

# BAZAAR

## A FASHIONABLE LIFE

SIMONE ARORA

*With her eponymous décor store, which stocks some of the best boutique brands, the self-taught curator is showcasing her idea of the good life.*

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Simone Arora at her Mumbai store, SIMONE—Naturally Inspired. All clothes and accessories, Arora's own.

A branch of burnished driftwood here. A smattering of polished pebbles there. The curl of a leaf and the curve of a seashell. The gleam of gold and the sparkle of silver. Hushed hues of sand and smoke. A fond memory, laced with latte and cocoa. Simone Arora's eponymous store SIMONE—Naturally Inspired, has the uncanny ability to uplift the spirits. Her brand of 'nature luxe' has been creating oases of calm and comfort in Mumbai for a year now, after opening to great appreciation and It parties in September 2014.

We find her in her gorgeous workspace, sitting in the midst of beautiful moodboards that she created, and gift hampers that she's customising. Arora's weaving plans for expansion (maybe in Delhi) and going international, she confides, and her excitement is palpable. "I'm showcasing the line of export-quality fabrics that I've created especially for SIMONE at Maison & Objet Paris in January." That's rather quick work, considering that about three years ago, the store itself was merely an idea taking root.

It took about a year and a half to fructify from ideas sketched in pencil renderings on an iPad to getting permits for restoring the outside of a heritage building and creating a contemporary ambience inside, a fusion of the old world and the new world, as she puts it. But that's what Simone Arora, *née* Khan, has always been about. "I finish what I start. I feel that if you put your mind to it, all your resources and your 100 percent effort, you can make it happen."

Today, laid out across 8,000 sq ft of prime space in a beautiful colonial building in South Mumbai, SIMONE is a concept store that curates and assembles different product categories, making it easier for the customer to visualise how it will look. "It draws from the natural palette of colour, yet adds some glitz and sheen to give it that luxe component. Nature has always been an influence in my life, bringing peace and tranquillity to it," says Arora. The best symbol of her creativity is the 25-ft crystal chandelier hanging over the main stairway, which resembles a cascade of icicles falling from a central stem with brambles protruding laterally. "I designed it especially for the store and got it made in Italy. I have this light across the entire space in different orientations and forms."

The seeds for the store were sown 10 years ago, when Simone started to build her Juhu home, Amore, designed by architect Hafeez Contractor. "I brought all the furniture, artefacts, and accessories from Europe, mostly from Italy and France. We moved into our home six years ago, and my family and friends loved how it was put together and said how nice it would be if there was a store in Mumbai where they could purchase these items. Then I started thinking... 'Why don't I have my own little home store so I could bring these products to Mumbai?'" So that's what she did. Shortly after the launch, she roped in award-winning contemporary brand B&B Italia, and the store now houses collections by luxury brands like the Italian VGnewtrend. >

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Abundant greenery at the store reflects Arora's love for nature.



A bedroom setting at the store.

## A Fashionable LIFE

SIMONE wasn't just a flash-in-the-pan idea. It was the culmination of a 20-year design journey that started when she was married to her first love Ajay Arora at 21. Together they started D'Décor, a major producer of curtain and upholstery fabrics, where she was creative head of design and development, and attended all the big international design shows for more than two decades with Ajay. "The travelling, getting inspired by visuals, design, décor, meeting people in the industry, all these experiences enriched me. To look at window displays, how people put things together, I would observe how the interiors in restaurants were done, how the table was laid. Working passionately 16 hours a day helped make me who I am and SIMONE what it is," she says.

For SIMONE, sourcing was simple—she knew what she wanted. Starting with four, she now stocks 90 labels that she travels abroad to source from about four times a year. Apart from big names, like American metal designer Michael Aram, she patrons lesser-known family-run companies. "I mix them when I do a room concept, be it dining, living, bedroom... I curate about a 100 different articles for each."

Where does this sense of style originate? "I was born into an artistic family, my mother a designer (Zarine Katrak) and my father a filmmaker (Sanjay Khan). With the travel, it just developed further," she says.

Having worked so hard in her 20s and 30s, the 44-year-old has no plans to slow down. But at heart she's quite a homebody. After her daily swim and 'think-time' in her pool, she has breakfast with her 12-year-old daughter Adah, before she goes off to school. Her sons (Armaan, 20, and Yuraaz, 19) are away studying in the US. And she's happy to stay home with Adah and their two Golden Retrievers most nights, or meet a few friends to bond over a movie or home food. "Home-cooked, nutritious food is what I love, not this catered stuff," she says. And while she adores dancing, she loves her sleep even more, and wishes she could be in bed by 11:00 p.m.

So where does fashion fit in this ambit of domesticity? "I'm very fashionable!" she exclaims. "My style is classic. I have things that are in my wardrobe since five-six years. They are in immaculate condition as I look after them very well and don't have the need to buy excessively," she says. When she does shop, it's abroad. That's also when she goes all out. "Even if I'm travelling alone, I go out of my way to dress to the hilt. I get my hair done. I'm rarely dusted when I'm abroad. Skirts, blouses, mufflers, gloves, fur coats, jackets and jeans, I'll wear it all. I have a nicer winter wardrobe than a regular one and I love it!" Her go-to designers: Ralph Lauren, lanvin, David Yurman, and Adarsh Gill for saris. Her style is subtle, and she prefers to wear one accent piece instead of adorning every part of her body with jewellery. "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." We got a sense of that at her store, where less is more and true beauty is about being understated. ■



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Fabrics in varying shades and textures.



Arora, by a floral arrangement at the store.

Arora looks to tastefully combine different pieces, from accessories and artworks to furniture and fabrics.



Earthy tones and subtle style mark SIMONE's brand of 'nature luxe'.