

Reminding the past

## Bungalows reloaded

Jaideep Mazumdar | January 21, 2012



In a city full of old mansions in various stages of decay and disrepair, a few have defied the trend to remind the city of its glorious past. All thanks to a band of private entrepreneurs who have converted these 'heritage' mansions into attractive properties that today house their businesses.

When Swaminathan Ramani and his friends decided to give Bengalis a genuine taste of their own cuisine in 2003, they decided it would be in old-world style and ambience. "The best way to do this was to house our restaurant in an old mansion. We chose this 100-year-old bungalow built by a rich zamindar that was slowly falling into ruins and took it on lease," Ramani, the director of '6 Ballygunge Place' told TOI-Crest. Elegant antique furniture and framed portraits of Kolkata of yesteryear provide the perfect setting for a sumptuous Bengali meal here. The structure and the layout was kept intact, but every inch of space at '6 Ballygunge Place' has been put to innovative use to give diners a feeling of space as well as privacy.

Restoring an old property and making money out of it was also on Dimple Agarwal's mind when she decided to set up a home décor store four years ago. "We zeroed in on a two-storey 70-year-old bungalow on Rash Behari Avenue whose ground floor was up for sale," Agarwal told TOI-Crest. She renovated the 700 square feet space extensively and her store, 'Raintree', screams old-world charm. "I made use of the thick 15 to 20-inch walls to create niches and embellished the high-beamed ceiling, but kept the structure intact," she says.

Driving down the busy and clogged Acharya Jagdish Chandra Bose Road is a motorist's nightmare. The experience is relieved by what can only be described as the stunning sight of a two-storied structure. Till a little over two years ago, this too was one of those dreary mansions that dot Kolkata. Today, its stark white facade and huge, wood-rimmed windows make it a head-turner. This is exactly what Richa Kanoi, an advertising graduate from Boston University, wanted when she decided to open a store. Having married into an old Marwari family in Kolkata who owned this old, nearly 80-year-old bungalow, Richa decided to renovate the structure and convert it into a boutique-cumlifestyle store, Bombaim. The interiors of the 1, 300-square feet store, which displays creations by a clutch of ten famous designers and home décor items, was designed by Charu Rajgarhia. While the old stone flooring has been retained, the walls and ceilings have been renovated to give them a more contemporary look. The all-white elegance of the exterior is compensated by a flurry of

colours inside Bombaim. Portraits of Hindu gods and goddesses vie for space with framed advertisements of yesteryear.

About a kilometer away, on Outram Road, a 106-year-old bungalow has been similarly renovated. This rambling two-storied bungalow used to belong to an old Bengali family. "It took us more than three months to renovate it. We didn't make any structural changes since the walls were all load-bearing ones. We repaired the facade and renovated the interiors, keeping the old-world look intact, " says Sujit Sinha, the managing director of the 'Tangerine' restaurant which occupies the first floor of the bungalow. The ground floor houses a boutique that sells Anamika Khanna's creations.

A two-storey, 70-year-old mansion at South Kolkata's Sarat Bose Road is perhaps the most stunning example of a decaying mansion being given a fresh lease of life. A chat between two friends lamenting the absence of a one-stop address for designer labels led to a hunt for an old mansion. "We zeroed in on an old mansion at 85B Sarat Bose Road that was up for sale and commissioned interior designer Ajay Arya to do up the place, " said Shalini Nopany, who teamed up with friend Pooja Goenka to start '85 Lansdowne'. The facade, structure, floor layout and original cement flooring of the mansion were retained. Century-old wooden railway sleepers as window ledges and beams on ceilings give this place an old-world yet contemporary look. Antique furniture, wooden louvered windows painted a deep algae green, verandas with cast iron railings, wooden staircases and a neat lawn add to the charm of this place.