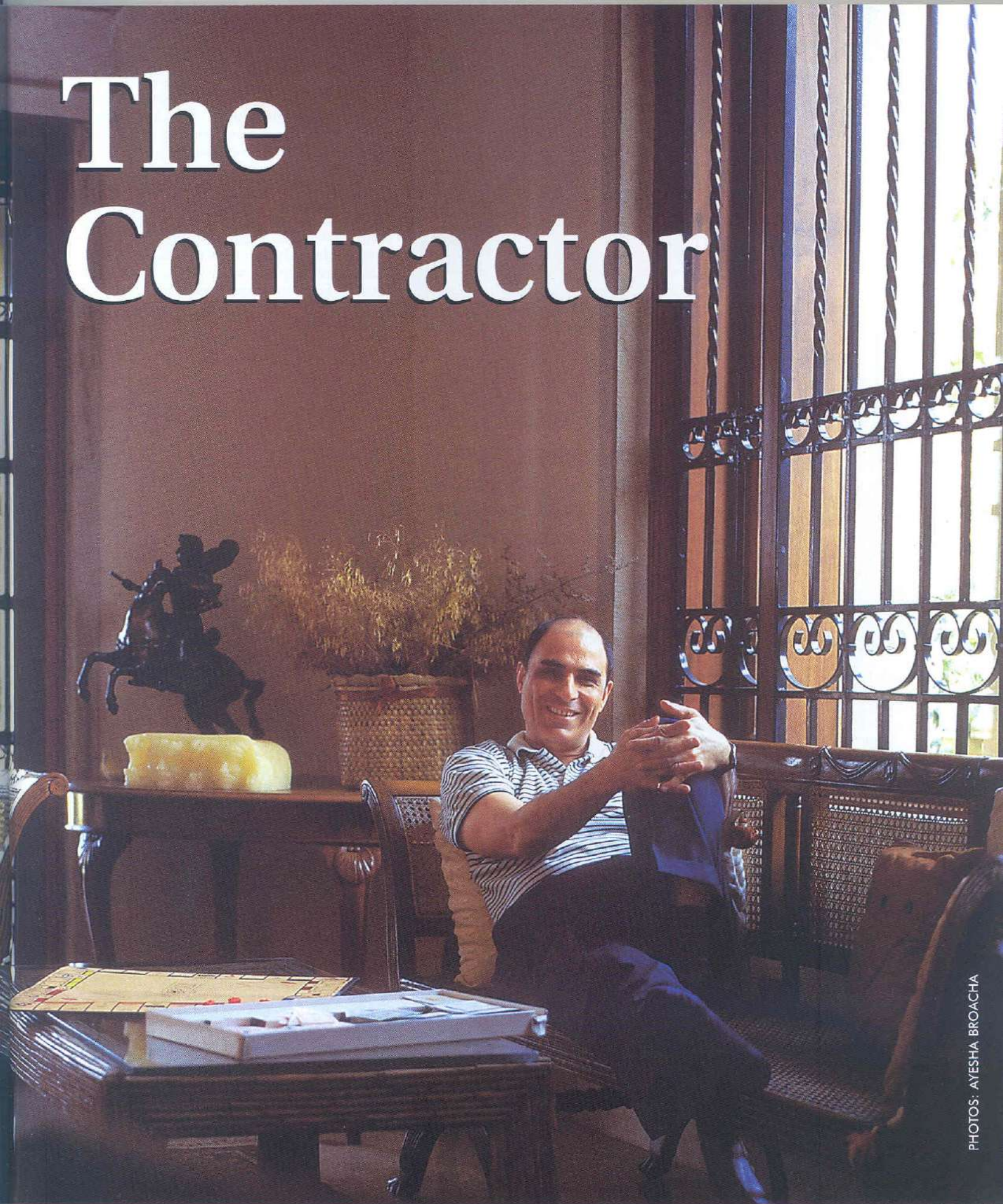


The Contractor



PHOTOS: AYESHA BROACHA

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He has been accused of all kinds of architectural rampages. One can admire the man or hate him, (and there are many in his field who do and how!) but Hafeez Contractor remains unfazed with each controversy that engulfs him, and continues waltzing his way to more success. *Hi!* meets the man who can easily be labelled the most famous architect in India.

Only 54 years, but Mumbai's skyline is dominated with his handiwork. An architect whose name has become synonymous with mammoth projects; and his ability to deliver to his clients. Just some of the landmark buildings he's whipped through—The National Stock Exchange, CIDCO, ICICI, Buckley Court; hotels like the Hyatt Regency, Grand Maratha of the ITC group and most recently the ITC Hotel Grand Central Sheraton; and suburban colonies like the Hiranandani complex.

We are lost finding Hafeez and Pearl Contractor's weekend hideaway in Khandala.

Considering the eclectic, some would prefer to say the eccentric, architect Hafeez Contractor, one would expect the much anticipated monument to slap you in the face. All *Hi!* knew was that his week-end home is situated in Khandala with no vital clues to bank on, but happy in the knowledge that if it is a *Hafeez Contractor* then it probably is a landmark in itself.

The house is hidden obscurely along a series of other private villas but large enough to accommodate a township within its al fresco and homely confines. Hafeez confesses to have taken a backseat with this retreat. "Though I would have done the house in a more contemporary style, I am not selfish. My wife wanted it this way so I let her design it her way and I am happy with the place."

We are sure that it did not take too much guts on behalf of Hafeez, as wife Pearl is a renowned interior designer. She humbles us by pardoning herself for her weekend home not sheltering any of the ostentations that, in her words, "*Hi!* is used to!" With the couple's hectic schedules of making their respective clients' dream homes Pearl and Hafeez have been pressed for time to complete their own. However, the Contractors' Mumbai abode which *Hi!* also visited, pays more than sufficient testimony to the couple's midas touch to create handsome homes.

In Class 3 it was when his teacher out of sheer frustration made a prophecy that the Hafeez Contractor would grow up to be an architect because doodling on paper with sketches of forts, bikes and guns, etc. was more his thing.

The award-winning architect, a graduate of the Rachna Sansad Academy of Architecture in Mumbai went on to pursue his post-graduate course from the Columbia University after which New York followed. Having commenced his career in a cousin's law firm in 1968 with T Khareghat as an Apprentice Architect, he became the associate partner in the same firm in 1977. "Ever since college, I had dreamt of setting up my individual firm that would work in two shifts, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and from 6 p.m. to 9 a.m. When I discussed this dream with my friends

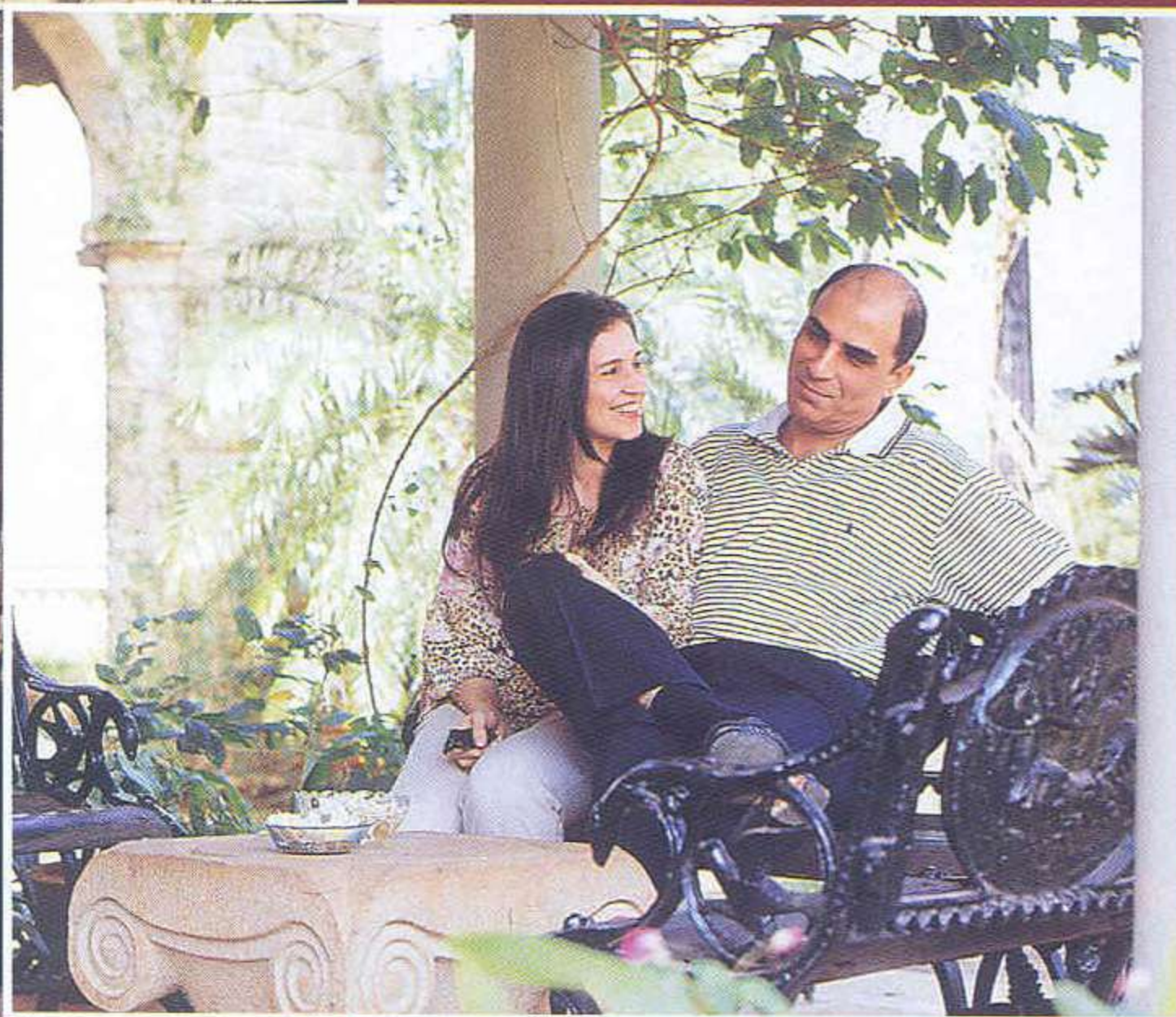


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**"I have produced so many pictures of countries where they have reclaimed land virtually the size of Mumbai city. Singapore has reclaimed thousands of acres and look at how beautiful the city is."
—Hafeez Contractor**



Pearl and Hafeez's little Kodak moment.

they would make fun of me, but it has happened." From humble beginnings till 1982 when he began his own private practice and from that moment onwards there has been no looking back.

We beg him to confess that people only joke when they say, 'Hafeez does not even have his own private cabin in his law firm—he works from a huge table parked in the centre of the office.' He retorts in his *bama* baritone (Parsi colloquial), "for what do I need a cabin? My job involves working with my team constantly for which a big table is adequate." Surely one needs space for creativity? Hafeez corrects, "There is no bar on creativity. I usually create as I speak to my clients."

Speaking of creativity, why is Hafeez Contractor almost only known for towering edifices? We realize we have been absolutely clueless of his versatility, "I have 250 architects working for me. One should do all kinds of jobs, small, big, the ones that pay very well, while some just for the acclaim. For example I do low cost mass housing and high profile villas. Versatility is my forte." He continues, "I can switch on and switch off from one style to another. I can do one house incorporating stone and arches, while the other can be completely contemporary. The biggest example of this, are the two hotels which we have done, the Grand Maratha and the Hyatt Regency near Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai whose architectures are in stark contrast to each other. Even the Blue Dart office behind these hotels is done by us. So only within a furlong we have done three to four distinct styles as the demands for each were different." And smaller homes? "Oh, many, Vivek Talwar's home, Laxmi Mittal's and Naresh Goyal of Jet Airways."

It would have been nearly futile to come away not having asked Hafeez about the much controversial subject about reclaiming land on the east coast of Mumbai. Hafeez is prompt, "We recently had a presentation at Bandra Reclamation with Indian architects and builders regarding the subject. It is a wrong notion that anything to do with reclamation is wrong. I have produced so many pictures of countries where they have reclaimed land virtually the size of Mumbai city. Mumbai has a periphery of 126 kms and the Palm City in Dubai itself has created a periphery of 120 kms. If it was so bad why are other countries doing it? Singapore has reclaimed thousands of acres and look at how beautiful the city is. Hong Kong is reclaiming and is going to create an island literally the size of Hong Kong. Huge bays are reclaimed creating massive spaces for people. Here in Mumbai there is constant struggle for space but just because a few people said that reclamation is bad, the media took it up. I feel it is not correct. I have proposed a reclamation of only 430 acres, and that too to be made into forest area, so as to create huge green spaces for Mumbai."

But his suggestion has met the wrath of environmentalists. His statements are infuriatingly bold but he has the gumption to support them whole-

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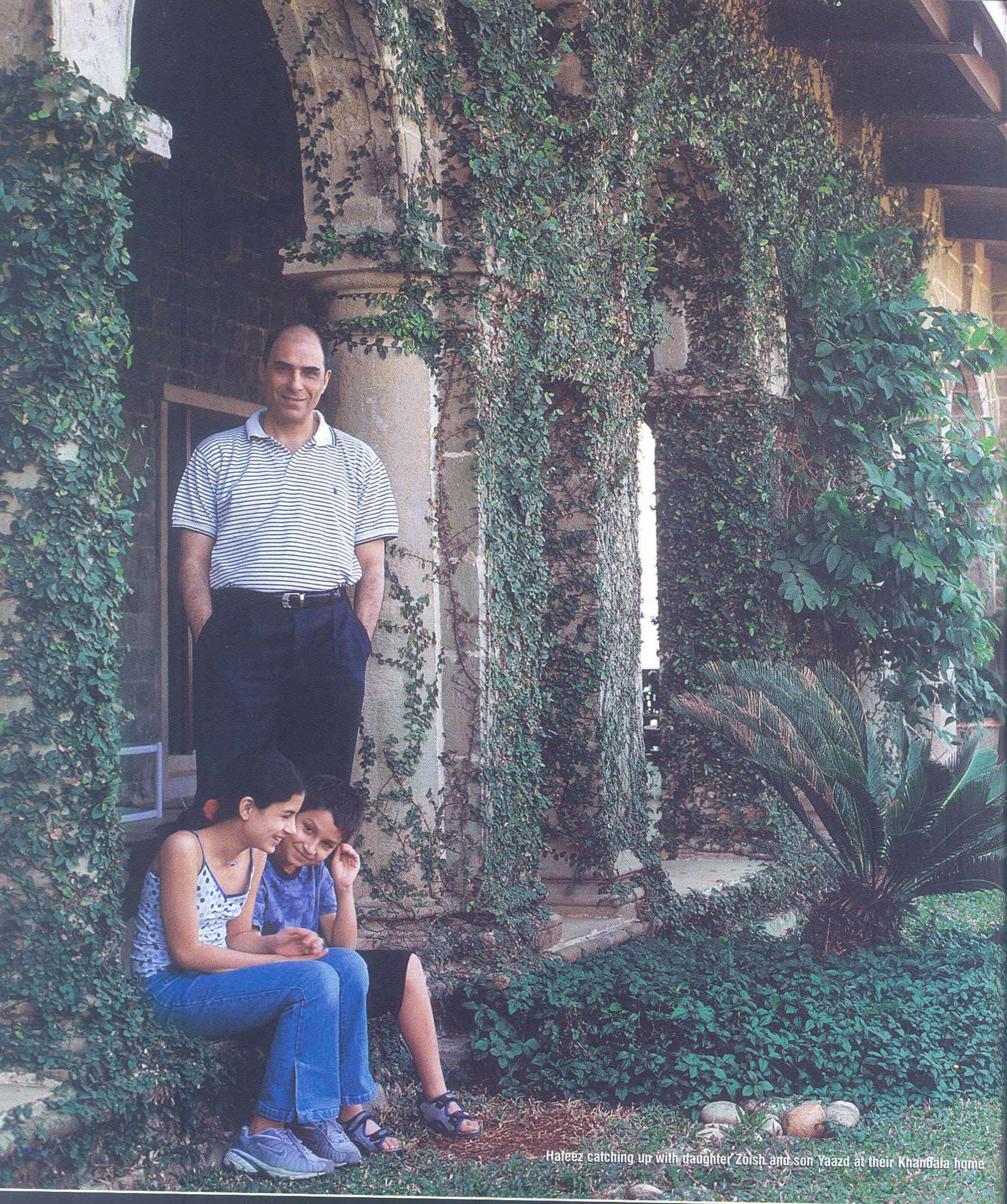
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Pearl Contractor in the vibrant hall of her living room. Their duplex apartment in Mumbai is home to prominent artists like Satish Gujral, Bidut and Vimal Sharma

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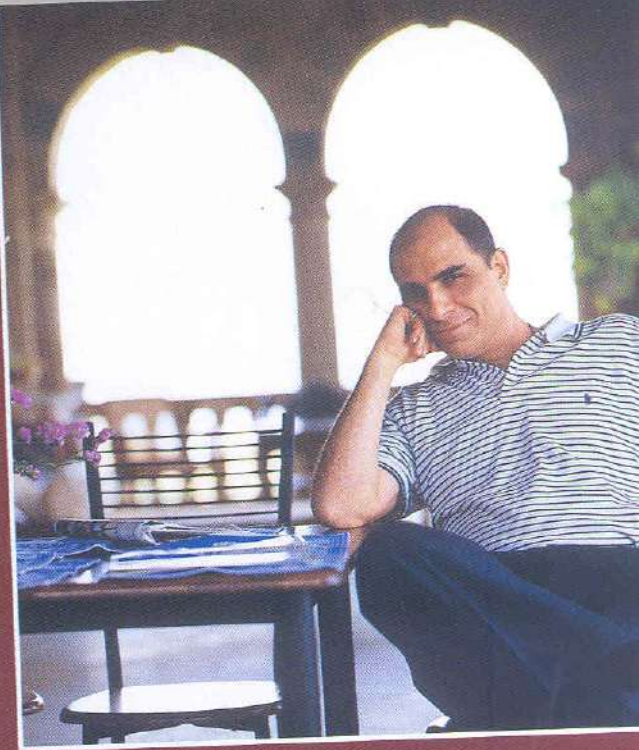
Hafeez catching up with daughter Zoish and son Yaazd at their Khanpala home

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Contemplating his next pièce de resistance

Hafeez's family informs us that wife Pearl, a popular interior designer, is the best thing to have happened to Hafeez—truly his better half. Hafeez was 41 years before he said the loaded 'I do'. "When I started, I used to live in a tiny apartment with just one bedroom and kitchen. I could not even think of marriage under those circumstances. I wanted to make sure that I was very well settled with a good home first."



heartedly. "Let me put it this way. The environmentalists have done some good, but their role is that of a watchdog. They are not there to imagine and provide solutions. They say 'protect the environment', I say 'protect and develop, otherwise it is not protection'."

In a recent opinion poll done in a newspaper for Mumbai's leading professionals, Hafeez was once again in the spotlight for voting himself the top architect of tomorrow. How bombastic, complained his colleagues! "Yes I do believe that I will be a great architect. When you have to be modest, be modest, but you do not have to be modest for the sake of it."

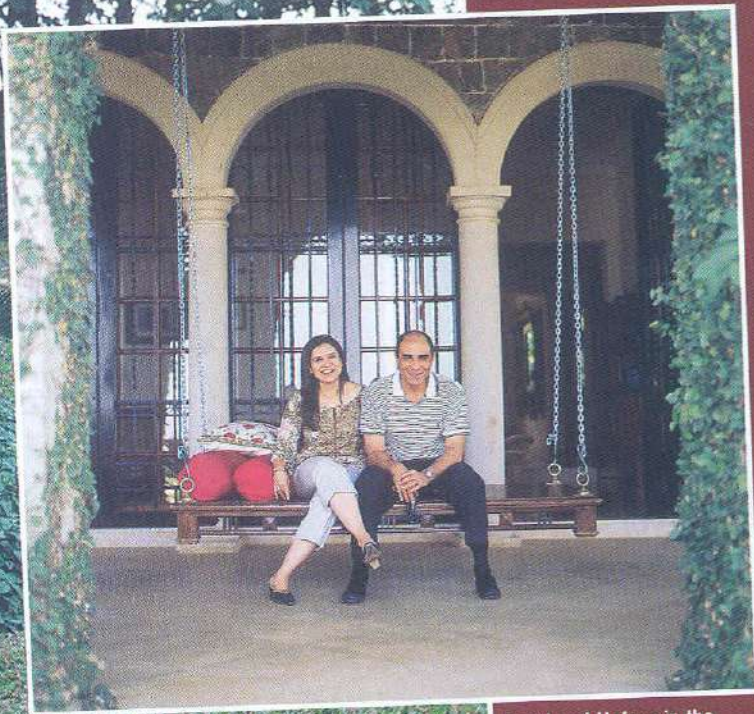
Wife Pearl walks in to announce lunch. She has been rightly christened as she indeed is as pretty as a pearl and a fabulous host at that. Pearl, in her own right is a popular interior designer. She refutes completely that Hafeez is a difficult person to live with. A career woman and a mother of two—daughter Zoish, 12 years of age and son Yaazd, 8 years. Pearl is known in her friend circles to possess an eye for detail. At her parties every minute feature is taken care of—her table arrangements are good enough for a book!

Hafeez's family who joins them on the weekends insists on interrupting to inform us that Pearl is the best thing to have happened to Hafeez—truly his better half. We inquire little into the couple's courtship and this time Hafeez offers to tell, "Pearl had come to me for a job and I have a policy at the firm not to hire good looking girls." We could not say if that was meant to be a joke, "But since we did not need anybody at the time, I told her that we would consider her if an opening came up. I then bumped into her after two years by chance while at an official shopping spree at Shyam Ahuja's boutique. She was managing the boutique, cupid popped up and I thought, why not give it a try."

Hafeez was 41 years before he said the loaded 'I do'. "When I started, I used to live in a tiny apartment with just one bedroom and kitchen. I could not even think of marriage under those circumstances." Would he expect his children to join him in business especially since daughter Zoish is already showing artistic expertise, "No, I will want my children to explore any avenues they like to, after all a great barber is far better than a bad architect."

One world famous monument he wishes he had built is the, "Empire State Building in New York city. What a satisfied man the architect must have been. For me anything that would go down in history or make people stand around to think that this is really something, would do it for me." Hafeez is currently working on a project in Dubai for the tallest residential building of 120 floors. This will be the only kind of residency in the world while he is also attached with a prominent commercial project in China. Well we think he has arrived long time back though Hafeez seems to feel like he has only just begun.

Parizad Contractor



Pearl and Hafeez in the verandah of their beautiful weekend hacienda in Khandala

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