

New use for stately old house

If you delight in the preservation of a heritage building, chances are you will be doubly thrilled when an old building is put to new use. Take the case of this 49-year-old two-storied bungalow in Nungambakkam that now houses *Rasvihar*, a jewellery shop, and *Sarangi*, the Kanjeevaram saree store. This is such a perfect setting for the traditional merchandise: you have to wonder why no one thought of this concept before. The

aesthetic interiors and the lush greenery outside exude tranquillity. Shopping here promises to be a very different experience from shopping at the established, and eternally crowded, showrooms in T'Nagar and Mylapore.

The renovation was the brainchild of S. Ahalya, creative director of the business venture. While the art-deco style house, built in 1963 in 6.5 grounds, matched the entrepreneur's needs, certain design challenges had to be squared away first. That was freelance designer Elemma Kuruvilla's job. The house had six doors

leading outdoors – most had to be done away with for security considerations. The verandahs and balconies were enclosed for the same reason; the portico is the highlight. Extensive rewiring made the installation of security cameras and motion sensors possible. The designer sourced furniture and lights from the same period as the house construction and kept the mosaic flooring. With other such thoughtful touches, the transformation of the building into 6500 square feet of retail space was complete.

Originally, this was the residence of India's first Rhodes

scholar, Eric Prabhakar, who lived here with his family till 2007. He had represented India in the 100m in the London Olympics of 1948. Then, this Economics graduate from Madras Christian College – where he was captain of the hockey team – proceeded to the U.K. to do his Master's degree at Oxford University. In 1949, he received the 'blue' from the captain of his track team, Roger Bannister, who went on to create sporting history with his sub-4-minute mile. Prabhakar later worked for UNESCO and came back Madras upon retirement. He passed away in Sep-

tember 2011 in Bangalore to where he had moved a few years earlier to be closer to his children.

The bungalow on 17a Sterling Avenue was home to a distinguished scholar-athlete, 'Oxford's Madrasi on Bannister's Team'. Like me, if you believe that long-time inhabitants of a place leave their imprint within, then a non-architectural detail like this is significant. In this particular case, it somehow makes the effort behind the renovation seem even more worthwhile.

– Vijaysree Venkatraman



The late Eric Prabhakar's art deco home, now tastefully converted into a saree (below left) and jewellery (below right) store.



Quizzin' with Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period March 1st and 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

- For which 2010 disaster has the petroleum major BP agreed to pay \$ 7.8 billion to the affected plaintiffs?
- Fill in the blank: Following recent elections, Vladimir Putin is to become President of Russia for the _____ time.
- Name the animated cinematic adaptation of Dr. Seuss's book that opened to huge openings in the U.S. and the rest of the world in early March.
- In the history of Apple, what milestone did the 'Where's My Water? Free' app., downloaded by China's Chunli Fu, achieve?
- Name the composer of unforgettable melodies in *Waqt* and *Chaudvin Ka Chand* who passed away recently.
- Who retained the top spot among Indians in the *Forbes'* annual list of billionaires, with a net worth of \$22.3 billion?
- What does the 'Lux in Arcana' exhibition that opened in Rome on March 1st showcase?
- Who are the new Chief Ministers of Goa and Uttarakhand?
- How did the drug 'Nexavar' make news?
- After 244 years, which respected reference publication is going out of print?

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- Which shop, synonymous with Mylapore, was started by RKT Bros. at Thirucharai in 1900?
- Which building in Egmore is said to have been inspired by the Viceregal Lodge in Simla?
- Which thespian founded *Arivuchudar*, considered the only Tamil tabloid exclusively meant for the theatre fraternity?
- Of which organisation that has been prominently in the news in the last few weeks is K. Rajaraman, IAS, the Managing Director?
- What was the profession of Nagabattan who, along with Beri Thimmappa, was involved in the founding of Madras in August 1639?
- To which dynasty did Rani Mangamma belong?
- In which District of the State is Koodankulam?
- Apart from Tamil and English, in which European language can tourists access the Tamil Nadu Tourism website?
- In which bustling city is the 300-year-old Church of Our Lady of Snow?
- At which place near Tiruchi can you visit the Peacock Sanctuary?

(Answers on page 10)

SENATE HOUSE'S SAD STATE

(Continued from page 1)

embraced modern building techniques. The second, and this is even more likely, is that keeping the building closed for so long has taken its toll. In a humid atmosphere as in Chennai, it is extremely vital

that buildings are opened for fresh air regularly. That not being the case here, moisture has collected and begun eating away the decorative work.

Senate House's fate should not come as a surprise to those familiar with the background.

The building was restored with professional support thanks to an extremely enthusiastic Vice-Chancellor. Funds were collected from corporates, old and current students and other well-wishers with an informal understanding that the restored building will be governed by a trust and used for public events. The inauguration and re-dedication were done in 2007 by the then President of India during the University's sesquicentennial celebrations.

Subsequently, there was a change in Government and also a change in guard at the University immediately thereafter. The succeeding Vice-Chancellor had the *Senate House* locked once again and it is also rumoured that the principal engineering contractor for the restoration is still awaiting payment. The building was used once again for storing examination sheets which, given our

city's record with heritage buildings, means an ideal situation for a conflagration.

Matters appeared to have taken a turn for the better last year when the next, and present, VC announced the formation of a three-member governing council for *Senate House*. However, nothing happened beyond the announcement. The current exhibition is the next development. The opening up has, however, also exposed what the last few years of inaction has caused.

Now that the matter is out in the open, it is necessary that the University immediately wakes up to the damage and sets it right. It needs to recall the team that did the restoration and explore ways and means of rectification. And once that is done, it needs to keep up with regular maintenance. Can this be hoped from our University?

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