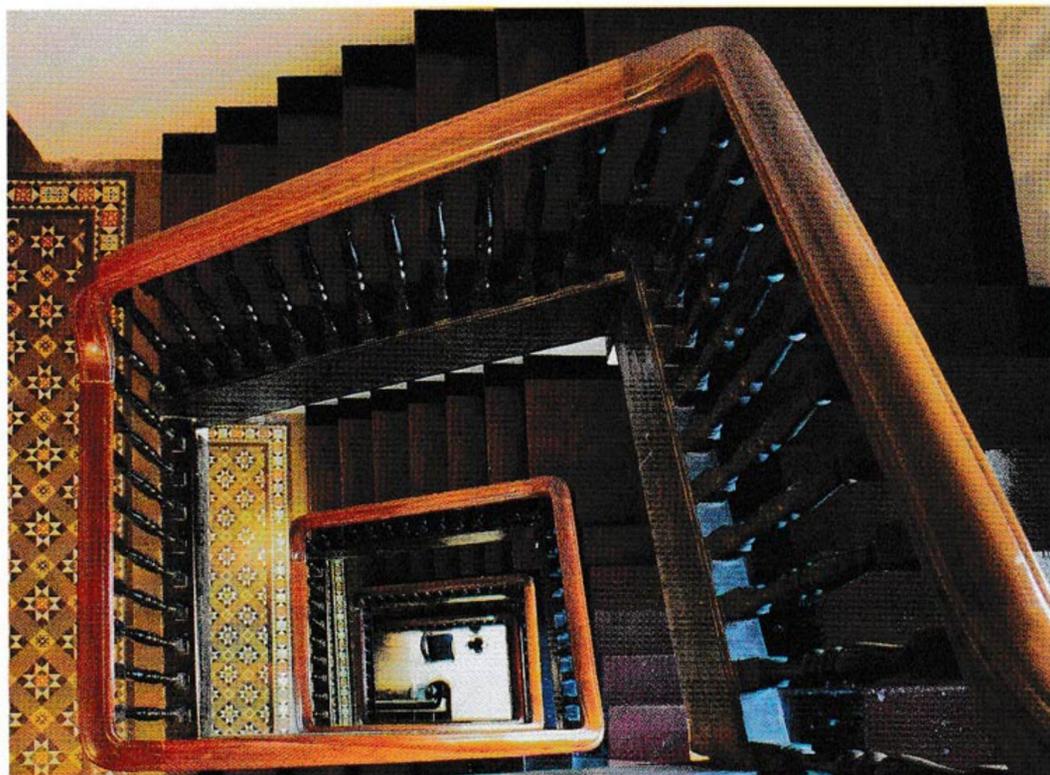


MUMBAI MODERN

One of the most stylish forms of architecture worldwide, art deco continues to define Mumbai's character with its unique local form

By Nityaa Iyer



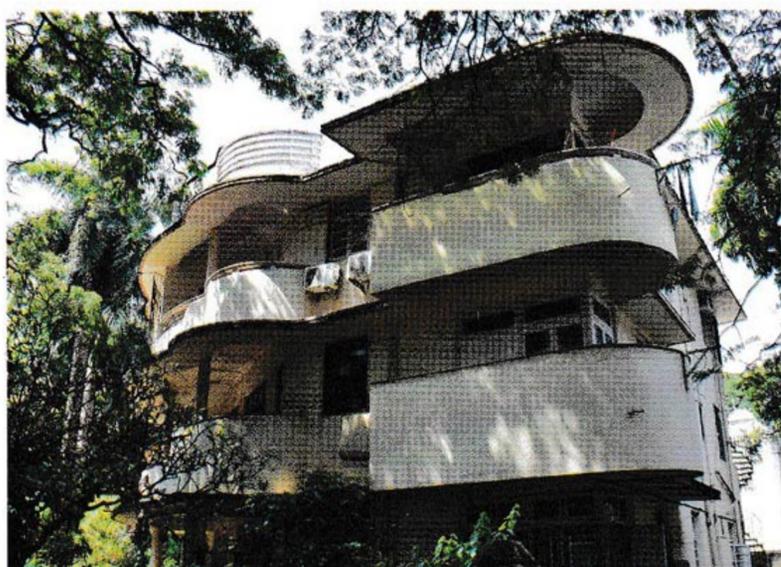
IT IS THE ICONIC STYLE IN WHICH NEW YORK'S CHRYSLER BUILDING AND EMPIRE STATE WERE BUILT. Miami's skyline is dotted with it. And with over 200 structures, Mumbai is a large, open-air museum for the art deco lover. Though the stylish mix of straight and curved lines, colourful bas-relief work, and geometric patterns is instantly recognizable, deco in Mumbai is unique because of the way it developed its strain: Bombay Deco.

The architectural form arrived in the city via prosperous merchants and traders who had travelled to Europe and observed the cultural and architectural movements taking place there. They brought impressions of that back home. At the time, land was becoming available on Backbay Reclamation in Mumbai and these traders began approaching Indian architects like GB Mhatre, Merwanji, and Sathe and Bhuta to design in the sophisticated deco style that came to embody the cosmopolitanism of the city. Consequently, the initial stretch of buildings in south Mumbai is European in

style. Further north in Matunga and Dadar, the tropical and nautical decorative elements give way to a sense of 'Indianness', seen in details particular to the communities that lived there. Localised elements like the Om appear as on Nalini Kunj, as well as the swastika symbol which is in the grille at Tejookaya Park. A more elaborate example is the Laxmi Insurance Building in Fort, which has Laxmi on the top, and elephants incorporated into the design. They show how art deco was transformed by the city and became an integral part of it.

To see some of the finest examples, take a curated walk with Art Deco Mumbai, which covers south Mumbai, along the Oval. If you want to check them out by yourself, some of our favourites are Rajjab Mahal for its angular grillework, Shiv Shanti Bhavan for its lovely panels resembling stained glass, Dhanraj Mahal in Colaba for its extravagant façade, and Philomena in Dadar for its oyster shell-shaped balconies, and grilles fashioned like musical notes. ■

Nityaa Iyer is part of Art Deco Mumbai, an initiative working to chronicle and conserve Mumbai's Art Deco buildings



(From top)
Scholar High
School; Dhanraj
Mahal; Philomena;
Rajjab Mahal.