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LUXEBOOK



In high spirits

Luxury surfaces

Topstona's Founder **Nikhil Tiwari**
on how he created a
market for luxury wall surfaces



Where did you grow up and how has that inspired your fascination with stone in design?

I was born and brought up in Rajasthan and currently live in the crafts capital city of India, Jaipur. The inspirations behind my brand are my culture, surroundings and experiences. While growing up in Rajasthan's architecturally rich landscape, and travelling to numerous places, I realised how the stone has been an important building material since time immemorial. Be it the Hawa Mahal, Taj Mahal, Colosseum or the Pyramids.

Which are your favourite textures?

I have grown up in, both, urban and rural settings. All my life I have been observing the beauty of nature; rough mountain terrain, lush grasslands and open landscapes, as well as concrete homes, modern designs and various textiles. This observation, along with my personal research of various tactile surfaces gave me the vision to include this element in my business. I intend to bring our everyday textures into the design language of today. Some of my favourite textures from nature would be that of mountain rocks and tree barks. As for everyday things, I like the textures of woven fabrics and charpais (a traditional Indian bed), blocks used for hand block printing, and terracotta pots. All these deeply imbibe the soul of the environment they are born into.

How has your family's history in business and your education helped Topstona?

I am from the second generation of a family in the stone mining and processing business. This has helped me a lot to understand the very nature of the luxury stone surface and the consumer market. To add to that, having an MBA degree and a Master's in marketing from the Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies. There I was given theoretical and practical approaches to business transactions, growth strategies, and case studies. A combination of both gave birth to Topstona.

In what way do wall textures add to the interior design of a room?

Our home is our everyday environment, making it a reflection of ourselves. Conversely, every element of our home unknowingly has an impact on how we feel. Firstly, textures have been part of our natural habitat since our inception, be it in trees, rocks, land or water. Reinstating them into our living spaces makes us feel closer to nature. Secondly, textures make a room feel more intimate and grounded. As a part of interior design, they make a statement, add comfort, give a luxurious feel and are also very durable when compared to other alternatives like painted walls. They convert walls into pieces of art.

Have you noticed an increased interest in wall textures as a design element amongst homeowners?



Nikhil Tiwari, Founder - Topstona

Yes, wall textures as a design element for homes are emerging. They add more contrast to space when paired with other materials. Every piece of stone has a unique personality combining the design, look and feel. Only recently have homeowners started acknowledging these textures and are ready to experiment and move beyond plain white walls. I truly believe that the trend will pick up, but at its own sweet pace. It is also something that can end up becoming timeless.

What are some challenges you faced while setting up the brand, and while promoting it to consumers?

Just like any other business, there have been a lot of challenges, starting from the lack of sophisticated machinery available in India. We had to import it from Europe and assemble here. Also, the product market of stone is lesser-known and highly unorganised, this has resulted in a lack of talent and good manpower. You never know how a texture will look on a stone until you try it, which leads to high development cost for innovation and product sampling.

What goes into the creative process for designing Topstona's various collections?

The creative process is always ongoing. All objects, living or non-living, have textures in one way or the other. My team and I narrow down on a texture we want to implement. It is followed by rigorous planning, research and experimentation. Some of our collections are inspired by nature's elements like rocks, beehives, flowers, while some take inspiration from things like weaves, age-old craft forms, bricks, architecture, and even food. I want to bring these textures into the concrete houses of today and back to our lives.

Can you tell us what Topstona's upcoming collection is going to feel like?

Our upcoming collection 'Art Deco' is a special one. It is one of our first ranges that takes inspiration from an art era. Named after, and deriving patterns inspired by, the 1920s art movement, this collection is crafted in soothing and subtle sandstone. Straight lines, geometric shapes and streamlined forms are derived from the majestic grandeur of the art deco era and transcribed onto soft coloured stones.

What can we expect next from Topstona?

We started Topstona in 2016, and in these few years, we have received a lot of love and recognition from the industry. We are working on numerous high-end projects, and have a huge distribution network now. A lot of our business comes through social media as well. I want to see Topstona as a global brand. Through it, I aim to spread more awareness about the stone as a material not just for exteriors, but also for interiors. While innovating and processing new surface designs, I would also love to bring back in vogue the rich traditional aesthetic through stone art. ■