

# BOMBAY ART DECO Architecture

A Visual Journey (1930-1953)



LIFE SEEMS TO BE ABOUT MEMORY, the memory of home, the memory of everything that takes us back to places that elicit emotions. Photography, because of its fundamental bond to the world, seems to give us the attachment or something close to the truth about the past.

Having spent many years of his youth in an Art Deco neighborhood in Bombay (now called Mumbai) Navin Ramani's first impression of Miami is described in his lavish book of photography *Bombay Art Deco Architecture: A Visual Journey (1930-1953)* "the first time I laid eyes on Miami Beach's Art Deco District, I felt as if I'd been transported back home to Bombay." Anyone who is familiar with Miami Beach's Art Deco architecture, upon seeing the photographs of Bombay Art Deco is in turn transported back to a sense of familiarity – as if they too have been to Bombay.

# BOMBAY ART DECO ARCHITECTURE: A VISUAL JOURNEY (1930-1953)

By Key Biscayne resident Navin Ramani

(295 pages. Roli Books, 2006. \$35)

In this comprehensive book, with lucid and informative descriptions Ramani (a resident of Key Biscayne) lays out the buildings that take us back to his childhood. Ramani is particularly adept at presenting the city both as a sampling but also a way of "bridging the gap of awareness and of sharing Bombay's Art Deco architectural trove with those who have yet to discover it."

The book also chronicles the city's progression from the first known European to arrive on Indian soil to what is now known as Mumbai. Six chapters present the history, the dawn of Art Deco in Bombay, from the tropical imagery and nautical design features to the influence of Indian tradition and mythology on public, residential, and commercial buildings. The penultimate chapter, "Bombay-Miami Beach (BoMi) Deco" explores the similarities in design – this chapter displays photographs side by side where the reader may have to look twice before guessing which building is in Bombay and which in Miami. The index and appendixes include a catalog of buildings and street names. What is also useful is the glossary at the end of the book.

The book will captivate both tourists and architects with its compelling tale of a city that evolved into one of the "grand cosmopolitan cities of the world,"- its art and culture developing

out of the "huge melting pot of West and East European influences." The book is also an excellent introductory guide to the history of Art Deco that includes influences from the German Bauhaus to the awareness of rhythm and geometry. The city's first Art Deco district, Churchgate, were commissioned and designed by Indian rather than British developers and architects. Key architects such as Ganjanan B. Mhatre, who were part of the first generation Indian architects to contribute to the assembly of Art Deco architecture, are also appraised.

There are enduring values in traveling to distant places, but photographs of the art of buildings in those places can reconnect our future with the past in order to live in a place that is worthy of our present. Cities and towns are indispensable to our sense of reality and later memory. Even if photography doesn't give us certainty on a silver platter, it does make it easier for us to connect to our natural legacy as creative beings and allows us to reclaim our sense of reflection. Pictures force us to collect our memories. They make us think about stimulus, purpose – they make us think about how we interpret our past and our relationship to the world. Ramani's images make us care because they make us part of the mystery of art and our connection to Bombay and ultimately humanity. We are not merely spectators; there is a common element in art. We are all involved. ☺