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**STILL WATERS**  
The swimming pool at Aishbag has deep blue ceramic tiles. Beyond the rock wall made from local stone is the lake and the surrounding Aravalli forest.

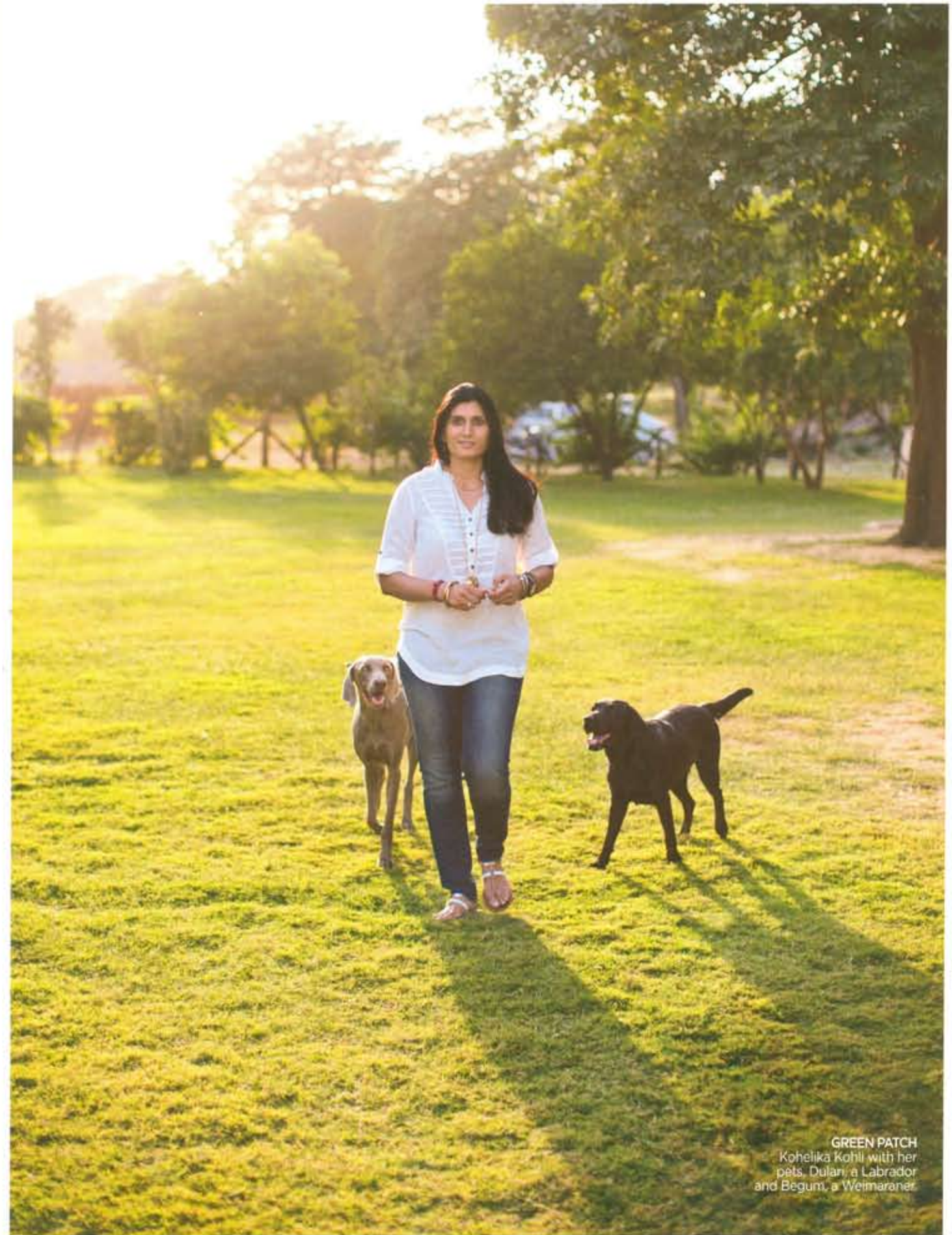
# HOME STRETCH

*A one-and-a-half-hour's drive from Delhi, Aishbag is a weekend home where architect Kobelika Kobl's family retreats from time to time, to connect as well as disconnect*

WRITER KOMAL SHARMA · PHOTOGRAPHER TOM PARKER  
PRODUCTION PRAGNYA RAO



**UNDER THE ROOF**  
The exterior of the cottage features multiple verandahs and roofs covered with clay tiles from Morvi, Gujarat.



**GREEN PATCH**  
Kohelika Kohli with her pets, Dulari, a Labrador and Begum, a Weimaraner.



**STEP UP**

The slab of the dining table from Borneo is made from the trunk of a teak wood tree. The mild steel bar cabinet has silver gilded art deco legs. A lava rock sculpture is on the lowest level of the bookcase. One of the twin staircases-made of industrial metal girders with teak treads-leads up to the two first-floor bedrooms at either end of the cottage.



**THE ART OF RELAXING**  
 The study-cum-TV lounge has a deep L-shaped sofa. The teak wood coffee table is on a powder-coated mild steel frame. The photographs of the Milan cathedral are by Kohli's brother Suryaveer. The bronze head is a work by Delhi-based architect Gautam Bhatia. The painting is by Amrut Patel.



**GREY AREA**  
 The leather chaise longue in the living-cum-dining room is in front of a bay window overlooking the lawn. Sections of massive old teak trunks from Borneo have been used as the base for a glass-topped coffee table placed in front of the 'Shell' chair by Hans J Wegner. On the extreme left is the 'Python' desk chair from Suryaveer Kohli Home. The flooring is Granatilo marble.

It's that point of intersection where all paths meet, where you leave the city behind and embrace solitude. Outside Delhi, Aishbagh is a weekend home, a four-bedroom cottage, beige on the outside with a sloping slate-tiled roof. The private oasis of architect Kohelika Kohli and her family, it blends modestly with the brown undulating landscape of the Aravallis, the oldest mountain range in India. This patch, however, is pleasantly green, fed by the waters of the Damdama Lake—a perfect spot to create a personal paradise.

### BALANCING ACT

There is a poetic symmetry to the house that is evident as you step in. An expansive living-cum-dining area in the foreground and a set of four bedrooms in the background are all tied together with a floating staircase. I followed Kohli on a tour of the home—up one part of the staircase, into the parents' bedroom with its incredible series of Kalighat paintings, into the children's room connected through a passage, down via the other part of the staircase and back to the ground floor. At no point did we retrace our steps. It all ties up lyrically in a loop.

Aishbagh is one large space, interconnected very playfully to allow for togetherness, yet with separate nooks for some private time. "We all pop in at different times, my parents, my brother, my niece and nephew, other family and friends. We're the kind of family where everyone does their own thing, but we like to sit on top of each other," Kohli laughs. The study has a TV and movie library, plus a table and chair "if anyone wants to do homework". The living area, flush with natural light, has the receding waters of the Damdama for a view. As we chatted, Kohli perched on top of a round rattan lounge, her five dogs trying to find their way onto her lap. An understated warmth and comfort about her seeps very organically into this space. "I never design in a way that this can't be touched or that can't be touched. That's the difference between a house and a home," she shrugs, adding that while she was driving here, plans were made with friends and now she has

eight guests coming over. "I just said 'get two extra pillows, and the *gaddas* (mattresses) will be pulled out'," she says nonchalantly.

### TRAVEL DIARY

Born and brought up in Delhi, Kohli studied architecture at New York's Pratt Institute of Design, and worked through college with Oliver Cope Architects. Then she spent some time in London working with Sir Norman Foster. A few years in Rome and Italy, and then she came back to India eight years ago to set up her own architecture firm. "Two things are key to being a good architect or designer—good education and travel. Every travel experience adds to your visual vocabulary. My time in New York helped me understand how to work in small spaces. In Italy, I came across Carlo Scarpa's work which deeply influenced me. Travelling inspires you. Sometimes it's not so immediate. It comes to you later. I visited the Florence cathedral a few months ago and recently designed a furniture piece inspired by the organ pipes I saw there," she says.

Some influences go back to childhood. Kohli remembers being fascinated by the ancient city of Vijayanagar (in Karnataka), which she saw with her mother. "It was overwhelming to see how great architecture can live through lifetimes," she recalls.

This passion for life and travel is obvious in the home. The furniture is a mix of things her mother, interior designer Sunita Kohli, and she have picked up from all over the world. The carpets and dhurries were bought from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. The deep-red woollen carpet in the living area is a gift from a friend in Morocco. There are pieces from an antique shop in Mussoorie, where Kohli's grandparents have a summer home. A thread common to all the lifelong collectibles put together in this home is their earthy, natural texture—the raw, solid wood dining table from Borneo, the stone installations inside and out, or the old south Indian columns erected outside, combined with steel girders to create a porch. There is no unnecessary painting and polishing. Everything is used in its original form. The staircase, made of Burma teak planks held together by untreated steel girders, is my favourite feature.

### HOUSE FULL

In-between this sensory mix of organic textures, Aishbagh is dotted with iconic furniture pieces, classic and contemporary. And they range from the best of Danish design—the 'Swan' chairs—to clever IKEA pieces, like the coiled lamp sitting in the study, which Kohli decided, looks better without the shade. Adding to the fabric of the space are her art-collector brother Suryaveer's contributions. And then there are her own designs—an ingenious mirrored cabinet that defies the rule that 'cabinets block space'. There is personal memorabilia strewn all over. Shelves are lined with cookbooks, art history books, classics and Kohli's horse-riding trophies. The staircase landing is a place of pause with its collection of family photographs in an elegant white-on-white frames.

Kohli's favourite nook, however, is the study, with a couch perfect for lazy Sunday siestas. "You can read a book, watch a movie or just sleep. Sometimes when everyone is over and the house is buzzing with activity, I sit here and look at the pool outside. My parents put on some jazz and dance, and the kids jump into the pool; two of the dogs love water as well," she says. Which brings us back to the paradox that Aishbagh accommodates. It's a tranquil spot away from the city, away from network coverage, yet it allows for elaborate family lunches and sleepovers. Interestingly, in an unrelated part of the conversation, Kohli mentions the same emotion about herself. She pauses to find the words to explain: "I'm a private person, but with a big heart. In some ways everything is personal, and in some ways nothing is personal." ♦

(Clockwise from this picture)

### WALL ART

Kohli's ground-floor bedroom has an oil painting by Irene Vesne above the headboard; on one side are monochromatic watercolours by Akbar Padamsee and Ramachandran. The first-floor master bedroom overlooks Damdama Lake; the walls have a collection of Kalighat paintings by artist Kalam Patua; an old Kurdish kilim is placed at the foot of the bed. The 'Pebble' mirror in the master bath is a Kohelika Kohli design.

(Opposite page)

### FAMILY ALBUM

The staircase landing features photographs of family and friends, and equestrian medals won by Kohli in her teens.

