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Shailja Awasthi: Shaping Striking Spaces that Tell Tales



Shailja Awasthi

Founder

The Japanese strongly believe that the concept of Ikigai, which roughly translates to 'a reason for being', can be a human being's route to a happy and fulfilled life. Described as an intersection between one's passions, skills, ability to earn a living and what the world needs, achieving Ikigai can help one in terms of zeroing on their ideal career path. While some identify their idyllic profession with ease, some might take a considerable amount of time to find a vocation that renders their lives purposeful. Shailja Awasthi, an artist at heart and the Founder of Stories Design Studio, an interior design studio, took a while to reach her Ikigai.

"I have always been an artist at heart, a good one at that, but somehow I could never pursue art academically or professionally," says Shailja. While she pursued a Bachelor's degree in life science and then a Master's in Business Administration, Shailja was always drawn towards a career with a creative spin to it. She first tried her hand at copy writing. After having worked at some of the leading national and global brand communication firms, the young design enthusiast finally took the plunge into space design and founded Stories Design Studio (SDS) in 2013 along with her friend Revathi. The specialized space design boutique integrates soft human sciences, art, nature and technology to build humanistic, functional and creative spaces. Specializing in design, styling, execution and developer service, the Bangalore-based firm works with retail, commercial, residential, hospitality, institutes, corporate and other new age spaces.

Being Perceptive to Customer Preferences

Steve Jobs once famously said, "Customers don't know what they want until we've shown them". Therefore, the criticality of communication and being perceptive to a customer's needs cannot be overstated for a client facing business. While working in the communications industry, Shailja developed a unique insight into understanding customers' preferences even when they are not articulated clearly. The perceptive artist simultaneously also identified the challenge faced in the space designing industry in terms of creating structures with imaginative and impactful design elements that tell the story of people who inhabit them and being able to do so at an affordable price.

" Making it big as an entrepreneur often requires one to prioritize work over personal life; however, a strong support system can make all the difference "

Shailja's unique expertise in understanding consumer preferences imbued with her artful, visual story telling has helped align SDS' work with its vision. She believes in creating spaces that speak tales about the people who dwell in there and inspire them in their everyday lives.

Laying strong emphasis on staying true to her artistic integrity, Shailja only works with clients who understand her design philosophy and are willing to try something

new, innovative and fresh rather than those who look for typical check in the 'interior designing' boxes. While starting-out, she deliberately built a small, self-funded organization as it allowed her to work free from any pressure. "I prefer to not work on projects that I do not believe-in. I still decline more projects than I accept - the reasons are varied, including at times clients not willing to meet me with my son toddler Kihaan and my dog Sugar Boy," Shailja adds.

Artist Fuelled by Passion

The insistent artist's work is fuelled by her passion and emotional involvement in the various projects that she undertakes. Although her passionate outlook towards work sometimes serves as a limitation since it results in rework, investing extra resources which impact project profitability, Shailja believes that her passion is also her strength as it compels her to deliver her best.

"Some where down the line, I forget that I am working for the client, and start working for my own self and do not stop till the time I am happy with the outcome," Shailja explains.

From the get go, Shailja has had to undertake tough business calls which had the potential of backfiring. For an instance, the self-funded designed organization required to hire highly paid designers, since quality does not always come cheap. The decision worked well for the organization as most clients were impressed with the quality of work delivered by the young design firm. Similarly, given Shailja's out-of-the-box thinking, there are times when at conception stage, the firm's designs are not easily communicated and accepted by the client. These designs are also a tough nut to crack in terms of execution. However, the smart risk taker ensures that her innovative ideas are executed impeccably. Shailja also believes-in being truthful and transparent with clients in terms of deliverables. Balancing client expectations well, she never shies away from acknowledging that the team cannot deliver something out of the world in every project.

Leaning on Family for Support

Making it big as an entrepreneur often requires one to prioritize work over personal life; however, a strong support system can make all the difference. "Both sides of my family have been extremely supportive in raising my kid and supporting me financially," says Shailja. Upholding her staunch belief in her artistic abilities and powered by her risk taking appetite, Shailja is working towards fulfilling her life's purpose - crafting warm spaces that tell a story.

Key Management:

Shailja Awasthi, Founder

Shailja is an Indian artist, visual storyteller and design enthusiast, who believes-in creating spaces that speak tales about the people who dwell in there and inspire them in their everyday lives.

Offices: Bangalore & Chennai

Offerings: Space Design, Space Styling, Execution & Developer Service

