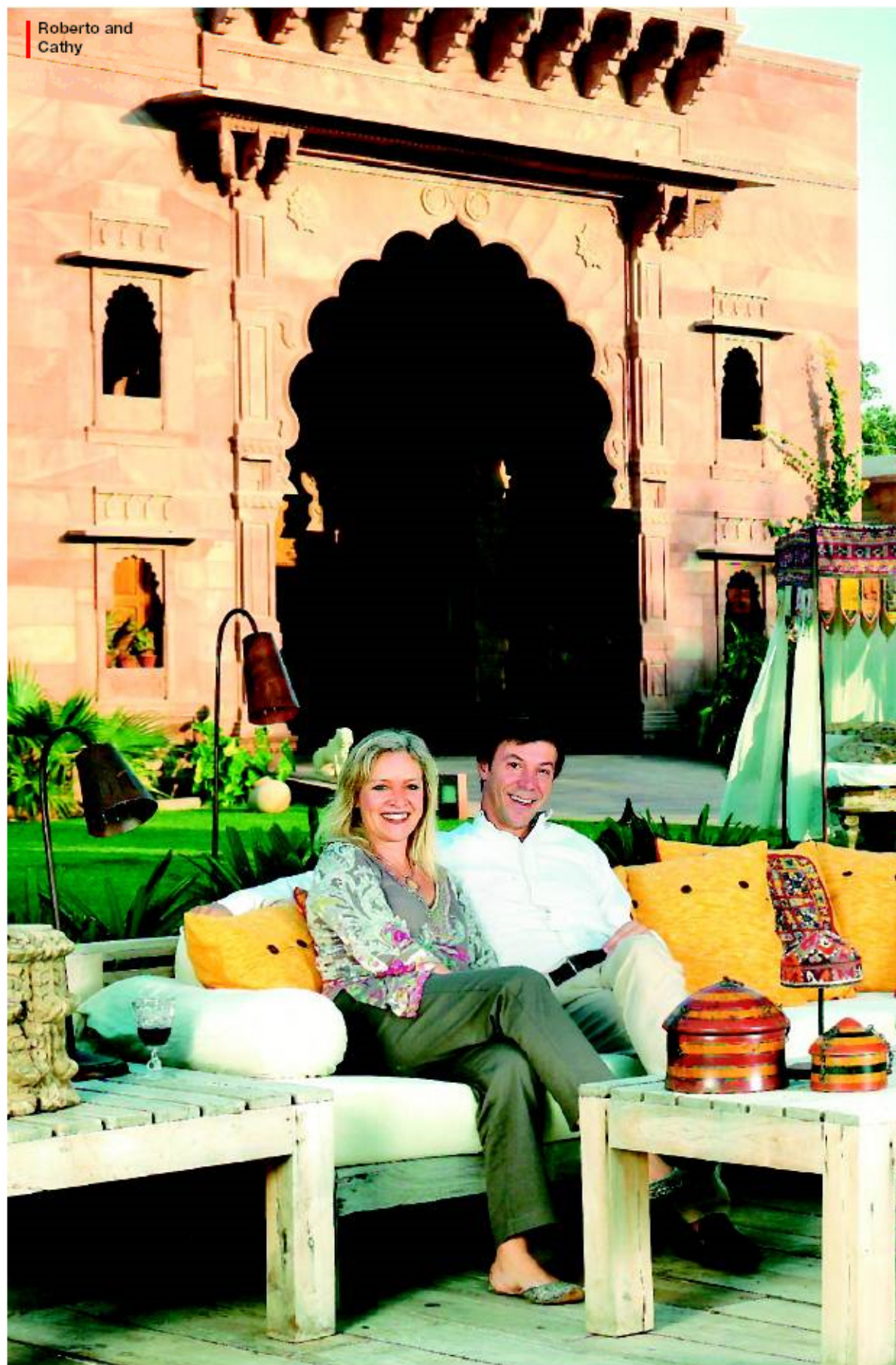


Roberto and Cathy



RAJASTHAN IS INCREDIBLE

ROBERTO NIEDDU IS AN ITALIAN, BUT FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES, HE'S AN INDIAN. A RAJASTHANI, ACTUALLY. HE'S NOT ONLY GOT HIS BUSINESS BEARINGS HERE, BUT IS ALSO TRYING TO MAKE JODHPUR A GLOBAL CITY

MANDVI SHARMA
Times News Network

Roberto Nieddu, an Italian citizen, has been living in India since 1993. He has been involved in designing and creating his own fusion architecture and interiors for the past 20 years. Currently, he is the Consular Correspondent in Rajasthan for the Italian Embassy in India. He has been staying in Jodhpur for the past 17 years and says he can't think of quitting this sun-city, ever.

"I first came to India in 1993. I was a buyer of furniture at that time. Soon after, the guy I used to buy the furniture from became my partner, and we started a company in Jodhpur, with the main aim of export. When I was just a buyer, I was buying from Indonesia and Thailand also, but India's workmanship is something different altogether and that is what made me choose to do business from India. The art, culture and the talent in Rajasthan are the things that attracted me," he explains. Though Roberto is an Italian, his buyer days started when he was in America.

When Roberto chose to make Jodhpur his epicentre for business, he knew that he would have to face some difficulties as he came from a different culture. "Yes, initially when I started staying in Jodhpur 17 years ago, things were different. There was a huge cultural difference. The roads, the cars, means of communication and everything else were difficult to adjust to. When I was in Jodhpur, it was the era of trunk calls, the ones that took a full day to connect you to anyone out of the city you are living in. But I must confess that in the last 10 years, things have advanced very quickly. A lot of changes have come about in the city. At that time, everything was difficult to get used to – the food, way of living and communicating with people, and just living here – it was all very tough. Though Jodhpur needs a lot more of advancement in terms of infrastructure, etc, I am happy at the pace with which it is advancing. But if you ask me if I want to change Jodhpur, I would say no. As compared to the other cities, Jodhpur has retained its simplicity and the people are very nice. I have made some very good friends here in these years and they are very nice and caring people," says Roberto.

But having nice and friendly people is not the only thing that made Roberto choose to stay in this city

for so long. "Jodhpur is pivotal for my business. All the artisans and craftsmen are here. All the carpenters and everybody who are an essential part of what I do, are here. It is a quiet and very likeable city. I would not have stayed here for 17 years had I not got the kind of company and support from the people of Jodhpur that I have."

With the support of various embassies, Roberto founded the Centre for Performing Arts in Jodhpur some time ago. The goal of CRN, as the company is called, is to bring artistes from around the world and blend them with the local artistes of Rajasthan. "I have a dream – I want to make Jodhpur the ultimate cultural destination for artistes around the world. More than a hundred thousand people are working in the handicrafts sector here. They are dedicated and now they know the value of their work. My wife is also involved in the textile sector here in the vil-

lages of Rajasthan. She gets block prints done and work with me in my other companies. She shares my interests too, which is great. I am sure one day I will see my dream come true," he says.

Roberto is still an Italian citizen, even if he has spent 17 years in India. "I have built a home for myself here in Jodhpur and for me India is a very dear country. They will have to throw me out of here because otherwise I am not going to leave this country. I love it here! I am an Italian, but if I get a chance to apply for dual citizenship, then I would apply for Indian citizenship. Actually, I do feel like an Indian after so many years spent here," he says with a smile.

Roberto has a piece of advice for all the 'first time *firangs*' who come to India. "The people who come to India for the first time should come

with an open mind. They might look at the obvious negatives before looking at the positives – the dirt, poverty and so on. But India – and especially Rajasthan – is much more than all this. They should pay special attention to the culture, which is so rich and wonderful. And most importantly, people here are happy, no matter what situation they are in. They do want to advance, but they aren't cribbing about their current situation all the time. Rajasthan is incredible and we can learn a lot from Rajasthanis – tips that will keep everyone in the world happy and at peace," he concludes.

PEOPLE HERE ARE HAPPY, NO MATTER WHAT. THEY DON'T CRIB. WE CAN LEARN FROM THEM