

# DRIVING PASSION

Three transport museums light up the road ahead, says **Sonal Shah**.



The words “Guggenheim” and “Gurgaon” have rarely, if ever, been uttered in the same breath. Yet Vikas Harish had the audacity to refer to the New York landmark as he talked about an upcoming suburban museum. It was no idle boast. Harish, a museologist and the curator of the staggering 85,000-square-foot Heritage Transport Museum, described how a Lloyd Wright-inspired system of ramps and atria will create interior vistas across its four levels.

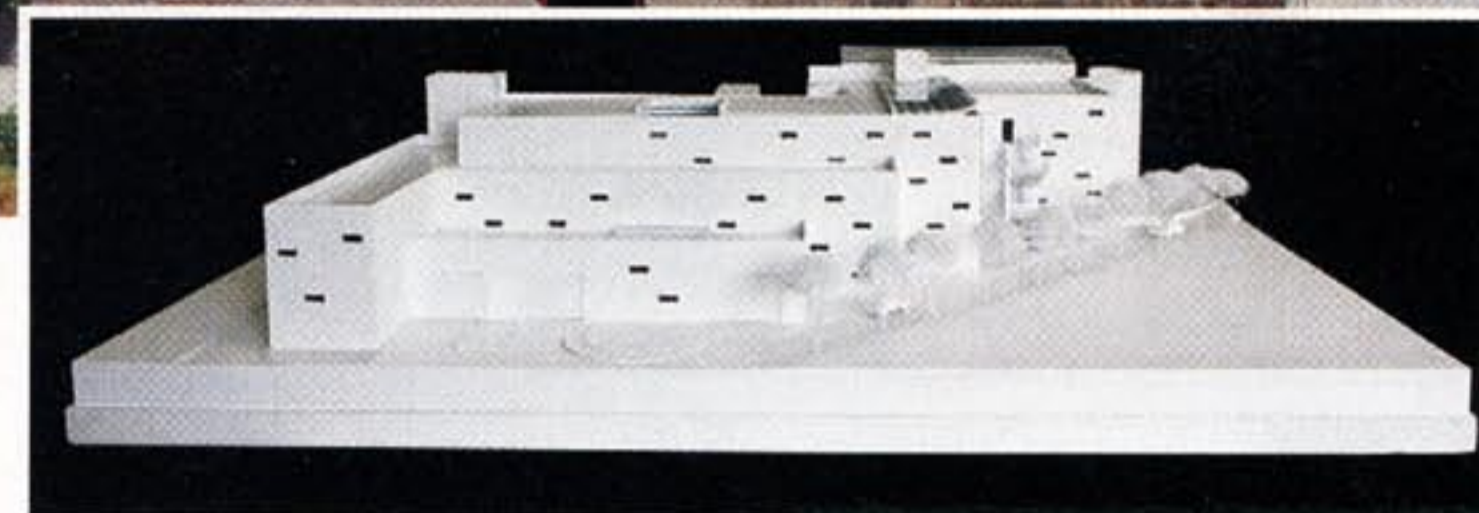
The museum is one of three projects driven by car-mad Delhi collectors, who are racing to move their antique vehicles out of the garage and into curated museums, parking them within the context of India’s history.

The first to rev up was Diljeet Titus’ Pro Bono Publico Museum for Vintage and Classic Cars, most of which were formerly owned by royalty. It’s currently in the shop for a major overhaul, but Titus hopes to reopen the place to visitors, by appointment, next March. In keeping with the princely nature of his collection, his museum will be set up like “a

giant 25,000 square-foot drawing room,” he said, with antique carpets and cars, palms, and Oslo chandeliers. “The effect is of a 1930s-’40s showroom,” the way cars were typically displayed at Western motor shows at the height of Art Deco style. “I’m not using any technology or electronic gimmickry,” Titus said.

Pro Bono Publico is geared towards serious enthusiasts; every vehicle will have supporting photographs or artefacts that belonged to its first owner. Titus explained, “I’m trying to show that these cars have documented provenance.” In Delhi, it’s a small miracle to hear the word “provenance” matched with “museum”.

Three months ago, restorer and collector Sandeep Katari opened up a little labour of love in Jaunapur Village. Katari sold his accessories shop to fund his museum. “I couldn’t afford a fancy place,” he said. “I want to



**On the horizon** The Heritage Transport Museum nears completion; (below) a 1959 Lambretta from Sandeep Katari’s collection

show that you don’t have to be super-loaded to do something like this slowly. It takes time – and getting used to abuses from your family – but it should not deter you from doing it on a small scale.” Katari has an abundance

“**I’m trying to show these cars have documented provenance**”

of secondary sources: memorabilia, posters, photos. His museum is a small but tantalising appetiser before the big event: the Heritage Transport Museum, slated to open near Manesar by December.

*Time Out* first spoke to Tarun Thakral, an obsessive collector who also happens to be COO of Le Meridien, in February of 2009. He was just beginning to institutionalise his private collection, which includes palanquins, antique autos and a royal rail saloon. At the time, he said it would be ready in nine months.

Three years later – and with nearly ten crores of Ministry of Culture funding, private donations and sponsorship – Thakral’s vision for the Heritage Transport Museum has grown to incredible scale. It promises to be a deluge of immersive audio-visual displays, archival photos and documents, and a large dollop of the good old-fashioned wow-factor. Its exhibits will include a Bollywood section with Shah Rukh Khan’s *Dil To Pagal Hai* clown car, Gond and Warli artists’ renditions of

modern transport, kitsch trucks surrounded by hand-painted hoardings, a period mechanic’s shop, “jugaad” or modified transport, maritime transport, postal stamps, video art, a railway platform and possibly old engines from the Ministry of Railways. Then add a conference centre, a cafe, a library and an auditorium, along with Thakral’s 1947 Piper JC3 Cub plane, and “something big in aviation,” Harish teased. “We really can’t speak about it right now!”

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Is it Superman? Ultimately, the real surprise at the Heritage Transport Museum will likely be the thought and research behind it. Harish, the head curator, got his start at the National Museum Institute in Delhi but has lived in Paris for the past few years – he knows the wrecked state of local museums.

“There’s a museological joke,” Harish said. “Somebody’s up in a balloon and asks ‘Where am I?’ and the museologist on the ground looks up and says, ‘You’re in the air!’” Whether it’s a hot air balloon or a horse carriage, we expect to be told a lot more than that.

**Sandeep Katari’s collection** Jaunapur Village (98730-33111). Daily, by appointment only.

