

INSIDE OUTSIDE

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plush point!

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Architect Mahesh Punjabi gives a basic Mumbai apartment an expansive ambience and plush accents.

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COURTESY, MAHESH PUNJABI





A corridor with extravagant gold-leafed niches backed with mirror greets you at the entrance, where wooden rafters on the ceiling house the lighting. A painting of the Buddha, and one of Ganesha which is actually a painted shutter concealing the main distribution board, reside here. The split level living-dining area has a dining table with a central runner in glass, under which pebbles or flowers can be placed to create myriad table settings. One step down a triangular floating glass step leads to the main living area. Silver leaf on the ceiling lends a luxurious appeal, while the different ceiling heights house cove lighting.

A name plate inlaid in mother-of-pearl on the front door should prepare you for what you are about to see as you walk around this three-bedroom apartment in the Mumbai suburb of Juhu. It's certainly opulent – marble and mirror, hints of gold leaf and rich woods – but the real slickness lies in the way Mahesh Punjabi has disguised the previously awkward elements throughout the interiors, by using Travertino marble wall cladding and creating ceilings of different heights. Problem beams and columns, which could constitute a design nightmare, have been deftly treated to look premeditated. What could be a better accolade to anyone's aesthetic sensibilities than that? In addition to this, Mahesh and associate Rajni Gupta had to contend with that bane of the existence of all designers – stringent vastu requirements!

Enter this apartment, and you find yourself in a corridor enlivened with extravagant gold-leafed niches backed with mirror, for holding artefacts. Wooden rafters on the ceiling house the lighting. A painting of the Buddha catches your attention, as does one of Ganesha, which is actually a painted shutter concealing the main distribution board.

The split levels of the L-shaped living-dining area turns an ordinary space into an architectural feature. It is an expansive area, ideal for entertaining, with a dining table that incorporates a central runner in glass, under which pebbles or flowers can be placed to create varied table settings. Nearby is a study table and two seating areas, as well as a little





ABOVE: The deceptively simple, stunning counter in the daughter's bathroom, where four layers of sandwiched Crema marble sit atop another counter of wenge, below which are floating cabinets. Heavily veined brown marble was painstakingly cut into squares used along with grey tiles for wall cladding.

RIGHT: The guest bathroom with a curved counter and combination of mosaic with marble on the walls and flooring.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: The master bathroom in spotless white Australian marble, interspersed with a transparent patterned blue glass mosaic.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Zen-like simplicity defines the guest bedroom. Strip lighting under the eight-inch-high wooden platform lends visual lightness. The wardrobe appears to be almost too slim to be functional, till the architect explains that it has been recessed into the ten-inch-thick wall.

sacred space for the family deities, housed behind a decorative shutter of gold-painted glass.

Step down a triangular floating glass step, and you enter the main living area, whose textured white walls form a canvas for a back-lit unit of veneer and wallpaper, which houses artefacts as well as the music system and home theatre. The L-shaped seating, conducive to conversation, is in clean, non-fussy straight lines, which are slow to date, and the centre and side tables follow the same elegant lines. A custom-made mural of siporex hangs on one wall, and there is extensive use of silver leaf on the ceiling, lending a very luxurious appeal. The various ceiling heights have been handled extremely well, incorporating



cove lighting and geometric layering, to look like a planned design feature.

The cool grey and white kitchen, with walls clad in granite and grey quartz mosaic, and glass blocks fitted near the window to enhance the light, has a fresh, pristine look. The cabinets are easy to maintain, with glossy white poly-coated shutters and stainless steel baskets, and have all been customized to suit the client's requirements. A frameless glass sliding door shuts off unavoidable noise in the kitchen from the rest of the house. A cleverly painted panel on the corridor wall conceals access for servicing the door fitting. A painted, marble-clad alcove in one wall ensures that the refrigerator and washing machine are neatly aligned with the counters. All the details have been painstakingly worked out.

Diagonally across the kitchen is

the master bedroom, in neutral beige, walnut and ebony. You see what appears to be Mahesh Punjabi's signature treatment of an awkward column alongside the headboard of the bed. Instead of attempting to align it with the rest of the wall and losing valuable inches, he brings it further into relief by cladding it with small blocks of Travertino, laid in a criss-cross grid. The same pattern is echoed in the veneer on the central shutter of the wardrobe. Other alcoves in the walls provide storage for small necessities. The bathroom uses a spotless white Australian marble, interspersed with a transparent patterned blue glass mosaic, and the basin on top of the counter has a very contemporary appeal.

The daughter's bedroom has a sophisticated colour scheme, with a woven faux leather headboard and Zebrano veneer on the





wardrobes. The piece de resistance is the bathroom counter, which is deceptively simple. Four layers of sandwiched Crema marble sit atop another counter of wenge, below which are floating cabinets, in a look which is geometrically minimal. Mosaic is created for the walls, by painstakingly cutting a heavily veined brown marble into squares, to be used as wall cladding, along with grey tiles.

Enter the guest bedroom, and you are pleasantly surprised by its zen-like simplicity: an eight-inch-high wooden platform that takes up half the floor space, topped with a mattress. Strip lighting under the platform gives it visual lightness. The wardrobe appears to be almost too slim to be functional, till the architect explains

that it has been recessed into the ten-inch-thick wall. The combination of grey and black Carvalho veneers and the judicious juxtaposition of glossy poly-coating with matte melamine polish has an undeniable appeal. The bathroom has a curved counter and repeats the over-counter basin concept as well as the combination of mosaic with marble on the walls and flooring. Crucially, the mosaic on the floor of the shower areas provides essential anti-skid properties.

Throughout the apartment, the use of mosaic, the creation of niches, as well as the treatment of awkward beams and columns appears as a leitmotif, giving the appearance of an intentional design element. Budget constraints required that most of the

furniture be made on site and the flooring throughout is a matte vitrified tile. The combination of direct and ambient lighting, both fluorescent as well as incandescent, creates different moods according to the requirements of the users and has a sophistication which is unmistakable. Most importantly, the owners are delighted with their sparkling new home. **O**

The cool grey and white kitchen, with walls clad in granite and grey quartz mosaic, and glass blocks fitted near the window to enhance the light. The easy to maintain cabinets have glossy white poly-coated shutters and stainless steel baskets customized to suit the client's requirements. A painted, marble-clad alcove in one wall ensures that the refrigerator and washing machine are neatly aligned with the counters.