

# MumbaiMirror

## CITY'S ART DECO-DING NOW JUST A CLICK AWAY

By Reema Gehi, Mumbai Mirror | Updated: Jun 27, 2017, 09.56 AM IST



*Clockwise from top: Built in 1938, Eros Cinema in Churchgate is a classic example of ziggurat, a V-shaped stepped style design; A 1936 art deco structure, Ismail Begmuhammad High School in Byculla is in decay; Pai House in Matunga stands out with its curvilinear balcony. PHOTO COURTESY: [WWW.ARTDECOMUMBAI.COM](http://WWW.ARTDECOMUMBAI.COM)*

*The website will serve as a repository of Mumbai's art deco architecture*

Mumbai is the second largest art deco precinct in the world, after Miami, Florida, and this is why finance professional Atul Kumar had curated a social media page to sensitise people about Mumbai's forgotten architectural heritage. A year later, leveraging on their social media presence (with over 1000 followers), Kumar and his team have created a website- [www.artdecomumbai.com](http://www.artdecomumbai.com), which goes live at 8 pm. Kumar hopes to create a bigger outreach among city's audiences. "It's a unique and diverse distinction. The city has its own 'Bombay deco' with tropical imagery, waves, plants and Indian women in the motifs," explains Kumar. About 200 art deco

structures that dot the city were introduced during the 1930s.

A resident of Marine Drive, Kumar shares, "We keep engaging with NGOs and policy makers to define heritage boundaries for the protection of our buildings and for their UNESCO nomination." A champion for deco structures in the city, Kumar reckons there is a lack of awareness amongst locals who fail to see the appeal of art deco around them. "When we think of Mumbai, the only image that comes to mind is Victorian gothic architecture; all very big and dominant," he says. "Art deco is hidden behind the shadow of the architecture that the Empire left behind."

That there wasn't a single repository of information pertaining to art deco in Mumbai did little service to the cause. "When you type 'Mumbai art deco', nothing shows up. The information is in libraries and hidden in fat books; they are expensive," says Kumar. "We have drawn information from all over the world, there is a gallery of pictures of lesser-known buildings that we have curated as well as a blog section."

The first blog post on the website is a delightful conversation with Mehernosh Keki Sidhwa, third generation of the family that built Soona Mahal, an iconic building on Marine Drive. Another highlight is a feature that brings to focus legendary architect Gajanan Mhatre, who was responsible for some of the most well-known art deco structures in the city such as Empress Court and Queen's Court. "He was called the shadow architect. Unlike his contemporary, British architect Claude Batley, Mhatre never signed his work," says Kumar.

That apart, the website provides a visual inventory - an interactive map of Mumbai. The team is in the process of earmarking all the art deco structures. Marine Drive, Churchgate and Colaba have the densest population of art deco structures, followed by Byculla, Mohammed Ali Road, Dadar, Matunga and Chembur, which are dotted with these deco gems. "But I guess south Mumbai has become more synonymous with art deco because they are better preserved and highly populated. It also has public buildings such as The Cricket Club of India, BEST Bhavan, Liberty, Eros and Regal cinema," says Kumar. "Tourists visiting Mumbai have no idea that this is something worth seeing. Our effort is to consolidate and educate people about something Mumbai should be proud of."

## **Atul's art deco guide**

### **KEY FEATURES**

**Nautical features:** Porthole windows, ship deck-style railings and observatory tower

**Banding highlights:** Horizontal and vertical bands

**Ziggurat or stepped pediment:** Zigzag or lightning bolt like designs on the rooflines

**Flat roofs:** Buildings with a single or multi-level flat roof

**Eyebrows:** Shelf-shaped windows; what we know as chhajjas

**Grills:** Nature-inspired designs such as moon, sun, clouds, birds, waves and flowers

**Fonts:** Streamlined fonts in mediums such as metals, teak, stone and stucco

<http://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/civic/citys-art-deco-ding-now-just-a-click-away/articleshow/59328119.cms>