THE TORCHBEARERS

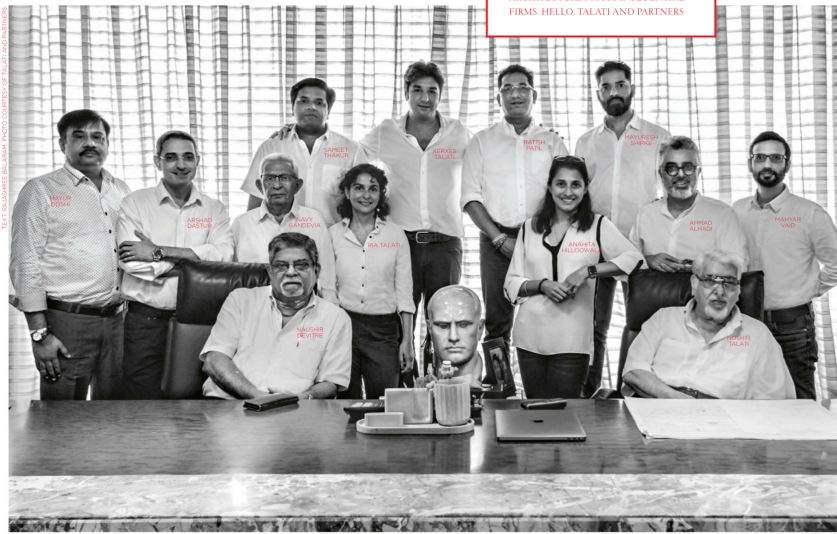
A CHANGE IN NAME HERALDS NEW MANAGEMENT AND A FRESH BURST OF LIFE FOR ONE OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE'S MOST INFLUENTIAL FIRMS. HELLO, TALATI AND PARTNERS

TEXT: RAJASHREE RAJARAM. PHOTO COURTESY OF TALATI AND PARTNERS.

With the change in nomenclature of one of India's oldest architecture and design firms, there is growing curiosity and speculation about the shape of things to come—what was long known as Talati and Panthaky Associated is now recast as Talati and Partners LLP. For siblings Ria and Xerxes Talati, the children of founder Noshir Talati, who now jointly helm the firm with a strong and seasoned team of partners and associate partners, the revisioning brings an even greater awareness of the mighty shoes that they have stepped into. "We will adhere to the same principles of intelligent functionality and elegant, fuss-free design like our dad and his partners did for over 50 years, but give it a new vigour and freshness with a contemporary perspective," they say, adding that the team is powered with more young blood now at the top. The other older partners—besides Naushir DeVitre, who was Noshir Talati's first employee in 1964, when he started the firm—have gone their own way but the relationships live on.

"It's a natural progression. The management structure of the organization was such that there was a contingency plan already put in place at the outset, in case my father ever officially decided to step down," says Ria. "When he got seriously unwell last year, my brother Xerxes stepped in and decided to implement that."

Over the years, the firm grew to 300 people, a behemoth of sorts in the fraternity. However, the Covid-19 outbreak and ensuing lockdown also presented the brother-sister duo the opportunity to streamline things and take a closer look at how the organization was structured. But the lockdown has not diminished the workflow. On the contrary, the team has only gotten busier with a diverse and stellar array of projects.

Though at a more sedate pace, Noshir Talati continues to contribute his design inputs. The illustrious designer has more reasons to feel enthused these days; the work on his dream project—the stupendous Palais Royale in Central Mumbai—which had come to a grinding halt for a few years, has recently resumed. A decade in the making, the eyeball-grabbing tower is also the first residential building in India to apply for the LEEDS certification.

For the children, their dad remains the greater colossus. "He had a rough life. When he was young, he used to sell pencils and sweets on the streets, only so he could earn enough to feed himself and pursue his education," they say. "Our father professionalized interior design in the country, and created job opportunities for so many carpenters, painters and stone masons. The grandchildren of many of the carpenters and painters, whom he had employed in the 1970s, now run successful contracting companies of their own. We are overwhelmed with pride when we meet them. No matter what changes, respect, humaneness and empathy will always come together in the grounding ethos of our firm."