

The breakout area near the washrooms gets brightened with the brand personality emblazoned in neon lights. The exposed slab of the ceiling is painted in their trademark pink.



A view from the reception area towards the interiors of the workspace. Brand colours make their presence felt, through the washi-tape patterned reception table and the pink grout of the brick wall.

Pretty in Pink

Akari Studio pulls out all the creative stops to design an office for a Mumbai-based lingerie start-up, Pretty Secrets, that is truly connected with the brand ideology — fun, young and sexy; yet practical, productive and passionate about work.

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The reception table is an illustration of thrifty, innovative design. Instead of an expensive strategy, the designers chose the humble washi tape as an unusual furniture accent. The tiled flooring is softened by floor rugs.

Creating a 'space', is all about collaborations. Between the designer and various consultants or agencies. Between the client and the designer. And when there is a certain empathetic rapport between the latter two, the process of creation, becomes more productive, enjoyable, satisfying...

Interior designer Niyoshi Sanghvi — she calls herself a design start-up as she set up her Akari Studio just about a year ago — understood the apprehensions and concerns of lingerie start-up Pretty Secrets, when it came to setting up office in Mumbai's upscale BKC area: it needed maximum bang for its buck. "We were introduced through word of mouth and then we helped them design a pop-up retail event that they hosted for three days. Through this process, we enjoyed a great creative bond that then led us to design their current office," reveals Niyoshi, who has cut her design teeth by working with architect Ajit Shilpi. "One of the biggest challenges we face in a commercial project is the tough balance between achieving great design in a tight budget. And while working with start-ups is very exciting as they are open to the bold, innovative ideas, they want to spend their investor-backed money frugally."

The brief that emerged from a systematic questionnaire that sought information about what the clients wanted their space to say, feel like, etc, spelt out several things clearly: a

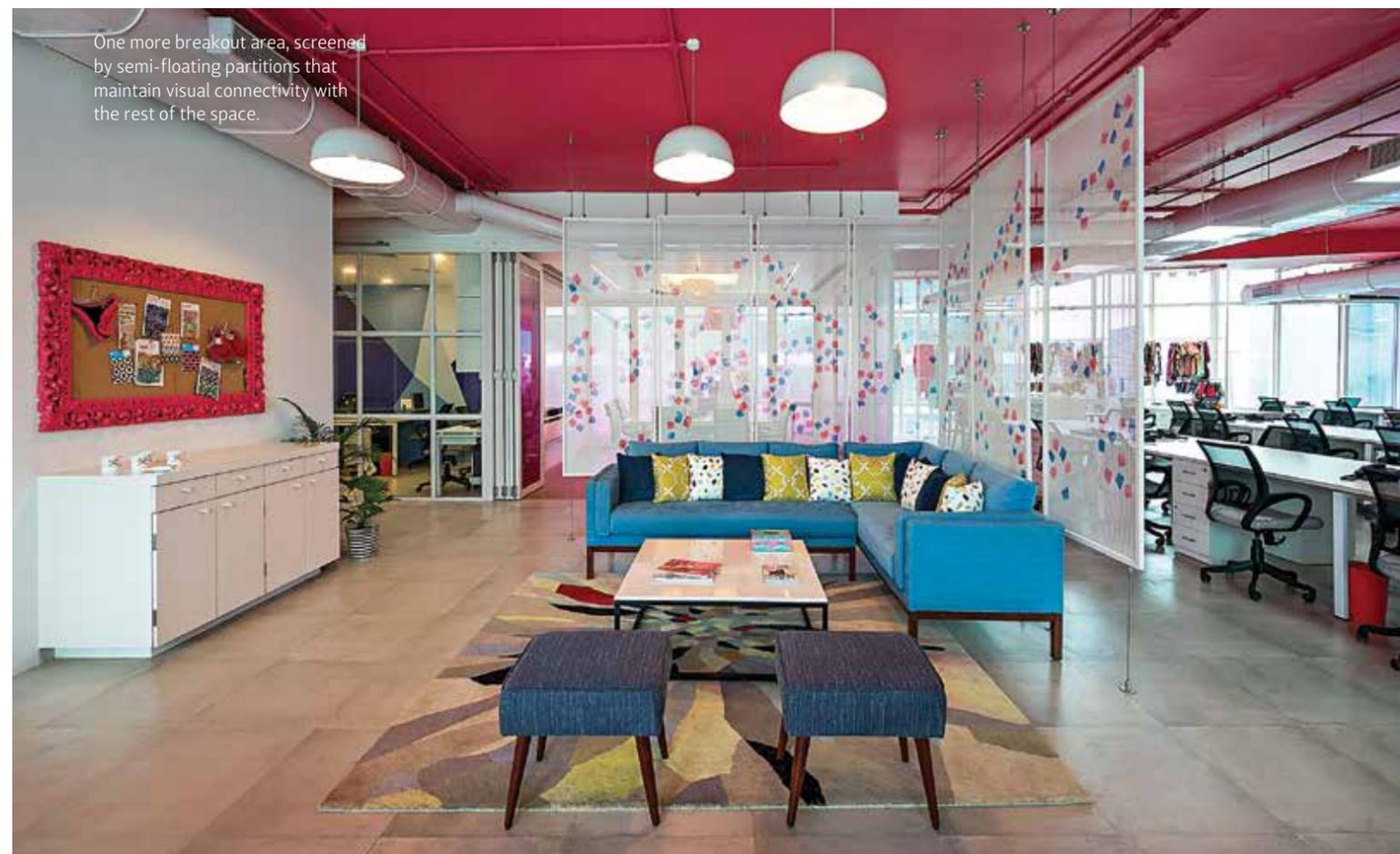
workspace that would embody the Pretty Secrets brand personality (Young, Fun and Sexy); value its employees; and want them to have fun, be creative, productive, relaxed, informal and have a home away-from-home. The brand personality, along with the key words developed in discussion with the client — simple, clean, quirky, unique, fun and brand-conscious — lead the design direction and set the aesthetic tone for the space.

The space where Pretty Secrets now stands, used to be two offices. A strip-down to a bare shell and a few civil changes later, it is now "a beautifully crafted open-plan office with every detail meticulously planned and thought out. As soon as you enter the space there is a sense of 'I have arrived somewhere exciting'," says the alumna of Parsons New School of Design, New York.

The design program carefully split the open floor plan into different zones to promote collaborative work. "User functionality and movement was very important to us. We sat down with the clients to understand which teams interacted on a daily basis, and which ones needed further interaction. We took conscious decisions on where to strategically place the breakout areas and the public spaces in the plan for enhanced collaboration." Thus, there are brainstorm nooks with floor-to-ceiling writable walls and low soft seating to facilitate lengthy strategy, forecast and product development meetings. A high throw worktable helps the product team to work out new



The spatial configuration lays great emphasis on a collaborative work-style. Therefore, the workstations interspersed with break-outs areas and brainstorming nooks with writable walls to pen down thoughts.



One more breakout area, screened by semi-floating partitions that maintain visual connectivity with the rest of the space.



INTERIOR DESIGNER

Niyoshi Sanghvi



CONCEPT: To create a workspace that would be connected with the brand ideology. A collaborative, fun and functional space that felt like a home away from home and not a regular 9 to 5 workspace.

The client brief set aesthetic direction: an office that was fun to be in, fostered creativity, increased productivity... A relaxed, informal space that would be a home away-from-home.

patterns, fabric styles, etc. Breakout spaces are sprinkled throughout the workspace to promote idea sharing, impromptu meetings and transparency. "The end result is an office that just flows seamlessly from one area to another," says its creator.

In addition to interactivity, the designer also realized the need to create a space that was multifunctional and versatile. This resulted in a flexible meeting room whose three glass walls collapsed to form a 'townhall', a product brainstorm area or an entertainment area. Another idea was setting up a mock store along with a photo-studio so that the client could save overheads and shoot their product shots at the office itself. "This was quite fun as we planned a unique display rack that was visible from different parts of the office. When photography sessions are conducted, a lot of props are simply picked up from the office itself," says Niyoshi. "Should the need arise in the future, the photo-studio can accommodate additional workstations." Another highlight is the pantry/breakout space. While designing this, the designer envisioned it as the heart of the space

with a lot of movement and interaction. They wanted to create a warm, inviting and unique space — and this formed the Pretty Secrets wall, a rotational art wall that highlights the social media posts and new products and can be changed by the employees itself.

Named after the Japanese word for light, Niyoshi's Akari Studio takes lighting design seriously. "For us, one of most integral design elements is light: natural, artificial, warm, white or lack there of. We have tried to incorporate as much as natural light into this space and played with both daylight and warm light kelvins. This enables the employees to transition throughout the day with the natural light conditions pouring in through the glass facade. We also made a conscious effort to add ambient lighting; this creates warmth and a calming effect. I feel that commercial office spaces, to a large extent, neglect to do this as they don't think the lux levels will be apt for a working condition."

Working with a start-up had its pro and cons — the constant war between budget and scope for 'cool' spaces, being one. This lead the designers



TOP AND ABOVE The flexible meeting room with ombre vinyl glass walls doubles up as a townhall, product brainstorm area or entertainment area. Glass was quite deliberately used to let light through, but the vignitted vinyl maintains privacy as well.

to explore innovative ways of using inexpensive materials. "As a design firm, we pride ourselves on creating unique and fun artwork because I feel that is a true translation of your clients personality into the space. All the artwork in the space has been specially designed, created and curated for the office. We've used materials that you would not think of using in furniture, like Japanese printed washi tape — that was used to highlight the reception tables."

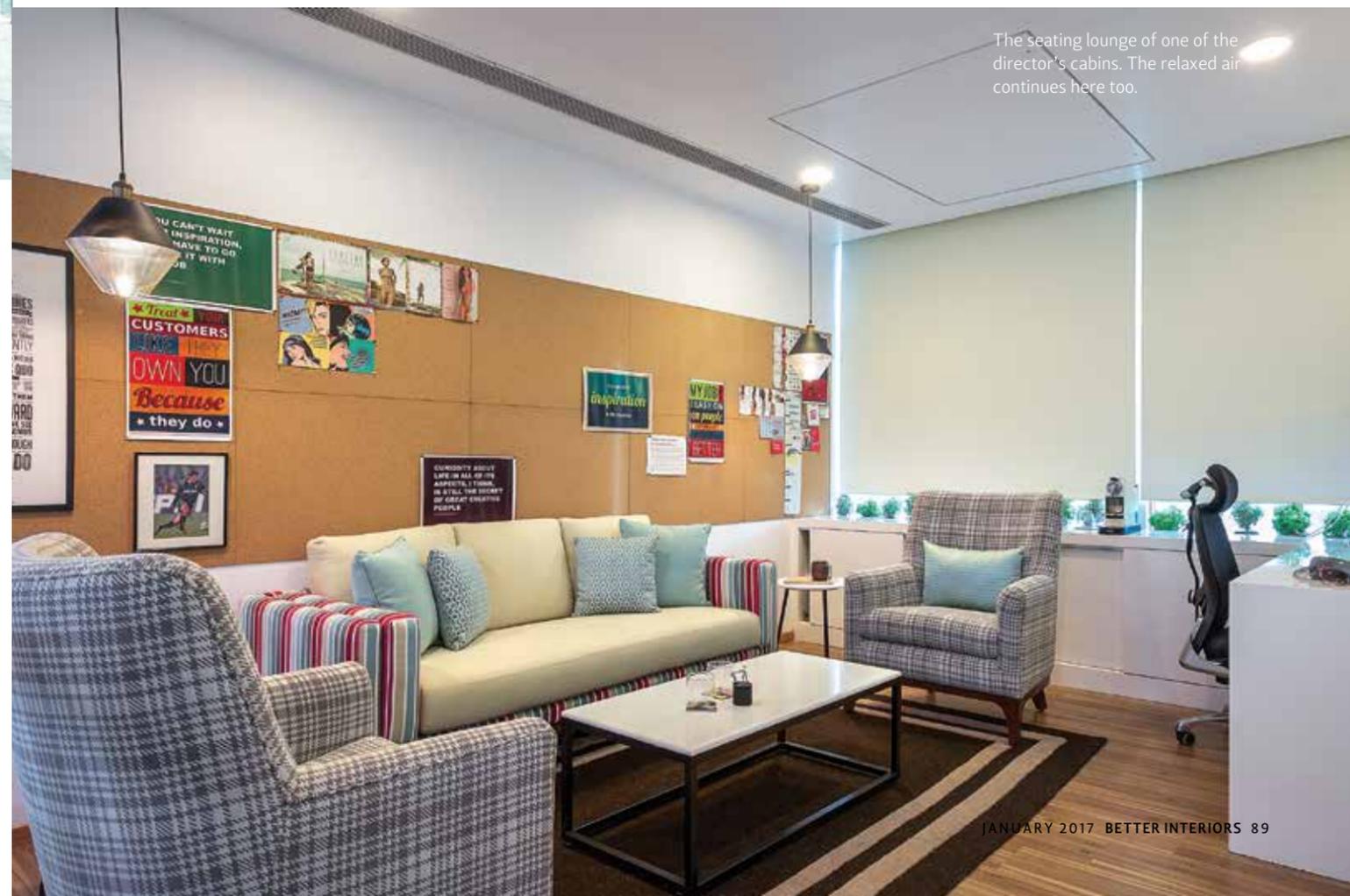
Colour and leveraging in-house and local talent also contributed significantly to an easy-on-the-pocket aesthetic strategy. "We've painted some artworks and graphics ourselves," discloses Niyoshi. "Additionally, we've drawn heavily upon Pretty Secrets' brand colours — pink and blue — to create an impact. But in this too, we went

MATERIALS

Walls Exposed brick with a coloured grout, retractable and foldable glass partitions, printed vinyls, back-painted glass
Floor Tile interspersed with loose rugs and laminate wood flooring
Panelling Machine carved exposed brick
Furniture Customized, using sal wood, teak wood and Duco finishes
Ceiling Exposed slab, painted in Pretty Secrets pink



The workspace includes a photo studio that helps the company save considerably on production overheads and shoot products in-house.



The seating lounge of one of the director's cabins. The relaxed air continues here too.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT
Like other meeting rooms, tile gives way to laminate flooring here as well. Blue is the second brand colour that sees prominent usage here.

The designers were quite keen on using the two brands colours — blue and pink — as a 7' x 7' terrazzo table top in one of the meeting rooms. But since that was turning out to be expensive, the designers created a similar look using actual pink and blue paint shavings that were then finished with Duco paint. Another instance of out-of-the-box thinking.

High throw tables come in handy for devising new patterns and fabric styles. This has been strategically placed in close proximity to the product team.

The mock store has a unique and fun display rack that is visible from different parts of the office.



Instead of laminate flooring, this director's cabin sees a bold serrated pattern rendered in tile.



ABOVE AND LEFT The cafe is cheerful in pink and blue. The wall behind the coffee machine is clad in regular 4" x 4" tiles, rotated for an interesting effect.

about looking for economic alternatives. For instance, we initially wanted to create a terrazzo table-top with pink and blue glass chips but it was turning out to be an expensive proposition. So we decided to adapt the idea and create the look with actual pink and blue paint shavings that were then finished with Duco paint. Then, there was the carved and filigreed frame picked up from a roadside vendor, painted in pink and mounted up in a breakout area, as well as the fancy carved wooden table legs made by a local wood worker."

Akari Studio's design for Pretty Secrets is miles removed from a stodgy, prim workspace. It invites you to put your hair down and your feet up — but never at the cost of productivity. It's energetic vibe seems to say, "We're Loud and Proud. We're Pink and Fun. We're successful... and enjoying it!" **BI**

FACT FILE: Project Pretty Secrets
Location Bandra-Kurla Complex, Mumbai
Area 8,000 sq ft (indoor space)
Principal designer Niyoshi Sanghvi
Design team Nitin Jangid and Shrutika Pawar
Interior contractor Ramphal Vishwakarma
Modular furniture Geeken India
Graphics and creatives Akari Studio
Paintings Nikita Sagar