



MAKING HER MARK

With a shimmering legacy to live up to, Shalini Kasliwal now leads the US operations of Sanjay Kasliwal.

| By Smitha Sadanandan

An eighth-generation descendent of the lustrous Indian jewelry house, The Gem Palace, Shalini Kasliwal moved to New York three years ago to join her father's eponymous label – Sanjay Kasliwal. Known for making jewelry for Maharajas, international royalty and Hollywood's elite, for the past seven generations, The Gem Palace has exclusively been run by male members of the family. Rather than let it intimidate her, Shalini charted her own course. "I have always loved jewelry and with my father's encouragement, I have now become the first daughter in our family to forge a career in the business." With a shimmering legacy to live up to, she now leads the US operations of Sanjay Kasliwal.

Shalini made a crossover from law to jewelry; a circuitous route, no doubt. Her background in law, however, proved helpful during the launch of their boutique in NYC. "The laws, regulations and marketing are very different. So, law has actually put me in a very strong position. I'm able to look at things very critically, which helps when you're relaunching a business in another continent," she explains.

Spurred by an entrepreneurial spirit, Shalini took her first tentative steps in the retail business. "The biggest challenge for me at the beginning was talking to people in a professional setting in a language that wasn't my first. Now that I've been here for a while, I feel much more confident; but this was definitely something I had to overcome," she adds. "Also, I've never lived away from my family, and all of the rules about running a business were completely different here. I needed to learn everything from scratch and I needed to do it quickly. But now I can finally say our team's dedication is paying off. The



brand continues to grow and American jewelry connoisseurs are becoming familiar with our signature designs."

The marketing and sales strategy in New York is completely different from India, admits Shalini. "In India it's a 'little' bit easier for us. When you're the oldest family jeweler... word gets around. But when you move to a different culture, you start from scratch and have a lot of ground to cover. I've been here for three years now and understand that you need to be incredibly attuned to trends and focus on presenting collections in a way that people can easily visualize how to integrate the pieces into their wardrobes. We are also building our stylist relationships and we understand editorial is key." Perhaps, the most important strategy the brand has adopted is the pop-up shows held across the country. "We get to learn about what might be our next best market and introduce people to our brand," she points out.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

She has taken the brand from strength-to-strength by collaborating with "forward-thinking" retailers, including Jeffrey in Atlanta and NYC, Just One Eye in Los Angeles. "Online retailers like Moda Operandi offer a more global perspective, when it comes to what they curate. In that regard, we

have a very a good partnership with Moda and love to sell our jewelry through them. I love their marketing strategy,” says Shalini. Additionally, the trunk shows on Moda received such great response that the jewelry brand bagged a permanent space online.

Melding her Indian heritage with her Italian one, Shalini brings forth a fresh perspective to the brand: introducing new collections and redefining the classics, and curating pieces for the Madison Avenue boutique and retail partners.

Design at Sanjay Kasliwal is a family effort with both Shalini and her brother, Samir, (GIA alumnus) working with their father. “My dad’s designs blend Indian and Italian aesthetics.” With the workshops and artisans located in Jaipur, Shalini divides her time between Asia, U.S. and Europe. “I’m in love with my city Bologna! Whenever I go home to visit, I realize how lucky I am to have grown up there,” she adds. Italy’s rich culture and heritage has had a profound and timeless influence on artists, designers, jewelers and everyone with a creative bent of mind. Shalini’s Italian grandfather used to design jewelry and often traveled to India to buy gemstones from her Indian grandfather. “That was how my parents met and got married – my dad met my mother, when she accompanied my grandfather on one of his buying trips.”

Truth be told, Shalini grew up in the midst of gems and jewelry. “I never knew my Italian grandfather or saw him work, but I do remember seeing my Indian grandfather and my dad work together. They were always agonizing over selecting stones for their designs. I remember thinking this was the most boring thing in the world an adult could possibly do...until I had to select stones for my own collection.” With an unbridled passion, she goes through every bag to make sure she doesn’t lose an opportunity to use the perfect gemstone in a piece of jewelry. “It is a dream come true to be working with my dad on my first collection,” says Shalini, gearing up for a 2018 design debut.

