

# The Design Entrepreneur

**Designer, Adventurer, Hotelier and Entrepreneur Jimmy Mistry dons various hats with aplomb. With mechanical engineering background and passion for design he has created a business based on design - Della Group. In conversation with Sapna Srivastava, he recounts his journey and briefs on his various ventures.**

**S**tanding in front of the building Della Tower that houses Jimmy Mistry office and residence, one cannot help but be awed by magnificence of the structure. Designed by Mistry, the 21 storey tower, adorned with Avestan prayers and massive reliefs of Prophet Zarathustra, is an ode to Persian architecture and the ancient Zoroastrian faith.

**I do not design for the clients, I design for myself.**

**DELLA TOWER**

“The restoration project of agiary (Fire Temple) was the setting point for building this tower.

The idea was create something permanent that can reflect Parsi culture and architecture,” enthused Mistry. This led to talking about his design firm, which he admits, he has scaled down from 1300 to 600 employees.

“I no longer design for others, as the whole emphasis is now on my ambitious project of developing a one stop shop for upscale design products. The large format, company managed Concept Stores will soon open in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru and Kolkata, starting from Pune to provide luxury interior products at affordable prices. The products ranging from furniture, lighting, furnishings to bath fittings, lights etc. will be manufactured in factories, both company owned and outsourced. But, designing products at a mass level requires a different kind of expertise and that’s what I am gearing up to.”



JIMMY MISTRY

**I believe in democratizing design, so a person doesn't need to hire designer's services.**

**I have got the curiosity to learn from everybody.**

Explaining the concept behind this venture, he said it is like fashion designers bring out their prêt -- off the rack ready to wear labels, as not everyone can afford customized haute couture designs.

In interiors too, not many can hire a high-priced designer, but want a good quality high-end product. "Concept Stores, offline and online will enable buying designer items priced democratically. Another first of its kind initiative is Della Villas, the luxury second homes being developed as part of the Della Resort in Lonavla. Here clients can see the various interiors designed for different villas and order exactly the same for their homes."

## The Journey so far

Starting at the age of 19, Mistry first entrepreneurial venture was Mistry Pest Control. He forayed into interior contracting in 1993 and later started manufacturing modular office furniture in his first factory at Nagpur, Tecnica Office Systems Pvt Ltd. But the turning point of his life came while working with an Italian design firm as an importer, which gave him abundance of experience and real understanding of designing. "My three years of extensive work of representing Italian furniture companies in India gave me a real understanding of building materials, executions, design and layout. I observed how they designed, worked and marketed, which influenced my own working philosophy." Thus, in 2000, he started his turnkey interior design business.

"The diploma in design combined with mechanical engineering education helped me understand the minute construction and functioning of furniture and enabled me to innovate. This I feel has been the differentiator for me from other designers. Design is imbibed in oneself but engineering is something that needs to be learned." Mistry expressed.

Mistry is also a firm believer of self-learning. He has always accepted the challenges of doing something completely different, learning on the job and delivering the best. For example, the master planning of 16 acres residential development in Indore, restoration of heritage project of Rustom Faramna Agiary, retail design of Bajaj Auto stores and interiors for a yacht. "On visiting one of the Bajaj auto showrooms, I happened to comment on the design and Rahul Bajaj asked me to give something better. Though I had not done retail design before, this led to my designing of one of their showrooms and later on another 70 stores across India. Another interesting project was interior design of Vijay Mallya's yacht M.Y. Kalizma. I studied naval architecture to give a complete makeover that involved



**THE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE, DELLA RESORT**

understanding the architecture of the yacht and redesigning and remodelling the structure. Similarly, restoration of agiary was the first heritage conservation work for me that later inspired me to build a building adorned with Avestan prayers and massive reliefs of Prophet Zarathustra. I built the model of the elevations in the film studio which was then replicated for the Della Tower building,” stated Mistry.

Being in the design industry for 25 years or so, he feels the design profession is still not given its due respect. “Design services are still paid at square feet rate which are then negotiated to the minimum. The designers are considered like any other vendor and clients do not even do the homework of selecting designers of same calibre for submitting presentations. I have been there and done that, but now I design only for my own firm and its various verticals.”

According to Mistry, there is no dearth of talent in Indian design sector. What is required is exposure to best practices of the world and designers themselves broadening their horizons. He questions that when so many international designers are working on projects in India why there are just a handful of Indian architects and designers working internationally. He also feels that unlike global scenario, there is lack of work, research and development collaborations among professionals here.

## The future ahead

Della Group today comprises various businesses, Holiday Resort, Adventure Park, Luxury second homes, Adventure Training Academy and Concept Stores. In 2002, Della Group was certified for quality systems and environment management. It received ISO 9001 & 14001. Mistry believes in long term approach and ploughs in the earnings back in the business to make it grow. As he says, it is investment in oneself.

While he looks forward to the full-fledged opening of first Concept Store next year. He is also busy with his real-estate project of Della Villas the luxury serviced homes and collaborating with various Indian and international suppliers to produce products under his brand name. “We are identifying and taking on board specialist product manufacturers from Europe and China for lights, bath products etc. Homeowners, architects and designers would no longer have to travel abroad to procure quality luxury items as they would be made available in Concept Stores.”