



**ARCHITECTURE**  
**A + D**  
**DESIGN**

A JOURNAL OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE VOL. XV NO. 6 NOV-DEC 1998 Rs 100

**INTERIORS IN ARCHITECTURE**  
**AGA KHAN AWARDS**



# Historic Retrieval

## NGMA Mumbai

Text **Abha Narain Lambah**

The urban fabric of each city is held together by the warp and weft of historic buildings and the overlay of modern architecture. This dichotomy of the past and present is unavoidable and architects often have to deal with challenging situations when their professional services are required to create a delicate interface between the old and new, and reconfigure an old vernacular to adapt to modern interiors and exteriors as per requirement.

A whole new set of permutations emerge each time an architect begins to unravel the folds of the past in a building, in an effort to give it a contemporary interpretation for maintaining its relevance in a changed time.

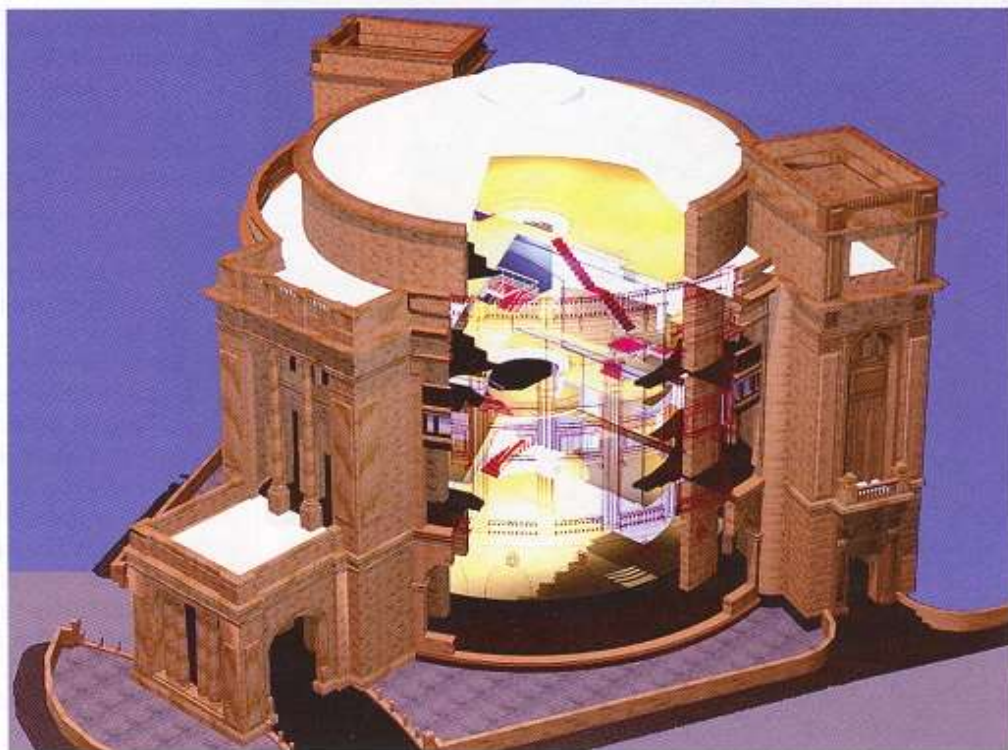
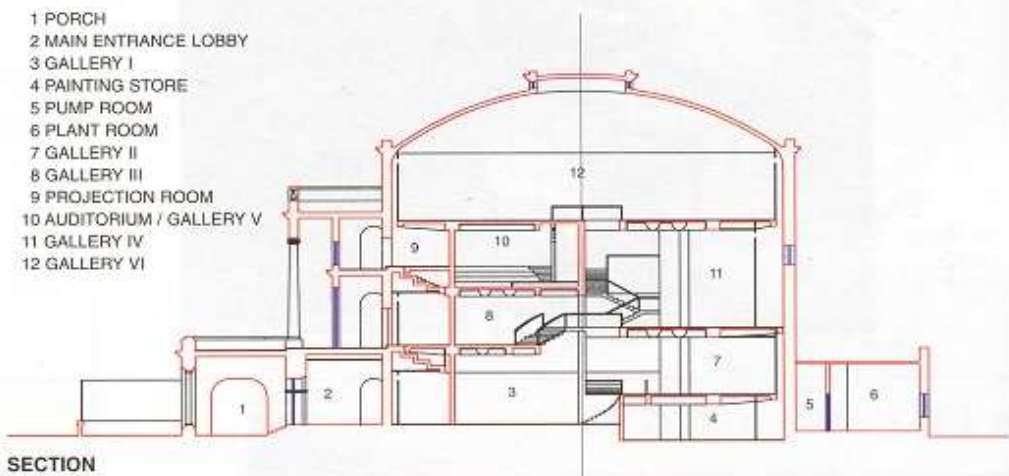
A case in point is the old Sir Cowasji Jehangir Public Hall, Mumbai, designed by the British architect George Witter as a public hall and theatre. The building gradually lost its significance as a cultural centre. Its recent conversion into the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), as an extension of the one in Delhi, is described by the architect Romi Khosla as his landmark project. He uses a new term — “Historic Retrieval” to describe the conversion and affirms, “It is a term I use to describe the project as it reflects how the heritage building has been retrieved from the past to perform a modern function and regain its relevance in the contemporary context.”

The client’s brief included the need for modern electrification, air-conditioning, auditorium and multilevel gallery spaces within a public hall that was ill-equipped to handle such a variety of functions either structurally or in terms of modern services and infrastructure.

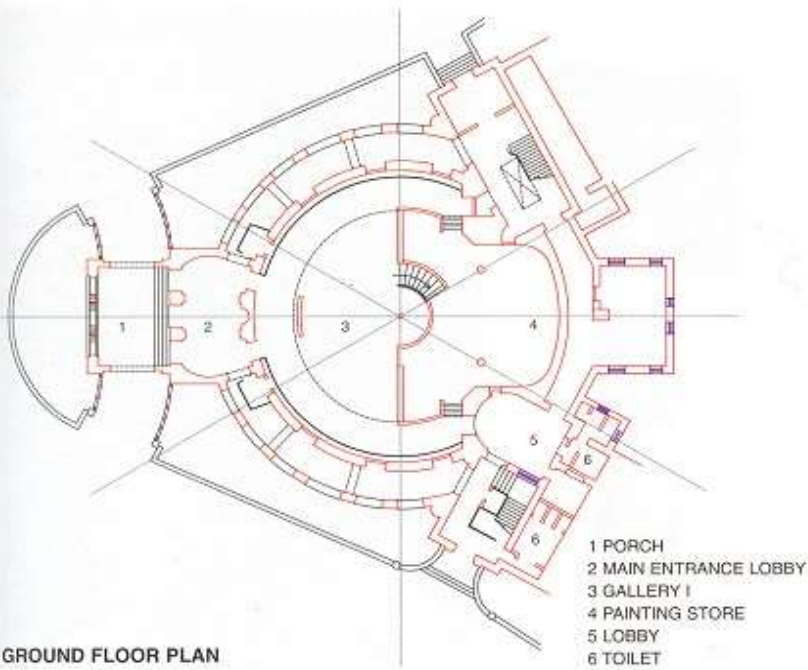
To create minimal interference within the heritage structure, separate pile foundations were erected to support the multilevel galleries. An internal envelope was created by circumscribing a circular



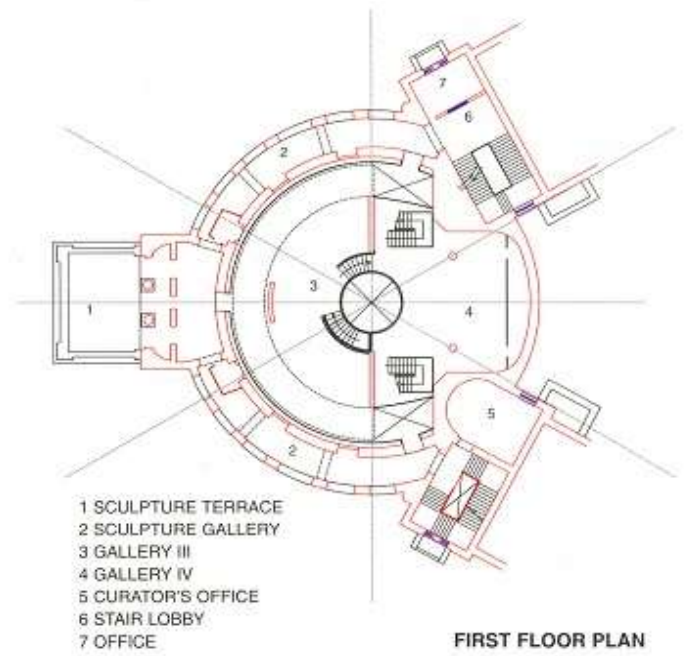
- 1 PORCH
- 2 MAIN ENTRANCE LOBBY
- 3 GALLERY I
- 4 PAINTING STORE
- 5 PUMP ROOM
- 6 PLANT ROOM
- 7 GALLERY II
- 8 GALLERY III
- 9 PROJECTION ROOM
- 10 AUDITORIUM / GALLERY V
- 11 GALLERY IV
- 12 GALLERY VI



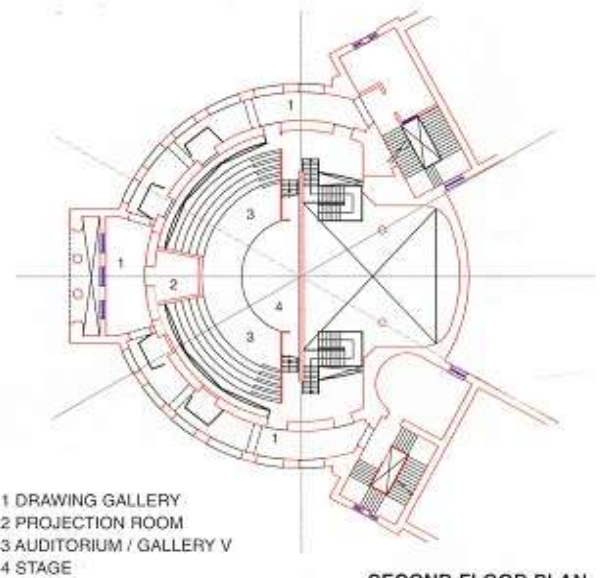




GROUND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

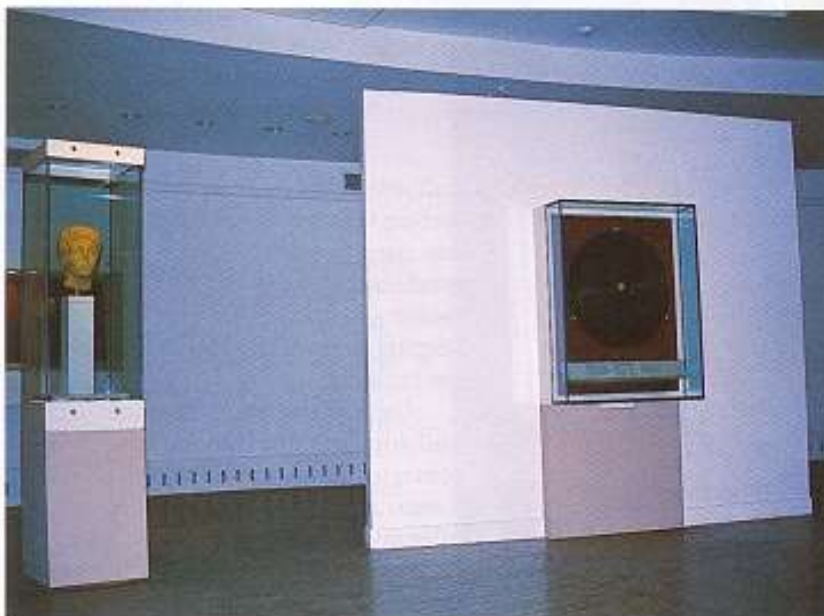
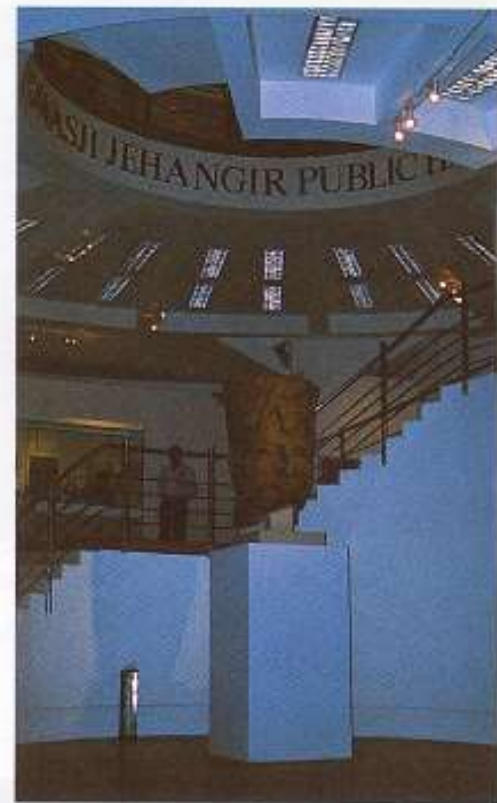
wall within the original hall and the hollow section between the old wall and the new was used to carry electrical conduits, air-conditioning ducts and vents. The external facade and entry foyer were restored keeping in mind the historic value of the building.

Using a system of three load-bearing wall supports, the internal space was converted into a multilevel art gallery with a central staircase acting as the visual fulcrum. Within this staircase, the architect used a combination of elements like chrome-finished steel balusters



## FEATURES AND FACILITIES OF THE RENOVATION

- The new structure within the Hall rests on five columns supported on 56 micro piles, without transferring any load to the old one. The new construction provides an RCC frame with six split levels and an area of about 20,000 sq ft. The total cost is Rs 5.10 crores.
- Six galleries with an area of 15,000 sq ft, with the topmost one of 80-ft diameter in the rotunda.
- A 120 seating capacity auditorium with modern lighting, projection and audio systems.
- Teakwood flooring in a radial pattern to match with the shape of the galleries.
- White Makrana marble flooring in the corridors, gypsum board wall panelling and false ceiling.
- A modern fire protection system including automatic detection, alarm and public address system.



supported, almost symbolically, by archaic wooden bracket motifs.

By raising the level of the existing floor by means of a new wooden flooring, both the old walls and the original flooring are kept largely intact. The old domed roof has been restored and a false ceiling (that had been a later addition), was removed to expose the original roof profile of the interior hall.

The neutral wooden flooring and stark white walls let the paintings stand out without disturbing sight lines. The furniture and glass display boxes have been kept to a bare minimum and the colours and textures used are subtle.

The project is an endeavour to retrieve a historic building from the sands of time to once again become the centre of the cultural world of Mumbai. ✦

*Visuals courtesy the author.*

**Architects** Grup India Pvt Ltd, Delhi

**Principal in charge** Romi Khosla

**Project co-ordinators** Sunil K Batta, Anil B Jain

**Design team** Chandu V Arsilkere, Atul Kota, Anuj Mehta

**Consultants** Mahindra Raj Consultants (structural), MKG Consultants (plumbing), Udayan Choudhari and Associates (HVAC), T S Sethi and Associates (electrical), Surti and Surti (acoustics), Milind Sambhare (liaison)