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THE DWARIKA'S HOTEL

By Jane Poretsis



The pool is a replica of a 12th century royal bath

Entering the sumptuous Dwarika's is like stepping into an enchanting museum, crammed with spectacular artworks and intricately carved wood, salvaged from the temples and palaces of the 13th century Newar Kings.

An intricate maze of spacious rooms, each unique and created with its own character and individuality, many with 16th century windows and low, dark eaves; passageways, planted courtyards and gardens; this luxurious five star boutique hotel captures the beauty and spirit of an ancient city, and its exquisite architectural traditions.

Inspired by Kathmandu Valley's rich cultural heritage and the ancient grandeur of the Newar palaces, Dwarika's was the vision of one man and his family, who set out to preserve Nepal's history, before it was destroyed.

Born into a relatively affluent Newar family, Dwarika Das Shrestha was sent to school in Darjeeling at the age of six, completing his education with a degree in law and commerce in the early 1950s. He returned to Nepal with the dream of helping Nepal regain its past glory, and established the first hotel in 1952, the Paras Hotel. Nepal was not yet on the tourist map, so the main patrons were Indian and Nepali pilgrims who came to visit the Pashupati Temple. Back then, charging



Planted courtyard with tables set under parasols

religious pilgrims for shelter was considered sacrilegious and earned Dwarika Das the wrath of his family.

In Basantapur, one cold morning in 1952, Dwarika was jogging past the ruins of an old building in front of the ancient palace complex of Kathmandu's Newar Kings, when he spotted two carpenters sawing off the intricate carvings on an old wooden pillar and using it to feed a fire. They explained that they were using the good wood to make a new door frame, while most of it was for burning as no good. Shocked at the destruction, he bought the rest of the ancient wooden pillars from the carpenters, and from that point whenever



Courtyard with potted plants and pieces of art



Interior lobby



Momo's at the Krishnarpan

an old building was brought down, he would buy as much of the carved windows, doors and pillars as he could afford. As his collection grew, he reflected:

"There they lay wounded for years, but I saw them every day. They communicated with me. They compelled me to visit monuments and temples in an attempt to understand them."

By the late 1950's, he had started collecting wood work passionately, understanding the value of preserving Nepal's heritage, as centuries-old mud, brick, and wood houses were making way for the concrete structures of modernity. The catalyst for a new building revolution was the 1934 Great Bihar earthquake -magnitude 8.1- which destroyed a large portion of the buildings and houses in Kathmandu. In the decades that followed, most locals wanted a more modern concrete style.

It was around this time, Dwarika bought the land upon which The Dwarika's Hotel is now located, building first a small family home, with some of the



The ancient dhungedharas, (stone water taps) never stopped flowing



Ornate vanity

ancient windows he had collected. The first window that he used can be seen today in the Fusion Bar. However his passion for the old window frames was not matched by many and he was told often to get rid of them, as they saw the traditional architecture more a reflection of poverty rather than an appreciation of cultural wealth.

The Dwarika's Hotel was born in 1964, with a small apartment above the family cowshed, as a way of financing and displaying his expensive collection. This was initially constructed for an American friend of his wife Ambica, who needed a quiet place to write



Glazed terracotta flooring and window seats



Beautiful handcrafted fabrics



Executive Suite



Dhulikhel sunrise

her M.A. thesis. The rental income allowed him to continue expanding his collection, but more importantly, it enabled him to hire three master carvers who still recalled the ancient knowledge and techniques of traditional Newari wood carving. With the master carvers, he started a heritage workshop to restore his collection of wood work to their former glory. Still continuing today, over the years, scores of master carvers have emerged from its grounds.

Ambica's friend loved the room and was impressed by the old carved window that was used in the room. Soon the news spread by word of mouth and Dwarika and Ambica let the cows go and built 5 more rooms, and converted their home into a 5 room lodge in time for the coronation of King Birendra, in 1972.

By 1980, The Dwarika's Hotel was awarded the prestigious Pacific Area Travel Association's (PATA) Heritage Award, and

Dwarika Das himself was recognised for his remarkable contribution to heritage conservation.

The central idea behind the hotel was to revive the architectural splendour of the valley. All the terracotta work was made in the valley, using local clay and skills, and elements of Nepal's diverse cultural heritage beyond the valley. The furniture was crafted by families of traditional carpenters, and the linen, textiles and



Begin the morning with a sun salutation with the Yoga master



Outdoor living



The Chakra sound chamber

embroideries were hand woven and used Nepali patterns and Buddhist motifs.

Explaining his vision one day he said: "My project is to recreate a 15th - 17th century environment where tourist and Nepali alike would have a sensation of the original. The hotel as a commercial enterprise is merely a vehicle to finance and carry my dream forward."

A further 10 rooms were added in 1981, with the central Lumbini building, and the Ram Palace a 16 room wing, opening in 1990.

As the people of Nepal started to re-appreciate their heritage, Dwarika Das Shrestha passed away in 1992, leaving his vision incomplete.

Continuing his vision, and using his original sketches, his wife Ambica and daughter, Sangita Shrestha Einhaus, completed the front building in 1998, working closely with a local potter named Hirakaji for nearly a year, replicating the horizontally carved designs from the Lumbini building,



using terracotta filled moulds of the originals; reviving traditional terracotta design craft which was used in the valley around the 15th century.

Re-introducing the production of dachi apas, a tapered glazed brick, a traditional practice that

had died out in the valley, Ambica was to later state: "what satisfies us we started dachi apas. I feel proud when I see people using dachi apas. We are rediscovering our traditions."

Newari civilisation flourished during the reign of the Malla Kings from the 12th to the 18th

century, and they invested heavily in their arts and culture, which was religious in nature and dominated by a variety of motifs and symbols that reflected the valley's animistic, Hindu and Buddhist inheritance.

Today, the hotel is still managed by the Shrestha family – his wife Ambica Shrestha,



Junior suite



Outdoor deck

his daughter Sangita Shrestha Einhaus, and Dwarika Das' grandson, Rene Vijay Shrestha Einhaus - and it houses one of the biggest private woodwork collections in the world. Dwarika Das Shrestha's vision can be observed clearly in the old cities of Patan and Bhaktapur, where public and private initiatives are gradually restoring the cities to their former glory. Back in 1969, with the help of his wife Ambica, Dwarika opened Kathmandu Travels and Tours, one of Nepal's first travel agencies, to develop Nepal's tourism and further finance his passion for conservation, knowing that many people would be interested in coming to Nepal, to tour its heritage sites, and to experience its natural beauty.

Located close to the famous Pashupathinath temple and the Swayambhunath Buddhist stupa at Bouddhanath- also known as the Monkey Temple, The Dwarika's Hotel is set in the heart of the chaotic magnificence that is Kathmandu. You can lose yourself in the nearby bazaars; explore the temples and pagodas of Patan or Bhaktapur. Or go out for the day, to the Royal Golf Course in Kathmandu Valley.

There are now 86 rooms and suites, ranging from the Deluxe to the Royal Suite set over 3 floors, and a range of facilities from a well-stocked library, the Pancha Kosha Spa and yoga, pool and fitness centre.

The 3 restaurants are world class

The Toran and Fusion Bar overlooks the swimming pool which is a replica of a 12th century royal bath, and is open all day and late into the night, with exotic cocktails and a live band on Friday nights. The outside courtyards allowing for more informal al fresco dining, with a wide fusion of tasty world food, from Bruschetta's and club sandwiches to the Mo:Mo: Cha.

Mako's is an authentic Japanese restaurant, managed by Mako-san a Japanese lady who makes her own tofu from fresh soybeans from Dwarika's own organic farms, and offers an extensive menu from Sushi to Tempura, noodles to Teppanayaki.



Junior Suite



Spa reception

For a real experience you must try the Krishnarpan, probably one of the best restaurants in Nepal, where they offer a walk through the multi-ethnic nature of Nepal. This is a culinary extravaganza, 'a slow dining experience reminiscent of the meals relished by the Kings of yesteryear, and reminiscent of ancient customary feasts,' with a menu from 6 to 22 courses. The evening's menu, individually addressed with your name, and printed on handmade paper.

On the 1st October this year, The Dwarika's Resort Dhulikhel, opened founded on a philosophy of respecting nature and the self. Set within 20 acres of pristine woodland, it

follows a holistic approach inspired by a blend of Vedic Philosophy and Buddhist Medicine. Each element at the resort has been designed to address the Pancha Kosha or five layers of Being: Annamaya (physical), Pranamaya (vital air), Manomaya (mind), Vigyanmaya (intellect) and Anandamaya (inner bliss). With the use of natural materials from stone, wood, earth, natural fibres and colours, that are less harmful to the environment, this is a haven of peace on earth. Organic and inherently Nepali.

"Man himself is a living heritage. Man created heritage and history depicting the values of life.

Understanding a system of education which makes people realize the individual cultural heritage of each country as a part of universal legacy and common property of mankind. This is the only means for world peace." Dwarika Das Shrestha.

All photography is courtesy of The Dwarika's Hotel, for more information please visit: www.dwarikas.com and www.dwarikas-dhulikhel.com



Walled with rock crystals the Himalayan salt room is a powerful healing chamber, that releases negative energies from the body