

# Rediscover Indian art

It was a journey of rediscovering Indian art for Mitali Bajaj, director of Le Sutra, who converted the erstwhile Pali Hill hotel into India's first art hotel, says **Syed Ameen Kader**

**L**e Sutra came into existence after a lot of brainwork and application by a team of over 50 designers and artists. As Mitali Bajaj puts it, they didn't want to build a hotel with art, but an art hotel. It wasn't an easy task to convert the whole concept into reality. "We spoke to all the designers and architects whom we have worked with earlier, but none of them wanted to do it. We told them that we don't want just a hotel with a painting, or get an artist to paint the walls, because that's very common and boring. We didn't want to make it a Jaipuri or Rajputana art hotel. They all said it was a great idea but they didn't know how to do it," says Bajaj.

It was a very challenging job for them to find designers for this kind of project. "We tried and tested work from various designers and architects but we didn't like them. We were really looking for abstract and contemporary art which has an Indian soul. Then we came across two designer brothers, Ayaz and Zameer Basrai, who collated all our thoughts and presented us with a design based on the three Gunas which we liked and approved," she says.

Each thing in the hotel, right from the paintings, furniture and lighting, to wardrobe or bed, tells a different story which is inspired by the three Gunas – Tamasic, Rajasic and Sattvic. It brings together Indian myth, art form, historic pride and philosophy, to take you through a journey to discover intrinsic Indian-ness. The 16-room hotel has three levels, with each level having three different themes which are based on historic characters (Ravana, Ashoka and Buddha) and characteristics (sensuality, love and purification). The rooms are subtly composed through art paintings, artefacts, chairs, inlays and sculptures that narrate their part, showcasing diverse themes and philosophies.



Le Sutra brings together Indian myth, art form, historic pride and philosophy

The second big challenge was to find artists and sculptors who could implement those designs in the rooms. And that made them cre-

ate an art company— Dr Arts and Designs - which consists of designers from varied backgrounds such as exhibitions, museums, graphics and furniture, stylists, art curators, and sculptors. "This organisation was created to implement this art hotel as well as do projects for other hotels. For us, the biggest challenge was to find artists and sculptors who continued giving us more versions of their concept until our team approved it. In many cases, an artist had to do 50-60 rough sketches to get the final ones. These artists are from the JJ School of Arts; Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda; Rhode Island School of Design, USA; National Institute of Design (NID) and IIT. We went for those whose style suits our concept," she adds.

Everything in the hotel is designed and manufactured in-house. "Whether it's the art or sculpture, all of them are trademarked. We have put in the design application for patents, which is in process as per the Patents Act. We have also applied for the trademark for five chair designs and other sculp-

Mitali Bajaj, director, Le Sutra

tures," says Bajaj.

The renovation cost per room is Rs12-lakh which includes Rs five lakh that they have spent for the art work. Le Sutra will opt for a three-star category. "We will be listed with all the GDS and booking websites. We are looking at the international market to provide us with 50% of our clientele which would consist of foreigners as well as Indians settled abroad. The rest of the business would come from the Indian market, because there are lots of intelligent young people out there who will be excited about the ideation," she says.

Le Sutra plans to take the art hotel concept and duplicate it in other properties depending on the region. "The next Le Sutra is already under planning, which is in Dehradun. It's a five-storeyed hotel based on the five different forms of Yoga. We hope to open it in 2012. We also want to do an art hotel in Kolkata; we are negotiating for a property there. We would like to look at the mid segment, 40-to-100 rooms," says Bajaj. ■