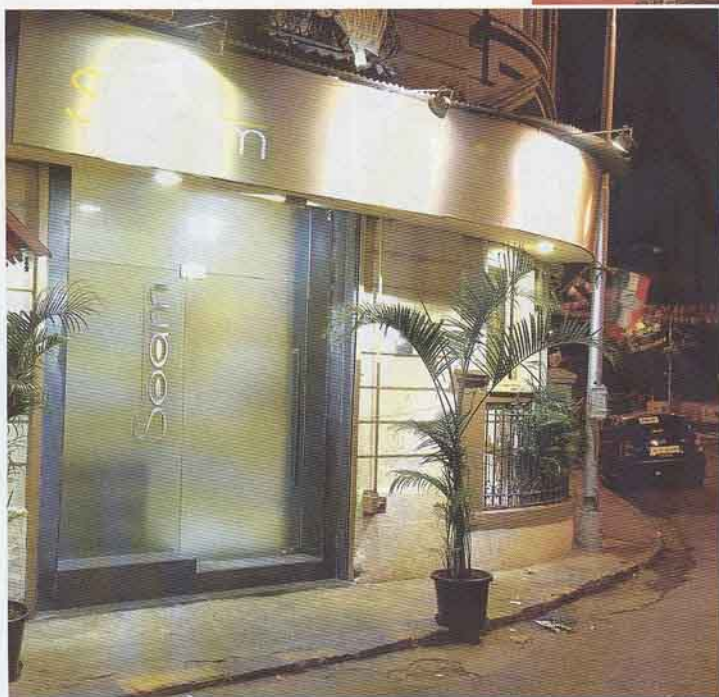


✦ Architect and interior designer **K h o z e m a Chitalwala** of Designers Group is a product of Academy of Architecture, Mumbai. His signature style is the simplicity of interiors and achieving that, he believes, is a very complicated affair. Understanding that lighting plays an important role in design, Khozema makes a lot of effort in that direction as can be seen in almost all his projects ✦

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EMI



**EATING OUT**

# ETHNIC FARE

Recently opened SOAM in Mumbai is the ideal destination for some veggie delights in an ethnic ambience.



**W**hen meal becomes a pleasant experience, it assures a re-visit. This is truer in the present scenario of the hospitality industry where restaurants are opening every fortnight and shutting down even faster. But all is not as hopeless as this may sound as there are a number of factors that contribute to the success of such a place. "The most important is the correct food-ambience-service ratio and maintaining it. This is the reason why you will find so many restaurant owners asking designers to create the right kind of ambience for their eatery and even the successful ones are redoing their interiors with our professional help," says Khozema Chitalwala, the man who has been steadily gaining a reputation of creating some of the best looking hospitality spaces in the country. He is also the man behind Soam, the latest vegetarian destination in Mumbai.



Named after the Babulnath deity, Soam with an area of 1,400 sq. ft. has been given a minimal look "so that it doesn't distract from the food, rather accentuates the gourmet experience," says the designer. The design accents come across more through the wall hangings and artefacts that pepper the entire area. Though in the background, one is forced to acknowledge their presence in the restaurant feels Khozema.

There was no specific brief given to him by the clients who just gave Khozema the cuisine specifications — the food was to have a homemade touch. "He wanted to give the visitors home-cooked food away from home," he smiles. It is a fairly uncomplicated place where the seating arrangements allow enough movement space for both service staff as well as guests. What comes across at the restaurant is the innate ethnicity emphasized through elements like the yellow colour scheme, metal frames in *pital* and framed *zardozi* work on the walls, an Indian-red wallpaper on one accent wall, and most interestingly the use of actual dried leaves instead of mats on the tables.

Another noteworthy element is the wooden rafters on the ceiling, a sight almost rare in a city like Mumbai. "Nothing of the original structure was touched. Everything was retained and became a guiding factor while designing," says Khozema, "there was a false ceiling which we broke to reveal the original structure which had these rafters along with the height." Apart from the main seating section there is a lounge-like area near the entrance that can also be used for serving food if the guest so desires.

The pleasure of eating is not just governed by the ambience and the taste but the way it is served. Essentially a cafe for short eats like chaat, snacks and mini meals, you are served the fare in bronze-copper Rajkot *thaalis* accompanied with

a variety of chutneys and achars on the table. "Both me and the client were in agreement on the kind of vessels to be used and the little motifs to be incorporated in the design," explains Khozema.

Now that my information is complete, its time to give in to my olfactory senses. Sipping the *thandai* ice sherbet I eagerly await the *bajra methi dhebra* with *launji*, *paanki* chutney and *gatto nu saak* with *satpadi roti*. Though the temptation to linger on is strong, I fear the stares of others waiting in the lounge for their table. While I wait for my doggy bag of *bajri roti*, I have to admit that the delectable fare was not just healthy for me'self but for my pocket too!

Gleaming white flooring, comfortably airconditioned, neat and clean ambience, just the right place to head for a lovely evening with family and friends ♦

**TEXT: SHABANA DURRANI**

**PHOTOGRAPHS: SAMEER CHAWDA, COURTESY THE DESIGNER**

CELEBRATING  
ETHNICITY: PITAL AND  
ZARDOZI FRAMES ON  
THE WALL, CHICK  
BLINDS AND ARTEFACT

