

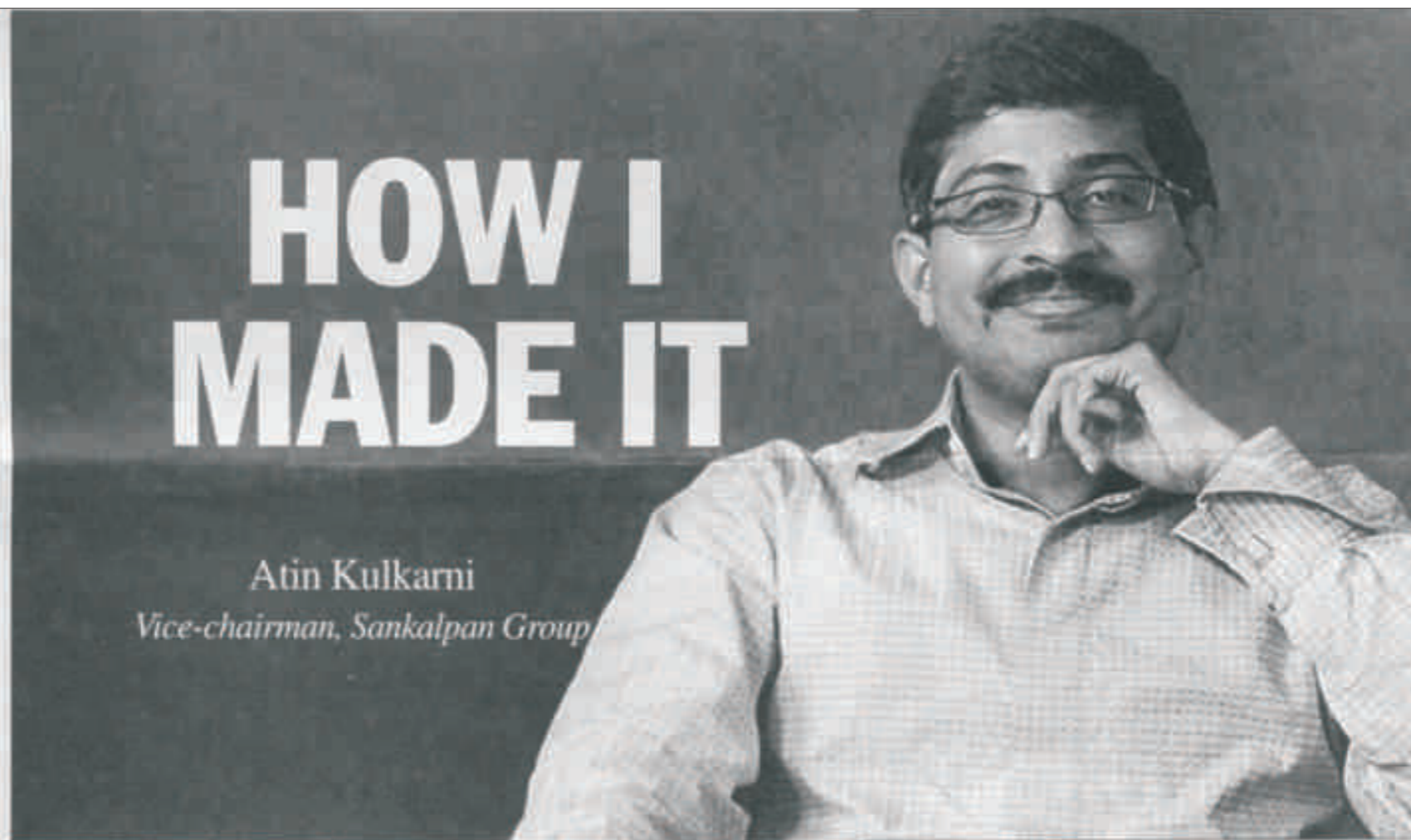
There was no real reason for Atin Kulkarni to opt for Kolhapur's SPMBH College of Architecture. But this decision would shape the course of his life. It was in Kolhapur that he met classmate Nimal Randive, his best friend and business partner. Together they built the Sankalpan Group from scratch (or from a second-hand computer) to a name to reckon with in the field of commercial real estate infrastructure.

Kulkarni may have become an architect by chance, but starting design firm Sankalpan Architects Pvt Ltd (SAPL) in 1996 was a well-thought-out decision. The idea of being his own boss was very appealing as was the fact that he would be able to enjoy the fruits of his labour or "wealth creation" as he put it. "It took three years of practical experience to unlearn the idealistic cliches taught to us in college," says Kulkarni.

Fortunately, living in a college hostel had taught the two friends to "manage limited resources for maximum output", something that came in handy in the initial days of their business. "Our first office was a half-room in an apartment owned by my aunt, which we rented for Rs 100 a week. It was just big enough for our assembled 286 PC and one person," reminisces Kulkarni.

The other thing they had learned in college was to make "critical business presentations in the minimal turnaround period". So they started off by making presentations to prospective clients, waiting and hoping for a breakthrough. "The most difficult part was proving our credentials in an environment that already had many established players," says Kulkarni. This they proceeded to do with their customer-centric focus. "Just do it and make it right against all odds," says Kulkarni of their guiding philosophy.

They seem to have it



HOW I MADE IT

Atin Kulkarni
Vice-chairman, Sankalpan Group

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made, all right. Sankalpan is one of India's foremost and fastest-growing integrated commercial realty and infrastructure service providers having interests in architectural design consultancy, infrastructure turnkey fit-outs and real estate development.

Headquartered in Mumbai, the Sankalpan Group has executed over 600 projects worth \$200 million over the past 10 years and developed over six million square feet of premium commercial real estate.

After making their name as a design consultancy firm, Kulkarni and Randive decided to go downstream. "The (realty) sector had been seeing exponential growth. It is basic business acumen to invest at the right time by expanding," explains Kulkarni. The duo started Sankalpan

Infrastructure Pvt Ltd (SIPL), which builds the projects SAPL designs.

Most of SIPL's projects were for commercial properties, so the group set up Sankalpan Realtors Pvt Ltd. The objective: "To develop world-class commercial real estate in India and abroad." The first project — an IT park in Mumbai — is off the blocks.

Kulkarni is the creative force behind Sankalpan. Although these days he is mostly busy building Sankalpan, this 35-year-old with a penchant for perfection loves to don his architectural designer role. Hafeez Contractor is the architect he looks up to while Dhirubhai Ambani and Lakshmi Mittal have greatly influenced his outlook towards life and business. "Their services to our nation lie in their actions more than any-

thing else. Great things are not said but done and they have motivated all of us to accomplish our own goals and objectives through vision and passion," Kulkarni says.

The elder of two brothers, Kulkarni is the man-management guy at Sankalpan. His job, he says, is to ensure that the right man is chosen for every job. A hard taskmaster, he also ensures that his team members are taken care of. His dream is to see Sankalpan reach the top.

"Sankalpan should grow generation after generation without being a personality-driven organisation," Kulkarni clarifies. "India is emerging as the Asian hub for development of commercial real estate and Sankalpan is one of the few firms that can deliver end-to-end solutions in this sector. This gives us an

edge over our competitors, especially since our quality management systems are of international standards," says Kulkarni, who emphasises that they have never compromised on quality.

This love for quality products spills over into other areas of Kulkarni's life, as proven by his love for fast cars and Cuban cigars. Chilling out means weekend outings with family and very close friends and, yes, keeping business off the agenda. "Sipping cold beer or scotch on the rocks while listening to classical music is my way of unwinding," signs off Kulkarni. You can never have too much of wine and song; these are, indeed, his seasons in the sun.

Based on a conversation with Paromita Sen in Calcutta