ABSTRACT

BOMBAY’S “LESSER” ARCHITECTURE: MAKING A CASE FOR PRESERVATION
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This thesis seeks to introduce the city formerly known as Bombay and its architecture which grew out of the movement and subsequent architectural style globally recognized as Art Deco. Art Deco gave Indian architects of the thirties and forties a supple language to express progress, technology, sophistication, and national identity through their designs for cinema theaters, offices and, mainly, middle class, speculative apartment buildings. However, such building achievements were deliberately relegated to the background even by the architectural establishment in the country with most domestic architecture being referred to as “Lesser Architecture,” an appellation its creators seem to have been at peace with. The forces behind the adaptation of Art Deco by pre-independence Indian architects and its proliferation throughout the country echo a silent sentiment of resistance and revolution against the prevailing colonial manifesto of the day. It therefore becomes important to recognize the various degrees of significance of the architectural manifestations of the style and period – the Art Deco apartment buildings of Marine Drive and the Oval Maidan – which live on today as something desirable and worthy of preservation. This thesis argues for their architectural, historic and cultural significance and aims to establish a basis for forming an enlightened preservation effort for the Marine Drive Art Deco Precinct.

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