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# Style Sutra

Peek into the glamorous business of Archana and Sumeet Bhohe, owners of Snip Salons & Spas

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# Style Sutra

Peek into the glamorous business of Archana and Sumeet Bhohe, owners of Snip Salons & Spas

By HARSHVARDHAN BHATKULY ARCHANA AND SUMEET Bhohe come from different business backgrounds. A qualified fashion designer, Archana had started an eponymous store which

garnered a sizable client base over eight years of its operations. Sumeet, owned and operated a high volume creative advertising agency, Sphinx - which was engaged in pathbreaking design work for clients across the globe. The

entrepreneurial bug bit several times and they dabbled in many ventures, including a very successful Oriental restaurant named ZEN. Of course, it took everyone by surprise that they threw this all away to pursue a business that has changed the

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rules of the luxury grooming and wellness industry in Goa with Snip.

"Both of us were fairly successful with our original businesses. Archana had firmly established her brand name in the affordable designer wear segment and I had an enviable list of blue chip clients that any advertising agency would kill for. When we started Snip, our businesses were still operational, but we realised that Snip was growing faster than we had ever expected. We had something red-hot and had to capitalise on its popularity and growth to realise its full potential. Apart from being lucrative, we liked the dynamism and the challenging nature of the business. Every day is a new day. There's not a dull moment! So it was decided that we should quit when we are ahead and focus on nurturing and growing Snip. Archana took the plunge first and closed her store in 2004. I followed suit in 2006, when I wound up my agency and started working full time at Snip," says Sumeet. Defying conventional



Snip, Calangute, an oasis of calm on the North Goa beach belt

wisdom, there was no big 'Eureka Moment' that went into the creation of Snip. "I wish there was a wildly

dramatic story behind the business concept! In reality, it was just an early sighting of a prime opportunity. Both of us

love to travel and during our many sojourns, we saw how the grooming and wellness space had evolved in other parts of India and the world. Goa was eons behind and we reckoned that someone had to do something about this. Several individuals took pride in travelling to Mumbai to rendezvous with their hairdresser every month because there was practically no one who could meet their standards in Goa. Sumeet changed all that," says Sumeet about the origin of Snip.

One wonders what happens when people with no experience in a particular business go out and put their heart and soul into creating a game changing brand. "From the word go, we set about bringing international standards to grooming and wellness into Goa. We didn't restrict ourselves to local talent, but hired trainers from several other countries to impart education and further raise the bar. Our perspective has always been global and we are continuously improving and evolving to provide an



The lap of luxury grooming

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international experience to our guests. It's heartwarming to hear our guests say that they prefer our services over several salons they tried during their travels abroad," says Archana proudly. She also feels that her expertise and experience in fashion helped her enormously in building Snip as a luxury brand. "Well, for starters, our uniforms have always been trend setting! I have been fortunate to work with several acclaimed designers to style our uniforms which see a change every four years or so. From the beginning, a certain degree of style was always high on my list of priorities. Over the years, our 'look and feel' both in terms of our ambience and our people, has stayed fresh and current. My aesthetic sense was honed in fashion school and I have enjoyed applying it at Snip."

So what are the bestsellers at Snip? "Let's just say that we don't do different things, we do things differently. We try and ensure that every item on the service menu is a carefully curated experience. Needless to say, nothing but the finest products are used. In the hair department, our exceptional hair colours nourishing Kérastase hair rituals are a must-try. In the skin and body section, detectable Hungarian organic products are employed in rejuvenating treatments," informs Archana. "We like to think of ourselves as a company with the mind of a corporate - efficient, forward thinking with a global outlook. However, at heart we are a warm, congenial and personalized family-owned business which cares deeply about each and every guest. It's not uncommon for us to periodically sift through feedback forms personally to ensure that our service delivery is satisfactory," adds Sumeet. "Over the years, we have consistently added more services to keep our guests engaged. Evolution for us is a continuous process and it startles us to see the range of services we offer now. What was started as a stylish hair salon with 3 stations now offers over 200 services spread over several thousand square feet," he elaborates.

Starting a business from scratch is no mean task. It took a lot of effort and smarts to solidify the business model and switch into the growth gear for the ambitious duo. "To be honest, we learnt as we went along. In the early entrepreneurial years, there is a certain naiveté which primarily relies on gut feeling. The fear of failure was non-existent and we just did what 'felt right'. Having said that, the biggest challenge from day one (which hasn't changed much) is the management and retention of quality professionals. Ours is a very



Archana Bhohe, Business Goa Awardee 2015

**"Let's just say that we don't do different things, we do things differently. We try and ensure that every item on the service menu is a carefully curated experience. Needless to say, nothing but the finest products are used. In the hair department, our exceptional hair colours perfectly compliment the latest haircuts"**

ARCHANA BHOHE

personalized approach. Perhaps almost as intimate as a doctor-patient relationship and no one likes to change their doctor (read hair stylist)," says Sumeet.

Accountability - to their colleagues and customers, sincerity - towards their service delivery and goals, honesty in their business practices and interactions are some of the cornerstones of their business. To quote from Snip's Mission Statement: "Hospitality is our Raison d'être. Generosity and warmth are our genuine pleasure. Performing daily duties with sincerity and a sense of style. Delighting our guests with creativity and attention to detail. Seeing the finest in everything and creating a beautiful, inspiring environment. Spreading conviviality, joy, trust and positive energy."

Snip targets its appeal to everyone... "From a toddler to an octogenarian and beyond, is our target audience. Our principle is 'affordable luxury' so we

try and see that there is something for everyone in our menu," explains Sumeet. As a successful advertising professional, does he bring in a lot of his marketing tricks into play? "Marketing Strategies? We don't have any! We personally do not like the concept of hard-sell, so we never impose it on our customers. Snip's entire business model is honest, up-front and gimmick-free. There are no discounts, seasonal price hikes, buy-one-get-one-free schemes. Yes, we do have loyalty cards that give our customers more value. This is probably the most honest and flexible loyalty program ever. So, no marketing strategies for us. Hell, we didn't even have a website or Facebook page until 4 years ago!," he laughs.

Snip is based in 3 locations in Goa - in Panjim, Calangute and at the Grand Hyatt Goa, Bambolim. Besides, the salon also has a branch at a beautiful heritage home at Turner Road, Bandra, Mumbai. Although all their locations are uber-elegant and highly sophisticated, the Mumbai unit deserves special mention. Housed in a heritage building, Snip Bandra is a sanctuary of calm in the frenetic suburb. Reason enough for many Bollywood stars, literati and celebrities to frequent this branch.

Goa being a tourist destination, the strategy of having a unit at a five star property seemed like a logical business decision for Snip. "That's right, we started off with a very successful stint at the Goa Marriott Resort; and now we moved to the Grand Hyatt Bambolim. Hotel operations are essentially a waiting game and highly seasonal. The off season is very depressing but operations during the tourist and wedding season turns into a veritable melee. So in short, when it rains, it pours and when it doesn't, it's dry as a bone," says Archana.

The wellness business has grown exponentially in the state, spewing cut-throat competition among salons. How does Snip manage to keep its brand promise above the ring of competition? "Competition exists in a 'me too' situation? We firmly believe that we have a unique product. Although our business model has been plagiarized, our ethics and commitment to quality remain our biggest strength and these alone will see us through any situation," says Sumeet, as he puts the competition in perspective. He further adds, "The expectations are from us, ourselves. Snip is an extension of our collective personalities - it is heart and soul and blood and sweat and occasionally, tears too. Our passion for excellence drives us. Our continuous effort to learn

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something new keeps us grounded."

Sumeet, who is a voracious reader, and reads a lot on business and personal growth to stay inspired in the journey of entrepreneurship. "I'm an absolute sucker for self-help books. Most of my inspiration comes from titles like '12 things mentally strong people don't do'. The rest of it, I get from the people around me. I believe there's something in practically everyone that I can learn from and derive inspiration from," he says. While Archana says that her inspiration comes from travelling and scrap-booking. Somehow they have managed to resist many popular temptations and introduced their personal tastes into their business. One of which is not to be too reliant on technology. "We have a massive tech-allergy! You won't see large LED screens at Snip. No gizmos and gadgets. There's no wi-fi either! For us, 'analog' is a virtue. The company actively dissuades the use of mobiles, tablets and the like in our units. Instead, there's very nice reading material, really nice music, soothing aromas, a nice selection of teas... you get the picture," says Sumeet.

So how does a couple, who self-confessedly call Snip a family-owned business, manage to stay business-like while at work? "We have worked together at Snip for 16 years and people often ask how we have not killed each other yet. I guess we avoid friction by maintaining a few ground rules. Firstly, we have our own areas of responsibility, which are totally independent of each other. Second, we have our own teams who report to us. Lastly, and most importantly, we respect each other's decisions and try not to influence them," says Archana about being disciplined with their management style. "Control Freaks would be an adequate description for us! Although we are lucky to have a fantastic team who take a lot of day to day pressure off us, we are nevertheless guilty of micro-management. Call it a flaw if you must. Many wise men (and women) tell us that it's not the right way to do it. Apparently the new age management style is all about delegating. Call us old fashioned, but we like to stay on top of everything. There is no aspect of our business, however mundane and routine, which we do not know of. However, we do acknowledge that as we grow, we will eventually need to cede control and delegate more," he says.

A few years ago, Archana and Sumeet took the lead, along with a few competing salons, to institute the Goa Salon & Spa Association (GSSA). "Well, our industry has been a target of negative publicity for more than one occasion. It is also one



Snip, Bandra, housed in a stunning vintage property

**Housed in a heritage building, Snip Bandra is a sanctuary of calm in the frenetic suburb. Reason enough for many Bollywood stars, literati and celebrities to frequent this branch**

of the most over taxed, over regulated businesses to run. Aspiring entrepreneurs think it's a very easy and lucrative business, but they have no idea how demanding it is. Because of a few unscrupulous operators, the entire industry was getting a bad name. We needed a unified voice to speak for the industry and address its many concerns. At the same time, we had to work towards building a positive image of the salon and spa industry. In 2014, we took the initiative and formed the GSSA (Goa Salon & Spa Association) which remains the single most respected entity representing the interests of the industry and working for its betterment. Only the finest and most reputed salons and spas are part of the GSSA; and membership is by invitation only," says Sumeet.

So how would they summarise their success mantra? Sumeet, with a philosophical nod says, "Logic takes you from A to B. Imagination takes you everywhere. Keep thinking out of the proverbial box." Archana's answer to success is more profound. "I'd rather be on a plane - inspiration is everywhere, seek it, find it," she says with a calm that only someone who has climbed the flight of success one stair at a time, can say.

What next? Does running a successful business leave them time for anything else? How do they decompress, relax and recharge? When they are not jetting off to some offbeat location, the couple is fussing over their Lhasa Aposos or catching up on movies and keeping their 14 year old son engaged. Sumeet is a motorhead with a passion for superbikes. "A ride a day keeps the doctor away," he laughs. Archana retreats to her studio where she works on her scrapbooks, an activity that calms her 'hyperactive mind'. Both are die hard animal lovers, and they dedicate a couple of hours each week to rescue, vaccinate and neuter stray dogs. As we grow, we realize there is much to do in terms of giving back to society. Snip regularly sends its team to orphanages as a part of their CSR; and next on the list is old age homes.

"Operating Snip is a full time job and there's very little time to diversify into anything else. Yes, we do have major expansion plans in the near future," says Sumeet, leaving little doubt that they are already onto something bigger than what they have created in a little over a decade and a half.