



## Le Corbusier

Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru wanted it to be a city "unfettered by the traditions of the past." He hired a Swiss-French architect named Le Corbusier to design it. Le Corbusier laid out a neat grid of numbered sectors, wide tree-lined roads, and three great concrete buildings at the city's head, the Secretariat, the Assembly, and the High Court, together called the Capitol Complex.

Most cities grow slowly, old quarters on top of older ruins, temples next to office blocks. Chandigarh is different. It arrived all at once, in the early 1950s, planned from scratch on farmland at the foot of the Shivalik hills. A new capital for Punjab, after Lahore went to Pakistan. And yet, in just seventy years, it has built a heritage that is deep, layered, and still very much alive.



***"CHANDIGARH IS A BIG THING. IT IS THE FIRST LARGE-SCALE WORK OF PLANNING IN FREE INDIA."***  
**— JAWAHARLAL NEHRU**



Somewhere in Chicago right now, there is probably a chair in a collector's living room. It is a teak armchair with cane weaving, with a particular angle to the back that Pierre Jeanneret got right after years of working in the city of Chandigarh. It was made in Chandigarh in the late 1950s, for a government office. It must have sat in that office for decades. Then it disappeared. It was sold at the Wright Auction House in Chicago. They are the original furnishings of the Legislative Assembly, the High Court, the Secretariat, Panjab University's Central Library, and the College of Architecture, institutions that are still functioning, in a city that has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2016.



A table designed for the Punjab and Haryana Vidhan Sabha sold in France last year. A set of committee armchairs from the Assembly were sold at a Chicago auction in April 2024. In December 2024, more pieces went in Luxembourg. In early 2025, Sworders in the UK auctioned a Jeanneret collection. The sales are not slowing down. They are accelerating. This happened because nobody thought to protect these objects until they were already gone. Dealers, acquired pieces cheaply from government scrap sales in the 1990s and early 2000s. They took them abroad and sold them at enormous markups to collectors who understood their value. By the time anyone in Chandigarh looked up, the prices were in the lakhs and the chairs were in Paris.

The Chandigarh Administration has not been entirely inactive. There is a Heritage Items Protection Cell. There have been action plans. The Ministry of Home Affairs imposed restrictions on the disposal and export of Jeanneret and Le Corbusier furniture. But the restrictions have not held.

- What can you do? If you are a student studying in a building that may still hold original Jeanneret furniture pay attention to what is around you. If you see teak chairs with cane weaving or low peg-leg tables, that is your heritage. Tell someone. Take a photograph. Ask your institution whether the pieces are catalogued. Awareness is the first step in protection.



Sukhna Lake wasn't in Le Corbusier's original blueprints. It arrived out of practical necessity: the seasonal Sukhna Choe stream was dammed in 1958, creating a reservoir at the foot of the Shivaliks. What started as a utilitarian measure became the city's most loved public space, a 3-kilometre promenade where morning walkers, rowing clubs, migrating birds, and Sunday picnickers have coexisted for six decades.

The Shivalik hills have sandy soils embedded with clay pockets, they erode rapidly during the monsoon. For decades, this erosion fed silt into Sukhna at alarming rates. The response was a long programme of afforestation and soil conservation in the catchment area work that transformed degraded scrubland into a functioning forest, eventually notified as the Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary in 1998.

● **By 1988, Sukhna had lost 66% of its original water-holding capacity because of siltation from the Shivalik catchment** ●

The Capitol Complex sits at the northern tip of Chandigarh, in Sector 1, with the Shivalik Hills right behind it. This is the only place in the city where Le Corbusier's big ideas about city planning are all visible at once. Three concrete buildings, the Secretariat, the Legislative Assembly, and the High Court, face each other across a huge open esplanade. Four sculptural monuments complete the picture: the Open Hand, the Tower of Shadows, the Geometric Hill, and the Martyr's Memorial.



The Open Hand, the city's official emblem stands 26 metres tall and spins on a pivot to face the wind. Le Corbusier described its meaning simply: open to give, open to receive. It was his last great unfinished project in Chandigarh; he died in 1965 before it could be built. The monument was finally put up in 1985.



Sometime in the early 1960s, a man named Nek Chand Saini, a road inspector in the Public Works Department began clearing a small patch of jungle near the northern edge of the city. He set stones in a circle. He made a figure from broken bangles and some pebbles. He came back the next day, and the day after that. He worked at night, after his shift, in total secrecy. He continued for eighteen years. When the Chandigarh Administration finally discovered what he had made, they found, sculptures formed from industrial waste



***"The Rock Garden is now acknowledged as one of the modern wonders of the world. Over 5,000 visitors each day, some 12 million people so far, have walked through this vast creation – the greatest artistic achievement seen in India since the Taj Mahal." – Nek Chand Foundation***

## DID U KNOW?

CHANDIGARH IS ONE OF THE FEW CITIES IN THE WORLD WHERE EACH SECTOR WAS DESIGNED AS A SELF-SUFFICIENT NEIGHBOURHOOD EACH ONE WAS DESIGNED WITH ITS OWN MARKET, SCHOOL, AND GREEN BELT, SO PEOPLE WOULDN'T NEED TO TRAVEL FAR FOR DAILY NEEDS. TODAY THERE ARE 56 SECTORS IN THE CITY.





Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier's cousin, was the true day-to-day architect of Chandigarh. He lived here for seventeen years, supervised construction, adapted the master plan to Indian conditions, trained local engineers, and designed furniture that still fills the city's government buildings. His residence, a modest double-storey at the edge of a sector green has been converted into a museum.

## *The Jeanneret Furniture Crisis*

*HUNDREDS OF ORIGINAL TEAK CHAIRS DESIGNED BY PIERRE JEANNERET HAVE LEFT CHANDIGARH THROUGH AUCTION HOUSES — A SINGLE COURTROOM CHAIR SOLD FOR SEVERAL THOUSAND EUROS IN PARIS. CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION IS NOW IMPLEMENTING AN ACTION PLAN TO CATALOGUE, RESTORE, AND PROTECT WHAT REMAINS. THEY HAVE SOUGHT ACCESS TO LE CORBUSIER'S ORIGINAL DRAWINGS TO VERIFY AUTHENTICITY.*



**original "city furniture," made in the city's own workshops between 1952 and 1965.**





## Phulkari

Literally "flower work" in Punjabi, thread embroidery with neat, geometric and natural motifs on coarse hand-spun cotton cloth. Done from the reverse side; the pattern emerges on the front through a careful darning stitch. Every major life event in a Punjabi woman's life was once marked by a phulkari: a chope at weddings (gold thread on red cloth), a thirma (on white), a nilak (red and yellow over blue).

Today phulkari is made across Chandigarh on dupattas, kurtas, blouses, and sarees.

## Jutti

Traditional closed footwear from Punjab, worked entirely by hand. Its most distinctive feature is its symmetry: there is no left or right shoe rather both are identical, and the leather moulds to the foot with wear. The upper is embroidered with gold or silver wire called tilla, which covers the entire surface in dense geometric patterns. Men cut and assemble the leather; women do the tilla embroidery on uppers and backs.

## Dhurrie Weaving

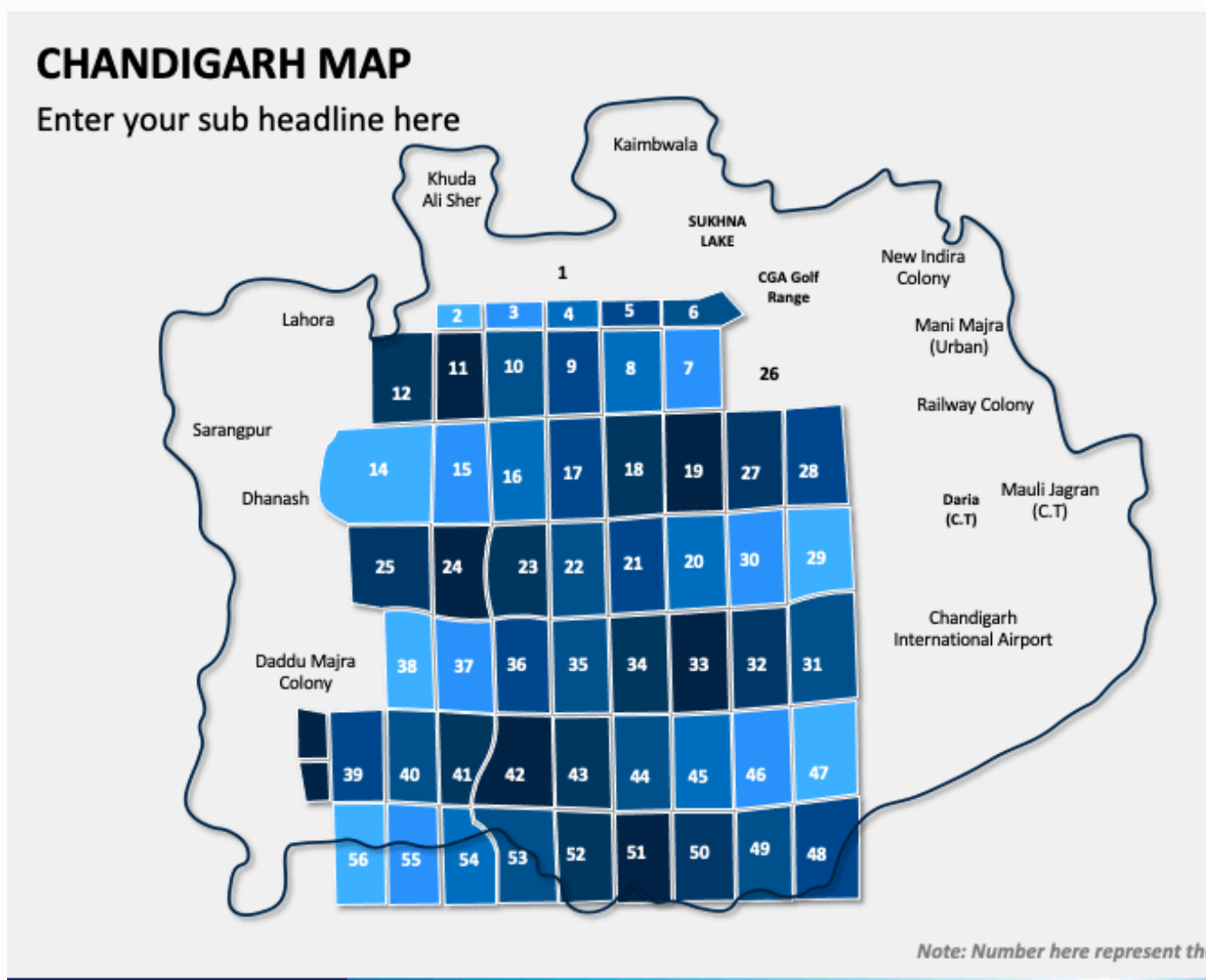
A dhurrie is a flat-woven Indian floor covering lighter than a carpet, reversible, and traditionally woven on a pit loom or a vertical frame. In Chandigarh and wider Punjab, dhurries are made from cotton, wool, jute, or silk, in geometric or floral patterns. The three main types are Navalgund Jamkhana, Ja-Namaz (prayer mat format), and Guddar (from recycled cloth strips) each have distinct weave structures.

## Mitti da Kaam

Pottery in Chandigarh draws on the traditions of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. Three main traditions are practiced: terracotta pottery (utilitarian and ceremonial vessels in unglazed red clay), blue pottery (imported via Jaipur but now practiced locally, with Persian-influenced cobalt patterns on a white base), and Kashmiri-influenced work brought by artisans who settled here after Partition.

Can you find and mark these places on the map of Chandigarh?

- **Capitol**
- **The Rock Garden**
- **Sukhna Lake**
- **The Government Museum**



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Chandigarh Tourism (Official)

Content, Research and development

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