

DILIGENT

Designing

Interior designer and entrepreneur Sheela Levy has homes in Zurich, London and Mumbai, but her home in Mallorca is where she has invested her heart and soul. A global citizen with many business interests focused around nature, she now chooses to dwell amidst her olive grove and vegetable garden.

TEXT: AMITA SARWAL



The muted ivory, beige & wooden interior is elegantly juxtaposed with the Levys' impressive, vibrant collection ranging from Stuart Semple to Miro

From Mallorca—Delving into her Past

Sheela and Ivan Levy's Finca—Son Naava was meant to be “just another holiday home” but for now, “Son Naava is where we have come to stay. This was definitely not part of the Big Plan! I call Mallorca our divine intervention. Buying a home here was complete serendipity. We came, we saw—and we wanted it,” she gushes.

Sheela was born in New Delhi, grew up in Kenya and went to boarding school and university in England, where she majored in Law, Economics and Politics. This is where she met her Swiss husband and got married in 1978. From 1979 to 1983, they lived in Geneva where she initially taught English to diplomats and bankers, while mastering her French. She then worked for multiple international companies and travelled the globe.

“After a stint in London, we moved back to Zurich in 1983 to open our own business—The Body Shop Switzerland. Our daughter Shaana was also born in 1983, making it the best moment of our lives. Shaana got married in 2013 to Mumbai-based Uraaz Bahl,” Sheela reveals.

In 2003, she joined the Women's Leadership Board at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. “During these seven years, I interacted with strong,



The long, cream living room with 15 feet high ceilings, an antique Indian coffee table, rocking chairs with a large daybed in the library



The living room has an 'oversized' theme to it with large sofas, an overpowering MOOOI candelabra & lamp reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland

Ivan Levy is principally responsible for their biodynamic Son Naava Olive Oil with the entire production for 2016 pre-sold! His goodwill involves setting up a charitable foundation for Dulwich College International in Asia; help establish Magic Bus in Myanmar and helping a local Franciscan Monastery brand market their homemade produce to ensure a sustainable future.



An old vintage suitcase converted into a chair & covered in beautiful black & white printed fabric

powerful women from conflict ridden countries around the world, met world leaders, visited the White House, dined at Buckingham Palace and undertook study trips to South Africa and Egypt, to name a few. I met 250 amazing women CEOs and entrepreneurs, many of whom have still remained friends."

The Body Shop Years

From 1983 to 2012, Sheela and Ivan were the face of The Body Shop Switzerland. "We owned and operated 50 stores. Ivan was the mind of the company and I was its heart and soul! I undertook staff training, customer service and visual merchandising, which won us every Award for Excellence year-on-year," Sheela affirms.

Getting the franchise at 25 years of age was sheer luck and genius, she avers. "I was convinced that The Body Shop was the best thing since sliced bread! I interviewed with Gordon and Anita Roddick.... I was an enthusiastic young dreamer with no substantial backing or experience, so like Scheherazade I spent four hours enthralled with stories of Indian beauty traditions and culture and voila...I got the franchise a week later!"

"The family thought we were crazy for wanting to start a 'hippy dippy concept', but against all odds, we opened our first 25 sq m store in Zurich in August 1983. Products came in canisters and we filled our bottles in the kitchen of our quaint garden flat, which smelt of white musk incessantly.

"We didn't advertise and didn't conform. Unconventionally, we sprinkled

strawberry perfume all the way from the streets and the bus stops to the store to lead people in!

"Early 1990s, our fame spread for our legendary windows. Being arty and creative, we did funky stuff like coordinated the launch of our elderflower eye gel with the release of the first *Batman* film—had big cutouts of Batman wearing our coolpacks near piles of eye gels. We sold truck loads!

"What became an inherent part of our DNA was campaigning. We developed great social, environmental and corporate responsibility. We always believed that 'If you think you're too small to be effective, try going to bed with a mosquito!' The best campaign of all, hands down, was our Self Esteem Campaign that said: 'There are three billion women who don't look like supermodels and only eight who do!' We sold more tee-shirts with this slogan than any accessory to date—besides the Love Pillows! Sharing a dinner table with activists hell-bent on saving the world, or world leaders, was not only inspiring, but part of regular life at The Body Shop those days. The Late Dame Anita Roddick, a close friend (we spent many holidays at her gorgeous homes) always instilled in us, 'If you do things well, do them better. Be daring, be first, be different, be just!'"

"Sheela Levy Interiors (www.sheelalevy.com) started in 2015, but I feel I have been living this role for over 30 years. I have designed, decorated and curated homes from New York to Mumbai for discerning clients, friends and family. Being a qualified practitioner of Imperial Feng Shui, Chinese Astrology and Face Reading, has given me in-depth understanding of space and energy, and honed my intuition about bringing tranquillity and harmony to both the home and its inhabitants," she states.

Ivan and Sheela established CocoSage last year—a real estate development company—with beautiful old buildings in Palma, such as a duplex penthouse with a roof-terrace with 360 degree views over the sea and gorgeous cathedrals. They have also partnered with Michelin Star Chef, Marc Fosh to develop his brand and open a chain of restaurants with a difference.

Ivan is principally responsible for their biodynamic Son Naava Olive Oil (www.sonnaava.com), with the entire production for 2016 pre-sold! He also ensures that everything works in a systematic Swiss fashion! A certified workaholic, his mind is buzzing with fifty projects simultaneously. His goodwill involves setting up a charitable foundation for Dulwich College International in Asia; help establish Magic Bus in Myanmar



The live-in kitchen with its central cooking island continues as the breakfast table



Made in Mumbai, this bench is at Shaana & Uraaz Bahl's home in Mumbai



The black & white kitchen has a beautiful skyline flooding it with light. The B&B Italia white dining table with black & white striped chairs has a row of different sized, black Tom Dixon Lamps



A commissioned art installation with poems engraved on it by designer Paul Cocksedge



The 100 sq m master bedroom suite with a floating bathtub in the centre of the room & a sizeable walk-in closet

(www.magicbus.org) and helping a local Franciscan Monastery brand and market their homemade produce to ensure a sustainable future.

“A home is not yours unless you add your own essence and soul to it. Each current home is a work in progress—a ‘setting’ for my creativity. I place and move stuff around endlessly till I am completely satisfied with the mood and light it captures at different times. My years of detailed excellence in retailing, combined with Feng Shui, give me an intuitive understanding of energy,” she explains of her four homes.

Kusnacht, Zurich

The wrap-around terrace overlooking Lake Zurich was the prime attraction for this modern, linear, 2600 sq ft (260 sq m) two bedroom apartment. The colourful, contemporary art that adorns the walls inside is a strong competitor to the view outside. The muted ivory, beige and wooden interior is elegantly juxtaposed with the Levys’ impressive, vibrant collection ranging from Stuart Semple to Miro. The undisputedly best feature is the 100 sq m master bedroom suite with a floating bathtub in the centre of the room and a sizeable walk-in closet.

Eaton Place, London

This ground floor and basement duplex was one of Sheela’s greatest achievements. Architect Will Caradoc-Hodgkins helped her transform the apartment into one of the ‘It’ residences in this already desirable, celebrity-filled neighbourhood. On the upper floor, the study has an oversized daybed; a cream living room with an antique Indian coffee table and the dining room with wall-to-ceiling windows overlooking the private courtyard. The live-in kitchen with its central cooking island continues as the breakfast table. It’s become the focus of the house where most meals and endless cups of chai are consumed. On the lower floor, the two spacious bedrooms open onto a Zen courtyard with white Philippe Starck sofas, a lit wall, lined with tall bamboo, and a Big Black Buddha head serenely watching from the corner.

Finca Son Naava, Mallorca

“The house on a NE-SW axis was built by the Swarovski family. It had a lot of stuck earth energy so we changed the whole dynamism of the house with some structural changes, flora and colours. White dominates the walls, fabrics and flowers to enhance positive energy flow. Favourite zones are the Moroccan-inspired courtyard with a fountain and outdoor cinema! Next is the 150 sq m terrace, which has become our summer

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living space! Everyone hangs out there all day long with conversation, ideas, food, and music floating in the air!”

Notting Hill, London.

A Grade II listed building adjacent to cool, hip Westbourne Grove. The focal point and grandeur of this triplex is the large staircase that runs through the centre of the house. “We commissioned an art installation with poems engraved on it by designer Paul Cocksedge. It



The views from the church bench onto exquisitely maintained lawn, palm trees with hammocks on one side & the outdoor bamboo covered terrace that essentially serves as the summer living & dining room

hangs from the ceiling, cascading down three flights of stairs. The living room in natural tones has an ‘oversized’ theme to it. Large sofas, an overpowering MOOOI candelabra and lamp are reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland*. The black-and-white kitchen has a beautiful skyline flooding it with light.”

Sheela Levy very evocatively sums up her zeal and her ardour thus, “I focus on my passion—the houses. I love the idea of dabbing these blank canvases with colour,

texture, energy and designing interiors with a soul.

“I am a house junkie! I go looking at houses purely for pleasure. There is no better way to truly get under the skin of a place, see its true beauty and feel its heart and soul, than to visit local homes, and meet interesting people,” she winds up passionately.

Photos: Natxo Bassols & Aranka Israni; courtesy Sheela Levy



Ivan, Shaana, Sheela, Uraaz Bahl