



## An Anonymous Photographer's Mission to Preserve Mumbai's Art Deco

BHAVYA DORE AUG 2, 2016

---

**The city has over 200 such buildings, second only to Miami.**

The five-story Keval Mahal sits on Mumbai's iconic [Marine Drive](#). Cream colored with red lines, circular motifs, and oblong balconies, it's one of 35 Art Deco buildings facing the sea in this heritage district.

The city has more than 200 Art Deco buildings, the [second](#)-largest collection globally after Miami. But unlike Durban, Napier, or Chicago, Mumbai's Art Deco heritage remains little known around the world.

Now an anonymous resident is trying to change that, one photo at a time.



artdecomumbai

Follow ...

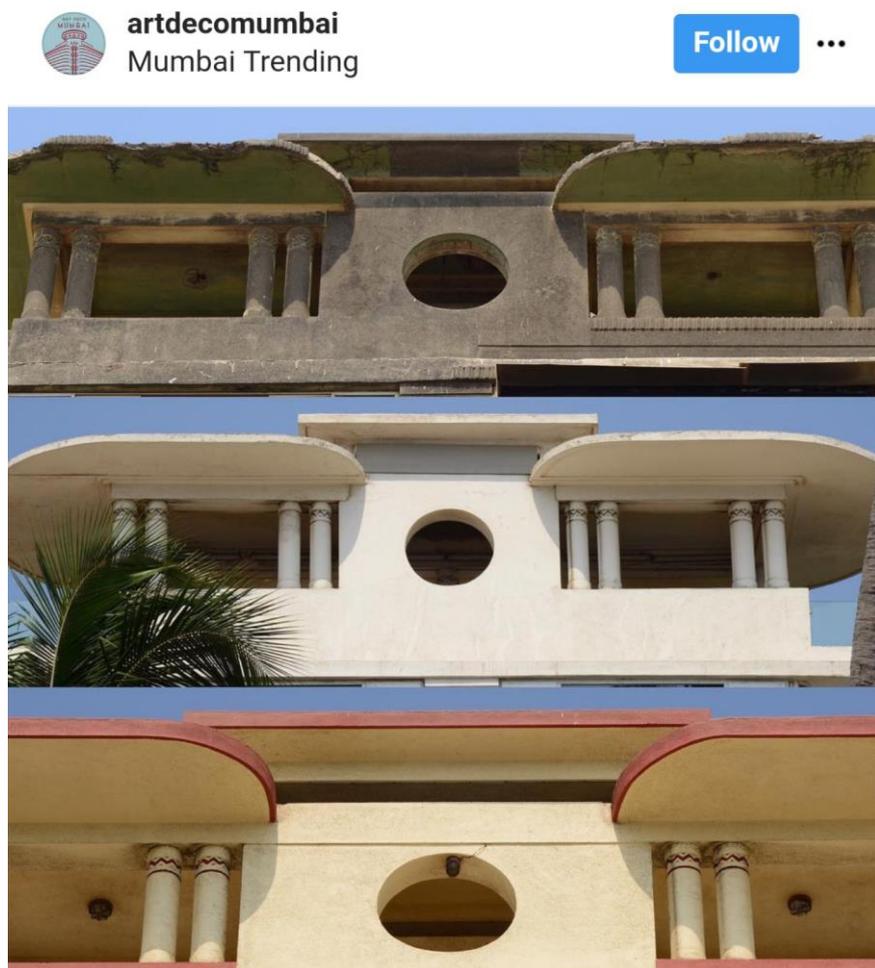


Last May, this gentleman, who asked to remain anonymous, decided it was time to document the city's stunning and under-publicized Art Deco structures. "Every country is showcasing their gems. We should also be creating a buzz about our city and connecting ourselves with the Art Deco map of the world," he says. (His anonymity allows all of the attention to go strictly to the buildings.)

Cue the social media outreach, through [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) with celebratory photos of ascendant central columns, curving balconies, and chunky typefaces.

"South Mumbai is strewn with gems," says the documentarian. "There's a delight to document every 200 meters."

Art Deco, with its distinctive geometric flair, emerged after World War I. In the '30s, it arrived in Bombay – a cosmopolitan city flourishing as a trade hub at the time. The city has officially been known as Mumbai [since 1995](#).



The colonial center had already seen a wave of construction through the second half of the 1800s, including neo-Gothic landmarks like Victoria Terminus and the High Court, buildings with which the city continues to be best identified. But the 1930s marked the moment for a different aesthetic triumph.

Last year the state government [officially](#) mapped Marine Drive and some adjoining parts as a heritage area – which means the buildings cannot be modified or repaired without permission from the urban heritage conservation committee.

Since 2012, the “Victorian and Art Deco [ensemble](#)” has been one of India’s submissions on the tentative UNESCO world heritage site shortlist. But most citizens barely know about this effort. “When you make such a recommendation, at

least make it known,” says Rajan Jayakar, a former member of the urban heritage committee and resident of a striking Art Deco building himself. “How will people be proud of their heritage if they don’t even know about it?”



Mumbai’s continuous conflict between development and preservation makes it hard for the city to safeguard its architectural heritage. The mantle of conservation has fallen on determined heritage lovers and building owners with little help from officials by way of incentives or compensation.

“In Miami, the owners are proud of their buildings; here, owners often look at heritage as an impediment to commercial exploitation,” says Jayakar. “Heritage-minded citizens have to be vigilant and the authorities have to take steps to ensure preservation.”

A social media endeavor aimed at public awareness – especially among young people – is a move towards protecting Mumbai’s heritage, according to the digital documentarian.

“Bombay Art Deco is non-existent on the map,” he says. “But it can be one more reason for visitors to come here.”

<https://www.citylab.com/design/2016/08/an-anonymous-photographers-mission-to-preserve-mumbais-art-deco/493901/>