

Back to the Future

Home décor brands are carving a contemporary niche for traditional materials and motifs, finds Shubhanjana Das

For many of us, words like 'tradition' and 'ancient' spark doubts of archaism instead of trust. But a handful of home décor and lifestyle brands are adeptly balancing present-day sensibilities with time-tested Indian wisdom. How? Think brass martini glasses and terracotta-coated copper goblets that make the old school cool again.

So, whether it's Delhi-based A Clay Story bringing age-old pottery practices to the table, Jaipur's Ellementry quirking up the most mundane bronze homeware items, or Himéya that uses ethically-sourced cotton and natural dyes for bed and bath linen, brands are revisiting and paying homage to our roots. But, can these ancient values really be beaten into new forms to fit into our homes for a more holistic lifestyle? Revati Jayakrishnan of Rare Studios says, "People today relate to these materials which often act as a medium to communicate ethos and values of the past."



Glass water dispenser



Cutlery holder

ELLEMENTRY

Who: Founded in 2018 by Ayush Baid, Ellementry frees you of the dilemma to choose between the old and the new simply by fusing them into minimal yet highly utilitarian homeware products.

Ethos: To make handcrafted home décor and lifestyle products that tick all boxes—form, function, beauty, and utility. Ellementry uses environmentally responsible, locally-sourced materials like brass, bronze, terracotta and copper, among others.

We love: The brass martini glasses, terracotta curd setters, and copper teapots, each of which harks back to the familial rituals of Indian homes.

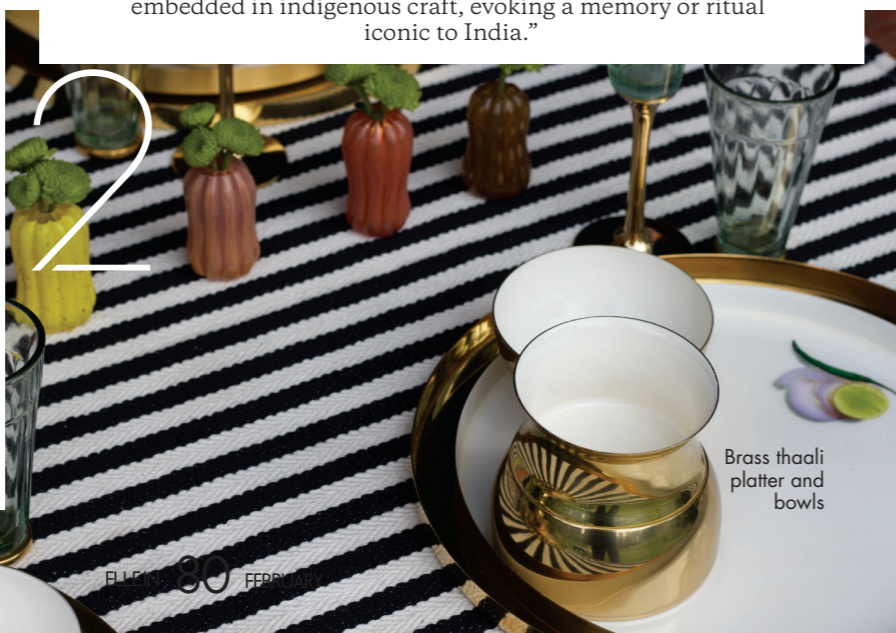


IKKIS

Who: Gunjan Gupta's Ikkis, launched at MAISON&OBJET Paris in 2019, uses indigenous materials, craftsmanship, and narratives to create products with a global design relevance.

Design inspiration: Ikkis reinterprets décor products that would be found in a conventional Indian household, such as the *chowki*, *diya*, and even the humble chai glass, to give them a modern visual twist.

The artist says: "Ikkis features a range of functional objects, each embedded in indigenous craft, evoking a memory or ritual iconic to India."



Brass thali platter and bowls



Luxe silver dinner set

ZISHTA

Who: A brand that spells its ideology in its name, Zishta (Sanskrit for traditional roots), was brought to life by Archish Mathe Madhavan, Meera Ramakrishnan, and Varishta Sampath in 2016.

The artisanal connect: Zishta was founded as an initiative to bring forgotten crafts from their originating source to our homes by working with artisan clusters from across the country. Each Zishta product bears the fingerprint of the artisans who have inherited their skills from their families to revive dying art practices.

Materials used: Natural river grass from West Bengal for *madur* (mats), *kansa* from Gujarat for tableware, black stone pottery from Manipur for cookware, bronze from Kerala for traditional cooking utensils called *uruli*.



Russet floater

STUDIO COPPRE

Who: The brand was founded in 2014 by an all-women team as a Pune-based social venture to revive heritage crafts.

Brand code: Studio Coppre believes working with local artisans brings to every product certain imperfections that make it unique.

The aesthetic: Refreshingly simple yet highly utilitarian, the brand's home décor as well as tableware items have strong yet subtle elements of ornamentation. On the spectrum are products like thalis, mugs, planters, and even tea-lights, all of which are beaten from copper.

On sustainability: "The repertoire of Indian materials and their crafting processes are by nature mindful of their environmental impact, long-term use, and recycling value," explains Sudakshina Sinha Banerjee, one of the founders. »



Handmade madur mats

ECRU

Who: For Noor Al-Sabah, Nur Kaoukji, and Hussah Al-Tamini of Kuwait, the hospitality, rituals, and customs of their homeland were the inspiration to start Ecrú, a word that denotes the colour of unbleached linen.

Ethos: Ecrú's products carry a unified message—to slow down and treasure the human connect of everything that is in our homes.

The Indian connect: Ecrú works closely with a small number of artisans to make a limited range of products which span from furniture to accessories. Be it their brass hot plates, natural jute rugs, or wooden salad bowls, every product borrows from Middle-Eastern influences for design just as strongly as it relies on Indian craftsmanship.



NO-MAD

Who: No-Mad's founder Anuj Kothari believes in voyages. It is the central axis of his lifestyle brand and hence the self-justifiable name which also reinstates its contemporary edge.

Challenges: Kothari admits that the process of collaborating with local artisans is a long and complex one. Having inherited ancient crafts as they were practised back in the day, the artists take time to trust 'new' designs and ideas.

Modern compatibility: "Though essentially inspired by everyday India and adapted to the Indian lifestyle, the No-Mad collections fit in easily in a holiday home in Alibaug as they would in a beach house in South of France," believes Kothari.



Misty monsoon dinner set

RARE STUDIOS

Who: Rare Studios founder and creative head Revati Jayakrishnan aims to preserve the art of ceramics in each of her products, be it through artistic plates and bowls or sculptures and three-dimensional installations, created with locally-sourced materials.

The old and the new: Jayakrishnan's creations include adaptations of Indus Valley Civilisation terracotta pottery into stoneware to super minimalist, hand-glazed, everyday-use bowls.

The artist believes: "It does not make sense to import materials from far-off places to make new things that would not fit into the local context. I try to use what exists here to create what does not exist here," shares Jayakrishnan.

A CLAY STORY

Who: Anumita Jain's childhood fascination with pottery snowballed into A Clay Story, her design practice where she plays with the malleability of clay and its many design possibilities.

Design inspiration: The artist often uses natural objects like leaves, seed pods, and even mushrooms, for their textures and impressions as well as for structural influence in her creations which range from plates and tumblers to vases and candle-holders.



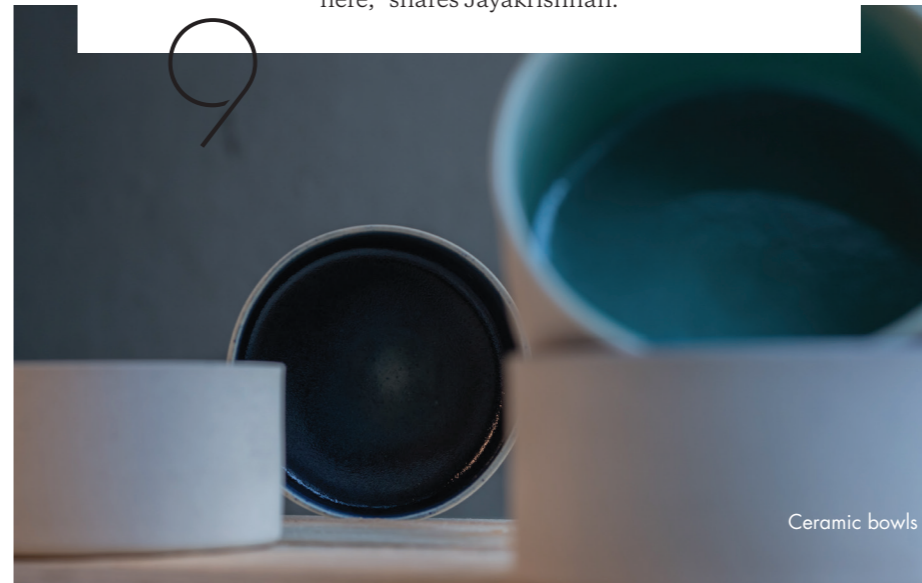
Himèya duvet and decorative pillow

HIMÈYA

Who: Himèya relies on the philosophy of 'less is more', as believed by our ancestors. Akanksha Himatsingka, CEO-EMEA & Asia Pacific and founder of Himèya, often turns to familial wisdom when it comes to manufacturing the products but relies on her emotions and instincts to envision linen that looks and feels good.

The brand signature: Himèya's practice of ethical cotton sourcing and natural dyeing also reflects in the texture, earthy hues, and the patterns of their products, be it the bed sheets, bath towels, or *dohars*.

In the mastermind's words: "We marry tradition with modern machinery capabilities to recreate something that is organic and natural feeling," shares Himatsingka.



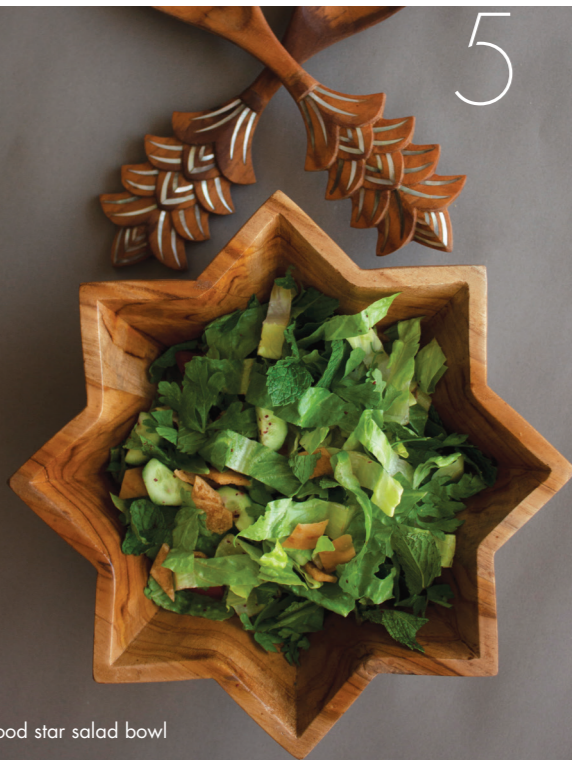
Ceramic bowls

HATTI

Who: Hatti originates in the lunar landscape of Ladakh. It is founded by French landscape artist Berenge and Rigzin Lachic, who, after a year of corporate life in Tokyo, returned to her land to help its people and revive its dying crafts.

All local everything: The grass for the baskets, the wool for the carpets, and even the silver and brass for the hookah bases to bowls, everything is sustainably sourced from different parts of the region.

In the words of the artist: "There has never been a more important time for humanity to realise the damage we caused to the planet with overconsumption and irresponsible living," says Lachic.



Wood star salad bowl