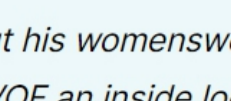




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D'Ascoli: From India for the World

By Sohini Dey



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7 Min Read

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It is a warm Thursday morning, a day before Holi, and Delhi-based American textile designer Peter D'Ascoli's studio is buzzing with activity. Part of the two-storeyed building in Faridabad is being renovated, to make room for new work spaces, a photography studio and design infrastructure. Spread across different rooms, karigars are threading delicate French knots and other stitches on textiles, tailors are creating samples, a digital printing machine is whipping out lengths of clothing patterned in summery hues and block printers are readying to create hand block patterns on fabrics. Meanwhile, the design studio upstairs is packed with samples, swatches, racks of garments and new designs. A dress form (mannequin) stands dressed in a long white garment—an early prototype of a festive wear line, envisioned for the local market.



Signature fabrics from D'Ascoli created using a digital printing machine at the design studio in Faridabad.

| Priyanka Parashar

This year marks a fresh sojourn for D'Ascoli, a New Yorker who has made India home for the past 16 years running his eponymous fashion and home textiles label. It is almost easy to forget that he is an American, dressed as he is in an indigo kurta and white pyjamas, working and interacting with his artisans and workers. "I am a foreigner, but this is a desi company," he chuckles, introducing me to members of his 35-strong team. "The brand is a celebration of cultures from all over the world, but we are very proud of our Indian influences and our team is all Indian."

It is then somewhat akin to a homecoming for the brand which after years of retailing internationally, debuted its women's fashion brand in March for Indian consumers. Two collections from the brand, 'Escape' and 'Nostalgia' are now available in collaboration with multi-designer retail store Ogaan, in Malcha Marg, Delhi, in Kala Ghoda, Mumbai, and the e-commerce platform. "In my years of being in India, and knowing India, I've seen the market mature and change. There is a lot of consolidation in the fashion business, a sign that the potential for revenue from the population's growing affluence of the population is increasing," says D'Ascoli "We are excited about the Indian market."



Campaign stills from the 'Nostalgia' collection of womenswear by D'Ascoli.

| D'Ascoli

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New York to New Delhi

A familiar name in the Indian fashion fraternity, D'Ascoli is spotted at many fashion events in Delhi and known for his extensive knowledge of Indian design and crafts traditions. It is an interest and passion that the designer developed when he arrived in India in the early '80s as a consulting designer for the Government of India, to create hand printed, handwoven and embroidered textiles with local craftspeople. Years later, he returned, following stints at fashion label Diane von Furstenberg and fabric manufacturer Covington Industries, setting up Talianna Consultants Pvt Ltd in 2006, the company holding the fashion brand D'ASCOLI and luxury, custom home products marketed under the brand PETER D'ASCOLI.

For over a decade, the brand has stocked its designs primarily at stores in the West—exports comprise 90 per cent of the business. "We like the place our exports command—we do sophisticated stuff, and we have prestigious influential tie-ups that give us a lot of visibility," he says, citing stockists such as luxury e-tailer MatchesFashion, luxury lifestyle brand Aerin (founded by Aerin Lauder) and *Cabana*, the Milanese interiors publication and artisanal homewares retailer. The brand produces up to six collections a year, rooted in a textiles based design vocabulary dominated by original prints and embroidery. The design studio also works on commissioned projects, that include created custom printed and embroidered wall panels from the Royal Palace in Udaipur to a private residence in California (US) and bed canopy for *Cabana* founder Martina Mondadori and British interior designer Ashley Hicks in Milan.



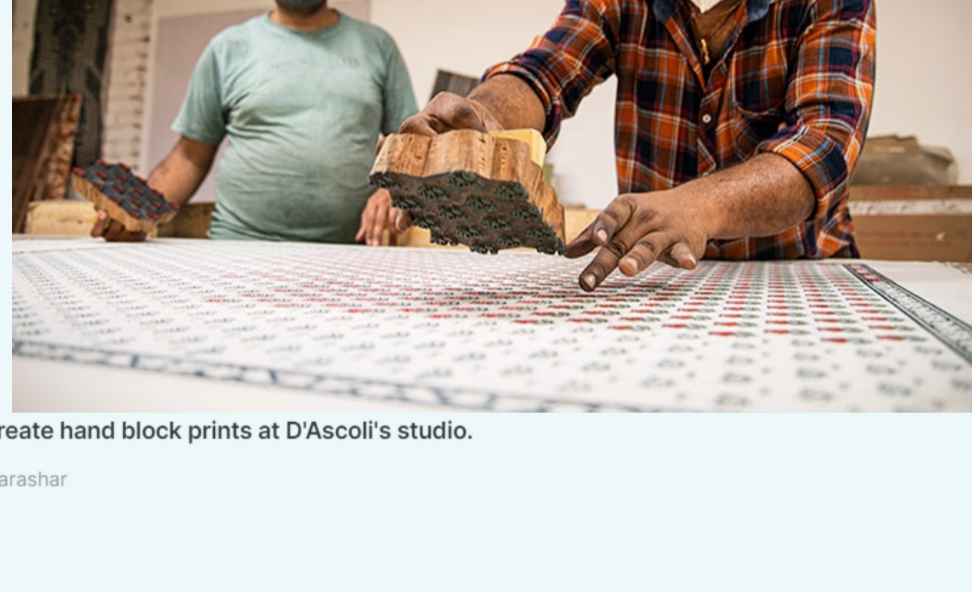
Table linens created by D'Ascoli for 'Cabana' magazine.

| D'Ascoli

In the past three years, D'Ascoli says, the brand's revenue has doubled year on year. While garments comprise the bulk of the business, the pandemic has seen the demand for home textiles rise. Table linens, ranging from cotton napkins to printed linen tablecloths are priced ₹6,800 - 24,800, decorative printed fabrics for interiors begin at ₹4,000/mt for cotton, ₹6,000 for linen and ₹12,000 for silk satin (and upwards for hand embroideries). Clothing prices, particularly for the two collections available in India, range from ₹11,000 - 48,000 for blouses, dresses, and kaftans. Apart from Ogaan, D'Ascoli's designs are also available via his e-commerce store. "The foreigner's gaze and that ignorance can also be a strength—it offers the opportunity to bring something new."

Design and Brand Culture

Working on a trendless-design principle, D'Ascoli and his team create patterns using a combination of hand block printing, digital prints and embroidery. "I like fantasising what the French call a *milieu*, what would people be wearing in that environment," he says. "Then we start to look at pattern types and range, colour palettes and decide what would be good for garments and for the home, building on the theme." Working on diverse concepts, from a Bohemian beach cottage look to Parsi *gara* patterns, the designer seldom lets prints recur across categories. "I don't like when we use the same designs in the same colours on both garments and home products. It's almost an embarrassment of riches of patterns that we have."



Artisans create hand block prints at D'Ascoli's studio.

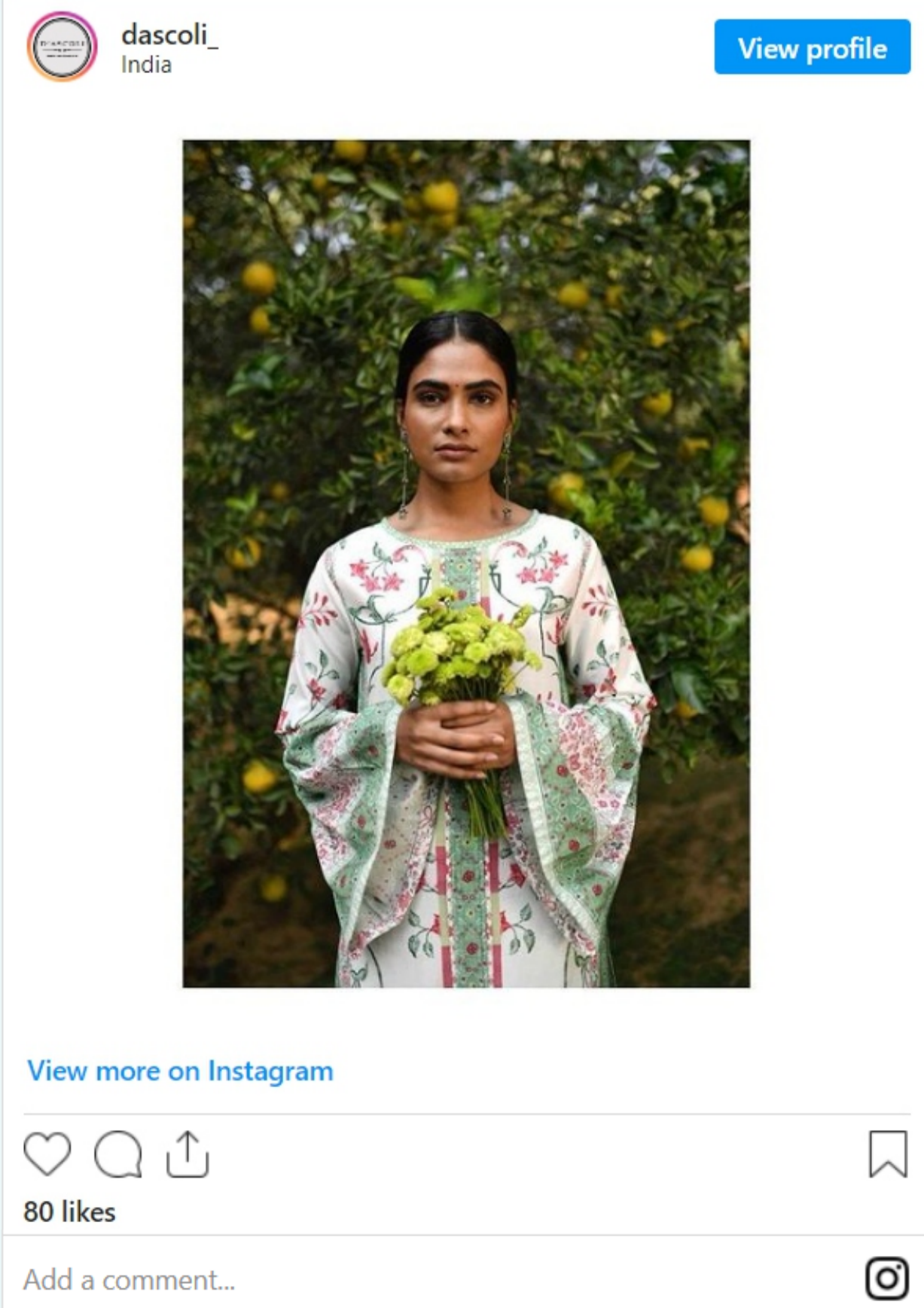
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D'Ascoli notes that he tries to source as much of his materials from India as possible. "All the cotton we use in our fashion line is hand spun and handwoven, mostly from Murshidabad (West Bengal). For home products, because of demand, we use industrially woven Indian cotton. Our linen is Belgian flax, but spun and woven in India," he says. Apart from West Bengal, the brand works with weavers in Chennai and Bengaluru. The one material that continues to be imported is silk, which he adds, drives him crazy. "I would like everything we make to be sourced from India," he says noting the pride he feels seeing Made in India products launched at elite international marketplaces. "India, more than any other country, can offer the world an alternative sustainable supply at least for certain segments. This is something I find miraculous."

A Homecoming

A loyal international clientele, and consolidating the business has encouraged D'Ascoli to dip his toes deeper into the Indian market. The design studio in Faridabad is now equipped with an embroidery atelier, printing units and tailoring setup as well as an in-house effluent treatment plant—built five years ago, in an attempt to further the brand's slow, sustainable manufacturing processes. While the Ogaan collaboration has brought a selection of the brand's Western wear in the Indian market, D'Ascoli hopes to build on this venture to create Indian products, such as the festiveness line. "We have to try to imagine why D'Ascoli exists in India. What would the Indian client look to our brand for? he says. "We want to create something new and unique, which blends East and West."



Even as he expands the scope and infrastructure of his business, D'Ascoli is keen to retain the brand's small, independent label. "It has always been my desire to create not beautiful designs or a bestselling dress, but a body of work that stands for something more than the sum of its parts," he says. "In India, there's potential for huge volume, but we are not taking that path. We see strength in being small—we can continue to take risks and do what we want without worrying about failure."

Banner: A portrait of textiles designer Peter D'Ascoli, at his studio in Faridabad. Photograph: Priyanka Parashar.