

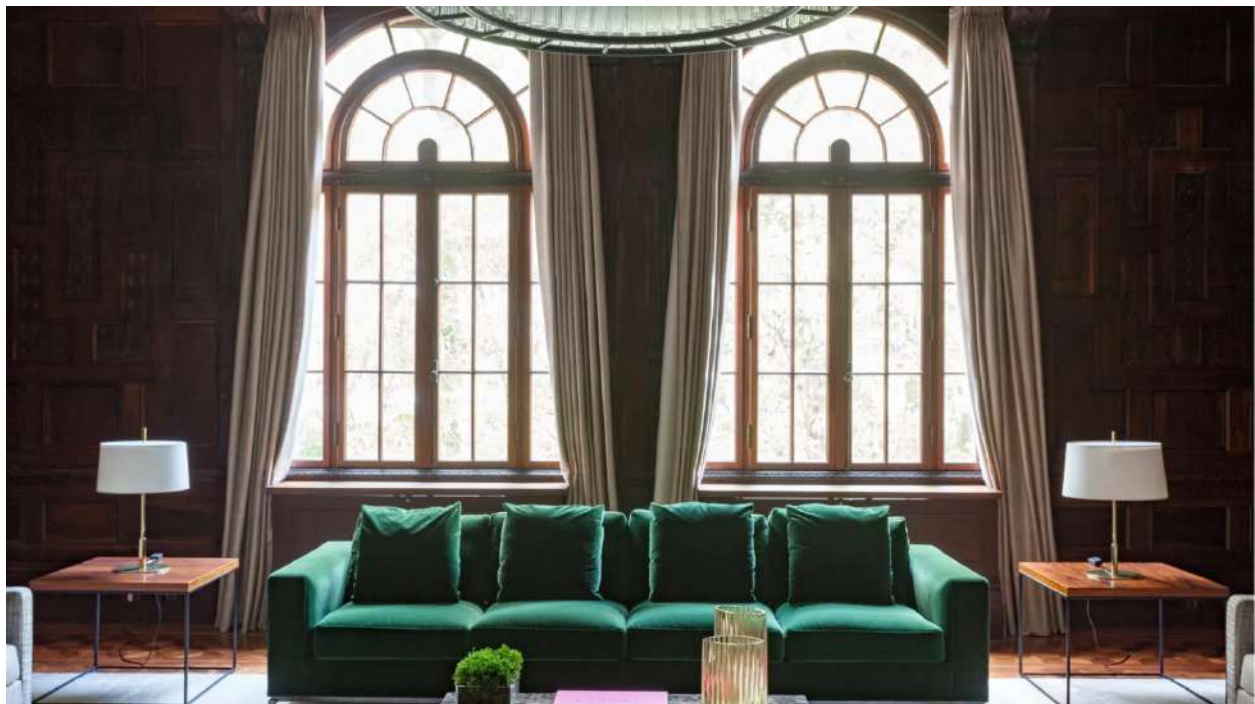
## AD

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## This century-old, restored mansion in São Paulo embraces Neoclassicism with a Brazilian flair

A coffee baron's not-so-humble abode, Casa Higienópolis is one of the last of the remaining opulent mansions of São Paulo.

By Shubhanjana Das



Home to the Amazon rainforest, the energetic and colourful carnival, soccer legends, exceptional coffee, Christ the Redeemer, and some of the best beaches in the world, Brazil also boasts of an extensive architectural history. From Portuguese colonial to Gothic and Modernist, Brazil's architectural vocabulary has been shaped by its colonial history and socio-political, economic, and cultural influences. São Paulo, now Brazil's most populous and wealthiest city, reflects this architectural evolution in the country.

Post Brazil's independence from the Portuguese in 1822, coffee became the country's principal export, and São Paulo transformed into a bustling metropolis. One of the most prominent neighbourhoods inhabited by the coffee barons of the time was Higienópolis, now an upper-class residential neighbourhood with some of São Paulo's best restaurants, cultural institutions and fashion boutiques.

<https://www.architecturaldigest.in/story/this-century-old-restored-mansion-in-sao-paulo-embraces-neoclassicism-with-a-brazilian-flair/>



*The ornamented facade of Casa Higienópolis, complete with a terrace surrounded by balustrades*

Higienópolis' residential mansions represents the Europeanization of the Brazilian elites' way of life in the early 20th century. Some also reflect the country-wide shift from the grandiosity of the erstwhile Baroque era to the symmetry and simplicity of Neoclassicism. But only a few of its opulent mansions remain, owing to lack of preservation and restoration. One of the few defining structures that do remain, however, is Casa Higienópolis—a 25,833 square-foot French Neoclassical mansion commissioned by the coffee baron Leôncio de Magalhães in 1927.

Casa Higienópolis, earlier called Casarão Nhonhô Magalhães, was built on a 1.7-acre plot of land. It was a two-year-long project led by engineer Heribaldo Siciliano of the engineering firm Siciliano & Silva, and incorporated the renowned baron's desires for his grand home—an external area similar to the mid 19th-century French mansions, a lush garden, and internal spaces for hosting soirées and cultural entertainment for the family and their guests.



*Jorge Zalsupin's modern furniture present a harmonious contrast to the intricate wood carvings and plaster ceilings.*

The external structure is disguised by an ornamented main façade that features scalloped ionic columns—typical of the classical architectural style—supporting the mansion and a terrace surrounded by a balustrade. Inside, its 40 rooms spread over five floors exhibit the classic French style on which the building's architecture was based, also evident in the mansard crown (window arranged in the roof of a building to light and ventilate the attic). The ceilings are highlighted with details in hardwood and decorated in plaster similar to that of the Gothic ogives, inspired by the interiors of a medieval castle.





*Walls paneled with ornately hand carved wood.*

Casarão was inhabited until 1952, after which it was sold to the state government. The mansion has since housed the Secretariat of Public Security and the headquarters of the Anti-Kidnapping Police Station until it was sold to its neighbour Shopping Pátio Higienópolis (owned by the Iguatemi group) in 2005.

“Buildings such as these are part of our DNA. They are part of who we are, the history of our city, and Brazil. We can’t let them disappear,” Carlos Jereissati, Chairman of the Board at Iguatemi Group, which introduced the shopping mall to Brazil back in the ‘60s, told AD India. “In a country with plenty of historically significant architecture—from baroque to brutalist —there have been missed opportunities to preserve architecturally significant properties. We need to lead by example and show the bright side of our culture.”



*Art deco inspired bathroom at Casa Higienópolis.*

Restoration began in 2009 and after a 13-year-long recovery, Casarão emerged as Casa Higienópolis, where Neoclassicism mingles with Brazilian flair and the comforts of the 21st century. While some features—like the moorish-style door, the stained-glass windows ranging from classic to Art Deco, the modern amphitheatre, the carved wooden doors, the English and German tiles in the bathrooms—needed to be painstakingly restored; the white paint that covered the walls was meticulously removed to reveal the original paint, the wood carvings polished, the original floor given new life, and the façade returned to its old appearance.



*The stain glass windows were retained during the restoration.*

One of the mansion's hero spaces is the renovated entrance bar where the walls are lined with gold leaf. Highlights also include art by Rio de Janeiro-based [contemporary](#) artist Chiara Banfi, whose installations and sculptures are inspired by the world of music. The intricate, hand-carved woodwork and ornate plaster ceilings offer a contrasting setting for mid-century designer Jorge Zalszupin's modern furniture, which are used throughout the property.





*The extravagant entrance bar with gilded walls and modern furniture.*

“In its renovated form, Casa Higienópolis gives visitors a deep and varied sense of Brazilian history,” says Jereissati. The restored mansion will host corporate and social events as well as exhibitions, installations and events related to art, fashion and culture. Parts of it can also be experienced through an architectural heritage tour of the neighbourhood.