

433-year-old church all spruced up, to be opened for parishioners on Sunday

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Thane: The 433-year-old historic St. John the Baptist church, near Talaopali, has been restored and will be thrown open to devotees from Sunday, September 20. The restoration work began a year-and-a-half ago after the structure was almost in a crumbling state.

The church now wears a fresh coat of paint, polished Burma teak wood and many more alterations. The unused alters, also known as pulpits, have not only been gilded and polished, but have also been given an ornate canopy.

The planning began over a decade ago, but since the city lacked a team that looked into such matters, work could begin only a year ago. A detailed research on the history of Thane and the church was submitted to the architect by the parishioners. "The church was constructed in Baroque style or early Portuguese



A FRESH, BRIGHT LOOK: The church has just one high speed fan; the altar that was built using Burma teak wood has been polished and the intricate work on it has been given a ting of gold. CCTVs and television screens have also been installed

style, which comprises of a simple lime washed exterior and ornate interiors," said Fleur D'Souza, a parishioner and also a member of the historic committee.

"Almost all churches in the city that were renovated have been converted into modernized structures, making them lose the actual feel of a church. The earliest records of the church dates

back to 1582 and over the years the structure has witnessed a lot of changes. As we are part of this historic legacy, we must protect it and restore it, instead of renovating and changing its entire look," she added.

While carrying out the restoration work, conservation architect Vikas Dilawari had to modify his plan a couple of times as he found many



niches and historic carved stone slabs that reveal the history of the church.

"We scraped off the paint around the doorway to find beautiful stone arcs that dated back to 1668, 1725 and 1707. We have preserved all these. We also came across hidden niches and doorways in the walls. We have also retained the plain glass panes as it brightens up the church. We

have used lime plaster instead of cement to keep the historic feel. As it is difficult to find the original Minton tiles for the flooring, we used black marble and Jaisalmer stone, keeping the original pattern intact," Dilawari said.

While all players in the restoration project have given top priority to the revival of the heritage structure,

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Fleur D'Souza | PARISHIONER

they have also incorporated a few modern elements in it—which includes just one high volume low speed fan whose blades are 20-ft long, energy saving lights, CCTVs and television screens.

"A heritage structure is a living monument and it has to be maintained in course of time," said D'Souza, who heads the history department at St. Xavier's College, VT.

Pics: Anil Shinde