

Top 9 Art Deco Buildings In Mumbai That Will Take You Back In Time

By Cynthia Lewis | 5 min read



The iconic Oval Maidan in the south of the city is flanked by two Mumbais. One side is mostly Victorian New-Gothic from the late 19th century, with buildings covered in turrets, gargoyles and curlicues; on the other side is a stunning panorama of Art Deco buildings from the early 1900s, with curvilinear structures, pastel coloured walls, marble corridors inlaid with teak and sweeping balconies with stern brows. Art Deco may have originated in France in the early 1900s, but it was the architects of what was then Bombay who embraced it with unbridled enthusiasm, starting in the 1930s. They gave it their own unique flavor, often adding elements in the design that gave it a distinctively Indian character, creating a style often referred to as IndoDeco. The south and central areas of the city and some of the northern suburbs, which were largely built in that era, are still strewn with these architectural gems, many of which have now gone to seed.



Ram Mahal, Churchgate



Atul Kumar

“Our outreach has made us the only online repository that celebrates Mumbai’s Art Deco in such a comprehensive manner” – Atul Kumar

Design enthusiasts have been writing about these buildings on and off for many years now. The most recent example is Vancouver-based architect Navin Ramani’s award-winning book *Bombay Art Deco* (2007), which compared the building styles of Mumbai with those of Miami, the only other city with equal or more Art Deco structures. Finance professional Atul Kumar, a resident of one of Marine Drive’s Art Deco buildings decided to go beyond what others have done in the past. He set up a team comprising an architect and a conservationist to document every known Art Deco building in the city. Equally important, he harnessed the power of social media to raise awareness. Their website, artdecomumbai.com, is now a premier public information resource on Mumbai’s Art Deco, and it is likely that their work contributed to UNESCO’s decision last month to designate the Art Deco and Neo-Gothic buildings in the Fort, Churchgate and Marine Drive areas as World Heritage properties.



Seksaria Building, Marine Drive

Kumar and his team have so far catalogued 330 Art Deco buildings in Mumbai. This count only includes Colaba, Marine Drive, Oval Maidan and Matunga areas. Work on the rest is still ongoing. Two years ago, when he started looking for easily available public information on Mumbai's Art Deco, Kumar found very little. "That intrigued me, upset me and motivated me to acknowledge that we have a building precinct that is as significant as any in the world, and we don't have a single resource available other than two books, one of which is out of print. In today's day and age, any book that costs more than `2000 is a privileged resource; it's not in the public domain or accessible democratically."



Eros Cinema, Churchgate

So he turned to social media, launching Instagram and Twitter handles ([@artdecomumbai](#)) and a [Facebook page](#). "[Social media] enables outreach very freely and easily. [Any person] will have a `10 data plan, which means he has access and can see what we're doing and we can reach him. We're lucky that we can reach out to a generation that learns more through visual- and datadriven content than books and conventional learning resources like libraries."



Edward Cinema, Kalbadevi

Kumar's research has spawned a wealth of data on the movement, going back to its origins in 1930s Bombay. The growth of an educated middle-class migrating into the city for jobs combined with the land reclamation schemes of the time made for fertile ground for this architecture. The city lent its own flavour to the imported design, a unique twist that alters even across neighbourhoods. "Because we're on the sea, you'll see nautical elements such as porthole windows. You'll see balconies. Balconies are a tropical phenomenon, designed for people to sit and enjoy the cool breeze on a summer evening," Kumar says. "Then you have the chajja on top, which, in Deco terminology, is called an eyebrow. That was possible because reinforced concrete was used instead of stone, which is what Victorian Gothic [architecture] is made of. On Marine Drive, a lot of the buildings have turrets on the top, which almost look like a ship's masthead." Away from the ocean, in areas such as Shivaji Park and Matunga, local elements are more subtle: wraparound bands in the shades of the tricolour, or an 'Om' symbol built into the design.



Liberty Cinema, Marine Lines

Art Deco Mumbai has created an organic following that isn't limited to the district. "I think what makes me really happy is that our outreach has made us the only online repository that celebrates Mumbai's Deco in such a comprehensive manner. I'm so glad that we're not just on Mumbaikars' mindscape; we're also on the global map. At the end of the day, if we enable the citizens here to understand and appreciate it and, therefore, become invested in it, then they are the first level of protection. You can make as many rules as you want, but they won't help if the person has no connect with what you're talking about."



Shiv Shanti Bhavan, Churchgate

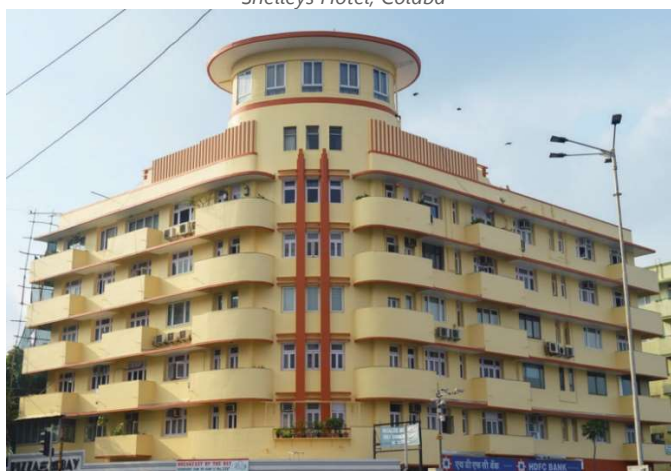
Connecting the story of this built heritage with the people who inhabit them has been one of Kumar's key achievements. "I'm amazed when a guy in Chandni Chowk sends us pictures on Instagram or a guy from Mohammed Ali Road says, 'Here's my building: Bandoowala Mansion. Will you please post it one day?' And, sure enough, we did post it and he was over the moon."



Keval Mahal, Marine Drive



Shelleys Hotel, Colaba



Soona Mahal, Marine Drive

<https://www.mansworldindia.com/art/top-9-art-deco-buildings-mumbai-will-take-back-time/>