

THE Umbrella

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Photo by Marcia Falho

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IMPRESSO

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This month, we bring you Marcelo Henriques de Brito. Brazilian by birth, but a dedicated Anglophile, Marcelo now specialises in handling issues relating to international business and promoting the advantages of free trade, the flow of capital and the exchange of ideas around the world. He particularly enjoys sharing his knowledge of the cultural differences between Brazil and European countries. He feels he "communicates spontaneously as a Brazilian, but follows strictly an underlying structure, which is natural to Anglo-Saxons".

This may be due in part to the years he spent studying at the British School where Marcelo learned a lot about Britain's culture, history and geography at a time when only English was ever heard in the classroom and the children were taught to handle £.s.d. in Maths! Marcelo remembers the visit of HM the Queen as a highpoint, and still keeps a commemorative mug from that occasion.

However, at the age of ten, Marcelo moved on to the Colégio de Aplicação da UFRJ, where he experienced a "tremendous cultural shock". From there, he went on to take a degree in Mechanical Engineering from UFRJ.

When did your family come to live in Rio?

I was born in Rio de Janeiro on December 5th, 1963. My father was born in Portugal, and my mother came from São Paulo. Their parents brought them up in Rio, with international exposure. They travelled a lot and lived abroad. When they were already professors at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), they met each other and got married. I was brought up in Brazil with a globalised mentality

What brought your family to Brazil?

From Portugal or São Paulo, all my grandparents came to Rio to establish a new life at a time the city was growing very fast. It is quite usual for Portuguese citizens to live abroad. The Portuguese and their descendants naturally have this idea of belonging to the world, nevertheless being proud of Portuguese heritage, culture and achievements

What were your first impressions?

I was frequently told that Rio was a beautiful, friendly and warm city with a lot of things to be done.

Where else have you lived?

I had the opportunity to live for 5½ years in Switzerland, where I worked for a Swiss company and took a PhD in Engineering at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne – EPFL. After coming back from Switzerland, I lived and worked for several years in São Paulo, where I took a degree in Business & Administration, which was important for setting up my company Probatas Consultoria (www.probatas.com.br).

Has your family settled here for good?

Yes – and they live very happily here.

Is your spouse Brazilian? Where and how did you meet?

My wife Ana is a gaúcha. She is a Brazilian with Portuguese ancestors like me. We met in São Paulo during an environmental trade fair. She was working for a potential customer. Her company bought that equipment – and I got married to her. Thus, I share with you a very practical marketing lesson: treat your customers very well, because one of them might become your spouse.

What is your favourite place in the city?

I do not really have a favourite place in this beautiful city, since there are a lot of corners where I feel myself comfortable. Actually, for me it is important to be with friends, have an interesting talk and enjoy the view.

Do you samba?

Yes, and quite well. In fact, I enjoy dancing other styles too.

Beaches or mountains?

Definitely mountains. When I was a child I would spend holidays in Teresópolis. When I lived in Switzerland, I enjoyed hiking with friends in the mountains. I love the air I breathe and the energy I feel in the mountains.

Where is your favourite place to eat?

I could list several restaurants in Rio. I particularly like churrasco and Portuguese food.

Caipirinha or chopp?

Caipirinha, and I do like to drink wine and chopp whenever I am with friends.

What has changed most in Rio in the time that you have been here?



The city seems to have become less international, with fewer expatriates and foreign citizens. Moreover, slums spread out in Rio after I left the city in 1986. When I came back to live here again many years later, I was also impressed with the enormous growth of The British School with the new buildings at Urca and Barra.

Can Rio's problems be solved?

If you are a Brazilian – or live here – you should believe in the saying that "hope is the last thing that dies" (a esperança é a última que morre). Thus, the answer should be yes.

Will you stay in Rio?

In principle yes, although I do not know what might happen. Life has already sent me to Europe, but did bring me back to Rio, nonetheless before living several years in São Paulo.

Do you follow closely what goes on in the UK?

I strive to know what happens throughout the world, especially in Europe. Indeed, I do follow the news and opinions released by European media.

Are you an optimist or a pessimist?

An optimist who always likes to know the real situation, and the reasons for being an optimist.

What keeps you busy?

Besides my professional activities, which make me feel useful to society, my wife, my friends and all my social engagements keep me busy and make me happy. Theatre is a valuable hobby for me. I also like to read books by different authors, as well as write essays. I also very much enjoy meeting people, travelling and talking in different languages. Now, I also do yoga regularly, in order to stretch muscles, release stress, and avoid fatness.

Interview by Lucy Beney