

FLIGHT OF FANCY COLUMNS

The show must go on



Gayatri Rangachari Shah

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Living up cloudy days with cocktails, camaraderie and some stunning art

After the summer, there's only one way to get back into the swing of life in Mumbai: an old-fashioned house party. I hadn't thrown one in aeons, and was long overdue to "retaliate", as my father puts it, towards our friends whose hospitality we have so often enjoyed. So, when my friend Priya Gaekwar, who runs a luxury brand consulting firm, rang to ask if I'd host a party in honour of the Ritz Carlton Reserve in Ubud, Bali, I said, "Sure, but what is the 'Reserve'?" "Well, there are only five of these properties in the world, and they offer a luxurious, personalised travel experience," she said.

Since it was Bali, I decided to go with a lush jungle theme décor (no prize for ingenuity) and found, through a helpful friend, a talented local florist who immediately got the brief. We decorated my doorway with heaving heaps of leaves and branches, while in the house there were generous bursts of white ginger lily, whose fragrance comes alive in the evening. Luckily for me, I had stumbled upon a home décor shop in St Tropez that had table mats with banana leaf motifs (made in India), so I pulled those out, and placed them on the dining table to channel Ubud. An ambitiously early time of 7.30 pm had been sent out, but by the time Ali Nizar, the head of sales and marketing for the hotel, arrived, I already had a few guests. By 9.30 pm, there were about 50 people at home; unfortunately, one air conditioner had conked out and so had the light dimmers (blame it on monsoon leaks). "Can we dim the lights?" was a question I dodged multiple times. In the middle of the evening, one subset retired to the guest room to discuss Kashmir, and another perched themselves in my bedroom to gossip. When the doorbell rang at midnight, and people continued to stream in, I turned to Ali and said, "Punctuality is not our forte, but at least you've seen South Mumbai in action!"

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Now, the art season has also begun in earnest. I can never make it to the Frieze Art Fair in London, since it is always during my son's birthday, but here at home, there were many milestones to celebrate. In honour of Gandhiji's 150th birth anniversary, the National Gallery of Modern Art is hosting an exhibit, *Santiti – Mahatma Gandhi: Then, Now, Next*, which brings together architect Ashiesh Shah, fashion designers Gaurang Shah, Gaurav Gupta and Rajesh Pratap Singh, *haute* embroider Jean-Francoise Lesage, and light experts Klove Studio, to interpret and fashion works as a tribute. The inauguration was packed. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev spoke on non-violence; in the audience were actor Juhi Chawla and her husband Jay Mehta, art doyennes Dr Saryu Doshi, Pheroza Godrej, Urmila Kanoria and Sangita Jindal, and collector Harsh Goenka.

The week also marked 10 years of Space 118, an artist residency programme founded by my friend Saloni Doshi. In 2009, Saloni refashioned a sprawling family warehouse in the city's neglected dockyard area to create a lovely multi-room space where she invites emerging artists from across India to live, work and find inspiration in Mumbai. To mark the milestone, she held a two-floor art show at the recently-relocated Sakshi Art Gallery in Colaba. I had hitched a ride to Saloni's with the multi-faceted collector, Amrita Kilachand, whom I had run into at the just-opened Rana Begum show at Jhaveri Contemporary. This was after I had attended a talk on artist Priya Ravish Mehra by Laila Tyabji and Tasneem Zakaria Mehta at Chemould gallery. Phew!

Another milestone celebrated this week was for the elegant Hema Shroff Patel, who founded her textile label, Amba (one of the 101 names for the Narmada river), 20 years ago. Hema, one of the city's most stylish and beautiful women, has been working with the weavers of Maheshwar to promote livelihoods, and sustainable, eco-friendly clothing well before it was trendy. Gandhiji would approve.

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