A Survey of American Art Deco Architecture

Kathleen Murphy Skolnik

Initial Readings

Gebhard, David. “Art Deco and Streamline Moderne Architecture in the United States, 1920 to 1949.” In *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, pp 1-15.

Whiffen, Marcus. “Modernistic.” In *American Architecture Since 1780. A Guide to the Styles*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969, pp 235-240.

Robins, Anthony W. “Introduction—Art Deco New York.” In *New York Art Deco. A Guide to Gotham’s Jazz Age Architecture.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017, pp 1-8.

Art Deco and Streamline Moderne Architecture in the United States, 1920 to 1949

A recurring theme of the 1920s and 1930s, both in traditional design and architecture and in the various avant-garde movements, was the desire to seek out new forms or modifications of old forms to express the continually changing character and accelerated tempo of the new age. The machine and technology, especially the automobile, were seen as new nontraditional sources for architecture. "The black bottom and the Charleston typify the new rhythm of modern life," wrote the Austrian architect Adolf Loos in the mid-1920s. "An architect of today," he noted, "to be successful must be able to translate that rhythm into something of beauty in brick and stone."

Without question the two most pervasive and most popular modes that expressed the prevailing attitude toward change were the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne. While other architectural styles also emerged in these years—Constructivism, Expressionism, Futurism, and, perhaps most significantly, the International Style—it was the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne that caught the eye and held the attention of most Americans. These two styles permeated virtually every facet of the design world; their influence was manifest in everything from hairstyles and clothing to Hollywood films, to science fiction illustrations, to furniture, and finally, to architecture.

Although the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne were almost universally embraced in their time, the limits of their popularity are worth noting. Untold numbers of commercial and public buildings adopted a stylish image in the decades following World War I, but only rarely did the Moderne penetrate the realm of domestic architecture. In the 1930s by far the most

popular image for single-family housing in the United States was the colonial Cape Cod cottage (or its West Coast equivalent, the California ranch house), and while tubular metal furniture might appear in a sunroom, screened porch, or breakfast nook, it would not replace the maple reproductions of colonial chairs, tables, and cupboards that occupied the principal rooms of the average American house. In a fundamental sense, most Americans perceived the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne as fashions of the moment. The American middle class would never abandon its belief that permanency, or at least the illusion of permanency, was preferable to a world of continual change.

For many Americans who lived during the Jazz Age of the 1920s and the Depression years of the 1930s, the open contradiction between the imagery of permanence and the imagery of the transitory helped to create a delightful visual richness and complexity. At the end of the 1930s, middle-class Americans could leave their Colonial Revival suburban homes, climb into their streamlined cars, and dart off to their Streamline Moderne supermarkets or neighborhood movie theaters. Or they could tend to public business in a Public Works Administration (PWA) Moderne or Colonial Revival post office or government office building.

Modern or Moderne?

In a guidebook such as this, it is useful to set forth with all possible precision the characteristics of each style under consideration. The terms used to denote architectural styles are, however, notoriously slippery, and in this regard *Art Deco* and *Streamline Moderne* are not exceptional. Like the labels attached to many other styles of the past or near past—*Gothic, Baroque, Rococo*—the terms *Art Deco* and *Streamline Moderne* came into being decades after the modes to which they respectively refer held sway. In retrospect, *Art Deco* may seem an almost inevitable term to choose, given that the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes which took place in Paris in 1925, was widely acknowledged as one of the principal sources of the "new look" in American architecture and design in the late 1920s and the 1930s. But what we today know as the Art Deco went by many names before the term was coined in the 1960s by the British critic and historian Bevis Hillier. In his 1968 book *Art Deco* Hillier took a careful look at the various terms employed in the 1920s and 1930s and also at the labels that had cropped up in the intervening years. He selected *Art Deco* partly because it could easily be paired off against *Art Nouveau*, the term used to denote a pervasive turn-of-the-century stylistic movement. *Art Deco* seemed apt also because at the time interest in the style was focused primarily on the decorative arts. Not incidentally, Hillier's chosen term pro-

vided art dealers and collectors with a label that carried overtones of lineage and respectability.

The second wave of the Moderne, which emerged in the 1930s and drew its primary inspiration from the aerodynamic teardrop, almost immediately acquired the term *Streamline.* The coupling of *Streamline* with *Moderne* occurred decades later when the first Art Deco/Streamline Moderne exhibition was mounted in the United States. This exhibition and its catalog, organized and written by Harriette Von Breton and myself, were devoted to the work of Kem Weber. The exhibition was presented in 1969 at the University Art Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Since the designs and architecture of Kem Weber encompassed both phases of the popular Moderne, the distinction was drawn between the designer's work of the 1920s, which was labeled "Zigzag Moderne" (Art Deco), and his later work, which expressed the Streamline Moderne.

In the 1920s and 1930s casual observers of the architectural scene seldom focused on the differences between works that would today be perceived as exemplifying contending styles. Such terms as *Functional, Modernistic, Modernesque,* and *Modern* were used virtually interchangeably to refer to any and all works designed in the "new" style. But practitioners of what is generally called "International Style" or simply "modern" architecture, which developed in the 1920s and 1930s primarily in Europe and on America's West Coast, tended to object to being grouped with the designers who worked in the popular Moderne modes. Following the lead of the German architect Walter Gropius, the modernists played a semantic game, arguing that they were not creating a style at all but, rather, were merely responding to the new social, economic, and material conditions of the 20th century. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson called the modernists' bluff in their 1932 exhibition and book, *The International Style: Architecture since 1922,* but the American high-style modernists continued to disclaim any interest in forging a new style.

Another discomfort experienced by the International Style modernists was that their avowed affinity for the North American concrete grain elevator, the automobile, the airplane, and the ocean liner was openly shared by the designers of Moderne objects and architecture. The elitist poetry of Le Corbusier's ode to the transportation machine in his 1923 manifesto *Towards a New Architecture* became, in the hands of Sheldon Cheney, Paul T. Frankl, and others, one of the arguments in support of the popular Moderne. Echoing Le Corbusier, Cheney wrote in his 1930 book *The New World Architecture,*

> We sometimes wonder why our dwelling-place couldn't have been conceived and built as cleanly, as efficiently—and as beautifully—as our automobile: THAT has just the combination of mechanical efficiency and comfort, of cleanli-

> ness and pleasurable brightness, of mechanically perfect shelter and of beauty out of proportioning and structure, that we should relish in a house.

The line separating works in the popular Moderne styles from works of International Style modernism is in some cases so fine as to be invisible. A significant percentage of the buildings and monuments listed in this book are hybrids—either combinations of the Moderne and the International Style or admixtures of various Moderne styles. Still, it is useful when studying modern or Moderne architecture to retain certain distinctions. While each of the styles that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s was to some extent expressive of the new age, the Moderne styles were based upon fashion and taste, not upon any functional or moral imperative; and whereas the modernists eschewed traditional forms in their search for entirely new forms, the Moderne designers played freely with historical precedent, sometimes abstracting traditional forms beyond recognition.

The Art Deco

In 1928 an observer of the new Moderne architecture described the Art Deco as characterized by "Straight lines; it is angular, geometric and tends to follow cubic proportions. . . . The lines are unvaryingly plain and severe, with touches of decoration in the way of color, wrought iron and glass work, for relief." As a description of the Art Deco, this is a good starting point. What should also be noted as primary are the importance the style placed on ornament, especially sculptural ornament, and the direct manner in which the Art Deco was nourished by historical roots.

Insofar as most of America's Art Deco structures were produced by architects directly or indirectly educated within the Parisian Beaux-Arts system, it should not be surprising that when these architects turned their attention to the "new" language of design (as almost all of them did after 1925), the forms they produced were, to a considerable degree, derived from classical precedent. Whether the project was a PWA-funded post office or public school building in a small Midwestern community or a towering slab skyscraper in New York City, the classical ideals of solidity and mass remained paramount. So too remained the predilection for classical-inspired proportions and axial, balanced, symmetrical plans and elevations. The architect might look to the classical traditions of Western Europe—to the Greek, the Gothic, the Romanesque, or the Renaissance—or to the architecture of ancient Egypt, ancient Assyria in Mesopotamia, or the pre-Columbian world of the Aztecs and Mayans in Mexico and Central America. Whatever historical sources the Art Deco designer drew from, the forms, surfaces, and details were maneuvered within a classical Beaux-Arts framework.

Thus the typical Art Deco building represented a bringing up to date, a modernization, of one or another of the architectural traditions. For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to separate the buildings that represent a slowly evolving phase of a particular historical language from those that were consciously intended to be responded to as Moderne. A case in point would be Paul P. Cret and Alexander B. Trowbridge's Folger Shakespeare Library (1932) in Washington, D.C., which Cret himself cited as an example of the "new classicism." Cret would certainly have rejected the idea that this building, or any of his designs, could be cataloged as Art Deco. Yet for us today, Cret's buildings of the late 1920s and 1930s comprise some of the most impressive examples of abstraction of the classical tradition—a quality intimately associated with the Art Deco.

What separates the Art Deco from other contemporaneous modes is, above all, its approach to ornament and surface sheathing. The Art Deco building often played a sort of game, contrasting the earthbound, even monumental, nature of the structure with the fragility and thinness of its exterior surfaces. The general tendency, from the mid-1920s on into the early 1940s, was to exhibit exterior walls that expressed little depth or projection. Such abstraction would dissolve the traditional link between architecture and sculpture; the result was buildings less sculptural and more like drawings on a drafting board.

The Moderne skyscrapers that captured the upward-soaring quality of the Gothic belong to a subset of the Art Deco generally referred to as the American Vertical style. These tall urban buildings articulated their thin stone-veneered or terra-cotta–clad surfaces with attenuated vertical shafts alternating with vertical bands, usually recessed, containing windows and spandrels.

In many Art Deco buildings the style's characteristic emphasis on verticality was manifest in a row of piers or pilasters that subtly represented a classical portico or temple front. Most such Art Deco designs alluded to a traditional base, but typical of the style was the absence of a cornice or other device to provide a vertical conclusion. While an attic or a band of ornament might imply a conclusion, such features were at best highly abridged versions of a cornice. Even in those instances where a classical-inspired low dome or pyramidal hipped roof was used, the form was customarily recessed behind a parapet and sprang, not from the building's outside walls, but from the rooftop itself (thus reading principally as a pure geometric shape, only incidentally as a traditional roof).

The thin panels of stone or brick that sheathed many Art Deco buildings were meant to appear as an appliqué, abstractly (as in a drawing) suggesting traditional masonry. (By a similar token, the interior public spaces of many large Art Deco buildings employed thin sheets of rare and expensive polished stone, whose effect was like that of wallpaper or a painted mural: just a

skin covering the frame of the structure.) Terra-cotta was a material frequently employed, both for the overall sheathing of a building and for its ornament. Sometimes the terra-cotta was treated so as to be indistinguishable from stone; on other occasions it was made to resemble porcelain or glass—fragile, with brilliant colors and gleaming glazed surfaces. Another popular material for sheathing Art Deco buildings was cast stone (a fine-surfaced concrete), in some cases so similar to stone that it is difficult to identify as concrete.

The 1920s styles, especially the Art Deco, delighted in experimenting with the numerous metal alloys introduced in the course of the decade. All sorts of mixtures of steel, bronze, nickel, silver, platinum, lead, and zinc were used for elevator doors, window frames, spandrels, decorative panels, and sculpture. Lightweight aluminum also came into its own in these years, and the Art Deco architects were obviously fascinated with it, both as a material in its own right and, with plating applied, as a substitute for other materials: bronze, nickel, silver, even gold.

"The automobile with its firm but soft coloring and its flashes of bright metal may again afford us a clue," wrote Sheldon Cheney in discussing the Moderne's relation to color. Such a scheme—"firm but soft color" contrasted with "bright metal"—was certainly one of the hallmarks of the Art Deco, employed in the production of objects both large (skyscrapers) and small (perfume bottles and cigarette lighters). The Art Deco typically contrasted warm tans and pale shades of green and blue either with shiny metals or with accents of strong "pure" color—vehement reds, cobalt blues, or golden yellows. The style also exploited the drama of light and shadow through the adroit use of electric lighting. The Art Deco's most dramatic employment of artificial lighting was the nighttime illumination of building exteriors. For here architects could come close to transferring light-and-shadow renderings (such as the drawings of the famed Hugh Ferriss) into the real three-dimensional world. In a critical discussion of the buildings of Rockefeller Center, Lewis Mumford wrote, "Here, at night, is what Ferriss meant: something large, exciting and romantic . . . again, life has imitated art."

The architectural details associated with a particular historical style often underwent a reductive process when subsumed into the Art Deco. The slender column (or cluster of slender columns) traditionally associated with the Gothic was commonly employed on the exterior of American Vertical–style skyscrapers. In their Moderne incarnation, such columns might become narrow vertical bands without bases or capitals. Similarly, the Art Deco might reduce the Doric column to the barest vestige of a pilaster, its surface a continuation of the adjacent wall. In many Art Deco buildings vertical fluting along an exterior surface constituted the only residue of a classical column.

The Art Deco took two approaches to ornament: the first was to make ornament integral to the surface upon which it was placed; the second was

to confine the ornament to a panel that hovered (or seemed to hover) in front of the wall surface. Favorite motifs in Art Deco ornament included spirals, sunflowers, steps, zigzags, triangles, double triangles, hexagons, fragmented circles, and seashells. The patterns containing these motifs were generally rendered in low relief with sharp angular contours.

The Art Deco frequently enlisted sculpture and inscriptions in its game of playing tradition against modernity. Figures and events from classical mythology, from the bible, or from ancient and "primitive" cultures (Near Eastern, Native American, pre-Columbian, etc.) were represented in Art Deco sculpture. Such sculpture transported the middle-class audience to which it was addressed not only into the past but also around the globe. The figures and the ideas they personified were often maneuvered to comment on the modern world of commerce and industry—hence the inclusion of gears, propeller blades, automobile headlights, or whole airplanes, dirigibles, trucks, steamships, radio towers, and oil rigs in so much Art Deco sculpture.

Three methods were typically employed for integrating sculpture into an Art Deco building. In the Goodhue-esque approach (originated by the architect Bertram G. Goodhue and widely emulated) three-dimensional figures were made to spring forth in primeval fashion from the surface and mass of the structure. A second route was to project a rectangular panel out from the building's surface and then to place relief sculpture on the panel. An opposite tack was to place low-relief sculpture within a recessed panel; figures or decorative patterns contained in such recesses seldom broke out beyond the plane of the adjacent surface. On the whole, Art Deco figurative sculpture (of humans, animals, birds, and plant forms) reflected trends in the parallel world of modern art: the reemergence of the classical human figure, the influence of primitive and folk art, and the impulse toward abstraction evident in the work of cubist and postcubist artists of the 1910s and 1920s.

The Art Deco was employed in the design of all kinds of buildings, large and small—banks, retail stores, motion picture theaters, apartment houses, even service stations—but without question the style's favorite building type was the skyscraper. Perhaps the least well-known of America's Art Deco treasures are the tombstones and mausoleums in cemeteries and memorial parks across the country. Some of these were designed by noted architects (Reginald D. Johnson and Thomas Tallmadge, for instance); others were produced by anonymous designers who obviously kept abreast of the latest architectural trends. With the onset of the Depression, commercial construction ground to a halt and public buildings, many of them funded by the PWA and built by WPA labor, became one of the principal vehicles for the Art Deco. These buildings, which constitute a subset of the Art Deco known as the PWA Moderne, included courthouses, schools, armories, water treatment plants, bridges, and dams. PWA Moderne structures generally assumed a

demeanor of stripped classicism, with an emphasis on the monumental (reminiscent of the "Fascist" architecture espoused in the same years by totalitarian rulers in Europe). The style was employed also for several private-sector building projects, most notably the office buildings constructed throughout the United States by the regional Bell Telephone companies; these late Art Deco skyscrapers typically also incorporated elements of the Streamline Moderne and the International Style.

It could convincingly be argued that several of the most lively Art Deco buildings constructed in the United States at the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s were churches. The various Protestant denominations, as well as certain factions within the Roman Catholic Church, sought to express their modernity and their compatibility with the 20th-century world through buildings that appeared at once traditional and modern. By 1940 an impressive number of Art Deco churches in exposed reinforced concrete had been constructed on the West Coast. In the central United States, churches designed by Barry Byrne and Bruce Goff commingled the Gothic, Expressionism, and the Moderne; and the New York architect Henry J. McGill (working in some instances with Talbot F. Hamlin) designed churches that seemed to carry on Goodhue's exploration of architecture as sculpture.

Sources of the Art Deco

In the United States the Art Deco began as a "smart" urban style, the latest fashion among a small contingent of upper-middle-class sophisticates in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and other major cities. From these centers the style rapidly spread to smaller communities throughout the country. If the Art Deco was the mode of the moment in New York, then there was no reason that it shouldn't be emulated posthaste in Fresno or Peoria. By the end of the 1920s virtually all facets of American design—advertising, fashion, the decorative arts, and architecture—were following the example of Paris.

Although the French capital was the acknowledged fountainhead of the Art Deco, the style's sources were varied and complex. The foundation for much post–World War I Parisian design was the work of the Austrian and German designers Joseph Hoffman, Joseph Olbrich, and Peter Behrens. The 1925 exposition had in fact originally been planned in 1914, as the French answer to Vienna's perceived preeminence in architecture and design, and the war had caused its postponement. By the mid-1920s several well-established Central European designers had emigrated to the United States and set up practice, including Kem Weber in California and Joseph Urban and Paul T. Frankl in New York. These designers helped to establish the Moderne in the United States in the years immediately before and after the 1925 Paris exposition.

Many American architects also created buildings and furniture that helped to establish the style. Frank Lloyd Wright designed some splendid (but unbuilt) Art Deco skyscrapers in the late 1920s. Claude Bragdon wrote a sharp-edged essay entitled "Ornament from Platonic Solids" that enjoyed wide circulation. Lloyd Wright, Barry Byrne, and Bruce Goff produced designs that have much in common with the Parisian-influenced mode. Even a "futurist" such as R. Buckminster Fuller registered the impact of the Art Deco in his Dymaxion houses of the late 1920s.

Among the architects who made the most significant contributions to the early development of the Art Deco in the United States were: Eliel Saarinen, who arrived in this country from Finland in the 1920s; the Franco-American Paul P. Cret, an advocate of the Beaux Arts who opened an office in Philadelphia; and the New York architects Bertram G. Goodhue and Cass Gilbert, both of whom in the 1910s and 1920s turned from a preoccupation with the Gothic to a monumental version of the Moderne mode. Saarinen's widely published design for the Helsingfors Railroad Terminal (1904–14) illustrated how sculpture and architecture could be integrated in a dramatic new manner; his universally admired entry in the 1922 Chicago Tribune Tower competition was a pioneering exploration of the vertical vocabulary through which the American Vertical style developed. Cret's contribution can be seen in his Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. (1928–32). Cass Gilbert's United States Army Supply Base (1918) in Brooklyn, New York, demonstrated that an abstracted classicism could be achieved in exposed concrete. Goodhue took this theme and elaborated on it in his design for the Nebraska State Capitol (1922–26).

The Streamline Moderne

If the Art Deco captured the spirit of the moment, the modern age, the Streamline Moderne offered a glimpse of the future. What it portended was a fully automated world in which machines, controlled by man, were everywhere—and everywhere invisible. The style evinced an intense fascination with speed—speed of transportation and communication. Its visual vocabulary (the curve, the teardrop, the uninterrupted horizontal line) was derived largely from the form of high-speed modern transportation machines: the airplane, the automobile, the ocean liner.

Another fundamental difference between the Streamline Moderne and the Art Deco was the economic climate in which the two styles flourished. The Streamline Moderne conjured up an exciting vision of the future partly in order to help lift the American public out of the gloom of the Depression. In striking contrast to the skyscrapers and large-scale public buildings that constitute the great monuments of the Art Deco, Streamline

Moderne structures were relatively small. As a consequence of increasing surburbanization throughout the United States, Streamline Moderne buildings also tended to be street- or highway-oriented (service stations, motels, drive-in restaurants and theaters, supermarkets), not confined to urban environments to the extent that Art Deco buildings were. The Streamline Moderne was also commonly employed in remodeling, or repackaging, existing buildings (storefronts, bars and cafés), since new construction was beyond the means of most American entrepreneurs in the 1930s. As yet another point of distinction, the typical Art Deco building argued for permanence in its forms and materials, while the Streamline Moderne structure, with its "flash-and-gleam beauty," implied a built-in impermanence akin to the need to replace one's automobile every year due to Detroit's annual ritual of restyling.

What the Art Deco and the Streamline Moderne had in common was that each came close to being a universal style, employed for everything from airplanes, ships, trains, and automobiles to children's toys, to household appliances, to buildings. In the case of the Streamline Moderne, no matter how an object was produced, it was meant to be read as machine-made. The style's evocation of machine imagery was in a sense indirect: that is, the machine aspect of a Streamline Moderne object was not set out before us to see and comprehend. Rather, the object's smooth flowing "skin," its sheathing, served to symbolize that the object was produced by a machine and/or was itself a machine. "Simple lines are modern," wrote Paul T. Frankl in 1928. "They are restful to the eye and dignified and tend to cover up the complexity of the machine age. If they do not completely do this, they at least divert our attention and allow us to feel ourselves master of the machine."

The visual language of the Streamline Moderne was realized through a limited number of highly effective motifs. In architecture, the designer's attention focused primarily on the building's skin. Structure was seldom revealed. Similarly, there was no outward assertion of a building's mechanical systems. Plumbing pipes, ducts, electrical conduits, together with furnaces or air-conditioning units, were hidden away behind a smooth exterior.

In its form the ideal Streamline Moderne building was a horizontal rectangular container, usually with dramatic rounded corners and occasional semicircular bays, surmounted by parapeted or projecting thin-slab roofs. The image projected was that of a scientifically advanced, effortlessly hygienic world. A sense of rapid movement was imparted by narrow horizontal bands of windows that often wrapped around corners and by horizontal layering in the building's facade (via changes in colors or material). The sense of speed was often enhanced by projecting or recessed bands (or groups of bands) disposed on the facade, by metal ship's railings, and by horizontal window mullions. Although terraces and screened porches might extend a building

out over its site, the ideal Streamline Moderne structure was meant (like its International Style counterpart) to be experienced as an object independent of its environment.

Two prominent characteristics of the style were glass brick (for windows and even entire walls) and small round windows reminiscent of the portholes on yachts and ocean liners. Window frames and doorframes, and even the doors themselves, were metal or appeared to be metal—products of the Machine Age. White cement stucco was a close to universal sheathing material. Thin rectangular sheets of opaque colored glass—Vitrolite and Carrara glass—were extensively used on smaller commercial buildings, as were steel panels coated with porcelainized enamel. Stainless steel and aluminum were employed for detailing and hardware; linoleum and Formica were the preferred materials for interior floors and countertops. By the end of the 1930s plywood had also entered into the Streamline Moderne vocabulary. It was employed for walls, ceilings, and furniture; its typical finish was bleached white, sealed with a coat of matte lacquer.

That the Streamline Moderne embraced its own built-in obsolescence also set the style apart from the Art Deco. In place of the elegant and expensive (or at least expensive-looking) materials encountered in Art Deco buildings, the Streamline Moderne favored mass-produced, easy-to-install components—in short, materials perfect for use in remodeling projects. A colorful new facade of Vitrolite or Carrara glass (available in black, white, green, blue, red, and other colors), a few curved walls or glass-brick windows, a bit of stainless-steel trim, and some bands of neon signage could effectively and dramatically repackage any existing structure. By 1940 almost every city and small town in the United States had acquired an array of commercial buildings remodeled in the Streamline Moderne mode.

Those architects who were fortunate enough to continue their practice in the Depression years occasionally sallied forth into the Streamline Moderne. For them the Streamline was a new language, employed to convey a sense of ultramodernity. Even such "space age" designers as R. Buckminster Fuller and Frederick Kiesler absorbed the Streamline language into their work of the 1930s. Many of the style's foremost exponents belonged to an entirely new breed of professionals. While a few may have been trained as engineers or architects, several of the major figures came to this new profession with backgrounds in theater design or the graphic arts. Between 1926 and 1930 Norman Bel Geddes, Walter Dorwin Teague, Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss, Kem Weber, Paul T. Frankl, and Harold Van Doreen brilliantly performed their first act of repackaging, namely reinventing themselves in the newly created role of "industrial designer." Their paramount task in the bleak years of the Depression was to repackage the old and package the new so that the American public would be stimulated to buy products ranging from houses to electric toasters.

National chains of retail stores and service stations were especially fond of the Streamline Moderne. In the mid-1930s such chains began to realize the sales advantage not only of establishing a uniform and instantly recognizable image but also of cultivating an image that the middle-class public perceived as modern, up-to-date. Sears, Roebuck & Company advanced their sales by utilizing the Art Deco image in the 1920s, and by the late 1930s they had turned to the Streamline Moderne. Service stations built by the regional and national oil companies ranged from Frederick Frost's Streamline Moderne oil-drum design for Mobil to Walter Dorwin Teague's porcelainized-enamel-clad stations for Texaco.

The single-family house, as a machine for living, also occasionally assumed a Streamline Moderne image. For the limited number of Americans who could afford to build, a Streamline Moderne dwelling established them in their own eyes and in the eyes of their neighbors as progressive, scientific, avant-garde. Advances in construction technology offset some of the effects of the Depression, and manufacturers of prefabricated building components took advantage of the opportunity to catch the public's eye with a strikingly designed object. Magazines such as *American Home* and retail stores such as W. J. Sloane & Company sponsored the construction of Streamline Moderne model houses across the country. Frederick Kiesler's "Space House" of 1933, built within the showrooms of the Sloane & Company store in New York City, was perhaps the most sophisticated Streamline Moderne dwelling built in the country. Just as there were subdivisions whose images were limited to the Colonial Revival or the California ranch house, there were a few developments restricted to the Streamline Moderne, among them Swan Acres near Pittsburgh (1934–38) and the Park Moderne in Los Angeles (1929–34).

Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art from 1929 to 1943, claimed always to be able to distinguish between works in the International Style and those in the populist Streamline Moderne mode. Barr decried the Moderne for its "desire for 'styling' objects for advertisement. Principles such as 'streamlining,'" he said, "often secured homage out of all proportion to their adaptability." Yet many International Style buildings of the 1930s utilized design elements that are commonly associated with the Streamline Moderne. This is true of buildings designed by such notable architects as Richard Neutra and R. M. Schindler on the West Coast, George Fred Keck in the Midwest, William Lescaze and Edward D. Stone in the Northeast, and others. It might even be argued that the most splendid and original Streamline Moderne building in the United States is Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax Company Administrative Building (1936). Although purely Wrightian and highly individualistic, this streamlined structure and its interior spaces are remarkably similar to buildings depicted in illustrations by Frank Paul that graced the cover of *Amazing Stories* magazine in the 1930s.

As one might expect, elements of the Streamline Moderne—rounded corners, corner windows, glass brick, metal ship's railings, circular staircases, even portholes—are often found in buildings that we would today call Art Deco. They even crop up in some Monterey Revival and Colonial Revival buildings of the 1930s. One of the most suave and sophisticated styles of the day, the Regency Revival, delighted in incorporating outright Moderne traits. One often feels today that a coin could be tossed as to whether certain structures should be labeled Streamline Moderne or Regency Revival.

The high point of the Streamline Moderne, which turned out also to be the style's swan song, was reached in the buildings of the 1939 New York World's Fair. While the Trylon and the Perisphere, designed by the New York architects Harrison & Fouilhoux, served as the symbolic center of the fair, the buildings that attracted the most attention were those produced by the industrial designers Norman Bel Geddes, Walter Dorwin Teague, and Raymond Loewy. Bel Geddes's Futurama and his exhibition for General Motors entitled "Highways and Horizons," with its multilayered streets and sidewalks, were masterpieces of the Streamline Moderne.

Sources of the Streamline Moderne

The visual imagery of the Streamline, for architecture as well as for transportation machines, originated in the world of science fiction. The genre itself reaches far back into the 19th century, past such classics as H. G. Wells's 1896 novel *The Time Machine* and E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909), past Jules Verne's depiction of Captain Nemo and his streamlined submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and his *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), all the way to Edgar Allan Poe's "Hans Phael—A Tale" (1835). But science fiction came into its own—in books, pulp magazines, and films—in the 1920s and 1930s, and the image of the Streamline was an essential ingredient of its futuristic world. The term *science fiction* was coined in 1928 by Hugo Gernsbeck, who three years earlier had commenced publication of the magazine *Amazing Stories*; by early 1929 the illustrator Frank Paul (whose fame rests on his illustrations for *Amazing Stories* in the 1930s and 1940s) was sharing with readers of *Science Wonder Stories* his glorious vision of Streamline cities of the future. Comic strips and Hollywood movies brought images of Streamline Moderne buildings into the everyday world of middle-class America. The comic strip "Buck Rogers of the 25th Century" began appearing in 1929, and five years later it was joined by the popular "Flash Gordon." Several feature-length science fiction films were also created in these years, among them such classics as *Just Imagine* (1933) and *Things to Come* (1938).

The speed of modern transportation was a theme of avant-garde architecture as early as the beginning of the 20th century. The low-lying and expansive California bungalows that seemed almost to hover over their sites were often called "airplane bungalows." Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House and other Prairie School works were sometimes satirically referred to as beached ocean liners. But the architectural evocation of fast-moving transportation machines is probably most accurately traced to the sketches and drawings produced in the 1910s by several European modernists, among them the Italian Antonio Sant'Elia and the Germans Kem Weber and Eric Mendelsohn. In 1921 some of Mendelsohn's drawings were published in the United States under the title *Dynamic Architecture: New Forms of the Future.* Mendelsohn's realized European work, with its frequent commitment to the curve and horizontality, did much to set the stage for the Streamline Moderne. The designers and architects who took up the Streamline Moderne in the 1930s also borrowed from the International Style, particularly in their use of rectangular flat-roofed boxes articulated by smooth stucco surfaces and horizontal bands of windows.

To these sources within the world of architecture should be added the influence of the painters, sculptors, and graphic artists whose fondness for the curve and for organically derived forms was expressed in much of the art produced from the 1930s onward. And, of course, the contribution of engineering design must not be overlooked. The airplane—in spite of the fact that commercial airliners were not fully streamlined until the early 1930s—assumed the position as the dominant icon of the age.

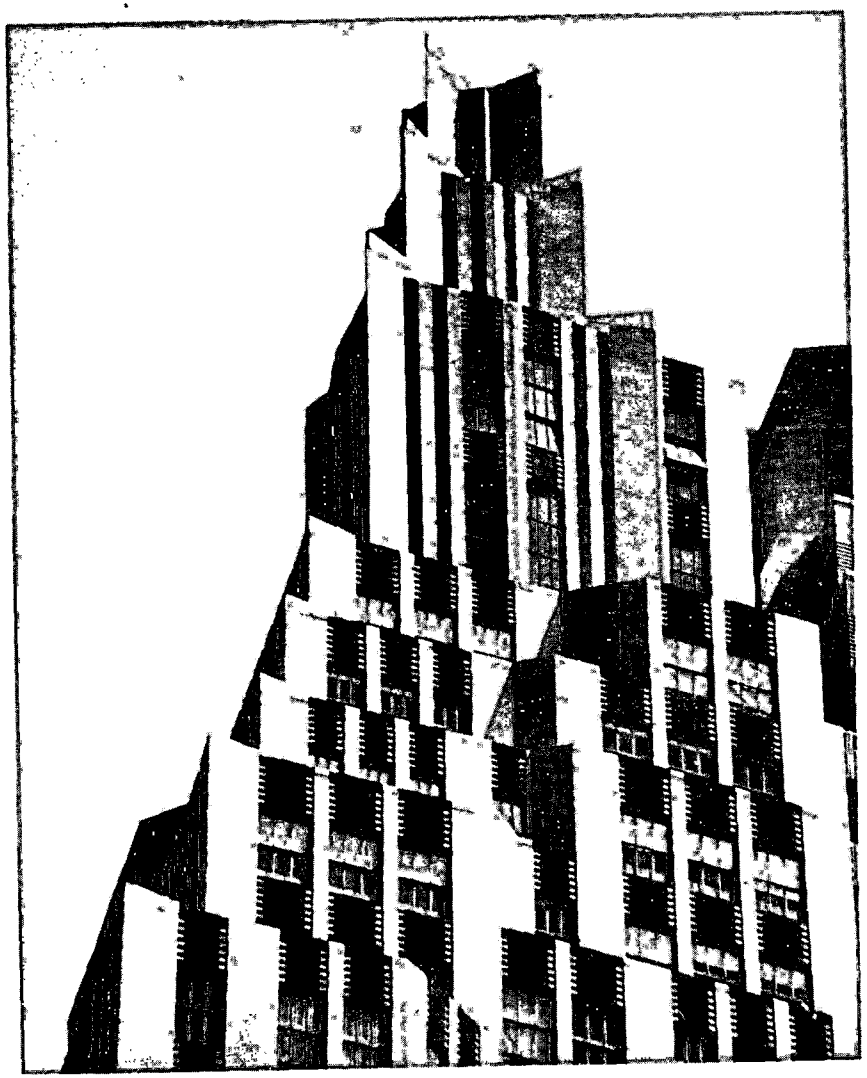
Finally, it should be noted that the popularity of Streamline Moderne architecture was probably enhanced by the redesign and repackaging of many everyday household products and appliances in the 1930s. For example, the streamlined Hoover vacuum cleaner (Henry Dreyfuss, 1936) and the child's Tot Bike (Harold Van Doreen, 1937) familiarized most middle-class Americans with the style and helped to pave the way for acceptance of Streamline Moderne buildings.

The Continuation of the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne After 1945

When building activity in the United States resumed after World War II, a populist version of the International Style, rather than either the Art Deco or the Streamline Moderne, emerged as the dominant mode. While many Streamline Moderne buildings were constructed after 1945, the style no longer embodied the image of the moment. The new image of the here-and-now machine, the metal-and-glass rectangular box hovering on stilts over its urban or suburban site, came to express the modernity of the moment. The

Streamline Moderne's vision of the future faded, and the style itself was nudged aside by Corporate Modernism.

The imagery of the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne did not, however, disappear from the scene after World War II. Frank Lloyd Wright created a number of major monuments in the Streamline Moderne style in the late 1940s and 1950s: his Guggenheim Museum in New York, his Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Wauwatosa, Winsconsin, and his Marin County Civic Center in San Raphael, California. With the advent of Post Modernism in the late 1960s, the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne became new, much used sources for architects. The interest of these Post Modern architects was not in the richness of Art Deco ornamentation; rather it was the simplification and abstraction of form that had come to typify these two popular modern styles. Parapeted towers with pyramidal roofs, windows and doors with corbeled arches, and curved walls of glass brick formed a repeated vocabulary of many Postmodernist buildings. The image of the streamlined transportation machine emerged once more in the form of new (now quite fashionable) diners. And even the early Expressionist verticalism emerged as a dominant motif in major monuments of the early 1990s, such as the Mormon Temple in San Diego. With their references to the Classical tradition and at the same time to modernity, the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne will undoubtedly continue to be rich sources that architects of the future can plagiarize. They also continue to hold a fascination for the middle class, as is evident in a recent real estate ad in the *Los Angeles Times* (June 11, 1994), which announced the opening of an "Art Deco Jewel," Kelton Place, a new condominium complex in the heart of Brentwood.



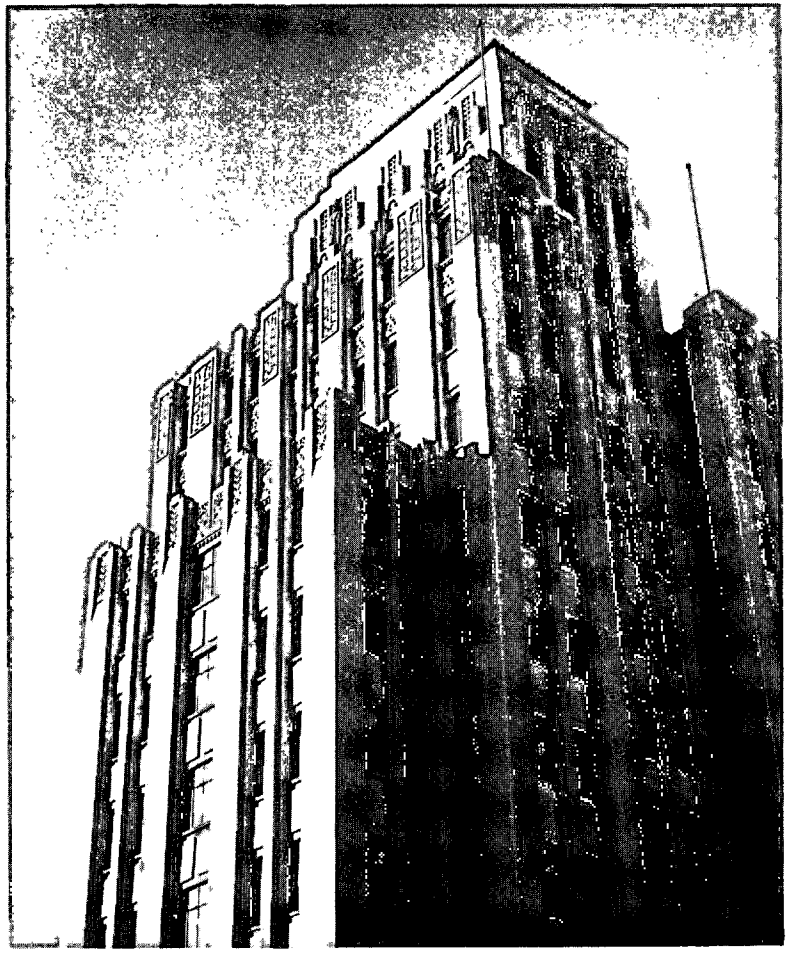
1

Modernistic is first of all a style of ornament. This ornament is predominantly rectilinear, with geometrical curves playing a secondary role. The commonest motifs of all are fluting and reeding, often flanking doors or windows or forming horizontal bands above them. Chevrons or zigzags and various frets are much employed. Such ornament is normally in very low relief with a flat front plane. Another type, of greater saliency, consists of square or oblong blocks and other rectangular projections composed symmetrically around entrances or forming repeating patterns across the upper stories. In frame buildings the piers are normally devoid of ornament, except sometimes at the top, while the spandrels show one or other of the customary types or, at the very least, are faced with a different material, probably contrasting in color or texture with the cladding of the piers. Polychromatic effects are achieved by a variety of means, ranging from the use of faïence for surfacing walls to the application of gold leaf.

Verticality is stressed in most Modernistic buildings. In skyscrapers, setbacks are universal features as a result of the zoning regulations in force by the middle 1920's in all major American cities, the building as a whole often having somewhat the appearance of having been chopped out of a single tall block of material; this effect is increased by the treatment of the piers, which as a rule are neither stopped under a cornice nor crowned with pinnacles.

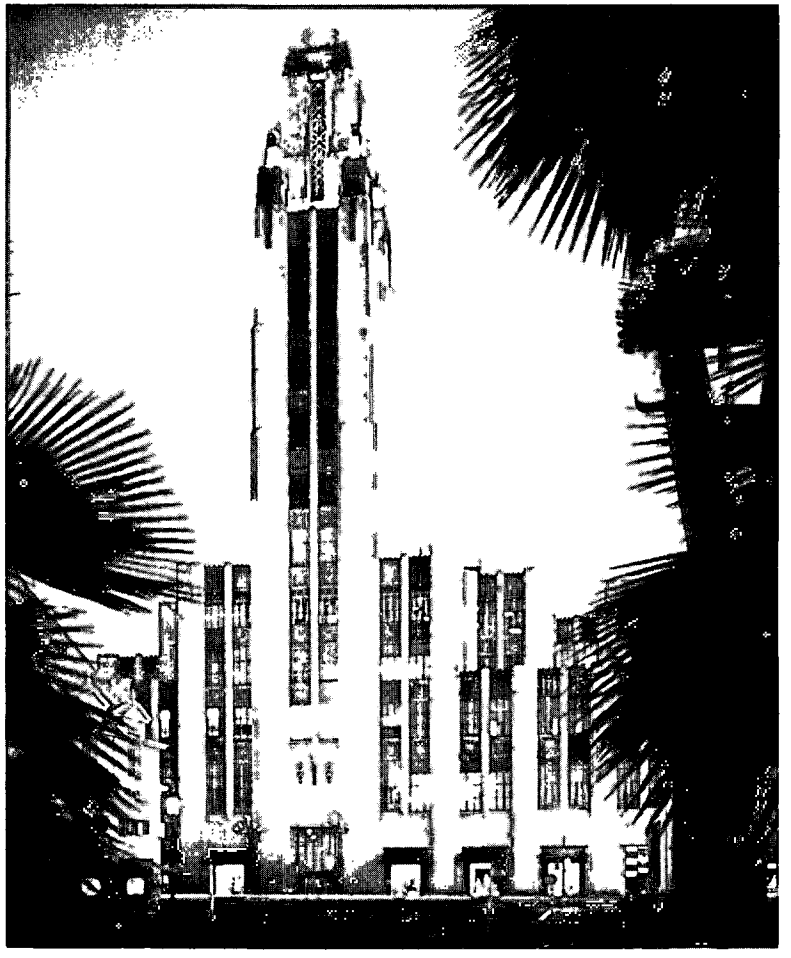
History: The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, held in Paris in 1925, supplied the impetus for the rise of Modernistic architecture in the later twenties. In the case of America, it did this less by exhibiting any stylistic consistency in the buildings housing it than by diffusing a sentiment for modernity and the notion that it could be achieved by means of decoration. Architects who had conceived of their task as the adaptation of past styles to present requirements abandoned historical eclecticism (when their clients permitted) for what was soon being called the modern movement – a term that for some years to come meant different things to different people. How clean the break could be is seen in the New York buildings of the so successful and (in his day) much admired Ely Jacques Kahn. His Arsenal Building at Seventh Avenue and 35th Street, completed in 1925, has a colossal pilaster order, in a very "free" classic, embracing the first four stories, his contemporary 550 Seventh

Jacket design by Gerald Cinamon



2

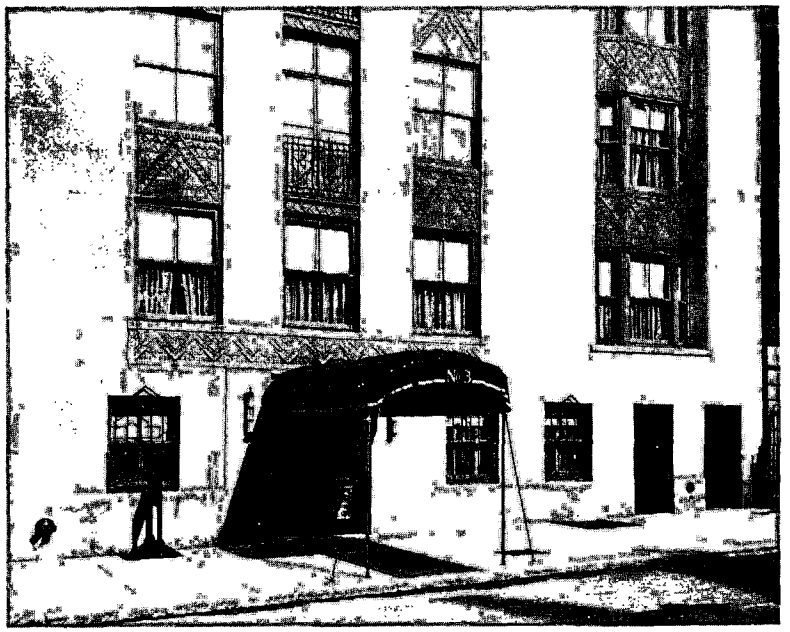
3



Avenue an arcade with Byzantine colonnettes below the first setback. But 2 Park Avenue, completed two years later, is purely Modernistic.

The motifs that Modernistic ornament in Europe owed to a belated vulgarization of cubism are less conspicuous in the American version of the style, at least as represented by the work of Kahn and Raymond Hood (for example, the latter's apartment house of 1928 at 3 East 84th

4



Street, New York, and his Daily News Building, completed in 1930). The sources of American Modernistic, it is safe to say, were largely cisatlantic. They surely include George Elmslie's version of Sullivanesque ornament and the ornament (of Mayan inspiration) of the concrete-block buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and his son Lloyd in the early twenties.

In commercial architecture the biggest single influence was that of the design that won the second prize in the Chicago Tribune competition of 1922 for the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (and led to his settling in America). This project, which was praised in print by Louis Sullivan, established unrelieved verticality as the ideal for high buildings, while the freedom of its Gothic detail, in Henry-Russell Hitchcock's words,

5

"stylized nearly to the point of absolute originality," prepared the way for detail that at least in theory was completely independent of historical precedent. Another, earlier design by Saarinen, the tower of his railroad station in Helsinki, was the prototype of those Modernistic towers (for example, that of Bullock's Wilshire Department Store in Los Angeles; John and Donald B. Parkinson, 1928) whose top stages look as if they might be telescoped into the main structure below.

Few American towns are without examples of Modernistic architecture. During the ascendancy of the International Style they seemed to represent what was worst in the immediate past. Today they are not so much disliked as simply disregarded. Tomorrow they will doubtless be found to have period charm. Some of them – though perhaps not very many – must have more than that.

Bibliography references: 3, 10, 16, 43, 44

1. Casino Building, New York. Ely Jacques Kahn, architect, 1931. (Photo: Sigurd Fischer)
2. Luhrs Tower, Phoenix, Arizona. Trost and Trost, architects, 1928. (Photo: Author)
3. Bullock's Wilshire Department Store, Los Angeles, California. John and Donald Parkinson, architects, 1928. (Bullock's Wilshire. Photo: Fred R. Dapprich)
4. Apartment House on 84th Street, New York. Raymond M. Hood, architect, 1928. (Photo: Gottscho-Schleisner)
5. New Fliedner Building, Portland, Oregon. Remodeled by Richard Sundeleaf, architect, 1930. (Photo: Author)

INTRODUCTION—ART DECO NEW YORK

Art Deco today is the fashionable name for all the various modernistic architectural styles, current between the two World Wars, that helped redefine New York City as the world's modern metropolis. The style is readily recognizable, but its substance is sometimes hard to pin down. Its sources can be found in European decorative arts, but also in New York's zoning regulations. Its practitioners range from socially prominent architects with sophisticated European training to immigrant builders who were largely self-taught. Its monuments include major Midtown skyscrapers and modest Bronx apartment houses. It is flowery and it is zigzag; it is intimate and it is monolithic; it is abstract and it is figurative; it is Roaring Twenties extravagant and it is Depression-era cheap. In all, Art Deco has become the collective name for all the brash, polychromatic, geometric, whiz-bang effects that could make a neighborhood diner or a multimillion-dollar skyscraper somehow suggest a skimpy dress, a rakish look, and a glass of champagne.

New York in the Jazz Age

Art Deco coalesced as a distinct manner of architecture at a time of massive growth in the great metropolis of the New World. New York emerged at the end of the First World War as one of the world's great cities. Its population was increasing by the millions, spilling into new residential districts in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, while its dense Wall Street business district grew denser and spread to Midtown, which sprouted the city's second skyline. As it grew, the city characterized in the nineteenth century as one of sunshine and shadow—of the very rich and the very poor—developed a massive middle-class population, and with it a mass culture made possible by the technical marvels of the new century. This was the Jazz Age, defined by one writer as a modern era of skyscrapers, the World Series, tabloids, radio, and the movies.

This new city—dense, modern, and a citadel of mass culture—found its built expression in skyscrapers, apartment houses, movie palaces, lunch counters, and bus terminals, all serving the anonymous millions of the

metropolis, particularly those on their way up from immigrant poverty to middle-class comfort. In the first years of the century, architects draped such buildings in exotic styles, extravagant if imprecise versions of the past glories of foreign places. But in the late 1920s, and on through the '30s and into the '40s, the glories of the past gave way to the fantasies of the future, in the explosion of exotic modern styles we now call Art Deco.

The Skyscraper Architects

Art Deco drew on many disparate sources, and ultimately touched every modern building type, but in New York it took shape first as a fashion for skyscrapers. Two dozen major monuments, conceived or completed inside nine years (from 1923 to 1932), designed by a handful of architects—several of whom regularly lunched together—created the new modern style that soon spread to thousands of buildings of all sizes designed by dozens of other architects over the better part of three decades.

The handful of Deco pioneers included four very different architects, of varying output, who were associated with the style from its beginnings: Raymond Hood, Ralph Walker, William Van Alen, and Ely Jacques Kahn.

Hood took the limelight by winning, together with John Mead Howells, the influential 1922 Chicago Tribune Building competition, and then designing four major Manhattan towers: the American Radiator (5.7), Daily News (5.1), McGraw-Hill (5.8/5.12), and RCA Buildings—the last as the seventy-story centerpiece of Rockefeller Center (6.10). Hood adopted the pose of a no-nonsense, businesslike architect manufacturing shelter, writing that "there has been entirely too much talk about the collaboration of architect, painter and sculptor; nowadays, the collaborators are the architects, the engineer, and the plumber." And: "Beauty is utility, developed in a manner to which the eye is accustomed by habit, in so far as this development does not detract from its quality of usefulness." Yet while writing about design as a series of effects clustered to give the greatest impact for the dollar, Hood produced some of the most imaginatively theatrical architecture of his day: the red-and-white-striped tapered stacked masses of the Daily News Building, the greenish-blue-tiled McGraw-Hill Building, and the soaring RCA tower. In the words of a 1931 *New Yorker* architectural critic, "Raymond Hood possesses the position in architecture that he wants. He is its brilliant bad boy."

Walker, later voted "architect of the century" by the American Institute of Architects, emerged in 1923 as the enfant terrible of architecture with his Barclay-Vesey Telephone headquarters (2.4) in lower Manhattan. This was the first of a chain of Walker-designed Art Deco phone company skyscrapers based on behemoth massing, expressionistic brickwork, and huge

lobbies, many with grand pictorial schemes illustrating some facet of modern telecommunications. Most extraordinary of all Walker's work was No. 1 Wall Street, the Irving Trust Company building (1.3), a monolithic fifty-story Gothic Modern tower, with undulating brick walls, zigzag windows, and a gold-and-red mosaic-lined two-story Reception Hall.

Van Alen, once called "the Ziegfeld of his profession," produced only one major Art Deco monument before moving on to other pursuits, but it proved to be the best known of them all: the Chrysler Building (5.4). While Florenz Ziegfeld, the great showman, dazzled audiences on West 42nd Street with his Follies, over on East 42nd Van Alen dazzled the world with the first skyscraper to rise above the thousand-foot mark set by the Eiffel Tower. From setbacks marked by giant metal replicas of winged Chrysler hood ornaments, Van Alen's tower rose to a brilliantly shiny, tapering steel crown and spire visible for miles around.

Kahn, perhaps least familiar of the four, is best known for his high-profile office building at Two Park Avenue (3.4)—one of the city's earliest Art Deco skyscrapers—with its speckled, multicolored, terra-cotta façade, and for several idiosyncratic lobby designs, like the Film Center Building (5.11), which draw on a strong decorative arts aesthetic. Yet Kahn was by far the most prolific of the original group, producing dozens of loft buildings for the garment industry, the printing trade, and manufacturing businesses throughout downtown and Midtown Manhattan. Hood and Walker developed the style, Van Alen created its best-known icon, but Kahn filled up Manhattan's business precincts with solid, serviceable, workaday products.

Older, established firms soon found their way to the new modernistic styles. Schultze & Weaver, designers of such elegant, Beaux-Arts Classic-inspired Fifth Avenue hotels as the Pierre and the Sherry-Netherland, turned to Art Deco for the new Waldorf-Astoria (6.5/6.7). Walker & Gillette (no relation to Ralph Walker), known for houses and estates in a variety of traditional styles—Tudor Revival, Mission Revival, neo-Georgian, neo-Federal—produced the geometric Fuller Building (7.2). Cross & Cross, authors of sober, academically styled office buildings, turned out the wildly exuberant General Electric tower (6.4/6.6). Shreve & Lamb, formerly partners with Carrére & Hastings, masters of Beaux-Arts classicism, produced the Empire State Building (3.3/3.6). And dozens of smaller firms brought the style to buildings of every kind throughout the five boroughs.

The Art Deco Look

The great Art Deco skyscrapers owe certain of their decorative motifs to the Exposition for which they were later named, especially to the stylized

floral fashions of early-twentieth-century France. Other European sources include the French Art Nouveau, the Austrian Sezession and German Expressionism, among a host of early Modern design movements. Much of the formal conception of the skyscrapers—the internal planning of their public spaces, their external expression as major urban monuments—marks them as heirs to the grand Classical tradition of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Their ornamental forms often reflect the influence of Aztec, Mayan, and African art.

The modern American buildings owe just as much, however, to the circumstances of their own time and place. The influence on the skyscrapers of New York's revolutionary 1916 zoning resolution can scarcely be overstated. Designed to ensure adequate light and air for surrounding streets and buildings, the new law helped shape skyscraper bulk for half a century, virtually mandating buildings that fill half a city block at their base, then taper inward via mathematically calculated setbacks, rising into the skyline as slender towers. An influential set of studies in the early 1920s by Hugh Ferriss, the famed architectural renderer of the period, explored the potential of skyscraper design under the new regulations. Thanks to the new zoning laws, three-dimensionally-designed building mass, like a piece of abstract sculpture, became a chief characteristic of the new Art Deco architectural manner.

Another hallmark, on the other hand, goes straight back through the genealogical skyscraper line to Louis Sullivan in Chicago: the organization of a building's hundreds of windows in long, vertical columns. It was Sullivan who wrote that a skyscraper should be "a proud and soaring thing, rising in sheer exultation." Rather than organizing windows as horizontal rows, suggesting floors of offices stacked one on top of another, he arranged them vertically, as tall, uninterrupted bays of windows recessed behind and between tall, uninterrupted vertical stripes of brick wall, suggesting uninterrupted upward motion. The same arrangement became typical of Art Deco towers—and architects at the time, lacking a better name, often described their buildings as in the "vertical style."

The most publicly visible part of any skyscraper, of course, is its presence on the skyline. From neo-Gothic towers to International Style boxtops, all skyscrapers have skyline value of one kind or another. The Art Deco skyscrapers meet the sky in a variety of razzle-dazzle concoctions, ranging from the Chrysler Building's elegant steel spire to the General Electric Building's Gothic Modern crown to the Empire State Building's dirigible-mooring mast. Perhaps most telling of all is the disingenuously flat top of the Daily News Building. Raymond Hood later wrote that he decided to let the building simply stop when it reached its top. In fact, however, he did

no such thing—he continued the walls of the façade many feet higher than the building's roof, to hide such ugly utilities as elevator shafts and water towers. He wanted to add to the skyline a building with the dramatic effect of stopping at the top, not the messy reality. But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Art Deco skyline is that it can appear on six-story apartment houses as easily as on seventy-story skyscrapers, witness the skyline treatment of elevator buildings on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx or Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn.

Standard Art Deco ornament certainly helps identify the buildings from the period—zigzags, stylized floral patterns, striking geometries, and later, streamlined curves and speed lines. But perhaps more telling than the mold from which the forms are cut are their materials and color. The Art Deco period saw the development and use of such modern synthetic materials as Vitrolite and Bakelite for decorative use. For buildings, a major new material proved to be Nirosta, a rustproof, nickel-chrome-steel alloy that allowed the use of metal on the exterior of skyscrapers, most extravagantly on the tower and spire of the Chrysler Building. The ornamental use of metal, brick, and terra cotta, and especially the application of a variety of colors, became the decorative hallmark of Art Deco buildings, replacing in large measure a reliance on carved stone ornament based on historical styles. Hood's American Radiator Building is black and gold. His Daily News Building relies almost entirely on the contrast between red and white brick for its decorative effects, including red and white brick spandrels set between the windows—the few metal zigzags at the building's base hardly matter at all.

The Art of Advertising

An architectural critic writing about the Daily News Building in 1930 shrewdly observed that Hood had come to understand architecture as a variant of advertising art. And indeed, the great Art Deco skyscrapers are nothing if not giant advertisements for their clients. Exotic grand entrances, dramatic vertical towers, and long tapering spires made for buildings that could hardly help becoming corporate symbols.

But the architects went further, incorporating corporate imagery into the building's ornamental schemes, especially at main entrances and inside grand lobbies. To the Chrysler Building's winged radiator caps Van Alen added brick tracery suggesting a Chrysler's tires, hubcaps, and running board, and, in the lobby, a ceiling mural showing the building's very construction, but also suggesting the history of transportation—which culminated, of course, in the Chrysler automobile. The elevator doors at Walker & Gillette's Fuller Building, headquarters of the Fuller Construction Company,

sport metal images of men at work building the metropolis of the future, while mosaic portraits of major Fuller projects are set into the floor. Hood's grand, three-story entrance to the Daily News Building centers on an enormous bas-relief showing the denizens of a busy modern metropolis buying newspapers, while inside, a lobby conceived as a gigantic popular science display helped educate the masses that the paper considered its core audience. Perhaps the most elaborate program was concocted for Rockefeller Center, where the symbols of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s, cherished hopes for international understanding and technological advancement covered the buildings inside and out.

The most unusual aspect of such ornamental programs may have been the glorification of the very buildings in question. The grand bas-relief over the Daily News entrance rises to a dazzling image of the great striped building itself. The ceiling mural of transportation inside the Chrysler Building's lobby metamorphoses into a tall portrait of Chrysler's skyscraper, its tip touching the top of the main entrance on Lexington Avenue. On the far wall of the Empire State Building's Fifth Avenue entrance lobby rises a silhouette of the world's tallest building. Perched above the main entrance of the Cities Service Building at 70 Pine Street (1.6) is an enormous sculpted replica of that seventy-story tower—with a duplicate over the entrance on Cedar Street thrown in for good measure.

Filtering Out and Down Across the Metropolis

The Depression put an end to the building of skyscrapers—the last ones opened in 1932—but the great towers had already transformed the skyline, and their impact was felt across the metropolis. Art Deco, firmly launched, continued into the 1930s and 1940s in building types of all kinds throughout the five boroughs.

Among the first to show the influence of the skyscraper style were Manhattan apartment buildings. Late-nineteenth-century apartment houses—accepted by New York's well-to-do only reluctantly—had early on turned to the glories of Europe for respectable architectural models. The Dakota on West 72nd Street, built in the 1880s, suggested a grand, German Renaissance palace fit for, if not a German prince, then several hundred fortunate American families. Fifty years later, the designers of the Majestic Apartments (8.3) directly across the street abandoned the European palaces of centuries past in favor of the American skyscrapers of the new century to come—creating one of three strikingly vertical twin-towered Art Deco apartment skyscrapers prominently silhouetted in the residential skyline of Central Park West. At the same time and in the same way, the new

Waldorf-Astoria, successor to the old Victorian pile that once occupied the site of the Empire State Building, was brought up to date as a twin-towered Art Deco skyscraper hotel on Park Avenue.

More unexpected perhaps was the creation of a residential skyline not of thirty-story apartment towers in Manhattan but of six-story elevator apartment houses in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Dozens of architects—many of them immigrants whose training ranged from sophisticated to rudimentary—brought the color and vitality of Midtown skyscrapers to the Grand Concourse, Ocean Avenue, and the side streets of Brighton Beach where Brooklyn meets the Atlantic Ocean. How did the high-class skyscraper style make its way to the middle-class precincts of the outer boroughs? Marvin Fine, of the firm of Horace Ginsbern & Associates, watched both the Daily News and Chrysler Buildings rise in 1930 from the ringside seat of his East 42nd Street office; he later recalled telling his boss that those red and white brick spandrels on the Daily News would make a terrific trademark for their new apartment blocks on the Grand Concourse.

By the 1930s, builders and architects throughout the city had caught on to the new style. Sedate department stores expanded into raffish modern additions, as at Bloomingdale's (7.1) in Manhattan, or commissioned brand-new Deco buildings, like J. Kurtz & Sons (14.8) in Jamaica, Queens. The exotic eclecticism of movie palaces gave way to an exotic modernism, whether in small Depression-era neighborhood houses like the Lane (15.5) in New Dorp, Staten Island, or in the grand fantasy of Radio City Music Hall in the heart of Midtown Manhattan. Parking garages and filling stations, banks, restaurants, nightclubs, airport terminals, even churches found their way to the style of the modern metropolis.

The Fall and Rise of Art Deco

Economics undoubtedly played a part in the appeal of the Art Deco style. In hard times, what could be more attractive than a simple and affordable design, in which a change in color or a geometric pattern in the brickwork could make a cheap building seem stylish and up-to-date? Perhaps inevitably, the various modernisms of Art Deco became associated with the Great Depression in the minds of the people who lived through it. By the 1960s, shortly before its name was coined, Art Deco had fallen into almost total disrepute, a depressing relic of the past, condemned as a misinformed modernism whose practitioners had been unable to comprehend the austere, pristine purity of the International Style, the True Modern.

Over the past four decades, as part of the general reappraisal of all historic architecture, Art Deco has been rediscovered, reconsidered, and

re-embraced. It appeals to us as stylish and romantic. Perhaps we see it, wistfully, as the modern road not taken, and wish it could take the place of the dreary banality that passed for modern in the decades following World War II. We have, in short, adopted it as a usable modern past. The rediscovery of Art Deco may have seemed a passing fad at times—witness a *New Yorker* cartoon captioned, "Do you realize we are living through the second time people got tired of Art Deco?" Deco lovers may note with pleasure, however, that the cartoon in question appeared in 1984, and in the decades since then the national and international passion for Art Deco has only grown.

Today, Art Deco New York survives and flourishes. Ninety years after Art Deco's introduction to the city, its great monuments have evolved from brash modern upstarts to historic landmarks. Many have been lovingly restored, from the world-famous spire of the Chrysler Building to the lobbies of Bronx apartment buildings. And they're waiting impatiently for you to visit and discover their many charms.