

## Deco Bookshelf

### Review By Jim Sweeney

I was visiting the National Building Museum's retrospective on architect Cesar Pelli when my eye was drawn to a photo of a theater. It had the unmistakable curves, towers and pastel colors of an Art Deco theater. I wondered why it was in this exhibit--had it inspired Pelli's work?

It turns out it had been designed by Pelli: the 1996 Celebration Town Cinema in Celebration, Fla. Many architects look back to the Deco era in designing theaters, a fact made clear in "Cinema Builders" by Edwin Heathcote (John Wiley & Sons Inc., hardcover, \$95).

This book is part of a series on current design of various types of buildings (such as airports, hospitals and libraries). Heathcote is an English architect, and his book was originally published by Wiley's English subsidiary, so many of his examples are in Europe (others are in Asia, Australia or the United States).

Before the examples, Heathcote devotes more than 40 pages to a well-illustrated history of theater design. Again, the European origins of this book provide many Deco theaters that American readers may not have seen, such as numerous examples from England's Odeon chain.

Heathcote refers to the Sony Pictures complex in Culver City, Calif., by the American firm Gensler as "permeated with a kind of Deco nostalgia for what is invariably perceived as Hollywood's golden age in the 1930s." That statement could apply to many of the theaters in Heathcote's book. The Culver City complex features miles of neon, as do many of the movie houses in this book, plus Deco geometric design motifs. Heathcote sees this style as "an odd insecurity about the modern in favor of the past." Or maybe it's just an acknowledgement by architects that post-World War II theaters were, by and large, not very appealing.

Neon is not the only design element borrowed liberally from the Deco era. The British firm Burrell Foley Fischer put the name of the 1997 Lux Cinema in East London in elegant sans serif letters over the door. Many of the theaters have their names conspicuously displayed on towers or large neon

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signs.

CCBG Architects' Harkins multiplex in Superstition Springs, Ariz., is basically a warehouse. But the roof is topped by metal poles with metal rings over them. Similar metal masts (with tubes of neon ringing them) top a WPH Architecture theater in Washington State. They're a nod back to the towers of Deco theaters.

The interiors also feature Deco elements. Tim Foster's Tricycle Theater in London (1980) has a streamlined lobby that mixes Deco and later styles, with glass block. Gensler's Sony Theatres complex on Broadway has a three-story lobby mural with Deco-style scenes of Hollywood and movie episodes.

Singapore architect Jeff Malone built Asia's first multiplex. He has an eclectic style that includes Deco details. Heathcote sums up Malone's work as having a "UFO aesthetic."

American architect Jon Jerde designed Europe's largest multiplex, the 30-screen Star City in Birmingham, England (2000). Neon is a major design element, and the theater's name is prominently featured on a large tower. The exterior, neon-decked towers borrow heavily from Deco. Inside is a lobby mural with Deco metropolitan scenes.

A more sedate example is Panter Hudspith's Curzon Theater in London (1998). Tucked into a small 1959 building along a busy Soho street, the Curzon resembles a neighborhood theater with its understated vertical tower (which includes its name).

In the Warner Bros Central Cinema in Oberhausen, Germany (1996), RTKL drew on "roadside cinema architecture of the 1950s," Heathcote says. The glass tower on the roof is topped by a metal mast that features a WB logo.

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