

Design Journeys



Photographer: Ken Hayden, The Interior Archive



INDIAN SPLENDOR

MINIMALISM MEETS MAGNIFICENCE IN A RAJASTHAN PALACE,
NOW TRANSFORMED INTO A POSH HOTEL. **By Angelika Taschen**

My first trip to India was back in 1992, with friends during the Christmas holiday. Although I can't believe it now, at the time I didn't even want to go. But India can be addictive, and I've been back several times. When people ask, "Why India?" I always say the same thing: It's epic. India has amazing colors you see in no other part of the world. It's one of civilization's oldest cultures, and you can feel it: The place so sophisticated and so advanced and so deep that it has a very strong identity.

When I'm in India, I want to buy everything I see. I've found a few pieces here and there, and have brought back some nice embroidered carpets. But overall, I've come to realize that what I really take home from India is inspiration. The more folkloristic items don't work with the architectural design of my house or the rest of my art, most of which is European or American.

As I worked on my latest book, *The Hotel Book: Great Escapes Asia*, I discovered a wonderful hotel that mixes the best of traditional India with modern design. Called Devi Garh, it's a huge old palace surrounded by mountains near Udaipur, Rajasthan. Many gorgeous palaces throughout the country have been restored and transformed into hotels; without this type of investment and renewal, they would probably just crumble and one day be ruins.

Devi Garh, *above*, is much more minimal than most Indian palaces, but it is still resplendent. The interiors are modern, with built-in beds and tables. Each of the 23 rooms is finished with a different mix of local materials; one suite, for example, is in white marble and an intense blue stone called lapis lazuli. Although the look is simple, the detailing is beautiful and truly Indian. Traditional forms, materials, and colors appear in a more subtle way.

Achieving such a good balance of old and new is much of why I love Devi Garh. The look even extends to the landscape design and the five courtyards, where modern fountains play off ancient ones. Overdoing the modern look, after all, can destroy the spirit of the tradition.

The same can be said whether you're building a new home or restoring or redoing an existing interior. The main focus has to be on the quality of the basics—and then you can add a little fun. Even when it comes to design, I look back to what my Latin teacher used to say about translation: Be as precise as possible and as free as necessary.

Angelika Taschen edits architecture, photography, design, and contemporary-art books, including The Hotel Book: Great Escapes Asia (Taschen, 2004). She splits her time between Los Angeles and Berlin.