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THAT FUNNY GUY **RANVEER SINGH** THE LIVEWIRE

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THE STATE
OF THE
INDIAN MAN

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WILLIAMS

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CINEMA

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THE BEST
INDIAN PAINTINGS

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THE
THINGS
THAT
HAVE
CHANGED
INDIA
+
MW'S
HOTTEST
WOMEN,
OVER THE
YEARS



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Their highnesses

Bob Rupani's new coffee-table book offers a glimpse into the lives of some of India's royal families.

By Pablo Chaterji

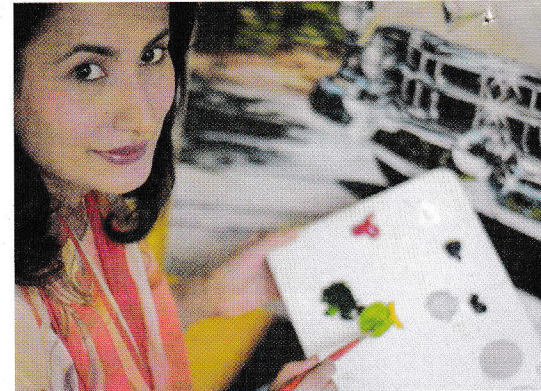
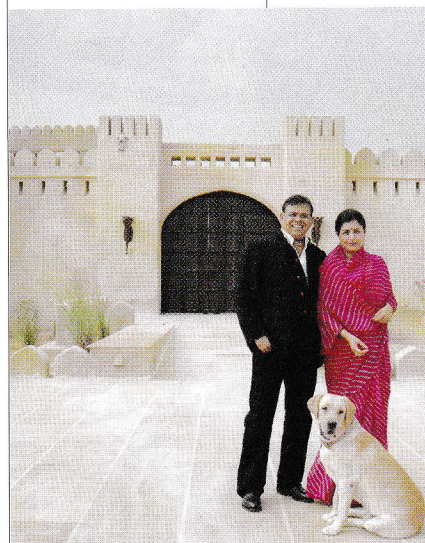
INDIA'S RELATIONSHIP

with its erstwhile royal families has been a bit love-hate, since Independence, and I daresay the former royals have felt the same way, especially after their privy purses were done away with. For example, I know people who believe that India should have gone all French Revolution on them when it had the chance, but I tend to take a slightly more pragmatic view of things; in other words, I sit on the fence. What I can state with some certainty is that I'm endlessly fascinated by India's royalty, devouring any literature about them that I can get my hands on. Regardless of the debate about whether they should be given any importance in today's India, there's no doubt that they led some pretty far out lives, that some of these families gave a lot back to the country and that, as individuals, some of them make for interesting reading. It is in the last category that Narayan 'Bob' Rupani's coffee table book, *Living the Royal Life*, fits.

Bob, in a long and colourful career as an automotive journalist, travel writer, television professional and rally driver, has developed close friendships with a number of royal families, and in this book he features a few of them, along with some of their achievements, hobbies and pastimes. You learn about Thakur Sidharth Singh of Rohet and his wife, Thakurani Rashmi Singh, who own and run Mihir Garh, a luxury hotel in Rajasthan that was voted

the world's best boutique hotel in 2013, and the world's most extraordinary hotel in 2014, by *Lonely Planet* (I had no idea the place existed, I have to say). There's the delightful Maharaj Kumari Vidita Singh of Barwani, whose automotive art is near-photorealistic (her father, Rana Manvendra Singh, a renowned vintage and classic car expert, is also featured in the book). The Maharaj Singhji of Jojawa, you discover, practises a form of acupuncture and has treated over 12,000 patients suffering from allergic asthma, free of charge.

Saheb Raghvendra Pratap Singh of Jhalamand appears to be an ace cook, whipping up traditional Rajasthani cuisine with the aid of some secret spices (aren't they all?). There's a prehistoric touch thrown in — Nawabzadi Aaliya Sultana Babi of Balasinor has ensured that a dinosaur fossil site near Balasinor is maintained in good order (the site has the remains of 'Rajasaurus Narmadensis', an Indian dinosaur species). Maharaj Kumar Harshvardhan Singh of Dungarpur and his amazing 'Car Bar' (a huge and eclectic collection of cars, cannons and carriages, along with assorted memorabilia) feature prominently, and there are other intriguing bits of information, such as about the royal family of Kanota, which produces its own liqueur, called Chandr Haas. The book isn't a serious, weighty tome, but it provides enough material for a light, engaging enough read.



(Clockwise from top) Harshvardhan Singh and his family; Vidita Singh at work on automotive art; Aaliya Sultana and her husband at Dinosaur Fossil Park; Raghvendra Pratap Singh with his family; Sidharth and Rashmi Singh at Mihir Garh

