



Suriya gives life to artistic and comfortable living

A gentle fragrance spreads a sense of calm in an interior abounding with objects of beauty, a gallery of masterpieces rich in tradition and culture. Serenity radiates from the face of the Buddha, the piety of the saffron-clad figure glowing with gentle dignity inside the tightly packed shop.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena | **Photographs** Isuru Upeksha



The face of a godly being displayed on an iron stand

Suriya is the sort of place that draws you in, and once inside, it's hard to leave. The hustle and bustle of the outside world grinds to a halt. This emporium of Sri Lankan art, crafts and furniture offers a blissful escape from normal life. Every item on sale is a celebration of Sri Lankan heritage, from rows of candelabras to terracotta sculptures, and from intricately woven baskets to solemn images of celestial beings. And this is just the beginning - there are objets d'art to feast the eyes on from floor to ceiling.

Founded 15 years ago, Suriya has become one of Sri Lanka's leading lifestyle stores. Beautifully crafted pieces of furniture, their surfaces accentuated with images of the Buddha, take pride of place in the sensitively styled interior. They are masterpieces created by rural craftsmen; the work of more than 120 families has been showcased at Suriya since it opened its doors.

Ruwanmali Jayasinghe, CEO and managing director of Suriya Home Decor and Suriya Warehouse, exudes confidence and resolve, twin traits that have stood her in good stead over the years. Interior design being her forte, what started as a charitable venture to help village artisans has grown into a successful lifestyle business. Balancing a career and motherhood was a challenge, Ruwanmali says, yet she managed it with panache because of her passion for art. Not one to feel intimidated by the competition, Ruwanmali enjoyed the challenge of starting and growing the business and is full of excitement for things to come on the eve of the store's 15th year.

The large selection of decorative household accessories bears witness to that tenacity. Lamps, vases, wall hangings, paintings, ornaments, brass and silverware, crockery, cutlery, therapeutic products and candles are just some of the delights on display.

A unique addition to the carved wooden furniture at Suriya is the '*pekada*', a lotus inspired by the elaborate wood carvings of the ancient temples of Sri Lanka. Coffee and console tables bearing the symbol are the epitome of Sri Lankan design. Made with jack and teak wood, the pieces come in a variety of finishes and colours. Temple art is also beautifully recreated in the 'Pettagam' range of chests, pieces painted with replicas of murals from Sri Lankan Buddhist temples. The classic design of the chests complements the traditional art form that inspires them.

It's a pleasure to meander through the store, losing yourself in the warm, homely atmosphere of the bedroom suites. A range of handloom upholstery and curtain fabrics are showcased, their bright colours and vivid patterns sure to enliven any domestic interior.

But Suriya isn't just about home décor these days. Ruwanmali is a supplier to commercial and hospitality clients too. And she intends to go even further with the business, increasing the range of her collections, including global brands.

As you step out of the store, back into the real world, you can't help but feel that Suriya has got a lot to look forward to.

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