

From Glass Houses to Green Houses

A sprinkling of white frangipanis lines the stairway to the entrance of the blue villa. The crashing of ocean waves in the near distance punctuates every conversation in the office whilst the aroma of freshly brewed organic coffee wafts through the air. Here is where the next generation of impact startups are quietly being built. A dramatic change of scenery for Varun Chawla, co-founder of build3, who began his career as a high flying analyst on Wall Street, NY.

Born into a middle class Punjabi family, Varun was eager to get rich beyond belief while he was young. He worked hard to secure admission to a prestigious ivy league university in the US, guaranteeing him a ticket to the esteemed 'Good life'.

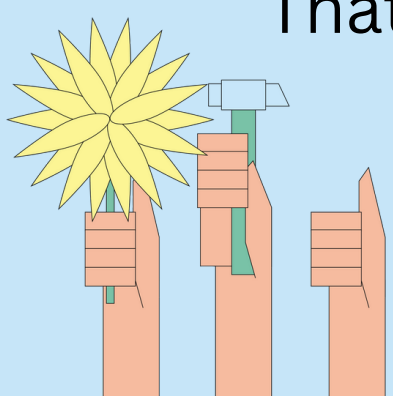
Post college, Varun began working as an equity researcher at Goldman Sachs, New York and he was rolling in dough. As many young men would attest to, financial wealth bolsters a sense of machismo that is quite intoxicating. There is a propensity to believe that the whole world revolves around you and you have got it made.

Yet, amidst all the dizzying attractions of New York, there was a niggling doubt that he couldn't get rid off; "Is this all that life has to offer?"

Many of us experience different flavours of the same question. We are steeped in a culture that values external bells and whistles more than exploring our innate talents as human beings and discovering what this whole life is about.

Goldman Sachs taught Varun a lot of skills but he was increasingly disillusioned with his work there and it's purpose. He learnt the financial wizardry of multiplying money but he was just making the rich richer. His time wasn't his anymore and all of it seemed hollow. No amount of money could act as a salve to his persistent doubt about life.

That's when entrepreneurship came as a saving grace...



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With a one way ticket back to India, Varun plunged into the startup world and started over 8 businesses, some of which became very successful. His last venture 91springboard, is a leader in the co-working space revolution in India, and caters to over 18,000 members across 9 cities in India.

While the entrepreneurial bug satiated his desire to build something from the ground up and be a master of his time, it came at the cost of burning both ends of the candlestick. His health went for a toss, he couldn't spend enough time with his family and he still felt a lack of purpose in his life. It was time for another reset. A more conscious one at that.

His body beckoned him to slow down and radically alter his diet. The stress and hustle of the entrepreneur lifestyle tremendously aged his body. This led him to experiment with a bunch of alternate lifestyle practices. He took long walks on the beach, switched to a vegan diet and through his practice of Iyengar yoga started on his journey of self-transformation. He spent more time with his lovely daughters and wife and slowly but surely his body began to heal itself and his mental health improved.

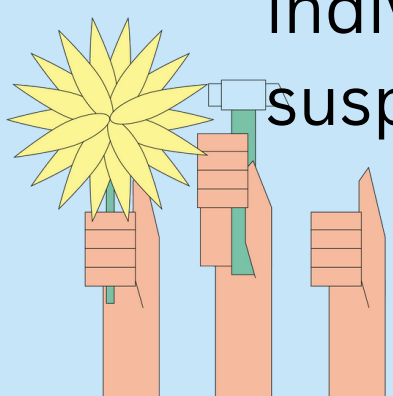
Buoyed by the results of his newfound physical and spiritual diet, Varun was inspired to share it with a larger audience.

That's where build3's bespoke project comes into picture; The startup eco-village.

Varun figured that by combining his talent for building successful startups with his lifestyle learnings, he could attract a community of entrepreneurs and creators who strive to live a holistic lifestyle amidst the chaos and uncertainty of modern life.

This is not a fanciful vision of privileged folks who want to hold hands and sing Kumbaya around a campfire (Although, singing kumbaya around a campfire might happen spontaneously ;)). This community envisions itself to be an antidote to the plague of meaninglessness and ill health that has come to determine modern life.

As societies became more modern, the ego of individuals grew stronger. Individuals in modern societies are constantly plagued by the thought of "making it" in life, a concept that is foreign to traditional societies where the individual ego does not play much of a role in the trajectory of one's life. (I suspect this statement is anathema to life coaches but I digress)



In traditional societies, living for the community gave people strength and an individual was assured that the community would have their back at various stages in their life. You did not have to go through life alone as the social fabric of the community would look after you.

The 50 to 100 acre startup eco-village that build3 strives to build aims to embed the community strength of traditional societies with the technological advancements of modern societies. In essence, the village aims to be a laboratory for people who seek to replicate an ecosystem that prizes ingenuity but is tempered with a spiritual ethos.

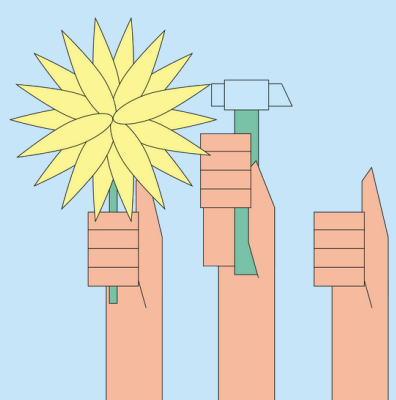
It will house entrepreneurs and creators that are trying to bring about a meaningful change in their world through their work. Areas of work could range from education to sustainable engineering to conscious art to everything in between. The possibilities are endless!

The people who the eco-village seeks to attract will be competent in their respective fields, are willing to work towards the common good of the community and aim to live in harmony with nature. There is no place for artificial hierarchies in the village; decisions will be made by people who are the most skilled in their respective fields. Most importantly, the community will consist of people who have your back.

An average day at the village would involve working at communal farms, cooking and eating meals together at the community kitchen, working on individual passion projects, hanging out with friends in nature and spending time in solitude to refresh your soul.

John Dryden in “the Spanish Friar (1681)” wrote that “there's a pleasure sure to being mad, that only madmen know". The challenge of building a thriving sustainable eco-village from the ground up is a mad challenge but a pleasurable one at that. It's important for alternative hubs of living to mushroom around the world and act as laboratories of lifestyle that is sustainable for human beings and the planet. The build3 eco village is an effort in that direction.

Building and living in an ecovillage is a siren call for us. We hope it calls out to you as it did us. If your heart strings have been pulled, don't hesitate to reach out to us. We would love to hear from you. :)



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