



# 10 Architects that gave shape to Bombay's Art Deco Movement

April 30, 2021 | Philomena Vida

Mumbai, India's financial capital, is home to the second most extensive collection of the Art Deco art movement, second only to Miami. Historically and visually, the movement's style starting in the 1930s distinguishes Indian architecture from the widespread neo-classical Gothic style, which architects from the West mainly brought in.

As the first expressions of modern architecture in the country, the movement expressed an initial statement on nationalism and independence.



©Art Deco Mumbai

## The Art Deco Movement

In 1925, an art fair in Paris, the "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes," marked the Art Deco movement's beginning. The use of defined craftsmanship to create modernistic shapes out of ordinary and novel materials first distinguished itself in the form of furniture, accessories or decorations, but soon also influenced architecture.

As the name suggests, the fair exhibited art that combined an artistic appearance influenced by technological progress. External features were flat roofs, rounded walls and shapes, ornamentation, modern and expensive materials, and typography use. The artistic approach of this movement allows for a wide range of applications.

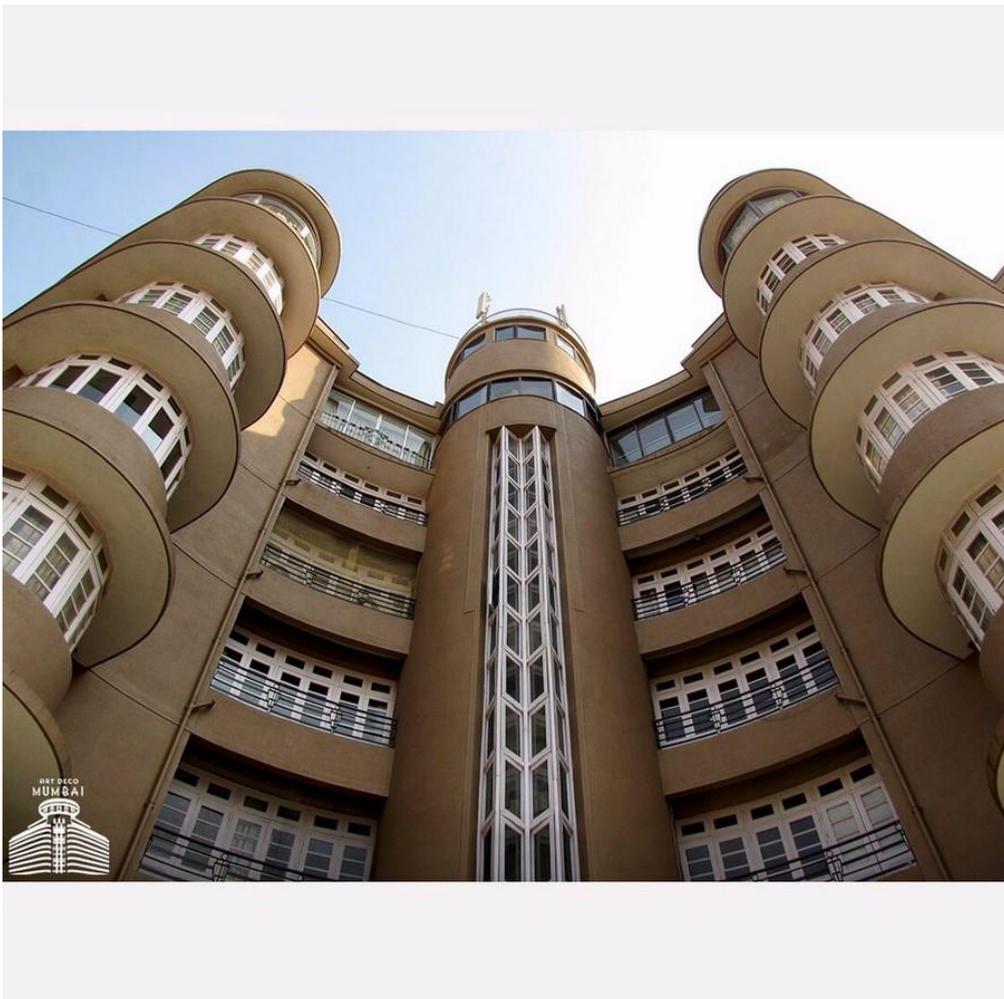
“What is special about Mumbai’s architecture, and about Art Deco in particular, is that unlike Delhi it is not all monuments or public buildings. It is homes and schools and cinemas, spaces we have lived in, grown up with and can relate to.”

The internationally renowned style of the era was conditioned in Mumbai by local and international architects to the tropical climate and Indian culture, giving this interpretation a blend of Indian design and Art Deco imagery—an “Indo-Deco” identity.

Along Marine Drive and Oval Maidan Park, several buildings were declared part of the World Heritage Site by Unesco. The recognition resulted from a fourteen-year campaign led by activists and locals to promote and preserve the neighbourhood’s cultural identity as it represents this era.

The following list presents ten both Indian and international architects who significantly influenced the Art Deco movement through their architecture in this area.

## 1. John Mulvaney



Ram Mahal by architect John Mulvaney\_©Art Deco Mumbai

Having designed the corner building called Ram Mahal in the Churchgate neighbourhood in 1935, the British architect implemented Art Deco features such as the cubature's ziggurats, the curved façade elements, balconies adapted to the tropical climate as an extension of the living space and the shading ornaments.

Furthermore, it becomes apparent to what extent the movement's design features find their inspiration in technological development. They resemble innovative nautical structures as the porthole windows refer back to the city's geographical location at the port.

## 2. Gregson, Batley & King



Maneckji Wadia Building by architects Gregson, Batley & King\_©Art Deco Mumbai

This architectural office also contributed to the variety of Art Deco Buildings by designing the Maneckji Wadia Building. In contrast to the example shown before, the building is more conservative but still full of features that make up the movement.

The British architects implemented ornamented balconies while at the same time keeping the façade design otherwise very vertically linear, decorated with occasional chevron motifs. The recess of the facades, called a ziggurat, is also evident in Maneckji Wadia Building.

### 3. Gajanan B. Mhatre



Queen's Court by architect Gajanan B. Mhatre\_©Art Deco Mumbai

Nevertheless, it was not only European architects, but above all Indian, native architects who shaped this architectural era. The architect Gajanan B. Mhatre designed several buildings in the Art Deco style, one of the most well-known being the Queen's Court.

Influenced by the architecture of the Gurajat in combination with typical stylistic means of the Art Deco style, the building focuses on an exciting interplay of proportion, material and scalability. The use of colour, the metal grills and the typographical address formation also refer to Art Deco.

#### 4. K.P. Daver & co.



Belvedere Court by architects K.P. Daver & co.\_©Art Deco Mumbai

The exciting play of colours, promotion, depth of the façade and the address formation on the corner became typical for the time. Designing Belvedere Court, the architects made a significant contribution to the Art Deco Movement.

It is a prominent representation of that era with its location at Oval Maidan, facing the neo-classical counterparts on the other side of the park.

#### 5. Master, Sathe and Bhuta



New India Assurance by all Indian architects K.P. Daver & co.\_©Art Deco Mumbai

The New India Assurance is representative of this period as it combines symbolism with technical innovation. Technical advances in the construction industry in reinforced concrete and ventilation systems made multi-storey buildings with internal sanitary facilities possible.

This accomplishment allowed the architectural firm, the first all-Indian-led office at that time, to increasingly use the building's façade for an expressive play of symbolism referring to Egypt mythology in ornamentation.

## 6. Merwanji, Bana & co.



Shiv Shanti Bhuvan by architects Merwanji, Bana & co.\_©Art Deco Mumbai

Shiv Shanti Bhuvan is part of apartment blocks that face the Oval Maidan's greenery and the neo-Gothic colonial buildings behind it. The French designer René Lalique gave the movement a large audience through his art, which can also be found in the building's façade through the "Frozen Fountain", a symbol of eternity.

The building bears another typical feature, the roofing over the windows, locally called "eyebrows".

## 7. Mistri & Bhedwar



Eros Cinema by architects Mistri & Bhedwar\_©Art Deco Mumbai

This Indian architectural firm is responsible for the design of the famous Eros cinema. The building stands out from afar with its red-sandstone facade, ziggurat roofline, and theatrical use of friezes.

The cubature is formed in the shape of a cylinder and is reminiscent of pyramid structures. The Eros cinema offers an essential counterpart to the Liberty cinema, which a British architect designed.

## 8. P.C. Dastur



Zaver Mahal by architect P.C. Dastur.\_©Kennie Ting

Another excellent example of the nautical aspect of architecture is P.C. Daster's design of the Zaver Mahal. The building looks like a cruise ship as the turret on the roof is reminiscent of a ship's cabin, as well as the colour scheme and the rounded corner.

The frequently implemented "eyebrows" are used as a modified ceaseless variant. Through the use of typography, the building achieves a prominent address.

## 9. Suvernpatki & Vora



Soona Mahal by architects Suvernpatki & Vora & G.B. Mhatre\_©Art Deco Mumbai

Together with the architect mentioned above, Gajanan B. Mhatre, the architectural office of Suvernpatki & Vora designed this building. Soona Mahal was commissioned by the Sidhwa family and is still owned by them.

Located on the Arabian Sea, as part of the Marine Drive neighbourhood, it is one of the most prominent and best-preserved buildings of the era. Unlike many other structures that bear a European name, the naming was deliberately linked to Indian identity by naming it after the current grandmother of the family.

## 10. Sykes, Patkar & Divecha



Swastik Court by architects Sykes, Patkar & Divecha\_©Art Deco Mumbai

With the Swastik Court, the architectural office addresses other features of the Art Deco movement, such as the bas relief carved in stone on the façade. The use of various materials as decoration, such as the windows and balconies' metal frames, are also aesthetically developed. Other already mentioned features appear in the design, such as the colouring and curved cubature of the building elements.

From the 1930s onwards, the Art Deco Style represents India's first modern architecture movement. Not only were the above-mentioned magnificent buildings built, but additionally, hundreds of family homes in the style, courts, cinemas and other functions appear.

Mumbai's enormous richness of architecture is currently being preserved and documented by the art deco movement trust. As there are numerous buildings in the art deco style spread all over Mumbai, this list of architects involved only represents a fraction of the players.

The Art Deco Movement resulted in the understanding of architecture as a work of art – both in its inner and outer appearance. The resident may not only enjoy an aesthetic façade image because, through the combination of art both inside and out, the resident experiences his home in a whole new way.

## References

- Art Deco Mumbai, 'Architects and Firms That Shaped Mumbai's World Heritage Site', 16 April 2019 <<https://www.artdecomumbai.com/research/architects-and-firms-that-shaped-mumbai-world-heritage-site/>> [accessed 27 February 2021]
- Kennie Ting, 'Bombay Art Deco (Churchgate and Marine Drive)... and Malabar Hill', 2018 <<https://dreamofacity.com/2018/04/29/bombay-art-deco-churchgate-and-marine-drive-and-malabar-hill/>> [accessed 28 February 2021]
- Punit Paranjpe, 'Photos | India's "Miami": Putting Mumbai's Art Deco on the Map', Hindustan Times, 28 November 2017 <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/photos/news>> [accessed 27 February 2021]
- Ronojoy Mazumdar, 'Mumbai's Iconic Art Deco Buildings Were Made to Conquer Disease', Bloomberg CityLab, 2020 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-30/how-india-s-bombay-deco-buildings-battle-disease>> [accessed 27 February 2021]
- The Heritage Lab, 'A Tour of Mumbai's Art Deco Architecture', 2018 <<https://www.theheritagelab.in/mumbai-art-deco/>> [accessed 27 February 2021]
- Vaishnavi Chandrashekhar, 'Discovering Mumbai's Art Deco Treasures', The New York Times, 21 October 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/travel/mumbai-art-deco.html>> [accessed 27 February 2021]

<https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/know-your-architects/a4018-10-architects-that-gave-shape-to-bombays-art-deco-movement/>