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Stopover Bombay

Mumbai's doyenne of restaurant design brings flair to the city's culinary circuit.

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Oh, to be a diner in Mumbai in 2019: A Middle Eastern joint with sultry lighting debuts on a Tuesday, a homey café throws open its vivid turquoise doors the next day, an opulent temple to fine-dining sets up its velvet ropes just in time for the weekend. If it sounds exhausting trying to keep up, imagine what it's like being Shweta Kaushik, one of the city's most prolific restaurant designers—and the mastermind behind seemingly every noteworthy opening in town.

"I like the freedom of expression and creating spaces that transport you to a different place or feeling," says Kaushik, principal designer of SK.ID. "It's an escape—you make people forget that the road is brimming with water outside."

Kaushik's eclectic portfolio is truly a global affair. There's the Mediterranean-inspired Bayroute in Juhu, where balloon-shaped lighting fixtures gently illuminate the faces of Bollywood couples canoodling in booths made from Calacatta marble and velvet. The comfort food standby Canto Café, whose gilt-edged, geometric design

choices—hexagonal tiles, chevron details embedded in the bar—were an organic extension of its art deco building. The wavelike ribbon of teal velvet booths flowing through the dining room at Trèsind, a Dubai import, are a tribute to the city's location by the sea. Even when she's working on multiple branches of the same restaurant, not a single tile or cushion is replicated. "If you go to one today and one tomorrow, you will never have the same experience," Kaushik says. "There are many expressions of the same concept. It's almost like *deja vu*."

That feeling is especially strong at Hitchki in Bandra-Kurla Complex, a high-energy bar where 90's Bollywood nostalgia reigns in the form of vintage typewriters, film reels, and cameras unearthed from the infamous Chor Bazaar antiques market, long rumored to be a repository of pilfered goods. "Hitchki means a hiccup, like you're remembering something," Kaushik says. "I took inspiration from the old theaters in Bombay."

Restaurant design was an unlikely path for Kaushik, for whom a career in medicine seemed preordained. "I come from a long line of doctors," she says. "Design wasn't in my blood, but it called out to me." She answered the call by studying interior design in Mumbai and pursuing a master's at Domus Academy in Milan before returning home. "India was booming, and it made sense to come back and build something here."

From her first solo project Terttulia, where she channeled a glamorous industrial farmhouse aesthetic and made the city's key players sit up and take notice, word of mouth has landed an enviable roster of clients at her door—from a 3D printed chocolate bar to her most ambitious undertaking, a mall opening in Pune this fall. But with 25 restaurants under her belt and many more ahead, the hitmaker's culinary concepts are sure to remain a fixture on every Mumbaikar's social calendar.