

NIPA DOSHI RECALLS A childhood played out against dusty pink architecture, enlivened by the bijoux-hued saris worn by the women of Delhi. Jonathan Levien remembers the earthy tones of Scottish heather and the brown cardboard packaging of his parent's toy factory. Doshi, who studied at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, says their design process is like playing jazz, each riffing off the other. Levien, a carpenter by early vocation, suggests it's more like classical music, a harmony produced through order. The pair met while completing their studies at London's Royal Academy of Art in the mid-1990s, married, and set up the now widely acclaimed Doshi Levien design studio in 2000.

Since then, they've created furniture, lighting and objects for global brands including Moroso, B&B Italia and Cappellini, developed textiles for Kvadrat and produced limited edition pieces for private galleries and cultural institutions.

There's "Shanty", a series of sideboards designed for BD Barcelona, composed of chromatically mismatched corrugated panels that despite apparent disarray enclose a rational storage system. For Moroso, the My Beautiful Backside collection of sofas consists of upholstered day beds perched upon ornamental legs; asymmetric, elaborately embroidered back rests are arrayed like scatter cushions. (Yes, it looks just as good from behind.) Their magnificent ceramic Le Cabinet commissioned by the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, France's master porcelain works, is a homage to Le Corbusier's buildings at Chandigarh, the utopian capital of Punjab and Haryana which was masterminded by the first Indian prime minister, Pandit Nehru.

"It's such an emphatic piece and we were delighted to learn that it was acquired by a Chinese collector based in Paris," says Doshi. "We are increasingly intrigued to know about the kind of people who are buying and collecting our work."

This desire to build a rapport with their

audience led to the duo's decision to produce and sell their new lighting collection themselves, rather than work in tandem with a brand. It's an expression of independence as idiomatic as their designs.

"The conceptual start of the project was really about exploring form, light and space," says Levien. The aesthetic, says Doshi, was inspired by the mid-century

tapestries of Le Corbusier. (Like the one commissioned by Jørn Utzon for the Sydney Opera House in 1958, titled *Les Dés Sont Jetés – The Die is Cast* – these typically feature evocatively amorphous shapes floating in vaguely architectural space.)

As the pair, who work opposite one another in their East London studio, began to roll, pierce and piece together paper maquettes, they started to envision the lights as heavy-duty metal sculptures. The kind of forms that could only be fabricated by highly skilled craftsmen like those employed in the British vintage car trade to restore the deep-formed, sensual bodies of E-Type and XKI Jaguars.

"Each individual shape is made of at least two pieces of automotive-grade aluminium that are beaten into shape on a wooden block with a mallet, then seamlessly welded together to form the complete shape," explains Levien.

"This creates an almost visceral relationship to the object," says Doshi. "You

can walk around it, there's something about it that you desire. At the human level, you respond to it."

The series, titled Earth To Sky, is made up of seven lighting objects, including suspension and wall sconces that look like giant metal amoebas skewered on brass toothpicks. Their perforated metalwork is reminiscent of the outdoor furniture devised by French designer Mathieu Matégot in the 1950s. The larger pieces are available in runs of 12, the standard edition for fine sculpture. Smaller items are produced in open limited edition.

"The idea that something has been made to the best of man's ability within the limitations of materials and processes is incredibly appealing," says Levien. "Beautifully made details which reveal the work of a skilled hand become a powerful expression of human endeavour."

Like all Doshi Levien's work, the new lighting is an expression of the designers' diverse cultural heritage, funnelled through a profound complicity and shared fascination with the process of creation.

"For us, the process for making and design is really inextricably linked," says Levien, noting that the Earth To Sky series took two years to bring to fruition.

"Having researched and prototyped and made all the expensive mistakes, it felt like we might as well go the last mile and present and sell them ourselves."

"I believe," says Doshi, "self-producing and a direct rapport with the collector is a way of the future." ●

Prices on application to dashilevien.com



TWO-WAY INSPIRATION

DOSHI LEVIEN DESIGN STUDIO HAS A GLOBAL FAN BASE. BUT THE ADMIRATION IS MUTUAL.



Clockwise from top: Two pieces from the Earth To Sky lighting series; Le Cabinet is in a private collection in Paris; My Beautiful Backside sofas for Moroso.

