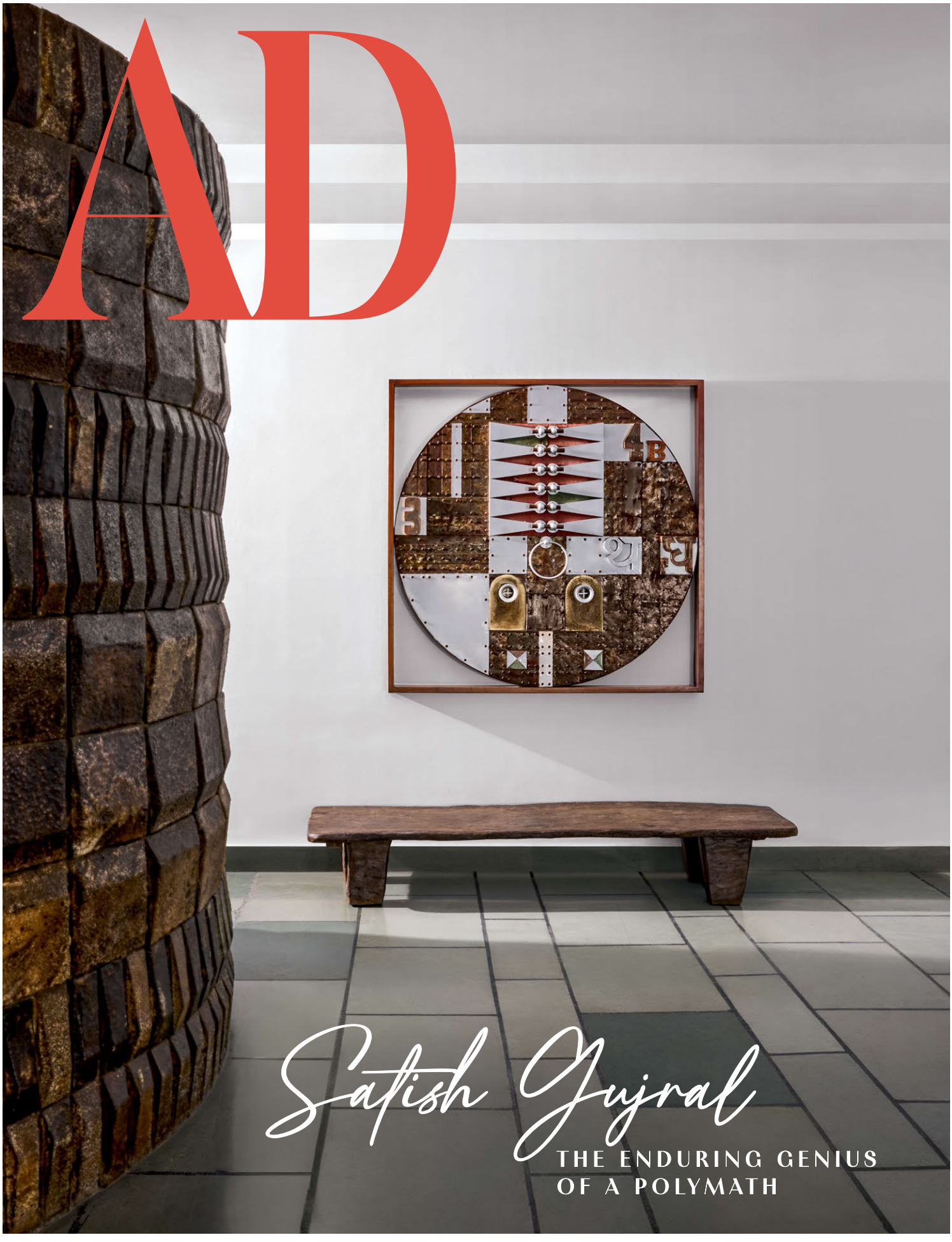
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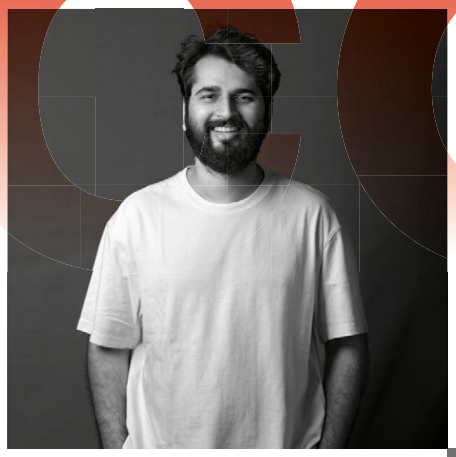
AD



Satish Gujral

THE ENDURING GENIUS OF A POLYMATH

CONTRIBUTORS



← AVESH GAUR

PHOTOGRAPHER Gaur is an experienced architectural photographer. For this issue, he covers designer Vikram Goyal's bold art deco villa in Delhi, capturing how he has filled the home with a lifetime's worth of globe-spanning finds *(pg 200)*.



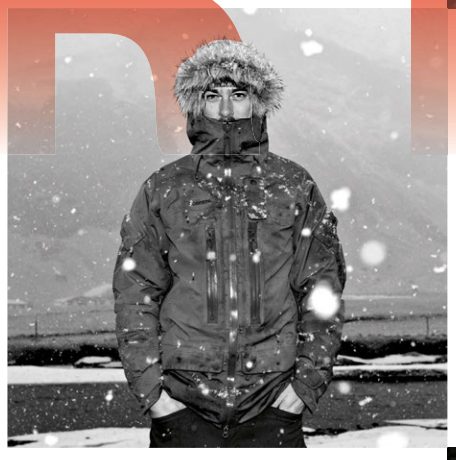
→ SARAH MEDFORD

WRITER New York-based Medford is a journalist specialising in design and visual culture. She is also the author of *At Home with Town & Country* and has contributed essays to many other publications. For this issue, she writes about designer Vikram Goyal's home in Delhi *(pg 200)*.



↑ RADHIKARAJE GAEKWAD

HERITAGE CONSERVATIONIST Gaekwad is a member of the erstwhile royal family of Baroda and trustee of the Maharaja Fatesingh Museum Trust at the Lukshmi Vilas Palace. For this issue, she writes about Maison Frison in Brussels, a 19th-century home built by Victor Horta, one of the founders of the Art Nouveau movement, that is being conserved by Nupur Tron today *(pg 182)*.



→ ALMAS SADIQUE

WRITER An architect by vocation, Sadique forayed into writing to fulfil her nascent aspiration of exploring latent tales and forging immersive narratives. Her work explores the sociopolitical, cultural and temporal factors that impact every kind of design and creative intervention. In this issue, she talks to Aman Nath, the cofounder of Neemrana Hotels, about the art of reclaiming ruins *(pg 160)*.



↑ LUC ROYMANS

PHOTOGRAPHER A Belgian photographer with an expertise in interior design and architectural imagery, Roymans captures Maison Frison, a 19th-century home in Brussels built by Victor Horta and being preserved by Nupur Tron *(pg 182)* for this issue. "What made this project stand out is the complete dedication Nupur is putting into her home. It's her raison d'être to reanimate the house and make its splendour available to the world."



← SAMIR WADEKAR

INTERIOR STYLIST A Mumbai-based interior stylist, exhibition designer and creative director, Wadekar styles designer Vikram Goyal's home in Delhi for this issue *(pg 200)*. "Vikram's home is an abundance of stories, memories and histories. Our conversations about the provenance of each object and the beauty of the memories that these pieces retain were truly delightful."

NEEMRANA: 40 YEARS OF RECLAIMING HISTORY





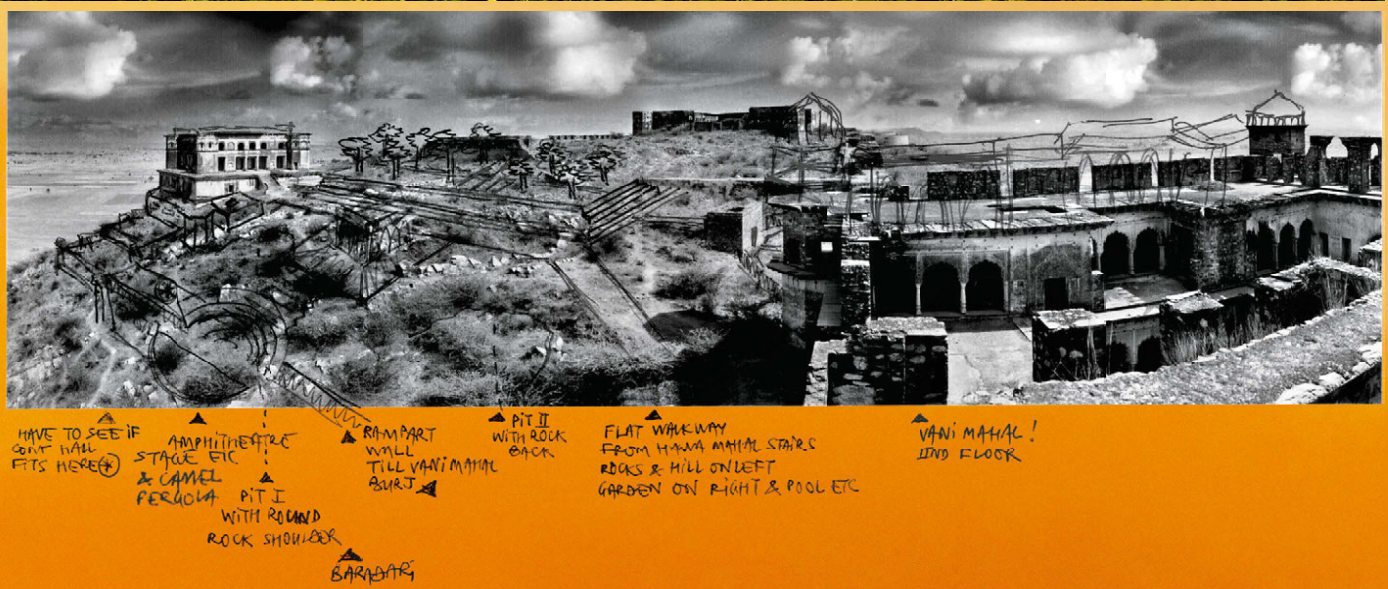
For four decades, Neemrana Hotels has given new life to India's forgotten forts, palaces and historic buildings. Aman Nath, the cofounder of the chain, speaks to AD about the art of reclaiming ruins, inhabiting history, and balancing preservation and reinvention.

Writer **Almas Sadique** Photographs **Courtesy of Neemrana Hotels**

An early image of Tijara Fort-Palace in Alwar, Rajasthan, which opened after Neemrana Hotels' massive 13-year restoration efforts. *Below:* Panoramic view of the fort-palace, originally built in the 19th century by Maharaja Balwant Singh. *Bottom:* An annotated photograph of the fort-palace detailing restoration.

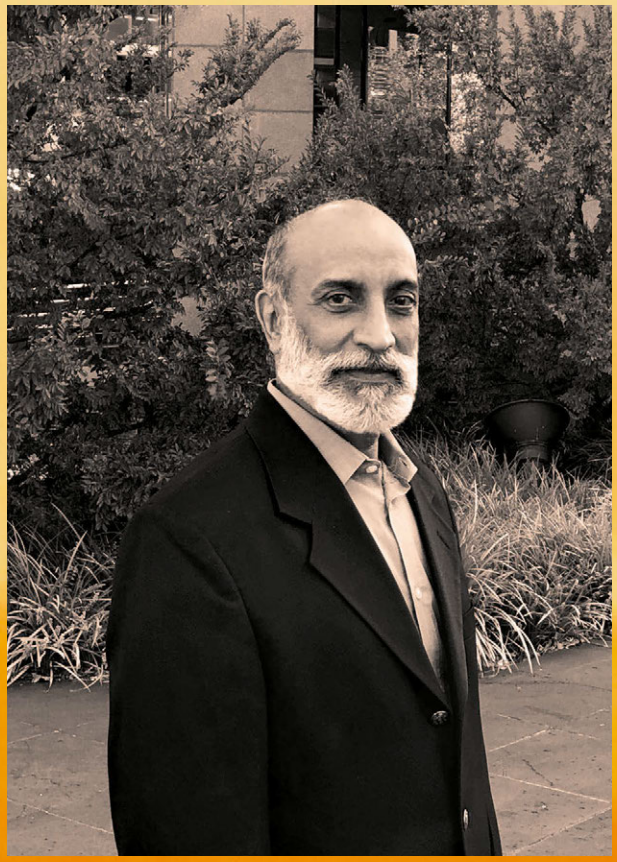






The interior hallway of the Mardana Mahal at Tijara Fort-Palace. *Below:* Aman Nath, the cofounder of Neemrana Hotels. For Nath, each restoration is an act of bringing a dormant history into contemporary life.





Named after the first fort-palace that it started restoring in 1986, Neemrana Hotels has built its distinctive portfolio across the many histories that have shaped the Indian subcontinent. Its properties encompass the legacies of Chauhans, Jats, Sikhs, Marathas, Mughals, Nawabs and Reddys, alongside Portuguese, French, British, Scottish, Danish and Dutch colonial architecture. For Aman Nath, each restoration is an act of bringing a dormant history into contemporary life.

What made you see potential in ruins and neglected buildings, and choose to give them new life?

Recycling comes easy to most Indians. Being born into a refugee family from Lahore taught me that a lack of resources can also be a great asset. Excess isn't necessarily good soil for creativity! And once you awaken a bit of history, it's like tasting blood. You keep going back to it. You touch a grave with a magic wand and a whole life is reborn. I became the person who saw life where others thought it was over.

Historically speaking, being the only continuously alive civilisation on our planet, India never had the consciousness for restoration. In Jahangir's time, a Dutchman noted that the cities were strewn with ruins because everyone built in their own name rather than repair the work of their ancestors, unaware that their work, too, will crumble, like Neemrana (fort-palace in Rajasthan) had. Adaptive reuse gives heritage a reason to survive. We strictly







Above left and above right: Top view of Tijara Fort-Palace, seated amidst the Aravalli hills, before and after the restoration. *Left:* A suite within the Paashaan Mahal (Palace of the Rock) in Neemrana Fort-Palace.

Neemrana Hotels' Hill Fort-Kesroli in Alwar traces its origins to the 14th century. *Below:* An arched entryway leading to the property.





revive unlisted ruins outside Archaeological Survey of India's protection, thus giving dead structures a new silhouette. It would be pointless to preserve these if they serve no purpose.

How does inhabiting a historic building change the way we experience and understand the past?

Our front-door entry to the past consciously awakens old buildings, affirming mankind's continuity while carrying forward the foundations of our shared heritage. The experience is deeply memorable and joyful. Guests often tell us they felt like kings and queens. Once, a guest wrote that she experienced heaven on Earth at Neemrana. Actor Kate Winslet stayed here when *Titanic* released, calling one of our rooms her favourite in the world and returning again later. When we started, the industry assumed we were rebuilding for foreign tourists but today, over 80 per cent of our guests are Indians. There has been a real resurgence of interest and pride in our own culture. Neemrana Hotels has reflected this idea for the past 40 years by giving people an authentic historical setting that celebrates local craft and history.

Neemrana Hotels' properties bring together centuries of legacy. What does it mean to take over buildings with such layered cultural and material histories?

I see it best as a responsible custodianship, working with nearly 6,000 years of collective history. Since we restore, adapt and revitalise ruins to relive and retell an old story in a contemporary

A pre-restoration image of Neemrana Hotels' The Bungalow on the Beach in Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu. *Below:* The 17th-century historic colonial property is located right on the seashore in Tranquebar.







context, all interventions must happen simultaneously on two time planes: keeping as much historical authenticity as is practically possible and applying an inventive design-based revitalisation to accommodate the changes of current lifestyle.

How do you introduce contemporary interventions into historic structures while retaining their character?
The process is both iterative and intuitive. Since most of our buildings are unlisted ruins and there are no archival blueprints or oral histories, we rebuild by listening to the building. We read the surviving lines of the foundation and follow the logical geometry of the existing walls, preserving the arches, doorways and other details that signify different epochs. At Tijara Fort in Alwar, Rajasthan, there were 16-foot-thick fortification walls. We cut a wedge through them, installed large old Gujarati windows with iron grilles and built sleeping platforms within the depth of the wall. When we needed to add glass for air-conditioning or gauze against mosquitoes, we put the window frames on the inside while maintaining the historic exterior with antique shutters.

Rebuilding from pure intuition has been shockingly accurate. When Neemrana's old rani visited the rebuilt sections, she gasped, "This is exactly how it was." It was confirmed by a 19th-century







Clockwise from left: A bedroom at Neemrana Hotels' Wallwood Garden, seated on the Nilgiris in Coonoor, Tamil Nadu; another bedroom at the property; lounge area there. *Facing page:* Wallwood Garden is a restored 19th-century Scottish-style heritage hotel.

British watercolour painting and an old family photograph that surfaced decades later. We restore the structure's physical truth, while leaving guests to imagine a past that resonates with them.

Over 40 years, what has Neemrana Hotels taught you about instinct and knowing when to take a risk?

Instinct and risk-taking are about biting off more than you can chew and having the faith to digest it as you go. In this field, taking risks means having the audacity to see life where others see a ruin. Instinct is really just common sense backed by a heightened sensibility. Time is our greatest asset. You can either play it safe or spend time building a haven out of forgotten stone. When you operate with clarity of intent and an appetite for the impossible, the risks settle themselves and the universe bends to support you.

How would you like Neemrana Hotels to be perceived 100 years from now?

Our work has led to the coinage of the term "Neemranification", which suggests a creative reinterpretation of old spaces. Now it is a whole movement in India. I hope future teams remain passionate enough to build on this legacy and live by our motto: We don't let history become a bygone. AD