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design IS HER MEDICINE



Independent design consultant Shweta Kaushik found her calling in her teens and deviated from her assumed career path – that of a medical professional. By helping change the way the world is perceived and experienced through design, Kaushik believes she's doing her bit of service.

TEXT: Shefali Thapliyal | PHOTOS COURTESY: Shweta Kaushik

Born into a family of famous surgeons, it was expected that Shweta Kaushik would toe the traditional line. But one look at a family friend's daughter's work, who was studying architecture – and life deviated from the scalpel forever for 13-year-old Kaushik. And though she continued to study medicine, Kaushik says her heart was never in it."My parents finally asked what I wanted to study.'Design' is what I answered and I have never looked back in regret since then," she says.

Kaushik went on to study Interior Design from P.V. Polytechnic at SNDT Juhu, Mumbai, after finishing her graduation in science. After the three-and-a-half year-long intensive course and the subsequent five years of working in this field, Kaushik felt stagnated and had the"urge to go back to the learning mode". That's when she signed up for a master's degree in design from the acclaimed Domus Academy in Milan, Italy.

What drew her to design in the first place is the mix of functionality and aesthetics."Working with design, you have the ability to change the way the world is perceived and experienced," Kaushik says. She's interested in interior, product, graphic, logo design as well as installations."To me, design never was just about creating something beautiful, but about creating beautiful experiences. I like to call it'Experience Design'," the consultant explains."It is about creating spaces and products that actively make your life better or interesting in some way or the other. Designers have a social responsibility and the advantage of creating opportunities to facilitate a better tomorrow," she adds.

For Kaushik, internships during college, even if for a month, paved the way for gathering practical knowledge – an essential in this field. After graduation, she was hired by the firm she had interned with."They [the firm] focused on residential interiors but I wanted to specialise in hospitality. I worked with Vivek Verma, Pronit Nath and TAO (The Architect's Office) which helped hone my skills in the hospitality sector," Kaushik says.

Today, she consults with various firms and designers on hospitality design for bars, restaurants, hotels and spas and high-end residences. She has lent her expertise to brands such as Zaffran, Out of the Blue, Deliciea and Ego, to name a few. Ask her to pick the project closest to her heart and – like a mother asked to pick her favourite child – she is unable to."Every project is dear in some way. Each project takes so much of your self, time and energy that it's hard not to consider them close to your heart," she says.

1. The Ego showroom, situated in Raghuvanshi Mills at Lower Parel in Mumbai, has been designed as an exclusive concept store

2–3. The interiors of the Ego showroom serve as the perfect backdrop for the wooden flooring, wall coverings and office seating on display


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To me, design never was just about creating something beautiful, but also creating beautiful experiences

Inspiration for design is subject to state of mind at that particular moment. "Daniel Libeskind's deconstructivism (a style characterised by unpredictability and controlled chaos), Geoffrey Bawa's tropical organic architecture and Droog's unconventional product concepts – have all influenced my work. In India, I have been influenced by Pronit Nath, of Mumbai-based architectural a firm, Urban Studios. He has been instrumental in changing the face of hospitality design in the country," Kaushik says.

To the growing trend of designers dabbling in too many fields, Kaushik concurs. "Creativity knows no bounds," she says. "The principles of design and design vocabulary remain the same whether you design buildings, products or haute couture. Truly creative people can express themselves through any medium in any field." And India seems to have no dearth of creativity. Kaushik says she's glad to see Indian designers making an impact on an international platform. "Indian design is at the cusp of change. There is a lot of talk going on about the identity of Indian design and implications. The world has started to take notice of India as a place of original design and it's our responsibility as designers to fuel original thinking. I would like to see a lot more designers be known internationally and score projects around the world."

About her preferred stream – hospitality design – Kaushik says it has also come a long way in India. "Earlier there were just a few designers who could churn out a fabulous product in this segment. Today, the F&B industry is a lot more competitive and that's reflected in the spaces too. It's a far cry from the


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4–5. At Out of the Blue, an upscale restaurant in Powai, Mumbai, the idea was to wed casual dining with a smart ambience

6–7. Zaffran, a swanky restaurant in Mumbai, has an opulent look. The rich upholstery and customised lighting add to the effect



kind of designs that are churned out internationally, but there is still some good work being done," she says, stressing on the need to cultivate original thinking and be exposed to international design and trends.

One way ahead, Kaushik feels, is by constantly evolving and yet staying "indigenous and true to our roots". "If we cannot respect and appreciate the rich heritage of our architecture and building practices, we cannot expect the world to. The focus must be on original design via design research and concept development that needs to start at grass-root level in design schools," Kaushik suggests.

Felicitated as one of iGen Top 50 young innovative designers by a leading publication, the young consultant has also won an award for Best Hospitality Design at the Aces of Spaces awards. Kaushik regularly contributes articles on design and writes a column called 'Design=Love' for the lifestyle blog 'Urban Eye by Riaan George' – a bi-weekly catalogue of all that catches her fancy in the design world.

But design is just one of the many facets of this multi-disciplinary consultant. A fitness enthusiast, Kaushik has a keen interest in kickboxing, cycling and skiing, and plans on running the half marathon next year. In her spare time, she enjoys reading design blogs such as dezeen, designboom, cool hunter, moco loco and inhabitat. Of late, she has acquired a taste for wine and calls herself a "budding oenophile". About future plans, she's clear: building her own brand and predictably a design studio. All we can say is cheers!

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