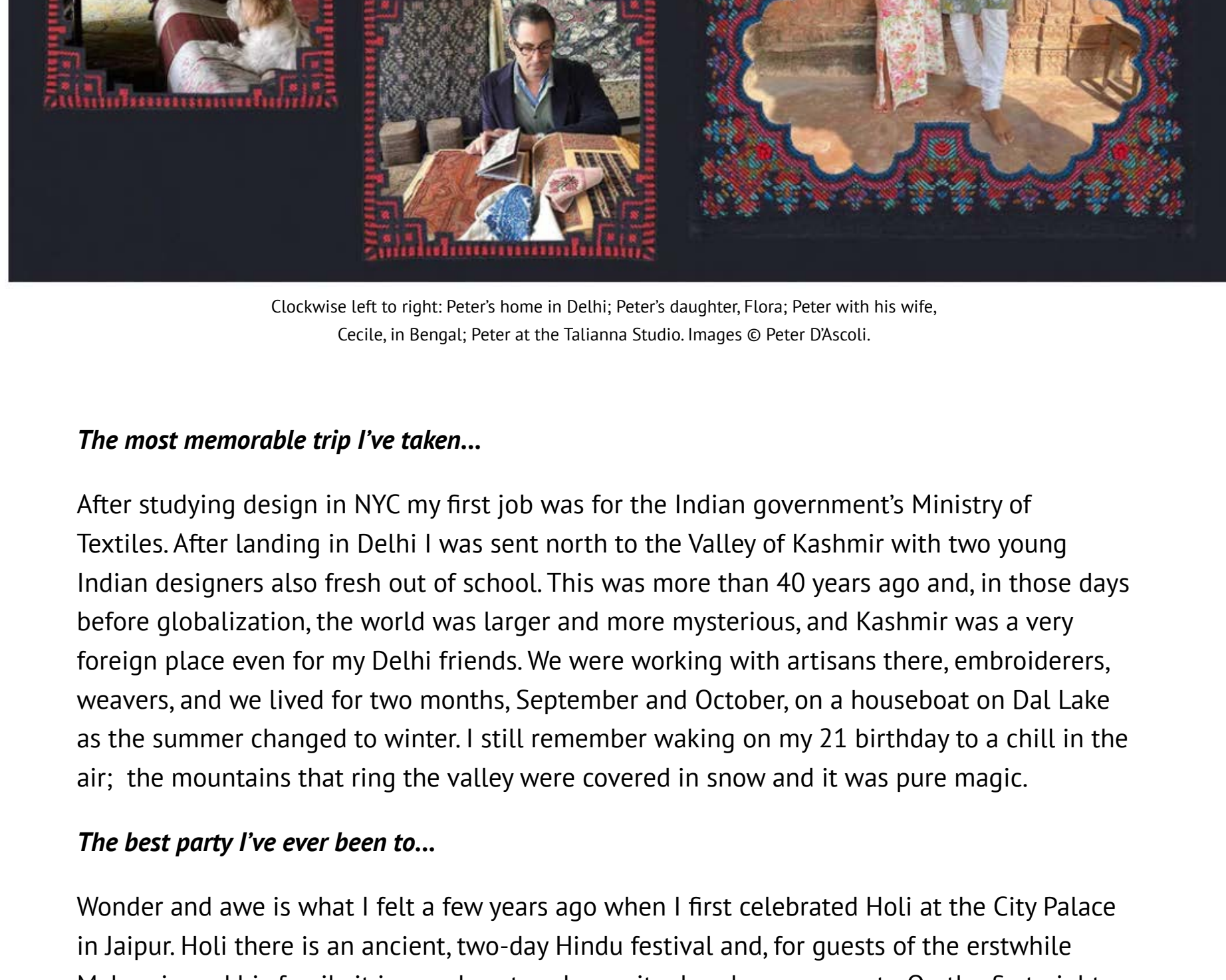




THE INTERVIEW | MASTERS & MUSES | CABANA MAGAZINE

NYC-born Delhi-based designer, Peter D'Ascoli - the creative mind behind Cabana favorites, D'Ascoli and Talianna Studio - shares candid insights from his studio, revealing his favorite (and least favorite) interiors, guilty pleasures, greatest challenges, happiest memories, favorite fabrics and dream dinner guests.

INTERVIEW BY CAMILLA FRANCES | MASTERS & MUSES | 14 JUNE 2024



Clockwise left to right: Peter's home in Delhi; Peter's daughter, Flora; Peter with his wife, Cecile, in Bengal; Peter at the Talianna Studio. Images © Peter D'Ascoli.

The most memorable trip I've taken...

After studying design in NYC my first job was for the Indian government's Ministry of Textiles. After landing in Delhi I was sent north to the Valley of Kashmir with two young Indian designers also fresh out of school. This was more than 40 years ago and, in those days before globalization, the world was larger and more mysterious, and Kashmir was a very foreign place even for my Delhi friends. We were working with artisans there, embroiderers, weavers, and we lived for two months, September and October, on a houseboat on Dal Lake as the summer changed to winter. I still remember waking on my 21 birthday to a chill in the air; the mountains that ring the valley were covered in snow and it was pure magic.

The best party I've ever been to...

Wonder and awe is what I felt a few years ago when I first celebrated Holi at the City Palace in Jaipur. Holi there is an ancient, two-day Hindu festival and, for guests of the erstwhile Maharaja and his family it is equal parts solemn ritual and raucous party. On the first night guests gather with the family and all the nobles of the court dressed in traditional finery including magnificent jewels, turbans, and embroidered garments as the full moon rises. We have come to witness the king, guided by priests, set fire to a giant bonfire symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.

An elegant cocktail party and dinner follows, with laughter and dancing continuing late into the night. The following day guests arrive at the palace garden where more revelry ensues. This is a traditional morning party heralding the arrival of Spring and is an intoxicating, joyous dance to divine love at which participants douse each other with color. What is so thrilling about this party in this place is that it has been held for hundreds of years and is featured in many antique miniature paintings of princes and princesses 'playing Holi' in this very garden.

The best gift I've ever received...

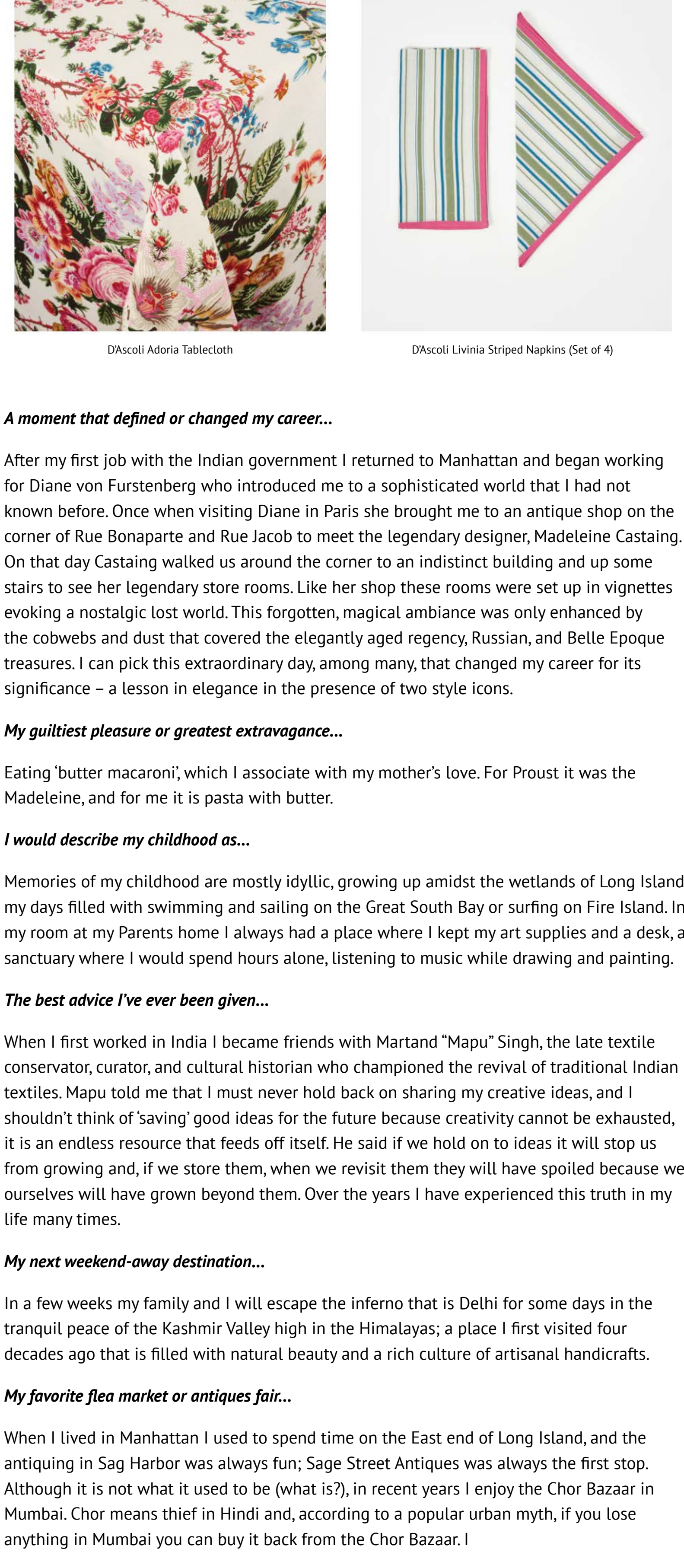
My daughter, Flora, who came to me late in life. Who gave her to me? This could be a complex answer but I credit Cecile, my wife.

An object I'll never part with...

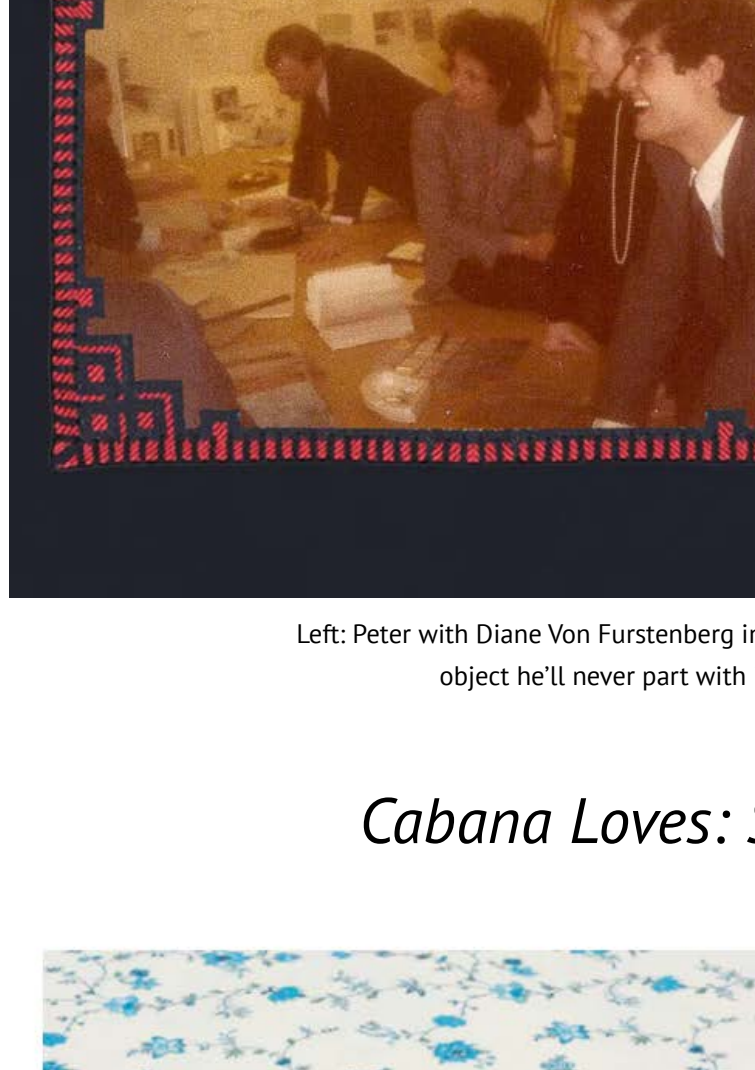
I have a large seashell, a Triton's Trumpet, that I found while diving on a vibrant coral reef on a sailing expedition in the Caribbean when I was fourteen years old. In addition to being beautiful to look at as a highly decorative object, it is precious to me because it symbolizes innocence, adventure, mystery, and courage.

The greatest challenge I've overcome...

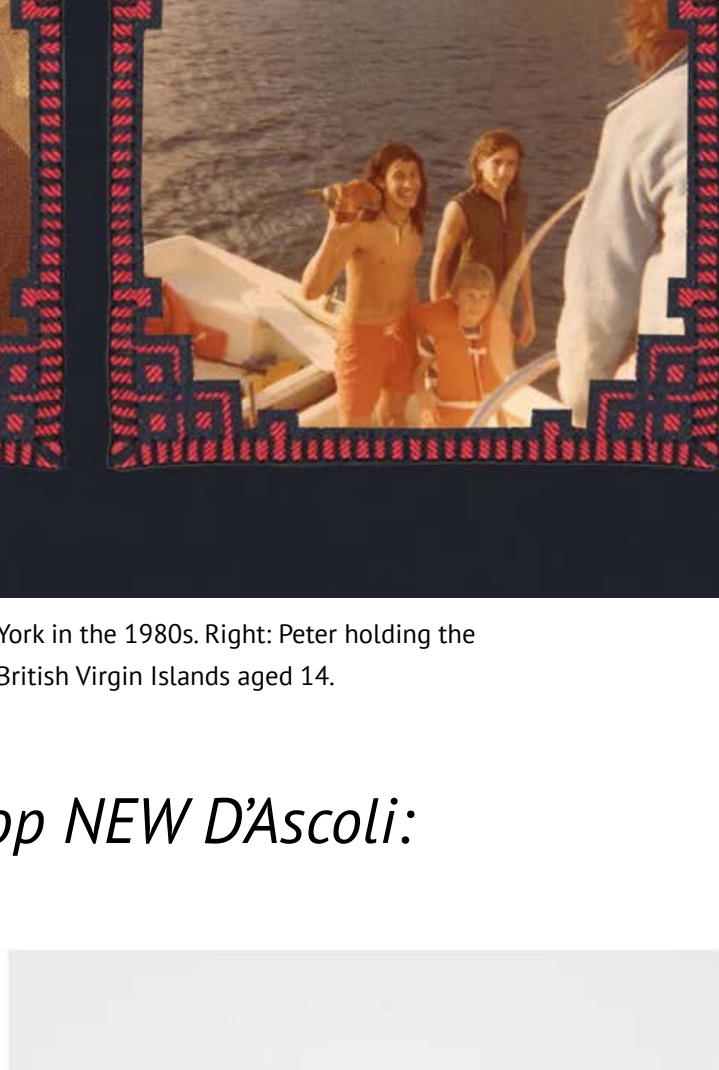
Definitely when, after five years as a startup and, after reaching profitability, the Talianna Studio I had established in India failed, running out of money after the 2008 financial crisis. In addition to the anxiety caused by my need to support my family, the idea that our work would stop and our team would never experience its potential was psychologically devastating. Thankfully my wife Cecile supported me with personal funding and we not only survived but have flourished.



Peter celebrating the 2024 Festival of Holi at the City Palace in Jaipur with Sawai Padmanabh Singh © Fabrizia Caracciolo



D'Ascoli Adoria Tablecloth



D'Ascoli Livinia Striped Napkins (Set of 4)

A moment that defined or changed my career...

After my first job with the Indian government I returned to Manhattan and began working for Diane von Furstenberg who introduced me to a sophisticated world that I had not known before. Once when visiting Diane in Paris she brought me to an antique shop on the corner of Rue Bonaparte and Rue Jacob to meet the legendary designer, Madeleine Castaing. On that day Castaing walked us around the corner to an indistinct building and up some stairs to see her legendary store rooms. Like her shop these rooms were set up in vignettes evoking a nostalgic lost world. This forgotten, magical ambience was only enhanced by the cobwebs and dust that covered the elegantly aged regency, Russian, and Belle Epoque treasures. I can pick this extraordinary day, among many, that changed my career for its significance – a lesson in elegance in the presence of two style icons.

My guiltiest pleasure or greatest extravagance...

Eating 'butter macaroni', which I associate with my mother's love. For Proust it was the Madeleine, and for me it is pasta with butter.

I would describe my childhood as...

Memories of my childhood are mostly idyllic, growing up amidst the wetlands of Long Island, my days filled with swimming and sailing on the Great South Bay or surfing on Fire Island. In my room at my Parents home I always had a place where I kept my art supplies and a desk, a sanctuary where I would spend hours alone, listening to music while drawing and painting.

The best advice I've ever been given...

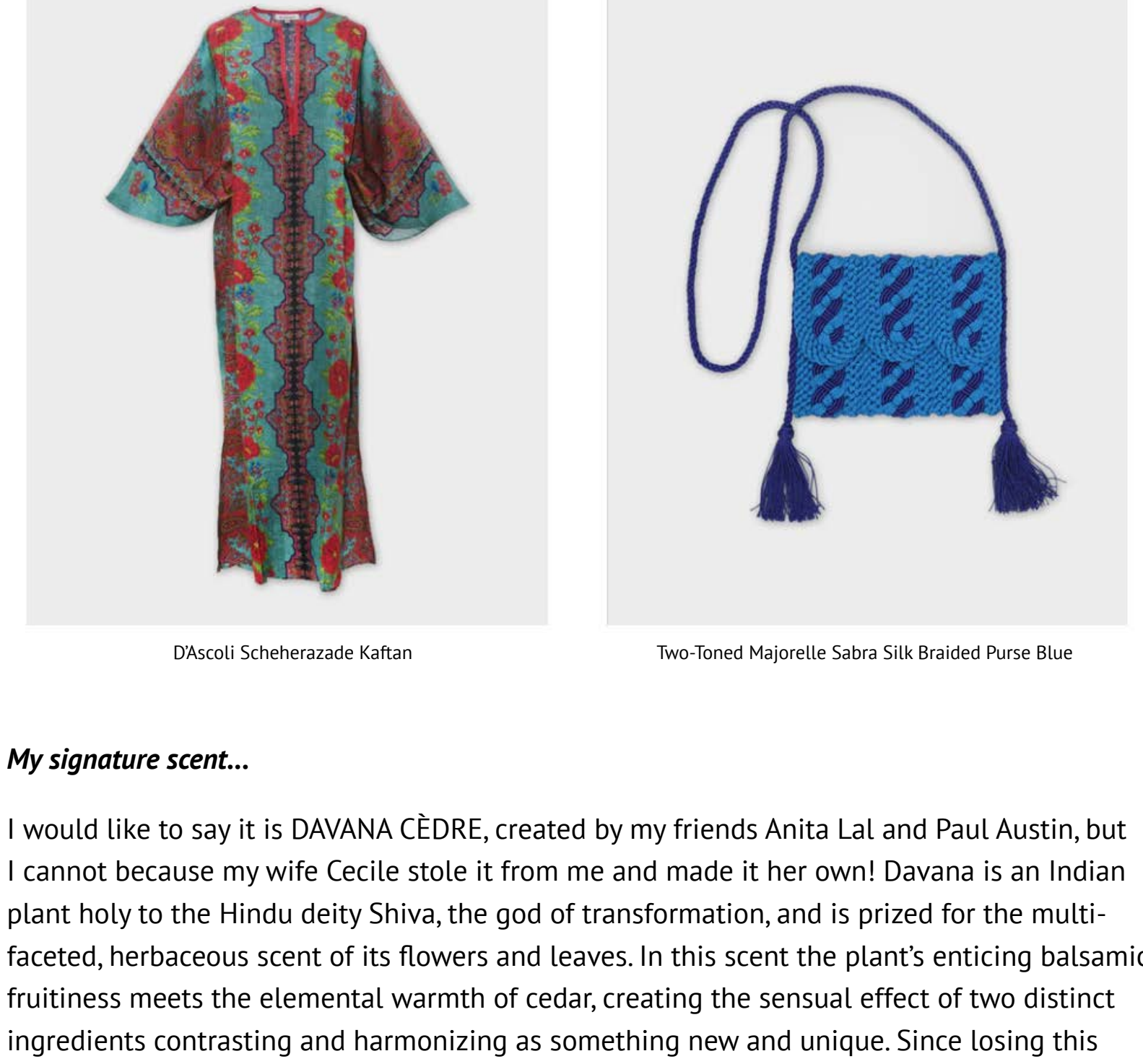
When I first worked in India I became friends with Martand "Mapu" Singh, the late textile conservator, curator, and cultural historian who championed the revival of traditional Indian textiles. Mapu told me that I must never hold back on sharing my creative ideas, and I shouldn't think of 'saving' good ideas for the future because of money constraints, it is an endless resource that feeds off itself. He said if we hold on to ideas it will stop us from growing and, if we store them, when we revisit them they will have spoiled because we ourselves will have grown beyond them. Over the years I have experienced this truth in my life many times.

My next weekend-away destination...

In a few weeks my family and I will escape the inferno that is Delhi for some days in the tranquil peace of the Kashmir Valley high in the Himalayas; a place I first visited four decades ago that is filled with natural beauty and a rich culture of artisanal handicrafts.

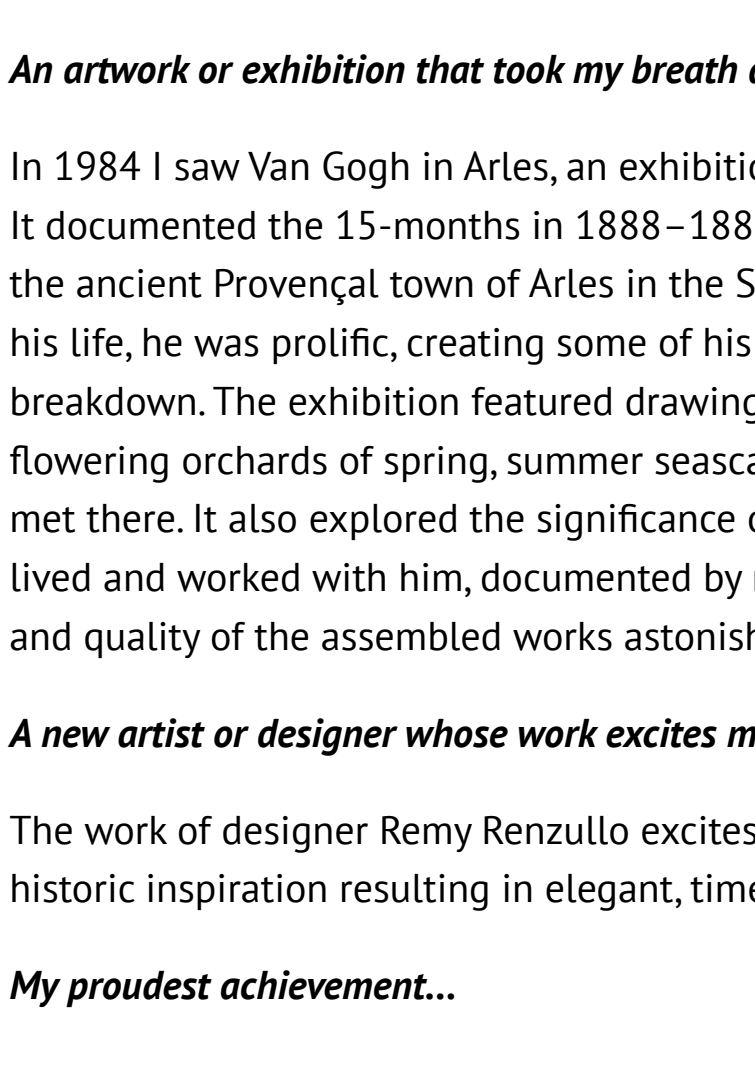
My favorite flea market or antiques fair...

When I lived in Manhattan I used to spend time on the East end of Long Island, and the antiquing in Sag Harbor was always fun; Sage Street Antiques was always the first stop. Although it is not what it used to be (what is?), in recent years I enjoy the Chor Bazaar in Mumbai. Chor means thief in Hindi and, according to a popular urban myth, if you lose anything in Mumbai you can buy it back from the Chor Bazaar. I

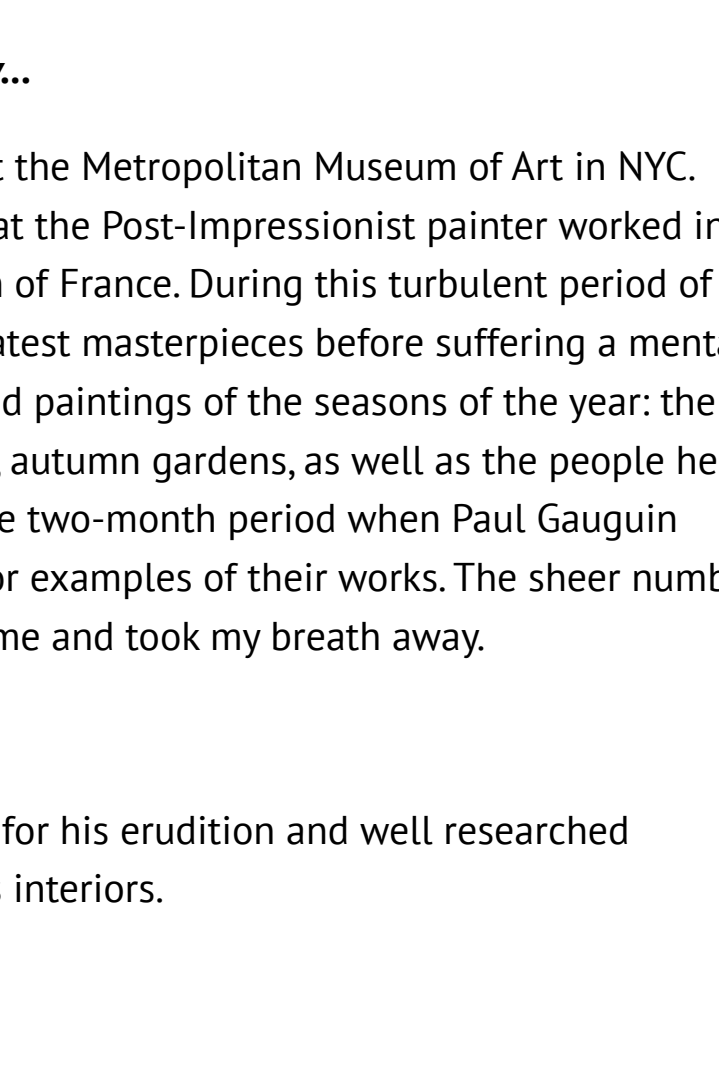


Left: Peter with Diane Von Furstenberg in New York in the 1980s. Right: Peter holding the object he'll never part with in the British Virgin Islands aged 14.

Cabana Loves: Shop NEW D'Ascoli:



D'Ascoli Malabar Tablecloth



D'Ascoli Malabar Napkins (Set of 4)

I feel most confident when wearing...

I live in north India where the weather is often hot, and I am most comfortable wearing a traditional long tunic called a kurta and churidars, pants that are full at the waist and tight over the calf, ending in gathers that puddle at the ankle. Sadly, India has seen a loss of traditional, regional dress, especially for menswear. Most men wear a western dress shirt and pants but I dislike wearing these without a jacket, so I almost always opt for the elegant if old fashioned, super comfortable, traditional solution.

My all-time favorite fabric...

Speaking of favorites always reminds me of my daughter when she was very young because, she would often ask me things such as, what is my favorite color or what is my favorite flower, etc. I would always answer by saying that "variety is the spice of life" and, if I selected blue or red then what about green or black? I later realized that she was trying to figure out the world, trying, in this way, to develop her own taste by seeking my advice. If I had to pick a favorite, I would select a cloth we source at my company for a wide range of products: the hand spun, hand woven Indian cotton from Murshidabad District in West Bengal that we call 'Fine Khadi'. I choose this for what it represents, a cultural artifact from a nearly pre-industrial, agrarian society in a place using methods that have barely changed for millennia.

Ideal interiors in three words...

Personal, Eclectic, Decorative.

Distasteful interiors in three words...

Kitsch, Trendy, impersonal.

My go-to recipe...

Pasta that starts with olive oil and garlic. From here I can go several different ways depending upon my mood or the diners. Sauté onions and broccoli and add cream for a rich dish of rigatoni, or sauté prawns and cherry tomatoes and serve with spaghetti. Generous toppings of Pecorino Romano or Parmesan are standard in our home.

Peter D'Ascoli with his wife, Cecile, in Bengal © Peter D'Ascoli

D'Ascoli Scheherazade Kaftan

Two-Toned Majorelle Sabra Silk Braided Purse Blue

My signature scent...

I would like to say it is DAVANA CÈDRE, created by my friends Anita Lal and Paul Austin, but I cannot because my wife Cecile stole it from me and made it her own! Davana is an Indian plant holy to the Hindu deity Shiva, the god of transformation, and is prized for the multi-faceted, herbaceous scent of its flowers and leaves. In this scent the plant's enticing balsamic fruitiness meets the elemental warmth of cedar, creating the sensual effect of two distinct ingredients contrasting and harmonizing as something new and unique. Since losing this fragrance I reverted to my longtime favorite, Blenheim Bouquet from Penhaligon's.

My dream dinner party companion...

The London based philosopher Alain de Botton would be my dream dinner companion for his affable manner and humor when explaining sophisticated existential concepts. And perhaps, Virginia Woolf could be sitting opposite us to add her perspective to our stream of consciousness.

An artwork or exhibition that took my breath away...

In 1984 I saw Van Gogh in Arles, an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC. It documented the 15-months in 1888–1889 that the Post-Impressionist painter worked in the ancient Provençal town of Arles in the South of France. During this turbulent period of his life, he was prolific, creating some of his greatest masterpieces before suffering a mental breakdown. The exhibition featured drawings and paintings of the seasons of the year: the flowering orchards of spring, summer seascapes, autumn gardens, as well as the people he met there. It also explored the significance of the two-month period when Paul Gauguin lived and worked with him, documented by major examples of their works. The sheer number and quality of the assembled works astonished me and took my breath away.

A new artist or designer whose work excites me...

The work of designer Remy Renzullo excites me for his erudition and well researched historic inspiration resulting in elegant, timeless interiors.

My proudest achievement...

My proudest professional achievement is always to see the fruit of our creative endeavors produced in the studio and ateliers of the Talianna Studio. Coupled with this is the esteem for our company's aesthetic culture shown by so many people around the world who I highly respect.