

Passage to America

MUMBAI-BASED LUXURY RETAILER KIMAYA IS EXPANDING TO THE U.S.

By Madhusmita Bora

A

PLACE FOR THE RICH

of India is soon to become a destination for the affluent of America too. Mumbai-based Kimaya, one of India's most exclusive apparel stores, plans to begin exporting its exclusivity to the U.S., beginning with a store in New York City.

The store, set to open in August on swanky Madison Avenue, mere steps from Barneys, Devi Kroell and other luxury retailers, will be a window on haute couture from India, Pakistan, Malaysia and South Africa. Like other Kimaya stores, it will measure about 4,500 square feet and have a significant bridal section.

"There are a few boutiques around the U.S. that come close in terms of Kimaya's quality of merchandise and the reach to both society and celebrity: Fred Segal, in Los Angeles; Barneys; Hirshleifer's, at the Americana Manhasset; Ikram, in Chicago," said Faith Hope Consolo, head of the retail leasing, marketing and sales division of Prudential Douglas Elliman, the firm handling Kimaya's U.S. leasing. "You could even compare Kimaya to an exceptional art gallery, with a very strong eye creating a collection from which the shopper se-

lects the pieces right for her," she said.

In India Kimaya has charmed clients with its offerings of traditional and contemporary clothing and accessories. It offers the collections of dozens of top designers, all beneath one roof. The company's mission has been to present Indian fashion to the outside world while bringing the styles of the outside world back home, according to its Web site.

Though Kimaya officials declined SCT's requests for an interview, others had plenty to say about the company. "[It] is niche and upmarket," said Harish Bijoor, head of Harish Bijoor Consults,

a private-label consulting firm that specializes in brand and business strategy. "It aspires to be a brand that can touch the purses and hearts of the small set of people who have it all."

Husband and wife Pradeep and Neha Hirani established Kimaya in 2002 in Mumbai, India's fashion capital. The opening coincided with the arrival of the first foreign luxury retailers, which were eager to serve India's emerging affluent class. Kimaya held its own against these Western brands, quickly becoming the go-to retailer for socialites and Bollywood stars. The store soon was featured regularly on the celebrity pages of Indian newspapers.

Kimaya's signature is its ability to present traditional Indian attire in a Western style. Its saris and salwar kameezes — the traditional Indian tunic and pants — are a far cry from what you would find at a regular Indian store. The designs, fabrics and colors are geared



NEW YORK CITY'S POSH MADISON AVENUE WILL BE KIMAYA'S STEPPING STONE TO AMERICA'S TOP MALLS.

more toward the modern Indian woman or a shopper craving fusion attire.

"Their collection is the best of the new India, a contemporary look with inspiration from some of India's traditional stylings," said Phil McArthur, SCSM, CDP, senior vice president of Ivanhoe Cambridge Investment Advisory (India).

The concept quickly caught on beyond Mumbai. In 2004 Kimaya expanded to Delhi and to the United Arab Emirates, and two years later the company found a platform at the world-famous Fashion Week fashion show, in Milan, Italy. The company has 20 stores across six countries currently.

On its Web site, Kimaya describes its brightly lit, airy stores as an "exercise in fashion extravagance" and as having a feel of "regal space," complete with chandeliers, polished floors and mirrored walls — a "blend of opulence and minimalism."

The New York store will feature two selling levels and even an atelier for the select few among the select few. "The design will be modern to provide a backdrop for the many designers that will be featured," said Consolo. The second level will contain a lounge for private showings, plus a cappuccino bar, and tea and champagne will be served too.

Shibani Shah stopped by the Kimaya store in Mumbai's Vile Parle neighborhood, but only to have a look. "It's way too high-end," the 24-year-old photographer said. "You have to be pretty loaded to shop there."

Kimaya should have no problem finding shoppers in the U.S., observers say. "The U.S. market in this segment is open to more," Bijoor said. "The allure of the East is always welcomed with open arms in the U.S." McArthur certainly thinks so. "Discerning women shoppers are always looking

for something unique, fashionable and striking," McArthur said.

By arriving in the U.S. now, the retailer can take advantage of the best rents in years, together with a favorable currency exchange rate, Consolo says. Moreover, the population is increasingly familiar with South Asian culture, in part because of such movies as

the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Consolo says the company is exploring the top 10 U.S. metro markets and the very best malls, specifically those offering the top designers, for further expansion. "If, for example, Giorgio Armani has a store in a particular mall," she said, "Kimaya likely would belong there too." ect

TENANTS BEHIND ON THEIR RENT?

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