



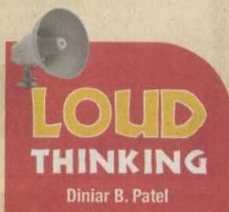
**Loud Thinking**

Fred has a different calling. He gives away everything he earns to charity.

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# EASTSIDE PLUS

## The whole world's in his hands



Fred Tibbitts Jr, one of the most sought after wine-by-the-glass consultants in the world, was here in Pune for a short visit. The best chefs will fall at his feet if only he utters the word but Fred has a different calling. He gives away everything he earns to charity and lives off a humble \$ 200 a week and the suit he wears is 12-year-old. It's people like this devout Buddhist who keep the wheels of life turning

It was meant to be an evening where food would be getting centre-stage and wine would be discussed by the crème-de-la-crème of the city. The strictly-by-invite-only dinner had me walking in late as it was not the wine I was after but the man, known the world over as one of the most revered wine-by-the-glass consultants. I had set out to write a column dedicated to food but found this space does more justice to the man who claimed 'he lives every day as his last' as doctors, in October of 2004, have told him, in confidence, he has between 12 and 14 years to live.

Alzheimer's is catching up with Fred Tibbitts Jr, who today lives life for everyone else but himself. Though Fred's business is global, and he is a consultant for chains that include Accor North America, Millennium Hotels & Resorts and Carlson (Radisson) in the United States as well as the Starwood group, he gives his family only \$ 200 a week for their daily needs. The rest goes to Buddhist charities.

Our discussion at Starwood's five-star property on Koregaon Park took us half way into the night where Fred humbly pointed at the suit he was wearing, saying that too was 12-year-old. His effluent lineage and ivy league education had him living the high life in the city of dreams -- New York. "In 1990, I

realised that I needed more out of life and Christianity was not really my need. My own religious experiences remained unfulfilled. For five years I read about Buddhism and embraced the religion in 1995 after meeting the Abbot who felt I could be accepted into the Buddhist fold."

Fred has mastered the state of being at a low level of meditation throughout the day. "I have spent a lot of time in the monastery where we got up at 3:30 am and did a lot of soul searching. I took the call to go out and serve the less fortunate and that's why I gave up all worldly possessions. I look at myself as running a social entrepreneurship."

Whatever Fred earns goes to different charities. In Bangkok, the proceeds of what he earns goes to the National Elephant Hospital at Lamphang. At all the Asia dinners he talks in all his 'strictly by invite dinners' means those invited have to buy tickets for hearing him speak and the money collected goes straight to the poor and scholarship programmes - the proceeds go to the China Asia Development Fund.

Fred's awards are all related to the hospitality sector and in Pune too he had come for the 2011 Fred Tibbitts and Associates - FTA Hospitality Awards. Fred hosts seven annual dinners in Asia and two in New York City during the course of



the year. "The sole purpose of my dinners is to recognise excellence in hospitality. We give out scholarships in the name of those we recognise to students for bettering their lot," said Fred.

The opportunity for getting into the wine tasting business came when Fred joined Seagram in 1979. Thanks to that stint, Fred was exposed to "every conceivable wine on the planet". That brought him close to the hospitality sector which he is associated with even today. "I initiated the WOW programme - Wines of the World, which is an annual event in the Asia Pacific region."

Living in Bangkok and be-

ing married there has brought Fred very close to the Eastern way of life. "Families, to all those living on this side of the world, mean everything. I am a family man and encourage my wife to work with her brothers in the family's rice fields. I don't aspire for riches because any which way I have it with me."

We parted ways but not before echoing Fred's words all the way back home: Live each day of your life as the last one, 'cause as the Buddhists say, "One never knows which comes first, the next morning or the next life."

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