

SOCIETY

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# INTERIORS

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SIZZLING ISLAND-CHIC STYLE AT  
SOFITEL THE PALM, DUBAI

AR. HAFEEZ CONTRACTOR'S  
ICONIC DESIGN FOR EMAMI



SANJAY PATIL | ADITYA AGRAWAL | WOW ARCHITECTS

# historic REVIVAL

**FOLLOWING A FIRE BREAK-OUT IN 1990, THE 103-YEAR-OLD PARK MANSIONS IN KOLKATA HAS BEEN RESTORED TO ITS LOST GLORY BY DULAL MUKHERJEE & ASSOCIATES.**

**Park Mansions** was built by an Armenian jute merchant TM Thaddeus in 1910 for both commercial and residential uses. The 103-year-old structure was taken over by the Apeejay Surrendra Group in the 80s. This building is spread across 1.77 acres of land and has five blocks with three arched entry points from Free School Street, Royd Street and Park Street. In 1990, a fire broke out and destroyed an entire wing of the Park Mansions.

Today, due to the relentless efforts and able leadership of the late **Jit Paul**, then Advisor of the Apeejay Surrendra Group, and **Karan Paul**, Chairman, Apeejay Surrendra Group, the magnificent building stands in all its glory. The restoration planning for this building started in 2006, while the reconstruction spanned between 2008 and 2013.



Park Mansions' grand architecture is a mix of Victorian and Indo-Saracen styles with a touch of Indian architectural style on the façade. But this was destroyed after the devastating fire of 1990. The building is now completely secure from hazards that plague old heritage structures and has better detailing than when it was first constructed in 1910.





Though the building looked sturdy on the exterior, the inside was heavily damaged. The staircase had given way, loose wires posed another fire threat and a great deal of harm had been done thanks to the indiscriminate use of concrete patchwork. During the five-year-long restoration work, **Ar. Dulal Mukherjee** and his team had to change the roofing, reinforce sections that had been weakened by a fire, give the electrical system a complete overhaul and rebuild the intricately-carved façade, inner courtyard and driveways. They also gave the entire building various layers of Polymer based treatment.

The senior architect says, "It was also surprising that the building had such a huge structural problem. The entire load of the building was shared by the side walls. It had no support across the walls. We gave the walls extra bracing to support the structure."

The core team overseeing the project is **ND Chowdhury**, Director, Park Mansions and **Bibhash Sanyal**, Senior Manager-Projects, Park Mansions. They employed 70 skilled and unskilled labourers. Artist Gopal Das from Bandel Hooghly, who is known for his terracotta work, was hired to recreate the roof balustrade. A total of 1,100 pieces of roof balustrades were impeccably hand-made in 11 months. The damaged bulbuous dome was re-created by two senior masons within a span of seven months.





The cost of the restoration rose to a whopping ₹10 crore and further investments and works are underway. Speaking on his future plans for Park Mansions, Karan says, "A substantial part of the restoration process is complete, but much more is planned for Park Mansions to give the space tremendous value and character." They have plans of opening up coffee shops, eating joints, book shops and a foyer in the central courtyard.

These efforts of the Apeejay Surrendra Group were recognized by the state too. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) and Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage awarded Park Mansions the prestigious KMC-INTACH Heritage Award 2013 for restoring this colonial era architectural heritage. Elated with the award, Karan says, "We are extremely honoured to receive this heritage award. I am grateful to all those who have laboured tirelessly to restore this architectural marvel. Due to our joint efforts, history will live on."

A beaming Dulal is also happy with his efforts of heritage conservation. He says, "The structure will be respectful of Park Mansions architecture, but not colonial-style architecture. Rather than being a copy, it will reflect the architecture of the time it was built in."

Today, Park Mansions shining golden dome and intricate front façade reiterate its past glory and reminds us of the words of French author Victor Hugo: "...let us, while waiting for new monuments, preserve the ancient monuments."

CONTACT DETAILS  
PARK MANSIONS  
57A Park Street  
Kolkata 700016

*Text: Sudeshna Chakravarty Photographs: Amit Srivastav*