

There's Something About Ravissant



When RAVI CHAWLA's dreams take wing, they carry India's best to the world's finest. And the result is Ravissant Boutiques — a fusion of the classic with the contemporary



NANDINI RAGHAVENDRA

THE cautious businessman is spreading his wings. In fact, one can say Ravi Chawla is on a roll. The next two years will see as many as 30 new Ravissant boutiques across Europe. And four in India. In contrast to the present seven Ravissant boutiques — four in India and three abroad (London, Paris and Milan) which were set up step-by-step over two decades — the over two dozen in Europe and four new ones in India

(Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and Agra) come as a surprise indeed. Turnover which is presently Rs60 crore, is expected to increase in the next three years fourfold to at least Rs250 crore. The 2,000 sq ft



Chawla (top left) with his prized collection

LIFESTYLE

RAVI Chawla admits that silver is his weakness. His preference is for something he can put on a table and see. And Ravissant's sterling silver takes pride of place at the family dinner table.

"The twisted silver cutlery set is among the things I got designed specially for my family, for which our designers adopted techniques from eighteenth-century blacksmiths," says the 53-year-old Chawla, who claims his silversmiths are among the best in the world.

Unlike most success stories, Chawla's is not a rag-to-riches saga. Chawla candidly admits that every step on the ladder of success has been planned carefully. One of the few Indian labels to gain access into the international couture circles, Ravissant however began on a small and cautious note, at the Taj in Delhi in 1981.

The company, which today grosses a Rs60 crore turnover with an additional Rs40 crore coming from the garments export division, began with a single exhibition of garments and sarees. Says Chawla: "I saw a huge potential for the Indian clientele in the high-quality segment. So, I got in two designers from Europe who designed new prints and styles along with some garments and we had an exhibition at the Taj in Delhi. Guess what? It was a sell-out!" This was in spite of the goods being priced at least 300 per cent over the market rate. "Our silk printed sarees cost Rs2,500 at a time when they were available in the market for Rs600," says Chawla, adding that this contributed to raising the market prices by 10 per cent!

The ever-cautious business-



Silver Streak

man, along with wife Mina, decided to check if these same guys who contributed to the sell-out would repeat their success. And so followed another exhibition, before the couple decided to set up the first Ravissant in Delhi in 1981. Mumbai followed immediately in 1982 and led to the flagship Ravissant store in Delhi, which spreads over 50,000 sq ft.

Once again, the businessman was wary before venturing into international waters. A decade of success in India gave Chawla the confidence to test the UK market and 1991 saw the doors open to the Brompton Cross Ravissant, London. "One of the most surprising things I've seen over the years at our London store is that we have not had a single Indian client! The same guys who live there, may buy when they come to India, but not in London... they still feel that it might be cheaper here!" says Chawla, who invested in the property too.

Chawla waited another decade before venturing into haute cou-

London store at Brompton Cross will see additional space of 1200 sq ft (leased), along with a half-crore investment on new interiors. Around Rs8 crore will be pumped into increasing manufacturing to supply the new growth ventures.

If this is a reflection of sudden money pouring into Chawla's coffers, he dismisses it immediately. "Ravissant has identified partners in Europe, some investment bankers we can work with, who'll be putting in the money. Each boutique will cost a million dollars. Our contribution is the merchandise," says Chawla who along with wife Mina set up the brand two decades ago.

Also expanding alongside is Ravissant's manufacturing base to

supply the range of home, silver leather, products which are created entirely in-house. "What we cannot make and want to offer, we have tied up with the best," says Chawla, explaining Ravissant's business tie-ups with Alfred Dunhill, Cartier, L'Occitane, Rosenthal — and the latest with Jacques Dessange, which hit's the capital later in the month.

These tie-ups were also culminations of Ravissant's investments made years ago. "India is a country worth waiting for. A decade ago, we brought in Cartier in small exhibitions when the market had not even opened up," explains Chawla. And that the patience has paid off for Ravissant today in terms of brand exposure, besides maturing the mar-



ture markets like Milan and Paris. He says he's now ready to spread his wings both in India and Europe.

Where, according to Chawla, lies the true success of a high-end luxury brand? "Ravissant's success lies in our craftsmanship, where we have total control. We do not offer anything that we cannot make ourselves," says Chawla. There is no outsourcing, whether it is weaving or packaging, besides our designing, styling and the fusion of contemporary designs with Indian raw materials. Of course, everything is hand-crafted, a rarity in the Western markets," Chawla adds that he visualised slowly expanding from garments to home furnishings, to sterling silver and jewellery.

Realising that the retail world is changing, Chawla has even initiated CRM into all Ravissant outlets globally. He says it has shown results in revenue.

ket too. The Ravissant story, which began with two designers, dreamt only of creating the timeless. The aim was to fuse the classic with the contemporary and bring India's best to the world's finest. The collection today encompasses home, sterling silverware, leather and jewellery. And bringing in the imagination, innovation and elegance which have characterised its creations, have always been European designers working with Indian craftsmen and material.

Growth for Ravissant has come from all segments, according to Gia Sharan, sales director, Ravissant. From home, silver and garments. Swiss designers, who Chawla wooed, are his buyers today.

With the market for high-end couture opening up in terms of liberalisation and so many global brands making a presence in India, where does Ravissant stand? "The Indian consumer has matured. But it is Ravissant's retail experience of two decades in this market wherein lies the difference.