

# When cultures *collide*

Bombay-born **NIPA DOSHI** and Scotland-born **JONATHAN LEVIEN**, the couple behind internationally acclaimed **DOSHI LEVIEN**, live in one of **LONDON**'s most exceptional examples of Brutalist architecture, Barbican Estate, which represents the utopian vision for inner-city living post World War II. But it's travelling and exploring that often inspires their designs.

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TEXT CLAIRE MILLETT | PHOTOGRAPHY FILIPPO BAMBERGHI (HOME) CHRIS TUBBS (PORTRAIT)  
HAIR LARAZEE | MAKEUP NIKKI WOLF





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NIPA | DESIGNER & RESIDENT

It's 7pm on a Tuesday evening in Perth and the atmosphere at the State Theatre Centre, designed by Kerry Hill Architects, is palpable. In a city that is just now drawing people out of their homes on a 'school night' and into a number of new restaurants and bars lining the streets and laneways, a midweek sold-out show as part of Mobilia's Design Circus is no mean feat. Yet it is here, as Nipa Doshi and Jonathan Levien take their positions on stage in two Paper Plane chairs that they created for Moroso, where an audience of design professionals, enthusiasts and students hang on every single word.

In what was a truly candid discussion about their experiences since boldly quitting their jobs and establishing Doshi Levien in 2000 (and going on to win the EDIDA Designer of the Year 2015), it was clear from the outset that this was a couple that was more than happy to share the lessons learned along the way.

"I think design is more than a profession; it is a way of life and I always say that inspiration is everywhere as long as your eyes are open," said Nipa the previous day, as we sit on the rooftop of the nearby Alex Hotel. "It could be just sitting here, while I'm looking at the roof tiles, the steeple, and the colour of light."

"I think that's because you're very interested in the visual culture," Jonathan counters. "In my case I would say I'm really looking at how things are made and the technical resolution of elements, as I'm looking around the whole time to figure out how things are put together in terms of materials and structure."

With such an authentic approach to their everyday surroundings, it's only natural for interest to pique further as details of how this intriguing couple live at home are revealed.





Home is a duplex in Barbican Estate, an iconic 1960s-era Brutalist housing estate in London. With barely a trace of what occupied the space before WWII bombings devastated the city, architects Peter Chamberlin, Geoffry Powell and Christoph Bon created a complex that accommodates approximately 4,000 residents and has since been labelled a site of special architectural interest for its scale, cohesion and the sheer ambition of the project.

Barbican is built entirely above street level, with an art gallery that hosts sellout exhibitions of art, photography and design. The complex also includes a conservatory hot house with exotic plants and two private gardens situated around a lake, giving the impression of an oasis in the heart of the city.

Being the type of people who relish the opportunity to immerse themselves entirely in their surroundings and who genuinely enjoy interacting with the people around them, Nipa and Jonathan appreciate the utopian feel of the communal-type living at Barbican Estate.

Inside the home, collections of artifacts, metal bowls, mirrors and photographs by Indian screenwriter and photographer Sooni Taraporevala decorate the walls as well as the floors. It is a home that appears instantly comfortable (in complete contradiction to any preconception of what a designer's home might look like), and begs for further exploration of each and every piece.



“I think as a designer you’re always working within the context, including where you live,” says Nipa. “Design for me is very much about caring about our everyday environment and how I do things, whether it’s how I lay the table, how I make the bed, or even enjoying the simple gesture of cooking. Design seems to permeate everything we do.”

In an eclectic assembly of pieces accumulated over the years, of their home Jonathan expresses that just as in the way that you care about how you dress, the same attitude is applied to the home and how things go together.

As for their favourite spaces within the home both Nipa and Jonathan agree on the livingroom, yet for completely different reasons. “I tend to use the floor a lot, particularly when practicing singing with our son, so using the Rabari rug that we designed for Nanimarquina in this space is really special,” says Nipa.

For Jonathan, it is the Charpoy daybed that creates a platform for living. A collection of four daybeds designed for Moroso in 2007, the Charpoy combines Indian craftsmanship and Italian precision in industrial production. Ultimately, it set a blueprint in terms of how they like to bring together cultures and different ways of making. “This daybed is a place to sleep for our guests as well as a place where we hang out to sit and read,” Jonathan explains. “It gets a lot of use because it’s quite



OPPOSITE | A LARGE SOONI TARAPOREVALA IMAGE, FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS, THE MAYA MIRROR AND METAL AND COPPER ITEMS COLLECTED ON TRAVELS LINE THE WALLS AND FLOORS OF THE STAIRCASE AND LANDING. ABOVE | UNABLE TO FIND A BED THEY LIKED, NIPA AND JONATHAN DESIGNED THEIR OWN WHERE THE CUSTOM-SIZE MATTRESS IS EMBEDDED WITHIN A LOW-LYING SOLID WOODEN FRAME WITH PAINTED OCTAGONAL WOOD FEET.



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ABOVE LEFT | NIPA AND JONATHAN COLLABORATED WITH CLASSIC BRITISH SHOEMAKER JOHN LOBB TO DISCOVER THE TRADITION OF HAND MAKING SHOES. THE PROJECT WAS NAMED 'APPRENTICE' WHICH ALLUDES TO THE RESPECT THAT DOSHI LEVIEN FELT TOWARDS THE MAKERS. ABOVE RIGHT | THE VERSATILITY OF THE KALI WALL-MOUNTED UNIT SEES IT BEING USED BOTH HERE AND IN THE COUPLE'S BATHROOM. OPPOSITE | THE IMPOSSIBLE WOOD CHAIR DESIGNED FOR MOROSO IS JUST ONE COLOURFUL ELEMENT IN JONATHAN'S WORKSPACE. MINIATURE PROTOTYPES OF DOSHI LEVIEN'S CHANDIGARH ARMCHAIRS SIT ON A GLASS SHELF THAT PROTRUDES FROM THE KALI WALL-MOUNTED UNIT.



an open object.”

When not at home the couple and their son can be found at the theatre or opera in London, at a lesson learning classical Indian music, cycling along the canal, or enjoying a dim sum lunch with family at Yauatcha. A typical trip to India can include a visit to a spa in the Himalaya Mountains, or swimming in Udaivilas overlooking Lake Pichola.

“When we travel to parts of the world we see things that are made by hand, we get to experience a different pace of life, and everything from the colours to the smells and the food is about the joy of exploration,” says Nipa.

Always in absorb mode, it’s not uncommon for Nipa and Jonathan to return to the studio and only realise a few months later that there is a distinct influence from their recent travels that is woven throughout their latest creation, and that the percolation of these ideas was brought to life well before they were even aware of it themselves.

“For us it’s really important that when we go away we are actually more alert in some ways and that we don’t shut down, so that we can invite inspiration to come to us from all angles,” explains Nipa. “Even when I’m in a really polluted city and I see a beautiful colour on a bus, I feel that inspiration is always everywhere; particularly when we are in the midst of escaping through travel.”



Doshi Levien | [doshilevien.com](http://doshilevien.com)