

weekend

wild



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Industrial mills are turned into luxury boutiques and banks into schools, as Indian architects find innovative ways to give old structures a new lease of life

If buildings could speak

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With the often-abused term sustainability lending itself to every category, be it decor or food, its roots in the built environment have held strong for centuries. With architects and restoration enthusiasts increasingly reusing structures across the country, the concept of adaptive reuse architecture is catching on.

From havelis-turned-museums to ancient bungalows now functioning as coffee shops and boutique hotels, we explore how old buildings are getting a new lease of life.



The Postcard Mandalay Hall, Kochi

Since its launch a couple of years ago, Mandalay Hall Concept Hotel, now known as The Postcard Mandalay Hall has become a landmark of sorts in Fort Kochi's historic Jewish quarter. The home-turned-boutique hotel took Stapati Architects a year-and-a-half to complete. "Mandalay Hall is one of few remaining Jewish homes on Synagogue Lane. The building holds

historical significance as the house that celebrated the last Jewish wedding, in Mattancherry. The 18th Century building was constructed in Dutch Burgher style, brought in by the Sephardic Paradesi Jews fleeing Europe," says Tony Joseph, principal architect and partner at the firm.

When the team took over the dilapidated building, a portion of it had collapsed and remained unused

for 30-40 years. Design strategist Pallavi Kainady, the owner's representative, had one primary objective: to preserve and retain the character of the place while creating a space that reflected Kochi's vibrant and artistic energy.

Every element of the original structure was repurposed, showcasing a commitment to maximum functionality and minimal waste, says Tony. "The foremost challenge encountered was the extremely fragile foundation

constructed with laterite stone. Compounded with this, the masonry was in a deteriorated state, and a section of the roof was on the verge of collapse."

Addressing these issues necessitated the reinforcement of the existing foundation without disrupting the overall structure. "This demanding task involved methodically strengthening the foundation, foot by foot," he explains, adding, "The design of the hotel distinguishes it from typical art hotels by integrating a unique concept where each room serves as a gallery showcasing art that is refreshed every two years."

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I've been to Chennai once and this is my second time to India. The love for K-Pop among Indians has increased the popularity of Korea. My favourite dance style is waacking, which involves arm movements, posing and sound visualisation.

PRINCE WIZZARD
SOUTH KOREA



I watch videos of dances from various cultures, and try incorporating elements of that into my style. I'm a hip-hop dancer but really like Afro-style steps, for which I'm going for classes now. Dancing is my passion, job, and something I cannot live without!

JEDRAS
POLAND



This is my first time to Asia. I see myself as an artiste rather than just a dancer. My style in voguing, more specifically, vogue femme dramatic, which involves catwalk, floor work and spins. It originated in New York City and is a style of battle dance, something that conveys: You want to mess with me, I will mess with you. Instead of fighting, we dance it out.

IVY MUGLER
UNITED STATES

From dance battles to captivating performances, the world finals of Red Bull's 'Dance your Style 2024' saw 16 of the world's best fight it out in Mumbai

Hips don't lie



Srinivasa Ramanujam
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Spawling on the floor, Ivy Mugler looks like she has fallen asleep for half a second. Till she hauls herself up, in one exaggerated move, springing to her feet. Even as her legs wriggle, Ivy, hair up and swaying, starts dancing. Her steps are quick and rapid. And yet, graceful.

The US-based vogue-style dancer (a style involving catwalk and floor work) is as much at ease performing to one camera and half-a-dozen people inside a conference room at The St. Regis Mumbai, as she is to 20 cameras and a 100 mobile phones in the packed National Sports Club of India Dome (NSCI Dome) auditorium.

Over the last weekend, top 16 performers from the world competed fiercely in the world finals of Red Bull's 'Dance Your Style 2024'.

A global all-style dance series, the competition saw performers in a battle format that showcased styles such as hip-hop, waacking, locking and popping. Testing freestyle and musicality skills through tracks ranging from global hits to classic numbers, the contestants – picked after 145 events in 49 countries – had 55,000 dance-crazy Mumbaiiks swaying, moving and voting for their favourites.

Ultimately, Vietnamese popping sensation MT Pop clinched the title, even as he shook a leg to the iconic 'Mundian To Bach Ke' (Panjabi MC), creating a video moment that is bound to go viral. "We are here for the love, for the culture and for the

Cool steps

Some of the dancers who stole the limelight:

- Title winner MT Pop, a renowned popping dancer from Vietnam, who is celebrated for his fluid movements.
- Finalist Rubix from France, a hip-hop dancer known for his choreography and energy.
- Klockwise from Philippines, known for the locking style of dance, a funk style that is said to have originated in the US in the 1960s.



(Clockwise from left) Saumya Kamble, Bhangra battle, T Rai and Nico Chanh in action, at the Red Bull 'Dance Your Style 2024' event in Mumbai. JOHAN SATHYADAS

Belgium-based performer incorporates his early martial arts training into dance. "During the pandemic, I had a lot of time and realised that when I danced to some videos, I was using poses from my martial arts training days. Martial arts is also based on movement, as is dance," says Nico, who describes himself as a "fighter more than a dancer."

Among the crowd's favourites at the event was Saumya Kamble, a Mumbai girl making waves for her unique style. Saumya started professional belly dancing when she was six and has been at it ever since. "I add elements of popping and waving too in my performances," says Saumya, who has also choreographed Bollywood film numbers and music albums apart from participating in dance battles. At 'Dance your Style 2024', Saumya's performance also included elements of Bharatanatyam, something that took the audience by surprise. "Belly dancing and Bharatanatyam are from two different worlds of dancing, and combining them on a big stage was a great experience," she adds.

The evening showcased not just energy but also various dance styles across the world. Like locking, a street dance style from the 1960s that involves freezing from a fast movement, holding the position and then continuing at the same speed.

Kenneth Martinez – known in the dancing community as Klockwise – is from Philippines and a master at locking.

Inspired initially by Quick Crew, a Norwegian dance group, Klockwise is a name he chose because it represented his "personality." "In school, I loved solving problems that involved clockwise and anti-clockwise challenges. As I was interested in the locking dance technique, I thought this was cool," he tells us.

Nico Chanh showcased 'martial arts dancing'. This

If Saturday evening at 'Dance your Style 2024' was about milling crowds, the Friday evening bash at Mumbai's Famous Studios was more intimate, and groovier. Here, the 'Bhangra Battle' took centrestage, with performers trying to outdo each other, yet giving the crowd some great entertainment. The music and the moves were not restricted to the stage alone; everyone in the crowd joined in the celebrations.

After all, what is the point of life without dance?

The writer was in Mumbai at the invitation of Red Bull



To watch video, scan QR code



The soul of Japan

Still planning that trip to Japan? For now, Japan comes to India as Konnichiwa Japan 2024 returns to DLF Avenue, Saket. The two-day cultural celebration offers a glimpse into Japanese tradition, art, and entertainment.

It is organised by the World Heritage Academy (WHA) and the Konnichiwa Japan Club to strengthen India-Japan relations through cultural exchange.

This year's festival will feature two renowned sumo wrestlers, Yoshinori Tashiro and Ryusuke Soma. Yoshinori, who weighs 188 kilograms, starred in the Tamil film Sumo and other global productions, while Ryusuke, who weighs 130 kilograms, gained recognition through his appearances in various media.

Highlighting the diversity of Japanese traditions, Konnichiwa Japan 2024 will also showcase a kimono fashion show, a taiko drumming performance, and a vibrant cosplay performance that brings beloved anime characters to life.

Attendees can also look forward to experiencing a Bollywood dance performance by Japanese artistes, a hands-on kimono-wearing experience, and a DJ night featuring anime music. Gaming enthusiasts can join Sony PlayStation 5 gaming competitions, while those interested in art and craft can participate in calligraphy and origami sessions.

Konnichiwa Japan 2024 will take place on November 23 and 24 at DLF Avenue, Saket, New Delhi. Entry is free.



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Glastonbury Festival 2025: The general admission tickets for Glastonbury Festival 2025 will go on sale on November 17 at 9 GMT. The festival is slated for June 25 to 29 at Worthy Farm, Somerset. The deposit – the amount customers pay to secure their ticket – is £75 on glastonbury.seetickets.com.



Talkingpoint

Cool tool: OpenAI is reportedly building a new AI agent tool, internally referred to as Operator, that can directly carry out tasks on a user's computer. It could be launched in January 2025, according to a Bloomberg report. It will be available to developers through OpenAI's application programming interface (API).

Pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours and everything else you need to plan your social calendar.

For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Stop and shop

Menu mantra

Kids' corner

Watch out!

Laughter therapy

Creating fantasy

Punk's not dead

Fashion designer **Aseem Kapoor** will be at **Collage**, Chennai, for his new line Mural-24. Inspired by ancient and classical art forms, his latest collection features signature texture prints, ornamental murals and motifs reminiscent of Byzantine mosaics. Expect layered jackets and trapeze-bodice gilets with lacework and dori details, starting at ₹10,000 today 11am to 7pm.

Hibiscus Café's new brunch menu has dishes like sweet crepes, Shakshuka and stuffed bagel, starting at ₹125. Available on Saturday and Sunday from 9am to noon. Meanwhile, Le Royal Méridien, Chennai, has launched a new menu at **Navaratna**. It spotlights cuisine from nine Indian states and has dishes like zaffrani malai broccoli and lamb vindaloo. A meal for two costs ₹2,500.

Sip & Paint Chennai is hosting a parent-child art date on November 23 at Hindustan Trading Company from 4pm to 6 pm. ₹2,000 per pair (includes all materials and take-home canvas). You can also head to Chetpet EcoPark, Chennai, today and tomorrow for a magic show by **Magic Shakthi** (4 pm to 5 pm today). There will be games, EMCEE activities and a puppet phow too. ₹100 on in.bookmyshow.com.

Vacheron Constantin's **Les Cabinotiers Le Temps Divin** (divine time) series explores time in cultural and conceptual perceptions, from Greek to Japanese. For details, visit: vacheron-constantin.com. More on timepieces, **Police** Watches, a brand of De Rigo Group, has signed a two-year deal with cricketer KL Rahul for Audacity Wanted, a campaign which celebrates modern masculinity. Visit: policelifestyle.com.

Comedian **Devesh Dixit** will be in Chennai to stage his solo show **Khuli Kitaab**. He will perform at Medai - The Stage on November 22, 8pm. ₹499 on in.bookmyshow.com. Speaking of all things funny, comedian **Rahul Subramanian** will also stage a solo gig, Who Are You?, at Chennai's The Music Academy today. Tickets for two shows, at 3.30pm and 7pm, are on in.bookmyshow.com; ₹999 upwards.

Unfolding Curiosities – Imagination Meets Fantasy, an exhibition by **Apparao Galleries** at Shridharani Gallery, South Extension-II, Delhi, will showcase the artworks of 10 artists: Farhan Mujib, George K., Mainaz Bano, Namrata D, Ravinder Dutt, Sanjeeva Rao Guthi, Saraswati, Sitikanta Samantsinghar, Srinivasa Reddy, Umashankar Pathak. On display between November 20 and 30.

The Angular Sessions, a mashup of punk/post-punk ideals and sounds, will begin at The Spotted Deer, Chennai, today at 7pm. It will feature MADLAD, a solo electronica project by bass player Rohit Malladi, who has dropped a new EP *Slipstream*, CDV, a punk act known for its covers of The Stooges, Ramones and Iggy Pop, and The Broadway Addicts, the night's hosts. ₹399; skillboxes.com.

Geetika Sachdev

Maqbool Fida Husain or MF Husain's life and death have been a recurring subject of discourse. While his body of work has been celebrated repeatedly, not many exhibitions have been able to evocatively capture the prolific artist and painter's curious mind and indelible legacy. A new showcase *Husain: The Timeless Modernist* at DAG in Delhi's stately Janpath area attempts to change that.

This exhibition, following the prelude *Master Maqbool* in Mumbai in 2022, features a collection of 116 works that offer an extensive representation of Husain's artistic journey from the 1950s to the 2000s.

"The singular aim with this exhibition was to provide a research-led qualitative narrative which provides a holistic perspective on Husain's practice, showcasing as it does his diverse and rich practice across six stellar decades," says Ashish Anand, CEO and Managing Director, DAG.

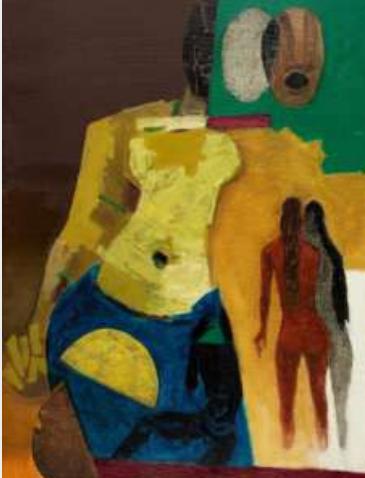
Curating the exhibition of this scale was a challenging task. It was a labour of love that took the better part of two years, confirms Ashish.

"While we already have a sizeable collection of Husain's works at DAG but for an exhibition in which both high quality and representation were important...it was critical to ensure we didn't have too many works from one period at the expense of another that was less adequately represented," he adds.

Spread over two floors, the exhibition has been divided into six sections for a better understanding of the artist and painter. One needs



(Clockwise from left) That Obscure Object of Desire Nine; Arrival; Invocation of Peace; Portrait of a Painter, Surrounded By His Own Images. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Celebrating Husain's legacy

An exhibition in New Delhi's DAG covers pivotal moments of legendary artist and painter MF Husain's artistic journey

to spend a few hours or return a couple of times to absorb the expanse of Husain's works.

My walkthrough of the show began with 'Conversations and Connections' – a series of portraits offering a window into Husain's perception of himself and how he was with the world around him. His emotional intensity shows up

across works, confirming the ease with which he formed personal connections.

Another takeaway from these artworks is the artist's inclination to be a showman who enjoyed people's attention.

'The Idea of a Nation' section reinforces Husain's ideas of nationhood and secularism. While

he was a devout Muslim, his ideas were syncretic and very much rooted in India. He captured the nation's colours, myths, symbols, rhymes, and rhythms in crude lines and cubist forms.

'Deciphering Desire' looks at women from all walks of life who took on the role of his muse – be it his mother draped in a

time immemorial and definitely, since the last two-and-a-half years, males have had a huge complexed and often bitter relationship with hair fall. I don't like to use the term hair loss, because that implies the hair just got lost on its own accord.

'Hair fall' is more appropriate, in terms of terminology. The reasons for hair fall as listed by inmates, Professor Ranjan and Rango include, genetics, or as I like to call it 'your parents' fault', and diet, or as I like to call it, also your parents' fault. From Toronto to Thiruvananthapuram, (sorry no direct flights available), men face an epic struggle dealing with the fall from scalp. Many seek gurus, psychiatrist, herbal remedies and change of spouses to help with the cure.

Sadly, in each of these cases, the hair fall just gets further accelerated. Now I'm at the precipice, (figuratively, I'm actually on couch), hair weave wig or hair piece? That's the option the wife has put forward. I urge the readers to help me choose wisely by writing their suggestions to the editor, in triplicate, of course. Now, as my guru RajwRam has instructed me, please let me do a headstand to urge hair follicles to go forward.

The writer has dedicated his life to communism. Though only on weekends.

THE COLUMN THAT WASN'T

Many seek gurus, psychiatrists, herbal remedies and change of spouses to help with the cure to hair fall

Hair we go again!

Cyrus Broacha

We must face the truth. We can't keep hiding. I suppose, we can keep hiding, but it's painful. So, we must face the reality. I guess, by now, all of you have guessed it. I can see a number of anxious faces. (Now, when I say I can see, I mean, I obviously, can't see, but it's more like I feel I can see all of you, oh and by all of you, I mean the men folk). Yes, this is the problem we men must deal with. For many, it's worse than the Indian man's worst nightmare, which obviously is trying to understand the subtle changes in the tax structure, or whether to wear shoes or sandals when the invite says semi-formal.



SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

Before we tackle this large elephant in our tiny bedroom, let me warn that some people (and by people, I mean men). The author also wants to stress that the word 'people' normally is inclusive of women, but in this context, he's borrowed it for a very short time to mean men only, and within minutes, he will return it, will be badly affected by dealing with this conversation openly. So,

the best I can offer is make sure you are sitting down, with an adequate back rest, before reading further.

To be fair, the subject is open to men from all ages, previously referred to as the 'people'. To be absolutely super fair, it can and does occasionally affect women and animals. However,

amongst animals, reptiles are exempted. To be totally clear, both male and female reptiles are exempted. However, two preeminent scientists, who today face jail terms for impersonating Income Tax officers, have written a monumental complete book on this whole situation.

Professor Ranjan and Rango's book called, 'Why it falls?' is sadly out of stock.

In the meantime, please brace yourselves. If you feel like going to the toilet, go now. I'll leave two blank paragraphs, to give you some time. Okay, as I have not heard from you, let's proceed, since

time immemorial and definitely, since the last two-and-a-half years, males have had a huge complexed and often bitter relationship with hair fall. I don't like to use the term hair loss, because that implies the hair just got lost on its own accord.

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The writer has dedicated his life to communism. Though only on weekends.



Maharashtrian sari, public figures like Mother Teresa or Madhuri Dixit or even mythological figures.

One of the most interesting sections is 'The Freedom of Form' which explores the maestro's ability to create across mediums beyond the canvas. His fascination with multidimensionality through text, music, cinema, calligraphy and even toys is visible through his works. One of the most striking pieces in this series are acrylic panels part of the set of *Gaja Gamini* (2000) that featured actress (and his muse) Madhuri Dixit.

'Equine Elegance', as the name suggests, examines Husain's closeness with horses from a young age.

The last section 'Monochrome Musings', reflects his inclination towards mathematics, particularly geometry. It also makes it clear that he was a spontaneous person who would express emotions through quick scribbles or sketches of anything he could get his hands on.

"Each work in the showcase is individual and yet part of a link in his journey; it is almost impossible to dismiss one work at the expense of another," says Ashish.

Much of the legendary artist's life was shrouded in controversy. Does the exhibit try to dismantle that image? Ashish explains, "Any controversies around the artist emerged from a lack of an understanding and sensitisation around his works. So many years after his death, I think we should move beyond this artificially created reference and view him for the magnificent painter that he was."

The exhibition is open till December 14, 2024



Kathika Cultural Centre, Old Delhi

Thomas House, Mumbai

At Mumbai's iconic Fort area, home to several heritage restaurants and establishments, stands Thomas House, a restored bank building that is now a school. Built in Neo-classical architecture, a prominent style during the 19th Century, the structure's facade showcases a variety of captivating elements, including Hellenistic pediments adorned with traditional English heraldic symbols, decorative friezes, and Corinthian column capitals. "The building's meticulous craftsmanship is evident in its Porbandar stone accents, arched windows, and flooring reminiscent of Minton tiles," says Nandini Sampat, principal architect, SNK Architects.



administrative offices, and facilities," she adds of the project that took six years to complete and was handed over in 2023.

Nandini explains that the adaptive reuse and restoration of the heritage building was done at a cost of ₹60 crore (funded by the Anglo Scottish Education Society).

Revamping Thomas House also posed additional challenges including time, weather damage, insensitive repairs and inappropriate interventions. "Challenges escalated due to ongoing Metro construction on the D.N. Road, and specialised crack monitoring systems and subsoil grouting were employed, she says, adding that the project bagged the 2024 International Award for Restoration Excellence by the Chicago Athenaeum for these very techniques.



She explains how the client, The Anglo Scottish Education Society, acquired the building with the vision of transforming the former bank into the IB arm of the Cathedral and John Connon School. "The adaptive reuse from a bank to a school involved integrating upgraded functional elements suitable for educational purposes. Key interventions included integrating classrooms,

names like Vittoria Frigerio, Flexform, Elie Saab, and Alberta, was crucial."

Vita Moderna, Mumbai

Aimed at mirroring the aesthetic of Milan's esteemed Brera District within Mumbai's bustling urban environment, it is a luxury retail store located within Mumbai's historic Raghuvanshi Mills industrial estate. Rahul Mistri, principal designer at Open Atelier Mumbai, says the original structure – an industrial shell – had significant architectural elements.

These included a 24-foot floor-to-ceiling height, 11-foot window openings, load-bearing brick walls, weathered columns, and aged metal windows. "These elements provided a unique industrial character and a sense of historical charm that we aimed to maintain," says Rahul, whose focus was on striking a delicate balance between modern sensibilities and the authentic heritage structure. "Respecting the diverse roster of brands, including globally renowned

Kathika Cultural Centre, New Delhi

In May 2023, a haveli from the late 19th Century was relaunched as a cultural centre and museum "that tells the story of Old Delhi to visitors and local communities". Aishwarya Tipnis, architect and cultural heritage expert at Studio ATA – who helmed the project – explains how the original structure was purchased by him in a dilapidated condition. "The client who has roots in Old Delhi was keen to create a place that showcased the history and heritage of Shahjahanabad, not just the architecture but also the intangibles like dance, food, baithaks etc," she says.

Aishwarya adds how the original structure was rich in Mughal elements such as decorative gateways, fluted columns, multi-foliated arches, lakhori brickwork, and sandstone brackets.

"The primary challenge was to ensure

the structural stability of the building and carry out minimal interventions. We worked closely with the client and co-created solutions that helped us repurpose many elements from kabadiwalas and other demolished buildings and gave them a new lease of life in the new haveli," says Aishwarya of the project costing ₹3 crore. For example, the railings on the first floor were carefully collected by the client over the years and the team repurposed them to create a balustrade around the courtyard in keeping with the architectural ensemble of Shahjahanabad.

Due to the pandemic, work started only in early 2020, and working with a limited supply of materials and labour were constraints. "All the work had to be done in-situ due to the government

regulations on social distancing etc, and the building was handed over in 2022."

By using traditional materials and processes in the adaptation processes, the emphasis of this project was on circularity. Which is why, carefully repurposing several dismembered elements of other havelis and skillfully integrating them into the design was special for the team. "For example, the timber screen on the first floor has been put together from several components and adds character to the courtyard. The restoration and conservation process involved the participation of local artisans and masons from Old Delhi and Rajasthan," explains Aishwarya, who is now working on an Art Deco Palace in Gurgaon, a 19th Century haveli in Agra, as well as the Woodstock School in Mussoorie.

If buildings could speak

CONTINUED FROM
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The Red Bari, Kolkata

During Durga Puja last year, a coffee shop and co-working space opened close to the city's iconic Kalighat temple.

What sets this apart from similar establishments is the fact that it is housed in a 98-year-old home. "It was a house that was perfect for sharing. It's too big to live in, but I could imagine it being a perfect community space," says Avantika Jalan, founder-director of the project, who bought the home in 2022. "The family was wanting to sell since 2017 to someone who would retain the building. I had read about it in 2019, and two years later a friend who had seen the property for the open house connected me to the owners."

The reason for purchase was "to restore and repurpose the building, and make this a viable business to make a case for restoration and repurposing of built heritage," says Avantika, an entrepreneur working with sustainability since 2011. "The house has thick walls which is the main support, with no columns, but arches holding the house up. It has open verandas on the west and north side, unique round verandas on the sides, and on each of the front rooms. There is a lot of cross ventilation and natural light because of how it's designed," she shares.

Her team "only opened up the courtyard which was not really usable earlier". Apart from this, only a fire escape and elevator were added with minimal damage to the original building. "Nothing else was touched. We restored some of the arches which had given way," she says of the restoration process that took a year-and-a-half to get done. "But a house like this is never finished," says Avantika.

Addressing innovative techniques used, she talks about their unique solution to restore the old red oxide floors which had developed cracks. "Sonia Guha, the project lead, did a lot of research to get the right material. We did this process in-house like an art project because commercially, no one would give it the kind of attention to detail it required," she concludes.

Designs for all

Ranna Gill's new outpost offers a fresh, modern shopping experience for every woman



Barry Rodgers
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While the rise of e-commerce has led many to predict the decline of brick-and-mortar stores, the fashion scene in Mumbai tells a different story. The city has witnessed a surge in new store openings, transforming retail spaces into immersive brand experiences that offer more than just clothing – they provide a window into the brand's ethos and identity.

In line with this trend, designer Ranna Gill has expanded her presence in Mumbai. This is Ranna's fourth store in the city. Located in Bandra, this outpost is part of her broader strategy to engage customers through thoughtfully designed spaces that reflect her brand's aesthetic and values.

"A physical store is essential. I know online shopping is huge, but for the type of product we offer a store experience matters. We're not selling basic T-shirts or lower-cost items; our collection is luxurious, crafted, and special. The colours, unique patterns, and the specific length of a blouse – these details need to be seen, felt and tried on," says

Ranna, adding, "Our customer wants to know exactly how it looks on her before she swipes her credit card. That's why we have physical stores and continue to open more. This way, she can experience the pieces first-hand, rather than relying on images and descriptions."

The new store offers a modern, streamlined shopping experience, thoughtfully designed to align with the brand's aesthetic. Covering 1,200 square feet across a ground floor and basement, the space is clutter-free, elevated, and perfectly suited to showcase the collections. It is not a grand, opulent setting, but rather a chic, understated environment where every detail is curated to reflect the simplicity and elegance of the products.

Each piece from the AURA '24 Festive Edit and Urban Prairie collection is displayed with intention, allowing customers to focus on finding the right co-ord set, pantsuit, blouse, or pair of trousers.

"When a young woman comes into the store with her mom, it's all about having the right pieces that speak to both of them. Maybe she feels confident showing off a bit of midriff, so we have those styles ready for her – pieces that she'll not only love to wear but will also be excited to tell her friends about. That's the magic of it; when she leaves, she's inspired to share her look with friends, and it just grows from there," says Ranna.



A snapshot from the AURA '24 Festive Edit; (right) Ranna Gill.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Malayalam

Fast-paced cyber crime thriller



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If there exists a parallel world where losers are guaranteed to find salvation, Girish A.D.'s characters would probably be the rulers of that world. Down and out protagonists have been a common factor in all his films till date, be it *Thanneer Mathan Dinangal* or *Super Sharanya* or *Premalu*. His latest outing *I Am Kathalan* is no different, but just as always, he brings the same underlying theme in a different packaging.

Cyber crime is the shiny wrapper that he uses this time around. Only that, we are seeing the film mostly from the perspective of the hacker, Vishnu (Naslen), who has completed his engineering course but has a load of back papers to pass. His lack of ambition and string of failures do not sit well with his girlfriend Shilpa (Anisha Anilkumar), who has joined her father (Dileesh Pothan)'s finance firm as its IT head. When things go wrong between the couple, it triggers Vishnu's criminal tendencies.

Vishnu's personality as someone who is not averse to using his technical knowledge for devious means is established early on, when he attempts a phishing attack on a female classmate's social media account for his friend. He is clearly a push away from attempting something on a larger scale. Hiding behind the technical sophistry is a guy seething with anger at a girl who has quite a few valid reasons for dumping him.

Girish and writer Sajin Cherukayil pare down the hacking sequences to its bare essentials, making them accessible. Humour, which is a common element of all of Girish's films, is also minimal, probably considering the nature of the plot. One of the funnier bits is meant to break stereotypes in the portrayal of hackers, complete with a hoodie and backpack, in some Malayalam films.

With a less than two-hour runtime, tightly packed with one event after another, the film runs briskly for most parts. But it fails to deliver anything more than what it shows in the first hour, always circling back to another iteration of the hacker carrying out his act and the victims updating their security system. The entry of an ethical hacker (Lijomol Jose), a character who also gets a stereotype-breaking portrayal, introduces some amount of thrill into the proceedings. Some elements of the writing, like how the stress-buster pillow mouse that Vishnu designs is used at various points in the story, are interesting.

Though one of the characters does call Vishnu a criminal, the film is ambivalent about how it should portray him. At times, it slips into a sympathetic tone, especially in a scene involving Vishnu's father. This ambivalence also restricts the makers from going all out against the negative-shaded protagonist in the end, preventing an impactful climax. Despite being an engaging watch, *I Am Kathalan* hits a little below the mark compared to Girish's previous outings.

I Am Kathalan is currently running in theatres



Spy show sparks intermittent joy

Directors Raj & DK bring texture and technique to this Indian spin-off of 'Citadel' with uneven results

Hindi

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In most spy thrillers, a hunt is always on for a MacGuffin. This is usually a piece of tech with unfathomable and potentially catastrophic powers. In the American *Citadel*, a trope-y, anodyne action series from last year, executive produced by the Russo brothers and starring Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Richard Madden, this was the 'X-Case', its disarmingly generic name chiming with its contents: whereabouts of retired spies, plus a cache of nuclear codes.

I was expecting Raj & DK to have fun with this trope in *Citadel: Honey Bunny*, the Indian spin-off of *Citadel* (an Italian offshoot, *Diana*, began streaming on Prime Video last month). This is how they play it. Two scientists meet at a Belgrade museum in 1992. They are old comrades who address each other by their first names: Raghu and Pavel. Their present mission, we gather, is to safeguard the 'Armada'—an advanced remote monitoring system—from slipping into the wrong hands. "Guard it with your life," Pavel instructs grimly, before handing over the gizmo stuffed inside a tape of Ramesh Shippy's *Shaan* (1980).

It is a silly little choice, having a paranoid European scientist matter-of-factly pass on globe-threatening technology in a shell of yester-year Bollywood. Yet it sings. Weirdness of this kind, precisely, is what endears the Raj & DK brand in our minds. Their breakout series, *The Family Man*, is among the few enjoyably atypical spy shows out there. In a similar vein, *Honey Bunny* springs to life whenever it's trying to invent and

Citadel: Honey Bunny

Directors: Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K.

Cast: Varun Dhawan, Samantha Ruth Prabhu, Kay Kay Menon, Saqib Saleem, Sikandar Kher, Soham Majumdar

Episodes: 6

Storyline: Separated by fate, two ex-spies, Honey and Bunny, must reunite to protect their young daughter

Indianize, like when two agents effect a traffic deadlock by yelling like North Indian hoodlums. At other points, however, the series closely resembles the boilerplate Hollywood franchise it's been tasked to augment.

The series, a prequel, unfolds in two timelines. Honey (Samantha Ruth Prabhu) is a struggling actress in 90's Bombay, auditioning for bit roles like 'heroine's friend' and 'village girl'. Failing to make ends meet, she's thrown a lifeline by stuntman Bunny (Varun Dhawan), who enlists her as a decoy in a spy op. Bunny, it turns out, is a footsoldier of Vishwa (Kay Kay Menon), the head of a clandestine spy network. After she's injured in the course of her mission and her cover is blown, Honey is offered an out. But she decides to enlist, finding a purpose in the mercenary life that her travails in moviedom denied.

Eight years on, Honey and Bunny are leading quiet, separate lives. Unbeknownst to Bunny, they have a young daughter, Nadia (Kashvi Majmudar) – precocious, pert, a tactical thinker, halfway the ass-kicking superspy she's destined to become. The present narrative turns on Honey and Nadia fending off armed agents while Bunny, acting on a tip-off, makes haste to find his lost family. As in all spy dramas, he reassembles the old gang: bespectacled techie Ludo (a charming Soham Majumdar), and old-school weapons man Chako (Shivankit Singh Parikh), now a sad sack corporate employee with two kids.

Buttressed by a sizeable budget, and working in tandem with cinematographer Johan Heurlin Aidt, Raj & DK pile on the action in *Honey Bunny*. commendably, the filmmakers appear unfazed by the pressure to match up to Hollywood, following their own, homegrown logic of mayhem. There are several 'oners'—inside cars, safe houses and cavernous old palaces – but these are pitched as scrappy

and scuzzy battles instead of attention-grabbing set pieces. While the action is definitely slicker than the Govinda-era films *Bunny* stunts for, it has a 90s heart: the level-based gunplay, for instance, is closer to films like *Aatish* and *Baazi* than the thudding monotone of *Singham Again*.

The writing in *Honey Bunny* is less persuasive than the action. The spy-talk sounds leaden and rote: "Activate all mobile units!"; "I'll get command to prep the troops, ASAP!" Bunny's manipulation at the hands of Vishwa makes for an interesting track ("This is a necessary sacrifice", the greying spymaster tells him. Only Kay Kay Menon can get away with this stuff). Meanwhile, Honey, who speaks in a mix of English and Telugu-accented Hindi, and is played by a Southern star, is a real problem for dialogue writer Sumit Arora to solve. His answer is to cheekily concede defeat: "Did you write your own speech?" Honey is asked at one point. "That's why it is in English," she demurs.

This is Dhawan's streaming debut; Ruth Prabhu earlier played the antagonist – a Sri Lankan militant – in the second season of *The Family Man*. The actors, who are the same age, make sharp, convincing action stars. But their characters are vaguely defined, and, over six episodes, I could not latch on to either. They are simple, fairy-tale constructs – "I have a daughter....and she's in danger." Bunny announces early on—and the interplay of betrayals and reconciliations over the two timelines don't land with clarity and force. Given Nadia's presence, a sense of pre-destiny hangs over the story; whatever happens to her parents, we know, the little girl who can survive on mango slurpees will make it out safe.

Honey Bunny fires a few blanks, but do not blame the weapons department.

Citadel: Honey Bunny is streaming on Prime Video

Anupam Kher takes a dip in the channel of mediocrity

Hindi

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One day, a foul-mouthed man on the cusp of 70 realises that he doesn't have any achievement in his lifelog that will keep him alive for posterity. A national-level swimmer who didn't strive enough to change the colour of his bronze medal, Vijay Mathew (Anupam Kher) is an ordinary old man seeking a sliver of gold dust. Having lost his supportive wife to cancer, he is withering from the inside and appears grumpy from the outside. Still, he hasn't given up on the magic of life and doesn't want those around him to undermine his leap of faith when an opportunity presents itself. Vijay decides to participate in a tough triathlon contest to make it to record books and give something back to his friends who stood by him.

Writer-director Akshay Roy has a promising premise about a complex



character that we can relate to but the film fails to provide him the wheels to last the distance. On paper, it reads like an episode in

Anupam's popular play *Kuchh Bhi Ho Sakta Hai* that celebrates the extraordinary leaps that ordinary life can take. However, it works out like a

PowerPoint presentation to sell Vijay to a disbelieving audience, in which slides touch upon the obvious obstacles in the path of the unlikely hero, without being kneaded into a compelling storyline or generating an engaging experience. Instead of instilling emotion into the narrative, Roy keeps falling back on the Asha Bhosle number "Aage Bhi Jaane Na Tu..." from *Waqt* (1965) to underline the essence of the film.

A daughter who doesn't want her father to take up the challenge because of health reasons, friends who have faith in his intent but not in his age, a young competitor who crosses his path, the need for a sponsor for equipment and gear, and above all the will to fulfil the promises made to the deceased wife – Roy writes all the necessary paragraphs but with the skill of a machine manual where characters are reduced to caricatures meant to carry out the task of jokes.

With little to reflect upon, it feels like an advertisement to promote triathlon, the new fad among fitness enthusiasts in all age groups. It is good to see Chunky Panday back as

the Parsi doctor friend of Vijay but it seems he has been told to exaggerate his Pasta act of the *Housefull* franchise. Mihir Ahuja as the young participant who forges a bond with Vijay, Guddi Maruti as the wholesome caretaker, and Vrijesh Hirji as the good-hearted coach, provide some hope but the makers seem keen on playing up underwritten characters with overblown expressions.

In times when OTT platforms are

vying for the attention of audiences who were, until recently, glued to general entertainment channels, the film turns out like a pitch for a television serial about an old man doing quirky things. Made on similar lines, Sooraj Barjatya's *Uunchai*, where Anupam charged up the melodrama with Amitabh Bachchan, made an impact. Interestingly, Anupam is cast as Vijay, and Yash Raj Films which distributed *Uunchai* has produced *Vijay 69*.

It goes without saying that Anupam can whip up emotions with the most facile of scripts. Known to play aged characters with amazing felicity from a young age, Anupam here gets to play his age and there are moments where he does make us identify with the desperation and motivation of Vijay. However, with a lot of soapy material around and little intent from the makers to take it some *Uunchai*, the veteran ends up making bubbles in thin air.

Vijay 69

Director: Akshay Roy

Cast: Anupam Kher, Chunky Panday, Vrijesh Hirji, Mihir Ahuja, Guddi Maruti

Storyline: A slice of life story of a 69-year-old swimming coach who decides to participate in a triathlon.

Vijay 69 is currently streaming on Netflix



Time Cut

Director: Hannah MacPherson

Cast: Madison Bailey, Antonia Gentry, Griffin Gluck

Storyline: A girl travels through time to find her sister's killer

The fun thing about *Time Cut* is it does not take itself too seriously like some other weighty incursions into the fabric of the space-time continuum. In April 2003, in the small town of Sweetly, a killer murders four teenagers including Summer (Antonia Gentry) and her best friend Emmy (Megan Best).

The killer is never caught and Sweetly does not recover from the horrific slayings. In 2024, Lucy (Madison Bailey) a gifted teenager, has just been accepted for an internship programme at NASA. We learn that Lucy is Summer's sister and after much mental maths, figure out she was born after Summer's death.

Lucy's parents, Gil (Michael Shanks) and Kendra (Rachael Crawford) are shadows of themselves, preserving Summer's room as a shrine to her memory.

On Summer's death anniversary, Lucy stumbles upon a time machine and is accidentally transported to 2003. Lucy realises she has the chance to stop the Sweetly slasher, and save her sister and the town, which will unfortunately erase her (Lucy's) existence.

There are the usual fish-out-of-water comments (what is Twitter? Why is the modem screeching at me?) and the all-knowing future wisdom (do not invest in BlackBerry). Lucy meets and gets to know Summer with a makeover and mall visit thrown in.

Quinn (Griffin Gluck) is the physics nerd who helps Lucy rebuild the time machine, which like all good time machines in popular culture has a missing part. He tells Lucy, "this is not a Marty McFly situation" referencing the greatest teen time travel trilogy, *Back to the Future*.

There is a bubblegum brightness to *Time Cut*, which even while featuring a nasty killer, manages to be upbeat and has an optimistic ending. *Time Cut* is the kind of movie that will slip by smoothly in your peripheral vision while you ponder the secrets of the infinite probability drive or your costume for a Diwalooeen party.

Time Cut is currently streaming on Netflix

Snippets



Hollywood director JJ Perry joins Yash and Geetu Mohandas' *Toxic*

KGF star Yash is next teaming up with director Geetu Mohandas for the new film *Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups*. It is now known that veteran Hollywood action choreographer and filmmaker JJ Perry has been roped in as the action director for *Toxic*.

Interestingly, Perry met Yash in London last year and shared a photograph of the two via his Instagram account.

A video of Perry landing in Mumbai airport, only to be surrounded by paparazzi to whom he said he was "super-stoked" to work in *Toxic*, has made its way online.

Toxic was announced in December 2023. The film, bankrolled by KVN Productions, is all set to hit the theatres on April 10, 2025.



Ali Fazal to join Phoebe Waller-Bridge in *Rule Breakers*

Ali Fazal is set to team up with *Fleabag* star Phoebe Waller-Bridge in his latest Hollywood project, *Rule Breakers*. Produced by Angel Studios, the film is directed by two-time Oscar winner Bill Guttentag and is scheduled for release in March 2025.

Fazal, who has built a steady presence in international cinema, expressed his excitement about joining forces with Waller-Bridge in the film that explores themes of resilience and defiance set against the backdrop of Afghanistan.

The Mirzapur actor hinted at the film's themes, describing it as a story every parent would want their child to see, especially for its powerful female-driven narrative.



Mohanlal - Shobana's film helmed by Tharun Moorthy titled *Thudarum*

Mohanlal's 360th film will be directed by Tharun Moorthy of *Operation Java* and *Sauda Vellakka* fame. The film reunites Mohanlal with actor Shobana after 20 years in what marks their 56th film together.

Last week, it was announced that the film's shooting, which went on floors in April this year, was wrapped up. Now, the makers have revealed that the film, initially titled *L 360*, is now titled *Thudarum*. The film's first look was also released featuring Mohanlal with a group of schoolchildren.

Written by Tharun and KR Sunil, *Thudarum* is produced by Rejaputra Vishal Media. *Thudarum*'s supporting cast includes Farhana Faasil, and Thomas Mathew.



Living room at the end of universe

While the gimmick of multiple frames wears thin fairly quickly, this mixed bag of chocolates from Robert Zemeckis rides on Tom Hanks' quiet charm

English

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This is a big anniversary year for director Robert Zemeckis as he celebrates 40 years of collaboration with composer Alan Silvestri starting with *Romancing the Stone* and 30 years since the multiple award-winning box of chocolates, *Forrest Gump*. *Here* is a big-time *Forrest Gump* reunion, seeing the return of its leads, Tom Hanks and Robin Wright as well as crew, which apart from Zemeckis and Silvestri, includes writer (Eric Roth), cinematographer (Don Burgess), sound designer (Randy Thom), and costume designer (Joanna Johnston).

Probably it is all the anniversary feeling that makes this adaptation of Richard McGuire's eponymous comic book feel burdened by nostalgia. Though non-linear

Here

Director: Robert Zemeckis

Cast: Tom Hanks, Robin Wright, Paul Bettany, Kelly Reilly

Storyline: The many stories played out in a beautiful room in a gracious home through time

like the comic, *Here* begins with the dinosaurs, then there is the ice age, and the ice melts, and we realise the story is told from this one patch of land and the different dramas that play out there.

There is an Indigenous couple, who fall in love, have a child and later, the woman dies leaving the man to grow old alone. The land is then part of Benjamin Franklin's illegitimate son, William's estate. At the turn of the century, a house is built and *Here* tells the stories of the different families who live there – an aviation enthusiast John Harter (Gwilym Lee) and his wife Pauline (Michelle Dockery); the inventor of the recliner, Leo (David Fynn), and his pin-up model partner Stella (Ophelia Lovibond); the Youngs who have the house for the longest time; and the Harris family (Nicholas Pinnock, Nikki Amuka-Bird and Cache Vanderpuye).

The angle is always of the gracious bay window looking out at the old colonial. After WWII, Al (Paul Bettany) and Rose (Kelly Reilly) buy the house where they live with their three children, Richard (Tom Hanks), Elizabeth (Beau Gadsdon)

and Jimmy (Harry Marcus).

Richard falls in love with Margaret (Robin Wright) and they get married in the same room and also have their daughter, Vanessa (Zsa Zsa Zemeckis) there. The passage of time is clocked by the changes in the television sets as well as the programming, apart from the clothes and the music.

While focusing on the lives of regular people, with their triumphs and tears, there is a maudlin thread running through *Here*, which is only made bearable thanks to Hanks, who is the son, brother, dad, husband and co-worker anyone would love to have. Bettany and Reilly carve out believable characters, trying to hold their place in a rapidly changing world.

When the camera finally swings around at the end of 104 minutes (seemed much longer), we are finally set free of the rather clunky time-traveling room. Wish that T-Rex had popped up again to chomp down the megalodon though.

Here is currently running in theatres