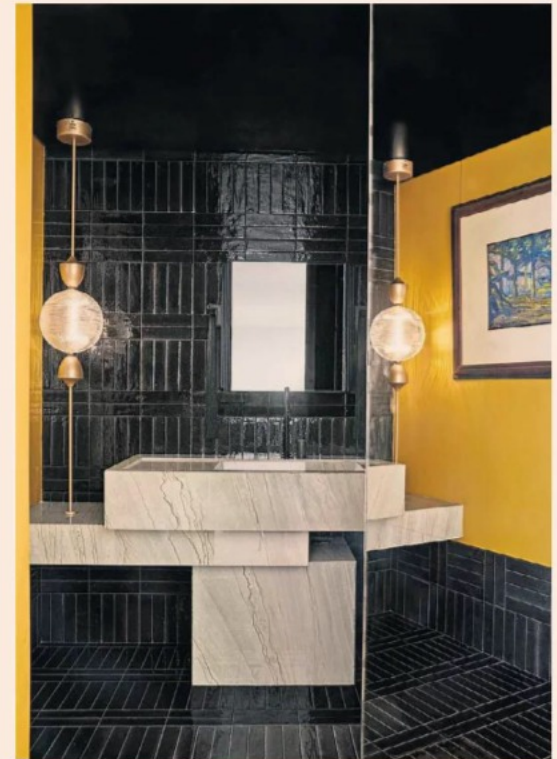


Left to right: the green wall in the main bedroom echoes the city's coconut trees; a zigzag wall in the cosy family room softens the acoustic; the moody hidden bathroom

Styling by Samir Wadekar



The cool white interiors of Madhuli Apartment in Worli, south-west Mumbai, are a welcome refuge from the relentless heat and traffic outside. On the fifth floor of a 13-storey building dating to the 1970s — originally a hotel before its conversion into residences 25 years ago — a large, open-plan dining, living and bar area frames sweeping ocean views to the west. Below, tall coconut trees and a scattering of bungalows dot the building's compound. An eight-lane highway built on 150 metres of recently reclaimed land separates it from the Arabian Sea.

The owner, who preferred not to share her name, inherited the apartment after her parents moved out in 2025. After several years in an 800-sq-ft rental, she was excited to return to her childhood home with her husband. But she wanted it to “represent who I am today” and reflect the couple's tastes and lifestyle: no children, occasional guests and a love of contemporary Indian and South Asian art. And she decided to turn the planning approach typical of Mumbai interiors on its head.

Mixing it up in Mumbai

Renovation | An artist inherited her childhood home — and turned the Indian metropole's design traditions on their head, converting four bedrooms into two. Her family thought she was mad. By *Rupal Rathore*. Photography by *Talib Chitalwala*

The 3,300-sq-ft property had suffered from neglect, termites and water damage, but it had a promising base from which to rebuild, the owner says, pointing out the intricate, slightly peeling traditional *Thanjavur* painting concealed behind a pair of antique wooden shutters in the entrance. Much of the apartment had to be stripped back to the bones. “This started as a facelift and then became a full-blown renovation — whatever we could knock down, we did, to make the most of the view.”

She enlisted her longtime friend, interior designer Shonali Mahajan Cooper of

Empire — The Living Company. Cooper, too, has fond memories of the home, having spent what she describes as the “fun part” of her teenage years there at sleepovers and parties.

Launched as Studio Wodehouse in 2014, the design company was rebranded by Cooper after a decade, with “a more distinct point of view” that focuses on integrating technology into a range of residential and other projects across India and Dubai. The idea came from husband and business partner Rustom Cooper, whose family has built a legacy operating single-

screen cinemas across India and supplying sound equipment to audiophiles.

The new practice takes its name from the art deco New Empire Cinema in south Mumbai — the last of the 100 cinemas the family owned — which is now home to the Coopers' design office and showroom. Following the rebrand, the duo showcased their new direction at Design Mumbai 2025 with a listening room installation.

“I look at acoustics in a residence more than I ever did before,” says Cooper as she joins us on the textured, pearl-white sofa. In the adjoining family

room, for example, a striking zigzag wall dampens sound. “But,” she adds, “the driver for this project was art”; the owner is an artist as well as a collector.

The home began as two separate units, acquired in 1990 and 1999, before being joined together. As it wasn't originally designed as a single residence, it contained a number of awkward, underutilised spaces. To open it up, Cooper reduced the number of rooms; the main entrance now opens into a central corridor that extends deep into the apartment. Originally, she explains, it opened directly on to the dining area

“This started as a facelift and became a full-blown renovation — whatever we could knock down, we did”