

# VOGUE

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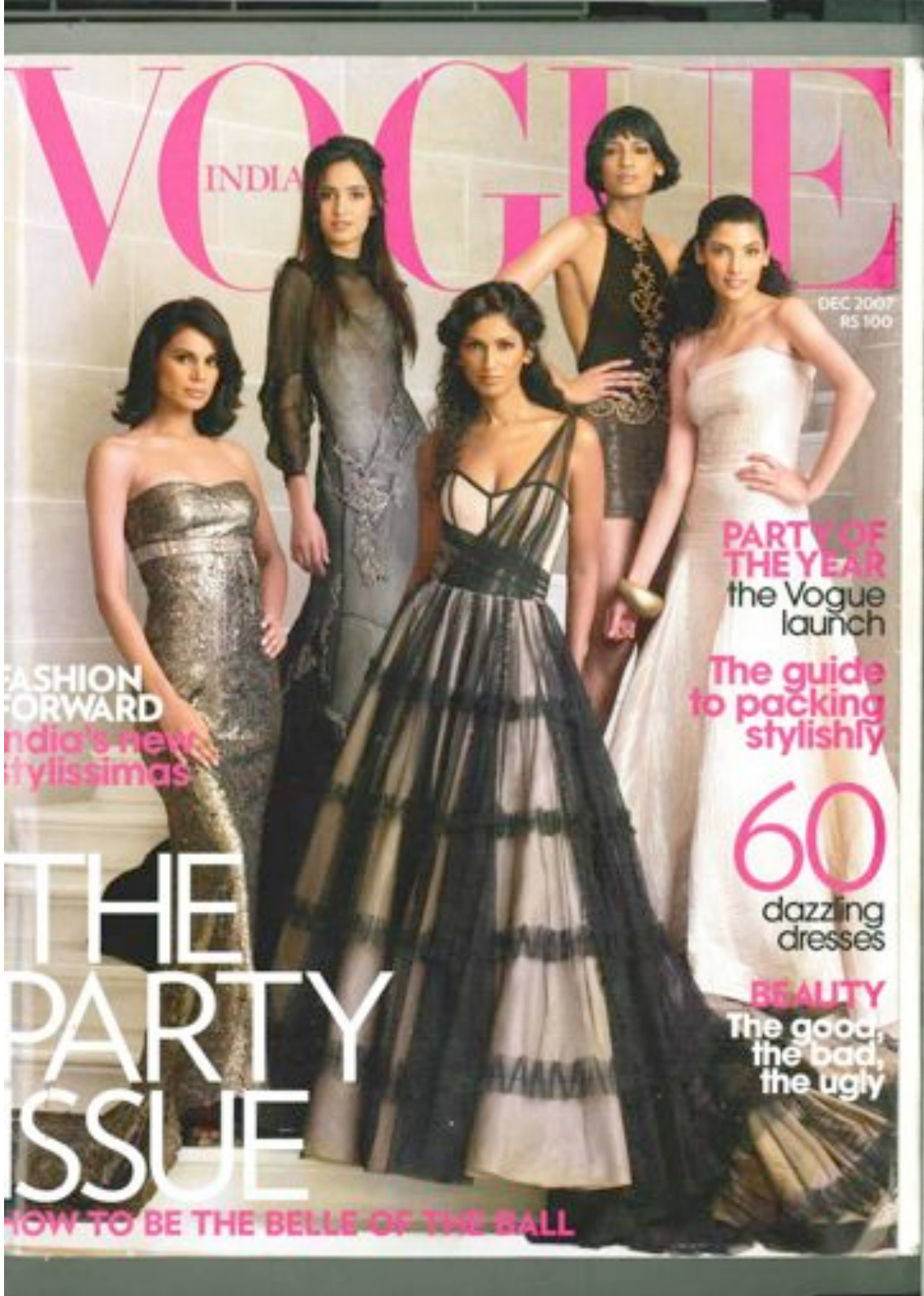
The guide  
to packing  
stylishly

**60**  
dazzling  
dresses

**BEAUTY**  
The good,  
the bad,  
the ugly

# THE PARTY ISSUE

HOW TO BE THE BELLE OF THE BALL



# GOAN IMMERSION

*Jivi Sethi's Assagao sanctuary combines peace with vibrant personality to create a home with a laid-back Goan vibe, discovers Vivek Menezes. Photographs by Prabuddha Dasgupta*

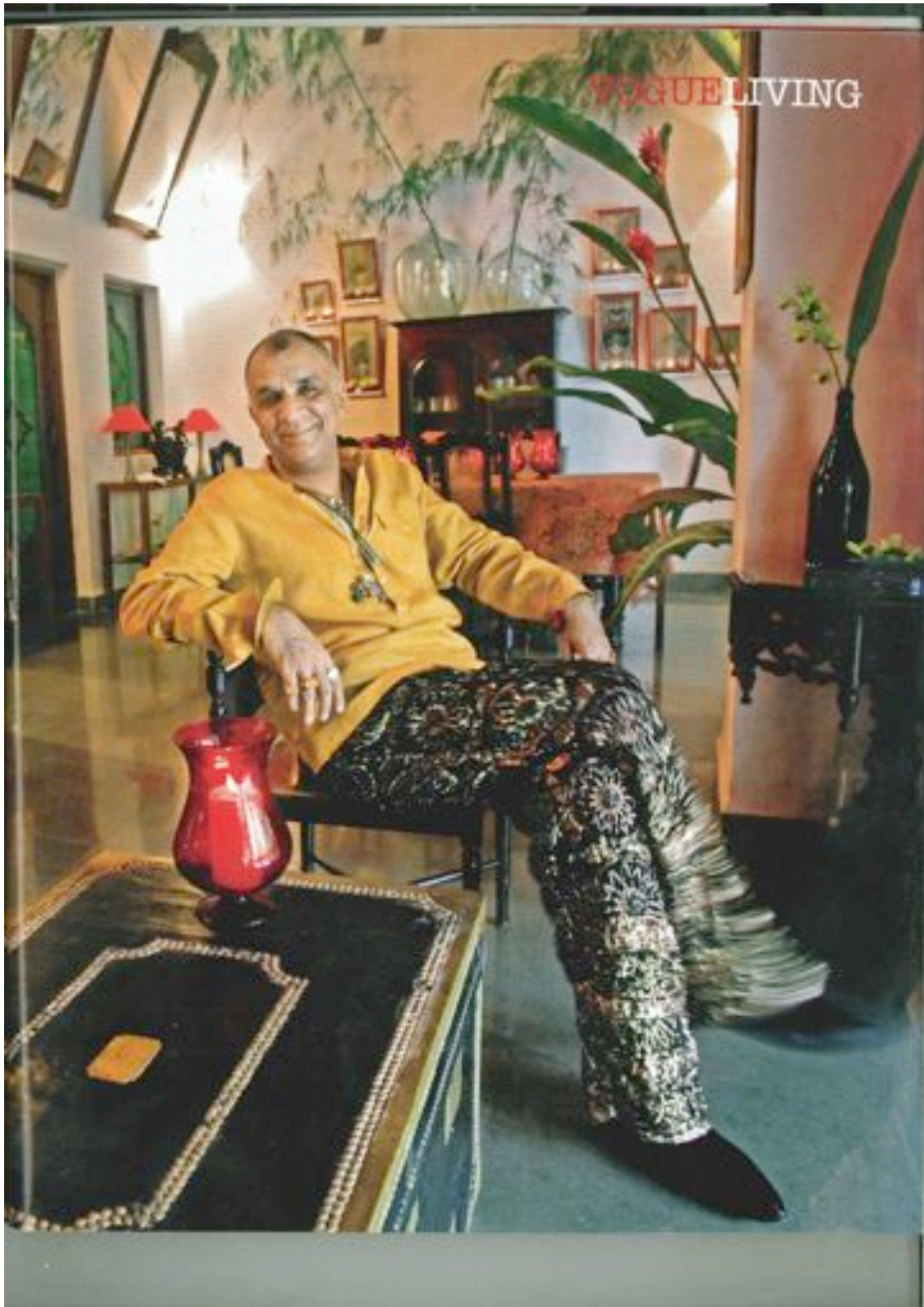
**t**o get to versatile designer Jivi Sethi's private chamber in his multi-level, multi-faceted house in Assagao, you climb a narrow staircase that reveals nothing of what is to come. As you take the final turn and deposit your shoes at the door, you're nearly knocked off-kilter—an eye-popping expanse of white on white, and light-filled space; a feeling of being aloft in the canopies of the spreading trees that grow profusely in this old part of Goa. It feels a bit like a fairy-tale machaan, which comes complete with perfectly tailored upholstery, an Internet connection and a charming Laxma Goa etching on the wall. Easily the most notable room in this stylish house, it is also all Jivi—beautifully detailed, yet relaxed and disarming, fully equipped for the 21st century, but still in full possession of its aesthetic inheritance.

**Space personalized**  
Designer and stylist Jivi Sethi's Goa home reflects his personality: detailed, relaxed and discriminating.





VOGUE LIVING





**Design matters**  
Sethi's private chamber, an airy expanse of white, is lifted with a variety of bold colours and interesting textures. A coffee table of his own design (in picture above) has been made with glass and red lacquer. Much of the art and sculpture in the home was created by Sethi's artist friends.





## VOGUE LIVING



When home, Sethi quite understandably spends most of his time in this eye, and the careful attention that he has given it is evident. The air-conditioners are housed in eye-pleasing slatted white cabinets; the fans have been divested of their plastic shields ("Those things are always teki") and instead dangle from unobtrusive little white boxes that seem to disappear into the ceiling; the floor is coated with lush, matte deck paint that yields like canvas under your bare feet.

Here is a piece of the kind of antique furniture you might expect in a heritage-wallah's house in Goa, bought from Casa Goa, his friend Cesar Pinto's showroom in Baga. Right alongside are tineware

**"Goa subdues people in a good way, it calms them down, and this has happened with Jivi"**

family heirlooms salvaged from the Sethi homes in Amritsar and Delhi. Everything else is just him—a gleaming coffee table of his own design, all glass and gleaming red and black lacquer; a cheeky portrait of him by the great Goan artist Mario Miranda; a drawing by another friend, the Australian artist Davina Stephens, even a small, colourfully striped toy pig that sits in a position of honour near the bed.

Cesar Pinto, who has seen the house develop from the beginning, agrees that this particular space speaks volumes. "It's a really wonderful room, I love the sense of absolute calmness that you get when you enter." He adds, "I've known

Jivi for a long time, I helped him find this place because I felt that his tremendous creativity and artistic talents would be a real asset to Goa. That has happened, but what I also see is that Goa has had a profound effect on Jivi. This place tends to subdue people in a good way, to calm them down in an important way, and it's clear to me that this is what has happened with my friend."

Sethi feels the same way. He has named this house *Sushlam*, after his family home in Amritsar, the place where he was born and the site of many childhood memories. "I may be single," he says with conviction, "but this is a family home. I have flowed through life, and have created a close family of friends, which came together with the family I was born into. Here is where all of this becomes one, where the circle closes. I was born in Sushlam and hope to die in Sushlam."

This collaborative family aspect to Sethi's house can be felt and seen in every room. There are the Goan touches, many of which come from the workshop of Cesar Pinto, who says, "Jivi has a very keen eye, it's about the best I've ever encountered. He knows exactly what he wants, and often zeroes in on un-retouched pieces. He knows, just from a glance, exactly how it should be, and where it will fit in." Other friends have also collaborated—each door handle in the house is a unique work by the quirky, highly original American metalware designer Michael Aram, whose bowls and servers are also prominently displayed, along with a chic masterpiece of a candlestand in the shape of human neck bones.

The house is overflowing with the impressions of friends: a triptych of Dyanita Singh's photographs of the over-stuffed dicer of beauty magazine Shahrukh Hashmi's house make an otherwise spare little room burst with colour. "Shahrukh is my favourite," says Sethi, and pays tribute to the Queen of Kitsch with plastic boxsets and garlands in the attached bathroom. The pair of Kelings lions at the gates are fine replicas of the famous guardians of the 13th-century Sun Temple at Konark. Each fierce beast is depicted crushing an elephant, which in turn lies astride a fallen human—a stunning depiction of the might of the Sun God. It was Jivi's brother's idea to have them at



### Aesthetic bent

Sethi's home blends antique objects of art (sourced from his close friend Cesar Pinto's store, Casa Goa, in Baga) with contemporary furniture and heirloom pieces from his family homes in Delhi and Amritsar. American metalware designer Michael Aram's quirky works—like this noughts-and-crosses set and funky cube (above and right, on table)—are scattered throughout the many rooms of the house.



the gate of Surbhoan.

Step away from the peek-a-boo gate which tantalises with a view of the courtyard beyond, and there is yet another friend's contribution, a striking Celtic cross—an exact replica of one that stands in County Down in Ireland. From that vantage point, you're suddenly back in Assagao, and firmly on the meandering road that leads to the busy-busy of Anjuna beach in one direction, and the overcrowded market town of Mapusa in the other. Which brings us to perhaps the most excellent feature of Sethi's modernist mansion: that the bulk and spread of it is almost entirely invisible from the road. He has taken pains to make his space politely private—it does not impose, it is the opposite of the aggressive style of building that overzealous developers have started to fast on a state where the native architecture is still notable for its light footprint and easygoing give-and-take with the unrelenting landscape.

**t**he village of Assagao is among the tiniest, and prettiest, in the territories that make up the Velhas Conquistas, or the Old Conquests from the very first period of Iberian colonial rule. It comprises a narrow strip of especially rich orchard lands, full of fruit trees and thick rubber groves that rise to forested hillsides. So verdant is this terrain that the village name supposedly derives from the phrase locals have had to repeat a million times to doubtful wayfarers, "Assa Gava", meaning "Yes, there is a village here"; look closely, the houses are merely hidden in the orchards and acres of coconut palm.

Over the last 200 years, these hidden houses of Assagao have produced a stream of notables. The originator of folkloric Konkani *nata* (drama), Lucasinho Ribeiro, was a native, an Ascendant, as were several bishops and clerics, including the pioneering linguist Helder Dalgado. Another member of the Assagao diaspora is Anthony Lanzolot Dias, who served India Gandhi as Governor of West Bengal. And then the footballing D'Souza's, Neville and Deryk, who represented India at a time when the team wasn't the laugh-

### Assagao has recently burgeoned into a hub of the widely globalised neo-Goan world

ing stock of FIFA. Neville's match-winning hat-trick against Australia at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics is surely Assagao's finest sporting moment.

In recent years, Assagao has burgeoned into a centre of the wildly globalised neo-Goan world. There is a professional New Age birthing centre not far from Surbhoan, which offers pre-natal yoga and a facility for water births. A short walk in another direction brings you to a stylish restaurant in a converted Indo-Portuguese mansion, where you can feast on moose, or walrus and anacardi salad, while chilling out to live trib-



#### Quiet hideaway

Sethi has made a deliberate effort to keep his home discreetly hidden; it's almost invisible from the road and is an arduous refuge from the world outside, including the busy Mapusa market town and crowded beaches of Anjuna. An old map of Goa (above) provides a charming backdrop to a work desk.



## VOGUE LIVING



### Native accents

Sethi's talent for styling interiors is evident in the little touches of local flora dotting tables, shelves, counters and even armchairs. His design elements include lots of mirrors and glass, including chandeliers.

"Look, I'm a world citizen," says Sethi. "My friends are from all over the world, and I spend a lot of my life travelling abroad and around India. All of us are becoming more like this. I believe that there are rotten people in every community, but also wonderful people who can be my friends. What's important is that we can have a fabulous time together, and also always look to see what we can do to help."

In Goa, this has translated to projects executed for the Museum of Christian Art, a world-class collection of religious craftsmanship housed at the Rachel Seminary. But it has also meant quiet support, like regularly showing up for activities at Lila, a free studio space run by the avant-garde Goan artist Aparna Kulkarni, which "was born out of the idea that a sense of play leads to discovery, and often the rediscovery of our inner self or selves."

"It's quite true that this house, and Goa itself, has become a way of life with me," admits Jivi, as he walks through the courtyard to show us the newly finished massage room at Sunroom. "The peace, the solitude beckon me. When I am parked in Delhi, where I always just feel so very busy, it doesn't take long before I'm raring to leave and get back here." ■

al fish. And from yet another converted old house, this time with luxurious rooms to rest and a swimming pool, the Tris Anigun run motorcycle tours that involve Enfield Bultards and itineraries that take in all of South India.

But there's trouble in paradise, and its impact can be felt even amidst the plantations and swaying palms. Planning procedures are ignored, and there is a growing unease as Goans eye a future where migrants outnumber and outvote them. In the last 12 months, locals managed to overturn a Regional Plan that had the support of the political class, and which would have opened up huge swathes of land to development à la Costa del Sol or Cancún. But this pressure on territory is unlikely to let up in a resurgent India which looks at this slice of the coastline as its Konkani Riviera, and as growing numbers of Indians seek their own slice of paradise under the Goan sun.

**M**aria Aurora Costa (literary critic and author of *Goa: A Daughter's Story*) has known Jivi Sethi from his schoolboy days in Delhi, when she was a substitute teacher and he was an "exceptionally intense, caring and sensitive" nine-year-old. She says of her old pupil's house, "I love it. It's an absolutely splendid use of the space, and what I really appreciate is that he didn't cut down any trees or interfere with the lovely green spaces that are all around." More importantly, "Jivi is one of those very rare individuals who isn't using Goa just as a pad, but is really getting involved with the local culture, with local people. He interacts with Goa, and that makes him special and very welcome here."