

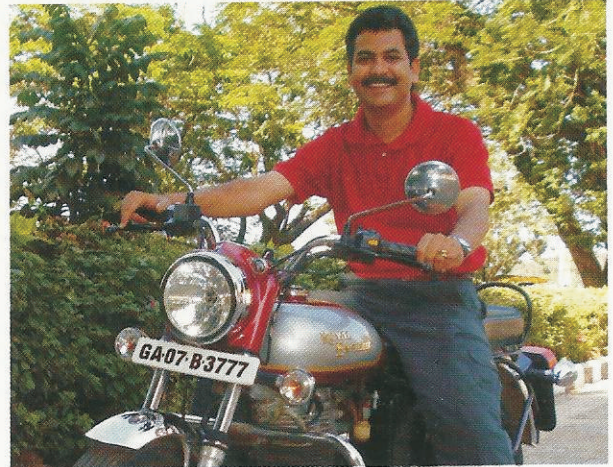
# Milroc: Creating diamonds out of earth

How Milroc created a brand one brick at a time. **BG Features** finds out more about this real estate developer and its dynamic director, K K Sekhar

What started out as a humble beginning two decades ago has grown into a respected and trusted brand among real estate developers in Goa. Milroc Development Company started with an initial capital of only Rs.1 lakh. 'Milroc' the brand means millions of rocs. 'Roc' being the slang for diamonds in the trade. Initially the name was christened for a jewellery company which did not materialize. The name also means the process of getting jewels, also comes from a story of the Sindbad tales from the Arabian Nights and the mythological giant bird named 'Roc'." explains K K Sekhar, the director and the driving force behind this Panaji based company. Sekhar's family managed a diamond factory in Corlim and coincidentally 'CORLIM' spelt backwards is 'MILROC'.

The underlying philosophy of this development company has always been 'Building Better Homes, Building A Better Tomorrow' and Sekhar says that they are "driven by a desire to create beautiful, environmentally appropriate places of minimal negative impact. We at Milroc strive not just to build better homes but better futures for the generations to come. Our thrust has always been on a better built environment, a concept that essentially incorporates the 'Home' with 'Family' as its focal point, values, a quieter lifestyle and community living.

It is easy to bask in success and enjoy the good times, but like most businesses, Milroc too had to suffer serious teething issues in the beginning. "As everyone goes through hardships, we too faced our challenges. As we were a new company, I was just out of college with hardly any experience and also raising funds was a big problem. Banks were not willing to fund us. So we borrowed from private parties and started our business with a small property of 500 square meters. Apart from money, obtaining approvals is a very complex and difficult affair. The numbers of approvals to be obtained are too many and takes a lot of time (over a year). Another challenge is managing men and materials required for construction. Being an unorganized sector, getting manpower in Goa is very difficult. Moreover to deal with hundreds of suppliers to get so many different materials that go into putting up a residential community. Balancing all the different aspects of the business like funds, cash flow, title clearances, land acquisition; planning and design, approvals, pricing, appointing the right team, construction, marketing and sales, social responsibility; keeping up to date with new technologies, and finally profit. We are also striving to



Sekhar on his prized Enfield

create a healthy building culture between stability and change, tradition and innovation" says Sekhar

"I remember my father had advised me that this industry has a lot of opportunities and specially if you do a honest job, as general image of a builder is very poor. We followed this as a guiding principle and slowly and steadily inched towards becoming one of the finest real estate developers. Some other guidelines that we have been following since our inception are transparency, quality in design and construction, clean and of course always treat people the way you would like to be treated. We make home buying as easy and comfortable as possible."

Milroc has never lost sight of the fact that building homes takes more than cement, sand, steel and brick. It also takes time, patience, attention to detail and the torments associated with persuading materials and other humans to cooperate with designs; ensuring that all turns out the way it is supposed to be. Another aspect of a Milroc product is the fact that the developers have been involved in every aspect of building homes, every detail that ensures customer satisfaction. The company tries to put themselves in the customer's shoe to actually understand their needs and preferences before coming out with the plans. "We pride ourselves on being sensitive to the client's needs and we limit the number of projects so that we ensure each project receives the attention it deserves, from concept to completion. I feel privileged and responsible towards the values promoted by our building complexes. After all what we build is more than someone's home, it is someone's dream. I am proud of each and every project we have built; each is a masterpiece in its own right and each has its own character" beams Sekhar like a proud parent.



Just like how an artist covets his earlier works, Sekhar prides his buildings "A project that is special to me is our 'Milroc Ribander Retreat'. A fabulous property on the Ribander Hill overlooking the river Mandovi, the Charao island and Panjim city. Simple, small low buildings have been carefully placed on the gentle slope, making sure we left the mature trees untouched. Our highlights of this project are the open spaces, nice wide internal roads, many original trees and contours maintained, the beautiful view and above all a simple clean design. Another fantastic very exclusive project is our 'Milroc Vista Do Mar' at Reis Magos this is probably the chicest sea side community now evolving on the Goan coast. These elevated villas gaze out the Arabian Sea, cut off from the urban madness. And there perched on the hillside, nestled between earth, sky and sea, stands these beautiful villas, modern minimalist yet awesome; even exhilarating. These villas of great character are designed in stone and glass in the ground hugging style of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The project challenged both the architects and us. Finally we certainly did do justice to this fantastic property. I like to look at it this way Heaven and Earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation."

Other marquee projects include Milroc Woods at Old Goa, Milroc Temple Towers at Mercês, Milroc Clement Residency.

What is occupying the energy of the company at present? "We have recently launched 'Milroc Kadamba', a premium apartment residential community and we are really excited with this project. This is a class project in every sense. Our unique luxury features are the landscaped gardens, space, parking, lifts, privacy, security and safety, waste management-STP and vermi composting, water management, rainwater harvesting and recharging, water filtration; and a beautiful club cum spa - large gym, health bar, games room, swimming pool, his and her spa and function hall."

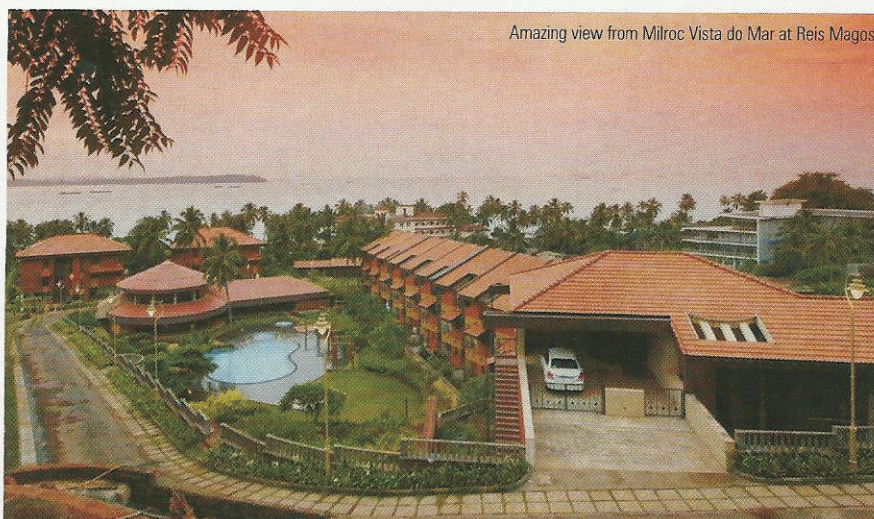
So how does the builder's personal likes and dislikes express in his projects? "Personally I like to define luxury as a lot of space - room to think, create, play and become fully ourselves. Gardens - a remarkable place with great respect for the natural landscape, providing a deep connection and belonging. This is what we are trying to incorporate in all our upcoming projects."

Sekhar is a man who brings a very refined taste in life and the arts to the table. His passions and hobbies are great architecture, good books, travel, photography and he loves 'cruising around town on his Royal Enfield. "I was always fascinated by architecture.

Initially it was the great looks and facades. But as I learnt more, I became more and more interested in the deeper meaning of architecture and design. I started reading about great architects, why they design the way they do? What is their underlying philosophy? What influenced them to become who they are? One book that changed the way I look at architecture was *Places of the Soul - architecture and environmental design as healing art*. This is a 'Bible' for architects.

I began to appreciate simple structures like a shed, a country home, a covered walkway; paths in a garden seeing things which I would normally take for granted. Apart from architecture, I read books on spirituality, philosophy, religion, travel, environment and ecology and management. My wife Muriel and I share a common love for books. So much that we started and ran our own little bookstore *Legacy* for over 5 years. That we lost a lot of money on the venture is another thing" Sekhar laughs.

On Sekhar's to-do list is a desire to build retirement homes for seniors citizens, a school and if possible, a hospital. Sekhar considers it his good fortune to have been married to Muriel and they have two sons, Chaitanya and Siddhartha. He also has a good word for his partners Mr. Prasad and Mr. Jhaveri who he thanks for having given him the space to grow and incorporate his skills in building Milroc, the brand.



Amazing view from Milroc Vista do Mar at Reis Magos

Sekhar also started a children's charity trust in 2004 along with a close friend Michael Green and Adv. Meera. They call it 'SACHIN TRUST' Support A Child In Need. This trust provides humanitarian, financial, educational and training classes for the street children and young people. Around 100 students a year "We provide skills, training for underprivileged youngsters, so as to be able to support themselves and their families with dignity. Current training classes include sewing and embroidery in Porvorim, Diesel Mechanics class in Mapusa and two pre school classes at Betim and Mapusa.

After talking to Sekhar about himself and Milroc, it is easy to wonder why diamonds are forever! ■