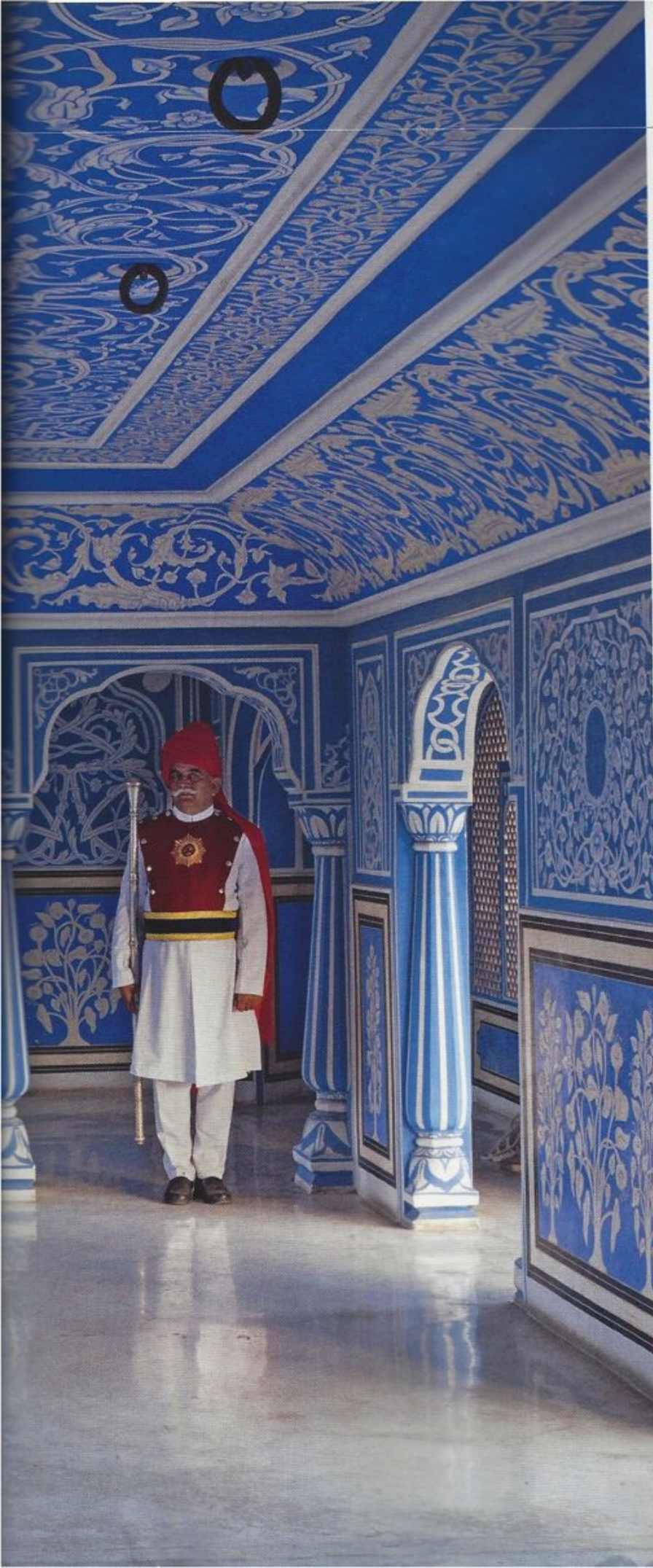

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The maharaja Padmanabh 'Pacho' Singh in Jaipur City Palace's Sukh Niwas – the Hall Of Rest



RAJASTHAN, INDIA

Join the jet set in Jaipur

The Gen Z heir to a thousand years of history is leading his city into 2020 and beyond

Story by **Ned Donovan**
Photographs by **Derry Moore**

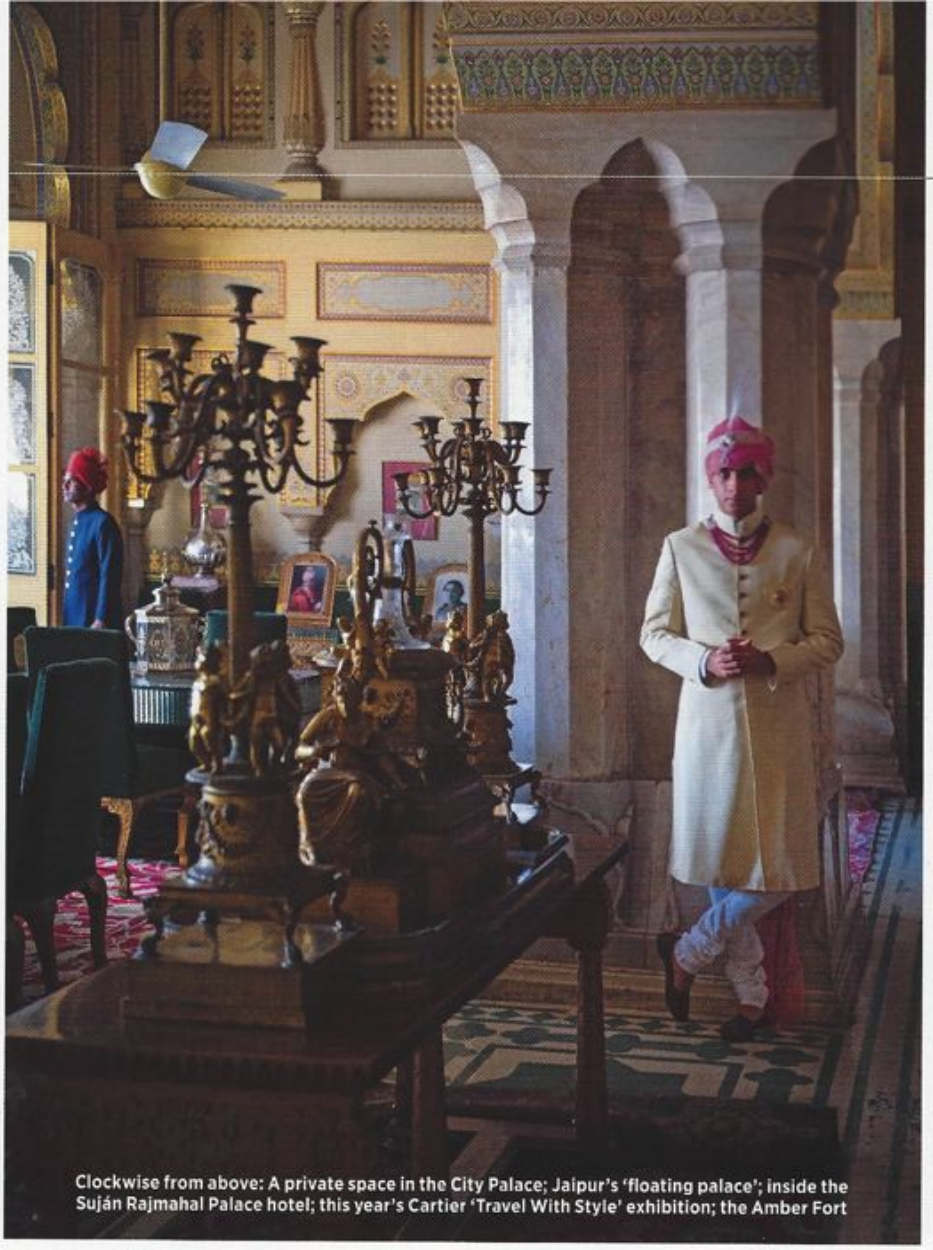
These days in Jaipur, it's not hard to find Europeans who came for a holiday and, just hours before their return flight, decided to quit dreary jobs back home and settle here permanently instead. And with the capital of the northwest Indian state of Rajasthan undergoing a renaissance, it is not a stupid decision.

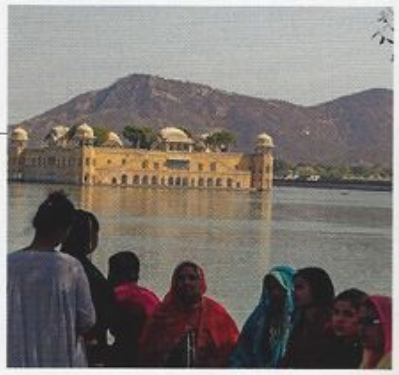
Jaipur has long been a staple of what the travel trade call the "Golden Triangle". Every day, thousands of tourists are shuttled between here, Delhi and Agra to see the Taj Mahal. But the type of visitor to Jaipur has been changing. The tour groups and backpackers are still here, but young, independent travellers are turning Jaipur into the ultimate fashionable city break.

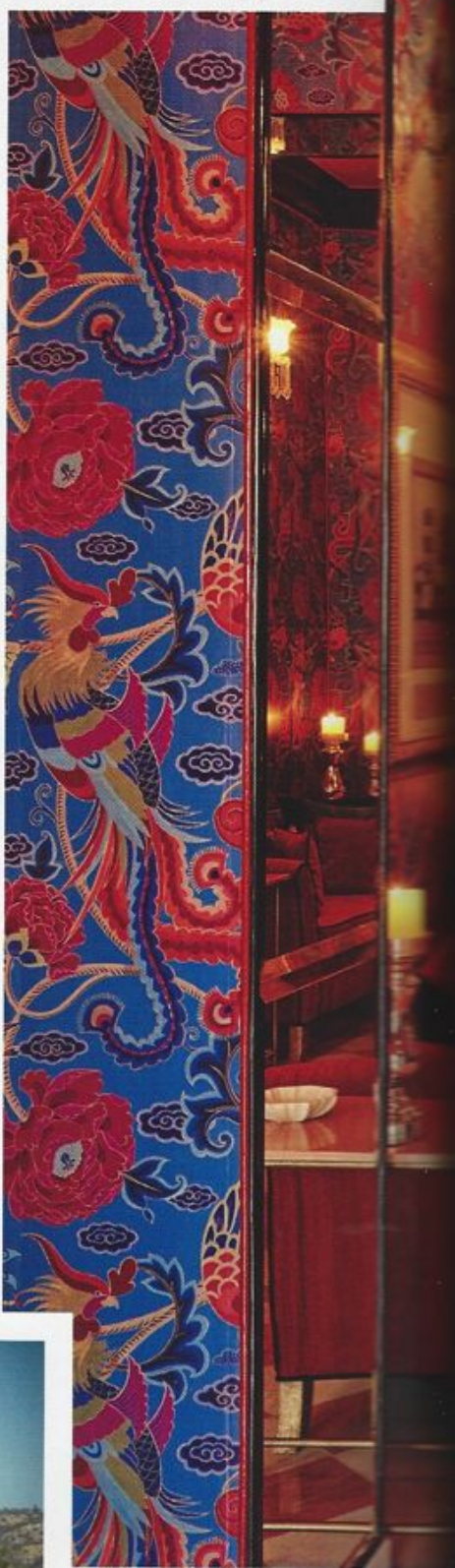
Indians and Europeans alike have set up successful art and design businesses in recent years, furnishing homes and outfits across the world. Their new-found popularity, combined with centuries as a hub for textiles and jewellery has brought fresh life to the city.

Of course, the fascination with Jaipur goes back centuries. "It is a city to see and to puzzle over," Kipling wrote in a newspaper column in 1887, declaring it to be "the city of the globe-trotter". Back then Jaipur was a princely state, ruled by a maharaja who showed his allegiance to the British monarch in return for domestic control of his city. The city itself is in fact named after one of the ruling princes, Jai Singh, who built his town as one of Asia's first entirely planned cities. "Many years afterwards," Kipling wrote, "the good people of America builded their towns after this pattern, but knowing nothing of Jai Singh, they took all the credit to themselves."

In the 132 years since those words were >>







Clockwise from above: A private space in the City Palace; Jaipur's 'floating palace'; inside the Suján Rajmahal Palace hotel; this year's Cartier 'Travel With Style' exhibition; the Amber Fort

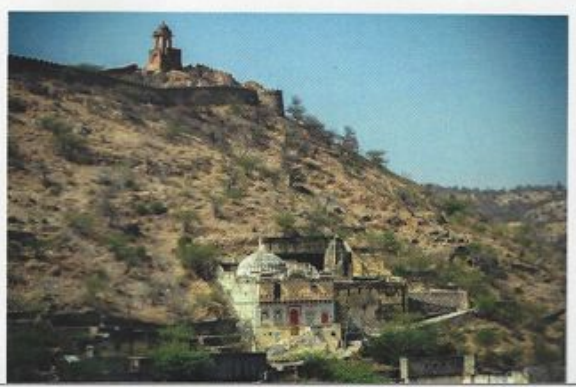
>> written, Jaipur has seen India fight for and gain independence and its maharajas deposed, but its beauty has not faded. And while the city's royal family no longer rule, they still see it as their duty to promote Jaipur, just as their predecessors did for almost a millennium.

The view is epitomised in the man who would be king, 21-year-old Padmanabh Singh. Singh succeeded his grandfather as maharaja in 2011. While India no longer officially recognises the titles of royals, many locals still see Singh – known as Pacho to friends – and his family as the city's most important figures and he doesn't want to let them down.

India is well known for its religious festivals and it has been Singh's aim to combine this with an opportunity to promote tourism. Once the centre of Jaipur State, the City Palace right in the middle of town, is now the centre for a new "season". Singh organises events over several days, to which he invites hundreds of people, including celebrities and royals from all over the world.

As well as being great parties, the maharaja's guests also learn about their religious and cultural significance and have plenty of opportunities to explore the city and contribute to the local economy.

Some of Jaipur's shops have been around for aeons. The Gem Palace once outfitted Indian princes and British viceroys alike and now the Kasliwal family sell their handmade creations to visiting Hollywood stars, social media influencers and Arab sheikhs. Other international companies use the city as a base for design and creation, such as the jewellery house Marie-Hélène De Taillac. It has also become a key destination for interior designers. It is not unusual to find a sofa in London upholstered with designs by the likes >>





Bars and cafés are cacophonies of Italian and French... the dish of choice might be carbonara

>> of Thierry Journo, a French artist now based in Rajasthan.

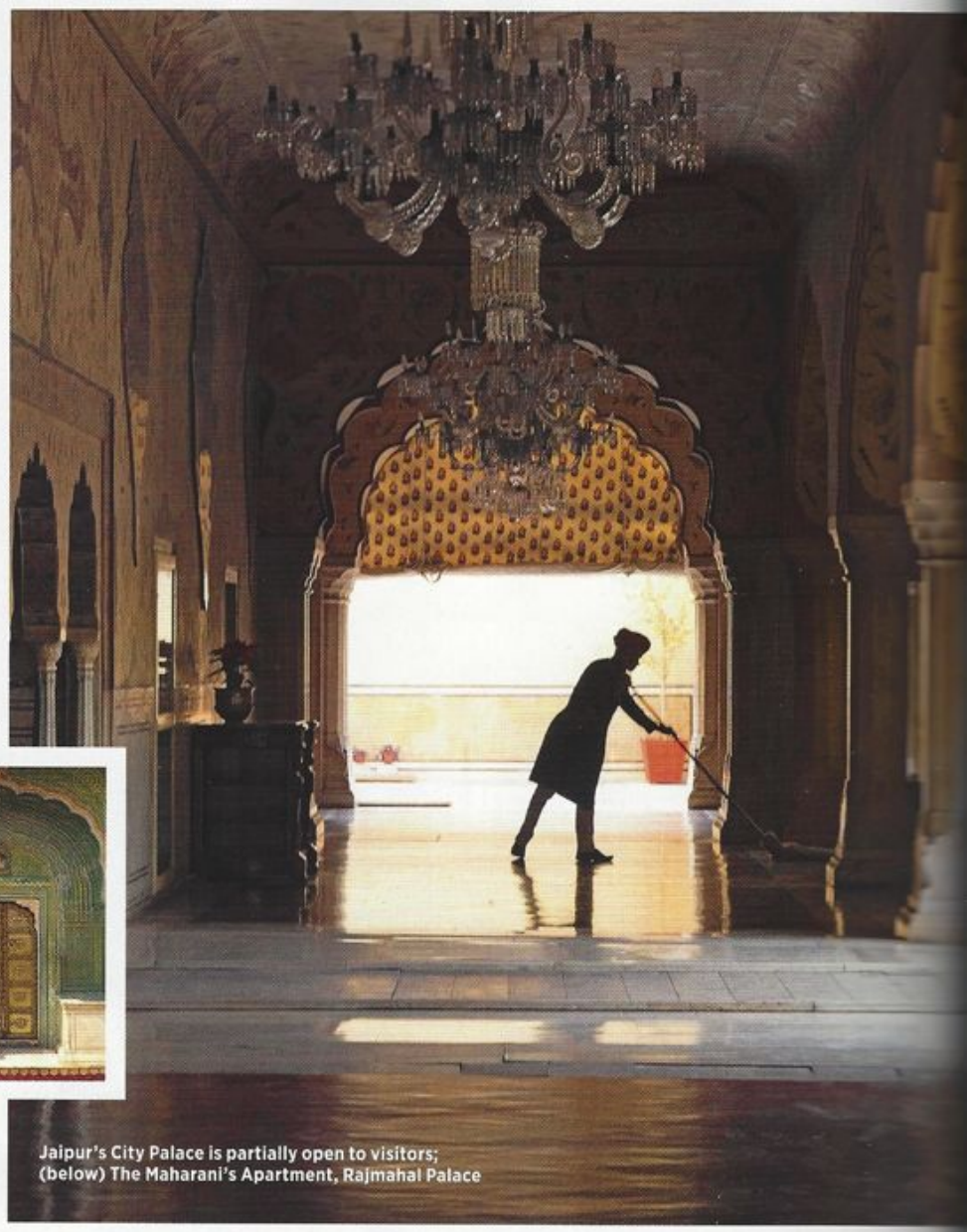
As a result, Jaipur's expatriate community is thriving. Bars and cafés in the city are cacophonies of Italian, French and even a little English. Curry does not even appear on some menus, where the dish of choice might instead be carbonara. Often, one wanders into shops and finds them run by Parisians, Londoners or even Bogotáns. The social scene blends locals and foreigners, and visitors are often surprised to discover their dinner table neighbour is the maharaja himself.

Despite this rise in popularity, Jaipur remains exotic. Replace art galleries with "monkey temples" or view the city from above at the stunning Amber Fort, a Unesco World Heritage Site. Jaipur's hotels – where roaming peacocks do the job of alarm clocks in some properties – operate based on the belief that the "guest is god" and it shows. Good lodgings abound, often in heritage buildings that once housed royalty. The exquisitely refurbished Raj Mahal Palace is owned by the maharaja, while the Rambagh Palace is a former royal retreat. And this year Airbnb even managed to get a royal suite in the City Palace onto its website.



Brands and events have flocked to Jaipur to take advantage of the myriad opportunities in the rising city. British Polo Day hosts an annual game, combining the fast sets of London and Jaipur for a weekend of chukkas, while Cartier made it the most recent destination for its biennial "Travel With Style" event.

Many in Jaipur, especially Singh, see this as just the beginning. Newly returned from Rome with a diploma in art history, the young maharaja has an entire life to dedicate to the city and its locals, who put their trust in him.



Jaipur's City Palace is partially open to visitors; (below) The Maharani's Apartment, Rajmahal Palace

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The perfect Jaipur weekend

Get the low-down on a maxi break destination like no other

Stay at the seriously opulent Rambagh Palace or the more contemporary and "boutique" Ramballagh Palace. Once settled, pay a visit to East West Tailors – clients include the Prince Of Wales – for a traditional bandhgala jacket. Or for a challenge, try to track down the roaming tailor known only as Mein Karoonga, a name that translates to "I can do it, sir". Asking around should yield the prerequisite referral and a chance to buy one of his famous safari jackets. Once stitched, it's perfect for a tiger safari at Sher Bagh, the nearby luxury Suján camp in Ranthambore.

When in season, watching a game at the Rajasthan Polo Club is highly recommended. The club also serves the best traditional Rajasthani food, as long as spice is not a problem, and an invitation can be charmed out of a member after the chukkas. Alternatively, seek an Italian menu at Bar Palladio, the most popular dinner and drinks spot among the Jaipur set.

Leaving Jaipur without picking up gifts would be a mistake and the best place for it is Saurashtra Impex, an Aladdin's Cave where towers of fabrics and pashminas teeter precariously in a warehouse that supplies brands all over the world.