

'I knew that the key to living large even in a small space is to feel that one has several places to sit, and that one can host a dinner for eight or cocktails for 30. And I made that happen.'



Miniscule Marvel

TEXT: AMITA SARWAL
PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY REDDYMAD E DESIGN

Suchi Reddy's home is an ideal one. Her micro-apartment, all of 375 sq ft, is distinctive because of all that she has incorporated in it.... And it understandably tops her list of preferred projects because it 'Makes me happy every single day and I never tire of it. I always wanted a Zen space, but beyond that, I had no particular inclination,' affirms the New York based architect-designer.



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'The wonderful thing about designing my own home is that I was able to use it as a lab of sorts, to try out materials I would not test on a client or push the limits of hardware, etc.'



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Suchi formed Helming Reddymade Design in 2002, and her portfolio comprises many innovative, cutting-edge residences and projects.

This was earlier a tiny dentist's clinic in a circa 1925 building in Greenwich Village. What endeared Suchi to the space, was 'The light, the high ceilings, and the proximity to the best farmer's market in the city. I love to cook and this was very important to me, to be able to walk over and get my fresh ingredients. But speaking on the pragmatic aspects of the design, it is the site which engenders everything. Once I bought the apartment, I found myself reacting to the constraints of the site. We even built models of its design with scale models of me in them, to make sure the dimensions would all work well, which is so, so important in a small space. I would have created a Zen space/feeling even if I had 3,000 sq ft and not the 375 that I have (maybe I would have had a meditation room in there, which would have been great!). The other wonderful thing about designing my own home is that I was able to use it as a lab of sorts, to try out materials I would not test on a client or push the limits of hardware, etc.'

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Innovative ideas such as the dining table strung on cables to be lifted to create more space, could be an ice-breaker for guests. The hostess explains: 'This came from functional reasons. I needed space for parties and to entertain guests and not feel like I had to give up my sofa for that. Ergo tables that rise into the air! Never say architects are not crazy. My favourite areas are actually the entire apartment – from my flower filled shower to my very comfy bed with my Bengali curtain, to my lovely velvet sofa! I knew that the key to living large even in a small space is to feel that one has several places to sit, and that one can host a dinner for eight or cocktails for 30. And I made that happen.'

The 'chandelier' begs attention – more so when you learn it is crafted from, hold your breath, packing material called geami paper used to stuff boxes for shipping. Suchi came up with this version after much experimenting with the shape. It's lightweight, easy to manipulate and uses a material that is unexpected and different, yet affordable. End result gets top marks on all counts!

Suchi points out that usually the 'Entrance hall/foyer gets no respect, or the attention it deserves, yet it is the first space one steps into. It should make an impression. In my home the challenge was to create one. Since there was so little space, I "implied" a foyer. I have a large quartzite counter, delineated by the single column in my space. I

keep my favourite things here to greet me when I come home, like a drawing by my idol Louis Kahn of his retreat.'

The mid-40s professional modestly affirms, 'Inspirations such as these can happen anywhere, it really is a matter of a combination of the right setting – and the need for invention – and originality. The rest flows as needed.'

Art is another passion she has indulged in since her formative years in college where she found the work of the early cubists 'mind blowing'. Her private collection embraces many contemporary Indian artists – Srinivasa Prasad, Manish Nai, and Aaditi Joshi to name a few. 'I use them as a ground to work from.'

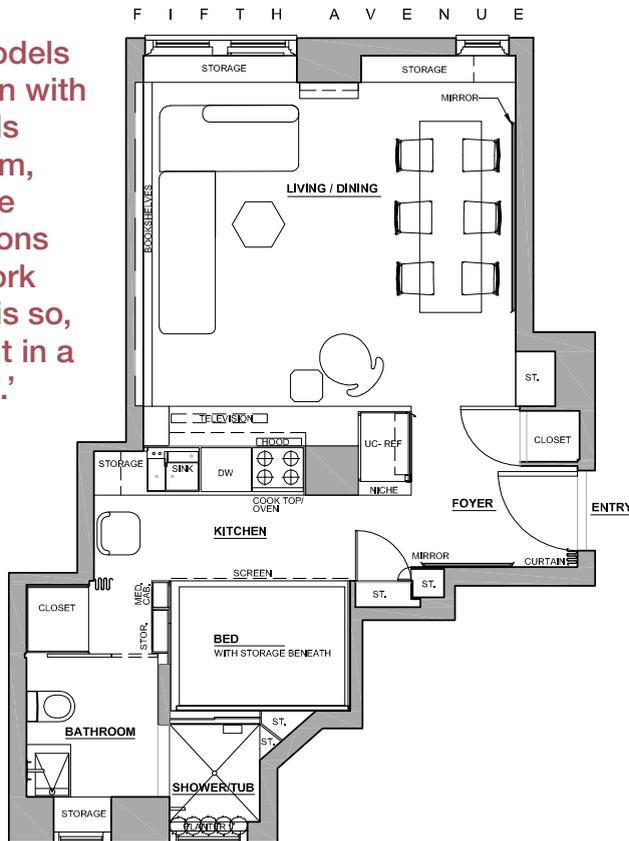
As the saying goes, you can take the Indian out of India, but you cannot take India out of the Indian. As such, Suchi adheres to her roots, which are found as accents in her work, 'From the multiplicity of my influences, to my love of colour and light and texture. My mother used to take me to her sari weavers in Kanchipuram and from that moment on, I have been in love with textiles. This is probably the way in which my Indianness shows the most. For instance, in my white minimalist apartment, the focal point is the silk and gold brocade screen from Kolkata by my bed.'

Often it's the 'accidents' in life that teach one the most. While working at Angus Young Associates in Wisconsin, no one handled interiors there. Out of sheer necessity and because I had a sensibility for it, I found myself immersed in that discipline, and this was pivotal in giving me an additional skill.

What is an average day in Suchi Reddy's life? 'In one word – busy.

indians abroad

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I start my day with meditation, then a walk through wonderful Washington Square Park to my office, where staff meetings mean reviewing ongoing projects, interspersed by a series of meetings with clients and collaborators. At the end of the day I walk back through the same park to drinks and dinner with friends – or to my very own sanctuary of a home.’

As for what makes her the kind of designer she is, she avers, ‘It’s up to the Gods. And to inspiration through art. And to my clients who continue to motivate yet challenge me.’

A final question is begging to be asked – yet again, I am sure – the clever pun on ‘Reddy’made Design. ‘Actually it was my boyfriend’s idea. And my homage to Marcel Duchamp who reigns in my pantheon of artists.’ Internally, the team comprises ‘seven amazing, strong people’ who supposedly keep Reddymade Design in demand for their increasing clientele.

SUCHI REDDY



THE PERSON

Growing up in Chennai in a house conceptualised by an architect and opening onto its gardens, made a lifelong impression on Suchi. ‘I realised when I was about 11 that I was different from my friends because of the kind of space I was used to having around me. This drove me to become an architect. I did consider being an archaeologist or an anthropologist, but my father took a long look at me and said: “Darling, as a young girl in India, I think you would probably be more satisfied as an architect.” To his credit, and my undying gratitude, he never dissuaded me from any of my ambitions and continues to be one of my biggest supporters.’

Suchi’s journey from Chennai to New York connects seven states and two continents and a few oceans in between. After schooling at the School of Architecture and Planning at Anna University, ‘where I was blissfully happy, until I left to join my husband at the time and finish my studies at the University of Detroit-Mercy, USA. After graduation I was privileged enough to work for several well known architects, from Miami to New York, like Arquitectonica, Ennead (formerly Polshek Partnership), and Gabellini Sheppard. My projects varied from museums to high rises to precisely detailed high-end retail stores. I’m indebted to them forever for my diverse learning experiences which enabled me to start my practice 11 years ago.’

Among Reddymade’s most recent accomplishments is a loft on Orchard Street for a Canadian actor couple. Additionally, over 65 projects have been completed and ongoing are three large projects and some smaller ones including one in Chennai. ‘We have been approached by several clients in India, and I am very excited by the idea of building there,’ she muses. 