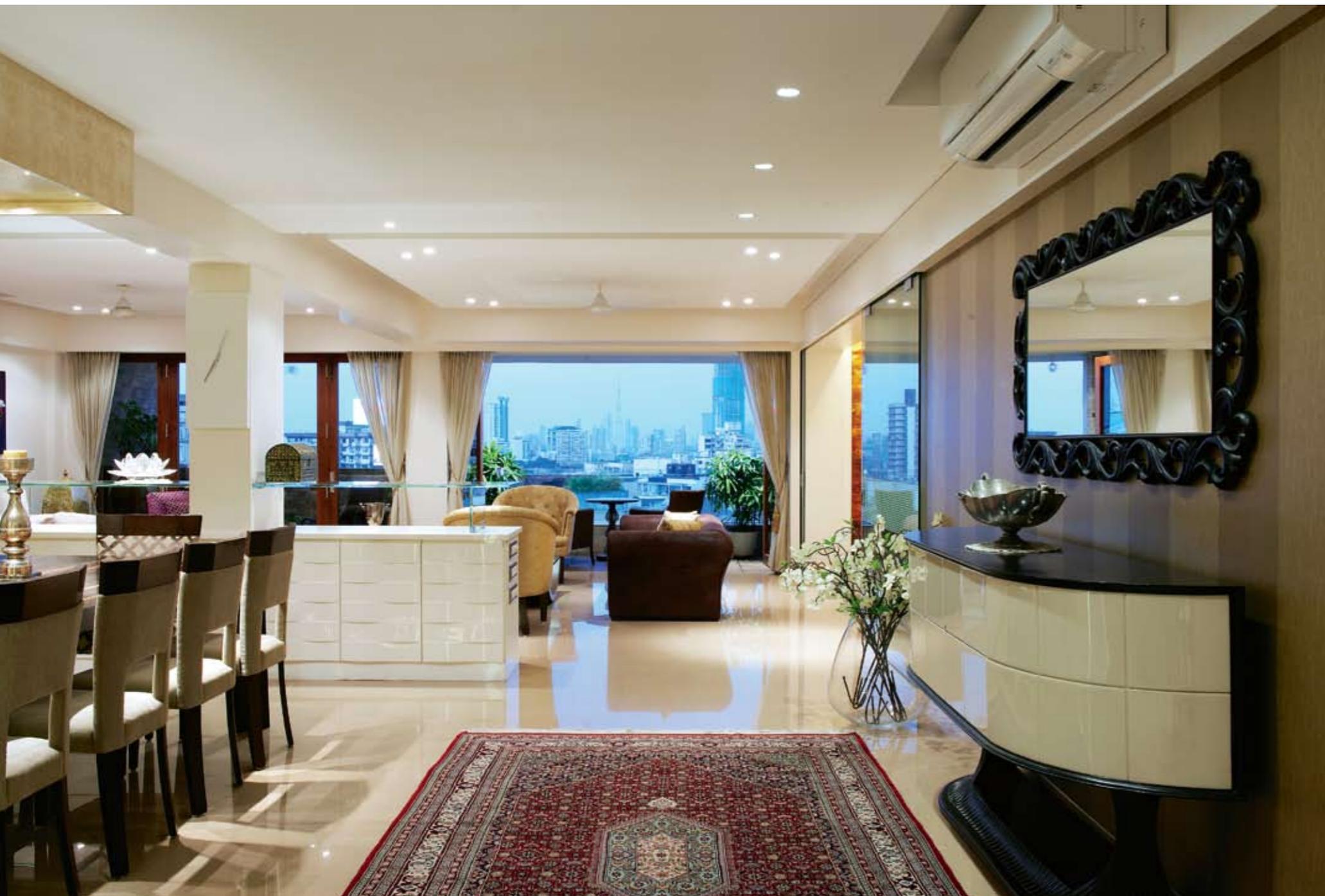
Location:

Napeansea Road, Mumbai

Area: 1,100 sq ft

Duration: Nine months

An intricately woven maroon Persian carpet adds character to the passage leading to the living area. An ornate black framed mirror hangs above a black and white console in high gloss polyurethane.

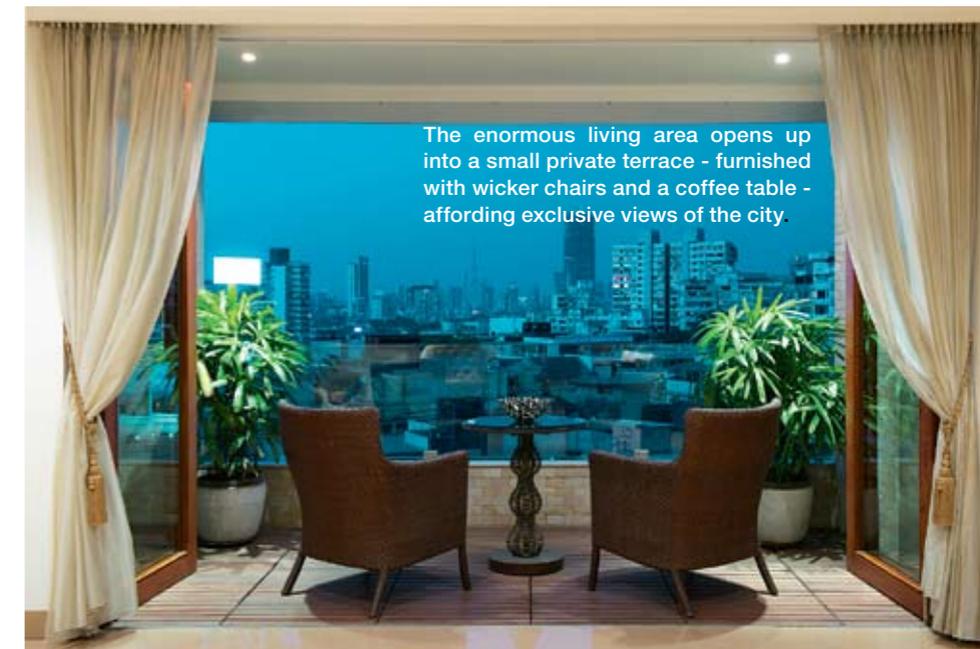


Opulence Personified

Warmth. It's the most elemental feeling in any home; the one factor that turns a house into a home. This expansive, 3,000 sq ft apartment, located at Pedder Road in Mumbai, exudes that feeling in plenty. Home to a busy, jet-setting couple – the wife is a doctor and the husband an industrialist – who wished for a bright, spacious and open house, the residence is contemporary, without being sterile. The owners had an existing three bedroom apartment and had recently acquired the adjacent two bedroom flat. The challenge for Neesha and Shruti was to amalgamate the two houses into one seamless whole, creating a space that would play many roles: a place for entertaining guests, a retreat after a long day's work and above all else, a family residence.

'The apartment needed to look sophisticated, while offering the warmth of a home to its residents. This became the guiding principle behind the redesign. The biggest challenge we faced was that the existing apartment measuring 1,650 sq ft, had to be partially remodelled so that it could be merged flawlessly with the newly purchased neighbouring apartment, which was 1,350 sq ft. Creating a smooth transition from the old to the new was the key,' says Shruti.

Stepping into the apartment, there is no tell-tale sign that one is looking at two separate entities that now lie conjoined. The entrance vestibule has a steamed larch veneer panelled ceiling and similar walls. A niche set into one wall, houses a sculpture that creates a focal point, while an antique wooden bench is placed alongside. Walking into the formal



The enormous living area opens up into a small private terrace - furnished with wicker chairs and a coffee table - affording exclusive views of the city.

The formal living chamber is sheer grandeur and opulence. Decked in a Danish crème Italian marble floor, it has customised furniture, comprising neutral shades of cream, beige, brown and dull gold with aubergine and rust accents.



This dressing area boasts matte gold wardrobes and a distressed, white dresser, both of which make for a dramatic sight in the master suite.

living chamber, one is enveloped in sheer grandeur. 'While the old living room was converted to the family room – connecting the two children's bedrooms and the master suite – the new apartment was entirely converted into a formal living and dining space, with a lounge that acts as an extension to the master bedroom. Tearing down existing walls and erecting new ones fused the apartments together, connecting spaces through function and design. Although the transition between spaces is soft, the house interior has undergone a comprehensive transformation,' Neesha tell us.

The opulent living room, like most of the house, is decked in Danish crème Italian marble and



is perfect for a family that likes to entertain. It is an enormous area, which opens up into a small private terrace – furnished with wicker chairs and a coffee table – affording exclusive views of the city. All the furniture is customised, with some pieces painted in high gloss polyurethane, some clad with wood and veneer – also finished in polyurethane polish, and some in an antique paint finish. The furniture consists of neutral shades of cream, beige, brown and dull gold with aubergine and rust accents. An intricately woven maroon Persian carpet adds character. The stylish study table in the accompanying lounge is finished with high gloss beige PU, accompanied by a beige chenille and wooden study chair. The walls have been coated in lustre paint, while others are covered with wallpaper or veneer panels. The lounge area is an extension of this space and includes two full height cabinets, placed on either side of the study table, with large, twin abstract paintings mounted on their shutters. These bold-stroked works of art help liven up the otherwise muted atmosphere in the room.

The dining space – divided from the living by a white high gloss, PU laminated console – is dominated by a solid wood, 10-seater dining table with an exotic veneer top, two head chairs carrying an embossed design and the other

The dining space is dominated by a solid wood, 10-seater dining table with an exotic veneer top, two head chairs carrying an embossed design and the other eight in plain beige chenille. An ornate Persian rug, silver candlestands and a bright mustard abstract complete the sparse decor here.

profile

The entrance vestibule has a steamed larch veneer panelled ceiling and similar walls. A niche set into the sky blue wall houses a sculpture that creates a focal point, with a hanging Moroccan lamp throwing a soft light, while an antique wooden bench is placed alongside.



FACT FILE

Principal Architects: Neesha Alwani and Shruti Jalan

Firm: n+s architects, interior designers and planners

Location: Pedder Road, Mumbai

Area: 3,000 sq ft

Duration: Nine months

eight in plain beige chenille. The informal living room houses a wooden sofa with aubergine fabric, tan leather chairs and a wooden coffee table. A beige shaggy rug connects the pieces of furniture. Since the clients procured a large chunk of home décor pieces and artefacts during their travels, these were used to bring the place to life, along with some commissioned art pieces.

The private part of the home, consisting of the three bedrooms, has walnut hard wood floors. The master suite, connected to the living room through the lounge-cum-study area, is complete with a dressing area that boasts matte gold wardrobes and a distressed, white dresser, both of which make for a dramatic sight. An ornate bathroom in regal, beige marble with rich, woodwork cabinets finishes the look. Diffused lighting and dimmable LED spotlights have been used judiciously throughout the home, creating different moods to suit various occasions.

Aesthetically speaking, there is a fluid passage between spaces, a sure sign that the design metamorphosis is complete. The apartment succeeds in exuding a largely contemporary style, with a definite leaning towards an ambience of glamour and élan. Suffused with measured sophistication and panache, the space adopts a seamless flow of functions and elements. Despite completing the project in just nine months, Neesha and Shruti have managed to excel at maintaining a high quality of living that is perfectly tailored to meet their clients' varied needs, at the same time infusing the feeling of home and belonging that is instrumental in turning brick and concrete walls into the confines of a comfortable residence. 