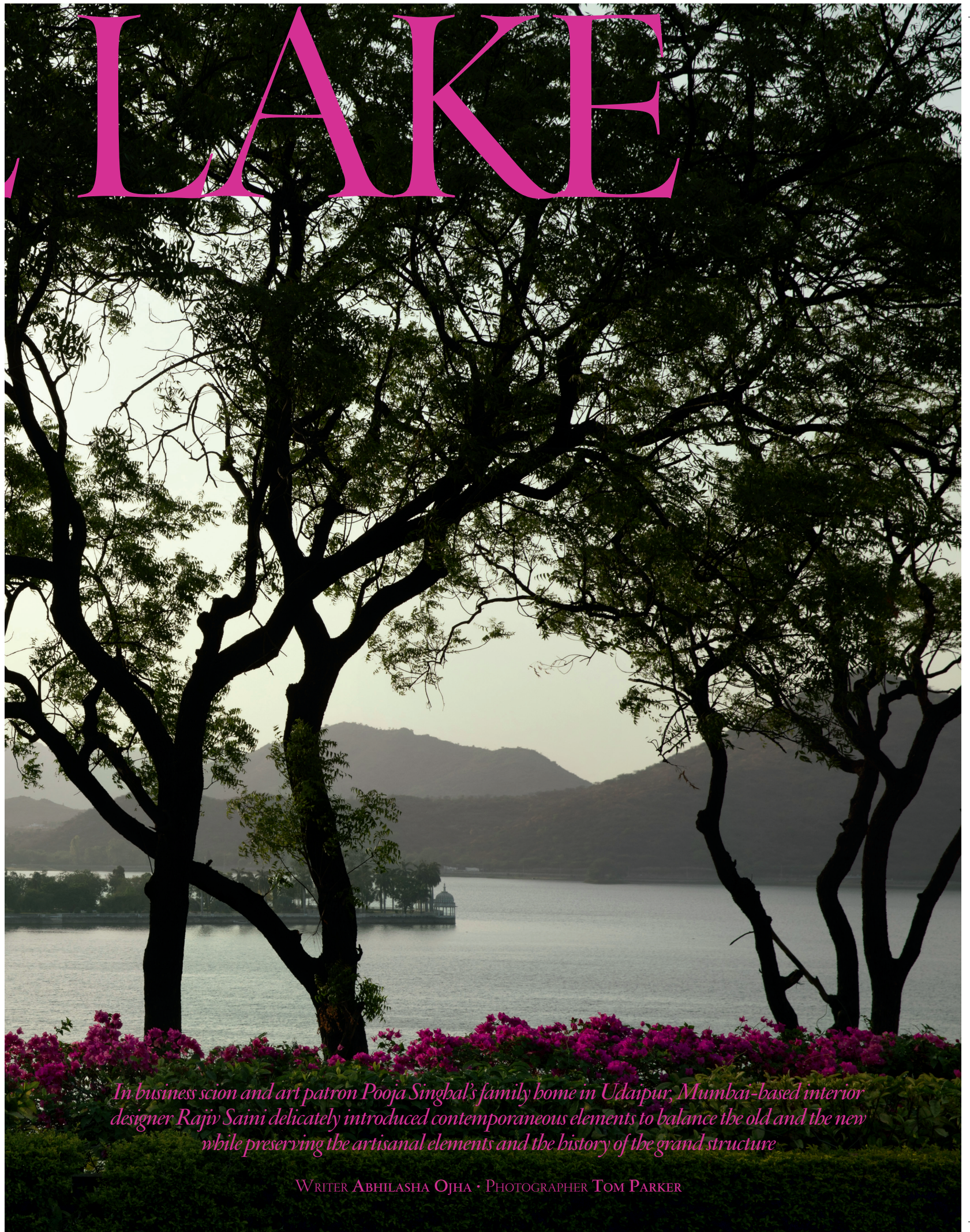


ON THE

The front entrance to art patron Pooja Singhal's Udaipur home—which she shares with her parents and siblings—faces Nehru Park island and Fateh Sagar lake.



LAKE

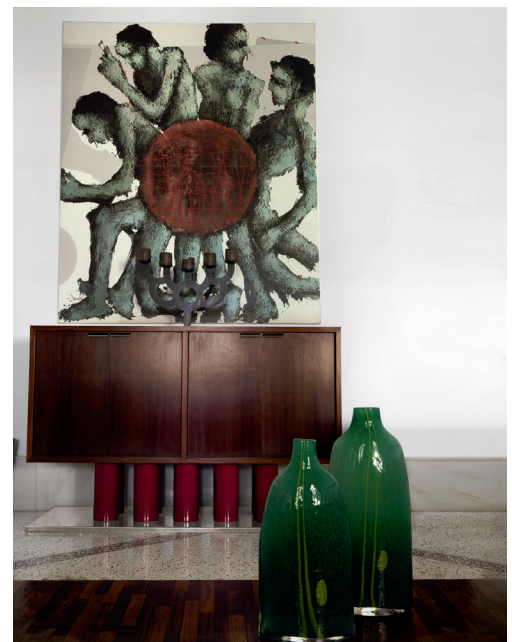
In business scion and art patron Pooja Singhal's family home in Udaipur, Mumbai-based interior designer Rajiv Saini delicately introduced contemporaneous elements to balance the old and the new while preserving the artisanal elements and the history of the grand structure

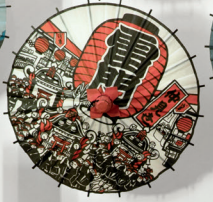
WRITER ABHILASHA OJHA • PHOTOGRAPHER TOM PARKER





Above: The Singhals' home is a homage to Indian culture and traditions. A range of fabrics, made with traditional handloom techniques, has been used through the home—from cotton to khadi and raw silk. This wall in Pooja's bedroom, which the family has named the Yellow room, displays a selection of paper *pichhwais*—framed pages from a book gifted to her mother. **Right:** The Red room is used by Pooja's parents. The lacquered wood cabinet is by interior designer Rajiv Saini, who decorated the home; above it is a contemporary artwork by Prasanta Kalita that matches the room's palette. In the foreground are a pair of teal hand-blown glass jars picked up from a small gallery in New Alresford, UK. **Facing page:** The living room's mirrored mosaic arch is a feature seen in many Rajasthani palaces. The mirror and pouffe were picked up in Udaipur. The heads were picked up in Chor Bazaar, Mumbai; the sofa below it was designed by Saini. **Next spread, left page:** This selection of rare Japanese lithographs in the Orange room—used by Pooja's brother—was picked up in Singapore. Most of the other artefacts here, including the traditional handmade umbrellas, were bought on trips to Japan. The chair and occasional table are vintage.







Top left: In the Red room, the contemporary cabinet is paired with a carved teak bed, which has been in the family for nearly three decades. The vase on the cabinet is from Turkey and the kettle beside it from China. The rug is custom-made. The contemporary acrylic-on-canvas is by New Delhi-based artist Kalicharan Gupta; the brass vessels are from Pooja's mother's collection. **Top right:** At the entrance is a series of artworks by Banoj Mohanty, who specializes in working with old newspapers and paint. The brass oil lamps are from her mother's collection; the green lacquer boxes are from South East Asia. The light installation—with twigs, straw and pieces of wood—was made by Pooja's aunt in Kolkata. **Above right:** The fireplace in the Red room is flanked by lacquered-wood vases and a vintage chair. **Above left:** Saini designed the lacquered-wood-and-steel cabinet in the Orange room; above it are two works by Vietnamese artist Nguyen Thanh Binh.

Right: Though they had purchased this house in the mid-1990s, the Singhals only moved in a decade ago; the renovation of the interiors took a couple of years; but the exterior was left untouched. **Far right:** A view of the veranda—each of the rooms opens out to this space, the original construction of which is over 100 years old. The table was custom-designed and the chairs were picked up at a sale from The Aman (now The Lodhi) in New Delhi. The flooring of the veranda, like its structure, is as it was originally built—unlike the interiors. **Below:** The bathroom in the Blue room, which is used by Pooja's sister—the blue lamp was bought in England, from The Conran Shop. **Facing page:** Pooja Singhal with a series of framed paper *pichhwais*.



There's curation and then there's finesse in curation. In Pooja Singhal's breezy home in Udaipur, where she lives with her family—parents, two siblings, her niece and nephew—it's the flourish with which art is placed that gives this abode's curatorial syntax its distinctive style. It's a home that celebrates the union of the old and new with immense sensibility—and sensitivity—and that's a rarity. Over 100 years old, this home, originally a Rajput *thikana*, resonates, as Pooja explains, with the philosophy that the family stands for: "Never discard the old; the old is where you began, the new is where you are."

EYE FOR BUSINESS

Interestingly, the ethos of her home is reflected in Pooja's businesses, too. The third generation of one of India's most illustrious families (her grandfather PP Singhal started Mewar Oil & General Mills in Udaipur, which was later renamed PI Industries), Pooja has effectively combined her philanthropic contributions in the revival of art and craft with a sharp business acumen. Through Pichvai Tradition & Beyond, which she started in 2009, Pooja has not just given a facelift to the art form, but also ensured its resurrection. While her mother was already a patron of sorts in Udaipur to some of these artists, Pooja built her own atelier, changed the size, scale and, sometimes, the medium to revive this art form for people living in smaller apartments.

Then there is Ruh, Pooja's apparel business, which she began in 2004 to collaborate with weavers from all over India. Here, too, she worked with Indian heritage and handloom, reinterpreting it in a modern format to make it more relevant to consumers. Today, Ruh, with a store each in New Delhi and Kolkata, and a strong focus on trunk shows, is reaching out to an increasing number of Indian women who want a combination of the traditions of the East with silhouettes inspired by the West.

ARTISANAL HOME

When Pooja reiterates that her home is "a reflection of everything that I'm doing now", I understand her position perfectly. If her businesses are a "modern interpretation" of the old, in her Udaipur home, where the family moved more than a decade ago, this thought process resonates evocatively. Interior designer Rajiv Saini not only let the original architecture remain unchanged, the stone cladding, the wooden frames, the imposing jali doors, furniture pieces, but even the flooring of the veranda, was retained in its original style. Wherever the owners of this home introduced changes, it was done with care and respect for the work of the artisans. Take, for instance, the indigenous technique of silver-cladding that features in some of the furniture acquired for the living room, a Zen space with its ecru colour palette; Saini merged it perfectly with contemporary pieces. If the chairs and mirrors in silver-cladding are an ode to royalty, the glass inlay work, delicately created in the niches of the arches of this home, is a homage to the skill that was used by artisans in Udaipur's palaces. In the Yellow room, which is Pooja's bedroom, we find the traditional concept of *chatai*-making or mat-weaving effectively used in the inside section of a glass cupboard. Every part of the home is reminiscent of the heritage of Rajasthan, particularly the city of Udaipur, which Pooja's grandfather made his home several decades

ago when he moved to the city from Allahabad.

If heritage forms the solid foundation of this artistic home, "memories of our travels" is what binds its curatorial stance. An impressive chandelier brought all the way from Prague, masks and curios from trips to destinations all over the world, paintings and lacquer cabinets from Japan and Vietnam ("My brother's room has an Oriental feel to it, while my sister's room is minimalistic."), carpets commissioned to artisans from another part of the world—the art and artefacts in this home are conversation starters. While the *pichbwais*, unsurprisingly, stand out (particularly the one in the living room, made in black with gold and silver block-print and natural colours), it's the sophistication with which the contemporary art is juxtaposed with the traditional in the main gallery that makes this home unique.

FRAGMENTED STYLE

But more than anything else, the *caractère distinctif* of this home is the element of mosaic and its usage in this spacious home, its inspirational cue taken from the family's previous home, also in Udaipur. The rooms—with Saini contemporizing the mosaic technique of flooring to introduce a spirited colour palette—are a burst of colour, giving this home its yellow, orange, blue and red rooms, which belong to Pooja and her brother, sister and parents, respectively.

This home that seamlessly melds tradition and contemporary elements reflects her family values, according to Pooja. "We embrace everything that is modern without leaving our culture behind," says the business scion who believes her aesthetic and eye for art have been inspired by her mother and her grandmothers, particularly her paternal grandmother. Pooja's home in Udaipur could well be a reference point for many of us to follow, a tribute to celebrating the old while introducing the new. ❖



PHOTO: ROOJIKA SARAN