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FOR 15 YEARS

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# GERARD D'ARCY MAKING SPACE FOR THE FUTURE

Editorial Vernon Ramesar Photography Gary Jordan/Soft Box Studios

Sitting in his company boardroom, Gerard D'Arcy exudes the quiet confidence of a man who knows his business inside and out. As CEO of RGM Limited for the past 13 years, he heads a business that manages over 500,000 square feet of real estate. In short, he is a huge player in the industry and yet isn't exactly a household name.

Though he now heads a real estate empire, as a young man his career trajectory wasn't exactly clear. After obtaining a master's in international business in Florida, he still had no idea what he wanted to do with his life. It didn't bother him, though, and even today his advice for young people is this: "What you do up to 30 doesn't matter. If you're not sure, you move around, you try to immerse yourself in different types of work and business to see what hits you."

After returning to Trinidad with his master's, he went on to gain experience working at Associated Brands, Sagicor and First Citizens Bank. While at the bank, he began working with his real-estate agent mother on fixer-upper side projects. That was when he found his passion. Sporting a broad smile, D'Arcy says, "I love real estate. It's very satisfying to build and renovate."

Having discovered this love of real estate, he took up an offer at B. H. Rose, which, though now best known for furniture, was heavily involved in construction and contracting at that time. Thus immersed in real estate, there was no looking back for D'Arcy. With the help of his friend, Joe Pires, and other investors, he bought shares in the company and went on to start the design firm Interior One, which he grew until he sold it five years later. "It was a spectacular time in my life," he recalls. He admits, though, that he's circumspect about the sale of the business now, but notes that he and his family had planned to emigrate, and it was the right decision at the time, even though they ended up staying in Trinidad. Nevertheless, the experience of Interior One was key to his career, as he notes that working for yourself "is the crucible; that's where

you learn how to focus and execute."

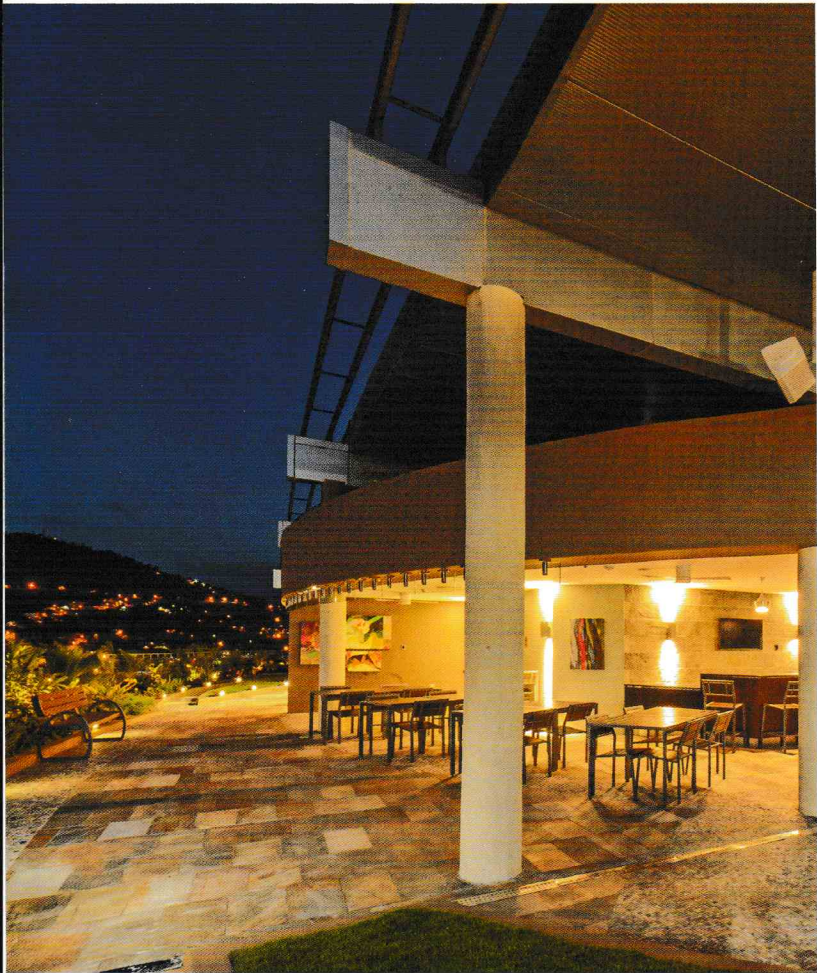
D'Arcy says heading RGM, a joint venture of RBC, Guardian Life, and Sagicor (then known as Mutual) that was set up in 1982, is very much like running his own company: "I'm left to my own devices. The shareholders require a return on their investment and want to know there's money coming in and we're running the business properly." The company itself is a tightly run ship with a small, handpicked staff of eight managing investments of over a billion dollars from their office in Port of Spain. The secret, D'Arcy says, is "outsourcing everything, which allows us to be flexible and agile."

RGM's first major venture was building and managing a new local headquarters for AMOCO. The building features energy-efficient generators, sprinklers, a high elevator capacity, atriums, and a façade that pays homage to its predecessor: the Queen's Park Hotel. As D'Arcy proudly remembers, the AMOCO project also marked RGM as "the best game in town." He describes RGM's focus on meeting the ever-changing requirements of large corporate clients as similar to being "in the business of selling hot hops." This is reflected in the company's latest project, the TT\$180 million Savannah East, the first LEED-certified eco-friendly building in Trinidad and Tobago. When clients demand sustainable buildings, D'Arcy is happy to provide them.

Since the completion of that trailblazing green project, D'Arcy has guided the company from strength to strength, describing Savannah East as his crowning achievement so far. His success has not been free from challenges, however. "There are frustrations everywhere, but in Trinidad it's just ridiculous," he says. Obtaining building permits is a special annoyance for him: "We have applied for construction permits for buildings, and gotten those permits four years after the building is completed."

The construction of the eco-friendly Savannah East presented him with a new set of challenges.



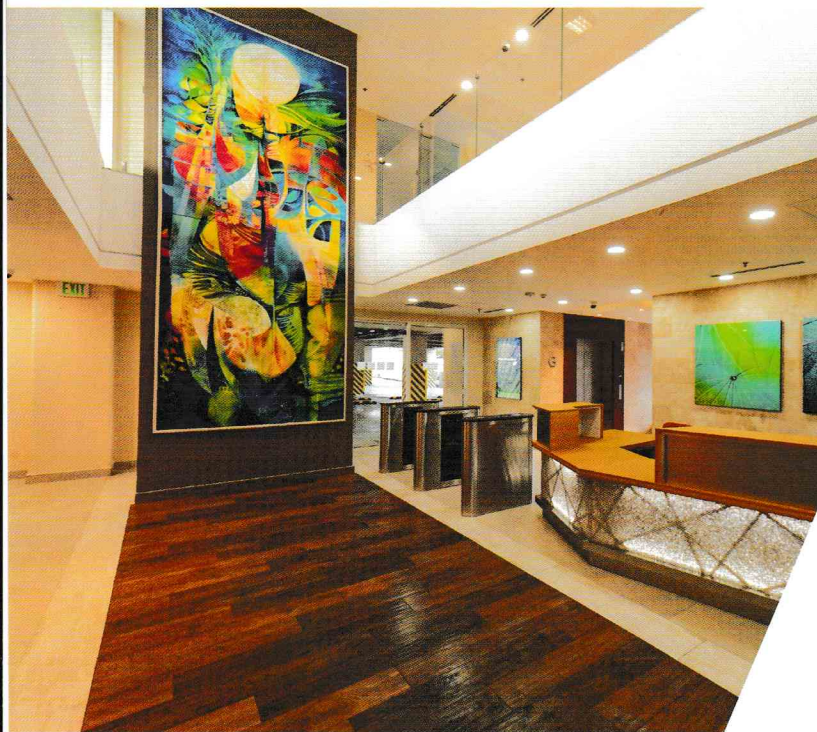


"We don't have legislation that properly encourages and regulates solar panels," he says, with more than a tinge of irritation. "In some ways we're very antiquated in the thinking we have."

D'Arcy also laments T&T's work ethic. In his view, the excesses afforded by a hydrocarbon-rich country have allowed successive governments to use that wealth to gift things to the population. The result, according to him: "We've reached the point where people think they don't need to work hard."

Behind the tough-talking real estate mogul, however, is a committed family man. D'Arcy's wife of 17 years is a partner in an international accounting firm, and together they have three children aged 10, 12, and 14. "One of the benefits of both of us being high-powered professionals and being well compensated is that we can afford infrastructure," notes D'Arcy. "We can afford a driver, help at home, that sort of thing." But he still says parenting is a balancing act. For example, while none of the children has a cell phone, their parents indulge them with world travel so they can expand their horizons. As parents, D'Arcy says their goal is to "raise ambitious, worldly children who aspire to make a difference." He goes on to add with a chuckle, "I believe it's worked out well. We haven't screwed up any kid yet... but there's still time."

The father, husband and real estate powerhouse has these final words of advice for aspiring young entrepreneurs, echoing wise words he followed himself on his climb to the top: "Do it while you're young. I'm not going to discount you because you've had five jobs before the age of 30." ■



D'arcy's crowning achievement is Savannah East, T&T's first LEED- certified eco-friendly building