

COVER STORY

WOMEN WITH VERVE

More women in India are stepping into top positions in real estate. Besides the fresh perspective they bring in, innovations and people management skills are their hallmark

BY JAYASHREE KINI-MENDES





Scan New York's major residential real estate brokerage firms, and most often than not, in every instance, "the man in charge" is, in fact, a woman. No other industry in this city is so completely dominated by women.

India is not too far behind when it comes to women taking charge in the real estate space. Of course, we might not have a liberal dosage of women leading from the front in the Indian real estate arena. But one thing is for certain: the glass ceiling (the imperceptible obstacles faced by female managers, stymied by 'corporate tradition and prejudice') actually broke two generations ago when young women fresh out business college decided to step into the aggressive world of property development and one that will not allow them to rest on their laurels.

And undermine them not. The women we feature here have taken the title of planning and building classy structures while making an impact in terms of delivering with excellence. Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Most of them may have had to claw their way to the top, but they admit that working with peers has enabled them to bring polish and define best practices in what is fairly a rag-tag industry. One rule that has guided them through their career is hard work and honesty, not to forget the determination to climb the ladder of success with every deal they strike.

Considering that the real estate industry in India is like the greatest Rubik's Cube of all time, it causes much joy when all the pieces fall into place on a project or a career in this industry.



Urvi Aradhya, senior VP, HR, K Raheja Corp, says, "Ultimately, the onus lies on oneself – on one's confidence, especially when you are seen as a value creator for your organisation. Respect comes naturally. Women and men bring different leadership styles and from an organisation's perspective it is important to have this diversity even in the leadership pool."

This is not to say that it's a feel-good club, but along the way these women have proved that you don't need to be an Alpha Dog to master the art of building sustainable and iconic buildings, and cultivating a decent work place environment.

Kruti Jain, director, Kumar Urban Development, Pune

Education: Kruti is a BBA LL.B (Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Legislative Law) from Symbiosis College, Pune. She is nominated on the Board of Advisers to DY Patil Institute of Education School for Management. She also finished her training in Micro Economics from London School of Economics and Real Estate strategies for growth from Harvard Business School.



AS KIDS, WE CHECKED OUT LAND PARCELS ON WEEKENDS. WE WOULD IMAGINE THE BUILDINGS THAT WOULD STAND THERE.

KRUTI JAIN





The living room at Nahar Amrit Shakti.

Career growth: Belonging to the Jain community, joining the family business in one's teens is pretty much a family tradition. She is creative and could not keep away from it for long. "As kids, we often went to check out land parcels on weekends. We would imagine the kind of buildings that would stand there and I just couldn't wait to join the business."

Distinct projects: KUL Ecoloch, a 100-acre green smart township, with a holistic environment and the first township to bag green certification from IGBC, and 45 Nirvana Hills, a 79-acre urban renewal project. Echelon in Mumbai, a 60-storey tower boasting of superior technology, and the award winning Kumar Sophronia symbolising exuberant surroundings for residents.

Future plans: To build sustainable and quality real estate re-defining the city, skylines and lifestyle standards and build a healthy society. She is keen to integrate technology to achieve speed and innovation.

Breaking the glass ceiling: "I entered this sector at the age of 15 and that raised many eyebrows. Moreover, a young woman joining real estate was looked askance at by many." She does



CONSIDERING THE COMPLEXITY IN THIS FIELD, I KNEW IT WOULD BE CHALLENGING TO

BRING AESTHETICS HERE.

MANJU YAGNIK

not find it hard to accomplish any job that was hitherto the domain of men. She does admit that certain aspects of business are not for women like liaisons, but says that otherwise it's a creative field. She acknowledges that the industry is indeed unorganised and traditionally seen as a male-dominated one; but that is changing fast with the entry of equally (or even better) talented women.

Advice for women: Women should assert themselves. "We are inherently blessed with the ability to multi-task and have good interpersonal skills, which help them perform well in a competitive sector. Successful and happy women communicate a feeling of empowerment for other women."

Manju Yagnik, vice chairperson, Nahar Group, Mumbai

Education: Completed her graduation from Kurukshetra University and sought to use her skills in a profession that would be challenging and matched her passion. She entered the real estate industry by joining the Nahar Group two decades ago. She is known for her ability to spot unique land spaces, com-

Barberry & Bryony located at Powai in Mumbai by Nahar Group.

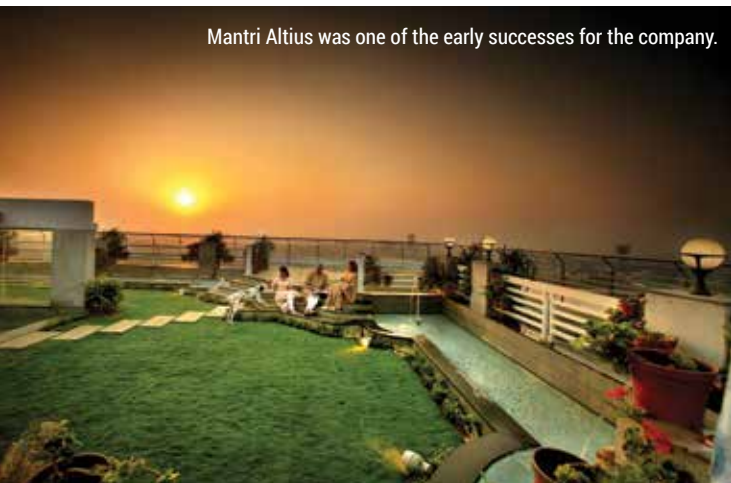




The Mantri Altius is distinct in its exclusivity.



Some tastefully done privileges offered at Mantri properties.



Mantri Altius was one of the early successes for the company.



I ENSURE THAT MANTRI DEVELOPERS IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF MARKETING THROUGH INNOVATIONS.

SNEHAL MANTRI

ing up with unique initiatives for consumers, being a decision maker, and good people management skills.

Career beginning: She entered the real estate sector as it seemed a worthwhile challenge. It was a well thought decision and the industry promised great potential. "Having an eye for detail and quality and considering the complexity and precision required in this field, I knew it would be challenging to bring aesthetics to brick and mortar. It also meant dealing with different kinds of people." Today, she looks at various aspects of the business which includes planning, marketing, designing and sales strategy giving her a bigger canvas.

Future plans: The real estate sector is seeing a transformation and requires likeminded people to steer it in a particular direction. She looks forward to encouraging more women into this industry to give it a direction. As VP and governing council of NAREDCO, she has the opportunity to work towards progress and actively participate in formulating proposals to the government and its allied bodies.

Indulgences: She takes a keen interest in social, educational, and sports activities. She was a state level hockey player and is a keen follower of sports. Besides this, Manju is passionate about rifle shooting, flying and has a flying license as well.

Snehal Mantri, director, HR, marketing, Mantri Developers

Education: A Home Science student, she joined her father in-law's stock exchange business in Pune soon after marriage. When the family relocated to Bengaluru in 1999, she soon affiliated herself with her husband's newly launched venture, Mantri Developers, as sales and marketing head.

Routine: She starts her day at 6am and after a daily workout prioritises her schedule for the day. Much of her time is spent with the HR and marketing teams discussing goals for the quarter and trouble-shooting grievances. A part of the day is



An artist impression of Raheja Vistas.



The K Raheja Corp brings in some of the finest designers for their properties.

also spent in meeting stakeholders/partners and discussing ways to bring in innovation and efficiency in the system.

Roles she plays: Snehal has donned multiple hats managing all stages of project management. She ensures that Mantri Developers is at the forefront of marketing with out-of-the-box concepts. Programmes such as Digital Interactive Mannequin and Augmented Reality initiative benchmarked the integration of technology for enhanced consumer engagement. Tools like digital information kiosks, live feed of construction status to consumers, voice and video chatting (first time in India) heightened the consumer brand experience. Her experience has helped her pioneer projects like Telemedicine, and create concepts like Home Care, Home Décor, and Spacethetics.

Bringing in character: As a woman, she can relate to the housing needs of a family and plan a project based on needs. As the director of HR, she has introduced a regulated work environment, encouraging talent and supporting skill development.



EDUCATION SHOULD NOT STOP WHEN WORK BEGINS. CONTINUALLY UPDATE SKILL SETS

AND KNOWLEDGE.

URVI ARADHYA

She has created a well-defined HR policy and a well laid out employee grievance addressing process. With digitalisation catching up in all aspects of real estate, she initiated an alliance with Snapdeal and explores selling options through the portal.

Urvi Aradhya, senior VP, HR, K Raheja Corp, Mumbai

Education: A graduate in statistics and post graduate in Human Resource Management, she has straddled various roles at an FMCG company before joining K Raheja Corp. "Education should not stop when work begins. Continually update skill sets and knowledge on new HR practices by attending courses and workshops."

Career: Since joining the group in 2007, the brief was to make this a 'dream company to work for', and have best-in-class people practices. She has introduced employee-friendly practices like flexi work hours, five-day week, work day leave concept, annual employee engagement calendar, Employee Connect programmes, etc. Launched the flagship Leadership Development programmes christened LAUNCH and LEAP for nearly 1,400 employees spanning various locations.

Next big thing: There is a need to strengthen processes and improve people practices. There are functions that are industry agnostic, and I would like to see the industry attract the best talent. A little more perseverance and focus will help hire people seeking to choose this as a launch pad and build their careers.

Advice for other women: Organisations that prefer diversity hire a healthy women mix in their employee ratio. There is no substitute for hard work, and one should not compete with another person, irrespective of their gender. Compete to beat industry set standards and do it with hard work, perseverance and business acumen. Stay focused, empower yourself with knowledge, work with passion, and there is no stopping one from scaling heights. **EW**