They made a difference in our lives!

The Rustom Faramna Agiary in Dadar and the Guzdar Scheme Residents – Trust, were presented the prestigious Urban Heritage Award and the Citizen’s Award, respectively.

By Indira Rodericks

What do a cathedral, an office building, an agiary, a tile showroom and a group of concerned citizens have in common? They are all recipients of this year’s Urban Heritage awards, presented by the Indian Heritage Society (IHS), last week.

The awards instituted in 1989, is given to sites on which work was carried out in the last ten years, in terms of restoration, continuing maintenance or recycled in a sensitive and contextual manner.

According to architect Mr. Harshad Bhatia, the honorary secretary of the IHS, the purpose of presenting the awards is simply to create greater public and institutional awareness for the need to preserve and protect public and private buildings, urban spaces and gardens in the city. There is also an award given to an individual or a group whose work involves preserving the heritage of the city.

This year’s winners include: St. Thomas Cathedral and Forbes Building in Fort, Rustom Faramna Agiary in Dadar and Keramos Tile & Stone at Colaba. The Citizen’s Award went to the Guzdar Scheme Residents – Trust.

Here are profiles of two of the recipients, the agiary in Dadar for it’s unusual upgrading and repair work and the residents of Guzdar Scheme, who took time off their busy schedules to restructure the breakdown of civic amenities in their locality, even taking to legal recourse when necessary.

The Rustom Faramna Agiary, Parsee Colony, Dadar

This agiary occupies a commanding corner position in the prominently residential neighbourhood. However, refurbishing a fire temple requires research and planning, because certain essentials in the original structure cannot be altered. Mr. Jimmy Mistry of Della Tecina Architects & Interior Designers, who was responsible for restoring the agiary because he didn’t want to devote even an inch from the original design and style. Mr. Mistry poured over ancient texts and drawings of the agiary before taking over the project.

Italian marble was used for the flooring replacing the existing one, which developed cracks, whilst old cornices and mouldings that had broken-off from the ceiling were copied and refitted. The doors and windows covered with layers of oil paint were stripped and the original wood was touched upon, varnished and exposed with polyurethane coatings.

The ritual room, where the sacred fire was moved to (during the restoration work) was cordoned off. The sanctum sanctorum was de-consecrated before repairs began and the sacred fire was returned to its sanctum after repairs ended.

Old partitions that has been haphazardly fitted and were causing smoke from the fire to remain trapped inside were removed and a proper ventilation system was created. The lighting was specifically designed keeping the original structure in mind, a ceiling suspended diffused light fitting was designed and a new lighting grid was worked out.

To complete the work a stunning Zen-like landscaped garden was laid in the compound outside on the lines of the Swaminarayan temple in London. During the work, a deliberate effort was made to leave the basic design untouched and unharmed. This structure thus displays authenticity, which is symbolic of the Parsee community itself.

Mr. Mistry completed the work at the 6,500 square feet fire temple as well as the garden in a record two months and is willing to help renovate other agiaries with technical support.

Jimmy Mistry who has helped restore the agiary.