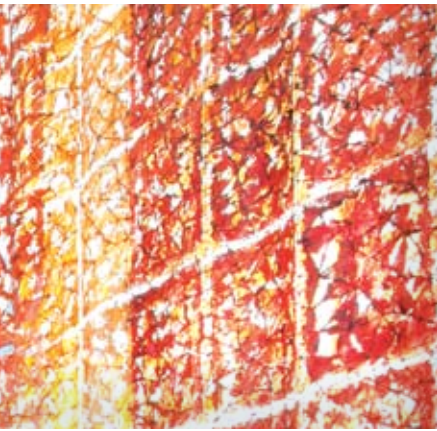


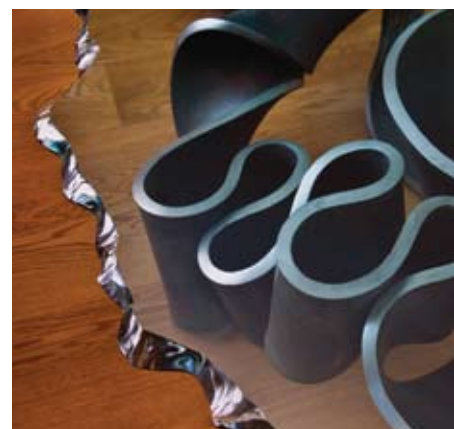


# LOVE FOR HOME

TEXT: **AR APURVA BOSE DUTTA**  
 PHOTOGRAPHS: **TOM SULLAM;**  
 COURTESY **THE ARCHITECT**



International in flavour, Indian at heart, architect Shalini Misra's London home resonates with style.



ARCHITECT **SHALINI MISRA**

“One coherent piece of art in architecture gets created by taking elements of architectural space, lighting, interiors and landscaping. It is like being a photographer and framing views using all these tools.” These are architect Shalini Misra's words as she lovingly describes her home, made proverbially picture-perfect by architectural elements and her love for art. There is something about this renovated 1850 brick-and-wood Victorian family mansion that makes you want to go there, stay and taste its delights, or, like us, enjoy it long-distance.

Leading the competent team at her 16-year-old, London-based architectural firm Shalini Misra Ltd (earlier Spatial Innovations), Shalini planned a change of layout that

The main living room is a statement in art with various pieces sourced from India, dramatically juxtaposed against contemporary furniture.

involved restructuring with steel beams and columns, reusing the 150-year-old (and still going strong!) wood, and adding windows. "Getting a new plot is extremely rare in London... So my husband Rajeev and I, along with our three children, zeroed in on this house with a 150-foot-long back garden and 4-metre-high ceiling. What's more, it had never been refurbished before."

The unassuming double-fronted facade is stuccoed and painted a serene white. Steps lead up to the main entrance lobby (on the ground floor), and down to the lower ground floor and Shalini's office in the basement. The rectangular plan on five levels shows a cautious division of space: a study and formal living on the ground floor; the public zone — dining, kitchen, guest room, gymnasium and family room on the lower ground floor; the bedrooms on the upper two levels, topped by a floor for the staff.

From the ground floor, close to the formal living area, a flight of steps with glass balustrades gracefully lands into a pebbled courtyard on the lower ground floor. Here, the 'canvas' of serene white walls has been made vibrant by different art pieces, especially a Vishnu painting (lending the accent); orange dining chairs; and greenery. "Art has changed the shape of architecture; it is a way to show wealth for some... It transforms a space completely as it is such a powerful medium and involves emotions," says Shalini. It is worth noting here that this home has such a feel-good factor that most of the artists who had been commissioned work preferred to come down and work on site.

Coming back to the lower ground floor, the carefully selected accessories and bespoke furniture speak of discernment and attention to detail — the glass chair swing near the landing, a white sculpture evocative of a jagged rock formation next to the dining table, granite stones (imported from Pondicherry) in the family area and the island kitchen, the bronze and red linen bench in the family room or the overhead dining light (Altar, by American designer Kevin Reilly). The family room which leads to the patio has two sofas named Mater and Pater (mother and father in Latin), hinting at the subtle emotions behind the design concepts.

**(Clockwise, from right)**

The terrace doubles up as an extended living space.

The study features a sliding screen which has autumn leaves from Shalini's garden etched by a French artist from Auroville.

The raised formal living, which shares a wall with the study, has white furniture enhanced by myriad decorative accents.

A view from the ground floor, with a glimpse of the dining area, gives you an idea of the play of levels in this home.

PHOTOGRAPH: VIPUL SANGOI



**CONCEPT:** To deconstruct the existing house, and create an abode to the owner's liking.





The study on the ground floor, while allowing connections with the raised living area, the terrace and garden beyond through glazed walls, maintains its privacy through a autumn-leaf-patterned sliding screen. The formal living (divided into two by the staircase) opens out onto the cosy terrace surrounded by lush landscaping. Spectacular vistas of the garden validate why this is Shalini's favourite part of the house, both to relax and work out of.

Back in the entrance hallway, the staircase leading to the upper levels is topped by a dramatic spiral head, which infuses an element of fun in its otherwise straightforward design. While the first floor houses the master bedroom, the second floor, where a skylight brings light into the hall, has three bedrooms. Another flight of steps originating here leads to the third floor which houses the staff, plant rooms and storage. However, we suspect, a separate external entrance for the staff would have been more functional.

Shalini's exposure to international design (she's worked in New Delhi, New York and London) can be seen in the way she approaches her work. The house, an aesthetic display of materials and art, is awash with light and air, with each space treated uniquely. Throughout, simple elements are elevated via thoughtful design strategies: artwork on glazing is replicated as blinds; vastu-specifications get a respectful nod via a large, red, velvet mirror in the entrance lobby; art pieces are strategically positioned and highlighted by angled down-lights (note the gold teardrop at the entrance that reflects a 360-degree image of two floors), and mundane boundary wall gets a generous dose of pretty landscaping. Besides spelling functionalism, they "give an ageless concept to the home, to make it a stunning, comfortable haven for the young

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER JOHNSTON



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- (Left, above)**  
The lower ground floor in Portuguese limestone tiles was originally a garage and a storehouse of paintings.
- (Left, below)**  
The dining chairs take their colour from the Vishnu painting. The overhead light and the white sculpture are exquisite pieces of art.
- (Top)**  
You can admire the landscaped boundary wall seated in the glass chair swing or on the wooden cover of the radiator that acts as a window seat.
- (Above)**  
The 'burgundy' balustrade of the staircase in the entrance hall is inspired by the photograph of a Florence library on the stairwell.
- (Left)**  
A massive granite stone supports the counter in the kitchen.



PHOTOGRAPH: VIPUL SANGOI

family to grow old in..." which, incidentally, was Shalini's brief to herself. Lutron light controls, centralized servers for music, concealed speakers and a security system provide another layer of high-tech functionality to the home.

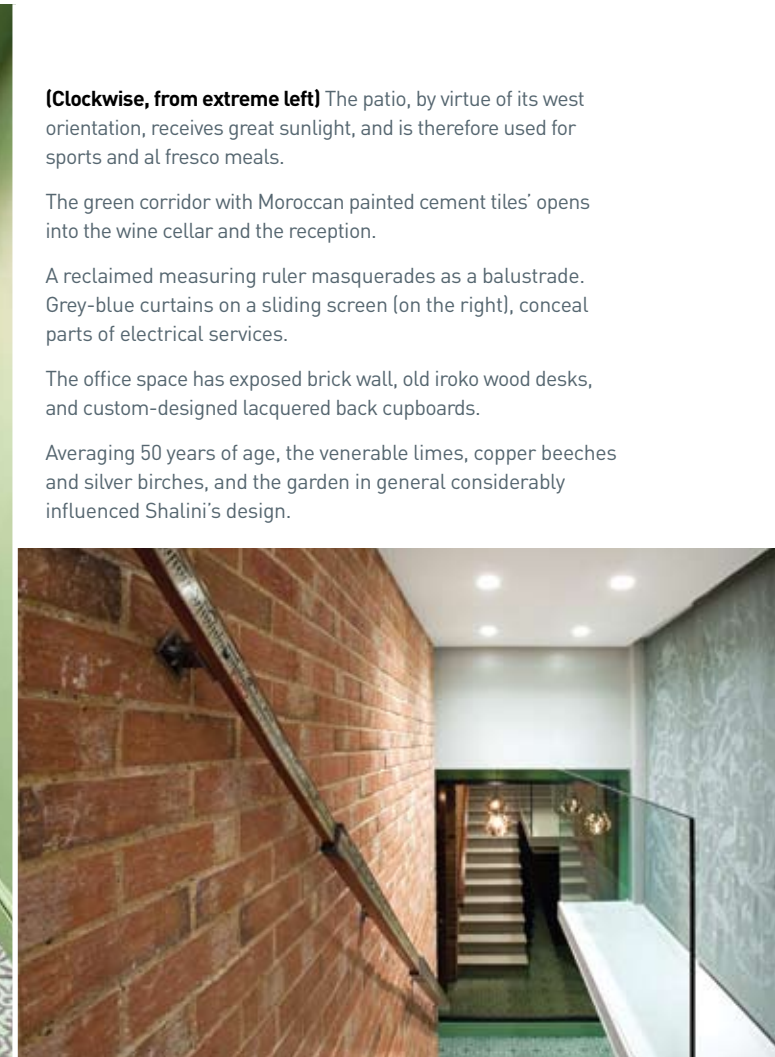
Shalini's office, which is part of this home, yet located outside it, can be accessed via a flight of steps with a reclaimed measuring ruler masquerading as a balustrade. The staircase leads into a 'green' corridor which opens to a reception (come evenings, this also acts as a 'snug room' for her teenage kids), a wine cellar and the rustic-meets-modern-style workspace featuring an exposed brick wall.

Despite the strong presence of 'international' art and products, Shalini's home reverberates with a deep sense of Indian culture — a fusion of contemporary and classical forms. Not only is it an ode to the country of her birth, where she studied and worked, but it also speaks of her love for Indian architecture with its various styles and related proportions.



PHOTOGRAPH: VIPUL SANGOI

**MATERIALS: WALLS:** Mostly painted, silk wallpaper in cloakrooms.  
**FLOORING** Oakwood engineered floorboards, Portuguese limestone tiles, green Moroccan painted cement tiles.



**(Clockwise, from extreme left)** The patio, by virtue of its west orientation, receives great sunlight, and is therefore used for sports and al fresco meals.

The green corridor with Moroccan painted cement tiles' opens into the wine cellar and the reception.

A reclaimed measuring ruler masquerades as a balustrade. Grey-blue curtains on a sliding screen (on the right), conceal parts of electrical services.

The office space has exposed brick wall, old iroko wood desks, and custom-designed lacquered back cupboards.

Averaging 50 years of age, the venerable limes, copper beeches and silver birches, and the garden in general considerably influenced Shalini's design.

Shalini's home is an example of the genre of 'residences' she specializes in. "I love doing residences; they are fun and dynamic, and ever changing. They teach us about new materials, technology and how people live. However, residential projects can be quite time-consuming and difficult. Having said that, I do enjoy a considerable repeat clientele," admits Shalini.

On being asked how it was to play the dual role of architect and client, Shalini responds, "It was a complete nightmare! I was a terrible client and kept changing my mind. I totally concentrated on the design and did not take on any project for six months!" Well Shalini, seeing the impeccably-styled home, the efforts truly show! **BI**

Bengaluru-based architect Apurva Bose Dutta is an architectural journalist. She writes for various national and international architectural and interior publications. She can be contacted at [apurvabose@yahoo.com](mailto:apurvabose@yahoo.com) or reached at [www.apurvabose.com](http://www.apurvabose.com)



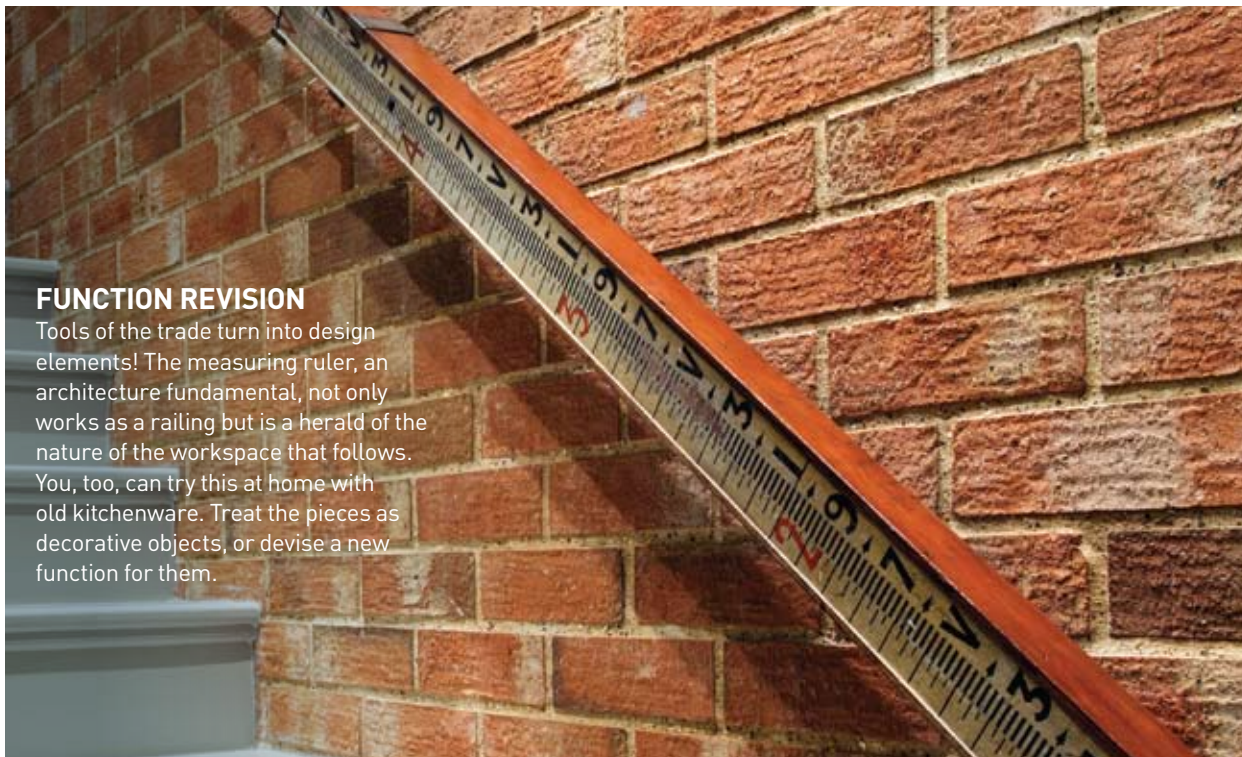
**FACT FILE: LOCATION** North London. **AREA** 6,000 sq ft.  
**ARCHITECT** Shalini Misra. **DATE OF COMPLETION** 2004.  
**DURATION OF PROJECT** 10 months.

## [SMART PICKS]

ARCHITECT SHALINI MISRA'S HOME

**FUNCTION REVISION**

Tools of the trade turn into design elements! The measuring ruler, an architecture fundamental, not only works as a railing but is a herald of the nature of the workspace that follows. You, too, can try this at home with old kitchenware. Treat the pieces as decorative objects, or devise a new function for them.

**SOLID EFFECT**

A look at how aesthetic pieces have been made to perform as functional pieces can speak volumes about one's creativity. Here, a granite stone, brought all the way from Pondicherry, shoulders the responsibility of a breakfast counter.

**PROP IT RIGHT**

Besides increasing the space visually, the large velvet-bordered mirror serves to 'capture' arty objects. Instead of merely panelling a dead wall with this material, try propping an enormous mirror against the wall for added effect.