

DESIGNING F&B

SAHEBA SINGH



In this day and age, where travel is as affordable as it is and lifestyle channels covering the fine/fun life from all over the world, each element in a restaurant is as important as the other. Having said that, the food and the interiors must complement each other. In a restaurant one is an extension of the other. So, for the wannabes in the F&B sector, wine and dine alone does not make an impact- the interior designing of the

restaurant is of equal importance. It's the whole package.

While grooving at a gig at OTB in Hauz Khas Village or sipping some quirky cocktail at Gurgaon's Farzi Café; you must have admired the interiors of these places.

The credit goes to Saheba Singh, the designer behind the restaurants that today define a new age for F&B in Delhi.

Saheba floated her designing firm, This Is It Designs, 12 years back. Just like their work, the name was a stark amusement for many. There are many Interior Designers so what sets them apart? More important than hiring an Interior Designer, it is important to hire an Interior Designer who understands the nuances of design for Hospitality. It is not easy to design a space that people frequent to get away from their hectic lives. Because just great food or good wine is not the only thing, people have in mind when they step out. According to Saheba, "The food, bar menu, the music, the vibe, and the service/operations – it all has to speak one language. I like to think that interior design ties it all together." Hospitality design comes with its own set of specialized requirements, limitations, and needs, which have to be taken into account. Any loose end anywhere will drastically affect the food, bar sales, service etc. There are thousands of factors to consider – starting from the theme of the restaurant, bar or cafe. How to make the interior as beautiful and decorative as possible, without disrupting the staff's workflow? Will safety

regulations even allow the grandiose designs to take form? Saheba is a person who can visualize the F&B concept and do a holistic design where all the elements come together.

Moreover, Saheba is capable of blending aesthetic sense with practical designs while keeping the client's perspective in mind- even if it sometimes proves to be a challenge! "Each site comes with its own set of constraints/challenges. Apart from adapting our unique design to the space, the next biggest challenge is to justify the layout on expensive real estate. Our clients share numbers and figures with us and we have to plan the space keeping the business plan and the project viability in mind," said Singh.

With 10 people on board, the mid-sized design firm is making waves with its quality work and dedication for projects. The year 2014 was particularly overwhelming since Saheba brought out some of the best concepts.

Saheba gleams at the mention of their projects. "We worked on Farzi Café in CyberHub Gurgaon, which seems to set a new benchmark of sorts; Townhouse Café in Connaught Place is grand and has a larger-than-life goth inspired design; The Flying Saucer Cafe – with all its 25000 sq.ft of grand indoor/outdoor space; and Zai in GK II that shows off a warm, old school design sensibility".

The brand has many forthcoming projects on hand as well- like Playboy Café in Gurgaon, Playboy Microbrewery in Pune, Smoke House



Deli, Social at CP, Made In Punjab in Noida and a Sports Bar in Kolkata. "Playboy is also planning to roll out the brand in different F&B formats which we will be taking forward," says Saheba. The most recent one is in Greater Kailash, called The Penthouse, is designed like the drawing room of a house, and has been spearheaded by Singh. Saheba is also looking forward to the Hilton Hotel projects at Sector 56 in Gurgaon- a terrace restaurant and a garden restaurant. Both are in the stage of conceptualisation at present. While one has a machaan-like concept, the other will be similar to a quaint little trattoria. When asked which one she is looking forward to the most, she smiles and says, "We are currently working on – Social and Smoke House Deli in CP. We have also

started worked on Farzi Cafe in CP & Dubai and we are equally excited about it. What is unique about her projects is that they portray her special bond with the hospitality sector and inspire her to push the limits and each time create something new. Over the years, she has created a



niche for herself in the industry and the who's who of F&B would prefer her to design their space.

Saheba adds, "Today, we create F&B spaces that will be frequented by people from all walks of life. To create a space that conforms to different aesthetic sensibilities is a huge challenge. Something for everyone – while making sure that all the 'somethings' marry well together." One wonders what the inspiration behind her passion is. Saheba elaborates "It was always fascinating to see how, by just walking into a space, can help transform someone's frame of mind. And, the fact that your design can do that, well that's a pretty trippy feeling. Sometimes at the end of a long day, I just visit one of the spaces I have created and watch people have a great time there. Watching their expressions change the minute they walk in and feeling the experience I envisioned, that is the best feeling in the world. This was the dream."

A charming Saheba who seems to speak with her eyes adds, "I feel I am very lucky that I am living my dream. This was all I ever wanted. God has been kind. No dream comes true unless you get up and work hard. There are no shortcuts to success and most of the time it is an uphill trek. It's your life, the choices are yours to make. Make your choices work for you".