

SANT CHATWAL On Hillary Clinton & Donald Trump

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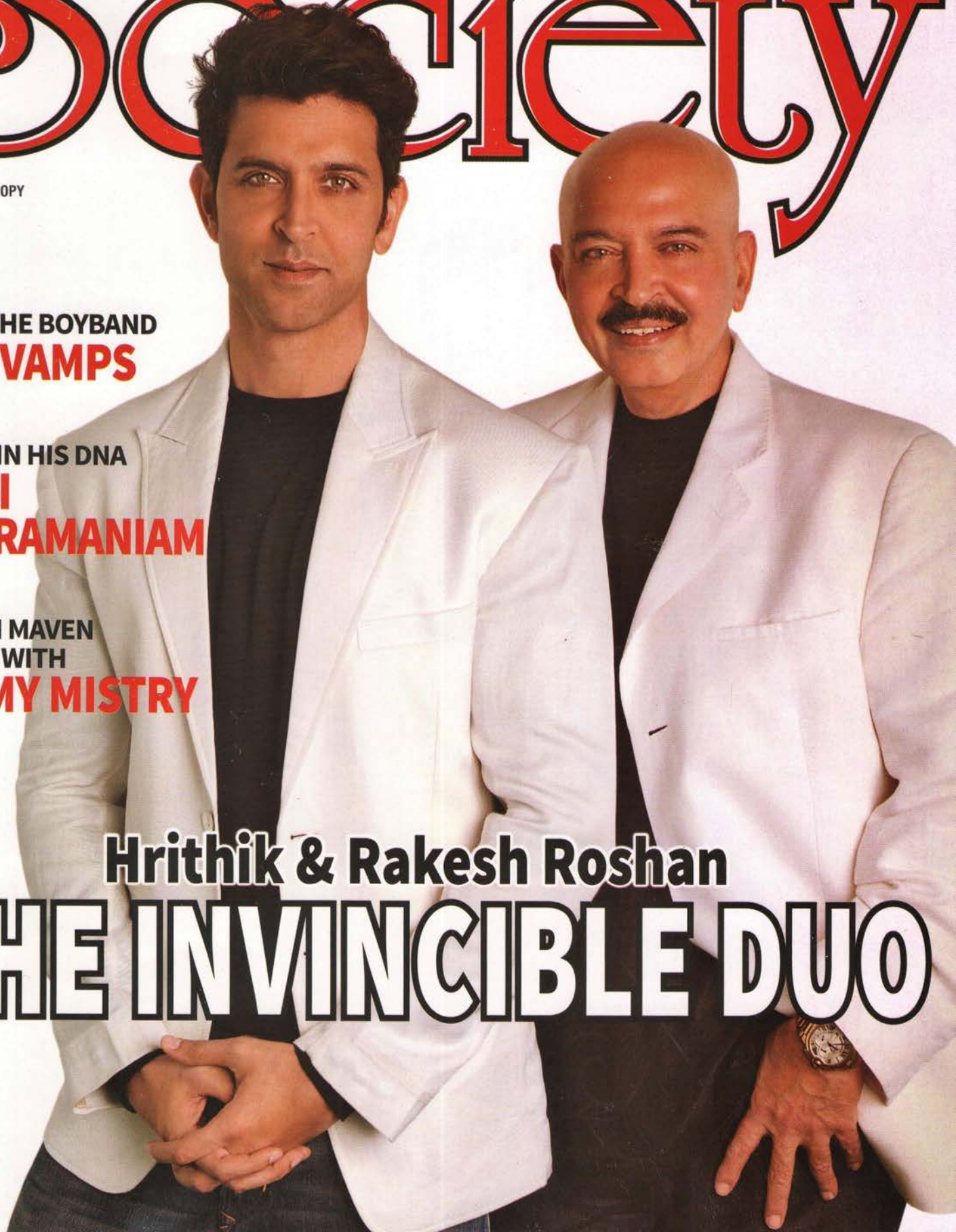
MEET THE BOYBAND
THE VAMPS

MUSIC IN HIS DNA
**AMBI
SUBRAMANIAM**

DESIGN MAVEN
A CHAT WITH
JIMMY MISTRY

Hrithik & Rakesh Roshan

THE INVINCIBLE DUO



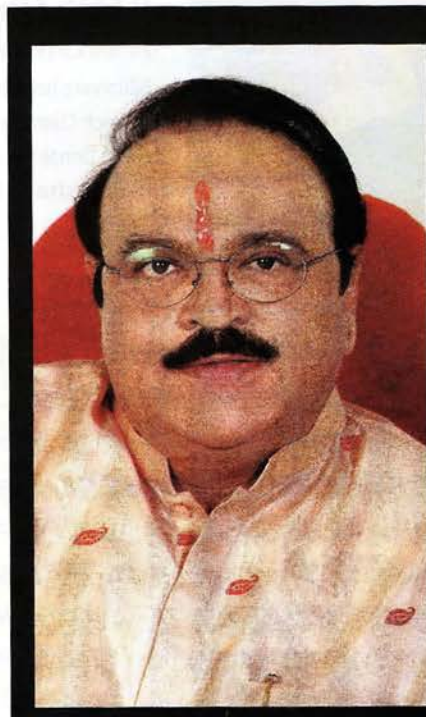
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MEET THE VAMPS

British boy band, The Vamps, who recently performed at the Global Citizen Festival in Mumbai talk to **Payal Mehta** about their India experience.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark grey blazer over a dark t-shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a dark, tufted sofa. He has his arms crossed and is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The setting is a living room with a large, ornate wooden grandfather clock in the background. To the left, there are window blinds. The floor is made of light-colored wood. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

Who thought that a passionate biker would one day become a famous architect and designer? Well, Jimmy Mistry has proven that wrong and stands tall, as he discusses all things design with **Ankita Rathod**



An Accidental Architect...

He utters the word 'design' in almost every single statement of our conversation. He is the only non-qualified architect, who won an award for an urban heritage restoration project. Having worked with the who's who of the country, from the Saharas to the Bajajs to the Birlas— he has designed 100s of corporate quarters, 80 per cent of TV channel offices, Vijay Mallya's much talked about yacht (more on that later) and several more projects across the length and breadth of the country.

For those who came in late, the man in question is a devout Parsi, a passionate biker and an accidental architect. Meet Jimmy Rusi Mistry, Chairman and Managing Director of Della Technica. Having set a benchmark in the field of real estate

and construction with its multi-facility property, Della Adventures and Resort, comprising an adventure resort, luxury resort, banquets, multi-cuisine restaurants and residential villas, its most recent addition, the range of Signature Suites, is the jewel in the crown.

"Luxury to me is anything that has fine craftsmanship and an element of surprise in it," exhilarates Jimmy, as he poses for our last shot by the mini bar of the recently curated Fendi Suite at the Della property in Lonavala. The uber-posh themed suites, designed by Jimmy, are inspired by and use elements of luxury brands like Armani, Roberto Cavalli, Versace, and Fendi. "The Roshans, the Rampals and more are regulars at these suites," informs Jimmy. But, it's simply

design which connects them, he adds. Jimmy's versatility and talent has allowed him to take on various roles depending on the situation. Jimmy quotes, "I didn't get into the business of design, but the business got into me. The only thing I did was to combine my mechanical engineering qualification to the passion of designing luxury furnishing and saw a concept taking shape in reality; this indeed gave me a lot of satisfaction and happiness."

A big supporter of self-learning for the past two decades, Jimmy has been at the forefront of the design industry. "In today's day and age, with technology, you can self-teach yourself far more easily than you would do in the past," points out Jimmy. At the onset of his career, he dealt with contracting jobs and executing projects. But, the turning point of his life came while working with an Italian design firm as an importer, which gave him abundance of experience and a real understanding of designing. "I was going twice a month to Italy, buying stuff from there and selling in India. I did that for three years. Whatever I learnt in manufacturing, I put up in a factory in Daman and implemented it there. After four years of furniture supply across India to almost all the architects and major corps, I realised every architect and designer had their way of dealing with clients, contractors and vendors, but then I also understood the shortcomings in each of the design practices. And, I thought I could fill that gap," he narrates. Somewhere in 2000, he did his first project for Star, which got him

a young design practice award from the Institute of Interior Designers (IID). Post which, there was no looking back. One office led to the other.

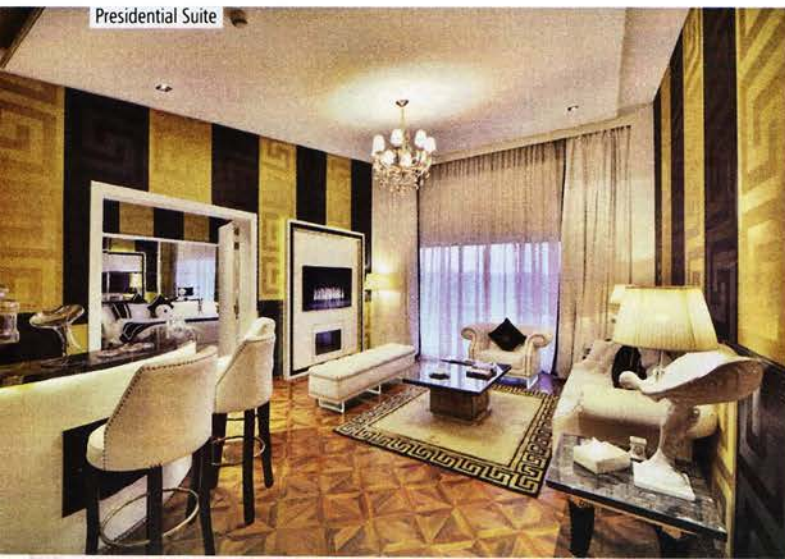
It was in the year 2009 when he started working on his pet project, Della Adventures and Resorts. Ironically, Mistry wasn't even planning on an adventure park. "I wanted to build a set of second-home villas," says the 43-year-old. He was formalising things in 2009 but, "that's when the slowdown hit the villa sales." Mistry had to diversify to utilise the rest of his land bank, and the idea of a park began to take shape. Go-karting had started to take off in a big way in India, motor racing was no longer a fool's obsession and expat friends enquired about quad bikes. So, Mistry imported some equipment from the US and Europe, and built a rudimentary dirt track. The same year, recession hit—but that played a major role in the formation of his company. "I took advantage of the recession and kind of converted my people across from doing multiple interior and architectural projects into working towards my brand," he says.

By that time, he was also beginning to get tired of having to design to the whims and fancies of clients. "I crossed that stage of taking bullshit from clients and down the line officials. Till the time you deal with the top most, you are at a wave length, down the line people have no understanding of design or colour palette. You go through a lot as a designer and you need to make everybody happy, otherwise next time,

they make sure some other architect is doing the project," he says, referring to an incident when he was asked to deal with an assistant of the L&T's Chairman. "She was the one who was calling the shots. There was no sensitivity towards design, colour combination, economics," he says, while adding that he eventually designed a whole building for them but did not enjoy it. "So, at Lonavala, I am my own boss. I design my own projects. I give vision to my own team and I don't need to ask anybody. That's the kind of design I like to do. Very independent."

Having done extensive amount of work across the nation for almost all sectors, including mass houses, architectural projects, townships, industrial complexes, malls, private spaces, etc, etc, by now, Jimmy was definitely very well-connected. He was designing the UB Group's headquarters, when Mallya asked him to work on his yacht. "I had no specialisation in yacht design. So, I went off to Italy, met the biggest yacht designers and tried to see if I could get them on board. I came back and realised that the entire budget of the yacht modification was equivalent to their fees. That's when Mallya said to me, 'Why don't you do it yourself?' We stripped it and actually reconstructed the yacht by adding a whole floor on it, and that's how the yacht was done," he says.

The point being, yes, you tend to grow close to your clients. Taking into account Mallya's current absconding status, Jimmy shares, "I don't care what the world says. Leaving aside the financial angle, having





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Atash Suite



Amardad Suite



worked very closely with him, I have a great amount of respect for his hard work. Contrary to what the media believes—that he is just flamboyant, because that's how he is portrayed—I have seen him slog his butt off and he is just paying the price for being over ambitious.”

Jimmy possesses a vibrant vision, a zest for innovation and a commitment to sustainability. He has taken on the role of a designer, adventurer, hotelier and developer. Still creative at heart, Jimmy pays passionate attention to people, process and product, the result of which evokes emotion in the observer of either. He has dealt with people from all walks of life, from *gutka* barons to extremely classy people. He shares, “Even today, when I am passing through our resort lobby, I see some cheapo shouting at the top of his voice for that extra 50 per cent discount because some small thing

happened and he wants to make the most of it by threatening with social media and politicians. So, what do I do? Do I fight back? No! I just look down and walk through the lobby as if I am not Jimmy Mistry.” On the other hand, he adds, there are extremely polished people, “who, even if everything has gone wrong, will speak silently and tell you in your good interest, ‘You know what, the pizza wasn't right.’ They will not ask you for a discount, they will just want you to know this happened.”

Citing Hrithik Roshan's example of how just last month, he sweetly made a credit card payment at Della, he says, “He didn't want to leave without paying, which normally any other cheap actor would have willingly done—leave the hotel and ask us to collect the payment from his office. But, Hrithik,

very sweetly, paid by his credit card. There are all kinds of people and my job is to build their reputation and like a magnet attract the right people.”

In fact post that, Hrithik even approached Jimmy to do up his Panvel house. “So, I started interacting with Rakeshji and Pinky (Roshan), his mother, who got involved and we are designing his entire villa. Rakeshji is very close to me. You develop your relationship because of design. This is how design gets you closer to people, and for me, design has been at the forefront of all my businesses, and everything that I do is because of design,” he says.

When asked how being an hotelier was coming along, he quips, “Very difficult. Operating hospitality is a different kind of animal altogether. If you're passionate about good things, you understand people, you can go and get it done, but it's not a piece

“I didn't get into the business of design, but the business got into me.”



of cake." He further adds, "By the grace of God, we have been successful in doing it. We obviously must have done certain things right, but it is design thinking which has helped me to reach where I have. Design thinking gives you the ability to be able to work out a solution to any given problem, so if the kitchen is not churning out good food, you apply design thinking."

So, design thinking, in lay man's language, is a process which designers follow to problem solve. Jimmy thoroughly believes that design happens with ideation, prototyping, analysing what options are available, removing the options, putting a logic to each option, then deliberating, discussing it with your teams and then coming on to a prototype, finalising it, analysing it and then putting it in line. "There is a process to design. You just don't wake up from your sleep and say, *'Haan theek hai white kar do black kar do'* (Yeah, fine, make it white or black). This is the way our designers work usually, and specifically, the way our interior designers work." This is the reason why our architects cannot expand. Pointing out that the biggest architectural firms in the country have just one or two offices, he says, "They can't manage to expand. You compare them to the biggest designers globally, who are able to go across 50-60 countries. An Indian architect is not able to go across even two or five countries. Because, they do not professionalise the process of design."

Then, the question arises if creativity can be professionalised. "Of course, it can," he elates confidently. "The guiding examples are the biggest firms in the world. They have put a process, they control the designs. So, individuals like Zaha Hadid or Thomas Heatherwick are always involved in the design. But, they follow a process and hence every project turns out different," says Jimmy. A big fan of architects BV Doshi, Karan Grover and Hafeez Contractor, Jimmy feels that only



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few people work just to contribute. Giving his viewpoint on the huge population of India and providing accommodation to all, he asserts that as high-rise buildings are the demand of the hour, we should go for vertical construction, keeping in mind open

space environment, which is only possible when infrastructure and buildings go hand in hand.

Meanwhile, unveiling his next step and plan, he says, "My deep and passionate love for design cannot be possibly mentioned in words, so just wait, my potential is yet to come. I am etching to work on luxury furnishing."

On a personal front, Jimmy is married to his teenage sweetheart Delna Mistry for 22 years and the couple has three children. "I had a child marriage," he jokes, considering he got married at the age of 21 to an 18-year-old Delna. They both met while he was studying mechanical engineering in Nagpur. Jimmy has also been on the board of the Bombay Parsee Panchayat as a trustee since the last seven years and is heavily involved in community politics.



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“Only since the last two years, I have taken a sabbatical and I am pulling myself out, because I was too deep into it. But, I am completely into my community,” he confirms.

No wonder, he was keen to take on the Fire Temple renovation in Dadar as a part of his exercise to ensure that Mumbai did not become a jungle of concrete boxes. “We could not change certain elements, and yet it needed a major facelift,” he explains of his restoration effort. While he chose to replace the worn out floors with Italian marble, he managed to retain the original wood on the doors and windows, simply ensuring it was touched up almost beyond recognition. A landscaped garden was created inside the temple compound to breathe new life into it. “We took two months to complete the project, but it was one of my most satisfying experiences.” In fact, he even won his first design award for the same.

Jimmy is a biker at heart. He is the owner one of the first Harleys and Hayabusas in India. All in all, he has five super bikes, including a Triumph Prophet. Remembering his college days, he recalls how he begged money from people to modify his Yamaha. Again, it's the design element that connects him to bikes.

So, my final question: doesn't your family get bored of you using the word design so often? To which, he first laughs and then responds, “Well, they have begun to live with it.” Even their travels and trips are around design.

A beautiful family, a gorgeous three-storeyed penthouse apartment in the financial capital of the nation, a massive holiday home in Lonavala and an array of vehicles—Jimmy Mistry definitely has a life worth envying! 