The background image shows a building facade with a decorative stone balustrade. The balustrade features intricate carvings of grapevines and clusters of grapes. Above the balustrade, there is a window with a decorative metal grille. In the foreground, there is a dense arrangement of green plants with bright red flowers, likely a type of shrub or small tree. The overall scene is well-lit, suggesting a sunny day.

# Art Deco: The Lost Glory of Karachi

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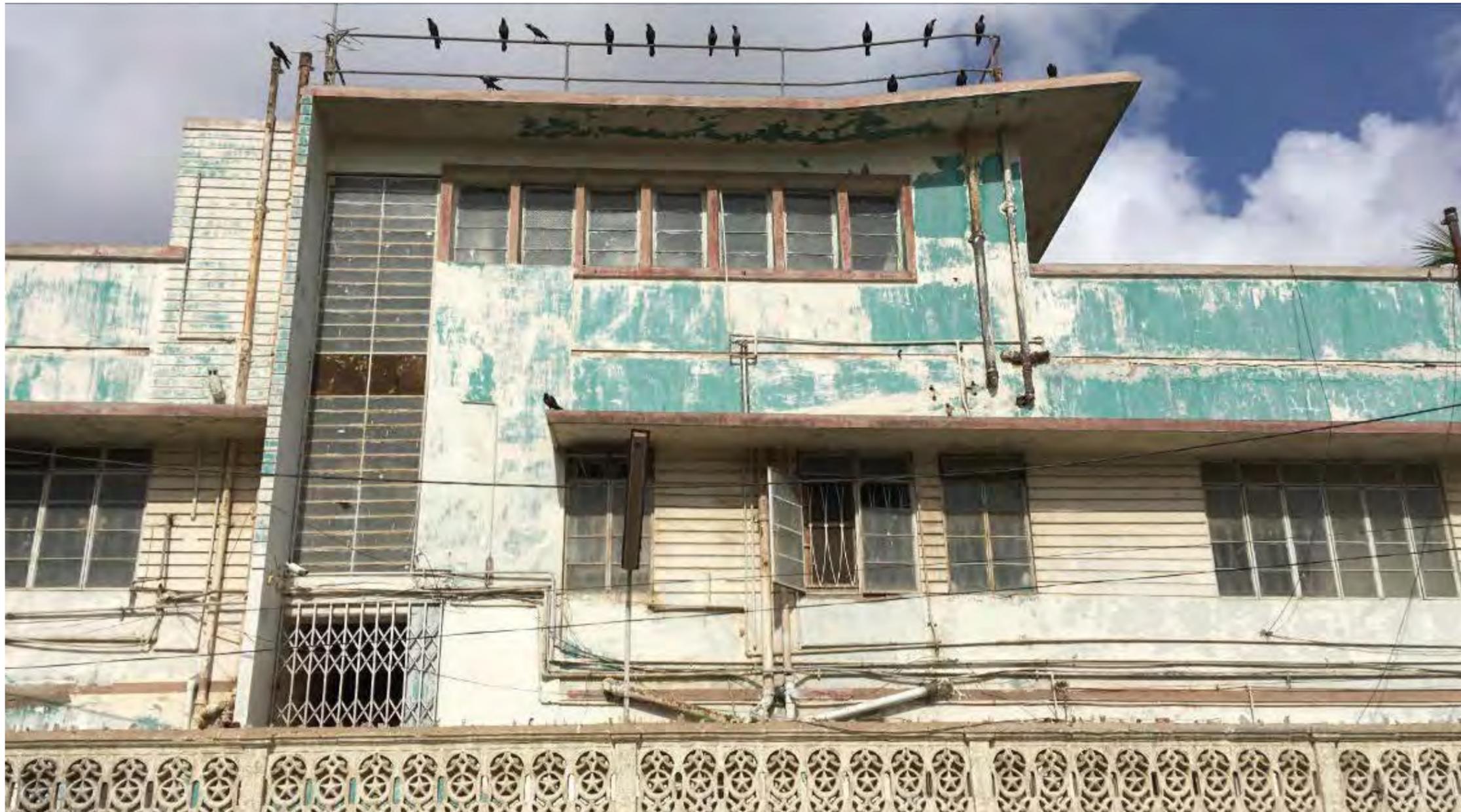
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## 0 Prologue

**‘For many developing nations, modernity is associated with progress and there is an aspiration towards western styles of living; the old is rejected for being backward, and historic continuity becomes disregarded in favor of the status of the modern.’**

Historic Bungalow Research is an ongoing documentation project of the historic buildings of Sindh. It is conducted by performing extensive field work and collecting oral narratives and literature. The work involves analysing bungalow typologies, spatial definition, material techniques, craftsmanship and personally owned artifacts which define material memory.

This project began in January 2015 with the fieldwork and documentation of the historic buildings of Sukkur, where I started studying colonial period housing schemes especially designed during the construction of Sukkur Barrage in the 1920s. My work involved documenting the buildings by using internally developed survey forms, where government owned records, archival photographs, original master plan of the housing society and survey maps were included as part of the research.

Using the same methodology, I started documenting the Historic Bungalows / Townhouse and Apartments of Karachi; the information that was gained from the resources was then verified and analyzed onsite. Zoning the historic districts on Karachi’s urban master plan helped to identify and organize the data, and the districts were then further analyzed for their public spaces, commercial / residential zones etc. Extensive field surveys were conducted, and it was found that unfortunately, over the passage of time, a lot of interventions had already taken place in the original scheme due to which the verification process has become more difficult.

Owners currently residing in the historical bungalows are interviewed. The history of the bungalow and its evolution through the owners and secondary research would be found. The methodology and approach that is used to document the historical buildings is extremely important for the preservation and protection process under Heritage Law. This type of research and documentation methodology is holistic and investigative, unlike the current governmental approach to heritage documentation, which is carried out on a superficial level.

The research aims to document, understand, and profile century old bungalows across Sindh for archival purposes. Educating current and future generations about the existence and beauty of these historical bungalows is imperative for understanding the history. Historic Bungalow Research of Karachi focusing on the history and influences of Art Deco is an essential and important feature of dialogue towards conservation in an urban environment, as most of the urban heritage is in active use and occupation.

Heritage documentation and conservation is not an isolated goal, but a part of a larger effort, which is to make the city a better place to live in. Just as the city has taken various initiatives on other issues, recognition of various architectural influences is a step towards maintaining its culture and values, through which citizens can benefit the most. Acknowledging the city’s architectural changes and progression fall not only in the realm of preserving the rich history, culture and values of our city but also promotes the protection of the lifestyle of its occupants and users. It is also important to preserve a distinct identity for the city. Heritage sites are multifaceted. They are in the form of residential neighborhoods, educational institutions, state buildings, corporate establishments, etc. All these structures with unique influences and precincts collectively contribute to the character of the city.

Heritage for many reasons is a complicated subject in Pakistan, and especially Karachi, where along with infrastructural issues, heritage is suffering from teeming with occupants and seething with landlords and tenants engaged in prolonged warfare, occupying structures ripe for collapse within the framework of regulatory provision of law. We need to shift policies to include living and everyday heritage in our preservation and documentation framework, perhaps taking cue from Mumbai's heritage act.

It's important to start a conversation on everyday heritage, and think of movements which have influenced and curated the architecture of Karachi. Not particularly focusing on the idea of identity, but observing and classifying influences.

'It was tentatively in 1860s, that Karachi began to expand commercially. The city was largely used as a port by merchants belonging to the Bombay Presidency from where they could ship products manufactured in Sindh and Europe and vice-versa. Gradually Bombay companies set up their local offices in the city which resulted in the establishment of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce. Soon the town became a business hub where exchange of ideas and influences in the built environment started taking place.

Art Deco is a very important part of Karachi's history. Karachi in the former half of the 20th century mostly had buildings either classically designed or indicated a revivalist trend. There is one significant structure that is referred to as a fine example of Art Deco style- the Karachi Cotton Exchange Building on McLeod Road (now I.I Chundrigar Road). Elements of Art Deco in Karachi bring together many conflicting styles: a lot of them are hybrid structures. For example, dome and parapet detailing are borrowed from Lutyens architecture in Delhi. It also has elements of modernism. Basically, the era that it represents is the transition period for revivalist movement to a new architecture.

The idea is to keep documenting Old Town of Karachi using social spatial activism methodology, and lean towards developing the Old Town Authority of Karachi and developing further safeguarding mechanisms within the marked geographic extension.

Heritage is the link between the past and the present and its preservation is not an easy task, nor can it be fulfilled by regulations alone- public participation and support are the critical ingredients. This can be achieved by persuasion, monitoring, and awareness. Architecture is a social art, and its acceptance by the society is of paramount necessity. We hope through our regular digital publications we can start the dialogue of protecting Karachi's historic center.

### **Marvi Mazhar**

Architect / Heritage and Spatial Activist

### **Published Research**

Iranian Cafes of Saddar, Karachi

Clock Towers of Karachi

Historic Bungalows of Karachi

Documentation of Sindh Tiles (ADRL Project)

Art Deco of Karachi

### **Ongoing Research**

Historic Apartments of Karachi

Modern Public Buildings of Karachi

## 1 Introduction

Cities in South Asia with profoundly diverse cultural histories have now started to focus on modern heritage, alongside curating conferences and debates focusing on everyday living heritage. In Karachi, however, where heritage listings are limited to the city's pre-partition colonial past, there is absolutely no discussion on everyday heritage. Neighborhoods like Bihar colony, Messiah Mohalla, Bengal Nagar, are all part of living heritage. A very important section of Karachi's modern heritage are movements such as Art Deco of the 1940s, Brutalism of the 60s, and modern residential and public civic buildings of 70s- yet they are all still pending conversations. A well documented heritage timeline of a city nurtures and strengthens the master plan, and develops outstanding values that transcend national boundaries and are of common importance to present and future generations of all humanity. A cultural good for shared history.

Karachi, with its unpredictable and ever growing urban fabric is now one of the most populated and fractured cities in the world, devoid of holistic and informed urban planning. It is notoriously popular for its ravaged urban infrastructure that entails a failing transport system, negligence of heritage sites, and unregulated land development. This densely packed city currently witnesses rapid urbanisation and an obsessive vertical growth that has dwarfed the older (planned) Karachi that is typified by low rises and houses that feed into a larger neighbourhood, a mohalla strategy. Ill-informed 'development' of the built environment at the hands of land and real-estate developers threatens the very existence of Karachi's older neighbourhoods and heritage sites that now, more than ever, need to be preserved.

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©MMA

Historic preservation efforts have been carried out under the Antiquities Act 1975 and Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act 1994, with the 18th Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan shifting the management and responsibility on to the provincial government in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The provincial government in Sindh has largely focused on preserving archaeological sites, where pre-partition and colonial structures are ignored or left under the hands of private owners. Within Karachi, the local government has adopted a myopic perspective of their heritage conservation efforts, with their narrowed focus on revivalist and pre-partition architecture causing to neglect heritage sites that do not fall under the former category/period. An important example of such severe neglect is the lack of recognition and preservation of historical periods such as Art Deco buildings that have dominated a significant portion of Karachi's architectural and urban history. This negligence is rooted in the lawmaking process that has failed to take into account our post-partition heritage, a heritage that is eccentrically sprawled across various neighborhoods.

## 2 Progression of Karachi's Architecture

When studying Karachi's architecture today, we can see distinct historical quarters/old neighbourhoods that include architecture belonging to diverse time periods and architectural styles. These periods vary from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial with influences and amalgamations from British and Subcontinental/vernacular architecture.



Mapped by Uzayr Agha and Hareem Naseer



Before the British and by the end of the Talpur reign (1729-1843), Karachi consisted of its fortified Port area and its suburbs, later known as the 'native quarter'. Architecture in Pre-British Karachi was characterised by a strong vernacular style guided by the local materials available that were most appropriate for the weather. Dried mud brick walls, reinforced with mangrove marsh with elevated stone foundations for flood protection were the norm. These structures usually had flat roofs which were easily constructed with natural materials like bamboo and mud plaster.

Once the British annexed Karachi in 1843, they started to develop the city further. Soon many historical quarters of Karachi were developed by the British around the 'native quarter'. These historical quarters included the Cantonment, Bunder, Napier, Garden, Ramswami, Preedy, Soldier Bazaar, Ranchore, Clifton, Civil Lines Quarters, Artillery Maidan and Queen's Road Quarters. A significant portion of the architecture in the Historical Quarters of Karachi are typified by the historical bungalows constructed throughout different periods. These historic/traditional bungalows have a unique and complex history due to the varied architectural influences that led to their widespread use in imperial compounds as well as upper-middle-class housing in the Indian Subcontinent in the 19th and 20th century.

The introduction of the Dalmiah Cement Factory in the 1920s revolutionized construction techniques of the past, effectively replacing mud brick walls with concrete blocks. This material allowed different styles like Neo Gothic, and Art Deco to be introduced to and adapted within Karachi.<sup>2</sup> Though the arrival of Neo Gothic architecture had been consciously engendered in the local landscape by imperial forces, the emergence of Art Deco in Karachi's architecture was a historically significant step taken by locals in the 1930s, as it spoke of constructing a built environment independent of its colonial counterparts.

### 3 The Art Deco Movement: Global to Local

The Art Deco design movement originated in France post-World War I, and can be traced back to the 1925 International Exhibition of the Decorative Arts (*Exposition Des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels*) in Paris. With the arrival of the Machine Age and Functionalism, many design fields such as architecture had started focusing on creating functional, machine made and standardized designs for the masses. This caused pushback from conservatives who wanted to retain traditional arts and craftsmanship by delving into decorative arts, which is where Art Deco was introduced to the world. This design movement, though widely criticised as solely indulging the wealthy, dominated various fields such as decorative arts, architecture, interior design, furniture, and graphics.

Due to World War II and the Great Depression, the 1940s witnessed the stagnation of Art Deco in the Western world, although its influences had already started to spread across the globe to countries such as Egypt, India, and Australia. This led to the adaptation by and incorporation of many cultures and mythologies within Art Deco, and allowed for the eclectic style to encompass a variety of movements such as cubism, fauvism, futurism, functionalism and new modernism through widespread exposure. This is why the movement was not clearly defined until its reemergence in mainstream academia during the 1960s, when it was given the title of 'Art Deco'.

Globally, Miami and Mumbai are now recognized as the two main cities that constructed architectural forms heavily inspired by Art Deco, recognized as souvenirs of their urban past.



Court View Building in Oval Maidan, Mumbai<sup>3</sup>

Art Deco Mumbai. Court View Building in Oval Maidan, Mumbai. July 6, 2020. <https://www.artdeco-mumbai.com/gallery/>.

## *The hidden politics behind Art Deco in South Asia*

The subcontinent observed the arrival of Art Deco in the mid-1930s. The style, known for being luxurious and modern, was one that Indians were keen on absorbing in their urban landscape.<sup>5</sup> Within India, Bombay (Mumbai) was the main city that incorporated Art Deco in its built environment. Here, local architects adopted the style in an unusual way to create 'muted' or 'restrained' modern buildings that differed from the Indo-Gothic/Revival architecture brought about by their colonizers, thus/hence erecting buildings in India that felt sovereign from its colonial counterparts, which helped to generate India's urban identity as a 'modern nation state'. This architectural ownership came about with the use of local materials, ornaments, resources and designers, a conscious decision that is observed as an extension of the Swadeshi movement that had emerged in India. The political nature of Bombay's Art Deco ar-

chitecture was later used to inspire other Indian cities to incorporate the Swadeshi and Independence movement in their praxis.

Some of Bombay's first locally owned insurance buildings, Lakshmi Insurance (pictured below) and New India Assurance Building, were inspired by Art Deco, and all materials, finances, designers and architects were locally sourced for their construction. This triggered a surge of Art Deco inspired commercial buildings in Fort (a commercial and historical district in Mumbai) that merged native and Art Deco influences to create an urban fabric stitched from the cultures, resources and knowledge systems of the indigenous. It was a clear statement from Bombay's industrialists; they intended to gain independence and were capable of developing as a modern, sovereign nation.

The Lakshmi Insurance Building<sup>4</sup>  
Art Deco Mumbai. Lakshmi Insurance Building. <https://www.artdecomumbai.com/inventory/lakshmi-insurance-building/>.





Marine Drive, Mumbai<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Bombay's residential areas experienced the Art Deco movement a little differently- lively and vibrant neighborhoods such as Marine Drive and Oval Maidan were developed, where the Art Deco elements were far more subtle and overall much less politically driven. Instead, they created a built environment much in line with Bombay's elite; they actively tried to communicate an image centered around a global identity, one that wasn't rebelling against the British Imperial authority, but simply becoming part of a cosmopolitan, consumerist and capitalist society living in a modern neighborhood.<sup>6</sup>

## *Karachi*

In the meantime, while travelling across India, Bombay's merchants found themselves attracted to Karachi's port. In a DAWN article, Mohammad Salman states that the gradual growth of enterprises and cotton trade on Karachi's port resulted in the establishment of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce, earmarking Karachi's genesis as a business hub. Soon cotton trade shot up resulting in the organisation of the Cotton Association in 1933, and its formalisation in 1936 as a physical structure- the Karachi Cotton Exchange Building. This building adopted Art Deco in its design and revolutionized the architectural scope for Karachi's landscape, effectively transitioning from Art Nouveau and Revivalist architecture to a newer and diverse array of designs as part of modernism.<sup>8</sup>



Cotton Exchange Building in Karachi<sup>9</sup>

As Karachi's urban landscape started forming and negotiating with varying architectural ideas, the city found its urban fabric being stitched by 4-8 storey commercial and residential buildings and bungalows that embraced multiple styles, including Art Deco.





In the 1940s to 1960s, when Art Deco inspired architecture was most prevalent in Karachi, citizens were much more conscious of giving back to public spaces and to their neighbourhoods through the designs of their homes and buildings; they were sensitive to their surrounding environment, and thoughtful elements such as public benches within shop windows and parks such as Chetumal Terrace existed throughout the city. Comparatively, Karachi's newer architecture is isolated and disconnected from society. The exteriors of houses and buildings are not as personalised as they used to be during the era of Art Deco architecture, and built spaces are not friendly to the public.

## 4 Influences on Architecture: Symbols and Furniture

### *Architecture*

Internationally, Art Deco inspired architecture featured straight and sleek lines, geometric patterns, and shapes of Greco-Roman Classicism. Ziggurat Patterns inspired by Ancient Babylonian and Aztec architecture, clean rectangular designs, symmetry, and unvaried repetition of design elements were also common features of this style. Motifs using the sun (eg. sun rays, sun bursts) were quite common.

The sun is the most widely recognised motif of the Art Deco Movement. It is one of the most ancient symbols in human history; all of the most important concepts were wrapped up in the image of the sun: time, life, birth, death, divinity, royalty, and power. It also symbolises the dawn of a new age. South Asian Architecture uses the sunrise and sun bursts motifs plentifully in the form of grills, taking different forms, the symbol becomes what is termed as 'Glocal'; generating local versions of a symbol or design from a globalised movement.



The Art Deco style was essentially one of applied decoration. Buildings were richly embellished with hard-edged, low-relief designs. Buildings in South Asia utilized expensive hand-crafted decoration, others used machine-made repetitive decorations. To keep costs down, ornamental treatment was often limited to the most visible parts of the building.



Zaibunissa Road, Karachi / Source: @artdecokhi/Instagram



Source: @artdecomumbai/Instagram  
Art Deco Mumbai. <https://www.artdecomumbai.com/>



Source: @artdecomumbai/Instagram  
Art Deco Mumbai. <https://www.artdecomumbai.com/>



Source: @heritagewalkkhi / Surriya Mohamedi

Art Deco, also known as 'Style Moderne', sometimes known as streamline moderne, was influenced highly by the design of automobiles and planes to make them more streamlined and aerodynamic. This styling used in the aviation and automobile industry started to influence design, and can be seen in the more curved lines which came towards the tail end of Art Deco.

Windows in Art Deco designs usually appear as punctured openings, either square or round. To maintain a streamlined appearance for the building, they were often arranged in continuous horizontal bands of glass. Wall openings are sometimes filled with decorative glass or with glass blocks, creating a contrast of solid and void forms while admitting daylight.

The 1920s and 30s were all about movement. Not only was the urban cityscape growing rapidly, modes of transportation had changed swiftly 'overnight' from horse-and-buggy to planes, trains and automobiles. This led many Art Deco designers to use curves to represent motion.





Old Clifton / Source: @artdecokhi/Instagram

Radial Geometry and Patterns along with heavy textured plaster were also common symbols within architecture. The circle itself symbolises a sacred thing that can mean wholeness, fertility, equality and strength. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, circles also provide great contrast to harsher geometric shapes, which is why a lot of Art Deco typography mixes both hard lines with exaggerated curves. Designers also made use of rigid lines by slanting them to imply motion.

In South Asia, another major Art Deco influence was the emergence of **Terrazzo/In-situ flooring**. The tiles show the changes in design influences that the sub-continent went through. The emergence of Art Deco in Karachi's architecture was a historically significant step taken by the locals in the 1930's, as it spoke of constructing a built environment independent of its colonial counterparts and emerged to compete with British imported tiles and to help India end its reliance on British goods<sup>10</sup>. In much of our modern heritage, we find Terrazzo patterns laid down in-situ, which is nostalgic of our city's post colonial heritage.

The floor documented here is laid down in-situ. A method in which the floor is prepared on site, as compared to tiles which are manufactured separately and then installed. This process is a very bespoke process with the possibility of creating complex patterns and designs. The simplest of which found in our context is terrazzo with a wide variety of pigments and marble chips used, with a glass in-lay in the joints. The mix is prepared on site as per the requirements, a background colour is chosen and the terrazzo chips to be laid on the surface are chosen as well. It is a technique that enables large coverage of surfaces with lesser joints in the floor. The mix is usually prepared with marble chips, pigments and cement as the binder element and then is further laid down onto a prepared floor. The joints given can match the joints of the floor below to ensure that the floor does not crack. Terrazzo patterns created with the in-situ technique have recently become a strong design element in contemporary design as well. The feeling of a timeless space that such floors can create is being revived.





## *Furniture*

Art Deco influence extended to interiors as well, and furniture from the Art Deco era can still be found in Karachi homes, preserved as valuable historical and cultural objects. Art Deco within interiors mirrored the exteriors, celebrating modern life and emphasizing luxury and sophistication. Furniture design featured new materials like chrome, Bakelite (a type of plastic) and plate glass, as well as costly materials like ivory, mahogany and dark lacquered surfaces. Lacquering was a process that coated materials like wood with many layers of resins to create hard shiny surfaces and this process was widely used in Art Deco style furnishing. When you look at an Art Deco Architecture or objects, you see common elements like geometric shapes, often in the form of zigzags or chevrons (upside down V forms).

The following are examples of Art Deco inspired furniture found in people's homes in Karachi: (Images provided by Kiran Ahmad, H.M. Naqvi, Farooq Soomro, Ahad Ali, Marvi Mazhar)

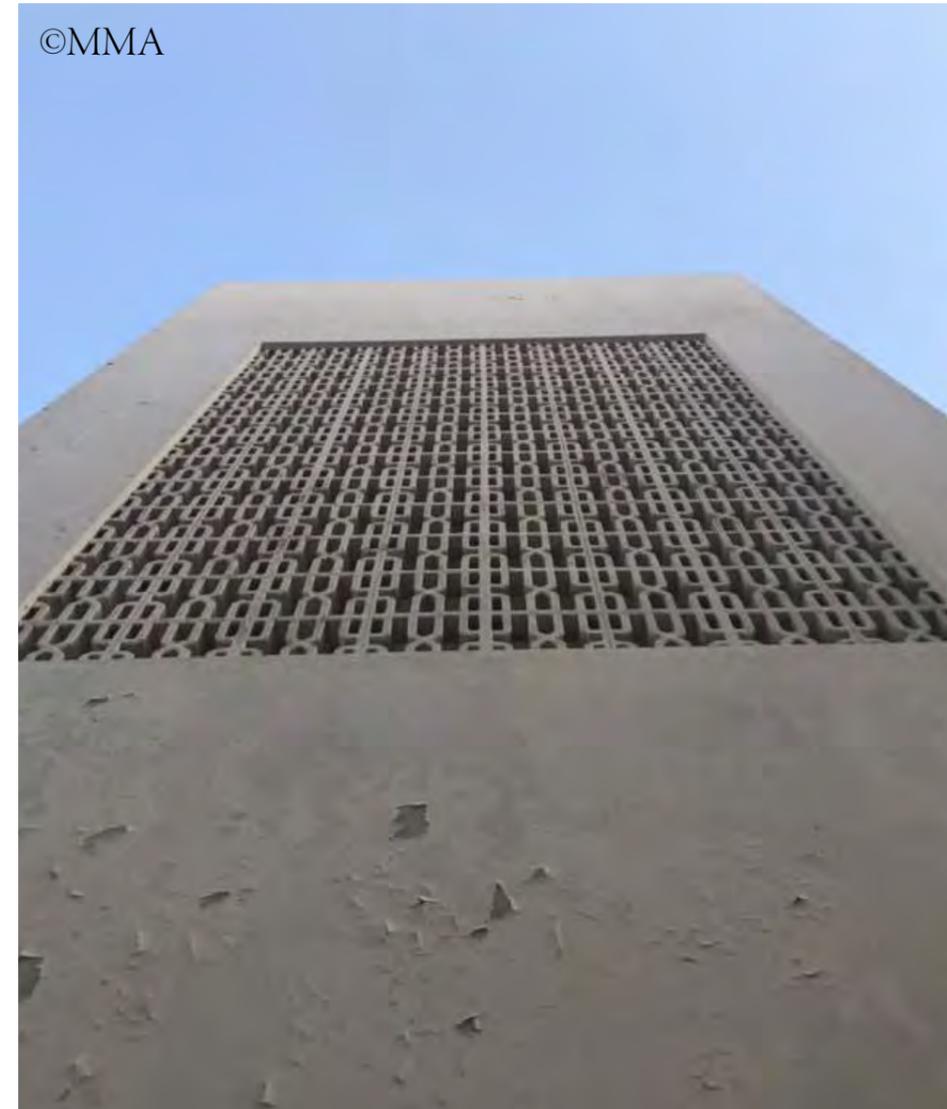


## 5 A South Asian Network: Art Deco Insta Family

Across South Asia, the deterioration and loss of heritage is a common issue. Local and federal governments are usually the ones tasked with preserving heritage, but due to their inefficiency, we now see citizens across the subcontinent taking it upon themselves to document and preserve their past. The next generation of collaborators and preservationists are now online, and have created a South Asian Network through Instagram and other social media sites to collaborate, share information, and bring awareness to the rich historical heritage of their cities. Many South Asian Art Deco instagram pages have been active for years, documenting and bringing recognition to Art Deco influences within their communities. Examples of such pages are as follows:

@artdecokhi  
@artdecomumbai  
@decoindeli  
@artdeco.bangalore  
@artdecohyderabad  
@deccankaravan  
@delhimodernism  
@decoarchitecture  
@artdecobombay  
@artdecogoa  
@calcuttaartdeco  
@kerala.artdeco  
@storycityindia  
@asianartdeco

@artdeco\_la  
@art\_deco\_arabi  
@deco.rebel  
@artdecolahore  
@mumbaipaused  
@allthingsoldandbeautiful  
@calcuttacornice  
@intach.hyderabad



In our collective struggle to make Karachi and other South Asian cities more livable for the common man, we need to realise that preservation is a must. The ease of outreach and documentation through social media has been a great benefit for citizens of South Asia concerned with preserving and documenting their past. The collaborative aspect of these pages highlights the fact that this South Asian Network is working together to make information on Art Deco accessible to the general public, and to create a repository that will hopefully inspire others and help to preserve the rich heritage of South Asian cities.

# Armchair Deco tour of the subcontinent

If you are a fan of all things Art Deco, here are six interesting Instagram handles, from Kolkata to Karachi, to follow

JANE BORGES

## Mumbai

THE financial capital is where the Art Deco movement gained foothold in the early 20th century, before it spread to other parts of the Indian subcontinent. Art Deco's Instagram handle is no different. With 11.4K followers, it is one of the largest digital repositories of Deco in India. "Through our digital outreach, we have created huge awareness within the 24 to 45 age group. It's led to a sensitisation and appreciation of the city's Deco, and many have responded with curiosity and enthusiasm. Empowering residents is the first step in enabling conservation," says Atul Kumar, founder trustee of Art Deco Mumbai. While their website is heavy on news and content, the Instagram page focuses on engaging visuals.

FOLLOW: [instagram.com/artdecomumbai/](https://www.instagram.com/artdecomumbai/)



Shiv Shanti Bhuvan, the eyebrow queen of Mumbai, in Oval Maidan. PIC COURTESY/ART DECO MUMBAI

## Delhi

DECO in Delhi was born out of architect Geetanjali Sayal's curiosity of understanding and archiving the brief stint Art Deco had in the capital. "Art Deco became a popular choice of building during the British rule in many public structures and residences [here], especially after it gained popularity in Mumbai," says Sayal. The spirit of this style helped some of the architects, princes, professional class and local residents to experiment

with art and design in architecture for the first time. "Here in Delhi, Art Deco is found to have fascinating overlaps with Indo-Saracenic, Neo-Classical styles, while making its way to some of the modern structures we have even today. In some cases, it also reflects the religious beliefs of people, aptly identified as Indo-Deco, a term coined by Amin Jaffer, the International Director of Asian Art at Christie's London."

FOLLOW: [instagram.com/decoindia/](https://www.instagram.com/decoindia/)

## Kolkata

ADHIRAJ Bose's interest in Art Deco began when he saw a picture of the Empire State Building in the Millennium Encyclopaedia that was gifted to him. "The school where I studied, St Lawrence High School, was also built in Art Deco style. You could say I almost grew up with it as part of my surroundings," says Bose. "The style of Art Deco architecture in Kolkata can be compared with Miami's Tropical Deco with the dominance of streamlined modern designs. Though, at first largely popular with commercial archi-

FOLLOW: [instagram.com/calcuttaartdeco/](https://www.instagram.com/calcuttaartdeco/)



The spire of the Tower House Building in Kolkata. PIC COURTESY/ART DECO CALCUTTA

## Kerala

IT was in 2016, during a visit to Mumbai, as part of his architectural studies that Aflah Habeeb Mohammed first got interested in Art Deco. The buildings kissing Marine Drive, piqued his curiosity. "This led me to dive deep into the style and its history," he recalls. The next phase was to explore similar structures in Kerala, and photograph them. "Kerala doesn't have a cosmopolitan city. It has a unique settlement pattern of the rural-urban continuum, due to which the Art Deco structures here, aren't concentrated in a few cities/towns like in Mumbai, Delhi or Kolkata. This also



Kerala Bhavan Lodge, Palayam. PIC COURTESY/ART DECO KERALA

makes it a little harder to map every building," he says. At present, Mohammed says that only vernacular architecture is recognised as heritage in Kerala, while structures from movements like Art Deco are left to fall to ruin.

FOLLOW: [instagram.com/kerala.artdeco/](https://www.instagram.com/kerala.artdeco/)

## Hyderabad

WHEN one talks of the city of Hyderabad, it's the Charminar or the Golconda Fort that is usually mentioned in the same breath. Architecture student Nitya Gonnakuti started documenting Art Deco buildings on Instagram, as an attempt to show that her city had made room for other aesthetic architectural marvels, too. That many of these structures were slowly giving way for "modern buildings", made it urgent to document them. Gonnakuti says, "People always pay attention to conserving monuments that represent a centre of power, but we also need to focus on architecture, that actually shows the transition the city



Mahmood function hall, Yousufguda. PIC COURTESY/ART DECO HYDERABAD

has gone through." Art deco in Hyderabad, she says, reflected the transition from the Quth Shahi, the Nizam, and Colonial architecture. "It paved a way for modernism. A large number of these are situated on the RP Road and Jeera in Secunderabad."

FOLLOW: [instagram.com/artdecohyderabad/](https://www.instagram.com/artdecohyderabad/)



A building on Lalazar Road, Karachi. PIC COURTESY/ART DECO KARACHI

## Karachi

KARACHI-BASED Marvi Mazhar is a torchbearer of architectural and cultural heritage in her home city. Having initiated an academic research-based project called Heritage Walk Karachi for Pakistan Chowk Community Centre, the architect simultaneously began working on another initiative, where she developed archives on historic bungalows. This is when the idea of documenting Art Deco in Karachi took root. Art Deco came to this port city much later than it did in Mumbai, and it brought together several conflicting styles, says Mazhar. For instance, the dome and parapet detailing were borrowed from

Lutyens' architecture in Delhi. "In Karachi, our heritage is looked at from a typical lens, pre-Partition/colonial or Mughal past. But Art Deco and brutalist movements with newly introduced material concrete in '50s and '60s talk about the starting of modernism in Pakistan," says Mazhar. The 450-odd posts, are not heavy on captions, but allow you to soak into the architectural details in the photograph. From the mosaic geometric shapes on the flooring, semi-circular balconies, intricately designed balustrades, to sweeping curves, this is an interesting pictorial curation.

FOLLOW: [instagram.com/artdecokhi/](https://www.instagram.com/artdecokhi/)

[jane.borges@mid-day.com](mailto:jane.borges@mid-day.com)

A collaboration through social media family:

"Armchair Deco Tour Of The Subcontinent" by Jane Borges in TODAY SUNDAY MID-DAY (Mumbai)

<https://www.mid-day.com/articles/armchair-deco-tour-of-the-subcontinent/22850209>



A building on Lalazar Road, Karachi. PIC COURTESY/ART DECO KARACHI

## Karachi

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FOLLOW: [instagram.com/artdecokhi/](https://www.instagram.com/artdecokhi/)

[jane.borges@mid-day.com](mailto:jane.borges@mid-day.com)

## 6 Conclusion: Karachi's Urban Decay and Way Forward

In complex cities like Karachi, urban planning and historic preservation are misunderstood and are usually some of the last aspects of development to be considered. New development projects are initiated without any public discussion or publication of development plans, and the decision making powers are centralised within the Sindh government, which is highly fragmented and lacks a holistic, unified vision for heritage preservation. Moving forward, we need to allow the public to have a say in what happens, and give ownership of the city's heritage to her citizens.

To begin with, we should establish a formal, professional committee similar to New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to oversee everything related to historic landmarks in Karachi, and give the public a platform to voice their concerns. A centralised committee similar to LPC is sorely needed to establish and formalise rules on demarcating historic areas and buildings, to organise the process of approving changes to historic buildings, and to legally protect not only the heritage from the greed of owners who allow it to deteriorate, but also owners from misplaced allocations of historic buildings.

The international precedent of major cities is to have demarcated areas like historic quarters, financial districts and art districts within their cities. We too need to formally create heritage districts and zones (eg. Art Deco District) to recognise and protect our heritage, both pre-partition and post. Demarcated zones help to preserve heritage for future generations by encouraging citizens and authorities to treat whole neighbourhoods as spaces that need to be taken care of and maintained.

We should also raise awareness of the importance of Karachi's historical sites and areas through mediums such as heritage walks and trails. Art Deco Mumbai, a not-for-profit organisation, documents the Art Deco heritage across Mumbai, advocates for its preservation, makes information public through their website, and allows people to interact with the heritage through guided tours led by informed and passionate researchers. Guided tours/walks across heritage sites are not a foreign concept- within Pakistan, the Walled City of Lahore Authority carries out guided tours in addition to being responsible for the preservation of the heritage district. Heritage Walk Karachi is also a local initiative that conducts guided walks across areas within Old Town, and creates a medium of interaction between citizens, historical narratives and heritage sites. Guided walks should be formalised and adapted to historically significant areas across Karachi, and should preferably be led by locals of the area to empower them to protect their heritage, and to continue traditions of passing down stories and histories through word of mouth.

To conclude, Karachi is in dire need of cultural urban planning that allows neighbourhoods and a centralised formal committee to work together in an organised and legalised way to protect and document the rich historic and cultural urban history of Karachi. We need not just the government to be empowered, but the common man as well, to work towards the goal of making a more liveable city for one another.









## Endnotes

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