

From a superstar’s wife to doyenne of design: Gauri Khan’s journey

She tells us how Gauri Khan Designs itself was born from a collection of pieces that she sourced from across the world, each distinct and uniquely inspired, some sourced from international design conventions, others from her travel.

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ht Priya Pathiyen
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Design has been in Gauri’s DNA from the start. After she redesigned Mannat, Susanne (Khan) visited and loved it and invited Gauri to collaborate with her on some projects. From there began Gauri’s formal journey as a designer. Gauri wears a top by Nandita Mahtani, jeans of her own and shoes by Christian Louboutin. (Make-up and hair: Mehek Oberoi) (Photograph exclusive to HT Brunch by Subi Samuel)

She glides gracefully into the room, the one where she entertains intimate friends and family. She wears her Givenchy gown and celebrity status with a disarming childlike charm. It’s the night of Halloween and Gauri Khan is visibly excited as she waits to see the plushest family. She wears her Givenchy gown and celebrity status with a disarming childlike charm. It’s the night of Halloween and Gauri Khan is visibly excited as she waits to see the plushest party of the year, one that she has conceptualised for the London nightclub Cirque Le Soir. The sets are lavish, with angels, demons and everything in between.

“My team, led by Shwetha Sebastian, and I have enjoyed the creative process tremendously. It’s decadent luxury. The theme is Halloween so you’ll see installations inspired by heaven and hell. But mainly, we want people to look at the performers as they have specially flown down for this. They are the centrepiece...” says Gauri.

“I don’t see as many Indian names as I’d hoped for in the global design space, but there is an increasing appreciation for Indian craft”

When we attend the party later that night, we witness for ourselves how her attention to the minutiae casts a spell that many others can only aspire to.

Design with an Indian sensibility

Design has been in her DNA from the start. “I’ve always enjoyed the creative process,” says Gauri. “After I redesigned Mannat, Susanne (Khan) visited and loved it. She had just begun her own design work and invited me to collaborate with her on some projects. I enjoyed doing that, and from there began my formal journey as a designer.”



Gauri studied art and history in college and that has an influence on her work too. Gauri’s green dress is by Nandita Mahtani and shoes from Christian Louboutin. (Make-up and hair: Mehek Oberoi) (Subi Samuel)

Today, in her substantial flagship store in Juhu, there’s a distinct dichotomy. “Indian design sensibilities are now quite international. At Gauri Khan Designs, we have a section dedicated to our international partners – Roberto Cavalli and Ralph Lauren. There is growing interest in luxury design,” Gauri shares. But there’s an equally good representation of Indian motifs and artists. How integral are these to her décor projects?

“Indian accents like diyas instead of candles, silver thali placemats, flowers like mogra always accentuate the atmosphere”

“In college I studied art and history. Both had a profound impact on me. You see that influence in my work too,” explains Gauri. “In the collection we presented at Maison et Objet in Paris (the biggest global showcase for design internationally), we had tables

with prints inspired by the Konark temple. I want to encourage local craft in India. We have such a rich heritage. For instance, the ‘Sankhedu’ collection had a lot of ethnic craft from the village in Gujarat that has traditionally specialised in this kind of work.”

Are there simple ways to celebrate Indianness as a host? Gauri offers some suggestions:

“From a décor point of view, you can use Indian accents in the table set up. For instance, diyas instead of candles, and traditional silver carved napkin holders, crockery with Indian prints or silver thali placemats, traditional embroidered napkins, traditional flowers such as frangipani or mogra in tasteful arrangements to accentuate the atmosphere.”



Gauri shares a light moment with the women at Jaipur Rugs

Indian design has yet to fulfil its global potential, says Gauri. “There’s a long way to go. I still don’t see as many Indian names as I’d hoped for in the global design space,” she says. “But there is definitely an increasing appreciation for Indian craft in collaborations. You see some of the stunning work Jean-François Lesage is doing with Indian artisans or the chandeliers that Régis Mathieu is creating with rock crystals sourced from India. I’m looking forward to presenting a signature line of premium hand-knotted carpets in wool and silk that we are especially creating for Jaipur Rugs, which will be presented at Maison et Objet in January 2018.”



The Rex Diamond mirror installation at Arth, the upscale restaurant designed by Gauri (Avinash Gowarikar)

Lights ... and action!

International design showcases such as the Maison et Objet are great places to see some of the best in world design, but for Gauri, inspiration comes from everywhere. “Art, history, nature, architecture... even conversations,” she says. Her design aesthetic is hard to define. “Ultimately, you have to remember that you are designing for a client. So the aesthetic depends on their vision for the space and occasion. It’s a collaborative effort. Even at our store, we have created areas with different feels and aesthetics in terms of layouts, accessories and backgrounds, to help ideation for our clients.”



Gauri loves working with lights and also has a penchant for statement pieces. Gauri’s black dress is her own. (Make-up and hair: Racinda Martins) (Avinash Gowarikar for Arth)

But there’s a common thread that binds her eclectic chic. Lighting. “I love working with lights,” she admits. “Lights are central in creating ambience. One of the highlights in the restaurant we recently designed – Arth, in Mumbai – is the use of a lot of light installations. There is a gorgeous Rex Diamond Mirror inspired by classic cinema that’s one of my favourites.”

“There is an increasing appreciation of Indian craft. you see it in the work Jean-Francois Lesage is doing with Indian artisans, and in the chandeliers that Régis Mathieu is creating...”

She also has a penchant for statement pieces. In fact, she tells us how Gauri Khan Designs itself was born from a collection of pieces that she sourced from across the world, each distinct and uniquely inspired, some sourced from international design conventions, others from her travel.

“These unique pieces can inspire the design for the entire space. Many rooms in Mannat, for instance, were designed around a specific piece rather than having the piece fit into a pre-designed room,” she says.