

Nupur Tron's diary is filled with A-list events and business ventures with high-wattage designers. She gives Society a peek into its pages

The French **CONNECTION**

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BY ANUPAMA BIJUR

It's around 6.30 in the evening and the Polo Club at the Oberoi, Bangalore empties rapidly as business executives leave after a long day of business meetings just as another set of men-in-suits enters for after-work drinks. As one labours over whether to continue with the coffee or switch to a Shiraz, Nupur Tron's entry with a large-brim black hat, a larger tote and lofty platforms is a welcome distraction.

Nupur's petite form belies the weighty title she's been vested with—Ambadress of art and culture for India in France for the Chambre de Commerce and for Drives Des St Tropez.

With 'Namaste France' (cultural festival of India in France) inaugurated in April this year, India is the French flavour of the season. 'Namaste France' follows 'Bonjour India', the French festival that was organised in India in 2009.

Nupur is also the only artisanal Indian jewellery designer to sell at Le Bon Marche in Paris, an exclusive store which stocks other premium jewellery labels like Chaumet, Fred, Poiray, Chanel, Boucheron and Cartier, besides fashion and



beauty products. Le Bon Marche is owned by the LVMH group and is situated in a beautifully ornate heritage building, which was renovated in the late 18th Century by Gustave Eiffel (who also designed the Eiffel tower).

"As the ambadress I will be curating expositions in art and culture," says Nupur, the Dehradun-born Rajput girl of royal lineage who currently lives in Paris with her French husband, Frederic Tron. They met at the Louvre. "And when I saw him the first time, I was wearing braces," says Nupur, and we laugh about how men 'do' look at girls in braces. Saint Tropez, the charming port town and the playground of the rich



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and famous, is also where her husband was born. And it has a Franco-Indian story dating back to the 18th Century, quite like her cross-cultural romance. "Saint Tropez has a connection with India. General Jean Francois Allard, who served under Napoleon, later joined the services of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who ruled over Punjab in 18 C. During his stay there, he fell in love with Princess Bannu Pan Dei of the Chamba valley, married her and brought her to the Pan Dei Palace. Soon after, he left again for India to fight for the King, but met with a tragic end, dying in battle. Bannu Pan Dei continued to live in Saint Tropez and the Pan Dei trophy is in memory of their story," says Nupur.

In her new role as a cultural ambassador, Nupur continues to write new chapters in Franco-Indian relations and for the next few months her diary is crowded with A-list events. The three very premium events associated with Les Drives de St Tropez are the 2nd Saint Tropez Ladies Amateur event (for golf

and polo), the 3rd France India Business Cup (golf) and the 4th Pro-Am of St Tropez Indian Summer Pan Dei Trophy (golf).

The France-India Business Cup for instance is an extremely premium event with participation criteria that stops at the level of CEO/VP/ Director of an Indian or a French company, and of course a handicap of 36.

Associated with the three sporting events that make the Les Drives de Saint Tropez, will be gala events, cocktail receptions on the Pearl Beach, and on board the sailing boat Dolce Vita. Nupur plans to add art and cultural events that will underscore the best of India's heritage.

"I'm quite excited to connect with my Indian friends, artists and cultural icons and have them participate in this festival. I met Hemant Oberoi from the Taj Group of Hotels who will come here for a festival of gastronomy. I've also met a few artists who have agreed to participate in an expo of contemporary Indian art," says Nupur. In October, she plans to start filming a documentary on Contemporary India, which will be aired on TV 5 Monde, a French channel. The documentary will focus on politics, arts, fine arts, gastronomy and hospitality. "Each episode will be 26-minutes but will be developed later into a longer programme," says Nupur. Next year, she plans to hold a retrospective of 18th Century jewellery in Paris.

"We also plan to host a festival of Indian films, and want to make it a calendar event like the one at Cannes. Unlike Cannes, this festival will only screen Indian films. We would like to promote French locations for Indian cinema too. Like the French Riviera... they would make good locales for Bollywood films," she says.



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Nupur's grandmother, the face of her brand

Alongside her role as an Ambassadors, Nupur continues to work on her eponymously named brand of jewellery. "I once saw Juliet Binoche wearing one of my rings. The Dior family has bought one of my necklaces—a 850 carat tourmaline necklace," says Nupur. The face of her brand is her husband's grandmother, an elegant beauty at 98! "I think she personifies my jewellery perfectly. She's precious and beautiful. My jewellery collection is a timeless classic, like a family heirloom," gushes Nupur.



Soon, Nupur will have a place for her jewellery at the Pan Dei Palace. Nupur gets all her jewellery made in Udaipur. "It's an old atelier where a father and his son work. They've been making jewellery for centuries. It's a small and a very artisanal set up," she says. "Next year will be quite exciting. I will be working with Bottega Veneta, the Italian leather fashion house. Gabriella Corto is another designer I'll be working with. Corto makes clutch bags and I will be designing jewellery pieces to go on the bags for them." Nupur is also collaborating with an Iranian designer, Maryam Mahdavi to take jewellery embellishing to furniture. In another venture, Nupur marries jewellery designs with environmental concerns for a project supported by Prince Albert of Monaco. A small group of jewellery designers like Van Cleef and Arpels, Cartier and Nupur, will craft special pieces of jewellery which will be part of an expo that will travel to many countries. "The theme of the expo is the Falcon, and each designer will interpret this bird in his or her piece of jewellery. This will be displayed at the Expo whose final destination is Dubai. It will also travel from Monaco to London, Singapore and Abu Dhabi. Al Gore is expected to attend the Abu Dhabi expo," she adds.

Nupur has been working on another jewellery collection keeping environmental concerns in mind. "On Mother's Day we launched a recycled gold collection. One of the pieces was a bracelet in the shape of the recycle sign studded with emeralds," says Nupur, who stays true to her philosophy of "rethink, rebuild and recycle" by using jute bags instead of packaging her jewellery in boxes.

Nupur is also one of the few people who have the keys to the historic Chateau de Saran, which once belonged to Dom Perignon, the most respected champagne house in France, but is now the residence of the LVMH group. The guests at this Chateau comprise royalty and dignitaries, high wattage celebrities, business executives and their spouses, VIPs and Hollywood stars like Lenny Kravitz and Vanessa Paradis. The Queen Mother has also visited the villa here in summer.

This chateau is also insulated from the prying eyes of the paparazzi and has thus become a much sought-after destination for A-listers. At this Chateau, Richard Geoffroy, the wine-maker of Dom Perignon hosts French gastronomy and vintage wine tasting sessions for his premium guests. You gain admittance here only if you are very well connected or from the rarefied echelons of society. And then you may just find a black invite with gold lettering informing you that you will visit the abbey where the Benedictine monk, Pierre Perignon first invented champagne, followed by some fine dining at the Chateau and a walk through the Chardonnay vineyards, perhaps a hot air balloon ride, some hunting on the estate or a ride through the beautiful countryside of Epernay.

Nupur talks of a time when she once hosted Richard for dinner at her home, with an eight-course meal of Indian food paired with French wines. "I was on the phone with India, every five minutes, asking for consignments of alphonso mangoes and saffron. We had some inventive dishes like *chole bhature* with *anar* and dry peaches. It was even featured in a top Japanese magazine *Spur Luxe* and the 18-member editorial team also dined with us. It was quite an experience," she says, with a smile laced with relief and the memory of a successful event.

But for now though, Nupur has just one thing on her mind—creating an awareness of the rich traditions of Indian art and culture in France and on the international stage. <<