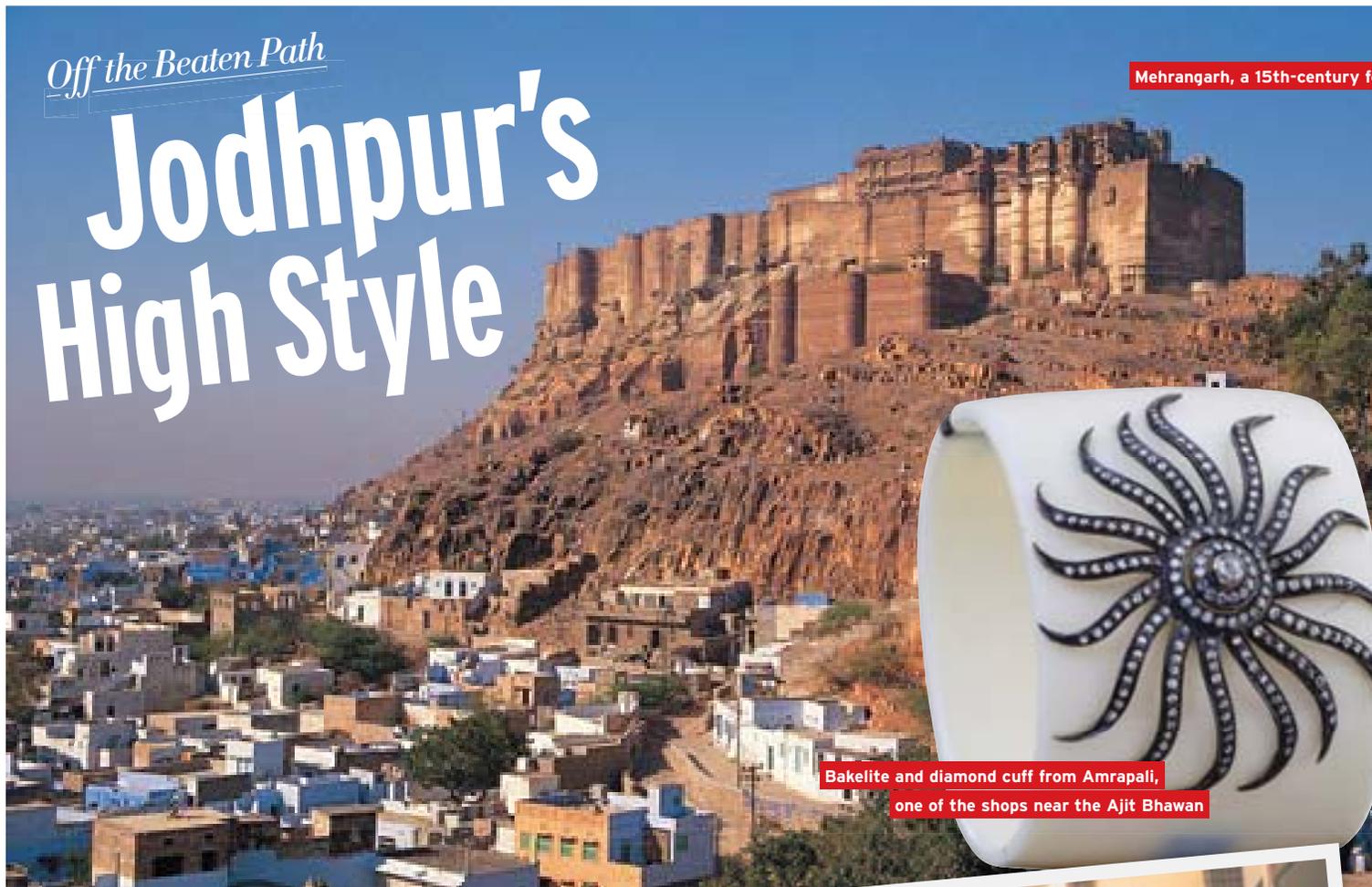


Off the Beaten Path

Jodhpur's High Style

Mehrangarh, a 15th-century f



Bakelite and diamond cuff from Amrapali, one of the shops near the Ajit Bhawan

While no part of the Indian state of Rajasthan can truthfully be called undiscovered, the city of Jodhpur is usually bypassed by travelers en route to Jaisalmer, the site of an impressive though much trampled fortress five hours west. Which is unfortunate, because its red sandstone **Mehrangarh Fort**—which was built in 1459 by the Rathore clan and where the dramatic Becky Sharp—on—elephant finale of Mira Nair's *Vanity Fair* was filmed—is well worth the hour-long flight from Delhi. The Rathores, now headed by Maharaja Gaj Singh II and still treated like royalty, inhabited the fort's mirrored and gold filigree—encrusted rooms for more than four centuries, until they “shifted,” as Indians like to say, across town to the pink **Umaid Bhawan Palace**.

Taking an early-morning walk through the old walled section of Jodhpur is like stepping into an India that's been frozen in time. Burly camels—six feet tall at the shoulder—make deliveries to businesses, children in crisp blue uniforms journey in pony-drawn tongas to school, and imams' prayers ring out from mosques. Lining the narrow streets are dazzling markets for gold, pottery, baskets, sweets, and *jutis*, embroidered leather shoes curving up at the toe that are worn by everyone from cotton dhoti-clad sweepers to the maharaja. Princes from neighboring states come to **Juti Corner**, outside the walled section, to commission special wedding *jutis*; a pair of such intricately hand-embroidered gold or silver



Inside Umaid Bhawan Palace



Gardens and gazebo at Umaid Bhawan

Bollywood-themed pop art at Bollygood restaurant



Inside the Ajit Bhawan's sprawling complex

shoes sells for \$50, but wildly colorful versions with Kashmiri stitching and pom-poms—like those made by women of the shoemaker caste on nearby Mertigate street—are just \$10. Meanwhile, just inside the walled city sits Tambaku Bazaar's eye-popping mounds of spices; beyond that is **Maharani Art Exporters**, the five-floor fabric emporium where you can heap up gorgeous fabrics for a pittance—say, \$120 for a double-sided handsewn silk brocade bedspread.

Roberto Nieddu, an Italian expat, and his Canadian-born wife Cathy, a textile designer, moved to Jodhpur in 1993. Their interior design and export company, **VJ Home**, sources furniture from nearby **Lalji Handicrafts**, a seven-warehouse spread that's crawling with ABC Carpet & Home buyers and crammed with camel bone-inlaid columns, hand-painted trunks, wrought-iron spiral staircases, and teak vanities. All are priced at a third of their overseas value.

In fact, the getting is so good that last year Nieddu began organizing customized shopping excursions with Cambridge, Massachusetts, importer Kevin McPherson. Clients journey to Jodhpur to load up on hand-knotted rugs, block-printed garments, silver jewelry, and stunning architectural artifacts. Everything is sold at wholesale prices and then shipped back home while the shoppers lounge, sipping small-batch red Indian wine by the emerald-hued pool at Nieddu's dazzling compound, where only guests on his tours are permitted to stay. The property, surrounded by a 30-foot stone gate, sleeps eight in converted stables adorned with bright, mirror-festooned rugs; dinner prepared by Amer, the couple's skilled Nepali chef, includes plump tomatoes and fresh basil from their garden.

Also outside the walls of the old city sits the **Ajit Bhawan**, India's oldest heritage hotel. The 81 rooms are set among manicured courtyards and run by the maharaja's nephew, Suryaveer Singh Rathore, an entrepreneur who enlisted his elder brother Raghavendra, a well-known clothing designer with a line called Rathore Jodhpur, to design several suites. The younger Rathore brother

The Essentials

GETTING THERE Jet Airways flies daily from Delhi and Mumbai. jetairways.com

THE AJIT BHAWAN From \$130; ajitbhawan.com

UMAID BHAWAN PALACE From \$460; tajhotels.com

BOLLYGOOD Khaas Bagh, Ratanada; 91-291/251-4513

KEBAB KONNER Bal Samand Lake Palace, Mandore Rd.; jodhpurheritage.com

MEHRAN TERRACE Mehrangarh Fort; mehrangarh.org

AMRAPALI Circuit House Rd.; amrapalijewels.com

JUTI CORNER Station Rd.; 91-291/264-1398

LALJI HANDICRAFTS Pali Rd.; laljihandicrafts.com

MAHARANI ART EXPORTERS Tambaku Bazaar; 91-291/263-9226

RATHORE JODHPUR Circuit House Rd.; rathore.com

VJ HOME F-46 TO 48, M.I.A. Basni, 1st Phase; vjhome.com

SHOPPING EXCURSIONS by the Nieddus and Kevin McPherson; buyingtrips.com

EDITORS' TIP Because there's so much history around every corner of the old city, it's a good idea to hire an expert. Contact local historian **Prakash Detha** at 94-144/69634; he will connect you with a guide.



Jodhpur's maharaja, above; a silver opium cup and leather shoes crafted by locals, left; a spinel necklace at Amrapali.



debuted Jodhpur's first upscale restaurant, **On the Rocks**, in 1995; last year he opened the pop eatery **Bollygood**, with giant, colorful digital prints of Bollywood stars on the walls. And last fall he opened a row of high-end boutiques outside his hotel that includes the exquisite jewelry shop **Amrapali** and—naturally—a **Rathore Jodhpur** atelier, where shoppers can get fitted for his brother's trademark long Jodhpuri coats in velvet-cuffed pin-stripes (\$1,040) or embroidered silk brocade (\$1,690).

Across the way one can glimpse the pink turrets of **Umaid Bhanwan Palace**. Named after the maharaja's grandfather, who commissioned 3,000 laborers to build it during a famine, the Art Deco interiors of the 347-room residence (64 of them are available for guests) were updated when Taj Hotels took over in 2005, but the Trophy Bar is still amusingly crammed with the family's hunting winnings—elephant-foot stools, bison heads, enormous wild boar tusks. Downstairs is a **Taj Spa**, where the princess can be spotted lounging with friends by the Zodiac pool. Taj Hotels also updated the palace's restaurants, including **The Pillars**, the only place in town where you can watch the sun sink behind the fort while drinking a ten-year-old bottle of Château Margaux.

Five miles outside Jodhpur is the oasislike **Bal Samand Lake Palace**. Formerly the maharaja's summer residence, the palace, surrounded by 300 acres of lime orchards and croquet lawns, is



The Nieddus' pool, tinted Mediterranean green

now a hotel with enormous echoing rooms largely unaltered—think bad seventies lighting—from their stint as private guest quarters decades ago. A better bet is a stroll along the cool, lovely lake (mind the low-flying bats, which cluster inside an 800-year-old banyan tree) before dining at the **Kebab Konner**, where tables are spread out in a sea of velvety grass and spicy platters of lamb, chicken, *paneer*, and sausage are served sizzling.

Or venture up to **Mehran Terrace** at Mehrangarh Fort, long the site of opulent princely galas involving hookahs and harems. These days the fort's audio tour, narrated in part by the maharaja and his handsome son, Shivraj, is a riveting account of the region's bloody history. By night, tourists disperse and a handful of tables are lit with candles on the stone terrace that's still lined with cannons. Clad in tangerine turbans, the staff bring out *thalis*, platters of silver bowls with curries, rice, and chapatis. Knowing when to disappear—after all, they serve cocktails at the Rathores' parties—the staff then leaves you in peace to gawk up at bright desert stars and down, way down, at the city's sea of lights.

—ROSE REIS

In Store

Water Colors

If socks are the new ties, could umbrellas be the new totes? Between bright florals, cheeky plaids, psychedelic mushrooms, and vibrant butterflies, these graphic *parapluies* have turned what was once merely a rainy day necessity into a statement-making accessory. Better yet, they rob you of any excuse for carrying a solemn, utilitarian black shield overhead.

—DANIELLE JOHNSON CONTRAY



LUIGI BORRELLI, the Italian company best known for its custom shirts, keeps polka dots subtle on a backdrop of moss green. \$295; 212-644-9610



ETRO took this mixed floral Liberty print straight off its spring runway, where the pattern showed up on dresses and skirts. \$270; 212-317-9096



PARE UMBRELLA's whimsical mushrooms on chocolate is a top seller at the Manhattan boutique Blue Tree. \$125; 212-369-2583



BRELLA BAR, which stocks scores of high-end brollies, counts this citrusy one with a butterfly print among its most cheerful. \$260; 212-813-9530



JACK SPADE created this yellow, green, and red tartan umbrella that is equal parts preppy and downtown cool. \$185; 212-625-1820



BURBERRY's chic new minimalist design features the company's looping signature logo across a black background. \$225; 866-589-0499