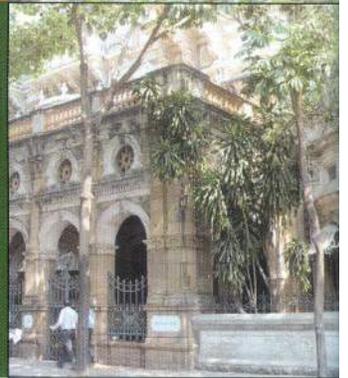
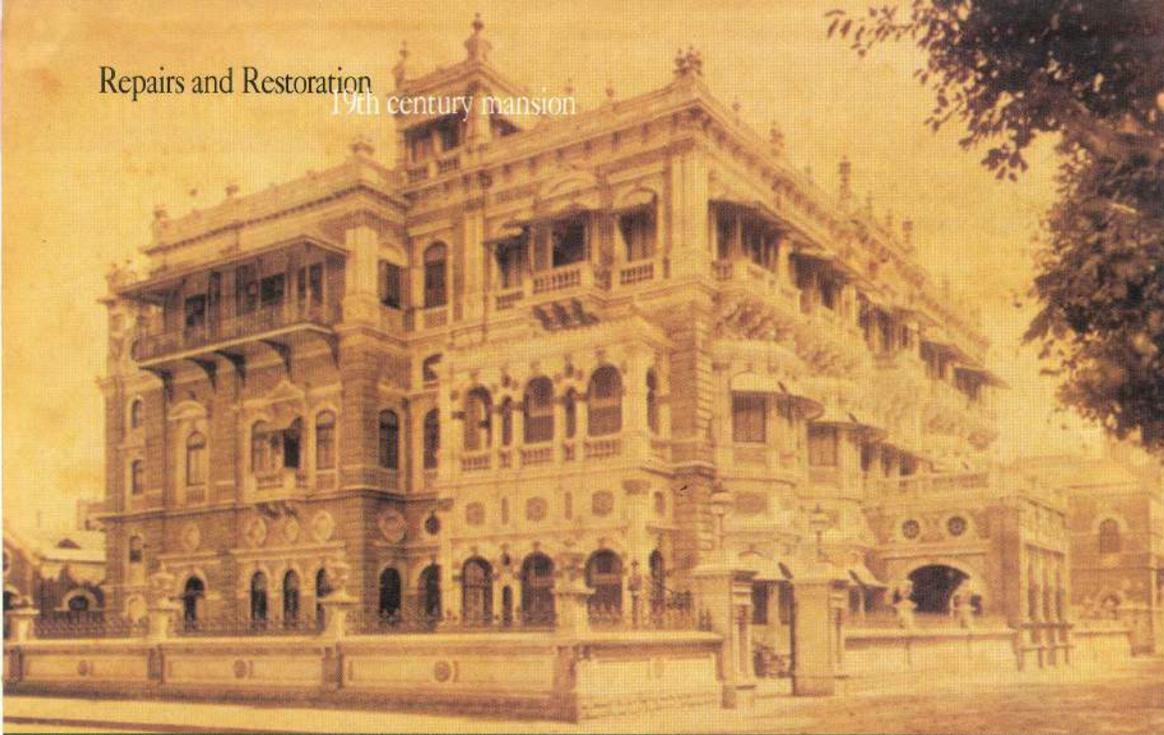


Repairs and Restoration

19th century mansion



The magnificent 130-year old town residence, **Esplanade House in Fort, Mumbai**, was the home of the pioneer industrialist Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the founder of the Tata Group. The building is noted for its European architecture with intricate decorative details, combined with ornate Indian window eaves or '*chhajjas*'. It showcases some of the finest cast iron works too. Conservation Architect Vikas Dilawari revived the dilapidated stately mansion and restored it to its original glory, infusing adaptive reuse. The restoration of Esplanade House won an Honourable Mention at the **2014 Unesco Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation**.

*Text & images: Courtesy, the architects*

# Conserving a Vanishing Typology

**Esplanade House, Fort, Mumbai** Vikas Dilawari, Conservation Architect

**C**onstructed in 1885 and completed in 1887, the **Esplanade House** at **Hazarlal Somani Marg, behind Bombay Gymkhana, Fort, Mumbai** is noted for its intricate decorative details which are different on every facade. The grand private residence gradually fell to seed over the decades. **Conservation Architect Vikas Dilawari** revived the dilapidated stately mansion and restored it to its original glory, infusing adaptive reuse, which has earned him his tenth Unesco Award.

The mansion has extensive use of etched glass with floral patterns and with decorative and mythical images relived on a very high quality

stained glass. Ornate decorative teakwood screens are also present serving as ventilators. The paintings on stucco plaster, oil paintings on the ceiling, gold gilding on cast iron works, the roman mosaic tiles and the ivory inlay work add to the buildings exclusivity.

The building design was constructed based on Jamshetji Tata's ideas. Morris (of Gostling and Morris a local firm) assisted to execute these ideas to reality. The front facade is symmetrically relieved by a central portico with three semi circular arches with an exclusively decorative Iron Gate that dons the entrance with the crest of the Tata. Above the arches, the pattern changes with the ornamental cornices and the use

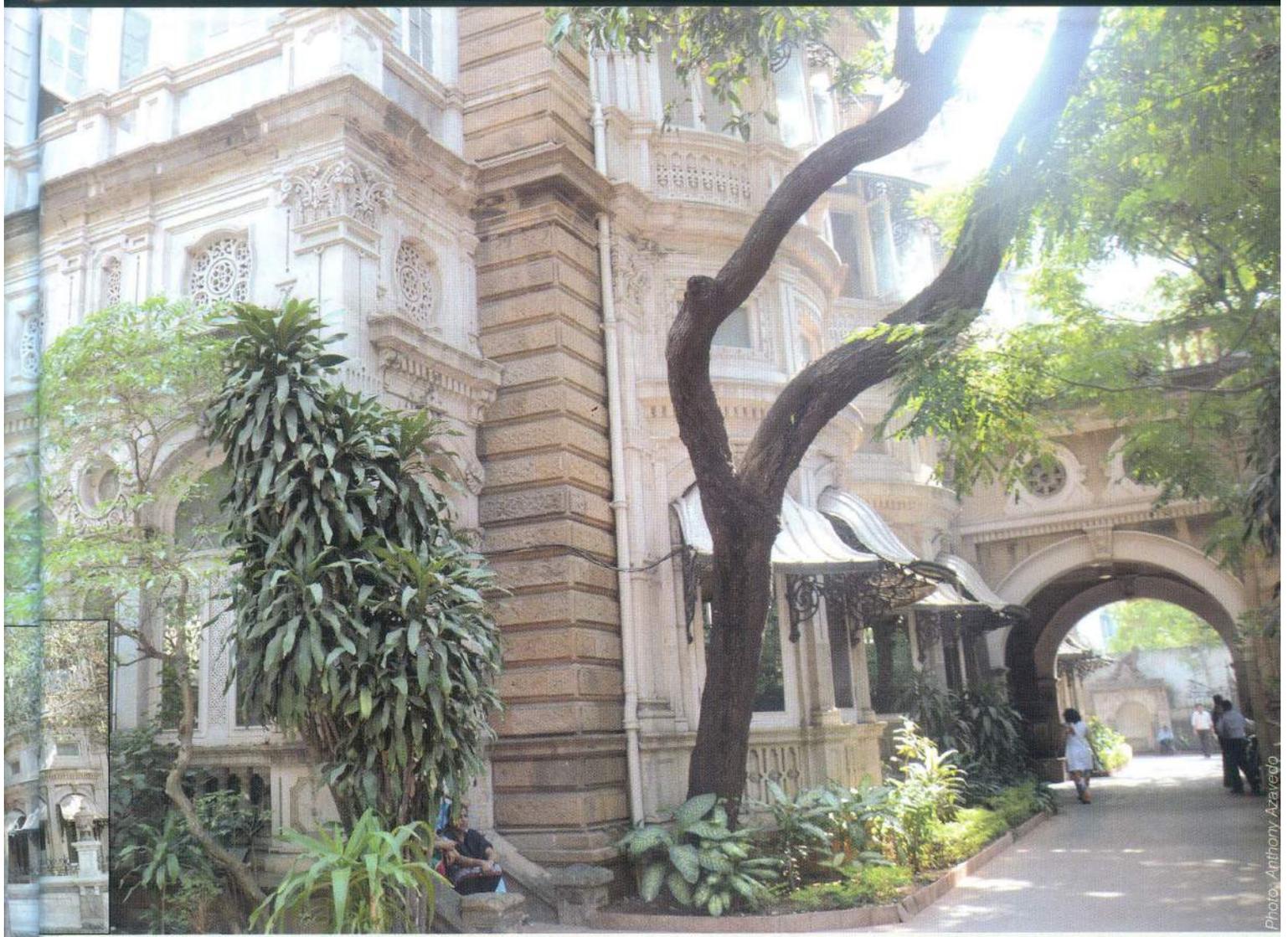
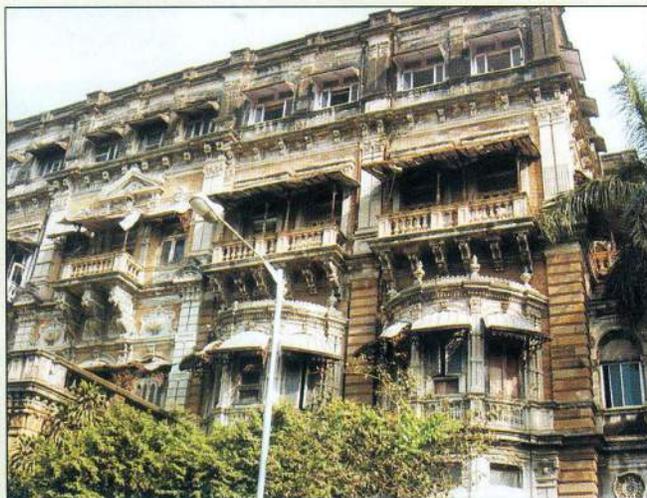


Photo: Anthony Azavedo



*Vikas Dilawari is a practicing conservation architect with more than two and half decades of experience exclusively in the conservation field. He has done his double Masters in Conservation from School of Planning and Architecture (New Delhi) and from the University of York. He was the Head of Department of Conservation at Kamla Raheja Vidyandhi Institute of Architecture (KRVA) Mumbai from its inception in 2007 till August 2014. His practice has successfully executed several conservation projects ranging from prime landmarks to unloved buildings of Mumbai. He was instrumental with INTACH Mumbai chapter to list the CST station as a World Heritage Site in 2004. Several of his projects have received national recognition. A total of ten of his projects have won UNESCO ASIA PACIFIC Awards for Cultural Preservation in SE Asia. Prof Dilawari has lectured and written extensively on the subject of conservation nationally and internationally. He was one of the reviewers on technical mission of ICOMOS to review the works at World Heritage Site of Ayutthaya in Thailand in May 2014. He is a Trustee of Indian Heritage Cities Network (IHCN), Co- Convener of INTACH Mumbai Chapter and a member of Mumbai Heritage Conservation Committee (MHCC). He was member Board of Governors of MMR HCS (Heritage Conservation Society) from 2009-2011. He is named in the latest Architectural Digest AD 50 Awards as the most influential names in Indian Architecture and Design.*





of bulls eye windows. The intricate detailing is evocative of the best of Indian architecture although the architects were British.

Its graceful curvilinear lead sheet chajja's over the bay windows resting on the equally decorative cast-iron brackets with built-in gutter give elegance and grace to this residential structure reminding one of a Parisian Villa. The facade has the use of beige local trap stone relieved by white limestone and sandstone from Porbandra and Dhangadhra respectively used for 19th century Neo Classical decorations apart from the very early use of imported terra-cotta from J. Stiff & sons, Lambeth, U.K. for its urns and balustrades. The building has some of the finest cast iron works as seen now in its main gate, staircase, indoor tympanums and the inclined inter- connecting bridges.

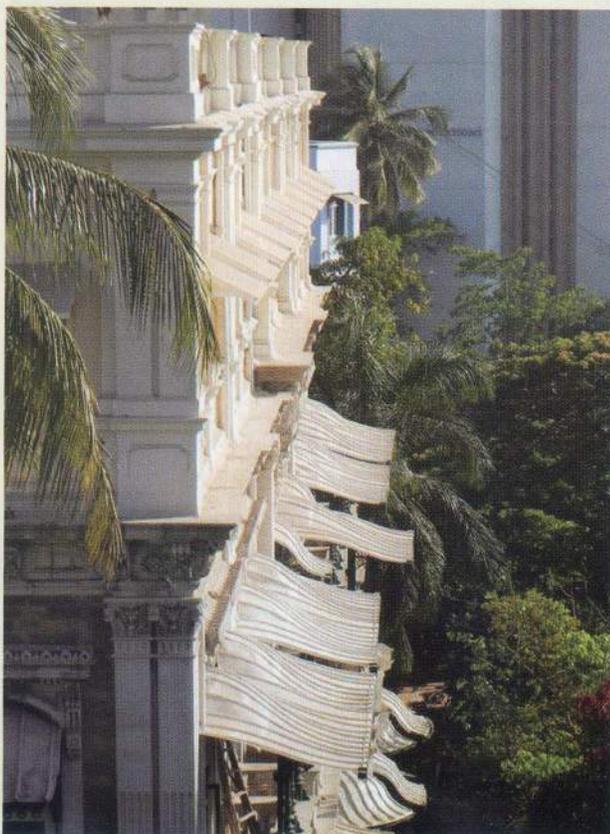
#### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROJECT

The Esplanade House is one of the finest and the only residential building originally owned by Jamsheji N Tata in the Fort precinct, which came up after the demolition of the fort walls in 1860's. This project is a unique example to show how adaptive reuse, reviving traditional skills

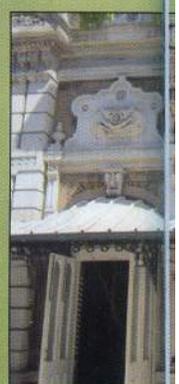
coupled with present technology and patronage of the client can demonstrate to the city and its administration that conservation can work and lead the past into a good future.

This project revives one such dilapidated stately mansion in the core of the city restoring it to its original glory and infusing adaptive reuse. This project also illustrates that such run-down buildings can be revitalized to its original palatial form if the right patronage is received despite government giving no financial incentives.

The R.D.Sethna Scholarship Fund is a charitable trust which owns this property presently and deserves all credits for deciding to conserve the property. Part of the Ground floor has been leased to an Advertisement company RRKSBD who are sensitive to the heritage and have done an adaptive reuse of the entire Ground floor space. RD Sethna Scholarship Fund through efficient management of their property have been managed to generate funds and have ploughed this back on the repairs and maintenance of the building. Hence this becomes amongst the first examples in city to demonstrate that frozen rents due to rent



In Mumbai, redevelopment is taking over conservation as the government incentives are unfortunately favourable for reconstruction and not for repairs. The frozen rent control since 1940's has resulted in a lot of good building stock being ill maintained and deteriorating at a very fast pace. Lack of incentives, traditional skills and good patronage has made the conservation scenes in the city arduous; beautification is the approach taken in contrast to conservation. The city has a varied typology of heritage buildings ranging from majestic public buildings to elegant private residences well planned and thought. The Architects were fortunate to conserve and restore one such noteworthy and historically important yet fast vanishing building typology in the city - the Bungalows/ the Stately Merchant Prince Homes. It was vital to take comprehensive efforts to set technical and social benchmarks in this city where real estate values are prioritised over conserving intangible values.





Complete painting works, restoration of decorative filigree works in POP, gold gilding done on the ceiling

control act is detrimental to the entire movement. As without incentive the conservation movement cannot survive.

**The process:** Being an important historical and architecturally significant building the first task was to make the building structurally sound and water tight, giving it a new lease of life for a few additional decades as it had not under gone major structural repairs since the 1940's. However, a decade ago some of its waterproofing was done.

- To make it functional as many areas of the buildings were unused and under used. To make this happen structure had to be made presentable with basic repairs for new occupiers to invest. Once they moved in and started paying the market rent, the money was then ploughed back to the building's restoration.
- These new spaces required updated present day infrastructure and interiors had to respect the historicity too.
- To restore the building to its original grandeur as far as possible within the limited resources.
- To revive the lost traditional skills and where the revival of skills was



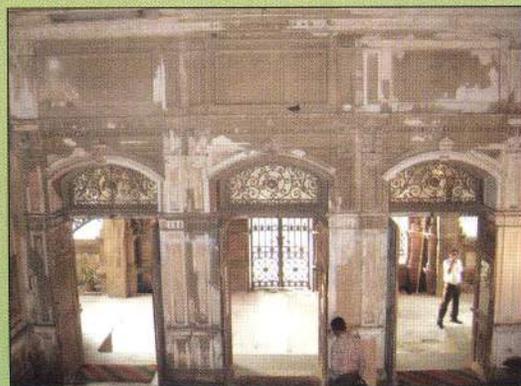
Restored ornamental cast iron fascias for the curvilinear chajjas on the north and west side of the building.

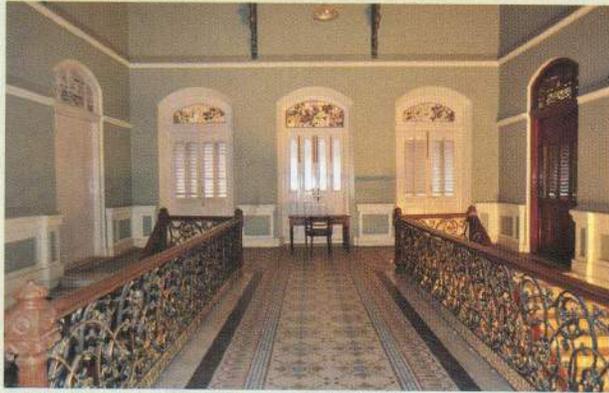
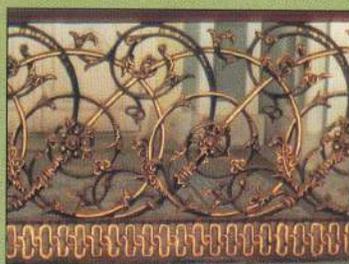
not possible as these were imported; then matching the original in new material was adopted like in the terracotta urns reconstruction.

- The repair philosophy was to retain as much of the original fabric as possible thereby saving on resources and making it economical. This is the most important step, if conservation has to be accepted as a mass movement.
- Such conservation friendly approaches of clients coupled with professional inputs can actually transform the city's heritage and can demonstrate that it is better to conserve than to redevelop which seems to be the accepted fate of our city's heritage, than loading its already burdened fragile infrastructure.

**Duration:** This project was a live laboratory for conservation as it went on for 10 years and covered practically all aspects of conservation from structural repairs to architectural restoration, from landscape to interiors and adaptive reuse to infrastructure upgradation.

**Objective:** The Project is a simple and effective example of adhering to

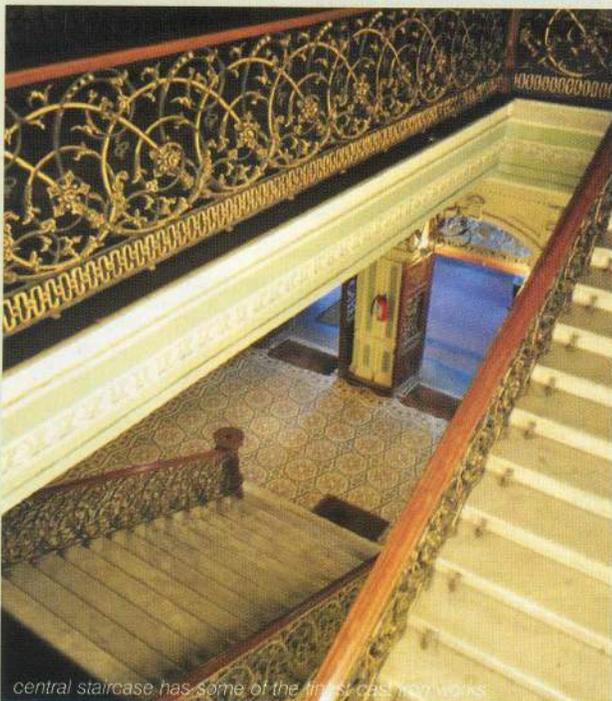




lobby above the central staircase on the first floor post restoration



another view of the lobby above the central staircase



central staircase has some of the finest craftsmanship works



efforts were taken to repair stained glass panels, restoring its old charm and authenticity

basic principles of conservation i.e. minimum intervention; as a result conservation of precious resources is done thereby giving new lease of life to the fabric. The project illustrates how interventions can help retain the authenticity and bring back the old time charm of the structure at the time when many other such stately mansions are either being demolished or are losing their originality with out of place modern materials.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

The Project is significant as it shows the way forward that with help of adaptive reuse how a vanishing typology of bungalow / stately mansion can be conserved despite having no incentives from government.

It reveals the path of skillful repairs and adaptive reuse which help in retaining the cultural significance and authenticity incorporating the state of art present technology and infrastructure. There are many examples of reuse but these are not adaptive in nature. It helps in reviving traditional art forms like lime pointing, skilled carpentry, stained glass, gilding to name a few.

It demonstrates good market lease rent can sustain its maintenance and conservation of such properties is a way forward for retaining a balance between old and new and that repairs is better than redevelopment. ▲

#### fact file:

project	: Repairs and Restoration of Esplanade House
location	: 29, Hazarilal Somani Marg, behind Bombay Gymkhana, Mumbai
client	: R. D. Sethna Scholarship Funds
conservation architect	: Vikas Dilawari
interior designer	: Vikas Dilawari for all common areas of the building and for the office interiors or R. D. Sethna Scholarship Fund and for part south side extension of RKSwamy BBDO office on Gr floor.
commencement date	: 2004
completion date	: July 2013
area	: 41,000 sqft