

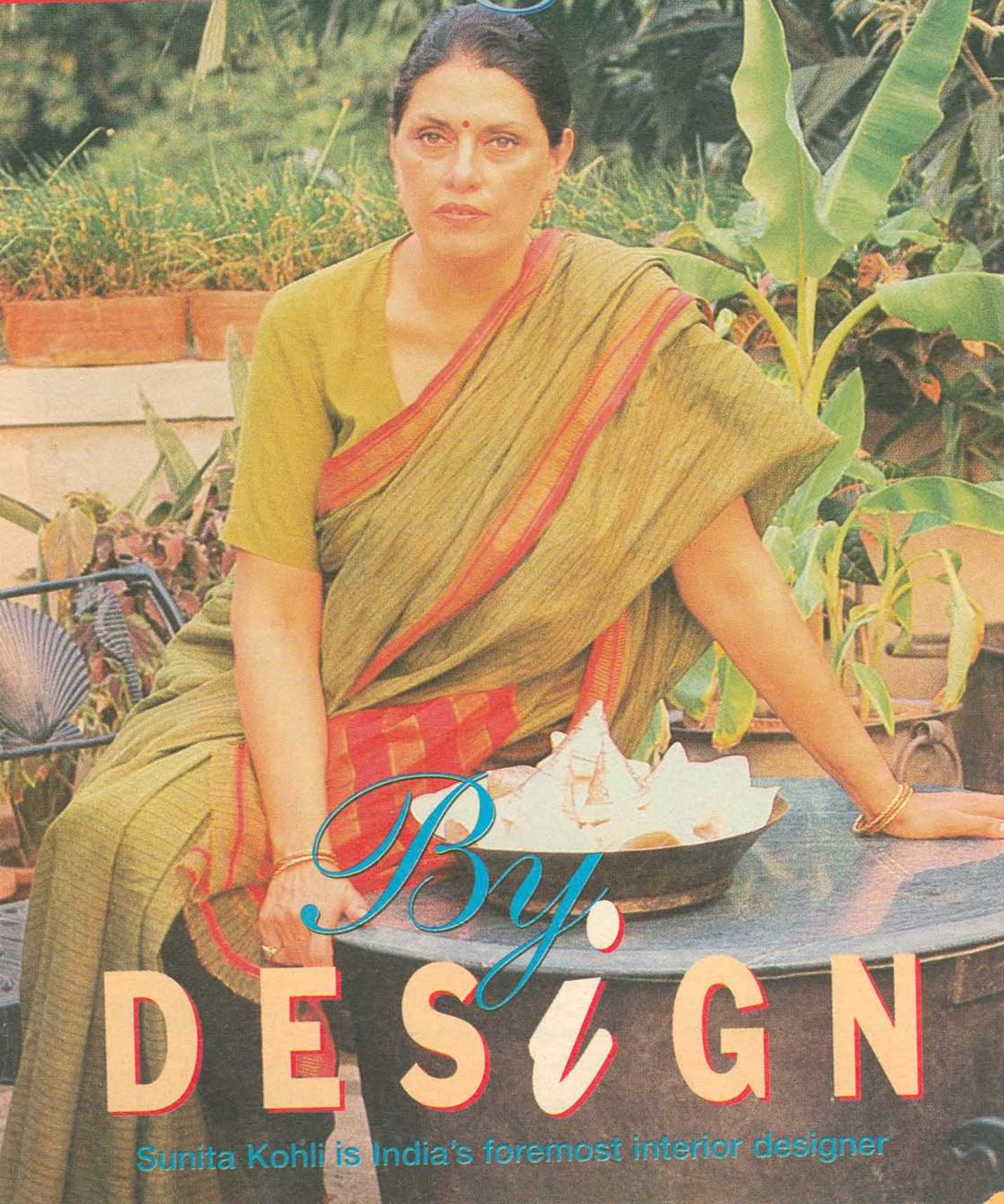
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SECTION

3

magazine



By

DESIGN

Sunita Kohli is India's foremost interior designer

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Sunita Kohli is India's foremost interior designer. **Samita Bhatia** meets the woman who re-designs everything from hotels to Rashtrapati Bhavan

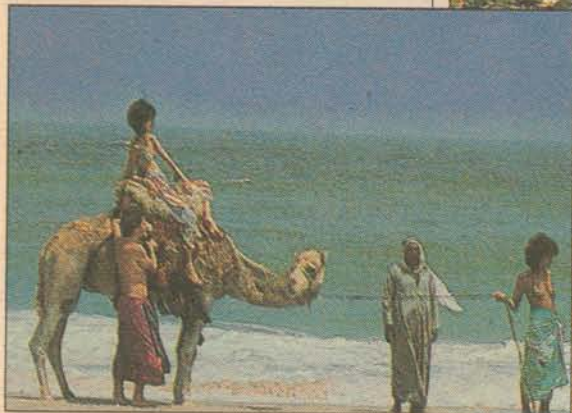
The Gharana at The Oberoi Grand, Calcutta, designed by Sunita Kohli



It had been a long day for Sunita Kohli. The interior designer had returned to her elegant Golf Links residence after hours spent at Delhi's wholesale wood market in January 1992. So, it hadn't seemed important to return the innumerable calls from the ministry of home affairs that had bombarded her residence during her absence, immediately. She recalls, "The next day being Republic Day, I decided to call back the day after."

However, the caller rang again and this time, was rather irate. Preliminaries over, he informed her rather tersely, "The President is desirous of conferring the Padma Shree on you," and then equally briskly, asked, "Do you accept or not?" A surge of disbelief swept over midnight's child Sunita Kohli.

Out for dinner with friends later



Imparting an Islamic and Bedouin touch to Hotel Egoth Oberoi, Egypt, and (right) Sunita Kohli

that evening, speculation veered around the 'Padma List' to be announced the next day. Kohli recalls "keeping absolutely silent," for she, but more so her businessman husband, were convinced that someone had played a cruel joke on her. But a couple of official telegrams the following day established the credibility of these calls.

Kohli had won the coveted Padma Shree, becoming the first designer to be honoured thus. Veering away from the arts, astro-physics and nuclear science, the award had succeeded in putting a stamp of respectability and acceptability to her chosen profession. The field of interior design and restoration had been irreversibly

