

## On an Art Deco Trail through Mumbai

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In 2018, when UNESCO inscribed Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai in their World Heritage list, many city dwellers looked up in awe at the buildings they had so long taken for granted. While it was not difficult to understand the grandeur of Victorian Gothic, it was the Art Deco which surprised most. Residential buildings, fire temples, cinema halls, which they have been visiting or passing by for years, had suddenly become edifices that catapulted Mumbai into the global league of cities such as New York, Miami or Paris.

Although Mumbai is dotted with many Art Deco buildings (some have been pulled down over the years), it is the precinct to the west of the sporting fields of the Oval Maidan, with its slew of Art Deco buildings, which led to the UNESCO honour.

Some of the most prominent Art Deco examples can be seen along the Marine Drive.

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The Taraporevala Aquarium in Mumbai

Apart from the apartment buildings, one of the prominent Art Deco structures is the Taraporevala Aquarium, its exterior marked by well-defined lines and an artwork consisting of sea horse and other denizens of the blue waters, highlighting the purpose of the building.

Although the term 'Arts Décoratifs', or 'Art Deco' for short, became popular following the 1925 Paris-based world fair titled 'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes' (International Exposition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industries), this new architectural design had already taken its roots in Europe. Buildings built with modern materials sported a precise look, including flat roofs and smooth walls, while the exterior sported unique designs reflecting the use of geometric patterns and regional motifs (Chinese, Egyptian, Mayan, etc.), even lettering.

It did not take long for architects and designers in Mumbai (or Bombay as it was then known as) to be inspired by this new style in imagery. They also added Indian designs to the repertoire, thus giving rise to what later became known as Indo Deco. In Mumbai, the style reached its peak during the 1930s and 1940s.

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The Eros Cinema

Some of Mumbai's iconic theatre or cinema halls are fine examples of Art Deco style, largely owing to their American connections. Examples include Edward Theatre, Metro, Regal, and Eros.

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The Regal Cinema

Driving past the MG Road in Fort area, one of the Art Deco buildings that you cannot miss is the New India Assurance Building.

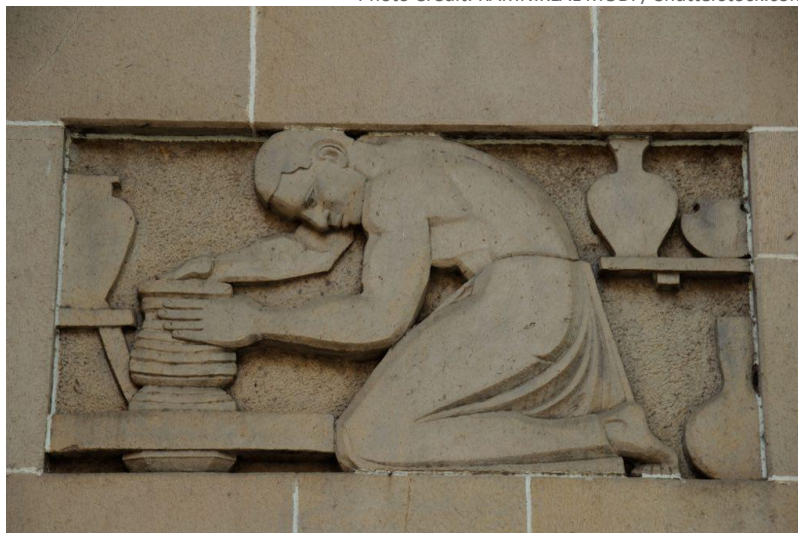
Photo Credit: AnilD / Shutterstock.com



The New India Assurance Building

With its façade sporting two huge statues which bear a strong resemblance to Egyptian art and Indian imagery of a potter or a woman spinning the 'charkha' in bas relief, it is one of the best examples of Indo Deco.

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Indian and European carving at the Insurance building

Interestingly, even before the UNESCO recognition, individuals were trying to gather information about the Art Deco buildings in Mumbai. Finance professional Atul Kumar, who lives in an Art Deco building himself, with the help of an architect and a conservationist, has been documenting them. In a media interview, Kumar explained

how location and Indian sensibilities also influenced Art Deco expressions in the city. As examples, he pointed out the porthole windows, balconies, turrets resembling mastheads of ships, and more.

One of the buildings which often feature in the itinerary of most Mumbai Art Deco walks is the Soona Mahal, recognised by its prominent linear look, curved balconies and turret.

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The Soona Mahal at Marine Drive

So the next time you are in Mumbai, take some time off and go on an Art Deco trail.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/outlooktraveller/explore/story/70823/art-deco-trail-through-mumbai>