

Kalaya: A Fusion Of The Modern And Traditional

Posted on



Cement sculptures

Kalaya is the Sinhala word for a clay vessel. Its rounded shape lends it an aesthetic appeal, while it serves the practical purpose of storing water. At Kalaya, almost all the products seem to reflect the name of the store, in that they serve a practical purpose but, at the same time, are beautiful to behold.

Words Haseena Razak Photographs Prabath Chathuranga

Every article housed at Kalaya's minimalist and spacious store exudes its own unique blend of modern flair with a touch of an ethnic element. Kalaya began in 1993 in the form of temporary sales, then grew to establish stores in Colombo and has culminated in a two-storey designer homestore at Battaramulla.

The first items that the discerning customer sees upon entering Kalaya, are statues of the meditating Buddha, fashioned out of cement. They are positioned tastefully amongst other items sculpted out of the same material. Brightly coloured candles stand strikingly against their grey-blue cement stands. The wide, platter-shaped vessels sitting at the base of the arrangement are multi-functional and can be used as table centres containing flowers and candles or even as birdbaths. The various textures that the cement takes on and the traditional element infused into these modern-day items is what makes them unique.

Kalaya is full to the brim with objects, painstakingly designed by the proprietors to ensure this uncommon fusion of modern and traditional. Lampshades created from oxidised iron adorn a bright yellow wall at the back of the store. The design of each, shaped differently, was settled upon only after experimentation with four to five prototypes.

Another feature of the products at Kalaya, is that most of the items are manufactured in Sri Lanka. Once the designs have been completed, Kalaya engages people involved in cottage industries in various parts of the country to manufacture their products. In Kiriella, Ratnapura, the local women create beautiful pieces of coconut-shell jewellery that can be found at Kalaya. This village empowerment project benefits local people by providing them with an income for producing jewellery out of their daily waste material.

Against a wall of the store, patchwork quilts, wall hangings and bedspreads decorated in batik sway in vivid contrast against shelves stacked with more bedspreads, quilts and shawls folded neatly away. At a glance, they create an artistic collage similar to the applique on some of the quilts and wall hangings themselves. The designs are contemporary in style and are hand-printed, thereby making each piece one of a kind.

Crowding the brilliant orange wall along the stairway are numerous shadowy hued human and animal figures. The black and white images are called block paintings and are created by cutting a design into a block of wood and imprinting it on a white background. Sri Lankan artists produce these and several other paintings at Kalaya, such as representations of ancient temple murals.

Whilst most of the pieces at Kalaya originate in Sri Lanka, there are also objects from other countries. Interspersed between the paintings by Sri Lankan artists are brightly coloured pieces of art from India, several depicting the Hindu gods Rama

and Krishna. Some of the glassware, twisted and fashioned into captivating shapes, is from Thailand.

The spacious layout at this outlet radiates a sense of leisure. It allows shoppers to browse at their own pace, piecing together items that would complement each other and their homes. All of the pieces at the store, including the furniture and rugs, can be custom made ensuring customers leave Kalaya with exactly what they want. On a relaxing trip to Kalaya, every item needed for the home, practical and beautiful, can be found and treasured.

Kalaya – Designer Home Store

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