

CULTURE & LIVING

# 8 Indian creatives take us into the spaces that brought them joy during the pandemic

From Aditi Rao Hydari's nostalgia-filled family home to designer Rooshad Shroff's sunlit office, these spaces sparked joy when it was all gloom and doom

BY MEGHA MAHINDRU

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Errikos Andreou

From the mellifluous strains of a tanpura to the sweeping view of heritage buildings in a metropolis, eight Indian creatives show us that there's no one magic formula to finding your bliss. But somewhere between nostalgia and hope, they seem to have secured the key to spaces that bring them joy.

## **A sense of belonging**

**Aditi Rao Hydari**



“My happy place is around the people I love and those who love me. During the lockdown, I spent most of my time in Hyderabad. I was back in my family home—that of my beloved maternal grandmother, who I call Ammama. My grandmother, Shanta Rameshwar Rao, was a storyteller. My

summer holidays were spent in her company, where she taught me badminton and cycling and when I was older, driving. She was always welcoming. None of the doors were locked and I could bring friends home anytime. There was always food, a place to play and the promise of a wonderful story. She made characters come alive, and encouraged an environment of free-spiritedness and learning. She taught us to be fearless and curious, to ask questions and to explore. She shaped so much of who I am today. So happy places for me are spaces filled with nostalgia, family and love. It's about those memories that are ignited by the little things, be it the sounds of my mother playing the tanpura or the soothing fragrance of the parijat flower (night-flowering jasmine) that dotted my grandmother's driveway."

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*- As told to Udita Jhunjhunwala*

*Actor Aditi Rao Hydari will be seen in Mani Ratnam's next film, Ponniyin Selvan*

## The remains of the day



“The past two years have been an incredibly strange time. Hiding from all the heartbreaking news and managing to make an image that depicts the emotions that I’ve been engulfed in, is my version of a happy place.”

*Photographer Prarthna Singh’s recent work includes documenting Dior’s *Chambre de Soie* at the Chanakya School of Craft in Mumbai, collaborating*

*with The ReFashion Hub to raise awareness on fast fashion and publishing Har  
Shaam Shaheen Bag, a multi-media portrait that collates photographs, maps,  
drawings, letters, lyrics and other memorabilia from the protest site, Shaheen  
Bagh*

## **City of dreams**

**Rooshad Shroff**



“My happy place is my new office. Tucked away in South Mumbai, with an abundance of sunlight, and a sweeping view of heritage buildings such as the neoclassical Asiatic Society of Mumbai, the entire space is filled with an ‘old Bombay’ charm. Between the nostalgic architectural bones of the city I love

and a space that I've designed from scratch, it's the perfect coming together of what was and what can be. It is where I get to do what I love, even as I stay inspired."

*Architect and designer Rooshad Shroff's recent collections include fluted marble vases and pressed flower tables*

## **Raising hope**

**Anjali Sud**





“My two-year-old son Saavan and I have a reading chair in his nursery. When he was younger, he would quietly sit on my lap and I would read his favourite books. He’s now at an age where he doesn’t want to be read to anymore, he wants to do it himself. And while he can’t read yet, he sits and flips through the same books, pretending to read them to me and his stuffed panda. I love watching him grow and become independent, and I’ll always cherish those hours he spent in his mama’s lap. Everyone told me motherhood would change my life. What I wasn’t expecting was how it

would change my life at work. I am a stronger, more empathetic leader because of my experience as a mum.”

*Anjali Sud is the CEO of Vimeo, a video-streaming platform*

## **All in a day's work**

**Sameer Kulavoor**



“My studio has to be my happy place (more ‘zen’ than happy, probably). I work alone and when I truly begin to occupy the studio, the space becomes part of my mental environment. Over time, objects that accumulate in the space or things that are thrown out of the space can be seen as a manifestation of one’s personality. Even the geography of the space, its surroundings or character of the architecture, have an impact on one’s daily state of mind and resulting work, I believe. While most of my work is about the experience of life in a dynamic and sometimes stressful, fast-changing metropolis, my work process of mark-making itself is extremely slow and analogue, leaving the city outside while working inside the studio. For me, being completely immersed in the act of making in the studio is therapeutic and calming. *58* is a painting of my previous studio. I have since moved to a new space, but this work remains symbolic of my idea of a studio space. The simultaneous presence of the figure in the middle of different activities in different parts of the space blurs the sense of time—it’s pretty much my day in the studio.”

*58 was part of artist Sameer Kulavoor’s solo show You Are All Caught Up earlier last year at TARQ Gallery, Mumbai*

## The secret indoors

**Kashmira Sarode**



“During the second lockdown, with all avenues to step outside closed, I tried to focus indoors. I found that when forced to be confined, the brain works in mysterious ways and finds inspiration in the most mundane things. And that became my source of happiness during this time. I started noticing every nook and cranny in my home and noticed a fascinating amount of detail in the smallest of corners. Mesmerised by these details, I started a papercut series to capture these. This particular artwork shows an aspect of my happy place— the stationery items at my desk, a ceramic pencil holder with the most beautiful detail and a stationery box by Marimekko along with a speaker.”

*Kashmira Sarode is a multimedia artist obsessed with scale, as is evident from her large-scale murals (Harbouring Hope at St+Art Chennai 2020) and her miniature embroidery patches*

## **A room of my own**

**Sanjena Sathian**

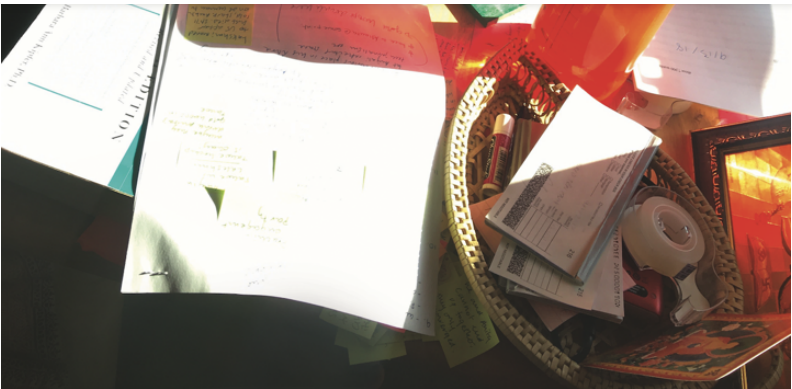


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Janelle Effiwatt

“My happiest place in the world is my writing space. I haven’t lived in the same place consistently, so the nature of my work desk or home office changes, but some things stay the same. Wherever I am, I try to find a very long table, which I push up against a window—ideally one that is east-facing. I keep my bookshelves nearby, and on the table itself, I keep a physical copy of *Roget’s Thesaurus*, as well as any books I’m referencing in my work at the time. I also like to have a reading chair within spitting distance.

This kind of set-up, a bright, inviting room that's close to my books (i.e. the very reasons I write) gives me something to look forward to every day. I feel beckoned to my workspace rather than afraid to get writing in the morning. Paying attention to the little comforts can make all the difference, both for writing and for happiness.”

*Sanjena Sathian's debut novel Gold Diggers (HarperCollins) released last year and is being made into a TV show by Mindy Kaling*

## The lightness of being

**Yashica Dutt**



COMING OUT AS



# DA LI

a memoir



YASHICA  
DUTT

“What are happy places? Are they simply corners of the rooms we inhabit? Or are they spaces outside our regimented lives we can seek refuge in? In the two years of the carnage caused by the complete mishandling of a pandemic, where almost every home knows someone that they lost, what does it mean

to have a happy place? If you, like so many of us, are struggling with how to be happy these days or wrestling with the idea of what happiness even means, then you are not alone. To reconcile with the vacuum of loss, pain and suffering around us, we owe it to ourselves to find little gaps and tiny fissures that cut through the mountains of grief to make space for healing, restoration and repair. Especially as Dalit folks and marginalised people, who are battling with so much more than the pandemic, it is vital for us to find the openings to let joy in, whenever and wherever we can find them. Happy spaces don't always have to be external or a physical structure. In the pandemic, a happy space can simply be a few minutes taken from a grinding day to pay attention to our needs—physical, emotional and mental. It can be a place inside of us where we retreat to sit with our thoughts, ideas and feelings and emerge only when we feel heard. For me, my happy place is my favourite podcast in the background, my hands finding a rhythm of their own as I organise my closet, and my mind wandering to new, undiscovered places I haven't been before.”

*Yashica Dutt's memoir Coming Out As Dalit (Aleph) won her the 2021 Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar*

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ADITI RAO HYDARI

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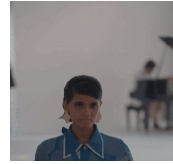
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