



# FABLE AND FLAIR

MINNIE BHATT'S REPUTATION IN THE REALM OF HOSPITALITY DESIGN IS GROWING STRONGER

BY MARIA LOUIS

**T**hrow an idea her way, and interior designer Minnie Bhatt can dream up the most effective ways to translate it into reality. Her lasting passion is hospitality projects, as they offer more scope for creativity – and this is evident in her work on Fable and Myx, both ventures by Ankit Anand of Redbrick Restaurants. Located in Mumbai's upmarket suburb of Juhu, the all-day cafe and pizzeria (Fable) successfully transports you to the land of fantasy thanks to its innovative décor that succeeds in 'cooking up the most delicious stories'. The fork and pen logo immediately draws your attention, and the captivating wishing well takes you back to childhood tales of yore.

Once you enter, you cannot miss the theme that the décor revolves around. Not only do the walls sport well-thumbed tomes of yellowed pages at intervals, but you will spot the Fable Wall made up of over 50 novels with an artistic illustration across them, an old telephone comprising stacked books with a background wall of illustrated pages, and a lampshade placed on another pile of books – most appropriately called

the Reading Lamp. "The name of the restaurant came about during interactions with the clients, and the décor concept was developed to integrate fables and stories visually into the space," discloses Bhatt.

The clients wanted a charming space with a timeless appeal and, yet, one that lives up to its name. "It had to be bright and cheerful. Also, it had to incorporate aspects of different fables and create the ambience to suit the concept," elaborates the designer. "Since the clients were inclined towards a theme that was inviting, that had to be translated to the venue as well as the food. The comfortable seating, the gorgeous natural light, and the relaxed and peaceful ambience are all designed to encourage people to spend time there. It's the reason why Fable is a perfect place to chill with a book, catch up with friends or even conduct business meetings in a relaxed atmosphere.

"The first thing that appealed to the designer about the site was the length of the façade and the al fresco area. "It is a treat in our city to dine outdoors. The most amazing part is that it's full of natural light during the day, which makes it an ideal

1. The al fresco area at Fable is a charming dining space.



2

## MATERIALS

**Flooring:** (outdoor) Rough Kota stone and (indoor) cement tiles from Bharat Flooring

**False ceiling/roofing:** Acoustic insulation foam used to cover the indoor area ceiling.

**Lighting/light fixtures:** All decorative lights from Jodhpur

**Wall partitions:** Wooden louvered screens from Chor Bazaar

**Wall textures:** Rough cement plaster

**Dado:** Finishing bricks painted white

**Paint:** Lustre paint

**Tables and chairs:** Custom made and painted white

**Sofas/soft seating:** Cotton, linen and linen blends

location," declares Bhatt. Old vintage windows interspersed with wooden trellis, all finished in a white distressed paint, highlight the façade – giving the impression of a space within that beckons with curious charm, while hinting at a mysterious house in a fable. The wood-fired oven at the back of the outdoor area is finished in cement and made to look earthy.

Since the indoor space is not too large and has many structural columns, the designer promptly thought of using arches to bind the space together. "I created faux arches to make the columns appear charming and, in order to create a soft and restful ambience, I used pastel shades for the colour palette," points out Bhatt. "With the help of my artist friend Prashant Keluskar, I was able to create an interesting open book wall installation with a quirky artwork painted on it – of deer antlers riding a bicycle."

As fables are stories with animal characters, the décor incorporates papier mâché heads of a horse and rhino displayed on the columns inside, in addition to the telephone and floor lamp made with books. The table tops have clocks or text printed on them along with a few illustrations in black and white, while the chairs are of four different kinds in pastel shades. The outdoor area, which is in the shape of a 'V' encompassing the indoor space that holds the bar and dessert counter, is lit with lampshades clustered together and suspended from the

2. Book-based inspirations, as seen in this Reading Lamp, have been used liberally in the interiors of Fable.

## PROJECT DETAILS

**Name of the project:** Fable

**Location:** Juhu

**The client:** Ankit Anand, Redbrick Restaurants

**The designers:** Minnie Bhatt Design

**Team:** Principal designer Minnie Bhatt, associate designer Misbah Kapadia, assisted by Chaitali Kandalkar

**Duration of project:** Three months

**Date of completion:** December 1, 2015

awning. Each of the three areas have a different feel. While the outdoor sections have the best lighting, the indoor section has a rather charming appeal.

Pastel shades were chosen to give the space a soft and restful feel. Powder blue, white, lemon yellow and pale green were used for the chair and in the soft furnishings. Stripes and floral patterns for the upholstery are, again, in pastel shades to complement the space and furniture style. The walls inside are finished in a rough textured plaster, painted white to make the small indoor area look bigger. The flooring inside is a geometric cement tile in shades of pale green, ivory and grey. The flooring is busy, and the stark white columns and walls complement it. By contrast, the outdoor area flooring is in natural cobblestone.

For the designer, the most challenging aspect of this project was customising the furniture and other design elements, as there are many kinds of tables (a mix of circles, squares and rectangles), chairs and benches used in the restaurant. To overcome the challenge, she had samples made of each type of chair and table, corrected each piece and worked on the table artworks to get the desired effect. In addition, design elements like the book lamp, the animal heads and the wall book installation required a lot of back and forth to get them right.

## HEADY MYX OF STYLES

A stone's throw away from Fable, Myx was conceptualised as a tapas bar, with small eats from around the world. The fusion of popular dishes with great ingredients – both local and imported – and the use of classic cooking techniques combined with molecular gastronomy in both the food and drink, give Myx its name. "Since it was meant to be a gastronomic journey, we have played with the imagery and theme in the décor," points out Bhatt. "We let the concept behind the food and drink guide us, and so didn't adhere to a particular genre. We chose minimalistic décor and artwork so as to let the focus be on the dining experience rather than overwhelm the patrons with too much ornamentation."

The clients had conveyed that they wanted a casual yet chic space, which had its own personality and wasn't reverent to any current design trend. The space was to be open for lunch as well as dinner and, hence, the lighting was planned accordingly to fit the ambience for both. They were clear that it was to be a tapas bar that would be taking guests through a culinary journey around the world, as well as serving fabulous cocktails. The bar was to be accessible to guests from indoors as well as outdoors.

The premises used to house a popular Italian restaurant, which the designer had visited on several occasions earlier. "When I visited the space after it had been chosen as the venue for Myx, I felt that the indoors had to be warm and plush and comfortable for dining, whereas the outdoor area could be more casual and bar focused," recalls Bhatt. "There is one huge



## PROJECT DETAILS

**Name of the project:** Myx

**Location:** Juhu

**The client:** Ankit Anand, Redbrick Restaurants

**The designers:** Minnie Bhatt Design — Minnie Bhatt (principal designer), Misbah Kapadia Jaiswal (associate designer)

**Area:** 2,000sq-ft

**Duration of project:** Four months

**Date of completion:** May 15, 2016

## MATERIALS

**Flooring:** (outdoor) Cuddapah stone and (indoor) teak wood

**Ceiling:** Restored vintage tin tiles.

**False ceiling/roofing:** Cement sheet

**Lighting/light fixtures:** Custom fittings specially created for the project

**Wall partitions:** Old wooden louvered doors, reclaimed

**Dado:** POP, red brick, IPS

**Paint:** Plastic paint

**Tables & chairs:** Custom made

**Sofas/soft seating:** Faux leather, chenille

compass that sits at the helm of the restaurant, forming the focal point of the décor. The rest of the walls are an eggshell white and adorned with artwork – like the image of a lady looking out at the world through a pair of binoculars. Other artworks on the wall depict modes of travel – like the unicycle and the hot air balloon.”

For Bhatt, the name Myx meant a mix of elements and design styles. She and her team created tables which were a fusion of two tables, a carved one and a minimalistic wooden one, with two different finishes for the outdoor area. The customised chairs were casual in style with metal frames and leather-covered seats. The walls of the outdoor area are finished in cement panels cast on site and decorated with vintage travel accessories like cameras, binoculars, nautical instruments, etc, all set in jute-backed frames with bright colours.

The wooden bench at the entrance area is vintage in style and finished in paint. The dangling lights with many arms were devised to create an interesting play of light and shadow. The table seating in the outdoor area is lower than a regular tall bar seating and higher than a dining seating. The old limestone flooring is retained outside. The indoor area has design elements like artworks on the textured white walls, depicting a lady looking out at the world along with other world travel

elements. A large metal compass decorates one wall and the existing red brick wall has been retained and clad with broken-edged plaster of paris.

The space is divided into two sections – outdoor and indoor, with the bar placed strategically at one end to make it accessible from both sides. The highlight of the indoor area is the ceiling, created with a collage of vintage tin ceiling tiles, painted in colours complementing the space. The bar area display was designed to resemble the old-world bar storage cupboards with locks. A narrow community table finished in deep burgundy duco paint is placed in the centre, to serve a large group or a floating crowd; while black-and-white striped upholstery was chosen for the booth seating towards the back, to complement the artwork on the wall. One section has two large tables and plush black sofas.

The colour palette consists of deep hues of blue, yellow and burgundy on the ceiling, contrasting with the textured cement, red brick and textured plaster of paris finished walls. The warm brown of the wooden floor indoors is complemented by the textured white walls and contrasted with the black-and-white striped upholstery of the booth seating. To create a contrast of textures, two finishes were selected for the furniture – natural polish and bright duco paint.

The most challenging aspect for the designers was customising the light fittings for the indoor and outdoor areas. “We didn’t want any light fittings mounted on the floating tin tile ceiling panels, yet we wanted them there to make sure the tables below are lit correctly,” explains Bhatt. “The outdoor area is covered with a retractable awning, with intermittent fixed metal supports which was the only support we could use to fix the lights on. This was a challenge, as the tables below couldn’t be placed directly below them to be lit.”

There was a lot of trial and error whilst customising the light fittings to ensure that they illuminated the spaces as desired. “We customised a fitting with three movable arms each and metal shades that could be adjusted to light the roof as well as the tables below, for the outdoor area. Once fixed, we adjusted and angled each arm of each light to achieve the desired effect,” discloses Bhatt. “So, for the indoor area, we sampled many light fixtures and were able to customise a fitting that not only lit the ceiling well, but also the tables below – without having to fit the fixture on the tin tiles.”

Like most of Bhatt’s work, in this project too, the artworks on the wall have lent character and charm to the interiors and visually translated the concept. **AB**

3. The bar at Myx is accessible to guests from the indoors as well as outdoors.

4. The customised light fitting with metal shades and three movable arms each can be adjusted to light the roof as well as the tables.

5. The indoor ceiling is created with a collage of vintage tin ceiling tiles.