

# Attend this exhibition to celebrate architects behind Mumbai's urban skyline

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**A special exhibition showcases the works, life and times of unsung Indian architects who shaped the urban fabric of modern Mumbai**



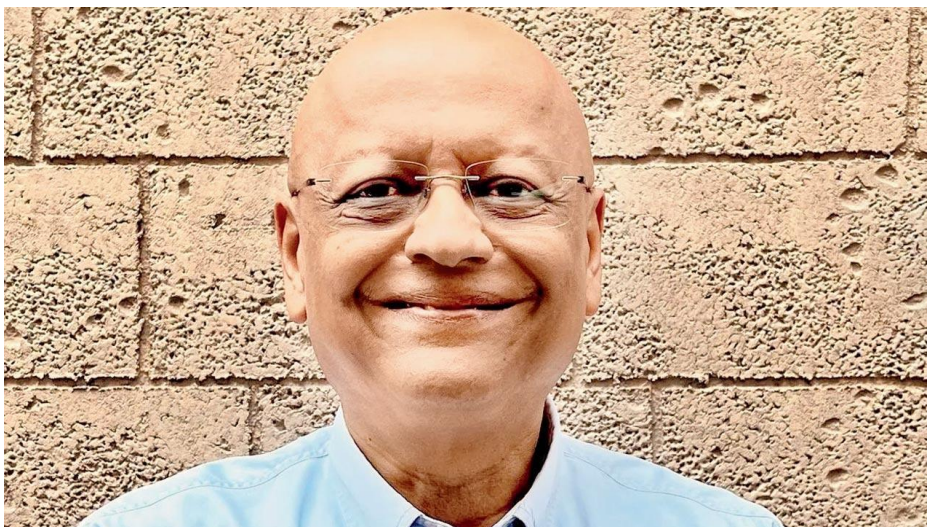
*Pic Courtesy/Getty Images*

Winston Churchill knew a thing or two about actions that define an age. Perhaps it was this knowledge that led him to remark that 'We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.' It could not be truer in the case of Mumbai. After all, every resident of the city, and its far-flung suburbs, has been influenced by its spaces or lack thereof. Starting from this weekend, Art Deco Mumbai Trust in collaboration with the Mumbai Research Centre of The Asiatic Society of Mumbai will present an exhibition that highlights the Indian architects whose contribution laid the foundations of the urban lifestyle of the city today.



**Swastik Court bas relief. File Pic**

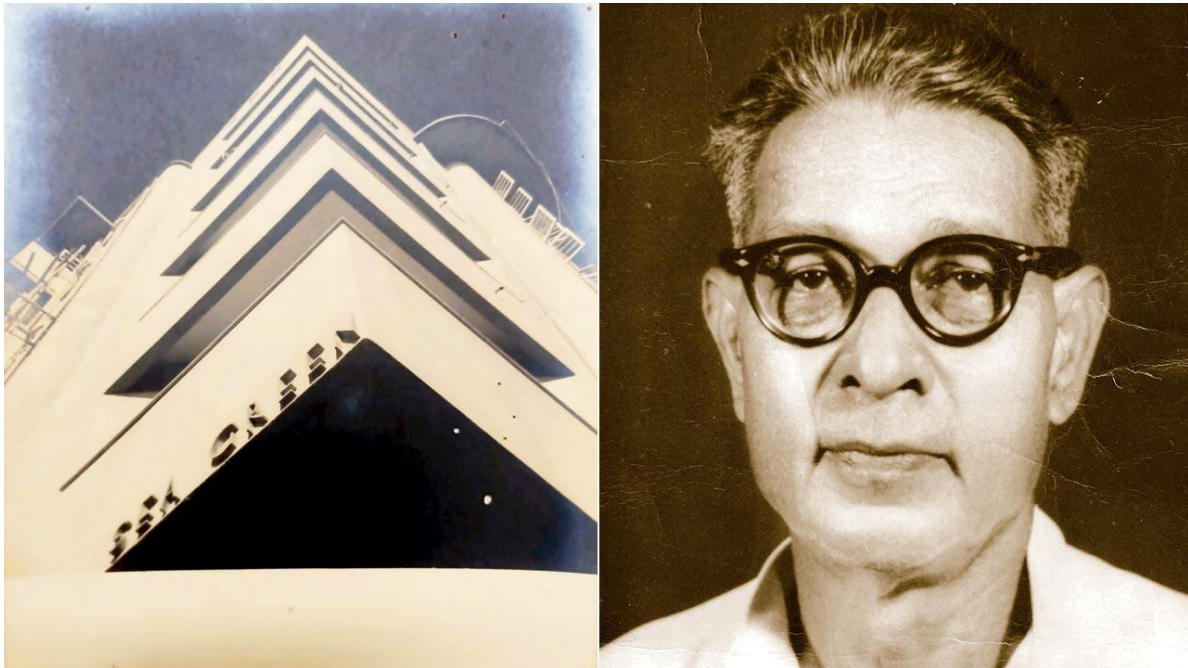
“We wanted to transition the conversation towards acknowledging Indian masters. They built large swathes of the city, designed it, and not only gave us a quality of life but also a way of living. Not just that, but they imbued a culture into the city as well,” says Atul Kumar, founder of Art Deco Mumbai Trust. The nine-day exhibition will feature talks, discussions and walkthroughs that offer insight to names such as Gajanan Baburao Mhatre, PC Dastur, Bhicaji Edulji Doctor and Dattatraya R Chowdhari among others.



**Atul Kumar**

Many of these names shaped the buildings that are now living monuments to the urban skyline of Mumbai. “If you ask anyone about Eros Cinema or Shivaji Park, they would know in an instant. But few know who designed them. Over the years, we

have been in touch with several archivists and the families of these architects. This led to a unique exhibition that honours not just the individuals, but also many of the firms,” he adds.



***Photograph of Sea Green Hotel, designed by Gajanan B Mhatre (right) with Suvernpatki & Vora; contributed by Sachin Goregaoker, grandson of Gajanan B Mhatre***

It is often easy to forget that Mumbai once lacked the skyline that now defines it. The famed Art Deco buildings that line one side of Oval Maidan and Marine Drive’s promenade, were dreamed up in offices by their creators. “GB Mhatre, who designed Soona Mahal, was one such artist. His grandson Sachin Goregaoker, who will be attending the event, has shared several priceless notebooks of his drawings for the exhibition,” Kumar reveals. Another rare memento is the silver replica of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, designed by Doctor & Vazifdar. Then, there is Marathe & Kulkarni whose ideas shaped the now famed Shivaji Park and its neighbourhood in Dadar. “While we were researching, someone revealed how they [Marathe & Kulkarni] first built the park, and then approached the designs for the neighbourhood around it. This was an example of their high thinking,” he remarks.



***Mustansir Dalvi***

Architecture, he explains, was not simply a work of bland buildings. “Many of them were products of Sir JJ School of Architecture. The artist Narayan Pansare, for instance, was the hand behind the iconic bas relief structures on the New India Assurance buildings in Fort among other works. Kumar notes, “He also designed the iconic Black Lady for the Filmfare Awards in 1960. The model of the statuette, lent by his son, will be on exhibit as will his personal drawings and notebooks.”

Mustansir Dalvi, Professor of Architecture and trustee, Art Deco Mumbai, Trust adds that the works were just as much a product of the Art Deco movement and internationalism of the period from 1930s to 1950s. “The exhibition will have a lot of names, but for every name you could add another 10. There have been many Indian architects,” Dalvi notes, adding that there was a synergy that ran through the group during that period.



***The New India Assurance Building in Fort was designed by architects Master Sathe & Bhuta with sculptural work by Narayan Ganesh Pansare. Pics Courtesy/ArtDecoMumbaiTrust***

Kumar explains, “We have, in fact, a section titled Ethos of Collaboration. Many of these architects would actually work freely and offer help on request to their fellows. For instance, GB Mhatre would design a building, and simply forget to sign it. This was a group of people with a vision, and everything we enjoy about the city today is because of them.”



***Kiran Pansare beside the bust sculpted by his father, artist Narayan Ganesh Pansare. This was a mock-up of the warrior-like figures on the facade of New India Assurance Building; (right) A photograph of Empress Court, contributed by Karl Bhote. The Art Deco building was designed by Gajanan B Mhatre with Contractor Kanga & Co***

Yet, why is it that people pass by these buildings without any curiosity about their creators? Dalvi has an insight. He says, “These buildings formed an urban fabric; they were not monumental, standalone structures. Such buildings often form a background to your life. For 80 to 90 years, people lived happily within them without any concern about who designed these structures. It is only now that we are in a state of retrospective interest, and appropriately so, about these Indian architects.”

The exhibition, Kumar says, seeks to change this notion. “It is a collection of memorabilia, photographs and art works. No one knows how CM Master or GB Mhatre looked like. To juxtapose the person, their work, philosophy and education together in an exhibition offers a different perspective. These were responsive creators focused on ensuring a higher quality of life for the city,” he concludes.

That alone earns them a space in the hall of fame of architecture, especially in the real estate of Mumbai, we think.

**ON March 2; 11.30 am (inauguration), 2 pm to 6 pm; March 3 to March 10, 10.30 am to 6 pm**

**AT Durbar Hall, Asiatic Society of Mumbai, SBS Marg, Fort.**

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**FREE**

## Designs on Mumbai



*Interiors of Liberty Cinema. File Pic*

### . Learning from the past

A talk with Ojus Chowdhari, grandson of Dattatray Chowdhari, senior partner of Gregson, Batley and King, the firm that designed Bank of India and South Court buildings in Malabar Hill.

**ON March 2; 3 pm**

**AT Durbar Hall, Asiatic Society of Mumbai.**

### . Liberty Cinema – Showpiece of the Nation

A walk through the iconic Art Deco interiors of one of Mumbai's showpiece theatres.

**ON March 5; 11.30 am**

**AT Liberty Cinema, New Marine Lines.**

### . The story of Soona Mahal

A conversation with Mehernosh Sidhwa, third-generation owner of the iconic Soona Mahal on Marine Drive.

**ON March 6; 11 am**

**AT Durbar Hall, Asiatic Society of Mumbai.**

<https://www.mid-day.com/mumbai-guide/things-to-do/article/deco-desi-architects-at-work-23337525>