



GETTING JIVI WITH IT

Jivi Sethi's one-off retro-pop furniture line has found many takers.
Archana Jahagirdar discovers what makes it tick

It's difficult to pigeonhole Jivi Sethi. Interior designer, lifelong student of Indian craft, an effortless clotheshorse for self-designed fashion, talent-spotter, Sethi is many things. Recently, he's added another feather to his rather natty hat, that of furniture designer. Called Just

course of an exhibition therefore gains some significance.

Using vinyl and plastic for upholstery, steel for the frame, Sethi's furniture is like him — modern, but rooted in its Indianness. Opines Sethi, "I am a hybrid. I come from a colonial past and then there

Sethi says that he had been working on this collection for a while and did them as "a design statement". He adores and respects Indian craft, which is why the use of modern materials is a departure for him, but in his home in New Delhi he shows how craft and modernity can

with vinyl and plastic, and there are beautiful silk brocade cushions that nestle in the vicinity without looking in the least bit incongruous. The flash and dash of the plastic and vinyl plays off the richness and grandness of the brocade.

"The pieces," emphasises Sethi, "are a design statement." Since he claims now to work "hardly", he won't do industrial production of these pieces, but "I will do them as and when" he wants to be creative. Calling this line "exuberant and colourful," Sethi says, "I want to trigger off ideas rather than be a factory. Younger people should be producing. I'd rather see, view and look than just keep producing. It's easier for me to be free flowing." Was producing these pieces a challenge? Sethi's response is as always filled with respect for what India offers: "The pleasure of being in India is that there are incredible people at hand to execute whatever you visualise. Indian craftsmen are very receptive to new ideas. They are excited about new ideas as they see light and hope that their craft will survive because of these new ideas."

Sethi's acceptance of every influence that has come his way has, he feels, something to do with his upbringing. Born into a cultured Punjabi family, Sethi says that his parents' household was all-embracing of religions and cultures. Reflecting on that, Sethi comments, "There was an openness towards everything." Openness, feels Sethi, is creativity's oxygen. He says, "Anything, from the most simple to the most profound can excite your design sensibility."

Sethi's lack of formal design training has given him a unique perspective, making him highly sought-after by those who understand the idiom of design. Sethi himself is fascinated by "an outsider's view" of things. He explains, "I like to see how a foreigner does the interiors of an Indian house, or how an Indian does a foreign interior. The way both will perceive these realities is very interesting to me."

He may even want to live a low-key life

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It's difficult to pigeonhole Jivi Sethi. Interior designer, lifelong student of Indian craft, an effortless clotheshorse for self-designed fashion, talent-spotter, Sethi is many things. Recently, he's added another feather to his rather natty hat, that of furniture designer. Called Just Jivi, Sethi designed and manufactured 25 one-of-a-kind pieces which all sold out within minutes of going on sale as part of an exhibition along with some young product designers at a Delhi home store. Sethi says, "The pieces are retro-pop. I did retro shapes and then took street culture and Indian colours. This was an exercise with new materials."

Indian furniture design, unlike other creative disciplines, has languished while some of the most important work in the field has happened and continues to happen in the West. Few really good furniture designers have emerged in recent years, hampered by access to top quality raw materials, low awareness among possible patrons and high entry barriers. Sethi's success in selling out in just the

course of an exhibition therefore gains some significance.

Using vinyl and plastic for upholstery, steel for the frame, Sethi's furniture is like him — modern, but rooted in its Indianness. Opines Sethi, "I am a hybrid. I come from a colonial past and then there is my Indian culture. I like to take the best from that colonial past and my Indian heritage. I am very proud of both. I am very clear at this juncture about who I am, and I am very calm." That is why Sethi wears a tie not with a Western style jacket but with a bandgala.

Design impresario Jivi Sethi recently did a collection of retro-pop furniture in bright colours, using vinyl and plastic in lieu of upholstery. The result was colourful, to say the least, and he's hoping that the experiment will pay off with young designers opting for creative solutions

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He may now want to live a low-key life as an observer but he is as excited as ever about what India has on offer. He says, "There is still lots to explore. But we also need to re-think our craft and bring in new technology and therein will lie our strength. We have everything here." The future for Sethi, like his well-appointed apartment, is a work in progress. All he will say about the future is, "I am working on a couple of things, so let's see where it goes." The generality of that statement belies the creative talent and discipline with which Sethi has practised his craft so far. And the results have mostly been unique and well-received. ■

