

AD

QUEEN
OF HER
CASTLE

SONAM

KAPOOR

AHUJA



T H E S T Y L E I S S U E



ADITI MAHESHWARI

WRITER

AD's former digital editor, Maheshwari met Loulou Van Damme in the home she designed for Maithili Ahluwalia (pg 128). "This home is a story about two women who share a cosmic connection so deep, pure and tangible, it's writ large across the interiors."



KANIKA PARAB

WRITER

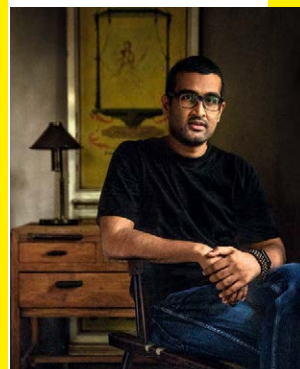
In this issue, the co-founder of Brown Paper Bag writes about her colleague and friend Mansi Poddar's Mumbai apartment (pg 142). "It's only right to let other people into a home that has offered me a bounty of mint margaritas and sage advice. I hope you enjoy the tour."



BANDANA TEWARI

WRITER

Vogue India's former editor-at-large, Tewari now campaigns as a sustainability activist and writes for fashion magazines and sites. In this issue, she curates a global list of young, emerging fashion designers, for whom sustainability is uncompromising (pg 110). "It is the joy of discovering ordinary people who do extraordinary things to cause less harm to the environment that really makes me enjoy writing about sustainable fashion."



PANKAJ ANAND

PHOTOGRAPHER

A regular contributor to Condé Nast magazines, Anand photographs Maithili Ahluwalia's Mumbai apartment, lovingly designed by Loulou Van Damme (pg 128). "It was a fanboy moment for me; I've admired Loulou's work since my photo research days at AD back in 2012. So this was an incredible opportunity."



ASHISH SAHI

PHOTOGRAPHER

AD's former art director shoots Mansi Poddar's Art Deco apartment in Mumbai (pg 142). "Mansi's chic style and impeccable taste transcend seamlessly into her home as well. We had so much fun styling and shooting her incredible closet."

THE INIMITABLE LOULOU VAN DAMME OPENS THE DOORS TO HER MOST BELOVED PROJECT, A HOME SHE LOVINGLY DESIGNED FOR HER SOUL SISTER, AND OWNER OF THE FORMER BUNGALOW EIGHT, MATTHIL AHLUWALIA

Isla Maria 'Loulou' Van Damme in the main bedroom—the chest in the foreground, bronze Kerala bust, and painted panels are from Bungalow Eight. The cane box is from an antique market in Karaikudi, Chettinad. The rug is from Jaipur Rugs.



WRITER ADITI MAHESHWARI PHOTOGRAPHER PANKAJ ANAND



A view of the guest bedroom—the teak desk was sourced from Jogeshwari's antique market, while the baroque chair is a flea-market find. The artwork above is a Manish Nai, part of homeowner Maithili Ahluwalia's personal collection. The deer sculpture is from Phillips Antiques. **Facing page:** The dining room is the central space in the house, visible from every area. The cow head is from Phillips Antiques and the horns are from Bungalow Eight. Loulou advised Maithili to purchase art only once the entire home was designed—to find pieces she could live with for a long time. The Krishen Khanna was gifted to Maithili by her father and the Manisha Parekh is from Jhaveri Contemporary. The fluted hanging lamp was sourced from a flea market, while the Irani chairs are from Chor Bazaar.





The living room is a museum of rare finds. The colonial daybed was once Maithili's own bed, and was repurposed for this space. The metal floor lamp, Bakelite hanging lamps, ceramic candle stand, glass-and-iron side table, Art Deco lounge chair, and glass coffee table are all from Bungalow Eight. The Naga headgear and framed embroidery are part of Maithili's personal collection and the cushions were designed from old fabrics.



A corner of Maithili's bedroom—the painted angel panel is from Bungalow Eight, and the teak chest of drawers, and Anglepoise lamp are from Chor Bazaar. The George Nakashima chairs are part of Maithili's personal collection. **Facing page:** The antique embroidery panel was from Maithili's grandmother. The Art Deco sofa is from Zubeen Arts and the lamp is from Taherally's. The painted cupboard is from Jogeshwari's antique market.



"Maithili told me she wouldn't cook but I still insisted she have a well-designed kitchen. She now cooks all the time!" says Loulou. The Anglepoise lamp is from Bungalow Eight, and the fish wall-hanging and tray are from a flea market. **Facing page:** The Japanese plates are from Gramin Arts and the wooden workman table is a flea-market find.





Another view of the guest bedroom—the Art Deco bed is from Chor Bazaar, and the portrait is from Gramin Arts. The drums on the wall are from Vayu. The vintage lamp is from Zubeer Arts, while the rug is from Raj Overseas. **Facing page:** The powder room is a compact, functional space for guests. This was a space that was specially created by knocking down doors and expanding this area. The vintage cabinet is from Lalji Handicrafts, the horse figurine is from a Karaikudi market and the portrait is from Bungalow Eight.





A dressing corner in Maithili's bedroom—the table and vintage tray are from Lalji Handicrafts, while the industrial metal chair and black-and-white baskets are from Bungalow Eight.

I

remember *AD*'s 2019 Red issue distinctly, because inside was what I consider the magazine's most iconic portfolio shoot. Interior designer Isla Maria 'Loulou' Van Damme was decked from head to toe in rubies, the precious stone lightly reflected off the delicate folds of her skin, its bold colours confidently pouring across the pages, and her carefully orchestrated and captured silhouettes juxtaposed with her bohemian personality...ah! A 'fashion shoot', but not entirely. So clever, so unique, so *AD*. To me, Loulou—the muse, the designer, the visual artist—is an enigma.

One Monday morning as I excitedly rode across rain-washed Mumbai roads to meet with her at her "most beloved project" I knew it would be doubly special because the home belongs to Maithili Ahluwalia—a pioneer who brought a very special, distinct touch to the fashion landscape of Mumbai. Her former store, Bungalow Eight, was one of the first and most-unconventional interior design and clothing concept boutiques, with an inimitable appeal—classic, global, eclectic, yet modern Indian. "Whether it was my Colaba store or the Wankhede Stadium one, my honest ask was for the space to be designed like a home—warm and eternally comfortable. And, that was the value add of the genius Loulou," says Maithili. "For her stores," says Loulou, decked in her usual glorious long dress and quintessential silver jewellery, "I told her I knew what she needed, with the right lighting, product display and more. So, we worked together for a year, and I'll never forget, at the end of it she said 'Now Loulou, we've entered into a lifelong *jugalbandi*!'" Surprisingly though, their connection runs even deeper. "My parents, who lived in Bombay in the 1940s, were Maithili's grandparents' friends. I remember going over to her family home for rooftop parties. I left India when I was 16 and came back in the 2000s. I started visiting her grandmother again, who was an iconic lady. At one of the lunches I met Maithili, who mentioned that she and I even shared the same nanny. And that's how we connected. I don't have children of my own, but she is like a daughter to me," shares Loulou.

Maithili decided to move into her own home six years ago, and found a vintage Art Deco building in South Mumbai; its beautiful old bones and charm-

ing patina resonated with her immediately. In its true essence, though, the home became an extension of her ideologies and a new address for her lovingly sourced Bungalow Eight pieces. While the store may have closed its doors, its spirit, aesthetics and soul still live on in this very home. "And Loulou, of course, was to design it. She has been my creative soul sister, mother, mentor and sparring partner for almost two decades!" says Maithili.

The apartment has a natural pull, its surreptitious interiors doused in rare finds. The balmy spaces enhanced with art panels, found objects, and the mild morning light invited even a stranger like me to lounge around with abandon. The design grew out of living and experiencing the spaces first, then organically flourishing them with the classic Loulou-Maithili touch. The closing of unnecessary doors, the creation of a new bathroom, a light paint on the walls and the peppering of Bungalow Eight pieces emerged as the first chapter in the home's design story. And then the design of the two bedrooms, two bathrooms, guest toilet, and kitchen unfolded. The original terrazzo flooring was an immediate favourite. Perhaps the most whimsical of the lot is Maithili's colonial bed, which became a wonderful multifunctional piece. With its legs removed and the addition of a thicker mattress it seamlessly converted into a sofa-cum-daybed in the living room—ideal for socials or long stupors. "I think [the home is] a mirror of me at 37, when I moved in: enthusiastic, curious, passionate, impulsive, indecisive, impatient, eclectic, chaotic, but within all that somewhat structured—essentially, a consummate shopper and aesthetic glutton," adds Maithili.

The two are currently working on redesigning the space. Staying home during the pandemic has, after all, made each of us even greater, more astute aesthetes. "Maithili wants a certain lightness and simplicity to the home. We're going to bring in some glass, and in terms of art, we're going to add a large painting over the bed and Warli art in the public area. The home doesn't need more colour, just a fresh coat of homeliness," says Loulou. And Maithili concludes, "We have entered a new phase of our collaboration and this home represents our legacy together." ▀