Social, BKCb AND VERSOVA

Harif Kureishi of St-art India Foundation, that's behind the washrooms at Capital Social and Versova Social, remembers the washrooms he saw in Berlin. "Every washroom was a piece of art that you walked into. People were encouraged to write graffiti on the wall, and draw or sketch. So, it's like layers and layers of art and graffiti, and it's beautiful," he says.

His design for Versova Social is a girl and a boy on a seesaw embedded into a green wall of leaves, and it needs to be seen from afar to figure out which side has the door you need to open. "The difference is subtle, just one ponytail," he says.

At Capital Social, the theme is Communist, with a man and a woman holding a sickle. But, to us, it just looks all the same. "The point there was to have a Communist hangout in the middle of all that surrounds us."

And it gets curiuouser,
DELLA ADVENTURES, LONAVALA

DELLA seems to have really pushed the envelope when it comes to bathrooms, and almost makes a woman believe she could have walked in on a man doing his business, with a man with his back towards them. This in, in fact, a mannequin. The man's washroom has a generous use of glass, and the impression of a catwalk ramp with female mannequins who watch you as you use the bathroom. Architect Jimmy Mistry, Principal Designer & Owner of Della Group, says, "Washrooms tend to evoke different emotions in people. While customer expectations might be conservative or even indifferent in case of public washrooms, here at Della, we explore the fun element. The washrooms are far from prosaic and are, in fact, naughty, without being overt-the-top, or crude. They get the shock value right." Reactions at Della have gone from people being amused to taking pictures with the mannequins. "In fact, customers take home the hair pieces on the mannequins as souvenirs. We've lost so many of them that finally we had to stop putting a wig on them."

'He who drinks soma will be impervious to fire'

Here, the author writes of som, the first alcoholic drink to find mention in Rig Veda in 1700 BC.

THE juice of the soma plant is considered an intoxicant, delivering an euphoric high. It sounds very similar to the liquor of the lican ayahusca, a plant-based drink which has hallucinogenic properties (thanks to dimethyltryptamine, or DMT). Of what we can gather from textual descriptions, soma had long stalks, tawny in colour and 15 leaves (although the Vedas record this plant as being leafless). Some point out that it was possibly a creeper (somalatha is a candidate for this, still found in the Himalayas) with a bulb but it couldn't have been the source of the juice as it is toxic to humans and, strangely enough, white ants.

How one found that out will perhaps remain the bigger mystery. The sacred juice was almost milky in nature and obtained by the pressing (and even pounding) of the stalks and stems. It was common to mix this with milk and honey. Although it grew commonly and widely in the Himalayan reaches, nobody knows where it came from or where it was native. It was known to be big on the trade circuit, so it could have just as easily arrived in someone's backpack and then found its root here with much commercial success, which would have further boosted its popularity as a commodity on the trade route. What does remain are entire strings of songs (well, prayers more correctly) offering apologies to the gods for the loss of the plant and its marvelous elixir. Shushruta recorded in his famous medical compendium, the Samhita, that he who drinks soma will not age and will be impervious to fire, poison or weapon attack. He can master all the Vedas and will find success wherever he goes. Furthermore, he could imbibe the drinker with the energy of a 1000 elephants! But the trouble was that one really had to prepare to drink soma — not before imbuing it, but for the period which followed right after.