

Bringing Character to Modern Spaces

Kalaya, the lifestyle store, is a design lover's marketplace for rustic contemporary homeware. It is a celebration of Sri Lankan artisans and is rooted in cultural heritage but the interpretations are clearly modern.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

Photography Menaka Aravinda.



This festive season, Kalaya has a charming collection of Christmas decor.

Not so long ago, the kalaya was everyone's water jar. Even during the severest of

summers, the water in the earthen pot remained cool. The minerals in the clay got mixed in the water, giving it its distinct freshness. The history, simplicity, and proportion of hand-sculpted earthen pot demonstrate the native craft and the nimble-fingered pottery industry. For Darika and Nilo, the two owners, the name resonates with the heritage item dear to the native psyche. Therefore, they named their lifestyle store Kalaya to provide the space for their unique homeware. As we stepped into Kalaya, the interior was being prepared for the festive season. The gentle tinkling of the windchimes added a beautiful melody to the ambiance.

The Christmas decorations, like everything else in the store was simple and elegant, capturing the nostalgia of the season. Christmas, after all, is one of the most fun seasons when it comes to decorating. Kalaya has found some chic ways to incorporate the spirit of the season into their non-traditional Christmas decor. The mortar and stucco Christmas candlestands in the shape of houses, are the first items visible through the glass facade of the store, revealing that Kalaya is not the usual shop of traditional handicrafts. Created using upcycled newsprint, boxes of pretty bonbons for the festive table, have been carefully packaged with dainty Christmas trinkets. Elegant snowflake bon bons have been designed so that the decoration can be reused on the Christmas tree. Rows of snowflakes catch your eye with their textured surfaces of stucco. Paper pulp ornaments, baubles from discarded fabric, doves carved out of dried coconut and king coconut shells, are far from the glittering gaudiness of traditional Christmas decor. They are a departure from the familiar, a more minimalist and simple take on festive decoration. A lot greener and eco-friendly, earthy and naturalistic, and much in sync with the store's overall theme. Conscious consumerism at Christmas, leads to less waste. Elsewhere in this modern-rustic store, one finds a plethora of lampshades, clean and sculptural light fittings, and candle stands made of cane. Chandeliers, vases, figurines, side tables, candlestands, brass, wood, mortar figures, art deco pieces, and wall sculptures radiate a fine blend of artistic ingenuity. Crockery, cutlery and batik homeware are bold and striking. From small doorknobs to statuesque sculptures and elegant carvings, the synergy is beautiful and stylish. Inside this unique atmosphere, one discovers the textures of wood, stone, iron, and mortar figurines and decor pieces that are organic and blend well in any interior. Darika and Nilo's design inspiration is born from their innermost passion for decorating and designing. The sculptures of a tall man, the torso, and couples are expressive in shape and stance. Drawing heavily from their Sri Lankan heritage, the owners interact with their artisans to convey their design

ethos, the quality they desire, and the stories they want to recreate. The perfect figurine or the intricate carving that connects the present with the past. The handcrafted items are distinct and a blend of old and new elements ideal for contemporary settings.

Kalaya has found some chic ways to incorporate the spirit of the season into their non-traditional Christmas décor.



Festive decors crafted with a dainty touch are sure to add glamour to your homespace.



Styling upcycle decors with Christmas trinkets.



Attractive upcycled decors.

The sculptures are incredibly evocative, exuding a sense of history. Avatars of small-scale figures drawn from religious tradition abound. Statues of gods and deities in ritualistic stance, mainstream Buddhist art formed in the mudra statues and sculptures that carve out an expression of mindfulness and tenderness and exude the feeling of inner peace. The patina adds layering and texture to the

sculptural surfaces. There are lots of sculptures on bases for console tables. Framed watercolour prints and leaves cast in cement and table centres are part of a unified theme. Objects inspired by the natural world adorn the walls. The intricate carving on small pandal arch is stunning. The store's trendy range of lamps and lampstands are sold separately, giving the customer the flexibility to customize and coordinate the two pieces with a particular interior. Spread across three floors, the store is literally a souk of numerous household items, but different from the everyday store. Here everything is finished exquisitely and differently with loads of imagination and inspiration. Even scrap metal is bent to create an orb or an animal. The store is a vision of astounding creativity, from doorknobs, hooks, soap trays to door stoppers to beautiful woodcut prints to acrylic paintings. Their range of bold batik bedspreads, table cloths, and runners to cushion covers are one of a kind with daring prints and patterns, a departure from the ordinary. The creative culture is being pushed to embrace good practices, focusing on reusing waste material, sustainability and recycling. By sourcing their bags for the store from Kantha Kandayama, a Women's Group in the village of Mahausakanda in Rathnapura, Kalaya is supporting an initiative to conserve the forests and uplift village women. The members of this women's group make bags from discarded newsprint and ornaments from the shell of the king coconut. These initiatives are tiny ripples that make a contribution in a more significant project to drive conservation, while helping income generation among marginalized groups. It is also a learning opportunity for the grassroots, and the consumer sees the focus on conservation through recycling material often discarded as waste.

Through the store, its owners have maintained a long-standing working relationship with nearly 50 artisan families since 1996, contributing to the continuation of heritage crafts and cottage industries. For the lover of art, time spent inside the store reveals a combination of products harking back to the past, yet characteristically adapted to achieve an artistic symbiosis that blends history with the contemporary.



One of the many minimalistic ideas.



The lifestyle store has a beautiful range of vintage and rustic homeware.



Elegant candle stands.



An elegant expression of wall decors to adorn your home space.



A vivid collection of handcrafted products.