

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Delineating Areas in Delaware Containing Art Deco Structures

Examination of the spread of Art Deco architecture in Delaware involved developing an inventory of all Art Deco structures. The inventory was conducted through field observation by the author, but it quickly became apparent that it was neither possible nor necessary to traverse all Delaware's many roads (Figure 24). Instead, the search area was narrowed, based on the assumption that since Art Deco diffusion lasted from the 1920s to the 1960s at the latest, any areas of post-1960 development in Delaware could be excluded from the field survey. It was further assumed that Art Deco structures were built adjacent to highways and roads as those roads existed before 1960. By computer-scanning historical USGS maps to a Geographical Information System (GIS), and overlaying them with present day road maps from the Delaware Department

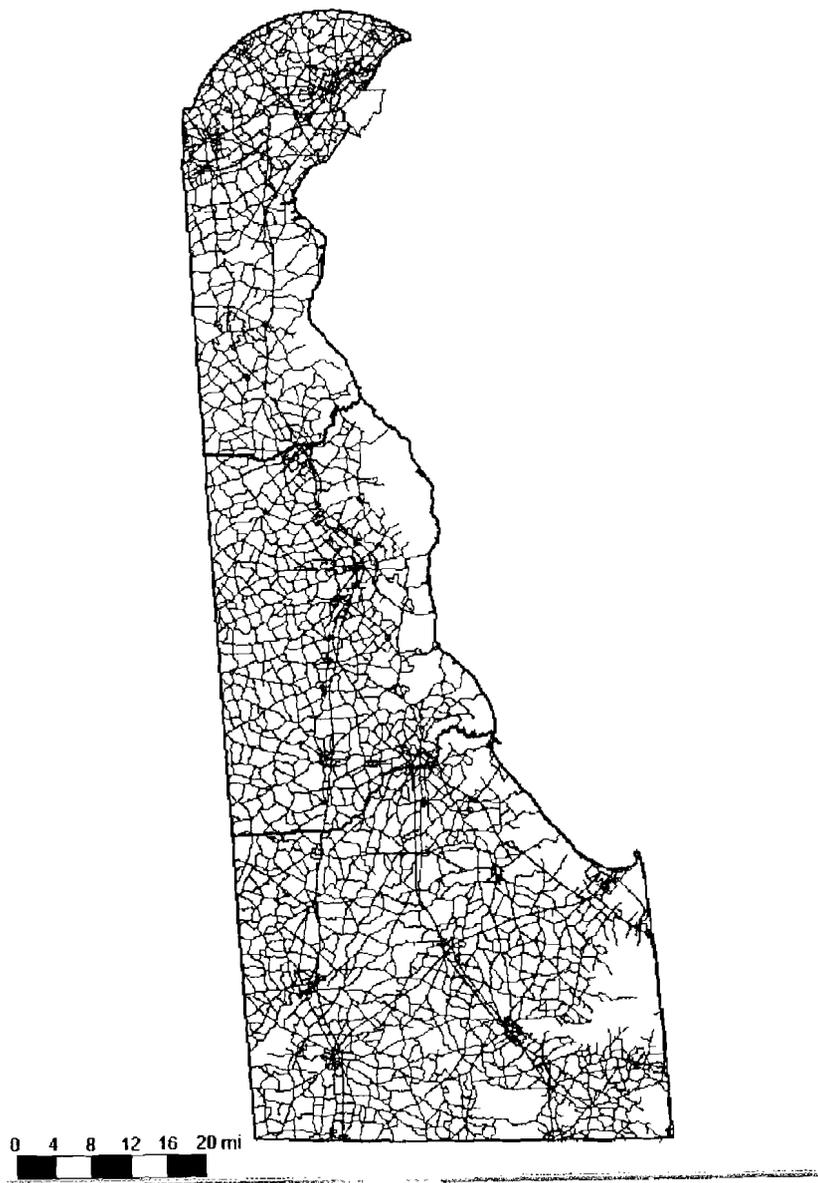


Figure 24: Delaware's Current Primary Road Network.
(Delaware Department of Transportation).

of Transportation, it was possible to determine which roads had new alignments and where towns were now bypassed by the construction of post-1960 roads (Figure 25). For example, the new alignment of Capital Trail in New Castle County, also known as Kirkwood Highway, bypassed the old town of Marshalltown. Marshalltown, Delaware would prove to contain several significant examples of Art Deco architecture, yet the current road alignment, which circumvents the town, makes them easy to overlook. Particular attention was paid to central business districts of the pre-1960 period, since such areas were likely to generate the most examples of Art Deco architecture.

The process of consulting old maps and analyzing where Art Deco might exist allowed identification of areas of predictability (Figure 26). These included areas within municipal and town boundaries, areas adjacent to municipal and town boundaries, and areas encompassing transportation corridors between cities and towns. Mostly excluded from the survey were rural and suburban areas built after the Art Deco era had ended. Some spot canvassing in these areas was performed to confirm that sites of Art Deco architecture were in fact absent.

Creating an Inventory Template

Before collecting data, an Art Deco inventory template was created containing vital data to be recorded about each individual structure (Figure 27). Common data



Figure 25: Historical USGS Map of Wilmington and Vicinity, 1942. (Delaware USGS).

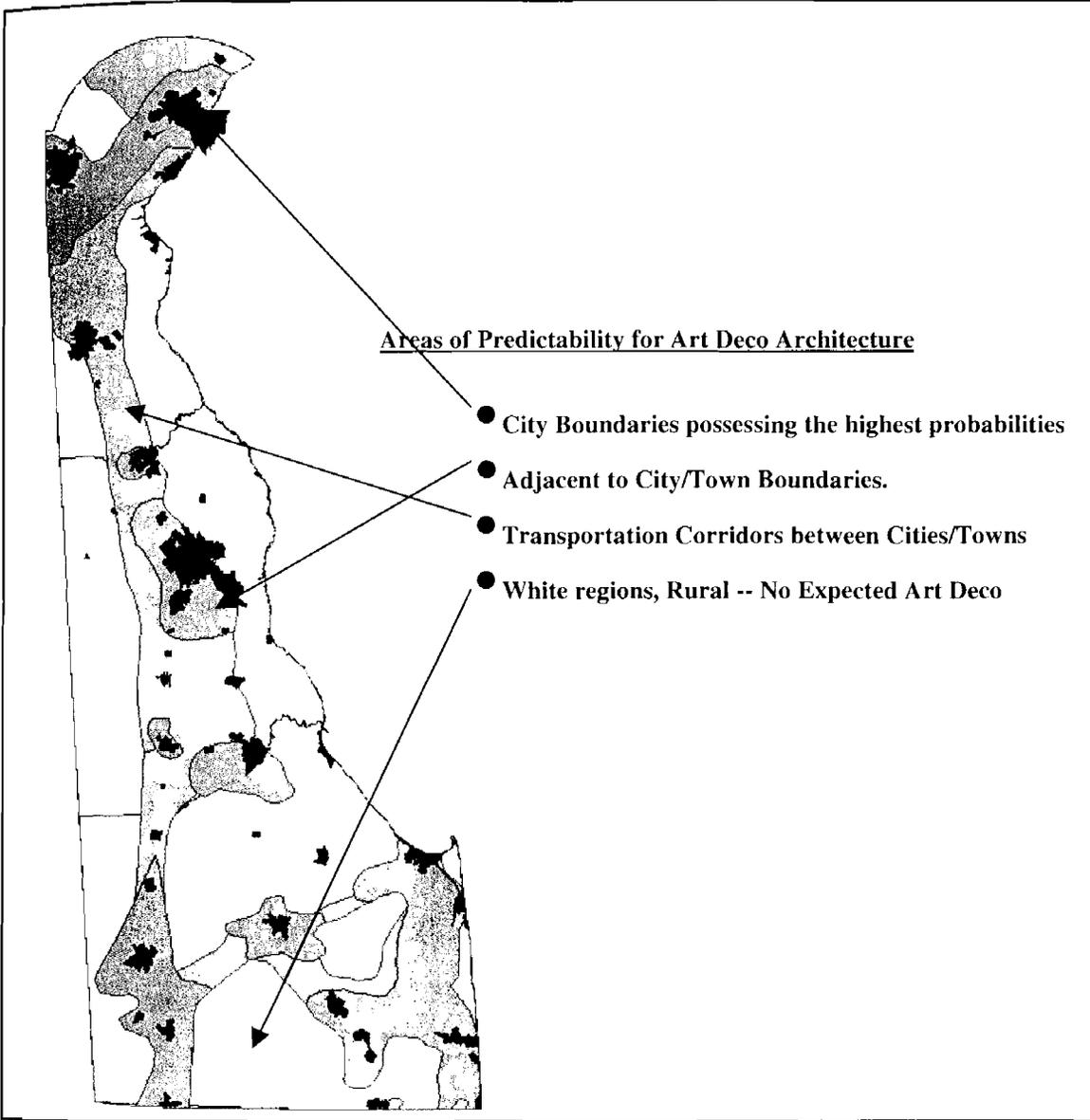


Figure 26: Areas of Art Deco Predictability.

Template for Art Deco Inventory: Commercial Buildings

Photo

Location:

*North of Wilmington
5 Northeast Blvd*

Longitude: _____ Latitude: _____

Date Built:

1948

Original Purpose of Structure:

Auto Dealership

Art Deco Features Rating: Circle

1. Steel windows? Curved Glass, Glass Block?
0 1 2 3
2. Exterior of light colored brick or stucco?
0 1 2 3
3. Evidence of "Speed Stripes"
0 1 2 3
4. Flat Roofline?
0 1 2 3
5. Rectilinear/Curvilinear motif on building façade?
0 1 2 3



ADF Rating:

ADF = 15 / 15 = 100%

Description:

Excellent example of Streamline Moderne Auto garage motif found in the front facade with bas-relief sculptures showing various themes of an auto dealership and car in general. Oil can, wrench set, tire pump, etc. Excellent speed stripes in dark blue tiles against tan colored brick terra cotta tiles.

Figure 27: The Art Deco Inventory Template

recorded about every site included: the name of the site, a general description, its location, the year the structure was built or designed in the Art Deco style, original purpose of the structure, its present use and condition, and finally a follow up contact for further information.

Any historical architectural inventory invariably faces the problem of whether or not a building falls entirely in a particular stylistic category. This issue is created because buildings sometimes predate the style and acquire later additions in a new style. More frequently, buildings built in one style are substantially remodeled in a later style obscuring the original intent. For this reason, in the present study, an objective, quantitative rating of the Art Deco features was developed, called the Art Deco Factor (ADF). The ADF ranged from a low percentage to 100%. A 100% rating considered the site to be a definitive example constructed completely in the Art Deco style. Although each structure was rated against a select list of criteria, separate rating criteria were required for each type of structure. For example, when rating a bridge, it made little sense to score a bridge as Art Deco or not based on the existence of a flat roofline or glass block.

Developing the ADF Value for Specific Types of Structures

Rating Bridges

One of the most critical elements found on an Art Deco bridge is the stepped back style on the supports, similar to the skyscraper designs of major cities in the U.S. The presence of geometric shapes or vertical "speed stripes" used for ornamentation, and whether the bridge is constructed of concrete and /or steel would also rank highly. Lastly, the color of the bridge is considered, white or raw concrete colors receiving higher ratings (Figure 28 and 29).



Figure 28: Paper Mill Road Bridge. Photo by Author.

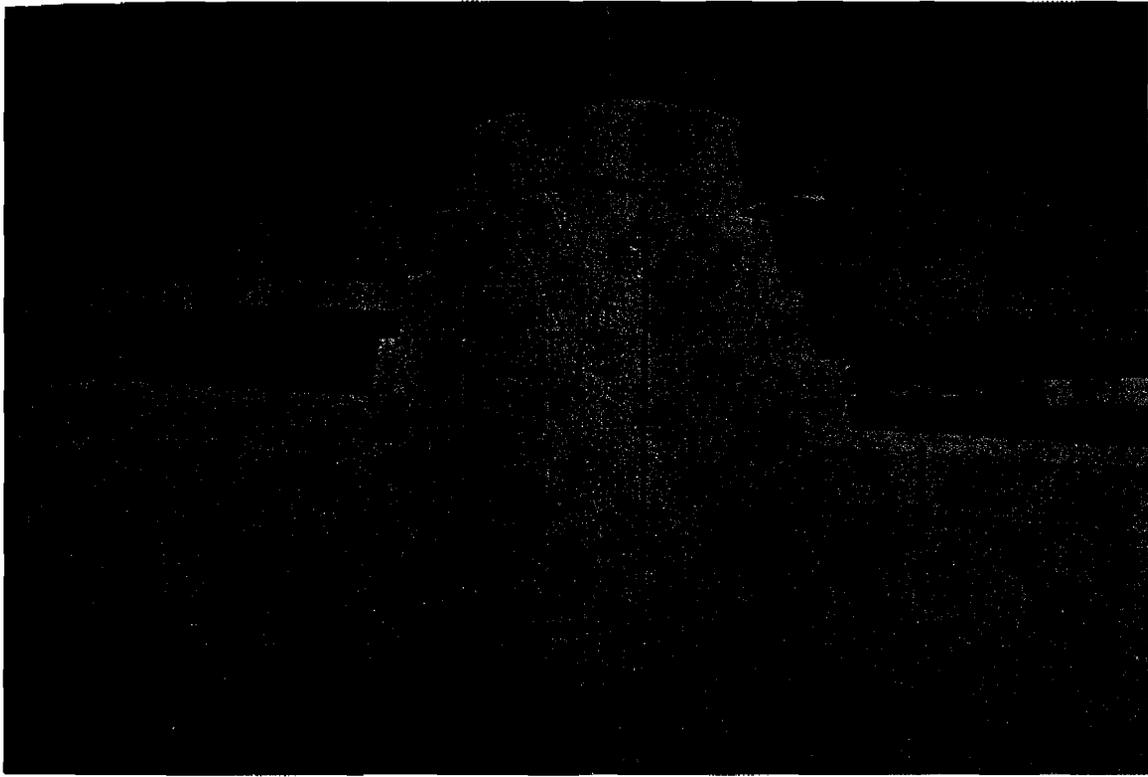


Figure 29: Wilmington Jazz-age Deco Bridge. Photo by Author.

Rating Commercial, Office, Apartment, and Other Public Buildings

The criteria for commercial office buildings, public buildings or large apartment buildings placed more emphasis on the Jazz-age style of Art Deco. The criteria included the following: an ornate entranceway with symmetrical linear details, relief carvings, Art Deco font lettering, rectilinear motif on front façade showing vertical emphasis, and whether the exterior was a light colored brick, concrete, or stucco with contrasting trim colors (Figure 30).



Figure 30: Commercial Office Building. Photo by Author.

Rating Warehouses, Factories, Service Stations, and Diners

Warehouses, factories, service stations, and diners tended to appear later in the diffusion period, and thus most of these buildings exemplified more of the Streamline Moderne features. The criteria list for rating these structures were: the presence of glass block in the exterior, a general curvilinear shape, a stucco or concrete exterior usually in a light color and/or with bright metal trim, emphasis on the horizontal axis, evidence of "Speed Stripes", and finally steel windows (Figure 31).



Figure 31: A Former Gas Station. Photo by Author.

Private Homes

The final structure type was the residential home. The criteria for rating considered: the existence of corner windows and/or metal frames, glass block, flat roof lines, stucco or concrete exteriors in light colors, extended overhangs over doorways or roof lines and/or porticos that extended beyond the dimensions of the house (Figure 32).

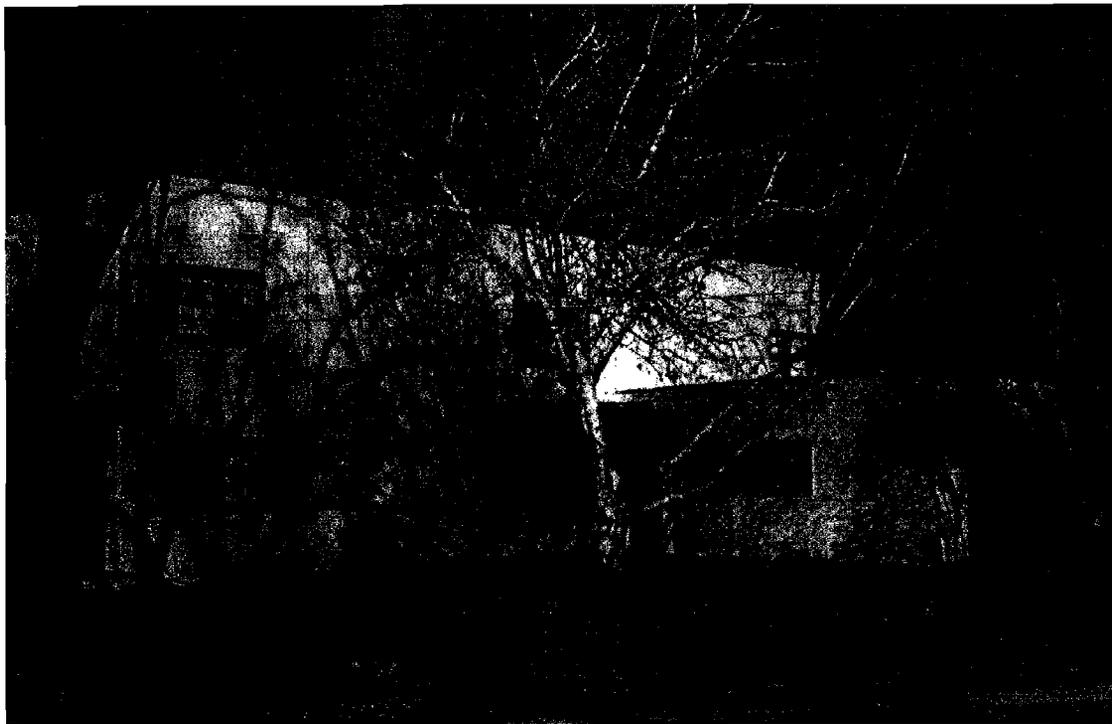


Figure 32: Private Home. Newark, Delaware. Photo by Author.

The Field Survey

Information gathered was obtained between February and May 1999 through various procedures that ranged from observer interpretation to interviews with the owner, the manager, or anyone knowledgeable about a site. When no one was available on the site, as much general information as possible was gathered, and a follow up query directed to a local government representative. Once the data was gathered, it was entered into a computer database program that made it possible to sort and group criteria, thereby testing hypotheses concerning the cultural diffusion of Art Deco in Delaware.