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DESIGN FAIR



**AD EXCLUSIVE!**

**INTERNATIONAL  
AMBASSADORS**

REVEAL THEIR OFFICIAL  
RESIDENCES IN INDIA

**AUTHOR WILLIAM  
DALRYMPLE**

AT HIS DELHI FARMHOUSE

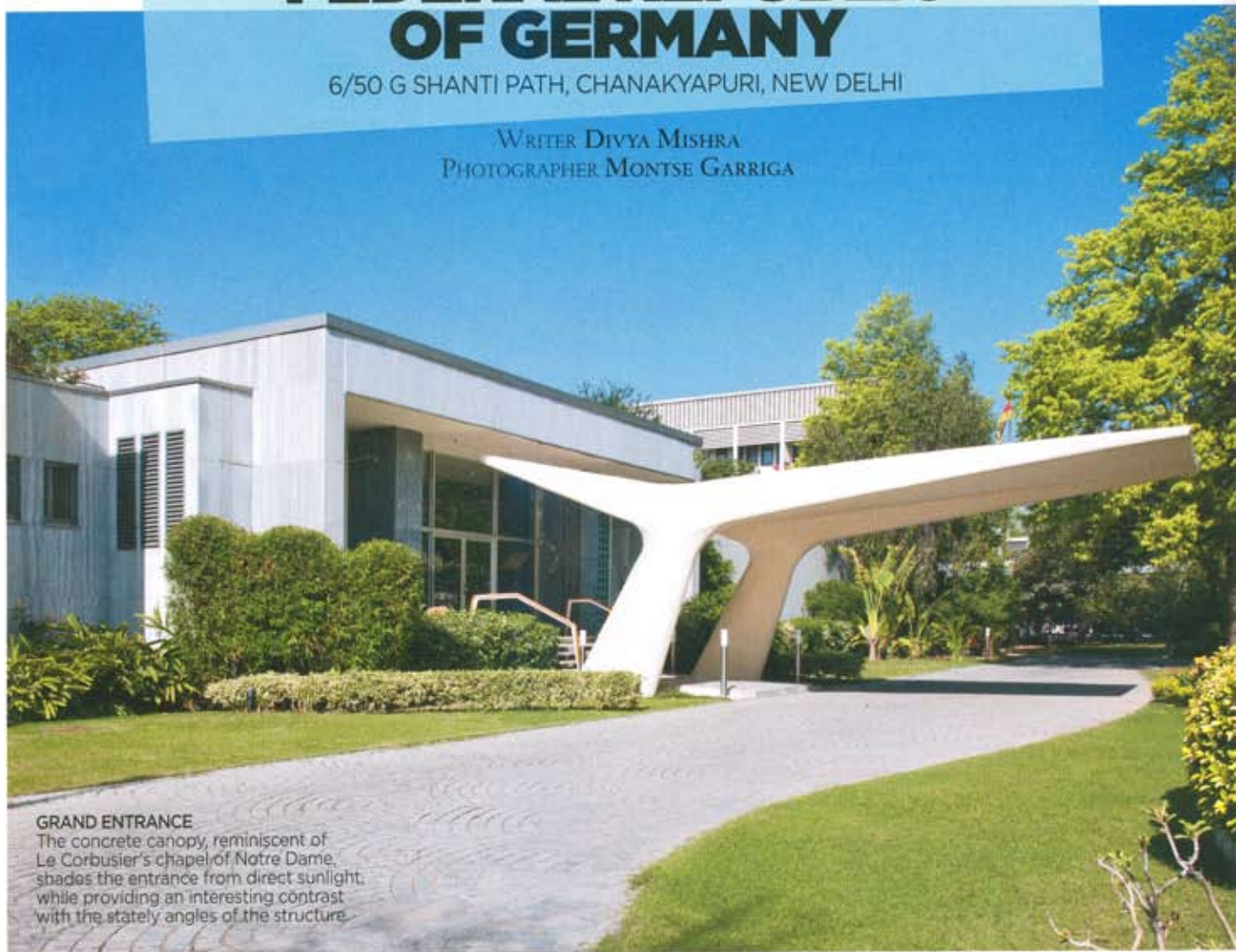
# THE DIPLOMATIC ENCLAVE

*It was an international mission that required skilful persuasion and diligent pursuit, but it resulted in a masterful coup that was a study in the art of diplomacy: getting a quartet of European ambassadors to open their fiercely guarded official residences in New Delhi for an AD Exclusive. These homes showcase their ability to work within strict frameworks and create beautiful homes that culturally connect India and their respective countries*

## AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE **FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY**

6/50 G SHANTI PATH, CHANAKYAPURI, NEW DELHI

WRITER DIVYA MISHRA  
PHOTOGRAPHER MONTSE GARRIGA



### GRAND ENTRANCE

The concrete canopy, reminiscent of Le Corbusier's chapel of Notre Dame, shades the entrance from direct sunlight, while providing an interesting contrast with the stately angles of the structure.



**ART APPRECIATION**

Ambassador Michael Steiner with his wife Eliese in the inner sitting room of their residence. The artwork on the wall behind them by Delhi-based artists Jiten Thukral and Samir Tagra was designed as a painting within a painting. By an odd coincidence, the Braun radio shown in the painting was the exact model owned by the Ambassador in his younger days.



#### POP ART

These installations by Thukral and Tagra were part of an exhibition titled 'Longing for Tomorrow'.

*(Opposite page)*

#### PORCELAIN BEAUTY

The porcelain sculptures, called 'Dream Machines', and wall decals, both by Thukral and Tagra, feature stylized devices like radios and toasters that portray the desires of the Indian middle class. The jaali-like wall of glass cubes is a nod to local architectural traditions, and also functions as a sun-shading device.



## RIGHT ANGLES

The understated beige walls of the music room highlight the striking false ceiling; the mirrors further accentuate them; the lamps are from Munich, by Occhio; the furniture is by K2 India.



**WARM UP**  
The Ambassador's private living room includes a library and a functional fireplace.



*(Clockwise from this picture)*

**TABLE TALK**

The Ambassador's private dining room. The formal dining room where sit-down dinners are hosted. The entrance hall leading to the the main drawing room.





In 1954, almost a decade after the Second World War, the Federal Building Office in Germany, tasked with constructing Germany's first foreign embassy after the war, announced an architectural design competition. The jury deemed none of the competitors fit for a first prize, and the architect of the building came to be a Johannes Krahn, who won second place. While the Federal Building Office had apparently had many debates on whether the structure ought to reflect the aesthetics of Germany or the embassy's host country, India, the result, an open, light-filled building, acknowledges and honours both.

The building, completed in 1959, was constructed in the modern style. "I think it is interesting that the style, which was seen for many years as completely outdated, comes back now as something fitting very well to a modern environment. It was very modest, built with materials that were fitting to our state of affairs at that time," says Michael Steiner, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to India, who, together with his wife, is on a mission to obliterate every stereotype associated with Germany and its people.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

As we step through the doors of the ambassadorial residence, a slim young woman appears, wearing an old T-shirt, tights and sneakers, with a dog's lead in her hands. "Oh hello! I was just about to take the dog for a walk, but come in!" she says, cheerfully. As we make our hesitant, startled introductions, she explains, "He's an Indian dog and needs to socialize, otherwise he gets cranky." Her sentences are peppered with softly pronounced Hindi words (*achcha, haan, theek hai*) and we are instantly charmed. This, we discover, is Frau Eliese Steiner, the wife of the German Ambassador.

Effervescent, warm and down to earth, she loves Ghalib, travelling in autos, and Delhi's Nizamuddin area. Soft spoken and measured in speech, he has a serious manner tempered with a puckish streak. This is a couple you'd expect to meet at a laid-back cultural soirée, rather than in the diplomatic corridors of Delhi.

"What we want to do with this building is to show modern Germany. In a sense, it's a manifesto against stereotypes," says Ambassador Steiner. With clean lines, a sense of stability and interesting accents, the structure does just that. Shading the entrance is a graceful concrete canopy, which, when seen from the inside, frames the front lawn perfectly. The angular false ceilings inside play with the light from the full-length windows, making it almost necessary that the furnishings be understated. Eliese says, "To me, the new Germany, which is Germany after re-unification, is this very open, modern, multicultural country. In a sense, this building reflects that mindset. Everything is open and transparent. There are these large windows and almost all the rooms are on the same level. The reinterpreted jaalis show a sensitivity to the local traditions."

### SUPPORTING ACT

With the help of K2 India—owned by Sunita Kohli and her daughter Kohelika (whose Haryana holiday home was featured in the May-June 2013 issue of *AD*, in the article, 'Home Stretch')—Eliese thoroughly enjoyed the process of designing the interiors. Of the same process though, Ambassador Steiner, says, "In shaping the place, I had many defeats. All the colours you see here are the result of feminine ingenuity. The only thing that is mine is the red on the wall of the inner sitting room." When he tells me how he spotted this shade of red in a shoe shop in Munich, then sent a picture of it to the

architects, I express my surprise, not knowing too many men who would do this. "It was just this once," he says sheepishly.

### MIX AND MATCH

But the Steiners are looking for much more than just a peaceful coexistence of traditions; what they want is an intelligent, enriching dialogue between the two cultures. It is a cause they firmly believe in, as evidenced by the artworks of Delhi-based artists Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra, that occupy pride of place. Inside the foyer, against the background of dark striated marble, their pop-referential wall decals and installations represent, in the words of Eliese, "exactly what is the new India and the new Germany in a very interesting way."

Eliese is an art historian and her enthusiasm for the subject comes across as she explains the history of these particular artworks. "In order to reinvent themselves, a couple of years ago, Meissen—Europe's oldest and best-known porcelain manufacturers—invited Thukral and Tagra for an artists-in-residence programme. So T & T, who had in the past addressed issues of migration, found themselves working in Meissen, in this very tiny German context, travelling with a luggage of *dal*, living on top of a Punjabi restaurant and working together with German artisans. They took, from the archives of Meissen, historical porcelain forms, reassembled and reinterpreted them, and decorated them with their typical vocabulary." The result is striking and, you can tell, valued by the residents. "The first night, after the installation was done, I didn't sleep at all," says Eliese.

Late last year, the German embassy also hosted a cultural evening featuring performances by western classical music icon Zubin Mehta, and Bharatanatyam danseuse Alarmel Valli. "People had tears in their eyes watching the performances," says Ambassador Steiner.

Of their recently formed connection with India, the Ambassador says, "Eliese and I went to Germany last summer. And despite the fact that we are from Germany, and despite the fact that we loved it there, when we landed in Delhi, and came back to the residence, we both said, 'It's good to be back home'." ♦



**AL FRESCO**  
The entrance from the official part of the residence to the sprawling lawns, where the Ambassador hosts gatherings when the weather permits.