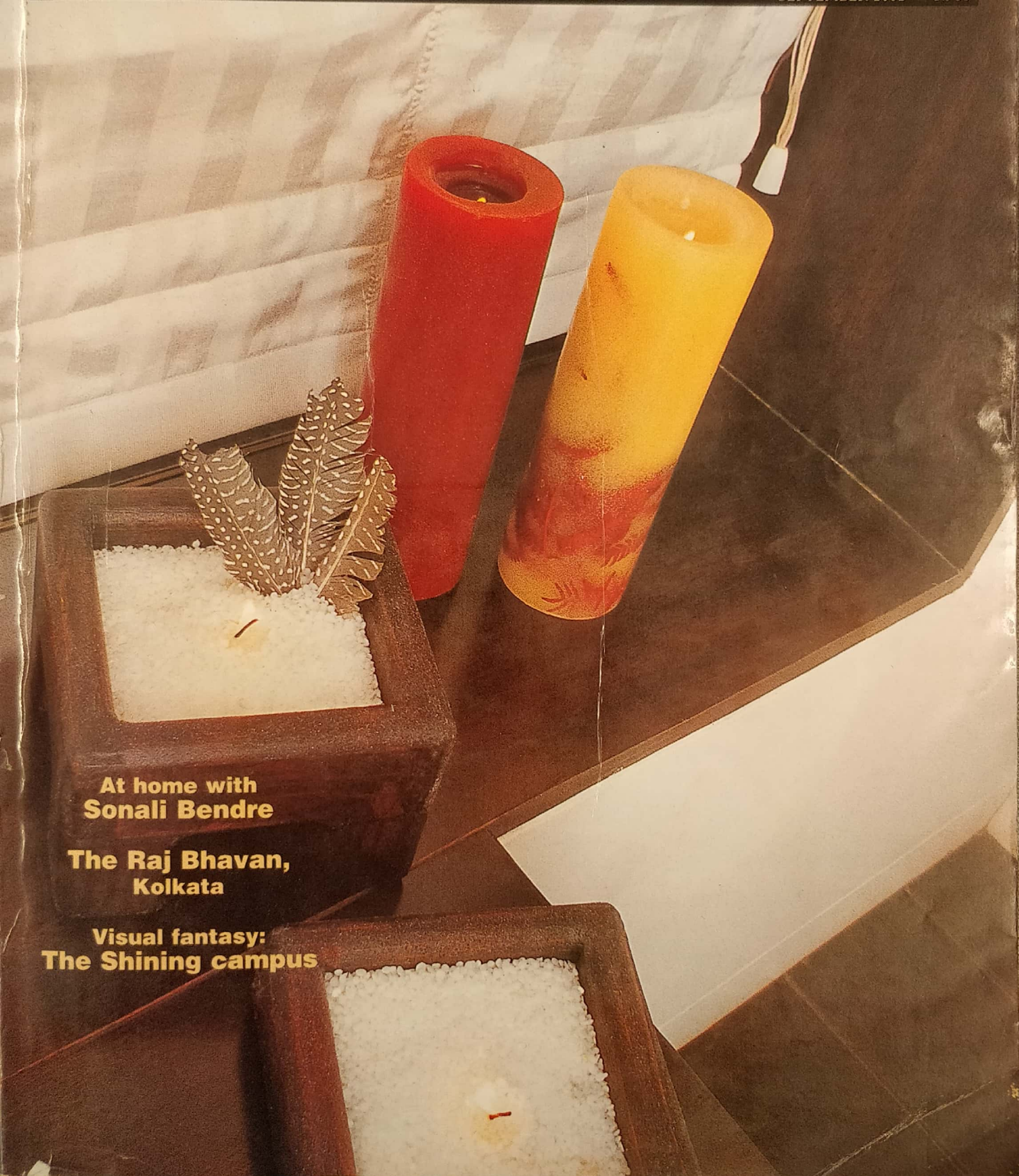


INSIDE OUTSIDE

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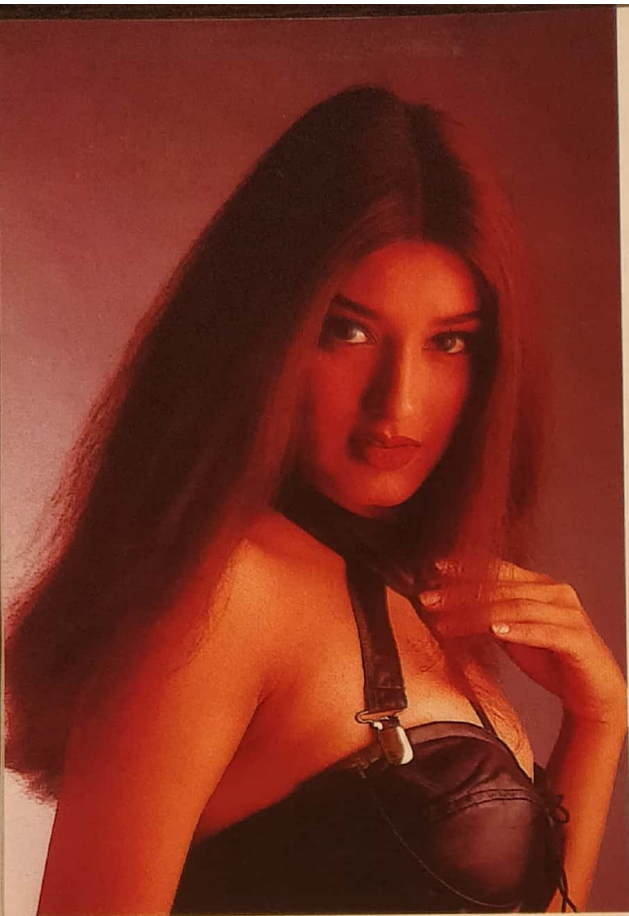
SEPTEMBER 2002 Rs 35



**At home with
Sonali Bendre**

**The Raj Bhavan,
Kolkata**

**Visual fantasy:
The Shining campus**



AT
**HOME WITH
SONALI BENDRE**

Bollywood glamour queen Sonali Bendre knows that she can get away from the razzmatazz of the film world — to head straight for the zen-like home created for her by architects Vishakha Dholakia and Muninder Chowdhry.

When film actress Sonali Bendre handed over the designing of her flat in Mumbai to Muninder Chowdhry and Vishakha Dholakia, friends warned her, 'They are youngsters and they will learn at your expense.' But Sonali had liked the way the two architects had designed a photographer's studio without any unnecessary frills, and she was undeterred.

'I had met quite a few architects before I saw Muninder and Vishakha's work but none of them seemed to understand that I didn't want a pretentious home. Only these two gave me a design that didn't need "propping up".'

Says Muninder, 'Sonali's brief to us was, "I don't want any clutter. I want to come home and feel calm and peaceful".' The architects gave her exactly what she wanted. A zen-like tranquillity does indeed envelop you as you step into the Bendre home.

You enter to see a wall at the left of the front door, curving gently towards a three-layered glass baffle, breaking the monotony of the angular walls. The infinity-edge glass baffle comprises two sheets of clear glass with a sand-blasted sheet in between, which gives it an opaque effect. This combination of solidity and transparency looks extremely attractive, while functionally it serves to keep the main living area out of sight of casual visitors and delivery men. The silhouette of a bamboo plant behind the baffle imparts a delicate oriental touch, while a low hanging lamp, a small table and a chair make this a very attractive corner.

Behind the baffle extends the living room. Clean, clear-cut lines, cool marble floors, soothing off-white upholstery and soft ambience lighting contribute to making

TEXT :
ALPANA CHOWDHURY
PHOTOGRAPHS:
JAGDISH MAALI

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Inspired by Japanese architect, Tadao Ando, who has renounced colour, Muninder and Vishakha have used shades of white in the living room, with oils by masters making dramatic statements on the walls.

The chief design feature here is an infinity-edge glass baffle that screens the main living space from the lobby area. As you enter the flat, the wall on the left curves towards this baffle, and in the corner of the lobby an aesthetically functional space has been created for casual visitors and delivery men.

Bamboo, flowers and pebbles lend a delicate, artistic touch to a room that was consciously designed to be free of clutter.

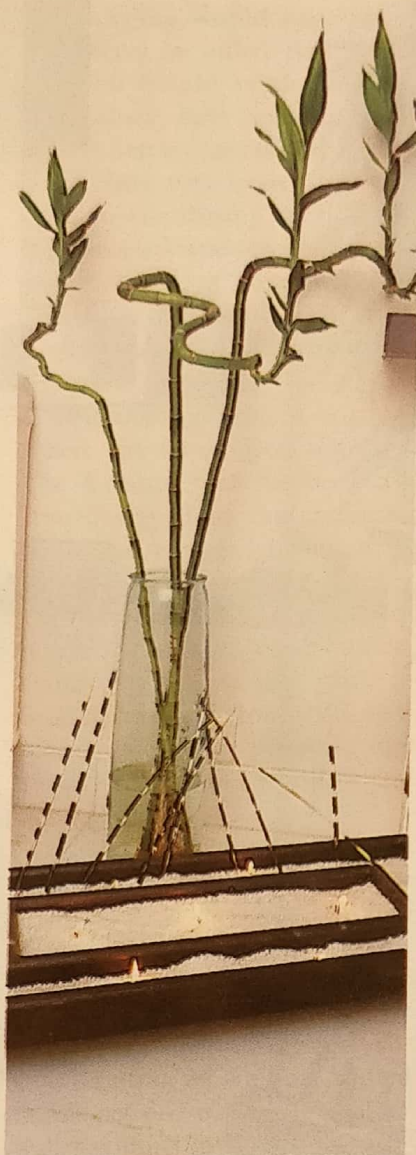
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the living room an almost spiritually elevating place.

One end of the room has a 'riverbed' of white pebbles, which serves as a transition plane between the living and dining areas. Lit candles in this 'riverbed' enhance the feeling of calm and peace. Though no principle of feng shui has been followed, the overall atmosphere is conducive to relaxing and positive thinking.

Switchboards and wiring are neatly hidden behind painted plywood panels that blend into the walls, while accessories picked up by Sonali from all over the world add interesting touches to different parts of the room. Porcupine quills, freckled feathers, aromatic candles reflect her eclectic taste. Vast expanses of the walls were kept deliberately bare by the architects to form the backdrop for two large oils by Lakshman Shrestha and Yusuf Arakkal.

The overhead wires run behind a partial false ceiling. By creating a partial false ceiling, the architects have retained the height of the room, and thus avoided the cramped, oppressive feeling a full





The bar is housed in an inverted L-shaped wall unit in the living room. Typical of everything else in this house, it is not an ostentatious piece of furniture, nor does it show off the hand-picked glasses inside. When the bar is opened, the cantilevered shelves on either side become service counters without disturbing the visual harmony of the walls. When the candles in the pebbles are lit, the effect is magical.

false ceiling would have given. The areas on either side, where the full height of the room is maintained, have horizontal teak panels that accentuate the height.

Guiding you from the living area to the dining section is a right-angled wooden shelf on the common wall of these two areas. The shelf serves to cut the starkness of the wall while making the transition smoother.

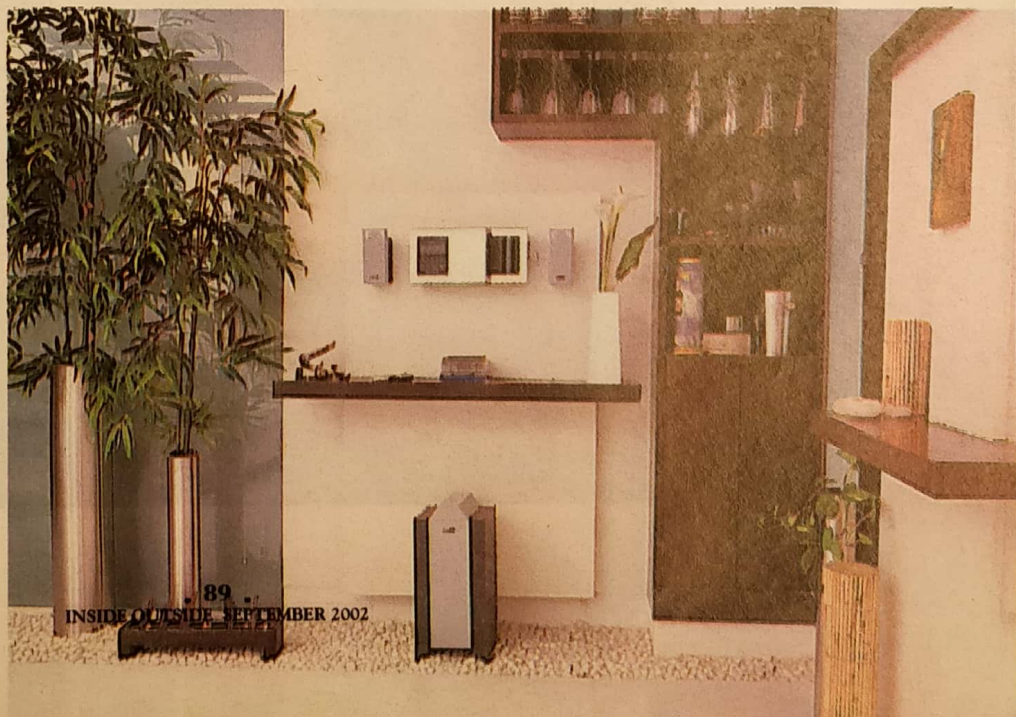
The dining area is a place where the family gets together. The furniture here has been custom-designed by the architects from old, recycled Burma teak. Sonali's concern for protecting the environment is apparent when she says, 'I can't understand why people take pride in making furniture from solid, new wood. Wherever possible one should recycle old wood or use ply and veneer.'

A floating false ceiling above the dining table serves to subdue the lighting as the architects didn't want 'in-your-face' lighting. Should more light be required two spotlights can be switched on. A brilliant aquamarine painting by Fatima Ahmed dominates one wall while another wall has units for crockery. Two

of the units have sand-blasted glass surfaces, while the third one has a 'floating' surface, which can be lifted up to facilitate cleaning. 'The glass and the floating surface were put in to avoid the solid, claustrophobic look that an all-wood unit would have given.' The dining table, too, therefore has a bevelled glass top.

An important guiding principle for the design has been easy maintenance, because Sonali was very clear about this requirement from the start. 'We are a middle-class family and my parents like their independence. I didn't want a house that would require a large staff to look after it. My parents need their space so we wanted a home that could be maintained with minimum domestic help,' explains Sonali.

The kitchen was, therefore, planned to suit her mother's style of functioning as this is her domain. With a 'work triangle' that enables three people to work simultaneously without stepping on one another's toes, and space for all the required gadgets, the





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kitchen has an easy-to-clean terra-cotta tiled floor and handmade lacquered tiles on the wall behind the work counter. Basic, practical needs were borne in mind when planning this important room.

Next to the kitchen is a powder room for guests and a toilet for the domestic staff. Small, colourful Bisazza tiles on the wall impart a soft, feminine look to the powder room, with exquisite candle-holders that look like soap bubbles accentuating this effect. The translucent onyx wash counter is lit from below, highlighting the unusual 'salad-bowl' washbasin. This room is a good example of how even a tiny space can be both pretty and functional.

The very private section of this house, designed for the star herself, reflects her interests and her temperament. Since Sonali wanted free-flowing spaces, the architects combined two rooms, a passage and a bathroom, to make one large, spacious room. Sonali's bathroom and bedroom are not segregated from one another. Rather, walls were taken down to merge the two.

However, the beam that lay exposed as a result, looked odd and out of place. So the architects introduced a baffle to create symmetry. The baffle also serves the purpose of keeping the WC and washbasin out of sight of the sleeping area. Light filters through a narrow vertical slit, relieving the monotony that an all-solid look would have given. Further symmetry was achieved by building a partial wall behind the bed. The bed thus has a



OPPOSITE: The architects used recycled Burma teak to make the dining room furniture. The dark furniture is offset by a brilliant aquamarine oil by Fatima Ahmed. A floating false ceiling allows for diffused light, but when bright lights are required, two spotlights have been provided.

ABOVE: Hanging lights, greenery, and a floating candle make for a pretty composition.

BELOW: Detail of the baffle wall that screens the lobby area from the main living space.





Sonali's personal domain is a free-flowing space where a baffle and a partial wall serve to define functional zones, while contributing to symmetry and harmony.

The wide windows add to the openness and spacious feel of the room. The windows have Jaisalmer stone ledges and custom-made chiks, attractively colour-coordinated with the predominant hues in the room.

The wall unit in white cedar was designed around the large TV set. A terracotta inset in the unit offsets the large expanse of the black of the TV.

Manas Kamal Biswas' paintings add an artistic touch to the architectural intervention.



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definitive place of its own and is visually separated from the wardrobes that lie beyond.

So, though Sonali's room is one large free-flowing area, different functional zones have been demarcated without enclosing them within walls. Explaining these architectural changes, Muninder points out, 'Membranes that define the activities within the master space remain incompletely stated within two-dimensional planes, affording the luxury of visual continuity along with physical separation.'

The colours in the bedroom are warm. Ochre Jaisalmer stone window-ledges, white cedar furniture, Pergo flooring, form the backdrop to paintings by Manas Kamal Biswas and Souza, lending the room a feel that is just what the actress wanted. An avid reader, it is here that she curls up with a book or has friends joining her for a film.

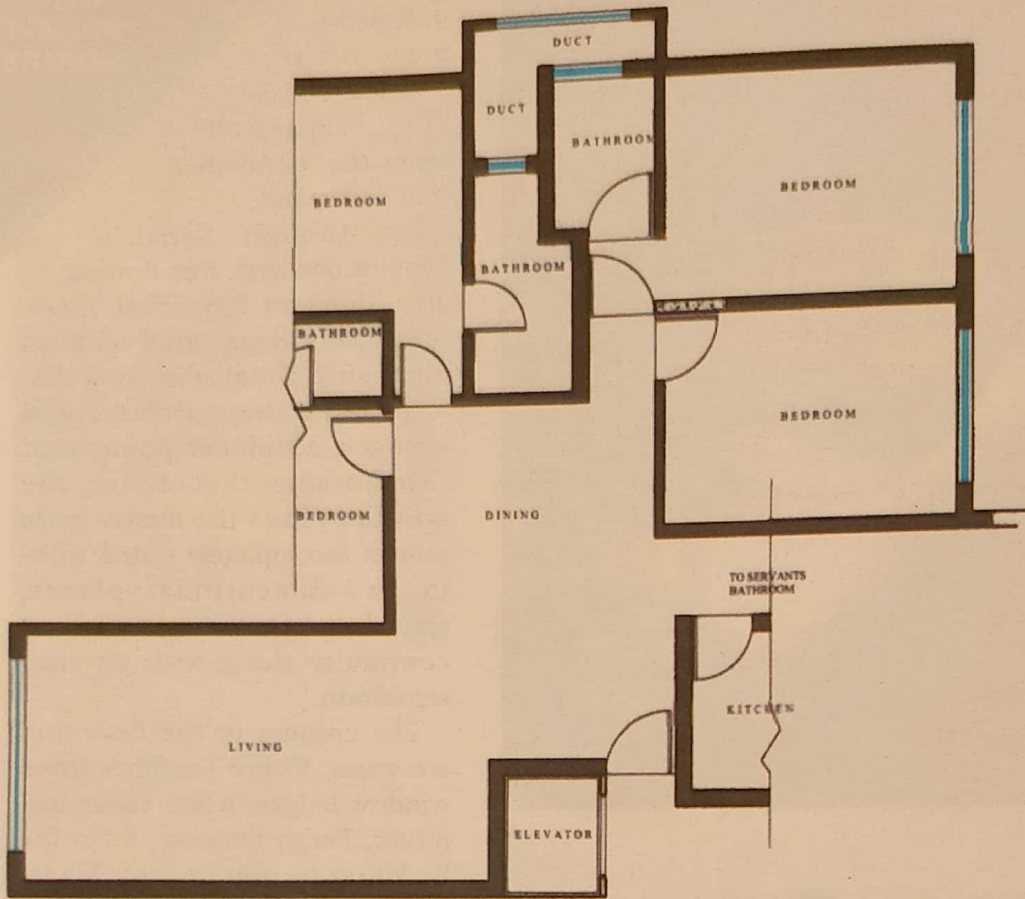
The warm colours continue in the bathing section. Apple-red tiles on one wall, ochre flooring, and scarlet bath mats make this a very cheerful place. Not surprisingly, Sonali enjoys spending time here, sometimes even reading as she soaks in the warm comfort of her jacuzzi. A reading light has, therefore, been strategically positioned near the tub. When not reading, she can simply gaze out at the street below, as there is a large one-way glass window at the foot of the tub that affords her an overview of the cityscape.

Since Sonali does her make-up here, the mirror above the wash-basin is appropriately lit. No star



The powder room for guests is soft and feminine, with small colorful Bisazza tiles, a translucent onyx counter lit from below, framed paintings and candle-holders that look like fragile soap bubbles.



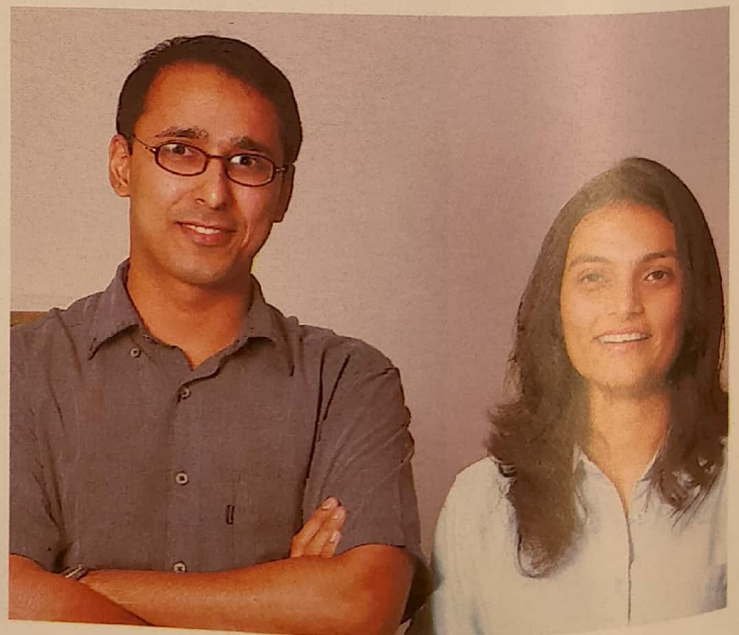


PLAN - before

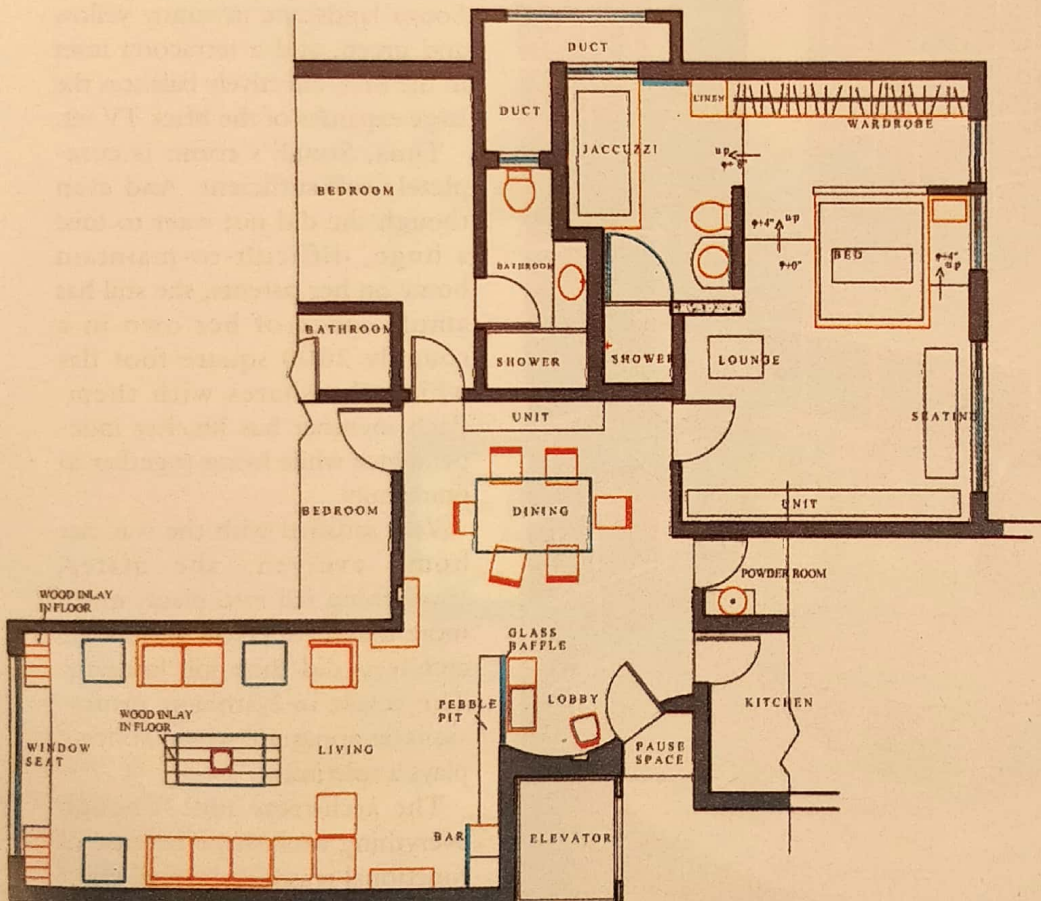
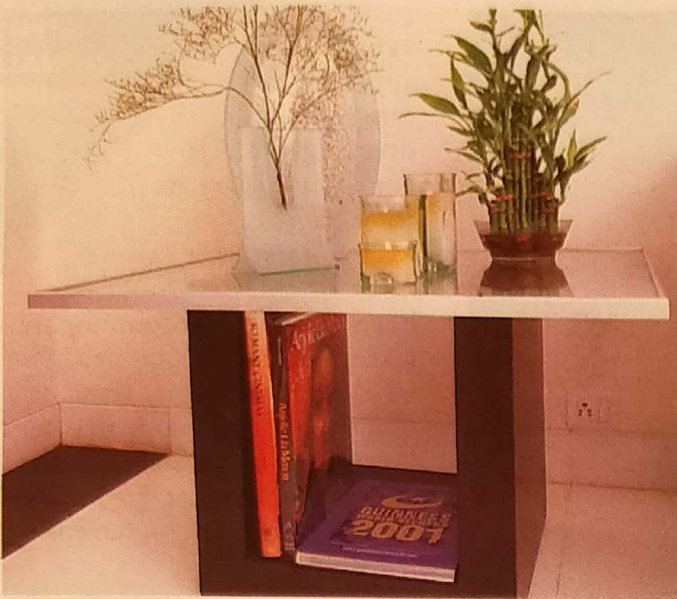
CLIENT - Sonali Bendre
 BRIEF - Apartment House
 DRAWING - Plan
 PROJ. CODE - vd/ss/04
 DWG. CODE - pr/pl/01
 DATE - 05/07/02

muninder singh chowdhry
vishakha dholakia

interior design, architecture



Architects Muninder Chowdhry and Vishakha Dholakia



PLAN - after

CLIENT - Sonali Bendre
BRIEF - Apartment House
DRAWING - Plan
PROJ. CODE - vd/ss/04
DWG. CODE - prpl/02
DATE - 05/07/02

muninder singh chowdhry
vishakha dholakia

interior design, architecture

vanity is apparent in this home, as a dressing table is conspicuous by its absence.

The Jaisalmer stone floor of the bathroom has been raised to accommodate water pipes under it. The wardrobes, therefore, stand at a slightly lower level. A step further down is the sleeping area. Subtle touches that further distinguish different functions of this room.

The wall unit opposite the wardrobe was designed around the extra-large television set. A Souza landscape in sunny yellow and green, and a terracotta inset in the unit, effectively balances the large expanses of the black TV set.

Thus, Sonali's room is completely self-sufficient. And even though she did not want to foist a huge, difficult-to-maintain home on her parents, she still has ample space of her own in a roughly 2000 square foot flat which she shares with them. Each member has his/her independence while living together as one family.

Very satisfied with the way her home evolved, she states, 'Everything fell into place, much more than I expected. I think the architects did their job honestly. The result in both our professions is apparent when honesty plays a role in it.'

The architects add, 'Though everything took shape because of functional reasons, the final effect is one of understated class.'

And that's how the Bendre home was conceived... honestly, aesthetically, minus the glitter and shine that is almost mandatory in many a star home. **O**

