This page: designer Nipa Doshi in the living area of her London home in the Barbican. Marshmallow sofa from Herman Miller, enquiries to Living Edge; Riding High console by Doshi Levien for Galerie Kreo; Earth to Sky light by Doshi Levien and Rabari rug by Doshi Levien for Nanimarquina; enquiries to Mobilia; Doshi Levien x Shammi Bannu Sharma artwork for Galerie Kreo. Details, last pages.
By VIRGINIA JEN  Portrait photographed by RODRIGO CARMUEGA

The co-founder of *interdisciplinary* practice DOSHI LEVIEN continues to make VIBRANT, instinctive *strides* in design.
First impressions can count for a lot and Nipa Doshi makes hers matter with studious ease. At our interview off the back of her triumphant Sydney Design Week keynote speech at the Powerhouse, the co-founder of design studio Doshi Levien arrives in a blue corduroy blazer and a black leather dress complemented by green-and-pink Gucci x Adidas Gazelles and a Gucci monogrammed bag. Doshi embodies colourful flair and intuitive style, both touchstones of her distinctive work that has catapulted her into the upper echelons of designers who produce boundless work across a multitude of disciplines.

Since establishing Doshi Levien with husband Jonathan Levien in 2000, the practice housed in an old furniture factory on Columbia Road in East London has created everything from a cookware range for Tefal with motifs and forms inspired by food culture to handcrafted rugs for Nanimarquina. There are also wrap-around lounge chairs for Moroso and textile-led outdoor furniture for Kettal, both brands exclusively available at Mobilia, as well as the pair’s own artful passion projects. It’s an approach that was recently recognised with Doshi and Levien on the King’s 2023 New Year Honours.
List and awarded Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to design.

The plurality of the studio’s output somewhat mirrors Doshi’s own upbringing. “I remember growing up in this Art Deco house in a central part of Delhi, but it wasn’t just a beautiful residential neighbourhood,” she says. “We had a bicycle workshop next door and a paper-cutting factory, and I remember being fascinated by seeing this big blade cutting reams of paper, and a local chaiwala, a man on a plinth making chai in a big copper vessel. And the activity around that, and the markets, the temples, the mosques, the synagogues, the churches: it was my idea of heaven. Even at that age, I was fascinated by this, not knowing that it’s juxtaposition or that it’s plural.”

Pursuing an active dialogue to understand the juxtaposition of different cultures and ways of living would lead Doshi to the Royal College of Art in London where she met her future work and life partner and learned the functionality of design, but also uncovered the value of her own perspective. “It was instrumental, of course, finding Jonathan, but also finding my approach or what I loved and what I wanted to say,” she recalls. “I wanted to bring the beauty of my culture to another world that I was inhabiting and to show that there is another way to design, there’s another approach to material culture.”

Her role may, on face value, be built on her deep connection to visual language and culture, but Doshi is a truly multifaceted creative. “What I bring is a broad perspective and interests, and making those cross-references, whether it’s theatre or art or architecture or fashion,” she says. “As women, we care about many different things and we are interested in many different things. Your mind is everywhere, a bit scattered but in an extremely positive way. But I also bring a very strong business head — I’m good at numbers and negotiation.”

Over the years Doshi has seen seismic momentum and wants to see more positive evolution in design. “There needs to be more plurality, diversity, different voices,” she says. “It’s something we all need to work towards. What has really shifted is that kind of indoctrinated approach to design that’s about functionalism, about problem-solving. Design has definitely become more about joy, about celebrating life, it’s more layered, it’s softer.” Doshi Levien has harnessed this joy from the start and is set to keep doing so. dosilevien.com