

SKYE A THOMAS

HAVE A DECCO

In which we trace the city's relationship with the architectural style

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Bandra: The Bungalow Deco



Desirée bungalow in Bandra (above) showcases several deco features. Chez Nous (below) shows off its curvilinear balcony with concrete grill work at the entrance

On a cool evening, we stepped off the wide pavement of the Bandstand promenade into one of the most peered-into compounds in the city: Galaxy apartments. On the lookout for the Deco in Bandra, we quickly realised one cannot speak of Bandra without Bollywood, and so there we were — walking into the marble and wood lobby of the house of Waheeda Rehman on BJ Road. The walls of Rehman's bungalow, a Deco structure we estimate to be built in the late 40s, curved ever-so-slightly, an attempt on behalf of the architects to capture the shifting sea wind. Rehman emerged from between half-moon walls — their slow-curves making the scene undulate before us — her silk kurta shining as she moved over to greet us.

Bandra is known for its bungalows. A favourite is St Roques Road's Saudades, a salmon pink two-storey with red banding; a perky sailor in white uniform saluting the public at its helm. Then there is Perry Road's Roseannette, powder blue with eggshell grills, which sits like a rose pulled apart by the hand. The Deco in Bandra is not always dramatic, but upon closer inspection is certainly infused with a dramatic flair, and a penchant for storytelling. It maintains a distinct characteristic to the rest in the city, where it is at once visible that these are not the grandstanding projects that we are accustomed to elsewhere. Take the facade of Rebello Road's Peteville — with repeated patterns of a setting and rising sun, which are joined by wave-like undulations — all in a lathery pastel. Bandra never saw urbanisation that other neighbourhoods in the city such as Dadar-Matunga Scheme, Churchgate did in the late 30s and 40s. It remained disconnected from rapid urbanism, and building projects were mainly undertaken by private individuals looking to develop housing for the entire family — and as such, shows a meeting of several aesthetic features of the time.

Some bungalows still bear the stained-glass windows (typical of a Catholic neo-classical architecture), while others emulate Portuguese style villa architecture — most common to the paddy field properties of Goa; some even dabble with early modern-



ist patterns. Some — most dramatically — straddle several features at once. An example is the villa Desirée with Deco curvature set alongside the hard lines that we know now to be distinctly modernist. Blue, yellow and peach stonework makes it way up the sides of the property, melting the styles together.

Bandra was a neighbourhood largely separate from the central and southern parts of the city until much later in its history. And it still retains a distinct village characteristic even though it is now a site ripe for gentrification. It's trendy — this trendiness, of course, hurts its longtime residents the most — particularly the East

Indians local to the area. The East Indians are people of indigenous populations that were folded into the East India Company quickly upon its arrival in 17th Century, and were the first employees of the Company, hence the name 'East Indian'. Although the Salcette colonies reserve residences for the Catholic populations of Bandra, many East Indians did not benefit from this reservation of land. The East Indians of Bandra instead occupy tight spaces, their living areas flung to newly opened traffic on their narrow streets. It is not uncommon, on denser streets, such as Chapel Road for example, to see sides of buildings with reflective tape layered along their corners, so as to warn vehicles that 'hey — we still live here, don't crash into our living rooms.'

Walking through the narrow streets of Bandra is like getting a narrative survey of the neighbourhood's history — a history that is solely acted out by its architecture. From the villas, to the churches, and the plague crosses that can be found at many nooks in the city — they are all the characters of this play. The Deco bungalows too, stand all along streets both small and large, characters of this complex history. Much like the sailor that sits atop Saudades, greeting pedestrians with a cheeky wink, each building does this too — all we have to do is pay attention.

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The writer works with Art Deco Mumbai which showcases Mumbai's Deco. Follow them on Instagram @artdecomumbai