

# QUARTZ

WHY GO TO MIAMI?

Mumbai has the world's second-largest collection of Art Deco buildings but no one notices them



Remnants of another era. (Sandra Cohen Rose and Colin Rose/Flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0)  
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Visitors to Miami rarely miss an opportunity to admire the city's Art Deco heritage. In the historic architectural district, you'll find

tourists capturing every painstakingly preserved detail on camera, from the buildings' smooth lines and curved balconies to the pastel-coloured facades and porthole windows.

But in Mumbai, believed to host the world's [second-largest collection](#) of Art Deco buildings, such interest is hard to find. Tourists tend to focus on established landmarks, such as the Gateway of India, while residents, some of whom even live in Art Deco apartments, are hardly aware of their historical significance. Besides, in a city starved for space, conservation efforts haven't always been [able to save](#) these heritage structures from damaging restoration or repair work, or even outright demolition.

Over the past year, though, a small team of locals has been working to raise awareness about the Art Deco style, taking to Facebook and Instagram to document all of Mumbai's Art Deco details, and help people engage with the city's architecture. Today (June 27), [Art Deco Mumbai](#), a self-funded non-profit organisation, is launching an online platform that will allow architecture buffs, experts, and even the ordinary, curious visitor, to explore and learn more about one of India's most underrated architectural styles.

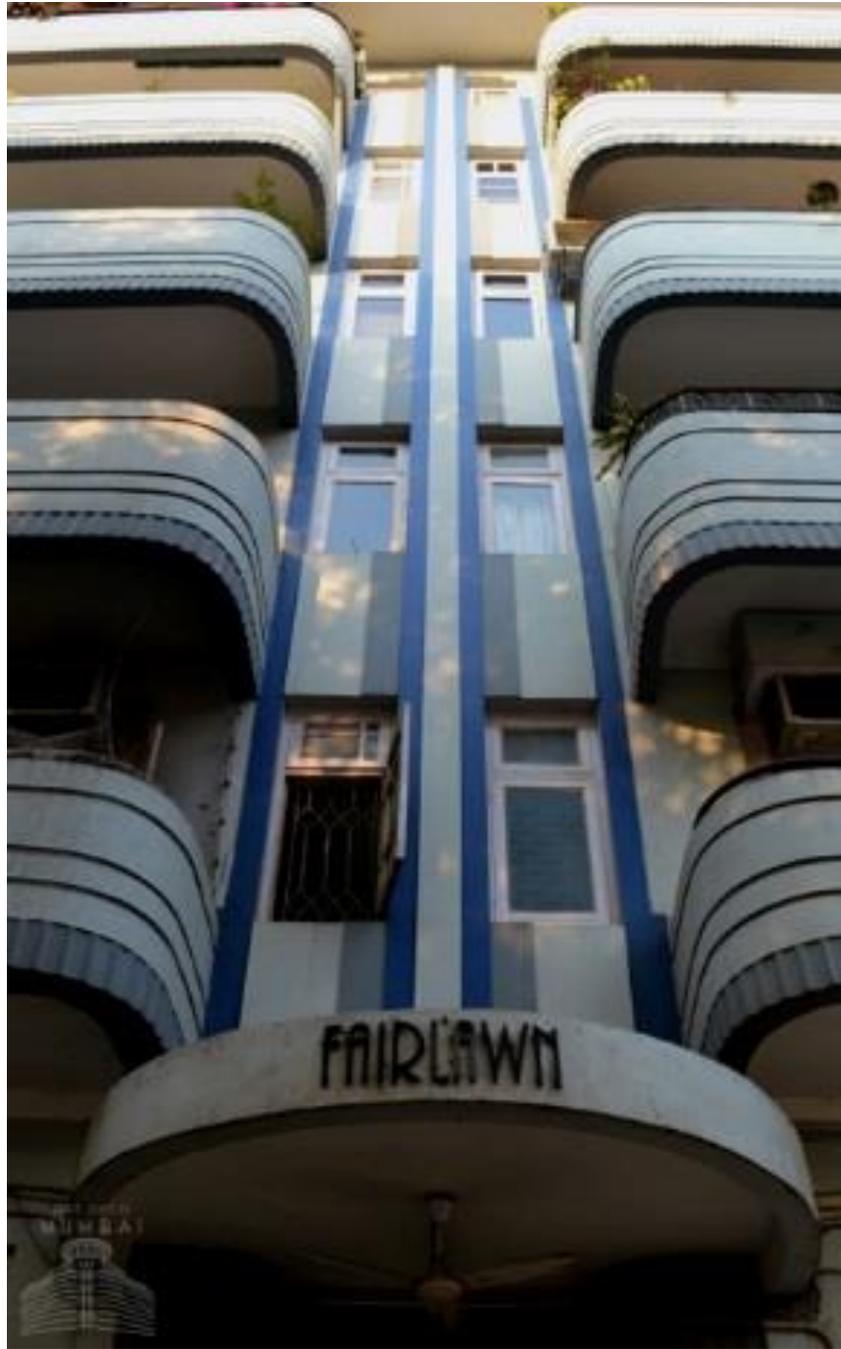


Rajjab Mahal. Finest work of preservation of an [#artdeco](#) building. Immaculate diagonal windows with Egyptian sunburst below. Original colour themes. A straight line delight. [#mumbai](#) [#window](#) [#design](#) [#architecture](#) [#deco](#) [#india](#)

“There is no repository to showcase all of this,” founder Atul Kumar, who has worked in heritage conservation for over a decade, told Quartz. His goal is to create an inventory of the city’s Art Deco buildings, and empower residents to become advocates for their conservation.

The Art Deco style originated in the 1920s and spread from Europe to the US and the rest of the world through the 1930s and ’40s. In Mumbai, known as Bombay at the time, Indian architects were drawn to its futuristic glamour, and began using the [new materials and technologies](#) available to incorporate geometric patterns, pastel colours, and even nautical elements (such as porthole windows) in

their buildings, some of which, such as the Regal and Eros theatres and the Fairlawn apartments, still stand today.



Fairlawn. At the Oval. 1933-38. Streamline moderne elegance. Sleek and curvy balconies. Banding highlights on balconies and central vertical blue lines create a delightful tripartite symmetry. [#lines](#) [#blue](#) [#artdeco](#) [#symmetry](#) [#curves](#) [#sleek](#) [#mumbai](#) [#thingstoseeinmumbai](#) [#photo](#) [#framed](#) [#unique](#) [#cityscape](#) [#citylife](#)  
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However, they are often overshadowed by the older, more imposing structures built in another iconic architectural style: the British-era Victorian Gothic, which dominates the landscape in southern Mumbai. Constructed in the 19th century, buildings such as the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (previously the Victoria Terminus) and the University of Mumbai have a much more forceful physical presence, which could explain why they're more well-known.



The Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. (Anunandusg/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

“Those buildings are firmly etched in people’s memories. They’re not looking beyond that,” Kumar said.

That’s why local activists have been working to get the areas around south Mumbai’s Fort, Oval Maidan, and Marine Drive recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With the help of citizens’ groups, the Maharashtra state government first submitted a [nomination proposal](#) to UNESCO for the “Victorian & Art Deco Ensemble of Mumbai” way back in 2012 but it has remained on the tentative list

since then, [losing out to other historical sites](#) in India, such as the Nalanda university ruins in Bihar, which received endorsements from the central government.

However, things could change. In February, the central government finally [nominated the area](#) for UNESCO accreditation, setting in motion the process that could eventually lead to World Heritage Site status in 2018. That will guarantee international attention, as well as funding for conservation efforts, and a massive influx of tourists.

For Kumar and Art Deco Mumbai, however, the focus for now is to meticulously record the presence of Art Deco buildings across the city. So far, the team has counted 125 structures in just the southern tip of Mumbai alone, and there's plenty more to be found in lesser-visited areas such as Chembur, Matunga, and Dadar.

“(Mumbai) is an Art Deco paradise,” Kumar said. “I like to say that we're taking (Art Deco) out of the shadows...”

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