

COSMOPOLITAN

JANUARY- FEBRUARY 2026, ₹200

INDIA

**COSMO
QUIZ IS
BACK!**

**New Year,
New Mood**

Ayushmann Khurrana

Rakul Preet Singh

Anya Singh

Sahher Bambba

BLIND DATES

Instant chemistry

GEN Z

Era of romcoms

Shanaya Kapoor

THE GIRL, THE FILM, THE VIBE — STEPPING INTO A NEW PHASE



BRAND COLLE

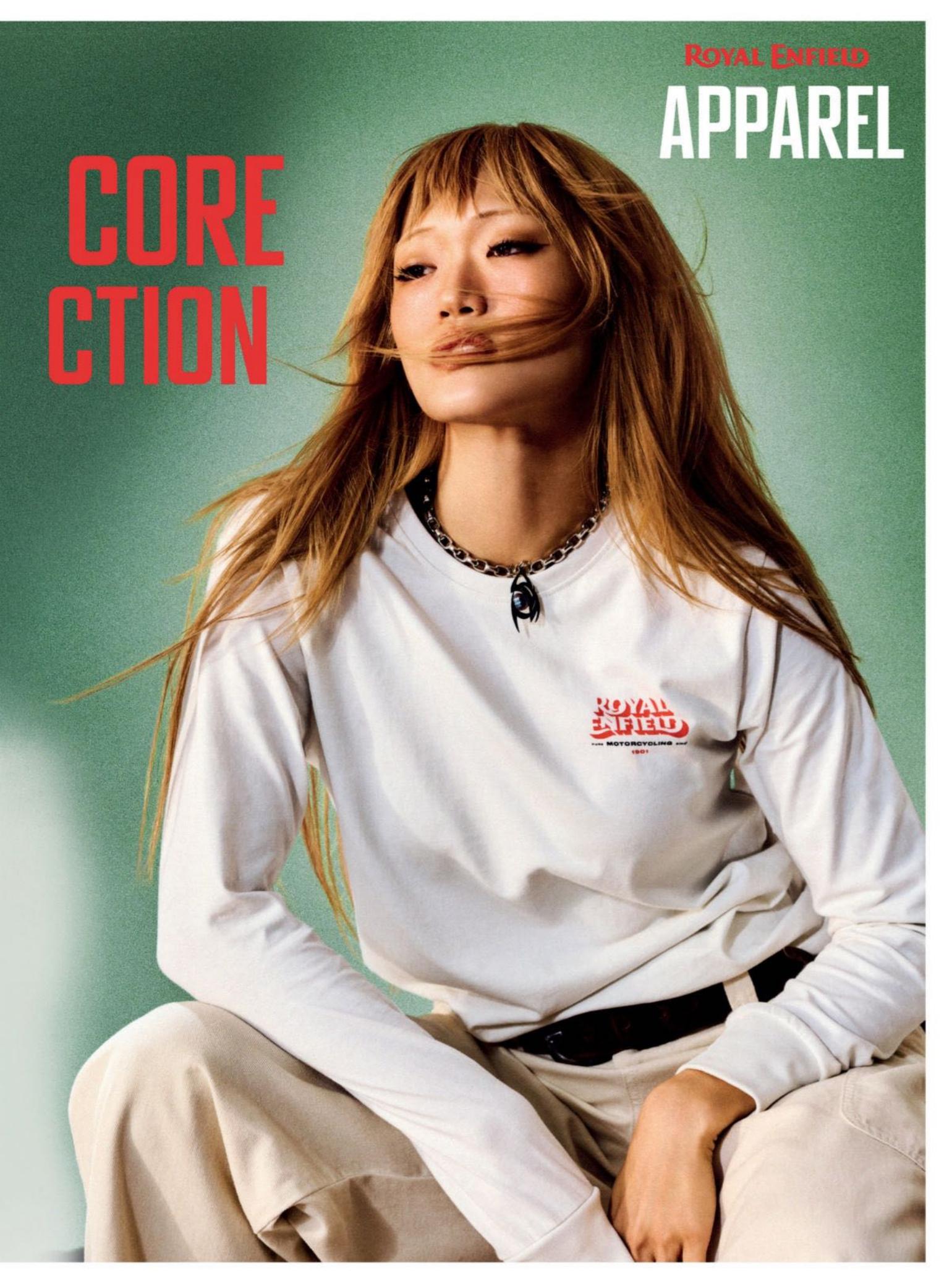


ROYAL ENFIELD

APPAREL

CORE
CTION

ROYAL
ENFIELD
MOTORCYCLING
1901



COSMOPOLITAN CONTENTS

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2026

94

Anya Singh Is Just Getting Started

Play

- 14** It's Complicated (But Very Watchable)
- 16** Joy, Queered
- 20** Need for Speed, Teen Edition
- 22** Under the Influence With Sakshi Sindwani
- 24** Do Book Adaptations Actually Need to Be Faithful?
- 28** Suvir Saran Would Like You to Clean Your Glasses

Glow

- 32** Skincare, Stripped Back: Lessons From the Glam Chair
- 34** Grey Area: Cover Up or Show It Off?
- 37** Reds You Could Take to Bed
- 38** Lust List
- 40** Smells Like Love

42 When to Break Up With Your Makeup

43 Everything to Know Before You Buy Velcro Rollers

Style

- 45** Along for the Ride
- 54** Gen Z Rewrites the Rules of Looking Sexy in Bed
- 57** It's Gradient Season, Girls
- 58** The Great Drape
- 59** Colour Me Curious
- 60** Dancing With the Clouds
- 61** Not Skirts, A Whole Vibe
- 62** Boredom Left the Chat
- 63** On the Date Night Menu
- 64** Twice As Nice

Big Reads

- 86** Ayushmann Khurrana: Soft Boy, Sharp Edge
- 102** Sahher Bamba Manifested This
- 106** Rakul Preet Singh on Love, Gratitude, and the Power of Letting Go



Love

- 112** Till Debt Do Us Part
- 118** Everyone Is Online and No One Is Posting
- 120** Should You Actually Get Back With Your Ex: A Quiz
- 122** Flamenco's Love Notes With Deepak Verma
- 128** What's Your Fight Language?
- 130** Why You Shouldn't Turn a Blind Eye
- 133** What's Your Modern-Day Love Language?
- 134** I Faked It—And Found Myself

- 136** Can AI Be Your Matchmaker?
- 140** Sorry I Didn't Text Back, But Should I Be?
- 144** Rent-Free in My Head
- 146** What's It Really Like to Be a Stay-at-Home Girlfriend?

Vibe Check

- 150** Eat, Post, Repeat: Cakes for the Scroll Age
- 154** Cosmo Quiz With Arissa Khan
- 156** Money Talks...and So Should Couples
- 158** The Stars on Your Favourite Stars
- 160** Cosmo Catch Up
- 162** Your Horoscope for the Season Ahead

THE COVER STORY

78

Our cover star Shanaya Kapoor's heart only breaks in the movies.



Photographer: Sushant Chhabria
Stylist: Chandini Whabi and Elsie Chetry
Makeup Artist: Riddhima Sharma
Hair Artist: Aanchal Morwani

On Shanaya: Outfit, all Rhygni; earrings, Vandals; Conquest watch, Longines



124

*Romcoms, Red
Flags, and Why
We Love Love*



visit our website

COSMOPOLITAN

Chairman & Editor-in-Chief

Aroon Purie

Vice Chairperson & Executive Editor-in-Chief

Kalli Purie

Editor Snigdha Ahuja

Managing Editor Diya J Verma

Assistant Editor Malika Halder

FASHION & FEATURES

Senior Features Writer Ananya Rai

Fashion Stylist Tongpangnuba Longchari

Contributing Jewellery Editor Ankita Malhotra

ART

Art Director Mandeep Singh

Art Director Satender Sharma

Assistant Art Director Ravi RG

Contributing Assistant Art Director Vineet Singh

Designer Chandan Arya

ADMINISTRATION

Senior Editorial Coordinator Pooja Singh

Editorial Coordinator Shalini Kanojia

Chief Operating Officer (Lifestyle Division)

and Publisher Sakshi Kohli

IMPACT TEAM

Vice President Kamalinee Chatterjee

Deputy General Manager Abhinav Seth

Senior Manager Sales Pooja Arora

Senior Manager Sales Rajeev Dubey

Manager Sales Mohit Sehgal

Executive Kangana Malik

Senior Manager (Operation & Queries)

Nitin Bhola nitin.bhola@intoday.com

SALES AND OPERATIONS

Assistant Vice President (Sales & Distribution) Deepak Bhatt

General Manager (North) Rajeev Gandhi

Regional Sales Manager (West) Yogesh Godhanlal Gautam

Regional Sales Manager (East) Manawer Hossain

CONSUMER MARKETING SERVICES

Deputy General Manager (Operations)

G L Ravik Kumar

DIGITAL

Editor Sonal Ved

Managing Editor Rucha Devkinandan Sharma

Assistant Editor Shreya Shah

Features Editor Eden Noronha

Junior Features Editor Schenelle Dsouza

Features Writer (Entertainment) Sagarika Choudhary

Junior Writer Santya Ahuja

Social Media Executive Assistant Mohit Kumar

Social Media Manager Tanmay Dinesh Ashar

Social Media Executive Eesha Jain

Social Media Executive Sidhi Goel

Video Editor Sanjana Bhalerao

HEARST MAGAZINES INTERNATIONAL

PRESIDENT OF HEARST MAGAZINES INTERNATIONAL: JONATHAN WRIGHT

SVP/GLOBAL EDITORIAL & BRAND DIRECTOR: KIM ST. CLAIR BODDEN

GLOBAL EDITORIAL & BRAND DIRECTOR: CHLOE O'BRIEN

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, COSMOPOLITAN (1965-1997): HELEN GURLEY BROWN

INTERNATIONAL EDITIONS:

AUSTRALIA, BULGARIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, FRANCE, GERMANY, HONG KONG, INDONESIA, ITALY, KOREA, MEXICO, MIDDLE EAST, NETHERLANDS, PHILIPPINES, SLOVENIA, SPAIN, TAIWAN, TURKEY, UKRAINE, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 323

PUBLISHED AND DISTRIBUTED MONTHLY BY LIVING MEDIA INDIA LTD., BY PERMISSION OF HEARST COMMUNICATIONS, NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

EDITORIAL/CORPORATE OFFICE: LIVING MEDIA INDIA LTD., INDIA TODAY MEDIAPLEX, FC-8, SECTOR-16A, FILM CITY, GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR, NOIDA (UP)-201301, UTTAR PRADESH; PHONES: (120) 4807 100;

NEW DELHI • **SUBSCRIPTIONS:** FOR ASSISTANCE CONTACT CUSTOMER CARE INDIA TODAY GROUP, C-9, SECTOR-10, NOIDA (UP) - 201301. EMAIL: wecarebg@intoday.com; PHONE / WHATSAPP:

+91 8597 778 778 (MONDAY TO FRIDAY, 10 AM - 6PM) • **IMPACT OFFICES:** 1201, 12TH FLOOR, TOWER 2A, INDIABULLS CENTRE (JUPITER MILLS) SB MARG, LOWER PAREL (WEST) MUMBAI-400013

• INDIA TODAY MEDIAPLEX, FC-8, SECTOR-16A, FILM CITY, NOIDA - 201301 • 98-A, DR RADHAKRISHNAN SALAI, 2ND FLOOR, MYLAPORE, CHENNAI 600 004; PHONES: 28478526-41; TELEX: 041-6177 INTO IN; FAX: 28472178; CABLE: LIVMEDIA, CHENNAI • 201-204, RICHMOND TOWERS, 2ND FLOOR, 12 RICHMOND ROAD, BENGALURU, 560 025; PHONES: 2221 2448; 22213037; TELEX: 0845-2217 INTO IN;

FAX: 080-2221 8335; CABLE: LIVMEDIA BENGALURU • 52, J.L. NEHRU ROAD, 4TH FLOOR, KOLKATA 700 071; PHONES: 2282 5398, 2282 7726, 2282 1922; FAX: 033-2282 7254, CABLE: LIVINMEDIA, KOLKATA

• 6-3-885/7/B, SOMAJIGUDA, HYDERABAD, 500 082; PHONES: 331 1657, 339 0479; TELEX: 0425-2085 THOM IN. FAX: 040-339 0484. • 39/1045, 1ST FLOOR, KARAKKAT ROAD, COCHIN 682 016;

PHONE: 0484-2377057, 2377058; FAX: 0484-2377059 • 2C, "SURYA RATH BLDG" 2ND FLOOR, BEHIND WHITE HOUSE, PANCHVATI, OFF C.G. ROAD, AHMEDABAD-380 006; PHONES: 656 0393, 656 0929;

FAX: 656 5293. • COPYRIGHT 1996, LIVING MEDIA INDIA LTD., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. REPRODUCTION IN ANY MANNER IS PROHIBITED. • PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY

MANOJ SHARMA ON BEHALF OF LIVING MEDIA INDIA LIMITED. PRINTED AT THOMSON PRESS, INDIA LIMITED, BEHIND WHITE HOUSE, PANCHVATI, OFF C.G. ROAD, FARIDABAD-121007, (HARYANA), PUBLISHED AT

F-26, 1ST FLOOR, CONNAUGHT PLACE, NEW DELHI - 110 001. EDITOR: SNIGDHA AHUJA. CORPORATE OFFICE: FC 8, SECTOR 16A, FILM CITY, NOIDA (UP) - 201301. COSMOPOLITAN DOES NOT TAKE

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RETURNING UNSOLICITED PUBLICATION MATERIAL. • ALL DISPUTES ARE SUBJECT TO THE EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTION OF COMPETENT COURTS AND FORUMS IN

DELHI/NEW DELHI ONLY. • REGISTERED OFFICE: F-26, 1ST FLOOR, CONNAUGHT PLACE, NEW DELHI - 110 001.

COPYRIGHT LIVING MEDIA INDIA LTD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. REPRODUCTION IN ANY MANNER IS PROHIBITED.



TIMEX

analog life
Make time yours.



Q Timex® Continental

Available at **TIMEX WORLD, JUST WATCHES** and all leading watch retailers in the country. Shop online at shop.timexindia.com



www.justwatches.com



For Trade queries, reach out to **9833792915**

Editor's Letter

In Emerald Fennell's on-screen rendition of *Wuthering Heights*, Academy Award-winning British costume designer Jacqueline Durran creates a dreamy imaginarium that is part period drama, part haute couture from the MTV era. Margot Robbie as Catherine Earnshaw becomes the canvas dressed in more than 50 costumes, and a smattering of red, white, and black—only three colours to complete the palette. Although, calling them colours seems reductive.

Just ask Pantone that is vouching for “A whisper of tranquillity and peace in a noisy world,” with its foamy shade for 2026, Cloud Dancer (our style pages tell you how to wear it this season). My point is—colours don't merely exist, they carry emotions, tell stories, and hold memories. Remember the pink sweater you wore to your first date with your partner? Or, the green pen you always carry to a job interview? Or, the almond browns of your father's eyes that take you back to childhood and grocery runs? Colours can soften blows, help you mediate loss and grief, and sometimes, they become a radical tool to see the world, in all its politics and complexities. For me, colour is love.

finance expert Sonia Shenoy on how couples should manage money talk, a piece on revisiting blind dates, and more. Plus, stories of intimacy, romance, sex, fantasies, and forgiveness. At *Cosmopolitan*, we are trying to push boundaries by starting conversations that need to be heard and engaged with—so with this issue, we introduce ‘Under The Influence’, a digital series (scan and watch!) starring content creators and their thoughts on what influence really is. And as we ready ourselves for the **Cosmopolitan Blogger & Creator Awards '25-'26** and stir the ‘who gets the prize?’ debate—for now, it's my blue coffee cup and my notebook that deserve one.

In This Issue



For Ayushmann Khurrana, it's the journey—not the destination. The actor on diversity of characters, love, and soft masculinity.



Romcoms, red flags, and Gen Z. The idea of love on screen (and on Spotify) for a generation armed with dating apps.



Being sexy was never this easy. How the younger buyer is reimagining the idea of bed-ready lingerie.

No, not because it's Valentine's month, but because love is always, always dressed in a shade of me. Be it an oversized black jacket for a day when I don't feel confident about my body (working on it), or the stark blue of my coffee cup that reminds me every time of my never-ending-to-do list. For many, love is a shade of red—a colour that marketing teams and our own mental mirror has reflected since time immemorial. It's very *Cosmo*, too—bold and unmissable. So, why didn't we put our cover star Shanaya Kapoor in red? Well, because she is into a shade of dark romance these days. With a Valentine's release that is a survival thriller, the emerging actor is trying to shift attention to all that love can look like, while she makes a case for gore as a viable genre in Bollywood. This is Shanaya like she has never been seen before—with shadows, in a moodier hue. And you'll find a Lady Gaga reference too, if you choose to read her interview where she talks of love, heartbreak, and dealing with social media trolls.

But that's not all—for our first print issue of the year, our stories look at love in myriad ways. There's a reported piece on pre-nups in India, an interview with journalist and



Love,
Snigdha

Snigdha Ahuja
Editor



follow us on Instagram

INDULGE IN A DAY OF PURE

Pampering



Curated women-only day stays at our iconic hotels.
Discover moments of pure bliss. Let the day be all about you.

Woyage

DAYCATIONS

Contributors



Amitava Saha
PHOTOGRAPHER

Sun sign: Sagittarius
Trend prediction for the year: Film photography.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Calm, focused, consistent.
In this issue: Photographed *Cosmo's* February digital cover star, Sahher Bambba.
p.102



Manpreet Kaur
STYLIST

Sun sign: Libra
Trend prediction for the year: Intentional dressing—fewer pieces, stronger point of view. Craft, texture, and emotion over loud trends.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Focused, intuitive, unapologetic.
In this issue: Styled Sahher Bambba for *Cosmo's* digital cover.
p.102



Nishanth Radhakrishnan
PHOTOGRAPHER

Trend prediction for the year: Authenticity, texture, and imperfection over overly-polished, superficial aesthetics.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Calm, precise, expansive.
In this issue: Photographed the versatile Ayushmann Khurrana for *Cosmo's* digital cover.
p.86



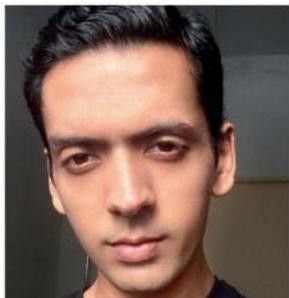
Kriti Sanon
ACTOR-ENTREPRENEUR

Sun sign: Leo
Trend prediction for the year: Choosing multitasking products that do more with less because heavy layering can feel overwhelming and unnecessary.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Strong, flowing, intentional.
In this issue: I talk about unlearning skincare myths, simplifying my routine, and how going back to basics helped me truly understand what my skin needs.
p.32



Saumyaa Vohra
WRITER

Sun sign: Gemini
Trend prediction for the year: A (soft) return to caring.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Do less! Sorry, I know that's two words.
In this issue: I've explored if AI can be your matchmaker. Spoiler: It can (kind of). But there's a few caveats...
p.136



Sushant Chhabria
PHOTOGRAPHER

Sun sign: Libra
Trend prediction for the year: If peace, cleaner air, calmer minds, and kindness can be a trend.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Eyes open inwards.
In this issue: Photographed *Cosmo's* Jan-Feb cover star Shanaya Kapoor.
p.78



Tshering Lama
MAKEUP & HAIR ARTIST

Sun sign: Cancer
Beauty prediction for the year: Real, radiant skin and hair.
Your 2026 energy in three words: Grounded, expansive, intentional.
In this issue: Worked with actor Anya Singh for her hair and makeup looks for *Cosmo's* digital cover.
p.94





Introducing

ENGAGE

BRAZILIAN

Maracuja Perfumes

Indulge in a realm where every sense is exquisitely awakened, and temptation blossoms. Infused with the untamed spirit of the passion fruit, born from the depths of the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest, these fragrances are mesmerising.

These fragrances are a masterpiece of unique olfactive design, crafted with high quality ingredients and state of the art in house manufacturing.

Experience the daring depth of Maracuja Cognac Perfume, for Him.
Indulge in the vibrant elegance of Maracuja Wine Perfume, for Her.

Engage Brazilian Maracuja Perfume Range
is not merely perfume,

It's Forbidden Fruit
of Passion.



Buy Now On **amazon**

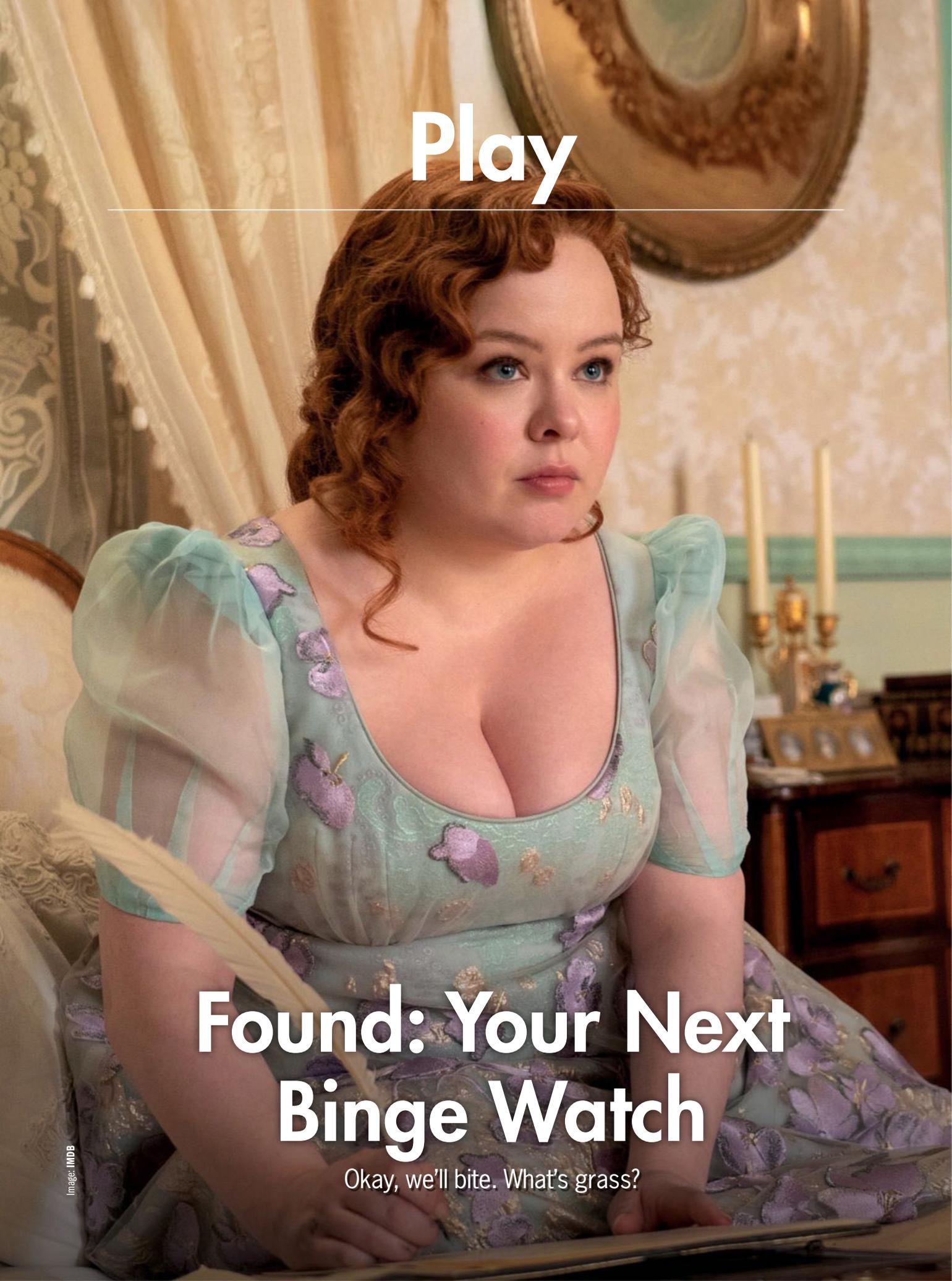


COSMOPOLITAN



Your fabulous life is just a click away!

WWW.COSMOPOLITAN.IN



Play

Found: Your Next Binge Watch

Okay, we'll bite. What's grass?



The Last Thing He Told Me, Season 2
February 20, On Apple TV+

If you would have told us that Laura Dave's novel-turned-show would become so huge that it would force her to write a sequel for it to be renewed for a second season—we would've raised an eyebrow...but wouldn't have brushed it off completely. Jennifer Garner, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, Angourie Rice, and David Morse all return as the story continues beyond Owen's (played by Coster-Waldau) disappearance.



It's Complicated (But Very Watchable)

Wuthering Heights
February 13, In theatres

Don't @ us, but we have a hunch this would be the biggest hit of the year. If you've seen the sex scene discourse online, you know the obsession is real. Emerald Fennell's adaptation of the 19th century novel stars Jacob Elordi and Margot Robbie—and that is reason enough for most (read: Us) to watch it. Brb, on our way to the read the book for the 9642853th time.

The course of true love never did run smooth... but it sure streams well.

By Ananya Rai



Do Deewane Seher Mein
February 20, In theatres

This Siddhant Chaturvedi and Mrunal Thakur starrer is an "imperfectly perfect" love story according to its makers. Directed by Ravi Udyawar of *Mom* (2017) fame, and produced by Zee Studios and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Bhansali Productions, the movie is pivoted on old-school romance.

Images: IMDb



Project Hail Mary **March 20, In theatres**

Ryan Gosling plays Ryland Grace, who wakes up alone aboard a spacecraft with no memory of who he is, or why he's there. As his memories slowly return, so does the terrifying truth: He is humanity's last hope, tasked with solving the mystery behind a strange substance that's causing the sun to burn out. Sandra Hüller, Lionel Boyce, Ken Leung, and Milana Vayntrub round out the cast.



Tu Yaa Main **February 13, In theatres**

Our cover star Shanaya Kapoor and Adarsh Gourav pair up for this romantic thriller, positioned as "the ultimate date fright film" by its makers. Directed by Bejoy Nambiar, the movie follows a meet-cute that soon spirals into a survival thriller. We bet you're already hooked!



Bridgerton, Season 4 **January 29 (Part 1) and February 26 (Part 2), On Netflix**

Everyone's favourite show is back and JSYK Jonathan Bailey will be returning as Anthony Bridgerton! This season, divided into two parts, is about Benedict, according to Netflix's tweet. "Benedict Bridgerton has been unmasked as next season's newest suitor. Please scream to celebrate our boy." *Screaming with a big S.* So if you need us, don't (unless it's to talk about Bridgerton, of course).



Industry, Season 4 **January 11, On JioHotstar**

There's just something so comforting about having a soapy workplace drama to look forward to every Monday. And if the creators Mickey Down and Konrad Kay are to be believed, this season might be the most addictive yet. According to the official press release, the show will see frenemies Harper (Myha'la) and Yasmin (Marisa Abela) drawn into a high stakes "globetrotting cat-and-mouse game". Also joining the cast are Kiernan Shipka and Charlie Heaton. Consider us locked in.

Heated Rivalry (2025)



Joy, Queered

Why seeing queer characters love freely on screen feels radical for those of us raised on silence, secrecy, and longing.

By Anwesh Banerjee

It is a truth universally acknowledged today that Canadian streaming giant Crave's recently released first season of *Heated Rivalry* has the entire world in a chokehold. And if, upon reading this sentence, your first reaction is to ask what HR is, then you, dear reader, have truly been living under a rock. Based on Rachel Reid's widely feted *Game Changer* novel series, the show follows two closeted ice hockey players, Shane (Hudson Williams) and Ilya (Connor Storrie), as they navigate a turbulent (and deeply heated *coughs*) cross-continental enemies-to-lovers arc spanning an entire decade. But as the series progresses, for those

already initiated into this cult, one of its most euphorically moving sequences comes not from the romantic leads but from supporting characters Scott Hunter (the devastatingly handsome François Arnaud) and his lover Kip (Robbie Graham-Kuntz).

In the fast-paced penultimate fifth episode, Hunter—fresh off a historic championship league win—finally forgoes his macho hockey persona and publicly acknowledges his homosexuality by kissing his estranged lover Kip on the rink, in front of the entire world. The moment is at once a celebration of severed lovers reunited, a coming-of-age canon event for both men, and the catalyst that pushes

Queerness in cinema was implicitly coded as serious, sombre, art-house fare—far removed from the frivolity of mainstream heterosexual romance.

Shane and Ilya to finally give their clandestine affair a fighting chance. Yet even as we watch Shane and Ilya's shocked faces react to Hunter and Kip's kiss in real time, the real power of the scene lies in a larger question: In a world that constantly urges us to become versions of ourselves that belie who we truly are, what does it mean to be seen?

UNMASKED

Watching this episode took me back to my own growing-up years as a closeted gay teenager in India, before the decriminalisation of Section 377, when noteworthy queer media rarely contained joy. Somewhere around middle school, when I first discovered the hidden world of the internet and the pleasures of streaming cinema in the privacy of my bedroom, tentative searches led me to queer classics like *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *A Single Man* (2009). In Ang Lee's rocky masterpiece and Tom Ford's sepia-drenched restraint, I watched tortured queer lives defined by heartbreak, secrecy, and a suffocating loneliness. There was joy, of course, in simply seeing two men hold hands or kiss on screen—an urgent validation of my own buried desires—but with each



Red, White & Royal Blue (2023)

passing year, I found myself asking: Must every queer character be this miserably sad?

There was relief in knowing people like me existed on screen at all, but the sheer abundance of unhappy queers in my cinematic repertoire became increasingly bothersome. As I moved from high school to the country's largest public university, conversations with peers and professors only reinforced my fear: Queerness in cinema was implicitly coded as serious, sombre, art-house fare—far removed from the frivolity of mainstream heterosexual romance. Even as my

In a world that constantly urges us to become versions of ourselves that belie who we truly are, what does it mean to be seen?

literature- and history-pilled brain took pride in this intellectual lineage, my heart continued yearning for a queer story that dared to offer happiness.

In recent years, that childhood yearning has found some satiation through the proliferation of shows like *HR*. Queer joy is a complicated phrase, holding within it a plurality of meanings. For some, it is the radical act of granting queer subjects happiness in a world structured to deny it; for others, it is a contrarian state of being—an assertion of self against the grain.



And increasingly, both small and large productions have embraced this.

THE JOY WATCH LIST

Amazon Prime's 2023 film *Red, White & Royal Blue*, based on Casey McQuiston's novel, was panned in many quarters for its lack of cinematic seriousness, yet celebrated by queer audiences

globally. Watching the bisexual, Hispanic son of the US president fall in love with the closeted gay heir to the British throne, I laughed and wept at the film's sheer audacity. From frank depictions of queer intimacy to its unapologetic fairy tale structure, it was exactly the kind of fantasy my teenage self needed.

This refusal to apologise extends beyond *RW&RB*. Prime's 2025



There is hope that future generations will grow up knowing that happiness is a valid and unequivocal share of queer life.

length finale movie titled *Heartstopper Forever*, instead of a fourth season, my mind drifts back to a now-estranged high school classmate who struggled for years to articulate her asexuality. On nights when I stumble upon her Instagram posts and witness the life she is building, I feel immense pride knowing she has found a space where she no longer has to overexplain herself. Like the uncreased folds of the handloom saris she wears, I hope those painful memories smoothen over as more children like Isaac (Tobie Donovan) in *Heartstopper* find their place in the world.

In the 25th year of my existence, it gives me great joy—perhaps my version of queer joy—to witness the proliferation of stories like these. There is hope that future generations will grow up knowing that happiness is a valid and unequivocal share of queer life. As important as peeling oranges in secret may be, it is sometimes just as necessary to run across an airport declaring your love, actually. And while seeing more queer characters of my skin colour remains an unerring wish, for now, this hope is enough to fill the single, *Brokeback*-shaped hole in my 15-year-old heart. ■

comedy-drama series *Overcompensating* foregrounds plural queer identities through its unlikely friendship between Benny (Benito Skinner), a football-playing jock, and George (Owen Thiele), a femme-presenting queer man with enviable nails and crop tops. Netflix's *Heartstopper* (2022), based on Alice Oseman's graphic novels, remains a rare queer teenage drama

that centres innocence, confusion, and joy without denying darkness. Though it addresses bullying, body image, gender nonconformity, asexuality, STIs, and abuse, the show never relinquishes its commitment to hope. Violence is not spectacle but context—something to be met with care in pursuit of a better tomorrow.

As we await Netflix's feature-

Need *for* Speed, Teen Edition

Karen Kaur is not your run-of-the-mill sports star, as she races beyond the finishing line with a confidence that Gen Z and Gen Alpha need in their lives.

By Upasana Das



Somewhere in her old family album is a strangely prophetic photograph of Karen. She'd just been cradled back from the hospital, and her father, Kuldeep, immediately dressed her in a tiny white shirt he'd made for his firstborn. It said 'Future Race Car

Driver' in bright red letters. Little did her dad know that the race fanatic within him would manifest those simple words into a future on the fast track for his daughter, who has vroomed her way into the Formula 4 circuit at 15. And, she is only just getting started.

The week before Christmas

last year, we caught up with Kaur zooming in from her home in Singapore, after she'd finished her routine netball practice around late evening—as her parents sat beside her beyond the vicinity of the camera. From tagging alongside her father to his car repair workshops to now training with him, she has come a

Her family's heart jumped to their throats as they saw her car skid to the wall after being hit by another—right before the ROK Cup Superfinal in Italy, last year.

long way within a handful of years. And, it only seems a little while ago when she was nine and stepping into her first go-kart under the watchful eyes of her father.

Sitting upright on her chair, what comes through as she speaks is a hawk-eyed focus on the finish line. “There was one time when someone hit me in a karting race and I had to stand last,” she recalled, adding: “I knew then that I had to do whatever it takes to get a podium finish—and I did.” This pride isn’t misplaced considering how she was overtaking people much older than her in karting races a mere year after she ever set foot in one—and it caught the attention of an Italian racing team. “After that I started racing internationally,” she shares.

ENTERING THE ARENA

Kaur recalled the first time stepping into an F4 car and immediately being overcome with excitement of manipulating a vehicle that would run at over 200kmph.

Singapore doesn’t have a permanent race track that can support F4 racing, so she has to make the trip to Zhuhai in China to train with the Asia Racing Team, and follow up her on-track training sessions with off-

track strength and endurance training and swift recovery. “You have to be so much stronger and remember a whole lot of technicalities,” she gushes, adding how she once gave her first trophy in karting to her mechanic to recognise the effort they put in. There is now a recognisable confidence which seamlessly rolls off her in the conversation—which is perhaps how she also handles pressure looking up to her F1 idol, the Belgian-Dutch Max Verstappen. “I love how focused he is to get to a goal,” she explains, adding: “I do get nervous—but I don’t let it get to me. I push these thoughts away by skipping, which makes me focus on the race.”

However, amid everything, Kaur is still in middle school, and this jump-start to her career means finishing homework in connecting flights and quiet hotel rooms, in between planning game strategy and spending long days away from friends. Sometimes, catching a glimpse of reality TV shows like *Physical: Asia* or *Ninja Warrior*. When asked how she has worked around this schedule, she says it’s her friends who have helped her stay afloat with classes. “They are supportive of what I do on social media, and sometimes even come to my races,” she smiles.

It’s also her parents—who had preponed their holiday so their eldest could make it back in time

““ I get nervous—but I don’t let it get to me. I push these thoughts away by skipping, which makes me focus on the race.”

for her training in December, when the rest of the world would be on downtime. And her little sister, she adds, trudging along to every single of her races—and making sure she’s hydrated. “My father helped me a lot financially,” she says, smiling at the duo sitting beside her. “My mom is my moral support—when you asked me about nervousness, she is the one who helps me during such times.” While the former is the stricter one, he is also the one keeping up the tradition of going to McDonalds and ordering a filet-o-fish burger, nuggets, and fries after a good race.

BATTLEGROUND, REVVED

Her family’s heart jumped to their throats when they saw her car skid to the wall after being hit by another car—right before the ROK Cup Superfinal in Italy, last year. “I injured my right hand,” she says, while admitting that a part of her was afraid to go to the race, worried if the same thing would happen again. “But eventually, I showed up and didn’t go back home,” she says, adding: “I just realised I worked very hard for this, and I’ll not give up halfway.”

This refusal to stand down to defeat is cracked with a strange sense of sudden humility as she shares that she sees herself progressing to F2 in the next 10 years—and when cajoled by her parents, admits she’d like to see herself competing in F1. It’s no surprise then that she is being considered as a wild card entry to F1 in the upcoming months, where she hopes we’ll see her signature yellow helmet painted with her insignia—a butterfly—blazing through the competition.

More often than not, Kaur finds herself the only girl in the room fighting her way through male opponents...and it’s something she wants to change. “Recently, I got to know that a girl started carting as a hobby after watching me, and I felt really touched,” she smiles, adding: “It’s a great feeling to know I inspire other girls to get into the sport.” ■

Under the Influence With Sakshi Sindwani

Keeping it real with *Cosmo* India's new series, *Under the Influence*, where we sit down with content creators to discuss the evolving Insta-universe, brand building, cringe culture, and more.

By Snigdha Ahuja

“ I love the word influence—I think it holds great power.

“ If I had to give a tip to budding influencers, I would say don't start content creation for the money. Only 5 to 10 per cent of people are actually able to make that kind of top money.

Outfit, One True Pairing; jewellery, AEQEA



“ Influencer marketing is obviously working for all brands—otherwise they wouldn’t be putting their money behind it.

“ We [creators] have shown people how so many things can be done differently. We have challenged the norms—my entire channel has been about breaking stereotypes, and that’s not just changed my life, it has changed the lives of so many people. So, yeah, I don’t get why people hate on influencers.

“ As content creators, we need to give immense respect to the brands that we work with—and we need to demand the same in return.

“ Boundaries are absolutely necessary. So, I do switch off from time to time. It has taken me a lot of years on social media and maturing to realise that I really have to say full stop and live life as Sakshi Sindwani, as opposed to Style Me Up With Sakshi.

“ Believe in your content, believe in yourself, and be in it for the right reasons—not just for the money, which may or may not come.

Watch Here

Part 1



Part 2



Do Book Adaptations Actually Need to Be Faithful?

The internet collectively lost its sh*t over the trailer for Emerald Fennell's interpretation of *Wuthering Heights*. But do movies owe us an accurate retelling?

By Lydia Venn



Wuthering Heights (2026)

Nothing screams *Wuthering Heights* more than a blonde Cathy, whitewashed Heathcliff, and Charli XCX, am I right?’ was just one of the many scathing comments left underneath the trailer for Emerald Fennell’s adaptation of Emily Brontë’s 1847 novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Upon the teaser’s release last November, everything from the “posh” accents—unfamiliar in 1800s Yorkshire—to Cathy’s “inaccurate” wedding dress, and the seeming addition of BDSM on a level with *50 Shades Of Grey*, was heavily criticised. Fans of the novel blasted Fennell for what they called a ‘butchering’ of the source material.

The movie, due for release on the eve of Valentine’s Day, is one of many recent adaptations of novels. We’ve seen *Frankenstein*, *Regretting You*, *People We Met on Vacation*, *Hamnet*, and *The Housemaid* all getting the big-screen treatment, with adaptations of *The Hunger Games: Sunrise On The Reaping*, *Lord Of The Flies*, and *Homer’s Odyssey* also on the way.

Since the dawn of moviemaking, books have served as inspiration for film-makers (the first-ever book-to-screen adaptation was Georges Méliès’ version of *Cinderella* in 1899). With a ready-made fan base to pull in a big audience, it’s easy to see why Hollywood studios rely on existing IP to create smash hits. Take Harry Potter, Lord Of The Rings, and James Bond movies, for example—all prove that films based on novels can dominate the box office. But just because a movie takes inspiration from a book, does that mean it must follow it blindly?

There is definitely an argument that, yes, movie versions of novels should be as accurate as possible. One of the main concerns Brontë fans have about Fennell’s version of *Wuthering Heights* is the erasure of Heathcliff’s ethnicity. It’s a long-standing debate among scholars: Heathcliff is first described in the novel as a “dark-skinned gypsy” and later on as “a little Lascar [a sailor from India or south-east Asia], or an American or Spanish castaway.” While Heathcliff’s exact ethnicity remains uncertain, it’s widely agreed he was not white. So, the casting of Caucasian Jacob Elordi was seen by many as a wasted opportunity for an actor of colour to excel in the role and another example of whitewashing in the film industry.

For Mercedes Ron, the author of the *Culpable* trilogy, which has been turned into a hugely successful movie franchise on Prime Video and developed a cult following, the main priority in

seeing her work adapted for the screen was maintaining the feel of her novel, without worrying about translating the narrative specifics to screen.

“The non-negotiable element was preserving Noah and Nick’s unique dynamic. Noah isn’t your typical ‘good girl’—she’s rebellious and determined. Nick appears to be just a bad boy, but has tremendous emotional depth. Their chemistry drives everything, and Nicole [Wallace] and

“Faithfulness to me means preserving the heart of the story.”

- Mercedes Ron, Author

Gabriel [Guevara] captured this perfectly on screen,” she explains.

Certain elements of Ron’s works were changed for the big screen. The story’s location, for one, was moved from sunny Los Angeles to equally sunny Spain, an alteration Ron was not worried about because, as she points out, “each tells the story in its own way,” and overall, “faithfulness to me means preserving the heart of the story—the feelings it evokes—rather than recreating every page exactly as written.”

Arguably, some of the most successful adaptations—both culturally and at the box office—have been those that kept the integral elements of the story but gave it a fresh twist. Baz Luhrmann’s stylised 1996 version of *Romeo + Juliet*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes in the titular roles, isn’t entirely faithful to the play. Set in a Miami-like ‘Verona Beach’, packed with parties and glamour, the tragic love between the pair still feels just as crushing as it is in Shakespeare’s text.



Why do we care so much about preserving the 'original vision' of the text?

And if the majority of movies getting green-lit are those that are deemed more likely to be commercially successful because of the existing IP, then getting new interpretations of the stories we've seen countless times is surely good for entertainment?

These retellings often add depth, such as the expansion of the friendship between Red and Andy in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994). They can also make casting more inclusive by ignoring period considerations, such as when Dev Patel played the eponymous hero in *The Personal History of David Copperfield*; the role had previously always been played by Caucasian actors. Sometimes, endings are changed for a more satisfying conclusion, such as Steven Spielberg's choice to have the T-Rex, not the military, save the protagonists in *Jurassic Park* (1993).

It's also worth pointing out that when translating texts from page to screen, it's usually impossible to condense everything from a 300-page novel into a two-hour movie, so there are always going to be changes and compromises to make it work as a film. So, when it comes to adaptations, perhaps the question we should really be asking ourselves is, "Why do we care so much about preserving the 'original vision' of the text?"

Another issue raised by Brontë fans is the apparent romanticisation of Heathcliff and Cathy's relationship in Fennell's *Wuthering Heights*. For those who haven't read the novel, their fraught relationship is anything but romantic—it's layered in abuse, pain, and trauma. Seeing the exaggerated sexual undertones on screen has led fans to question whether the film-makers truly understand the novel's deeper meaning. This inevitably sparks comparisons between text and film, often leading to the age-old refrain, "The book was better."

However, for Dr Frances Kamm, director of education and a lecturer in film at the University of Kent, the phrase comes with its own problems. When we say it, she feels that what we're really saying is, "It didn't encapsulate that particular vision or interpretation of that text that I had." And most of the time, we assume our interpretation aligns



with the author's—something that is, of course, impossible to know for sure.

Dr Kamm argues that once we have expressed our love for a book, it is unlikely that anything will match up. "If you are truly in love with Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, for example, nothing is ever going to compare, because there is only one Shelley's *Frankenstein*," she explains. "There also has to be an understanding of a contract between viewer and text. If you truly love the book, that is always going to be the true one for you. An adaptation is engaging in a translation, a retelling, a reimagining, which means that for you there are going to be aspects of it you may love and there may be aspects you won't because it can never be, for you, that one text."

Ultimately, an adaptation is just that—one person's unique interpretation of a story. When reading *Wuthering Heights*, my vision of how the ragged moors look will be vastly different to your own, as will Fennell's, even though we're all reading the same text. So, yes, while the movie's casting issues can't be overlooked, the film is still just one version of the story, alongside more than 50 adaptations in various forms over the years—while Brontë's original will remain on your bookshelf. It's up to you which version you choose to experience and put your cash behind. Now, where can I listen to that Charli XCX remix? ■

Z R



BORN CINEMATIC

Image courtesy: Shubhodeep Das



Z CINEMA

Nikon | RED

6K HIGHEST RESOLUTION
6K/59.94P

BIGGEST MONITOR
10.16 CM (4") IN ITS CLASS

R3D IN-CAMERA 12-BIT
R3D NE & N-RAW CODEC

**WORLD'S FIRST 32-BIT
FLOAT & OZO AUDIO.**

Corporate/Registered Office & Service Centre: Nikon India Pvt. Ltd., Plot No. 71, Sector 32, Institutional Area, Gurugram 122001, Haryana, (CIN-U74999HR2007FTC036820). Ph: 0124 4688500, Service Ph: 0124 4688514, Service ID: nindsupport@nikon.com, Sales and Support ID: nindsales@nikon.com, For more information, please visit our website: www.nikon.co.in



NIKON ZR
PRODUCT PAGE

Suvir Saran Would Like You to Clean Your Glasses

A deliciously unfiltered hour with the man who wrote *Tell My Mother I Like Boys*—and means every word.

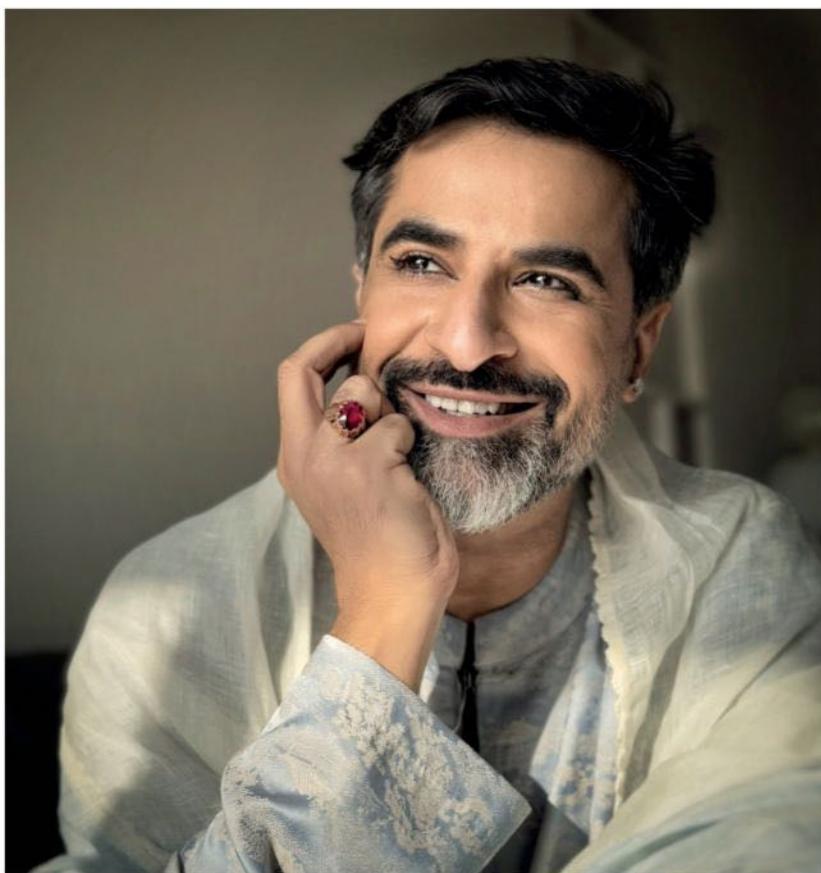
By Duhin Ganju

Five minutes into my Zoom call with Suvir Saran, before I can even get to the cookie that opens his memoir, he stops me mid-sentence to say, very seriously, “You have stains on your glasses. Please wipe them.” This is not a metaphor. This is a Michelin-starred chef and author (who has previously published three cookbooks)—and recently wrote the memoir, *Tell My Mother I Like Boys*—politely but firmly asking me to clean my lenses because clarity matters. I comply. (Let’s call it mutual respect, not obedience).

This sets the tone for the next hour: Intimate, unruly, slightly ‘filthy’, and deeply precise. Saran adjusts his camera, compliments my lighting (“You look gorgeous”), and announces—gleefully—that everything we’re saying is being recorded and will make for excellent trailer bites. At one point, he asks me my “position.” At another, he declares himself the emperor of gay India. Somewhere in between, he talks about shame, hosting, Grindr, grief, and why vanilla is both a culinary and sexual sin.

GROWING UP, COMING OUT, WANTING MORE

The memoir at the centre of this madness, *Tell My Mother I Like Boys* (published by Penguin Random House India), is not a coming-out



story in the neat, Western sense. It’s a book about hunger—literal and emotional—about growing up in Delhi as a boy who was dressed like a doll, adored until puberty betrayed him, and then quietly abandoned. “I was paraded from age five to 11 as the prettiest girl South Delhi had ever seen,” he tells me. “And then the first hair came out. The girls left.

My voice cracked. I failed sixth grade.”

He says it without drama—like recalling a recipe he’s cooked too many times to romanticise. In the book, puberty isn’t a moment so much as an invasion: A hostile takeover where the body turns into contested ground and desire shows up before the words for it do. “That’s

when I realised,” he says, “that I was becoming something I also wanted to be with. A lover.”

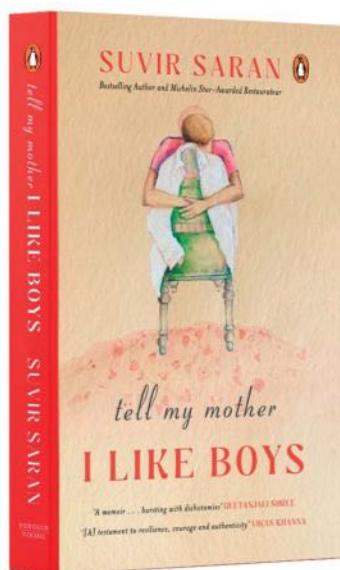
What Saran has now, abundantly, is language. For sex, for food, for fear, for survival. When I ask him what the most “insignificant” food to shape his life has been, he answers instantly: “Cookies and cream. And doughnuts.” Then, because he’s Suvir, he adds, “Doughnuts! Cream or not.” I fail to regain control.

There’s a reason this book lands the way it does. Saran came out to his parents over three decades ago, and in his telling, that moment burnt shame to the ground. “From that day on, I had nothing to hide,” he says. “Anything you know about me, my parents know.” His father, who thanked him for becoming a role model for other queer kids from the Global South, looms large. His mother is the emotional axis. “If my life were a *thali* (traditional meal),” he says, “my mother would be the *thal* (platter). Omnipresent. Without her, nothing works.”

CITIES, SEX, AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE

We talk about cities like former lovers you still stalk on Instagram. Delhi made him queer—and terrified. “I cried myself to sleep for 10 years,” he says. Mumbai taught him what it meant to be othered for his body—“*chikna, gora*” (fair, pretty boy)—but also gave him freedom. New York gave him success, fame, and fear in equal measure. “I was beaten once because they thought I was someone’s farmhand.” He pauses. “The world is never safe. It only pretends to be.”

And then, because we are *Cosmo*, I ask the important question: Which city made him boldest in bed? “India,” he says, without hesitation, naming a country instead. Not New York. Not San Francisco. India—because he can host. Hosting, according to Saran, is not about hospitality; it’s about power. “In



India, most people don’t have a place,” he explains. “They have hotels. Shame. Fear. Money. I live alone. I can host. I’m the Raja.” In his worldview, desire is infrastructural. Safety is erotic. Privacy is foreplay. It’s not about excess or exhibitionism,—it’s about honesty. About being able to “f*ck”, love, and live without pretending you’re someone else.

This is also why he’s on Grindr—with his real face. “I have nothing to hide,” he says. “If someone sees me and thinks, ‘If he can be out, maybe I can too’—that matters.” He claims to hate flattery, insists he’s happiest alone, and blocks people he knows. I don’t believe all of it. I like him anyway. For someone who flirts relentlessly, Saran is surprisingly tender about love. The most romantic thing anyone has ever done for him? “Loved me fully,” he says. “Gave me their time. Their loyalty. Their life.” He pauses. “And I didn’t see it until I lost them.” He quotes softly: “*Jo mil jaaye wo mitti hai, jo kho jaye wo sona*” (what stays feels familiar like dust; what’s lost becomes precious gold).

If the book asks readers to witness his life, he hopes it also takes something from them. “Their bias,” he says. “Their fear.” Shame, after all,

COSMO QUIZ

Kiss: Soft or savage?
Savage

Foreplay: Underrated or overrated?
Underrated

Turn-on: Confidence or kindness?
Kindness

Texting after sex: Yes or no?
Depends on how they text

Favourite post-sex snack?
Foreplay

Biggest ick: Ego or dishonesty?
Ego

Bedroom vibe: Lights on or lights off?
Lights on

Aftercare: Essential or optional?
Optional

Jealousy: Hot or hell?
Hell

Fantasy: Private or shared?
Both

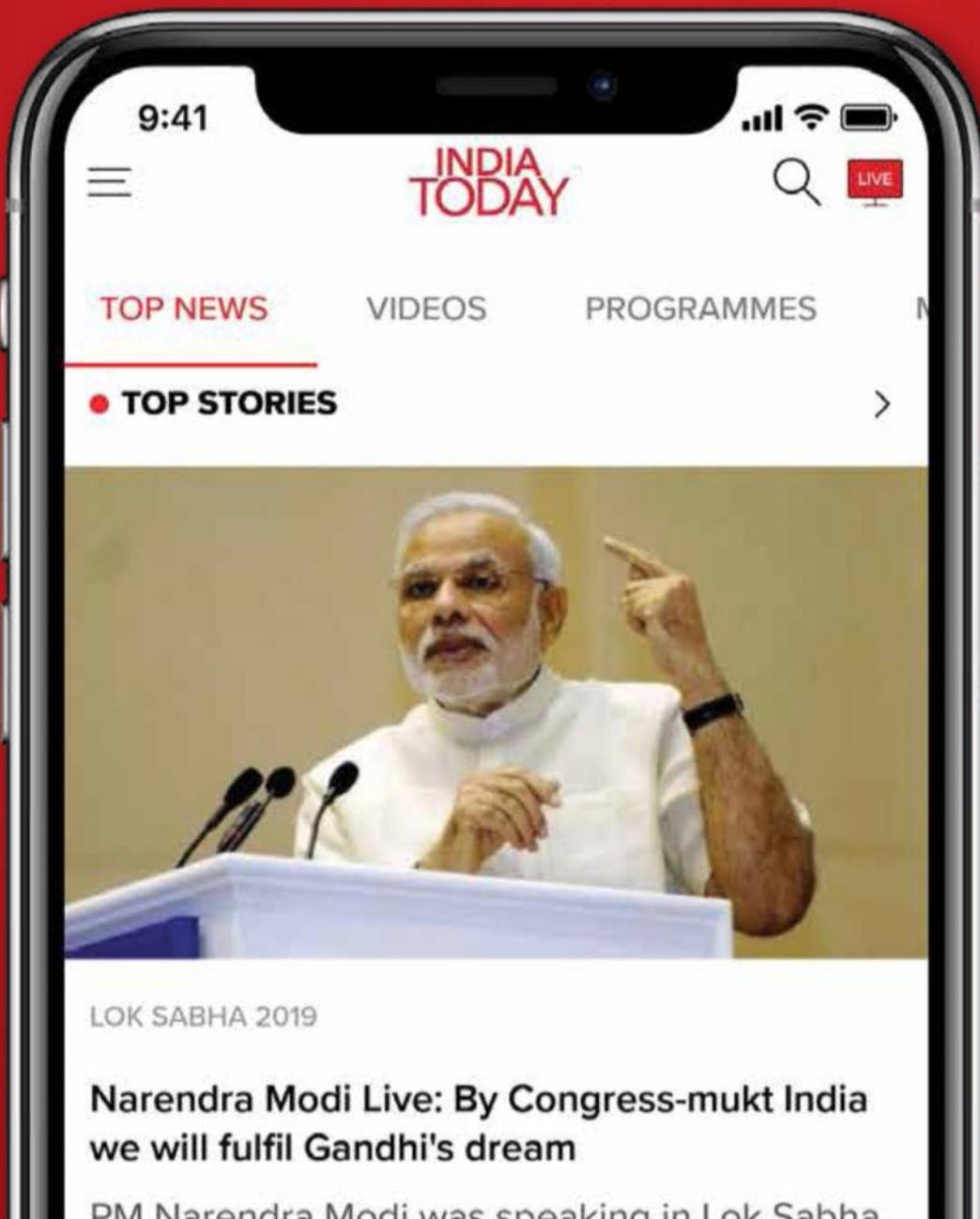
belongs to the world—not to the boy.

By the end of our conversation, he tells me he’s always in love. Not always with a person—sometimes with music, sometimes with cooking, sometimes with tomorrow. “I love today,” he says. “Because I can still do something with it.” Before we hang up, he asks me if I got what I wanted. I tell him I did—and then some more. He offers to keep going, to make it “more saucy, more *Cosmo*.” I check my glasses. Clean. Crystal clear. Some men want to be desired. Suvir Saran wants to be seen—properly, sharply, without smudges. Preferably with the lights on. ■

INDIA
TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

JUST A TAP AWAY



DOWNLOAD THE APP NOW

AVAILABLE ON



Glow



Serving Face

Inside: Everything you need for your 2026 glow up.

Skincare, Stripped Back Lessons From the Glam Chair

How unlearning popular routines and separating myth from fact helped me truly understand my skin.

By Kriti Sanon



I have spent a good part of my life glued to a glam chair. It's part and parcel of me being an entrepreneur, an actor, and a producer. Early call times, late pack-ups, lights flashing right in your face, and constant makeup going on and coming off. It is all glamorous, yes, but it's also humbling. There's no hiding from your skin there. It is incredibly honest. No filters or any shortcuts can ever help. In my honest opinion, the glam chair has been one of my biggest skincare teachers. When I started in the industry more than a decade ago, I didn't think twice when I bought products. I hopped onto trends and figured more products meant better skin. But along the way, after talking to dermatologists and formulators, and just being curious on my own, I started asking questions that I should've asked way before: "What makes this ingredient so special?" "Why does my skin react differently on different days?" "Why do some products just feel right while others don't?" Slowly, I began to unlearn. And unlearning these very common skincare myths didn't just change my routine, it changed how I treated and understood my skin.

MYTH #1: MORE PRODUCTS = BETTER SKIN

There was a time when my skincare shelf looked...intense. Multiple serums, those glorified 9-10 step regimes, and a tiring routine that honestly felt like homework. My belief was that effort by default equated to results. But in the glam chair, prep is actually uncomplicated. As sets are time-sensitive zones, it becomes difficult to have an elaborate regime. The priority becomes what the skin needs in that particular moment.

I always follow the hydrate, treat, and protect routine. And the skin actually responds beautifully. That's when I realised that skincare doesn't need to be complex to

be effective. In fact, when it's simplified correctly, it often works better. Fusing ingredients into one formula can help you derive better results without chaos and much more clarity.

MYTH #2: IF IT TINGLES OR BURNS, IT'S WORKING

I used to believe that skincare had to sting to work. When there's a little burn, it's doing something, right? But the harsh studio lights mirrored the truth. Instead of glowing, my skin was irritated and inflamed. Makeup was sitting on red, patchy skin instead of blending in. This helped me understand the importance of gentle skincare. It becomes important that it must work with your skin barrier, instead of against it.

When you incorporate multiple products with no right formulation, it worsens the very problem it is trying to solve. So, the right and effective formulas can go a long way to deliver visible results. When I switched to gentler products, my skin improved. Now, I only search for formulas that feel gentle and soothing; not compromising on results. After all, achieving radiant skin shouldn't be about pushing through the sting and burn—it's about listening to your skin and being gentle so it thrives.

MYTH #3: DIFFERENT SKIN, ONE ROUTINE

Being on set with people of different skin types and concerns taught me something important. Skin is personal. Climate, stress, lifestyle... everything shows up on different people differently. And, skincare isn't meant to follow a universal routine or be the same for everyone. That's why skincare needs to be flexible and intuitive. Your routine should adapt to your life and not feel like an added responsibility. I appreciate products that not only work on their own but also when layered.

What changed during my 30s? A shift happened. My curiosity led me to invest in understanding my skin better. Earlier, I relied on the experts around me, but now, I realised the importance of self-learning. I was keen to learn more about ingredients and formulations. Then, Covid happened. No shoots, no glam chairs, no constant makeup. It was me and my skin, every single day. It gave me time to listen and take responsibility for my skin, making skincare more preventative and less reactive. I became more curious and started researching and learning about ingredients, especially natural ones. I truly believe nature, backed by scientific research, has so much to offer. I'd literally order individual ingredients, study their benefits, and understand how they feel and work when combined with other ingredients. That's also when my belief in simple skincare became even stronger.

Skin needn't be overwhelmed. It needs consistency, nourishment, and ingredients that make sense together. This is what the glam chair ultimately taught me. It stripped skincare down to its basics: Preparation, balance, and performance. It taught me to respect the skin barrier and build simple routines to follow. Today, I believe in the power of well-researched, thoughtfully made formulas to make skincare feel less intimidating and more doable. Because consistency comes from simplicity.

Unlearning these myths transformed my entire approach to skincare. And one thing I've learnt during this process is that good skin isn't about doing more; it is about what works for your skin—and letting good formulations do the heavy lifting. ■

Kriti Sanon is a National Film Award-winning actor, alongside being the co-founder and Chief Customer Officer of skincare brand Hyphen.

Grey Area: Cover Up or Show It Off?

Whatever you choose—remember you are the mane girl, regardless.

By Team Cosmo



Images: SHUTTERSTOCK and GETTY IMAGES

Don't get us wrong — there are enough examples out there to prove that if you give up on trying to cover up grey strands, you will still have the ability to own a room.

We don't really know who said it, but whoever invented the term 'wisdom highlights' is a genius. It makes one think of a very, very smart woman (only a woman—for reasons known and unknown), on a plane ride to a holiday resort that costs as much as most people's monthly salary. Composed and unarguably assured in her travel co-ords, just a smidge of makeup on her flawless skin, and accompanied by said wisdom highlights in her hair—strands of grey poetically woven into her dark locks. Makes one think of someone who has achieved a thing or two, paid off all her loans, has a personal Pilates instructor, and carries homemade almond milk wherever she goes. Just in case.

However impactful the wisdom here seems, the truth is much less exciting. Having greys, especially in your 20s or 30s, is a complicated affair, and brings with it a kind of insecurity that you get mad at yourself for. What about all the body positivity Reels that you scroll all day long, or the late-night conversations on body image that you have with your kind friend, ChatGPT? Well, it's not just you. Pop icon and actor Jennifer Lopez has told news publications that she started greying prematurely in her 20s, and has since touched-up her roots every single week. She is now 56, and looking at her, it seems her ritual continues with perhaps more nourishment, tech-savvy tools, and new-age treatments to the rescue. She is JLo, after all. While the salt-and-pepper look on men had millennials swooning over George Clooney and Dr McDreamy (actor Patrick Dempsey in *Grey's Anatomy*), the women didn't have any such luck.

So let's recap—if you are a woman with hair that has been prematurely greying for a while, and you are stuck between “owning it” and paying your salon guy every other week for that confidence-redeeming colour job—you are not alone.

GREY IS THE WAY

Don't get us wrong—there are enough examples out there to prove that if you give up on trying to cover up grey strands (or some of those confident silver ones), you will still have the ability to own a room. For instance, actor Andie MacDowell, who stopped colouring her hair, walked international red carpets with her gorgeous grey mane, and has become a spokesperson of sorts for those ditching colour. “It's not that I'm trying to advocate for not colouring your hair. I think it's a lovely choice. You have to do whatever makes you happy. I've enjoyed [being grey] for my work. I think it's more interesting to play someone who truly looks my age,” the 67-year-old told *Good Housekeeping* this September. Makes sense. What MacDowell does is exemplify a healthy hair trend, not advocate for it stridently—a balance actors like Jennifer Aniston have also spoken about in interviews.

But, what about younger celebrities? Because that's

Being in the public eye inspires a standard of beauty which is often unrealistic, and frequently tied with one's image as an artist and all that they represent.

often where the grey hair conversation gets tricky. Being in the public eye inspires a standard of beauty which is often unrealistic, and frequently tied with one's image as an artist and all that they represent. American singer Becky G is like a breath of fresh (h)air, having shared that she has had grey roots since she was 14. Many TikTok videos pay tribute to her confidence, with Reddit threads dedicated to how the 28-year-old inspired them to own their roots, too—literally and metaphorically. Often, grey hair carries its own weight, which can be cultural, societal, and even personal, and it's good to discover a muse who puts it all into perspective.

WE ARE ALL TIRED

In the past few years, multiple studies have alluded to the fact that disruptive lifestyles and nutritional deficiencies are making younger generations age faster. This includes greying. American integrative health coach Catarina Orr-Lee made digital headlines when she garnered millions of views on her TikTok earlier this year to highlight mineral imbalances in the body as the reason for premature greying.

Stress has also historically been seen as the leading cause—and it's also scientifically sound. A study published in 2021 by researchers at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons found that not only did stress add to the greying of hair, but eliminating it also led to



Andie MacDowell and Patrick Dempsey



reversing it. “Just as the rings in a tree trunk hold information about past decades in the life of a tree, our hair contains information about our biological history,” the study's senior author Martin

Picard told Columbia University Irving Medical Centre. He added: “Understanding the mechanisms that allow ‘old’ grey hairs to return to their ‘young’ pigmented states could yield new clues about the malleability of human ageing in general, and how it is influenced by stress.” That's good news for Gen Z—a generation cited as the most stressed (especially at the workplace) by multiple research and studies.

Reversing grey hair is one thing, and maintaining it is another. The grey hair blending technique helps with the transition (it's an art, really), balayage, fine foils, lowlights, and a soft root smudge help merge your natural greys with tones that flatter them—cooler blondes, gentle browns, or subtle silvery shades. The colour feels grown-in, rather than covered up.

Keeping, covering, colouring, cropping—by the end of it, it's the choice we make. And, all of them are valid. ■

Reds You Could Take to Bed

The ultimate lipstick for every kind of date night.
Compiled by Ankita Malhotra



Cocktail hour musings

LoveChild Masaba The Boss Statement Matte Lipstick - Money Shot, ₹1,400

Quiet dinner and low-key evenings

Simply Nam Satin Soft Lip Crème - Poonam, ₹1,099



Third date material

Fenty Beauty Stunna Lip Paint Longwear Fluid Lip Color - 01 Uncensored, ₹3,025



Off to the movies

Anastasia Beverly Hills Matte Lipstick - Royal Red, ₹2,600



Revenge season accessory

NARS Explicit Lipstick - Incendiary, ₹3,500



The icon for celebrating singlehood

M.A.C MACximal Silky Matte Lipstick - Red Rock, ₹2,550



Popping the question kind of hue

Givenchy Le Rouge Velvet Matte - R15, ₹4,900



Red alert for Netflix and chill

Kay Beauty Hydra Crème Lipstick - Rouge, ₹999



Sydney Sweeney

Lust List

Beauty finds that make us sit up and take notice.

By Diya J Verma



Ace your base

It'll see you through humidity, bitter cold evenings, and a good cry sesh. This hyaluronic acid-infused primer hydrates, blurs, and refreshes the skin for a smooth, poreless canvas.

ColorBar Crystal Glow Serum Primer, ₹1,599



Hasta luego, hyperpigmentation!

A fitting extension to their bestselling PowerBright range, this at-home 15-minute peel fades away stubborn marks and melasma for spotless skin.

Dermalogica PowerBright Dark Spot Peel, ₹7,000



Bag it

A fragrance that encapsulates the spirit of sophisticated luxury. One whiff and you'll sense notes of cappuccino, Italian bergamot, lavender, plum, tonka, and sandalwood. What's more? It boasts 54 per cent biodegradable ingredients and is created using green chemistry molecules—reflecting the brand's commitment to sustainability.

MCM Diamond EDP, ₹9,900 for 75ml



Smooth operator

The global K-beauty behemoth expands its iconic green tea line with a quick-absorbing formula designed to strengthen and restore a compromised skin barrier. Bonus: Not just one but seven types of ceramides!

Innisfree Green Tea Ceramide Cream, ₹1,700

Face forward

Why should girls have all the fun? Meet this new-age homegrown brand formulated for men—yes, *only* men. And what we have here is their Claytox cleanser, powered by bentonite, kaolin, and polyhydroxy acid to zap excess sebum without stripping the skin of its natural oils.

INTO IT Claytox Face Cleanser, ₹1,199





Velvet reverie

A warm, inviting scent that lingers on—revealing a blend of invigorating aromas such as apricot accord, sandalwood, and vanilla. Smooth, spicy, and like a warm hug on a chilly winter evening.

Jo Malone London Sandalwood & Spiced Apricot Cologne, ₹13,600 for 100ml



The eyes, chico...

...they never lie. These single-pan eyeshadows work *extra* hard to give you intense colour pay off with zero fallout. Moonlighting as a highlighter, a generous swipe across the cheekbones and collarbones is enough to make 'em swoon.

Tint Cosmetics UNREAL Shimmer Eyeshadow, ₹800

Dazzle, diva

This ain't just another lip gloss on the market—it's infused with 97 per cent caring oils that deliver an overdose of hydration while lending a plumped-up effect. Now available in 10 show-stopping shades.

YSL LOVESHINE Plumping Lip Oil Gloss, ₹4,000



Colour me pretty

Morphe (finally) makes its way to India, exclusively available on Nykaa. From the Hot Shot Blush Drops to the Continuous Setting Mist, the best of the LA-based brand is now just a click away! Think rich pigments, effortless blendability, and pro-level performance. We make a strong case for the 6-pan palette featuring a mix of mattes and metallics.

Morphe ChromaPlus 6-Pan Palette, ₹1,500

Sole mate

Hello, happy feet. Introducing a hassle-free, vitamin-fortified foot care stick for on-the-go nourishment. Unlike anything you may have tried before, just swipe and strut—no tight jars or spillage to fret about. Buh-bye calluses and cracked heels.

Hibiscus Monkey The Foot Balm, ₹689



Hey, hot stuff

Here's a red hot collaboration that wasn't on our bingo cards. Nykaa has partnered with Naagin to create a high-shine plumping gloss that summons a spicy tingle reminiscent of the hot sauce. Sensual, smokey, and oh-so-spicy!

Nykaa Cosmetics X Naagin Hot Sauce Plumping Lip Gloss, ₹599



Soft moves

If you're just entering the dating scene, make this your debut romantic fragrance. Fruity, floral, and fresh—the sweet notes range from litchi and rose to warm cedar and amber at the base. It's the winter transitioning into spring-summer scent.

Chloé Signature EDP, ₹9,900 for 75ml

February date

A fresh spritz with rose and musk serenade, while top notes of violet leaf and green papaya accord make the deal sweeter. For those who don't want something overpowering; ideal for daytime dates and brunches.

Bvlgari Rose Goldea Blossom Delight EDP, ₹12,700 for 75ml



Smells Like Love

The ultimate curation of rose perfumes that hit all the right notes.

By Ankita Malhotra



Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS



Rose in bloom

Fresh roses from the perfumed city of Kannauj meet the warmth and spiciness of carnations, transporting you to an Indian garden in full bloom.

Forest Essentials Intense Perfume Gulnar, ₹6,200 for 50ml

Blended bouquet

We found you romance—all bottled up. This perfume will remind you of a spring bouquet, lifted by notes of citrus and moss with a warm, woody base. The perfect indulgent blend.

Rosa Novella Santa Maria Novella EDC, ₹13,170 approx for 100ml





After hours

Imagine a palette of florals offset by a blend of spices. From Turkey red rose and pink pepper to raspberry bloom and more, this one brings in the heat with a side of romance.

Byredo Rose Of No Man's Land EDP, ₹17,100 for 50ml

Evening spell

Introducing Turkish rose that steals the spotlight wrapping you in smoky warmth, with the quiet seduction of oud. Wear it on date night or gift it to your boo—either way, it's a win.

Secret Alchemist Rose Oud EDP, ₹1,299 for 100ml



Midwinter love

Sometimes you just have to keep things wild. From spicy bergamot and jasmine sambac to rose at its heart, this one will accompany you to your getaway. Couples, here's your cue to get those boarding passes ready.

Coach Wild Rose EDP, ₹6,500 for 50ml



Keep it hot

Spray, dab, done—think lush damask roses drenched in smoky oud with a touch of clove and sweet praline to top it all up. It's dark and addictive (and perfect for gifting).

Jo Malone London Velvet Rose & Oud Cologne Intense, ₹16,900 for 100ml

When to Break Up With Your Makeup

We all want to get the most out of our favourite balms and blushes but, like food, our beauty products have expiry dates. Here's a handy guide to how long you can hold onto your essentials.

By Alexandra Harris

From the NARS Orgasm blush that's been mingling at the bottom of your makeup bag since 2014 to the bronzing powder that's claimed shelf space for more than a few seasons, many of us covet our beauty products for a little too long.

But how far can we stretch our favourites out for? Most of us know intellectually that our high school era lip-to-cheek compacts probably shouldn't still make the finishing touch in our beauty routines, but for those of us who find it hard to let go, let this be your warning.

Makeup experts on beauty and wellness booking platform, Fresha, say there's a formula for how long we should keep our beauty buys and, unfortunately, we don't think the blush is making the cut. Here, we break down exactly how long you should keep your beauty products for—and it is way less time than you probably thought.



Mascara

3-6 MONTHS

The advice from artists is to replace mascara every season and do a vanity (and makeup bag) cleanse before each winter. This is because it swipes close to the eyes and can cause an uptick in infections if not replaced regularly.



Powder Products

12-18 MONTHS

Big news for beauty fans that haven't hit the pan on their powder blush yet, there's a little bit longer to play with for a powder product. But, as Fresha's artists explain, powder products still lose their quality and efficacy over time.



Concealer

6-12 MONTHS

Applying a liquid foundation or concealer that's past this date can cause a dossier of pore-clogging conditions, including irritation, breakouts, and skin reactions. Avoid this by throwing away any products that have separated or appear "off".



Lipstick and Gloss

12 MONTHS

Dry lips and flare ups are skin conditions to watch out for with a stick or a gloss. Don't hold on to these for more than a year.

Recycle

Given this advice, if you now have (a lot of) beauty empties or half-used products in your bathroom cabinet, recycle! As part of Kindlife's Kind Circle initiative, you can ship your empties to them for 20 kinder points per empty—all in favour of hygiene.

Everything to Know Before You Buy Velcro Rollers

Because granny was onto something with these hacks.

By Keeks Reid

When you have hair that wants to sit flat, limp, and lacklustre, not utilising the power of a velcro roller feels criminal. Yes, they're old school—favourite among the blue-rinse baddies—but they work. I mean, bouncy blow-dries popped off in the sixties for a reason, and with big hair back in, you need to unlock their root-lifting powers. Here, Elliot Bute, stylist at London hair salon Hershesons Fitzrovia, has your styling 101.

How many do you need?

Short hair: 6 to 8 rollers through the crown and sides.

Mid-length hair: Around 10 to 12 for a full set.

Long hair: 18 if you want to set the whole head, or just 12 to hit the crown, fringe, and face-framing layers for a quick lift.

PRO TIP

Remember, it's not always about wrapping every strand, it's about strategically placing them where you want volume and polish.

What size should you use?

Short hair: Smaller rollers, $\frac{3}{4}$ in to 1in, will give definition and curl.

Mid-length hair: $1\frac{1}{4}$ in to $1\frac{1}{2}$ in for bounce and movement.

Long hair: Larger barrels, 2in to $2\frac{1}{2}$ in, for sweeping volume and those soft, brushed-out bends.

PRO TIP

Don't rush the removal. The longer the hair cools in shape, the more staying power you'll have.

Why do you need this in your hair routine?

Think of them as the final step after you blow-dry; a way to lock in shape and smoothness while you do your makeup or get dressed. The beauty of velcro rollers is that anyone can use them and they will always give you more polish, hold, and longevity. Yes, they've been around for decades, but for good reason! They're timeless.

Prep with...

A volumising mousse (such as Hershesons Zhoosh Foam) or a root-lift spray that builds the foundation while hair is damp. Remember to spray on a veil of heat protector as well, before you blast with a dryer.

How long should you leave them in?

Leave your hair to air-dry, or blast with a dryer, but your strands need to be 100 per cent cool and dry, or the style won't hold. Place your rollers, blast with some heat, then leave them in for 15 to 20 minutes while the hair fully cools again.



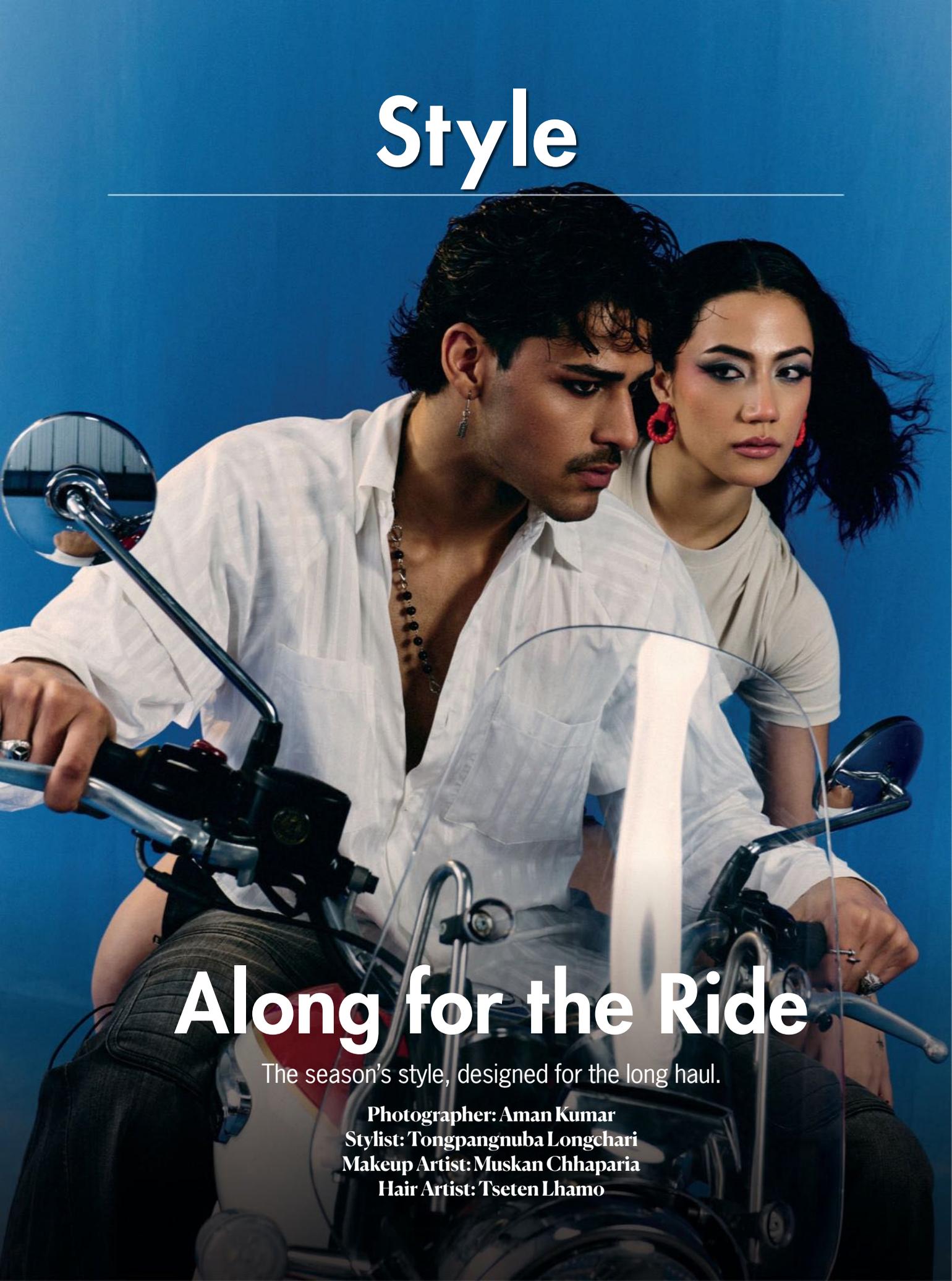
FOR THE EXCLUSIVE



Follow www.bridestoday.in for the latest in fashion, beauty and celebrity news.

BRIDES
TODAY.in

Style

A man and a woman are riding a motorcycle against a solid blue background. The man is in the driver's seat, wearing a white, long-sleeved, button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a necklace, and a ring. He has dark, wavy hair and a mustache. The woman is seated behind him, wearing a white t-shirt and large red hoop earrings. She has dark hair and is looking off to the side. The motorcycle's handlebars, mirrors, and a clear windshield are visible in the foreground.

Along for the Ride

The season's style, designed for the long haul.

Photographer: Aman Kumar
Stylist: Tongpangnuba Longchari
Makeup Artist: Muskan Chhaparia
Hair Artist: Tseten Lhamo

On Angad: Chitti DS shirt,
LEAD-A; pants, NoughtOne;
shoes, Royal Enfield Lifestyle;
necklace, WBO

On Vidisha: T-shirt, Royal
Enfield Lifestyle; Dilruba
skirt, Mirchi by Kim

Royal Enfield Meteor 350
in Aurora Red





On Angad: Denim stud shirt,
LEAD-A; pants, KGL

On Vidisha: Infernal linktop,
KGL; Lola skirt, Mirchi by
Kim; hair clips, WBO

Royal Enfield Meteor 350
in Stellar Marine Blue



On Angad: Jacket and pants,
LEAD-A; shoes, Royal Enfield
Lifestyle

On Vidisha: Alpha Cross ribbed
tank, Almost Gods; jacket,
NoughtOne; necklace, WBO

Royal Enfield Meteor 350
in Aurora Retro Green



On Angad: Jacket, Royal Enfield Lifestyle; 'Stria' shorts, KGL

On Vidisha: Denim top, ARKAR; fringe biker jacket, ARKAR; aina skirt, Mirchi by Kim

Royal Enfield Meteor 350 in Fireball Orange



On Angad: Jacket and shorts,
NoughtOne; insignia sleeveless
tee, Almost Gods

On Vidisha: Blackline circuit
skirt, ARKAR; bare cutout
bodysuit, JENN

Royal Enfield Meteor 350
in Stellar Matt Grey





Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Editorial Interns: Vrinda Jaiswal and Nikita Gupta

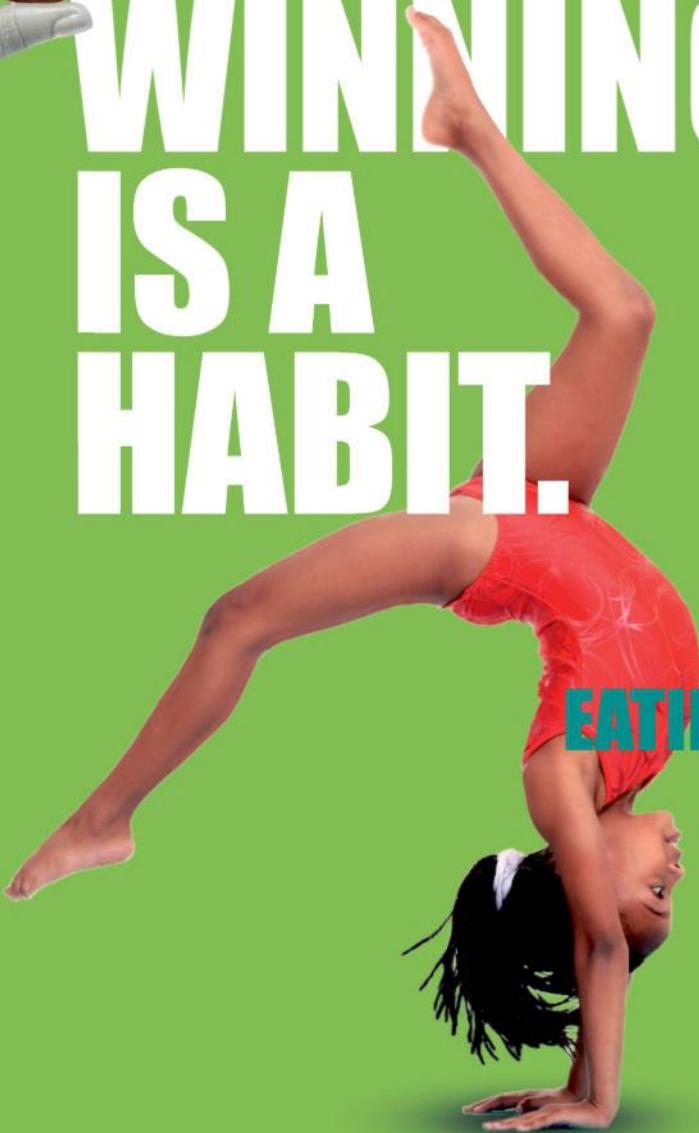
On Angad: Jacket and pants, LEAD-A;
shoes, Royal Enfield Lifestyle

On Vidisha: Alpha Cross ribbed tank, Almost
Gods; jacket, NoughtOne; necklace, WBO

Royal Enfield Meteor 350 in Fireball Grey



FOR CHAMPIONS, WINNING. IS A HABIT.



**...AND SO IS
EATING WALNUTS.**

California Walnuts
GOLD STANDARD IN NUTRITION

PACKED WITH PLANT-BASED NUTRIENTS, CALIFORNIA WALNUTS FUEL PERFORMANCE FROM THE INSIDE OUT. REAL FOOD. REAL FUEL. **BUILT FOR CHAMPIONS.**

 californiawalnuts.in





A campaign image
by loungewear
brand NeceSera

Gen Z Rewrites the Rules of Looking Sexy in Bed

There are no lacy thongs or edible underwear here, only DIY boy briefs, playful prints, and comfort over forced sex appeal. Here's how the younger generation is undressing the idea of sensuality and intimacy by keeping it real.

By Darshita Goyal

When you think of sexy lingerie, what comes to mind? Perhaps it's a montage of lace bralettes, padded push-up bras, rhinestone-studded thongs, fishnet pantyhose, and chokers and garters in many shades of black, baby pink, and red. Well, sounds about right. For long, pop culture and brands have sold sex as satin, see through, and easy-to-snap lace. Think of Julia Roberts in *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), or Julia Fox in *Uncut Gems* (2019); although the films are set decades apart, the underwear looks like it came from the same wardrobe. Even 'Lingerie in Movies', the now dormant Instagram account dedicated to documenting intimate wear in fiction, is proof of this prejudice.

But good news is in order: Change is finally upon us. After generations of lovers wading through cuts from underwire bras and awkward wedgies from prickly thongs, Gen Z is ready to flip sensuality on its head. The digital folk (born between 1997 and 2012) are bold in their preference for soft, comfortable, and playful underwear over scanty and synthetic

choices. Part of this shift is due to the new world purview of intimacy: One that prioritises the self over the other. "For so long, the word 'sexy' has been sold as someone else's perception of me," explains 23-year-old designer Vasundhara Iyer from Pune, adding: "Now, I don't care about that. Any lingerie that fits well, makes me feel good, and moves with my body, is sexy."

And, this renewal isn't restricted to undergarments. Lingerie, along with other recent trends including bed rotting and the weird girl aesthetic, are all part of a larger movement where women are explicitly rejecting the 'male gaze'. Coined by film theorist Laura Mulvey, the male gaze refers to a concept where women in visual arts are often portrayed as sexualised objects seen through the eyes of heterosexual men. As feminist literature and theory becomes common fodder online, young people are consciously breaking free from the norm of dressing for the male gaze. Even in the bedroom. Iyer, for instance, skips feminine lace panties in favour of boy shorts from body positive inner wear brand Tailor & Circus.

WEARING LOVE IN COMFORT

Born in Tiruppur in 2016, the queer-friendly and print-first label has built a cult following among young millennials and Gen Z. Throw a red solo cup in any house party, or whip up a quick Reddit search, and you will find loyalists swearing by and Circus' soft, sustainable underwear. Similarly, Delhi-based loungewear brand NeceSera also leads with comfort cotton lingerie over retired definitions of what's considered "hot in bed". "We see young customers restocking the same silhouettes in multiple colours. Clean cuts, soft elastics, breathable cotton, and everyday wearability resonate with them consistently," reveals co-founder Riddhi Jain. "In response, we are expanding our range with more colours and design details that feel true to different moods and emotions. The approach is to stay rooted in quality while making room for creativity beyond lace-lined narratives," she adds.

Meanwhile, Bummer—another 2020s-entrant in the Indian underwear market—allows men and women to customise matching briefs with colourful designs. Clearly, young brands are tuned into the fresh desire



for good-to-touch lingerie, and are ready to prioritise ease and play. After all, when sensuality looks and feels different in 2026, a corresponding sartorial collapse is justified. Once upon a time, intimacy consisted of long-stemmed red roses, bottles of Champagne, a candle-lit room, and sparkling white sheets. But this is a generation that notoriously shuns alcohol and equally, one-size-fits-all sensuality. Instead of performing closeness, they demand inside jokes and games that help them be vulnerable. Think of the continued demand for couple-ready card games such as We're Not Really Strangers, Lover! Lover?, and Talk, Flirt, Dare. In this set-up, they value cute, personalised underwear over intimidating Victoria's Secret or Agent Provocateur sets.

"Last year for Valentine's Day, my girlfriend and I DIY-ed lingerie. It was really hot, because we took green paint and played X and Os on briefs," shares Bengaluru-based analyst Yash Singh, 24, adding: "Growing up, porn and pop culture created extreme ideas of how men and women's bodies should look. It's refreshing that we get to make intimacy our own. There's no

“Porn and pop culture created extreme ideas of how men and women's bodies should look.”

— Yash Singh, 24
Bengaluru-based analyst

brand campaign here, just her and I being silly and stupid." The analyst also shares that this approach of play helped him navigate discomfort with his body. In reality, men's underwear comes with its own bag of pressures and prejudice. Almost always, the sex appeal is determined by the brand name that sits on the waistband. Briefs are expected to hide, highlight, and heighten just enough to create allure and fan toxic masculine ideals.

SHAPING SELF-IMAGE

No matter where you sit on the gender spectrum, the consequences are dire. A recent AIIMS-ICMR

study highlights that over 50 per cent of young adults in India feel extremely distressed because of body image-related anxieties. In this context, Gen Z's move towards more open, self-determined ideas of what is considered sultry is not just a trend, but a call for safety. Saranyaa, a 25-year-old content writer, who prefers to go by her first name, consciously eliminates restrictive expectations from her male partners. When asked what she finds attractive in bed, she says, "I have no specification of what I like on a man, really. When you turn pleasure inward, you do what makes you feel great...and that's enough. To each their own."

For herself, too, the writer picks soft cotton bras with delicate lace trimmings that sit soft on her skin. There's no place for stringy thongs or whole-lace sets in her underwear drawer—or that of most other women in their 20s. Through time immemorial, the popular adage has insisted, "Look good, feel good." Gen Z is ready to rejig this. For the young gen, you have to feel good to look good—even if that means you wear granny panties on date night. ■

It's Gradient Season, Girls

Embrace a full spectrum of colours with jewels for every occasion—playing with ombré tones to match every mood.

Compiled by Ankita Malhotra



Rosé Breeze Earrings, House of Yarané, price on request



Matrix Clip Earrings, Swarovski, ₹27,000



Celestial Sapphire Ombre Dangle Earrings, Prismara, ₹93,854



Alia Bhatt in Tallin Jewels



Ice Drop Earrings, Kazhal, ₹55,000



Ruby Teardrop Diamond Stud Earrings, Milo Jewels, ₹2,80,000



Soleil Ombre Opal Bracelet, Jia Jia, ₹45,800



Elysia Multi-Stone Gradient Ring, Zome Luxury, price on request



Natsumi Ombre Necklace, Nishani, ₹6,490



Knott Brooch, Cal Calcutta, ₹1,50,000

Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS

The Great Drape

How to make waves—the right way.



GENNY



FRANCESCO MURANO



1



2



3



4



5



ALBERTA FERRETTI



6



7

1. Lillies Cashmere-blend Blouse, MANURI, ₹27,717 approx.
2. La Jupe Perola Midi Skirt, Jacquemus, ₹61,900 approx.
3. Burano Cape-effect Draped Stretch-jersey Bodysuit, Maygel Coronel, ₹35,174 approx.
4. Cleo Top, SRG, ₹22,545 approx.
5. Cape Coat, Aleksandre Akhalkatsishvili, ₹88,247 approx.
6. Vivenda Draped Front Dress, Christopher Esber, ₹71,789 approx.
7. All In One Elephant Pant, Norma Kamali, ₹22,972 approx.

Compiled by: PRIYA ROY, Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

Colour Me Curious

Playful palettes that break every rule—because neutrals are taking a break this February.



2



3



6



7



MU MIU

MERYLL ROGGE



4



8

1. Short Green Jacket, Silvy Rowson, ₹8,320 approx.
2. Copenhagen Coat, OW Collection, ₹54,097 approx.
3. Knee Length Rib Skirt, Ottolinger, ₹38,000 approx.
4. Large Drop Earrings, Eshvi, ₹21,700 approx.
5. Jersey Off-the-shoulder Top, Ralph Lauren, ₹15,300 approx.
6. Golden Olive Velvet Ruched Mini Skirt, The Bae Club, ₹5,900 approx.
7. "DEVON" Holographic Green Mule, The Attico, ₹77,939 approx.
8. Origami de Lancel, Lancel, ₹49,659 approx.

Compiled by: PRIYA ROY. Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

Dancing With the Clouds

The Pantone Color of the Year, Cloud Dancer, is in its calm era.



CHRISTIAN DIOR



1. Rockabilly White, Retrosuperfuture, ₹18,152
2. Finged Top, H&M, ₹1,999
3. Concordians Runway Sliced Skirt, Rick Owens, ₹8,850
4. Jadis Top, Cult Gaia, ₹37,400
5. Oroh White Rotherham, Stiletto Heels, ₹7,490
6. Liza Earrings, Jennifer Behr, ₹28,700 approx.
7. Ivory small Calino Clutch, Jacquemus, ₹97,590

Compiled by: Vrinda Jaiswal; Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

1 Not Skirts, A Whole Vibe

Volume, texture, and all eyes on you. What more do you need?



2



3



4



5



6



7



ELIE SAAB



BOTTEGA VENETA

1. Fringed Midi Skirt, Xu Zhi, ₹56,821 approx.
2. Organza Shirred Tulle Midi Skirt, Susan Fang, ₹72,328 approx.
3. Freya Skirt, Chorus, ₹48,200
4. Halin Skirt, Roksanda, ₹91,900 approx.
5. Sequin Embroidered Layered Skirt, Rahul Mishra, ₹45,900
6. Crystal Fringe Mini Skirt Masked At Moonlight, Camilla, ₹73,802 approx.
7. Floral Appliqué Denim Mini Skirt in Dark Vintage Blue, Magda Butrym, ₹86,000

Compiled by: PRIYA ROY. Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

Boredom Left the Chat

Because texture is the mood, and so is experimentation.



1. Zebra Print Cotton Velvet Wrap Coat, Nina Ricci, ₹94,000
2. Neffie Fringe Earrings, The Folklore, ₹12,500
3. J3D Gathered Tuttle skirt, Rahul Mishra, ₹53,900
4. Embroidered Floral Velvet Wrap Skirt, Zara, ₹5,339
5. The Sculpted Wave Top, Gaurav Gupta, ₹50,000
6. Ice Blue Binocular Bag, Papa Don't Preach, ₹31,500
7. Erin Horsebit-Embellished Devore Velvet Slingback Pumps, Gucci, ₹92,999 approx.
8. UGG Ambush Heels, Kicks Machine, ₹83,499 approx.

Compiled by: Vrinda Jaiswal | Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

On the Date Night Menu

Mini dresses, mules, and sequins that play lovers to the candlelight—turning every corner into a soft-focus fantasy.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



FENDI



VERSACE

1. High-neck Sleeveless Top, Nanushka, ₹38,072 approx.
2. Bow Detail Bustier mini dress, Lika, ₹82,639 approx.
3. Rosario Floral Applique Velvet Mini dress, Leo Lin, ₹76,199
4. Gemstone Heart Embellished Ring, Oscar De La Renta, ₹26,413 approx.
5. Mollusk Pearl-Embellished Minidress, Christopher Esber, ₹71,318 approx.
6. Boat Neck Top with Rhinestones, Mango, ₹2,090
7. KM Fur Crepe Satin Mules, Christian Louboutin, ₹87,828 approx.
8. Gold-Plated Heart Drop Earrings, Ralph Lauren, ₹8,000
9. Sparkle Nano Embellished Shoulder Bag, Rabanne, ₹97,322

Compiled by: Vrinda Jaiswal; Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS and GETTY IMAGES

Nova Twins are ready for their close-up. Amy Love and Georgia South are here to prove that the best way to dress this season is as individual as the music they make.

Photographer: Lillie Eiger
Senior Fashion Editor: Rebecca Hill

TWICE



Let second-hand take centre stage — whether pre-loved or rented, there are vintage gems just waiting to be found.

On Amy (left): Top, Chopova Lowena via eBay UK; skirt, Susan Fang; earrings (worn throughout), Amy's own; rings (right hand), Pilgrim and Phoebe Bonne, (left hand), Amy's own; socks, Talia Byre; sandals, Charles & Keith x PH5

On Georgia (right): Vintage YSL jumpsuit via By Rotation; hat, Emma Brewin; necklace, bangle, and gold rings, all Pilgrim; silver rings, Phoebe Bonne; shoes, Roker

AS NICE



Midi skirts aren't going anywhere. Embrace your softer side with animal prints—and wear with a shearling jacket to stay cosy.

Jacket, Marques'Almeida; bra top, Pristine; skirt, Ashley Williams; rings, Pilgrim

**Make a (glam)
statement with a
flashy slogan
T-shirt. Add
sparkly tights, a
beaded bag, and
metallic heels...
maximalism all
the way, baby!**

T-shirt, Ashish; bag
and earrings, both
Susan Fang; tights,
Scar Kennedy; shoes,
Koi Footwear

Britpop is back. Layer a leather corset over a striped maxi shirt to *Rule, Britannia!*

Corset, Rokit Originals; shirt, Masha Popova





Women-led labels never go out of style—we're looking at you, Poster Girl, Pristine, and Kasia Kucharska.

On Amy: Coat, Mithridate; top and skirt, both Poster Girl; sunglasses, Amy's own; necklace and ring (just seen), both Phoebe Bønne; bag, Blumarine

On Georgia: Jacket, Pristine; bodysuit and leggings, both Kasia Kucharska; sunglasses, Jimmy Fairly

Let your accessories do the talking—an embellished chain belt, fuzzy beret, or tartan body harness can switch up an entire outfit.

On Amy: T-shirt, stylist's own; dress (worn underneath), Miló Maria; necklace, Phoebe Bønne; rings, Phoebe Bønne and Pilgrim; belt, Hairy Mary; boots, Roker

On Georgia: Shirt, Kitri; jeans, Cheap Monday; beret, Emma Brewin; earrings, Pilgrim; body harness, KNWLS via eBay UK; rings, Phoebe Bønne; boots, Simmi at Schuh



Take up space with big, sculptural silhouettes. Pair with open-toe heels to balance out the volume.

Dress, Cecilie Bahnsen; top (worn underneath), Asai via eBay UK; ring, Amy's own; shoes, Charles & Keith





Fuzzy textures are everywhere—from coats to skirts (and even shoes). Contrast with leather and latex to give your look a tougher edge.

On Amy: Coat, Halfboy; shirt, Susan Fang; shorts (just seen), Fruity Booty; ring and necklace, both Pilgrim; socks, stylist's own; shoes, Roker; bag, Louis Vuitton

On Georgia: Bodysuit, Scar Kennedy; skirt, Talia Byre; gloves, Elissa Poppy; necklace, Phoebe Bønne; boots, Kalda



Scar Kennedy is the fresh new designer to have on your radar—upcycling never looked so cool.

Dress, Scar Kennedy; necklace and rings (right hand and ring finger), all Phoebe Bonne; bangle, Pilgrim; other jewellery, Georgia's own



**Sequins and
platforms?
It's time to party
(or at least
dress) like it's
the 1970s.**

Top and skirt, both
Ashish; rings,
Pilgrim; socks,
stylist's own;
shoes, Roker



Balance grunge hoodies and oversized shirts with playful faux-fur accessories—girlhood is a spectrum!

On Georgia: Coat, Queens of Archive; hooded top, Pristine; rings, Phoebe Bonne; sunglasses, Georgia's own

On Amy: Shirt, Eric; hat, Emma Brewin; ring (top), Pilgrim; ring (bottom), Phoebe Bonne; tie, Dior via By Rotation



Hair: Shamara Roper using
Fenty Hair and Curlsmith
Makeup: Hila Karmand using Vieve
Nails: Tinu Bello using Nail Berry
All artists at Arch the Agency
Bookings Director: Sophie Leen
Fashion Assistant: Angel Cordova-Todd
Photography Assistants: Richard
Bartram and Jivan West
Digital Operator: Lisa Bennett
Location Courtesy: Electrowerkz

Shanaya's Dark Romance

With a big release slated for February, Shanaya Kapoor speaks of her version of love and her relationship with the internet and followers. Plus, the changing dynamics of boundaries in the age of Instagram and what it is really like to date as a celebrity.

Words by Snigdha Ahuja

Photographer: Sushant Chhabria

Stylist: Chandini Whabi and Elsie Chetry

Makeup Artist: Riddhima Sharma

Hair Artist: Aanchal Morwani



Outfit, all Rhycai; earrings,
Vandals; heels, Rene Caovilla;
Conquest watch, Longines





he walks into the room with a bounce in her step that only a rack full of beautiful clothes can elicit from a woman who loves style. This is also the moment *Cosmopolitan* India's (extremely) millennial editor is introduced to Shanaya Kapoor. At 26, the actor is among emerging Bollywood talents who juggle nepo baby debates, Insta-trolling, and raging Reddit threads with an ease which belies their age and experience in the industry.

On *Cosmo's* set, Kapoor, who made her Bollywood debut with *Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan* (2025), comes with a confidence that only a generation raised by the internet can exude.

And, 2026 marks a turning point for her. This month, Kapoor stars in the survival-romance-thriller *Tu Yaa Main*, alongside another stellar actor—Adarsh Gourav. “Sometimes, you’re anticipating, waiting, and don’t have much to do. And then, when the opportunity arrives, it all comes pouring in. And that’s exactly what happened with me in 2026, starting with *Tu Yaa Main*,” she tells us over a video call, a few days after our cover shoot. Kapoor is alluding to the diversity of projects coming her way, including those she is not allowed to disclose at the moment. “I want to play all kinds of characters. That’s what excites me the most about my work, and I am thankful that the roles that I have auditioned for have been so unique. As an audience, I am super into horror, murder mysteries, thrillers, and now I am getting to do these roles, too. Because of the platforms that have opened up to us as actors—including OTT—we’re getting a chance to explore our art much more,” she says.

Once upon a time, the big screen was the ultimate rite of passage for Bollywood newcomers—it was also all about buzzy releases, balcony seating, big budgets, and bigger branding. Today, the landscape has entirely changed. As someone starting out in the industry, does it feel confusing, complex, or exciting? “I see it as a positive. There are more opportunities for actors to just evolve and dig into different kinds of characters. We get to explore what we want to do in more niche spaces—be it darker characters or just shows versus movies,” Kapoor says, adding: “All of these characters and newer platforms challenge you to do better, be better, and to work even harder. So it’s all very exciting. And the more the merrier, right?”

A BLOODY RIOT

Coming back to *Tu Yaa Main*—a February release, with two young actors—did we mistake it for a good ol’ romance for Valentine’s month? Kapoor argues that it is still all that with (quite a) bit of gore on the side. “This is what excited me about the film the most, the fact that there are many genres mixed into one. It doesn’t get better than that, right? You get to watch a love story, alongside a survival thriller, which is kind of crazy considering we’ve not really seen a lot of such storylines in Bollywood. And, while it is different, it is a risk too—and that makes it more exciting,” Kapoor says, admitting that she is a huge fan of adventure-horrors, including the *Jaws* series (1975–1987) and *Crawl* (2019). “And, so is my brother (Jahaan)... He was on top of the moon when he heard that I had bagged the film.”

In short, the love is intact, but it is more Lady Gaga (that’s a *Bad Romance* joke, guys) and alligators, than date nights and sweet nothings. “I was trying to go through all the BTS of *Tu Yaa Main* on my phone and there was literally blood, sweat, and tears across our photos. And then, there were some of me and Adarsh just laughing and hugging each other—it was such a ride,” says Kapoor. The Bejoy Nambiar directorial is scheduled to hit the big screen on February 13.

LOVE, ACTUALLY

On the topic of romance—we asked Kapoor what it is really like to date as a celebrity, considering a witty Hinge bio may not cut it when you are in the public eye. “There isn’t an easy answer to this because the scenario differs from person to person. There are many celebrities who are pretty open about their relationship and other aspects of their personal lives on social media. And, that’s completely their choice. On the other hand, there are also those who are super private about who



Outfit, all Carolina Herrera;
Conquest watch, Longines

Dress, Carolina Herrera;
earrings and necklace,
Tara Fine Jewellery; Mini
DolceVita watch, Longines



they are off-screen. However, if I speak for myself, I like to remind myself that this is what I've signed up for. The attention will always be there because this is the profession I opted for. So, I won't call navigating such situations difficult or easy. It's just life," she says.

This awareness is accompanied by the fact that while Kapoor is steadily emerging as the next big thing in Bollywood, one hardly sees her private life go public. "I am the kind of person who only wants her work to be the topic of discussion. That's entirely my focus right now, and it will always be my priority," she explains.

Still—what's life without love? Especially for someone who has grown up being surrounded by the buzz of Bollywood, and the idea of romance that it is famous for. For the uninitiated, it's all in the family for Kapoor, whose father, Sanjay, is an actor and producer in the industry since the mid-90s, while her mother, Maheep, is no stranger to the limelight either—especially after starring in the popular reality show, *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives* (2020–).

Playing the part on screen, of course, is very different from getting into character in real life. And, as Gen Z, known as a generation that makes its own rules—what is Kapoor's idea of love and romance today? And, has it changed over the years? "It has definitely evolved a lot. I am a big Shah Rukh Khan fan (I mean, who isn't?). I've watched all his films and he is the undisputed king of romance. Like they say—his characters increase the stakes of love for every girl, and that's exactly what happened with me. So, all the relationships I got into, I was like: 'Listen, the bar is high, okay?' This is what I've grown up watching in the movies and this is what I want! I want someone to chase me when I'm at the airport and tell me not to leave. It's every girl's dream," chuckles Kapoor,

While the cinematic idea of love is hard to ignore, for today's generation, that is where it resides—only at the cinemas. "Someone had said this once—my heart only breaks in the movies. That's so me. It sounds quite funny, but it's true."

adding that while the cinematic idea of love is hard to ignore, for today's generation, that is where it mostly resides—at the cinemas. "Someone had said this once—my heart only breaks in the movies. That's so me. It sounds quite funny, but it's true."

SAFE SPACE AND SOFT LANDINGS

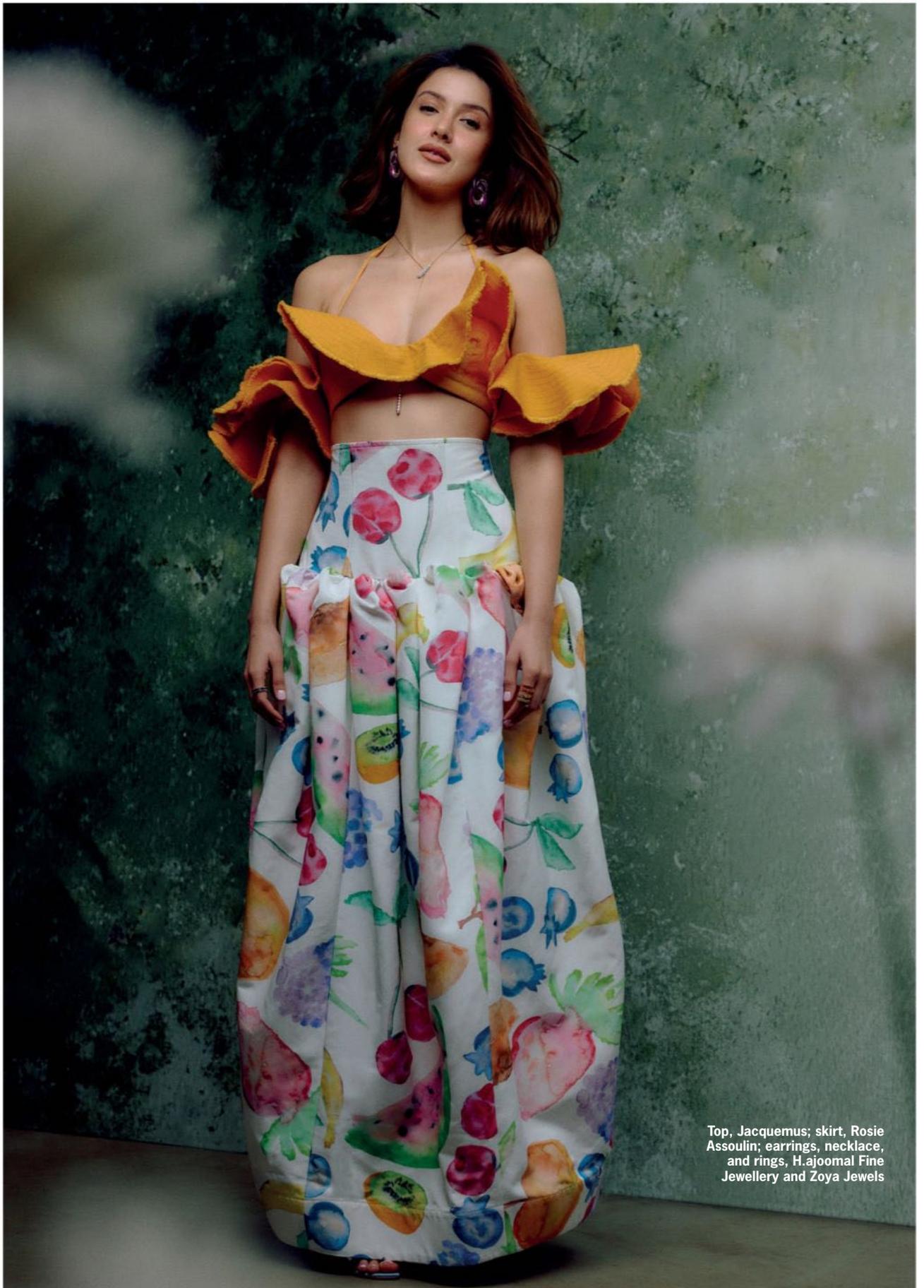
With 2.5 million followers on Instagram (at the time of going to press), our next question for Kapoor is about social media rules. Is it possible for boundaries to exist when the ever-expanding universe of online audiences knows what you ate for dinner last night or wore to your niece's first birthday? Does the trolling, criticism-for-the sake-of-it, and comments that are curated to hurt, bother Kapoor? "It's an everyday learning process. I don't think I can figure it out overnight. It's a mindset that can't be learnt, but only built over time," she says, adding that surrounding herself with confidants like her friends and mother, and seeking a safe space in activities like journaling, helps her disengage from online hate. "If it's my work and there's feedback to it—how I may have performed in a scene, danced to a song...basically how I can improve in terms of my craft, that's the feedback I take and try to imbibe. And I make sure that those are the articles I read. But, if the comments are about how I dress, how my body looks or my skin texture photographs on a particular day—I just switch off."

Now that social media has bridged the gap between stars and fans, has Kapoor figured out how to navigate the space? "If I want to reach out to a certain person, I send them a DM from my personal account because that's just the kind of relationship I want to maintain with the audience. With my fan pages, I have also been able to build a relationship where they are like my friends, and I can connect with them directly if something that is posted about me is incorrect or makes me feel uncomfortable. And they are very receptive to my requests," she says. And, if Kapoor had one suggestion for those who try to fight the urge for online validation—it would be to disconnect, disconnect, disconnect. And, to remember that there is no better sanctuary than the one that exists within ourselves. Onward, upward, and inward. ■



Mini dress, Patou; earrings
and ring, Kay Fine Jewellery;
Primaluna watch, Longines

Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Set Design: Janhavi Patwardhan



Top, Jacquemus; skirt, Rosie Assoulin; earrings, necklace, and rings, H.ajoomal Fine Jewellery and Zoya Jewels

Ayushmann Khurrana

Soft Boy, Sharp Edge

Actor, singer, writer, and a man in love—Khurrana opens up about riding the Bollywood wave, the ‘outsider’ being accepted in the filmverse, and the complexities of fame.

Words by Diya J Verma

Photographer: Nishanth Radhakrishnan

Stylist: Nishtha Parwani

Makeup Artist: Heema Dattani

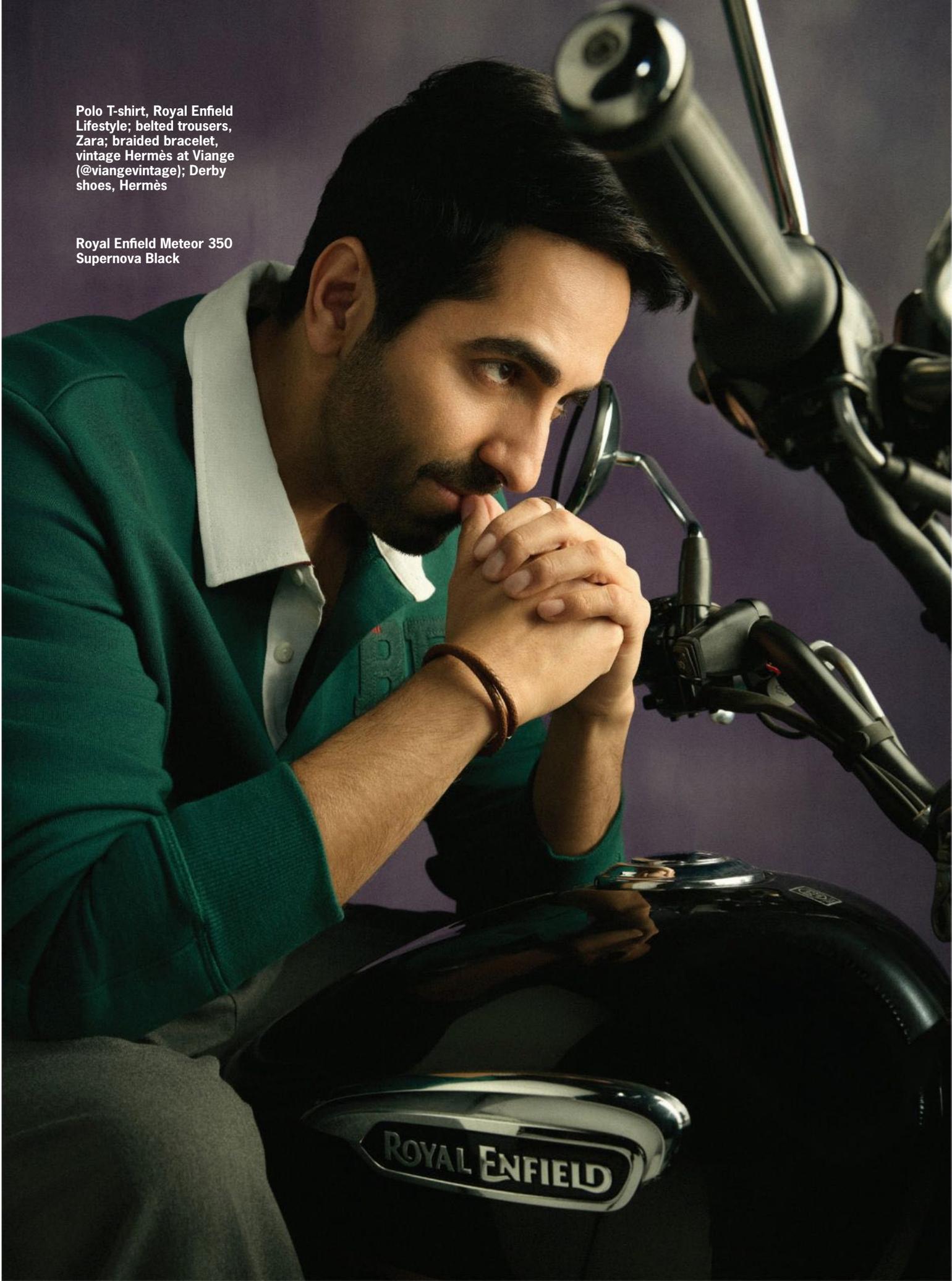
Hair Artist: Mohd Javed

Jumper, wool overshirt,
and trousers, all Tod's; ring
and bracelet, both vintage
Tiffany & Co. at Viange



Polo T-shirt, Royal Enfield Lifestyle; belted trousers, Zara; braided bracelet, Viange; vintage Hermès at Viange (@viangevintage); Derby shoes, Hermès

Royal Enfield Meteor 350 Supernova Black



We know him as Vicky Arora, the archetypal Delhi-born-and-bred Punjabi boy, as Nakul Kaushik, navigating peak middle-class panic with an awkward family announcement, and now as Alok, an everyman thrown headfirst into the unknown. Talk of Ayushmann Khurrana's remarkable range, evident across his filmography, and you'll know exactly why he's one of Bollywood's most versatile actors today.

"I believe an artist should add some value to their art," he promptly says over a Zoom call, reflecting on his comprehensive theatre training which likely guides his choice of roles. Not many know that Khurrana was a founding member of DAV College, Chandigarh's theatre groups, Aaghaaz and Manchanta. "The thing is, in theatre, we always talk about social issues...we make plays around them. And I think this [his on-screen persona] is an extension of my theatre personality," adds the 41-year-old Chandigarh-born actor, whose recent release, *Thamma*, struck gold at the box office.

CINEMA WITH A CONSCIENCE

From premature balding in *Bala* (2019), gender identity in *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* (2021), casteism in *Article 15* (2019), to erectile dysfunction in *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan* (2017), Khurrana's projects often sound a strong social message—earning him both commercial success and critical acclaim. Yet, you may wonder whether the fear of being typecast looms as he tackles one taboo at a time.

"It's my staple as a genre. Every once in a while, I venture out into uncharted territories with films like *Andhadhun* (2018), *An Action Hero* (2022), and even *Thamma* (2025). Probably 30 per cent of my films don't carry a message," he explains, adding: "While I must take that detour, my staple genre has to be creating art with certain value."

The actor's end-year release, *Thamma*, a thrilling supernatural drama—marking a departure from his usual roles—earned over ₹200 crores worldwide, a feat that came on the heels of *Dream Girl 2* (2023), which also surpassed the 100-crore mark: "It's my biggest film ever, in terms of scale and the release. *Thamma* was a no-brainer. It's a broad-stroke commercial film, and the reason I do such films is because it gives me the courage to choose films I *really* want to do."

RISK, RANGE, REWARD

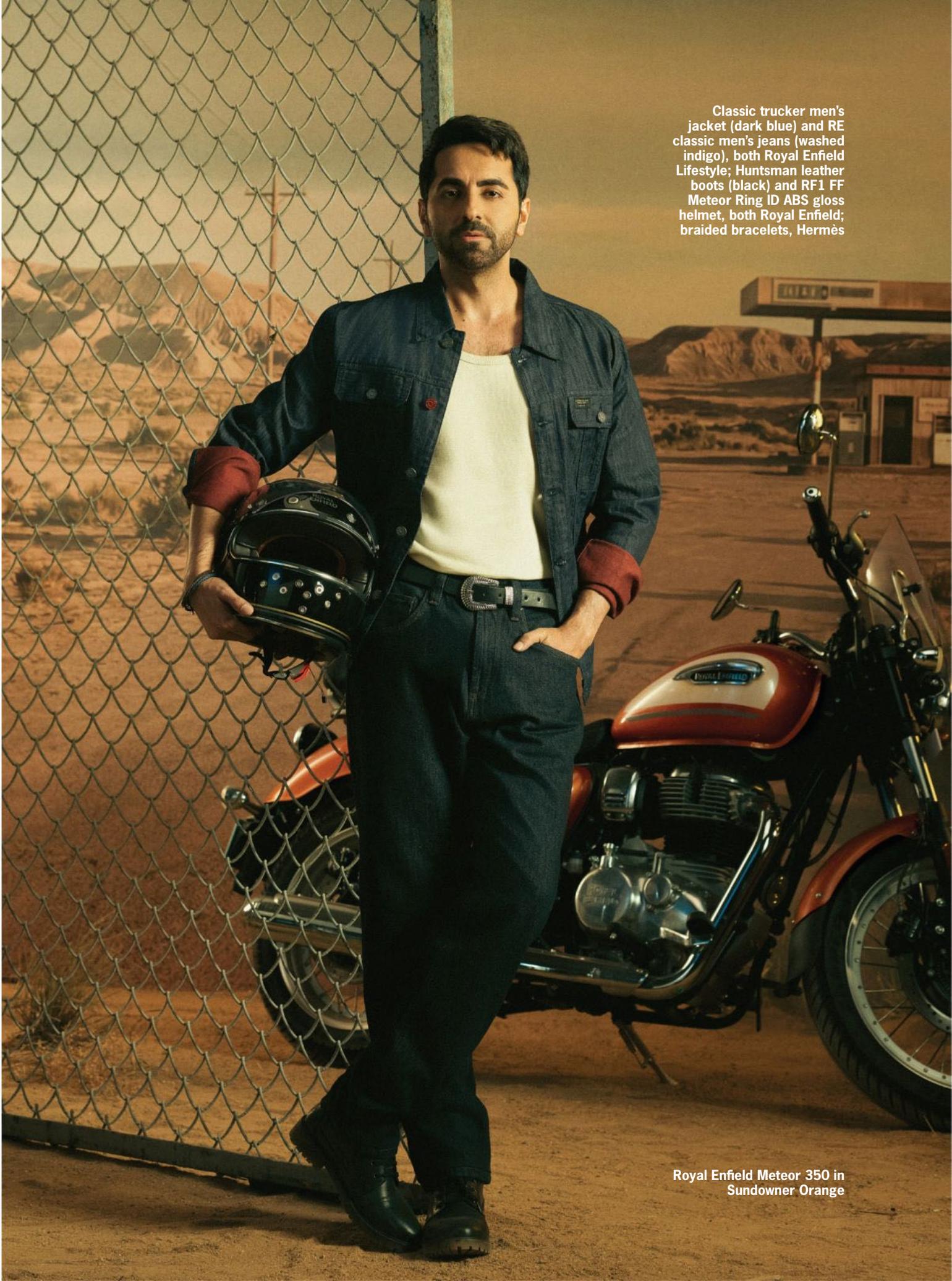
Riding the wave of *Thamma*'s success, the actor is prepping for his next, *Pati Patni Aur Woh Do*, Sooraj Barjatya-helmed *Yeh Prem Mol Liya*, and Yash Raj Films and Posham Pa Picture's yet-to-be-titled project. "*Pati Patni Aur Woh Do* is a clean comedy commercial film. And, nobody taps the tier-two, tier-three middle-class family like Sooraj Barjatya does. I'm a huge fan of his work. And with all this machismo around—which I personally enjoy watching—these films will stand out," he explains. Speaking of bagging that "rare script" with the YRF-Posham Pa collaboration, Khurrana adds, "It's a genre-breaker. It's the kind of film I've always wanted to do." This creative partnership between the Indian entertainment behemoths will see the two jointly produce theatrical cinema. And while you'd think such high-profile ventures selling the promise of mass box office appeal would rattle the actor, it isn't the case.

"I'm the quintessential risk-taker," he claims. "I'm a very producer-friendly actor; whenever I take on a project, it's always a plus—all vectors combined. So, I guess you could call that playing it safe with the kind of risks I choose in terms of subject matter. But being a risk-taker also means taking care of the commercial aspect and aligning with the producer's ideology," he adds.

BEYOND THE 'SOFT BOY'

While the actor carries a mixed bag of titles in his repertoire, he admits his characterisations may have lured the audience into a "sweet boy" trope. "I've not really tried a front-footed grey character...I've been the 'sweet boy,'" notes Khurrana referring to an affable, gentle masculine energy that seamlessly extends to his off-screen persona via his wardrobe.

"I think the 'soft boy aesthetic' is just me wearing my feminine energy. Every guy should embrace and express it in a positive way," he says, adding: "I used to be a lot more experimental with fashion, but now my personal style is low-key and minimalist. Classic just suits me better. I want to be



Classic trucker men's jacket (dark blue) and RE classic men's jeans (washed indigo), both Royal Enfield Lifestyle; Huntsman leather boots (black) and RF1 FF Meteor Ring ID ABS gloss helmet, both Royal Enfield; braided bracelets, Hermès

Royal Enfield Meteor 350 in Sundowner Orange

comfortable, and I don't mind repeating clothes. I'm lucky that in my line of work, I can enjoy wearing different styles without owning these garments."

It's also worth noting that Khurrana's distinctive sartorial choices exemplify his personal evolution. "Fashion is ever-evolving and style is cyclical. It's disruptive and subversive at the same time. You must keep evolving your sensibilities while making sure your personal style is never overshadowed—that's what I strive for. For me, it's extremely important that I express my individualism with comfort."

OFF CAMERA WITH AK

It'd be fair to call Ayushmann Khurrana an "outsider" in the industry. Having not hailed from a film family, he gained early fame as a radio and television presenter while honing his acting skills through college and street plays. "Back then, I was a journalist. I would be the one asking celebrities' questions—so I was in the mix of things. I've seen the industry from both the outside and now the inside," he reveals.

When we probe about the preconceptions he may have held about the industry, he confesses, "I was quite prepared when I did my first film [*Vicky Donor*, 2012]. There were, of course, certain preconceived notions, but that was before becoming a journalist or a radio and TV presenter. I'm glad I took these baby steps towards success and saw the industry from both sides."

As far as adjusting to the heightened accessibility and attention fame brings, Khurrana shares, "I'm a private person. I keep my life simple. If you're constantly acting off screen like you are on screen, it becomes very tiresome. I want to be myself, and let my family be the way they are. I

"I don't want to do a project just for the sake of reinvention. Being an artist gives you the license to work with purity and good intentions."

respectfully acknowledge the paps and go about my chores. It's part of the game...it's part of my life now."

AYUSHMANN THE ARTIST

A true multihyphenate, Khurrana's rise to stardom was partly fuelled by his rendition of *Pani Da Rang* in his debut. Since then, he has lent his voice to several songs in his films. "I would love to do a reprised version of a love song in every film. That's my zone. I love singing soft ballads," he admits, adding: "It's been a while though...but I would like to explore this with my forthcoming releases."

A poet by his own admission, he also pens poetry and composes songs that he prefers to keep private. "I don't put it out there, on Instagram or social media. I'll do it when I have to...when the time is right," he shares.

Turns out, Khurrana's introspective side isn't limited to his poetry—it shapes the way he views romantic relationships. In a swipe-first era where love has become a lot more fickle, he notes, "I think it's very rare. It's friendship and companionship that lasts forever. If you guys are friends, enjoy each other's company,

and have common interests, it's the best. As Shah Rukh Khan once said, "*Pyaar dosti hain*" [love is friendship], I firmly believe in that—and I'm great friends with my spouse."

As we near the end of our chat, Khurrana feels compelled to reiterate: "It's very difficult to maintain vulnerability if you've given X amount of years in the industry. But that's what I strive for...purity. And even when it comes to my craft, there should be a sense of purpose—an inquisitiveness and curiosity about the subject at hand. I don't want to do a project just for the sake of reinvention, or material success. Being an artist gives you the license to work with purity and good intentions." ■

COSMO QUIZ

A book you'd recommend to everyone

The Art of War by Sun Tzu. It's not just about war, it's about life.

A hidden talent you're proud of

It's not really hidden anymore, but I keep a diary of poems I write.

A song on loop

I recently discovered Shanka Tribe, a popular Kerala-based tribal fusion music band.

A fashion trend that needs to retire

Tight or ankle-length jeans with no socks—they need to go.

Your love language

Music is the best love language. Food, too!

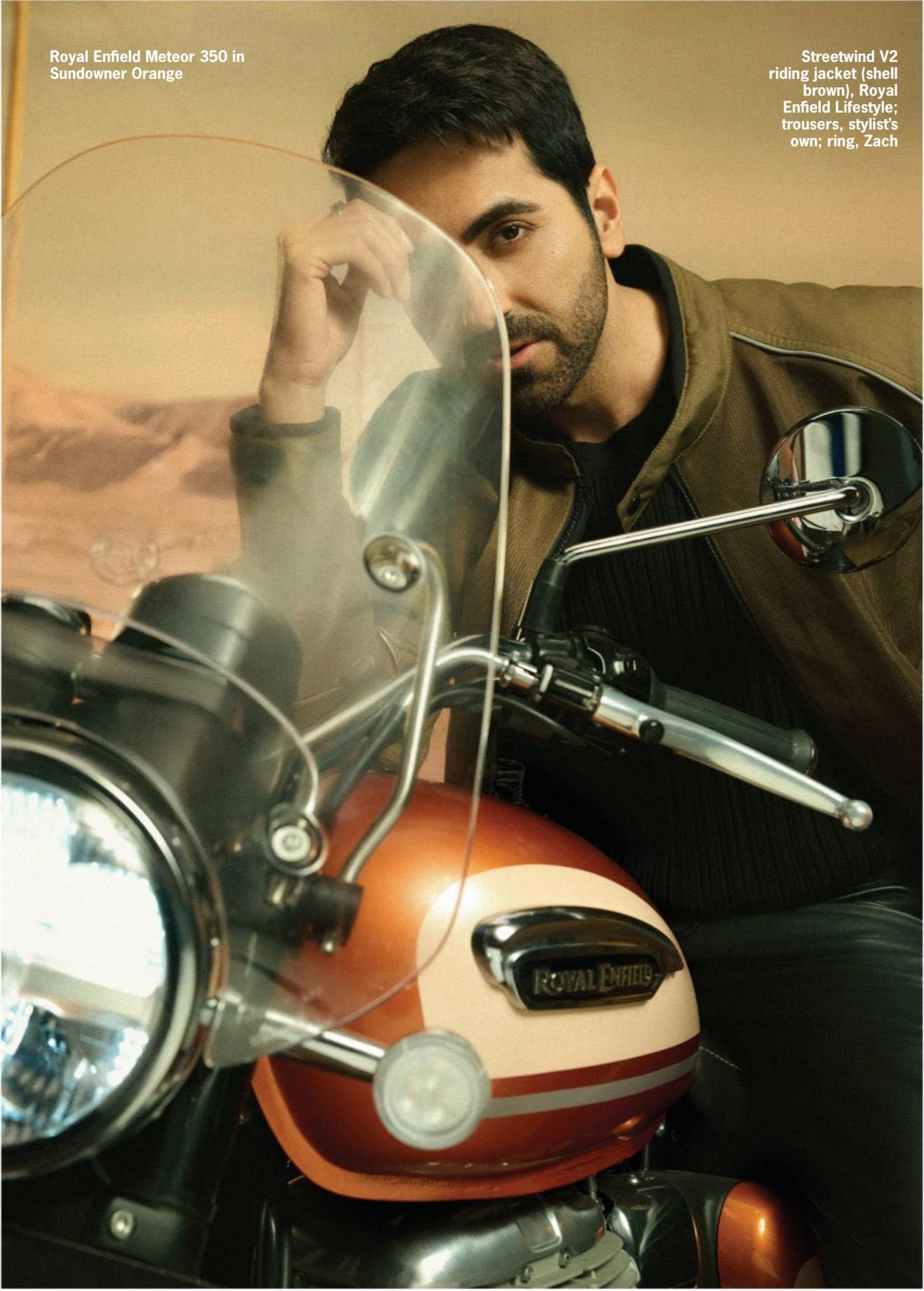


Jacket, shirt, and
belted trousers,
all Sasa

Editorial Coordinator: Shalini Kanojia
Assistant Stylists: Imran Shaikh,
Vanshika Aggarwal, and Kajol Poddar
Production (Set Art): Nafromax
Productions

Royal Enfield Meteor 350 in
Sundowner Orange

Streetwind V2
riding jacket (shell
brown), Royal
Enfield Lifestyle;
trousers, stylist's
own; ring, Zach



ANYA SINGH Is Just Getting STARTED

*The Ba***ds of Bollywood star is an actor of refreshing candour, sharing everything from awkward on-set encounters to finding friends in co-stars and meeting SRK. She lays bare her world of ambition, confidence, and an innate sense of individuality.*

Words by Shraddha Chowdhury
Photographer: Sushant Chhabria
Stylist: Sheefa Gilani
Makeup and Hair Artist: Tshering Lama

Crop top, Diesel;
denims, Off-White



RYŌ tie-up top, One True
Pairing; skirt, Maje;
rings, Ayana



She's a self-proclaimed "greedy actor", a romantic at heart, articulate to a fault, and a diehard animal lover.

"I'd probably have worked with wildlife had I not been an actor," says Anya Singh—also the proud owner of a T-shirt that reads "EW, people." Since her 2017 debut, she's had a number of high-profile projects in her kitty, including *Stree 2* (2024) and *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan* (2023). Though what brought her truly under the spotlight is her portrayal of Sanya Ahmed—the resourceful, contract-loving talent manager—in *The Ba***ds of Bollywood* that hit Netflix in September last year.

"Even though I knew people would enjoy it, it was an extremely pleasant surprise for all of us to receive the kind of love we did," she shares. "I was nervous about my character because she was a bit vanilla—the more practical and level-headed of the lot—whereas everyone else had so many punchlines. Incredibly, though, it all fell into place," she adds.

FRIENDS LIKE FAMILY

Every time Singh found herself being a little too forthright—in her opinion—the 33-year-old would try to laugh it off in the guise of nonchalance. Although she often took her time to mull over her responses, the words flowed sans hesitance when she spoke about her co-stars, the smile in her voice evident.

"The dynamic on set was quite like a family. I've never laughed so much on a set!" she tells us, adding: "Manoj [Pahwa] sir, Lakshya, and Raghav [Juyal] have a great sense of humour. And then you throw Aryan [Khan] into the mix, who's much the same!"

From the on-set antics Singh shares, we realise that the chemistry in *The Ba***ds of Bollywood* pretty much spills over from the camaraderie the cast shared on set. Like Lakshya taking over the job of resident 'orderer' as they had lunch together every day, and being ribbed for fumbling her lines. "I was constantly surrounded by the boys, and their humour is very different! I call them 'boys' because it was like a sweet gang... Raghav was the quirkiest. Manoj sir, the wisest. Lakshya, the most hard-working and disciplined. Aryan is extremely witty and observant... And there I was, among the lot, just enjoying myself..."

LIFE IN THE LIMELIGHT

Being part of one of Netflix's buzziest series of the year came with its set of challenges, beginning with renewed public attention and scrutiny. We live in a day and age where everyone's a critic, has an opinion, and no one's afraid to hold back from sharing what they believe—albeit with the crutch of anonymity that social media offers. Thankfully, being photographed, judged, and dissected incessantly isn't much of a bother to Singh, neither is the pressure to "look perfect".

"I wear makeup at shoots but not for, say, everyday chores. Sometimes I make an effort; sometimes I simply choose comfort," she shrugs. "I know I need to look good at events, but that's work. In my personal space, I've always been a minimalist with both my dressing and makeup. In fact, staying true to myself is what gives me confidence."

Nevertheless, everything from textured skin to fluctuations in shape and size becomes fodder for social media chatter. Although Singh has been quite lucky with supportive followers, she stresses the dearth of empathy in today's world: "People have become a little too generous with their opinions, and don't realise the effect their words can have. As a woman, I know how our bodies function. There's so much that's not in our control... Trolls, in general, believe they can say whatever they want to an actor. But they forget we're human beings first."

FINDING LOVE—ON & OFF SET

Present-day dynamics of dating are multidimensional, even as real human connections seem to be fading, thanks to the screens we're perpetually glued to.

Dating is clearly challenging enough for the layperson. But is it harder for an actor? Does fame make it trickier?

"I don't think dating within the industry is that difficult. Dating people not from the industry is," Singh explains. "We tend to meet people from the profession. It's easier because they understand your job, your work hours, what your days might be like. It's like how doctors usually end up with doctors." And, when she does click with someone, is she a "fall fast" kind of person, or is it the "slow burn" kind of energy she prefers when it comes to love? "I used to be the kind who fell fast, but I've learnt my lesson!" she laughs. "'Buddy, take your time' is how I now function. It's taken me some time, but I've learnt to set strong boundaries."

Being part of one of Netflix's buzziest series of the year came with challenges, beginning with renewed public attention and scrutiny.

Cautious or not, Singh is a romantic at heart and knows when to appreciate effort. “I find writing notes and letters quite romantic,” she shares, recalling thoughtful gestures from a former partner. “If someone’s taken the time out to pen something down for you, which no one really does today because of technology, that extra effort means a lot for me.”

There’s intimacy in reality, and then there’s intimacy on screen. The perfect first kiss, choreographed movements, cinematic lighting—all part of storytelling today. As awkward as such moments can be in actuality, it’s perhaps exponentially so on set. “It’s always awkward! And a very vulnerable position to be in,” she adds. “Even when they reduce the crew on set, you have people telling you to turn a little left, tilt a little right... We have to take direction while performing such a scene with somebody with whom we’re not romantically involved! Though there are intimacy coordinators, and it helps to strike up a friendship with your co-star.”

THE COVETED WISH LIST

A “greedy actor” is how Singh describes herself—and it has nothing to do with her pay cheque. Singh is hungry to work with a plethora of filmmakers. “I’d love to work with Zoya Akhtar, Rajkumar Hirani, and Shoojit Sircar, but my list is not limited. I want to work with everybody! The newer generation of filmmakers, especially, has a very interesting voice,” she shares. “I’ve worked with Arjun Varain Singh [*Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*] and Aryan [*The Ba***ds of Bollywood*], who were both debutant directors. People may be hesitant about first-time directors, but I love the clarity with which they come. It’s extremely collaborative.”

With the phenomenal success of her show, 2025 was a game changer for Singh, and the next year has a lot more work lined up for her. She, however, is just as focused on growing on the personal front. “I started my exercise journey just three years ago, and I’ve seen the change it’s brought to my mental health. This year, I want to be more disciplined and strike a better balance between work and getting to do things I really enjoy. Be it working out, or spending time with friends. And food! My food habits need work...”

As we near the end of our chat, we wonder what she has in store for audiences in 2026.

“I have a project releasing soon, but I’m bound by a contract and can’t talk about it. As you know, I take my contracts very seriously,” Sanya... We mean Anya, winks. ■

STARSTRUCK

Anya lived the moment most Indians can only dream of—she met Shah Rukh Khan.

“He knows my name!” she exclaims, recalling the first time she met him at the puja of the show.

“Getting to spend time with Shah Rukh sir at Mannat, being welcomed and taken care of...

It was so surreal that I found myself asking, ‘Is this really happening?’

I always loved him as an actor, a performer. Now, I feel fortunate to know him as a human being.”



Kawa cream dress, One True Pairing; earrings and bracelet, I Blame Beads and Lunaya



Primordi bustier and asymmetrical skirt, Shivan & Narresh; earrings, Nam; neck chains, Mirae and Nam; rings, Lunaya



COSMO QUIZ

Anya in three words

Honest, loyal, and resilient

What's the first thing you do when you wake up?

I have a 'garam pani' (warm water) concoction

The last show you binge-watched

The Girlfriend

Your current celebrity crush

Ranveer Singh

A co-star who makes you laugh the most

Raghav Juyal

Your go-to 2am snack

Maggi! Or perhaps a really good pizza, regular crust

Are you a texter or do you prefer calls?

Calls, any day. I'm terrible with texting

Mountains or beaches?

Beaches

Your most used emoji

The white heart, and the evil eye.

*A song you have on loop
I'm a huge '90s music fan*

*A fashion trend you wish would disappear forever
The trend to look outstanding all the time should disappear forever*

*A beauty ritual you swear by
A soothing face massage*

*One actor you'd drop everything to work with
Ranbir Kapoor, Ranveer Singh, RajKummar Rao. RRR!*

*Your go-to comfort movie
DilDhadakneDo*

If you weren't an actor, who would you be?

A psychologist. Or I'd work with wildlife

*The last time you felt starstruck
When I met Shah Rukh sir*

*One superstition you secretly believe in
Karma! Though that's not a superstition*



**Bikini top, Namara Swimwear;
shorts, Maje; pendant, Nam;
bracelets and anklet, Mirae and
I Blame Beads**

**Editorial Coordinator:
Shalini Kanojia
Assistant Stylists:
Maitri Desai and Amisha Thakkar
Artist PR Agency:
Everymedia Technologies**



GET THE LOOK
@Ambience Mall,
PVR Director's Cut

Dress: Label Ritu Kumar
Jacket: Label Ritu Kumar
Earrings: Swarovski



Manifested This

The actor on love, rejections, and *The Ba***ds of Bollywood*.

Words by Ananya Rai

Photographer: Amitava Saha

Stylist: Manpreet Kaur

Makeup Artist: Karma Choezom

Hair Artist: Mohd Akram

I don't think there could be anyone more single than I am right now," Sahher Bambba laughs on the other end of the line. "Romantic love is kind of non-existent in my life, but I'm not complaining," she continues. While work takes up most of her time, it's also her priority, and "nothing and no one can get in the way of that." You could say she's in on the whole online discourse around how having a boyfriend is embarrassing, but Bambba, 26, is not chronically online enough to know (or care). She has been booked and busy since *The Ba***ds of Bollywood* (2025), the Netflix hit that catapulted her into limelight. "Even my off days do not seem like days off anymore, it's always something or the other," she shares (with gratitude, of course).

Contrary to popular belief, and with no help from her character in the blockbuster series, Bambba is not a "nepo baby." Born and brought up in Shimla, she knew early on that she wanted to be an actor, despite having a "very protected childhood." "There was nothing to do (in Shimla) except go to school, followed by tuitions, and then dance classes," she says, adding: "I was very clear that once I

“One has to make peace with the fact that in this industry, the highs can be really high and the lows can be really low.”

GET THE LOOK
@Ambience Mall, Gurugram

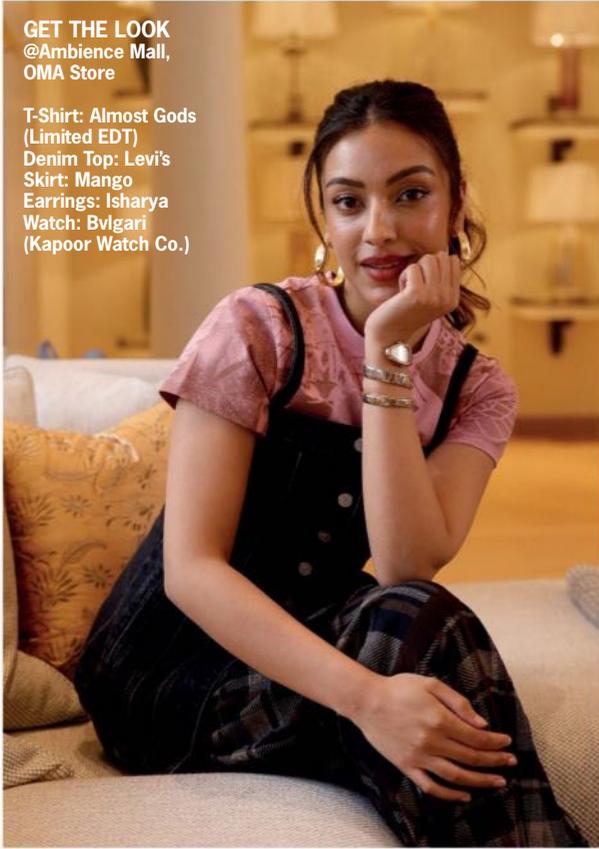
Jacket: Mango
Dress: Label Ritu Kumar
Earrings: Swarovski

Editorial Coordinator:
Shalini Kanojia
Styling Assistant:
Honokali Yeputho



GET THE LOOK
@Ambience Mall,
OMA Store

T-Shirt: Almost Gods
(Limited EDT)
Denim Top: Levi's
Skirt: Mango
Earrings: Isharya
Watch: Bvlgari
(Kapoor Watch Co.)



finished school, I had to go to Mumbai for college and buy myself a three-year window to explore the film industry and audition around to see if I could crack something.”

Bambba enrolled at Jai Hind College and moved to Mumbai in 2017. Classes, however, took a backseat to auditions—a choice her parents fully supported. She never even had to have ‘the talk’; they always knew acting was where she was headed. With no industry backing, Bambba never thought that her dream of making it in Bollywood was far-fetched. She didn’t know how it would happen, only that it would. “I’m a very instinctive person,” she explains. “I strangely never even had a plan B.” In hindsight, she doesn’t quite know where that kind of confidence came from. “All I knew was that this is my calling.”

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Bambba first appeared on the big screen in 2019 in Sunny Deol’s *Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas*, co-starring Karan Deol. While she went on to appear in projects like *The Empire* (2021–) and *Dil Bekaraar* (2021–), it wasn’t until Aryan Khan’s directorial debut that her work truly cut through. Talking about her earlier years, she reflects, “One has to make peace with the fact that in this industry, the highs can be really high and the lows can be really low.”

Years of rejection have taught Bambba one crucial lesson: Not to take it personally. “I don’t think anyone can train themselves to go through something like that,” she says, “but over the years, you become a little thick-skinned.” So, when she was called in to audition for *The Ba***ds of Bollywood* in 2022, she thought it was too good to be true. After being turned down repeatedly, she had misgivings about auditioning for a role “all of Mumbai was going for.” “But I’m so glad I did,” she smiles over the phone. Being part of a show that is unanimously loved across borders, she admits, is rare.

2025 marked a lot of firsts for her. She walked the ramp for Kolkata-based designer Richa Khemka at Lakmé Fashion Week in partnership with FDCI and starred in singer-songwriter-rapper King’s music video for his single, *Kamaal Hai*.

We wrap up our conversation sooner than planned, Bambba has a gym session to make it to and a shoot lined up later in the evening, the details of which she can’t share right now. What she can share is that she’ll begin filming a new project soon, set to be announced in the coming months, with more exciting work in the pipeline. What Bambba is certain about is the kind of actor she wants to be and the characters she wants to play. While she doesn’t mind being pigeonholed into the “rich girl” mould as yet, she is “hungry” for more. “If I were offered anything like *Gone Girl*, which is my favourite film of all time, I’d say yes in a heartbeat.”

For now, she is in her motivated era. “I wake up every day feeling extremely inspired and ready to take on the world.” ■

Rakul Preet Singh

ON LOVE, GRATITUDE, AND THE POWER OF LETTING GO

The actor gets candid about quiet mornings, meditation, and how 2025 taught her to slow down.

Words by Sagarika Choudhary

Photographer: Manasi Sawant

Stylist: Devki Bhatt

Makeup Artist: Salim Sayed

Hair Artist: Aliya Shaikh

Outfit, Verano by Tanya;
jewellery, Radhika Agrawal
Studio; footwear and
stockings, Theater





Jacket, 431-88; skirt,
Szabo Sihag; jewellery,
Forest of Chintz and
Ishhaara; footwear,
Zori World

Style Assistants: Sana Khan,
Jahanvi Jethi and Ayushi Gala
Set Design: Janhavi Patwardhan



gratitude for all the lovely things coming my way,” gushes *Cosmopolitan* India’s digital cover star Rakul Preet Singh, as she reflects on a year that’s brought both professional highs and personal clarity. It’s the one affirmation she seems to be living by, especially through the festive stretch that marked the close of 2025. Calm, centred, and quietly joyful, Singh feels like she is exactly where she is meant to be.

Over the years, Singh has carved out a cross-industry presence, moving seamlessly between Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil cinema. Known for balancing commercial blockbusters with author-backed roles, she has built a reputation for choosing parts that allow her to evolve with each phase of her career. While on one hand, she has done commercial films like *Yaariyan* (2014), *Sarrainodu* (2016), and *Thank God* (2022), on the other, she has balanced it with roles in films like *Rarandoi Vedula Chudham* (2017), *Aiyaary* (2018), and *Doctor G* (2022). 2025, in particular, has been a standout year with *De De Pyaar De 2* reaffirming her box office pull and her ability to spark conversations that extend beyond the screen.

BEYOND THE AGE GAP

Looking back at 2025, Singh resists the urge to define it by just one milestone. Still, she acknowledges the professional high. “If I have to materialistically put something out there, it would be *De De Pyaar De 2*,” she says. “The response, the love, the industry calls...that’s been the best gift!”

Her film also opened up a larger dialogue—one around relationships, agency, and age differences. For Singh, the discussion goes far beyond numbers. “I feel what is more important is not the technical age of a couple, but rather the mental maturity,” she says. “The deeper meaning of the film is the gist of it. It’s not about the age gap. It’s more about how no one can really decide the fate of your relationship. Any relationship is a gamble. If that decision has no certain result, then it’d rather be your own decision, be it good or bad,” she says. “That’s the messaging...where you get to have agency of your life,” she adds.

OF SLOW MORNINGS AND FESTIVE CHAOS

Away from conversations and cameras, Singh treasures moments of stillness, especially slow mornings, which she admits are rare. “I love my mornings a little more calm, a little more to myself,” she quips. Life has shifted for her beautifully since she married actor-filmmaker Jacky Bhagnani, and Singh seems to be soaking it all in. “It’s amazing to wake up next to him. We really love that morning bonding time while we’re sipping on our coffee and figuring out our day.”

Festive season, however, brings its own rhythm. “During Diwali and Christmas, it’s not an early morning because you end up having such a late night,” Singh says. “With the Mumbai Diwali scene, it’s hectic. The festivity goes out of the window after a point, you end up sleeping so late and wake up at noon; it’s all haywire,” she shares. When asked what instantly brings her peace, Singh says, “meditation and yoga” without wasting a breath. Introduced to meditation only a few years ago, she admits it changed her relationship with chaos. “Earlier, I was a very hyper person. I still am to some extent, but I understand better how you can maintain a centre even in the middle of chaos now,” she shares.

Affirmations play a quiet but constant role in Singh’s life. In fact, her phone screen carries one she wrote herself. “The best affirmation is to believe it’s happening. I always say gratitude for all the lovely things coming my way because that just encapsulates everything.”

2025 also taught the actor to slow down in ways she had not planned for. “In 2024, I had an injury. And it took me a year to normalise things and get back.” The rehab journey, she says, was as mental as it was physical. “I was a person who used to work at a very fast pace. I used to think I can do it all. But I learnt that sometimes, you just have to go with the flow. Things may not happen as per your plan. The biggest lesson in 2025 for me has been learning to surrender,” she adds.

WELCOME 2026

As she steps into the new year, Singh has a lot more waiting for her, personally and professionally. “I have my next release, *Pati Patni Aur Woh 2*, in March. I’ll have two to three releases next year. I just hope that I get more opportunities to push the envelope, to try different things, and to create disruption. That would be my hope for 2026,” she signs off. ■



COSMOPOLITAN.IN

Follow www.cosmopolitan.in for
*the latest in fashion,
beauty and celebrity news.*

A young man with a mustache and sunglasses, wearing an orange zip-up jacket, is being kissed on the cheek by a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue and white jacket with a basketball logo. They are sitting in a stadium. In the background, there are blue banners with yellow text that say "FINAL 20 P 2 INDIANA PAC" and "PLAYOFFS".

Love

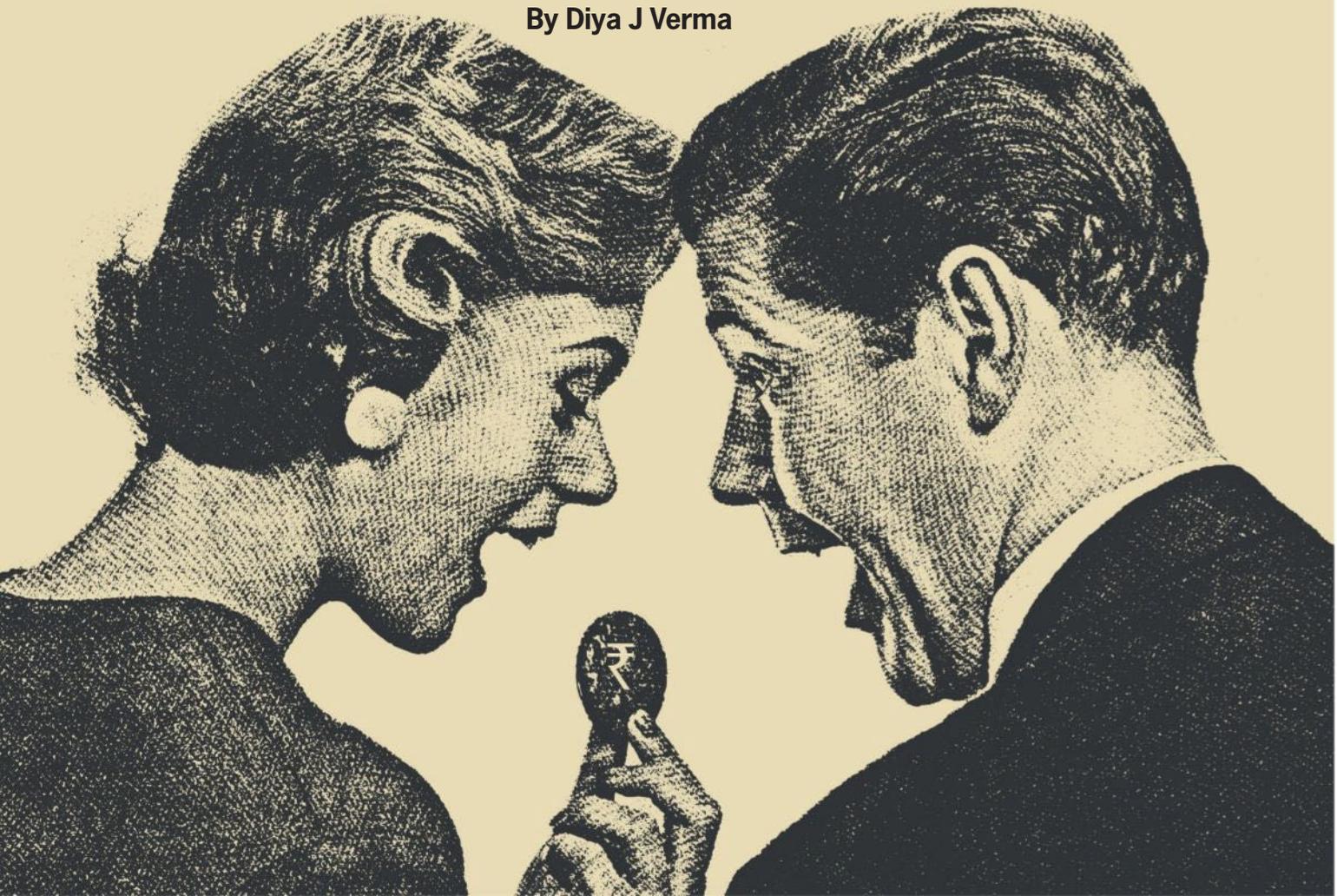
Heart Eyes

Let Cosmo play cupid for you.

Debt Do Us Part

A divorce lawyer, a marriage therapist, a financial expert, and a Gen Z-millennial couple—four perspectives unpack the legal, emotional, and financial realities of prenups in India.

By Diya J Verma



As of October 17, 2025, the Delhi High Court ruled that financially self-sufficient spouses *cannot* claim alimony under Section 25 of the Hindu Marriage Act—clarifying that the provision is not intended as a means of enrichment, or to equalise the financial standing of two able individuals. Take a good, hard look, and you’ll see this judgement does not exist in isolation. The pronouncement flips marital entitlement on its head, inviting a broader conversation on how money, marriage, and maintenance converge in modern India.

LOVE, LAW, LIABILITY

India treats marriage as sacramental, so prenuptial agreements aren’t legally binding here. But despite their unenforceability, they can still carry weight in courtrooms deliberating disputes over marriage and money.

“Women becoming financially empowered has brought the money conversation from the back-burner to the forefront,” explains Vandana Shah, a renowned divorce lawyer, author, and columnist based in Mumbai. “As the law once stood, women couldn’t even claim from their fathers. This has changed. So, finances should never be a reason for you to stay back in a marriage,” she adds, while acknowledging that prenup conversations often die a premature death due to entrenched societal norms. “You’re in India. You’re likely too shy to broach the topic of a prenuptial agreement. Why? Because society frowns upon it.”

A compelling study from Ally Bank reveals that nearly half of American Gen Zs consider signing a prenup before putting a ring on it. Closer home, a similar sentiment



What is a prenup?

A legally binding contract entered into by a couple before marriage that outlines the ownership and division of assets, liabilities, and financial responsibilities in the event of divorce or death.

echoes, with 83 per cent of *Cosmo* India readers indicating they would sign a prenuptial agreement if it were legally enforceable.* Such stats exemplify just how much finances have changed the way Gen Z perceives marriage.

However, the appetite for a prenup isn’t evenly split. “Men tend to ask for prenups far more often than women. Even when a woman is wealthier, she may hesitate to

bring it up...wary of judgement and labels,” Shah informs, alluding to the enduring ‘gold digger’ trope. Another oft-overlooked concern is the role and vulnerability Indian parents—who you’re sharing a roof with—play in such decision-making. Both nuclear and joint family set-ups pose a pertinent question: How will the distribution of family assets take place in the event of a divorce?

***IF YOUR PARTNER ASKED FOR A PRENUP, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?**

44%

i'd be totally open to it

25%

a tad bit uncomfortable, and perhaps offended

31%

all's fair in love

***SHOULD MONEY TALK BE A PART OF PRE-MARRIAGE CONVERSATION?**

94%

absolutely

3%
better avoided

3%
can be discussed after marriage

“Love is cool and all, but everything fades when a major financial crisis hits.

— **Priya, 28

ROMANCE MEETS RISK MANAGEMENT

Priya*, 28, who wed her 30-year-old “financially responsible” husband, was upfront about her limited financial literacy early on. “I am not financially responsible in any way or form—and I’ve been transparent about it from the get-go,” she says, adding: “He is the sole breadwinner for his family. So we thought it best to lay out all our expenses before tying the knot.”

Upon hearing this, her mother was taken aback—a reaction that underscores the generational gap in how partners today discuss and manage finances. “I was very sure that I wanted a house of my own, and I didn’t want to be made to feel I was being selfish,” Priya tells me.

But Shah cautions that property ownership can quickly become contentious if a marriage unravels. “Instead of purchasing a property in one partner’s name and residing there, couples should consider living on rent—at least in the initial years—so one can’t claim ownership easily,” she advises. She also makes a solid case for pooling money in a trust, which typically cannot be included as part of a marital settlement.

HOPE FOR THE BEST, PLAN FOR THE REST

For Priya, opening an honest line of communication with her partner precedes all else—as it does for a



whopping 94 per cent of *Cosmo India* readers.* “Growing up, I saw how my parents’ different spending habits fueled conflict. So, my partner and I have devised a way to divide our expenses—from groceries to getaways,” she explains...but is also quick to admit that the financial scale will oscillate once they begin expanding their family.

“Everything is super new, and we don’t have any major responsibilities like a child yet. We’re both earning and spending out of our pockets, and I don’t want to be judged for it. So, we choose to lay it all on the table,” Priya says, adding: “Love is cool and all, but everything fades when a major financial crisis hits.”

“ Prenups are a concept filled with shame. We are a country that lives off the idea of ‘happily ever after’, where your life’s accomplishments can be written off if your marriage fails.

— Vandana Shah, Divorce lawyer

Yet even for her, the desire for financial transparency has its limits. “I’m too emotional,” she notes, when I ask if she’d ever consider taking a legal route. “I’d be offended if my partner brought it up, too. A lot of people mistake legal preparedness for a lack of trust...or love.”

Priya isn’t alone. Twenty five per cent of *Cosmo India* readers report they’d be “a tad bit uncomfortable, and perhaps offended” if their partner asked for a prenup^o—and it’s a hesitation marriage therapists often encounter in their practice. “In India, marriages are seen as a sacred, lifelong union of families, and bringing up a contractual agreement might make it seem

***WHO WOULD NEED A PRENUP THE MOST?**



***ARE INDIAN FAMILIES READY TO TALK ABOUT PRENUPS?**



***WHAT'S A PRENUP TO YOU?**



helps protect both partners equally

***SHOULD THE LAW FORMALLY RECOGNISE PRENUPS?**



“If your portfolio extends beyond ‘one flat, two FDs (fixed deposits),’ a private family trust becomes less a luxury and more a necessity.

— Ashna Tolkar,
Financial content creator

like the relationship is set up for failure,” shares Dr Meghna Singhal, a clinical psychologist and couples therapist.

“But money talk before marriage is not at all unromantic...it’s emotionally mature. Finances are tied to our values and security, and setting the right expectations can foster trust and respect between partners,” she adds. Singhal suggests starting small and approaching financial planning as a team. “Sidestepping such conversations can breed resentment. If couples talk about the ‘hard things’ without fear, it sets a solid foundation for intimacy.”

SMART MONEY MOVES

There is, however, an important caveat. Goa is the only Indian state where prenuptial agreements are valid and legally binding, as envisaged under the Portuguese Civil Code. So yes, you could hop on a flight to Goa to sign a prenup—but whether it survives the journey back home is another matter altogether. Ashna Tolkar (@themoneylancer), a financial content creator, advises establishing



“If couples talk about the ‘hard things’ without fear, it sets a solid foundation for intimacy.”

— Dr Meghna Singhal, Clinical psychologist & couples therapist

a clear boundary between “your money” and “our money”.

“Jot down every asset you own and get it signed and notarised—it can serve as proof in court. For

larger assets, consider legally transferring ownership to a trusted family member before marriage. Alternatively, place your dough in a trust or clearly list beneficiaries so the money can bypass certain divorce and inheritance claims,” she recommends.

Tolkar also suggests scheduling a “quarterly wealth retreat”—a financial date night, if we may—where couples discuss setting up a ‘freedom fund’ for financial autonomy, a ‘partnership fund’ for shared expenses, and an ‘emergency exit fund’ for life’s uncertainties.

“If your portfolio extends beyond ‘one flat, two FDs (fixed deposits),’ a private family trust becomes less a luxury and more a necessity. Create the trust, register it, and let your assets breathe in peace. At the very least, do the basics:

Separate accounts, a structured will (renewed post-marriage), and no emotional co-ownership of property,” she adds.

Look past the legal jargon, and the reality is stark: Marriage in India is moralised, public, and unforgiving. Somewhere, there’s an aunt keeping score. “Prenups are a concept filled with shame. We are a country that lives off the idea of ‘happily ever after’, where your life’s accomplishments can be written off if your marriage fails,” Shah concludes. But while financial what-ifs are seen as cynicism rather than care, it might be the very thing that allows love to survive—and thrive. ■

*Cosmopolitan India Instagram Survey; respondents: 64.7% women, 35.3% men, with 77.4% b/w ages



Everyone Is Online and No One Is Posting

Is Gen Z going analogue amid an epidemic of disconnection?

By Ananya Rai

I rush back home after school and open Instagram on my iPhone 5. Today is the day when the winner of the Mrs Zayn Malik contest will be announced. (If you were ever a fan of the now washed up British boy band One Direction, you know what I'm talking about. If you don't, congrats on not having irreparable brain damage). The rules of this competition were simple and harsh: Whoever got the most likes on their selfies—posted across the band's fan-page accounts, one for each member—would be declared his “wife” and earn the right to look down their noses at everyone who didn't win. And before you ask, yes, I won. It was not my proudest moment. Or rather, I am not proud to admit that it was a really proud moment.

I was born in 1999 and spent most of my coming of age on the internet. Consequently, I am convinced I have one of the most embarrassing digital footprints under the sun: An Instagram fan page for my high school crush, a Brockhampton stan twitter (I can hear tomatoes being thrown at me), an online boyfriend I never even met. I could go on. But like most people my age, I have lived long enough to leave the cringe behind, that is to say, by deleting everything I could.



If you spend most of your waking time staring at your phone, you would be familiar with countless profiles on Instagram with zero posts. Journalist Kyle Chayka calls this phenomenon “posting zero” in his article “Are You Experiencing Posting Ennui?”, for *The New Yorker*. It’s when “normal people—the unprofessionalized, uncommodified, unrefined masses—stop sharing things on social media as they tire of the noise, the friction, and the exposure.” A survey conducted in 2025 by Morning Consult, an American business intelligence company, found that passive scrolling instead of posting is the norm among Gen Z in the US. *The Indian Express* also published a story earlier this year arguing that “many young Indians are pulling back from social media, not out of disconnection, but to reclaim control, mental peace, and autonomy.”

With the power vested in me by

several hours of posting-deleting-stalking—and, of course, my editor—I asked a group of Gen Z users why they’ve gone MIA after years of posting constantly as though someone, somewhere, was paying them to do so. Nikita Gupta, a 21-year-old zero-poster with a private account told me that she only ever posts on Stories, and that too when something “cool” happens. “It’s not because I’m shy or anything, it’s more about the micro level apprehension that comes along with it. Instagram is like the first impression people make of you, and it’s like, ‘Oh did you see what she posted the other day?’ and things like that. I feel a bit creeped out.”

PROBLEM WITH BEING PERCEIVED

Every one of us has lived through the minor tragedy of posting and immediately regretting it because you looked at that one selfie in slide seven of your photo dump for so long that you morph into an unrecognisable monster. The modern-day Narcissus, if you will. Ishita Mishra, a 22-year-old student at the London College of Fashion spoke at length about being chronically online, but only as a voyeur.

“Social media is the epitome of wishful thinking—anything you want to fabricate, it’s the way to do it. Everything is sort of perfect, and when I can’t achieve that perfection, I start detesting the idea of showing my life to others on social media,” she says. Mishra refuses to play this constant game of posting and seeing who liked and commented as opposed to who didn’t, “It drives me insane,” she adds. Instead she, like many, continues to be an onlooker, absorbing others’ content believing it is performative and fake.

“As much as we would like to deny it, the Gen Z need to be mysterious and nonchalant, which is why you don’t see anyone posting anymore,” she continues, adding: “Posting too little is not a problem but posting too much definitely is. Why, you ask? Because it makes you look like you’re trying to be an influencer without trying, and that’s

not very cool.”

I, too, have zero posts on my Instagram as this story goes to press. That could change tomorrow, because I’m a creature of habit and I like attention from time to time. But for many, there is no crush left to impress and no real incentive to make a post. Alvia Khan, a 26-year-old corporate lawyer is one of them. “I used to post before, but one day it just didn’t feel necessary. I never really figured out why I was posting, and once that urge disappeared, so did the posts,” says Khan. “Honestly, some things don’t need an audience,” she later adds.

For 24-year-old Saanya Chawla, who is an entrepreneur and manages the social media of her brand, posting outfits, outings, and events on her personal account has started to feel cringe and dated. “I have gotten too comfortable with not posting and that has inadvertently turned into a privacy thing,” she shares, adding: “Also, because I manage my business’s Instagram, diving into my personal account feels like a whole other overwhelming task.”

That’s not to say that there are no grid-posters left anymore. For there are more Gen Z influencers now than ever before. But even the ones who post constantly don’t share everything. You might have formed a parasocial relationship with them and feel like you know them, but well, you don’t really. Ilisha Singh Kaurav, a 24-year-old content creator, treats Instagram strictly as work and rarely shares anything deeply personal. “Since my niche is fashion, beauty, and lifestyle, my life naturally becomes part of the content,” she explains, “but the raw and real moments stay on Stories, never the feed. The feed is curated; stories are fleeting and honest,” she adds.

It shouldn’t come as a shock to anyone that a generation raised by the internet knows it inside out, and has grown increasingly wary of it. A generation of silent scrollers, with privacy concerns, nostalgic for 2016, and skeptical of AI’s overreach. It all adds up. ■

Should You Actually Get Back With Your Ex: A Quiz

Because your friends are (really) tired of hearing you go back and forth.

By Veronica Lopez

It's just so tempting. All those happy memories. All that great sex. And your ex really knows you, you know? Plus, dating around again can feel like a colossal challenge, and said ex seems sincerely willing to try again. Look, we get it. We truly do. Which is why we consulted relationship therapists Leanna Stockard and Laura Heck to bring you a pretty definitive answer. Add up your points and let this expertise guide you to making a decision (for good).

Let's talk about what led to your split. Would those issues remain a major problem?

- Well, we had only one big thing that we could never resolve.
3 POINTS
- Maybe, but I'm willing to do whatever it takes to fix them.
6 POINTS
- Nah. We've grown a lot during our time apart.
13 POINTS

In the time since your breakup, you've...

- Mastered the art of IG-stalking my ex while belting T-Swift's *All Too Well* (10-minute version).
1 POINT
- Re-downloaded the apps just to feel something.
5 POINTS
- Been working on me and spending time with my people!
12 POINTS



Images: SHUTTERSTOCK

What would your other loved ones think if you got back together?

● I'd probably get kicked out of some group chats, tbh.
0 POINTS

● "Here we go again..."
3 POINTS

● Are you kidding? My mom would start planning our wedding immediately.
8 POINTS

Do you both share the same long-term goals?

● Long-term as in next weekend?
1 POINT

● We haven't talked about it, but we can cross that bridge when we get to it, right? Right??
3 POINTS

● Our goals and values have been aligned from the start.
10 POINTS

Your actual relationship...

● Was really great! Besides the time they cheated on me! With my best friend's sister!
0 POINTS

● Could be described as "fiery" with a side of "tumultuous"...in the best way possible, I swear.
1 POINT

● Just felt right. They were my go-to person.
14 POINTS

Do you miss your ex, or do you miss being in a relationship?



How did you handle conflict when you were together?

● If you don't count the (ahem, several) public screaming matches we got into, I'd say we did alright?
0 POINTS

● We were good...at letting it simmer until it boiled over and one of us snapped.
4 POINTS

● Effectively, but only after several hours of talking about our feelings. It was kind of a lot.
9 POINTS

Would you both be willing to try couples therapy to sort through anything that might come up?

● Nope, nope, nope, not for me.
1 POINT

● Um, how about a couples retreat instead?
3 POINTS

● I have my own therapist on speed dial so, like, yeah, I'm into it.
12 POINTS

Results



Between 6 and 24 Points

Maybe...Don't

If the factors that led to your split remain present, the relationship may still not work for those exact reasons, says Stockard. Start a Notes app list of all these cons that you can look at whenever you're tempted to backslide, hit that block button, and focus on giving yourself the love you deserve.

Between 25 and 55 Points

It's Worth Entertaining

Ask yourself: Did the good times really overshadow the bad? Do I genuinely miss my ex, or do I miss being in a relationship? Can we work through what drove us apart? Stockard says this last bit is especially important because strong conflict-resolution skills are key to making it work long term.

Between 56 and 78 Points

Life Is Short Try Again!

Just don't stop working on yourselves. Heck suggests finding tools like books and podcasts that can help you learn to resolve conflict better the second time around. And take it slow! You're different people now. Take the time to get to know the new-and-improved versions of each other.



Flamenco's **Love** Notes With Deepak Verma

Flamenco guitarist Deepak Verma's music reflects his own love story. The artist speaks on blending Spanish strings with an Indian spirit, music as therapy, and more.

By Sidhi Kapoor

Deepak Verma's love story spans Spain, Slovenia, and India. His passion for the guitar led him to his first destination, where he immersed himself in the flamenco

tradition, learning from masters like German multi-instrumentalist Amir John Haddad and guitarist José Gálvez. In an interview with *Cosmopolitan*, Verma opens up about his journey, his passion for music, and his personal life. "I

believe in authenticity. That's my primary drive, and it's reflected in everything I do, from music to relationships," says the 33-year-old.

Verma started as a rock guitarist and played in bands alongside the likes of singer Kailash

Kher and popular jazz pianist Karim Ellaboudi, among other notable names. As a session musician, he was approached for recordings, movies, ads, and songs. Instructional DVDs opened up the world of flamenco. “Originally from Spain, it is among the most sophisticated styles of guitar. And, like every guitarist, I too had a fantasy to learn it,” he shares. When Haddad, also known as El Amir, was visiting Mumbai in 2016, it was a life-changing experience for Verma. Eventually, he was invited by the former to Spain, and his journey as a flamenco guitarist started from there.

In 2017, Verma travelled all over the country and learnt the nuances of the instrument, gradually gaining expertise. “Flamenco is a culture—and a way of life. Also, I find many similarities between Spain and Indian culture. The stories of the Banjaras, the gypsies, and the music...they are all woven by a common thread,” he says. Verma has performed extensively in Mumbai, including at the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Royal Opera House, and for the Spanish Consulates’ National Spanish Day, *Fiesta Nacional*. Currently busy with private performances, he feels: “Private shows are very personal and intimate; there’s a closeness that allows flamenco to breathe differently. Studio time, on the other hand, gives me space to slow things down, listen deeply, and explore parts of my sound that don’t always surface on stage.”

NATURE OF MUSIC

Born in Uttarakhand and having grown up in Mumbai, people around Verma frequently get surprised when they discover his origins. “I have embraced the culture of Andalucia and Spain as my own,” he says. Shared learning has also included tapping the potential of music to heal. “I had

a bad accident in Sevilla and got multiple stitches. That’s when I realised the importance of life and good health. While music is therapeutic to my mind, fitness and nutrition are therapy for my body. I also love going for long walks and being in nature. It calms my mind.”

Like the soulful notes of flamenco, Verma’s love story is nothing short of cinematic. He met his wife Polona Valic Verma, a Slovenian dancer, in Spain, and their relationship has been a source of inspiration for his music. “My own love story has been a bit of a challenge,” he laughs, adding: “Because my wife

“I believe in authenticity. That’s my primary drive, and it’s reflected in everything I do, from music to relationships.”

is Slovenian and I’m an Indian. I met her in Granada, and during the pandemic, we were stuck across countries. She finally came to India, and then we were stuck here! After that, I went to Spain in 2019. We got married in 2024.”

LOOKING AHEAD

With a musical journey spanning two decades, Verma’s ultimate goal is to introduce the authentic spirit of flamenco to India, and share its richness with a new audience. “I recently worked with AR Rahman. We had a mini jam session at 4am in the morning and bonded during that. It was a memorable experience. Before that, I had a lovely experience working with composer Shekhar Ravjiani. My

wife and I were in the beautiful mountains of Slovenia, and that’s when I recorded flamenco guitars for Shekhar’s song, *Nazar*,” Verma says, adding: “I feel all romantic pop music, historically, has had some form of flamenco guitar or a Spanish style infused in them. From Enrique to Bryan Adams—all have had influences of flamenco in their pieces. Everyone knows the sound of nylon strings. For any romantic song, a single verse is enough to take you to a beach or any other romantic location. Musicians like Rahman and Ravjiani understand that very well.”

Verma is currently preparing to travel across India alongside his wife, “with a very close-to-my-heart project called the Flamenco India Project. It brings together artists I deeply admire, including Sol Koeraus, a flamenco dancer and singer who also runs schools in Granada and New York.”

His words echo with positivity as he shares a parting thought. “Do everything with honesty and authenticity. Take risks and be more of yourself in work, romance, and life,” he concludes. ■

For all the die-hard romantics, Deepak shares his top four favourite tracks. “These pieces capture the essence of love and passion that I try to convey through my music.”

- *Tres Notas Para Decir Te Quiero* by Vicente Amigo
- *Canción de Amor* by Paco de Lucía
- *Practical Arrangement* by Sting
- *Te Extraño* by Diego el Cigala

Romcoms, Red Flags, and Why We Love Love

Five creatives spill the beans on their all-time favourite rendition of love.

By Tanishka Aggarwal

Name a Hollywood romcom from the early aughts and I can guarantee you, this writer has not only watched it, but memorised it scene-by-scene, too. Despite years of criticism against the perils of Hollywood's age-old formulaic romantic tropes, the familiarity they breed cannot be discounted. At the end of a long day, where you've cosplayed the strong, independent woman, it's the predictability of the conventional romcom that comes to the rescue. Read as five creatives reflect on love, relationships and how their favourite love stories have shaped who they are.





NIN KALA, 28

Model and Interior Designer

My favourite romcom isn't a film but a feeling—Taylor Swift's song *Love Story* blended with *Pretty Woman* (1990). That mix of romance, fantasy, and vulnerability reflects how I love. For me, love is like a butterfly, as Lana Del Rey sings in *Happiness is a Butterfly*—it's fragile, free, and never meant to be forced. Films like *Me Before You* (2016), *Guzaarish* (2010), *Sadma* (1983), and *Tamasha* (2015) shaped my understanding of love as unconditional and without boundaries. They taught me that loving freely is beautiful, but expecting the same love in return often leads to disappointment.

AGOU HENGOULAL SITLHOU, 25

Content Creator

My favourite romcom is *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009). The central character, Rebecca Bloomwood's love for fashion runs so deep that she's willing to go to great lengths to create a version of herself she believes in—even if that means pushing herself to the very last credit card. I relate to how she goes all in for what she wants. I've done the same whether it's to make a shoot happen, or building something meaningful from nothing. Even when resources are scarce, I've found ways to make it work. The love story, too, is casual and organic—two people meeting without pressure, connecting slowly, and falling in love naturally. That's something I deeply believe in and still hope for. I'm single, and I want love to arrive without force. At its core, the film reflects my journey: Loving fashion, dreaming big, taking risks, and trusting that things will fall into place. And honestly, all I want is for men to love couture, and of course, to always speak Prada.





NAYANIKA CHATTERJEE, 29
Animator and Illustrator

I absolutely love Roger Michell's *Notting Hill* (1999). I'm not sure if I relate to it, but the warmth that surrounds the film is something that makes me a little hopeful, especially when it comes to dating in this world while struggling with app fatigue. I also blame the film for setting extremely high benchmarks, since I now expect my future partner to be just as charming and perfect as Hugh Grant. But no matter what, I come back to these romcoms because they feel familiar, heartwarming, and make me a tad bit less cynical about the dating world.

PRANJAL JAIN, 24
Content Creator and Fashion Writer

My favourite love story is the limited series *A Suitable Boy* (2020). Directed by Mira Nair, and based on Vikram Seth's iconic novel, I see it as India's answer to Tolstoy's 19th century *War and Peace*. Set against the backdrop of religious turmoil, it revolves around Lata Mehra (played by Tanya Maniktala) who is trying to find a husband. After all her suitors, she meets someone who is honest and hard-working. Sometimes they don't mesh well, but he's consistent. He shows up and cares for her. After watching the series, I've become keen on finding someone who is consistent; who has a very gentle masculinity to them—someone that has a quiet but strong confidence and higher emotional intelligence than me. With Lata, you also learn that it's okay to be "soft". She is kind without giving too much of herself. She continues to be independent, and has her own thoughts and ideas.

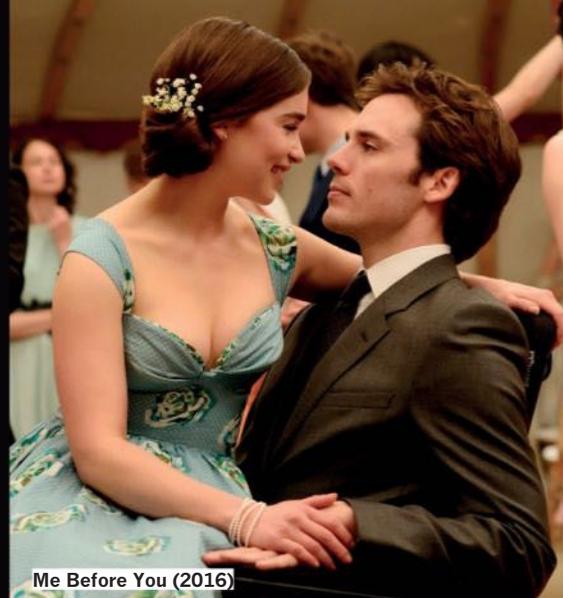




DIKSHANT, 25

Musician

My favourite romcom is *Hasee Toh Phasee* (2014), starring Sidharth Malhotra and Parineeti Chopra. Whenever I need comfort, this is the film I return to. I relate to it because I believe love often finds you when you think you're not ready for it, and yet it turns out to be exactly what you deserve and need. The film captures this feeling beautifully. It genuinely changed my perspective on love. It made me realise that love is not about grand gestures or material displays meant to impress someone; it is about being understood, seen, and accepted. It is about the small, seemingly insignificant things that quietly end up meaning everything.



Me Before You (2016)



Guzaarish (2010)



Notting Hill (1999)



Hasee Toh Phasee (2014)

You're a reflector:

You prefer to pause and process before presenting your side of the argument.

“I want to think about how I feel before we discuss this.”

OR

“Let me sit with this for a bit before responding.”

OR

“It's not like I don't care. I just need some time to sort my thoughts out.”

You're a collaborator: You, my friend, are the mediator, the de-escalator, and one who seeks a logical, win-win outcome for all parties involved. No tit-for-tat; more give-and-take.

“Why don't we talk this through together?”

OR

“Help me understand what it's like for you.”

OR

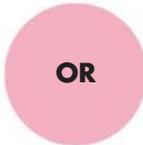
“Let's slow down and really listen to each other.”

OR

“I'm trying to put myself in your shoes.”

You're an accomodator: Just short of people-pleasing, you prioritise peace over pandemonium. So, let's just say, you're always willing to compromise.

“Whatever works for you is fine with me.”



“It's alright. I don't need to get into it.”

You're a deflector:

Confrontation is your worst nightmare. You'd much rather downplay the issue.

“Forget I even brought it up. Let's just drop it, shall we?”

OR

“This isn't worth arguing over. Let's move on?”

OR

“This feels like too much right now. Let's just keep the peace.”

OR

“Maybe we pick this up another time?”

You're a suppressor:

Bottling up = bursting out. You put a lid on it and pretend everything's fine...until.

“There's no point talking about it. Nothing seems to ever change anyway.”

OR

“There's nothing to discuss. I don't think I need to explain myself.”

You're a competitor:

For you, a disagreement is like a debate. It's all about winning.

“I don't think I'm going to change my mind about this.”

OR

“There's no middle ground. Someone has to take a call.”

OR

“We don't have time for debate, and I'm not backing down on this.”

OR

“If you think there's a better way, show me.”

You're a controller:

You certainly don't shy away from tackling the issue head-on. Intimidating much?

“Let's talk about what happened. It's better we address matters openly.”

OR

“There's no point in dragging this out. Let's just cut to the chase.”

Why You Shouldn't Turn a Blind Eye

Real love stories of discoveries, charm, and sweet moments—all packaged with an unexpected secret set-up.

By Bani Sachar



Somewhere between endless left swipes, algorithm-approved “compatibility scores,” and the exhaustion of situationships, something unexpected is happening: Blind dates are staging a comeback. Yes, that thing we only saw in good ol’ sitcoms, before one could stalk their crush’s cousin’s dog on Instagram, is suddenly the most disruptive, romantic, and surprisingly successful way to meet someone. Maybe it’s the resurgence of ’90s nostalgia—the mood that has seeped into our wardrobes, bronzers, and even our kitchen counters. Maybe it’s a decade of digital dating that has left us chronically underwhelmed. Or, we’re finally realising that the most radical thing you can do for your love life is... outsource it.

The proof is everywhere. Miley and Maxx. Emily and John. Harry and Meghan. All modern fairy tales with a friend’s gentle nudge behind them. But celebrities aside, the magic is now happening closer home. Across cities, group chats, and very nosy best friends, blind dates are having a renaissance moment. The couples we spoke to (and the matchmakers who engineered their meet-cutes) prove that the art of the set-up isn’t just alive, it’s thriving.

THE SET-UP

Before the spark comes the set-up—some would argue this can be even more fun than the actual date. It usually begins with chaotic hunches, accidental timing, and the kind of plotting mostly reserved for heist movies. A tiny suggestion, and suddenly two strangers are sitting across from each other. Then there’s that one moment—the instant something shifts from polite small talk to “wait...is this actually something?”

For 25-year-old publicist Prathana*, it was the feeling of time collapsing. “Jay* picked me up with flowers, so I knew this was going to

be an interesting one. But, at the end of the date, it just felt like it had been 10 minutes,” she says. They spent six hours talking, and kept moving to different locations to make sure the night never ended. “That’s when I sort of knew I was going to see him more,” she adds.

Shubhi Gakhar, a 29-year-old photographer, remembers the larger feeling rather than a single moment. “Even though we were meeting for the first time, he made me feel genuinely safe and at ease,” she says. “He talked so passionately about his work and his future, something about it just felt right. I didn’t realise it then, but the moment I got home, I knew I wanted to see him again.” Little did she know that they’d be parents to a girl just a couple of years down the line.

We’re finally realising that the most radical thing you can do for your love life is... outsource it.

For Huda and Samad, both 25 and working in creative fields, the spark arrived with unexpected comic timing. “We hit it off from the first second we spoke, as I was getting into the car and ghazals were playing. I asked him if he was stalking me, and he got all nervous and said, ‘No, I was just playing this to calm my nerves.’” Four hours of conversation later, and a moment at Tanjore Tiffin Room where neither finished their single starter, she realised something was beginning. And then came the voice note (two minutes long) in which he told her how inspired he felt after meeting her and that, regardless of where this went, it was one of his best days. “That was when

I knew, and we’ve been together ever since,” she says.

For Shefali Chethan, 24, a marketer and model, and Manav Sreekumar, 23, a professional padel player, the spark was quiet but instant. “We were talking and realised we were raised in such similar ways, even though we’re from two different states,” she says. The set-up itself was accidental (their best friends engineered a weekend meet-up), but the connection was undeniable. Despite living in different cities (she in Mumbai, he in Chennai), they kept meeting on impromptu trips across India. “It’s always been long-distance,” she says, adding: “But with the right person, everything just feels easy.”

What’s interesting about today’s blind dates is the complete absence of traditional prep. No dossiers, no LinkedIn deep dives, no frantic pre-date stalking. In fact, most set-ups start with minimal context, by design or chance. Prathana says her friend told them almost nothing. “Except that he thinks we’ll be a good match.” They already vaguely knew of each other, but not enough to form expectations. Somehow, the minimal briefing worked. Meanwhile, Shubhi’s situation took ‘less is more’ to a new level. “I didn’t even know I was going on a blind date until we were two minutes away from the restaurant,” she says. “In a way, we both walked in almost clueless, and somehow that made the whole thing even better.”

MODERN MATCHMAKERS

If blind dates are thriving again, it’s because of the friends—the chaotic, intuitive, meddling-in-the-name-of-love friends who believe in romance harder than the people they’re setting up. Ananya, 33, an entrepreneur who set up two friends in Bengaluru, relied entirely on instinct. “Every time I saw them separately, I’d think, these two speak the same emotional language,” she says. She gave them the world’s

tiniest briefing: “He’s not a serial killer, go,” and “She’s fun, please behave.” When the date went well, she did a small victory dance in her living room. And when they eventually got married? “I basically took full credit and retired from matchmaking at my peak,” she quips.

Meanwhile 29-year-old finance analyst Arjun*, who set up his two best friends at his own wedding, calls their love story the “real success story” of the event. He introduced them with, “You’re both my favourites, don’t embarrass me,” and left them near the cocktail bar. Hours later, they returned grinning, and one said: “Your friend is too funny, it’s annoying,” while the other declared, “Bro, I think I just met my match.” Six months later, they were officially together. And yes, he also takes full credit.

NEW RULES OF SAYING YES

What every couple agrees on is simple: Go in open, with honesty and zero pressure. Prathana remembers this advice clearly: “Just go into it having fun.” No assumptions, no expectations—just curiosity. Shubhi says the same: “Go in with zero expectations and just see where it goes. Pay attention to how the person makes you feel... Safe, comfortable, heard.” Huda insists on keeping an open mind. “Go with the intention of simply knowing a new person and not dating them, or it turning into something.”

And from Shefali—whose long-distance love story turned into something solid, joyful, and deeply committed—the rule is beautifully simple: “Have an open mind, don’t overthink too much before you go on that date, and see if your energies match.”

THAT ONE TIME I TRIED A BLIND DATE...

And because no attempt at finding love is complete without mild self-sacrifice, here’s my own blind-date moment (Bani, 22, journalist and marketer). A friend was convinced



“The rule is beautifully simple: Have an open mind, don’t overthink too much before you go on that date, and see if your energies match.

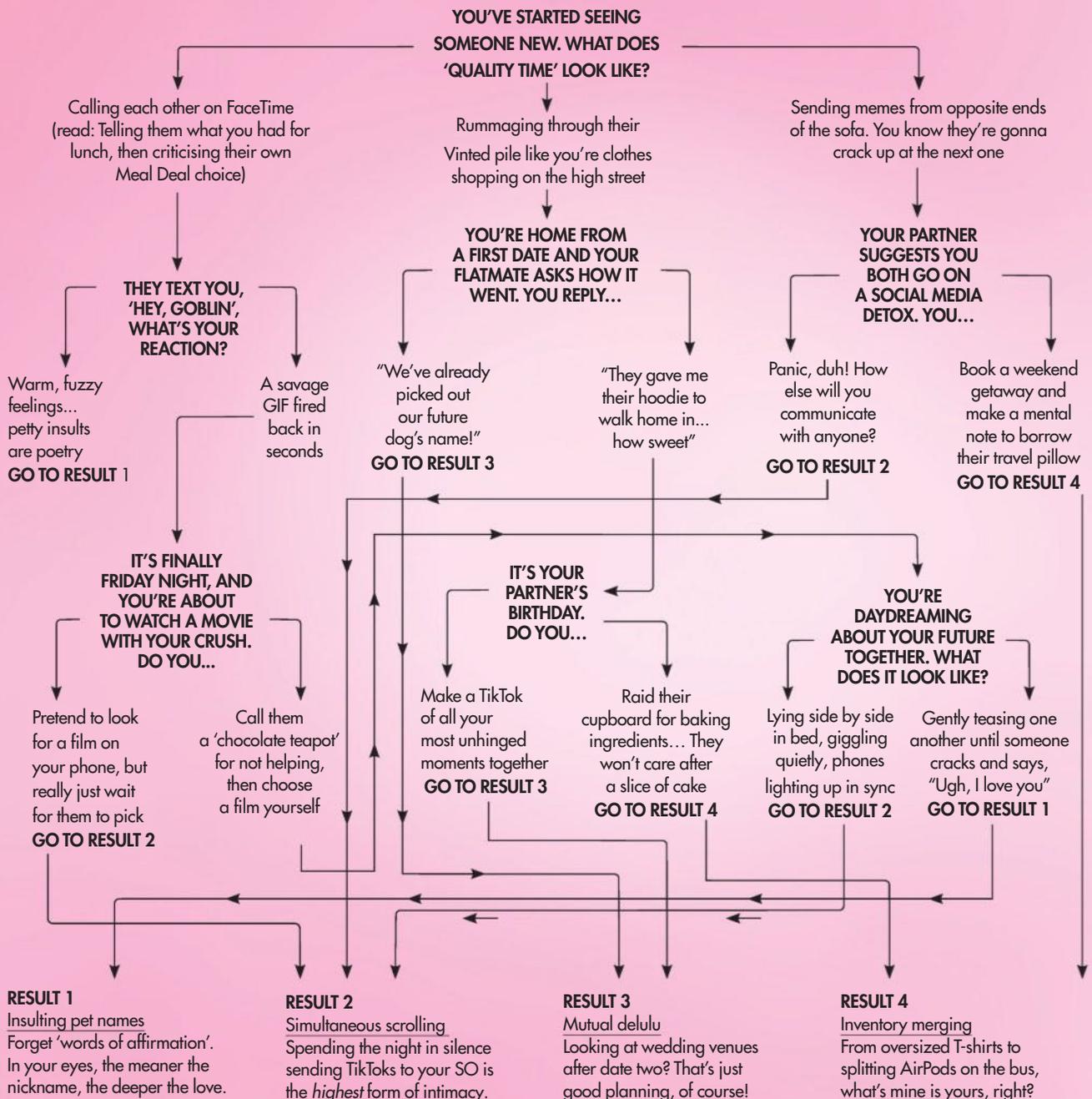
— **Shefali Chethan, 24, Marketeer and Model**

she had found “my person,” so I showed up open-minded and well-dressed. He was sweet, polite, and arrived a good 30 minutes late—no dramatic excuse, just an earnest smile and a “sorry, the day just ran away from me.” We sat down, and within minutes, he launched into an extremely detailed, TED Talk-level explanation of cars. I learned more about torque, engines, and something called a dual-clutch transmission than I have in my entire life. We didn’t fall in love. But we did share an excellent tiramisu, laughed more than I expected, and I walked away with a story that made girls’ night more entertaining that week. ■

What's Your Modern-Day Love Language?

Sure, 'acts of service' are nice, but they're sooo three decades ago. Whether happily coupled up or still swiping for 'the one', it's time to decode what 'romance' really means to you...

By Jade Biggs



RESULT 1
 Insulting pet names
 Forget 'words of affirmation'.
 In your eyes, the meaner the nickname, the deeper the love.

RESULT 2
 Simultaneous scrolling
 Spending the night in silence sending TikToks to your SO is the *highest* form of intimacy.

RESULT 3
 Mutual delulu
 Looking at wedding venues after date two? That's just good planning, of course!

RESULT 4
 Inventory merging
 From oversized T-shirts to splitting AirPods on the bus, what's mine is yours, right?



I Faked It— And Found Myself

How role-playing outside the bedroom helped me overcome my fear of intimacy.

By T

As far as I can remember, I was in class nine when I first pleased myself. The technique was slightly unconventional.

Unlike regular masturbatory practices, my disgust with my own body ran so deep, I couldn't bring myself to touch myself. And hence, I relied on 'syntribution'—a term I accidentally discovered on YouTube—where one presses their thigh muscles together tightly to generate an orgasm. But... have I completed an orgasm in its truest sense? The jury is still out on that one.

Despite having studied in a women's college, known for pioneering South Asian feminist theory, my internal battles with intimacy continued. It came easily to my friends, those who had been



What happens when the lights dim, the sheen wears off, and you're stripped to your bare bones? The illusion of the pornographic vamp dies. You remain.

graduate university space. It was the first time that I was living away from home, and I was hell-bent on getting rid of my fear of intimacy. Every night for the first month, my roommate and I discussed boys. We analysed behaviours and reported back to each other: Who likes whom, who's more likely to be with whom, and if there was anyone on the horizon for either of us. It was high school all over again, except this time, without the watchful eyes of our parents and the added liberty of cross-gender access in hostels. I could be in a boy's room all day and no one would bat an eyelid.

To put it crassly, when the opportunity to mate is endless, primal ideas gnaw at you—the prettiest, thinnest, fairest (all the superlatives) girls are supposed to get all the guys, right? Where would that leave me? The misogyny of class eight returned to me at 23, in classrooms where we dissected intersectional theories. And I soon realised, beauty (or the popular idea of it) was inherited; sex could be learnt. I couldn't help the former, but I could acquire the latter. What followed was an almost twisted social experiment. For a short filmmaking assignment, I decided to create a deliciously heinous, sexually charged movie called *Hunger*. Shot from the female gaze, it brought together the desires of a heterosexual woman: The hunger for food, and the hunger for a man's body. At the centre of the film was my character, a cannibal-esque vamp who lured men to her chamber, got herself 'eaten' by them, and then in turn, ate them.

The classroom's reaction was expected: An eruption of laughter, whistles, gasps, shrieks, horror all at

once. And so, I had gone from the nerd-ish, modestly dressed girl in class to one resembling a dominatrix who makes out with a man and then proceeds to simulate a climactic orgasm on screen—all within the span of 10 minutes.

But most importantly, I had now deemed myself a performative if not an active "slut" in my own eyes (reclamation of the word and whatnot). I was dedicated to the role: I stopped wearing anything that didn't display my concavely-curved cleavage. Plunging necklines paired with goth lipsticks, a pixie-esque haircut, and long trench coats with six-inch heels. Coupled with the 10 kgs I lost in the university gym in a span of three months, I had given myself the confidence, and more importantly, the license to finally be with a man. Just a day after that film screened, I had my first kiss—a passionate make out session outside the very gymnasium on a fog-riddled night.

The theatre training I had learnt as a child blurred for me, what was on-screen and off it. But the performance of the 'slutty' can only get you so far. What happens when the lights dim, the sheen wears off, and you're stripped to your bare bones? The illusion of the pornographic vamp dies. You remain. Vulnerability becomes a necessity. As for me and that guy who was my first kiss? It's been a year of him now being my long-distance pretend-boyfriend situationship, and we just broke up last night. I guess we didn't know what to do once the performance ended. ■

This piece is published under a pen name at the author's request.

dating young. They had held hands with boys at 13 and kissed at 14. Whereas, I was a college grad at 21, un-kissed and un-held. My friend had once jokingly set my contact name in her phone as 'extra virgin olive oil'.

It's not like I hadn't tried. A few borderline crushes and embarrassing flirtatious sentences populated my past. In college, after much motivation from coupled friends, I once mustered up the courage to go on a date. In retrospect, it was anything but that. An hour-long walk around the campus and a few texts on Instagram was about it. What added to my paranoia was also my family's persistently permanent efforts at constant GPS-location tracking. One foot away from the usual route and my phone would start buzzing.

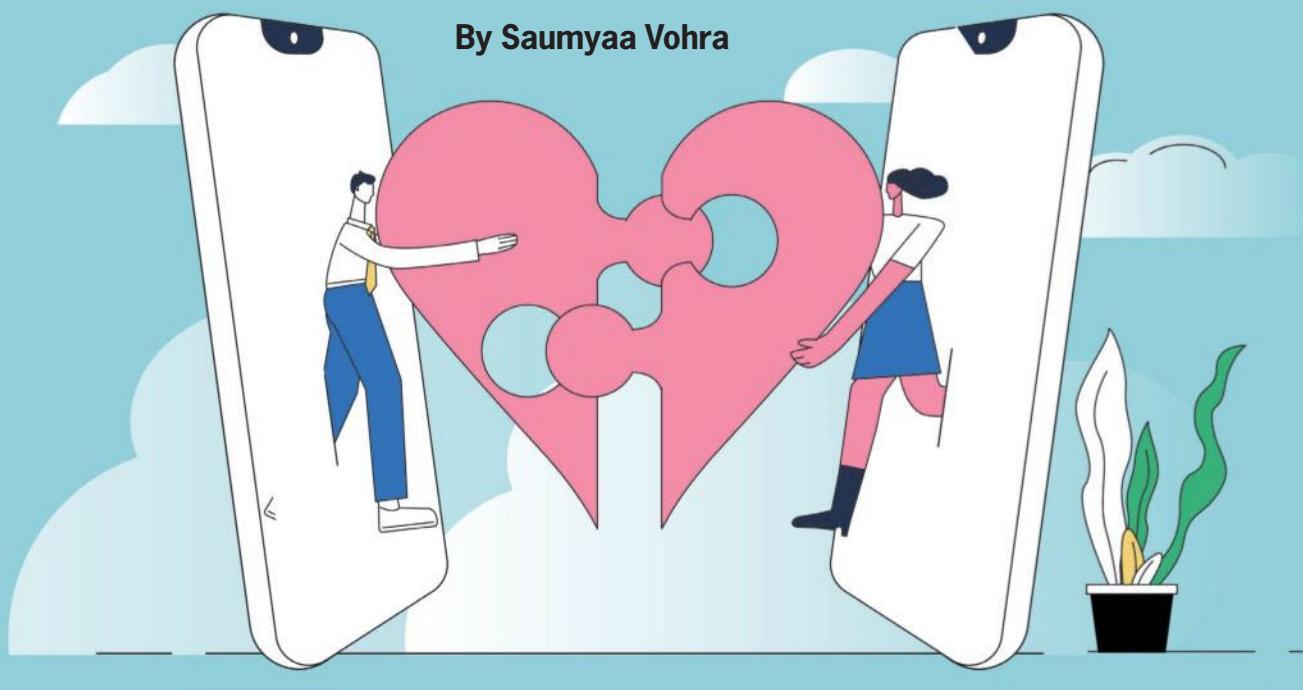
With that wealth of dating experience, I entered my post-

MATCH POINT

Can AI Be Your Matchmaker?

Is ChatGPT equipped to be your 'Sima Aunty'—or your custom-fit Raya? I experimented with it to find out.

By Saumyaa Vohra



A I is about as ubiquitous as the internet itself right now. We're trying to cut through the clutter of AI-generated videos in Instagram Reels, attempting to decipher what's real and what's not between the ones that can simulate reality best. Most of us are terrified

that AI is starting to edge us out of our jobs. And of course, like any love-hate relationship is, we are increasingly dependent on it, looking to it for everything from recipes and quick research to diagnosing car problems, role-playing awkward conversations, and planning vacations. AI's popularity extends to the

relationship arena, with people asking for customised sex advice, soft-dating AI models, erotic role-playing with fictional characters, and even 'chatfishing' (prepping conversation to seduce potential partners).

AI is incredibly present in the lives of both millennial and Gen Z daters—but Gen Z definitely wins

the count. The 14th annual ‘Singles in America’ study conducted by matchmaking website Match.com found that nearly half of Gen Z singles have already used AI in their dating lives. It also found that 41 per cent of young adults have used it to help end relationships, 15 per cent use AI to plan romantic dates, and 12 per cent rely on it for ongoing relationship counselling. Honestly, it was only a matter of time before someone began to use ChatGPT to find them their soulmate. And as it happens, they’ve already begun. I was intrigued by what exactly using ChatGPT as a matchmaker looked like—so I decided to go straight to the source. I asked it to help me find someone to date. It immediately responded by saying it could help me:

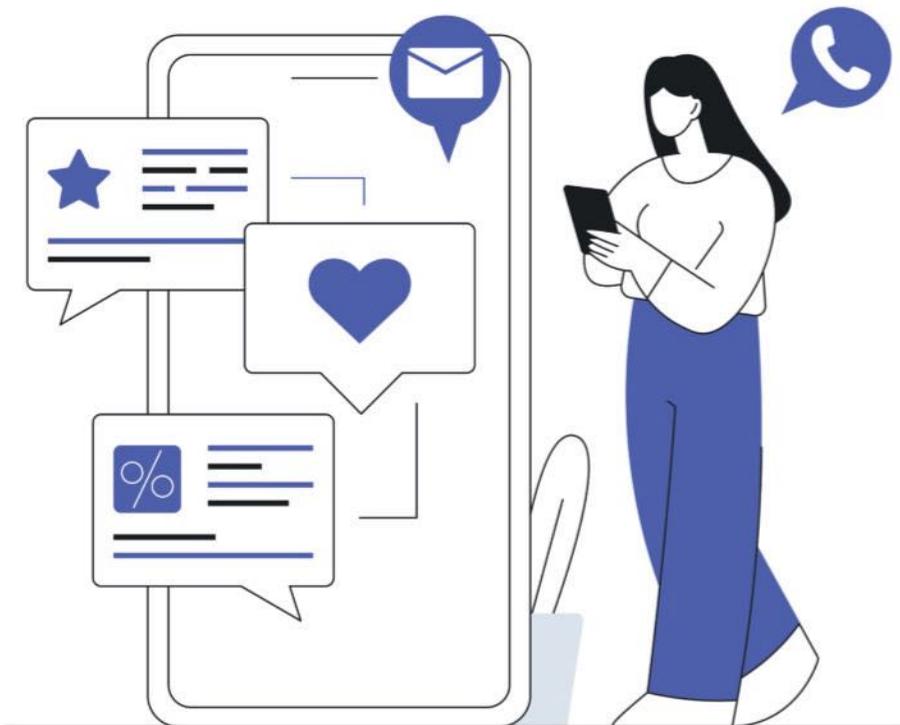
1. Figure out who I should actually be dating (not who I think I should).
2. Craft how I present myself (apps/intros/IRL).
3. Spot the right people faster (and avoid time-wasters). When I probed a little further, it said it could offer me dating strategy and filtering of prospects, profile building (for the apps), message coaching, decision support and advice, and vetting prospects’ compatibility for ‘matching values’.

Chat then also said: ‘What I don’t do (yet) is actively pair two real people together from a database, and run live matchmaking pools like a dating service. The ‘yet’ was interesting, suggesting a possible update where those tasks will soon be on the ChatGPT menu. “Functionally,” Chat says, “People use me as a thinking partner for romantic decision-making, which is a huge part of matchmaking. So, in short, I don’t introduce people—but I help them choose better, faster, and with less emotional chaos.”

PROFILE BUILDING

What Chat did next was, effectively asked me to answer some questions for myself, in the vein of “What kind of relationship do I actually want in the next 6–12 months?” “What has not worked for me repeatedly? (patterns, not people)” and “What am I no longer willing to negotiate on? (three non-negotiables).” I was then asked to pick a primary channel—would be using apps, meeting people through my friends or communities...? “Don’t scatter

recommends asking questions like: “Do our values align, not just chemistry?” After three to four dates with different people, assess calmly: “Who energised me?” “Who confused me?” “What pattern is emerging?” And then, Chat offers help on each step—should it write your bio for you? Or help you decode someone you’re already seeing? Where would you like to start?” A while ago, I did a similar experiment to understand what AI would be like as my therapist. It was an interesting



yourself,” Chat says. Then came the presentation. “Choose one clear photo that looks like you on a good day.” “One line that signals values + personality, not résumé (and no cliché’s, like ‘loves travel’)”.

Stepping into the dating world, the assessment continues. “Date with a filter, not hope,” Chat

experiment which led me to conclude that AI absolutely cannot replace a therapist, and needs to be used with extreme caution by the emotionally vulnerable and anyone in a fragile mental state. But for the average person, it was not a terrible stopgap between bottling things up and going to therapy. Used smartly, AI can

be, if nothing else, a tool that helps you fine-tune a decision-making process, or be a neutral sounding board.

TESTING IT OUT

That's the appeal for marketing consultant Aarti C at least, who, at 33, has come to find she doesn't always trust her own taste in men, thus has outsourced some of the decision-making to Chat: "I'll feed all the information I have about the three or four guys that I am talking to and ask Chat to help me vet them." She prefers the information and advice that Chat gives her to what she gets from her friends because, "There is no bias. Chat isn't coming from a place of knowing my history, judging me, or having its own ideas about what's best for me. It just gives me plain facts about these guys, and then lets me take a call," she says.

"I use Chat for conversations on dating apps constantly," says 27-year-old engineer Varun J. "I'm not the best conversationalist over text, and it has been my Achilles heel. But I now use it for help with those conversations; I'm not lying or anything, just using it to be more confident and articulate. Kind of like if Hitch wasn't problematic," he laughs.

AI is making online dating easier if Match.com is to be believed, with 22 per cent of the surveyed sample reporting more matches using it. 41 per cent would use AI for in-person conversation starters, and 40 per cent would use it to craft the 'perfect' dating profile. Self-proclaimed romantic, Srikala, however, is in the demographic that hates the idea of it, as well as the experience of using it. "I tried it on a whim, and I

“I’m not the best conversationalist over text, and it has been my Achilles heel. But I now use AI for help.

— Varun J, 27, Engineer

was hoping to be proven wrong," she sighs, adding: "But it was exactly what I thought it was." Her complaint isn't even that it was misleading or problematic; just that it felt clinical and dry. "It was deeply uninspired. Very rational, very problem-solving; making assessments about people based on information. But finding a partner shouldn't feel that way, when there's so much about a person you can't put down on paper. Where's the magic in that?," she asks.

Of course AI is going to be used in dating—the question isn't that at all. What is really something to chew on is the idea that AI can solve the human relationship dynamic—from finding them, to keeping and nourishing them—better than we can. My consensus is that it can't, yet. There is no telling how AI will grow stronger in its capabilities, feeding off the wealth of human intelligence it is surfeited with every minute. But at this particular moment in time, it is nothing but a calm advisor that can provide generic (but not terrible) guidelines to dating better. ■

Author and editor Saumyaa Vohra's 'Match Point' explores the ever-evolving dynamics of young love. Vohra is the author of the novel One Night Only, published by Pac Macmillan India.

Turning AI into your love guru?

Caution is your best friend here.

Manage Your Expectations

AI even sets them for you. It can't locate your soulmate and lead you to them—it is capable of helping you put your best forward, and sort through the clutter to zero in on them. Hoping for anything beyond that is setting yourself up for disappointment.

Don't Sub Out Humans For AI

AI will definitely give you 'unbiased advice'. But sometimes, people who know you—and know your weaknesses, your patterns and your past—can also be helpful in their own way. It isn't such a bad thing for people that love you to chime in when you're making a big decision.

Use Your Judgment

AI is ultimately informed by a billion users' experiences—some might be similar to yours while some might be nothing like it. Just because you're given AI advice, doesn't mean you have to take it. Don't treat it as gospel; instead, treat it like a helpful suggestion.

Avoid Drastic Steps

AI is famously easy to manipulate, if you know what you're doing. In turn, AI can also easily manipulate a lot of people. If ever AI gives you an extreme suggestion, pull back and discuss it with your most level-headed, rational friends or family before making a move. If AI suggests anything that could cause harm—mental or physical, to you or anyone else—abandon the conversation and report it immediately.

Keep One Foot In The Real World

There's nothing wrong with giving AI matchmaking a dry run. But don't lean into it as a primary source for helping you date. Put your eggs in other baskets—ask friends to set you up, join communities, go to events. There's more than one way to snag your soulmate (or at least, a great partner).

THE NEW HEIR, THE NEW VISION

How Yash Kataria, director at the Kataria Group of Companies, is redefining legacy-led leadership.

Meet Yash Kataria, the youngest director at the Kataria Group of Companies which spans real estate, energy, and manufacturing—and the newest torchbearer of a legacy deeply woven into Central India's cultural fabric. Kataria Jewellers has been a part of family milestones and festive traditions for generations. Today, Yash is redefining what that heritage looks like for the new generation.

Time spent in London and Singapore reshaped his perspective on design, retail, and consumer culture. More importantly, it sharpened his understanding of the evolving Indian customer. He returned home with a global sensibility, and a clear vision that heritage brands can evolve, scale, and stay relevant without losing their essence.

This year marks a pivotal chapter for the group. The group expanded into promising new markets, strengthened its presence in key cities, and introduced



stores designed to feel immersive, warm, and contemporary. The Ratlam flagship continues to draw loyalists as the largest store, while the new Indore flagship has already become one of the largest jewellery stores with the highest inventory. These spaces carry the Kataria identity, but with a fresh, contemporary edge that reflects Yash's thoughtful, future-focused approach.

Yash believes that meaningful growth takes discipline. He chooses to move with intention instead of speed. "Growth must be thoughtful and long-term," says Yash Kataria, director of the Kataria Group of Companies, adding: "At Kataria Jewellers, we look at every expansion, every investment, and every design direction with one question in mind: *Will this still hold value ten years from now?* That clarity shapes how we scale and stay relevant in changing markets."

His leadership style is quietly confident. He focuses on stability, prioritises transparent decision-making, and believes in nurturing young talent by reminding them that curiosity matters as much as skill. He encourages them to build foundations rather than rush through opportunities.

As the Kataria Group steps into its next phase, the balance feels seamless, the legacy remains strong, and the vision feels renewed. And at the heart of it all is Yash Kataria, guiding a brand rooted in tradition while confidently steering it into tomorrow.



Sorry I Didn't Text Back, But Should I Be?

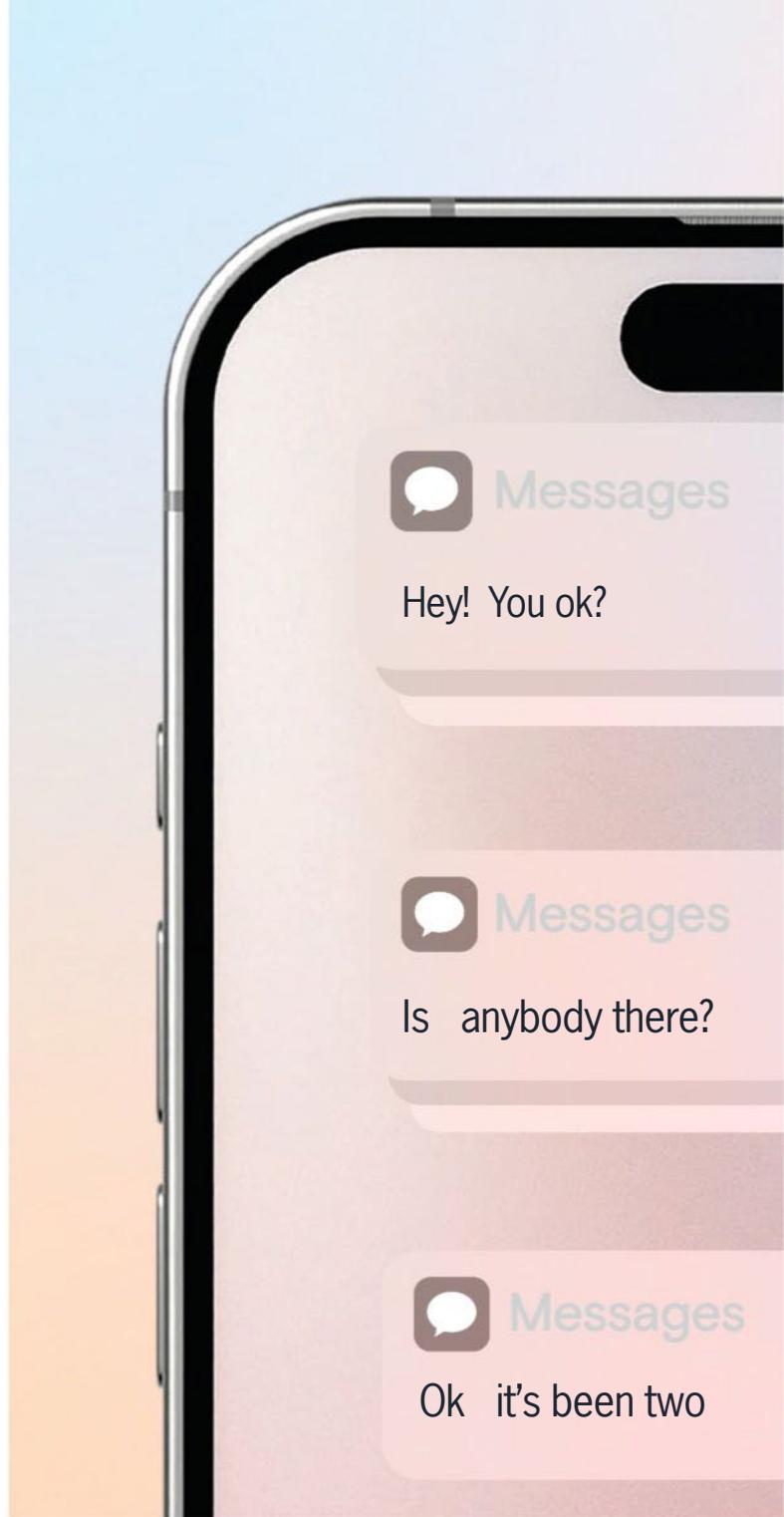
It may just be us but it could also be (super) wild texting expectations.

By Brit Dawson

I have just sent a cursory, “Sorry I didn’t text you back,” to a friend after once again leaving them on read. We’d been in a rapid-fire, back-and-forth—a rare thing to catch me in—when I suddenly stopped replying, and didn’t resurface for 12 days.

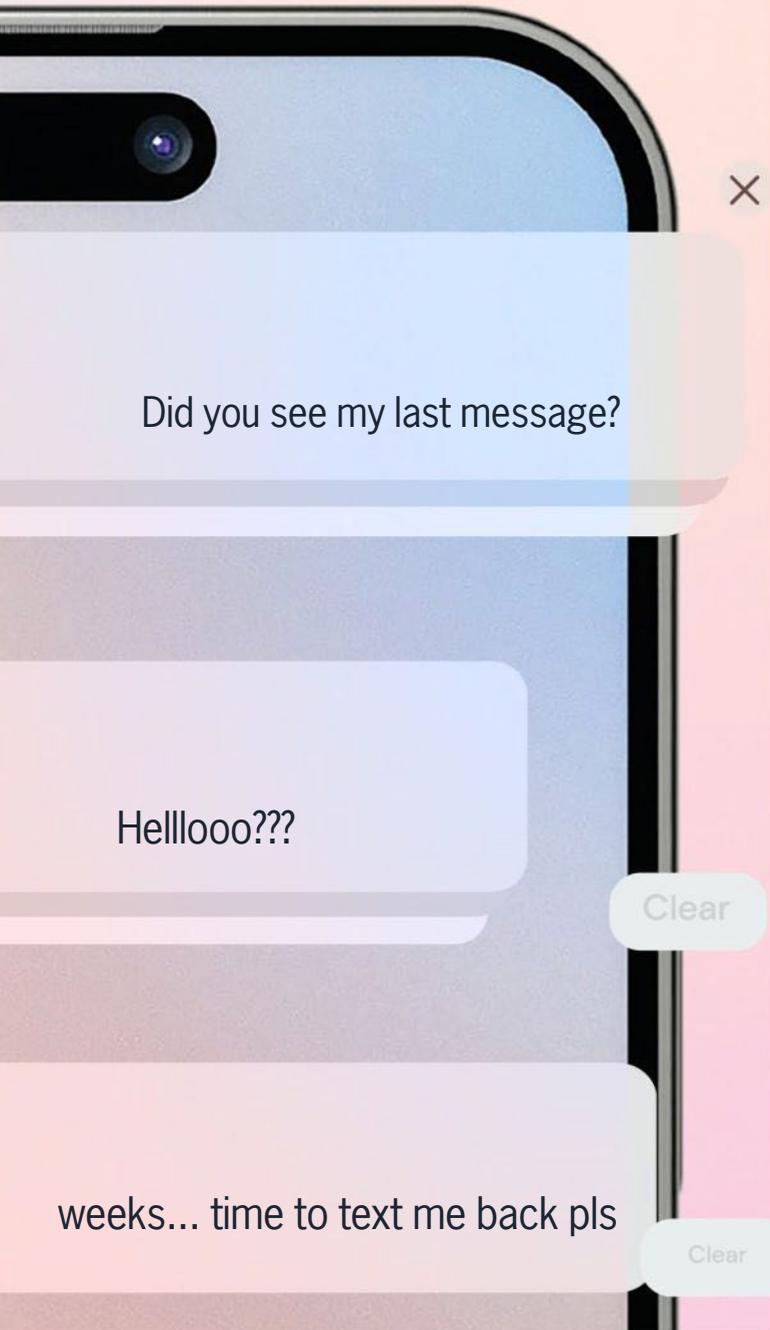
My friend is, of course, right to tell me to stop apologising if it doesn’t come with any actionable change. Am I actually sorry I didn’t text back if I continue to...not text back? Well, yes and no. During those two weeks, there wasn’t a day that I didn’t think about her unread WhatsApps—hers and all the others. My own green-dotted, guilt-ridden hellscape. And yet, I didn’t do anything about it.

Much has been written about people like me—the ‘bad texter’—usually by the offenders themselves (hi!). They might offer a feeble apology, haphazard defence, or a very genuine explanation. For my part, there are instances I am, honestly, very sorry for: The birthday dinner I missed because I didn’t open the messages inviting me; the two childhood friends I ghosted for four months; the now years-old voice note from an old colleague I still haven’t listened to. And there are explanations, too: A job that requires me to be always logged on, which can make all screen time feel like work; a bereavement that made anything other than grieving impossible; a stubborn adamance to only message via WhatsApp Desktop.



And I’m not alone in my shame-filled habit. More and more people around me seem to be referring to themselves as ‘bad texters’. Being reachable 24/7 on multiple platforms is, it appears, starting to take its toll. With the time we have outside of work—and, if living with a partner or housemates, the time we spend alone—feeling increasingly precious, the last thing many of us want to do is spend that time typing to names on a screen. When we polled* you, dear *Cosmo* readers, about feeling overwhelmed by messages, 49 per cent of you said you ‘sometimes’ did, 27 per cent said you ‘often’ did, and 12 per cent said you did ‘constantly’. That’s a

*Poll conducted via Instagram with 4,287 respondents.



Human beings are not meant to be contactable every minute of every day.

2025 Deloitte survey, people are starting to take action, with 29 per cent of Gen Z respondents saying they've deleted a social media app in the past year, 50 per cent of all respondents turning off notifications for one or more apps, and 18 per cent setting screen time limits.

This widespread digital fatigue is likely a hangover from the pandemic, when IRL interactions were swapped for video calls and Zoom quizzes, and our homes became our workplaces and third spaces. Our screen time skyrocketed, with a 2022 University of Leeds survey finding that 54 per cent of British adults use screens more often than before, clocking up an average 11 hours or more each day.

Interestingly, 'bad texters' aren't necessarily spending less time on their phones. My own phone is almost constantly in my hand—I regularly use it to read the news, scroll on Instagram or TikTok, and do *The New York Times* daily crossword. There are just lots of times when I CBA to talk to anyone. "Our phones can lead to exhaustion and a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the constant pull of attention," says clinical psychologist Dr Lynsey Kelly. "Burnout from being 'always on' is therefore a real risk. We have no control over incoming messages, and often have no good way of keeping up with the influx of information as well as our actual lives. We are aware that we value spending good quality time with friends and family vs being on our phones, and yet we end up having to do this [be on our phones] to manage demands." Although most people can empathise with this feeling, those who reject this pull for attention are usually deemed to be in the wrong. So, here's my argument: Maybe the 'good texters' are the problem.

Although I concede that the advance in digital communication has been transformative in a largely positive way—it's enabled me, for example, to keep in touch with my sister who lives halfway across the world; it's allowed marginalised people to find like-minded communities; it's helped shine a light on global atrocities; the list goes on—human beings are not meant to be contactable every minute of every day. For want of a less childish phrase: We all sometimes need to be left TF alone.

"We have to remember that this is a structural problem not of our own making," says Dr Kelly. "It has been created by technology to try and make money out of us. It's a new problem for humans, and we haven't really solved it yet. It's not your fault if you're feeling overwhelmed; this is, in fact, a very normal response to this new social problem. Our brains

Did you see my last message?

Helllooo???

weeks... time to text me back pls

staggering 88 per cent of you feeling the burden of 'always on' communication, on a pretty regular basis.

A more appropriate name for this feeling might be 'digital burnout', which is a type of burnout—a state of emotional and physical exhaustion due to prolonged, usually work-related stress—triggered specifically by excessive use of digital devices. A 2025 survey by EY found that 38 per cent of UK respondents are concerned about their screen time and are keen to have a 'digital detox', with 47 per cent of those aged 18 to 34 seeing their online activities as more disruptive than beneficial to their well-being. And, as per a

are not wired to be constantly wired. “[Getting] instant responses when we message our loved ones means being constantly interrupted, [which] our brains can’t really cope with,” she continues. “Attempts to multitask reduce productivity and increase stress. There’s a sense of being constantly ‘on call.’”

This can lead to your IRL interactions being interrupted, too. “We can confuse quantity for quality—feeling like we are staying in touch by messaging,” says Dr Kelly. “This can also create a state of ‘absent presence’, where the intrusiveness of phones can detrimentally affect our real-life interactions, distracting us [from this quality in-person time].” Admittedly, this doesn’t seem to be as big of a problem for everyone. In our poll, 11 per cent of you said you reply to your friends immediately, even if you’re too busy, while 59 per cent of you said you reply as soon as you’re free to (20 per cent, meanwhile, said it takes a few days, while just 10 per cent said it can regularly take you a week or more).

When I ask my ‘good texter’ friends how they’re so good at texting, one says: “I have the uncontrollable urge to people-please, which includes replying to people if they need me.” Another says: “It’s not that hard. Like now, I just reached for my phone, there was a text from someone I love, and so I’m responding to it. And then I’ll get on with my life.”

And how do these wonderful friends of mine put up with me, their texting Wario? “I’ve adapted to you being a bad texter by just knowing that it’s not personal,” the first friend tells me. “I’ve learned to be more understanding that you find it overwhelming. Also, I have you on Find My Friends, so I don’t have to constantly worry that you’ve died if you haven’t replied for days.”

A third friend says: “I don’t think it’s bad because I trust in our friendship that we’ll text again. If I’m feeling social, I want you to reply immediately, but as soon as I’m not, I don’t even think about it. Although the best is when we’re both replying at the same time, which is heaven.”

It’s taken a little while—and a lot of apologies—but I think I’m at a place with most of my friends where, even if they find it annoying, they understand that it’s not personal. Our poll shows that you largely agree, too, with 70 per cent of you saying you don’t think it’s rude if your friend doesn’t reply within 24 hours.

Some of my friends have even learned how to get me to text back immediately: For example, if they say, as one friend regularly does, “Stop ignoring me,” it seems to shake me into action. Plus, it’s worth noting that, while I don’t feel the need to talk to my mates all the time, I do text them back when we’re actually making plans—and I see my friends (who I love!) a lot.

That’s not to say my bad habits haven’t frustrated or even upset my friends—and, in some cases, it has caused a few friendships to drift, which I regret. I’m still trying to set better boundaries with myself, including: Don’t leave



people on read for two weeks (it’s a WIP), reply quickly if the message is timely and arrange catch-up calls with my long-distance friends.

But I’m also trying to not be so hard on myself—which you, fellow ‘bad texters’, should do, too. “By blaming yourself, it becomes harder to actually solve the problem,” explains Dr Kelly. “Try to take a more realistic and kind perspective—if we can recognise this as a social problem that we’re all trying to navigate, and realise that we’re never going to be able to reply instantly to everyone unless we totally sacrifice our own mental health, then we can feel less guilty about it.”

Equally, if you’re a ‘good texter’ but secretly wish you could take some time off the messaging grind, Dr Kelly suggests that “it might be helpful to go back to what we individually value and care about most, and then try to design our use of tech around this, rather than let our phones dictate how we live.” Reclaiming control, she adds, can help reduce stress levels for everyone—‘good’ and ‘bad’ texters alike.

In short: If I don’t text you back, then don’t take it personally. I just don’t want to talk to you, or anyone, right now. ■

ART OF INFLUENCE: MODERN LUXURY FINDS MEANING

Why authenticity fuels powerful storytelling today—and how my brand is reshaping the narrative for modern lifestyle labels.

In today's world, luxury doesn't shout, it doesn't use excess or attention-seeking to establish its value. Rather, it stays in the way a brand makes you feel, in the aftertaste of an encounter, and in the assurance of a narrative that doesn't have to make an announcement. The core of my work is the belief that true impact comes from people who prioritise meaning over noise in a world where content is in abundance.

As the creator of Brand Talk, I have created a unique presence in India's fashion, luxury, hospitality, and leisure sectors by avoiding the need to make a big statement. Being visible is only one aspect of true influence, it goes together with resonance.

I didn't start out in branding with ambition, but rather with an observation. There was a developing gap, even while most brands were talking all the time, very few of them were actually getting heard. Visuals became more sophisticated and campaigns became louder, but emotional clarity frequently diminished, almost vanished. Collaborating closely with innovative leaders and founders, I witnessed strong concepts fail due to lack of alignment more than lack of inventiveness.

So when alignment exists, influence follows effortlessly. Brand Talk originated at the intersection of noise and nuance. I often think of branding as architecture, a framework. It needs structure, intention, and a vision built to last. In luxury, storytelling cannot be ornamental; it must be foundational. My approach consistently prioritises clarity over excess, focusing on uncovering a brand's true voice and expressing it with quiet confidence. Modern luxury, as I see it, doesn't announce itself, it attracts through depth, consistency, and self-assurance.

Today, luxury talks softly. However, it is quite deliberate. Rarely, there is a single category that defines luxury. Fashion, hospitality, and lifestyle all depend on experience, despite their disparities and differences in form. In terms of fashion, this means prioritizing self-expression and identity over trends and surface-level beauty. Determining a brand's true value, the feeling it arouses, the cultural dialogue it engages in, and the target audience it appeals to becomes difficult. The challenge becomes figuring out what a brand actually stands for, the emotion it evokes, the cultural conversation it participates in, and the demographics it resonates with. In this instance, relevancy leads to visibility. In case of hospitality, a more immersive perspective is needed. Every component, including language, music, lighting, and arrival customs shapes perception. I see hospitality brands as



sensory ecosystems to make sure that communication reflects experience.

Lifestyle brands exist at the intersection of the two, influencing how people live and express themselves each day. Here, storytelling must feel intuitive and lived in, blending seamlessly into everyday life rather than interrupting it. So across all three spaces, my philosophy remains consistent. When luxury is grounded in emotion and clarity, persuasion becomes unnecessary.

Founded as a boutique communications agency, Brand Talk is a direct reflection of my personal ethos of restraint, consistency, and depth. Growth has always been intentional. Rather than scaling rapidly, I chose to build thoughtfully, prioritising meaningful partnerships over volume and longevity over virality. This approach has shaped not only the agency's output, but also its culture.

Speed has never been as important as depth. The customers of the luxury sector today are culturally conscious and emotionally savvy. Instead of a lifestyle, they want to see themselves represented. We value genuine connection over admiration, moving beyond aesthetics into spaces of individuality, empowerment, and trust.

Leadership is another facet of my work in addition to campaigns. The way you lead, listen, and provide space for others to grow is where influence begins on the inside. In a world when digital media rules and stories travel fast, brands have a real obligation to shape culture.

At Brand Talk, each campaign begins with a few simple questions: Does this seem authentic? Does it offer anything worthwhile? Will it go on after this?

Because ephemeral attention isn't the essence of true influence. It's about what's left over once the commotion subsides. Once an experience is carefully crafted, it wins attention rather than demanding it, just like true luxury.

Rent-Free in My Head

We asked you about the sexual fantasies you keep locked away, and let's just say, your imagination did not behave.

As told to Tishya Dubey

"I secretly love the idea of playful restraint—soft ropes, cheeky grins, and that second where I hand over control. It's all trust, laughter, and just enough danger to make everything crackle."

— Khushi Sharma, 22



"I'm intrigued by the predator-prey dynamic. It's the thrill of the chase, the illusion of danger, and the unspoken understanding that it's all chosen. It's taboo enough to stay unshared, playful enough to feel electric, and rooted entirely in trust. That slow-building tension is what makes my heart race, and honestly, that's the part I keep thinking about."

— Meher Arora, 22

"I keep picturing just the two of us on a deserted island, hiding out in a cabana at sunset. Not in a sweeping romance kind of way, but more of a no one's around and we can absolutely misbehave way. It's the privacy that makes it feel naughty; like the fantasy works simply because it's just us and no rules."

— Ayesha Kumar, 23

“A fantasy I don’t usually say out loud is being praised until my brain finally switches off. I like the idea of someone confident taking the lead, noticing the little things, and telling me, very clearly, that I’m doing it right. I’m not into drama or over-the-top theatrics. I want steady control, quiet authority, and a few perfectly-timed good girl moments. In that space, I don’t have to impress or overthink. I just relax, follow, and feel completely at ease. The praise is the power. That’s what makes it addictive.”

— Sanvi Ahluwalia, 21



“I know most guys’ fantasies aren’t exactly shocking, but there’s one I could never admit to my girlfriend. It’s us in the same bed with another guy. It’s charged, intimate, and impossible to ignore. The fantasy isn’t really about sharing her as much as watching her still gravitate towards me—choosing me, again and again. Maybe it’s an ego thing, maybe it’s about reassurance, or maybe it’s just curiosity I don’t plan on acting on. Either way, it lives firmly in fantasy. Private, vivid, and very real in my mind.”

— Virmaan Khanna, 24

“My boyfriend is a doctor, and my imagination refuses to hold back. Somewhere between his calm demeanour and my overactive brain lives a very cheeky role-play fantasy—purely fictional, wildly inappropriate. I keep imagining finding excuses to visit his workplace and slipping into fantasy mode despite knowing exactly where I want it to lead. It’s less about the setting and more about the tension. The looks, the restraint, the pretence. I have the white coat to blame.”

— Jiya Ahuja, 27

“It’s not a wildly kinky fantasy. Maybe it’s just the influence of *Fifty Shades Darker*, and the fact that my boyfriend and I play pool together a little too often. I picture a casual game that slowly turns competitive, with the tension building with every shot and smirk. One moment we’re joking, the next it’s just the two of us, pressed close on the pool table, forgetting what we were playing. In my head, the scene rewrites itself with fewer rules, more chemistry—and it’s definitely better than the movie ever made it.”

— Rhea Malhotra, 19



What's It Really Like to Be a Stay-at-Home Girlfriend?

Spoiler: The junior tradwife life isn't as rosy as it looks online.

By Erika W Smith

By this point, you've definitely seen a tradwife come across your social feeds. Watching their videos is like getting slingshotted into the past. Clad in 1950s-style aprons, newborns strapped to their chests, these women make cereal and snack crackers from scratch while embodying ultratraditional gender roles. "The man, he is the provider, the main breadwinner... The woman, the wife, she is a homemaker... She does the cooking and the cleaning," declares Estee Williams (@EsteeCWilliams) to her more than 1,90,000 TikTok followers in one video. Taken collectively, #tradwife posts like these read like a pre-*Feminine Mystique* guide to middle-class white womanhood—one that's attracting a growing number of younger, unmarried women eager to try out the lifestyle for themselves as stay-at-home girlfriends, or SAHGs.

Perhaps the sheer size of these popular fandoms is the appeal. Nara Smith (@NaraAzizaSmith) and Hannah Neeleman (@BallerinaFarm), mega-influencers whom many view as tradwives, have 7.6 million followers on TikTok and 9 million followers on Instagram, respectively. Perhaps it's the aspirational homes, the carefully curated hair and makeup looks, all those picture-perfect baked goods. Maybe it's the promise of a more secure, less stressful life—a

tantalising lure for overworked, underpaid young women. Or maybe all of the above are why terms like "Stay-at-Home Girlfriend," "Life as a Stay-at-Home Girlfriend," "Stay-at-Home GF," and "SAH GF" each have somewhere between 23 million and 43 million posts on TikTok alone.

Let's be fair for a minute and all acknowledge that on the surface, a SAHG setup does look pretty alluring:

“I knew he had the power to take away my whole life if he wanted to.”

— Bella Greenlee (@ZizzySizzle), a SAHG

Sleeping in, working out in chic neutral sets, showing off Target hauls to praise from faithful followers. Even the deceptively progressive-sounding language kind of intrigues. "People used to ask me, 'What's your dream job?' I never knew the answer. I realised it's because I don't dream of labour. I dream of living a soft, feminine life, and being a hot housewife," says Kendel Kay (@KendelKay), a former SAHG, in a video from September 2023 that now

has 1.7 million views. And honestly, who wouldn't love wandering HomeGoods at 2pm instead of working long hours and achieving 'inbox zero'?

Except here's the major thing: Unlike tradwives, SAHGs don't have any of the legal protections that come with a marriage license. "This is one of the ultimate financial scams," says finance expert Farnoosh Torabi, host of the *So Money* podcast. In the event of a breakup, a tradwife has safeguards like alimony and divided assets in place. But stay-at-home girlfriends (and boyfriends—yes, they're also popping up everywhere on social media) have no such rights. Theoretically, a SAHG could get a prenup-style contract to guarantee some more equal distribution in case things go south, explains Torabi, but that rarely actually happens.

Plus, whereas some influencing trends like FIRE (financial independence, retire early) dispense actually useful money advice, SAHG platforms aren't exactly full of life survival skills. Once a relationship is over, former SAHGs may be worse off financially and career-wise than they were when they started.

Bella Greenlee (@ZizzySizzle) was a SAHG for three years. She fell into the lifestyle slowly in early 2020, when she was unemployed and started documenting her relationship on social media. To her followers, her day-to-day looked cushy as hell. In reality, "I didn't really have a lot to do,



so I was kind of going crazy,” she remembers. Cleaning was normal for her, but sometimes she’d do it just to keep herself entertained. And being fully financially dependent on her now-ex-boyfriend made her feel “like I had to walk on eggshells because I knew he had the power to take away my whole life if he wanted to.” When she was contemplating breaking up, things got very real. “He was funding my life, so I couldn’t just leave,” she says, adding: “I had to make a game plan for myself.”

In a January 2024 TikTok, Greenlee explained her decision to walk away from being a SAHG: “If he is paying for [you] and you don’t have any income at all, there will start to be a resentment. I’m just glad I was young...I was able to start my life before I wasted more years just staying in the house.” The video went viral with 3.3 million views.

There’s also the big irony that for SAHGs who aspire to be legitimate influencers, their no-work way of life is actually...a lot of work. The constant filming and posting is time-

consuming and labour-intensive. Popular stay-at-home-girlfriend accounts are rife with sponsored posts for brands, affiliate links to products on Amazon, and even e-books. Successful SAHGs like Kay have reportedly made around \$2,000 a month (approx. ₹1,81,735) from their social platforms. If this sounds a lot like running and managing a business, that’s because it is. A lucrative one for a lucky few—but a mostly unpaid (and risky) one for SAHGs still toiling to make a name for themselves.

Ari Luu (@YoohooIts.AriLuu), another recovering stay-at-home girlfriend who’s now actively reinventing herself, knows this all too well. In a November 2023 episode of her podcast *Delusional Daydreams*, she confessed she had nothing—no car, no job, no money—after being a SAHG for nearly four years. She’d been responsible only for doing chores, and after a while, that led her to begin questioning her self-worth. “I wanted to feel like I was doing something for myself. I wanted to be

proud of my own life as well,” she says.

The aftermath of all this can vary ex-SAHG to ex-SAHG. After her breakup, Kay pivoted pretty easily into becoming a full-time lifestyle influencer. She now posts beauty and fast-fashion sponsored content and promotes products on TikTok Shop. Luu and Greenlee are also focused on making their own money. Greenlee moved in with her dad and started saving cash from babysitting gigs and brand deals. Now, she’s a full-time beauty and lifestyle content creator, determined not to make the same relationship choices in the future.

“I make it known to whoever I’m talking to that I’m going to make my own money,” she says. “I’m never going to 100 per cent rely on that person.”

Ideally, more former SAHGs will get this honest on their platforms about what they’ve learnt and where they’re going next. As Luu says, “Sometimes you need to crumble a weak foundation to build a stronger one that you’re truly meant for.” ■

Vibe Check



Get the Bag

What's that thing Elle Woods says about it being hard?

Eat, Post, Repeat: Cakes for the Scroll Age

Inside the rise of impossible-to-ignore cakes and the bakers making them worth the splurge.

By Bani Sachar

There was a time when a celebration cake was purely ceremonial. It showed up at the end of the party, sang its song, got sliced, and disappeared. Today, the cake arrives early. It matches the outfit, complements the decor, and has texture, colour, and a personality. It is photographed before it is cut—and sometimes admired long after the candles are blown out. Welcome to the era of the statement (sometimes referred to as ‘performative’) cakes—a form of self-expression and some light-hearted show-off.

Across India’s most exciting bakeries, cakes are bidding adieu to their previous status of ‘just a sweet ending’ and unfolding as emotional centrepieces. Sculptural but thoughtful. Visually striking but flavour-forward. Designed to feel intentional rather than just



Miam is known for its unconventionally shaped cakes

Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS

indulgent. And while Instagram may have accelerated this shift, what's really driving it is something deeper: The way we now approach celebration itself. Post-pandemic, milestones feel more loaded. Smaller gatherings, fewer occasions, and a renewed awareness that moments like these matter.

TOO PRETTY TO EAT

Many chefs resist calling these desserts performative. At Mumbai's Maska Bakery, known for its imaginative and joyful preparations, founder Heena Punwani prefers to think of cakes as storytelling tools rather than spectacles. "The drama should come from meaning rather than excess," she explains, adding that familiar flavours are what anchor even the most unexpected forms. Visually, her cakes often borrow from Bombay's bakery legacy—soft edges, playful forms, and nostalgic cues—filtered through a contemporary lens. Think layered sponges finished with minimal frosting, sculptural accents, and flavours that feel instantly familiar yet elevated: Coffee, citrus, nuts, spice. A rum ball might return as a sculptural centrepiece, but the flavour remains comforting, recognisable, and rooted. This approach reflects a wider shift in how people are buying cake today. Customers aren't ordering because an occasion demands it; they're commissioning because they want the dessert to take the spotlight.

For Mumbai-based Annie of Baked with Love by Annie (informally hailed as Bollywood's favourite baker), intention often shows up as narrative. Her cakes are known for their soft, romantic aesthetic featuring hand-finished textures, pastel palettes, sculpted piping, and intricate details. Flavour-wise, she leans into crowd-pleasers done thoughtfully: Chocolate layered with depth, vanilla that tastes anything but plain, fruit notes that balance sweetness. Fruit and chocolate tart cakes are a specialty. Cakes today, she believes, are part indulgence, part documentation. "People want their

cake to frame the memory," she says, pointing to how mood boards, colour palettes, and references now form the starting point of most conversations. In a world where celebrations live on camera long after they end, the cake gains even more prominence: Something that holds attention in a scroll—and in real life. Social media has undeniably changed the entry point. Many clients now begin by asking how a cake will photograph, how it will sit on a grid, look under warm lights and flash. But aesthetics only get the order. Flavour is what earns loyalty. Especially in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, where diners may be more opinionated and exacting.

That tension between visual impact and culinary integrity is where strong baker identities matter most. At the

Delhi-headquartered Miam Pâtisserie, founder Bani Nanda has built her brand by drawing clear boundaries. Her cakes are recognisable for their mould-driven forms and clean aesthetic, but never feel overstyled. They almost look too perfect to touch, until you do. Inside, the flavours are deliberately balanced. Textures that move between mousse, sponge, and crunch. Think winter details like strawberry, rhubarb, and perilla seeds, or bestsellers that blend dark chocolate, salted caramel, galgal zest and more with three-dimensional surface details and surreal glazing. "Trends are temporary. Taste is what brings people back," Nanda says. The philosophy is simple: One can dress a cake endlessly, but it's the eating experience that builds trust.



A floral detail cake by Blanchette



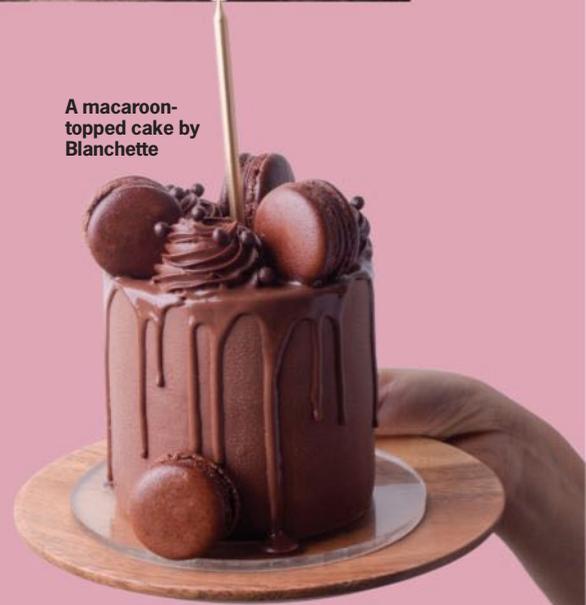
SPECTACLE AND SOUL

Mumbai-based Blanchette's Bianca Manik approaches this moment with restraint rather than maximalism. Her designs allude to a rustic and organic aesthetic, favouring texture over polish. Think imperfect finishes, natural tones. Flavours follow the same logic—ingredient-led, nostalgic, and comforting, with a focus on balance rather than excess sweetness. While first-time clients may still lead with visual references, repeat customers tend to care far more about how the cake feels once it's cut and shared. "A cake being finished within hours is a bigger compliment than one being admired from afar," she notes. Here, performance is quiet. Their signature gooey Comfort Cake is a prime example. Even established names like Bunty Mahajan's Deliciae have noted how design-driven cakes have become central to modern celebrations. A foolproof Mumbai staple, Deliciae is known for cakes that look good and taste even

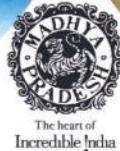
better: Reliable, crowd-pleasing, and built to deliver every single time. Their Chocolate Strawberry Gateau is to die for. Clients today are more informed, specific, and willing to invest in cakes that act as conversation starters. "People want cakes that reflect the vibe of the event," Mahajan says, noting how cakes that match decor, outfits, or themes are no longer unusual—they're expected.

So, where is this all headed? Surprisingly, not towards bigger or louder cakes. If anything, bakers are noticing a shift towards restraint. Away from overt spectacle and towards texture, nuance, and handmade finishes. Think less engineered perfection and more soul. Cakes that still photograph beautifully (duh), but feel emotionally resonant. The cake has entered its era not as a prop, but as a personality. And in a world where everything is content, that might just be the most indulgent thing of all. ■

A macaroon-topped cake by Blanchette



One can dress a cake endlessly, but it's the eating experience that builds trust.



MADHYA PRADESH TAKES TOURISM TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH HELICOPTER SERVICE

Avast landscape punctuated by spiritual hubs, ancient monuments and sites where wildlife and natural beauty abound. Exploring all of Madhya Pradesh would take a lifetime! In today's age of pressed timelines, Madhya Pradesh presents a service to assure the elderly pilgrim of safe and comfortable trips and delight the contemporary traveller. The PM Shri Heli Tourism Service offers fast and affordable aerial connectivity between major attractions, replacing long road journeys with short flights.

Here's a snapshot of how this integrated aerial network will bring the state's great destinations closer to each other than ever before:-

Navigating Nature: Bhopal- Madai-Pachmarhi

A weekend getaway from Bhopal to the picturesque locales of Madai and Pachmarhi involves more than five hours of driving on winding roads. Turn this into an effortless and affordable journey via just an hour of helicopter hopping. Cruise along dreamy islands of the Tawa Dam & reservoir or laze in the infinity pool of the MP Tawa Resort. Enjoy a never-before 45-minute joyride over the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve, touching incredible nature-based experiences.

Heritage Hopping: Bhopal – Khajuraho – Rewa – Satna – Singrauli

Beyond helicopters, leverage the PM Shri Vayu Paryatan Seva and hop from Bhopal to explore historic temples, palaces and caves in Khajuraho, Rewa, Satna and Singrauli.

If you have a destination, and are short on time, Madhya Pradesh's newly launched aerial services offer curated experiences for the contemporary traveller. Reduce the strain of long road journeys and take in more of the magical heart of India by maximizing your holiday time.

Wildlife & Worship: Jabalpur - Maihar - Chitrakoot - Kanha - Bandhavgarh - Amarkantak

Base yourself in Jabalpur to explore the Mahakoshal region. Helicopter rides make tiger spotting in the stunning flora and fauna of Bandhavgarh and Kanha's sanctuaries even easier. Taking the aerial route empowers visitors with fast and smooth trips to pray at the Sharda Devi Shaktipeeth at Maihar, or at the mouth of the Narmada at Amarkantak. Relive the Ramayana with a flying visit to the pilgrim town of Chitrakoot.

Seamless Spirituality: Indore-Ujjain-Omkareshwar

Hop on to a helicopter at Indore and cut travel time to Ujjain by an hour. Do a darshan at the iconic Mahakaleshwar Temple, pray at the Kaal Bhairav and Harsiddhi shrines and walk through the Bhartihari Caves. You can even sample a traditional Ujjain thali and then do what was unimaginable earlier – taking the aerial route once more, save over three hours and land at Omkareshwar for a same-day darshan of the state's other Jyotirlinga too. Truly a blessing, especially for senior citizens who can travel in comfort!

The Narmada Parikrama: Circle of Faith

Do a symbolic circumambulation of the mighty Narmada River, using a mix of aerial and road routes while walking the last mile. In a spiritually transformative journey that covers more than three thousand kilometres, a traveller touches a range of experiences – from stunning shrines to tribal life, from forests and wildlife to ancient rituals, from historical anecdotes to riverine adventures. It is a journey for the ages!



ARISSA KHAN

The 30-year-old Mumbai-based model-turned-entrepreneur, fashion content creator, and mother to the celeb-favourite brand Purple Paisley takes the iconic Cosmo quiz.

Photographer: **MOHIT MEHTA**; Hair Artist: **NEEDA IQBAL KHAN**; Styling and Makeup: **ARISSA KHAN**

COSMO
QUIZ



Nickname:

AK/ARI

Age:

thirty young

Sun/Moon:

Aries/Cancer

Relationship status:

SECRET 😊

Last person I texted was:

Mum

My fashion ins and outs of 2026:

COMFORT XTRENDS

One resolution for 2026
I won't break:

being fearless

My favourite song to sing
in the shower:

good morning - Kanye West 🎵

The last time I cried was:

ate a spicy chip

My first celeb crush was:

SALMAN KHAN

If I worked at Cosmo,
I'd want my job to be:

EDITOR

Best relationship advice:

be better first 🐶

Worst relationship advice:

"too many fish in the sea"

The game show/reality
show I'd absolutely win:

TAKESHI'S CASTLE

My biggest turn-on is:

an intelligent mind

If I could put anyone on
the cover of Cosmo, I'd put:

my cats
🐱🐱

Money Talks... and So Should Couples

This Valentine's, Sonia Shenoy speaks to *Cosmo* about financial non-negotiables, red flags, and wallet rules for couples at different life stages.

Words by Vrinda Jaiswal

Illustration by Pragalbha Singh



From breakfast debates to upcoming vacations, we talk about it all: “Let’s try that new cafe” “Let’s plan a cooking date this weekend” “Phuket or Goa for the trip?” But the moment the subject shifts to money, many couples take a polite sidestep—the discomfort of discussing finances is real—and it impacts relationships in myriad ways. Thus, the bills often remain blurry, and so do lifestyle expectations.

Cosmopolitan India learns with Sonia Shenoy, independent business journalist and finance subject matter expert, that money isn’t the villain in a relationship...the lack of conversation about it is. And how honesty about bank notifications can be a form of care. Below, we decode how instead of avoidance, couples can start talking about money without losing the romance.

At what stage of a relationship should couples start having honest money conversations?

You should start as early as possible, and honestly, it’s about the consistency and depth of the conversation. In the early stages of a relationship, one isn’t aware about how their partner handles finances. You just need to understand their general attitude towards money. What is their lifestyle expectation? While one partner may want to travel the world, the other’s approach may be a bit more frugal. Now, these conversations are those you should have early in your relationship. Because only then can one set realistic expectations, and there won’t be as much room for disappointment. At different life stages, you can have different money conversations; the key is to start having them early—and consistently.

How should couples handle situations where one partner earns significantly more than the other?

The problem is, when one partner earns more than the other, the relationship doesn’t feel fair. It feels



Sonia Shenoy, independent business journalist and finance subject matter expert

“The income of a husband and wife should be kept entirely separate from their worth in the relationship.”

like one person is dependent on the other. But the fact is that one person *has* to be dependent on the other—so, they must figure out what their comfort zone is. It’s not the income gap. It’s the unspoken expectations between the two partners. There are phases of life when one partner is going through a hard time, maybe a health-related issue, and you have to be flexible at work. So, money-wise, the relationship will never be the same throughout. The income of a husband and wife should be kept entirely separate from their worth in the relationship. My advice is, fully pool your income into one basket—its ideal for long-term couples and requires a lot of trust and shared values. If that doesn’t work for you, then split equally.

Do you recommend joint bank accounts, separate accounts, or a hybrid system for modern couples?

I don’t recommend a joint bank account for married couples—even those without children. I feel a joint expense should only be made for a

common project. And for a couple, the primary joint project is a child. Once you have a child, you have a lot of fixed expenses like school fees, transportation, tuition fees etc. Besides that, every person should have their own bank account, since spending patterns may vary. You can be aware of the other person’s patterns, but you needn’t be a daily participant in it.

What are some red flags when it comes to money?

I think the biggest red flag is the lack of transparency. If a partner is hiding financial matters like debt, loans, credit card debt, their income, their expenditures, and is actively avoiding money conversations, it’s a pretty big red flag. The second biggest red flag is controlling a person through money: “I earn more money, so I will decide what the expenses are.” Monitoring, questioning every expense, and restricting access are big red flags. A lot of women earn money and give it to their partners, subsequently losing access to it. Married couples go through a lot of financial abuse in different ways, and they may not even realise it.

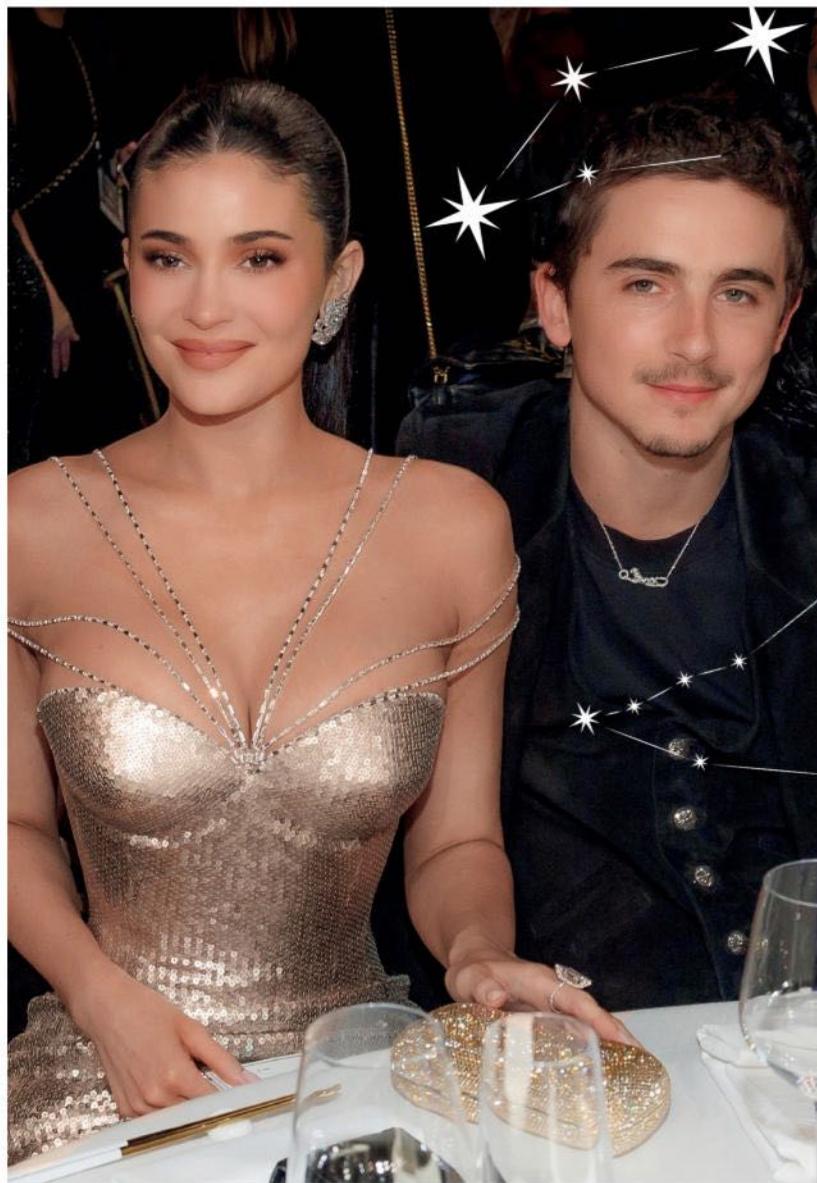
If you had to share three non-negotiable financial rules for couples, what would they be?

First is transparency. Being extremely transparent about what you have when you start out in the relationship. Transparency about your income, debt, loans, credit card expenditures, and the financial obligations to your family. Second is, of course, no financial abuse. Never use money as power: “I earn more, so I decide what to do with it.” Withholding money, guilt tripping, shaming, lying etc—avoid these at all costs. Third is the equality around money. This doesn’t mean that both partners should earn or spend the same. Equality means what works for one partner should also work for the other, irrespective of whether they earn or not. Transparency, safety around money, and equality around money...I would recommend every couple to bring these into their relationship. ■

The Stars on Your Favourite Stars

Astrologers break down the cosmic compatibility of celebrity couples. Are they meant to be...or will they have broken up by the time this story comes out?

By Christen A. Johnson



KYLIE JENNER AND TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET LEO ♥ CAPRICORN

Sorry to everyone not actively shipping these two, but Kylie and Timmy just might be in it for the long haul. "All of his Capricorn placements fall in his 5th house, which governs romance, sex, and fun," says astrologer Jake Register. And her Capricorn placements are in her 1st house, ruling everything that makes her who she is. Meaning: "Timothée just 'gets' her," Register says.

His Venus in Aquarius means he is able to easily draw out and celebrate all of her Leo traits. "And because they both have their Moons in water signs," says Register, "they understand each other on a level beyond the superficial."

Plus, the North Node of Fate, which influences the future, "just began its year-and-a-half-long journey through Timothée's 7th house, which rules partnerships and marriage," he says. So don't be surprised if by July 2026, these two are either engaged or fully wedded.



TYGA AND MADELAINE PETSCH SCORPIO ♥ LEO

These two pairing up was not on anyone's 2025 bingo card, but they might not be as random as you think. According to the cosmos, they had chemistry right from the start, thanks to their Sun (Madelaine) and Moon (Tyga) both being in Leo. This is a huge plus, because it can signal lasting success.

It also gives her an innate understanding of him and his emotions, while it enables him to make her feel like the most special girl in the world.

Their biggest challenge might come from their Mercury placements (hers in Virgo; his in Sag) "squaring," aka the thing that can cause conflict. Because Mercury rules communication, they might find themselves having to be extra mindful of how they talk to each other.

MONET MCMICHAEL AND JALEN NOBLE AQUARIUS ♥ TAURUS

If you're locked in on their TikToks, you know there's a palpable natural compatibility between Monet and Jalen. Ironically, the couple's challenges stem from the planets of love.

"Monet's Venus in Capricorn desires stable, long-lasting relationships," explains Register. "Jalen's Venus in Aries likes things fast and exciting."

Meanwhile, their Mars placements are in Pisces (Monet) and Leo (Jalen), two signs that have nothing in common. "This could lead to hot and cold feelings," says Register. "I suspect Jalen will soon have some trouble figuring out what he wants." But if they're in a good place, Neptune in Aries this spring will bring their dream 'ship to life.



LILY-ROSE DEPP AND 070 SHAKE GEMINI ♥ GEMINI

Lily-Rose's chart has a difficult placement: Saturn in her 7th house. This signals she probably hasn't seen a lot of healthy relationships in the past, and may have some avoidant tendencies as a result, says Register.

But her Venus in Cancer does soften those impulses, making her generally sensitive and open to wanting to love, he says. Good thing 070 Shake has her Moon and Mars signs in Virgo, making her the ultimate caretaker. So she is motivated to break down any walls Lily-Rose puts up, and is willing to be patient and put in the work to make Lily-Rose feel safe enough to forge a deep bond.

Last year, Jupiter in Gemini brought a lot of growth for each of them, but this year, expect to see a lot more of them growing as partners. If they make it to 2026 together, they'll be ready for whatever challenges Saturn in Aries throws their way. And if they survive that, they'll likely "stick together forever," predicts Register.



LADY GAGA AND MICHAEL POLANSKY LIBRA ♥ ARIES

We've heard it before that opposites attract, especially in romance. That's definitely the case for Aries and Libra, who oppose each other on the zodiac wheel. In Lady Gaga and Michael Polansky's case, Gaga's energy is fearless, expressive, and unapologetically bold, while Michael's Libra charm brings balance, calm, and emotional intelligence to the relationship. She leads with instinct; he counters with thoughtfulness. Together, they form a classic zodiac power pairing. Air fuels fire and fire keeps air alive.

For these two signs, 2026 brings bold moves, honest conversations, and a deeper understanding of what love really needs. The stars suggest this is a year where passion matures into partnership.

Cosmo Catch Up

1 BRB, Finding Someone to Kiss

British singer-songwriter Harry Styles has announced his much-anticipated album, *Kiss All the Time. Disco, Occasionally*. After Styles' hiatus of almost four years, the album is set to release on March 6. Can't. Keep. Calm.



2 Leading the Charge

Thai rapper, singer, actor, and member of the South Korean girl band

BLACKPINK, Lisa has partnered with athletic footwear and apparel giant Nike to harness the power of fashion as a catalyst for confidence and female empowerment. This "long-term partnership" is expected to talk the talk, and run the walk.



3 Cultured Perfection

Amid the Parisian hustle, Indian craft took confident strides down the runway as Kartik Research showcased its Autumn/Winter'26 collection, Raag. Beautiful textiles and desi heritage made the range feel modern, curated, and culturally relevant. The collection is inspired by Indian archival textiles from the 1970s, and it includes embroidered barn coats, tuxedo jackets, oversized linen suits, and more. Consider us obsessed.



Here's to 130 Years of Chic

4

Luxury fashion label Louis Vuitton is celebrating 130 years of its iconic monogram, and we're here for it! The Global Monogram Anniversary celebrations kicked off in January and will continue through the year, across all countries, especially for its five icons: Noé, Keepall, Speedy, Alma, and Neverfull.



5 An Ode to the Legend

Italian fashion designer Valentino Garavani, aka

the Italian fashion emperor, passed away at the age of 93 on January 19. The designer took his last breath surrounded by loved ones at his Roman residence. Leaving behind a strong legacy, Garavani's creativity, glamour, and achievements will remain forever.



Images: RESPECTIVE BRANDS, SHUTTERSTOCK, and GETTY IMAGES

6

A Red-Hot Debut

American rapper and actor Jaden Smith's showcase of his debut collection as Men's creative director for Christian Louboutin at the Paris Fashion Week was nothing short of spectacular. Featuring leather footwear, bags, penny loafers, pumps and more, the collection was bold and striking. And well, no points for guessing what the main colour of the collection was (ahem, red)!



7



Memory Store

The contemporary fashion label, Dhruv Kapoor, has opened the doors to its first flagship store in New Delhi. The space is designed to engage; showcasing soft forms, beautiful ensembles, and elemental materials, while also featuring trippy engineered soundscaping. Entering this intersection of memories, we have never whipped out our credit card faster!

8



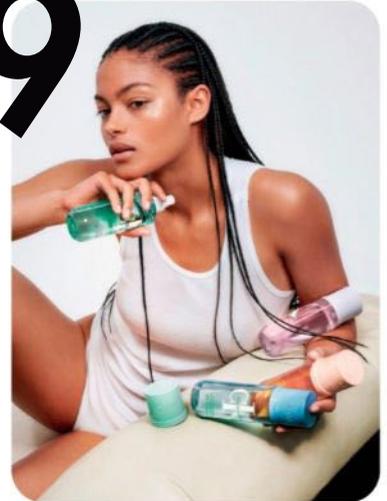
Here's the Tea

No, you don't need to hop on a plane to Thailand every time you're craving pad thai because Bangkok's most celebrated and Michelin-recognised Thai dining restaurant, Nara Thai, is now in India. Under the aegis of the Aditya Birla New Age Hospitality, the restaurant has launched in Gurugram.

9

Love at First Spritz

The American fashion and lifestyle brand Calvin Klein has recently introduced a collection of hair and body perfume mists. It includes four vibrant and easy-to-wear body scents that claim to not feel too heavy or overpowering to wear. While each of the four fragrances smell good, we took the brand's advice and merged two, making our own signature fragrance. Patiently waiting for the compliments to roll in!



10

AI in Beauty

Makeup is every baddie's sweet spot, and L'Oréal just announced that they're establishing a global beauty tech hub in Hyderabad! Run, don't walk, etc. With millions of dollars worth of investments, L'Oréal has the beauty industry and us completely shook. With the aim to serve AI-powered beauty tech innovations, L'Oréal x Hyderabad is set to go down as one for the books.

11

Change in Leadership

Leaving Italian fashion house Bottega Veneta, Bartolomeo Rongone has been appointed CEO of the fashion conglomerate, Moncler Group, effective from April 1. With years of experience to stand on, Rongone looks forward to leading the company towards new achievements. The only thing that could warm us more than this news is a pink puffer Moncler jacket!



Your Horoscope for the Season Ahead

2026 erupts with eclipses and game-changing New Moons. From love awakenings to career shake-ups, here's how the planets will shape your transition into spring.

By Kerry Ward, aka Tarotbella



ARIES

January's New Moon in Capricorn has you raring to go on your career and wealth creation—but practice patience. Think outside the box before making big moves. February and March's eclipses reset your relationships. Your progress in this phase comes from thinking differently and shifting lanes.



TAURUS

This late winter phase is marked by eclipse season's disruption in your realm and routines. But by February, fresh beliefs steer you to stability—a stronger, safer position than where you were. March's eclipse Full Moon completes the cycle. Whatever was cleared was an underlying block to your future prosperity.



GEMINI

February's Full Moon in Leo puts the spotlight on your relationships, which amplifies your emotional awareness. Listen to your heart as much as your head. The Aquarius New Moon will bring new connections, perhaps ones that test the current. Be thoughtful about who you prioritise—and why.



CANCER

The January Capricorn New Moon gives you your 2026 resolutions, supercharged by the lunar energy that propels you towards decisive choices. Venus in Pisces at Valentine's stirs up new love. The year is starting with lots of new opportunities. Move forward confidently. You're charting a new course.



LEO

The Full Moon in your sign starts February with you in the spotlight, but do remember to share resources, ask for input, and collaborate instead of going solo by default. Eclipse season (February through early March) brings unexpected opportunities to ensure these collective ideas land and succeed with a flourish.



VIRGO

Your 2026 focus on relationship-building and making magic memories can start when Aquarius season begins mid-January. An opportunity comes with the Full Moon in Leo, and again with the finale of the zodiac calendar in Pisces season mid-February. Be imaginative—even childlike—with what you organise.



LIBRA

There are so many opportunities for positive relationship changes in this early part of 2026 (Venus in Pisces, New Moon in Aquarius, Pisces season), so draw closer to your confidants and spill your secrets, fears, and anxieties. Leave winter behind, feeling purged of dread or worry, and step into your best spring yet!



SCORPIO

The start of 2026 brings you abundance, but also the need to discern your focus. January's Capricorn New Moon strengthens career ambitions, while March's eclipse highlights relationship intimacy. If you dream big and consciously organise yourself in alignment with that, you'll find surprising flow.



SAGITTARIUS

Eclipse season amplifies clarity and decisions—this is your moment to get to the heart of matters that need attention. February brings luck and success via your network and relationships, and March's lunar energy spotlights creativity. Speak your truth, act decisively, and you'll build new foundations for the year ahead.



CAPRICORN

Your sign's New Moon in January brings career and wealth to the foreground, but be mindful of not hedging your bets over too many options. What really matters will crystallise by the start of Pisces season, and then you can get creative with your ideas. Stay focused during March's eclipse, which rebalances everything.



AQUARIUS

The hard-working Capricorn New Moon calls for patience and persistence—daily baby steps that will result in a big leap by March. Your sign's season from mid-January will bring inventive creativity to the party, letting you showcase your mega brainpower! Eclipse season adds a little chaos, which you always thrive in.



PISCES

As we approach the end of the astrological year (your sign's season, the final sign), your psychic powers grow. It's time for deep self-reflection: Maybe a spiritual awakening or a higher calling. January's New Moon sparks new ideas here and February's Full Moon reveals how to implement them.

HARLEY-
DAVIDSON **X**
440T

BEYOND THE EVERYDAY



EX-SHOWROOM PRICE

₹ 2 79 500

Scan this QR Code or visit
www.harley-davidsonx440.com
to know more about the
Harley-Davidson® X440 T.



JENNIFER LAWRENCE



Elegance is an attitude
LONGINES

LONGINES BOUTIQUES

Delhi • Noida • Hyderabad • Bangalore • Chennai

Trivandrum • Kochi • Mumbai

Also available at selected retailers.

Now available online at Tata CLiQ Luxury



LONGINES
PRIMALUNA