

Cross-cultural influences color MTV's South India office in Bangalore, designed by Tania and Sandeep Khosla.  
by Juanita Dugdale

## SpiceTrade

INDIA MAY HAVE GAINED INDEPENDENCE IN 1947, but it still has cause to be vigilant about Western meddling. The interloper this time is American popular culture, which has been embraced so wholeheartedly by Indian youth, thanks to a recent media boom, that seismic shifts in taste and attitude are tangible across society. Fortunately, what seems to be emerging is a high-energy confluence of ideas rather than an overt cultural takeover. Enter MTV, strategically repositioned for the huge young Indian audience. After a slow start with predominantly Western fare, the channel's musical programming now emphasizes Hindi pop and "Indi-pop" that fuses local lyrics with reggae or rap. The top-ten countdown of Hindi movies is also a big feature, since India's "Bollywood," the largest film industry in the world, mass-produces musicals with extravagant song-and-dance numbers. For graphic designer Tania Singh Khosla and architect Sandeep Khosla, designing MTV's South India office in Bangalore was a ripe opportunity for cross-cultural exploration on their home turf. This young husband and wife maintain distinct practices (Khosla Associates and Singh Khosla Design), but often collaborate. Keen observers of global trends, both designers were subjected to a barrage of influences during student years in the States. Tania even devoted her Yale University graduate thesis to hybridization, concluding that cultural mixing has accelerated and can no longer be divided neatly into transmitter versus receiver, colonizer versus colonized, or aggressor versus victim. Both she and



*previous spread* In the reception area, a painted mustache echoes the backrest of a teak settee and camouflages cabinet-door hardware. The receptionist's female face, complete with MTV Dandi, looms over an auto-reclining reception table and storage unit. The designers sliced the nichedown in half and chrome-plated the born, hubcaps, and steering handles.

*above and right* MTV's graphic identity is represented by a giant M cutout that provides a transition between the reception and work areas.

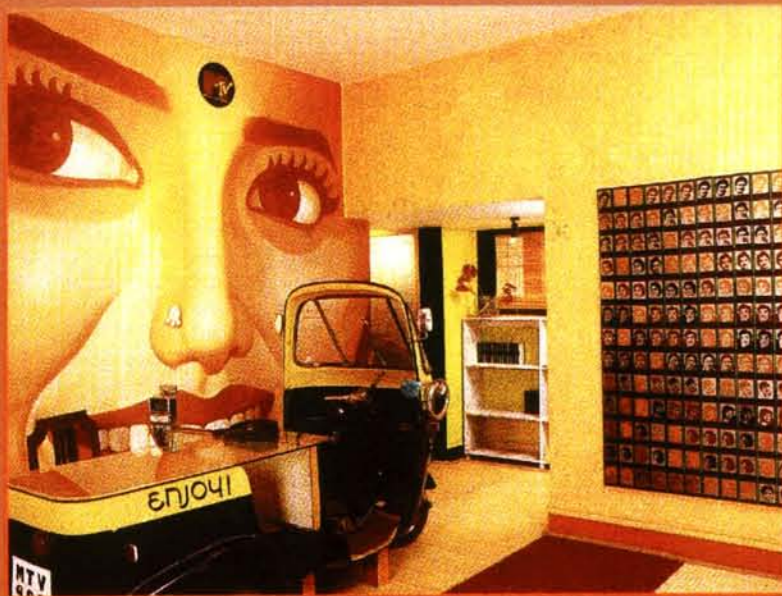


*below* Sections of an antique wooden temple truce, embedded in the conference table's base contrast with the chrome supports and beveled glass top.

Sandeep, who studied at Pratt Institute before establishing his own business, fold context and tradition into a modern design approach.

For the new office space, the two tried to reflect MTV's "repackaging of the everyday and the ordinary that gives back to the masses a new, sometimes humorous or exotic perception of their own culture," says Tania. The pair delivered the diametric opposite of the modern corporate interior. Instead of muting the space to promote serious business, they created a visually busy environment that affectionately pokes fun at regional clichés. Brilliant tropical colors predominate—the designers based their palette on hues from South Indian textiles and vernacular architecture. Ubiquitous video monitors and computer hardware coexist with antiqued patinas, traditional

furnishings, and common objects dressed up for the occasion. Mindful that MTV is identified by its animated and often deconstructed logotype, the designers scattered the space with typographic references. Visitors encounter a giant M cut in a wall, separating the reception from the work areas. Lined with a pattern of MTV logos, the divider wall is painted a traditional Indian Neel blue and has been scraped to suggest an antique, hand-crafted finish. Sandeep selected economical Chhattai floor matting produced in a nearby village. Areas such as the corridor through the M to the work space are highlighted by naturally dyed patches of burnt orange, purple, and pink. The office makes other graphic splashes with the work of Sampath, a commercial poster artist, who painted murals based on Tania's small computer-generated sketches. The reception



left: A commercial poster artist created the vibrant reception-area mural, evoking the movie-star billboards on local streetscapes. A collage of local celebrity portraits screensprinted onto discarded metal Polaroid cases graces the adjacent wall.

**project credits** Client: MTV South India | interior design: Tania Singh Khosla | Sandeep Khosla | mural: Sanjivani | photography: Pallavi Desai



below: With its nocturnal tones and themes based on Indian religious art, the conference room's ambience is comparatively reverent. The painted backdrop was interpreted from a computer-generated sketch.

area features two of his gigantic portraits in shocking pink and orange, interpretations of the movie-star billboards that proliferate on local streetscapes. A mustachioed male face fills the room's corner, camouflaging closet doors and dwarfing a barber's chair, one of many props that serve as furniture. His female companion, displaying an MTV logo bindi on her forehead, looms over an auto-rickshaw transformed into a table and storage cabinet. The chair and vehicle, both fixtures of everyday life in the region, seem joyfully anachronistic here. Sandeep explains that he tries to "integrate indigenous material into architecture that is essentially modern." Hence, computer stations sport teak legs from old babu writing tables, and the conference table features decorative fragments of antique temple friezes in sharp contrast to its severe geometric base,

intersected by chrome supports, and its sleek glass top. In the conference room, a dancing Lord Shiva glows as a negative image against a dramatic blue nocturnal background. The designers conceived this room as a respite from the other spaces, but the figure's animated pose and the fiery-orange ceiling could easily inspire meetings that are lively, if not downright uninhibited. This vivid approach has indeed struck a nerve. After a year in operation, the Bangalore space was deemed such a success by the client that the Khoslas are now completing the Bombay headquarters, about eight times larger. It only goes to prove that now more than ever India wants its MTV. **Q**

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