

# The NAME GAME

Indian developers are increasingly opting for foreign names for offices and residences

RANJIT BHUSHAN

**O**NE OF the foremost symptoms of stirred aspirations is the yearning to acquire a fancy name. The more westernised it is, the better. In no other sector are European and anglicised names more accepted, easily adapted and consumed as in India's real estate industry.

Gone are the days of Indira Nagars, Seva Nagars or Preet Vihars. Welcome to the world of Belvedere Gardens, Hamilton Heights, Mayfield Garden and Panache Homes. The day of Tara Nagars and Laxmipurs are not exactly what you may call top-of-the-mind names these days; bring on, instead, The Empyrean, The Spa or The Charmwood Village. That's more up the alley of the newly arrived Indian, the zing and the jazz, the adding of soda to pop.

Most experts see in it a design, not an accident. Aditya Bansal, managing director ABW Group, says, "The west has always been looked up to for its grandeur, development and contemporary lifestyle. When it comes to real estate, western names hold up an aspirational value for prospective customers. More than 80 per cent of residential townships these days have western names. Such exotic names are associated with high-end luxurious housing and they denote an snob value for the owner of the house."

Bansal should know. Their group's housing project at Golf Course Road, Gurgaon has been named La Lagune reflecting on what he calls "modern, world class features of our apartments". The word 'lagoon' implies water bodies. La Lagune is ornamented with pools, cascading fountains and splashing ponds. Targeted at a niche segment of the society, he says, La Lagune is in perfect sync with the desires of the elite.

Sanjiv Aundhe, chief operating officer (COO) of Fire Luxur Developers, who are developing 'The Empyrean' project in Bangalore, says, "We believe that the name of the township should be representative of the theme of the township. 'The Empyrean', which means highest form of heaven, was the obvious choice. It is contemporary and modern, while addressing the aspirations of most lifestyle conscious customers."

Many homes and office blocks built in the early years of post-Independent India had a distinct Indian flavour. The first flush of patriotism and nationalism may have had a large role to play. Today, with increased globalisation, Indian society has come a full circle and people have begun to associate with western names with sophistication and premium appeal. There is thus more a social and consumer acceptance phenomenon than anything else.

Consumer aspirations and psychographics in India have, over the years, undergone a seminal change. With increased consumerism and other cultural changes, India is also changing - from Hindi to Hinglish, from ethnic wear to fusion dressing, from joint families to nuclear ones, from arranged marriages to arranged 'love' marriages - to name just a few.

There is another angle as well - the rise of NRI interest in India. A Reserve Bank of India (RBI) study, conducted in November 2009 shows that the Indian diaspora has remitted \$46.9 billion in 2008-09, up from \$43.5 billion in 2007-08 and \$30.84 billion in 2006-07. Only around 4 per cent of the funds were invested in "land, property, securities" in contrast to a July 2006 study, which found that 20-25 per cent of remittances were invested in local assets.



A spokesman for Omaxe says, "Modern names surely arouse interest among NRI investors and new age domestic end-users who seek features comparable with global standards. To fulfill this need, developers have started roping in foreign consultants and architects to conceptualise theme-based projects, primarily reflecting western lifestyle and modernity."

Omaxe launched The Nile, in Gurgaon, incorporating Egyptian architectural designs, while The Forest Spa, their luxury project in Noida, is being developed on the theme of luxuriant greenery.

Managing director of Rics India, Sachin Sandhir, says, "Apart from the fact that we ape the west, Indian real estate developers who jet set the globe, often pickup ideas from there. It is common these days for modern properties to overlook a golf course or some forest." With such locales, associating an Indian name may not be regarded as being savvy enough.

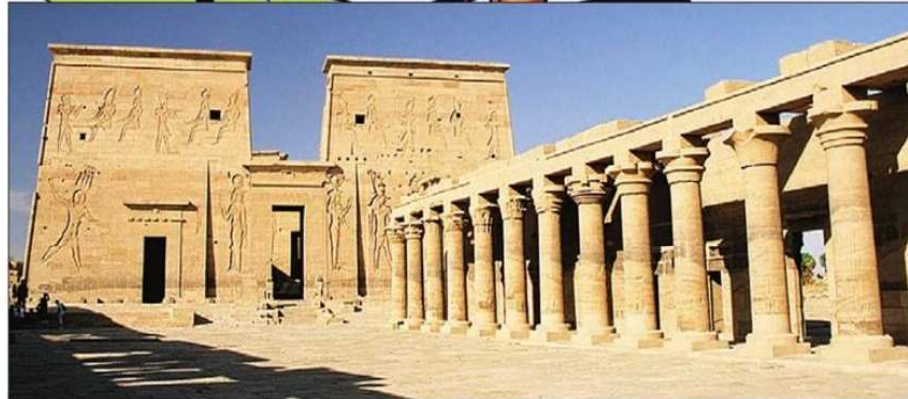
Akshaya Homes is known for prominently using European names for most of its popular residential projects in and around Chennai, including Belvedere, Adora, Adair and Metropolis.

"Having an English name for a residential project is part of our marketing strategy and enables the end user to have a value for his address," T Chitty Babu, managing director of Chennai-based Akshaya Homes, says.

"Usually, it is the developer who decides the name, based on the inputs given by the agency," says Babu. "There are agencies specialising in this segment and they work with us on a project for at least three months - from the time we identify the land, architecture and landscaping. Based on these, the agency also gives a logo for the project, besides a tag line, which is the latest trend," he adds. For instance, Akshaya Metropolis on GST Road has a tagline - City at your doorstep. "While we also consider Indian names, having an English name for upper level residential projects helps in making them fancy," Babu says.

Explains Prathish Devadoss, director, VGN Developers, whose company has names like - La Parisienne, Platina, Minerva and the yet to be launched Brixton. "The world knows that when one talks about architecture, we have to look up to Europe, which has a long history and kingdoms that ruled continents. The names not only sounds good, but also brings in the feel good factor," Devadoss adds.

Brijesh Bhanot, senior VP, sales and marketing of the 3C Company, says, "A lot depends upon where the project is going to be sold. In NCR for instance, which is one of the lucrative selling areas in north India, English has become the first language for the well



**CONCRETE IDEAS:** According to Omaxe, which launched The Nile in Gurgaon incorporating Egyptian architectural designs, modern names arouse interest among NRI investors and to fulfill this need, developers rope in foreign consultants to conceptualise theme-based projects

educated and heeled and easier to connect."

Ravi Saund, head business and development, CHD developers, concurs and says, "Ansals were probably the last of developers who used Indian names. DLF changed the rules of the game by adopting more modern and enticing names."

By no chance is it a one-way house though. There are still contrarians out there who firmly believe in maintaining the status quo. Murali, managing director of Bangalore-based Shiram Properties, says, "According to me it is a myth that western names would attract and appeal to buyers easily. That may be true for just 1-2 per cent of people. Most of our customers are from middle and upper middle class segment, and most of our projects have Indians names through which, we believe, our customers connect themselves well with our company and values."

And then there are those who say that while metros will go in for the so-called westernisation, smaller towns, or tier-2 and tier-3 towns, prefer local names. What may be regarded as hip in Delhi may not be regarded as such in a Pudukottai or Etawah.

Even in a metro like Kolkata, for instance, fancy western names of residential or commercial complexes are still not the

order of the day. "Some properties with names like South City, Orbit City, Orbit Garden, Merlin High, Merlin Residency, Urbano, Silver Spring, Forum and so on have come up. But a larger number of properties, which have come up, have local names. Therefore, one cannot conclude that it is a trend or it's fashionable to have imported names. It depends on how a developer is positioning his property, its location and target clientele. Mostly, some high-end urban properties and those with distinct flavours like Spanish, Portuguese, Gothic or British are opting for such western names. And it makes sense for them also. For LIG and MIG complexes it doesn't make sense," says Mayank Saksena, associate director, Jones Lang LaSalle Meghraj.

Kumar Sankar Bagchi, managing director, Bengal Peerless Housing Development Company, points out, "When we have such enriched languages as Bengali or Sanskrit, why go elsewhere? All our properties have names like 'Abhishikta', 'Alaktika', 'Anupama' and 'Sonar Taree' have been runaway successes. We never felt Indian names would not find takers."

In an interesting twist, however, Bengal Peerless' first commercial project, a multi-

utility urban complex itself had a western name: Axis!

Nilesh Biswas, director, Calcutta Skyline, takes this logic to another extreme. "You will notice that the private-public joint sector companies come up with projects that have local or Sanskritised names while non-Bengali developers come up with projects that have international names. It has got nothing to do with marketing sense, but possibly they are short of good and apt local names. There are some developers who prefer offbeat names. The western names are easily available to pick up from."

Keeping in mind large number of MNC employees, corporate honchos and NRIs looking for lavish housing options, it is definitely a strategic marketing perspective to have the project's name which would reflect their modern outlook and fancy western lifestyle. With many housing projects coming up, it becomes imperative to have a name, which would distinguish it from the others as well as keep its unique identity alive. Long live the native.

ranjitbhushan@mydigitalfc.com  
(With inputs from D Govardhan in Chennai and Ritwik Mukherjee in Kolkata)