

Team Work Makes for Dream Work

For those looking for a far more hands-on approach to furniture rather than just going to a store and buying it, the Mangrove Collective in Delhi is just the place. With products that are a fusion of design, art, craft and technology, the firm works around the concept of the 'design and make workshop' which is not just about offering a service, but about celebrating local resources and traditional craftsmanship, and where designers, craftsmen and clients are all equal partners.

Through its collaborative 'design and make' approach to customised furniture, Mangrove Collective believes in adding a singular style to spaces

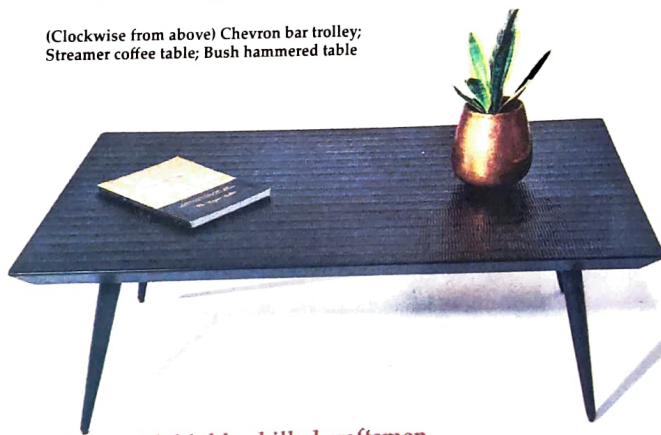
By BINDU GOPAL RAO

"We create and ideate not only on paper but with materials, through prototypes and details," explains Suman Sharma, Principal and Head of Business, and an NID alumnus with a master's in furniture design. "We experiment with proportions, permutations and combinations to translate visions into physical

Suman Sharma



(Clockwise from above) Chevron bar trolley; Streamer coffee table; Bush hammered table



Working with highly skilled craftsmen across the board and technologists ensures quality products are created



Chairpov: Moonj chair (right)

objects. Materials form the canvas for our explorations. When designing a chair, for instance, we develop full-scale drawings, not just on CAD, they are hand drawn on plywood or MDF, patterns are cut, and proportions tested and tweaked. A typical chair could go through as many as five cycles of iterations before the final design comes along, something we would be satisfied with."

This intensely collaborative process, where everyone from the client to the craftsperson is a participant, is a hugely rewarding exercise, says

Sharma, an EDIDA Designer of the Year awardee for 2018. "There is no doubt that it is a long and arduous process, there's plenty of debate and discussion regarding design possibilities, but we have fun with it, so why not?"

The five-year-old brand, with a 30,000 sq ft studio and experience centre in the NCR, has a team of "over a hundred people with numerous collaborators, designers and craftspeople forming a part of our extended family." So, naturally, their products are a fusion of design, art, craft and technology. "We design versatile products that can be placed anywhere on an international platform; they are not just about traditional handicrafts or Indian design sensibilities. Our furniture is quite contemporary, made with deft hands and cutting-edge technology, exhibiting the most delicate nuances of good design, like pieces of art," explains Sharma. For example, for its Shunya Lamp, the brass part is made by hand by members of the oldest living Thathera community,

who hand-shaped the whole brass sheet into a perfect half-moon dome. Perforations were introduced, again by hand, but enclosed in a laser-cut frame, giving it a touch of finesse. "We do not choose the handcraft over technology or vice-versa, but we select what works best for the design. All our products are crafted, either using technology or by hand, but we are not a traditional workshop by any means."

Working with highly skilled craftsmen across the board, ranging from weavers, metal workers, carpenters, upholsterers, polishers, carvers, craftsmen for *bidri* work to technologists, ensures quality products are created. "We take pride in multi-materiality. We strongly believe that it is the application of materials that holds the utmost importance in the impact it creates. Some of the new combinations we are working with include brass and wood; wood and mild steel; cane, mill steel and brass; copper with weaving, pine needles and stainless steel, wood with canvas and wood with leather."

CORRIGENDUM

In the March 7 feature on Rupin Suchak, we inadvertently used pictures of two products from the Mangrove Collective which is featured this week. The error is regretted.