

Chapter 1

THE ART DECO MOVEMENT AND DEFINITION

Art Deco was a material style movement that developed during the 1920s and was prevalent until the early 1950s. The term “Art Deco,” however, was not known during that time period, but coined only in 1968 by Bevis Hillier in his definitive book titled *Art Deco: the Style of the 1920s and 1930s* (Gebhard, 1996: 2). One theory is Hillier used the term “Art Deco” to juxtapose the style against the earlier “Art Nouveau” style. Another view is “Art Deco” was an abbreviated reference to the “Exposition des *Arts Decoratifs* et Industrials,” the exhibition held in Paris in the year 1925. Either way, Art Deco dramatically differed from Art Nouveau and other styles that preceded it. Where Art Nouveau tended to be floral and elaborate, with detailed lines, Art Deco was bold, stark, and had simple, crisp lines. A comparison of the Art Nouveau staircase (Figure 1), with an Art Deco staircase (Figure 2), visually dramatizes the different design philosophies. Comparing an Art Deco building with a Victorian building, the difference in the amount of detailing is noticeable immediately. The Victorian embellishments were



Figure 1: Art Nouveau Stairway, Brussels Belgium
(Hollingsworth, 1988: 6).

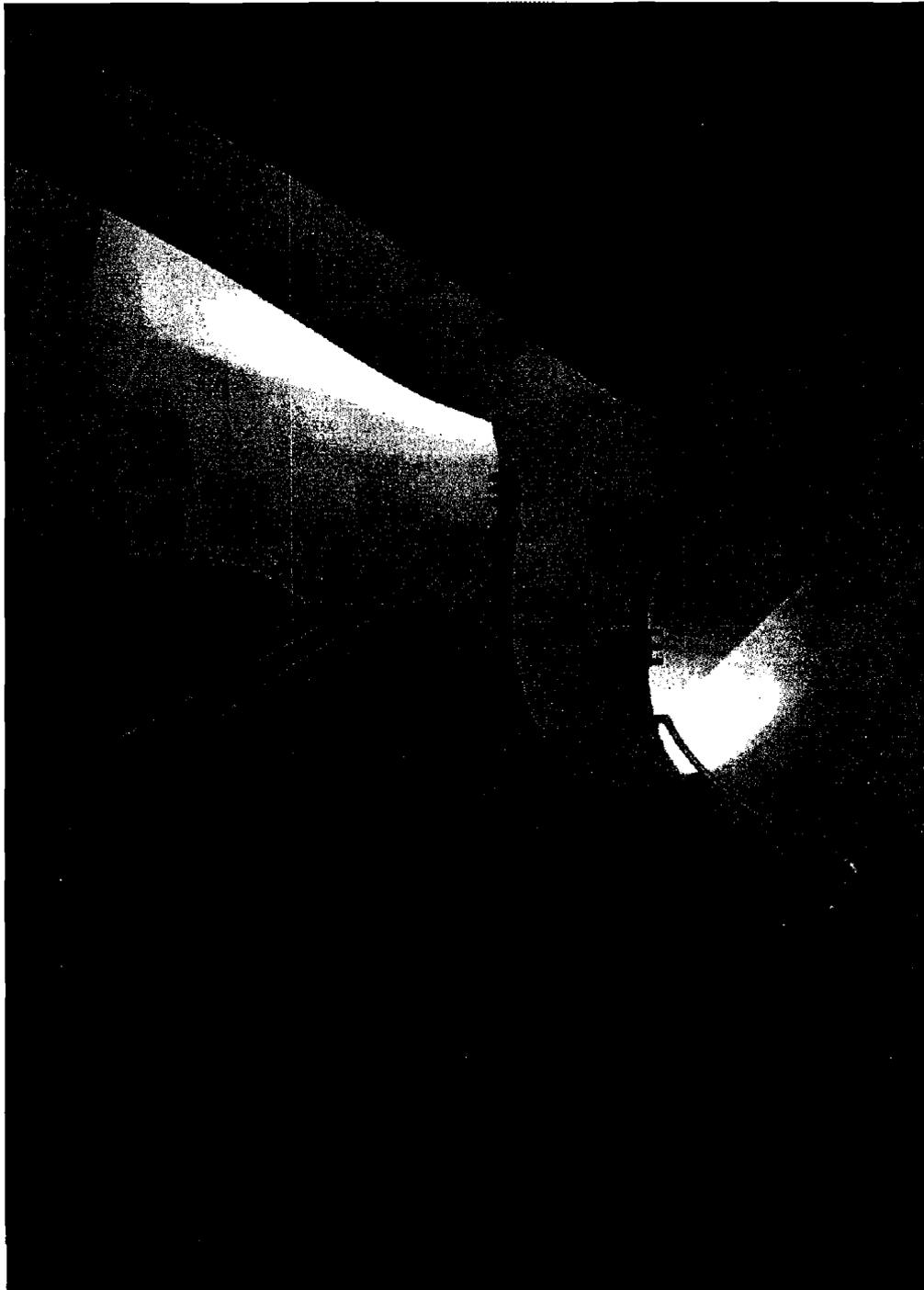


Figure 2: Art Deco Staircase, Cleveland, Ohio 1937
(Capitman, 1994: 10).

both expensive and difficult to maintain (Ford and Fusch, July 1983: 336). In contrast, an Art Deco building was designed to be clean and uncluttered, requiring little in terms of maintenance. As a modernistic design movement, Art Deco envisioned a New World order, clean and uncluttered, yet refined and elegant.

A Brief History of the Art Deco Movement and the Reasons for Its Emergence

Although most scholars consider that the Art Deco movement emerged from the Paris Exposition of 1925, its beginnings were in fact earlier. The first part of the twentieth century was marked by great changes in society. The aftershock of World War I and the visions that it spawned about the future of western civilization were especially significant to Art Deco development. Economic times went from boom to bust. World peace was destroyed and then restored. Advances in numerous technologies led to both a depiction of a wonderful future world and apocalyptic visions of a world gone awry (Striner, 1994: 11). This dichotomy of future visions was expressed through architecture, especially in Europe, then the western world's center of cultural influence. Traditional architects sought to avert disaster by sticking to the classical designs of ancient architecture, while ultra-modernists embraced a minimalist philosophy, reflected in the Bauhaus and International Style of architecture. Art Deco, in contrast to these extreme views, sought to locate a modern vision that embraced technology, yet symbolically referenced ancient civilizations of the past (Striner, 1990: 21-22).

Art Deco thus started as a highly stylized design movement after World War I in Europe. As it differentiated itself from the other modern styles of Bauhaus and the International Style, examples of Art Deco architecture began appearing in the design capitals of Europe -- most notably Paris. In 1922, a young European architect introduced American architects to the possibilities of the Art Deco style.

The Year 1922

Two events influenced Art Deco's impact on architecture in America. The first was the commissioning of the new Chicago Tribune headquarters building in 1922. The *Tribune*, Chicago's premier newspaper, had established a competition for architects around the world to submit designs for its new headquarters. While the winning submission went to American Raymond Hood and his traditional gothic-styled skyscraper, the second place design, submitted by Eliel Saarinen, a young Finnish architect was Art Deco. Although it did not win the competition, Saarinen's design created an enthusiastic discussion among architects and would later have a dramatic influence on the competition's winner, Raymond Hood (Franci, 1997: 23). When Hood subsequently won the bid to build the corporate headquarters of the American Radiator Company in New York City, he incorporated the ideas found in Saarinen's design. Combining Gothic with Art Deco, the completion of the American Radiator Building in

1924 represented the first Art Deco Skyscraper built in the United States. Later, after the Paris Exhibition in 1925, Hood would recount, "The Paris Exhibition of 1925 was less directly influential [than Saarinen's design] as far as architecture was concerned. In the end the show was most helpful in that it re-emphasized to the American architect that tradition could be left behind." (Dwyer, September 22 – November 3, 1974: 16).

The second event to occur in 1922 was the discovery by Howard Carter of the tomb of Egypt's ancient pharaoh, Tutankhamun. Although not directly related to architecture, this world event awakened an interest in early Egyptian civilization. Pharaohs, tombs, and the glorification of civilization through architecture intrigued modern architects. A broader interest in other native, ancient civilizations around the world found similar intrigue. Themes associated with past ancient civilizations, most notably Egyptian, Mayan, and Aztec, were soon incorporated into early Art Deco structures (Bayer, 1992: 15). Both of these events in 1922 signified the bold vision for the future that Art Deco expressed, yet at the same time, bestowed great honor and respect for ancient civilizations and their contributions to contemporary architecture and design.

The Paris Exposition of 1925

The 1925 Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels in Paris was the formal debut of Art Deco. World expositions had become hugely influential in disseminating new ideas and trends, but due to the interruption caused by World War I; it was two decades since the last great exposition had taken place. The scope of the Paris Exposition was tremendous. More than one hundred and fifty separate pavilions were built in the city center, between the Eiffel Tower and the Place de la Concorde, interspersed with numerous cafes, restaurants, theatres, monuments, plazas, and gardens (Van Lemme, 1996: 10-11). The exposition encompassed all realms of design. From an architectural perspective, pavilions were built by participating nations to display their contribution to architectural design and theory. Primarily, it was the host nation, France, that impressed most attendees in terms of architecture and design styles introduced (Figure 3).

Officially, the United States did not participate in the Paris Exposition. Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce, did not believe American designers could meet the entry requirement--producing truly new designs that did not borrow from ancient styles or were not imitations of previous works from other countries (Franci, 1997: 16). That the United States Government had such little faith in the creativity of its citizens actually helped inspire American designers. Those who did attend the Exposition returned home with the attitude that they indeed could contribute to the world of modern design after all, and a creative boom in American design resulted. No longer were American designers

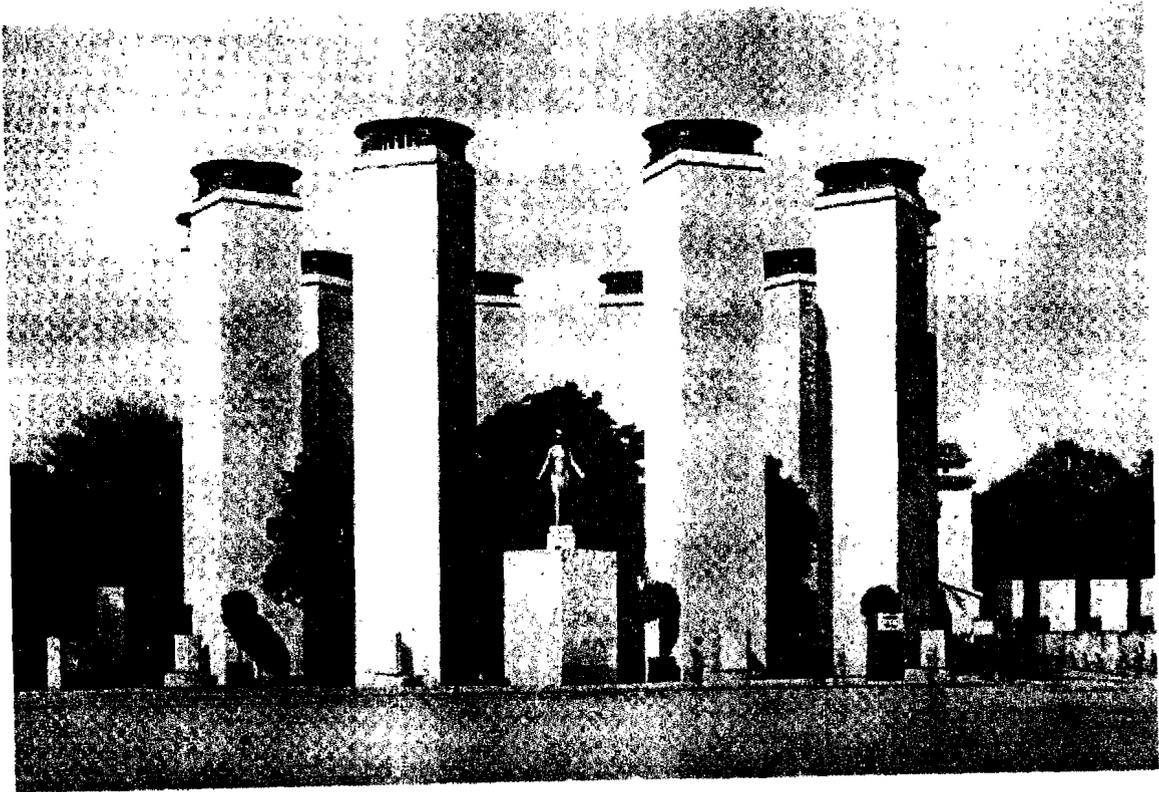


Figure 3: "Porte de la Concorde," Paris, 1925 (Arwas, 1992: 31).

inclined to think they were inferior to their European colleagues. American architects in particular felt little was "new" in terms of architectural design at the Paris Exposition, as stated previously by Raymond Hood. The architecture of Paris only helped convince American architects to embrace further the Art Deco style (Dwyer, 1974: 16).

The Hollywood Image

Designers from many professions attended the Paris Exhibition of 1925. Among them was Cedric Gibbons, a set designer from Hollywood's burgeoning film industry. Gibbons was the only noted designer from Hollywood to attend the Paris Exhibition. He would later become extremely influential in diffusing the image of Art Deco across the United States, and ultimately around the world.¹ Through his film sets, Gibbons helped create the new "Hollywood Image." It promoted glamour and a futuristic design centered on Art Deco. Gibbons crafted the first Hollywood film ("Our Dancing Daughters"), starring the then little-known actress Joan Crawford, to use Art Deco for its complete set (Figure 4). The film, released in 1928, made a big impact on audiences, creating enthusiasm for this new style. By the late 1920s, numerous films from other studios followed Gibbons's lead, producing films in the new "Hollywood Image." Ultimately, even the symbols of the studios themselves reflected Art Deco (Figure 5). Soon after

¹ Cedric Gibbons, the son of an architect, designed the ultimate Hollywood award the Oscar, itself an Art Deco statuette. (Katz, 1994: 523)

audiences looked at the world created on screen and wished for its presence in their own cities. Hollywood's widespread popularity thus stimulated the incubation of Art Deco to a broader audience and lay the foundation for its incorporation into the ordinary landscape.



Figure 4: "Our Dancing Daughters" Cedric Gibbons and MGM Studios, 1928 (Mandelbaum and Myers, 1985: 11).

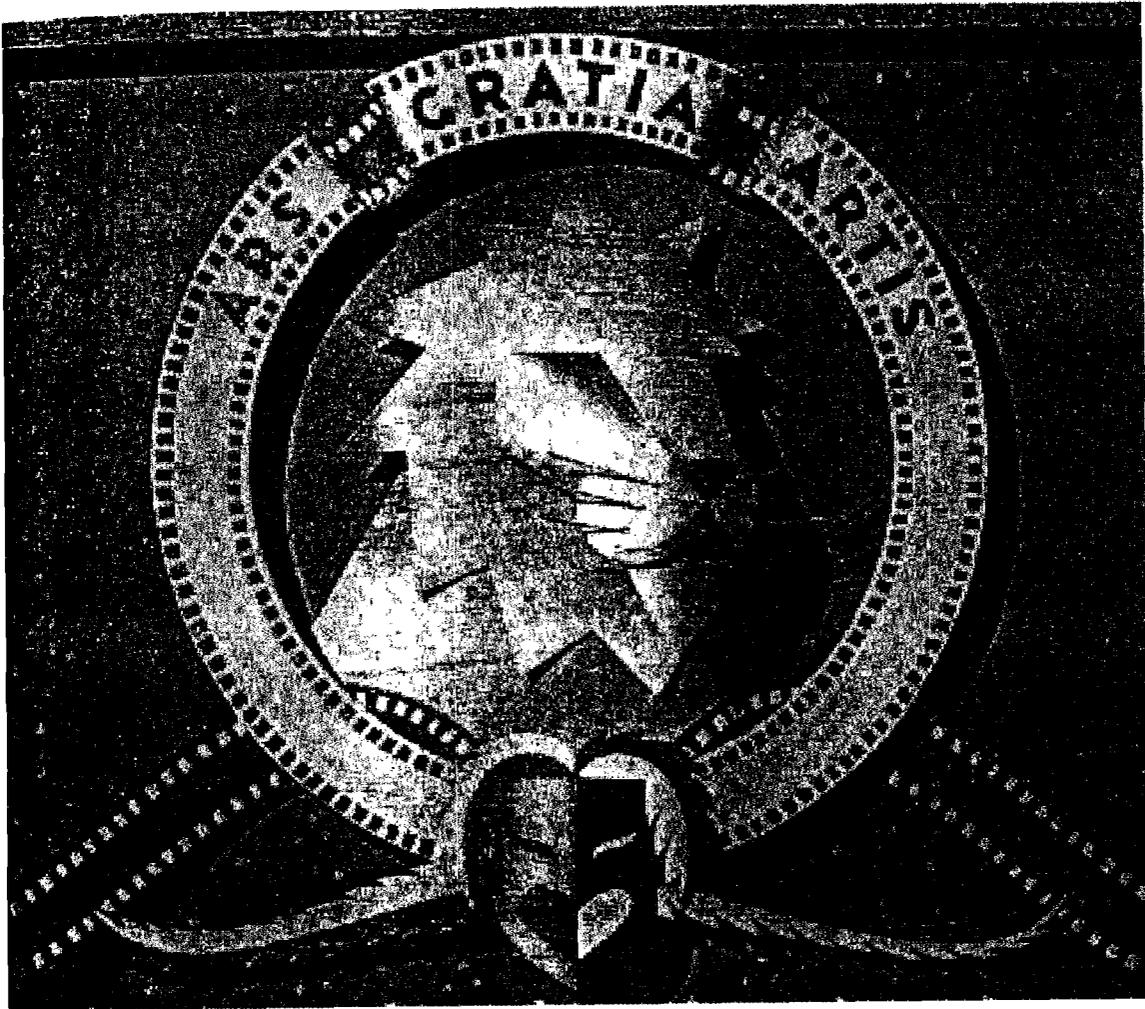


Figure 5: The MGM Emblem, Art Deco Detail (Mandelbaum and Myers, 1985: 28).

Phases of Art Deco Architecture: Vertical and Horizontal

What makes a building or structure Art Deco? While it is possible to recognize certain characteristics and features that most Art Deco buildings seem to share, it is perhaps the spirit of Art Deco architecture that determines its definition. Art Deco can be seen as either trying to scale vertically to reach the heavens or to spread laterally long and low to embrace the horizontal. What is categorized as Art Deco architecture really falls into two distinctive phases, based almost entirely on whether a structure accents these vertical or horizontal dimensions. Indeed, some scholars consider these phases of Art Deco to be two distinct styles; however, enough similarities exist to suggest that they are really one comprehensive style (Striner, Spring 1990: 21).

Jazz-age Phase of Art Deco Architecture and New York City

The early adoptive stage of Art Deco architecture, during the 1920s, is classified as "Jazz-age Deco", "Zig-zag Deco", or the "Skyscraper Style." All these terms are essentially synonymous. This phase of Art Deco was noted for its emphasis on the *vertical* aspect of a structure, combined with a geometric, rectilinear theme (McAlester, 1984: 465). Buildings tended to exhibit elaborate front facades that had vertical, fluted accents, with stepped back details as the structure ascended upwards. The base usually was broader than the middle and upper portions of the building or structure. The

Chrysler Building in New York City is among the finest examples of this vertical emphasis (Figure 6). By viewing its exterior, capped with a stainless steel helmet, one can envision the building taking off like a rocket towards the heavens.

This common trait of Jazz-age Deco architecture, the stepped back look of the skyscraper, is found to be especially prevalent in New York City. The early conceptions of Art Deco architecture in Europe, notably Paris, exhibited this stepped back motif, but not in the towering proportions found in New York skyscrapers. Many of the early French designs incorporated ornamentation paying homage to ancient Mayan pyramids. In New York, however, limited space placed a premium on land values, and thus building technologies using concrete and steel allowed building “taller” as a viable alternative. Furthermore, a New York City zoning law of 1916 forbade any buildings over a certain height to occupy the same amount of area at the top of the structure as compared to their base. Thus, all skyscrapers would have to taper as they attained ever-increasing heights. This law prevented New York's streets from becoming canyons of darkness (Dwyer, September 22 – November 3, 1974: 15). Thus, the distinctive Art Deco skyscraper received its characteristic stepped back pattern through a combination of the Mayan influences seen in Paris and the modified height ordinance of New York City.

Before the movement of Art Deco, skyscrapers reflected traditional styles of architecture such as gothic and classical. Art Deco was a style that fitted the new vertical thrusts of these impressive buildings (Franci et al, 1997: 12). With the economic boom

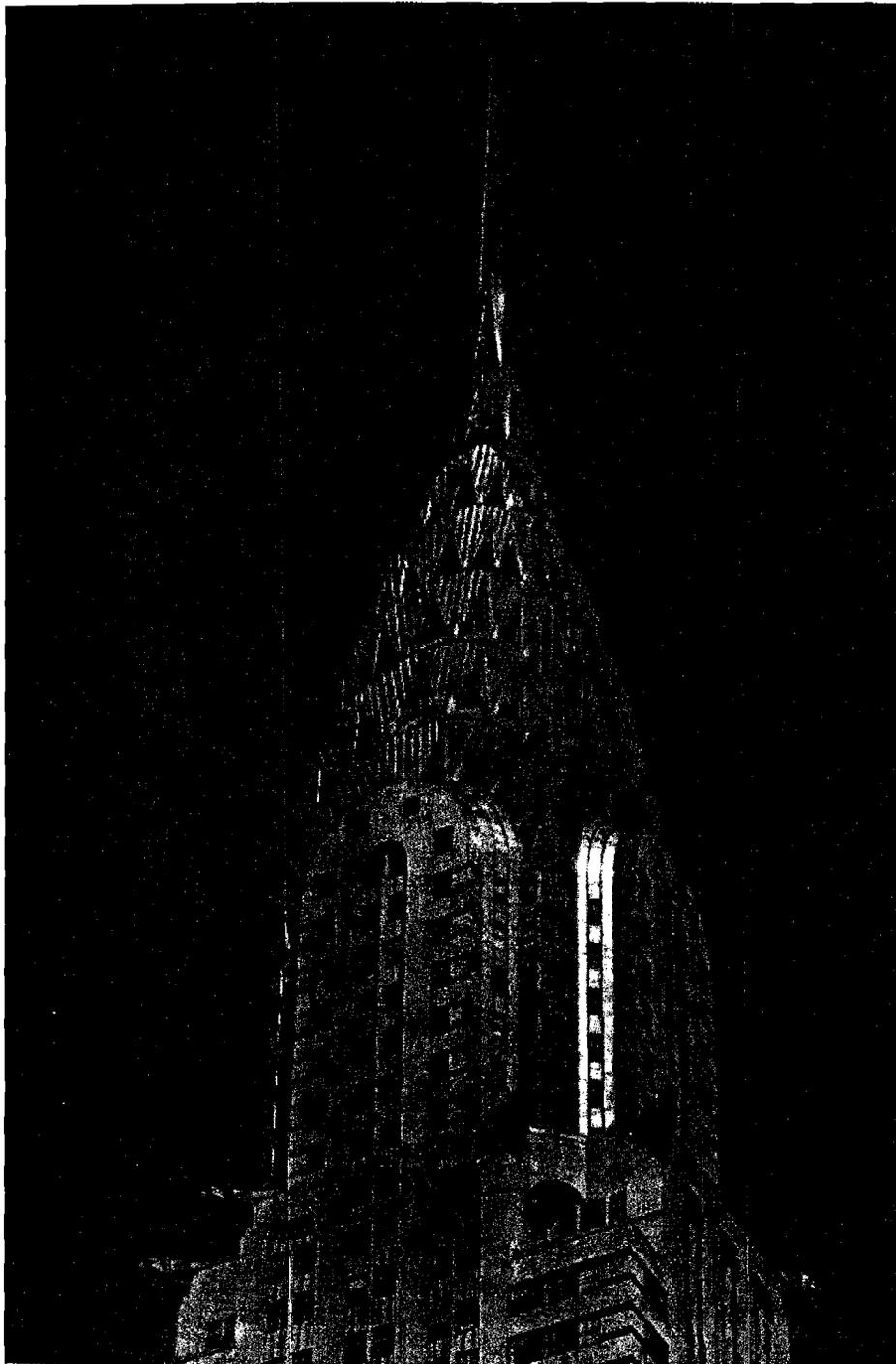


Figure 6: The Chrysler Building (Bayer, 1992: 86).

of the 1920s, cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles began incorporating Art Deco styling in new skyscrapers to such a degree that the style would also be referred to as the Skyscraper Style, with its distinctive stepped back appearance. The image of the skyscraper expressed progress and the capabilities of modern society. Optimism was matched only by the height of these structures, and fostered the belief in the “wonder city,” as exhibited by New York City during the Art Deco era (Figure 7).

Jazz-age Deco was also the preferred style when the structure was built by corporate America to impress. These structures exuded prestige and stability, yet also progressiveness. Numerous banks were designed in Art Deco. Banking institutions, by nature, are conservative in regards to style. Yet, at the time of the late 1920s, banks were trying to lure customers by creating a new look for their traditional bank buildings. “No bank or business house that claimed progressiveness would stay in quarters that were cluttered or unattractive... a large part of the appeal to patronage is based on the building that it occupies (Auger, Sept. 1931: 266).” Jazz-age Deco fit perfectly. Through this style, a bank could give the impression of being stylistic in an understated way. The façades of many of the Jazz-age Deco bank buildings are impressive in their geometric styles and the rich, subtle detailing that evokes a restrained elegance befitting a financial institution. Other structures that tended to apply the Jazz-age Deco style included many corporate headquarters buildings, especially those involved with new burgeoning industries such as automotive, electric utilities, and communication companies. With

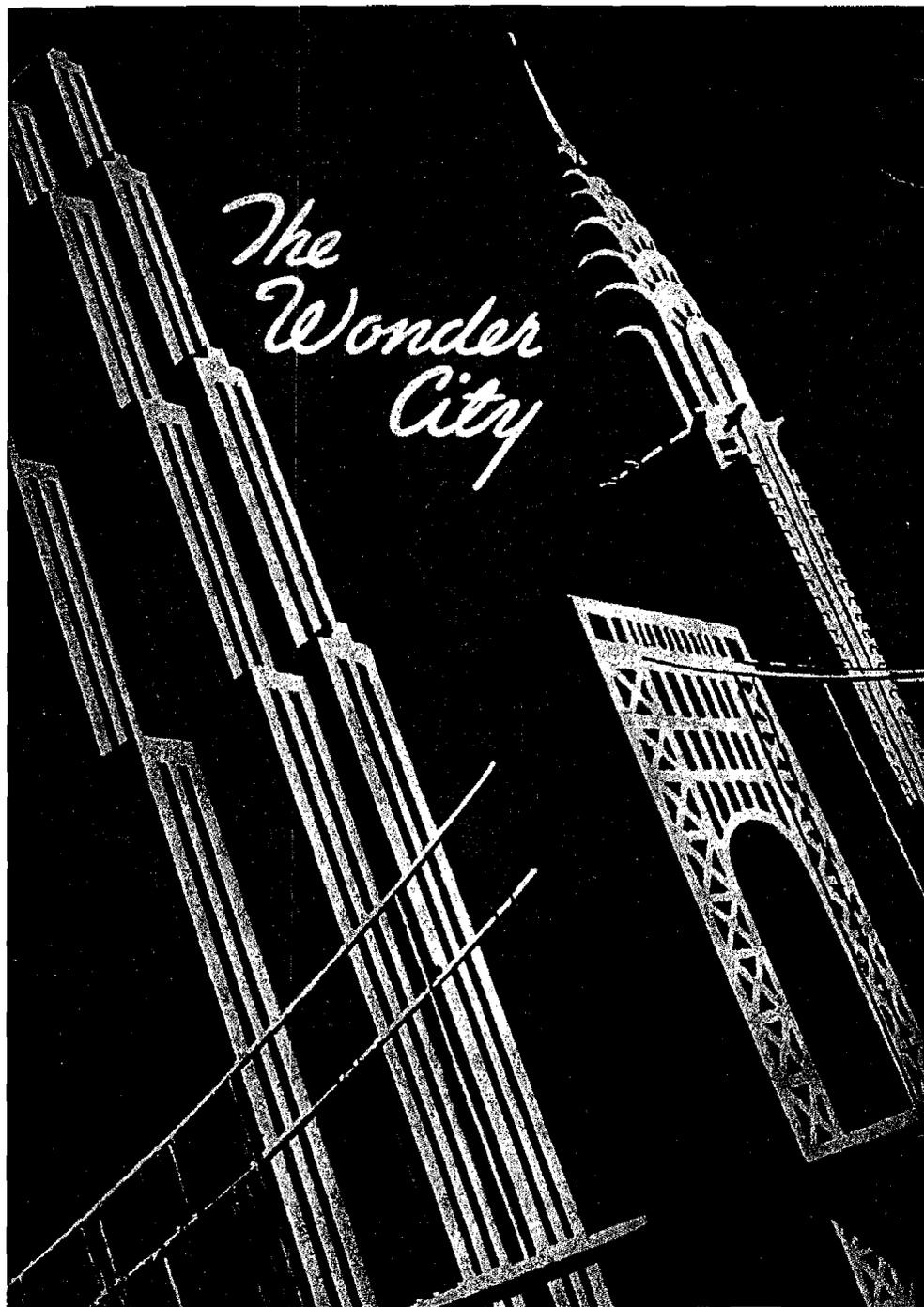


Figure 7: New York and the image of “The Wonder City”
(Heide and Gilman, 1991: 43).

Jazz-age Deco, these promising new industries were able to convey the message that they were enterprises that would be a stable part of the economy and were destined to play prominent roles well into the future of modern society.

The Streamline Moderne Phase of Art Deco Architecture

The second later phase of Art Deco styling coincides with the economic pressure that plunged the world into crisis in the 1930s. The economic depression forced designers to build their products in the new "cleaner" lines of the "Depression Deco" phase of the Art Deco movement. Other synonymous names for this Art Deco period are the "Streamline Moderne," and "Art Moderne." Buildings created after the onset of the Great Depression were called "Streamline" because of an emphasis on the horizontal, uncluttered stream of the exterior. The look of Streamline Moderne was increasingly austere, and aerodynamic. The demand for cost savings made "Depression Deco" almost void of ornamentation, other than details incorporated into the actual structure. Where "Zig-zag Deco" emphasized verticality, "Streamline Deco" emphasized the horizontal (McAlester, 1984: 465). While "Jazz-age Deco" was rectilinear, "Depression Deco" was more curvilinear with graceful, smooth exterior lines.

The Streamlining of America

In his 1932 book, *Horizons*, prominent industrial designer, Norman Bel Geddes, articulated the new concept of “streamlining” (Geddes, 1932: 4). “Streamlining” changed the look and functionality of almost every consumer product purchased in the 1930s, allowing the manufacturer to produce goods as efficiently as possible and with a clean uncluttered appearance. The U. S. automobile industry took the streamline trend to heart, both as an outward appearance and an enhancement to performance that the style afforded (Figure 8). Although often perceived by the buying public as simply a visual effect, this new style was built for speed and motion. The epitome of this expression was found in aviation’s DC-3, an airplane design conceptualized to be “Streamlined” (Figure 9).

The DC-3, manufactured by the Douglas Aircraft Corporation, exhibited a new shape--aerodynamic and aesthetically beautiful (Striner, 1994: 88). It gave credence to the expression “Form follows Function.” Rid of any unnecessary detailing and features that would adversely affect its performance, the DC-3 set new standards for aviation efficiency and flight. Unlike planes that preceded it, the DC-3’s single wing, void of external supports, produced considerably less aerodynamic drag. Compared to the Ford Tri-Motor, the DC-3’s wing surfaces were of smooth, rolled aluminum, while rippled metal encased the Tri-Motor (Figure 10). This allowed the DC-3 to use only two engines

while achieving still better operating performance than the Tri-Motor. Clearly, "streamlining" the design was not just for appearance.

The Streamlining trend in American design was quickly embraced by architects and led ultimately to the United States becoming more of an innovator of style rather than the imitator. No longer was Europe viewed as the premier center of design and architecture. As America in the 1930s churned out new mass-produced products, impressively scaled structures and new fashion trends, the world took notice. Art Deco had reached its most sublime form of expression. "Simple lines are beautiful," wrote Paul T. Frankl, a noted industrial designer of the Art Deco era (Gebhard, 1994: 10).

"Streamline Deco" tended to be utilized by structures that were an integral part of an efficient way of life, whether at work or at home. Many factories constructed in the Art Deco era were shrouded in Streamline Deco. Similar to the Jazz-age bank buildings, factories designed in Streamline Deco conveyed to the public more than just a factory that provided employment. Such styling announced that here was an efficient manufacturing center, a place where products would be produced in the most modern and productive manner possible.

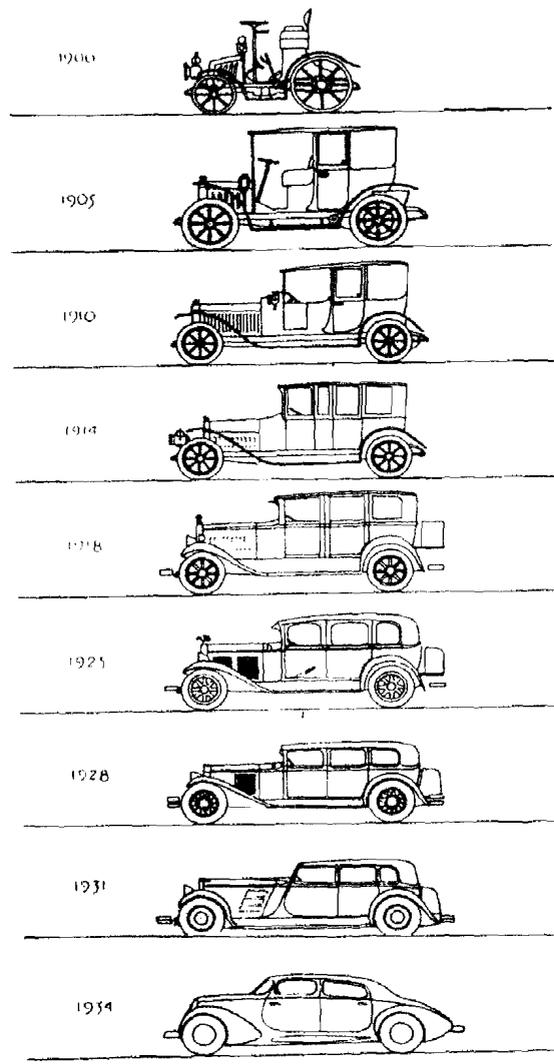


Figure 8: Evolution Series, Raymond Loewy (Greif, 1975: 46).

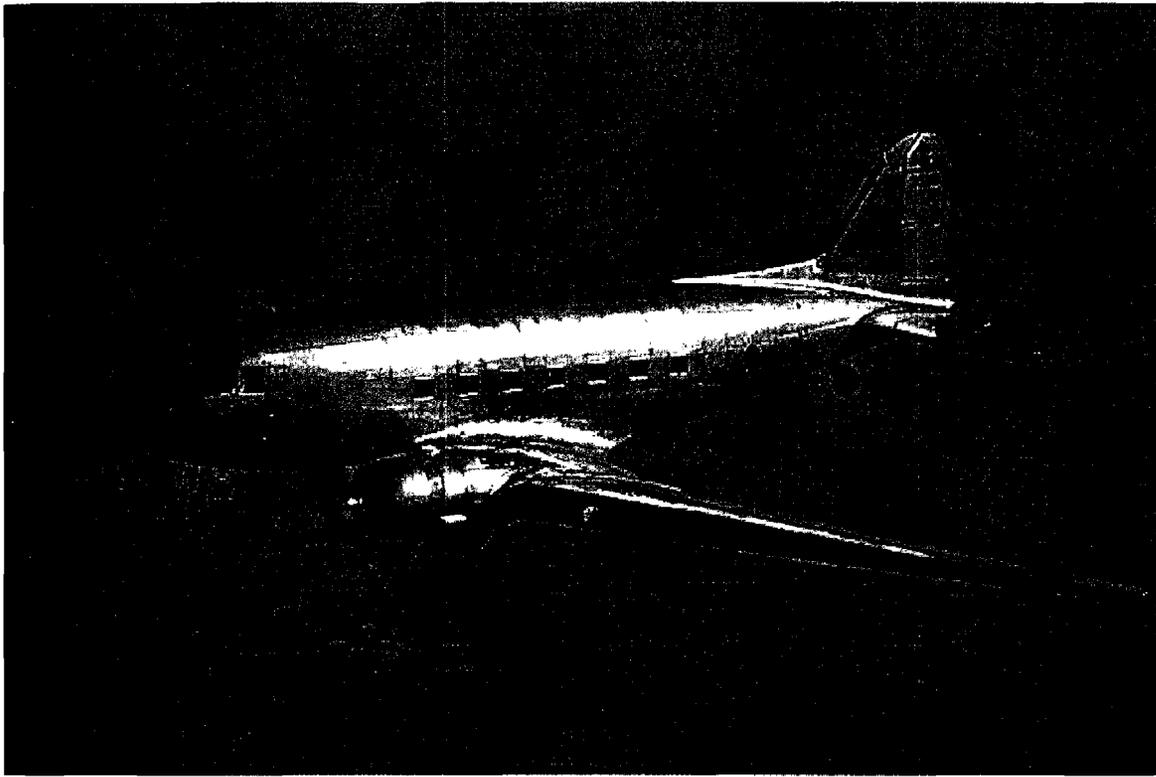


Figure 9: The DC-3 in flight. (The Boeing Company, 1999: www.boeing.com)

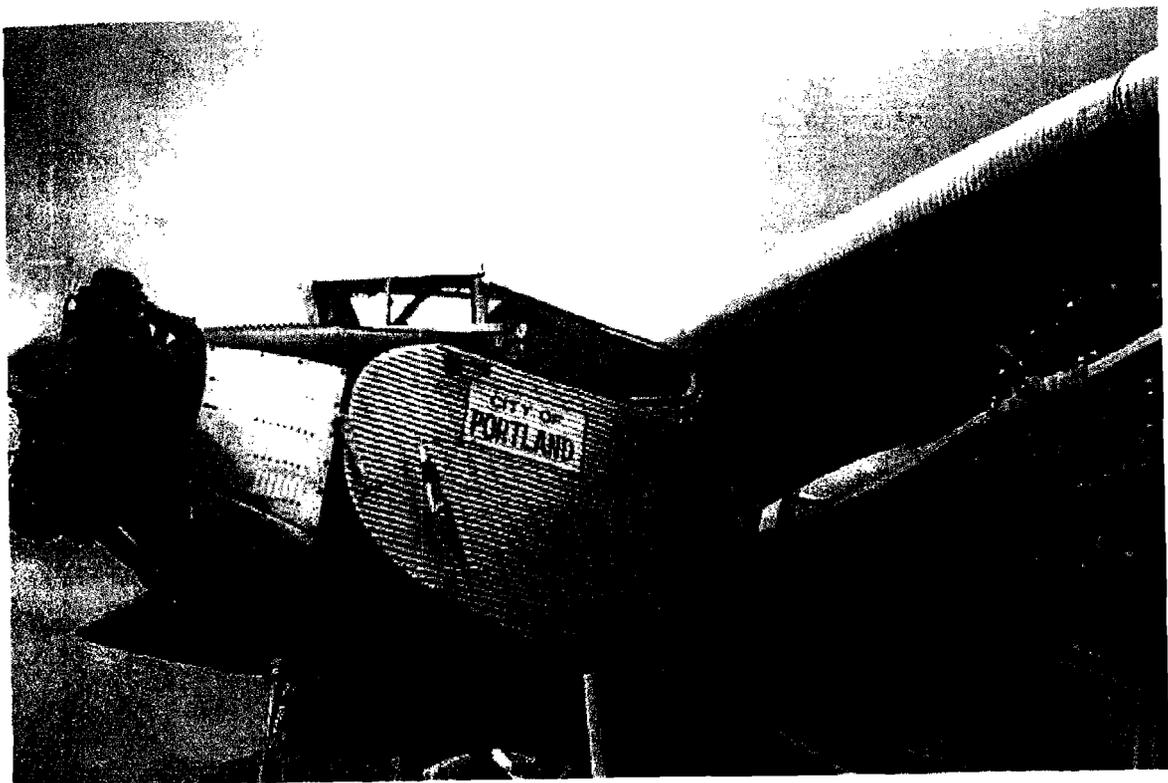


Figure 10: The Ford Tri-Motor. (Spruce Goose Museum, 1999:
www.sprucegoose.org).

Just as the Chrysler Building is the epitome of the earlier era, the Coca-Cola bottling plant of Los Angeles is a wonderful example of the horizontal motion associated with Streamline Moderne Deco structures (Figure 11). With its portholes as windows, and a ship's bridge for navigating, the bottling plant gives the appearance of an ocean liner. Although the building is firmly rooted in a sea of concrete and blacktop, it looks as though it could navigate the sprawling urban landscape of Los Angeles.

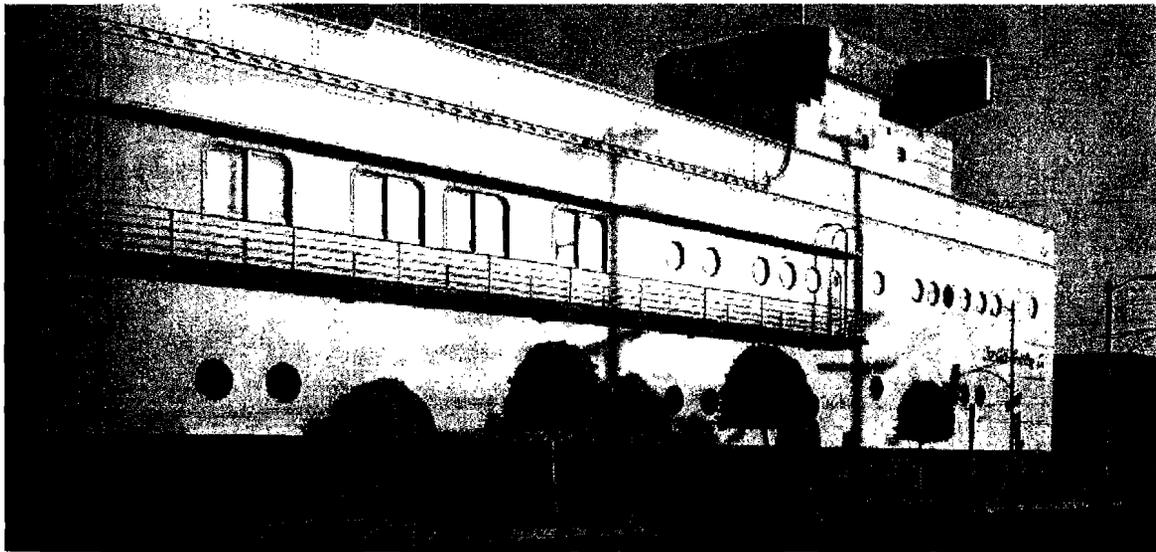


Figure 11: Coca-Cola Bottling Plant, Los Angeles, California (Capitman, 1994: 117).

Craft vs. Manufacturing

Although Art Deco had European origins, it was America that modified it and embraced its wide appeal. By the late 1920s, American architects had great success incorporating Art Deco architecture into the cultural landscape of major urban centers (Franci et al, 1997: 12). American architectural influence continued into the 1930s, increasingly becoming a world center of creative design. U.S. designers forged new paths, even with the onset of the Great Depression -- achieving ultimate pre-eminence with the Chicago World's Fair of 1933. Its theme was, "The Century of Progress" (Bayer, 1992: 41). Nowhere was this progress more evident than in the United States. In Europe, the wide distribution of Art Deco products was hampered by being tied to the handwork of craftsmen and artisans, who essentially created the "look" of Art Deco through meticulous skill, as shown by a silver tea service set (Figure 12). Made of fine silver and ebony handles, it exhibited at the Paris Exposition in 1925. Its production was limited, however, due to the fact that it was essentially hand made. In America, Art Deco designs were being integrally linked to the industrial complex. Taking inspiration from the auto and aircraft industries, products and buildings were designed in the new elegant style, yet made available to the masses through the efficiencies of machine production. This contrast between crafts from Europe and manufacturing from America was highlighted at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933.

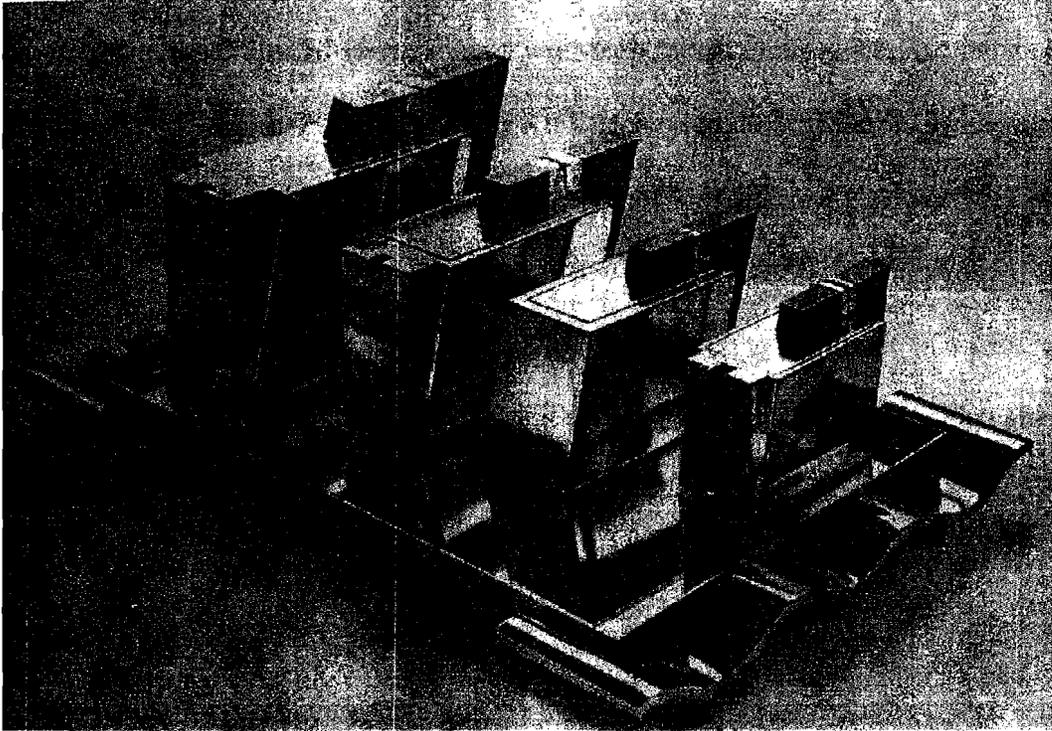


Figure 12: Tea Service from the Paris Exposition, 1925 (Menton, 1972: 140).

Art Deco Enters the Ordinary Landscape

By the mid 1930s, Art Deco architecture shifted from an elite style to a more broadly accepted form of architecture. It began to appear in far more prosaic structures, such as diners and gas stations. The common stainless steel diners, found across the American cultural landscape reflect the horizontal expression and the look of motion attributed to Streamline Moderne Deco. Society had become enamored with speed and motion, and the Streamline Moderne diners, with their rakish appearance, had the look of "built in motion" (Vienne, 1998: 102). The Art Deco styled diner (Figure 13), sheathed in stainless steel, looked like a dining car speeding down the railroad track, and became a permanent fixture of the ordinary cultural landscape (Gutman, 1993: 113). Diners became an American icon. The classic "diner look" conjured up an image of a certain menu, the availability of comfort food, and fast efficient service; attributes which are still associated with diners to the present day. Businesses utilized the Streamline Moderne Art Deco as a way of advertising a business establishment. In this manner, many Art Deco gas stations were built with a consistent appearance according to standards adopted by oil companies. Texaco service stations, for example, created a corporate image based on designs by Walter Teague in 1937. Teague utilized the clean lines of Streamline Moderne to create an image of cleanliness and service efficiency (Mansfield, 1999: 92). More importantly, due to the universal appearance of Texaco's White "Oasis" service stations, with their distinctive three green "Speed Stripes" encasing the station, motorists were able to recognize a Texaco station from a distance and before a competitor's (Figure 14). This consistent appearance would be associated to consistent service in the minds of

customers. Thus, Art Deco helped foster the “iconization” of American business.

Through icons, businesses were able to build a competitive advantage over competitors that lacked an established image or a recognizable corporate symbol.

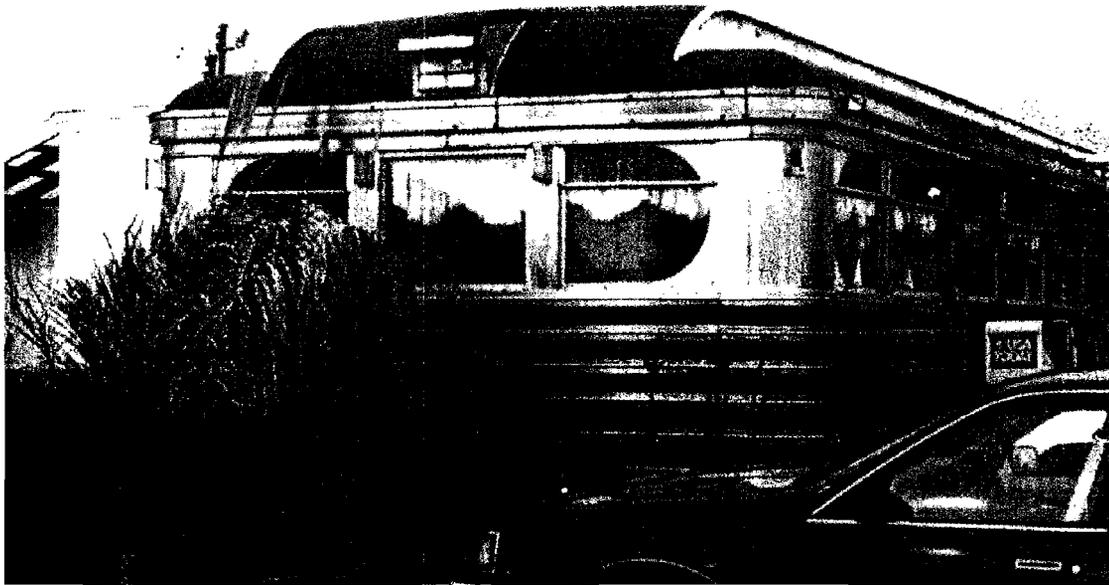


Figure 13: Bridgeville Diner. Bridgeville, Delaware. Photo by Author.



Figure 14: Texaco's "White Oasis" Design by Walter D. Teague (1937). (Vieyra, 1979: 71)

Art Deco Features

Exterior Features of Art Deco Structures

Predominantly, Art Deco buildings have only flat rooflines. Although a skyscraper may appear to have a tapered roof, it usually is the exterior lines of the building that taper and not the actual roof. Associated with flat rooflines, Art Deco architecture often incorporates balconies and roof overhangs that compliment the exterior lines of the building. Devoid of decoration elsewhere, Art Deco buildings tend to have ornate entranceways. A building, for example, having a rather austere exterior, yet with a somewhat grand and ornate entranceway, might indicate an Art Deco structure.

Materials and Colors

Art Deco exteriors are usually concrete, stucco, or geometric brick, with trim and ornamentation created in terra cotta tiles, glass block, aluminum, stainless steel and/or colored glass. Most exteriors of Art Deco structures are done in subdued colors. Concrete, stucco, and the brick tend to favor the lighter toned colors: tans, whites, cremes or the natural color of concrete. Trim colors and accents often are subdued pastel colors: mint or lime green, warm pinks, peaches, and mauves. However, trim colors might also go to the other end of the color spectrum, incorporating the bold look of black

shiny aluminum and/or stainless steel (Striner, 1994: 51). Furthermore, the trim colors of the colored glass might be rich deep colors, such as cobalt blue, or a deep, dark, fiery red. Colors may be juxtaposed against each other to give stark contrasts or, at other times, the colors might be complimentary, varying only slightly by the shade of a single color. Either way, Art Deco ornamentation tends towards the sparse yet rich, or the subtle yet bold. Art Deco architects believed it was better to work with the natural beauty of the structure using ornamental detail to highlight the overall aesthetic of the building, rather than to overpower and clutter its appearance with excessive detail.

Windows

Pursuing the nautical look, a common window feature is the porthole, resembling the round windows found on an ocean liner. Once again, the Coca-Cola plant building in Los Angeles provides an excellent example (Figure 11). More often, however, an Art Deco building, especially home designs, will only employ the use of a single porthole window to highlight the same nautical theme (Striner, 1994: 51).

Other window treatments vary with the type of Art Deco employed by the building. In Jazz-age Deco, the shape of the windows tend to compliment the vertical thrusts of the building, usually taking the form of tall slender bay windows. By contrast,

on Streamline Deco buildings, the openings tend to be long, ribbon-like windows that fit into the streamlined shape of the exterior of the building.

Long, slender windows are also characteristic of the International or Bauhaus style of architecture, a style that competed with Art Deco in the same time period. However, while Art Deco windows often flowed with the exterior of the structure, often wrapping around the corners of the building, the International Style or Bauhaus window might extend across the entire front of the building. The International Style or Bauhaus was box-like and had little fluidity in its exterior lines. Streamline Moderne Deco windows were evidenced by the use of curved glass or glass block which followed the smooth lines of the building's exterior shape, contributing to the structure's graceful appearance (Colomina, 1994: 132).

Cities Associated with Art Deco Architecture

Of the known cities where the Art Deco style of architecture was adopted, only a few are commonly perceived as having surviving examples today: New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago. This study refers to these cities as the "Deco Cities" (Figure 15). Yet several others, though not necessarily perceived as Art Deco cities, also have a significant number of Art Deco structures. They are Washington D.C., Philadelphia, San Francisco, and to a lesser extent, the cities Dallas/Ft. Worth, Detroit,

Kansas City, Cincinnati, and Tulsa. Other cities, though generally not considered "Deco Cities," also contain examples of Art Deco architecture.² Although the number of Art Deco structures varied from region to region, its primary existence is perceived in the initial cities mentioned: New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago, enhancing the perception that Art Deco architecture is characteristically an urban style of architecture limited to a select few cities high in the urban hierarchy of the United States.

Art Deco Architecture and Its Geographic Diffusion in America

Art Deco and its adoption as a style of architecture diffused from the design centers of Europe, especially Paris, to the highest order cities in the United States: New York and Los Angeles. This adoption follows a theory of geographic cultural diffusion which states that as new ideas, styles, and design trends are first adopted by a select elite section of the population, their continued diffusion is dependent on further adoption by a broader spectrum of the population (Zelinsky, 1994: 79-85). With architecture, the elite areas tend to be major urban centers, where new architectural styles receive the greatest exposure. Through this exposure, it is the hope of the architect and designers that a new style will be accepted and its diffusion advanced to the next lower ordered tier of the urban hierarchy. In a temporal sense, what determines whether an adopter city is early or

² While Washington D.C. contains many examples of Art Deco architecture, most were built later during the Art Deco era and are a combination of classical architecture and Art Deco.

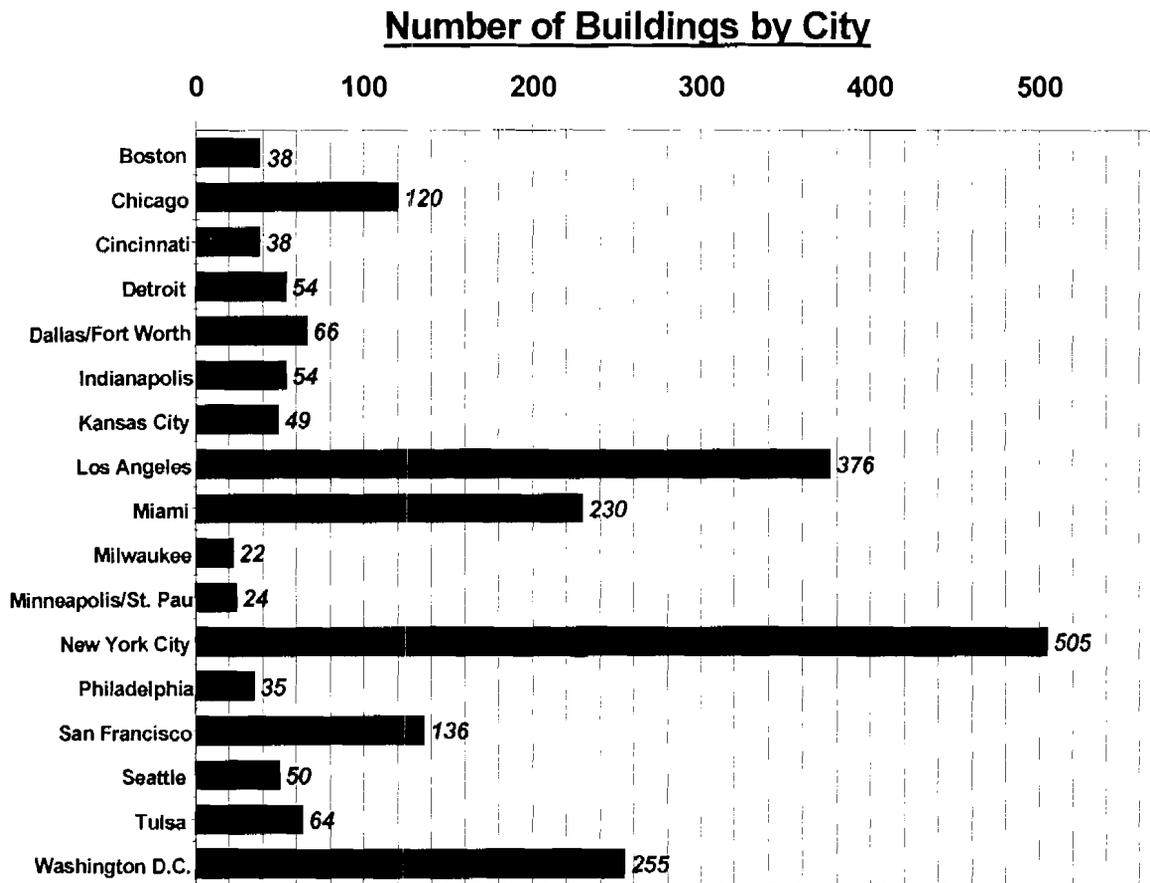


Figure 15: Art Deco Buildings in U.S. Cities, from “The Art Deco Database of the Barbara Baer Capitman Archives (Capitman et al., 1994: 9).”

late is the date that a structure was designed and built in the new style of architecture. For Art Deco, the general adoption route followed paths displayed in Figure 16.

New York: the Seed City and Zenith of the Art Deco Movement

As the first American City to adopt Art Deco architecture, New York City contains the greatest collection of Art Deco structures in the world. New York hosted the World's Fair in 1939, which coincides with the year when the largest number of Art Deco buildings were constructed nationwide. With the monuments of the Tylon and Perisphere as the Fair's focal point, combined with the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building, the Waldorf Astoria, and Rockefeller Center, all considered classics already by 1939, New York became the center of the Art Deco movement (Striner, 1984: 24).

One of the first significant Art Deco buildings to arise in New York was Raymond Hood's American Radiator Building (1924). As mentioned earlier, Hood's design combined Gothic Style with Art Deco. Its appearance originated the idea of contrasting colors to highlight architectural details, which became a signature theme of Art Deco. The most striking details on the American Radiator Building were found in its exterior. Clad in black brick, with shiny black granite at the base, the building was

highlighted in brilliant gold terra cotta tiles. The color contrasts, combined with night illumination shining on the gold tiles, and the stepped back massing of the building's general form, all gave emphasis to its vertical dimension. By this "towering" effect, created with Art Deco highlights, the height of Hood's building was impressive in its perception, though in actuality it was a mere twenty stories (Gebhard, 1996: 42).

Soon after the American Radiator Building, other structures began rising from Manhattan's bedrock foundation. A noted building that exhibits the dramatic effect of stepped back styling early in Art Deco's adoption was the Chanin Building. Begun in 1927, it was completed in 1929. As with many of the early Art Deco skyscrapers, the Chanin Building's Art Deco details were influenced by gothic styling. But, compared to the American Radiator Building, the stepped back, tiered styling was evolving into a more Art Deco style, as the prominently displayed detail of its top crown demonstrates (Figure 17).

Standing on the West Side of Midtown Manhattan, the Chrysler Building (1930) more than any other structure in the world, has become the symbol for both Art Deco architecture and New York City in general (Figure 6). With its stainless steel crowned top, terraced to dramatically accent its vertical ascent, the Chrysler Building exhibits some of the best examples of Art Deco detailing. Aside from its tiered, stepped, back form, the spiked windows look like teeth on a gear wheel. Combined with the gargoyles jutting out on the last story below the steel cap, the Chrysler Building brought Art Deco

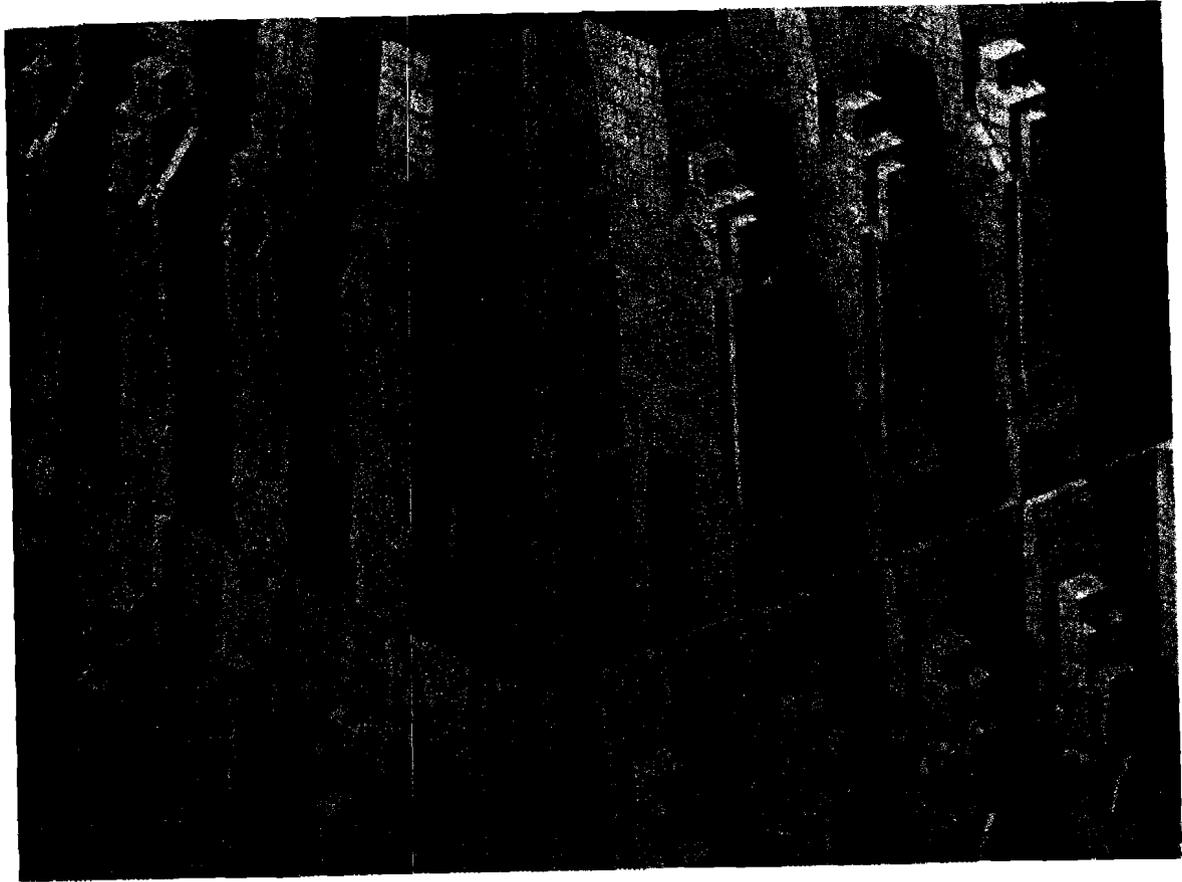


Figure 17: The Chanin Building, 1929 (Bayer, 1992: 106).

architecture to a high art form. It was instantly beloved by the general populous for its sheer beauty and form.

Following the Chrysler Building came the Empire State Building, begun in 1930 and completed in 1931. The Empire State Building is probably noted as the second most popular Art Deco building in New York. Although the Art Deco ornamentation is starker, the Empire State Building epitomizes the stepped back vertical emphasis. For four decades it stood as the world's tallest structure.

Among the best known examples of Manhattan Art Deco is Rockefeller Center. An immense collection of buildings, statuary, and parks clustered together to make a neighborhood of Art Deco architecture, Rockefeller Center is dominated by the towering, stepped style of the RCA building (Figure 18).

Los Angeles

Los Angeles was the other early adopter of the Art Deco style. Although most examples were built for movie sets, Bullock's Wilshire Department Store (1928) stands as a fine architectural example of Jazz-age Art Deco. Sheathed completely in terra-cotta tiles, the store featured a twelve-story tower that added to the vertical detailing. One

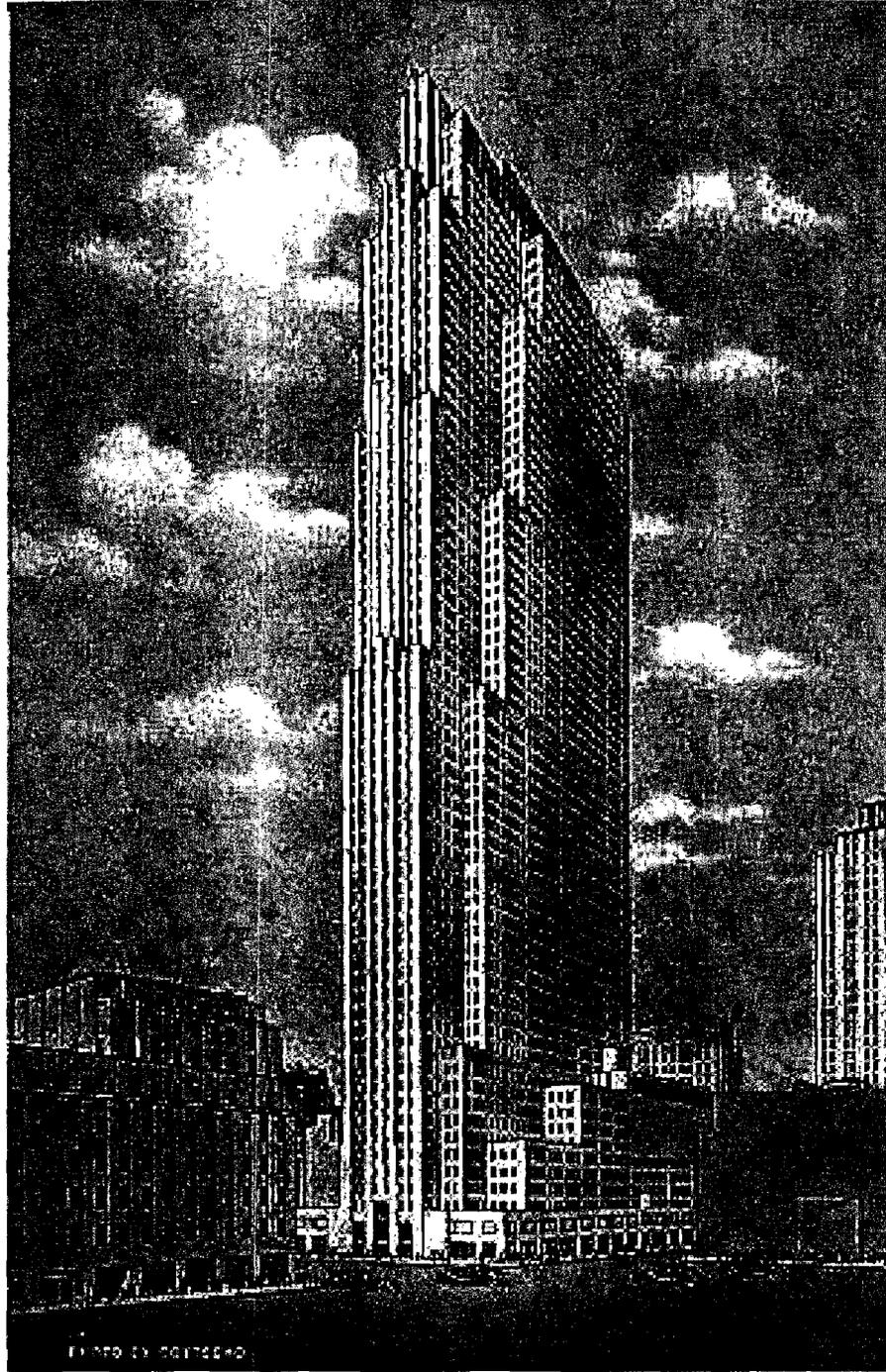


Figure 18: The RCA Building, Rockefeller Center, New York (Bayer, 1992: 106).

contemporary critic, noted that "Every room flows into the next by the way of design transition in form and color...The old box architecture is over." (Gebhard, 1996: 199).

Among the most photographed of all Los Angeles buildings is the Art Deco-styled Los Angeles City Hall (Figure 19). A splendid example of classical architecture combined with the spirit of Art Deco, its construction began in 1926 and was completed in 1928, and represents one of the earliest examples of Art Deco public architecture in the city. That the building is still in use as City Hall stands as a testament to the enduring appreciation of its Art Deco architecture. Note, however, that its top crown reflects a more Mayan-influenced pyramid shape, which was often found on early French Art Deco structures (Bayer, 1992: 179).

Chicago

Chicago, not to be outdone, began building Art Deco structures soon after New York and Los Angeles. The Chicago Board of Trade (1929) is in the Art Deco style as is the Chicago Daily News Building (1930). The latter structure combined Art Deco style in its landscaping, including a fountain and plaza (Gebhard, 1996, pg.105-106). Probably the most significant contribution to the diffusion of Art Deco architecture that Chicago made was its hosting of the World's Fair in 1933. Called "the Century of Progress," this exposition was influenced by early European design, as evidenced in the similarities of

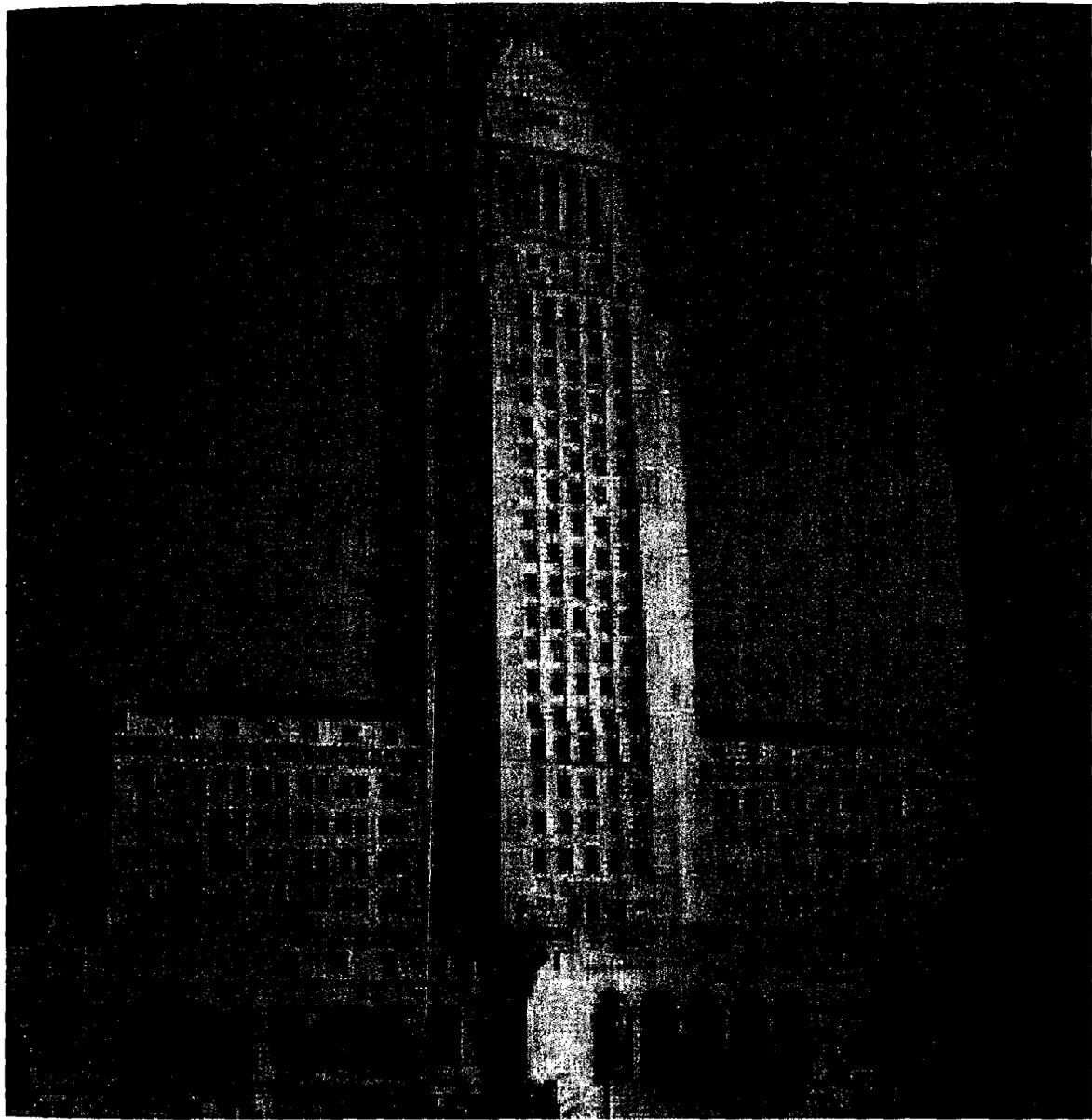


Figure 19: Los Angeles City Hall, 1928 (Gebhard, 1996, pg. 204).

the "Tourisme" Pavilion from the Paris Exposition of 1925 (Figure 20) with the "Science and Technology" Pavilion of Chicago's World's Fair in 1933 (Figure 21).

Miami

Although Miami is often associated with Art Deco architecture, its famed Streamline Moderne hotels and homes were built later in the Art Deco era -- during the mid-1930s. The one early Art Deco structure built in Miami also happens to be its City Hall. Begun in 1928 and completed in 1931, the building was originally designed as the passenger terminal for Pan American Airlines. It was converted to City Hall in 1945 (Capitman, 1994, pg. 140). Some of its design details would later define Streamline Moderne Art Deco, for which Miami Beach and its Art Deco district became world-renowned (Figure 22).

Houston

One city in the South that retains some early examples of Art Deco architecture is Houston, Texas. The Gulf Building (1929) on Houston's Main Street stood four hundred and fifty feet, and emphasized the verticality of stepped back Jazz-age Deco (Gebhard, 1996: 184). With its light colored brown brick, the building was a tribute to the



Figure 20: Tourisme Pylon, Paris 1925. (Arwas, 1992, pg. 32).

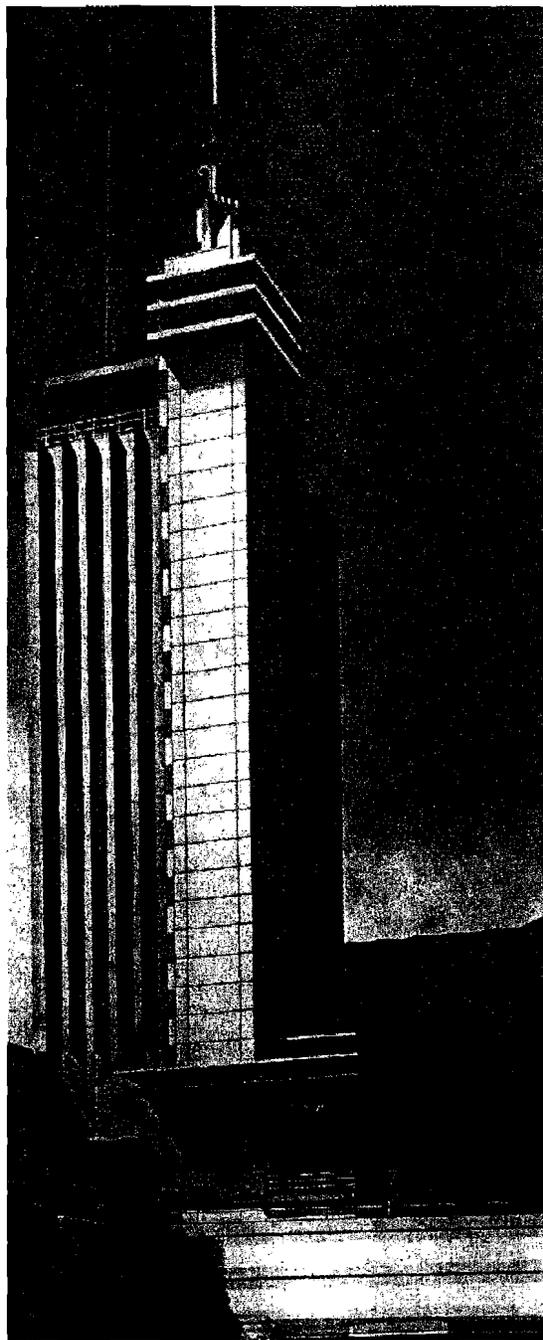


Figure 21: "Science and Technology" Pavilion, Chicago World's Fair, 1933.
(Bayer, 1992: 36).

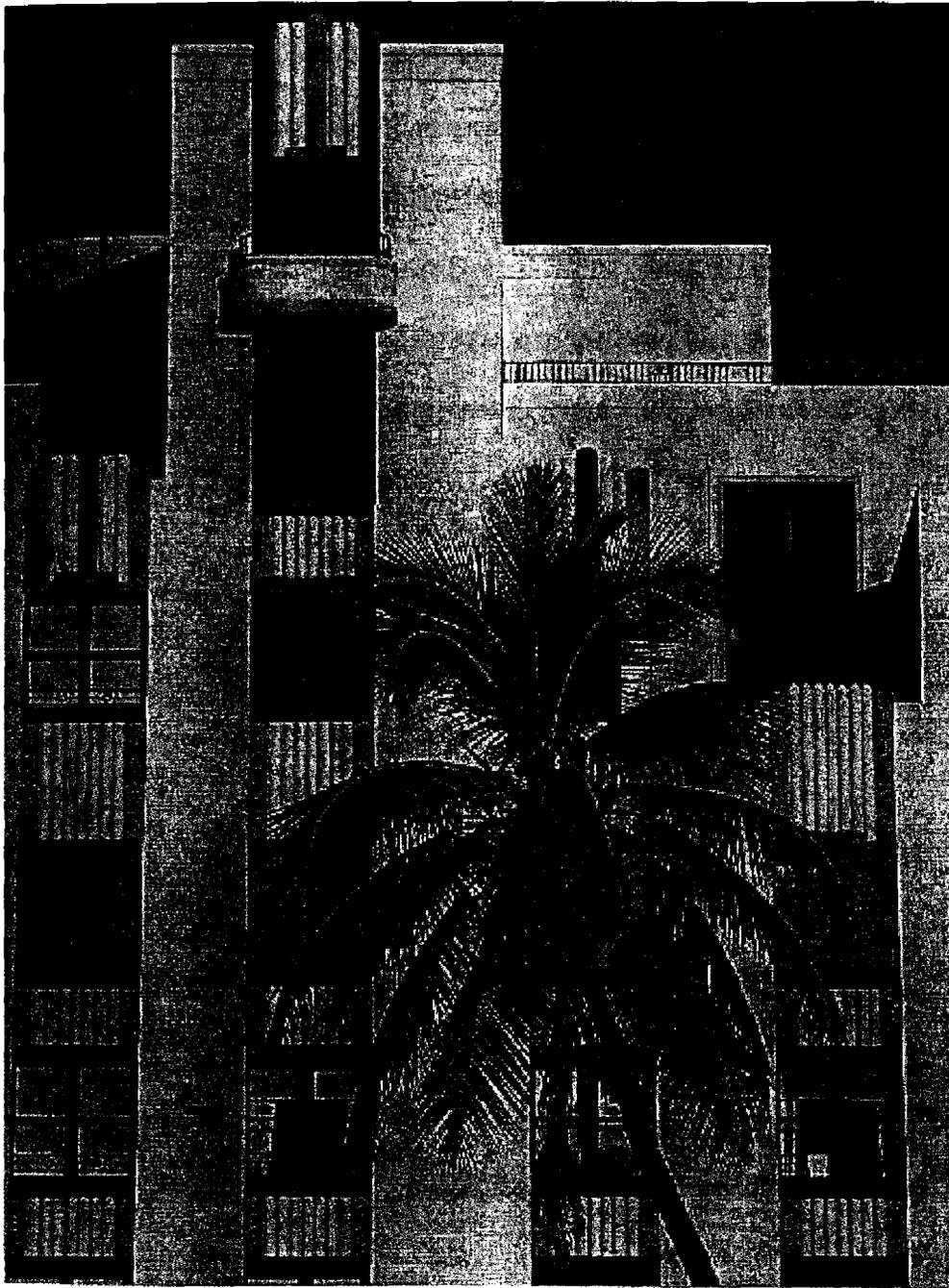


Figure 22: Miami Art Deco Hotel in vivid tropical colors (Kim, 1997: 25).

skyscraper style of Art Deco as shown in Eliel Saarinen's Chicago Tribune Tower competition of 1922. It combined Art Deco with Gothic architecture. Today, this building still illuminates the Houston skyline, but now as the Texas Commerce Bank building. Another Houston building constructed early in the Art Deco era was the Petroleum building. Designed and built in the years 1926-1927, it incorporated many of the Mayan motifs found in the French Art Deco designs. Through this twenty-two-story building runs a connection between the influence of the American skyscraper style, found in New York, and the subtle Mayan motifs found in the works of Art Deco structures exhibited at the Paris Exposition (Gebhard, 1996: 188).

Kansas City

During the 1920s and 1930s, Kansas City was booming economically. As the Rogers and Hammerstein's hit musical "Oklahoma" put it, everything was "up to date in Kansas City...(Capitman, 1994: 109)." As an aviation hub and a common stop-over point for airline passengers flying from New York to Los Angeles (including many of Hollywood's then famous movie stars), the city played an early role in the diffusion of Art Deco architecture through the American urban landscape, even though it was not among the highest-ordered U.S. cities. One of the most prominent buildings in Kansas City's skyline is the four hundred sixty-nine foot high Kansas City Power and Light Company Building. Begun in 1930 and completed the following year, this building is a

wonderful example of the Jazz-age Deco style. Since the building was the headquarters for the local electric utility company, its ornamentation highlighted themes of electricity and power. On the building's top tower, each window contains a lightning bolt pattern, symbolizing the power of electricity. Sculptured rays of sun, engraved in the façade of the building, further emphasized the power of electricity, bringing light and energy to all. (Gebhard, 1996: 138).

Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. had the third highest number of Art Deco buildings according to "The Art Deco Database of the Barbara Baer Capitman Archives" (Capitman et al, 1994: 9). Adoption began with the Folger Shakespeare Library (1930-1932) (Gebhard, 1996: 30). Yet most of its Art Deco architecture was completed during President Franklin Roosevelt's Administration, placing it later in the diffusion hierarchy. Through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the buildings it created, Washington, D.C. became the center of "Greco Deco," a term that refers to the fusion of classical architecture with Art Deco (Wirz and Striner, 1984: 24).

Philadelphia

Proximate to New York City, Philadelphia adopted Art Deco architecture quite early, indeed. The first of all the American Art Deco Expositions, the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition, was held in Philadelphia in 1926. The main entrance gate to the exposition was directly influenced by the entrance design of the Paris Exposition, “The Porte de la Concorde,” a year earlier (Figure 3). With its assembly of towering pillars, the entrance would also later influence the entrance gates to The Great Lakes Exposition of Cleveland, Ohio (1937), (Figure 23). Although Philadelphia’s Art Deco architecture exhibited more of the Skyscraper style of New York in the late 1920s, during the 1930s, the city adopted some of its own “Greco Deco” structures. The City’s two rail stations reflect these two distinctive phases of Art Deco architecture: Philadelphia’s Suburban Station (1929) has all the details of Jazz-age Deco, while the classically-styled exterior of Thirtieth-Street Station, completed in 1933, is adorned with Art Deco throughout its immense interior, highlighted by massively large Art Deco chandeliers and a towering Art Deco statue of an angel assisting a weary traveler (Capitman, 1994: 181).

Tulsa

The last city to be considered an early U.S. adopter of the Art Deco style is Tulsa, Oklahoma. Although not widely recognized as an “Art Deco City,” Tulsa experienced an

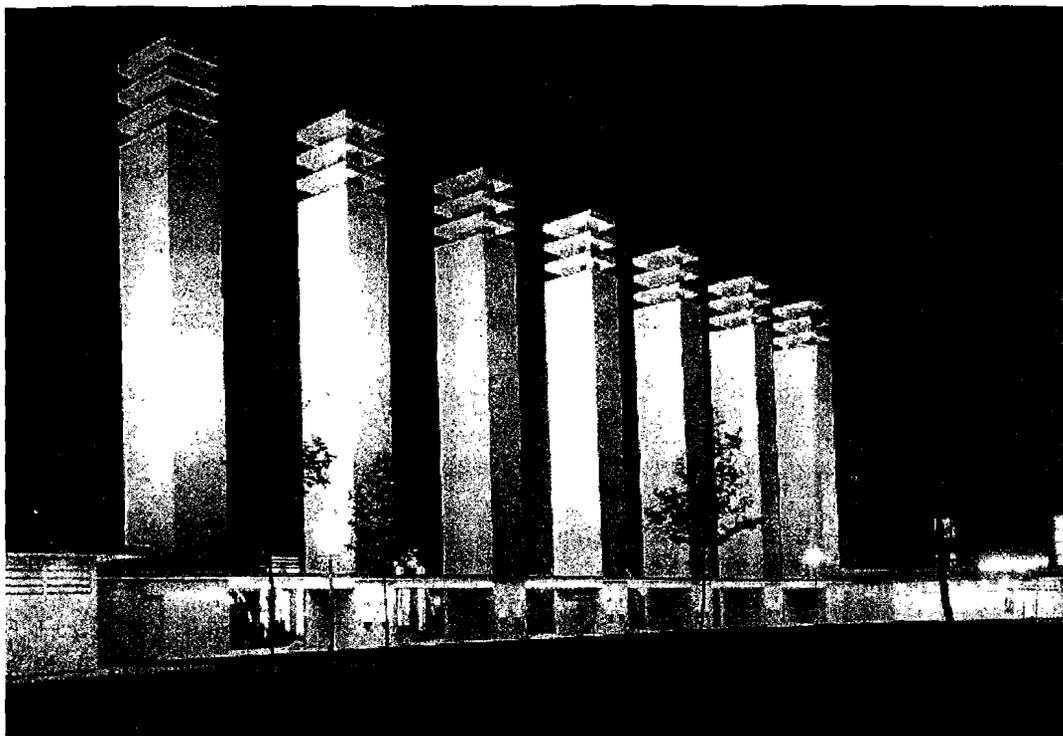


Figure 23: The Great Lakes Exposition, Cleveland, Ohio 1937 (Bayer, 1992: 52).

economic boom in the 1920s and early 1930s with the discovery of oil. Before oil, Tulsa was just a crossroads town with a few hundred inhabitants. After oil, the entrepreneurs of Tulsa sought to build a city that would rival the style and image of other great American cities, notably New York and Chicago (Capitman, 1994: 199).

Art Deco's Diffusion to Lower-Order Cities

From these principal urban centers, Art Deco diffused to other nearby lower-order centers in the United States., such as Wilmington, the principal city in Delaware. Given its relative proximity to New York City and Philadelphia, it is not surprising that Art Deco architecture reached Wilmington as early as 1922 in its temporal diffusion in the United States. Wilmington's first structure to show partial Art Deco influence was the Wilmington Public Library, built on the south side of Rodney Square in the epicenter of the city, supported financially by the influential DuPont family. At this early date, however, Art Deco was clearly an urbanized architectural style. Adopted by owners of capital, it was an affectation of the urban elite. Some cultural phenomena disperse no further than the high urban hierarchy, as was the case with Art Deco and its diffusion in Europe. But, late in its first phase of development in the United States, Art Deco began to spread into the broader, ordinary landscape. The endeavor of this study is to measure the extent of diffusion in Delaware, which will provide an indication as to what degree Art Deco penetrated the ordinary cultural landscape of the United States.