

The Liquor Baroness

Lisa Srao, Chairman and Managing Director, I Brands Beverages Ltd. sets an example for women, with her courage, determination and success

By Natascha Shah



We, as a nation are developing at a rapid speed—women have started being acknowledged and respected as equal beings, they are excelling in all fields. Be it an Anita Desai or Kiran Bedi, Mary Kom or Priyanka Chopra, women are making us proud. The face of the Indian woman is now on the global map.

I recently met one such woman. As much of a feminist as I am, when I was told that I was to meet the MD of a liquor brand, I did not expect an elegant, beautiful woman called Lisa to be the one. As she introduced herself, as the owner, founder, the conceptualiser and the Chairman and MD of I Brands Beverages, I was both impressed and happy. Impressed by her charm, her confidence and her courage to be somewhat an outsider (Lisa was born & raised in UK and moved



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to India in 2003 following her marriage) and to establish liquor business single handedly in a country like India. Happy that such women exist to lead others by example. TLF magazine, is also owned and run solely by women and we wish to see more and more of our kind excel in their fields and eventually lead the world.

Lisa has achieved a lot for her brand in the past four years. Under her leadership, I Brands has moved from brick to brick and managed to attain stupendous success in markets like Punjab, Haryana and Uttarakhand.

Exposed to liquor brands launched by her father in U.K including the Double Dutch beer, Lisa had long been inspired by the alcohol beverage industry. This experience helped her develop a keen interest in the Indian liquor industry and spot an opportunity in the underutilised mass market premium segment. Capitalising on this gap in the industry, Lisa founded the company in 2008 with an aim to provide Indian consumers international quality products that are affordable.

I wondered how difficult it was for her to do this in our country? "During meetings with distributors, people would not even talk to me, they would address any male colleague accompanying me and totally ignore me," says Lisa. She remembers a particular press conference in Punjab where a reporter actually asked her if her husband allowed her to do all this. Lisa was taken aback and realised certain segments of this country still have a long way to go. Having said that, She has enjoyed her journey in India a lot!

This charismatic mother of two is the only woman to launch a spirits company in India from scratch, managing to stay afloat in the male dominated industry that is known

LISA RECOMMENDS: FAVOURITE RESTAURANTS / PUBS IN LONDON

(Not in any order of preference)

Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park

Owned by Celebrity Chef Heston Blumenthal, this for me is one of the most remarkable restaurants in London. Heston is known for the theatrics in his food, and the same resonates here with the ambience and his food. The desserts especially are to die for, my favourite is the Sambocade, which is a milk cheese cake with elderflower and apple, walnuts and poached pear!

Petersham Nurseries, Richmond

Next door to my home in Richmond and also a favourite to the royals, Petersham Nurseries serves the amazing food in a beautiful country atmosphere. I liked the great wine selection they have and the light fish which was served, perfect for a summer's day.

Coya in Piccadilly, Mayfair, London

This is a Peruvian restaurant I like in London, because it is contemporary, but yet holds on to the traditional style of cooking. It has the best Sea bass and Monkfish Ceviche, the greatest beef skewers and definitely the best aged tequilas.

The Ritz London

The Ritz gives you the quintessential London experience! It is over a hundred years old, and I love the experience of the hotel. I had a Château Lafite at the Ritz Private Dining last time I was here, which was beautiful and really smooth. The food was also exquisite!





for new entrants shutting shop within six months of business operation. She was honoured earlier this year with the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award at the IndSpirit 2015 Awards, a very prestigious Liquor industry award ceremony by Ambrosia India as well as the Most Promising Entrepreneur by Asia Pacific Entrepreneurship Awards 2015, her first international award.

When not juggling between a high-powered job and her kids, she enjoys painting, listening to music and travelling. She strongly partakes in charity work supporting causes for women and education for the girl child. Married to Manoj Varma - an entrepreneur, Lisa lives with her family in Bangalore.

Chiltern Firehouse, Marylebone

A very luxurious contemporary restaurant. It has an American feel to it and very often you will spot celebrities here! The cooking is very ingredient focussed and they keep changing their menus to keep it seasonal. I love their Salmon Tartare and also the aged Beef fillet which they serve with lovely caramelised mushrooms.

The Lass O' Richmond Hill, Richmond

A very "English" place, I love The Lass for their specialty Sunday Roasts, especially their Slow-cooked Dorset lamb shoulder with mint sauce that they serve with roast potatoes and Yorkshire pudding. It also is my local favourite for a pint of beer anytime. :)

Chotto Matte, Soho

Chotto Matte is a contemporary restaurant serving Japanese - Peruvian cuisine and has an amazing array of dishes. The décor is amazing, and the food is brilliant. I love the sweet sashimi they serve and also the ceviche, which is essentially curls of sea bass in a zingy, chilly-spiked marinade. Also love the dragon rolls here. I could go on and on about this place; it's one of my favourite places.

The Shed, Notting Hill

What a surprise find this was! Full of locals the restaurant has a cozy feeling to it. I love the goats cheese melted platter and the marmite little toasts. What takes me back there every time is that they serve little portions of food and you share that with all your friends, making it an intimate experience.

The Oak W2, Notting Hill

A very modern Italian restaurant with an extremely cozy ambience, the oak serves the best pizzas in town... and consistently excellent pizzas. They also have a gorgeous bar upstairs where you can have their famous classic cocktails.

The Arts Club, Mayfair

This is a private members club and the regulars here are people interested in arts, science and literature! They have a beautiful outside lounge area and a perfect dining area, which has survived two world wars (The place was founded in the 1800s) I like the Irish Cocktails they serve. Beautiful place...

New York Burger Co., Chelsea

This is my favourite burger place. Love their cheese burgers which are amazingly succulent, as well as hotdogs. I can guarantee you will come back the second time once you visit this place.

Trailer Happiness, Portobello Road

A very, very good cocktail bar. It offers some of the best exotic rum cocktails I have ever had!