



LE SUTRA, INDIA'S FIRST ART HOTEL, WINNER OF MANY AWARDS, IS A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF HOW INNOVATION CAN CREATE A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE.

MITALI BAJAJ, CEO & FOUNDER OF DR ART + DESIGN AND THE CREATIVE MIND BEHIND THE HOTEL, TELLS US HOW THIS AMBITIOUS PROJECT CAME TOGETHER AND WHAT FUELS HER DESIRE TO ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE.

when art meets design

what does innovation mean to you?

Innovation is an inborn capacity for thinking and seeing differently, and making connections and perceiving relationships that others miss. In order to call yourself an 'innovative designer' you have to come up with an idea that has not been done before and more importantly, one that adds value.

what made you design a hotel, that has its roots in arts and challenges the norms of creativity in terms of design?

I had an intense desire to create something of purpose and something that would put a 16 room hotel on the map of the world of hospitality. That's how Le Sutra came into existence. A hotel that makes you think about the concepts of illusion (*maya jaal*), love, attributes of great kings and also concepts like purification, nirvana, *kundalini* and the chakras. It's a place where mind, aesthetics

and hospitality merge. Our hard work and idea also won us an award for the most unique hotel in India by IHEA (Indian Hospitality Excellence Awards).

how did the concept come into being?

Research revealed that the existing boutique hotels were just products of designers' quirkiness and didn't add up to much. So we came up with an art hotel concept. First, we worked on varied art concepts in each room, rather than just having art on the wall like other hotels. We decided to have a room with fabric art, a room with wood art, a room on metallic art and so on. Our first mock-up room turned out to be disappointing — it looked like a copy of what **Ian Schrager**, father of the boutique hotel concept, did. So I thought of creating a hotel with a soul and thus came the idea of an Indian art hotel. After 6-8 months of brainstorming, research and conceptualising, the design of Le Sutra — the Indian Art Hotel came into being.



The Ravana room

going against the trend of aping western styles, your decision to enhance the feel of india in your hotel concept can be deemed brave. weren't you apprehensive?

Basically it all narrows down to, 'In search of the elusive Indian-ness.' We didn't want to ape the west or even be like the South Asian countries. We had always felt that the selling point of our hotel was in not losing the Indian feel. We wanted to merge the abstract Indian art and culture in a contemporary format. After much research, we felt it would be innovative and interesting to theme it around *Gunas*.

tell us more about these *gunas*?

The *Gunas* are basically are different levels of consciousness from the basic to the evolved. You can qualify a lot of physical matter, human beings, animals, birds or behaviour or an ambience in the three *Gunas* — *Tamsik*, *Rajsik* and *Satwik*. *Tamsik* is symbolic to inactivity, inertia, a bit of eroticism; *Rajsik* is symbolic to everything royal and dynamic; *Satwik*, on the other hand, emphasises the zen-like state and the minimalistic life, when you manage to conquer your inner desires and senses. So, based on the 3 *Gunas* the theme from our 1st to 3rd floor respectively was decided.

intriguing and innovative as it sounds, taking the art off the pedestal and making it a part of the experience, is no mean task...

Yes, we did realise that and decided to bring the whole room together with an array of art, texture, sculpture and inlays. So we involved art in the form of canvasses and frescos as part of the insets in the wall and dabbled with inlays on the floor and designed products to showcase themes and philosophies. This was followed by a lot of sculpting on stones and wood.

We also added a creative touch by designing a concept chair for each room. So the Ashoka room has The Ashoka chair, the Ravana room has The Ravana chair, etc.



The Gambling room



The Ravana chair

having achieved this, what else do you dream to achieve?

My dream project would be to do a chain of art hotels inspired by different regions in India. I just hope we can find a client who is as wild a thinker as we are!