

The KCC: The Might That Set The Milestone

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From the very beginning Thusitha Wijayasena, Chairman/Managing Director – Property Finance and Investments, had always known that one day he would take the path less travelled, which he also knew to be a tremendous risk. Recently celebrating KCC's (Kandy City Centre's) fifth year of official inauguration, after nearly two decades of hard work beside civil strife, personal and financial exertions, he reflects on the decision that revolutionised an entire city's way of life.

Words By Sonali Kadurugamuwa | Photography Menaka Aravinda

Thusitha Wijayasena's vision of a master plan for a futuristic structure presented itself when a special request made by the late, Venerable Mahanayaka Thero of the Asgiriya Chapter, in 1992, sparked and even shook the very focus of his being. In 1993 KCC's conception had begun. It was to be a building that would be a feat of a lifetime, for Wijayasena, and as the idea turned to reality, he had witnessed the apprehension of a Kandyan society that was wary of accepting the realism of it all with open arms.

The history of the project in terms of the careful attention that was planned was not merely in bringing a large scale modern building and planting it in a very culturally sensitive city such as Kandy. Collaborations with leading architects from Singapore; Chandra Abeysinghe of AMC, and ADV's Ashley De Vos constituted to the meticulous planning of an architecturally Kandyan compliant building. As the developer Wijayasena had looked into various aspects that delved below what people would see from the outside. "The whole socio-economic fortification, quality of life, cultural and architectural importance and job distribution; those are things that needed to be emphasised in the creation of this structure," stresses Wijayasena.

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Alongside Wijayasena's unwavering vision and mission, which was to prove that in comparison to prominent structural spectacles such as the World Trade Center which had also begun its climb in the years not too far from KCC's own, that he too although a small scale businessman was capable of investing in large level innovations to benefit his motherland's economy. Over 25 acres of his own prime and residential property in Colombo including many personal assets were depleted in feeding the investments needed for the growth of KCC. Wijayasena and his family are still recuperating.

In 1995 the BOI awarded the KCC project a flagship status, but it was not until the year 2008 that construction had begun drawing to a close. As Wijayasena explains, this was due to the lack of support from relevant authorities in allowing the KCC project to move ahead smoothly.

Only five years since its commencement and already KCC is brimming with thriving businesses. “The market says that it’s very difficult to get a business space inside of the KCC and the reason it is so is because we refrain from giving spaces out randomly to just any business that requests for it.” Wijayasena firmly wants to create the perfect tenant mix that complements each other in terms of reiterating branded shops, in a mall like atmosphere, to distinguish the KCC from other shopping centres in Sri Lanka, implying that it was hard work to select the right category of tenants. “And that’s why it took us five years to fill in over 75 stores as even potential tenants comprehend the importance of being inside of a properly structured mall atmosphere, it’s good for business!” He praises the structural distinctions of building’s banking floor and so called ‘finance street’, which replaces the tone of a traditional impression of banking with a more customer centred approach; reinventing the ambience in such a way that fits into a mall environment, “where” he says, “people would want to do banking. You feel welcome walking into a bank with a fresh out-of-the-box look and experience.”

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Commending the efforts of KCC’s handpicked security personnel, Wijayasena acknowledges the importance of these so called customer service officers with regard to their hard work in constantly monitoring all KCC guests, adhering to their conveniences, while keeping the general running of operations, within the building, in check.

The general maintenance of the building even areas that the public does not see, for example the generator rooms and chiller plants are maintained to international standards, although it comes at a premium cost, it goes along with the philosophy of how Wijayasena believes a business should be run. “Not simply putting on a show for people on the outside and doing it in quite the opposite way behind the curtains. Even the technology that made the building what it is; state-of-the-art techniques are all of which require extensive planning and careful execution.” He adds.

In comparison to Colombo’s share of developments, Wijayasena says that Kandy was the perfect place for a building such as KCC to introduce the growth of commercial competence. It was time to bring the same selection of sophistication to Kandy, not to compete within the existing Kandy trade market, nonetheless, the building conveys a point which society needs to understand that just because the

KCC came into Kandy it did not take away businesses from existing businesses, he continues, “rather we have come with a new market. We have created the market, which we have wanted to come into.”

The Soon To Come Kandy Highway Will Make All The Difference In Creating Additional Prospects For The KCC’s Progress Into Being What It Was And Is Meant To Be—An Unmatched Lifestyle, Shopping And Trade Destination

KCC’s original master plan, according to Wijayasena has bits and pieces, although implemented, have not yet revealed themselves within the actual building itself; a super-sized food court, which would feature cuisines from the world over, a coffeehouse and cineplexes. “We hope to get these up and running in the near future.” He also emphasises on fact that “this is only Phase One of the original master plan and once the other phases are completed, KCC would be a ifestyle hub for the whole of the Central Province.”

Wijayasena is confident that the soon to come Kandy Highway will make all the difference in creating additional prospects for the KCC’s progress into being what it was and is meant to be—an unmatched lifestyle, shopping and trade destination. “It’s a city within a city,” he concludes.







