

# HOTEL STAR OF INDIA

SHIV NIWAS PALACE  
GLITTERS AGAIN IN UDAIPUR



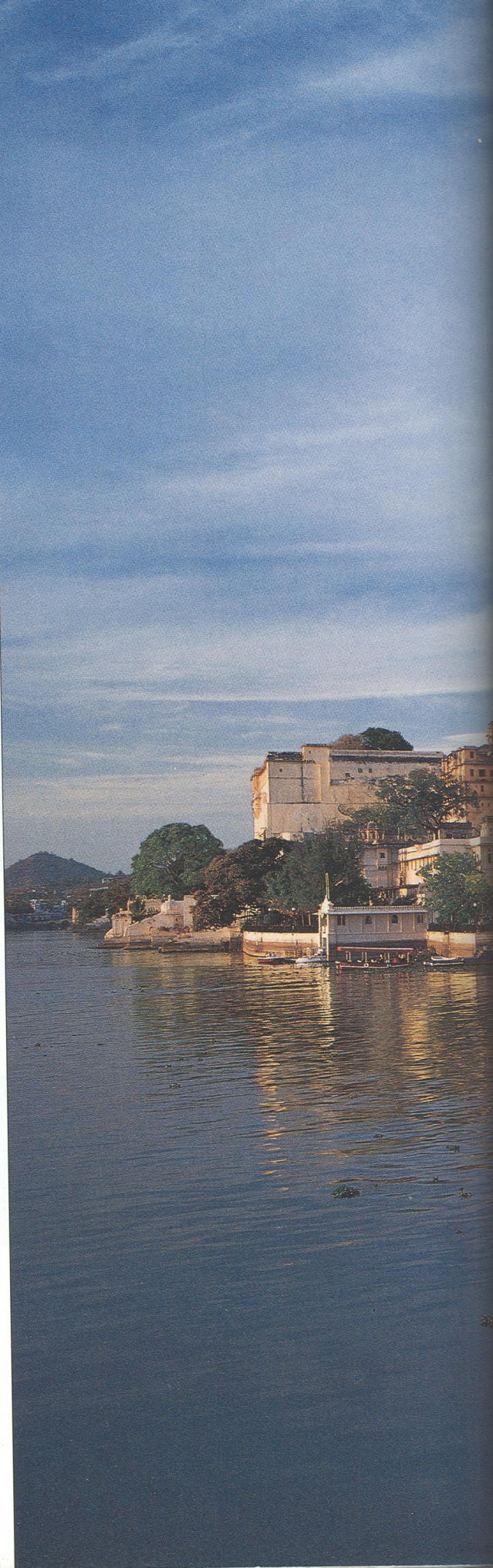
*Interior Design by Parul Zaveri and Nimish Patel  
Text by Roland Flamini/Photography by Jaime Ardiles-Arce*

A newly arrived guest at the Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel took one look at its domed structures, scalloped archways and intricate filigree stonework and remarked, "This is right out of *The Jewel in the Crown* or *The Far Pavilions*." But Shiv Niwas, in northwest India's former kingdom of Udaipur, is neither a Disney-like theme park nor an oversize movie set. It belongs to the India of romance and tribal warfare, palaces and harems, powerful maharajas and the British Raj.

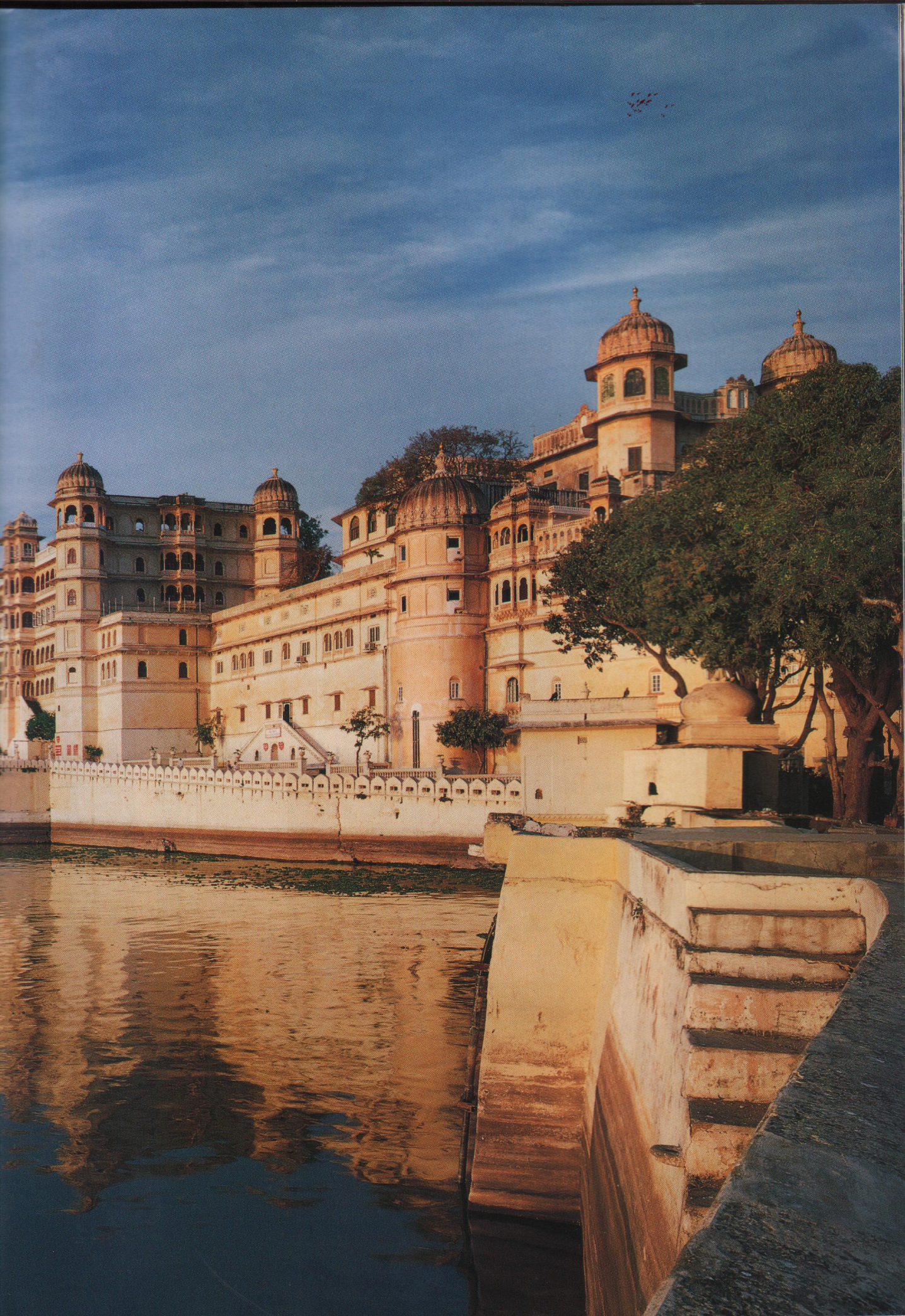
The palace was built in the late 1880s to adjoin the maharana's hilltop residence

(see *Architectural Digest*, January 1997), and since its completion it has served as a sumptuous, self-contained guesthouse for distinguished visitors. Elizabeth II, Jacqueline Kennedy and the shah of Iran were among those who occupied its dazzling suites. Today Shiv Niwas Palace still dispenses traditional Indian hospitality, but as a

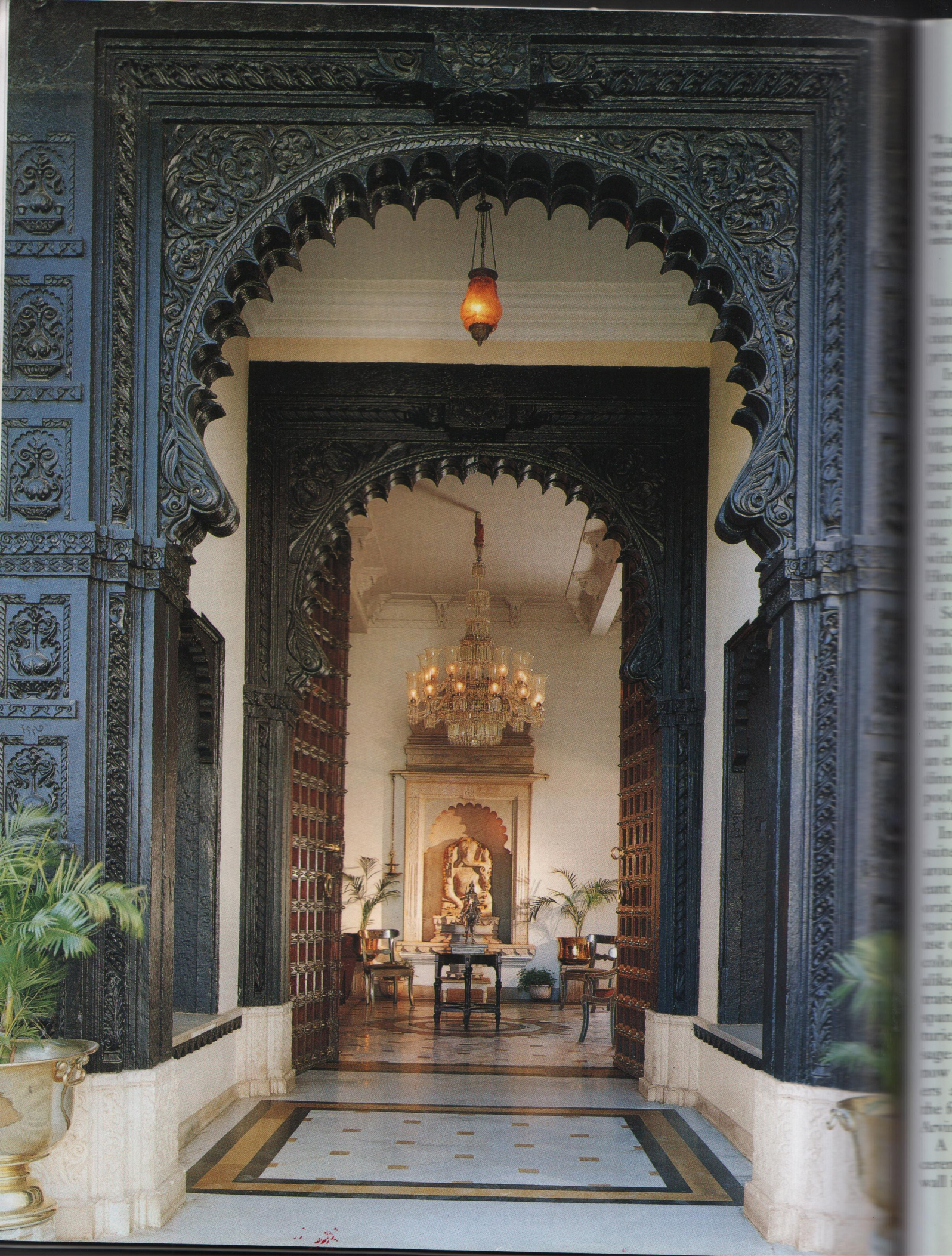
ABOVE: Flags fly above a pavilion of the Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel, which was completed in the late 19th century in Udaipur, India. RIGHT: The City Palace compound, erected over 24 generations by rulers of the Mewar dynasty, sits at the edge of Lake Pichola. The hotel is at right.













## IN THE HOTEL'S ROOMS, A PAGEANT OF INDIA'S DISTINCTIVE DECORATIVE STYLES UNFOLDS.

"It used to be my parents' private residence, then it was a personal guesthouse for many years before becoming a hotel," says Arvind Singh Mewar, present head of the Mewar dynasty. OPPOSITE: The lobby doors were originally the west entrance to the palace compound.

luxury hotel. Its transformation reflects the changed circumstances of its owners, the princes of the Mewar dynasty.

In 1971 India abolished princely titles and the role of hereditary rulers. To avoid becoming an anachronism, the Mewars invoked their distant past as a lure for wealthy tourists. Five royal palaces in and around Udaipur were converted into hotels to form the HRH Group of Hotels, with the Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel as the outstanding jewel in the chain.

Set within the stone embrace of a crescent-shaped building, a massive door leads into a spacious tree-shaded inner courtyard. There are fountains and ornate benches; there is fragrance, birdsong and the feeling of being in an enchanted place. Candlelit dinners are served around the pool, while in the background a sitarist plays a classical raga.

In the hotel's thirty-five suites and rooms arranged around the courtyard, a pageant of India's distinctive decorative style unfolds—airy, spacious and prodigal in the use of gold paint and exotic colors. No two suites are alike, but the ubiquitous portraits of turbaned maharanas spanning nearly five centuries deliver the same message: Though Shiv Niwas is now a hotel, the Mewar rulers are still the hosts—in the form of their descendant Arvind Singh Mewar.

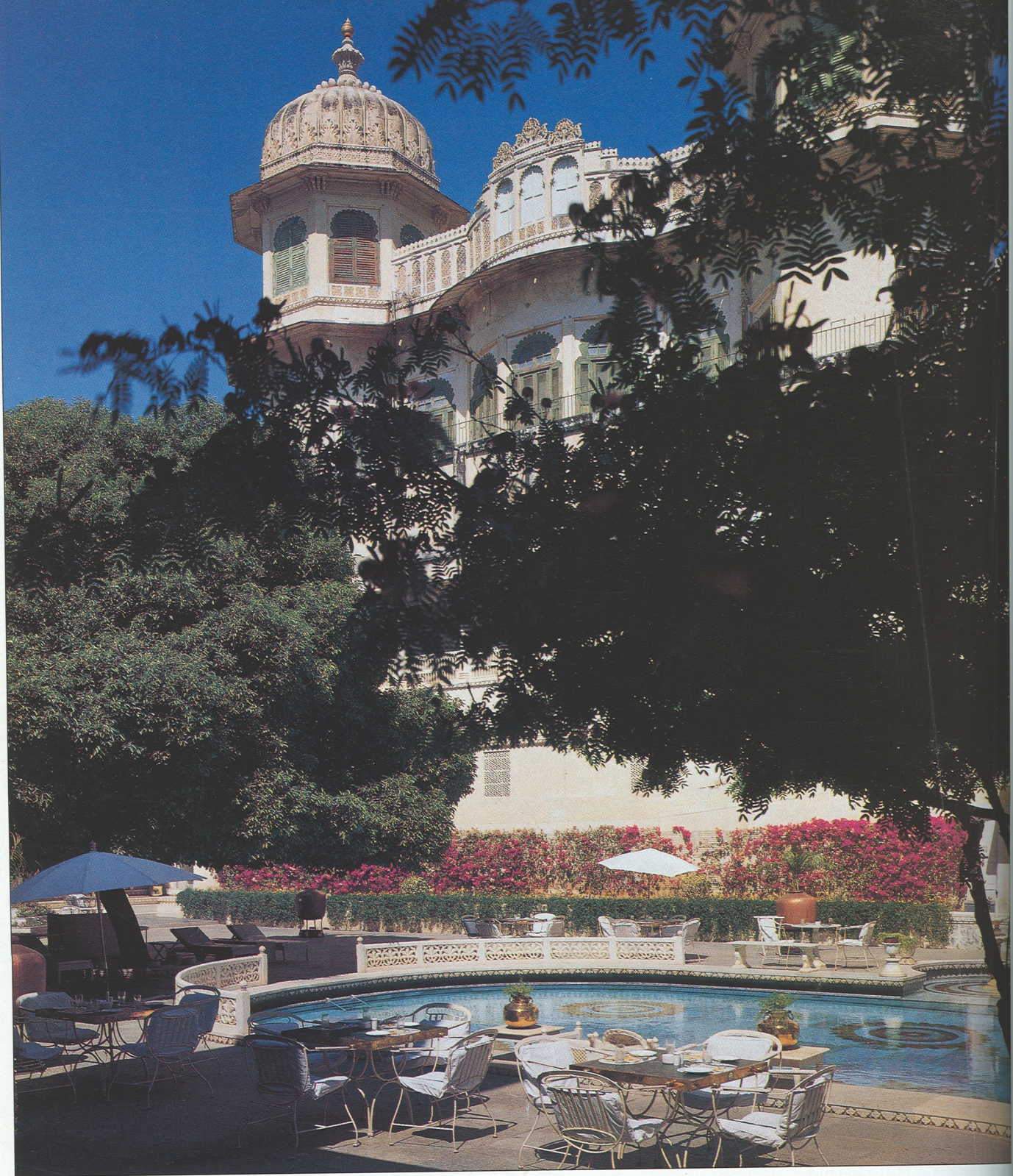
A photograph of him in ceremonial dress hangs on the wall in the long, comfortable



"Arvind knew what he wanted," says architect Parul Zaveri, who, with her husband and partner, Nimish Patel, restored the interiors and created new furnishings for Shiv Niwas. "He became our design arbiter." ABOVE: An ornamental balcony overlooks the double-height bar.

FAR LEFT AND LEFT: Decorating the lower bar area is a glass-inlaid frieze of roses with a contrasting scroll and foliage, while in the gallery, parrots and foliage are depicted. "Panels that had been vandalized for souvenirs were repaired," notes Zaveri.





"The entire second floor was added between 1978 and 1982, when we converted it from the guesthouse," says Mewar of the 35-room hotel. ABOVE: The bougainvillea-bordered façade rises above the inner courtyard and swimming pool, where trees and shrubbery provide shade.

bar, which is furnished like a living room. Blue silk pillows accent deep armchairs and sofas. Framed pictures of Arvind Singh Mewar's wife and his two daughters scattered on occasional tables around the room further emphasize the hotel's connection to the family's royal ancestors. From time to time a guest

will even receive an invitation to have drinks with Mewar on the terrace of his personal residence next door.

Boyhood memories formed the basis for the restoration of Shiv Niwas, which opened as a hotel in 1982. "I don't think that it's a question of more tradition or less," says Arvind Singh Mewar. "I was trying to

OPPOSITE: A glass-inlaid surround frames ivory-and-wood doors to the Imperial Suite. Pictured in the carved panel beyond is the last standing building of the original Mewar capital, whose destruction by Muslim invaders about 500 years ago led to the founding of Udaipur.



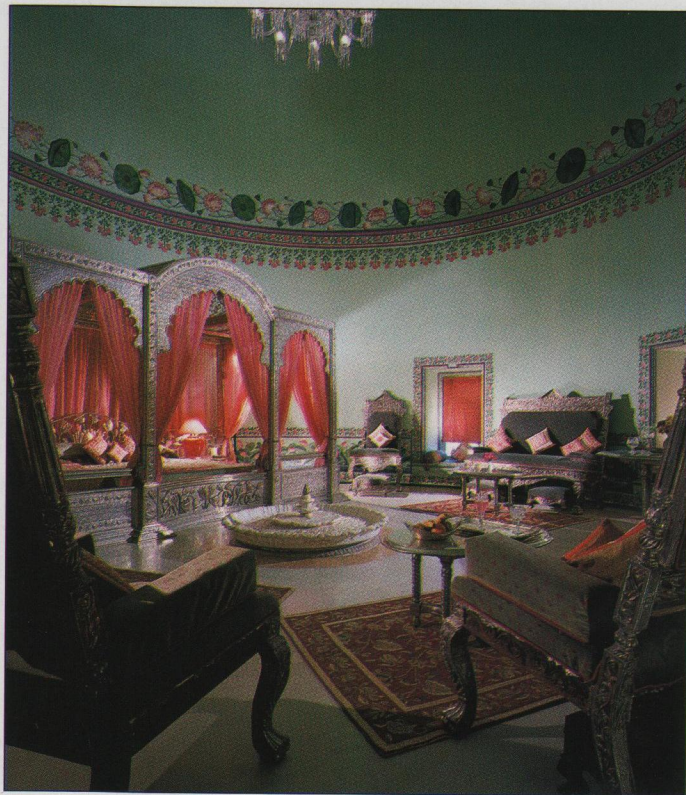








"We took the original design as our palette and built from it," says Zaveri. **LEFT:** Mewar's former private rooms are now the Imperial Suite. Scalloped arches bracket the portrait of his great-grandfather Fateh Singh Mewar. The painting's hues are reflected in the fabrics and carpet.



**ABOVE:** For the Lotus Suite alone, 50 craftsmen were hired to paint, make furniture and embroider. "People were found who work in the traditional style," explains Zaveri. "Their grandfathers were employed in the palaces by the maharana." **LEFT:** A detail of the waist-high frieze.

achieve the look as I recalled it." The more Mewar remembered about the guest palace in its heyday, when his father was maharana and a constant stream of important European and Indian visitors came to Udaipur, the more his interior designers, architects Parul Zaveri and her husband, Nimish Patel, had to forget about their training and professional experience.

"We grew up admiring the modern masters like Frank

Lloyd Wright and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe," Zaveri explains. "They are our heroes. But Arvind wanted us to preserve the past, and the kind of thing he was asking us to do was all new to us. At first I had a problem with a lot of it. My greatest difficulty was accepting the gold paint."

What started out as accommodating the client led to the exciting discovery of traditional Indian materials and

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Before being readied for dinner guests, the inner courtyard is calm. Directly across the pool is the main entrance to the hotel, which is flanked by a crescent of arches filled with filigree latticework. Stone balconies overlook the area.





