

Configuring the future

New age construction solutions are aiming to make habitat spaces more liveable through advanced building material and design elements. With the hospitality sector having undergone a sea change in recent times, the room for investment from hotels in safer and more aesthetic construction is expected to grow manifold. By **Andrea Lopez**

Benefits of a drywall construction

- Lightweight - eight to 10 times lighter than masonry systems
- Speed of installation - three to four times faster than masonry construction
- Aesthetic appeal - seamless and crack-free surfaces, allowing ease of decoration via paint, tiles or wall papers
- Excellent performances - in terms of fire protection, sound insulation and thermal insulation (helps reduce electricity consumption)
- Dry construction - clean and dust free work environment
- Flexibility - in creating and dividing spaces according to your needs
- Versatility - of the systems enable use in all internal areas of one's home and commercial areas
- Environment friendly - green product which is recyclable and is made of environmental friendly material.

most relevant property of all is the fact that drywalls are able to contain fires to a large degree. The lure of such a product, especially for hotels is, therefore, manifold. Additionally, the longevity of the product offsets the incremental costs.

So are Indian hotels and international chains exploring these solutions? Presently, the latter is experimenting with drywall constructions, more because of prior experience of having worked with similar constructions in their overseas properties. Indian chains are still to seize the concept in a big way, although scattered interest has been registered.

Saint Gobain has been a leading player in this space and is trying to get its product out to a wider audience. But the inherent challenges are many, the primary one being the limited awareness about the product. Saint Gobain's ascent to market leader in this space from its previous strength in glass manufacture is indicative of the scope and potential in the innovative construction space. And, more importantly, is the potential seen in emerging markets. Says V Subramaniam, managing director, Saint-Gobain Gyproc, "70 per cent of our turnover comes from Europe, but in recent times we have been looking at

About Gypsum

Gypsum is a lightweight material which is formed as the result of evaporating sea water in massive prehistoric basins. It has excellent insulation properties both thermal and acoustic and can offer very good passive fire protection, moisture resistance, impact resistance and vapour control when used in combination with the right systems.

Gypsum is used as plasterboard to create false ceilings and high performance drywalls and partitions. Plasterboard is one of the earliest and most versatile prefabricated construction materials that continues to outstrip construction growth in most countries. Gypsum can also be used as a plaster for finishing brick and mortar and other walls and ceilings to deliver superior finishes. Gypsum plasterboard systems are lightweight and, therefore, can provide huge structural savings. These systems are very fast to erect and provide huge labour saving and flexibility in construction. Globally reinforced gypsum wall panels are used as a replacement of brick and mortar construction and for screeds to be used on floors. Saint-Gobain Gyproc's range of high performance plasterboards include Gyproc Fireline for fire applications, Gyproc MR for high moisture areas and Gyproc Duraline for high impact areas apart from the plain plasterboard. This is backed by a range of Gypsteel ULTRA metal framing solutions and Gyproc range of jointing and finishing solutions.

emerging markets for growth. Part of our strategy was to bring our products to the Indian market and we have been doing that. There have been certain segments that we have understood, including hospitality and healthcare and we would want to grow our expertise in these areas. There has been a lot of new thinking that has been driving the hospitality sector today and I believe that the concept of drywalls will be very good product for hotels."

Wonder product

Saint Gobain has worked on eight to nine projects nationally, but the

Fundamental to all construction, is undoubtedly the element of safety. Following close on the heels is design. As the hospitality landscape in India transforms, the focus has moved to superior customer experience, something that rests significantly on the employee. Also contributing to the overall customer experience, is investing in superior design. The concept of 'drywalls' is extremely well known in the west in the construction and design of interior commercial spaces, including offices and even residences, but is yet to generate the same reaction in India. The product itself has some excellent properties including being lightweight, versatile, flexible, offering seamless crack free surfaces and being environmentally friendly. But the

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fact that a lot of global chains are looking at foraying into India has worked to the company's advantage. "Typically, we have seen that international hotel chains that have had experience with us in the past are the easiest to work with," says Subramaniam. Meanwhile, the trend of renovation, which is popular in the West and Europe is expected to slowly creep into India and when it does, Subramaniam feels, drywalls will be able to keep the trend afloat. "In instances of renovation, where an entire interior office space would be transformed, it becomes much simpler to change the interior layout if a drywall construction has been

used," he adds. The reduction in time spent on developing hotels in India, resulting in a quick availability of rooms also points to smarter, quicker, new age design solutions. For the purpose of acoustics too, drywalls are known absorbers of sound and can be designed to suit different tolerance of noise. "Normally hotels use thick carpeting to curb noise; however acoustic ceilings are able to achieve more and since they use up less carpet area, they leave more space for other fittings," says Subramaniam. Additionally, drywall constructions, unlike regular concrete walls don't require curing and thus minimise construction time, since parallel work can continue simultaneously.

Building blocks

Saint Gobain's interest lies in the big national and international hotels chains, budget hotels, serviced apartments and at a later stage, even residences. "Today it is a well developed market in the West. Our work in India is fairly recent, but we are seeing a definite interest. Construction practices are changing and people are looking at better solutions." He adds, "We are slowly building a repertoire of projects, but we are not looking at hospitality as the end game, rather as a good starting point. And we believe that the performance that this sector wants cannot be delivered by anyone. In retrospect, I believe that we can expect the number of projects we undertake to grow exponentially in the next few years; we have only scratched the surface." ■

