

VM-RD

VISUAL MERCHANDISING & RETAIL DESIGN



VF Brands
Bangalore

Driven by design



Bipratip Dhar
Principal Architect

He loves designing and his passion finds its resonance in versatile strength and diverse dexterity. Meet Bipratip Dhar, founder of Epsilon, the architectural-design firm founded in the year 2000 at Kolkata which is today a name providing high quality solutions across the Eastern region.

We chat up with Bipratip, a graduate from Sir J.J. College of Architecture, to know more about his innovative projects in which he is involved as an architect and as a visual merchandiser.

Bipratip's vision behind the magic which he creates with his designs has helped him and the agency to explore their expertise in a range of segments – from architectural & interior design solutions to retail outlets, hospitality, healthcare, auditoriums, residential and commercial spaces.

Presented below are excerpts from the interview.

As an Architect and Interior Designer what is your take on Visual Merchandising?

Visual Merchandising indeed is an integral part of any retail entity. The visual merchandise should be aptly planned for any venture keeping in mind the aesthetics of the particular project. The VM part comes in from the very beginning as it invites the customer towards the products displayed, thus the beauty of the facade or the atrium plays the first role of connecting the people with the merchandise. As it augments the consumer to visit the store or restaurant one should relate the place with the surroundings and we follow this thumb



rule for any of our assignment and deal VM in a very subtle manner without overdoing.

Do you have any role models in your design and creative philosophies? If so, who or what are they?

Architecturally I am influenced by the works of many great men of this field like Buskminster Fuller, Paul Rudolph and Frank Lloyd the exponent of organic architecture. The creative thoughts of these people have surely helped me enriching my design philosophy. Having onsite exposure to handling various kind of

designing projects at an early stage of my career has also helped in shaping my aesthetic fundamentals. Thus it has been a great learning path for me.

What is the unique skill or competence that you would attribute your success to?

In our agency we do not adopt any particular school of thought; the designs that we do are responsive towards the environment having a touch of exclusivity which is inspired from various forms of art. To complement that, we do extensive research work which fulfils



the functional and emotional purpose of the venture we are handling. For example, in one of our retail project namely Sawansukha Jewellers, we did an extensive use of straight line architecture in the ground floor and the upper level which is especially dedicated for very expensive collection has got a very exclusive look and feel harmonizing with the merchandise offered. Thus we do not have a design imprint or label which is easily recognised as we keep the end-users in mind while planning the VM.

Any favourite aspects of VM (Window displays, graphics, merchandise, presentation) that you have in terms of retail design?

I personally get charmed by the good height of any architectural space as it allows huge flexibility and more scope for visualisation in terms of presentation.

What has been your biggest achievement and what impact did it have on the business and your repertoire?

Designing the P.C. Chandra Jewellers showroom at Gariahat, Sawansukha Jewellers Showroom, Tanishq gave us recognition in this business.

What was your most fun project in retail? Please describe the experience.

All the projects have got some element of fun and challenge involved in it. I would like to mention the Dalhousie Institute Club which has got a very old world charm and it was exciting to do the work of revamping where we restored the heritage feel and fused in very contemporary design elements. Also the restaurant project at City Centre, Rajarhat called Massekah, which means a veil, we tried to create the ambience of the Afghan culture as the cuisine is dedicated to that region. Thus the use of screens with 'jaafri' works or the motifs, the wooden panels all recreate that aura of the place in itself.

What do you think are the advantages and challenges in the scope of VM in the Indian retail scenario? Any instances where you have changed a challenge into an opportunity?

From my personal experience I feel that as far as Indian retail scenario is concerned there are two distinctive areas, one consists of organised brands like Pantaloons, Shoppers Stop, Tanishq etc. who have got their separate VM teams with fixed budget and the others which are not so organised are generally the family run companies. Both have got their individual share of advantages and disadvantages. The challenges also lies in terms of traditional mindset of the Indian retailers as this whole concept of VM is just evolving in the country and typically is very new in the East zone of



India. Quality oriented visual merchandise is the demand of the hour which will ultimately hit the end-users. Thus convincing the clients that you need to differentiate your exclusive products and present them in such a manner that they are not lost among an array of regular merchandise offered is also a challenge for Visual Merchandisers.

What has been your experience in finding, training and retaining talent in VM in India? What do you recommend to soften the challenge?

Visual Merchandise should be treated as a separate subject altogether with special emphasis on retail design in India. The institutes should provide structured curriculum for this because so far VM has been just taken as a part of fashion technology courses. Thus VM should be recognised as a specialised wing of retail industry to increase the scope of the market as well as in retaining talent in this field. The interior designing courses should have courses on VM because nowadays visual merchandise has expanded its horizon in every sector be it Retail, F&B, Hospitality, Medical Field and so on.

From the point of view of an Architect what is the difference, you see in the VM industry in India compared to overseas in retail designing? What do you think are the reasons for the same?

The main difference comes from having a consciousness about brand positioning. VM is an amalgamation of knowing the value of your product and presenting it aesthetically. Starting from the choice of graphics, forms, colours, positioning the materials everything gets reflected through VM and establishes the thought process of that particular retailer. Abroad they have a very pre-mediated concept and the whole brand building is planned accordingly and i.e. how the end-customers get targeted very easily.

Where do you see the Indian VM industry in the next 5-10 years?

In the near future with more brands coming in the market is definitely going to grow. The franchisee business or the retail chains will also come up more where VM will play a great role as well.

Can you share with us your dream?

Just like in the western countries where the high-streets have got uniformity in terms of VM, it would be a great opportunity as far as urban planning is concerned if we can introduce such concepts in India. For example, carving an innovative visual merchandise plan for Park Street in Kolkata keeping alive the heritage feel for my 'City of Joy' would surely be a dream come true for any designer.

Nabamita Chatterjee

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