



Art Deco in Mumbai, Bauhaus in Tel Aviv... 1930s' building boom saw similar styles

TNN | Jun 12, 2022, 03.07 AM IST



The two buildings were built in cities 4,000km apart, yet yet share architecture similarities. Seksaria building on Marine Drive (L) was built in 1940, the Tel Aviv apartment in 1935

Mumbai: Several months ago, Professor Mustansir Dalvi at the Sir JJ College of Architecture received an unexpected call from the Israeli consulate. Consular officials were looking for ways to celebrate 30 years of Indo-Israeli relations: was there something they could do together? That question set off what Dalvi calls a “series of discoveries” about the connections between the architecture of Mumbai and Tel Aviv—connections that are now on show at a new exhibition at the JJ campus.

Both cities, it turns out, saw a building boom in the 1930s in a similar architectural style—in Mumbai, it was Art Deco and in Tel Aviv, it was called Bauhaus. In both cities, those buildings have been recognised as

Unesco World Heritage sites: in Mumbai, the Oval and Marine Drive precinct, and in Tel Aviv, the historical quarter known as the White City. Both cities were also influenced by the ideas of British urbanist Patrick Geddes, who was professor at the University of Bombay in the 1920s and then went on to create the town plan for Tel Aviv, then part of British Palestine.

The exhibition, created by Art Deco Mumbai and Bauhaus Centre Tel Aviv, along with the Israel consulate and JJ, juxtaposes the Art Deco buildings of Marine Drive with the Bauhaus buildings of Tel Aviv, and celebrates architects of the cities. “The cities are so far apart, and in the 1930s, that distance was even more,” says Dahlia Nuemann, deputy chief of mission at the Consulate General of Israel. “Yet similarities are there. Climatically, they are both cities by the sea.”

Mumbai’s Art Deco heritage is often compared to Miami. But elements of Deco can be seen in many port cities, reflecting the spread of a new international aesthetic in the 1930s with the rise of modern transportation—steamships and airplanes—and the technology of reinforced concrete. “This exhibition is a good example of how this style was everywhere at the time,” Dalvi says.

At first glance, Tel Aviv’s buildings seem spare compared to Mumbai’s more playful Deco. Architects in that city were influenced by the modernist bent of The Bauhaus School in Germany—many were Jewish architects fleeing Nazi Germany—as well as Le Corbusier. “The Bauhaus rejected ornamentation, and even colour,” says Atul Kumar, founder of Art Deco Mumbai. He notes that Tel Aviv’s buildings are painted in pale greys and whites.

But buildings in both cities share a similar streamlined look, and even shipping imagery such as porthole windows and decorative lobbies. Looking at close-ups of building details, Kumar points out, “you can’t tell which is which.”

For Kumar, there is much to learn from Tel Aviv’s conservation experience. The city got its Unesco tag back in 2003, not just for the historic quarter but for Geddes’s town plan. Geddes promoted the idea of a “garden city” with lots of greenery and road layouts that allowed sea winds to ventilate the

streets. Some of these ideas influenced the Bombay Improvement Trust, but Geddes' vision was more fully realised in his Tel Aviv town plan. The Unesco tag means his layout can't be altered greatly now. In 2017, Tel Aviv municipality demolished a 1970s-era pedestrian bridge at one circle, restoring the space to the original vision. "It would be as if we removed the flyover at Sion Circle," says Kumar.

Conservation didn't happen overnight in Tel Aviv, says Nuemann, noting that many of the buildings were run down even 20 years ago. Financing conservation was also a challenge, adds Michelle Joseph, public diplomacy officer at the Israel consulate who previously worked at Tel Aviv municipality. The city offered building owners—most heritage buildings were privately owned—the right to build and sell an additional floor to finance conservation, not unlike in Mumbai. But the rules also ensured the additions did not disrupt the visual character of the neighbourhood, says Kumar. "The challenges (for conservation) have been similar," he says.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/art-deco-in-mum-bauhaus-in-tel-aviv-1930s-bldg-boom-saw-similar-styles/articleshow/92153351.cms>