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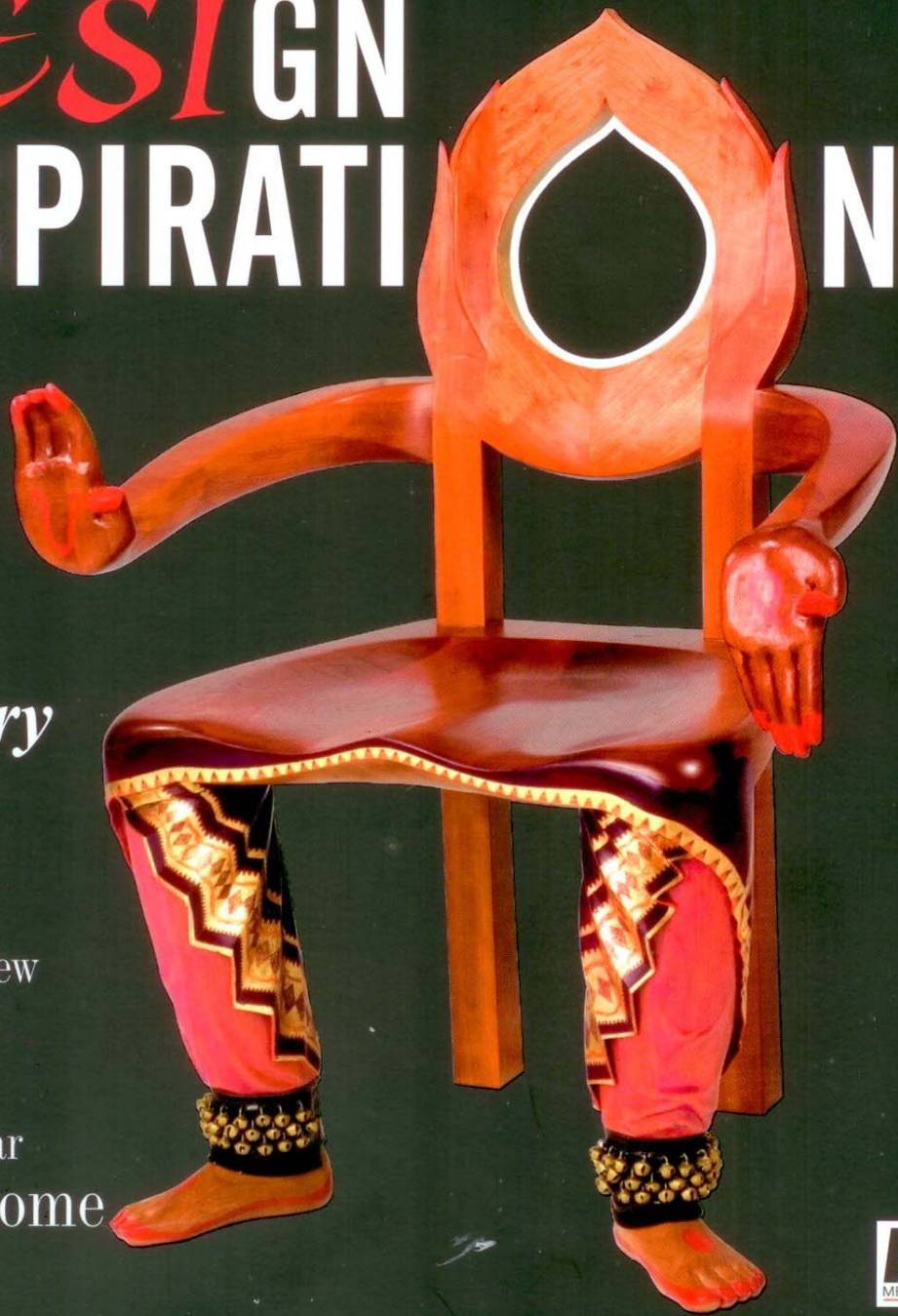
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INDIA

## DESIGN INSPIRATIONS



**5<sup>th</sup>**  
*Anniversary  
Issue*

Exclusive interview  
Rafael Pelli

American Pop star  
Cher's LA home

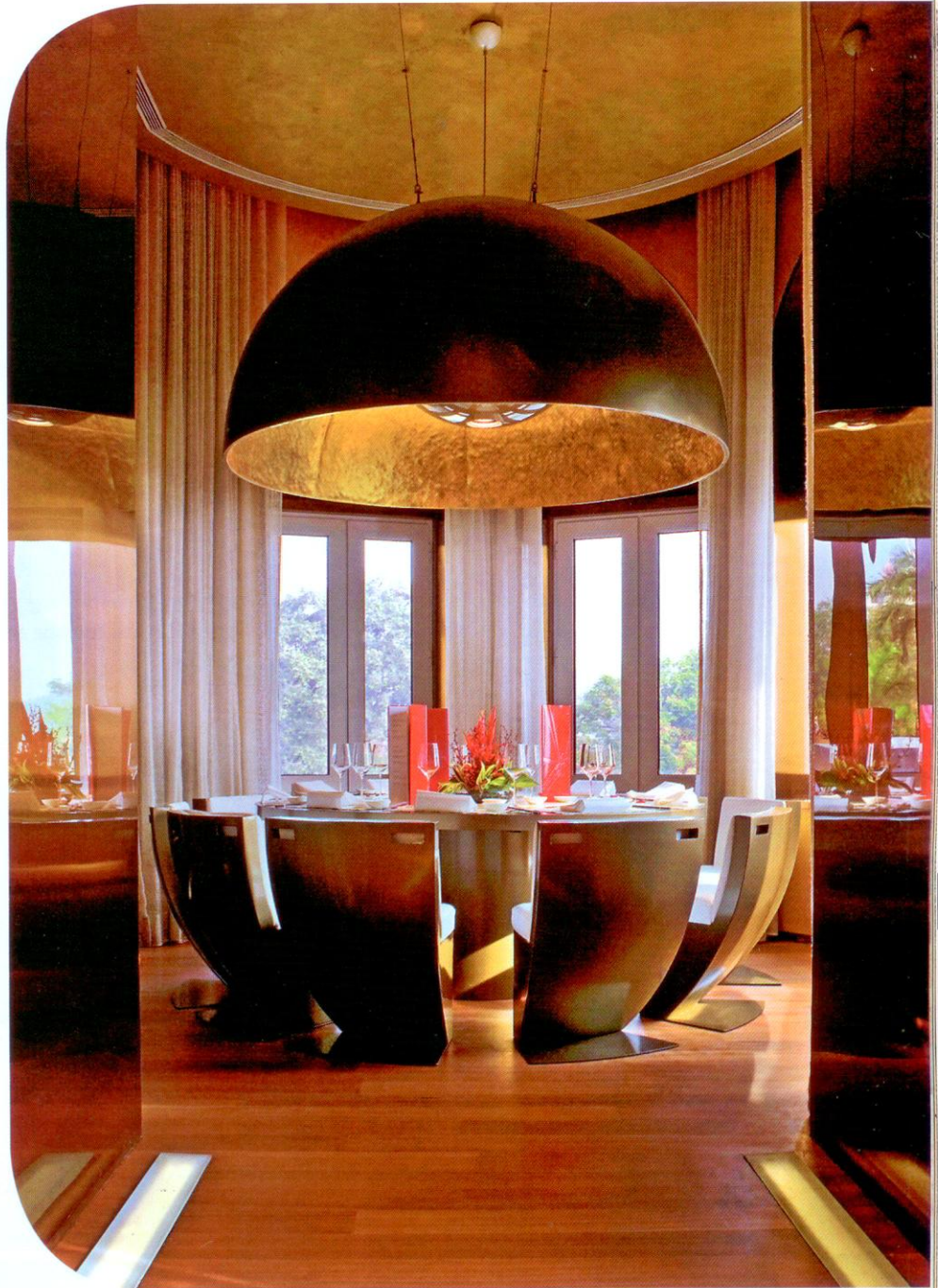
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The renowned original private dining room at Wasabi takes shape as a sculptural round table topped by an oversize custom pendant dome made of hammered metal.

**The Taj Group of Hotels** is a respected brand worldwide. All Indians take pride in the design and hospitality of this luxury hotel chain, the first one to be set up in India by an Indian. The international designers involved with the creation of the Taj hotels are deeply influenced by Indian design and culture. Whether it is **WOW Architects** that has recreated the traditional jaalis of India to design the contemporary **Vivanta by Taj Gurgaon**, or **David Dunphy** of **HFA Hospitality Focus Solutions**, USA who has given the **Taj Coimbatore** a local touch, every foreign architect has found inspiration in the rich culture, architecture and traditional backbone of the country. We speak to **Diego Gronda**, **Head Architect at Rockwell Group Europe**, who has designed two stunning restaurants at the **Taj Mahal Palace Hotel** in Mumbai.



## tell us a bit about the projects you have designed for the taj in india?

Rockwell Group Europe completed a long-term redevelopment master plan in 2008. We were then approached to expand our scope and restore the Harbour Bar, Wasabi by Morimoto, and the tower guestrooms. The restaurants opened in 2009 and the guestrooms are slated to open in spring 2014.

We took particular care to express the project as the evolution of the landmark spaces, rather than a rebuild. For the dining areas, we decided to completely reinterpret the design and blur the boundaries between modern and traditional elements. To honour the context and the people of Mumbai, we used local materials and employed craftspeople from many different regions of India ranging from Rajasthan to Tamil Nadu.

Left page  
For the Harbour Bar, Diego wanted to bring the original Art Deco design into today's generation.



For the Harbour Bar, we wanted to bring the original Art Deco design into today's generation. The center bar, a solid carved piece of local white marble, harkens back to a bygone era with a fresh face. The back bar is framed in cut glass and provides an inviting light and glow. All patterns and motifs represent existing ones in the heritage building.

Wasabi restaurant is a revitalisation of the renowned original dining space. We used a lot of reflective metals to make the space look bigger. Whereas the original sushi bar had a V-shape, ours is a long hammered-stone bar. The original private dining room takes shape as a sculptural round table topped by an oversize custom pendant dome made of hammered metal.

### what is your take on the indian design scenario?

Indian design and craft have always been of great interest to me. India is so vibrantly rich in years of culture and history. Much of the architecture reflects a collision of different periods, local traditions and influences. This has been a great vantage point to conceptualise the redesign of the hotel.

### how was your experience of working with indians?

We completed the rebuild of Harbour Bar and Wasabi by Morimoto one year after 26/11. So many of the people we worked with were still healing. I'll always admire their courage and strength during that period of profound tragedy and loss.



The center bar at the Harbour bar is a solid carved piece of local white marble that takes one back to the a bygone era.





-----> At Wasabi the original V-shaped sushi bar is replaced by a long hammered-stone bar.

### what elements in your projects are inspired by india?

Both spaces feature a significant amount of art. The Harbour Bar has a combination of art works by Indian masters such as Ganesh Haldi, Ram Kumar, Laxman Pai and GR Santhosh. In addition, we commissioned two up-and-coming Indian artists to create large-scale pieces for the Harbour Bar and Wasabi.

In Wasabi, Mumbai artist, Sadanand, re-interpreted the city's profile in an abstract and powerful art piece. For the raised platform at Harbour Bar, we selected the acclaimed new artist, Rajesh Pullarwar, to create a piece that anchors the room. The combination of works from the 1950s and 1960s with works by emerging artists provides guest with an alternative reading of contemporary art evolution in the past mid-century.

### what inspires you the most about india?

I'm often inspired by the sheer spectacle of the cultural landscape—the colour of the streets and markets, the ancient temples or the vibrant tastes and smells of the cuisine.

May our country continue to remain the birthplace of new ideas....

