



We have heard of people living in trailers, but rarely would you have come across someone who wanted to live in an 80-year-old train coach. Tarun Thakral is one such person. "I found this coach lying with the Railways. When Palace on Wheels was made, the coach was called Jodhpur Saloon. Then it got scrapped because Palace on Wheels moved onto broad gauge and this coach was meter gauge. So when I saw this lying like trash with the Railways, I asked them for it. I had this farm where I wanted to place the coach and live in it. It is as good as a house — it has a bedroom, lobby, bathroom, dining room and kitchen. They thought I was crazy when I wanted it. However, they finally decided to sell it to, but for ₹5 lakh. So, I had to sell a bit of my farm land and buy it. Since my dream of living in the coach never got fulfilled I recreated an entire railway station from 1930," said COO of Le Meridien, who recently set-up his own Heritage Transport Museum in Manesar. Thakral's museum is not a boring, educational confinement. But an experience that anyone who's lived between the 1930s and 90s will cherish.

Trap the scrap

TARUN THAKRAL spent 20 years collecting junk to turn it into a transport museum. He told IKNOR KAUR about restoring artefacts

came to Thakral when he was pursuing his MBA in Hotel Management in Paris. He elaborated, "When I was abroad I saw that people always collect and preserve something or the other. Both my roommates were ardent collectors. One of them, Luke, used to collect souvenir eggs. He had 350 of them. The other one was Bernard, he collected stamps. I was inspired and fell in love with gramophone players, lamps and cars."

As you step into the museum the first thing you see is the 'journey of wheels. Fancy, old-fashioned, twisted, curvy, rugged and rusty — all kinds of wheels are placed in a

geometric fashion. What catches your eye immediately is a sculpture from the Indus Valley Civilisation. "I got hold of this piece through an archeology department and they were ready to sell it to me. It is a bird with wheels which actually shows that wheels existed even during that time. Plus, it also shows that animals were used as a way of transportation then," explained Thakral.

There is a section dedicated to carts — bullock carts, horse carts, camel carts, palanquins and elephant carriers of 1850 made out of gold and silver threads. One thing that Thakral didn't do is collect royal goods. He said, "When some-



body comes and sees a car, cart or anything else, they wouldn't connect to it if it was a Maharaja's car because he never used it. But if they see stuff they have used or seen their fathers and grandfathers use, there is an immediate bonding. That experience is important."

The next section is a replica of a bus station which has vehicles dating back to 1942 parked. Right from Bedford to Tata, there is every size, colour and type of bus there.

Once Thakral bought two cars off milkmen who had been given

want to leave it to somebody else. So I read up a lot and saw hundreds of pictures. I got carpenters from the areas that the things belonged to. The conservator and I would explain the carpenter what to do and then supervise him. We didn't want to make the artefact look brand new," he said.

There are video projections that show footage of trams, buses and trains brought from the UK. You can also look at all the collections placed on the floor below and above the one you are on. The first floor has some of Thakral's prized possessions. He owns the first ever Indian flag that went to the moon and came back. He has framed it along with a letter if its authentication in an enclosed glass cabinet. He also has a massive toy collection which had toys made only by Indian brand. The basement is the best of all. It opens with an enlarged image of Gayatri Devi driving a Mercedes and leads you into an old 1940 street. It also had a Bollywood section which features the famous red car from *Dil To Pagal Hai*. There is also a recreated gas station. The basement also has a collection of predominantly American cars. The museum will open for public on December 7 and is being run under the Heritage Transportation Trust.

photos Pankaj Kumar