

PEAKLIFE

ARCHITECTS OF LEGACY



THE MIDAS TOUCH

Dr. C Vinod Hayagriv, Managing Director, C Krishniah Chetty & Sons is a well known personality in the world of gems and jewellery, both in India and abroad. Here is a candid conversation with the pioneer.

By Bindu Gopal Rao

Tucked away in a busy area of Bengaluru, is a beautiful home that seems straight out of a fairy tale with a well laid out beautiful garden and a lovely white door that invites you in. I am at the lovely home of Dr. C Vinod Hayagriv, Managing Director, C Krishniah Chetty & Sons Pvt. Ltd. Vinod started his career in 1975 and joined the family business full time after his Gemological studies in Santa Monica and Hong Kong. Today, he is a well-known personality in the world of gems and jewellery across India and the world. Vinod was unanimously elected as the Chairman of The All India Gems and Jewellery Trade Federation, was Director on the Board of World Diamond Council, a Director on The Gems and Jewellery Sector Skills Council and a member of The Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council. With enriched experience which is often sought along with his innovative ideas, Vinod confidently occupies the 'thought leader' position in the industry. He travels extensively for business and service. An avid traveller and a club golfer for 35 years, he is the recipient of several awards including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Gems and Jewellery Industry and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Retail Sector in 2016.

Tell us about your early days, and being

part of a family of jewellery how it influenced your life?

My childhood was spent when the economy and business of the country was very different, it was more restrictive while today it is more accommodating. You can mix generations together now and have a team of young and old people to come up with something more innovative. Also growing up in a jeweller's home, I did imbibe a lot of traits of "what a jeweller ought to be." In fact my childhood was very interesting and several conversations would happen around gemstones and jewellery and I would pay attention to them. In fact I was quite clear that I wanted to get into our own business while my family did give me a freehand to do what I wanted. At one time I was very keen to set up a mail order business and I started Sigma Gold a company dealing with high end leather accessories for men and women to be entirely sold without a retail presence. However as there were delays in shipment that caused a disconnect between what I promised and could deliver, I decided to give it up.

When did you join the business and how have you taken it forward?

I initially joined the business when I was about 16 years old. I was told that the most important task I had was to transform the organization. In fact I had 6 months free post

my 10th standard exams so I joined as an intern. My task was to build a database of our customers and I complied this with the help of three other staff and we used records from our store room to create registers to document customer details area wise. I also had some good mentors in the organisation, apart from my father and a large number of employees were receptive to my entry into the office. The fact that I was accepted within the organisation was my first success and it was out of mutual respect and the fact that I showed that time was not a constraint. I would be available at any time if they needed me and that was a crucial point in being accepted. Also I was never a person who shied away from getting my hands dirty. I never hesitated to sit on the floor and be with the craftsmen just to understand how wax was made. In fact one of the craftsmen told me that there was no work outside anyone's scope and the biggest tools of the trade were your hands and your mind. He told me to dive into anything that came in my path and that is something I imbibed early on. In fact in our business we have seen a trend where people mature after 50 and join the business after their retirement, so we have a new policy announcement that we will make soon that if you are above the age of 58 you will have different working hours compared to the rest of the staff.

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What is the pioneering work you have done after joining the business?

I think letting people know what you are capable of is important and letting outside people recognise that is key. So we decided that one of our goals would be to shoot for awards across various sections of business ranging from design to employee recognition within key functions. Fortunately in the last 10 years we have won several awards and recently winning the "best employer in retail" was a big feather in our cap.

Tell us about the new trends in jewellery?

The consumer is changing so there is a coexistence of the old world jewellery and also a need for a new age jewellery line. Also it is very difficult to put a finger on what that new age jewellery is as it is different for different people. So we are working on projects where we are looking to create lines that have never been done by us. We started this in 2012 with our line Denims & Diamonds and this made a big impact when we showcased this at the India International Jewellery Week in Mumbai. At this point of time we are working on 10 carat diamond jewellery for which I believe we have a future.

What does art mean to you?

In one line, art is a thing of beauty and it has to reflect your personality. Of course each person has a few traits of personality in them and each piece of art must be able to express that in one way or the other. So whatever art I choose to buy must reflect something of my belief.

Being an art connoisseur, tell us about the kind of art you collect?

For me an interesting part of art is very old, antique, heritage art that was either crafted or put together. It would be old Tanjore which is even today very interesting but to find that we will need to go into Tamil Nadu or approach some down to earth collectors who would like to part with their collection. The other aspect is crafted art which uses silver or metal to create forms. I prefer silver and this is an old technique that is not done today as it was originally made by hand and the craftsmen have disappeared. Looking ahead I think a deep dive into culture and technology together will create the art of tomorrow. I also have a collection of the first newspapers from



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1880 and it is very interesting to read them today. It takes you back to what happened in the city and the editors were mostly British and happenings of India involving the Maharajas. It gives me a good perspective of India and Bangalore in the past, something you will never find in history books.

How do you choose the artists you want to collect?

Personally I like to speak to the artist and ask

them to make the art work specifically for me. I rarely pick up art from the shelf. So if there is an exhibition of artists I will attend the show and then make the artist create a custom piece for me. I am looking for people who have the mindset to understand what I need as I would like the art piece that I own to be unique.

What is your advice for people who want to become art collectors?



I advice what I am doing, follow your heart and think about where you will put the art in your home or workspace. It is important that you are able to display the art you have. The art must have a story, perhaps mythology or modern thinking but it must connect with you.

What does success mean to you?

For me success is having the least number of people who don't like you. This means that by and large you have done the right things in your life and people believe in you. I always feel why people say things that they don't mean. I understand to err is human but you must accept it and move on while letting people know you are error prone and you stand correct.

How does art influence your jewellery

designs?

Art pervades everywhere and teams find it difficult with me as I always ask "where is the beauty in this?" I think it is important to inculcate the aesthetics of art in everything you do. It could be a data in a document and for me I think without art there is no life.

What are your future plans for your business?

I have a lot of plans that I am rolling out one by one. I am sure we will never be a large chain store, rather it will be a destination of class and unique products that is stuffed with good art. It is a place that people will come in if they are looking for something unusual. It is more a high thinking product and operations portfolio that I have for the brand. Going forward what I would like to do personally is

work more closely with designers rather than managing the business.

What does wealth mean to you?

There is only one wealth that is having happiness and good friends as it is not a great thing to be lonely as it could make you bitter. Money can make you internally bitter and its pursuit will never make you happy. You can lose your temper or calm in a situation but that is life. Recently when I reconnected with my old friends, it made me realise that this is what the true meaning of wealth is.

Tell us something about your education initiatives?

We have a foundation called C Krishniah Chetty Foundation where a portion of each sale goes to the same and it has a Section 80 G exemption and we are looking to purely use that for education and healthcare. In fact we do not even use those funds for the administration of the Foundation as it comes from the other group company. We use it for scholarships to needy children, infrastructure and activities school. We go beyond cheque book charity and we have 92 volunteers who actually visit the school, interact with teachers and students and also helping with creating events like having a sports day. It is important that Government schools have the same facilities as private schools and ensure that the money, time and effort are spent right. We will involve the Government and bring about the awareness and encouragement to make a difference to build these institutions. We have about 150 students currently and I am hoping that it can at least grow to 400 soon.

What kind of succession plan do you have in place?

I believe there are adequate people who can easily take the role I am doing today. This also means a team work is required and that should lead to the successor. I am of the opinion that it should be a Board managed organization that is professionally run and promotes the brand.

What is your advice to aspiring entrepreneurs?

If you have the gumption, conviction and mental strength you must be an entrepreneur. Else you are better off working in an organization where I suggest you work as if you are an entrepreneur and eventually end up as its Vice President. ▲