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# Draping her dreams

Deepikaa Lodha is a combination of talent and brains. A perfectionist with a comprehensive knowledge of fashion design, she recently launched her brand Beetroot. *Marwar* catches up with the newbie designer.

Text: Meher Castelino

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Deepikaa makes sure that she does everything correctly. To achieve a level of accuracy that she thinks is required, she gets into learning the nitty-gritty of the subject. At an early age, she was very sure that she wanted to put her creative talents to the best use. After finishing her Higher Secondary Exams, she knew the perfect avenue for her was fashion designing. "I knew I wanted to design beautiful clothes, so I went about it by acquiring all the knowledge on the subject."

## Getting ready for life

The first step was acquiring a *Bachelor of Home Science* degree from the *SNDT Women's University*, Juhu, Mumbai in 2001. To further her skills, Deepikaa joined the 2-year postgraduate course at *NIFT Mumbai* in knitwear designing and technology, which she completed in 2003. "I learnt both aspects of fashion — woven and knitwear — to get a complete idea of the business." Many designers would have stopped there and taken the ambitious step of starting their own label.

But Deepikaa added one more weapon to her armoury: an MBA from the *Welingkar Institute of Management Studies* in 2005 and specialised in marketing with a crash course in retailing. She was still sensible enough not to be tempted

to start her own label. Instead, she worked with *Shoppers Stop* as a management trainee, which involved absolutely no designing. "The *Shoppers Stop* management trainee programme put me through the paces of the retail business. I started off on the shop floor of the ladies ethnic wear category and then moved on to assist in the buying and merchandising of western wear. This gave me valuable insight into the business of garment retailing and how the whole process takes place. Taking a break from retailing, Deepikaa turned her attention to the burgeoning stock market where trading turned into an addiction. "It may be surprising but I just love stocks and shares, but the scene right now is not exciting and that's when I revived my creative instincts and launched my label *Beetroot*."

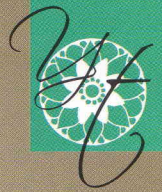
I LOVE:  
Food and  
clothes

## What's in the name

The first step to starting her business, the MBA graduate knew, was the brand name. But why *Beetroot*? A question Deepikaa has been asked several times. It sounds so much like a kid's wear or sports brand or even a health food store! "Exactly," she replies with excitement. "I did not want a typical apparel name for my brand. It had to be something very young, smart, colourful and classy, which could be associated with any product. I mainly do semi-formal, formal and bridal saris, apart from *lehenghas*, *cholis*, *salwar-kurta* sets and formal menswear, by order. Many people think *Beetroot* is a Western wear brand and I want to give the brand that foreign touch with an international feel," emphasises Deepikaa.

She zeroed in on saris and ethnic women's and menswear after a careful market survey of what was available. "I looked into different categories during my survey across India and discovered that top designers were selling in the price

PROFILE



I believe in driving  
dreams with passion and  
commitment.



range of Rs 20,000-40,000, which is a little unaffordable to the upper middle and middle class. On the other hand, there was very low-priced apparel or traditional wear. So there was a gap, which is where I have positioned my brand."

BIGGEST SUPPORT:  
Parents and friends

Deepikaa is confident that popular bridal wear stores are not going to be her competitors in this price bracket. "Most stores in a city replicate designs that emerge from the Kolkata market apart from stocking their own brands. One can find store-to-store repetitions. We are a small brand; we don't supply to stores, and even if we do supply to designer stores in future, there will be no repetition or copies. Our mode for selling is through exhibitions and direct clients who are informed through mailers; SMS, phone calls and soon we will be using print media. We will also have a show at the *Ram Bagh Convention Centre* in Jaipur and one in Hyderabad." Her exhibitions for Archana Club, Marwar show, Mansi and Bhagaini clubs in Mumbai, Shubham Club in Jaipur, and Dutchess Club and Meena Bazaar in Chennai brought her one-year-old brand a lot of recognition, sales, and orders.

### Bulls, bears and takers

Deepikaa's customers vary from 22-40 years who have come to know about the brand through exhibitions and a lot of very encouraging word-of-mouth. Her embellishment techniques include block, screen, flock, digital printing, embossing and crushing as well as transfer work.

Her production unit at Goregaon (W), Mumbai is a very organised and busy set-up. 17 workers and embroiderers with a few job workers manufacture the most beautiful saris with unconventional embroidery. The matching blouses are unstitched. "My core speciality is embroidery and my price ranges from Rs 4,000 -18,000. I would now also like to enter the market below Rs 4,000 which will be under a separate label," informs Deepikaa.

"BUT I WOULD LOVE TO DRESS AISHWARYA RAI BACHCHAN. SHE IS SO BEAUTIFUL."

Every two months, a new collection with a fusion of embroideries and craft appears in the studio. Exhibitions comprise nearly 120 creations. Deepikaa's favourite fabric is chiffon, and she is renowned for her penchant for bright colours. *Beetroot's* specialty is vibrant shades which are carefully selected." Her combination fabric saris are a great favourite with buyers.

Her business management training has turned her workshop into a systematic professionally run set-up. "It's not a housewife running a mini cottage industry," she assures us very intently.



It is funny but Deepikaa started *Beetroot* at the start of the recession in India, when most labels were shutting shop, "We haven't felt it. During our first two shows last year we were a little apprehensive, but we did a great job. That is why we are growing. Had we started earlier, maybe we would have been hit by the economic meltdown as well."

Deepikaa is a sharp confident businesswoman who handles all her negotiations and deals. "I also want to get into export and job work which will be separate from what I am doing now. The local market is very promising, and it is the future," she predicts.

### Style check

Dressing up celebrities is something Deepikaa enjoys. Bollywood directors' wives and socialites form some of her regular clients. "But I would love to dress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. She is so beautiful but I don't think her clothes do her justice." She would also love to put the *Dostana* duo – Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham – into some of her menswear. For her personal style, this Piscean loves to



sport western wear. Sharply dressed in black skinny jeans and knit top with a shimmering gold neckline, Deepikaa is partial to white and black, and loves saris for formal wear. "That is why I started designing them." Like many sari designers she doesn't want to tamper with the drape. "It is perfect as it is. But I like to experiment with different fabric textures in a single sari."

CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT:  
Love and fresh air

On the personal front Deepikaa's single and ready to mingle. Her dream man, she says, should be someone educated and independent, who is willing to let her to pursue her career. Spiritual books by Indian authors, squash, gymming and dancing (Western and Indian) keep this New Age businesswoman busy during her spare time.

### Looking ahead

She is very firm about her future plans. "Our growth will focus on market penetration in smaller cities where fashion is not too visible. There is a lot of potential in cities like Indore, Coimbatore, Chandigarh and Ludhiana with many buyers but not much awareness. In these growing markets people may spend and that is where the boom will be. The medium range which is affordable misses a good designer name's backing. This is the market I want to capture," states this confident lady.

She probably will – for Deepikaa Lodha is one determined lady who knows exactly what she wants and how she is going to get it. 🌸

