



On this day in 2015, American singer B.B. King died. He inspired generations with songs like 'The Thrill is Gone', 'Every Day I Have the Blues', and 'Rock Me Baby', leaving a lasting mark on music worldwide.

From Connaught Place and Paharganj to Kolkata and Bengaluru, typeface designer Pooja Saxena's photobook *India Street Lettering* documents the signs, scripts, and street typography that define Indian cities, and the nature of their change



From a typewalk conducted in Panjim, Goa

The signs of the times



Gainda Lal Ram Narayan, an old sweet shop in Delhi's Gole Market



Pooja Saxena, typeface designer

ADITHI REENA AJITH

WHEN walking on the streets, how often do we stop to look at the signs around us—the hand-painted boards, fading cinema lettering, or the multilingual shopfronts? In her debut photobook *India Street Lettering* (Blaft Publications), typeface designer Pooja Saxena documents over 300 signs and street letterforms from cities across India, from Delhi to Bengaluru and Kolkata.

Saxena's obsession with letters and typefaces began during her days at National Institute of Fashion Technology Delhi. On many metro rides, she found herself scribbling and decoding the LED boards carrying Latin and Devanagari text. "The Latin texts looked nice but to anyone who was observing them with any criticality and interest, much of the Hindi text didn't look as nice," she says. The observation became the basis for her design and research project, *India Street Lettering*, which began in 2017 and explored how different Indian scripts occupy the visual space in cities.

Later, while studying typeface design at the University of Reading in the UK, Saxena realised how little Indian scripts were represented in formal typography education despite India's linguistic diversity. Back in India, she faced another challenge: limited access to typography archives and libraries.

"There was so much interesting design and logos that happened post-Independence—I believe some knowledge of these exists at institutional libraries, but it's not easy to walk into different educational institutions in

our country and use the library. It's like you have the privilege of having connections, which is so different from just being able to get a library card made and just accessing a library," she notes. Today, she has built parts of her own physical archive, collecting over 500 newspapers from across the world for reference and study.

Building an archive

In 2017, Saxena began *India Street Lettering* as a digital archive, documenting signboards and lettering from hardware stores, schools, cinemas, churches, residential neighbourhoods and local businesses across Indian cities. Her interest lay in traditional hand-crafted lettering and the visual possibilities created before digital design tools became widespread.

"The sign maker or designer can basically draw the script in the way that they wanted to," she says. "I was interested in seeing what is possible in these scripts without the limitations of digital technology." Through the archive, Saxena also wanted to document the unique visual solutions sign painters created while working within material and production constraints.

When talking about *India Street Lettering*, Saxena believes the conversation is often reduced to clichés though there exists many different perspectives in the field. In 2023, she began publishing small-batch zines in Delhi focused on specific lettering styles and categories. The photobook itself took shape after Blaft Publications approached her in 2024.

The book is not intended only for designers. Alongside photographs of signs and storefronts, Saxena also includes interviews with signmakers and maps of neighbourhoods in Delhi, Chen-

nai, Kolkata, and Mumbai that readers can explore through their own type-walks. "I wanted it for people who actually are in the country," she says. "I'll really enjoy it when someone flips through the book and says, 'Oh my god, this sign. I used to walk past it.'"

The typefaces of Delhi

Delhi occupies a significant place in the book. Familiar landmarks like the wooden sign at Wenger's in Connaught Place, the lettering of Shri Ram Centre in Mandi House and the Art Deco neon sign of Imperial Cinema in Paharganj all appear in its pages. Despite having lived in the city for years, Saxena feels she has only scratched the surface of documenting Delhi's typography.

One aspect of Delhi's typography that particularly interests her is how official buildings and institutions communicate identity through lettering. Colonial-era monuments feature engraved serif lettering, while post-Independence architecture embraced modernist and industrial styles. Saxena points to Shri Ram Centre as an example of how functional lettering became part of the visual language of the newly independent nation.

Delhi's multicultural population too shapes its signage culture. "In Delhi, you see Hindi, Punjabi, English, Urdu. You don't always see all four, and you see combinations thereof," she says. In neighbourhoods like Paharganj, she notes, eateries and shops often feature several Indian and foreign scripts to appeal to travellers arriving from the nearby railway station. Languages like Korean and Hebrew also appear on some signboards catering to tourists and international visitors.

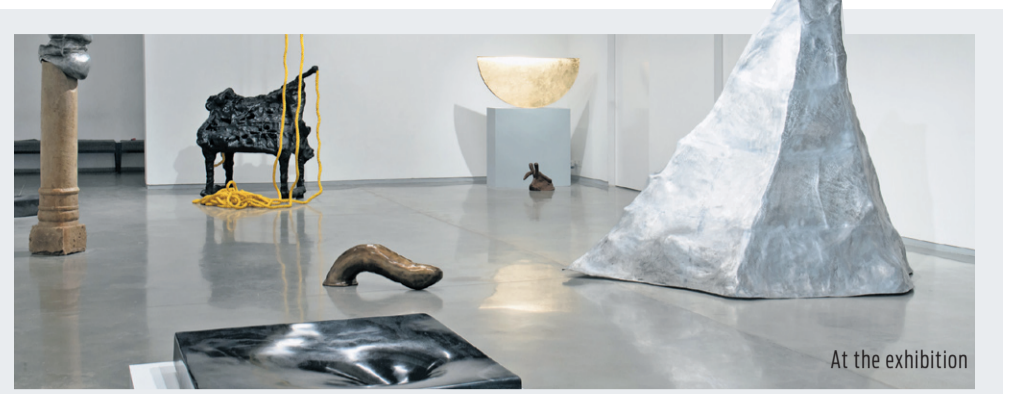
But Delhi is rapidly changing, which means older signs disappear constantly. Saxena recalls feeling emotional when Paras Cinema in Nehru Place replaced its original signage during redevelopment. "I used to really love that sign," she says. She also points to older wayfinding signs in Lodhi Colony and traditional shop signs in areas like Kashmiri Gate being replaced by printed flex boards.

Reading the city differently

Saxena hopes to create a growing archive of India's visual culture while encouraging people to notice the typography around them more closely. She regularly conducts type walks, guiding groups through city streets and decoding the stories hidden within signs and lettering.

"These are ways for me to start a conversation about something that I care about," she says. "It just makes you more curious about what the world around you is like and expands our view of how we see the city—with a fresh point of view."

Now, as she continues organising photographs from older archives and recent travels, Saxena is preparing for future documentation journeys to places like Bhubaneswar, South Goa, Coimbatore and Meerut, along with more zines and updates to her online archive, while also planning a more thorough exploration of Delhi's streets in search of the city's disappearing signs.



At the exhibition

SCULPTING MEMORY AND HOME

At Nature Morte, artist Murari Jha turns daily objects and personal memories into abstract sculptural forms in a solo exhibition exploring themes of home and belonging



PANKIL JHAJHRIA

AT Nature Morte in Delhi's Dhan Mill compound, artist Murari Jha presents 'The Future of Nostalgia', a solo exhibition that turns memory, nostalgia, and everyday objects into various sculptural forms. On till May 17, the exhibition features works made from materials such as stone, bronze, wood, brass, aluminium and synthetic putty.

Through abstract and familiar-looking forms, Jha explores ideas of home, migration, memory, and belonging. Besides being a visual artist, Jha is also engaged with performance art. He started with painting before moving towards performance during his time in Delhi, as he realised that performance could even become an extension of paintings and artworks, while also helping him understand his re-



Artist Murari Jha

lationship with time, space, and the audience. A live durational performance will also be held at Nature Morte on May 16, where Jha will perform within the exhibition space alongside his works. He describes the ongoing show as an "extended form of performance", where the gallery space functions like a stage for the artist, and the sculptures act like performative objects or theatrical props.

The idea of 'home'

Jha notes that much of his work has focused on understanding the meaning of 'home', especially after moving from Bihar to Delhi for higher studies.

"I wanted to understand what home means for me without using fixed terms like migration," he remarks. "For me, moving to a city was also connected with excitement and new experiences." This exploration of new experiences is thus reflected in his performance arts and sculptural works. The artworks have been kept untitled. Jha says he deliberately shaped the sculptures into abstract forms, so viewers can

bring their own memories and interpretations to the work. "I don't want to reveal the exact identity of any object," he says. "Every object has an emotional connection for me, but I try to dilute it into a more collective understanding." Hence, with their own interpretation of the works, Jha says that the "viewers thus become co-creators of meaning", their participation also plays an important role in shaping the show's narrative.

The featured artworks include a collection of intricately carved legs from traditional Indian cots, or charpais; a towering pole similar to those used in pole gymnastics or mallakhamb; a bronze sculpture resembling a canopied hut-like structure; and another form that is like an earthen cooking tandoor. Through these transformations of everyday objects, the works evoke memories and a sense of familiarity.

Art as self-education

Jha says that when he first started learning sculpture, he worked with M-seal, a synthetic putty usually used as an adhesive. He began using it for performance props, and it gradually became the primary material in his sculptural practice. Over time, he expanded his work to include metals such as bronze, brass, and aluminium.

He remarks that art also functions as a form of self-education for him—he realised early on that art helps him understand the world and himself better. "For me, art is an educational tool," he says, adding, "I practice art to educate myself."

Florence Pugh to star in and produce *The Midnight Library*



Actor Florence Pugh

Actor Florence Pugh, known for the *Dune* franchise, will star in and produce the fantasy drama *The Midnight Library*, which will be directed by Garth Davis, best known for *Lion*. Described as a "big-budget love letter to life", the film follows Nora Seed, played by Pugh, who finds herself in a mysterious library while caught between life and death. There, she is given the chance to experience the many lives she could have lived.

Based on the popular novel by Matt Haig, the screenplay is written by Laura Wade (*Rivals*) and Nick Payne (*We Live in Time*). StudioCanal and Blueprint Pictures are backing the project, which is expected to enter pre-production in early 2027.

Last seen in *Thunderbolts*, Pugh will reprise her role as Yelena Belova/Black Widow in *Avengers: Doomsday* and return as Princess Irulan in *Dune: Part Three*. Both films will release on December 18.

DELECTABLE DELHI

A few days ago, while a friend was visiting from Mumbai, we decided to head to a ramen bar tucked into the lanes of Shahpur Jat. The first thing he said when we arrived was, "This is definitely not a village." Fair enough. Shahpur Jat has travelled far from its old identity and transformed into one of the city's buzziest pockets, where designer studios sit shoulder to shoulder with tiny cafés and experimental kitchens. Hidden among them is Zuru Zuru, a 14-seater ramen bar by chef Navika Kapoor that has, over the last few years, built something close to a cult following among Delhi's noodle obsessed diners.

The idea of Delhiites queuing up for bowls of ramen would have seemed unlikely a decade ago; what was once dismissed as instant noodles from supermar-

ket shelves has now become one of the most exciting corners of the capital's dining scene. A younger generation of diners is searching for ramen with the same seriousness reserved for good biryani or butter chicken. Some return from trips to Japan craving rich broths and perfectly chewy noodles, while others first encounter these dishes through anime films and manga.

Zuru Zuru has the warmth of an old neighbourhood eatery. Kapoor, along with her business partner and chef Hitein Puri, has crafted a menu that balances classic ramen traditions with flavours designed for Delhi's adventurous diners. There are bowls of silky tonkotsu with deeply layered broth, delicate shio chintan ramen that lets the ingredients shine, vegan oatmilk ramen that manages to feel hearty without losing finesse,

and mazemen, the rich brothless version that coats every strand of noodle in flavour. Then comes the unexpected star of the season. Her litchi ramen, created out of curiosity and a love for summer fruit, sounds outrageous on paper but lands brilliantly on the palate.

Not very far from Shahpur Jat, at Casa Pasta Bar in Hauz Khas, Delhi's first pasta and jazz bar, chef Sambhavi Joshi is



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From Tonkotsu to Tortellini



(L-R) Litchi Ramen at Zuru Zuru, Shahpur Jat, and pasta at Casa Pasta Bar, Hauz Khas

building an entire dining experience around fresh handmade pasta. The menu reads like a love letter to regional Italian pasta making, with gigli, ziti, tortellini, pappardelle and other handcrafted varieties taking centre stage.

Joshi's journey into pasta began unexpectedly. In 2020, she landed a dream opportunity at a three Michelin starred restaurant in Paris, only for the pandemic to bring the world to a halt. "Nobody was really hiring then, so starting something of your own felt like the only way to keep moving forward. That's when I realised two things. One, that I absolutely loved pasta, and two, that there was a huge gap in the fresh pasta space in India."

At Casa, pasta is not treated like a side act buried under heavy sauces and cheese. It is the hero. The textures matter, the shapes matter, and diners are encouraged to understand

why a ribbon of pappardelle works differently from a stuffed tortellini or a ridged gigli. Joshi admits there has been some education involved, especially when explaining why fresh pasta tastes different from dried versions or why it carries a different price point. But she believes Indian diners are evolving rapidly.

"Because of travel, social media and the digital age, people today have so much more exposure to global cuisine and different dining experiences," she says. And perhaps that is what makes places like Zuru Zuru and Casa Pasta Bar exciting. Beyond the queues, the Instagram posts and the novelty of slurping ramen or twirling handmade pasta in Delhi, there are two women building spaces around food they deeply care about. One bowl and one plate at a time, they are changing how the city eats.