

# DESIGNING *to* DELIGHT

*As Global Head of Design, GCPL Design Lab, Darshan Gandhi leads an award-winning team of inter-disciplinary designers in their quest to transform brands and create delightful experiences for consumers in a rapidly evolving market*





**What, in your opinion, shapes a delightful design experience for a consumer today?**

**DG:** *Optimization:* It's the key factor for future design solutions. This is absolutely essential to save disproportionate time, and to do more in life more effortlessly.

*Non-fussy and super-easy-to-use solutions anchored in latest trends:* That would mean cost savings, compactness, and ease of use in addition to hi-tech, minimal and green solutions without compromising the best-in-class experience. The expectations of consumers are very high. Designers really need to pull their sleeves up as creating delight has become harder with changing technology, environments and lifestyles.

Of course, distinctive esthetics and aspirational brand positioning play a huge role in the FMCG sector too.

**What has been the role of design education in your career?**

**DG:** If you have a creative gene, problem-solving mindset and an architect attitude, then design education fuels you with more tools, mediums and principles to shape the ideas more methodically. Most importantly, it brings a planet- and human-centric perspective to the center of every design decision you take.

I studied Interior Architecture before doing a Post Graduation in Lifestyle Product Design at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. I still enjoy

quite a bit of space design as and when I get a chance. Doing a GMP program from Harvard Business School further helped my design practice at GCPL with more business relevance and objectivity in how one can better lead an in-house design function. Overall, I like the diversity and variety in my work, which keeps me creatively stimulated.

**Tell us about your journey at Godrej.**

**DG:** Godrej is a great place to work from both the perspective of it being a legacy brand and its industrial nature across various groups. The most fascinating aspect is the rich history clubbed with bold future aspirations.

I joined Godrej & Boyce's Interio division in Mumbai in 2006 after graduating from NID. My role started with bringing in design thinking, by creating and showcasing a diverse range of products under one

platform, with a unique design philosophy. This led me to work for Godrej Industries in 2008, where I was assigned to design SPACE, a prototype office to create a young work culture that inspired the exchange of ideas, innovation and change at Godrej. This led to the institutionalization and beginning of design driven thinking at GCPL in 2008.

**How did the GCPL Design Lab come about?**

**DG:** The GCPL Design Lab was formed in 2009. I was the only designer at that time. The expectation was to inculcate a culture of design not only for the products but at a brand level as well. For the initial nine months I was part exploring and trying to understand the organizational basics and part trying to contextualize where all we could create impact. It has been a time of learning from both successes and mistakes in the journey of contextualizing a design function.





We really needed to evolve our way, literally starting from zero, be it understanding consumers, research, science, competition, trends or business. To be honest, it was quite a challenge for me to understand a lot of business dynamics but I was supported and mentored on these critical aspects by senior leaders like Omar Momin. We did experiment with some project across GAVL and GCPL as a pilot. Based on the small success of the ideas, we slowly and steadily started building a team as we actualized what stream of designers we needed. The years 2012-13 were when we really established and executed large projects like Godrej Expert relaunch, Godrej Cinthol refresh, and Godrej Aer.

We had top leadership support - seeding design thinking was Nisaba Godrej's brainchild. We are a team of designers instrumental in applying design led thinking. This step aimed at transforming brands with delightful product offerings (in a Godrej way) for a rapidly evolving Indian market. It involved changing the mindset

and perceptive definition of 'role of design' beyond packaging, especially in FMCG. It was about letting our own design tools emerge. This created a great impact and value for consumers across GCPL's personal care, hair care and home care categories, with reinvigorated brands such as Expert, Aer, Cinthol, Goodknight, Protekt and BBLUNT in India. We did all this by using design tools such as need based user-centric segmentation, prototyping and product mapping, thus developing a unique approach route in line with the organization's overall objectives. Today, GCPL Design Lab works across India, Africa and Indonesia.

#### What has been the most challenging part of your role as the Head of GCPL Design?

**DG:** The main challenge was to create a common language and a healthy exchange across the functions and businesses to be more objective and not subjective. You really need to be agile to work in real-time, that too in an FMCG company. There is no time for over thinking. So the process has to be tailor-

made to this culture without compromising on the quality of the creative output.

#### Which projects are you most proud of?

**DG:** Godrej Expert and Cinthol brand refresh were amongst the first projects we rolled out. It involved reimagining legacy brands both of Godrej Expert and Cinthol with fresh brand architecture and a brand platform towards bringing back relevance.

The BBLUNT, Aer and Protekt brands were aimed at the progressive Indian youth's emerging need for premium experiences. These brands have been transformational in the FMCG industry with their distinctive and progressive brand design and structure design around an innovative product portfolio.

Projects like NYU & STELLA in Indonesia and DARLING in Africa were extensions of the same philosophy but in a totally different cultural context.

Knowledge Center for Interio was designed for creating and showcasing a diverse range of products under one platform, with a unique design philosophy.

#### How do you nurture the design culture at GCPL?

**DG:** In the initial years, our way of growing was absolutely 'on the job'. It still remains our best way to experiment and showcase possibility thinking. Involving people across other functions explicitly into the process always makes the outcome and ideation richer and more insightful. These small transactions at the foundation are the key to nurturing a holistic design culture. In short, always in action and not theory. We do attend a lot of design fairs and fests. A lot of learnings come from our global projects. The team is always experimenting.



**What are the key factors for successfully transforming a consumer brand in a rapidly evolving Indian market?**

**DG:** The changing semantics of the following:  
*a. Our mom and pop retail culture now mixed with e-commerce gaining popularity.*  
 You are designing for multiple customers here, primary being the end user but also a retailer. Both these landscapes are strategically very important to make your product content supremely consumable and meaningfully standing out from the clutter of jammer shelf space at one end and overtly stimulating e-comm space at the other. This has direct impact on brand design, product structures and communication architecture.  
*b. Massive influence of digital content and online social networks taking place on real-time social interactions.*

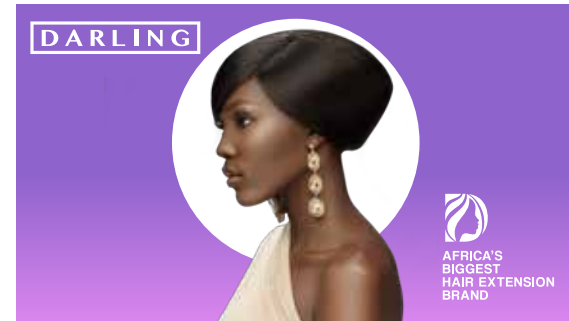
The dependency on an individual's recommendation in these categories is relatively going down and decision making on the purchases is becoming more individualistic. The appetite for information has drastically gone up and the information sources are substituted by social networks where people are making informed choices. This means that creative properties need to be created keeping these perspectives in mind.

*c. The duality between 'changing technology' and 'definition of sustainability'.*

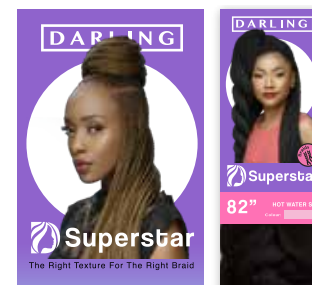
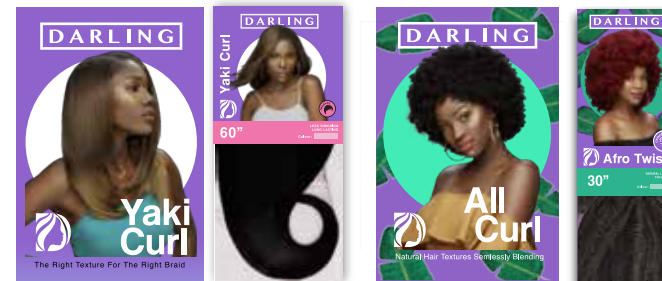
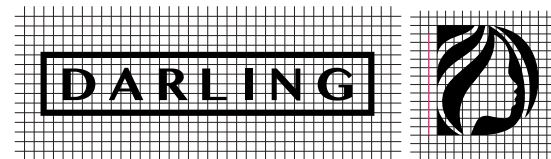
There is a need to adapt new material sciences and technology to attain high efficiencies, keeping in mind that sustainability is not just about less plastic or less packaging but it's the value chain of the entire eco-system. The biggest evil is human behavior - the policies and laws do not necessarily take care of the entire aspect. At the design stage there is an increasing need to integrate these two to create maximum impact by integrating cross functional knowledge under the philosophy of 'design concepts and concerns'.

**Share your experience of participating in national and global jury panels.**

**DG:** People and diversity make all the difference. Judging Product Design entries across the globe reassured me that we are living in a world full of possibilities, good intentions and hope. The interactions only mirrored and proved that we are progressing in the right direction. It was encouraging to see entries designed for right purposes, social responsibility, empathy and kindness, using latest technology and marrying it to spread delightful solutions for livelihood. There is definitely a trend observed where people are using technology not just to add more features but reduce complexity for the solutions to be accessible to more and more people. Overall, jury interactions indeed took the bar higher for me.



Unifying and contemporising one of Africa's biggest hair extension brand.



**You're no stranger to receiving awards. What difference do they make in a design career?**

**DG:** Design awards in general are a way to keep the community

connected and keep the buzzword of 'Design' (mostly not understood) relevant outside and inside the organization. It is always inspiring to see good design work across industries, especially in our country, where despite a lot of talent the use of design philosophy across industries is rather limited.

**How do you envision the Indian consumer products sector changing in the future?**

**DG:** The Indian consumer's journey has been very unique. With a more educated and informed younger generation, the way the consumer is making choices has changed quite a bit, especially when it comes to health and environment. But largely we are a very aspirational and festive nation and we do crave sharp aesthetics and modernity.

**What inspires you?**

**DG:** As much as 99% of inspiration comes from watching people and their behavior in various situations and actions - emotional, physical and now digital behavior as well. The remaining 1% comes from all the other information available across various subjects and experiencing as much of all forms of art, science or literature as I can.

**How do you spend time when you're not working?**

**DG:** I love to visit contemporary art museums, historic sites, cultural events or art centers wherever I travel. I enjoy working with clay and creating abstract art with my son.

**What would you advise youngsters keen on pursuing product design?**

**DG:** With the evolution of the human race, environments and lifestyle, the definition of product design is also rapidly changing. It's time to think beyond form, function and features. Product design needs to remain supremely relevant, 'fit to purpose and technology' and it needs to impact the entire ecosystem. Additionally, good design is everything you don't see in it so choose to solve for a larger meaning. Functional expertise and strategy have to work hand in hand. Lastly, I would urge youngsters to spend more time in defining briefs and problems before jumping into final solutions.



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Above: Knowledge Center. Right: Studio

#### What's next?

**DG:** I don't have any immediate plans, but I am on a journey of accessing what contemporary problems could be solved and what knowledge I need to gain to attain the next level of personal growth.

I believe what we have achieved at GCPL with Design Thinking is an absolute success when it comes to 'Transforming Brands' through architecting strong brand platforms. At present, extending the same approach in geographies like Indonesia and Africa is quite an exciting time for the Lab.

I strongly believe that for GPCL the future lies in experimenting further with the tools

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of design thinking at the ecosystem level with a more multifunctional and multi-disciplinary approach involving 'Design Concept and Concerns', 'System Design' and 'Experience Design'.