



# ART OF TIME, MUMBAI



**sonali ashar designs, mumbai**  
lead designer: des. sonali ashar, principal designer

#### Design brief and aim

To transform an old heritage building into a luxury retail store.

#### How this was accomplished

Amarchand Mansion, a Grade II heritage property in South Mumbai's Fort, was built in 1903, in the Indo-Saracenic and Neo-Moorish style. The structure had fallen into a state of disrepair with boarded windows, broken walls, and hidden cast-iron columns. It has now been transformed into a double-height retail space housing luxury watches in a grand atrium, a plush private lounge, and a back office. The team's aim was to preserve the building's architectural significance while creating a luxury retail environment.



When the team first entered the mansion, they found leaking jack-arch ceilings, sealed antique windows, and structural deficiencies. Yet, they saw its Indo-Saracenic and Neo-Moorish elements as worth preserving. Des. Sonali Ashar says, "The decision to restore Amarchand Mansion for Art of Time was both deliberate and symbolic. Located in the heart of Mumbai's Fort precinct, a neighbourhood with rich historical associations and architectural vibrancy, the Grade II A heritage structure merged legacy with luxury."

She continues, "We recognized the unique opportunity to bring a 1903 Indo-Saracenic structure back to life, not just for retail, but as a space to experience. The exposed arches, hidden cast-steel columns, and pieces of stained glass brought back memories of significance and grandeur that deserved to be resurrected. Rather than creating a new-build or contemporary shell, we chose to honour the craftsmanship of those who came before."

She adds, "This aligns with the values of the world's finest watches: precision, heritage, and timelessness. We saw purchasing a timepiece as an 'emotional' transaction, and wanted the environment to reflect that – intimate, overwhelming, and full of history. In many ways, this space is as much a homage to time as it is to the products we offer."

The team introduced champagne gold leafing to the false ceiling, along with bespoke furnishings and lighting for timeless luxury. The stained-glass arches, jack-arched ceilings, and other original features were restored. Balancing heritage conservation with modern retail requirements was a challenge, with the need to incorporate modern HVAC and lighting systems, and each modification requiring approval from Mumbai's Heritage Committee.



On the relevance of brick-and-mortar stores, Des. Ashar notes, "Post-pandemic, physical stores are more than just retail locations, they are brand experiences. The emphasis is no longer on transactions but on creating experiences that encourage emotional engagement, human connection, and narrative. At Art of Time, we performed intelligent zoning that creates both intimacy and spectacle, suiting appointment-based luxury retail while allowing moments of individual discovery."

She adds, "Adaptive layouts, adjustable lighting, and multi-use lounges offer flexibility for future events and launches, while providing comfortable areas for contemplation. By merging old-world construction with new-world versatility, we created an impactful environment that invites visitors to slow down, explore, and connect with the brand. In a digital-first world, physical stores must be destinations, and Art of Time is a living example of how design can make brick-and-mortar retail not just important, but necessary."



The team dug deep to implement thoughtful improvements. Restored stained-glass panels and cast-iron columns were reinstalled, and original materials were retained wherever possible. LED ambient lighting was integrated into existing cornices, and flexible spatial zoning was introduced for events and footfall. Here, "restoration" became a multi-layered exercise, balancing aesthetics, functionality, sustainability, and cultural integrity.

Des. Ashar reflects, "If I may share one piece of wisdom, it would be the patience and sensitivity needed to work within a heritage building. Restoration is an intentional decision, not a fallback when time runs out. True restoration takes patience, respect for the original work, an understanding of history and context, and the ability to tolerate the unexpected. Every heritage building has its layers to uncover."

She concludes, "We faced challenges beneath plaster and blocked walls, degrading structures, and hidden features. We worked closely with conservation architects, specialists, trade professionals, consultants, and statutory authorities to restore the building. The process showed us that luxury and legacy are not in opposition; they can enrich each other. When designed with consideration, everything should contribute to a larger whole, not just for purpose, but for the overall narrative."

