

Far from minimal

Interior designer Minnie Bhatt's eye for detail is what gives her designs striking character



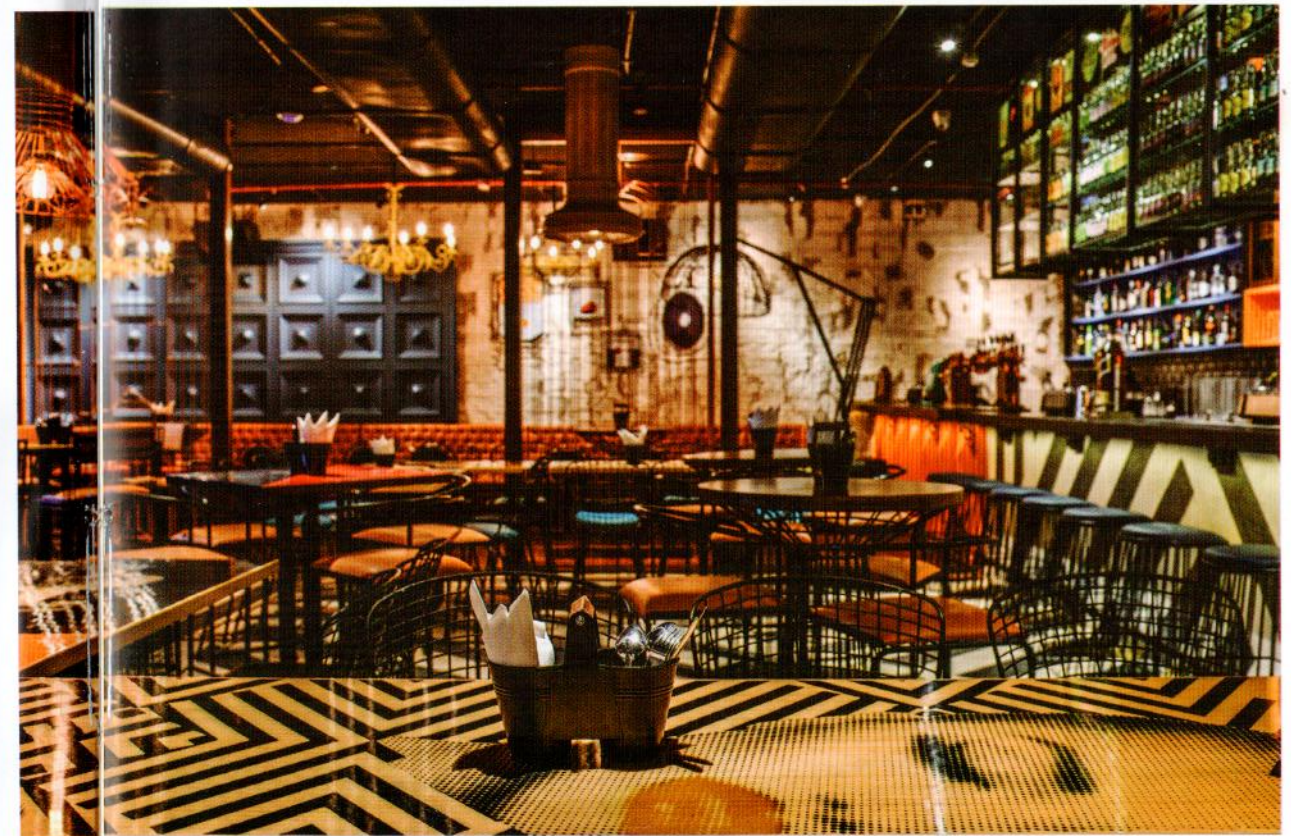
When were you first drawn to design?

MB: I was studying commerce at HR College in Mumbai and after the second year, I discovered I had a lot of time on hand. My best friend from school mentioned that she was thinking of applying for an interior design course and I decided to give it a shot too. I got into the Sophia Polytechnic for a Diploma in Interior Design and this started my career in design. I interned with Fine Lines Designers headed by Sunil Jasani and Sangeeta Mansharmani and it was there that I got really involved in the field and learnt a lot. I worked with them for four years and this gave me a very strong foundation in the field.

How did Minnie Bhatt Designs come about?

MB: Post Fine Lines Designers, I was associated with a couple of architects on residential projects for about eight years, and doing a few projects independently too. I founded Minnie Bhatt Design ten years ago, as I felt the need to have greater independence with regards to my design language. I set up a small office in Bandra (in Mumbai) without a single project in hand! My associate and friend Misbah Kapadia has been with me throughout. We got a couple of very good residential projects at the time and with time we grew our staff and relocated to

Left and Below: True Tramm Trunk interiors





our own office space at Kamala Mills four years ago. Our projects range from residential and commercial to religious spaces.

How do you approach a new project?

MB: It's important to get the brief correctly so that the design direction is clear, and we can work with clarity from the onset. Once we receive the brief from a client we work towards creating the best possible translation of it with our esthetic. In residential projects the client's lifestyle and requirements have to be kept in mind to a great extent. For F&B projects we keep in mind the visual identity and positioning of the brand whilst giving direction to the design language for the space. We then create a mood board for the client and work on detailing it. It's important to involve the client at important stages in the evolution of the site to ensure they are abreast of what's going on and in agreement with it.

How would you describe your style?

MB: My style is eclectic and versatile. I like to create warm spaces with lots of tiny details that enhance the space. I prefer working with pure materials as opposed to lookalikes.

Do you enjoy working on hospitality projects? Which has been the most memorable?

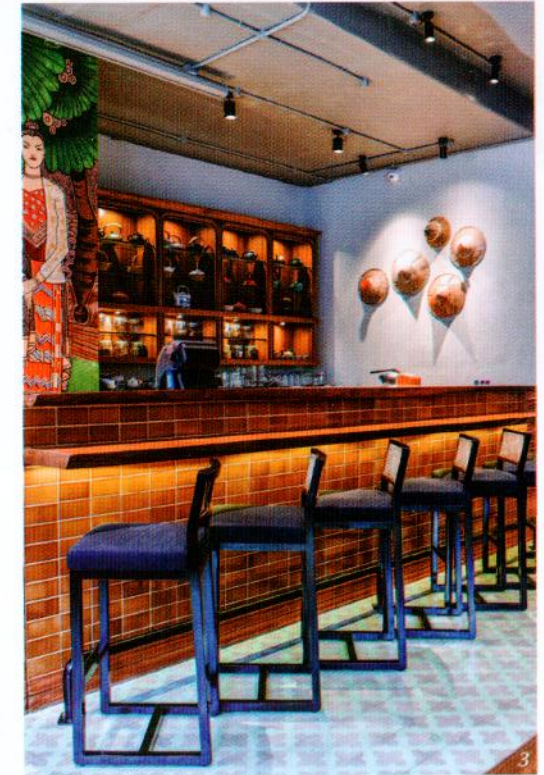
MB: I thoroughly enjoy hospitality projects and the entire creative process they involve... from understanding the brand and its positioning to conceptualizing an esthetic for it. Hospitality projects have great scope for creative solutions, and now after having designed close to 50 restaurants and bars and having understood operations, designing them comes very intuitively. My favorite F&B project would be True Tramm Trunk - the bar we designed at Bandra Kurla Complex in



Mumbai, where we created a blurred drunken visual by using wireframes.

Give us a glimpse into the process of reviving a 400-year-old temple in Vrindavan.

MB: When I first saw the Ras Bihari Asht Sakhi temple, I was overawed. It had Anglo-Indian stone carvings on the facade and inside and very good energy. My client, Ramesh Agarwal, was fabulous to work with. He was very passionate about reviving the temple for his mother who had begun living in Vrindavan, and he wanted to have the best possible. Retaining the existing temple, new areas were created around it to have a larger space for gatherings, and a few rooms for devotees to stay in. The inner sanctum has one room for the idols of Lord Krishna and his eight *gopis* and an outer room for

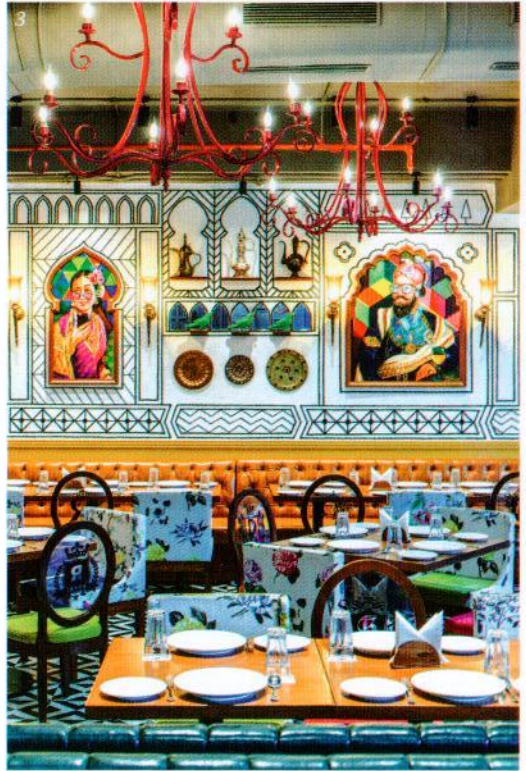


1. True Tramm Trunk interiors
2,3. Burma Burma Bengaluru

devotees. Krishna is always remembered with a peacock feather on his crown and this inspired the backdrop, which was made of semi precious stones inlaid in white marble. We had new temple gates created in cast iron with peacock motifs and also a tree in brass below which the new idols of Radha and Krishna could be placed. I traveled to Jaipur, Makrana, and Agra with the client to source various things for the temple. We had a lattice created in marble for the windows of the outer sanctum in the form of a tree of life.

What challenges have you faced in your journey so far?

MB: Initially the challenges were about how to handle and manage contractors on site, but with time and learning I overcame this. Another challenge was to understand



1, 2. Fable interiors. 3. Bindass Begum Rocking Raja

the monetary aspects of the field. With experience this got resolved too, and I learnt how to manage site budgets, certify bills, etc. I've loved the journey so far with all its ups and downs and ups again.

What makes a good designer?

MB: A passion for great design and spaces, the ability to create spaces as imagined and envisaged, and being hands-on!

What's next on the professional front?

MB: I've never been an ambitious person but I am passionate about the work I do and look forward to doing good projects pan India and abroad in the next five years. I also hope to design the interiors of a holiday resort someday!

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