



SCRATCHPADS

All eyes on Atara

Inspired by nature & exuding quality & style, take a step inside Atara Nail Bar, a sanctuary found on a busy south London high street

HELENA BIGGS REPORTS

Atara' is a biblical name meaning 'crown', and Atara Nail Bar is reigning supreme in South Croydon as a go-to destination for natural nailcare. Despite being forced to shut up shop just three weeks after opening due to the first coronavirus lockdown, the salon's slick setup and concise but care-focused service menu are seeing its popularity soar.

Situated within commuting distance of central London, Atara is amidst a multi-cultural hub with a strong sense of community. It has been founded by Lhaki David, whose Christian faith has influenced more than just the salon's name; playing a big part in helping her to stay positive throughout challenges brought on by the pandemic.

"Atara was born out of my passion for beauty and I was delighted

to open the premises on 29 February 2020, three months after acquiring the space," Lhaki reveals. "My aim is to provide something very different to people living in Croydon – a salon that not only delivers a high quality service, but a social hub with a welcoming atmosphere, cocktails and coffee."

Lhaki's vision for Atara had been brewing for many years. She grew up in the Himalayan town of Kalimpong, nestled among India, Tibet and Nepal; a region in which a sense of community plays a huge part in everyday life. "Fun and hospitality combine to create spirited social hubs in the lively salons and cafés of these hillside towns and villages," Lhaki reveals. "My memories of these happy environments spurred me on to create Atara – a place in which clients can laugh, relax and enjoy the experience given by friendly team members, who offer first-class treatments, drinks and unparalleled customer care."

Lhaki's background in beauty extends to her childhood, when she chased her cousins and workers around the house with a bottle of nail polish. However, her parents didn't acknowledge beauty as a profession, so she achieved a degree in politics from Delhi University. "When I moved to the UK in 1993, I enrolled on a manicure and pedicure course with City & Guilds, but I couldn't pursue it while looking after my toddler, so I stalled my dream of opening a salon," she reveals. "I decided to leave a career in the civil service to revisit my dream in 2015, and I enrolled at the London School of Beauty and Make-up."

"I wanted the salon to have a friendly café vibe and chose a semi-industrial look. My branding is green and white, which symbolises the natural world."

Upon graduation, Lhaki worked in high-end nail bars in central London to further hone her craft. "I wanted to launch a business with a unique sense of identity," Lhaki continues. "I didn't have a strong business acumen when starting out, but my sheer determination and ambition drove me to accomplish what I set out to do. However, two lockdowns have presented challenges for my small business."

During the first lockdown last March, Lhaki experienced a rollercoaster of emotions, unsure if her new business could survive the impact. Navigating uncharted territory, she spent time researching and getting necessary precautions in place such as screen guards, thermometers, hand sanitisers and PPE, ready for reopening on 14 July 2020.

Service options

Operating in a Covid-secure way with elements including temperature checks on arrival and additional cleaning, the team at Atara Nail Bar offers a concentrated menu for men and women. Lhaki oversees all treatments, runs the salon and makes the occasional cocktail while her three talented members of staff, Shanel, Narcisa and Pliidy, provide nail services.

"We focus mainly on natural nailcare, as I feel that clients these days are more conscious about their nail health," Lhaki reveals. "Hands and feet are in constant use, so it's important to take care of them – making them both look and feel good. The menu includes the 25-minute 'Keep It Natural' treatment, created with medical and food industry professionals in mind. This treatment is a full manicure or pedicure without nail painting – with pure coconut oil used in the soak before a hand massage."

Also on the menu is the 'Quick Change' express treatment, the 'Let's Get Going' full mani or pedi and the 'Get Those Vibes Going' treatment with mask and extended foot massage. All services have the option of a polish or gel polish finish with OPI or The Gel Bottle Inc products and glitter or a French finish if desired. Those under 10 years old can also enjoy a nail treat, with the 15-minute 'Mini Munchkins' service, and two treatment options have been specifically designed for men, launching due to popular demand.

"When we reopened the doors in July, all our clients said how happy it made them feel to see clean and professionally painted nails and toes," Lhaki reveals. "We have a strong male client base and they often come after gym sessions for a pampering male pedicure."

Salon style

Lhaki was keen to attract a diverse audience, so chose a gender-neutral décor. "I wanted the salon to have a friendly café vibe






and opted for a semi-industrial look," she reveals. "My branding is green and white, which symbolises the natural world, which was important to me. I got ideas for the salon design from my travels, such as the suspended ceiling made from dark wood. I worked with a great team of very creative builders who helped to put my ideas together."

The manicure area is set against an exposed brick wall from the Victorian era that was discovered during the renovation process and the team used recycled wood for the floors, bar and partition. "The nail salon is open plan and all on one floor," Lhaki reveals. "There is a reception area and bar at the entrance, and beyond it are the manicure tables and pedicure platform."

"I feel that the combination of green and white hues offers senses of calm and serenity. I wanted Atara to have a café style vibe in which both men and women could enjoy treatments and have a drink. The natural styling reflects the natural focus of the nail menu."

Attracting young professionals particularly, Lhaki partook in the 'Treat Out To Help Out' initiative after the first lockdown to engage even more clients, offering 20% off all treatments. The salon also offers loyalty cards and birthday deals and Lhaki has a view to focus on philanthropy.

"I opened this salon when I turned 50, so I have gone into the business with my own set of values," Lhaki reveals. "It's unfortunate that my business was hit by the awful pandemic so soon into its launch but I am hopeful I will achieve what I set out to do. I have strong humanitarian drives and motivations and hope that Atara will one day give back to the community. I am hopeful – and look forward to – a positive year ahead." 

www.ataranailbar.co.uk
 /ataranailbar  @AtaraNail  @ataranailbar

**Some salon photos shown taken prior to lockdown & the implementation of Covid-secure measures.*

"My aim is to provide something very different to people living in Croydon – a salon that not only delivers a high quality service, but a social hub with a welcoming atmosphere, cocktails and coffee."

