

Sterling success

The stamp of Ravissant's designs will eventually prove to be their guarantee

When it comes to exclusivity, it's difficult to think of any lifestyle boutique that returns the same value as Ravissant. Begun in 1980, the then New-Delhi based store was seen as a posh shop for spenders. It soon left that tag behind, however, when it moved from fashion to household linen and, eventually in 1991, to home products including silver.

Ten years after the silver-smithy operations were launched by Ravissant, under tutelage of Dutch masters, owner Ravi Chawla is ready to guarantee that the premium the brand enjoys will stay: "Five years from now, when we complete 15 years of designing our silver," he says, "we will make a buy-back offer." For those who, then, own early Ravissant silverware, the chance of selling back to the store "for a museum we will start", will be more an opportunity to re-evaluate the worth of their limited edition purchases. This is important considering that only a third of the value of silver governs the final price of an object, the remaining two-thirds being based on the value of the design.

"Ravissant lines," says Chawla, "are recognizable because they're very contemporary, and even though we've used different international designers for our annual collections, their's a continuation of the look and its sensibility."

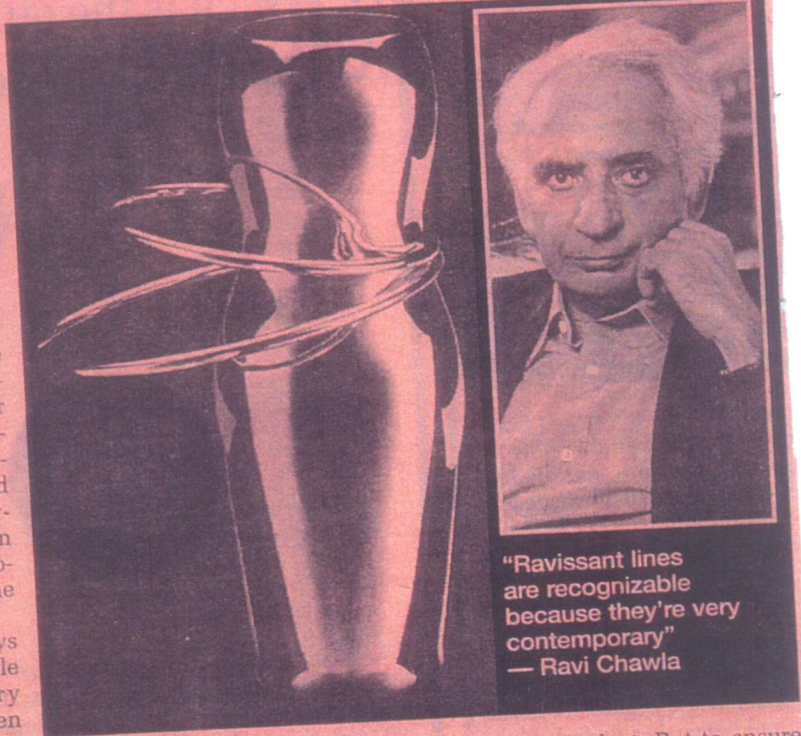
But silver isn't the only thing Chawla is upbeat about — Ravissant should be setting up a plant for products, mostly tableware, made of stainless steel. "In Europe," says Chawla, "stores do a range in silver as well as silver plating, but that might confuse our customers in India, so we'll use steel as our inexpensive line." That's figuratively speaking

— the "very young designs" aren't for those who buy their *bartans* from Yusuf Sarai or Sadar bazaar.

Chawla's also more sure of his market after two decades in the business. Having set shop in Delhi, and boutiques at upscale hotels in Delhi, Mumbai and Agra (and, soon, Chennai), he hopes to sell more to foreigner customers because there's less resistance to prices. To that end, commissioning European stores and participation in international

beauty salon has been a spectacular success," says Chawla — perhaps more than anticipated — "and we're planning a launch in Mumbai immediately, to be followed in other cities." Similarly, L'Occitane — being promoted in-store in Delhi — will probably also be launched independently in Mumbai. More interestingly, "We're working with the company to make some of their products in India."

A spot outside Delhi has been identified for the L'Occitane man-



fairs, and having a presence in Oberoi resorts overseas (Mauritius, to begin with) are part of the Ravissant growth plan. The Neiman Marcus stores in the US have expressed an interest in selling Ravissant silver in different American locations.

Back home in India, Ravissant is where you head when you want a Cartier watch or piece of jewellery, or an Alfred Dunhill suit, or the lavish L'Occitane range of grooming products, or a Jacques Dessange haircut. "The

ufacturing plant. But to ensure that the excitement at its flagship store does not abate, Ravissant has hush-hush plans for a rooftop restaurant to be located next to its beauty salon.

Two decades after Ravissant opened, Chawla's busier than before. London and Milan have already been conquered, but there are exciting markets in other European cities as well. Make no mistake, Chawla plans on being there before this decade is out.

● KISHORE SINGH