

HOMING Instinct



Shweta Mewara Ailawadi
chose the online model to bring
her range of elegant furniture
into the right homes

How has formal education impacted your career?

SMA: Formal education in Fashion at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), and Design Management at Parsons The New School of Design in New York helped open new doors for me. I discovered that I have a natural flair for design, which boosted my confidence. Specialized education is important as it carves out a definitive career path for an individual, especially when it's freely chosen. When I chose design as a field, learning came more naturally to me.

What led to the move from fashion to furniture design?

SMA: After graduating as a Fashion Designer from NIFT in 2004, I worked with brands like ITC Wills, Madura garments, VF-Arvind Brands, etc. and on several design projects. One experience led to another and the idea of starting my own business was born. My husband, Saurabh Ailawadi, and I came up with the idea of starting our own furniture brand. Both of us shared a passion for creating and providing furniture options that breathe easy and exude strong esthetics. The transition from fashion to furniture design never seemed a big deal, as the fundamentals of my design philosophy remain the same. Right since my college days I was always drawn to classic and timeless esthetics; that thread of design sensibility has been common through every aspect – whether fashion or furniture design. It has been a fascinating journey.



The Blackbuck Lodge, Gujarat

How did Gulmohar Lane come about?

SMA: In 2013, we decided to move our base to Jaipur as the city is extremely rich in design and tradition and is also one of the hubs for the furniture manufacturing industry. It was a tough decision to leave our jobs and move to an unfamiliar place, but we knew it is much easier to establish a manufacturing base in a place like Jaipur.

Gulmohar Lane was born out of a deep love for home décor and the lack of options to achieve that on a personal level. We both loved doing up our home each time we moved to a new city every couple of years. It was a huge challenge to find simple yet esthetic furniture that was affordable. I feel we were destined to create Gulmohar Lane. We spent close to two years just developing our product line before we launched Gulmohar Lane on 14th February 2015.

Why did you opt for an online model?

SMA: The Indian online furniture market is a very interesting place to be. It allows us to

reach out to a large section of the population; we can offer them a wide range of esthetically designed products, bring awareness about natural fabrics and introduce them to the age old techniques of sofa making, all at the right price.

Through an online store we can reach most parts of the country, whereas the brick and mortar format would have restricted us to metros. The high real estate cost would have increased the product cost that a consumer would have to pay. We have kept our pricing extremely competitive in the segment; we feel that our products should be accessible to people who appreciate design, quality and price. Furniture is a bulky category and comes with its own set of challenges. But, with the quality logistics now available in the country, it is definitely easier to ship furniture to consumers across cities. We are fully aware that this category, especially sofas, requires a high degree of customization, but we have kept this in mind since the beginning.



Isprava Holiday Homes, Goa

What differentiates your products in the market?

SMA: We have extensive product lines on our website with a choice of fabrics and finishes. Every product chosen and product combinations made on our website are unique and tailored by our customers as per their own preferences. The one common vein that runs through all our designs is world-class design esthetics and quality. We invest a great deal in creating products that are timeless and find a deeper connect.

Describe a Gulmohar Lane home.

SMA: It reflects the inhabitant's personality. Understated elegance, materials and esthetics that aren't bound by time are the key components of a Gulmohar Lane Home. Our huge product width is designed and customized to suit personalized needs both in terms of esthetics and functionality. Each Gulmohar Lane home is personal and unique.



8 way hand-tied suspension system



Hammering brass nail heads



Gulmohar Lane Lounge at The Project Cafe, Goa

What has been your experience working with artisans?

SMA: It was a real challenge to put a team of artisans together and to sync them to the core brand values, which were quality, emphasis on traditional methods of hand-craftsmanship and delivery commitments. We lay constant emphasis on consistency and stringent quality standards. Making artisans aware about core brand values motivates them to deliver quality consistently. Instilling a deep sense of pride in their craft of sofa making encourages them to meet expectations.

We work with artisans enrolled with the Vishwakarma Swayam Samuh. In August 2002, an NGO called 'Thar Artisan Welfare Society' was developed in Jodhpur, and controlled by the Government of India. Thousands of local artisans joined the NGO, which was then further divided into



Hand hemming a fabric sofa



Hand tufting of leather sofa



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16 developed groups. One of these, the Shri Vishwakarma Self Help Group, specializes in woodcraft and helps us connect with artisans who excel in the field of wood-carving and wooden framing.

Each of our products is skillfully handcrafted with a lot of attention to world-class design and quality. Reviving traditional methods of sofa making has helped newer generations of artisans gain employment and a renewed sense of pride in their craft. Now, the entire team takes pride in what we collectively stand for.

What does it take for an online store to create an outstanding customer experience?

SMA: Making customers aware and providing thorough information on product and services empowers them to make the right choices. Transparency and authenticity of products and services are key aspects to an online business.

How do you plan to expand your brand?

SMA: Our focus is to become a complete home lifestyle brand. For the past three years we have concentrated on expanding categories; we will continue to do so and introduce interesting new product categories over the next couple of years. We are also in the process of formulating some exciting business partnerships.

care@gulmoharlane.com