



## Atul Kumar, Nityaa Iyer: Mumbai Heroes

By Reema Gehi, Mumbai Mirror | Updated: Sep 27, 2017, 08.36 AM IST

*Kumar and Iyer harness the power of social media to create awareness about the city's Art Deco heritage*

### **Decoding Mumbai Deco**

*A finance professional and his team are taking up the cause of preservation of art deco buildings head on.*

#### **INITIATIVE**

Art Deco Mumbai

#### **FACES BEHIND IT**

Atul Kumar, Nityaa Iyer

#### **NOMINATED FOR**

Sensitising people about the city's Art Deco structures

Why does Mumbai, unlike, say, Delhi, have such a strong connect with its built heritage? Atul Kumar, a financial professional, who is spearheading the art deco movement in the city, seems to have the answer. "Delhi is predominantly monumental; people come, gaze at the monuments and walk away," he says. "In Mumbai, it's all part of your everyday life. Two million people have access to a wonderful structure like CST. All the buildings and architecture are part of the city's social structure. It's where they live, work, entertain and commute."

Art Deco structures such as Cricket Club of India and Liberty Cinema, and the Marine Drive precinct are no different. Art Deco, the dominant architectural and decorative style of the 1920s and '30s, was introduced in the city during the early decades of the 20th century. Mumbai, which has over 200 Art Deco buildings, has the second largest concentration of Art Deco buildings in the world after Miami. "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," says Kumar. Kumar is a Marine Drive resident, and living around the deco haven, he was instinctively drawn to the architecture style. "Nobody seemed to have any idea, or appreciation of it. These are structures built by Mumbaites. Sidhwa family built Soona Mahal; Seksaria family built the Seksaria Mahal. Both are beautiful buildings," says Kumar, who has made sensitising people about the deco structures his mandate.

"It was a slow process and not one eureka moment. As I explored areas such as Colaba, Mohammed Ali Road, Malabar Hill, Dadar, Matunga and Chembur, I realised the significance of art deco and how widespread it is across the city, and I knew I had to showcase it."

So, a year-and-a-half ago, Kumar put together a small team. Conservation architect Nityaa Iyer came on board as head of documentation and research, her colleague Prathyaksha Krishna Prasad, an urban conservation architect, took on the task of research and content, while Aakriti Chandervanishi, an avid photographer, was assigned the role of the digital content curator. Kumar and his team decided to harness the power of social media right from the beginning, and today they have over 3,000 followers on Instagram and nearly 7000 on Facebook. "Social media enables people to see and appreciate quickly and easily," he says. "Besides, the profile on Facebook, for instance, is very different. It's people from smaller cities and towns. The audience doesn't necessarily have the kind of architecture Mumbai does. We once got a response saying: "kadak picture". When he comes to Mumbai, he'll check these out these buildings. Instagram has much more urban and educated users."

Incidentally, Iyer found her way to Kumar's Fort office, where the team works from, after discovering the Art Deco Mumbai Instagram page. "I studied architecture in Mumbai and know that there's a lot we have to do in terms of conservation," says Iyer. "In India, we don't care about structures in the country unless they are 100 years old. To me, Art Deco is a moment in time, which is more recent and relatable. It is also about documenting an architectural movement of which not much is known." If the audience like what they see on social media, the team hopes that they would be keen to explore their recently-launched website, which features, among other elements, a detailed map of the deco structures in the city. "Cities, with 20 buildings, are celebrating their art deco structures. Here, we have 200 buildings and counting, and we have nothing to showcase," says Kumar.

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## **GETS MY VOTE**

**"They are creating fresh awareness about Art Deco, and bringing out the nuances of this style. Art Deco was a significant period in the city's architectural history —**

**Mustansir Dalvi, professor at Sir JJ College of Architecture**

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