

Media Statement

Iranshah Atash Behram Restoration: An Overview

Mumbai, December 13, 2021: The Iranshah Atash Behram building in Udwada, which was constructed nearly 130 years ago in 1894, and the other structures in the complex required extensive restoration and conservation work. Shapoorji Pallonji And Company Pvt Ltd undertook the restoration at the request of Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor of the Iranshah Atash Behram.

The Shapoorji Pallonji team acted as an anchor for the restoration project. A detailed examination was conducted for vulnerabilities on the structures, by a team of experts from various fields. It was discovered that the Atash Behram building and other structures in the complex had undergone many changes over the last century, which were not part of the original architectural intent. A meticulous restoration plan was then prepared with the objective to strengthen the structural stability and restore the architectural intent of the buildings in the Atash Behram complex as originally envisaged.

The Iranshah Atash Behram building which housed the revered Iranshah since 31st October 1894, was constructed originally with the generous contribution of Bai Motlibai Manockjee Wadia, daughter of the late Jehangirjee Nasserwanjee Wadia, in memory of her husband, the late Manockjee Naorojee Wadia.

The Restoration Work:

- The stone, brick and lime mortar structure of the Atash Behram building, constructed by the composite masonry method, was structurally strengthened. A majority of the wood in the building and the roof was repaired.
- The roof that covered the terrace on the first floor was not a part of the original structure. It was a subsequent addition that has now been removed as it was an additional load on the structure as well as a potential source of leakage. The roof waterproofing was redesigned to ensure no leakage.
- With utmost care and special tools, the meticulous work of removing the layers of paint was undertaken, to expose and restore the original stone façade of the building and the crafted stone pillars.
- The marble on the flooring of the veranda (otla) and the staircase was replaced with new marble of the same type.
- A ramp for easy access by wheelchairs was relocated.

- The dome that houses the Kebla (sanctum sanctorum) is unique as it is a ribbed dome made of lime mortar; the testing of this dome posed an additional challenge as very few such domes are available in the country to serve as a reference for conducting a non-destructive test. The dome passed the required test hence no repair work was undertaken.
- The five chimneys in the Kebla were replaced as they were rusted beyond repair.
- The Nanhya house was a part of the architectural intent and was constructed in 1895; this is a building where the Mobeds take their bareshnum and live in isolation as part of their purification process. The restoration of the structure involved repairing and restoring the roof and walls which were deteriorated on account of water seepage.
- New Ghodhas (Lamassu) were crafted from a monolithic sandstone block and placed at the entrance gate.
- All the other structures were not a part of the original Atash Behram but were added subsequently. The construction of the Mobeds' resting house was completed in 1998 and donated to the Iranshah Atash Behram. All damages to this building were repaired and the architecture modified to be in consonance with the complex.
- The Kusti area was entirely rebuilt as the existing structure failed the structural requirements.

Art and Antiquity:

- An art and antiquity restoration lab was setup in Dasturji Kayoji Mirza Hall in Udwada. The team of conservationists restored all plaques, metal antiquity and paintings which were damaged over the years.
- The original flag of Iranshah was restored and framed. As the restored flag cannot be hoisted, a new flag as a replica using the same material palette of the original flag has been made. It will be hoisted on all auspicious occasions.

Vada Dasturji Khurshed Dastoor of Iranshah Atash Behram initiated and guided the restoration and conservation work, along with members of the nine priestly families who serve the Iranshah Atash Behram. Our sincere thanks to Vada Dasturji Dr. Firoze M Kotwal, Ervad Dr. Ramiyar Karanjia, Ms. Firoza Punthakey Mistree, Mr. Marazban Giara and Ms. Parveen Z Mistry for their help and guidance throughout the project. The Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry family gave valuable guidance and unstinted financial support. The conservation and restoration work was supported by architect Mr. Hanoz Ichhaporia of NEU dekor, Mr. Anupam Sah, Head of Art Conservation, Research and Training at the CSMVS Museum Art Conservation Centre, Mr. Rahul Kshirsagar of Gadially

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For further information, please contact Shapoorji Pallonji:

Zarin Amrolia – 912267492696 | zarin.amrolia@shapoorji.com

For further information, please contact Concept PR:

Tanvi Khanolkar – 9619695172 | tanvi@conceptpr.com

Kaveer Ray - 9820219847 | kaveer.r@conceptpr.com

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