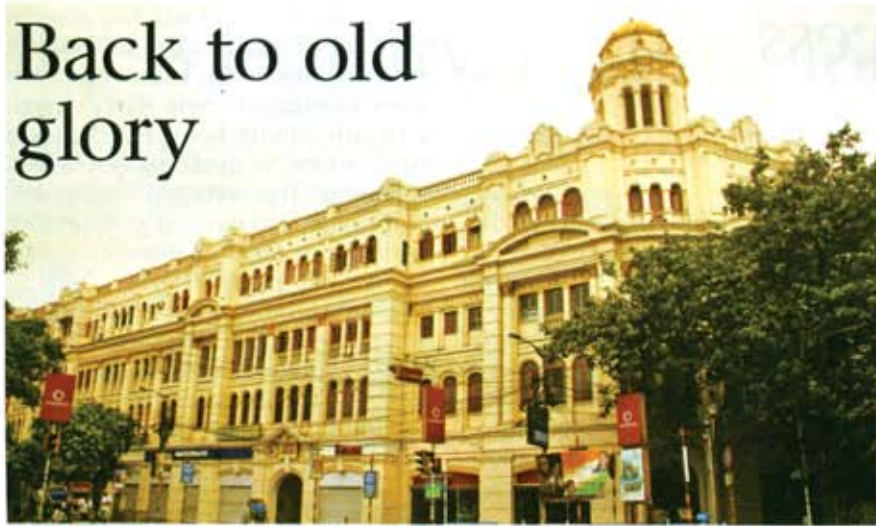


Back to old glory



The newly renovated Park Mansions bags heritage award

The heritage property at Park Street, owned by the Apeejay Surrendra group, and under renovation since 2008, has now been bestowed with the KMC-INTACH Heritage Award, jointly created by Kolkata Municipal Corporation and Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, for the commendable restoration of the city centre colonial era architectural heritage. Sovan Chatterjee, mayor of Kolkata, unveiled the award plaque, commemorating the receipt of the award, in the presence of G.M. Kapur, state convener of INTACH; heritage award selection committee members; Khalil Ahmed, commissioner, KMC; architect Dulal Mukherjee; and some of the oldest residents of the building.

Developed by Armenian jute merchant T.M. Thaddeus in 1910, Park Mansions is a sprawling majestic building. The architecture is a mix of Victorian and Indo-Saracen styles, having a bulbous dome on the roof, as well as British-style interiors with a touch of Indian architectural style on the façade. The 103-year-old structure was taken over by the Apeejay Surrendra group in the 1980s. Apeejay Real Estate, a division of the diversified Apeejay Surrendra group, took up the restoration effort in 2008 and completed the project in 2010. The magnificent building stands today in all its original glory, completely secure from hazards that plague old

heritage structures.

"We are extremely honoured to receive the heritage award. Park Mansions is a labour of love. I want to thank Dulal Mukherjee and his team of architects and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation for their support. I also thank each one of the nearly 70 skilled and unskilled workers who we brought here from Bandel, Hooghly, Midnapore and who may not be here with us today. Their work, 24x7, for two years will live on forever in Park Mansions. I want to tell them all that they have been a part of a cause and they have added glory to the Street – Park Street – which we all love so much. I am grateful to all of them for surpassing great challenges and working meticulously on this beautiful architectural heritage. We should be proud of what we have achieved together. Because of all our efforts, history will now live on," says Karan Paul, chairman, Apeejay Surrendra group.

Apeejay's late patriarch Jit Paul had planned and toiled over the restoration of Park Mansions to give back to the street he loved, in the state which he made his home in 1948, its glorious colonial era architectural heritage. "This award is an endorsement of Apeejay's belief that a city's heritage plays an important role in the urban landscape, re-establishing the city and its citizen's tryst with history and culture, giving the

citizen not only a historical perspective, but a sense of place and time," says Karan Paul, commending Jit Paul's vision and efforts to restore Park Mansions till his last working days in 2008, as well as the efforts of everybody who worked with him post 2008 on achieving the vision.

Heritage value

"Half a dozen years ago, Apeejay had entered into a unique partnership with the National Culture Fund and the Archeological Survey of India to restore the historic Jantar Mantar Observatory in New Delhi, in accordance with its conservation requirements," adds Karan Paul. "As a 100-year-old company, based in Kolkata, we value the heritage of Kolkata and believe that citizens want to utilise as well as enjoy its heritage venues. This is why the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival has, since January 2010, brought the best literary minds from India and overseas to Kolkata and hosted the Festival at heritage venues – Victoria Memorial, Town Hall, National Library, St John's Anglican Church and many others. Our commitment to conservation and preservation of India's rich cultural heritage is solid and passionate. This award for our work at Park Mansions is great encouragement of our beliefs."

Constructed in 1910 for mixed usage – residential and commercial – Park Mansions is spread over more than 5 bighas (1.77 acres) and was restored to its original glory in 2010 – the centennial year of Park Mansions, as well as the Apeejay Surrendra group. Requiring significant funding and painstaking restoration effort, the project started in early 2008 and involved many challenging facets. While the tenants still occupied the residential part of the building, the team had to change the roofing; reinforce sections that had been weakened by a fire in 1990; overhaul the electrical systems completely; modernise overhead water distribution system and elevators; and reverse the effects of aging; apart from rebuilding its intricately carved-out front façade, inner courtyard, driveway and lighting arrangements.

• SALONI JHUNJHUNWALLA