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**COALESCE
DESIGN**
A COHESIVE INITIATIVE

**SPHERE OF
SCENOGRAPHY**
STEPHANIE MARIN'S
LES ANGES

LIGHT



SHADOWS
BRAND VAN EGMOND

**CHARTING
THE SPICE ROUTE**
AN EXOTIC ENDEAVOUR

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TARIK AL ZAHARNA



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CHARTING

THE

SPICE





A RESTAURANT IN
BARWA VILLAGE
DESIGNED BY
COLLABORATIVE
ARCHITECTS
THROWS LIGHT ON

THE BEAUTY
OF INTENT AND THE
DOWNSIDE OF AN
INDUSTRY THAT IS
NOT AS PROFICIENT
AS IT SHOULD BE.

BY SINDHU NAIR

Tucked in between discreet stores in the dark and unlit shopping complex of Barwa Village, conceptualised to move the shopping district away from the centre of the city, is Spicy Route.

Touted as a mid-to-high-end Indian eatery joint, the location is the only aspect going against it. This restaurant attracts you as you pass by and makes you stand still for a moment to catch a glimpse of the interiors. Bright and curiously aesthetic, each feature inside makes you want to experience the space, throwing light on the intrinsic effect that design has on ones senses. Collaborative Architecture, renowned worldwide for their ground-breaking designs, for moving away from the norm wherever possible, were the creators behind this restaurant. Husband-wife duo, Mujib Ahmed and Lalitha Tharani, who head the firm explain

in brief: “The clients, an influential Qatar family, approached us to design this project after coming across the multiple international award-winning restaurant project designed by Collaborative in south India, which GID had featured last year – Inverted Topography. The brief was to design a highly innovative and contemporary Indian restaurant. The client was quite clear that the design does not get interpreted through tried and tested kitsch Indian motifs and iconography populated through the space. The design should rather be deciphered in a highly abstracted, design-centric way.”

For the local Qatari investors, Jassim and Khalid, this was a first investment in

the field of Food and Beverages, and they were excited by this new venture. “This project is part of our family investment and it is a completely new area for us to invest in such a competitive field. This field of business is so feasible and it can be successful if it is planned and envisioned well from the beginning. To achieve the success in this area, you need to select the right partner with you who has the know-how and then after that you need to select the right place and location,” says Jassim.

Keeping to the traditional, Collaborative first zeroed in on the material palette. “We selected a material palette, which would relate the space to the cuisine, hence the reference to





“The ubiquitous Spice Jars with the diffused glow at the base form the backdrop for the dining space, giving the restaurant its unmistakable tag and the origin of its name Spicy Route,” explains Lalitha Tharani.



copper and copper palette has been widely stressed upon throughout the design (and branding as originally designed). The lights, which were custom designed and fabricated, form much of the ceiling of the restaurant, imparting a warm diffused copper glow throughout the dining space. The ubiquitous Spice Jars with the diffused glow at the base form the backdrop for the dining space, giving the restaurant its unmistakable tag and the origin of its name Spicy Route,” explains Lalitha Tharani.

According to the architects, the project as it is executed today is only 50% of the original design intent. “The design got highly compromised, as the project had an inordinate delay and financial stress



on the clients owing to heavy idle rental they had incurred.”

Lalitha explains, “We had a highly innovative screen designed to give privacy and segregation of family or group diners, which was unfortunately not realised, along with the dynamic copper and Corian-fabricated staircase, which also got scrapped.”

The absence of a design integrity is visible as you step in, with parts of the restaurant finished beautifully while other major portions seem to be conspicuous with the absence of any particular character.

“The flooring was supposed to be a warm granulated BASF in situ floor, which again got substituted for standard cold vitrified tile,” laments Mujib.

Going on to the challenges of designing in the Middle East, the architects, quite fearlessly talk about the lack of professionalism in the construction sector. Mujib says, “It wasn’t a real challenge to design in a restricted space; the challenge is to design a highly innovative project in the Middle East on a smaller scale and to get it realised with the design intent intact. The infrastructure is virtually non-existent.



“Most of the material had to be imported. We selected the best-known contracting agencies in Qatar, who bungled at every conceivable instance, as they haven’t done a project of this detailing and finesse before.”

It is a cookie-cutter, or overtly simplistic, design market at that scale of the project. On the other hand, an innovative project can happen at an impossible premium cost, which most of the new businesses can’t afford.”

Pointing to the lack of detailing and almost non-existent work ethic, he says, “Most of the material had to be imported. We selected the best-known contracting agencies in Qatar, who bungled at every conceivable instance, as they haven’t done a project of this detailing and finesse before.”

It was a difficult game; of Collaborative having to push the contractor and clients to stay within the design guidelines, with the clients trying to manage the bleeding capital and the contractor always looking for easy ways out and executing a basic job by cutting down on the design intent, rather than focusing on a great delivery.

While the end product is indeed a beautiful interior space reflecting the cuisine that is to be served, for the purist there are gaps in design and workmanship which reflect on the standards of work execution in the country. ♦



ORIGINAL LAYOUT

The conceptual plan as given by the architects which was not executed in details.