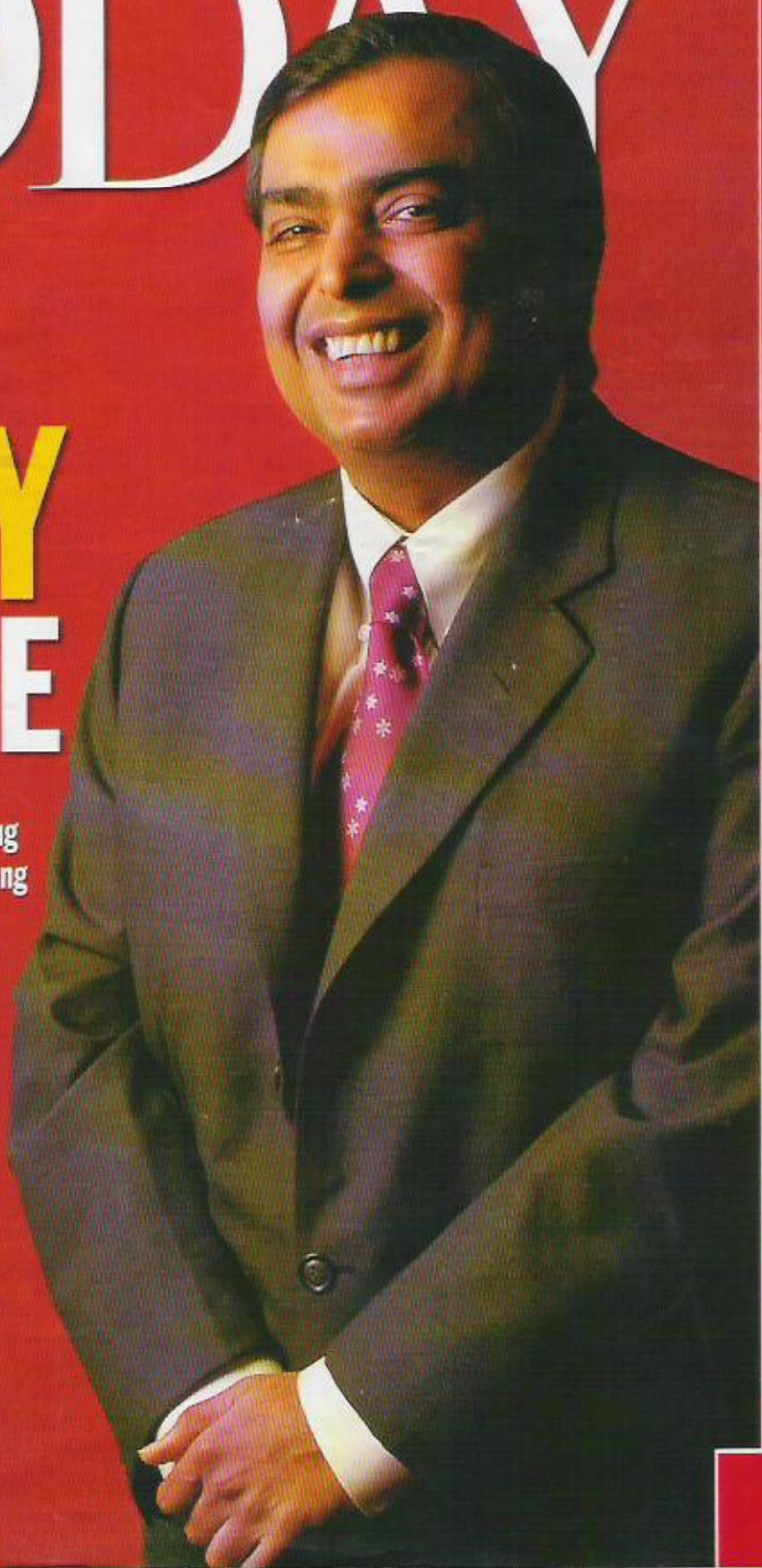


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# THE MONEY MACHINE

## Betting on India, thinking big and executing mega projects at a blistering pace puts the Reliance chairman among the world's top wealth creators





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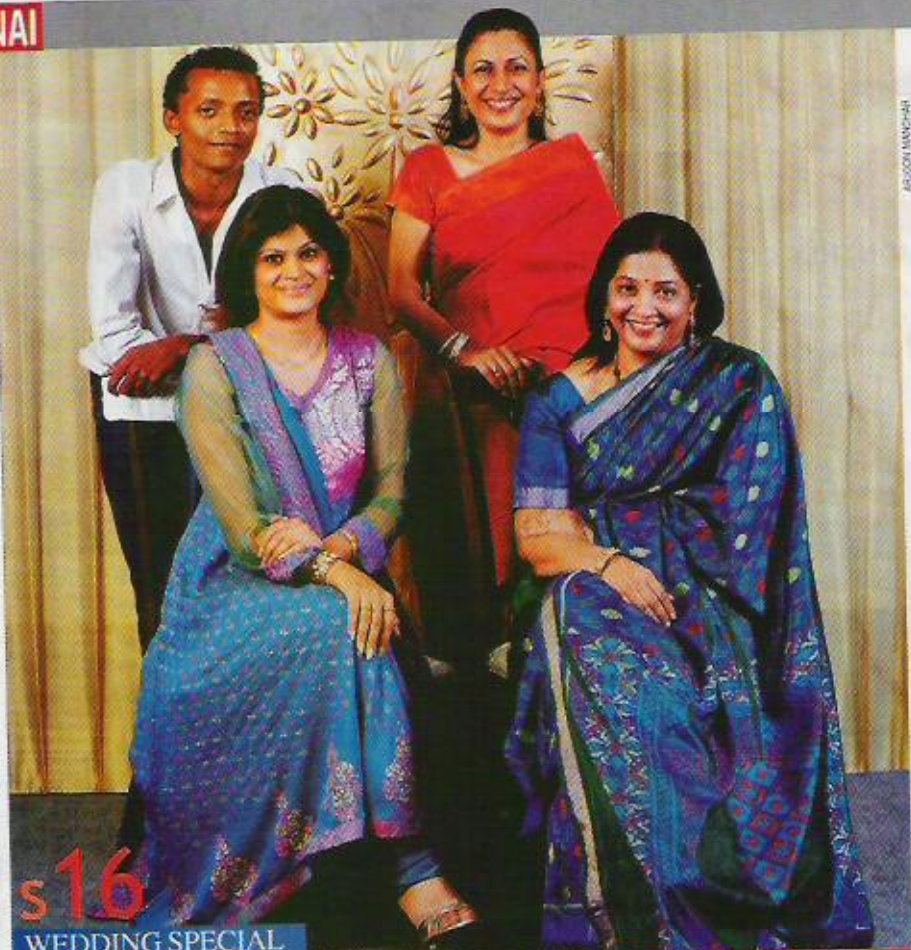
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## wedding: planners

an affair  
to remember

MARRIAGES ARE MADE IN HEAVEN,  
WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM  
THE CITY'S WEDDING PLANNERS

**F**or the last four months, for an hour every evening, Lakshmi or Saraswati's phone lines are busy. No, they're not busy chatting. The sisters, the wedding planning duo behind Event Art, are talking shop with a Tamil Brahmin NRI client from California who is taking stock of the pre-wedding progress for her daughter's nuptials slated for the end of November. The excitement of the lady on the other end is palpable. Suddenly, she chips in with an American accent that belies her Tamilian roots, making a request for "oil-free *murukkus*". Without batting an eyelid, the sisters make a mental note of how to execute this demand.

That passion for putting up a good show has significantly impacted the world of weddings that have blossomed from ritualistic and solemn ceremonies to grand and fun-filled occasions. Keen to make his sister Vivian's wedding a memorable celebration, Sidney S. Sladen (a prominent couturier in the city) decided to organise a grand sangeet for her in February last year. Helping him fulfil his dream of making it ultra special and fun was long-time buddy Lakshmi Krishnaswamy. To-

gether they put together a grand party at a beach house on East Coast Road. "It was a lot of work," says Sladen. "We had to plan the décor, put up a stage, decide on lighting, music, bar, food, DJ... But we had a blast." Adds Krishnaswamy, "We realised we were having so much fun working together." Almost instantly, the duo formed Fuchsias, an event management outfit that conceives and executes a host of fun shows, with wedding being the priority.

Not far from Fuchsias, two women—Vidya Singh and Rekha Rangaraj—are ideating over the seven weddings they've already been booked for this season. Singh is back in town after a three-week holiday in Europe but even before she gushes about her shopping binges and walks in the parks of London, she fills in her friend about a client she met there. "The mother sat next to me," she says, "and the bride and groom on a couch opposite me. Holding her fiancé's hands, the girl chatted about how she'd like her wedding to be. A truly charming couple, it's going to be a pleasure working with them." Her friend for many years, and partner since '05, Rangaraj, flashes a warm smile. When







Lakshmi (left) and Saraswati get set for another stylish wedding

people love their job, it shows.

"Weddings today have become pan-Indian," says Vidya Singh, princess of Vijayanagaram, who forayed into the business soon after she helped two NRI friends piece together a grand wedding in Chennai. "You're so good with organisation," one of them said to Singh, "Why don't you do this as a business?" Singh took that suggestion seriously, partnered with Rangaraj, and the duo started Sumyog two years ago.

For Lakshmi and Saraswati, whose production house, Jaishree Pictures, has made an impression on the small screen, transitioning into wedding planning from organising a host of events for corporate houses was almost a seamless process of evolution. "Thanks to our strong foothold in the media, logistics and

Novel approach and attention to detail is key. We try to understand the client's needs and customise our offerings to blend beauty and perfection.

LAKSHMI,  
Event Art

people management has always been our strength," says Lakshmi. After conceptualising an array of events for IT and ITES companies, an opportunity to organise a wedding knocked at Event Art's doors. "It was a Christian wedding for a couple from the US," recalls Saraswati. "We were quite clueless about Christian weddings, but we did our research, constantly communicated with the bride over mail, and did a great job."

Business has been brisk at Fuchias too. Sladen and Krishnaswamy have called the shots at over five top-end weddings, and have 14 events lined up before the end of 2007. They particularly remember a prominent wedding they conducted at Chettinad where they transformed a drab



## wedding

mandap painted in shades of blue into an ethereal setting draped in fabrics of mustard and gold. "We put up pillars and gave the entire area an Indo-Western look," says Krishnaswamy.

Rooted in fashion, Fuchsias also considers colour an important element of the look and feel of a wedding. "We usually discuss with our clients what they plan to wear," says Sladen who creates stage décor keeping that in mind. "We like

Photographs by ARJUN MANGALAM

## Knot notes

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to innovate on our designs and ensure every function of a wedding is a different experience," Krishnaswamy says telling us of a Muslim wedding they organised. There were four different functions, and three in the same venue. "For the engagement ceremony, that was held at a beach house, we made the setting romantic with a thousand lotuses and candles floating in the pool and the entire stage backdrop was in shades of baby pink and silver. For the other three functions, we had different sets put up in the same place on three different days. For the haldi ceremony, we had yellow flowers, for the mehendi, the background was a sparkling red, and for the sangeet, we strung jasmine and lilies on the stage."

Event Art too prides itself on "novelty in approach, and attention to detail". In addition to co-ordinating the A to Z of a wedding (from invitation design, postage and

"We discuss what the clients plan to wear and create stage décor keeping that in mind. We like to ensure every function is a different experience."

SIDNEY S. SLADEN  
Fuchsias

courier, costumes and décor, take-away bags, gift packaging, make-up and music, valet service, food and beverage to marriage registration), the sisters like to make the occasion memorable.

For instance, three months ago, at a sangeet ceremony they organised for a leading exporter family in Karur (a town in Tamil Nadu), the entertainment interspersed dance with a stand-up act by a popular comedian. "The DJ belted out both Tamil and Hindi music," says Saraswati. "We try to understand each of our client's specific needs, and tailor-make our



Sidney S. Sladen and Lakshmi Krishnaswamy ideate over stage décor



## wedding

offerings to blend beauty and perfection," adds Lakshmi.

Singh and Rangaraj's hands-on approach is said to be the key to Sumyog's success. "We treat it like our own daughter's wedding," they say. The other unique advantage they have is they are "people's people". "There's a huge element of joy in planning a wedding," says Singh. "Even after 18 hours of non-stop work, when our sets go up, there's an enormous amount of satisfaction and then you're convinced it's worth every moment of stress."

In the last two years of being in this business, Sumyog has spread its wings far and wide, having planned weddings in Chennai, Hyderabad and Salem too. They especially cherish their experiences in this small town in Tamil Nadu. "People are particularly warm and enthusiastic in towns and we literally become part of the family," says Rangaraj.

"Today you can order flowers from Thailand, tulips from Amsterdam, choose to have a Mughal-style wedding or opt for a Victorian look."

VIDYA SINGH,  
Sumyog

Apart from adding elegance to a wedding, the duo is extremely conscious about professionalism in quality standards. In the pre-discussion period, they present detailed drawings of every aspect of the set in its "minutest detail". "When the sets are being put up, we follow those drawings ditto, so we don't veer away from what we have promised the client," says Rangaraj whose strengths are "ideation in colour and design" while Singh's skill sets lie in "execution and personnel management". In Sumyog's world, the sky it seems, is the limit. "Now you can

have flowers from Thailand, tulips from Amsterdam, choose to have a Mughal-style wedding or opt for a Victorian look," says Singh who used her pool of resources recently to hunt down a Rajasthani man in Mint Street who knew how to tie *safas* (turbans). "A south Indian bride was insistent that all the men in her family tie *safas*," adds Singh who made it possible.

If weddings are the flavour of the season, planners are its manna from heaven. "Today weddings have become a status symbol," says Sladen while the ladies from Event Art feel that it is people's insatiable

demand for different things. Rangaraj lists three important reasons for this metamorphosis. "Indian families have become nuclear today and there are no uncles and aunts to pitch in," she says. "Secondly, today you can dare to dream because the onus is on someone else. Thirdly, you can keep adding to your requirements and rest assured they will be met."

As Singh puts it: "Every wedding is like a theatrical production with no dress rehearsal of any sort." And these planners ensure that tying the knot is a piece of five-tier wedding cake.

by Akhila Krishnamurthy



Bekha Rangaraj (left) and Vidya Singh gear up for the wedding season