

Pop Goes The Easel



Raseel Gujral in her own creation at the Casa Pop store



The Casa Pop store in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

Those who can make an earnest attempt to answer the question ‘what is your favourite colour?’ are rarely speaking the truth. The purple of prose in a writer’s mind, the grey of flannel suits on a banker’s body, the orange of dusk, the pink of health, the blue of yonder wild, there is a time for every colour under heaven. “Yes. Every colour has its own kind of life in it,” says Raseel Gujral, whose vivid imagination, is channelled through her brands Worxx and Casa Paradox, straight into the romantic psyche of all those with a heart for design. Interestingly, some who walk into her sprawling Casa Paradox store at DLF Emporio, Vasant Kunj, say they can now imagine in dramatic detail what stepping into Donald Trump’s living room would feel like. With crystal chandeliers dripping from ceilings, flower vases in bold and bizarre shapes, buttoned leather couches in delicious cream and caramel skins, the edge of mirrors cut out in delicate shapes, detailed in onyx and jaali-work on the rims; the whimsy is musical. Hefty price tags throw a bit of reality into the works, and only few who walk into these magical confines manage to take some wonder back home with them.



In order to open up her creative streak to a vast audience, in the October of 2014, Gujral launched Casa Pop, which retails funky, affordable home décor and fashion products aimed for those looking to experiment with their homes, and their lives. “In design, fun things tend to become a little naïve. I wanted to bring in sophistication and novelty to the concept of fun,” says Gujral. This explains the sudden presence of a candle inside a Victorian tea cup, lying amidst totes, and mobile covers.

Gujral, who has limited herself to serious high-end decor, feels this prêt diffusion line of her flagship brand Casa Paradox, lets her nurture her own colour-loving, playful side. Walk into the store and you will find a Monsieur brocade vanity where hues of neon are contrasted against ebony teak; the Shri Shri satin-silk cushions signify in a language of graphic the mystic union between poetry and dance; the Sarkaar Raj writing desk with digital print on a glossy teak wood accented with mirrors.

If the eccentricity doesn't get to you, the delicacy surely will. There are butterflies and cherry blossoms that bring to mind a Japanese high tea and paintings of maharajas on ottomans that ignite history, without getting caught up in its fury.



In sync with the Modi mantra, Gujral feels that it is the right time to make in India. "About 16 to 17 years ago, when I tried making products, the idea didn't work simply because there wasn't any forum to sell these products from," she says, pointing to the emergence of malls, online retail, and the high-street boom. This was coupled with the fact that decor aesthetics weren't really experimented with and people stuck to traditional gifting choices.

Along with the rise in awareness and interest in the domestic market, there is growing intrigue in the West about the surprising quality of design that can come out of India. When Casa Paradox showcased its surreal digital art at the Maison et Objet in 2013, its stall was among the three best. "There were people from all over the world taking pictures at the photo booth at our stall. I could see how excited the world was to see Indian designs in a contemporary avatar," Gujral says.

To keep the quality intact, she is taking things with Casa Pop very slow. "We produce 10 products each month, then gauge the response of the market, and carry on expanding our forte," she says. Gujral, a control-freak, works with a small team of technicians and production experts, but does the designing herself. "When you are in the game of selling aesthetics, you have to pander down to the lowest common denominator and keep in touch with the market. That's the only time in the creative process that your madness should take a backseat," she says.

The brand that retails out of three stores, two in New Delhi and one in Mumbai, is planning a shop-in-shop model in India this year. It is also looking to expand in the export market and develop its online retail wing. The products are upwards of `1,000 for small tableware accessories and run into a couple of lakhs for the furniture pieces. And, their snap-crackle-and-pop can be heard loud and clear in that vast space that runs wild between ebony and ivory.