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Shilpa Shetty Kundra

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THE AGE ADVANTAGE

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THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

Sunita Kohli and
Kohelika Kohli

It wouldn't be wrong to call the Kohlis the first family of architecture and interior design in India. The mother-daughter duo co-founded K2India, which not only designs residences, offices, gyms, hotels, boats and aircraft, but has also restored public buildings like the Rashtrapati Bhawan, the Prime Minister's Office and his official residence. While Padma Shri-awardee Sunita is a self-taught designer, Kohelika is an architect from the Pratt Institute of Design in New York.

One may assume that Sunita's standing in the industry may have influenced Kohelika's choice of career, but that doesn't seem to have been the case. "My mother always allowed me to be my own person and this is a profession I chose," says Kohelika. If anything, Sunita says, it was an "oblique influence" imparted through shared experiences. "I believe in the virtue of travel. It's a great way to see and experience great monuments and archaeological sites, and an essential part of building a visual vocabulary. I took Kohelika on her first visit to Hampi, Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal when she was

12. Many years later, after her graduation ceremony at the Pratt Institute, she told me she had decided to become an architect when she first beheld the architectural remains of the medieval city of Vijayanagara at Hampi."

As deeply attached as they are to each other, at work, their relationship is strictly professional and that of equals. "I do not think I have ever consciously tried to be her mentor," says the 70-year-old. "We are a generation removed, so there are differences in approach, particularly in the technologies that are applied, but our core approach to work is similar." Kohelika, 37, agrees. "Our

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work relationship is of two design individuals. Our ideas, concepts and design vocabularies constantly influence each other."

While their relationship may not fit into the mentor-protégé mould, there is no doubt that Kohelika has an abiding respect for her mother's achievements. "A decade ago, my mother



was the first Indian architect or designer to be invited to give a talk at the National Building Museum in Washington DC, the most visited architectural museum in the world. Her topic was 'Sir Edwin Lutyens and the Planning of New Delhi' as she had restored his principal buildings in the city," says Kohelika.

"A month before this talk, she was asked to organise, along with her colleague Romi Chopra, the inauguration of the Rajiv Gandhi Memorial in Sriperambudur by then president Dr APJ Kalam. She didn't think it was possible to leave immediately after to deliver the talk. I persuaded her to not cancel as the talk was a singular honour. I was then in New York and drove down to DC to listen to my mother and she was flawless. I wrote to her, 'I do not know how, but every time, you outdo yourself!'"