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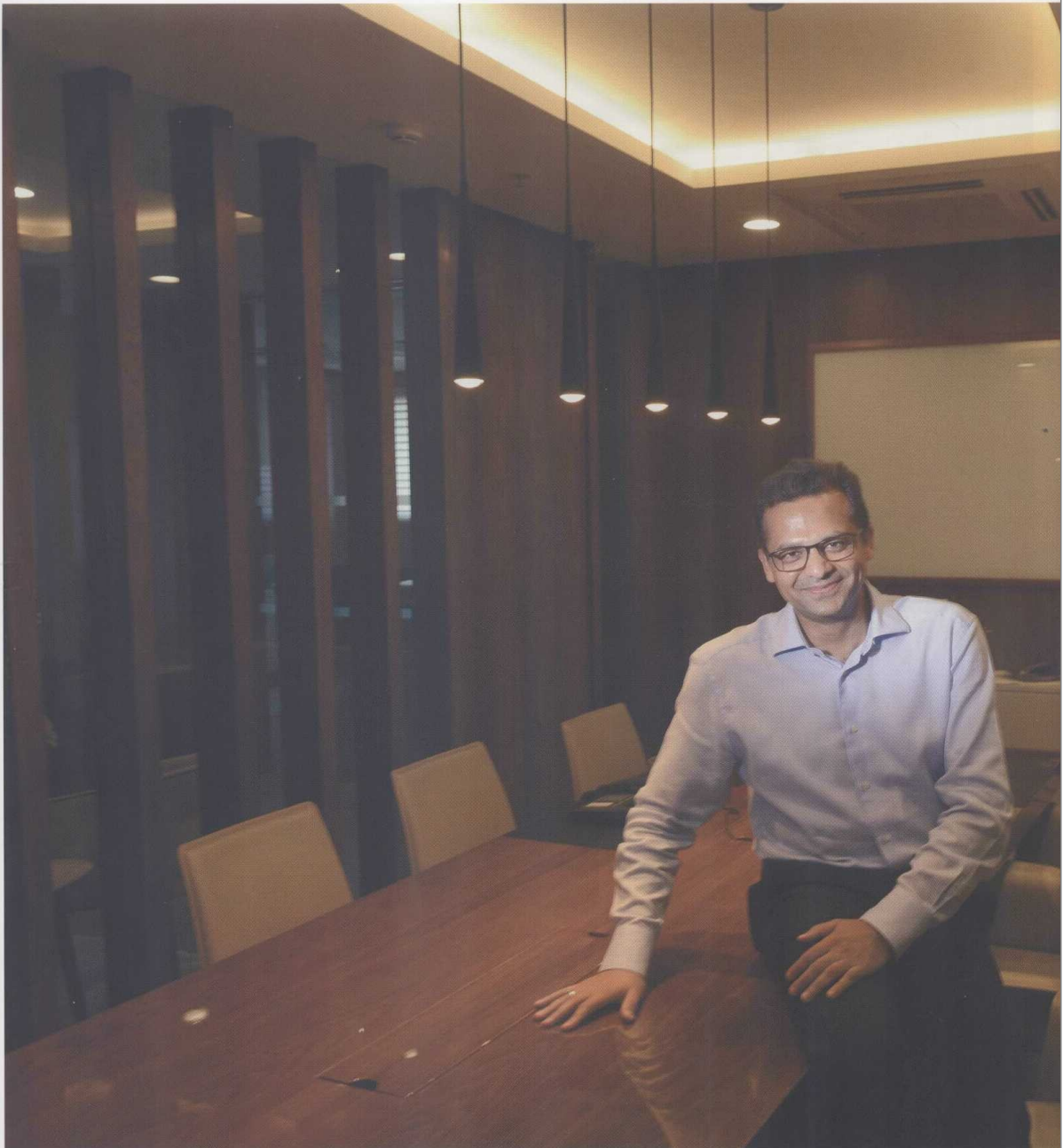
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THE CEO SAURABH MITTAL



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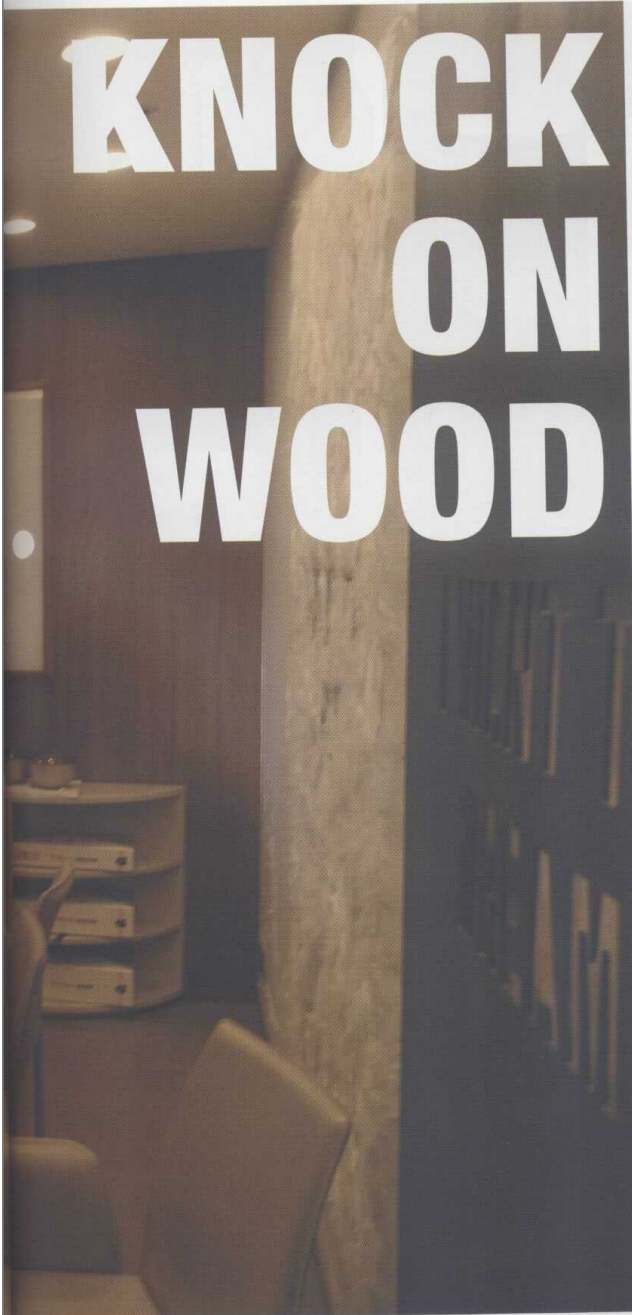
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KNOCK ON WOOD

THE CEO SAURABH MITTAL

WE SPEAK TO SAURABH MITTAL MD & CEO GREENLAM, THE MARKET LEADER IN THE WOOD FINISH BUSINESS IN INDIA AS WELL AS ASIA, WITH 17 PER CENT OF THE GLOBAL MARKET SHARE

BY: **BIKRAMJIT RAY**

HAVE YOU ever noticed how many different surfaces go in to make a hotel room or hotel lobby? Saurabh Mittal has. Maybe, its because he is in the business of making different surfaces (as long as they have something to do with wood). Mittal is the young dynamic Managing Director and CEO of Greenlam, a leader in the wood finish business. BW Hotelier got to speak with Mittal about his company and products. Greenlam is a relatively new company formed in November 2014, though as a brand, it is over two decades old. Greenlam, which Mittal heads, split with Greenply, the original company run under the chairmanship of his father Shiv Prakash Mittal, which is over two decade old. In Mittal's own words, his company is a very "interesting mix of youth and experience".

Speaking about his business, Mittal said, "Over the last one-and-a-half to two years, we have expanded the laminates businesses and added more products to our portfolio. We opened up a new facility in the UK and began new lines in flooring and doors". Greenlam de-merged and got listed under its own banner in March 2015. Of the Indian market, they are nearly 20 per cent of the value.

"We are 45 to 50 per cent of the export market, making us the world's third largest producers and Asia's number one," he said adding that as a new company, they have a market cap of around Rs 1600 crores.

But the business is not just laminates, as many laypeople may think. Greenlam does laminates, veneers, wood flooring as well as doors. 45 percent of revenues comes in from the international markets, with the company present in 100 countries as well as having an extensive

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PHOTOGRAPH: RITESH SHARMA

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domestic presence.

Mittal, who grew up across the country, schooling in St Paul's Darjeeling and Mayo College Ajmer. Doing his higher studies in Chennai before working in Mumbai and then finally arriving in the NCR has been involved in the business from the time when he was in college.

"I got been involved in the Greenply and Greenlam businesses, when I was still studying in Chennai. I used to do half-day college and then work," he said, stressing that this was not an inherited business as his father used to work in Kitply till 1993 and both father and son began their entrepreneurial journey together.

"I was involved in the Chennai business. We started from scratch and as an 18-and-a-half year old, my involvement was complete," he told us.

Mittal's father was the manufacturing head of Kitply with a deep understanding of the business (as had Mittal junior who remembers almost growing up in the factory where his father worked). It was a simple case of using the relationships, which they had already developed, in the market to get into the laminates as well as plywood businesses. The first seven or eight years were a struggle with the businesses having started with almost nil capital.

"The real traction for the company started from 2001 to 2002 when a couple of old failed or exited in laminates as well as the plywood industries. From then to 2014, when

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TALITY INDUSTRY

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we split our business, the combined company grew by 20 to 22 per cent every year," Mittal explained.

One of the reasons for the phenomenal success of the company was the fact that they got into the process of branding and expansion during the early years as well as cleaned up the professional practices of the trade.

"The smaller companies in the trade are an opportunity for us. Because they didn't streamline their books, they never attracted capital or talent or move up because their

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whole focus is on managing things and not building the business," Mittal said. Their company, was the first in the trade to raise private equity, he added.

"Now we are not just a laminate company. Within the laminates business we have introduced new products like bathroom partition, compact laminates, facade laminates, high gloss product. We have a range of veneers; we have a range of flooring, ready-made doors with panels. We are positioning ourselves post the de-merger as the only company in the wood panel laminates industry to have all decorative surfacing solutions," Mittal added.

There is still a long way to go, he confessed, as far as the industry was concerned. Usage is still very restricted to urban and semi urban markets, it's still not penetrating a large part of the country.

"We still haven't seen an explosion in demand. If you look at per capita consumption of our products, it is one of the weakest and we are quite well spread domestically as well as internationally. The midterm view is that there is going to be a lot of action in the near future," he said.

"All surfacing product in our trade are with us now. We have already added quite a fair share of products in the last two-and-a-half years. We have put in over Rs 250 crores of capital expenditure, while the markets were struggling, so our infrastructure is in place. We want to get into more allied products with similar target audience," Mittal said.



As far as the hospitality industry was concerned, Mittal's view was that all his products are already being specified and used in the hotel and hospitality industry. "If you look at the laminates business, we have products to be used on the doors, on the beds, panelling, table tops. We have compact laminates, which can be used, in premium hotels for façades, for the exteriors. Veneers is also a big consumption in the hotel industry, both natural as well engineers are used in doors, furniture, panelling," he added.

All we can say is, touch wood!

AUTHOR BIO: Bikramjit Ray is Executive Editor of BW Hotelier.

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