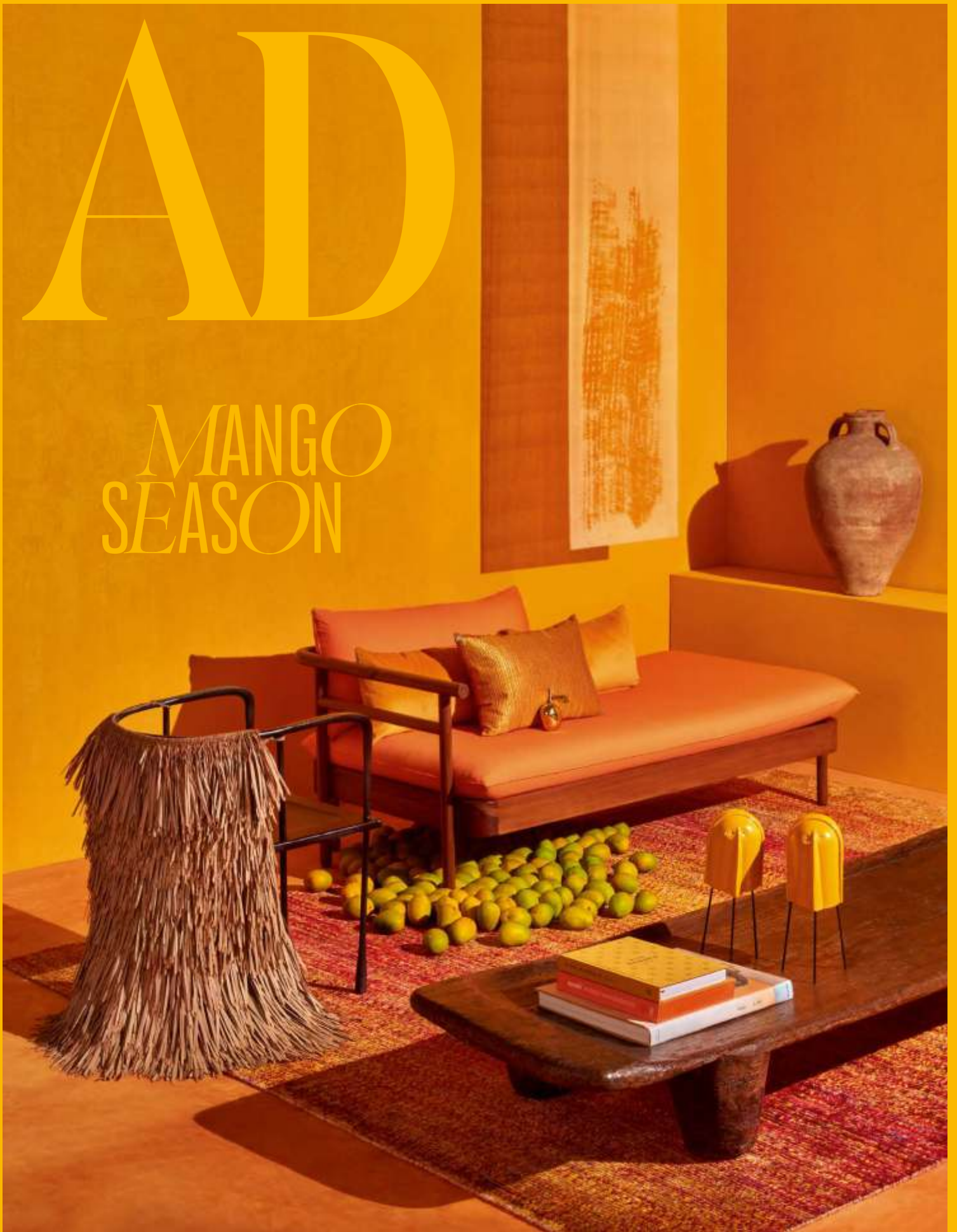


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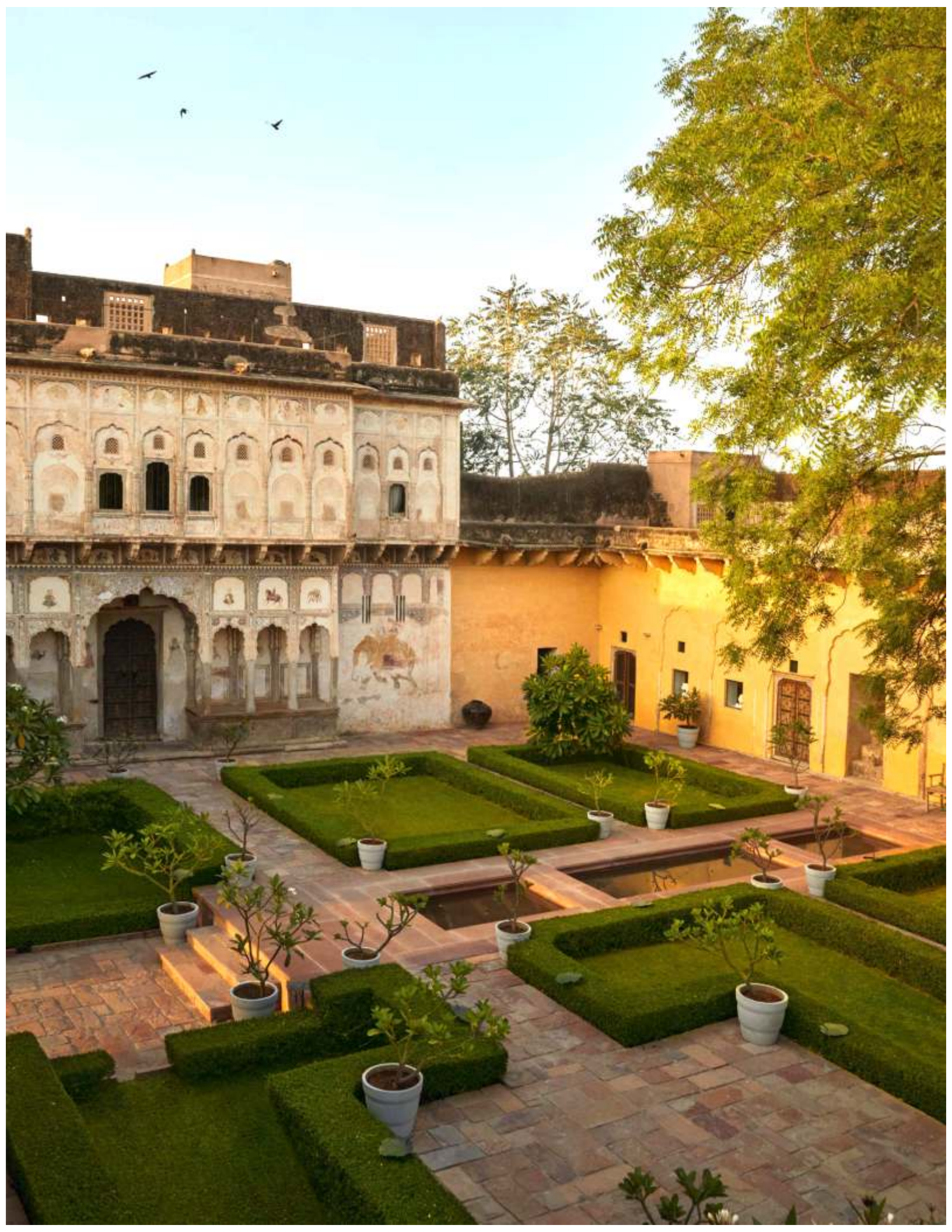
Deeppura Garh
MARIA GRAZIA BALDAN

**A TWO - HUNDRED -
YEAR - OLD HAVELI
IN RAJASTHAN WAS
GLORIOUSLY
RESTORED BY ITALIAN DESIGNER
MARIA GRAZIA BALDAN
WITH THE HELP
OF INDIAN ARTISANS
SHE HAS SAVED SPLENDID
DEEPPURA GARH
FROM RUIN WITH
REFINED INTERIORS AND
THE PERFECT PATINA**

WRITER PETER D'ASCOLI PHOTOGRAPHER ASHISH SAHI

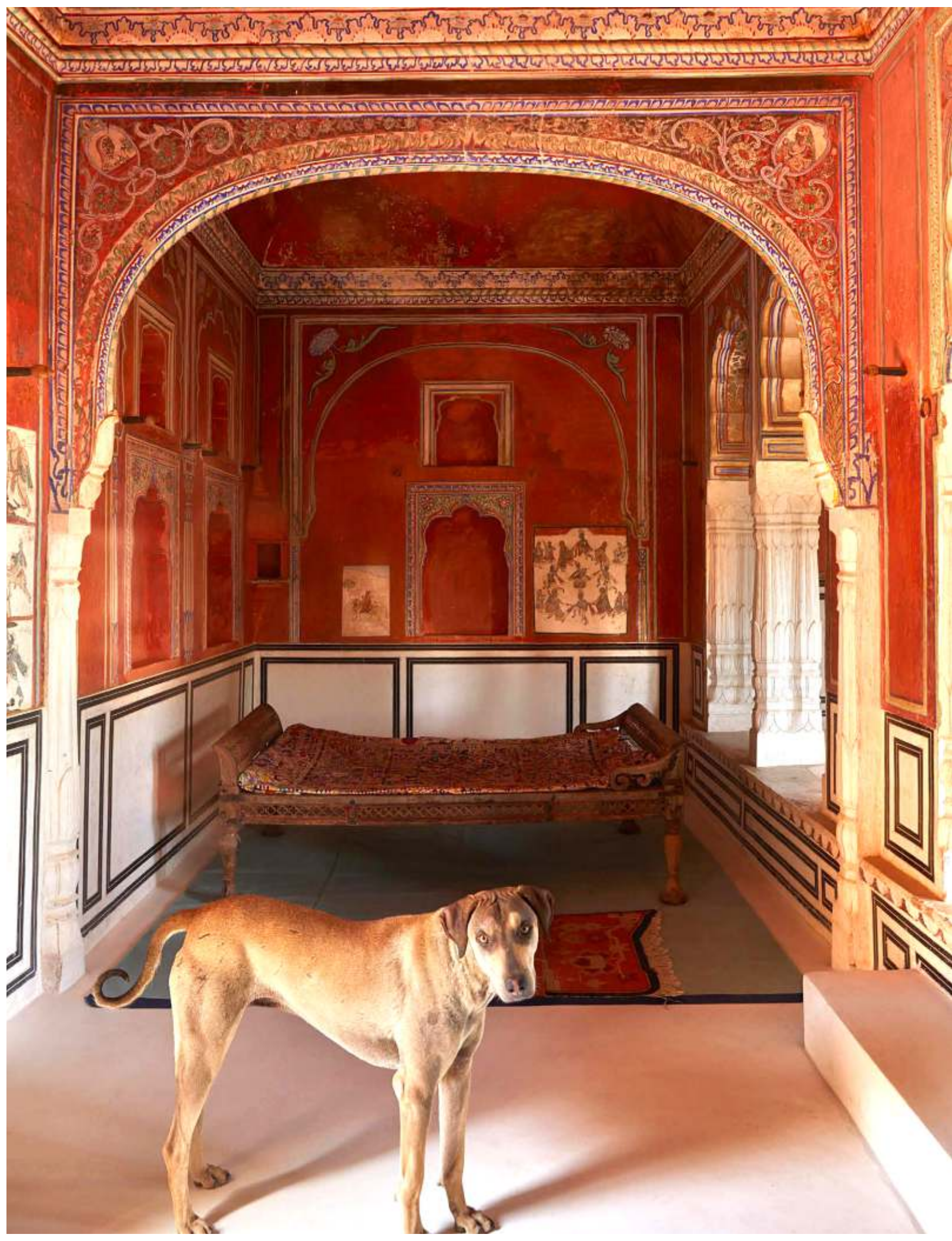


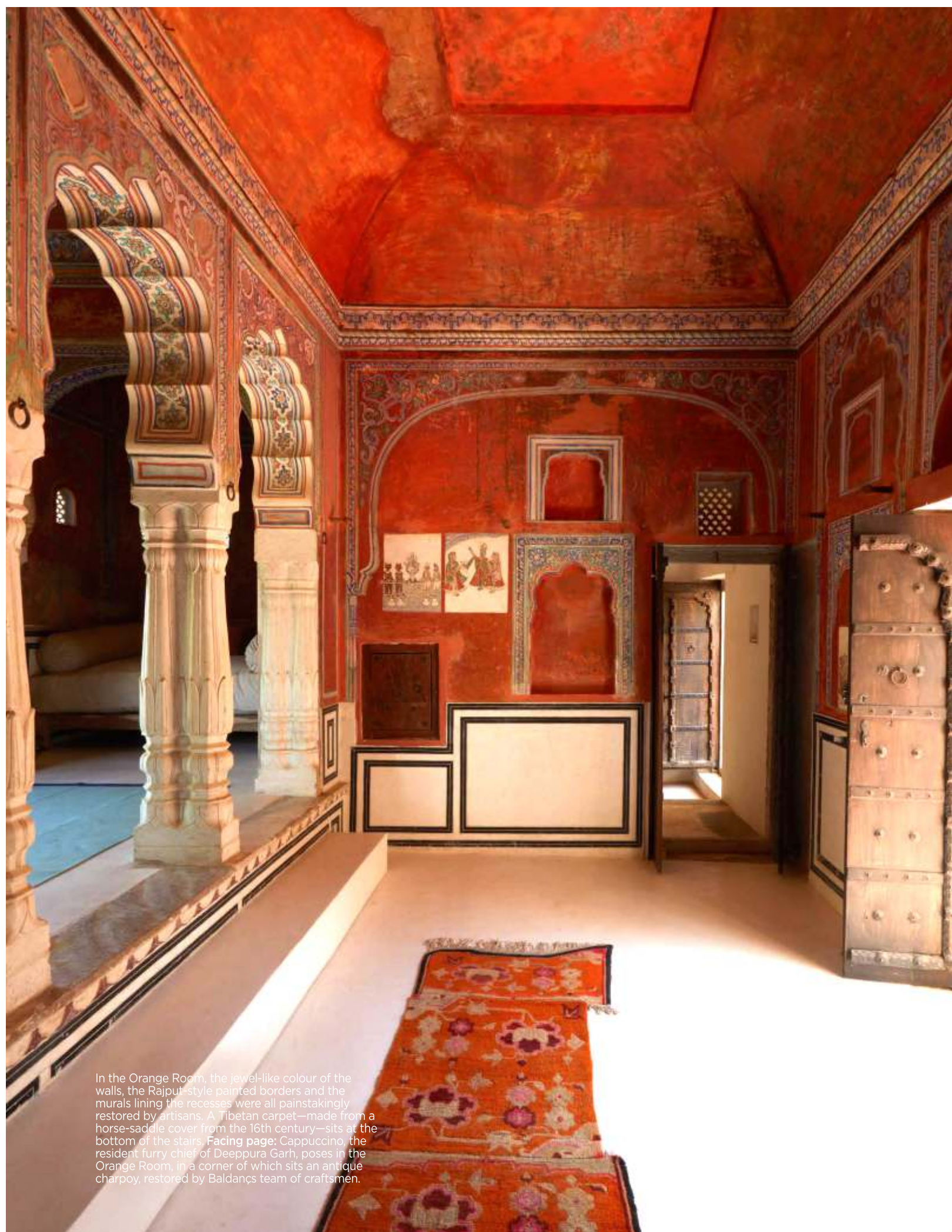
The walls of the meditation room at Deeppura Garh are hand-painted in a luminous saffron colour. The original ceiling, made entirely of stone and wood, was restored by Maria Grazia Baldan. A hand-painted Om symbol is seen in each niche in the wall.



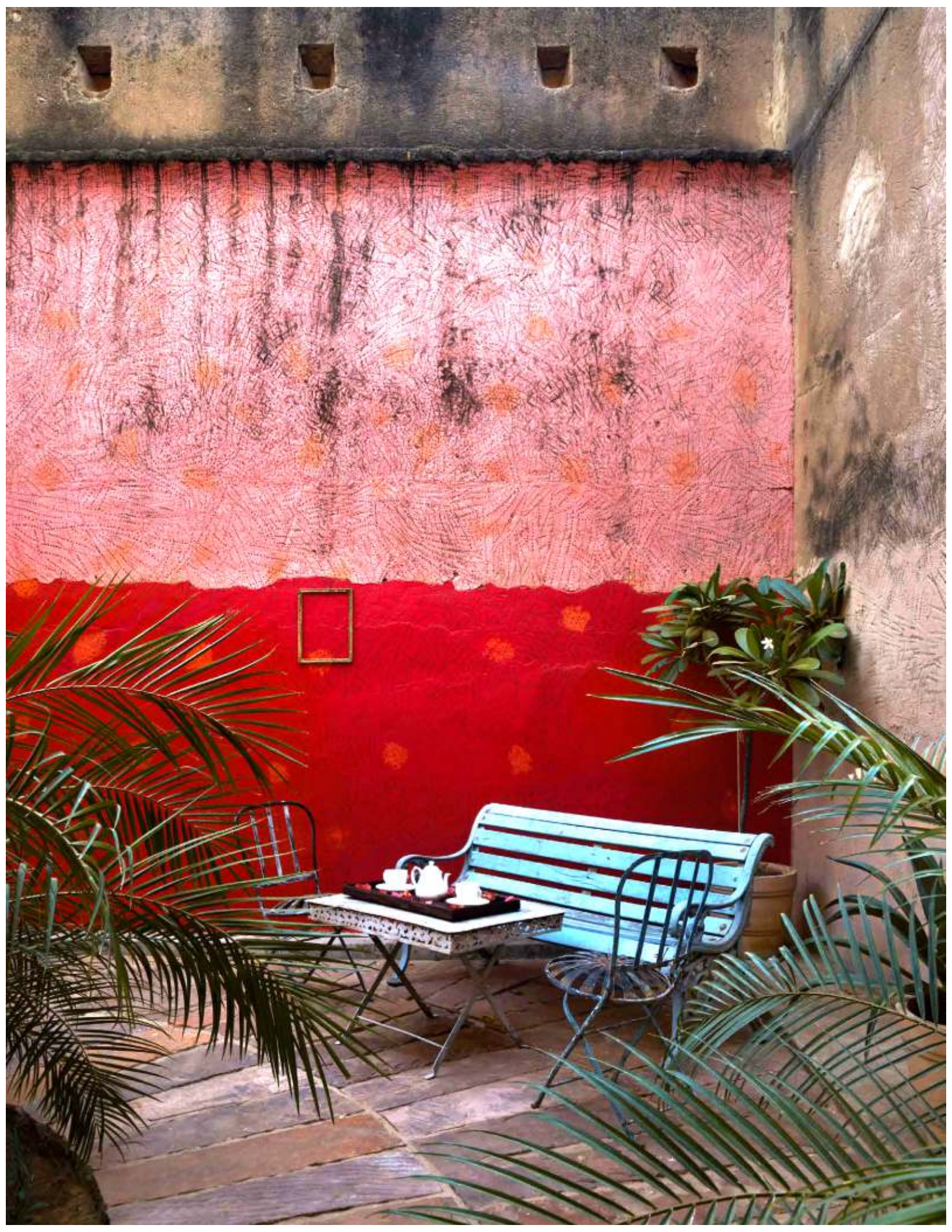


The original materiality of the 200-year-old fortified home is still felt in this old main gate, made in iron and wood. **Facing page:** The haveli's facade, decorated in pure Shekhawati style, was restored by a crew of artisans. The four carefully landscaped gardens, designed by Philippe de Villegas, that flank the facade are dotted with three fountains and numerous champak trees.



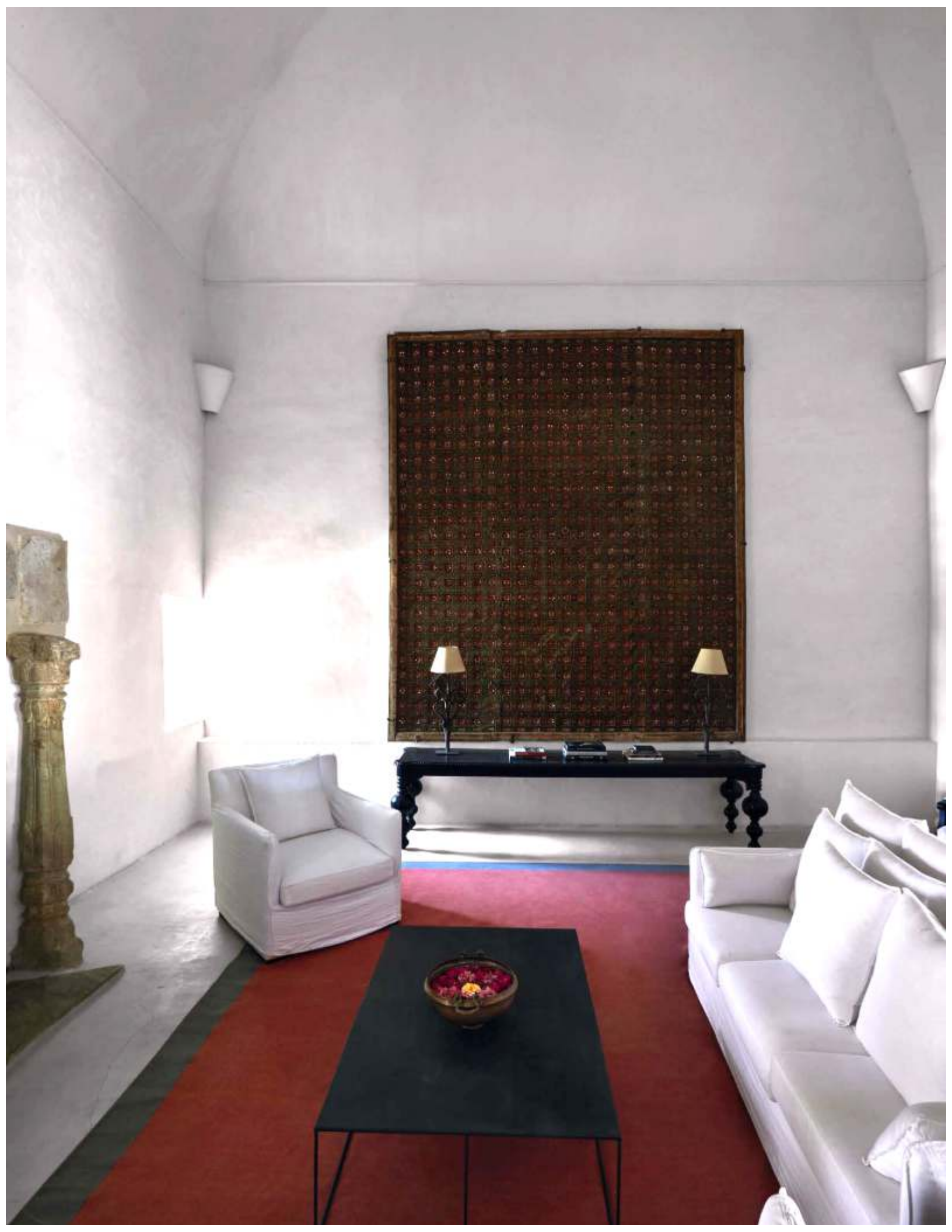


In the Orange Room, the jewel-like colour of the walls, the Rajput-style painted borders and the murals lining the recesses were all painstakingly restored by artisans. A Tibetan carpet—made from a horse-saddle cover from the 16th century—sits at the bottom of the stairs. Facing page: Cappuccino, the resident furry chief of Deeppura Garh, poses in the Orange Room, in a corner of which sits an antique charpooy, restored by Baldançs team of craftsmen.





The Green Room—originally meant as a space to catch some fresh air at night—is enveloped in lush scenes of a forest, hand-painted by artisans. **Facing page:** This secret spot in the garden with a wooden bench and metal chairs makes for a perfect spot for afternoon tea.





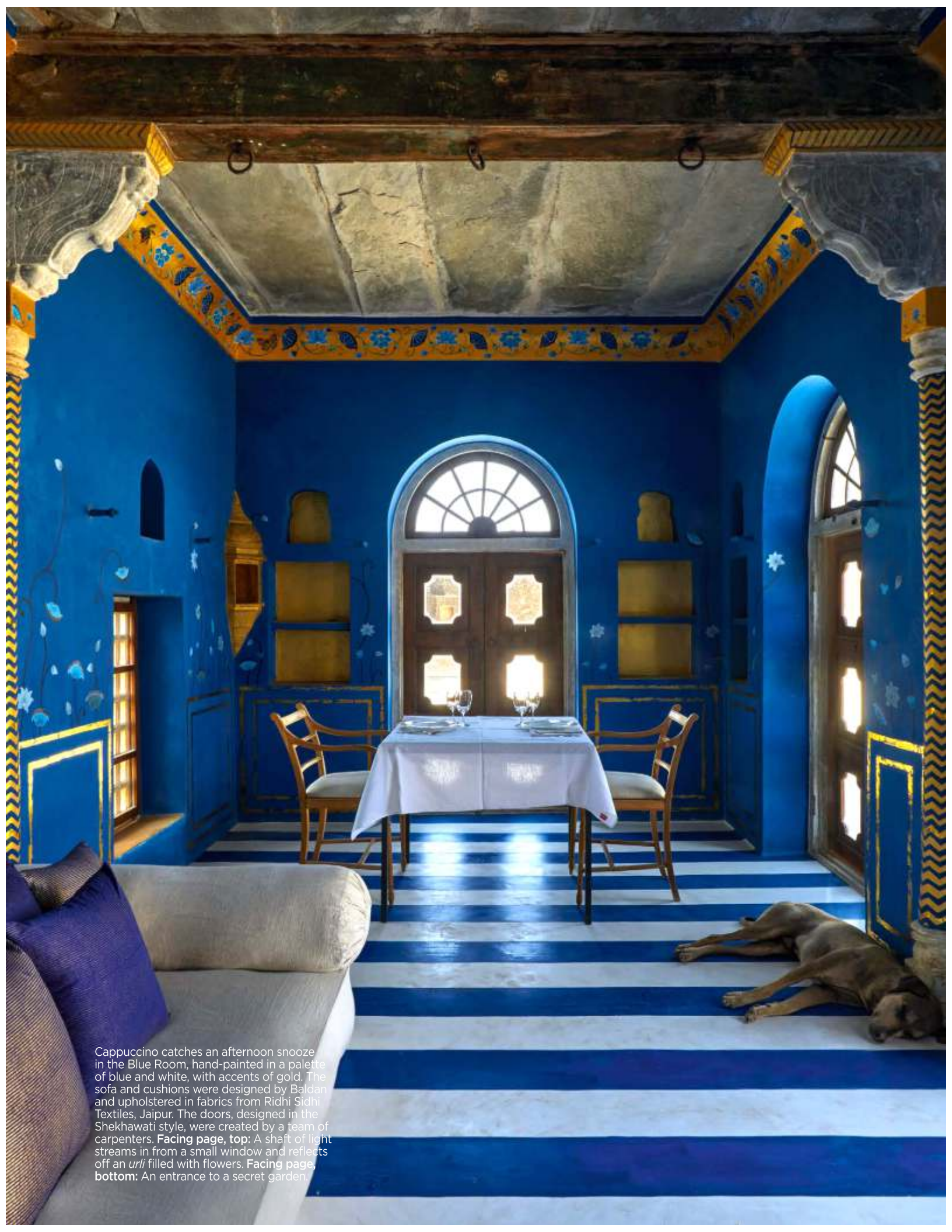
In the bedroom, the copper lamps and wooden side table are from Gulmohar Lane. The bed linen is from Kuançs Living. The floor is made with *witharai* lime plaster, a natural plaster unique to Rajasthan that is often seen in its many havelis. **Facing page:** In the library, a part of an antique Indian ceiling in carved wood—found in a shop in Jodhpur—hangs on the wall. The long, black table that sits underneath was found in an antiques shop. The lamps are by Baldan, while the sofa and armchair by Gulmohar Lane are also based on her designs.





The original stone columns and arches in the bedrooms were restored and washed in white. The cotton blue carpet is from Arihant Arts, Jaipur. The armchairs from Manglam Arts, also in Jaipur, are upholstered in a striped handwoven cotton fabric. An antique Indian painting on glass hangs in the recess. **Facing page:** The pristine all-white palette wraps the bedrooms in a sense of calm and serenity. The cushions and sofa are upholstered in handwoven cotton—dyed in natural pigments—from Manglam Arts.





Cappuccino catches an afternoon snooze in the Blue Room, hand-painted in a palette of blue and white, with accents of gold. The sofa and cushions were designed by Baldan and upholstered in fabrics from Ridhi Sidhi Textiles, Jaipur. The doors, designed in the Shekhawati style, were created by a team of carpenters. **Facing page, top:** A shaft of light streams in from a small window and reflects off an *urli* filled with flowers. **Facing page, bottom:** An entrance to a secret garden.



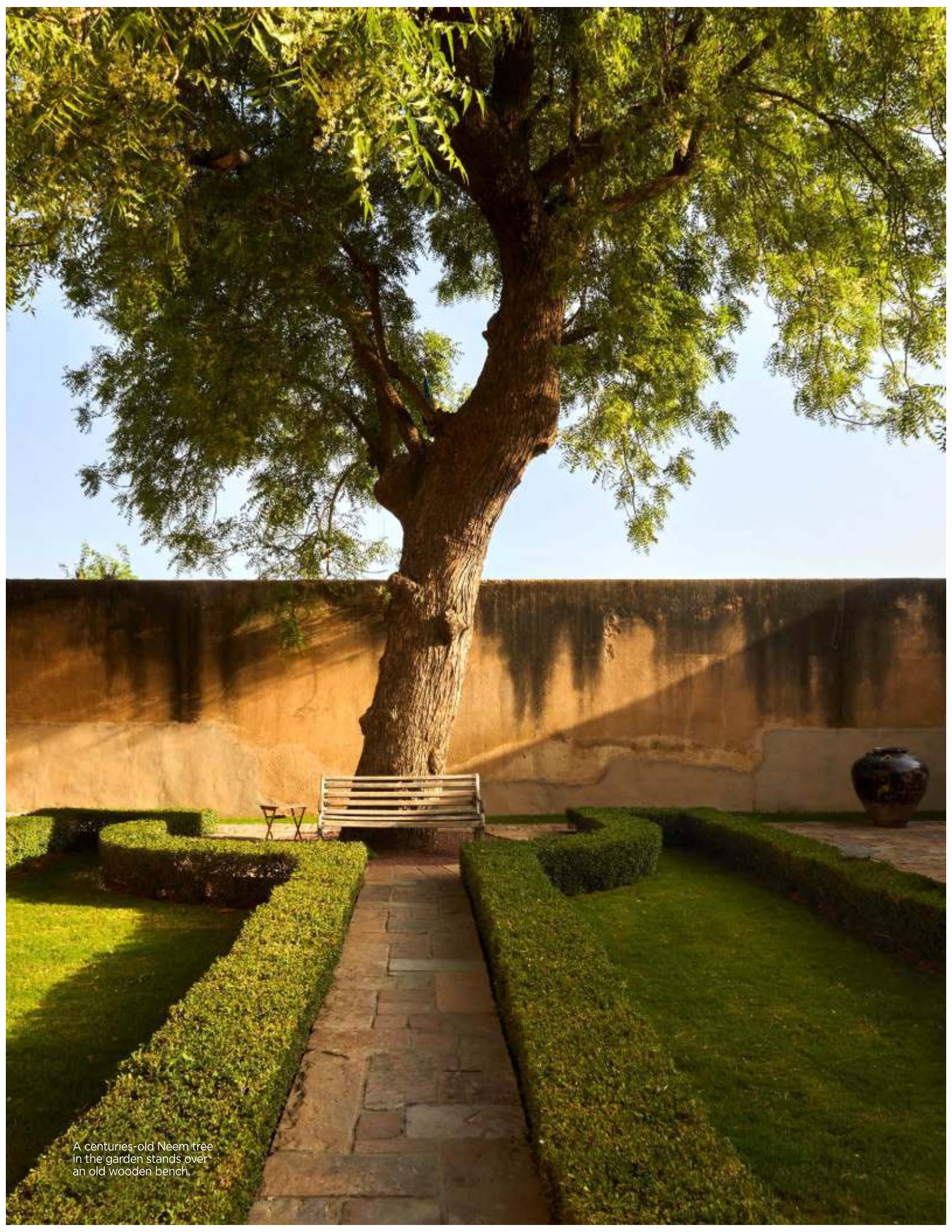
At Deeppura Garh, veranda passageways connect bedrooms, creating an interplay of the indoors and the outdoors. **Facing page:** In the en suites, the fluted columns, arches and painted ceilings were restored to reflect their original beauty.



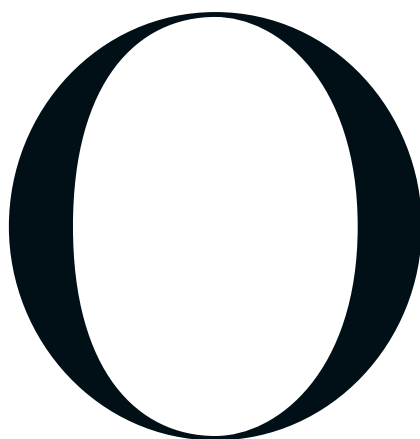




The north-end of the fort overlooks the gardens and the 18-metre-long swimming pool. **Facing page:** The Shekhawati architecture of Deeppura Garh—which was restored by 160 craftsmen and artisans over five years—is best viewed from the haveli's courtyard.



A centuries-old Neem tree in the garden stands over an old wooden bench.



n a recent trip to Rajasthan—my first trip away from home since the pandemic began—I met Maria Grazia Baldan. A friend and I drove through the Thar desert, touring the famous painted havelis of Shekhawati, as this heritage region of Rajasthan is known, and we landed up at Deeppura Garh, the 200-year-old fortified home that Baldan saved from ruin and renovated with the help of Belgian architect Philippe de Villegas.

As we entered the front courtyard, an attendant introduced us to Maria Grazia, an elegant Italian designer who had built a jewellery business, wandering the vintage markets—from Istanbul to Peshawar and Shanghai—collecting old coins, charms and other precious trinkets from which she made the unique pieces that filled her shops in Milan and Sardinia.

Baldan emerged from a freestanding structure beside the front wall, which she then led us to, explaining that it was an old camel stable transformed into an office. I was immediately smitten by this small space and how it had been renovated with a simplicity that enhanced the sheer monumentality of the stonework, tall ceilings, and large wooden beams—treatment that continues across this noble home that had been the birthplace of the last king of Sikar, the nearby district capital.

Baldan's worldly refinement is evident throughout this gem of a boutique hotel she has created, with 10 bedroom suites, each one different but all finished with the same clean lines and unerring eye for quality. From the front courtyard we entered the salon in the main building, a cream-coloured room with a screen of five stone arches and a soaring double-height ceiling. The only colour in this serene space came from the large green dhurries on the floor, accents of black in the scattering of choice antiques, and the paint on the dado above and below the neutral skirting.

Beyond the salon lies the kitchen that has been refurbished with such precision and simplicity that it feels like a show kitchen for a television chef. We were told that guests often gather here to eat or

participate in cooking classes. Then our hostess led us to the original kitchen that has now been turned into a library, dominated by a large fireplace, and then on through a warren of passages and rooms as one finds in an old fort. Each bedroom has a luxurious bathroom appointed simply and honestly in keeping with the overall aesthetics of the place.

Speaking of aesthetics, I am a self-proclaimed fanatic for ornament and decoration, but here at Deeppura Garh I was touched by the peace and calm created by a conspiracy of elements orchestrated by Maria Grazia. She has kept almost all the walls white, with only the occasional Rajput-style painted borders or frescoes as interior accents. On some exterior courtyard facades, my inner maximalist was delighted to find a riot of original patterns and iconography, gloriously restored.

“None of this is random,” she says as we view the private suites built in the garden beside the large swimming pool. “My desire was to create a holistic experience in which Deeppura Garh is a peaceful oasis amidst the excitement and sensory overload we experience in India,” she tells us when we settle for tea in the pavilion at the far side of the pool. “This is a place to come and relax for a few days, to unplug and take a yoga class or read a book. In our kitchen gardens, we grow as much as we can for our guests and staff, and we conserve and recycle water wherever we can.” She tells us this as I spy the delicate striped fabric backing the block-printed cushions on the banquet that I sat on, and I marvel at this stylish woman and the world that she has created. Everything about her and this home, each light switch and doorway, exudes chicness and style. And I wonder at how courageous and strong this woman is, to have left her home in Italy to venture into the depths of India to create this magnificent sanctuary.

In these dangerous times, when each of us has been forced to look within to find inner strength to manage the many challenges this pandemic has brought, I am encouraged by Maria Grazia and how she has incorporated style and grace in her adventurous experience of life in its fullness. ▀

Deeppura Garh



have a rest before
moving on

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