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Something Old, Something New

Ancestry, a contemporary Indian fashion and lifestyle label by Future Style Lab, is increasing its retail footprint in India. **Bindu Gopal Rao** speaks with Manjula Tiwari, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), to know more.



India's rich textile legacy, especially its weaving heritage, is impossible to ignore. It is this very thing that Ancestry builds on. A confluence of Indian aesthetics, responsible and mindful consumption, and subdued, natural materials, Ancestry is a brand that offers fashion and lifestyle products modelled on international design sensibilities, yet embedded in the age-old ethos of India. Manjula Tiwari, CEO, Future Style Lab, sheds more light in this exclusive conversation.

TELL US A BIT ABOUT ANCESTRY, AND THE THOUGHT PROCESS BEHIND ITS INCEPTION.

Ancestry is a fashion and lifestyle label launched by Future Style Lab. The brand derives its inspiration from India's design heritage, and offers womenswear as well as homeware, among other product lines. The brand's products, both in the fashion and lifestyle space, have a distinctly urban provenance while being intrinsically rooted in heritage. With nine stores in the country, which are situated in New Delhi, Gurugram,

Noida, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Goa and Chennai, Ancestry has already earned much love and accolades from new-age Indian women, who seek contemporary style rooted in Indian traditions. The idea was born out of the need to offer the charm of Indian traditions to discerning Indian consumers in a modern-day format, and at affordable prices.

WHAT ARE THE KINDS OF GARMENTS THAT ARE BEING RETAILED AT THE STORE?

Ancestry is especially known for making Indian craft easily accessible to women. The focus of our clothing collections is comfort and elegance. Each collection drop is made of different silhouettes and design elements. Current collections at the store include styles crafted using *jamdani* fabrics, *shibori* techniques, and a range of floral prints across dresses, jumpsuits, dhoti pants, shirt dresses, and kurtas. We have recently launched a collection titled 'Kaziranga', inspired by the famed national park in the state of Assam; the line features weaving techniques that are unique to the state. However, the collection celebrates something more special—the majestic Indian rhinoceros.

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WHAT IS THE UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP) OF ANCESTRY'S DESIGNS?

The label draws on India's design heritage but is also inspired by the new-age Indian woman who is self-assured, professionally competent, and curious to discover newer avenues. The Ancestry Woman represents the evolving face of contemporary India. She is curious about the world and finds new paths to discover it. Despite everything, she remains rooted and innately Indian. She is driven by her cultural capital to appreciate design and aesthetics. Our designs are created for this very woman; we strive to integrate homegrown weaves and craft forms such as *bagru* and *jamdani* in our collections. We believe this is the USP of our designs.





ANCESTRY WORKS ONLY WITH NATURAL FABRICS SUCH AS CHANDERI, COTTON, AND LINEN.

HAS YOUR FOCUS ON TRADITIONAL INDIAN HANDLOOMS BEEN A CONSCIOUS DECISION?

Yes, that is the ethos of Ancestry—to fuse traditional crafts with modern silhouettes.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR WORK WITH WEAVERS.

Ancestry works only with natural fabrics such as *chanderi*, cotton, and linen. The fabrics for Ancestry's 'Jamdani' collection were woven by artisans in Bardhaman, West Bengal. Similarly, the 'Earthenwear' collection was created in Bagru, Rajasthan, one of the few centres in India that are famous for mud-resist printing techniques.

HOW HAS ANCESTRY ATTEMPTED TO REVIVE TRADITIONAL INDIAN TEXTILES?

Some of the crafts used by Ancestry, including *jamdani* weaves and dabu prints, are extremely unique to the geographies they were sourced from. Ancestry helps the involved craftsmen in

bringing their work to the forefront by presenting it in styles and silhouettes that are loved and appreciated by present-day women. The idea is to revive traditional Indian crafts by taking them through the passage of time, and presenting their modern version to culturally evolved audiences.

WHAT IS THE DESIGN IDEOLOGY OF ANCESTRY?

The collections at Ancestry comprise exquisitely tailored Indian outfits such as kurtas, dhoti pants, palazzos, tunic tops, and even Western pieces like long dresses, short dresses, jumpsuits, and much more. We extensively use pastel colours and breezy silhouettes, clubbing them with motifs that allude to nature. The Jamdani collection embodied just this essence—rustic charm coupled with quirkiness. Our 'Meraki' collection is a fun mix of *shibori* styles, florals, and timeless classics in white. The colour palette ranges from natural indigo, watermelon hues, and pure whites to pastel blues and peach. While the designs and cuts vary with every collection, we do not compromise on quality and comfort.

WHAT ARE THE NEW TRENDS IN WOMENSWEAR TODAY?

Comfortable, easy-to-wear outfits with a touch of luxury are trending the most. More and more women want to take to our country's ancient

textiles and carry the concept of 'India Modern' forward. Today, we are seeing contemporary cuts in different fabrics make a great style statement.

HOW OFTEN DOES ANCESTRY LAUNCH NEW COLLECTIONS?

We launch a new collection every fortnight and sometimes, new styles are added to our repertoire every month. We also focus on crafting collections around festivals, and time our launches accordingly. For instance, we launched a collection around Durga Puja. Titled 'Cinnabar', it characterises the progressive, empowering spirit of today's women.

HOW HAS WORKING WITH NATURAL FABRICS BEEN LIKE?

With a commitment to ensure that we use only nature-derived fabrics, it is essential that every textile used by us not only provides the wearer with innate comfort, but also delight in terms of its touch, feel, and quality. And we do mention,

“IN AN INDUSTRY AS COMPETITIVE AND EVER-GROWING AS FASHION, PRODUCT INNOVATION IS PARAMOUNT.”

quite transparently, how such fabrics need to be treated delicately post every purchase, so the natural imperfections of handcrafted textiles are retained and not misunderstood for flaws or quality defects.

WHAT ARE SOME KEY ATTRIBUTES THAT BRANDS NEED TO STAY ON TOP OF THEIR GAME?

In an industry as competitive and ever-growing as fashion, product innovation is paramount. Continuous innovation, quality control, reinvention of designs and techniques, competitive pricing, technological intervention, and a distinguished identity keep raising the progress curve of any given brand.

WHAT IS NEXT ON THE CARDS FOR ANCESTRY?

Ancestry will continue to grow steadily and cautiously across offline and online formats, and each point of sale will be judiciously selected. In both physical and online spaces, the brand will focus on company-operated properties and assets. We are also always looking forward to collaborating with like-minded brands, organisations, and designers. ■

