

better interiors

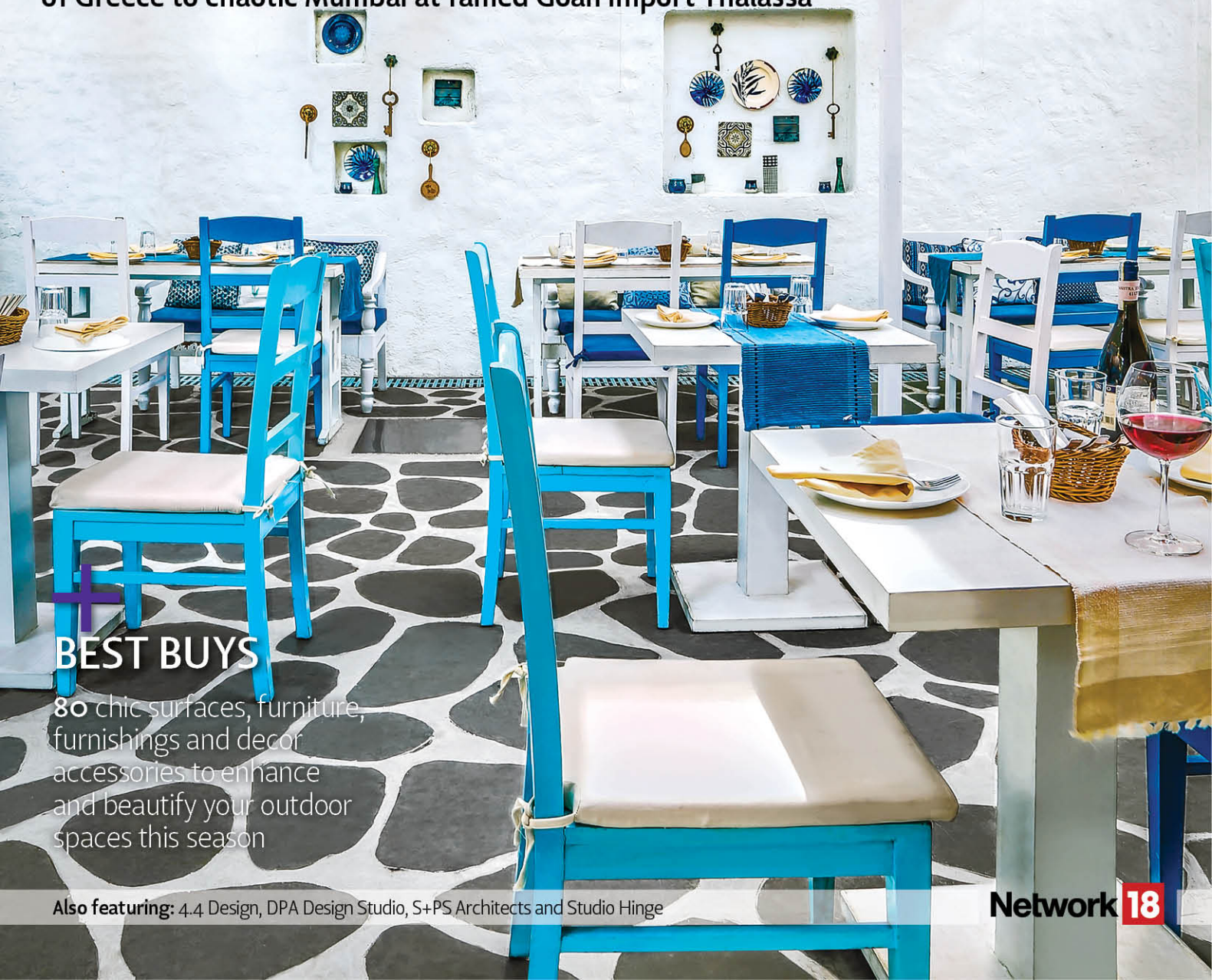
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₹ 125

IDEAS AND DESIGN FOR BETTER LIVING

Grecian Serenity

The Republic and Watermark Design Works bring a tranquil slice of Greece to chaotic Mumbai at famed Goan import Thalassa



BEST BUYS

80 chic surfaces, furniture, furnishings and decor accessories to enhance and beautify your outdoor spaces this season

Also featuring: 4.4 Design, DPA Design Studio, S+PS Architects and Studio Hinge

Network 18



A recycled workstation from the client's earlier office serves as a simple, yet elegant reception table, against a graphic pattern etched by the conduits that carry electrical cables.



A workstation is ensconced between two deeply-recessed louvered windows. The workspace sees minimal division in consonance with its zero-hierarchy work-style.

Spatial Narratives

Rising above constraints posed by a tight budget and strict building regulations, Studio Hinge creates a simple, yet delightfully detail-oriented office for creative agency Please See in Mumbai, while keeping its architectural beauty intact.

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ARCHITECT

Pravir Sethi

Design intervention needn't be a design imposition. Instead of a chest-thumping proclamation, it could be a gentle gesture: a programme that adds functional overlays judiciously on the beautiful bones of a space. Like this office that Studio Hinge and its founder architect Pravir Sethi designed for creative agency Please See. "We connected with the agency when they were marketing a residential development that we had designed. They needed a workspace to be designed for a staff of 14, with a requirement for future expansion up to 20. Additionally, they required a formal conference room, pantry, and informal brainstorming/discussion areas with varying degrees of privacy. The client was keen on having a 'zero-hierarchy' workspace, one that felt more like a studio than an office. They were also keen on using the space for events/open houses," says the architect.

In this office, design intervention is gentle, minimal. In this lounge-like space, for instance, the deep recesses of the windows have been used to advantage by fitting sofas within the niches.



The client was keen on having a workspace that felt more like a studio than an office, therefore the communal table — which also fit well with the no-hierarchy requirement. The table is illuminated with a custom-built, 28-foot-long light fixture. Its linear form is echoed by the 'trench' in the table that accommodates integrated services, with data, telephone and power lines. The pitched roof — offering heights in excess of 15' at the eaves and 22' at the ridge — is clearly visible.

CONCEPT: A minimal design intervention that would respect the architectural features of the existing shell. To maintain an open, informal working environment that was transparent and encouraged interaction between the team.



TOP The series of louvered and recessed windows lends a certain rhythm to this composition. The linear, customized chipboard light fixture that is suspended above the communal table plays a role in general and task lighting, and can be appreciated better in this photograph.

ABOVE, LEFT & RIGHT Workstations and conference tables feature 8-mm-thick, water-jet-cut MS legs supporting a 38mm x 38mm MS sub-frame, both epoxy-painted. The bison board top and Burma teak edges are finished in clear water-based PU. The architects also provided hooks concealed along the underside of the worktop for people to hang their bags from, and thus keep the floor clear of clutter.

The brief and the quality of the existing shell in terms of its generous height and abundant natural lighting called for a very light touch in terms of design intervention, which was also necessitated by a shoestring budget. This led to the only essential works being done initially, with add-ons planned phase-wise. Key ideas were maintaining an open, informal working environment that was transparent and encouraged interaction between the team. "We were also conscious of catering to the unconventional work habits of some staff: there were some who preferred to work standing; others while sitting cross-legged on the floor," recalls Pravir.

The space occupied the top floor of a beautiful heritage building with a pitched roof offering heights in excess of 15' at the eaves and 22' at the ridge. Like many multi-tenanted buildings in the area, this one was in a poor state of repair. "We received it as a bare shell, with not even basic electrical works done. Flooring of 2ft x 2ft vitrified tile had been provided by the landlord."

Since the brief did not require further division of space than that which already existed — 1,000 sq ft of main hall and a 300-square-foot meeting room — no civil work was necessary. "Even the pantry, which is part of the meeting



The demand for discussion areas with varying degrees of privacy resulted in a completely-open brainstorming area, a formal conference room, and this one — a visually semi-permeable enclosure shielded by what the architects like to call the “egg” partition, named after its elliptical form. The height of the slender teak members starts at 6ft and goes up gradually to about 11ft. The individual slats hover independent of each other, pinned only at the floor, such that each member vibrates slightly when brushed against, not unlike a tuning fork.

room, was built in carpentry.” As for the main hall, after deliberating on various alternate layouts, the architects settled on a single long communal workstation that would stand free of walls in the centre of the space. This forms the spine around which auxiliary activities take place, ranging from a completely open discussion table to a semi-enclosed ‘egg’ partition (so christened owing to its ovoid form) made of up vertical timber fins, to a completely segregated formal meeting room and a pantry area. “The external walls of the building being over 2’ thick, the large louvered windows were deep recessed, which presented us with naturally lit window niches into which we built sofa-style seating, with storage under,” adds Pravar.

This project saw limitations and challenges being transformed into design opportunities.

MATERIALS

Workstation and conference tables
MS legs and sub-frame, bison board top and teak edges
Egg partition
Teakwood and MS
Floor Vitrified tile
Light fixture above communal table
Chipboard
Pantry partition
Chipboard, teak wood frame, laminate and frosted acrylic



The partition between the conference and pantry areas morphs to function variously as a bar counter and a whiteboard, providing access between the two as required. This is done partly by having a window built into a door (both separately openable) and a “food-truck” style top-hung partition on hydraulic pumps, which further opens the two spaces into each other, turning the partition into a bar counter.

The shoestring budget allowed Studio Hinge to indulge its interest in furniture and product design. “Rather than buying stuff off the shelf, we decided to make everything, deploying elegant bespoke detailing to allow growth and flexible usage. Almost nothing new was bought. The castor chairs were recycled from their old office, as was the reception desk (earlier a workstation),” says the architect. “We have designed and built custom suspended linear fixtures up to 28’ long made of chipboard, which serve as general and task lighting. These are hung over the main workstation and conference table, as well as in the open office area.” The challenge of not being allowed to chase into the walls was turned into an advantage by “using exposed conduiting in yellow, and creating a branching pattern along the wall using this.”

Detail, emphasizes Pravar, is everything to them. “We are driven by tactility, surface, texture, joinery, the coming-together-ness of things and the whole-more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts-ness of it all. Our work is detail-and craft-orientated, yet often interpreted by cutting-edge fabrication techniques,” says the architect, whose interest in installation design and responsive mechanisms in architecture was nurtured at London’s Bartlett School





9 To 5

The long span of the top-framing member of the partition between the conference room and the pantry is supported by cotton rope used in tension. Repetition of this element provides the wireframe of a pitched roof above the pantry, visible from the meeting room.

of Architecture. The egg partition is one example of a painstakingly crafted interior element. Teak posts, 2" x 4" in thickness and with a height starting at 6 ft and gradually rising to 11 ft, encircle a brainstorming area at one end of the main hall. The base joinery detail of the partition allows for the posts to stand with no support anywhere along the height. This, along with the slender proportions of each member, establishes the desired visual lightness. "We devised an understated detail, avoiding typical gusset plates by using a 12-mm-thick upstand concealed by notching into the timber section, welded into a 6-mm-thick floor plate, both in MS and with black epoxy paint. The asymmetrical curve in plan and elevation, with a geometry starkly apart from their context, set the screen apart as a 'floating' element, despite it being anchored to one wall," reveals Studio Hinge's principal architect.

While the egg partition is the studio's response to a situation when one size does not fit all, the partition between the conference room and the pantry is its answer to when one size doesn't even fit one. "In such cases we build in flexibility," says Pravir. "We create things that bend, fold, twist and slide to become other things, new things." The element in question opens up in various ways to provide alternate

configurations of usage (service counter, whiteboard, bar), achieved partly by having a window built into a door (both separately openable) and a "food-truck" style top hung partition on hydraulic pumps, which further opens the two spaces into each other, turning the partition into a bar counter. The long span of the top framing member is supported by cotton rope used in tension. Repetition of this element provides the wireframe of a pitched roof above the pantry, visible from the meeting room. "Good design, to us, is like a clever bit of storytelling," says Pravir. "It is contextual, has a narrative, can be witty, moving, or both. It evolves, evokes, revealing new turns at every reading. We believe design should be ubiquitous, should trickle down into the nooks and crannies of daily life, and not just be the preserve of a luxury lifestyle." **B**

FACT FILE: Location Fort, Mumbai
Area 1,300 sq ft Principal architect
Pravir Sethi Design team Pooja Katara
Interior contractor The Makers
Furniture manufacturer The Makers
Graphics and creatives Please See,
Studio Hinge