

HERITAGE EMBROIDERY: REVIVING THE PAST TO SUSTAIN THE PRESENT

10th anniversary celebration of Manish Malhotra’s collaboration with the Mijwan Welfare Society which empowers women of Mijwan village by teaching them a special handcrafted embroidery called Chikankari.

SAHAR ZAMAN

It was the top trending moment on the internet when Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone walked down the ramp for the latest Manish Malhotra show. Ranveer wore white chikankari on a black ethnic suit while Deepika wore a heavily embroidered white lehenga with a trailing dupatta. Bollywood dressed up and showed up in full strength, many of the top names sashaying on the ramp. But not many realise that this was not a regular show on the fashion calendar. This was the 10th anniversary celebration of Manish Malhotra’s collaboration with the Mijwan Welfare Society which empowers the women of Mijwan village by teaching them a special handcrafted embroidery called ‘Chikankari’. This style of embroidery is believed to be introduced by



Women at ASRA stitching traditional ‘phool patti’ patchwork on tote bags.

Nur Jehan, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir’s wife. It has a signature style of stitches and knots in floral patterns. The chairperson of this society, film legend Shabana Azmi says, “Mijwan arti-

sans create exquisite handcrafted chikankari that has been taken to the doorstep of the film and fashion industry by Manish Malhotra. We have empowered women to earn their livelihood



Chairperson Shabana Azmi with girls of Mijwan Welfare Society and designer Manish Malhotra.

and become active participants within the family structure. When they come for the fashion show they experience the applause along with the models and filmstars who wear them. It is a life transforming experi-

ence.” While part of this may sound like an old formula, if you see the big picture, it continues to remain a very important aspect to provide sustenance to struggling women in small towns and

villages of Uttar Pradesh. I was recently witness to the work that is done by ASRA (Aligarh Self Reliance Alliance) for women. This once again functions on the twin purpose of keeping heritage handicrafts in demand

while providing a means of earning for women. ASRA specialises in the ‘Phool-Patti ka kaam’ (flower and leaf patchwork) in textiles. This delicate form of appliqué work originated in Aligarh and dates back to the Mughal period once again. When ASRA started out in 2019, the main aim was to rescue women from bonded labour and domestic labour. “With 20 days of bonded labour by the middle men and no access to the market, these women couldn’t sell their work independently. Today, under ASRA, our women are given a seed grant to create their own work and directly sell them to boutiques. This way, we are not just training newer hands but have also managed to eliminate touts from the market”, says Dr. Faiza Abbasi, Founder, ASRA. The more recent kid on the block is the Vanvasi Project India which is help-

ing the villagers of Saidanpur. ‘Zardozi’ (gold thread embroidery), ‘Arhi’ and ‘Malma’ used to be their traditional textile work but continuous exploitation by touts drove away one whole generation looking for labour work outside. Their handlooms were left abandoned for years at home. Today, the next generation of the patron family, Saif Habibullah has decided to resettle back in the village of his forefathers to help revive the handlooms and bring back a sense of self reliance and ownership for the men and women here. While this is literally starting from scratch, the next step will be to provide them with market connectivity to GenZ. Who knows, there could be a Saidanpur Unlimited brand in the near future. Reviving the past to sustain the present for creating a better future is what the cycle of culture is all about.

A-Class Marble teams up with designer Tarun Tahiliani for a unique collection



NOOR ANAND CHAWLA

With people spending more time indoors, an appreciation for designer interiors has emerged stronger than ever before. This was the reason why A-Class Marble, a company that has made a name for itself as the largest importers of exclusive marble, stones and architectural surfaces throughout its over 50 year existence, tied up with India’s favourite designer, Tarun Tahiliani. A-Class Marble’s aim has always been to revolutionise India’s interiors space by introducing futuristic design and construction techniques into the industry. “The impact of design extends from the physical world to our understanding of ideas and their implementation in our day-to-day lives. Design, by its very nature, is interactive and interconnected. Showcasing diversity through a judicious mix of marble and couture has become more important in a post-pandemic scenario, where design is interdisciplinary and multifaceted,” explains Rakesh Bhandari, Director, A-Class Marble, speaking about the collaboration. In furtherance of this design vision, the brand has devised an exclusive crossover by pairing natural stones from the A-Class Marble range with the delicate creativity of the ‘Global Indian’

couture collection created by Tahiliani. This unique collaboration attempts to exhibit the dynamism of Indian design through both fabric and stone. The ‘Global Indian’ collection showcases silhouettes and contemporary fabrics with ombre marbling as one of the techniques. “Our initial intent was to shoot at a quarry in South India. We immediately thought of the beautiful marble, granite and onyx stones at A-Class Marble and approached them for the shoot. The flamboyance of textural natural stone slabs was the perfect backdrop for our muted and majestic couture designer range,” says Tahiliani. The selection of marble designs for this collaboration highlights nature’s creativity which plays with both texture and colour. These include shades like Cola Onyx, Exotic Matrix, and Lava Gold, which are neutral but vivacious. Similarly, the ‘Global Indian’ couture collection is an amalgamation of modern and traditional silhouettes and drapes with aerodynamic forms. “Tarun Tahiliani’s ‘Global Indian’ collection is truly remarkable - a melange of modern-traditional fashion documented against the backdrop of vivid marble slabs - a true fusion of Indian techniques and elaborate teamwork. We believe this overlap of pioneering excellence and quality products will glorify the Indian design strata,” shares Bhandari. On the occasion of the launch of this collection, Bhandari joins Sunday Guardian for an exclusive chat. Excerpts from an edited interview: Q. What does A-Class Marble stand for as a brand?

A: A-Class Marble represents the exemplary landscape of luxury interiors, architecture, decor and construction in India by offering an exclusive collection of over 550 varieties of marble, stones and other architectural surfaces handpicked from global quarries. For the past 50 years, A-Class Marble has been amalgamating and implementing cutting-edge technologies, innovation, and sustainable techniques that honour the legendary legacy of delivering remarkable products and services. At A-Class Marble, we aim to reinstate India’s glory by engineering the future marvels of the architectural world. Q. How does this new collaborative collection stand apart from your regular offerings? A: This collection offers a unique take on the fusion of architectural stone industry with fashion, and that in itself makes it a truly stand-out collection. We believe that this exclusive fusion of the international standards promised by A-Class marbles, and the elaborate traditional aesthetic of Tarun Tahiliani, will take the Indian design strata to greater heights within the global fraternity. Q. How did the relationship between A-Class Marble and Tarun Tahiliani come about? A: For his collection, Tarun envisioned a shoot at a quarry in South India. When he thought of this idea, his team approached A-Class Marble because we are known for our beautiful marble, granite, onyx and exotic stones. The flamboyance of our textural natural stone slabs served as the perfect backdrop for the designer’s muted and majestic couture range. The A-Class Marble team developed picturesque textures on large marble slabs that were



Rajesh Bhandari, Director, A-Class Marble

bespoke, customised and seamlessly spectacular. Both the teams elevated exquisite sets at the fully facilitated A-Class Marble showroom to accomplish a two-day shoot in Delhi. The marble chosen for this shoot interpreted nature’s creativity and uniqueness through its imbued texture and colour combinations. With a cohesive and creative approach, this collaborative relationship creates a spectacle across the mega design universe, making it multifaceted. Q. What is the USP of A-Class Marble? A: A-Class Marble is known for delivering luxurious and exquisite architectural stones and surfaces quarried from over 40 countries, built on the amalgamation of innovation, technology, and craftsmanship. With insightful expertise in the stone industry for over 50 years, the A-Class Marble collection offers a range of unique hues, textures, finishes, shades and sizes. In addition to delivering remarkable products and services, A-Class Marble conscientiously participates in technology advancement, design exchange and media action across all platforms



A Class Marble Tarun Tahiliani Collab Shoot.

while forging exclusive partnerships to ameliorate the stone industry. Q. Which are the most popular products at A-Class Marble? A: The A-Class Marble Collection exhibits a variety of exotic colours, shades and textures for all categories of stones and finishes. Some favourite picks are Dover White, Pink Onyx, Amazonites, Sodalite, Lava Gold,



Tarun Tahiliani.



A Class Marble Tarun Tahiliani Collab Shoot.

Emerald Quartz and many more. Alongside, we continue to multiply our spectacular plethora in the classic Statuario and Michael Angelo styles through various

shades and textural options. Q. What challenges have you faced in setting up your brand and how did you overcome them? A: A-Class Marble’s journey

has seen challenges and difficulties with respect to locations and strategies. With a motivated approach and optimism, the brand has developed into a multi-faceted and disciplinary name with a pan-Indian presence. Committed to breaking benchmarks and lifting the company’s identity to the top level, the A-Class Marble journey showcases an approach toward research, experimentation, iterations, and innovation. Q. What is next on the cards for A-Class Marble? A: The A-Class Marble portfolio has some exciting campaigns and product launches in 2022. The company also has a new experience centre that exhibits the marvels of design, technology and live experience in Delhi, launching in 2023. Q. How has the reception of the collaboration been so far? A: We are amazed at the response! The collaboration has been received by the audience with such enthusiasm. Its uniqueness as a collaborative collection was most appreciated. Q. Who is the ideal A-Class Marble customer? A: Our customer base ranges from professionals such as architects, interior designers, etc., to aspiring homeowners who want luxury, contemporaneity and bespoke designs. We aspire to deliver magical and monumental collections to people who have a holistic approach towards designing their space. Our ideal customers are those who value the uniqueness and timeliness of imported stones and materials. Noor Anand Chawla pens lifestyle articles for various publications and her blog www.nooranandchawla.com.