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CITY'S GOTHIC AND ART DECO BLDGS MAKE IT TO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The historical inscription was made at the 42nd session of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO in Bahrain



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In Manama, Bahrain, at 13:02 on June 30, 2018, the Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensemble, Mumbai, was inscribed as a World Heritage Site, making it one of the most significant events in Mumbai's historical timeline. This inscription will serve to protect, enhance and showcase a spectacular ensemble of 94 historic buildings across 66.34 ha with four significant architectural styles. Two centuries, 19th and 20th, straddle the Oval Maidan on either side, making the 'Mumbai collective' unparalleled. The dramatic confrontation of the two styles across the Oval reflects two waves of urban expansion, within which the majority of buildings being built

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Gothic and Art Deco make it to WH list

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were Victorian Neo Gothic and Art Deco. These styles comprise Victorian Gothic, Indo Saracenic, Neo Classical and Art Deco. While the Bombay High Court, Mumbai University and David Sassoon Library are Victorian Gothic, the CSMVS (Prince of Wales Museum) and Western railway headquarters at Churchgate are Indo Saracenic. Sir Cawasji Jhangir Hall (NGMA) and the Army and Navy building are Neo Classical. Regal and Eros cinemas, HR College, Cricket Club of India and Empress Court are Art Deco buildings, and so is Soona Mahal. They are all included in the nomination and are a part of the ensemble.

The dossier

The journey began over a decade ago and was unique simply because no World Heritage Site nomination had been initiated, managed or funded by stakeholders. The entire nomination dossier, running into over a 1,000 pages was completed by stakeholders comprising individuals, resident associations, citizens, architects, urban planners, conservationists and activists, led by Abha Narain Lambah & Associates. Typically, in any other nomination at any other site in the world, the initiative, impetus, funding and preparation of the dossier are driven by the state. In Mumbai's instance, the state and central government, politicians and bureaucrats cut across ideologies and party lines and consistently supported the initiative leading up to its inscription.

For all the naysayers, this is easily one of the strongest statements reinforcing the fact that first and foremost Mumbai belongs to its citizens. They care deeply for their city and what the built heritage means to them. This is driven

by the fact that Mumbai is a city whose built heritage is "living heritage". The buildings in the precinct are public spaces with residential, commercial and entertainment usage. They are a part of the urban and social fabric of the city and form a part of the collective memory of every resident. If a grandparent remembers seeing his first adult film at Eros while he was still underage, his son remembers seeing Mackenna's Gold six times at Eros; his grandson remembers going there on his first date. Such is the bond of the built form with its citizens and the mind space it occupies, cutting across generations.

The inscription will serve to sensitise Mumbaiers even further about the architectural styles of the city and, more importantly, bring Art Deco to the forefront as it has resided in the shadow of Mumbai's magnificent, imposing Victorian Gothic structures. The Art Deco buildings are one of the largest and most homogenous assemblages in Asia and the world, with the spectacular coastal promenade, Marine Drive, sweeping the western boundary of the precinct. It creates a formidable architectural dialectic that influenced the narrative of modernism in Asia, with a distinct architectural genre—western in form and Indian in spirit—as an example of shared heritage.

The ensemble satisfies the criteria of being 'an outstanding example of a type of building... or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history'. The inscription will serve to leave a glorious architectural legacy for generations to come. Mumbai has a lot to celebrate today.

Read more about the Victorian Gothic & Art Deco Ensemble at <http://www.artdecomumbai.com/research/#unesco>

— The writer is Founder, Art Deco Mumbai Trust

14 yrs after ensembles' pitch, city's moment of glory arrives

With the inclusion of 94 Victorian Gothic and Art Deco buildings in the UNESCO list, Mumbai now has the distinction of having three world heritage sites

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The city's Victorian and Art Deco ensembles were inscribed in the world heritage site (WHS) list at the 42nd session of the world heritage committee of UNESCO at Manama, Bahrain, on Saturday. The inscription gives Mumbai the distinction of having 3 UNESCO world heritage sites, (including Elephanta and Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus). Spread over 66.34 hectares, with a buffer zone of 378.78 hectares, the ensembles comprise two architectural styles — the 19th century collection of Victorian structures and the 20th century Art Deco buildings along the sea, conjoined by the historical open space of Oval Maidan. As recommended by the world heritage committee, the heritage precinct is set to be renamed as 'Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai' shortly.

Selection criteria
For inclusion in the WHS list, sites must be of "outstanding universal value" and meet at least one of 10 selection criteria. A team of observers comprising heritage experts, conservation architects and UNESCO officials visit these sites to ascertain if they make the cut for nomination. Factors like the condition and maintenance of sites are



The two architectural styles are conjoined by the open space of Oval Maidan

also looked into. For the city's ensemble, the nomination dossier pitched it under criteria (ii): exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design, and (iv): to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history. Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma called the international tag as "a matter of great pride to the nation".

From the east to the west of Oval Maidan

The Victorian buildings form part of the Fort precinct to the east of Oval Maidan. These public buildings include the old secretariat (built from 1857-74), the university library and convention hall (1874-78), the Bombay HC (1878), PWD office (1872), Watson's Hotel (1869), David Sassoon Library (1870), and Elphinstone College (1888). The Art Deco buildings, to the west of Oval Maidan, were raised on newly-reclaimed lands at Marine Drive.



(Second from left) Conservation architect Abha Narain Lambah

Dossier funded by citizen groups

Conservation architect Abha Narain Lambah says it was pushed by 3 CMs

For Bandra-based conservation architect Abha Narain Lambah, who led the team that prepared the ensembles dossier, it was the culmination of 14 years of hard work. "It was in 2004 that I first made a presentation on Mumbai's heritage being among the finest 19th and 20th century groups at a UNESCO conference in Chandigarh on modern heritage in the Asia-Pacific region. A nomination for world heritage inscription has to go through the state government and then through the ministry of culture. The dossier was endorsed by three chief ministers — Ashok Chavan, Prithviraj Chavan and Devendra Fadnis," an ecstatic Lambah told *Mirror* from Bahrain, where she is part of the Indian delegation at the UNESCO heritage committee conference.

Though Mumbai's dossier was sent by two Congress CMs, the Centre had kept it in abeyance. In January 2015, Fadnis and actor Amitabh Bachchan endorsed Mumbai's nomination, but dossiers of Delhi, Nalanda, the 11th century Rani-kivav stepwell in Gujarat, and Ahmedabad city were sent. "In January 2017, the dossier was sent," said Lambah. She said it was the only one to be funded by citizen groups like Kala Ghoda Association, Oval Coopers Residents Association, Oval Trust, Nariman Point Churchgate Residents Association, Heritage Mile Association, Federation of Resident's Trusts, Observer Research Foundation, Urban Design Research Institute and MMR Heritage Conservation Society.

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