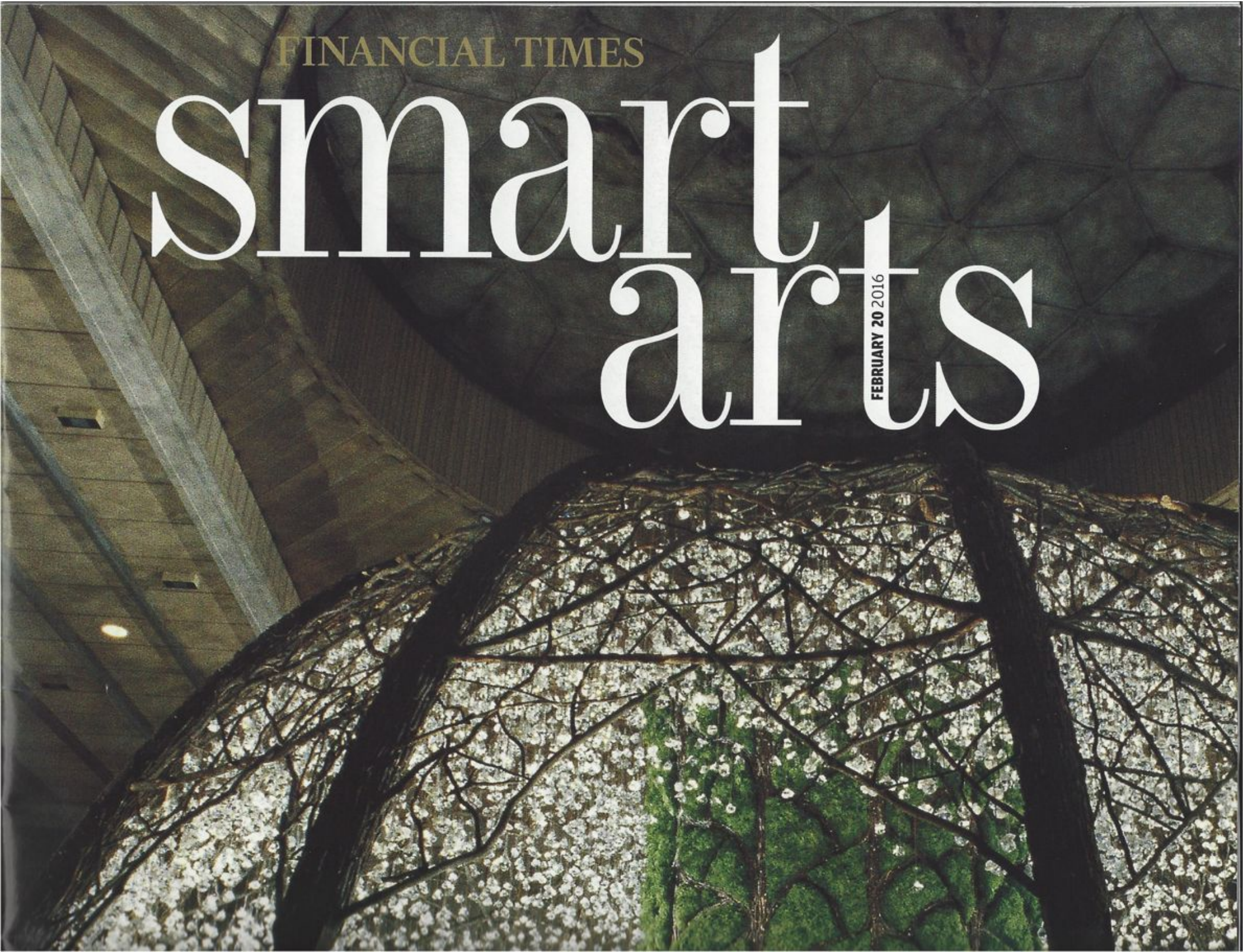


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how to spend it special arts issue



THE SMOOTH GUIDE | THE LONG LUXURIOUS WEEKEND

mumbai

India's greatest metropolis heaves with colour, chaos and a cultural scene so compelling, it captures art-world movers and shakers time and again, says **Maria Shollenbarger**

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India's greatest metropolis heaves with colour, chaos and a cultural scene so compelling, it captures art-world movers and shakers time and again, says **Maria Shollenbarger**

Even after so many visits, it's a thrill to be back." The happy proclamation from Amin Jaffer, international director of Asian art at Christie's, hits my inbox within two hours of his landing in Mumbai – the most recent missive in an enthusiastic volley on the city's dynamic cultural scene. That modern Indian art has held a prime place on the global market for over a decade is no secret – one doesn't need to visit the subcontinent to appreciate its cultural clout anywhere else in the world. But in a city that assaults the senses – at times delightfully, at others jarringly – it makes sense that the flash and glamour of the contemporary art world has found a perfectly intuitive backdrop. Exhibitions and spaces dedicated to provocation, extravagance, even shock, fit right in with Mumbai's cacophony, its magnificently crumbling architectural layers and tidal swell of humanity (the greater metropolitan area is home to more than 20m; at times it feels as if 19.5m of them are trying to get somewhere on the same road as you).

Also very much at home amid the whirl are some of India's most sophisticated and

forward-looking curators, aesthetes, collectors and retailers. They're what make denizens of the art world like Jaffer keep returning, orientating themselves at a handful of social landmarks, such as the venerable Taj Mahal Palace (where Jaffer is a regular guest). The tragic attacks of 2008 provoked waves of worldwide love for this hotel – and its esteemed Nariman Point neighbour, The Oberoi, Mumbai, also devastated by the terrorists. Both emerged within a couple of years with comprehensive renovations and brave new faces – The Taj Mahal in an especially chrysalis-like fashion, thereby reassuming its pride of place in the city's historic firmament. Today its ornate central stair, awash with daylight from its glass-domed roof, glows more grandly than ever, and its lobby bustles with the high-decibel comings and goings of Mumbai's (and the world's) great and good. The Oberoi's modern tower and sparer, more clean-lined room designs may have less of the aesthetic extravagance The Taj Mahal trades in,



From top: The Taj Mahal Palace hotel. A recent Rana Begum show at Jhaveri Contemporary

but the hotel more than holds its own with its manifold charms – not least the knockout views over Back Bay to Malabar Hill, and what has to be some of the most elegant and attentive service in India. Superstar chef Vineet Bhatia works magic at Ziya, where big deals get done over what Bhatia calls his “evolved” interpretations of local street specialties and southern-influenced dishes.

The real beauty of a stay at one of these grandes dames is proximity to many of

the city's most compelling cultural offerings, whose proliferation here in Colaba has made it Mumbai's unofficial arts district. Jaffer never misses a visit to Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, founded by Usha Mirchandani – one of the city's most respected art consultants – with her daughter, Ranjana Steinruecke; the two put

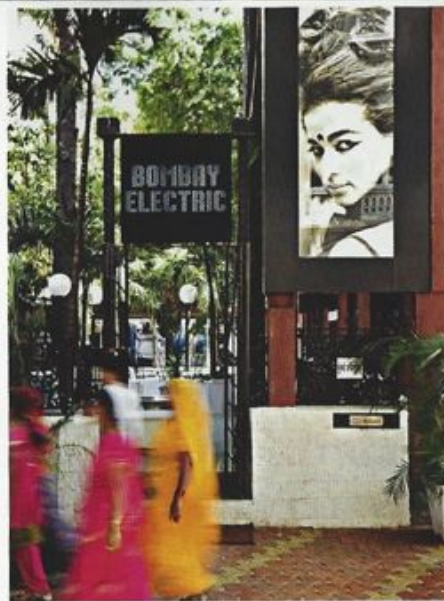
Indian art on the European map 15 years ago as dealers in Berlin, before returning to Mumbai in 2006 to open the 185sq m gallery space a stone's throw from The Taj Mahal Palace's west-facing suites. A few blocks to the south is Project 88, lauded as one of the bellwethers for established and emerging Indian art. Its owner, Sree Goswami, is young, glamorous and enthusiastically embraces all media; performances, installations and readings take place alongside conventional



painting and photography shows in the 370sq m converted printing factory.

Even more revered as an *adda* for the Mumbai cultural classes is Chemould Prescott Road. Founded in 1963 by the late Kekoo Gandhi – an elder statesman of modern Indian art if there ever was one – with his wife Khorshed, it occupies a huge third-floor space in a Prescott Road mansion. Back then, the Gandhys championed such names as SH Raza; today their daughter Shireen shows the likes of Atul Dodiya and others whose now firmly international reputations Chemould helped establish.

Two smaller, and newer, galleries attract art-world movers and shakers with thoughtful, often politically suffused shows of Indian or India-based artists. Tarq – worth a visit just to see Dhanraj Mahal, the ravishing art deco palace in which it's housed – focuses on Indian life contextualised in art, across topics ranging from wilderness sustainability to urban development. And



British-born Priya Kishore, is in the shadow of The Taj Mahal Palace: Bombay Electric curates a bolder permutation of directional Indian design (Kishore staged a pop-up boutique earlier this winter at Selfridges), but deliberately minus those



Clockwise from top left:
Mumbai's Gateway of India.
Dessert at Ziya in The Oberoi.
The Bombay Electric store

enduring (and exported) art form. There are the old reliable chains, Good Earth and Fabindia, both with multiple sites (one of Good Earth's nicest is just along from Bombay Electric) that stock quilts, linens, throws and casual clothing, including fabulous *kurtas* and cotton pyjamas that would command three or four times as much back home. Aficionados make a beeline for one of India's oldest home-design stores, Contemporary Arts & Crafts, which has been sustainably sourcing from makers across various regions since 1962; tableware and ceramics are the things to buy. At the other end of the spectrum is Sahasrabudhi Kalyaneshwar Sahasrabudhi

ornately embroidered wedding skirts that, here, are museum-quality works of art (and can weigh as much as a small child).

Between culture and retail pursuits, so are the days filled in and around Colaba. Come the evening, however, Bandra is the place to be (though to miss lunch at the trendy Bombay Canteen, with its winking throwback-to-the-1960s design motifs and wildly creative cuisine by chef Floyd Cardoz, who for years ran New York's Tabla, would be to miss a chance for some first-rate people watching). The bars and restaurants in and around Bandra's Pali Hill are popular with young, moneyed and invariably gorgeous Mumbaiers, who cram the tables

on the candlelit terrace at Olive Bar & Kitchen, where air kisses and champagne flow freely and the chef whips up a perfectly serviceable linguine alle vongole. Pali Bhavan and Pali Village Café are twinned establishments, set a few doors apart; the former serves delicious modern interpretations of regional Indian, while the latter skews stylishly western – seafood pastas and salads fill the menu and rows of Super Tuscans crowd the shelves in the industrial-chic space.

Funnily, though, it's Soul Fry – an unassuming, gratifyingly good-value joint on Pali Mala Road – that tops many locals' lists. They come to feast on Bombay duck (not duck at all, but a pungent fish dressed liberally in spices) and prawn curries, served without fanfare but blazingly delicious. I came with Monica Varadalli, a profoundly well-connected

Bungalow 8 is not to be missed; it's an aesthete's bazaar of covetable Indian style

tiny Jhaveri Contemporary, in Malabar Hill, has been knocking it out of the park since opening in 2010, with brilliantly coherent shows and projects curated by sisters Amrita (who has advised the Tata and Ambani families, among others) and Priya Jhaveri. Recent highlights included a retrospective of the late documentary photographer Raghubir Singh and collaborations with the likes of Anish Kapoor and Bangladeshi artist Rana Begum, whose 2011 light installation graced the spaces of Mumbai's premier concept store, Bungalow 8.

This is another address not to be missed, an aesthete's bazaar of all that is covetable in the world of contemporary Indian style. Owner and creative director Maithili Ahluwalia relocated to Wankhede cricket stadium last year; the new space is a whitewashed haven showcasing the most discerning eye in town for textiles, antiques, architectural remnants, ceramics and jewels (some designed by her mother Jamini, a social powerhouse and in-demand private shopping guide). Ahluwalia's own designs – floaty dresses, shirts and kaftans – are also sold here under the Bungalow logo. The city's other favoured fashion emporium, run by

Selfridges), but deliberately minus those two stereotypical local stalwarts, saris and wedding attire. The likes of Manish Arora are mixed into displays of one-off jewellery and shawls created for the shop, along with a smattering of international designs.

In general, armed with a discerning eye and the will to taxi-hop, it's hard to go wrong here on the hunt for beautiful crafts – which are, after all, still India's most

buy. At the other end of the spectrum is Sabyasachi. Kolkata-born Sabyasachi Mukherjee, weddingwear designer to Bollywood sirens and high-profile families, opened his store in Mumbai in 2010; the two-storey atelier, hung with brocades, passementerie and clusters of mirrors and portraits up to the ceilings, is a labyrinth of extraordinary bridal jewels and even more extraordinary lehengas,

brazingly delicious. I came with Monica Vaziralli, a profoundly well-connected socialite (and another of the city's most coveted private guides). Imperiously elegant but utterly warm, laden with jewels but shod in delicate leather flip-flops, her cultivated tones rising above the happy ruckus, she somehow fitted in perfectly – the embodiment of the mad, magnificent city she lives in. ♦

THE HIT LIST

WHERE TO STAY

Prices are for a double room with breakfast. **The Oberoi, Mumbai**, Nariman Point 400021 (+9122-6632 5757; www.oberoihotels.com), from £145. **The Taj Mahal Palace**, Apollo Bunder 400001 (+9122-6665 3366; www.tajhotels.com), from about £155.

RESTAURANTS AND BARS

Prices are for three courses and half a bottle of wine. **The Bombay Canteen**, Process House, Kamala Mills, SB Road, Lower Parel 400013 (+9122-4966 6666; www.thebombaycanteen.com), about £20. **Olive Bar & Kitchen**, 14 Union Park Rd, Khar West 400052 (+9122-4340 8228; www.olivebarandkitchen.com), about £35. **Pali Bhavan**, 10 Adarsh Nagar, Pali Naka, Bandra West 400050

(+9122-2651 9400), about £30.

Pali Village Café, 602 Ambedkar Rd, Pali Hill, Bandra West 400050 (+9122-2605 0401), about £35.

Soul Fry, Silver Croft, Pali Mala Rd, Bandra West 400050 (+9122-2604 6892), about £20. **Ziya**, see The Oberoi, Mumbai, about £95

SHOPS

Bombay Electric, 1 Reay House, Best Marg, Colaba 400001 (+9122-2287 6276; www.bombayelectric.in). **Bungalow 8**, North Stand E-F Block, Wankhede Stadium, D Road, Churchgate 400020 (+9122-2281 9880; www.bungalowweight.com). **Contemporary Arts & Crafts**, Taj Building, Naorji Rd, Fort 400001 (+9122-2201 3379; www.cac.co.in). **Fabindia**, +911800-3000 5636; www.fabindia.com. **Good Earth**, 2 Reay House, Best Marg, Colaba 400001 (+9122-2202 1030; [\[earth.in\]\(http://earth.in\)\). **Sabyasachi**, 6 Ador House, K Dubash Marg, Kala Ghoda, Fort 400001 \(+9122-2204 4774; \[www.sabyasachi.com\]\(http://www.sabyasachi.com\)\).](http://www.good</p>
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GALLERIES AND GUIDES

Chemould Prescott Road, Queens Mansion, G Talwar Marg 400001 (+9122-2200 0211; www.gallerychemould.com). **Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke**, 2 Sunny House, 16-18 Mereweather Rd, Colaba 400001 (+9122-2202 3030; www.galeriems.com). **Jamini Ahluwalia**, private guide, book through Greaves India (see How To Get There). **Jhaveri Contemporary**, 2 Krishna Niwas, 58A Walkeshwar Rd 400006 (+9122-2369 3639; www.jhavericontemporary.com). **Monica Vaziralli**, private guide, book through Greaves India (see How To Get There). **Project 88**, BMP Building, Narayan A Sawant

Rd, Colaba 400005 (+9122-2281 0066; www.project88.in). **Targ**, Dhanraj Mahal, CSM Marg, Apollo Bunder 400001 (+9122-6615 0424; www.tarq.in).

WHEN TO GO

Monsoon (June to September) is for the brave – and not your finest shoes. Best is winter (December to February), with relatively mild temperatures and dry skies.

HOW TO GET THERE

Maria Shollenbarger travelled as a guest of **Greaves India** (020-7487 9111; www.greavesindia.com), which offers bespoke cultural and shopping itineraries from about £1,450 per person for four nights, and The Oberoi, Mumbai. British Airways (0844-493 0775; www.britishairways.com) flies from London Heathrow to Mumbai twice daily, from £453 return.