



Nityanand Shetty

Dining Unselfconsciously

by A.S. Iyer

A cocktail of professions and self-discovery later, Mumbai based restaurateur Nityanand Shetty talks about his latest foodservice venture, which has been designed to encourage diners to come out of their shell and enjoy the food in a natural and relaxing atmosphere.

Stereotyping is often a thing one doesn't take too seriously and the ones who don't conform to it are often mocked for not being a stereotype. Quite ironical! One such person is Nityanand Shetty. Thanks to his last name, he was often asked where in Mumbai he owned a restaurant during his college years. Alas, at the risk of letting his friends down, he would say his family members weren't hoteliers. However, being asked the same question over the years repeatedly ignited inside him the desire to be a restaurateur, which brought about the launch of Pebbles, the first fine dining restaurant in Juhu to introduce tablets for placing the orders. Shetty's another endeavour in the hospitality industry is Thyme Bistro – a corporate style dining den in Kanjurmarg, which opened last month.

Building Blocks

Although trained as an engineer in industrial electronics, Shetty's passion for restaurants led him to invest in a chain and let the administration be taken care of by someone else. He says, "I am a man of numbers, and that comes with the

vast experience I have had as a businessman, albeit in the software industry. Moreover, if I was investing in something, I wanted it to have a mark of me – a part of me that would reflect who I am." Soon after, Pebbles was born – one of the first restaurants in the city to have tablets for ordering food – a rather prominent imprint bearing the mark of the software tycoon.

Shetty explains how the idea of his latest venture Thyme was born out of the varied experiences he has had over the years. Starting with his son who used to visit a book store called Oxford in South Mumbai, which lets the customers walk in and enjoy a book with a cup of coffee or a bite from the canteen. "It was one of the early ideas that I wanted to work on and so at Thyme, you will find a library space stacked with hundreds of books. Being a businessman, I often interact with my sales managers and many-a-times they express their frustration of going back to the same old Café Coffee Day or Starbucks to kill time between meetings with the same old coffees and cold coffees. All because the time gap is long enough to catch up on some work with free WiFi but not long enough to come back to office – a modern

day problem in Mumbai that several professionals face,” says Shetty who founded Essen Vision, a software company in the late 90s.

Going back to the roots

Thyme was born when Shetty’s experiences urged him to be his true-self. On one of the vacations with his son, Shetty recalled how he realised his feeling as a father that made him overcome fear. He says, “I am a very adventurous person. But when I had to jump off from one of the tallest bungee jumping points in the world in Macau because my son wanted to do it, I was petrified. In those moments, one doesn’t think of the non-refundable money that you have paid to avail the thrill. It was in that moment that I asked myself who I really was – was I the man whose fear got the better of him or the person who would do things anyway because he loved his son truly. That plunge was the defining moment.”

Learning the lessons

“In my early days with Pebbles, I had some great learning experience. One of the first lessons was to have a disciplined kitchen. The best way to do that was to have reviews every fortnight with my staff. I would actually look at the costs incurred by each department since Pebbles was a multi-cuisine restaurant. For instance, if I have an estimated cost of 13 per cent, I am okay if it goes up or down by a percent or two, but not if it goes to 18 per cent. So I made everyone responsible and answerable for their actions,” he says.

Shetty also established system of how things worked at Pebbles– the kitchen would be allowed supplies by the vendor only two times a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Similar processes are continued in Thyme too. “It is easier to establish practises earlier and to develop systems as an ongoing process from inception till the time they become foolproof and are deeply ingrained in the system,” says the man who is a firm believer of the philosophy ‘Create, Manage, Replicate’.



Giving back

At the entrance of the Thyme restaurant one can see, well, themselves! The words Thyme written as ‘Thy’ on the board and the letters ‘me’ on the mirror shows a glimpse of what you are in for once you step into the corporate DEN, aka a place to drink, eat and network. Shetty explained it as a place where one can actually be whatever they are – a musician, a singer, an avid reader, healthy eater or junk-food lover – it doesn’t matter. “That said, the customers who walk in can practically have the time to themselves. The waiters have been specifically instructed to not be hovering around the tables unless they are called for. The idea is to provide a platform for people where they can meet the like-minded, even if it’s by asking for a mobile charger,” explained Shetty.

Shetty adds further, “The restaurant in many way is my idea of ‘being myself’. I host events where RD Burman lovers like myself can come together to enjoy what we like. Or a cyclist who despite a knee surgery has cycled to Ladhak.” It is Shetty’s idea to provide people with a platform to get in touch with themselves when the world otherwise seems too demanding and perfect to live up to. And when that can happen with some food and drinks...who are we to complain! ●●

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