

JUNE 2014

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# BLACKBOOK

INDIA'S LUXURY INSIDER



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of food will  
be defined by  
presentation ”

**MANISH MEHROTRA**

CORPORATE CHEF  
LUXURY DINING DIVISION,  
OLD WORLD HOSPITALITY



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## SOUL KITCHEN

What makes a meal memorable? Food, of course, but more importantly, the experience. One of my favourite meals was a Bedouin feast in Jordan's Wadi Rum, prepared in an *Al-Zarb* — a brick-coated oven, buried one metre deep in the ground. Removing the vegetables and meat, which had been slow roasting for hours, was a ritual. It was an unforgettable repast — we gorged on delicately spiced fare, scooping it up with pillowy *shrak* — freshly baked whole wheat bread, still warm from the hearth.

Speaking of food, one of my favourite films on the subject is the documentary, *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. In the 80-odd minute movie, the camera trails octogenarian sushi master and Michelin three-star chef, Jiro Ono, owner of *Sukiyabashi Jiro*, a 10-seat, sushi-only restaurant, tucked in an innocuous corner of a Tokyo subway station. It's a masterful film that explores Ono's life and the uncertain future of his legacy, which rests uneasily in the hands of his eldest son, Yoshikazu.

In the cycle of life, old makes way for the new, though we try to delay this eventuality. But whether its humans going through outlandish procedures like vampire facials, or genetically modified food stuffed with preservatives, the elixir of youth and freshness remains elusive.

In the restaurant business too, the old guard is making way for the new kids on the block. Over the years, we've become accustomed to liveried waiters flicking open heavily starched napkins with a flourish — culinary coverlets that have shielded us from gravy stains and changes in the global fine dining world.

But now, things in India are transforming. As Manish Mehrotra, Corporate Chef — Luxury Dining Division, Old World Hospitality, says, "For decades we have equated fine dining with expensive white tablecloths, fancy decor and silver service in five-star hotels. That's not fine dining." Rather, fine dining is a complete culinary experience, something which is being successfully offered by a new breed of casual fine dining restaurants coming up across the country.

This gastronomical wave by no way means that haute cuisine is going out of fashion anytime soon. But authentic food experiences are coming in the limelight — where food isn't magically transformed into an unrecognisable foam, but remains true to its origins and roots. Restaurants are no longer cookhouses that serve to intimidate the diner and obfuscate the menu. Instead, chef's today are recalibrating their skills to appeal to the well-travelled Indian diner who seeks home-styled, comfort food served with a twist and presented beautifully.

Look no further than Mehrotra's celebrated menu that pairs dishes like seared prawns with *churan ka karela* with Champagne. It's simple, inventive and evolved cooking. Exactly what fine dining should be.

Neeti..

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Cover  
Photo credit: Ajay Gautam

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## THE CURIO COLLECTION

Hilton Worldwide has added a new brand to its portfolio — Curio-A Collection by Hilton. Created for travellers who seek local, authentic experiences, Curio is a carefully curated global collection of distinctive four to five star hotels. Each hotel will be different from the other, with individuality being a common thread. The SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, The Sam Houston Hotel, Hotel Alex Johnson in Rapid City, The Franklin Hotel in Chapel Hill and a soon-to-be-named hotel development in downtown Portland will be launched as Curios.

“Our customers and owners have expressed a strong interest in a brand from us that includes hotels that retain their unique identity but also deliver the benefits of our system, including our Hilton HHonors guest loyalty programme,” says Christopher J. Nassetta, President and CEO of Hilton Worldwide. “That desire, combined with the current size of the independent hotel market and demand for differentiated hotel stays around the world, made for the right timing for this launch.” Curio is one of two unique concepts

the company will introduce this year. Jim Holthouser, Executive Vice President, Global Brands, Hilton Worldwide, says, “Curio expands our portfolio to a total of 11 exceptional brands. With Curio, we can help owners leverage our scale, scope and expertise while keeping intact each hotel’s individual character.”

The flagship property, the SLS Las Vegas hotel and casino will open following a three-year, \$415 million renovation. The collaboration between SBE Chief Executive Officer, Sam Nazarian, renowned design icon Philippe Starck and James Beard Foundation award-winning chef José Andrés, will transform the 2.5 million square feet development as a mixed-use resort. [curiocollection.com](http://curiocollection.com)

## THE CULINARY CONCLAVE

Leading global culinary media converged at the historic winery and hotel estate in Spain’s Duero wine region, the Abadia Retuerta LeDomaine, to explore the evolution of gastronomy.

The conclave was helmed by Spanish chef, Ferran Adrià, celebrated for his now shuttered three Michelin-star elBulli restaurant on Spain’s Costa Brava. The conclave brought together 16 participants from eight countries.

The event marked the first ever meeting of the elBulliFoundation and Chef Adrià elaborated on his plans for it. He had initiated a dialogue with leading universities, such as MIT, to help define it and safeguard his legacy for the future.



The foundation will have three parts: elBulli 1846, Bullipedia and elBulli DNA. elBulli 1846 derives its moniker from the birth year of the seminal French chef Auguste Escoffier and the total number of original recipes generated at elBulli. It will be an exhibition that showcases the history of cooking, encompassing its origins and creativity. Meanwhile elBulli

DNA will play the role of decoding gastronomy’s genome, with a research laboratory and a creative team of 40 odd experts drawn from the field of gastronomy and culture. And Bullipedia will be a curated online resource to inspire, teach and assign proper descriptions to cooking and cuisine.

Meanwhile, the original restaurant will be transformed with a recreational centre, workshop, laboratory and a permanent exhibition explaining his restaurant’s historical and culinary evolution and is slated to open in 2016. [elbulli.com](http://elbulli.com)

## THE MAGNIFICENT JEWELS

The Christie’s Magnificent Jewels sale, held in Geneva, mopped up over US\$154 million, the highest result ever achieved for any jewellery sale in the world. The largest diamond in the world, a flawless fancy vivid blue, weighing 13.22 carats, achieved a stunning \$23,795,372 and was purchased by Harry Winston. “Since we acquired Harry Winston, my ambition has been to acquire the most desirable and unique gems. Today, I am proud to own the most beautiful blue diamond in the world: the Winston Blue,” says Nayla Hayek — CEO, Harry Winston. The Magnificent Jewels sold 85 per cent by lot and 94 per cent by value, achieving the highest total ever for a jewellery sale in auction history, setting four world record prices.



Close on the heels of the Geneva sale was Christie’s five-day spring sale in Hong Kong in which Chinese buyers demonstrated more selectivity than at previous auctions. The auctions of modern and contemporary Asian art, classical Chinese paintings and ceramics, jewellery, watches and wine raised over HK \$2.5 billion, less than last year’s spring sale which earned over HK\$3.19 billion.

The highlight of the sale was artist Liu Wei’s 1998 painting ‘Landscape’ that went under the hammer for HK\$21.4 million. However, the rare diamond pendant necklace named *The Eye of Golconda*, whose centrepiece is the largest Golconda diamond ever to be auctioned in Asia, weighing 40.0 carats, with a high estimate of HK\$80 million, failed to find a buyer. [christies.com](http://christies.com)



## BETWEEN WORLDS

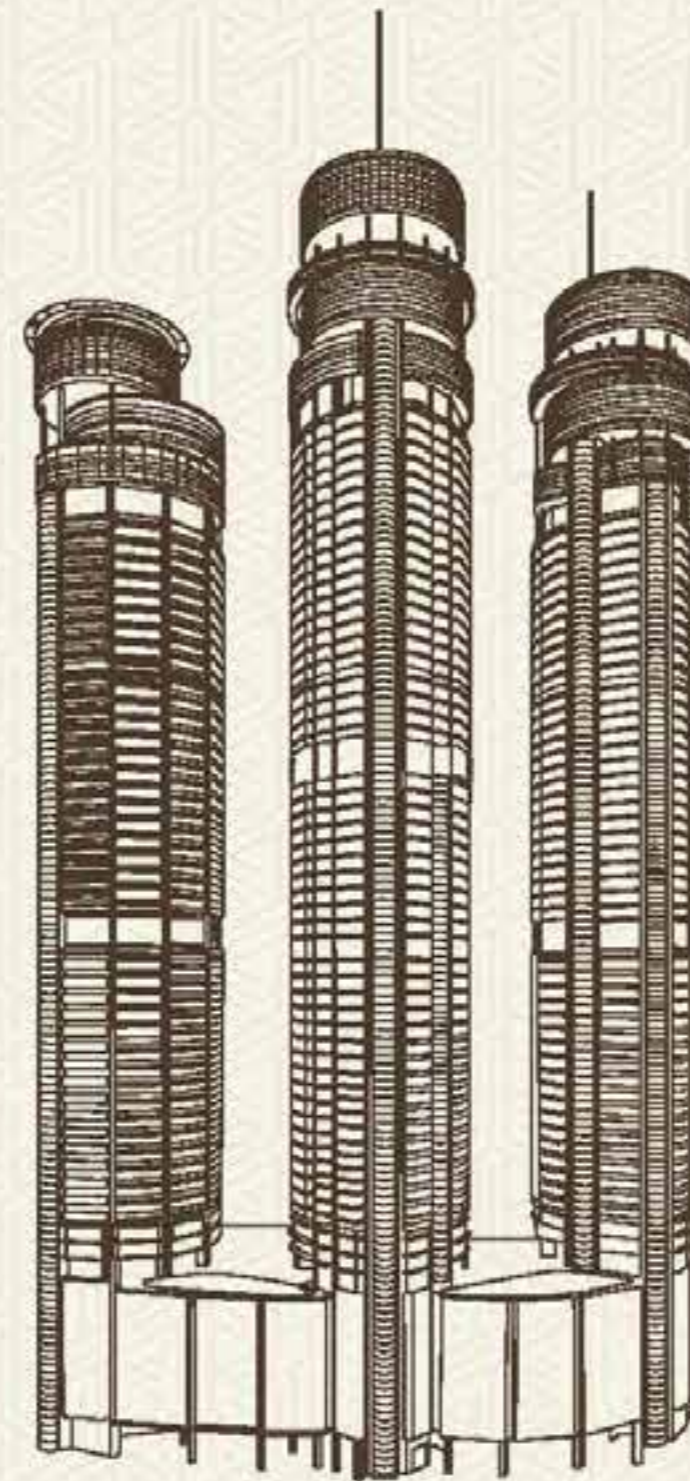
Galerie ISA has collaborated with British curator, Jane Neal for its forthcoming group exhibition ‘Between Worlds’ that will showcase works by four leading international artists: Ali Banisadr, Marius Bercea, Angel Otero and Fiona Rae.

The artists will explore the territory between abstraction and figuration. The concept of being ‘between worlds’ has for long fascinated artists. The transience of life and the delicate balance between the living and the dead perturbs and inspires in almost equal measure.

Each artist has carved a niche for himself in contemporary art. While Iranian born American artist Ali Banisadr’s exuberant works strike a balance between chaos and composure, Romanian artist Marius Bercea’s highly distinctive works are well recognised in the art world as part of the wave of the east European young artists. Iconic British painter Fiona Rae’s body of work is full of restless energy, humour and complexity and has found its way into several notable collections. The final of the four is Puerto Rican born Angel Otero, a visual artist best known for his process-based paintings that are influenced by photographs and other family memorabilia. [galerieisa.com](http://galerieisa.com)



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ART IN THE BIG APPLE

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum will present the first museum exhibition dedicated to the work of celebrated Indian modern painter, the late Vasudeo Santu Gaitonde, with the show *VS Gaitonde: Painting as Process, Painting as Life* that will be open to the public from October 24, 2014 to February 11, 2015.

The retrospective will comprise 45 major paintings and works on paper drawn from 30 leading public institutions and private collections across Asia, Europe and the US, forming the most comprehensive overview of Gaitonde’s work to date. His work presents an unparalleled opportunity to explore the context of Indian modern art as it played out in the metropolitan centres of Mumbai and New Delhi from the late 1940s through the end of the 20th century.

Featuring many works that have never been seen by the public, the exhibition will reveal Gaitonde’s extraordinary use of colour, form and texture, as well as symbolic elements and calligraphy. As Indian critic Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni has stated, Gaitonde’s “independent-mindedness was accompanied by a firm belief in his identity as a painter.” Gaitonde is known to have made only five or six paintings a year, given his lengthy process of conceptualisation.

The exhibition is organised by Sandhini Poddar, Adjunct Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, with Amara Antilla, Curatorial Assistant, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. A range of public programs, including screenings of the film *VS Gaitonde* by Sunil Kaldate and exhibition tours, will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition, which is supported in part by Christie’s. [guggenheim.org](http://guggenheim.org)



VS Gaitonde, Untitled, 1955, Oil on Canvas, Chowdhury Family Collection, PHOTO: FLOREN BIER

A VALUABLE COLLECTION

A recent listing from Wealth-X, the world’s leading ultra high net worth intelligence and prospecting firm, points out that American media mogul David Geffen’s \$2.3 billion art collection is the most valuable in the world. The list is dominated mostly by US and France-based billionaire collectors.

The combined value of the art collections of the 10 individuals on the list, whose total net worth is \$61.9 billion, is \$15.1 billion.

Geffen, a Dreamworks Animation Co-Founder, has an estimated net worth of \$6.3 billion. He is said to have one of the world’s largest private art collections, consisting mostly of works by American artists from the second half of the 20th century, including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning. In second spot is American philanthropist Eli Broad, whose personal art collection is worth \$2.2 billion. Broad, with a net worth of \$6.9 billion and his wife Edythe are building The Broad, a contemporary art museum in downtown Los Angeles that will house nearly 2,000 artworks.

At number six, French business tycoon Francois Pinault’s art collection is valued at \$1.4 billion, although his personal fortune (\$14 billion) is the highest among the collectors on the Wealth-X list. [wealthx.com](http://wealthx.com)

RANK	NAME	VALUE OF ART COLLECTION (\$ Billion)	NET WORTH (\$ Billion)
1	DAVID GEFFEN	2.3	6.3
2	ELI BROAD	2.2	6.9
3	PHILIP NIARCHOS	2.2	2.5
4	DAVID NAHMAD	1.5	1.8
5	EZRA NAHMAD	1.5	1.6
6	FRANCOIS PINAULT	1.4	14.0
7	STEVEN COHEN	1.0	11.1
8	SAMUEL NEWHOUSE	1.0	10.2
9	BIDZINA IVANISHVILI	1.0	5.7
10	NORMAN BRAMAN	1.0	1.8

SOFITEL’S JOURNEY EAST

Sofitel Luxury Hotels has announced two recent developments — Sofitel Singapore Sentosa Resort & Spa and the Sofitel Tirana Palace in Tirana, Albania — both scheduled to open in 2015. “These two important new development announcements are indicative of Sofitel’s continuing momentum in its 50th anniversary year,” says Rick Harvey Lam, Senior Vice President Global Marketing — Luxury & Upscale Brands ACCOR. “Both Sofitel Singapore Sentosa Resort & Spa and Sofitel Tirana Palace will be distinct symbols of Sofitel’s French elegance in luxury hospitality in two different global regions.”



The Sofitel Tirana Palace’s architecture is a mix of neo-Greco-Roman with an Albanian touch: columns, allegoric sculptures representing historical Albanian heroes and four large French clocks on the roof. The interior design is in the Palace of Versailles style, with wooden parquet, tapestry and handmade details. The Sofitel Tirana Palace will feature 180 keys, two restaurants, a bar, a casino, a Spa, and a 25-metre pool.

Meanwhile, the former Sentosa — A Beaufort Hotel, will be unveiled as the Sofitel Singapore Sentosa Resort & Spa. A full refurbishment has commenced. The property will have 215 keys, including suites and villas, with renovations handled by DP Architect / DP Green Landscape and interiors by design house MaxStudio.

Accor is focused on expanding in Asia Pacific, particularly within the resort segment, in response to Asia’s growing luxury market. It recently launched the Sofitel Legend People’s Grand Hotel Xian and is now managing a total of 19 properties in Greater China. Michael Issenberg, Chairman and Chief Operating Officer for Accor Asia Pacific, says, “We currently have 40 Sofitels in the region. Asia Pacific represents one third of our global network and we have a strong pipeline of Sofitels which will open in the next few years.” [sofitel.com](http://sofitel.com)

TOMBSTONE



Hotelier extraordinaire, visionary and environmentalist, Captain CP Krishnan Nair, Founder Chairman and Chairman Emeritus of The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, passed away after a brief illness at the age of 92. The erstwhile freedom fighter and officer of the Indian Army, pioneered the globalisation of India’s textiles industries and became a thespian of India’s hospitality industry, founding one of the leading luxury hotel groups — The Leela Group of Hotels.

Captain Nair’s frequent business trips to Europe and America for his textile business exposed him to international hotels, which reflected the highest standards of guest services, inspiring him to foray into the hospitality sector. At the age of 65, he started to build The Leela Group of Hotels, with a hotel in Mumbai in 1986, and back then, had signed a marketing alliance with Kempinski. Over the years, Captain Nair’s green vision inspired The Leela Group’s enduring commitment towards building sustainable, Platinum LEED certified hotels and practicing world-class green standards.

A recipient of the Padmabhushan from the President of India, he was also conferred the Global 500 Laureate Roll of Honour by the United Nations Environment Program and won many accolades for his invaluable contribution to the tourism industry.

Captain Nair is survived by his wife Leela, their sons — Chairman and Managing Director, Vivek Nair, and Co-Chairman and Managing Director, Dinesh Nair, their respective wives and children.

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## BRICK AND MORTAR

### GUCCI IN KOLKATA

Italian fashion brand Gucci has opened its sixth store in India, in Kolkata's Quest Mall. The boutique is spread over 2,350 square feet and boasts Frida Giannini's, the brand's Creative Director, design sensibility. The spacious boutique uses warm luxurious materials including rosewood, marble, ribbed glass, warm polished gold and smoked bronze glass, reminiscent of the Art Deco style. Geometric lines, including Gucci's signature web striping, define the internal space. Patrizio di Marco, Gucci President and CEO, says, "Kolkata is the third metropolitan city in India where Gucci is present. This opening is wholly consistent with our overall retail strategy to strengthen the direct control of the brand and further enhance a consumer's experience. Gucci is the perfect luxury brand for this market because of its strong heritage that stems from decades of tradition and innovation." The store will stock a comprehensive range of Gucci products including handbags, shoes, luggage, small leather goods, silks, watches, jewellery, fragrances, sunglasses, the children's collection and gift items. **Gucci.com**



### DIVA'NI IN MUMBAI

DIVA'NI, India's first cinema-inspired fashion label, a collaboration between Yash Raj Films (YRF) and House of KBSH, launched its flagship store in Mumbai. Recently, the brand opened its first store in the capital, New Delhi. Says Pamela Chopra of YRF, "This was an idea that truly excited my late husband. The store opening in Mumbai — the city of cinema — is very appropriate." The collection is inspired by celluloid while incorporating traditional textures and weaves. Says Sanya Dhir, Brand Director, DIVA'NI, "Mumbai is India's cinema capital and the perfect home for DIVA'NI — the only cinema inspired brand in the world. And it is this magic of Indian celluloid that our brand tries to rekindle." **divani.co.in**

## LUXE BYTES

### A FRESH PLATFORM

The domain, .LUXURY, has been launched and over 600 luxury brands, including Hermes, Chanel, Versace, Gucci, Cartier, Valentino, Van Cleef and Armani, have secured their .LUXURY address. This is part of a new domain programme being rolled out by the global regulator of web addresses to introduce greater choice and availability online. ".LUXURY will quickly become the destination for luxury online. With the beginning of general availability, businesses and consumers will be able to obtain a more attractive and relevant web extension to further define themselves within the luxury space," says Monica Kirchner, CEO of .LUXURY. The domain name provides a new way to market and communicate diverse initiatives such as new product launches, VIP customer experiences, exclusive service offerings and non-traditional marketing opportunities. Given the significant challenges regarding authenticity online, robust policies, including express prohibition of counterfeiting and cyber squatting, adopted by .LUXURY protects a brand's interests.

## APPOINTMENTS

### JACO LE ROUX

Has been appointed as the General Manager of the Grand Hyatt Goa. With over 20 years of global experience in the hospitality industry, he has an excellent understanding of diverse cultures. His role will be to achieve results that will benefit all stakeholders. Prior to this, he was the General Manager of Hyatt Regency Oubai Resort & Spa. **goa.grand.hyatt.com**



### SHALABH ARORA

Has joined The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, India as the Director of Sales and Marketing. Arora has over 18 years of experience and was previously the Director of Sales, The Oberoi Group, North Mumbai. "It is a pleasure to be a part of The Ritz-Carlton. I am looking forward to leading the team to achieve targets and moving our market ranking to the top," says Arora. **ritzcarlton.com**



### RAJEEV UPADHYAY

Has come on board as the pastry chef of Sofitel Mumbai BKC and will be responsible for overseeing the bakery, pastry and confectionary sections. He brings to Sofitel 13 years of experience in the hospitality industry and will also play a vital role in promoting the hotel's signature Parisian Café, Artisan. **sofitel.com**



## THE RADAR

### BOF

*"The younger generation doesn't hold diamonds in the same esteem as their predecessors — they're looking for something different from what their friends have. With the baby boomers it was all about keeping up with the Joneses. For the Millennials, it's about having something different and more personal — and coloured gemstones give more variety."*

— Michelle Graff, Editor-in-Chief of the New York-based National Jeweller.

### Forbes

*"We are starting to see agencies put their own name on experiences or endorse particular products and destinations in an effort to position themselves as authorities, build their own brands and up the level of customisation they are able to offer clients."*

— Becky Powell, Senior VP, Global Member and Advisor Sales for the Virtuoso Consortium on travel agents making luxury travel better with special expertise.

### Bloomberg

*"We've taken the concept of private jets and put them into the A380,"*

— Etihad Chief Executive Officer, James Hogan, on the A380 that will be fitted out in a three-class layout, with nine first-class 'apartments' on the upper deck. The planes will also have individually-styled cabins branded 'The Residence,' featuring a double bedroom, a separate living area and shower room and a dedicated attendant trained at the Savoy Butler School.

### The New York Times

*"Sneakers are enfranchising men into the fashion system without posing a threat to their individuality. For me, it's a harbinger of larger cultural changes coming down the pike."*

—Elizabeth Semmelhack, who curated a show on sneaker culture at Toronto's Bata Shoe Museum, on the humble sneaker's evolution into a luxury icon.



**BIRDHICHAND GHANSHYAMDAS**  
JEWELLERS

## MUMBAI DIARY

### From the depth of his archives

*A retrospective on Pablo Bartholomew shone the spotlight on photojournalism*

By **Pallavi Borkar**

Sakshi Gallery recently hosted the show, 'The Calcutta Diaries,' an exhibition of photographs from the archives of Pablo Bartholomew, focusing on his years in Kolkata in the mid-70s. A self-taught photographer, Bartholomew, one of India's finest photojournalists, shot to fame for his iconic image of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Tragedy, which won him the 'Picture of the Year' at the World Press Photo Awards.

There is a pattern that Bartholomew seems to follow in photography — a focus on things that are going to fade into oblivion and might not exist a few years from now. He looks at the world through the eyes of an ethnographer, an anthropologist and sometimes, a connoisseur.

'The Calcutta Diaries' features his documentation of the Hakka Chinese community of south Calcutta, his interaction with director Satyajit Ray during the shooting of Ray's cult classic film *Shatranj ke Khilari*, images of his aging grandmother and poignant narratives of the 'City of Joy'.

Bartholomew has documented societies in conflict and transition for over 20 years. His work captures the marginal, fringe worlds in which he lived and has been exhibited worldwide. He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government, for which he argues that his father, Richard, who wrote relentlessly about art and challenged prestigious art institutions about the role of the state in promoting art, was more deserving.

The bulk of Bartholomew's archives have many elements that reappear in each of his work. For him, anything that evokes emotion, even if ugly, can be beautiful. For him, his archives are the guardians of his memories. [sakhigallery.com](http://sakhigallery.com)



## SINGAPORE DIARY

### Changi Airport's luxury focus

*The strategy reaches out to a new market of luxury consumers*

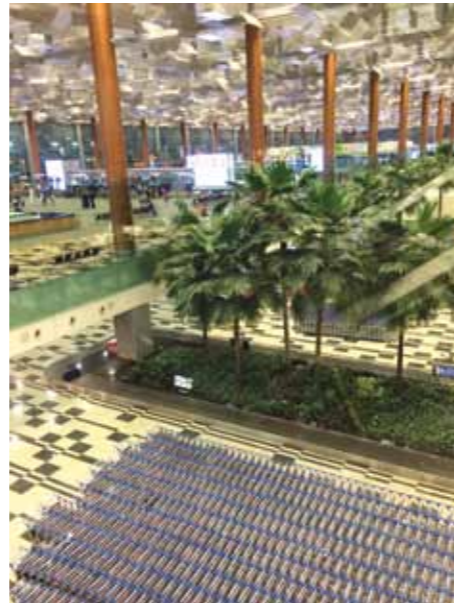
By **Riaan J. George**

Four-time-winner of the prestigious Skytrax Award, Singapore's iconic Changi Airport is upping the ante in luxury. Changi Airport recently showcased streamlined facilities for the premium traveller — luxury retail spaces, slick airline and bank lounges, spa facilities, fine dining options, indoor gardens, a rooftop swimming pool and transit hotels.

There is a strong focus on retail, especially, since last year, Changi's retail sales amounted to over 2 billion Singapore dollars. The emphasis is on luxury experiences for discerning passengers, irrespective of the class of travel or airline segment (premium or low cost). This strategy reaches out to a whole new market of luxury consumers who might not choose to travel premium.

Also showcased was Changi's unique JetQuay Terminal — a private, exclusive paid service offered to both commercial and private jet passengers, irrespective of class of travel. JetQuay, a full-fledged VIP terminal, offers private check-in facilities, immigration and customs areas, concierge services, lounge, personal shoppers for duty-free purchases, limousine transfers and a chauffeur-driven-car to ferry passengers to the aircraft or main terminal.

On the cards are two brand new ultra-modern terminals as well as a complete architectural overhaul of the existing three-terminal-layout. With the rise of new aviation hubs in the Middle East and other parts of Southeast Asia, it remains to be seen how a traditional hub like Changi will continue to maintain its place as one of the global airport leaders. [changiairport.com](http://changiairport.com)



## THE LUXESPY

*Our columnist-around-town gives us the lowdown on the country's luxury circuit every month*

The focus of luxury brands this summer seems to have shifted from Delhi, eastwards. The next biggest luxury market in the country is poised to be Kolkata. After Gucci, Kiehl's, Paul Smith and Michael Kors, Italian fashion label Missoni has announced plans to set up shop in Kolkata, followed by yet another Italian label — Furla. All have set-up shop in Kolkata's Quest Mall, among other beauty and fashion brands.

Meanwhile, Delhi's very own designer of chic fashion, Ravi Bajaj opened his new



store at DLF Emporio. The boutique stocks his creations against prints from iconic masters such as Caravaggio, Botticelli and Michelangelo. The elegant store boasts gilded mirror frames, crystal chandeliers, sliver leafing, Turkish velvet upholstery and sensual drapes. The highlight is, however, a unique thirteen feet long installation, studded with more than forty thousand sparkling Swarovski elements.

On the international front, *Pitti Uomo*, the specialised menswear show in Florence, is gearing up for the 'Firenze Hometown of Fashion' — a celebration marking the 60th anniversary of *Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana* this month. At the heart of the celebration will be the 'Born in Florence' initiative that will showcase five important designers and fashion labels, all of them Florentine originals — Salvatore Ferragamo, Roberto Cavalli, Gucci, Emilio Pucci and Ermanno Scervino.

Meanwhile, in other news, French fashion house Maison Chanel has acquired a 70 per cent stake in Jean-François Lesage, which owns the Chennai-based embroidery atelier *Vastrakala*. The embroidery house was founded in 1999 and employs approximately 174 embroiderers. The artisans' exquisite skills and expertise have been used in innumerable ready-to-wear and accessory lines, including Chanel's.

# Simply Silver

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### S.T. Dupont

Gift your main man a keepsake from the Night Symphony collection that celebrates Hollywood icon, Humphrey Bogart. Choose from the elegant Night Symphony Bogie Bag, available in deep black oilskin, the Ligne 2 lighter or the Elysée fountain and ballpoint pen, each finished in black and ivory dupont lacquer, featuring Bogart's silhouette engraved on a shield. [jotimpex.com](http://jotimpex.com)

# Luxe Buys

With father's day just around the corner, we present some lovely doodads that you can present to your eternal icon.



**Ermenegildo Zegna**

Look no further for happiness in a bottle. Pick from Essenze by Ermenegildo Zegna — an exquisite collection of six signature fragrances which have been discerningly sourced and brilliantly composed. Italian Bergamot from Calabria has been woven into the construction of each of these fragrances — a heady scent that lingers long after the day ends. [zegna.com](http://zegna.com)

### Porsche

Bond with your father over a leisurely drive in the extravagant 911 variant that combines the classic Targa concept with a fully automatic roof. The new Porsche 911 Targa features the brand's typical PTM all-wheel drive system, guaranteeing a smooth ride in trying weather conditions and on bumpy roads. [porsche.com](http://porsche.com)



### Johnnie Walker

Celebrate father's day with a rare blend from the House of Walker — Johnnie Walker Blue Label — a discerning choice for those looking for a tipple with genuine style and substance. Created using hand-selected, rare casks from across the distilling regions of Scotland Complex, it is powerful, smoky and incredibly smooth. [diageo.com](http://diageo.com)



### Rolex

A part of Rolex's Baselworld 2014 collection, the Cellini Dual Time Everose Gold — Black Guilloché Dial is a stunning must-buy for well-heeled horophiles. Boasting a 39mm, 18K rose gold case, a self-winding mechanical movement and a shiny black alligator leather strap, the Dual Time makes each minute spent together count. [rolex.com](http://rolex.com)

### Louis Vuitton

Louis Vuitton's natty Bruce sunglasses are a perfect addition to your dad's ensemble. Distinguished by its metallic top bar and mirrored gradient lenses, its almost futuristic style is sure to command attention. [louisvuitton.com](http://louisvuitton.com)



### Bottega Veneta

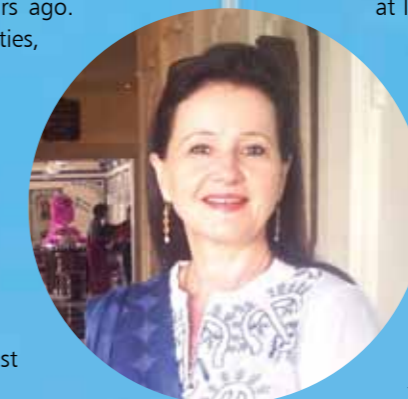
Ideal for hot summer days, these finely woven raffia slip-ons, embellished with luxuriously smooth chevre leather, are unusual yet elegant. Light and versatile, the shoes feature a contrasting weave on the toe cap, a pure leather insole and a stacked leather heel. A perfect gift for the man whose shoes you've always wanted to walk in. [bottegabeneta.com](http://bottegabeneta.com)



# A Traveller's Tale

**Beate H.K. Mauder-Kakkar**, Managing Director, Indiva Marketing, a company responsible for media relations, sales and marketing of international luxe hotels and destinations, says luxury is in the eye of the beholder

- Luxury, to me, is the ability to make a choice based on knowledge, exposure and experience. It also means refinement, quality, an immaculate finish and exclusivity.
- I moved from New York to Mumbai nearly 12 years ago. While there are many similarities between the two cities, each retains its own distinct characteristics.
- I start my day early with a brisk morning walk and a leisurely breakfast. This is followed by work. After a long day I unwind by swimming, meeting social obligations and spending quality time with family and friends.
- The luxury of time simply means being able to do things I truly enjoy — reading, swimming and most importantly, spending time with loved ones.
- Luxury means different things to different people — the term is understood in multiple ways. Almost everyone aspires to acquire luxe products and savour luxe experiences, such as travel.
- Working with different brands and helping them to develop a niche in the Indian market has been very interesting. The availability of multiple options and an excess of information sometimes overwhelms a consumer.
- The hospitality brands we work with offer guests a high-level of personal, non-intrusive attention. They also incorporate various design elements that reflect either understated elegance or overwhelming opulence.
- In the hospitality industry, hotel ratings are often highly misleading. For instance, the One&Only Resorts are positioned in the luxury five-star category, a group which is surfeit with many large hotel chains with several hundred rooms. The latter clearly have a different client focus. Thus, a hotel or resort needs to communicate specific brand values and aspects that clearly differentiate it from its competitors.
- Technology makes information accessible and allows for faster transactions. Travel trade partners who adapt well to technological changes will benefit, while those who don't will find the new environment challenging. Despite technological advancements, a personal touch will always play a significant role in the Indian travel environment.
- Luxury travel is still at a nascent stage and the market is developing gradually. Patience and perseverance are fundamental to operating here.
- I think different offerings attract different travellers — linked to their personality, experience, expectations and, of course, budget.
- There are different segments of travellers. Some guests regularly stay at luxury hotels and resorts. Others choose them occasionally, to celebrate a special event and hopefully, will return frequently. Both groups are equally important to brands who work hard to build loyalty and attract repeat clientele.
- The trend in travel is moving towards frequent but shorter trips, not necessarily to short-haul destinations. Now, people will travel to long-haul destinations like New York for a few days, instead of waiting for a longer holiday.
- It is amazing to see how some destinations, over the years, have continued to attract visitors. For instance, New York City, which never ceases to amaze, has always achieved a record number of visitors.
- For us, it is crucial to closely monitor business flows, gauge promotional opportunities and analyse partnerships so as to manage client expectations. In India, bargaining is prevalent and is culturally accepted. In fact, it's almost expected.
- I stay updated through various online and print media channels. Our travel trade partners are an important source of information, so are digital platforms which invite travellers to share their feedback.
- I travelled extensively as a child, and later, during the course of education and my professional engagements. A background in hotel management and business administration, coupled with global work experience, has enriched my journey and made it enjoyable thus far.
- Hard work, passion, energy and an open-mind have helped me grow professionally and personally in the hospitality and tourism industry, the world's largest employer.
- My biggest learning so far is that people make all the difference. I was blessed with professional and refined bosses throughout my career and I respected and admired them for their communication skills, knowledge and foresight. They taught me much more than just how to deliver the best possible results.
- I believe it is important to be well-informed and gain exposure to new trends in the industry. At the same time, I respect well-established traditional worldly establishments.
- Luxury is in the eye of the beholder — so whatever luxury means to you, indulge in it.



The One&Only Resorts are an exquisite collection of getaways that are positioned uniquely in the market

**M**anish Mehrotra, Corporate Chef—Luxury Dining Division, Old World Hospitality, recalls how during Indian Accent’s first year of operations, the restaurant would lose a reservation a night because there was no butter chicken on the menu. Perplexed guests would ask the wait-staff, “What sort of Indian restaurant is this? You don’t even serve *poppadoms* and *pyaaz*.”

In the 2014 edition of Asia’s Top 50 Restaurants, New Delhi’s temple of ‘inventive Indian’ cuisine has risen in ranking by 12 notches, from 41 to 29, not a mean achievement for a five-year-old restaurnt whose kitchen is constantly being raided by talent hunters. As Indian Accent’s high priest, Mehrotra is sought out at every important international gastronomic powwow, from Varli’s Chefs Showcase in New York City to the recently held international forum on The Future of Food in Singapore. And no A-list social event is complete without his culinary masterpieces. At Nita Ambani’s 50th birthday celebration, held in Jodhpur last year, he served the

Orient Express at the Taj Palace, New Delhi and much before he attained stardom in Bangalore. But 77 floundered, its woes compounded by the fact that it did not have liquor license.

The next chef to try his hand at turning around the restaurant, renamed *Mushk*, was the Michelin star chef Vineet Bhatia from London, but Delhi just didn’t warm up to his squid ink risotto-style seafood *khichdi* and *kala murgh*. The restaurant, as a result, was back to serving a multi-cuisine menu. That was till 2008, when Rohit Khattar’s Old World Hospitality took over the management of the hotel and started working on a new restaurant concept. Mehrotra, who was in London, heading the kitchen at another Khattar venture, the pan-Asian restaurant Tamarai, volunteered to do the menu for the restaurant that was to be called Indian Accent.

It was an unusual leap of faith for a chef who had trained under the famous Ananda Solomon at the Thai Pavilion — Vivanta By Taj President in Mumbai and then evolved as a pan-Asian chef at Oriental Octopus at the India

the mood in the industry altered dramatically and Indian Accent was born in 2009.

Ask Mehrotra what distinguishes Indian Accent from the competition and he’ll say that all the dishes served at the restaurant have been invented at its kitchen. “What I do is pull out the hidden treasures of Indian cuisine and give them a modern twist,” says Mehrotra. “I take the old Bengali favourite, *khichdi* made with aromatic *gobindo bhog* rice, and turn it around by adding smoked sausages. If the world knows about risotto, why not *khichdi*? Our challenge is to elevate home-style cooking.”

It’s different but not gimmicky, because Mehrotra knows he cannot afford to play around with original flavours. He says, “My audience is very difficult — mainly Indian and very well-travelled. They knows food very well and are aware of what is real and what is not.”

Mehrotra finds it reassuring that this new genre of Indian fine dining is gathering momentum and garnering serious investor interest. “No one tried molecular gastronomy in Indian cuisine

# The ALCHEMIST

In five years, Indian Accent’s inventive cuisine has won global accolades and has turned India’s fine dining business upside down

By **Sourish Bhattacharyya**



In Asia’s Top 50 Restaurants listing, New Delhi’s temple of ‘inventive Indian’ cuisine, Indian Accent has been ranked 29

guests, ferried in by 55 private jets, his signature *phulka* tacos with vegetarian fillings, six designer *chaats*, including *dahi batata puri* with wasabi peas, and caramelised onion *kachoris* with a blue cheese sauce.

It may seem incredible today, but Indian Accent almost never happened.

The Manor, a small luxury hotel tucked away in a *cul de sac*, shaded by laburnum trees at the tony Friends Colony, was struggling to make its restaurant, then named 77 after the house number, match its credentials as a preferred address of upper-crust travellers. Its first chef in the late 1990s was Abhijit Saha, fresh out of The

Habitat Centre in New Delhi, before moving on to Tamarai. Mehrotra now says that London exposed him to the many possibilities offered by Indian cuisine, but back in 2008, Khattar, a man with a keen eye for talent, was the only person who believed in him. Mehrotra flew back to Delhi for seemingly endless cooking-and-tasting sessions with Khattar and his team. Even as these sessions were on, the 26/11 terror strikes in Mumbai plunged the hospitality sector into uncertainty. It coincided with the economic slowdown in the western world. Hospitality industry analysts were convinced that the good times were over. India’s GDP growth rate, however, beat all expectations,

before Gaggan (Anand, the acclaimed chef-entrepreneur behind the stupendous success of his eponymous ‘progressive Indian’ restaurant in Bangkok),” Mehrotra says. “I get at least two e-mails and another two or three personal visits by potential investors every week. Recently, an investor from Teheran call me up to discuss the possibility of taking Indian Accent to the Iranian capital.” Call it ‘modernist’, ‘progressive’ or ‘inventive’, new Indian cuisine may have a handful of practitioners now, but it is here to stay — and chart out a brave new world beyond chicken *tikka* masala. Mehrotra, in a candid interview, speaks about the state of the industry and more.



It was a leap of faith for Manish Mehrotra to leave London and explore the many possibilities of Indian food in Delhi

**Chef, do you believe that fine dining has finally arrived in India, in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai?**

For decades, we have equated fine dining with expensive white tablecloths, fancy decor and silver service in five-star hotels. That's not fine dining. Restaurants need to deliver a complete culinary experience. Quality defines a fine dining restaurant and not its address. Every dish it serves must be a piece of fine art — pleasing to the eye as much as to the palate.

**By the standards you have set, Indian Accent certainly qualifies as a fine dining restaurant. But are there takers for the kind of 'inventive Indian' food you serve?**

Indian fine-dining has arrived. We have shown that there's space for fine-dining outside five-star hotels.

Indian Accent seats 56 guests, if we include the verandah. We serve an average of 75-80 guests at dinner-time every day. In the first couple of years, we did abysmal business during lunch hours, but now we get around 15-20 guests during the week and nearly 40-45 diners on Sundays. The average food spend ranges from approximately ₹3,200 to ₹3,500. With drinks it swells up by another ₹1,500.

**Is it expensive to run a restaurant such as Indian Accent? Are the operating costs high?**

Our food cost is approximately 29 per cent, which means Indian Accent is not a very expensive restaurant to run. But we do have items on the menu that set us back financially. When we serve soft shell crabs, our food cost goes up to 90 per cent. Our popular blue cheese naan, which we offer gratis, costs us ₹8-9 apiece. These items have to be balanced with those that aren't a financial burden, using intelligent menu planning.

**What is the biggest challenge you're faced with when running a restaurant with an ambitious menu?**

Supplies. We are at the mercy of our suppliers and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's labelling requirements, which holds up imported supplies at ports and lead to shortages downstream. Recently, our supplies of foie gras, which is an essential ingredient in the *gilawat kabab* and the Danish Blue (Danablu) cheese, which goes into the *naan*, stopped because of the new food safety and standards regime.

We had no choice but to go slow on foie gras and buy Danish Blue from department stores at three times the price we pay to our supplier.

Then, suddenly, after an absence of nearly 20-25 days, our supplier dumped ten kilos of foie gras worth ₹72,000. We had no option but to take the delivery, though the peak summer season is a lean period for the restaurant. Gaggan in Bangkok would never have to deal with such problems.

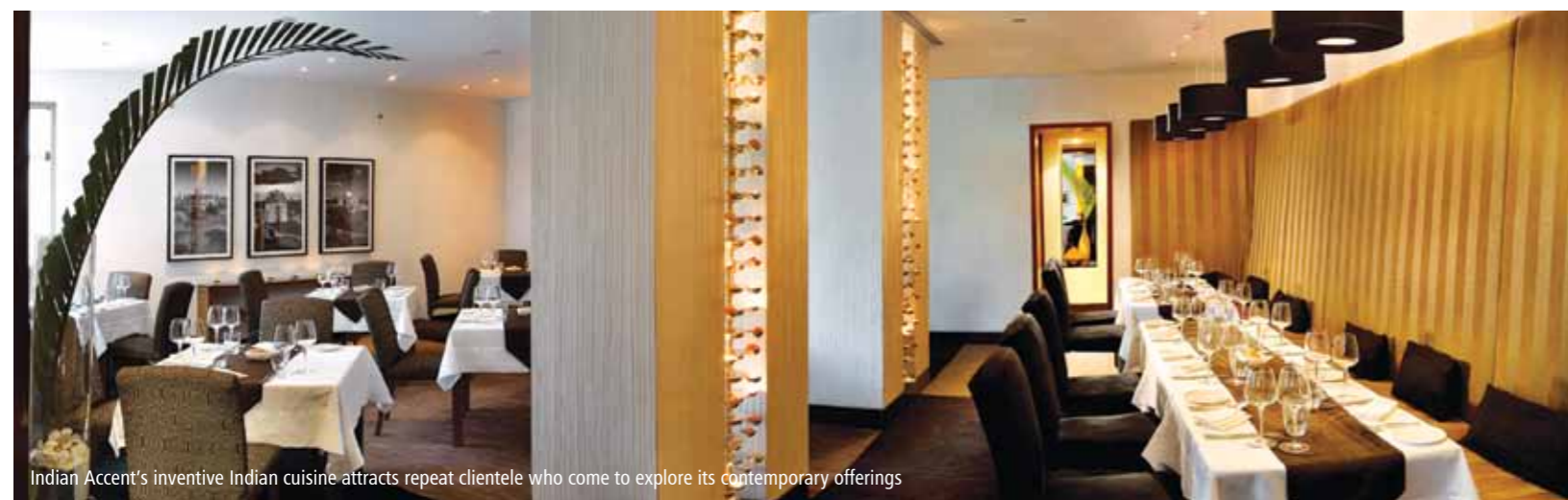
**Are erratic supplies the only disadvantage Indian Accent faces when compared to restaurants run by celebrity chefs around the world?**

Chefs abroad are spoiled for choice. For instance, they would have access to 22 different types of watercress and micro leaves. We, on the other hand, have to grow our own watercress so that we are not at the mercy of our suppliers. But that's just one of the roadblocks.

Delhi is not a tourist hotspot and most international travellers use it as a transit point *en route* to Agra and Rajasthan. Also, Indian Accent's international fan following is not as vast as that of an Alinea (Chicago), or an El Celler De Can Roca (Girona, Spain), or a Noma (Copenhagen). These restaurants won't be hurt financially even if they do not attract repeat clientele. I don't enjoy that luxury in Delhi.

Everyone I meet says they're in love with Indian food, but none of them seem to know that

“Everyone I meet says they're in love with Indian food, but none of them seem to know that there exists an inventive Indian cuisine, which goes beyond *naan* bread and butter chicken.”



Indian Accent's inventive Indian cuisine attracts repeat clientele who come to explore its contemporary offerings



Silken tofu *gathia* with spiced *bajra* and *kokum kadhi*



Roast scallops *balchao* with *saboodana poppadum* and *kokum powder*



Gujarati *suterfeni*, winter *chikki* served with homemade pistachio ice cream



Wholemeal and semolina *puchkas*, masala *cous cous* and five waters



Foie gras stuffed *galawat*, strawberry green chilli chutney



Mishti doi *canoli* and *amaranth ladoo*

there exists an inventive Indian cuisine, which goes beyond 'naan bread' and butter chicken. I was at the prestigious culinary school, ALMA in Parma, Italy, some time back. It was distressing to find out that none of the students knew anything about inventive Indian cuisine. To make restaurants such as Indian Accent thrive, we must make the world aware of what we have to offer. Fortunately for us, our international clientele now comprise nearly 25-30 per cent of our total guests during the summers and about 40-45 per cent during the winters.

**The market, despite these challenges, seems to be working in your favour. What are your growth plans moving ahead?**

Going international is the way forward for us. We have established ourselves. We have a reputation and a repertoire of recipes. But, at this point, we can't disclose what's on the drawing board.

**Restaurants such as Indian Accent drive a culture of celebrity chefs. Do you support the idea of chefs becoming cult figures with a fan following?**

It has done a world of good for chefs. We are viewed very differently and celebrity chefs have inspired talented young people to become a part of the profession. Parents no longer want to hold back a child who wishes to become a chef. It has also meant that professionals today are much better paid than their predecessors.

I wish the media gives the same importance to the front of the house staff. If they start lionising our service staff, we'll have much better

people wanting to join the industry as waiters and captains.

**What is your take on the quality of hospitality education in the country? Are hotel management institutes producing the kind of talent that the industry needs to advance?**

Unfortunately culinary education in our country is in a sorry state. The students studying in hotel management institutes are still being taught old-fangled techniques, which they have to unlearn the moment they step out of colleges. The institutes can invite chefs who have made a mark in the real world as guest speakers, exposing students to cutting-edge knowledge, but no one has ever approached me or any of my contemporaries.

Some time back I was judging a culinary competition at IHM, Pusa, in New Delhi. I was shocked to see gas burners being used in the institute's kitchen. A fellow judge, an alumnus of the institute, informed me that even his batch had worked on the same range some 20 years ago!

**What are your views on fusion cuisine, molecular gastronomy, organic food and healthy eating. Which trend will define restaurant dining in the years to come?**

I cannot understand why people consider fusion cuisine to be a contemporary trend. It is as old as Chicken Manchurian! Molecular gastronomy enhances the 'wow' factor of the dining experience by surprising the guest. But it is unlikely to become popular in India because we like our food hot. More importantly, many of the ingredients that

are needed to make spheres and foams are hard to source in India.

People are becoming more conscious about healthy eating. As regards to organic food, I believe that people talk about it more than they consume it in their daily lives. We are at a stage when we only have easy access to organic vegetarian produce. When are we going to move on to mass production of organic meats, organic milk and organic eggs?

In my view, the future of food will be defined by presentation. Food must look good and take you by surprise, without compromising the authenticity of taste. It should evoke nostalgia and bring a smile to your face.

**You now have a dedicated fan following. What is the secret behind building and retaining customer loyalty?**

Indian Accent gives each guest a complete experience that goes beyond good food. Consistency of food and service quality are other big assets. Our constant effort to keep improving our offerings works in our favour. It helps us stay ahead of the competition.

**Can awards inspire more restaurants to achieve the standards of Indian Accent?**

Today everyone is giving away awards. What we need is an independent and transparent rating system powered by credible assessors on the lines of the Michelin star rating. For India, we will need an army of auditors, but we can make a beginning with Delhi or Mumbai. •



Chef Manjit Gill, Corporate Executive Chef, ITC Hotels



Rahul Akerkar, Founder and Managing Director, deGustibus Hospitality



Manu Chandra, Executive Chef and Partner — Monkey Bar & The Fatty Bao and Executive Chef Olive Beach, Bangalore



Alex Sanchez, Executive Chef, The Table



Hemant Oberoi, Corporate Chef & Grand Executive Chef, The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai



Ritu Dalmia, Managing Partner and Chef, Diva Group

# CULINARY CROSSOVERS

A casual, fine dining culture is encroaching on the culinary turf dominated by traditional high-end restaurants

By **Naina Hiranandani**

**F**ine dining in India is suffering from an identity crisis. This is evident in a restobar in Mumbai's emerging business district. Fig-chocolate and kaffir lime *mille-feuille*, pumpkin gnocchi casserole with baby clams, sugar-snap peas and grilled chorizo are just some of the dishes that feature on a 15-strong menu at The White Owl. Even though their average customer is a beer-guzzling, twenty-something professional, greasy bar food has given way to an upscale menu that will be served for over a month, as part of a new, temporary collaboration between the restaurant's chef and a food blogger.

After the first wave of fine dining, the second wave is bringing in new concepts such as pop-up restaurants, sensory-dining experiences, tasting menus, green-going-mainstream kitchens and more. "Today's youngsters are ordering John Dory and scallops. An 18-year-old can tell the difference between *ha gau* and gyoza. We have exciting times ahead with a new wave of really innovative, great restaurants that don't try too hard," says Manu Chandra,

Executive Chef and Partner — Monkey Bar & The Fatty Bao and Executive Chef Olive Beach, Bangalore.

## The old guard

Haute cuisine is dropping its pretensions to suit the new casual diner. Hemant Oberoi, Corporate Chef & Grand Executive Chef, The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai reminisces, "I remember Rendezvous, a French fine dining restaurant at The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai, about forty-three years ago. Attention was paid to the minutest of details. For instance, the food trolleys were made of silver with intricate carvings on them. There was a silver platter to plate service, which made diners feel like royalty. Over the years, the concept of fine dining has changed and has moved from classical to *nouvelle* to a *ménage a trois*."

Rahul Akerkar, Founder and Managing Director, deGustibus Hospitality, was one of the forerunners of European, standalone fine dining when he set up Indigo in Mumbai in 1996. He says, "Fine dining is exacting, serious business.

Its definition in an international context implies a total dining experience. These restaurants are usually helmed by a celebrity chef. The food and bar is ingredient driven, sophisticated, creative, complex and superlative. The service is exemplary, knowledgeable and engaging. The interiors are well designed, aesthetical and spotless. The cutlery, crockery, glassware and linen are top notch. The experience involves a huge cerebral component too. And they're expensive because of this." Though he believes India has great restaurants, Akerkar says, "I'm not sure I'd classify them as fine dining."

There is no clear cut definition for fine dining in the country. "Fine dining in India is not well-defined — even a *thali* could come under the category. As Indians, we've always been exposed to this concept since centuries. The elevated platform with a *baithak*, silk cushions and a silver *thali* with continuous refills, by well-dressed attendants is a part of our tradition," says Chef Manjit Gill, Corporate Executive Chef, ITC Hotels.

But, this is making way for a more relaxed dining experience, without compromising on the quality of food. As Tony Naylor recently observed in *The Guardian*, 'Haughty waiters, hushed rooms and starched tablecloths are a thing of the past. Today's top chefs are all about casual dining.' What has brought about this tectonic shift? According to a recent ASSOCHAM report, fine dining restaurants in India saw a decline of 20 per cent in late 2013, due to the falling rupee. "The Indian consumer is very price conscious and that's why you will see a huge shift from fine dining to smart casual. With today's crazy rentals and import costs, keeping prices at a level which suit the client is a very difficult task," says Ritu Dalmia, Managing Partner and Chef, Diva Group.

## A new format

Abhishek Bindal, AGM — KA Hospitality, which has brought Hakkasan and Yauatcha to India, believes there has been a dynamic change in mind set. For instance, Yauatcha filled a huge void in the market for international quality dim sums, and will open in Kolkata this September. "It's been only three to four

years now that international brands have come to India and expat chefs have been looking at it as a lucrative market. It may take another couple of years for restaurants in India to be globally recognised," says Bindal.

What clever investors are cashing in on is the casual dining format — modern, gourmet meals in an impressive space with attention to detail and first-rate service. According to a report by Technopak, the Indian food service market is currently worth \$13.5 billion and is growing at 7 per cent. Of this, the organised sector accounts for just \$1.9 billion (14 per cent), but is growing much faster, at 16 per cent. Currently, QSRs account for the biggest chunk of the organised market at \$850 million, followed by casual dining restaurants, which are worth \$430 million — and this pattern will stay until 2017.

One of the most flourishing names in the casual dining business is Riyaz Amlani, CEO and MD at Impresario Entertainment and Hospitality. "We are going through many food revolutions in a compressed time. The rise of high-end standalones arrived with Saltwater Grill, Indigo, Olive and other restobars. People want go out more often, spend less and demand quality," he emphasises.

## The contemporary diner

Understanding the demographic and its market is crucial, as Rohan Talwar, owner of Mumbai's Ellipsis, learnt the hard way. The young entrepreneur brought top expat chefs and an international bar concept to a swanky space in Mumbai's Colaba. "I didn't understand the price sensitivity, the client's lack of exposure and the need to offer vegetarian options. It was a frustrating experience, but we learnt a lot. The Indian customer can be schizophrenic — they're willing to spend a few thousand pounds at say, Zuma, but will complain about prices at a top restaurant in India," he says.

Chandra observes, "Every metro has a different dynamic and propensity to spend. New Delhi has the trader and business belt with pockets of wealth,

Indigo was one of the forerunners of European, standalone fine dining

Ellipsis, a gastro-inspired modern American dining concept, brought top expats chefs and an international bar concept to India



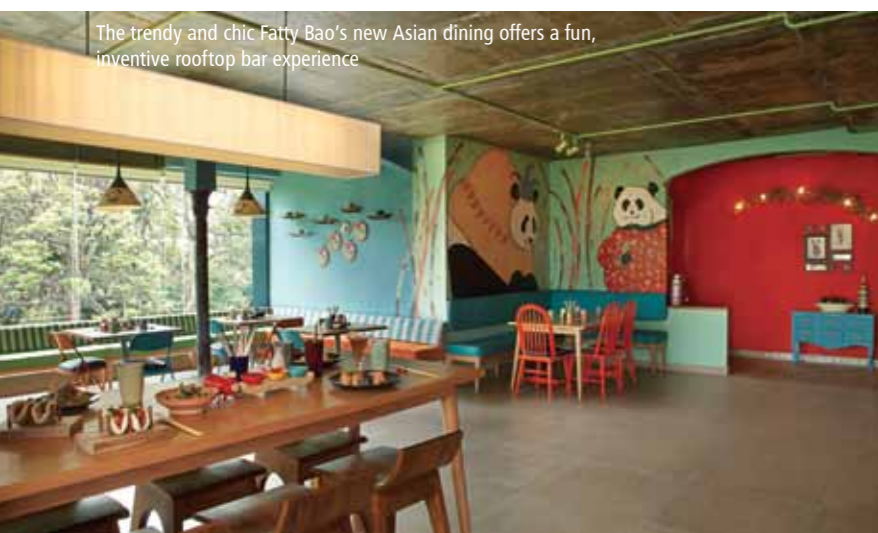
Yauatcha, the Michelin star London-based dim sum tea house opened its first international outpost in Mumbai



India has been well-acquainted with fine dining since the days of the Maharajas as seen as the sumptuous traditional Royal Vega Restaurant at the ITC Grand Chola, Chennai

whereas Bangalore is fantastic for mid-segment restaurants.” The Leela’s much celebrated Megu and *Le Cirque* in Delhi come with posh décor and old-world fanfare, but Mumbai’s Signature version of the former is a smart casual version — stripped of even a dress policy.

Gauri Devidayal, owner of The Table in Mumbai, had no experience in the restaurant business but her team has earned several accolades in just three years. “Executive Chef Alex Sanchez has managed to find a balance between economics and creativity. Those who want higher quality food will pay for it,” she says. Devidayal also created The Table Farm in Alibaug in 2012, in an attempt to execute the globally popular farm-to-table philosophy.



The trendy and chic Fatty Bao’s new Asian dining offers a fun, inventive rooftop bar experience

Almost simultaneously, smaller, affordable establishments are garnering interest. Amlani’s eateries are present in over 10 Indian cities and cater to non-homogenous consumer tastes that “change every 100 kilometres”. Chandra’s popular gastro pub, Monkey Bar (Bangalore and New Delhi), encouraged him to open The Fatty Bao, an Asian gastro bar in Bangalore. As Talwar aptly reiterates, “Diners don’t want to be in a stuffy, one-dimensional environment that is pretentious. People want a bar, great food and a party spot all rolled into one.”

### Experiential eating

Pleasing the demanding customer is no easy task. Giving a big sales push to establishments are restaurant weeks, culinary ‘passports’ and the pop-up concept. Mangal Dalal, Director, Restaurant Week India & Cellar Door Hospitality Consulting, says, “We started Restaurant Week India with seven restaurants in Mumbai in 2010. We now have 60-75 eateries participate across Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai. In our last round in April, over 10,000 diners participated nationally for the third time in a row. We generated over ₹1.3 crore in terms of revenue for these restaurants over a 10-day period on food only.”

Thirty year-old Kunal Jain founded the e-portal, Gourmet It Up. “Our dining experiences are curated to guarantee that diners have a fantastic experience, by providing choices balanced to take into account varying tastes, guidance on non-standard dishes as well as a fixed price point. We work with 75 top restaurant brands across India and our experiential menus are present across over 100 restaurants,” says Jain.

In New Delhi, food enthusiasts Atul Sikand, Rocky Mohan and Sourish Bhattacharyya’s Delhi Gourmet Club (DGC) had over 5,000 online ‘foodies’. Not only did the trio get the finest restaurants in the capital to shut their doors exclusively for DGC members, but also launched the ‘Gourmet Passport’ — a booklet of vouchers that allows customers to enjoy the benefits of group dining. “While people may be willing to spend big bucks, I think they prefer it in a more relaxed setting, where there is equal emphasis on a well stocked wine cellar as there is on food,” says Sikand.

Culinary festivals also are testing the waters. Taste of Mumbai, the local edition of the international Taste festival saw 8,000 visitors in 2013, but will probably not take place this year. “It’s hard to convince people to pay for international chefs in such a setting. In India, we still have the concept of free entry,” rues Rachna Sharma, one of the organisers.

Adding that element of mystery on a plate is also the trend *du jour*. The Mumbai-based Secret Supper Project was born out of the disappointment that the founders experienced in local restaurants. They also had another aim: to engage different sections of society that would have not interacted otherwise. Diners are informed about the date, venue and time via e-mail and for ₹2,000 to ₹4,000 per head, can enjoy a pleasurable dining experience in a novel space.

The trend of pop-up restaurants is gaining momentum too. In 2012, Bukhara’s famed *sikandari raan*, *murgh malai kebabs* and *dal bukhara* found

their way onto plates at the Sheraton Park Tower hotel in Knights bridge. The seats were sold out in a week before the pop-up, but “the challenge was to get the kind of ingredients required and specifications for setting/catering of our standards. However, our partners left no stone unturned in ensuring that we were able to deliver the Bukhara experience to the fullest,” says chef Gill.

Dalal, who has organised pop-ups in Mumbai with Ritu Dalmia and others says, “I’d love to see the day where we have truly big names such as a Roca or Redzepi or even a Ducasse come to India. There was a rumour that Nobu was to open in India and the hotel chain in question even had an agreement in place. However, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai put a spanner in the works and it didn’t materialise simply due to security concerns.” The international epicurean phenomenon, *Le Diner En Blanc* concept, is said to arrive here soon, but that’s if permissions and licenses don’t play spoilsport.

### Bring out the foodie

One of the biggest changes the market has seen is the rise of the *desi* epicurean. Amlani believes that several factors have led to the rise of the budding gourmand. “International TV shows, social media, community building exercises and food reviews encourage everyone to give their two cents. The word ‘foodie’ has been overused,” he says.

The extensive availability of gourmet ingredients also enables enthusiasts to learn about new ingredients and experiment at home. Food importer Chenab Impex used to have just one brand (Lindsay Olives) in 2002. Today, they import over 900 ingredients from 70 labels. “In the last decade, more Indians have started travelling overseas, and on their return, they want the same foods and tastes that they experienced,” says Anil Chandhok, Director, Chenab Impex. His company is the sole India distributor of *Sole Graells El Bulli Texturas*, texture-altering ingredients created by Spanish molecular gastronomists, Ferran and Albert Adrià, and ingredients like *Agroittica*’s CITES-certified sturgeon caviar and *Valette* foie gras. The brand recently launched a retail online store to reach out to a wider audience.

### The challenges

To sustain quality consistency and excellence a restaurant needs “great food, service, hygiene, good price points, something new to offer the customer, along with a buzz,” says Vicky Ratnani, the chef behind Nido and Aurus in Mumbai.

But challenges persist. The ASSOCHAM report states that the attrition rate of manpower in the food services market is 25-30 per cent. “We are growing at such a fast rate that keeping up with skilled resources is next to impossible,” rues Chandra. He hopes that the government focuses on upgrading and creating relevant institutes for the industry that is the third largest generator of employment in the country. For Zorawar Kalra, Founder & Managing Director, Massive Restaurants, skyrocketing real estate prices are “severely curtailing the expansion that the sector is capable of”. Devidayal believes the licensing process needs to be eased. “There are currently about 35 licenses/No Objection Certificates required before a restaurant can be fully operational. We also need



Chef Dalmia owns and manages a family of six unique restaurants in Delhi, as well as a thriving catering business

better collaboration between customs and importers (of wines, products, etc). Right now, officials seem to be putting every possible obstacle they can, resulting in losses running into lakhs, which drives up costs,” she explains.

Globally, the perception of a luxurious meal is changing. Ratnani says one of his most unforgettable meals was at a farm — Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills, NY — a 16-course menu that was created from fresh produce off the farm, paired with fine wine. Can the Indian gourmand digest this? We will wait and watch. •



Chef Sanchez brings his unique cooking style from San Francisco with global accents and nuances to The Table



Chef Oberoi’s menu in Varg retains the Indian traditional way of cooking while using exotic ingredients like sea bass, sand crab, black cod, morels and Iranian berries

# THE LONDON LOOK

Hardy Amies, synonymous with Savile Row's tailored menswear, is now turning its gaze towards Indian shores with its threads

By **Riaan J. George**

With a client portfolio that boasts British royals, international leaders and A-list celebrities, couture house Hardy Amies, from London's hotbed of exquisitely tailored menswear — Savile Row, is looking to explore new markets.

Its signature made to measure service is now available exclusively to customers at the luxury multi-brand store, The Collective, in the cities of Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore. During a recent made to measure event in Mumbai, **Nick Preston**, Trading Director of Hardy Amies, spoke about the label's plans in India.

## How has Hardy Amies evolved over the years since it first started?

Hardy Amies is the face of modern London, in a world that is becoming increasingly focused on heritage, history and pedigree. The brand has been growing for over 60 years and has effortlessly reinterpreted fashion in a contemporary way.

Today, Hardy Amies is more relevant than ever, given that British style is being exported globally. But we recognise that there is a growing demand for a 'London look'. London is a melting pot of cultures and this aspect gives a whole new identity to fashion. There is an aesthetic that is unique to the city. The quintessential London sartorial style has its roots firmly anchored in the past, in the heritage of Savile Row, but there is an undeniable newness and modernity about it, which is on par with cities like New York or Paris. Luckily for us, when we travel to any major city around the world, we see people who appreciate this aesthetic and style.

## What prompted your decision to bring Hardy Amies to India in collaboration with The Collective?

We arrived in India in March and The Collective is our perfect home here. Its retailing standards are impeccable and the staff embraces our philosophy. This association illustrates that Hardy Amies can retail along with other brands, yet stand apart because of its completely unique offering.

India is important on the global platform as an economic power and a developing market. It is necessary for us to be here, especially since there is such a pronounced evolution in the luxury menswear space. It is indeed an exciting time to start working in this market, which is positioned where Hong Kong was 15 years ago. The next few years are going to be exciting as there is a latent demand for global luxury brands.

## What kind of customer are you targeting in India?

Hardy Amies is a brand for men who take pride in their appearance. Our customers are well-dressed but believe in understated elegance. We are concerned about the subtleties of menswear — the fit, the fabrication and the nuances of old-school tradition, interpreted with a modern aesthetic. We don't aspire to be a mass-market brand and sell to everybody. We want to serve customers who understand and love our modern formal or semi-formal look.

## Currently, Hardy Amies offers ready-to-wear, besides the bespoke and made to measure services. What will you offer in the market?

We started our ready-to-wear collection three years ago to cater to a demand from younger customers. This was in addition to our bespoke



Hardy Amies has collaborated with The Collective in India

house, which has existed since 1948. Besides these two offerings, we also have a made to measure service, which is the third component of our offering, sitting halfway between the bespoke and ready-to-wear lines.

We stock our collections at Harvey Nichols worldwide, Isetan in Tokyo, Bloomingdale's in the USA — we have a retail partner in every major market. In India, we have just introduced the made to measure service and the ready-to-wear line. We offer the bespoke service only at our London studio.

## In India, would you focus on your ready-to-wear line or your made to measure service?

Our visits to India have revealed that there is a very sophisticated customer shopping at The Collective and that both the offerings could work.



Hardy Amies brings London's sartorial style to India — smart yet understated and elegant

We would let the market steer us. Our job is to let the customers see what we do and they can tell us what they want. The customer is educated enough to make a choice — all we need to do is provide the means and the options.

## What steps are you taking to promote the brand?

It would be fair to say that we are not doing it aggressively. We believe in a subtle, customer-focused approach. We are targeting a client base which already appreciates international design and lifestyle. Thus, our brand can grow organically.

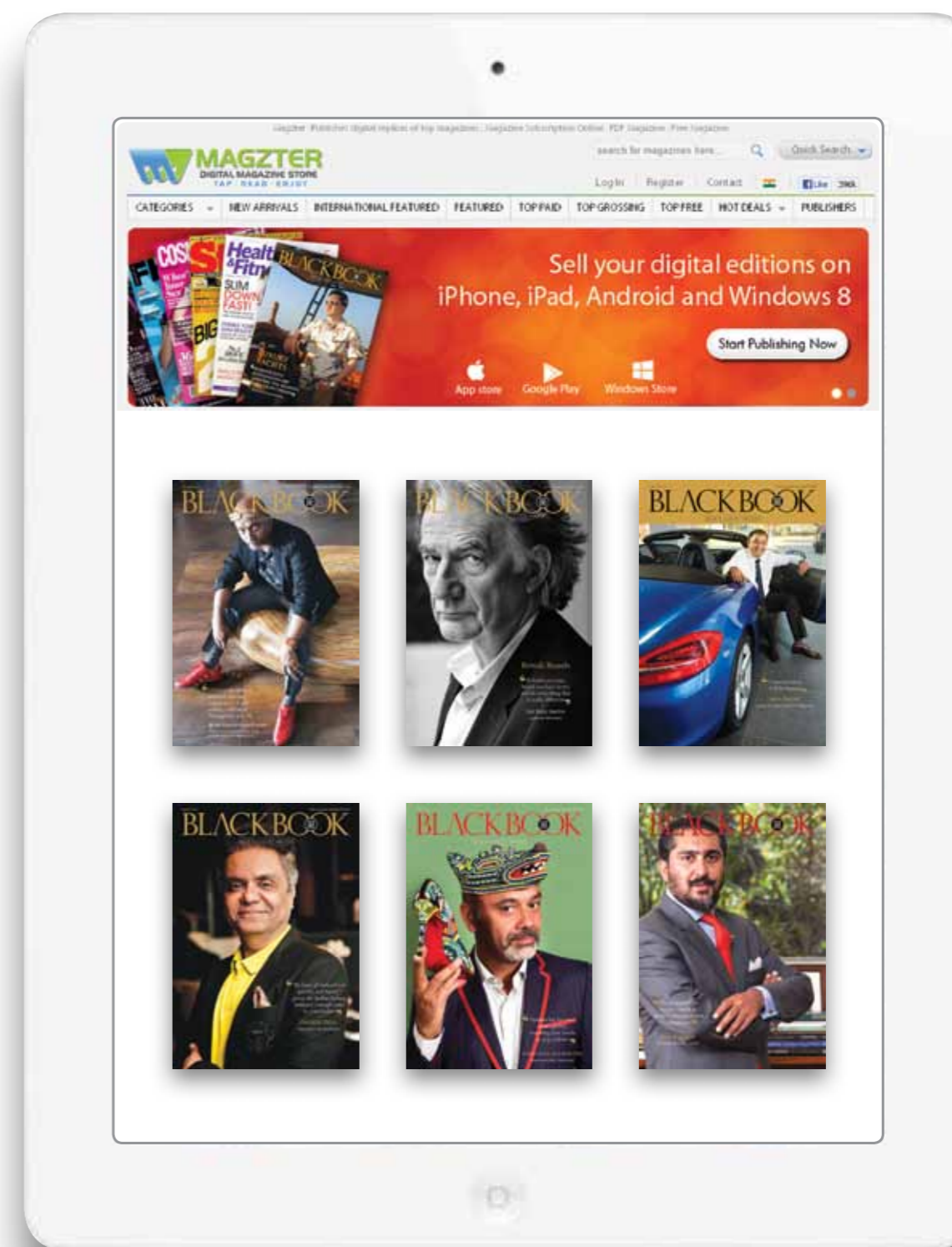
## In terms of aesthetics, have you tweaked your offering to suit the local market?

No we haven't and neither will we. We don't tweak our offerings to adapt to markets. In fact, a market reacts well to fashion which is slightly different from what's locally available — this makes a collection interesting and wearable. No matter which city in the world we are present in, there is a London sartorial style that our customers are looking for — smart yet understated and elegant. Our customers in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Paris, New York and now Mumbai all aspire for the same thing. Their choices in cars, watches, shoes and clothes are consistent.

## What are Hardy Amies' future plans in India?

We would like to start our made to measure shirt service in India soon as we currently only offer jackets, trousers, tuxedos and waistcoats.

We are a business that is prepared to invest in our partners; in this case it is The Collective and the Indian market. We believe that India is a veritable luxury powerhouse and that there is an explosion of consumption waiting to happen. •



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# Global powerhouses

A new report reveals that luxury goods companies have sailed through recessionary times with flying colours. **BlackBook** presents excerpts

The inaugural Global Powers of Luxury Goods report issued by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (Deloitte Global) states that the world’s 75 largest luxury goods companies generated luxury sales of \$171.8 billion through the end of last fiscal year (ending at June 2013), despite a slowdown in the global economy.

The report identifies the largest luxury goods companies around the world — with LVMH ranking at the top. LVMH has more than 30 luxury brands spanning the portfolio of luxury goods categories covered in this report and more than 60 prestigious brands in its entire portfolio (including wines and spirits, retailing and media). Three of the Top 10 companies are luxury conglomerates participating in multiple luxury categories with multiple luxury brands. Three are cosmetic and fragrance companies, two are watch companies, one is an accessories company and one is an apparel company. Switzerland and France are each headquarters to three of the Top 10, the US has two and Italy and Japan, one each.

The growth of luxury goods sales for the Top 10 luxury companies was modestly superior to the Top 75 in 2012, with composite sales for the Top 10 growing at 13.1 per cent versus 12.6 per cent for the Top 75. Kering led the group with a 26.3 per cent increase and five other Top 10 companies contributed to the group’s strong top-line result as well: LVMH, Richemont, Luxottica, Swatch and L’Oréal Luxe.

“Despite operating in a troubled economic environment, luxury goods companies fared better than consumer product companies and global economies generally. For the remainder of this year, we expect growth in developed economies to pick up speed while significant risks in emerging markets remain,” said Ira Kalish, Chief Economist, Deloitte Global. “The overall performance of the luxury sector will depend not only on economic growth, but on factors such as volume of travel, protection of intellectual property, consumer propensity to save and changing income distribution.”

### Regional trends

The report focuses on the high concentration of luxury goods companies headquartered in France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, the UK and the US. These six countries represent nearly 87 per cent of the top 75 luxury goods companies and accounted for more than 90 per cent of global luxury goods sales in 2012.

France, Italy, and Switzerland achieved strong composite luxury sales growth in 2012 with France and Switzerland outpacing the 12.6 per cent composite growth for the top 75 at 19.4 per cent and 14.8 per cent, respectively. Italian luxury goods companies grew in tandem with the Top 75 at 12.4 per cent. Countries trailing the Top 75 composite were Spain, the UK and the US, with the US having the smallest growth at just 5.6 per cent.

### Global trends

Controlling all aspects of a business has been the hallmark of luxury brands. But changing times, especially the advent of the digital revolution, have presented luxury brands with new challenges and opportunities.

The report highlights the following:



LVMH has topped the ranking as the largest luxury group in the world

### Ubiquity versus exclusivity

E-commerce is the fastest growing retail channel, accounting for up to 20 per cent of a retailer’s or a brand’s total volume. Luxury brands, however, were late to e-commerce, with many assuming that the aesthetics of their selling experience in the designer’s atelier or the flagship ‘maison’ would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate on the internet. The potential loss of exclusivity and the prestige associated with luxury brands’ bricks and mortar locations are hurdles that can be difficult for them to overcome, but they are surmountable. Ultimately, luxury brands, like most consumer-facing brands, need to deliver an interactive, exciting and efficient shopping experience to all their customers regardless of the channel, from flagship stores to mobile and everything in between.

### Social media

With the advent of social media, consumers had a new voice, increasing their individual and collective power. Communities of both brand advocates and critics have sprung up. While this erodes message control for luxury brands, the internet, along with mobility and e-commerce, is one of the most effective means to introduce new products globally and provide instant gratification to shoppers in any part of the world. Moreover, social media can be used effectively as a vibrant storytelling medium for luxury brands, communicating brand heritage and iconography to a new audience of potential clients.

### Omnichannel

Retailers and mass brands have adopted omnichannel or channel agnostic distribution strategies to keep pace with consumer expectations. The virtual world is vital in the discovery and path to purchase. According to a recent Deloitte US study, during the 2013 holiday season, omnichannel shoppers — defined as consumers who shopped online, on their smartphones and in-store — spent 76 per cent more than store-only shoppers in total. Consumers are spending increasingly greater portions of their day

online and are connected with smart phones and tablets. As uncomfortable as this change may be for luxury players, it is participate or perish. While an entire brand’s assortment needn’t be available for sale on the internet, a luxury brand can offer, for example, a select group of accessories that help promote its brand story and keep the customer happy. Consumers have extremely high expectations from luxury brand sites, from design layout, functionality and ease of navigation, to brand iconography and strength of overall brand presence. Aspirational or premium brands such as Coach, Kate Spade, Michael Kors and Tory Burch have been quick to adapt to the internet, as well as to social media and omnichannel strategies. Increasingly, we see the most exclusive luxury brands joining the ranks.

### Globalisation

During the last five years, an emerging global middle class has supported growth and is projected to continue fuelling growth through 2018. According to Euromonitor, Asia Pacific, Latin America, and the Middle East and Africa accounted for a combined 9 per cent of the luxury market in 2008. This figure leaped to 19 per cent in 2013 and is projected to grow to 25 per cent in 2025, driven by the combined forces of urbanisation, economic development and the love of luxury.

The developed economies benefit from the emerging markets’ travelling middle classes, for whom the former offer superior product selection and availability, as well as advantageous price comparisons due to high import taxes in the home countries. In 2012, according to Euromonitor, the US was the top country in terms of incoming tourism shopping receipts of approximately \$15 billion. Fifth-ranked France, at about \$8 billion, was a favourite destination for luxury shopping, especially for BRIC travellers. Over the 2012-2017 period, Euromonitor projects China to lead in outbound tourism expenditure growth, exhibiting a 15 per cent CAGR. India, Vietnam, and Taiwan are expected to show significant increases as well.

### Tourism’s support of sales

While much of the developed world struggled with weak domestic economies as consumers dealt with relatively high unemployment rates and tepid income growth, luxury goods companies benefited from favourable global tourism trends. Indeed, according to Euromonitor, France’s luxury industry depends on tourists from all over the world for more than half of its €16 billion in revenues across all luxury sectors.

Paris is the top destination, chosen by four of the top ten global shopper nationalities, which include Chinese and US citizens. It is followed by London, the preferred city for three of the top ten global shopper nationalities.

According to Euromonitor data, sales of luxury goods in that region grew 35 per cent in the 2008-2013 period and are projected to increase another 33 per cent in the next five years. While global tourism is always at the mercy of currency fluctuations and regional unrest, these developments

The performance of the luxury sector will depend on economic growth, volume of travel, protection of intellectual property, consumer propensity to save and changing income distribution

suggest that tourism is likely to continue benefiting luxury brand portfolios in the near future.

### Democratisation

Just as globalisation and information have combined to create what Thomas Friedman aptly described as a flat world, these transformational forces are driving the democratisation of luxury, whereby exclusivity is replaced with nearly mass availability, anywhere at anytime, increasing access to new markets and new customers. At the other end of the product

spectrum, products developed for the mass market are garnering new caché as they adopt the marketing/branding and retail techniques of luxury brands, borrow luxury designers for capsule collections (Karl Lagerfeld at H&M, Inès de la Fressange at Uniglo, Missoni at Target) and sit adjacent to luxury labels in magazines and shopping venues (consider 5th Avenue and Champs Elysées with their H&Ms, Zaras and Massimo Dutti alongside Louis Vuitton and Cartier). While mass fashion brands have benefited from these co-branding and co-habiting trends in terms of brand elevation and attracting new consumers, when luxury brands have promoted to a mass audience this has often come with some diminution of brand status.

### Fast fashion

Inditex’s phenomenal ability to translate Paris and Milan designs and bring them to market faster than the originators (six to eight weeks instead of six to eight months) and at a fraction of the cost, rapidly expanded the market for fashion merchandise. This had an impact on both the high end, where the luxury shopper can trade down occasionally and purchase a Roberto Cavalli-inspired dress for \$89 rather than the original for \$2,100 and still have change for a Prada bag and Christian Louboutin shoes, and the low end, where casual lines have lost sales to Zara’s more fashionable and often cheaper alternatives. Fashion is about newness and the rapidity of change at the mass fashion channel is driving a proclivity towards disposable fashion, while increasing demand for higher-priced accessories to accompany today’s fast fashion design.

### From communication to conversion

Going forward, luxury brands will increase their focus on how big data can increase conversion and on tracking global consumers, with return on investment and data metrics supporting branding and marketing decisions. The internet has created new distribution channels for luxury fashion brands to keep up with consumer demand for the latest fashion at a value price.

### Custom and bespoke initiatives

Luxury brands can retain exclusivity while broadening their client base. Custom made products, limited editions and exclusive assortments for the internet, wholesale and flagship locations create demand, drive store/site traffic, and elevate exclusivity while sustaining the distance between a luxury brand and a mass fashion brand. •

### Top 10 luxury goods companies, 2012

Luxury goods rank FY12	Company name	Selection of luxury brands	Country of origin	FY12 luxury goods sales (\$5bn)	FY12 total revenue (\$5bn)	FY12 luxury goods sales growth	FY12 net profit margin <sup>1</sup>	FY10-12 luxury goods sales CAGR <sup>2</sup>
1	LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton SA	Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Dama Karan, Loewen, Marc Jacobs, Celine	France	21,060	26,143	18.2%	12.9%	18.6%
2	Compagnie Financière Richemont SA	Cartier, Lancol, Van Cleef, Ohlson, Bouché & Moncler, WWC, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Montblanc	Switzerland	12,391 *	13,078	13.9%	19.8%	20.4%
3	Erlite Lashier Companies Inc.	Erlite Lashier, Aramis, La Mer, Aveda, Ju Malone	United States	10,182	10,182	4.8%	10.1%	7.5%
4	Luxottica Group SpA	Alain Mikal, Amortio, Ray-Ban, Persol, Oliver Peoples, Licensed eyewear brands	Italy	9,113	9,113	13.9%	7.7%	10.8%
5	Swatch Group Ltd.	Blancpain, Breguet, Longines, Omega, Rado	Switzerland	8,319	8,319	15.3%	20.6%	13.0%
6	Kering S.A.	Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Saint Laurent	France	7,990	12,522	26.3%	11.1%	24.5%
7	L'Oréal Luxe	Blotteren, Clarisonic, Kiehl, Lancôme	France	7,161	7,161	16.9%	16.2% *	11.2%
8	Ralph Lauren Corporation	Ralph Lauren Collection, Blue Label, Black Label, RLX, Purple Label	United States	6,945	6,945	1.2%	10.8%	10.8%
9	Shiseido Company, Limited	Shiseido, clé de peau Beauté, SaseMinerals, Benefique	Japan	5,522	8,200	-0.7%	-1.9%	1.5%
10	Rolex SA	Rolex, Tudor	Switzerland	5,122 *	5,122 *	n/a	n/a	n/a

# The Traveller's Guide



Frenchman **Lionel Villaron**, the Executive Chef of Delhi-based *boulangerie* and *pâtisserie* chain L'Opéra, has wielded the ladle for culinary institutions such as Guy Savoy and Le Grenadin and says luxury flows in his veins

## EAT

Which are your favourite restaurants in your home town?

My all time favourite is *Le Petit Nice*, a 3-star Michelin restaurant in Marseille. ([passedat.fr](#))



He recommends *Le Petit Nice* for a meal.



Villaron's hometown is the city of Marseille

Which is your favourite section in a department store?

It has to be the clothing section.

Tell us about your favourite restaurants and cuisine in India and internationally.

I enjoyed an exquisite meal at *Paatra* at the Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort in Greater Noida, comprising butter chicken, butter naan, *poppadams*, chutneys and pickles, among other accompaniments. ([jaypeeresortdelhi.com](#))

Internationally, *La Maison Pic*, in Valence, France, run by Anne Sophie Pic, the only female to have been awarded the coveted Michelin three-star rating, is amazing. The wild strawberry and *genmaicha* tea dessert is to die for. The slow-roasted blue lobster and berries with cherry-barberry chutney and yellow beets is another must-have delicacy. In terms of presentation and taste, few chefs have been able to match her excellence. ([pic-valence.com](#))



Armani is his favourite brand

## STAY

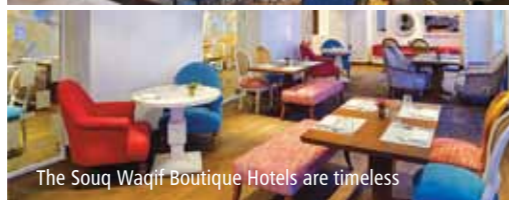
Which are your favourite hotels in India and abroad?

The Leela Palace New Delhi is a classy, elegant and sumptuous urban property. ([theleela.com](#)) Whereas, the Neemrana Fort Palace, located on a beautiful green hillock, transports me back in time, to a 14th century palace. ([neemranahotels.com](#))

I'm also a huge fan of boutique hotels with modern design. The *Souq Waqif* Boutique Hotels in Doha are timeless, palatial and impressive. ([swbh.com](#))



The Leela Palace New Delhi is one of his favourite hotels



The Souq Waqif Boutique Hotels are timeless

Where do you like to travel in India?

I love travelling to Chennai, Varanasi, Kolkata, Puri and Mumbai.

What do you recommend travellers shop for in your hometown?

Armani is my favorite brand for designer coats, shirts and shoes and I shop frequently at the Emporio Armani boutique in Marseille

([armani.com](#)), Lacoste ([lacoste.com](#)) and French sportswear and casual fashion company, *Le Coq Sportif*, are also must visits. ([lecoqsportif.com](#))

You should also buy the traditional *navette* biscuits, made from flour and butter, with a hint of orange blossom. These originated during the celebrations of the Abbey Saint Victor and are a pleasure to eat.



L'Opéra's Royal Chocolate



He admires Anne Sophie Pic, the Michelin three-star chef

## LOVE

What has been your most extravagant purchase?

I bought an Indian Chief motorcycle about 15 years ago. It gave me a profound sense of freedom. It made my heart pound, inspired a sense of adventure and invoked pleasure. ([indianmotorcycle.com](#))



His biggest indulgence has been the Indian Chief motorcycle

What do you miss about your country?

I miss my family and friends. But I also miss the gentleness of Marseille as well as the stunning creeks along its coastline. I have fond memories of the Provence region, with its beautiful architecture, *joie de vivre* and simple, rustic, down-to-earth lifestyle.

Which other country would you like to live and work in and why?

I would say Mauritius, where my family lives. It is a diverse, multi-cultural country with an open-minded culture and its people are very welcoming. Also, Mauritius has dreamy beaches. •

Because luxury is full of celebrations and soirées

## ART DISTRICT XIII



**What:** Launch of Art District XIII  
**Where:** Lado Sarai, New Delhi  
**Who:** Vikram Oberoi, Anu, Siddharth and Kapil Chopra; JJ Valaya, Mila Oberoi and Sunil Sethi; Veer Munshi and Ranjit Hoskote; Rashly Todd; Arjun Oberoi; Sakshi Kohli

## DVAR



**What:** Launch of DVAR — The Luxury Multi-Designer House of Fashion  
**Where:** Juhu, Mumbai  
**Who:** Parth Sanghvi and Vijeya Gandhi; Ramola Bachchan and Jaya Bachchan; Charu Parashar and Payal Rohatgi; Kunal Kapoor; Ragini Khanna; Schauna Chauhan; Aarti Surendranath

## RITU KUMAR



**What:** Launch of Ritu Kumar's Flagship Store and New Collection  
**Where:** Khan Market, New Delhi  
**Who:** Amrith Kumar, Smriti Gargi Eswar and Ritu Kumar; Vikram Baidyanath, Sanjay Sharma and Akhil Nath; Hemant Sagar, Naina De Bois and Didier Lecoanet; Aparna Bahl; Sonya Jehan; Shivani Wazir Pasricha

## MAKE A WISH FOUNDATION



**What:** Charity Fundraiser by Make A Wish Foundation  
**Where:** Palladium Hotel, Mumbai  
**Who:** Pramod Raju and Avantika Kilachand; Pearl and Hafeez Contractor; Asha and Amit Patel; Joeanna and Vinod Nayyar; Meeta and Vivek Jain; Sapna Kar and Mukeeta Jhaveri; Arjun Kapoor; Rekha Bharadwaj; Amrita Kilachand

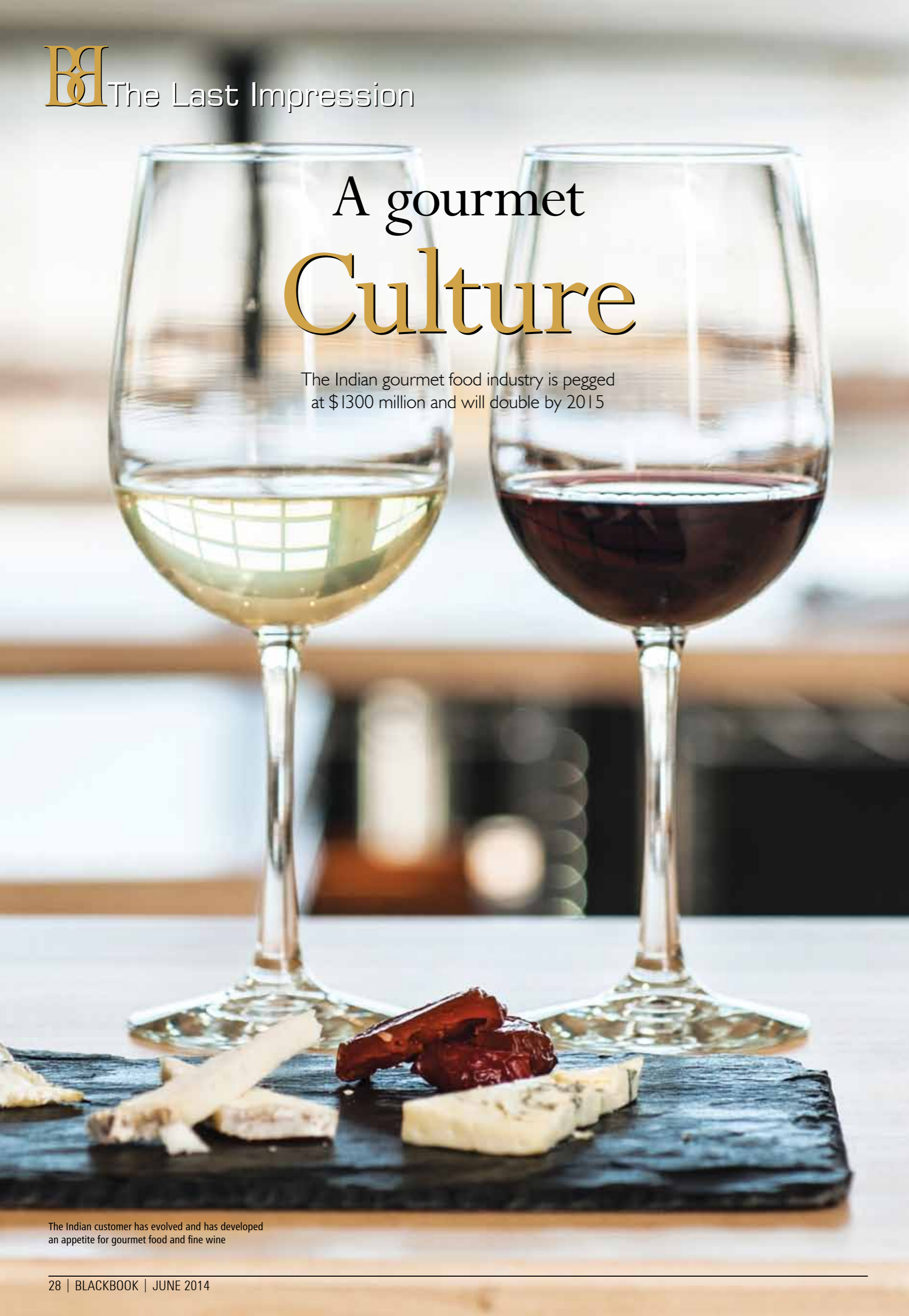
## MAYYUR R GIROTRA



**What:** Opening of the Mayyur R Girotra Flagship Store  
**Where:** Khar, Mumbai  
**Who:** Mayyur R Girotra and Amrita Rao; Ishita and Ila Arun; Sheeba; Kunika Singh; Rashmi Nigam; Karishma Kapoor; VJ Andy; Pooja Makhija; Sunny Leone; Terence Lewis and Akriti Kakkar

# A gourmet Culture

The Indian gourmet food industry is pegged at \$1300 million and will double by 2015



The Indian customer has evolved and has developed an appetite for gourmet food and fine wine

Not more than 25 years ago, our food habits were simple. Food was not as unhealthy as it is today. Our meals were cooked using traditional recipes handed down generations. Back then, we chose to focus on what was fresh, rather than consume what was processed and difficult to digest. Times have changed. Today, in addition to eating more packaged food, people also consume pre-prepared meals.

A critical impact of globalisation has been the severance of linkages between our traditional diets and current eating habits. The expanding world has transformed our culinary universe too. Consumers now have access to food that were previously not available to them. People are now exposed to international flavours and love to experiment with new taste. Fusion food is also in vogue, wherein people like to play around with different cuisines.

Rising disposable income, urbanisation and exposure to international cuisines have lead to a rapid increase in the demand for gourmet food. With new store launches and hypermarket chains dedicating floor space to gourmet food, there is much ado about it. A study by Technopak recently found that the Indian gourmet food industry, pegged at \$1300 million, is growing 20 per cent annually and could double by 2015.

The market for international gourmet food in India has increased tremendously. Indian tastes are certainly changing rapidly as can be seen by the growing popularity of different cuisines. Italian food is now the third most popular fare here, after Indian and Chinese.

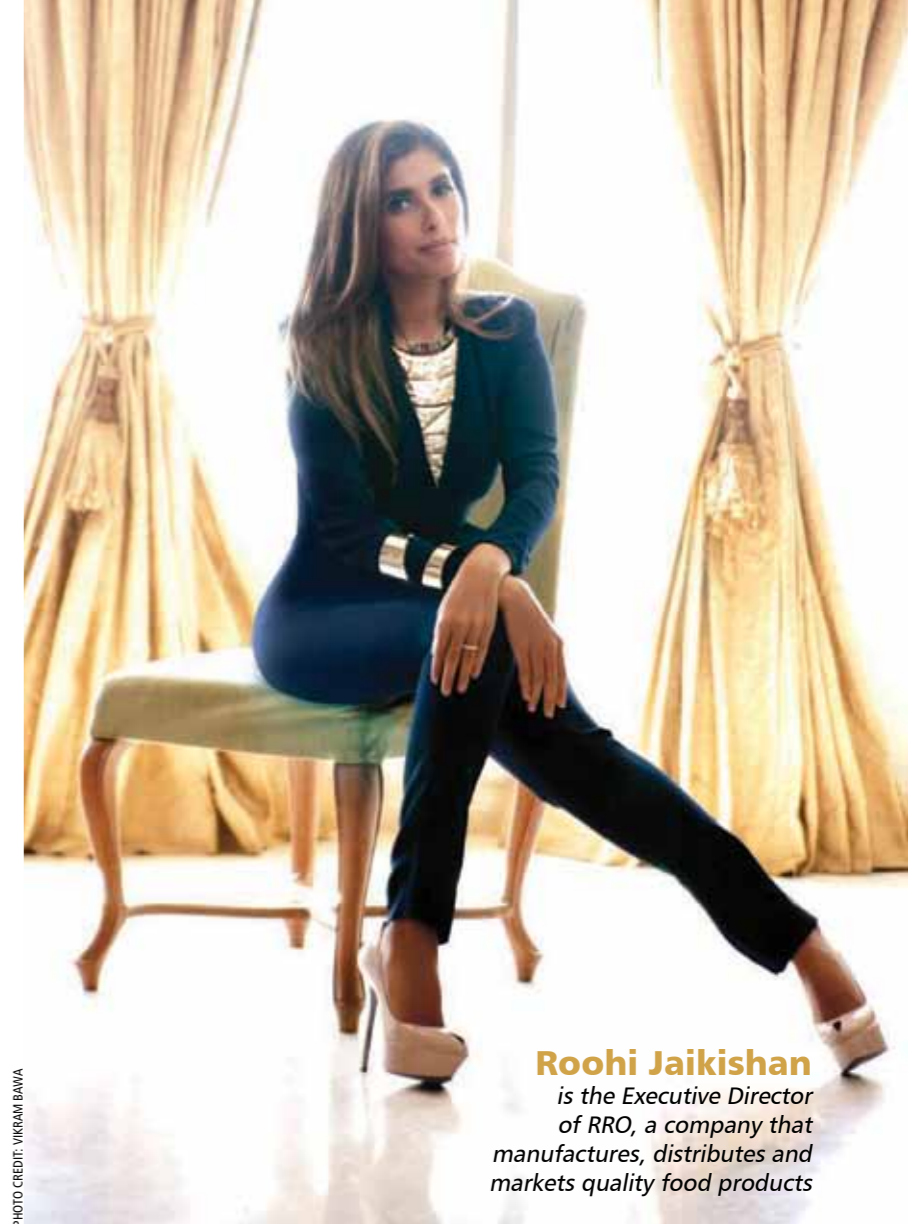
In keeping with our ethos of bringing the finest food products into Indian homes, RRO has initiated a number of successful alliances with leading global food brands. Using a combination of marketing strategies and distribution strength, we have ensured that these global brands have found a place in the homes of Indian consumers across the country. This has helped us develop a virtually non-existent category of niche food products, such as olive oil and pasta — the fastest growing categories in today's time.

The latest trend is the growing demand for different varieties of cheese. Customers now appreciate quality cheeses and are not interested in sub-standard ones that were a usual feature at the buffet table. People want to understand the nuances of flavours and experience cheese as a complete meal, rather than a side dish. In fact, we have observed that blue veined cheese like *Gorgonzola* and *Blue Stilton*, earlier despised for their pungent taste and strong aroma, are gaining popularity.

We inaugurated our first RRO Cheese Bar over three years ago, a unique concept with the aim of introducing a delectable range of cheeses to Indian tables through tie-ups with leading suppliers around the world. Strategic promotional activities such as the RRO and Gucci cheese and wine evening — a blend of gourmet food and haute couture, where the *crème de la crème* of Mumbai are invited, helped us reach out to the target market.

Within a span of three years we have expanded from retailing through just one to 13 RRO Cheese Bars across India and plan to take this number up to 20 by the end of this year. The demand for cheese in India is an urban phenomenon, coming from cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad. An RRO Cheese Bar is present in all these cities. Interestingly, the palate in Tier II cities is evolving too and we have received a great response from towns such as Chandigarh and Surat as well.

For a customer base so evolved, we ensure we bring in products from renowned global brands. These are handmade by artisans and individually vacuum packed, thus staying fresh and rich in taste, flavour and quality. In addition, every season we source new cheese variants. Last Christmas, we sourced mango and ginger *Stilton*, white *Stilton* with cranberry, apricot and truffle brie for our customers. We've realised that packaging plays a crucial role in purchase decisions. We offer the option of assorted cheese platters, vouchers and gift boxes to our customers.



**Roohi Jaikishan**  
is the Executive Director of RRO, a company that manufactures, distributes and markets quality food products

PHOTO CREDIT: VIKRAM BAWA



Pasta is one the fastest growing categories of food in today's time

How has the consumer evolved over the years? Most have developed a taste for fine wine and cheese and know exactly what they want. However, there are differences in consumption patterns between the individual and the institutional buyer. The retail customer is willing to pay a premium for quality and service, whereas the hospitality sector, due to budgetary constraints, often prefers quantity over quality. Secondly, retail customers are more experimental. They love to taste and learn about and buy different types of cheese, as opposed to the hospitality segment, which prefers tried and tested edibles.

We believe that a great product depends on the quality, its nutritional value and freshness.

**"The customer base has evolved. Most people have developed a taste for fine wine and cheese and know exactly what they want."**

Appearances, too, are key in this business. One of our principals from Spain complimented us that "our cheese bar looks exactly like a cheese counter in a well-known French fromagerie."

There are several challenges facing the industry. Tougher food labelling requirements imposed by the government has hit specialty food imports, but at the same time we are delighted about the strict implementation of rules. We are already working with our suppliers to comply with the required labelling norms and have arrived at workable solutions. For us, being transparent is part of our business model — it's not just a highbrow philosophy.

My brother, Riyad Oomerbhoj, and I appreciate good food. We endeavour to bring new, delectable eats to people's dining tables. The fact that I am responsible for taking decisions that will not only affect my company, but also the lives and palates of consumers, is a feeling that's hard to explain. •

ROGER FEDERER



THIS WATCH HAS SEEN  
RECORDS REWRITTEN.  
AND STANDARDS REDEFINED.



OYSTER PERPETUAL DAY-DATE II



**ROLEX**