

# Royale touch

One of the most coveted architects in India is also one of most unassuming gentlemen.

**Noshir Talati** tells Namrata Zakaria how his latest—the Palais Royale—is one of the most significant residential buildings in Asia

**HE** may be invisible in Mumbai's high-profile soirées, but Noshir Talati's signature is visible in almost every part of the city by the sea. Right from the beautiful Jindal Mansion on Pedder Road to the landmark Cadbury House at Mahalaxmi and the new JK House, the residential tower of the Raymond's Singhania, at Breach Candy, to Inox theatre and the Mumbai airport — some of the more significant edifices bear his stamp of white buildings with balcony gardens and sky courtyards.

His work outside Mumbai (especially in Muscat) has been rather remarkable too. But this humble Parsi is rather the quintessential Bombay boy as I discovered meeting him at his très plush Mumbai office. Ceejay House, on the busy Dr Annie Besant Road, is a building many Mumbaikars crane their necks to glimpse at each day on their way to and from work. Its white-washed walls and spillover flower beds offer a gentle



Ceejay House, a Talati and Panthaky construction



The reclusive Noshir Talati

breather for a metropolis on the run. His office is huge (it accommodates a 300-plus team), traditionally swanky and filled with interesting sculpture.

"Most of my team has been with me for many years," says the 71-year-old who will toast his golden jubilee in the business in 2014. "They become associates and then directors."

He is famously media shy, and almost never gives interviews. "It doesn't gel with my personality," he says. It's hard not to agree, he speaks precisely and with measured words.

He is a workaholic, he only takes a break for horse racing. But there are leisurely lunches. For work or pleasure, I ask. Always pleasure, he replies. Talati reveals he eats out almost 300 days a year. "I like to eat everything," says the architect of the noted Royal China and Aromas of China restaurants. But Wasabi and the Zodiac Grill, both at the Taj Mahal hotel, is where he is most often at.

Not many Parsis would admit to being Bollywood buffs. Talati watches all Hindi movies and loves them. As much as Hindi songs. He plays his iPod for a disbelieving me.

If there's a single edifice this iconic architect would be remembered by it will be the upcoming Palais Royale, at Parel. He says it has been bestowed the highest LEED rating, Platinum, as the safest building in Asia, the technology used to construct it is unparalleled. Its concrete is usually used for dams, and its architecture follows the New York fire code post 9/11.

"But all my projects are my favourite," he smiles, his eyes twinkling behind his perennial sunglasses.