

HOMING IN

A regular column by foreigners who have made Goa their home

THE GERMAN WAY, IN GOA ITALY

Architect VOLKER SCHARFENBERGER adds the inspiration of Goa's peculiar charm to 32 years of experience to create designs that speak for themselves

By DIELE D'SOUZA

Gollum runs out to greet visitors. She's an ugly little dog who more than makes up for her disproportionate features with tons of friendliness. It's a warmth that runs through the entire office at Patzschke & Scharfenberger Pvt Ltd where Volker Scharfenberger – who named Gollum after the Lord Of The Rings' hobbit – runs a tight ship, swayed slightly by the sensibilities of his Indian staff.

Having moved to Goa four years ago with his wife Claudia and daughter Sofie – one of three children, the German architect went from mega management to micro management in the blink of an eye. "I was working in the United Arab Emirates before, dealing with huge projects in Abu Dhabi with many staff. There were at least 50 employees under me, of which 45 were Indians. So I was very familiar with their way of thinking and attitude, which I must admit is very different from other countries," he explains.

A chance visit to India for a colleague's wedding cemented the family's thoughts to move. They met German architect Robert Patzschke, who already had his office in Goa, and



Office trip to Quepem

Volker partnered with him to run the office now in Dona Paula which has 10 architects, a visual designer and an MEP (mechanical, electrical, plumbing) engineer.

Claudia reminisces, "I could not imagine living in Mumbai, but we liked Goa and thought we could handle life here. So far, the life is good, and the people are friendly, warm and tolerant. You really enjoy it!"

The Scharfenberger approach to architecture is different from the way most architects in Goa function. Typically, offices in the state provide only aesthetic consultancy and work. Patzschke & Scharfenberger, on the other hand, provides a whole package. "We are responsible for the entire project, including developing

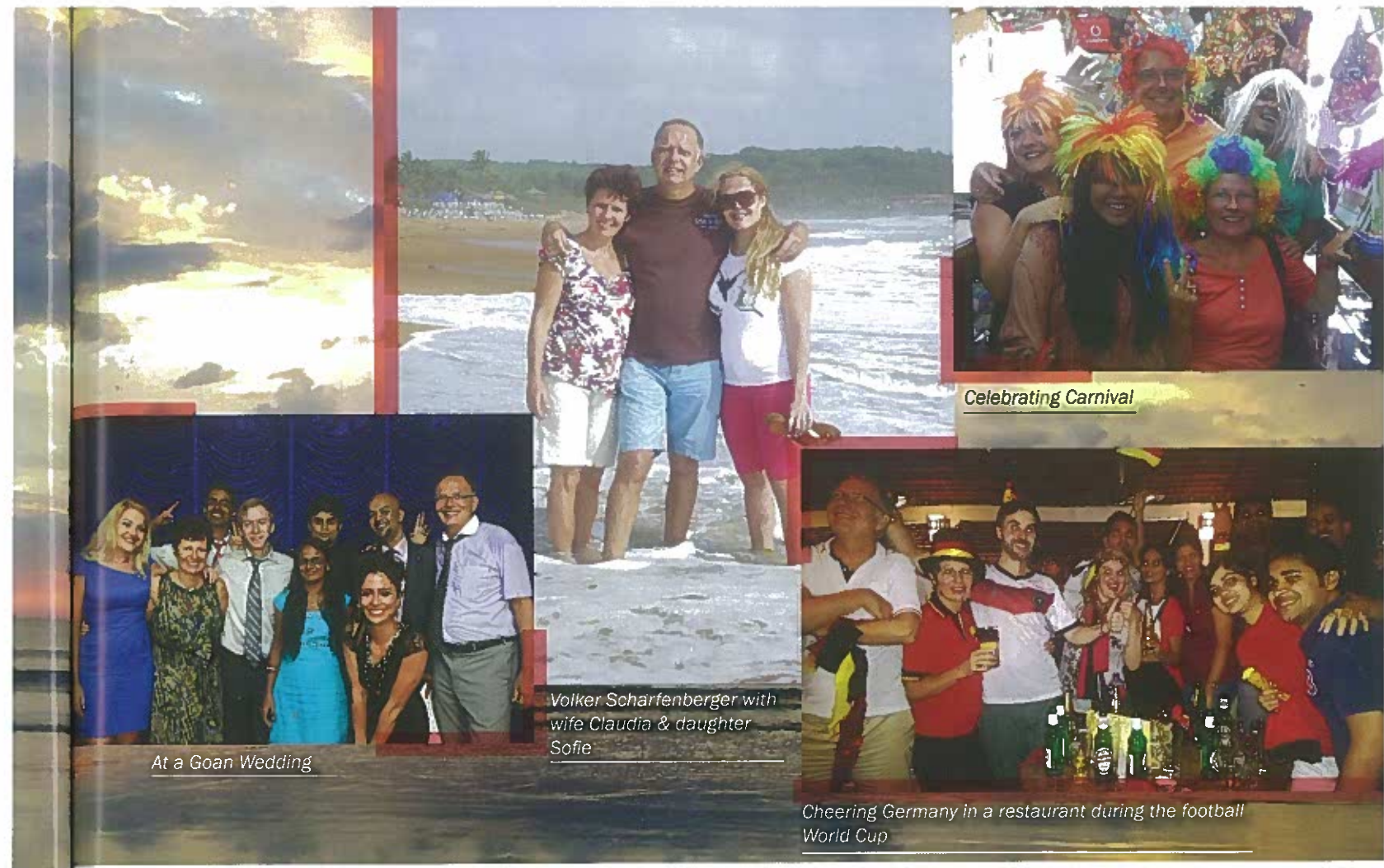
the property, planning, designing, aesthetics as well as technical aspects," says Volker, adding that consultants are hired only for special requirements such as hospitals or large hotels.

This eliminates a common problem that architects in Goa face, when clients hire technical consultants such as electricians and plumbers separately, leaving them to their own devices to incorporate elements, most

often, without consideration to the architect's overall vision.

The firm handles around six or seven assignments at a time, and are currently engaged in hospitality and private projects in Goa and Tamil Nadu. Having been in Goa for four years now, Volker finds himself naturally following his principle of imbibing local touches into his designs.

He explains, "In the 40 years that I've been an architect, I always try to implement the local spirit and traditional architectural elements special to the region. There is a valuable tradition in architecture in Goa with regard to Portuguese history and background that appeals to me. In architecture, it is important to incorporate these elements into a



Celebrating Carnival

Volker Scharfenberger with wife Claudia & daughter Sofie

At a Goan Wedding

Cheering Germany in a restaurant during the football World Cup

new development." But he warns against blind copying of motifs and designs. "If it does not meet expectations or fit into modern culture and lifestyle, it should not be used. It is worthwhile to use traditional architecture which can easily be accommodated environmentally with modern living and housing requirements," he adds, firmly stating that modern buildings with glass and aluminium panels are not his style at all.

The Scharfenbergers' move to Goa has brought many changes for the family, chief among them being a certain sense of leisure. "It's a luxury here," says Claudia. "We rise when we 'wake up' which is at around 8am, whereas in Germany we would be up by 6am. The office is also right where we live, and we can decide when to start work and when to end."

Initially, the family lived in Altinho and discovered a rather shocking trend. Where in Germany they were used to one or two boisterous festivals, they found that the community in Mala enjoyed celebrating all events that ran through the year. "Festival celebrations

were a big thing with lots of noise and music!" she says.

They have now moved to a villa in Dona Paula, which houses both the office and their home. The weekends are taken up with restorations to the house, but they enjoy taking time off to soak in their life here. "When it's dry, we go to the beaches, mainly in south Goa, where we read and enjoy the sun, swim and have a nice meal. Even in the monsoon, we drive to the forest and it's wonderful! Unlike in Germany where it gets very cold if you are wet, here it doesn't really matter," states Volker. The family also enjoys visiting heritage homes, spice farms and attending music concerts whenever possible.

When there's time, they travel around India, going to Rajasthan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kerala. "We have not yet visited the Taj Mahal!" quips Claudia, almost decidedly stating where one of their future vacations will be.

But they could do without the dirt and almost omnipresent garbage inconvenient power cuts, inconvenient power cuts, the incomprehensible and

seemingly endless public construction and repair works in the same places and often annoying manner in which appointments are cancelled without notice. And they miss their friends, and family in Germany – a daughter, her husband and their one-year-old son; a son who recently started working; and Volker's 87-year-old mother.

Gollum patters across the office floor towards Sofie, the Scharfenbergers' 28-year-old daughter who decided to make the move to India with them. "I may have been born and may have grown up in Germany and Qatar, but I do not feel very comfortable there," says Sofie, as she gives Gollum a tummy rub.

She had no expectations from Goa when she first arrived, and found it strange to see cows sitting in the middle of the road. But Sofie has integrated well to life in Goa, enjoying the beach and having a good time with her friends.

And with her eyes twinkling, she adds, "I love the spicy food. Now, even when I eat German food at home, I add pickles and spices!" ■