

Celebrating 30 Years of Taste, Timeless, Style

Posted on



The Paradise Road Collection stays true to the brand's concept
©BT Images

Paradise Road is the labour of love and the self expression of Udayshanth Fernando, whose design aesthetic has for three decades transformed the meaning of style in Colombo.

Words Keshini de Silva



Udayshanth Fernando, Founder and Chairman, Paradise Road
©BT Images

Paradise Road, opened its doors on July 13, 1987, and was a remedy to Colombo's

need for a different type of design. Monochrome and timelessness, the essence of the store's design mantra rejuvenated the city with an eclectic elegance.

"You can learn or buy style, but not taste! Paradise Road, in actuality is an expression of myself", explains Udayshanth Fernando, Founder and Chairman, Paradise Road.

Over 30 years, each product has been designed or handpicked by him. The design store's catalogue is a *mélange* of objet d'art; antiques or his inspiration from international travel translated into the traditional Sri Lankan artistry. He introduced geometric forms to resonate chic stylishness, the 'black and white' stripes are illustrative of the artistic identity of Paradise Road.

"Before Paradise Road, everyone in Colombo was retailing ceramic ware with little floral detailings on the edges. I promoted pure white ceramic ware and continue to list this style in the stores. I further converted batik from the traditional style to geometrics. To date, if you visit Mr Geoffrey Bawa's house, where you see how he lived, two of my cushion covers can be seen in his living room. Timelessness is what I retail at Paradise Road," he states. Hence, at Paradise Road, from the doorstoppers to ceramic ware, each design has endured time and the transformation of taste. Patronage for Paradise Road is high; clients, both Sri Lankan and foreign return, sometimes to introduce another to its timeless allure.

Decades later, even at Paradise Road Collection, which opened its doors in October 2016, the iconic concept conceived in 1987 has not changed. It is emblematic of Fernando's distinct interpretation of current world trends.

"You can learn or buy style, but not taste! Paradise Road is an expression of myself."

Paradise Road is a venture that has uplifted the livelihood of the traditional craftsmen in Sri Lanka. Keeping their best interests at heart has always been quite important to Udayshanth Fernando. Therefore, from early on, commercialism is an aspect he has eschewed. "I do not wish to ruin the rich culture of this country. I have unfailingly paid fair prices to all my producers because they must sustain their business. I believe in fair play. And although imitation is considered as flattery, I deem that duplication is obscene."



The Villa Bentota, shows a mixture of styles

A decade after Paradise Road, the country's foremost architect Geoffrey Bawa, entrusted Fernando with the beloved edifice that was his former office. The vernacular iconic structure, was by Fernando fashioned into The Gallery Café, which is the epitome of his love for a neutral palate that seamlessly merged with Bawa's characteristic architecture. "Mr Geoffrey Bawa influenced my taste as I belong to the same era. The use of colonial furniture, diverse textures and even the monochrome was in synch with Mr Bawa's style. It is evident if you look at his

home, after all his Rolls Royce is also black and white.” The Gallery Café, 19 years on is internationally recommended a must visit for the traveller in the paradise isle.

“I do not wish to ruin the rich culture of this country. I have unfailingly paid fair prices to all my producers because they must sustain their business.”

The subsequent milestone for Udayshanth Fernando, as well as for Colombo city, was Tintagel; the yesteryear ancestral home of three Sri Lankan political leaders that has been reimagined as a unique boutique hotel. It is a stunning city hotel fit for royalty. One which has hosted HRH Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife, Middle Eastern royalty as well as celebrities such as Amal Clooney.

Subsequent to this initial delve into hospitality, Fernando, reacting to repeated requests, undertook the Mohotti Walauwa, today The Villa Bentota, that was the first boutique hotel created by Mr Geoffrey Bawa. “The Villa Bentota, previously Club Villa was in fact one of my most favourite resorts. I redecorated it to suit the demands of today’s traveller while being loyal to Mr Bawa in his style,” Fernando elucidates.

“I feel it is my duty to foster art”, he says, and it is a responsibility that has not waned.

Udayshanth Fernando’s notable contribution to art is unmistakable. “I feel it is my duty to foster art”, he says, and it is a responsibility that has not waned.

The Gallery Café, in 1998, became Sri Lanka’s first commercial platform for artists. Similar to his establishment of a novel and unique shopping experience in Sri Lanka, Fernando elevated openings of art exhibitions from the rigid mundane to elegant affairs serving wine and canapés.

Even at Paradise Road Collection, which opened its doors in October 2016, the iconic concept conceived in 1987 has not changed.

Himself, an avid art enthusiast and collector of Dutch era colonial antiques, Udayshanth Fernando, has plans to make accessible his private collection to the discerning public and students of art. The exclusive collection includes over 150 original photographs by Lionel Wendt, work of art from all members of the '43 Group art movement in Sri Lanka and contemporary work from the entire country.

Recollecting his three-decades long journey with Paradise Road, Udayshanth Fernando elucidates, "I practice what I preach. Paradise Road represents good taste in living, dining and entertaining. I am proud that I was able to succeed with what I painstakingly began."

