

Keerthi Tummala talks with You & I

Keerthi Tummala is the Founder & Creative Director of Sage Living, a luxury furniture store that started in 2018 with the intention of building a lifestyle brand that had a “Made in India” tag. It caters to urban millennials with diverse preferences and distinct design sensibilities. We speak to the creative force behind the brand about what they cater to and what sets them apart from the rest.

By SUNEELA KIRLOSKAR

What is the story behind Sage Living? How did your entrepreneurial journey begin?

Nothing captivates me more than a simple and well-finished design that works well, but it was only after a decade of working with buying agencies and luxury retail for global brands that I discovered my other passion—manufacturing such designs. When I looked close to home, I realised that centuries of rich craftsmanship in India left us with an enduring legacy. I looked everywhere for unique, quality-driven, designer furniture manufactured within India and while individual designers had limited supply and scalability, the big-box stores served up a generic style. It was a search that left me questioning. Unwilling to settle, I decided to put all my experience to use. This discovery opened doors to several more as I began studying the market, thus leading to the start of the brand in 2018. Right from the get-go, the process captured my heart, as it drew upon my twin aspirations of design and entrepreneurship and motivated me to create a brand that inspires design.

What have been some of your greatest learning experiences since you started the brand?

- Brands can't be rigid; we must be fluid and adapt to the ever-changing market needs and innovation.
- Your back-end must be as strong as your front-end.
- Being a woman entrepreneur comes with a lot of challenges. We have to work harder, display courage and confidence constantly, and keep moving with a positive attitude.

What was it about design that drew you to it? Where do you draw inspiration from?

The journey. Seeing designs come to life is a high; I get excited about developing new products. The unexpected, the influences, the stories, and the love for craftsmanship and culture.

There is inspiration everywhere. Ours come from artistic practices and movements across genres and history—travel, culture, art, fashion, architecture, nature, and more.

What does it take to create products rich in craftsmanship?

Skill, quality, and deep understanding of the craft! It's the artist and craftsman, the worker and ideologue, a maker and seller, a unified squad, working together to weave something whimsical.

What are some challenges that you have faced as an entrepreneur, more so as a woman entrepreneur and how did you tackle them?

As a female entrepreneur, being treated as an equal has been a struggle since my initial days. I have been questioned about my family, my marriage, my financial background, having no male co-founder, and so on. It needed a lot of hard work and courage

to create my own reputation. I had confidence in my abilities to run the business and I just made sure that any initiative I was trying to move forward with was backed up by a solid business case. I was never unprepared for the questions I knew would come and I answered them with grit and confidence.

How do you market and distribute your products?

We are an E-commerce brand, and we have a presence in many marketplaces. We take part in different shows and distribute through both B2B and B2C channels around the world.

What are some of the most loved products of your brand?

Arc Bed, Amorfa Mirror, Glazetable, Sway, and our recent Enso collection.

How has the pandemic changed the home décor industry and how did Covid impact your business?

The pandemic forced people to rethink their ideas about their homes. People are investing more and more in their personal space now in order to have comfortable and specialised zones for their routines. More people are hiring designers and taking interest in interior design trends post covid. Digitalisation has opened doors to many businesses like ours and brought customers closer to local brands. People started thinking inward and the prolonged timelines and lag in the international supply chain have boosted local businesses. It's a start and we see “Made in India” only going upwards.

Can you share some tips on how to choose the most flattering pieces for one's home or workspace?

Create a board for each room using Pinterest. It's also a great way to get an idea of how the pieces you've selected will work alongside each other. Ensure you choose an aesthetic that matches your style, personality, and family preferences. Surround yourself with objects you love, that tell the story of your life and reflect your personality. Pieces that are chosen during your travels, non-coordinated looks, personalised touches, layers, and clashing elements express their personality to the max.

What are some of the latest design trends in the market currently?

Craft culture, burst of colour, and Individual expression will be largely seen in 2023.

How do you like to spend your free time?

Binge watching *Netflix*, reading a book, or playing with my dog.

What are your future plans?

To come up with even more exciting collections and expand into new markets. 🙌

