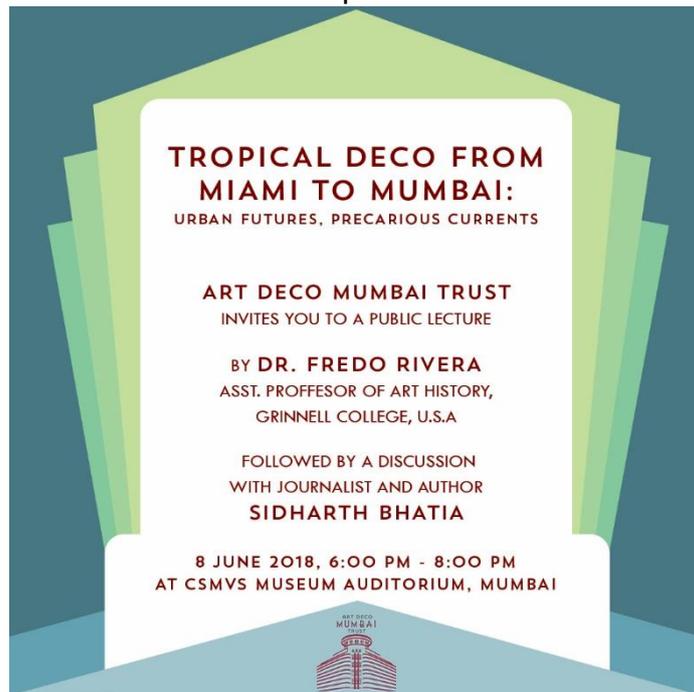


Art Deco Mumbai hosted a public lecture on 8 June 2018



Art history professor Dr Fredo Rivera talks about Art Deco in Mumbai

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Ahead of his talk this evening on all things Art Deco, mid-day spoke to Dr Fredo Rivera, assistant professor of art history at Iowa's Grinnell College, about how the style connects the two cities



Lincoln Theater in Miami, designed by Thomas Lamb, 1935. Lamb also worked on the Metro Cinema in Mumbai. Pic/Moises Herrera

Why did the Art Deco style of architecture gain popularity in cities as geographically and culturally apart as Bombay and Miami?

Art Deco was very much a global trend, so it is not surprising to see it in locales as far flung as Miami and Mumbai. It suggests a sort of cosmopolitanism among its patrons. Its prevalence in our cities, however, is informed by their expansion in the 1930s. Like Mumbai, Miami had a considerable amount of land reclamation in the early 20th century — Miami Beach was reconfigured from a swampy mangrove into an urban oasis between the 1920s, which required a significant dredging of Biscayne Bay. The creation of Art Deco districts in Miami and Mumbai is very much attached to urban growth in both contexts.

What are some of the similarities and differences in the Art Deco style adapted in the two cities?

There are many stylistic similarities, as they are both examples of predominantly 1930s Art Deco adapted to a tropical or subtropical climate. The use of eyebrows or eaves over the windows is just one of them. Sometimes, there were material differences — like the use of teak wood in Mumbai and the use of coral rock or oolitic limestone in Miami. Miami Beach's buildings tend to be smaller in scale, and there are a lot more hotels in the area. I feel a greater sense of permanence in Mumbai's Deco, especially in the apartment buildings where generations of families have lived.



Metro Cinema (now Metro Inox Cinemas), Mumbai

What are some of the Art Deco features that contemporary buildings would do well to include in their structure?

There is a sense of joy and play in our Art Deco buildings; I think it's important to keep that in mind with contemporary design. What I do think we can learn most from is the planning of these Art Deco districts; they have a very urban, inclusive feel.

Have Art Deco buildings in Miami faced challenges from real estate development or other factors? How has Miami responded?

Yes, buildings in Miami have faced many challenges, and we've lost a few gems over the decade. Many Deco buildings in South Beach were abandoned and dilapidated by the 1970s, and ripe for redevelopment. Miami Beach's Art Deco district became part of the National Register of Historical places in 1979, thanks to the efforts of the Miami Design Preservation League and especially, Barbara Baer Capitman. It was the first district of modern architecture to receive this distinction in the US, but this did not stop developers from tearing down buildings. It took a significant amount of activism to change local laws. Today, Miami Beach has some of the most stringent laws with regard to its Art Deco buildings, which has aided in expansions of buildings and the maintenance of interior elements.



[Dr Fredo Rivera](#). Pic/Justin Hayworth

How can Mumbai take a leaf out of Miami's book to preserve this architectural heritage?

I think it's important that preservation work is done locally and it impacts local or municipal law. It's also important for developers to recognise the value of all modern architecture, not just Art Deco. Today, tourists flock to the Deco hotels of Miami, which would have been inconceivable to many developers trying to tear them down in earlier decades. It's about seeing architecture as part of a place's heritage. I'm really impressed with the work being done by the [Art Deco Mumbai Trust](#), both with regard to advocacy and documentation.

How do you plan to explore Mumbai on this visit?

I've always been fascinated by Art Deco in Mumbai. This is my fifth visit here, and I always find new treasures. For this trip, I am simply observing, but with a more critical eye with regard to its relation to Miami Beach Art Deco. I came with a research assistant, who has been documenting examples of Art Deco here, especially the fantastic theaters.

<https://www.mid-day.com/articles/art-history-professor-dr-fredo-rivera-talks-about-art-deco-in-mumbai/19499151>