



Nipa Doshi and Jonathan Levien at their London studio. Above right: the Mudra armchair, part of their Open Home collection for John Lewis



Introducing Doshi Levien

Photographs / *Jake Curtis*

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Meet the internationally renowned designers who have created the new Open Home collection for John Lewis, responding to the varied ways we all now use our living space

Nipa Doshi and Jonathan Levien's London studio is dominated not by shiny computer screens, but by handmade models, books, furniture and beloved objects. A jewelled necklace hangs on one wall; a pair of Indian drums is tucked under a table. Projects in progress can be seen in the form of wire-and-paper sculptures, beautiful hand drawings and colourful fabric samples displayed upon tables.

This gives you an insight into the mindset of two creative individuals, whose marriage of industrial design and fine craftsmanship positions them among Britain's most respected designers. It has led to collaborations with international furniture brands including Moroso, B&B Italia, Hay and Cappellini – and now John Lewis.

Scottish-born Jonathan trained as a cabinet-maker, while Nipa has a passion for textiles, pattern-cutting and tailoring inspired by her Indian heritage. These influences have gone into Open Home, Doshi Levien's new furniture collection >



The Open Home collection for John Lewis comprises elements needed for a contemporary living space – including this high-backed Nami armchair, a modern interpretation on the classic wing chair

for John Lewis, two years in the making and their first collaboration with a UK company in ten years. The collection consists of “all the elements you need to create a living space”, says Nipa, including armchairs, sofas, a coffee table and side tables, a lamp and rugs, and it incorporates a combination of textured wool fabrics, smoked glass, lacquered oak and moulded forms.

It was Jonathan who kickstarted the project. “We work so much with big brands overseas and I thought it would be great to bring the same level of design thinking to the British high street.”

The aim was for the collection to be flexible. “This idea of ‘open home’ came to us,” says Jonathan. “People are living in more open environments now, and activities such as work and play happen all over the home. Our response to that was to create pieces that are less sedentary and lighter, more sculptural, allowing you to modify your home according to your needs.”

One example is the high-backed Nami armchair, which features Doshi Levien’s signature cocooning curves (its name means “wave” in Japanese). Described by Jonathan as an “updated wing chair”, it dispenses with arms in favour of an embracing back support that wraps the body. The Pondok sofa, meanwhile, is lifted off the ground, allowing space around the object and giving a sense of sculptural lightness. “British homes are often small,” explains Nipa. “So it makes sense to create pieces that complement the spaces we live in.”

As designers, the couple are committed to manufacturing excellence, and they apply the expertise gained from working with luxury brands to every project they undertake.

“We never compromise on the design process,” they say. “But it was important that the pieces in the Open Home collection represented high-quality, affordable design.”

The Nami armchair and Pondok sofa are likely to move into the couple’s own home, a duplex apartment on London’s Barbican estate, which they share with their son Rahul, eight.

The place is filled with prototypes from past projects alongside vintage classics and objects they’ve made themselves. Among the former are two pieces that helped forge Doshi Levien’s international reputation: the Charpoy daybed for Italian label Moroso, featuring a mattress hand-embroidered in India, and the Rabari rug for Spanish carpet specialist Nanimarquina, made



using a traditional sumak hand-knotting technique. Design is all around them, but outside work the duo’s chief passion is music. Both are training seriously as performers – Jonathan on Indian tabla drums, Nipa as a classical Indian singer. Jonathan also practises ashtanga yoga and taekwondo, while Nipa loves theatre and opera.

These are not Doshi Levien’s only influences. Nipa cites architect Le Corbusier’s work as another source of inspiration, in particular the modernist icon’s paintings and his buildings in the Indian city of Chandigarh.

Neither Jonathan nor Nipa has much time for the idea of trends – they like to look at the bigger picture. Nisha dreams of designing

beautiful public spaces, and Jonathan is interested in designing a house that pays special attention to how it interacts with its neighbourhood.

So what might their perfect home look like? “It would be an open space with a courtyard in the centre and rooms all around it,” says Jonathan. “We think about home in terms of activities – eating, yoga, sleeping, cooking, bathing. There would be a salon for entertaining and hanging out, and a window connecting to the street, inspired by India, where you might buy things from street vendors, or make goods and sell them from your home.”

Not so very different to how the couple live their own life, then.

The Open Home collection, designed by Doshi Levien, will be available from John Lewis in spring 2017.

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The Book List

Follow Doshi Levien’s five home-makeover rules on page 81.