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Total elegance

KAMAL AND SHIBANEE SAGAR ARE BUILDING HOMES THAT BRING THE OUTDOORS INDOORS, SAYS **SHRABONTI BAGCHI**



Windmills of your Mind, the latest Total Environment venture, has real gardens with earth beds and even water bodies in apartments on all floors

When Bangalore-based builders and architects Total Environment Building Systems were starting out, they worked on a housing project for employees of a soft-ware company. Total Environment's founder-director Kamal Sagar had named the project Green is the Colour. And he stuck to his green guns when the owners refused to pay extra for the garden patch he wanted to build with every apartment. He opted to throw it in anyway — at his own cost.

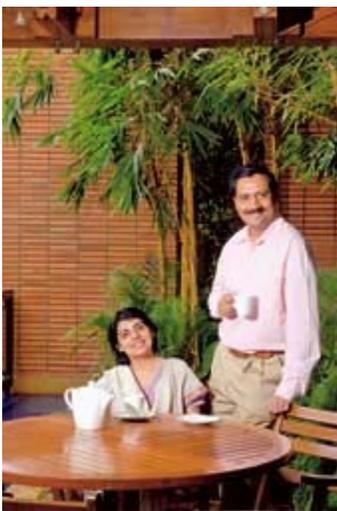
“We believe even apartment owners should be able to have a piece of their own sky,” says Sagar. And it's this conviction that has shaped Total Environment's design philosophy and aesthetics since its inception in 1996. Today, they're creating a distinct buzz in the Bangalore real estate market — spawning copies galore along the way — and changing customers' mindsets about the potentials of apartment living.

Walk into any Total Environment property, whether it's their first Cirrus Minor to the fully-furnished prototype of Windmills of Your Mind, their latest luxury lifestyle venture, and you'll immediately get a sense of their guiding philosophy. A lot of light and air, walls that are few and far between, enormous detailing, an unusual mix of warmth and almost Spartan clean lines — and most importantly, a smooth blending of the indoors and the outdoors.

And let's not forget the garden. It's the overriding USP of Total Environment that each property they develop must include a garden — even if it's a three-bedroom flat on the 17th floor. Not just a few potted plants on the balcony, mind, but a real garden with a bed of earth and sometimes even a water body, as in the case of their upcoming projects Windmills and The Magic Faraway Tree.



Windmills of your Mind, the latest Total Environment venture, has real gardens with earth beds and even water bodies in apartments on all floors



Shibanee and Kamal Sagar are changing mindsets about apartment living

architect from Sir JJ College of Architecture in Mumbai, runs Total Environment with Kamal. She's mainly involved in the interiors of their projects and also runs Shibanee and Kamal Architects, the company's design arm.

Another recent complex, Shine On, has open terrace gardens so that owners literally get a piece of their own sky. This is achieved by staggering the apartments in such a way that no two terraces fall exactly above or below any other. Then there's Time, which features an indoor garden running along the entire length of the apartment. The project grabbed the Habitat Award for Apartment Planning from the A+D Spectrum Foundation.

Or take The Good Earth, a complex with 24 custom-built apartments located on prime property near Bangalore's main artery M.G. Road. The main feature here is an ancient tree that's been incorporated into the building's design since Sagar didn't want to chop it down. This also collected an A+D Spectrum Award for Group Housing along with the J.K. Cement Architect of the Year Award.

Sagar, who studied architecture at IIT Kharagpur, has always been inclined towards environmentally conscious architecture. He's been an admirer of the works of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, a pioneer of organic architecture, and his followers Bruce Goff and E. Fay Jones. Sagar also says the work of Japanese architects such as Kenzo Tange and Tadao Ando, who mixed modernity with traditional aspects of architecture with startling effects, has been an inspiration to him and his wife Shibanee. Shibanee, an



The Total Environment philosophy is that even apartment owners should have their share of the sky



The overwhelming use of natural materials in Total Environment buildings also sets them apart. They are focused on creating physical environments in harmony with their surroundings and giving their buildings a character grounded in nature.

Shine On is another project with lots of open spaces and light

They try to achieve this by using natural construction materials like wire-cut bricks and exposed form finished concrete and stones such as Kota, Jaisalmer and Andhra

Chocolate for flooring and walls. Besides this they use building practices such as verdant landscaping, plenty of open spaces and water bodies. They believe that apart from being maintenance-free, natural materials age beautifully and the passage of time gives them a life and character of their own.

Helping them achieve the exact look and feel they want is their in-house construction team of skilled workers from across the country. They take care of everything — from building to woodwork, painting to flooring. For the more high-end projects like Windmills, housekeeping teams are being put in place for maintaining the individual apartments.



This is unique among builders in Bangalore, who mostly operate by outsourcing various aspects of construction and finishing. “By having in-house teams for everything, we’re able to ensure quality and control costs,” explains Sagar.

He maintains he has nothing against outsourcing but it hasn’t delivered the results he’s seeking. “We’ve never been satisfied by the samples of work we’ve tried to outsource in the past and have always ended up doing it ourselves,” he laughs. A high degree of customisation is another feature of their projects with apartment owners being allowed to specify every little nook-and-canny detail of their homes.



Till now, Total Environment has mostly restricted itself to smaller complexes with a handful of custom-built apartments. “We did not set out trying to be high-end and exclusive, but given our focus on quality, we restricted ourselves to smaller projects where this could be controlled,” says Sagar. This also set their customer profile — industrialists, CEOs and artists. Rahul Dravid was a big fan of Total Environment and now occupies an apartment in The Good Earth, he notes in passing.

But Windmills, which is on a 25-acre plot, promises to vault them into even bigger leagues. When complete, it will consist of 160 duplex apartments, 20 penthouses, 152 single-floor circular apartments and 73 bespoke villas with sizes ranging from 2,500 sqft (the circular apartments), 7,600 sqft (the penthouses) and the larger bespoke villas which will be customised. Given that the smallest apartment here costs slightly more than a crore, with the more high-end ones fetching upto several crores, they are targeting not only domestic buyers but the ones abroad as well.

Also on the cards is expanding to other cities which they’re doing with one project in Pune and another in Hyderabad.

Remaining true to their design ideals is key to Kamal and Shibaneer who shun design fads. And the names of their projects reflect Kamal’s particular fondness for music. He insists on naming each project after a favourite song. *Windmills of your mind*, for instance, is a Noel Harrison number later also sung by Sting, while *Time*, *Footprints* and *Shine on you crazy diamond* are Pink Floyd songs.



A builder with good taste in music? Now that’s something really special.

Pix by Gopal K.

