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THE WORKPLACE DESIGN MAGAZINE

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PREVIEW

The Sun- downer

If there's one thing that's absolutely guaranteed to ruin any Dry January intentions, it's a good old Sundowner. So it is, just days into the New Year, that we find ourselves in one of our favourite Clerkenwell drinking holes, awaiting the entrance of one of our favourite industry couples.

Having spent years working together, **Gurvinder Khurana** and **Nigel Tresise** have now parted ways – but, thankfully, only in a professional capacity, with Gurvinder becoming a Director of M Moser Associates and Nigel taking over sole direction of the good ship align. We commandeer a cozy corner, get the drinks in (it's surprisingly busy and clearly a not-so-dry January in The Coach tonight) and let our guests discard their coats and jackets, before readying ourselves to ask the first question. Gurvinder, however, is way ahead of us.



Gurvinder: So, what do you want to talk about?

She sips her G&T and grins. So, it's going to be like that is it? Excellent.

We ask how the couple first met and, importantly, about their first impressions of one another.

Gurvinder: I was looking for a job - I was in Design & Build and wanted to get out of D&B. This was back in the 1990s and it was full of cowboys and misogynists. I was put forward by a recruitment consultant for a job at Cochrane McGregor (a company that no longer exists). The thing that really 'got me' was that Nigel was designing the first ever pre-venture capital Jimmy Choo shop! I wanted a piece of that. I went for an interview, but didn't get it because I had no retail experience. I've

always had the view that, if you really want something, then you've got to go out and get it. I needed a job and I really wanted this - so I just kept ringing him! In the end I got a call back, saying "Okay, come and work for us". I didn't get the Jimmy Choo gig, but I did get to work on a number of global accounts - including Zurich and UBS.

Nigel: Jimmy Choo was a really cool project to be involved with and it was lovely to work with Tamara directly on delivering that, but on the workplace side we were also pitching some really interesting stuff. We did some great work with UBS including a really nice project at Triton Court. Their real estate division was looking to create a kind of lab where they could explain to the business what they were doing in terms of fit-out and design. That was really good - and then Gurvinder left!

Gurvinder: I got offered another job as this was a freelance position. I also had a policy at the time that I didn't date anybody I worked with. Looking back at it, I realise that it can be actually easier to date people who are in the same industry as it can be a demanding job - it is easier for them to understand. I didn't get that at the time. You go out for work events and come home often exhausted and your partner can end up feeling like you're out partying and having fun all the time - it can, I suspect feel a little excluding and hard on them.

I decided that I needed to build a network for future job opportunities. So, I messaged Nigel and he suggested we go out for a bite to eat or a beer. I lived in a council flat near Guy's hospital - and he lived in the posh flats two streets away. It took me a while to realise that we were on a date! Nigel



"I've always had the view that, if you really want something, then you've got to go out and get it. I needed a job and I really wanted this – so I just kept ringing him!"

GURVINDER



Mick



ordered an expensive bottle of wine and I started to panic – I couldn't afford all this! He paid.

Nigel: I think this was something like the 24th or 25th of August – and we got married the following 5th May.

We order more drinks before asking, what did you think of each other when you first met?

Gurvinder: To start with I, didn't really take to him – he was quite hard on me, and I wasn't as tough back then.

Nigel: I genuinely thought I was being cruel to be kind! Gurvinder was very idealistic and certainly not as commercially streetwise as now. I thought she was lovely; she was stylish, beautiful, clearly influenced by fashion, very passionate and driven. What more could you ask for really? It was a bit of a whirlwind really and I certainly think those early years were the most difficult, but, after 21 years it should be plain sailing for us now!

Gurvinder: He was stylish too but a hard-arsed businessman with it. I think I might have softened that in him a little – but hopefully that means he's hit a really nice balance. I do remember Nigel saying to me, as I was about to hand in my resignation all those years ago, that no job is ever forever – and he was right. I might not have thought that at the time, but he was right. There really is no such thing as job security. I've worked for myself for much of my career – all the way through until I joined M Moser.

Nigel: We've been working together for nearly 20 years. We started our first business together in 2004 and running a small business for that long can have its ups and downs; it can be pretty stressful.

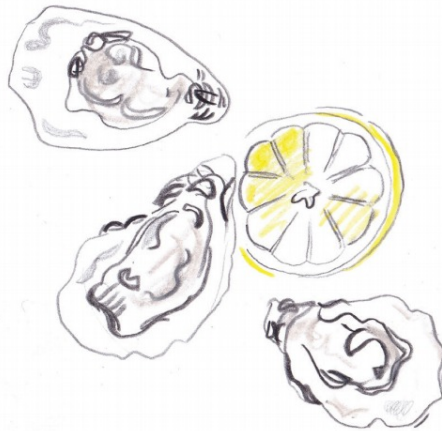
All your eggs are in one basket and you're always chasing business. That's not to say that we weren't successful, as we were fortunate to pick up a string of design awards in the years running up to the pandemic. We spent a lot of time over lockdown focusing on raising

the profile of align – allowing align to bear the fruits. But it also gave us a chance for reflection, which was really valuable, and we came to realise that actually align was in a really strong place to facilitate Gurvinder moving on – to scratch that itch she's always had about working at a much larger company.

We move on to talk about where Nigel and Gurvinder are today in terms of their careers – and how it now feels to NOT be working alongside one another.

Gurvinder: "The thing I really notice now is that we..." to "I think that we – designers, architects, real estate professionals – have a responsibility; construction is a big part of the sustainability problem and needs to help with the solution, so we need to take our bit of responsibility. We of course need to make money – but we need to be aware of the impact we're making whilst doing so. I've always been passionate about this – I even did my dissertation on it – recycle and reuse!

Nigel



“It’s been challenging running align on my own, but it’s been really interesting to see senior members of the team start to step up. And they have, which is fantastic.”

M Moser have always been in my periphery vision.

I think, because of my experiences in the past, there were very few D&B companies I could have worked for. My view was really tainted by my early experiences – and I won’t compromise on ethics. What I like about M Moser is that we’re an integrated project delivery firm, so we do Design & Build but we’re architects, designers, strategists, engineers, brand specialists and more. We do base build, consultancy, construction, technology, sustainability, and wellness ...we do the whole spectrum, all the elements associated with buildings and human-centred design - and that’s quite unusual. I like that. It makes it really interesting.

Gurvinder: Some days it’s really hard (not working with Nigel) and some days it feels like a breath of fresh air. I don’t know if I could do what I am doing right now if he hadn’t coached me so well. I love business – and I’ve realised that much more since joining M Moser. One

of the biggest changes is that mum and dad don’t sit at dinner and talk about work all the time (which is great for our two boys)! I also really think Nigel has blossomed.

Nigel: It has been challenging for both of us – but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. There were a painful few days when Gurvinder left align, but the team has really grown. It’s been challenging running align on my own, but it’s been really interesting to see senior members of the team start to step up. And they have, which is fantastic. I think that’s only going to keep getting better as well. We’ve had several conversations about where align is headed – and I’m keen to evolve it so that the team have some real ownership of the business. We have been fortunate in that it’s always easier when you’re busy – and we are very busy right now and just moved into a larger studio space. We seem to be migrating into more architectural work too, which is an interesting path for us. At the same time, Gurvinder’s aesthetic vision, her

boldness and love of colour, are now very much hardwired into the ethos of the studio, so her spirit still pervades!

Gurvinder: That’s always been a passion for both of us and we invested a lot of time, effort and energy into building that side of the business; the team is brilliant at it and it’s just so great to see.

And it is equally exciting working for a global business, getting involved in larger projects for global clients across Europe. Working with M Moser also means I can hopefully pursue something I am so passionate about and get involved in -adaptive reuse projects – we are big enough to design and deliver these sorts of projects. Taking existing buildings and breathing a new lease of life into them.

I think it’s fair to say that we are both relishing our new challenges and next chapters. We are both growing independently and there is no looking back; the future is looking really exciting and frankly, I can’t wait!