

# Women takeover luxury sector

The high-end segment is increasingly witnessing women executives occupying key roles, both for strategy and design. And, apart from overcoming stereotypes, female executives also leverage their innate sense of style to drive growth in the booming luxury sector.

PAYAL GULATI



The 'spilling' of champagne is no longer a common occurrence just at high street luxury retailers across the country, but also to a well guarded secret. A sector which has been traditionally viewed as a 'man's world', with Sanjay Kapoor of Genesis Luxury viewed as the 'king', is witnessing a profound change with the breaking of the 'glass ceiling'.

And, women executives who have distinguished themselves in various spheres of the marketing and retail sector are also playing a key role in the expansion of the luxury segment, which currently has annual sales of \$ 8.5 billion and growing at more than 30 per cent per annum. It's no surprise that women executives are increasingly occupying the role of CEO and head of design, at leading brands including Les Petits, Goodearth, AND as well as at Casa Paradox.

The key factors that have contributed to this development include the ability of the 'fairer' sex to understand the purchase decision from a shopper's perspective as well as to ensure a customised experience for these high-end consumers.

"Women have an innate sense of 'style' as well as the ability to provide out-of-the-box solutions, and they both are key for success in this niche segment," said Raseel Gujral, Creative Designer, Casa Paradox.

Striking a similar view, Simran Lal, CEO, Goodearth, said, "Female executives in this industry have distinguished themselves with their patience, and have the ability to 'guide' customers effectively, when making a big 'ticket' purchase."

Women managers however, highlighted that they did not face any gender-related discriminations during their professional careers and they have grown purely on their ability to "exceed" business targets.

*Retailer*, sought to gain a greater understanding of this profound change that is currently taking place in the luxury sector.



Swati Saraf, President, Les Petits, has leveraged the emerging trend of high-end products and accessories for toddlers and young children, and offers a wide repertoire of products at her store in South Delhi.

# No kidding!



## PAMPERING BRAND-CONSCIOUS PARENTS

Saraf on her recent visit overseas had observed that parents were purchasing a range of luxury products for their young children, and realised a “void” in the domestic retail market. Saraf set up Les Petits nearly three years ago, and its outlet at south Delhi’s luxe mall DLF Emporio offers a range of premium apparel, accessories and furniture from leading brands including Fendi Kids, Miss Blumarine, Baby Dior and Young Versace.

Saraf pointed out that she is quite “astonished” by the ‘pent-up’ demand from parents of children aged up to 8 years for these products, and it has helped to grow sales in this segment by 20-25 per cent annually.

“It’s heartening that shoppers are demanding products which offer exclusivity,” said Saraf.

## INITIAL ‘BABY’ STEPS

The key challenge, Saraf, pointed out in their initial stage of operations related to the selection of brands in their store. Saraf did not have any retailing experience, and her merchandising team selects the products based on prevailing trends and feedback received from customers’ in-store.

In addition, considerable emphasis is placed on offering clothes with a wide range of colours, and at diverse prices. Saraf does admit that at times it gets difficult to explain to parents the “high prices” for clothes, but “patience” is key.

Les Petit is also gradually expanding its presence in the ‘price-conscious’ segment, in a bid to further accelerate their sales growth. Clearly, fashion has no age barrier.



Ritu Beri, over the past two decades, has transformed the Indian and global fashion industry, with her iconic designs and couture. In addition, Beri's risk taking appetite has helped her 'to climb the ladder', and is currently heading the globally acclaimed French fashion house Scherrer.

# A risk-taker



## CHILDHOOD DREAMS

Beri aspired to become a doctor in her school days, but pointed out that she would often devote greater attention to the "wardrobe" of the medical staff rather than the technical skills of this profession. It didn't take long for Beri to realise that a career in fashion is the best 'fit', and she wore a hand-knitted sweater to her interview at NIFT.

The rest is history, and Beri was also the first Indian fashion designer to showcase her range at the Paris 'catwalk' along with being the first Asian designer to lead Scherrer.

"It was a 'heady' feeling," Beri said. Beri also stressed that Indian designers are still at a "nascent" stage, and need to prove themselves each time they showcase their range overseas.

## CAREER AS HOBBY

The key to her success, Beri stresses is "passion" for her work, and she only wants to "satisfy" herself. In addition, she plans to establish 'cultural embassies' which would represent exotic, 'mystical' and 'magical' aspects of Asia, and is currently negotiating tie ups with several leading international brands.

Clearly, the sky is the limit.



A rejection in the early stage of her career made fashion designer Anita Dongre start her entrepreneurial venture, and over the past 14 years, she has created several well respected brands including *AND* and *Global Desi*.

# A 'tailored' success



## INITIAL HICCUPS

The adage 'success doesn't come easy' could be described as akin to Dongre's career, and in the late '90s, when she decided to offer branded apparel, it was not accepted by the industry. Dongre did not get disheartened, and set up Anita Dongre Designs (AND). Initial operations were from a 300 sq ft outlet at South Mumbai's Crossroads mall, and her USP was trendy ready-to-wear fashionable clothes for women.

Apart from business challenges, Dongre's family was initially hesitant of her plans, but Anita's determination made them overcome their initial fears.

## RIGHT BUSINESS MODEL

Dongre's strategy is akin to a leading Europe-based fashion retailer with products positioned as a 'bridge to luxury', and it has enabled her retail network to expand to 90 stores including *AND* (western wear label), *Global Desi* (ethnic counterpart), *Anita Dongre interpret* and *Anita Dongre: Timeless* (bridal collection). In addition, Dongre has grown at more than 50 per cent for the past few years, and plans are on the anvil, to open four exclusive brand outlets each month on a pan India basis.

Clearly, Dongre has a design for every segment.



### SUCCESS FORMULA

#### FASHION TIP

A simple and elegant look

### PROFESSIONAL MANTRA

A design that 'turns out just right'.

### ADVICE TO ASPIRING DESIGNERS

No 'shortcuts' for success.



Simran Lal has transformed her homegrown lifestyle and home décor brand Goodearth to the next 'level' by leveraging her cross-functional experience of more than a decade. Lal, CEO of Goodearth, currently divides her time between product development teams in New Delhi and visits to stores on a pan India basis.

# An 'earthy' formula



## 'CONNECTING' WITH HERITAGE

Lal's mother Anita, over the years, faced difficulties in finding home furnishing products with an Indian theme. In addition, Lal pointed out that her mother wanted to revive "forgotten" local craft traditions and that motivated her to set up this brand.

Goodearth has distinguished itself from peers with its portfolio of innovative designs and price tags which are not too 'steep'.

"Shoppers are keen to purchase products which evoke nostalgia," said Simran Lal.

## INTERNATIONAL 'FIT'

It's not just Indian consumers who keep the cash registers ringing at Goodearth, but over the years, the expatriate community in metros which has also emerged as a key target audience. In addition,

Goodearth has also expanded its presence to Singapore via a shop-in-shop, and there involvement in the revamping of Hotel Rajmahal Palace, Jaipur also got them global recognition.

Lal points out that domestic sales account for about 90 per cent of their annual turnover of Rs 110 crore, but she expects that to change, given their emphasis on expanding sales overseas.

Clearly, Lal has redefined the way we decorate our homes.



Designer Raseel Gujral and her husband Navin Ansal have created a loyal customer base over the past two decades for their high-end furniture and allied products.

# 'DRESS' UP YOUR HOME



## THE JOURNEY

Gujral had grown up watching her father Satish Gujral, a well known painter, and she also gained her training at the family studio. She worked as an interior designer for nearly three decades, and along with her spouse decided to foray in the luxury segment in the mid '90s.

The couple also visit leading exhibitions in Milan and Paris, and purchase a range of eclectic furniture items. In addition, they also plan their new collection offered each year for several months.

And, while Gujral pays particular attention to the design and allied elements, Ansal focusses on the business-related aspects. An emerging customer segment that Gujral is also paying increased attention relates to commercial and high-end residential design projects in metros, and resort properties in Goa.



"IT HAS BEEN A FULFILLING 'JOURNEY' FOR US,"