

'I stuck to it and it worked for me...'

SAVIA RAJAGOPAL

Who is she Shatbhi Basu

Hall of fame :

First professional woman bartender; Founder, STIR, the official meet for bartenders, consultant; columnist and author

Flashback:

She started out wanting to be a veterinarian. When that didn't work out due to health reasons, Shatbhi studied hotel management for three years. "I wanted to be a Chinese chef and tried it out for four-five months. But I realised I may never reach a kitchen because of the conventional attitude of chefs back then. Bartending happened accidentally while I was manager at 'Chopsticks'. A patron asked for a drink and I had to step in. I had poor practical knowledge in that area. That was my turning point." She even had a brief tryst with an advertising agency. Now, she sets up and designs bars as a consultant. "I conduct training programmes and brand strategise for various high-profile brands," she adds.

Taking on:

Challenges aren't new to her. "That I gave up everything else to specialise in bartending was a shocker. Everyone tried to convince me that I had ruined my career. Luckily, I stuck to it and it worked," she confides. Founding the country's first bartending competition in 1997 (STIR) evoked similar sentiments of astonishment. "I wanted to start a bartending school but decided to launch the competition first. The response was stupendous." The meet is held every two years now. "The success was surprising but it convinced me that I was in the right direction." She founded the training academy for bartenders in 1999 and being a teacher for Shatbhi is a completely different experience.

Flipside:

"Being a part of the hospitality business appears glamorous but it's a lot of hard work," she elucidates. Also, financial remuneration is a big drawback. She explains, "It is one of the worstpaid industries in the world. It's thankless and you work long hours. So you have to be very passionate about what you do."

Being off-beat:

On entering an off beat-career by choice, she categorically points out, "It was never about making a statement, but more about knowing my job well." She further adds that the way you work, body language and confidence in what you do, helps to command respect, and being a woman bartender is purely coincidental.

