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GETAWAY



THERE'S A BUZZ

A new breed of independent boutiques, galleries, and restaurants in Mumbai's heritage district

ABOUT TOWN

is leading the city's creative renaissance, writes Arman Khan. Photographs by Talib Chitalwala





From left: **TARQ interior; Noorie Sadarangani of Obataimu.** Opposite page: **Pooranawalla store.** Previous pages, clockwise, from top left: **Abode Bombay; the Jodi store; black horse statue at Kala Ghoda; Payal Khandwala store; TARQ exterior; DAG interior; the Rose Bar and seared salmon, both at Neuma**

How does one tell the story of a city that has been the convergence of dreams and cultures? One way is to take a walk around the Kala Ghoda precinct—all the way from Colaba at one end, past Horniman Circle up to Ballard Estate. Today, these neighbourhoods are home to some of India's best-known couturiers—from Tarun Tahiliani to Gaurav Gupta to Amit Aggarwal. The latest is Sabyasachi's opulent store, conceptualised as a living museum.

"Town"—as the locals call it—has had a long tryst with culture. Walk back in time and you could meet Gaitonde and Husain, maybe even Naipaul at Café Samovar. Across the road could be sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar browsing for vinyls at Rhythm House. Not far is The Wayside Inn, where you may find Dr Ambedkar working on the Constitution of India from his favourite Table no. 4.

But this part of Mumbai has also found a way to take the past into the present: Café Samovar may be gone, but Jehangir Art Gallery, where it stood, still stands tall. The trendsetting Golden Thimble, established in 1970 by Munira Chudasama and now run by daughter Shaina NC, is still in business. And for those who like their books well thumbed, there is the beautiful David Sassoon Library with its al fresco reading room.

With all this heritage, no wonder that this is the seat of luxury in the city. In 2023, these neighbourhoods are collecting the city's creative energies through spaces that are intimate but bold, and a new crop of art galleries, boutiques, and restaurants are carving their niche into space and also time.

OBATAIMU With a smattering of galleries, cafés, and curio stores, Kala Ghoda is now synonymous with all things art. Obataimu, 'overtime' in Japanese, lives this ethos. From

hand-stitched stationery to Parisian books and feminist literature competing for space, the store is every nerd's dream and art aesthete's haven. *Machinery House, 3, S Bharucha Marg, Kala Ghoda. Fort; obataimu.com*

NAPPA DORI Founded in 2010, Nappa Dori emphasises taking an intricate, slow approach to leather design as manifested in its store with clean lines and minimalism. Whether it's the neatly bound leather diaries with slots for pencils, vintage trunks and leather backpacks or even handcrafted steamer carry-ons, the range will make you look at leather anew. *2, Sunny House, Mereweather Road, Colaba; nappadori.com*

SOHAM DAVE The designer who famously eschewed using electricity for looms in favour of manual energy while creating his garments, Soham Dave is known for celebrating the craftsmanship and intricacies of Indian textiles. At his Kala Ghoda store, clothes with Ajrakh motifs and



wood-block printing swirl with khadi and muslin stories. *20, Commerce House, Kala Ghoda, Fort; sohamdave.com*

EKAYA The Banarasi textile brand had its moment under the sun when producer Guneet Monga rocked its saree at the Oscars this year. The art district of Kala Ghoda forms the perfect backdrop for Ekaya's sarees—crafted to be heirloom pieces. In addition to its signature collections, the 3,000-sq ft space houses suits, ready-to-wear ensembles, bridal sarees, lehengas and pieces from their collaboration with various design houses. *Ador House, First floor, 6, Dubash Marg, Kala Ghoda, Fort; ekaya.in*

CORD Across two floors, Cord's store carves out its niche with a contemporary, urban chic appeal. The space is efficiently utilised—from leather bags, laptop sleeves, and wallets to neat rows of women's clothing on display. In terms of affordability, Cord stands out as compared to the high price range at most of the stores around. But therein lies the brand's appeal: to cut across age groups and class demographics. *Commerce House, 21, Saibaba Road, Kala Ghoda, Fort; cordstudio.in*

IF.BE One could've never visualised an old ice factory morphing into this airy art space. The Ice Factory Ballard Estate (IF.BE) is a confluence of all things fashion, art, and contemporary dialogue. With a banyan tree at the heart of the space, and, by extension, the Banyan Tree Cafe encircling it, the space exalts modern geometry in its architecture while retaining a sense of fluidity. *10-12, Calicut Rd, Ballard Estate, Fort; ifbe.space*

LOVEBIRDS Located inside the historic Wesley Church in Colaba, this ready-to-wear brand retains the expanse of the 1890 church, its stately window and fluted pilasters, with interiors done by Saurabh Dakshini of Studio Organon. The conceptual space in the store generally takes an art installation approach to showcase its newest collection with everything from quirky co-ord sets, wrap dresses, shirts with inventive bias cuts, and even jumpsuits. *Wesley Church, 62, BEST Marg, Cusrow Baug Colony, Apollo Bandar, Colaba; lovebirds-studio.com*

POORANAWALLA This new space in the Examiner Press Building in Kala Ghoda is a poetic ode to all things art and history. Regardless of how your home space is, any piece of furniture from this store, which sells

heritage pieces and artefacts from 1978 and later, will drape your space in the era you desire. Showcasing ornate Zanzibar chests made of hardwood, mythological antiques, and more, the space is awash with natural light spreading from its expansive windows. You might stumble upon a rare conch with a silver lining or even a sunlight-streaked regency-era sofa table. *Shop No. 5 & 11, Examiner Press Building, 35, Dalal St, Kala Ghoda, Fort; pooranawalla.com*

PAYAL KHANDWALA There's something with century-old buildings and contemporary fashion because the same holds true for Payal Khandwala's flagship store housed in the Bharthania building replete with sky-high ceilings, expansive windows, and heritage Burma teak roofs. The store also features accessories by sister brand Tachi. Look out for the antique gold leaf mural painted by Khandwala herself, as brass fittings on plain concrete juxtapose the old world and the new. *Bharthania Building, Burjoji Bharucha Marg, Kala Ghoda, Fort; payalkhandwala.com*

CHEMOULD COLAB How does an opportunity present itself to artists who didn't have the ways and contacts to make it big in the art world? Established in March 2022, Chemould CoLab works to precisely answer this question by giving new and emerging artists a platform to stretch their creative vision. Located on the second floor of Sugra Manzil, a historic building located in Colaba, this is an extension of Chemould Prescott Road gallery. Apart from the gallery space, it also hosts workshops and events that engage the wider community and provides on-site accommodation for studios of the artists selected for its mentorship programmes. *Second floor, Sugra Manzil, BEST Marg, Colaba; gallerychemould.com*

GOPI VAID The design house has been a staple for many when it comes to tunics, dresses, and kurtas. At its Kala Ghoda outpost, one gets a panoramic view of the label's range. If you're heavy on customisations, you might have to go directly to the factory as the store has a small stock of bridal wear and other heavy outfits. *49, VB Gandhi Marg, Kala Ghoda, Fort; gopivaid.com*

JODI With a focus on hand block printing, the label derives inspiration from various art forms such as music, movies, and a wide array of print works. Its Colaba store

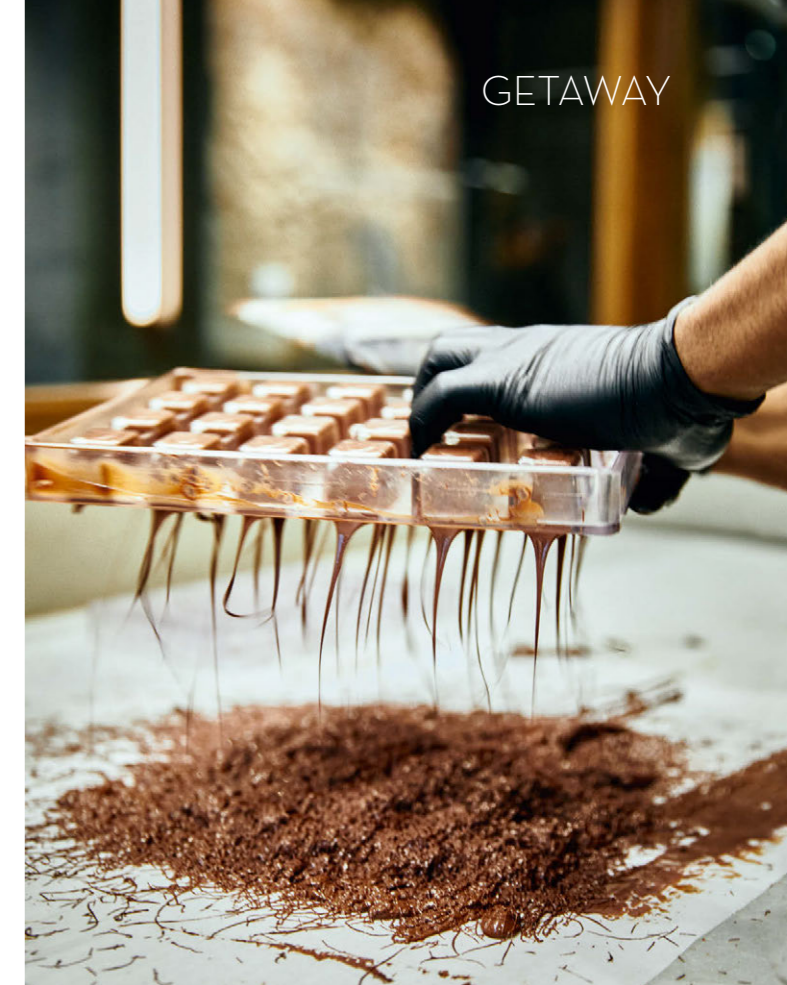
celebrates its craftsmanship-first approach of design deeply rooted in Indian storytelling and at affordable price points. *Shop No 1, Lentin Chambers, Dalal Street, Fort; thejodilife.com*

ABODE BOMBAY Abode famously commands the best view of Colaba's history-laden streets, with a bathtub in almost every room that opens to Art Deco windows. Now, its new 50-person space on the fourth floor of the building will play host to curated events with local brands and artists, including jazz listening sessions, private film screenings, workshops, meditation, and more. With the entire space replete with colonial and Art Deco hardwood, vintage lamps, high ceilings, and trinkets from Mumbai's markets, time is suspended here, save for the contemporary touches from Subko Coffee and BONO Boutique Ice-Cream that have their outposts here. *Lansdowne House, M.B. Marg, Apollo Bandar, Colaba; abodeboutiquehotels.com*

TARQ The new address of the iconic art gallery known for championing up-and-coming artists while also celebrating the veterans, TARQ's new home at KK Chambers in Fort promises to take the legacy forward and build on it. Most of the original Art Deco furniture has been repurposed and the viewing space is consciously located facing the northwest windows to allow for natural light to wash the space. Recently, Sameer Kulavoor's works opened the gallery solely because of the sheer expanse, detailing, and scale of his works. The artist is famously known for his musings over how cities and structures form and the contextual understanding of humans therein—TARQ provided just the space for these ruminations. *Ground Floor, KK (Navsari) Chambers, 39B AK Nayak Marg, Fort; tarq.in*

THE CACAO MILL Mumbai is no stranger to mills. Some would argue that the textile mill workers of the 1980s shaped its working-class contours and even its street food. The Cacao Mill by Subko carves out a unique space for its understanding of cacao—from craft chocolate to an immersive pod-to-bar experience, and the freshest savouries from the bakery section. *Second Pasta Lane, Apollo Bandar, Colaba; subko.coffee*

DAG While its glowing, three-storey space shut down in Colaba in 2020, DAG's new address inside The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel is



Clockwise, from top left: the set-up and chocolate being made, both at The Cacao Mill by Subko; pieces and interior at the Jodi store





From left: **a drink at Neuma; æquō gallery interior**
Opposite page: **chef Niyati Rao in action at Ekaa**

indisputably an art flex if there was ever one. The untitled seated nude, 1962, by FN Souza, was part of the opening show at the new space. This opening exhibition, which DAG has referred to as its most ambitious one yet, titled *Iconic Masterpieces of Indian Modern Art*, featured some of the best of the art world. From American and Dutch painters who depicted royal families in vivid hues to masters like SH Raza and VS Gaitonde who pushed the limits of modernism as we know it, DAG is all poised to celebrate art in its grandest sense. *The Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, Arthur Bandar Rd, Apollo Bandar, Colaba; dagworld.com*

EKAA Ekaa, meaning “one” or “matchless”, the brainchild of head chef and partner Niyati Rao, takes the ingredient-first approach and makes it contemporary. The dynamic menu flows on the basis of seasonality and produce with quirky interventions in sea urchins off the coast of Madurai, coconut sprouts from Thrissur, Manipuri black rice and Maharashtrian Indrayani

rice. It’s a staggering range that blends and morphs on your plate. *First floor, Kitab Mahal, D Sukhadwala Rd, Azad Maidan, Fort; ekaamumbai.com*

EXPERIMENTER Thirteen years after its birth in Kolkata, Experimenter, a contemporary art gallery that has been unafraid to interrogate the meaning of art through its bold and thoughtful presentations, decided to establish its new space in the city in Colaba last year, all while taking the same multidisciplinary approach forward. The founders, Priyanka and Prateek Raja, are clear in their vision for the space: to go beyond being passive viewers and actively engage with what art means to the world. *First Floor, Sunny House; 16/18 Mereweather Road, Colaba; experimenter.in*

ÆQUŌ India’s first-ever gallery dedicated to contemporary collectable design, æquō is a true meeting of minds of founder Tarini Jindal, architect Ivan Oddos, and

creative director Florence Louisy. Beyond its curatorial potential, æquō is actively involved in creating art. For the gallery’s first anniversary, it commissioned a series of screens made of bidri—a little-known silver inlay technique from Bidar, Karnataka. *First Floor, Devidas Mansion, Boman Behram Marg, Colaba; aequo.in*

NEUMA Karan Johar’s Neuma takes up the spot that Indigo famously occupied. Designed by Ashiesh Shah inside a restored heritage bungalow, it exhibits minimalism on the outside with layers of maximalism wrapped inside. Make your way from its sun-soaked porch to the Moulin Rouge-inspired Rose Bar. The food is just as eclectic: seared scallops with a saffron Hollandaise, salt-baked beetroot and tender coconut tartar, poached salmon glazed in a sauce of lime leaf and coconut, sticky toffee pudding, cashew agave mousse, and an easy glass of ginger-spiked cider to wash it all down. *4/6, Garden Chalet Mandlik Road, Colaba; @neumaindia*

