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Framed by tall planes of glass and mirror-polished stainless steel, Ziya has reimagined contemporary Indian dining at the Oberoi with a spacey aesthetic.

Reflective rhythm

Ziya at the Oberoi
Architecture Discipline
Gurugram, India
Words Allan Fraser-Rush
Photography Jeetin Sharma

Tasked with replacing the members-only business centre with a dining space befitting the Oberoi, the new restaurant is poised above a one-acre waterscape of expressive beauty. “The intention was to create an experience that is at once transparent and reflective—a rhythmic and robust architecture that engages its frame with clarity and vibrancy,” says Akshat Bhatt, principal architect at Architecture Discipline.

Noting that “a restaurant of such intimate scale warrants a sense of theatre and gradual revelation”, the entrance signals a portal to the unexpected through a contrast of fire-fused glass with a geometric graphic set against aged timber. Within, arched banquettes sit below

a gently sinuous ceiling, while the parquet flooring establishes a polyrhythmic sequence that anchors the material palette and choreographs the spatial experience.

Central to the space is a deliberate sculptural gesture — an 11-metre-long liquid-metal table that forms the heart of the restaurant — which Bhatt describes as being “conceived as a fluid mass of mercury.” Introduced as a note of discord, its mirrored surface gathers and disperses light, creating a dynamic layer of luminosity.

Anchoring the room with a quiet yet undeniable authority, as Bhatt explains, the table began as a frustrated sketch and an attempt to resolve an emptiness in the plan. This was compounded by a need to



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ensure the restaurant would not read as an assembly of furnishings, but as a coherent spatial composition. “The gesture allowed the scheme to retain harmony with the expansive, light-filled floor plate. In time, that impulsive line matured into a subtle nod to Marc Newson’s sculptural approach to tables — an evolution born as much from necessity as from admiration,” says Bhatt. Extensive sketches, models, prototyping, and material mock-ups followed as the design was tested for every aspect of its ideation to build something that inspires and endures. Several smaller tables and a console are designed with the same fluid materiality, while the back wall of the bar is finished in silver leaf to give a gleam that is similar to the table’s surface.

The grand gesture of the table aside, the interior is a complex layering of forms, whereby each distinct element is in conversation with the whole. Bhatt likens this layering and evolving aesthetic to a good dining experience, “something you discover progressively — course by course.” Arranged to one side of the central table are arched blue dining pods with radiating lines of metal foil that extend all the way to the ceiling. “The banquettes, to my mind, are the project’s most persuasive intervention. They instinctively draw people to the back of the room, even when the natural inclination is to sit by the glass. Their form and placement create a gravitational centre — an architecture of invitation that balances the allure of the view with the intimacy of the interior.”

Previous: The large blue and silver pods are both cocooning and exuberant.

Above: The grand gesture of Ziya at the Oberoi is the fluid expanse of the magnificent metal table.

Opposite: Custom-designed glass tables explore the theme of memory with glass inspired by the aroma of caramelised sugar.





The graceful and dramatic curve of the pods wraps around finely pleated, navy-blue leather banquettes and custom-designed glass tables that explore the theme of memory. “The tabletop is inspired by the aroma of caramelised sugar that we would encounter as children from a candyfloss maker on his bicycle,” says Bhatt. To this end, the rich caramel of the glass tabletops, which add to the profusion of reflective surfaces, are paired with a blue base modelled after the elegant turned timber Channapatna toys.

At the far end of the table, the room moves on from the pods with a slight palette shift that introduces burgundy and gold to a small cluster of tables and chairs. There is also a private dining room below a vaulted niche, in the same silver and blue design as the pods, that can be curtained off from the main. Without the pods filling the walls, dark blue and silver curtains have been introduced while internal walls have been painted blue and salon-hung with a great many artworks. For those who prefer a more open dining option with views of the property, the main portion of the restaurant has smaller tables spread along the glazed façade over traditional Indian rugs in subtle creamy tones. Designing for what is an ostensibly Indian establishment, blurring the line between conventional ideals of what an Oberoi restaurant should be and creating a contemporary interior

has been achieved with finesse and technology: “All serious design demands a laborious leap of faith. This project was no exception. The idea required both logical and intuitive persuasion, and three-dimensional visualisation became essential to communicating its intent,” shares Bhatt, noting that it was the first time the Architecture Discipline team had employed 3D imaging for an Oberoi project, allowing the team to comprehend the spatial ambition of the project in advance.

The restaurant is in fact mesmerising, with equal parts grand gesture and lyrical inclusion. The pod-like lights that emerge from the table, for example, are very much in keeping with the idea of a flowing mass of mercury, but also a bit space age and funky. This is compounded by the water-like spots of light that animate the swirling ceiling treatment, which in turn is condensed and amplified in the concave upper interior of each lamp.

New, contemporary, and fresh, Ziya is also sufficiently grand to be an Oberoi restaurant and most definitely speaks of special occasions and notable events. It is also super cool and in being so, Architecture Discipline have delivered the extraordinary.

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Above: Complex and layered the parquet flooring is mirrored in the liquidly metallic table and console.
Opposite: Large doors of fire-fused glass with a geometric graphic introduce the restaurant with aplomb.

