

VISUAL MERCHANDISING *for*
BENARES



Good Earth Design Collection 2015-2016





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Project I - **Internship at Good Earth**
May - June 2015

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Abstract

A celebration of all things beautiful, Good Earth is India's leading lifestyle and luxury decor brand. As a part of my internship programme, I had the delightful opportunity to work with them on conceptualising and visualising merchandising ideas for their upcoming collection (2015-2016).

The following report describes my journey as I undertook unique projects that challenged & heightened my design sensibilities; and contributed to my understanding of the impact of visual communication on society.

I have presented my design outcomes in form of tasks, each of which describe the objectives of the project, my role and involvement in the development, the challenges I faced along the way, and how I overcame them to come up with suitable solutions.

These tasks ranged from visual merchandising to designing wall collages, all revolving around the theme of **Benares & its cultural confluence** for the 2015-2016 collection.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my tremendous and heartfelt gratitude to those who have been a part of my design story at Good Earth.

Good Earth, for giving me an opportunity to work with them and be a part of the BENARES design story development;

Pavitra Rajaram, my mentor and team leader for her unparalleled guidance and inspiration, as I delved into and explored a new area of design;

Hiral Patel & Lamya Dohadwala, for aiding me in my learning and understanding of the brand and its signature aesthetic;

Piyali Basumallick, for sharing her experiences & deep knowledge of Indian arts, thus, enriching my learnings at the store;

Meghna Gandhi, for being responsible for translating my ideas and concepts to reality

A heartfelt note of thanks to the rest of the **Mumbai Design Team - Akshada & Ashley, alongside Raju, the craftsman** who have each contributed in some way to my journey;

I also wish to thank **Shabina**, the store manager; and all the employees and salespersons at the **Good Earth Flagship Store**, Lower Parel, Mumbai;

IDC, and all the faculty, for cultivating a holistic design sensibility within me and encouraging me to explore new avenues of visual communication;

& My Parents & friends, for being an unconditional pillar of strength and support.

Letter of completion

July 2, 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Ameya Narvankar completed an internship in my design studio this summer from 4th May to 10th June 2015. He conceptualized and executed on a Visual merchandising brief for our 'Benares' Collection to be launched in October 2015. In addition, he created collaterals and wrapping papers for the new collection and also worked on a conceptual design presentation for a Good Earth interior project in Hyderabad.

I found Ameya to be a good listener, capable of absorbing a brief clearly and focused on producing quality work. He was tenacious in ensuring that he brought all his work to completion. He shows a mature talent and an original approach to design. His design talent combined with his hard work and ability to deliver on time and respect deadlines was well appreciated and will stand him in good stead.

I wish Ameya the very best for a successful completion of his course and I look forward to seeing his work in the future.

Pavitra Rajaram
Head Designer
The Good Earth Company
Mumbai

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BENARES is
older than history,
older than tradition,
older even than legend
and looks twice as old
as all of them put together.

- MARK TWAIN

Prologue

Fabled to be over 3000 years old, Benares is perhaps the oldest continuously inhabited city in India. It has historically been a center of learning and religion; and was well known in the ancient world for its production of the finest silks, hand-embroidered saris, perfumed incense and brass sculptures. The temples, palaces, mosques and stairways that dot the 5 km long riverfront all stand a testament to the diverse fabric of the city. This very fabric forms the muse & inspiration for Good Earth's 2015-2016 design story.

Emphasis on storytelling, sustaining a craft community and contemporising the Indian aesthetic all contribute to the weaving of this story. Each design has a story and every story takes you on a journey. I was exposed to the various aspects of this particular story as I embarked on my own journey at Good Earth.



Anita Lal, founder & creative director of Good Earth, believes that —

"True luxury is in the details of everyday living; it is being surrounded by things that are natural and hand-crafted with designs that elevate the spirit."

CRAFTED BY HAND,
INSPIRED BY NATURE AND
ENCHANTED BY HISTORY.

The Good Earth Story

Established in 1996, Goodearth has set new standards in stylish luxury retail across India with its beautiful hand crafted products including designer dinnerware, hand block printed fine textiles, natural organic skin-care, luxurious bedroom linen, designer home décor, home fragrances and more.

Started by Anita Lal as an entrepreneurial response to a personal need, the brand under the leadership of her daughter Simran Lal and also the current CEO, today boasts of nine stores spread across the five metros - Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru & Chennai. In addition, two stores in Singapore too retail their products and they also sell online through their web boutique.

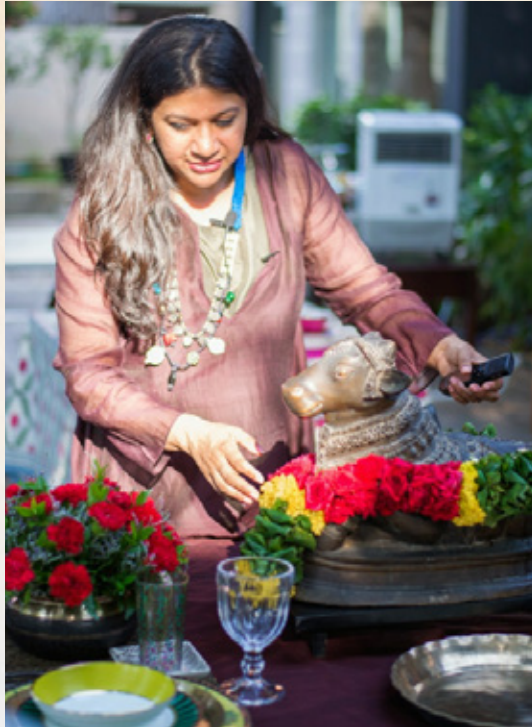
In its 19 year long journey, Good Earth has graduated from a shop selling beautiful home decor things to a brand that revives cottage craft from India and abroad and elevates them to products of luxury.

Creating original design through an Indian prism is the brand's philosophy. Through research and perseverance, the team at Good Earth creates contemporary design that captures the true Indian essence.

Each year Good Earth celebrates the heritage of the Indian sub-continent and of surrounding areas across Asia by creating unique design stories.

Titled BENARES, the 2015-2016 story draws inspiration from the varied fabric of the ancient mystical city of Varanasi.

The Team



PAVITRA RAJARAM
the Mumbai design team leader and my mentor

Good Earth employs a number of teams from marketing to design, and operates primarily from Delhi & Mumbai.

I chose to approach the Mumbai design team and work with them for my internship. The Mumbai design team is headed by **Pavitra Rajaram**, an interior and product designer, and stylist. She has been a pivotal part of Good Earth since the very beginning and has worked on several of their successful design stories. With her years of experience working so closely with the brand and her keen sense of aesthetics and colour, I could not have found a better mentor to intern with.

Like Pavitra, the rest of her team were equally talented and I had something to learn from each one of them.

Hiral Patel and her headstrong and speedy approach to tackling design problems

Lamya Dohadwala and her ability to create beautifully detailed yet practical imagery

Piyali Basumallick and her deep knowledge of Indian fabrics & textiles

Akshada Walavalkar and her well-thought approach to create timeless textile designs

Ashley Suvarna, the self-taught illustrator, and his rich & intricate hand-painted motifs

And not to forget, **Raju**, the artisan who sat near the window in our office with his loom and weaved the stories to life. He laboriously crafted out sample pieces which the rest of the team had designed.

In addition, I also got to briefly interact with the store employees who gave me a tour of the store in my first week and were equally knowledgeable about every aspect of the design story and its products.

A New Direction

I was always fascinated by the world of sustainable affordable luxury that Good Earth believes in. Having worked in print before, I felt with this internship I needed to broaden my design outlook in regards to contemporary Indian design and delve into a whole new area of design.

Before my first meeting with Pavitra, I chalked out a few learning objectives that I wished to achieve during my brief stint at Good Earth.

Exposure to various traditional art forms & craft

India has a rich visual culture. With this internship, my primary goal was to learn more about the various traditional art forms Good Earth is associated with.

While practical knowledge was not feasible at this time (as the Delhi store worked more closely with craftsmen), I was interested in hearing Pavitra's stories and experiences.

Understanding the design approach & process adopted at GE

I was especially interested in how Good Earth goes about creating 'design stories'. What is the thought process? How does one build the narrative and weave it so effortlessly with the aesthetics?

Good Earth is synonymous with contemporary design with Indian roots

Another area I am interested in is revival of traditional Indian art forms, and documenting it. How does one go about contemporising the art form without appropriating it?

Sustainability in design & its impact

Like IDC, the approach adopted at Good Earth is sensitivity towards the society and the environment. Exposure to production techniques, use of sustainable materials and collaboration with traditional craftsmen would be helpful in understanding the contribution of design towards sustainability.

During my interview with Pavitra, I laid forth the areas I wished to explore. A month was too short a time for me to get involved in product development which her design team primarily worked on.

After perusing my portfolio, she felt that visual merchandising and more conceptual work for the upcoming Benares collection, would be right up my alley.

In addition, she would also involve me in other design projects she undertook independently.

Visual Merchandising

A novice to the world of retail, I was not initially familiar with the term 'visual merchandising'.

What is visual merchandising?

Visual merchandising is the presentation of the store and its merchandise in such a manner that it will attract the attention of potential customers and translate it into sales. It involves decorating the store, keeping the interior presentation the same as what is promised on the outside.

As part of the whole design story, Good Earth believes in experiential shopping.

To set the mood, transform the surrounding space as suited to the story and teleport the minds of the customers to the ancient times of *rajahs* & emperors.

Vintage, is a frequent running theme at Good Earth and plays an equally important role in the decor and styling of the store. The decor and display of the store has to be over the top, enchanting, ignite nostalgia and romance, and capture the imagination of the

shoppers, but at the same time be within the guidelines set by the brand. It could be kitsch as demanded by the current design story but still keep its classic look and feel of the brand.

My role in visual merchandising

As part of Pavitra's team I was to handle visual merchandising for the upcoming Benares collection and come up with concepts and ideas for store decor. This mainly involved a window display and a hanging installation that would be put up in all the stores over the country. Other VM ideas would be more store-specific in this case the flagship store at Raghuvanshi Mills, Lower parel where our office was located.

I was to outline a brief and a proposal putting together all the ideas, concepts and sketches for VM; which was to be presented to and discussed with Anita Lal, the founder and Meghna Gandhi, the production designer responsible to bring the vision to life.



While visual merchandising was my main focus, I also got an opportunity to go back to my roots and work on some print and collateral. I was also briefly involved in the ongoing Domkonda project.

I shall briefly outline the projects I worked on and then further explain them in-depth.

Visual Merchandising Proposal

A presentation outlining all the VM ideas that will bring Benares to the store. This would include, two installations - one air borne, and one ground, larger than life installation for the Rani room; ceiling decor for the walkway on the first level of the flagship store; a moodboard for the window display, tablescape and other display ideas.

Swan Chariots - The Hanging installation

The main installation for Benares was to be air-borne and hung in all the stores. To convey the confluence of cultures and not just rivers was the main idea behind the installation. Large swan chariots give the feeling of the *devas* in their *vimaanas* showering blessings on mortals.

Diorama for the window display

The window display often features a moodboard for each year's design story but this time we opted to present it as a diorama scene of Benares.

The ghatscape features the elements of the lead collection for Benares - 'Varuna' alongside fabrics, brocades, motifs, florals to tell the tale of the fabled city by the river.

Collateral

Collateral at Good Earth refers to the visuals that tell the story of the collection. They are ideally a collage of images and elements from the collection and are hung as wall posters and used as wallpapers in all the stores.

Wrapping paper

The collateral I had designed for Benares were much appreciated by Anita Lal, who felt that they could be further adapted for the festive wrapping papers for the collection.

Domakonda

An ongoing project, Good Earth is renovating and styling Domakonda fort belonging to Kakatiya dynasty in Telangana

and it shall be transformed into a luxury heritage hotel. I got an opportunity to work closely with Pavitra on the presentation for its styling and interiors.

A month was too short to accommodate all the projects and on Pavitra's insistence, I extended my internship for two more weeks which gave me ample time to see them complete the design stage before I handed them over to Meghna, the production designer associated with Good Earth. Under Meghna, I am certain my designs would be executed and brought to fruition in time for the launch of Benares collection scheduled for October.

A study of Benares

A BRIEF DIP IN THE CULTURAL CONFLUENCE THAT IS BENARES

Each year Good Earth comes up with a “design collection” dedicated to the tradition/culture of a certain place.

The theme for each collection is chosen after careful assessing and studying the Indian market and scenario. Current events and trends also shaped the decision of choosing the ancient Indian city of BENARES for the Good Earth Collection 2015-2016.

For the current Samarqand collection, the GE team had travelled to Turkey and Uzbekistan for research & inspiration.

While a field trip was not possible during the duration of my internship, I had to heavily rely on the internet and book as resources for familiarising myself with the culture and heritage of Benares.

In addition, product development was underway and I was introduced to the style, approach & colour palette for the story.

Regarded as the spiritual capital of India, the city of Benares (also known as Varanasi & Kashi), situated in Uttar Pradesh, is a melting pot of cultures.

It is situated on the banks of River Ganges, which is believed to have the power of washing away all of one's sins. More than 3000 years old, the city of Varanasi has seen the rise and fall of legendary kingdoms.

Good Earth wants to tap into this rich sangam of not only rivers but of cultures that have inhabited this ancient city. While Benares is pre-dominantly associated with Hinduism, GE wants to showcase it as a cultural mosaic of Hinduism, Islam & Buddhism which have enriched it over the years.

Areas of study & research:

Cartography

Vintage is a running theme at GE, and I decided to begin my study in that direction. I collected references of old pilgrim maps and postcards of Benares that showed the Ghats of Benares in all their celebratory glory.

James Prinsep

From carefully detailed ornamental boats to the stunning temple architecture, these collection of images were illustrated by James Prinsep, an English scholar who had embraced the Ghats of Benares and dedicated his life to the city.

As his drawings and sketches fall under the public domain, we were free to use them in the collateral collages as well.



Mythology

Varanasi's importance in Hindu mythology is undeniable, however, I couldn't proceed further in that direction as it did not fit into the brand language.

Ghats

Benares is known for its 'Ghats' - the riverfront steps leading to the banks of the river Ganges. There are over 87 ghats that dot the nearly 7 km arc line of the Ganges. Most of the ghats are bathing and puja ceremony ghats, while a few are used exclusively as cremation sites. Some are associated with legends or mythologies while some are privately owned. Painted in vibrant and lively colours these Ghats have greatly influenced the chosen colours for the collection.

Architecture

The oldest continuously inhabited city in the world speaks every inch in its architecture. From colonial British style administrative buildings to the Mughal architectural influences, one can see a varied architectural style interspersed with traditional Hindu architecture of temples along the long ghat line. The city is a treasure trove of variety and hybrid architecture and is central to the idea of cultural *sangam* - the direction we were proceeding in.

I collected a good number of references of the beautiful arches of the temples, the colourful gullies leading down to the steps of the Ghat, the vibrant hybridised windows and doorframes of the settlements near the river.

Iconography

While direct religious symbolism was a big no-no, I was allowed to use them as a metaphor and a subtle reference in a broader story. For example, we could use the floating flower lamps as props despite their religious association. Other such elements included the *Aakash deep* woven lanterns, tiered Ganga *arti diya*s, bells, *rudraksha*, incense, etc.

Flowers

Scented flowers and candles are a daily part of life in Benares society. Pujas, offerings to the deities, to the temples, to the Ganges all revolve around flowers like Marigold (*genda*), Rose, Lotus, Jasmine, Hibiscus, etc. Florals are Good Earth's signature motifs, and do not be surprised if a collection or two launched as part of Benares are based heavily upon those.

In addition to their use as motifs, Pavitra was keen on using fresh flowers in the decor & styling of the store; to embrace the kitsch and capture the mundane aesthetics of Benares.

Arts & Craft

Benares presents a complete museum of Indian art and culture. One can feel the changing patterns and movements in course of history. It has a rich and unique style of art forms and folk art.

- **Silk Weavers of Varanasi**
Zari & brocade textiles are a speciality of the city, and are well-known and much sought after the world over.
- **Benares Brass**
Benares is also known for its antique brassware. The brass vessels are highly decorated and engraved with Hindu icons, swans & women.
- **Wooden toys**
Hand-painted, wooden lacquerware toys revolving around religious & cultural themes are widely popular.

The Good Earth aesthetic

The product development for a new collection begins immediately after the launch of the previous collection.

As it is a lengthy process of design development, colour separation, hot transfer of the design on blanks, sampling, quality and colour control check, it is a priority and work on it was already underway.

Each design team pitches their own story for the collection and work simultaneously on them. To facilitate and inspire the designers, the teams had taken a short trip to Benares in November 2014 and had returned with sketchbooks filled with temple arches, pillars and flower offerings and so on.

Pavitra's team is working on the lead dinnerware collection for the season named 'Varuna' after one of the rivers of the confluence.

For my study of Benares, I had to also take a look at their vision and understand the aesthetics the brand is so well known for.

Moodboard & Colour Palette

DERIVED BY GOOD EARTH FOR BENARES (2015-2016)

On my first day of the internship, I was asked to take a glance at the moodboard and colourboard prepared for the Benares season. They consisted of vibrant & colourful images of flowers, textiles and people by the ghats; which channeled the diverse fabric of the city.

I acquainted myself with the story they wished to build – a story of the confluence (sangam) of not only rivers but of cultures, of religions, of people, of lifestyles and of architecture in such a harmonious and mutually co-existent manner.

Keeping that aspect in mind, they had also derived a colour palette consisting of oranges and pinks from the flowers, teals and aquas from the architecture; and lapis and ultramarine blues from the rivers.

Several of these colours were already a part of Good Earth's set colour palette since they make their own dyes. The coloured dyes when used in transfers on the ceramics turn a deeper shade, so that was also considered when choosing them.



Pinterest

After getting introduced to & familiarising myself with Benares, I was to start Pinning. As Pavitra travelled often, Pinterest allowed us to share our ideas and thoughts with each other remotely as well.

Not a stranger to the Pinterest platform I immediately began to search for references and decor ideas for visual merchandising.



Task 1: The Swan Chariots

THE HANGING INSTALLATION FOR THE ATRIUM



My main job of visual merchandising was to come up with an air-borne installation inspired by the Benares collection. A play with scale & repetition was needed here as it was to be put up in all the Good Earth stores. It had to be minimal for easy of assembly but at the same time over the top and grand.

Pavitra had a fair idea of the direction we had to approach the design of the mobile in. She was keen on using the metaphor of *devas* and kings sitting in celestial chariots dropping flowers as blessings on mortals.

Early ideas

Prior to arriving at the final form of the chariot, I explored other ways in which I could put forth the idea of cultural confluence.

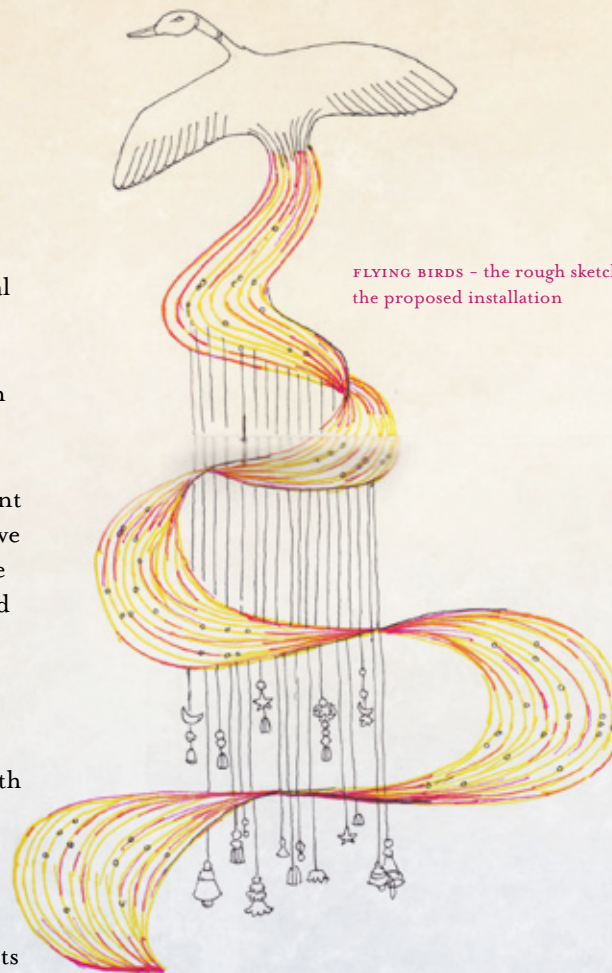
Flying Birds

Keeping in mind the idea of using celestial chariots, we decided to do away with using a horse or an elephant head attached to the chariot, as these two animals have been featured heavily in earlier collections.

We stuck to swans/birds as the main element of the structure. The initial idea was to have a series of 2 to 3 birds suspended from the atrium. Their plumes woven with coloured yarn – the religious kind, flow together showing confluence.

The yarn confluence channels the organic flow of the river, and can be embedded with trinkets from the three faiths.

However, we felt it was not practical to construct in all the stores and decided to scrap it. We retained the idea of the trinkets from the prospect and carry it further.



FLYING BIRDS – the rough sketch of the proposed installation

Kamandalam

A part of Hindu iconography, *Kamandalu* is the drinking water vessel carried by *sadhus* and ascetics. Traditionally made of dry gourd, coconut shell, or clay, it symbolises a self-contained life.

A variety of these *kamandalam* could be hung from the atrium in different shapes and sizes. They could be made of clay to go with the earthy decor of the stores. Each suspended *kamandalu* would be decorated with trinkets and charms again.

We rejected this concept too as it was overtly Hindu in nature, and was missing the Islamic and Buddhist influences.



The Form

After scrapping the initial ideas that did not seem feasible we arrived back to the vision of *devas* dropping flowers and decided to present it in a direct manner instead of a metaphor. We could construct a scene of the celestial skies and have swan chariots suspended with floral blessings and include the chains of trinkets and charms from the older concepts.

Simultaneously, I was also working on a graphic design task that required me to reference images of celestial chariots from *Pichhwais* - wall hangings dedicated to Lord Krishna, hung on the walls of the temples behind the idols. I simplified the detailed chariots to their minimal forms

There was still one small hitch, Good Earth frowns upon the use of imagery of gods so we were required to rid the chariots of the passengers - the *devas*. Without the person element, the chariots looked empty .

Finally, a thought occurred to me that the structure of the chariots resembled the *mehraab* shape. And we could actually just use a *jaali*(trellis) to fill the frame, bringing in the Islamic element to the form.



VIMAANA -
an ancient flying chariot or
palace described in Hindu
mythology & stories



MEHRAAB -
a design in the shape of a niche
or decorative panel designating
the direction of Mecca



JAALI | TRELLIS -
latticed screen, usually with an
ornamental pattern

* above jaali is enclosed in a
cartouche shape

Visualisation

After finalising the form, I began to explore and play with it. I tried out different shapes for the chariots, different jaalis and patterns that could be incorporated in the chariot, and the shape of the bird itself.

We decided it worked better as a mix of different combinations and was a subtle nod to the cultural mosaic of Varanasi.

I also felt the chariots worked better as frame structures rather than in its three dimensional form. The frames would be

easier to produce and assemble as well.

The jaals itself could be embedded with bells, stars, chands, and beads and then chains of charms and fresh flowers could be suspended from the frame.

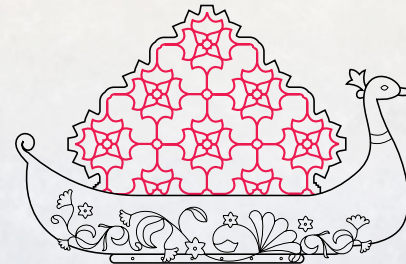
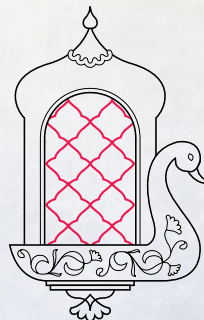
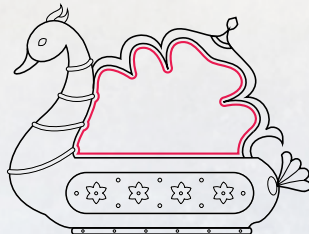
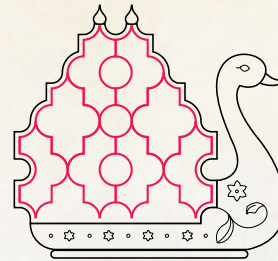
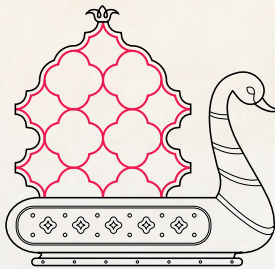
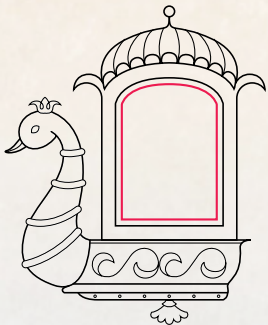
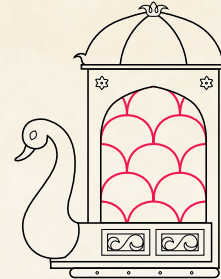
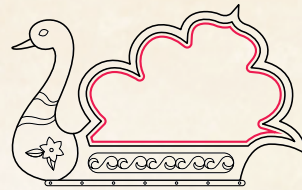
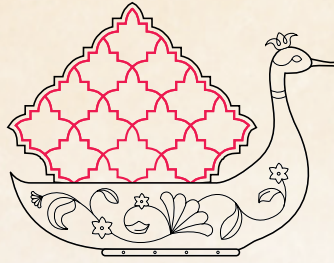


SWAN CHARIOTS - the various types of vimaanas



SWAN CHARIOTS - the rough sketch of the proposed installation

The Chariot designs



After choosing some of the forms from the sketches, I digitally drew them on Adobe Illustrator. Most of the chariots had symmetrical frames while a few had a little organic structure.

We also opted to keep few of the chariots without the jaalis, to make it slightly less overwhelming.

The designs for the jaalis ranged from simple to slightly more complex, from Indian motifs to more geometric forms.



Style & appearance

Once all the designs for the chariots were ready, I was to hand over the files to Meghna for production.

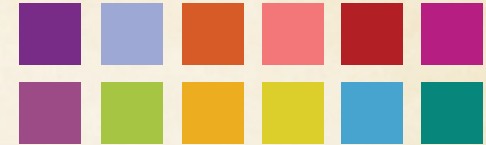
As the new collection is to be launched in November 2015, the production for the chariots was not the priority at the moment.

As part of my visual merchandising proposal, I had to also decide the material, and the look and feel of the installation.

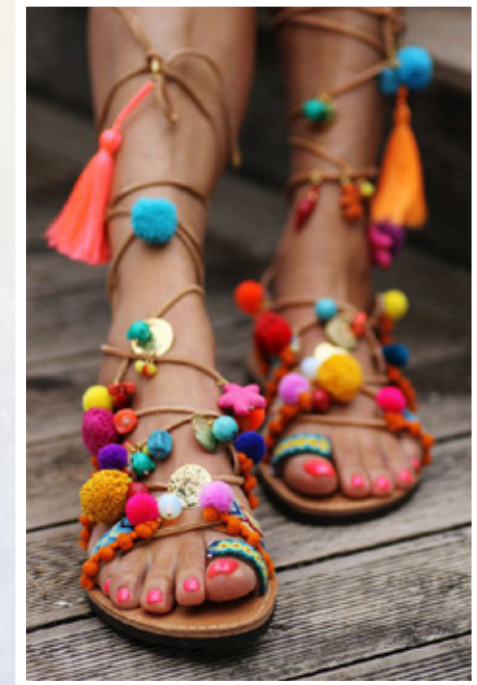
We settled on the use of wood for the frames, and metal for the *jaalis*. Two wooden frames would sandwich the *jaali* in between them, so the design is visible from both the sides.

The wooden frames fit perfectly with the Good Earth style, they would be painted with an ivory white and hints of gold in the engraved portions. The whole feel for the wooden frames would be rustic, distressed and vintage.

The white chariots would be contrasted with a healthy dose of colour from the chains of coloured threads, beads, charms and flowers hanging from them.



An eclectic mix of metal charms & bells, with pom-poms, stars, chands, beads and tassels made with silk & yarn; brings the kitsch & celebratory mood to the atrium.



Prototype

While the day of the chariots going in production was far, I decided to build a miniature model of the installation.

The 3d model would help Meghna visualise the final output more accurately and translate our vision to reality.

SWAN CHARIOTS - a miniature model, frames made with MDF and jaalis/trinkets with ABS



Task 2: Diorama

A GLIMPSE OF BENARES FOR THE WINDOW DISPLAY



The past collections of Good Earth often featured a reconstructed moodboard of the design story. Photographic references, rough sketches, pieces of fabric, dried florals, motifs and other elements were pooled together by the different design teams to recreate identical moodboards which are placed in the windows at all the stores.

For Benares, we felt we could switch it up a bit and repackage the same feel of a moodboard and present it as a Ghatscape – a nostalgic window to the ancient city.



SAMARQAND MOODBOARD - the window display
for Good Earth collection 2014-2015

Early ideas

For the window display we were keen on recreating a Ghatscape, and had begun to proceed in that direction. We were pretty clear from the start about the vision.

The only difficulty was integrating in all the elements that would have gone in if it were to be a moodboard.

Window & door mural

One idea was to pay homage to the eclectic architecture and have a collage of different windows and doorframes from Benares. As the sourced windows would be too large for the collage, we would be required to get them fabricated.

The niches of the windows and doors would hold elements from Benares – florals, silk brocades, brass bells, *diya* lamps, etc.

The idea was, however, rejected due to the availability and size limit for the display window. We figured we could retain the one of the frames and carry it ahead as a single window overlooking Benares.



The many elements of the Diorama

With the idea of using a single window frame in the form of a *jharokha*, we figured it would give the passerbys a glimpse into the mystic city of Varanasi.

One would primarily associate Varanasi with *sadhus* and holy men, however using a mannequin was out of question as GE frowns upon the use of human elements as the main hero of the imagery. I felt in that case, the *Ghats* can become the main focus.

Through the *jharokha*, one can see the hybrid architecture of the city, the rivers washing them at the base, the blooming lotuses in the waters and peacocks strolling the gardens. With this romantic imagery instilled in my mind, I began to visualise the exhibit.

Once again, the space in the window was a hurdle, but we were able to overcome it by resorting to the age-old technique of making it as a diorama, very much reminiscent of the shoebox dioramas I made as a child using layers of images.

As per the requirements of the earlier moodboards, we needed to put in a fixed set of elements in the diorama.

- **Florals**

Good Earth and florals are insperable; lotuses were a no-brainer. We debated on using marigolds but felt it would be too overwhelming as the rest of the store would be bathing in the orange flower at the time of the launch.

Jasmine fit in nicely with the rest of the composition as well.

We opted to scale the flowers up and make them as large as the buildings to up the over-the-top factor. Meghna felt that we should keep the flowers as realistic looking as possible and that she can get them made. We suggested the use of fabric and yarn to make these giant flowers emerging from the rivers.

- **Textiles**

Brocades with intricate designs using gold and silver threads are a speciality of Benares. The motifs and patterns from the Brocades will be used heavily in the textile collection for the season. Raju, the in-house craftsman had already begun working on samples.

I used a brocade motif from the ready designs and made into a border/frame for the whole unit.

A single motif was repeated with a gap to create a continuous border. Piyali suggested that Raju might be able to create it as a roll which could be used in putting it up in all the stores. I handed over a section of the border design to Raju and work on it is underway and will be ready in time for the launch in October 2015.

In addition, we decided to also block-print the waters of the river onto fabric and sew shimmering sequins on them.

- **Architecture**

The lead dinnerware collection for Benares – ‘Varuna’ is an ode to the city by the river; and its rich and varied architecture. I picked out a few temples and buildings from the designs and recomposed them in the diorama. The buildings would be placed as individual pieces as layers to add depth and dimension to the exhibit.

- **Jaalis**

The use of trellis is synonymous with Good Earth. It is a very pivotal element in most of their designs and has become their signature style. I brought in *jaalis* in three places – in one of the three building structures, the main arch of the *jharokha* that holds the diorama together and combined it with the sun suspended from the top of the diorama.

- **Fauna**

While not a common sight in Varnasi anymore, the majestic peacock resting on the balcony was a perfect centrepiece for the whole structure.

- **Cultural sangam**

Yet again, we had to lay an underlying tone of cultural confluence with the diorama. We had covered the elements from Hinduism with the temples and Islam with the use of *jaalis*. A couple of antique bells added the hint of much required Buddhism to the unit, completing the *sangam*.



VARUNA DINNERPLATES – a glimpse of the collection, designed by Lamya & Pavitra, acts as the base for the diorama design. Elements like the river were repeated to use as the waves of the Ganges, alongside the buildings and temples.

The layers of the Diorama



The primary elements of the diorama are to be broken down into layers which would be fabricated in wood.

The frame of the *jharokha* would have a wooden frame, with a thin metal *jaali* in gold as *gadh*. It shall be then covered with a maroon *chanderi* cloth.

The waves of the river will be wooden frames covered with coloured fabric on which the design would be block printed and sequins would be sewn in. They shall be placed on both sides of the diorama for added depth.

The sun with the intricate *jaali* will be laser cut in metal with a golden finish and suspended from a corner.

The temple, arches, and the balcony shall also be made in wood, and hand-painted with the colours of the collection.

We chose to avoid adding a screen of brocade as a background as initially planned since it shall be viewable only from the outside. This way, the diorama would be visible from both the sides of the window.

The Design

With all the elements in place, two identical frames would sandwich them and be erected at the window, making it viewable from both outside and inside the store.

Initially we had opted for a realistic peacock but Anita Lal felt that it was too rich and grandiose, and overwhelmed the composition. Also, the making of a realistic peacock would be require the use of real peacock feathers which is a strict no-no against Good Earth's enviornment policy.

As per her feedback, we suggested that Meghana and her team could construct a paeacock with plaster of paris and have it covered with paper feathers & semi precious gems to tone it down.



GHATSCAPE DIORAMA - the final design

Prototype

Once again, the date of production was far, so I decided to build a miniature model of the diorama as well.

The 3d model would help Meghna distinguish the different layers of the diorama more clearly and construct multiple copies for every store effectively.



Task 3: VM Proposal

STYLING & DECOR IDEAS FOR THE FLAGSHIP STORE



With the two installations design in progress, I was to also come up styling solutions for the store. Pavitra and I would simultaneously continue to pin references and ideas from Indian wedding decor and how we could borrow from them and recycle them for the store decor.

Meghna too contributed to this process as she was familiar with the fabrication and availability of the desired materials.

The floor upstairs has a walkway which shall be weaved with lights & flowers. There would be giant natural branches decorated with marigolds & tassels, and will give you a feel of walking through a celestial forest.

Sequin brocade lamps and decorative crystal umbrellas will be hung as centrepieces from these branched structures.

FRESH FLOWERS - marigolds and jasmines used with brass lamps and bells in tablescapes and styling



Atrium & the staircase

The swan chariots would be hung in the atrium, one could see them in their splendor as they walk up the stairs to the next level.

The walls leading to the next level will be painted a dusk to dawn ombré and showcase the city by the river in golden lineart.

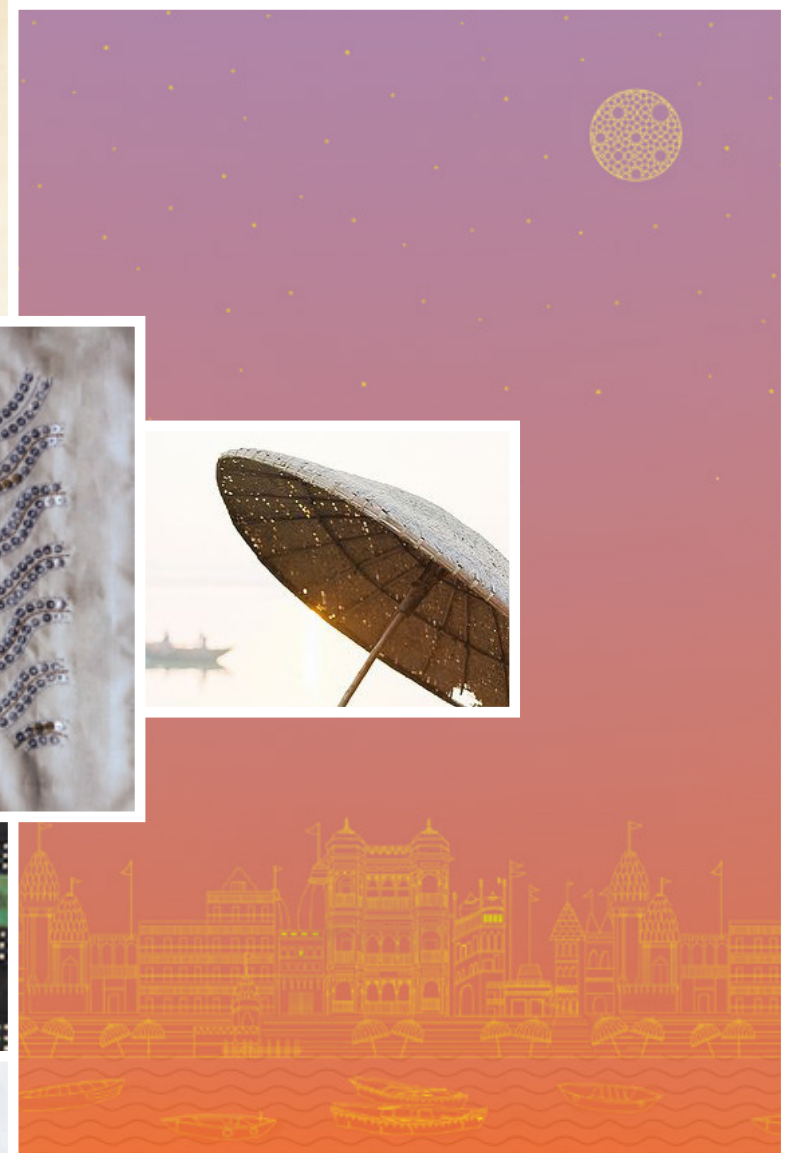
The waves of the river, & the night stars will be embellished with shimmering sequins.

The brocade painted mirrors in the cartouches, a gold sequined sun & woven cane umbrellas would complement & enrich the Varanasi ghatscape.



The atrium walls are painted and decorated just a day or two before the launch party which is held at the flagship store at Raghuvanshi Mills, Lower Parel.

SEQUINNED WAVE DESIGN -
a sample made by Raju which
is also to be used for cushion covers



DUSK TO DAWN OMBRE -
the design for the invitation of the launch party
made by the marketing team

Brocade

While Good Earth plans to create their own contemporary designs for brocades, that shall be used in the textiles; they have also sourced a collection of authentic brocades right from the markets of Benares.

Some will be used as inspiration while the rest are to be used as decor in tablescares and walkway canopies.

One suggestion is to cut them in triangles and put them up as a kitschy bunting garlands in the different sections of the store.



Another suggestion is to have the designs which are made for the cushions be printed on mirrors.

There are several mirrors placed in the store and are usually printed with the collateral collages. This time around, the brocade printed, distressed mirrors with patched gold foil; will take their place. The hints of gold are a nod to the gold leaf offerings on the walls of the Sarnath ruins at Varanasi.



BROCADE PRINTS FOR TEXTILES -
a combination of digital & block print, with
hints of sequins and zari for cushions



The Tasting Room

The flagship store in Mumbai also houses The Tasting Room (TTR) - the cafe which is an extension of the experience and service the brand Good Earth promises & delivers.



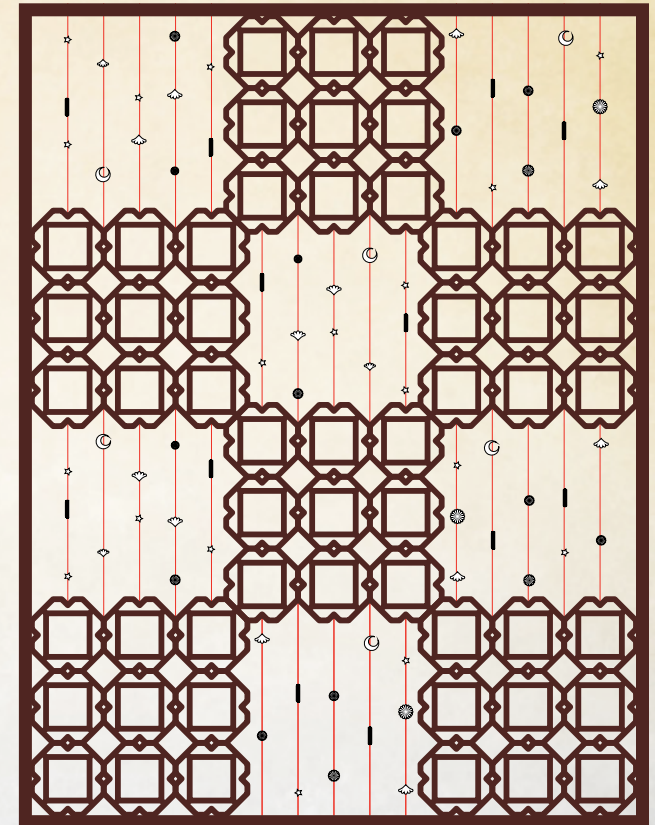
TTR also shares its hosts penchant for subtle Indian minimalism in warm earth tones and during the Benares season, TTR too shall be transformed to mirror the rest of the decor.

The restaurant has two seating areas which are divided by arches. I had to come up with a solution to cover the gaps in the arches.

A simple solution is to erect decorative trellis panels between the two sections. Origami boat lamps similar to flower lamps floating on the Ganges, can be placed in the cavities of the trellis dividers.



Raju, the in-house craftsman is also making cylindrical lampshades with the sequinned waves that shall be hung alongside the flower boat lamps.



DECORATIVE PANEL DESIGN -
a jaali frame made with wood, shall have
niches to place in the flower lamps.
Inspired the patrauli lamps, they shall be shaped like
origami boats and hold fresh slowlers and tealights

The alternate areas of the panel will once again
mirror the cultural sangam and consist of
metal charms and trinkets

Task 4: Collateral

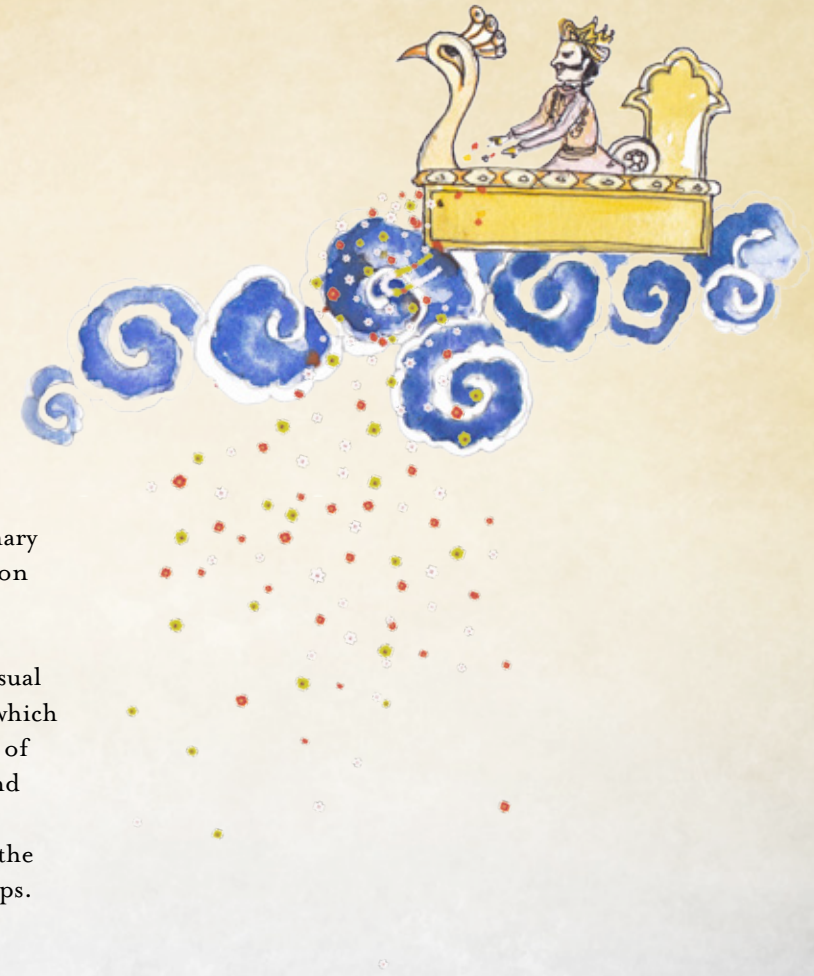
PHOTO COLLAGES THAT ADORN THE WALLS OF THE STORE



WHIRLING DERVISH - a collateral from the
Samarqand Collection 2014-2015

While visual merchandising was my primary task, I was simultaneously asked to work on collateral for Benares.

Collateral at Good Earth refers to the visual printed moodboards for the collection which are hung up as large posters on the walls of the store as well as used for marketing and press, in print and on social media. They are also used in the wallpapers for the store walls and on price tags and gift wraps.



Elements of the collateral

I spent a great deal of time studying the existing collateral for the current Samarqand collection as well as scoured the website for imagery from the older collections – Ratnakara and Farah Baksh.

Each piece of collateral was rich in detail and I could discover a story in every small section of the image. They reflected the essence of the collection and definitely added to the visual merchandising appeal in the store. Vintage photographs, motifs, paintings, pieces of fabric all weave together effortlessly to tell the story of their respective collection.

For every collection, certain number of collateral, roughly around 8 to 10, are made. Each design team contributes as many collateral as possible and then they are shortlisted by Anita Lal.

During my internship, I might have tried around four designs, from which, two have been finalised and appreciated by Anita Lal. And there is a good chance that they would also be used in the packaging for the corporate gifts during the festive season.

I began working on the designs with an initial study during which I concluded that there are certain repetitive elements that feature during each collection. There is a fixed formula to the aesthetic that I was set to achieve.

Some of the elements featured regularly in each collateral:

- **Botanicals**

Botanical illustrations of florals, and fruits of the leit-motifs of the collection. Intricately rendered in watercolour, they ooze nostalgia and possess a vintage quality that resonates with the brand. A lot of these illustrations are open source, and hence, free to be used in the artwork.

Marigold, rose, jasmine, hibiscus & lotus are some of the floral motifs for Benares.

- **Vintage Ephemera**

Vintage maps and postcards are shrouded in the backgrounds alongside the other elements. For Benares, James Prinsep's illustrations and pilgrim maps will serve the same purpose.





- **Architecture**

Temples, mosques & monuments from old paintings and vintage illustrations act as the main elements in the foreground. For Benares, we decided to use temples from miniature paintings to recreate an ancient city with arches, pillars and jaalis.

- **Textiles**

Patterns from traditional textiles respective to that collection are used heavily for borders and meshed alongside the other background elements.

Ikat textiles were used extensively during the Samarqand collection.

For Benares, silk brocades will perform the same function. The silk weavers of Benares went ahead to be the subject of one design, however, it was not selected.

Pichhwais which are the religious wall hangings behind the idols in the temples also contain rich motifs of florals and birds which can be used in the collateral.

- **Fauna**

Elephants and horses, that too in hand painted form fit well with the brand. The majestic peacock and other exotic birds that are relevant to the collection can be used. They should not be central to the collage, and should not look fierce.

- **Quotes**

During the Samarqand collection, GE had used quotes by the Persian poet Rumi. For Benares, I felt using quotes by the 15th century mystic poet and singer from India - Kabir more apt.

Similar to Rumi, Kabir's words are synonymous with the brand, and resonate greatly with the ecstatic and celestial appearance of the visuals.

In addition, Benares is the birthplace of Kabir and he was a weaver by profession, so this was a perfect fit.

I collected all the elements I required from the internet and scanned the rest from Pavitra's collection of books on Indian arts, textiles and crafts.

Collateral 1

BLESSINGS FROM ABOVE

One of the earliest collages I attempted focused on the theme of the devas dropping flowers as blessings on mortals, which was also the subject of the installation art for VM.

I scanned images of flying chariots from a book named 'In Adoration of Krishna' which was a collection of photographs of pichhwais, the decorative wall hangings from the temples. However, as the artwork came together, we realised the resolution of the chariots was too small. I redrew them at a larger size, and handpainted them, and replaced the older scans. The same resolution issue cropped up again for the flower showers and I had to reconstruct them with vector flowers.

The temple and flora from miniature paintings were added to the foreground. I also blended in jaali patterns in the background with textures for a rustic distressed appearance. Finally, an arch was added as a frame for the artwork.



BLESSING FROM ABOVE -
the earlier version with a teal wash



Final Artwork

As per feedback from Pavitra and the rest of the team, I also changed the colours of the whole design from teal to a more dawn to dusk appearance.

For the typography, I had to use Payrus - a Good Earth staple however, I decided to be a bit experimental with the layout and the placement of the quote. Instead of opting for a central alignment as seen in their older collateral, I went for a more organic appearance and let the words flow alongside the showers of flowers.

The name of the collection which shall be finalised in the month of August shall come right over the Good Earth branding.

Alongwith being put up as poster art, the design is to be used for the festive wrapping paper for corporate gifts, and will also be adapted for the price tags.

BLESSING FROM ABOVE -
(R) the final version, a Benares eventide



Collateral 2

ALONGSIDE THE GHATS

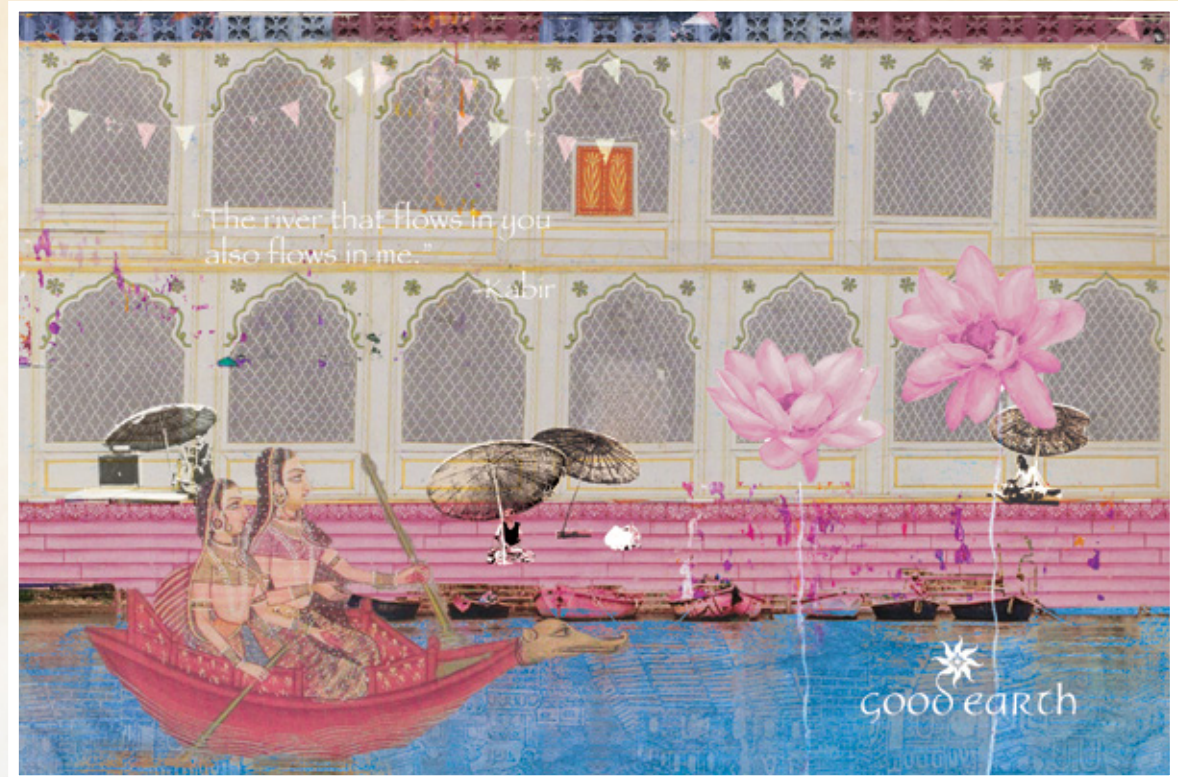
While working on the diorama, I felt we could also create a Ghatscape using elements from miniature paintings.

Pavitra also introduced me to a German artist, Olaf Hajek who often works with mixed media collages in his artworks.

I took inspiration from his bold style of using colour, texture to build a scene using elements from varied sources. It had to be imaginative, over the top and almost surreal.

I gathered my elements for the composition from vintage photographs of sadhus by the Ghats resting under their typical woven cane umbrellas (a common sight in Benares even today) to ornamental boats and palaces from miniature paintings.

The ghats are constructed from stairs, the boats along the ghats are from a photograph, the lotuses emerging from the waters are botanicals which were treated to make them appear as such. I laid out all the elements in a horizontal composition as some of the collateral required for the store walls need to be in that orientation.



ALONGSIDE THE GHATS -
the earlier version in a horizontal format

Pavitra felt the whole composition was very in sync with the brand aesthetic but it would work better in a vertical format. The horizontal layout lacked the skies and everything was scaled up more than necessary. I created an alternate vertical layout that worked better and was approved for print.

Final Artwork

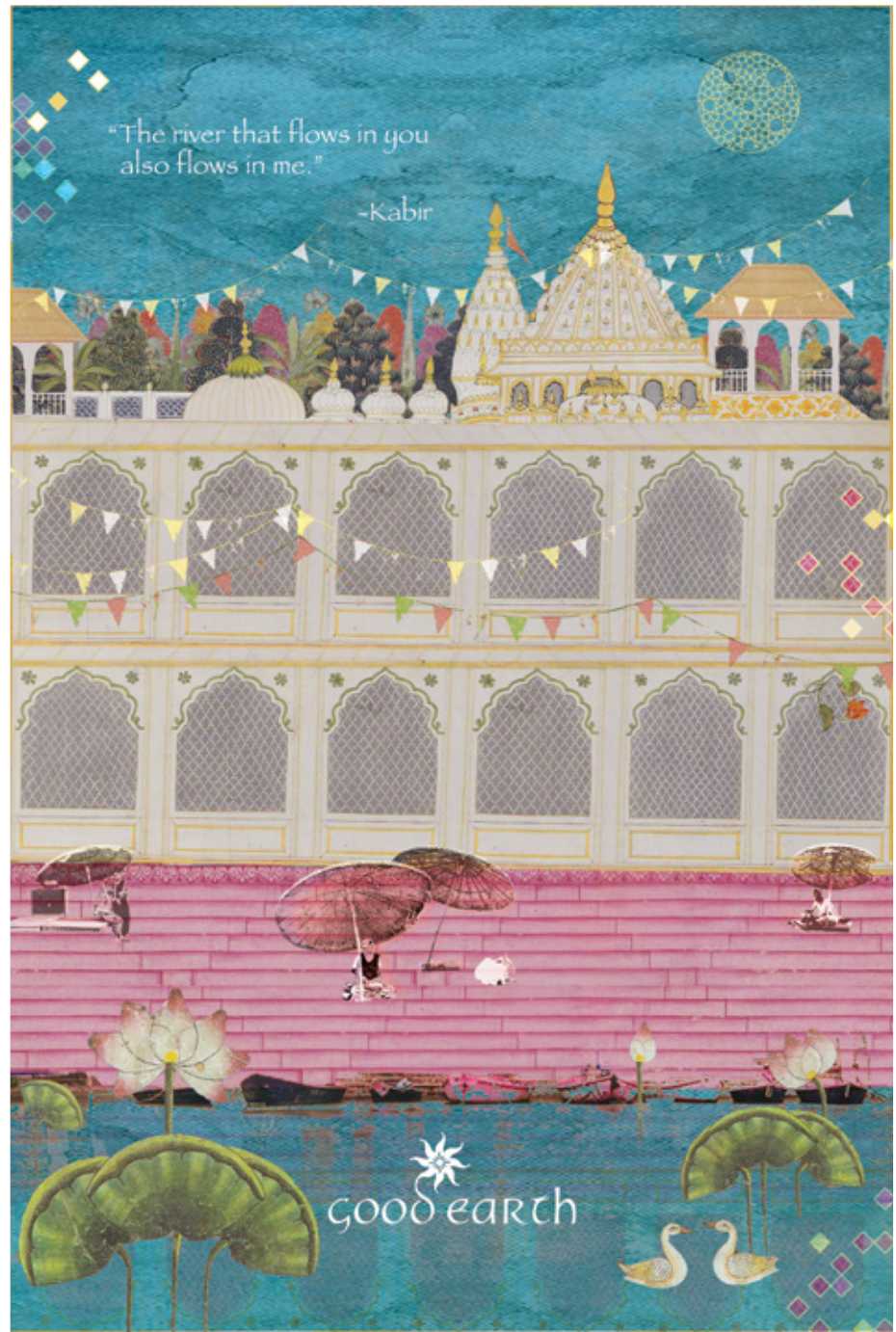
While the previous collateral showed Benares in its eventide glory, this visual shows a day scene of the Ghats by the river.

I kept most of the elements from the horizontal version but got rid of the human elements as per the Good Earth feedback. Added in a few hints of motifs from Varuna with coloured bunting to show the city readying for celebration.

The name of the collection which shall be finalised in the month of August, shall come right over the Good Earth branding.

The design is also to be used for the festive wrapping paper for corporate gifts, and will also be adapted for the packaging of incense, sold by the store.

ALONGSIDE THE GHATS -
(R) the final version, a day scene





Task 5: Domakonda

CONCEPT AND MOODBOARD FOR INTERIORS & STYLING OF VENKATA BHAVAN (DOMAKONDA FORT)



In 2014, Good Earth did the interiors for the new Suján Rajmahal Palace in Jaipur. From the chandeliers to the wallpaper, GE has redone and refurbished everything, transforming it from a royal guesthouse to a luxury boutique hotel.

Fast forward to 2015, and several such luxury hotels have approached Good Earth to do their interiors and encompass their trademark lifestyle with the decor.

An ongoing project, Good Earth is now renovating and styling Domakonda fort belonging to the Kakatiya dynasty in Telangana. I got an opportunity to work closely with Pavitra on the presentation for its styling and interiors.

The Palace

Before we could begin working on the styling, we had to familiarise ourselves with the history of the place and its culture.

The Kakatiya dynasty is one of the prominent empires of Southern India that dominated over those areas, which constitute of Andhra Pradesh and present day Telangana. With the establishment of their capital at Warangal in the 11th century, Andhra got one of its major dynasties to shape its history and civilization.

Domakonda Fort, located in Domakonda village of Nizamabad district, Telangana was built by the Reddy Rajulu dynasty during the 18th Century and imitates the Kakatiya style of architecture with influences from Mughal & Western architecture.

An arched gateway welcomes visitors to the beautiful fort structure, which consists of two palaces and also houses a temple complex which is believed to have been built by the Kakatiya rulers.

VENKATA BHAVAN -
architectural plan for the ground floor of
the luxury hotel drafted by Ashish

Venkata Bhavan

The subject of interest, Venkata Bhavan is the two storied palace which shall be transformed into a luxury hotel. Flanked by large courtyards on three sides, and consisting of three luxury suites and four grand rooms the complex is opulent and lavish in every way.

We had to come up with interior ideas and decor for every room of the luxury hotel, and integrate all the facets of the Good Earth lifestyle from dinnerware to textiles along the way to create a holistic customer experience. While Pavitra and I worked on the interiors, we were joined by Ashish, an architect from the Delhi team who worked on the plans for the refurbished palace.

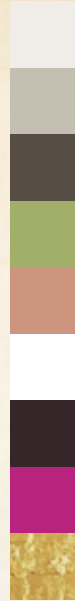


Presentation

We made a presentation with our moodboards and image references. It was a laborious and time-consuming task of sorting and pairing furniture and upholstery with walls and interiors. We had to also consider the lighting and chandeliers, the material for the furniture and decorative pieces, colours and tones for the walls and ceilings, along the way.

We also derived a muted earthy colour palette accented with gold and silver, with hints of green and pink here and there.

A few slides from the presentation:



Epilogue

Towards the end of the internship, I had successfully outlined a brief to transform the Good Earth stores at the time of the launch of the collection; alongside designing two of the store's main installations.

I am fortunate to have been a part of the Benares story and its development at Good Earth. Exposure to their design philosophy and approach, was a rewarding experience and has enriched my views on contemporary Indian design.



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Glossary

AL – Anita Lal, the founder of Good Earth

ABS – (Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene) an ideal material for conceptual prototyping

Brocade – a type of decorative shuttle-woven fabrics, often made in colored silks and with or without gold and silver threads

cartouche – (architecture) a rounded panel often containing an inscription, decoration, or coat of arms

diorama – a miniature three-dimensional scene, in which models of figures are seen against a background

diyas – Indian oil lamps made of baked clay or metal with a cotton wick

Domakonda Fort – 400 year old fort located in Domakonda village of Nizamabad district, Telangana

finials – an ornament at the top of a spire, the leit-motif for Good Earth's Samarqand collection

Ganga aarti – a Hindu religious ritual of worship of the Ganges performed every evening on the banks of the holy river

gadh – the background or patterned negative space in a textile design

GE – Good Earth

Ghats – Ghats in Varanasi are riverfront steps leading to the banks of the River Ganges

jaali | jaal – a trellis or a latticed screen, usually with an ornamental pattern

James Prinsep (1799-1840) – An English scholar, artist-engineer-architect and visionary James Prinsep, documented the history of Benares in his drawings and diaries and contributed greatly to the development of modern day Varanasi

jharokha – a type of overhanging enclosed balcony used in Mughal architecture

MDF – (medium-density fiberboard) an inexpensive, and durable material for prototyping

mehrab – a design in the shape of a niche or decorative panel designating the direction of Mecca; found in Islamic art & architecture

Pinterest – a media sharing digital platform and visual bookmarking tool

rudraksha – a seed of the Eliocarpus ganitrus tree, traditionally used for prayer beads in Hinduism

Samarqand – Good Earth's Design Collection 2014-2015 inspired by the crossroads of the Silk Route

sangam – a confluence of rivers, in this case that of the Ganges and Varuna, and Ganges and Assi

vimaana – an ancient flying chariot or palace described in Hindu mythology & stories

Pichhwai – decorative cloth paintings hung as a backdrop to adorn the idol of Lord Krishna on temple walls

Varuna – a tributary of the Ganges River, and one of the confluences at Varanasi.
The lead dinnerware collection for the Benares story is named Varuna.

VM – Visual Merchandising

zari – an even thread traditionally made of fine gold or silver used in Indian and south-east Asian textiles, especially as brocade in saris



Project I - **Internship at Good Earth**
May - June 2015

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