

T R A N S - L U X

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The Paris Exposition at 75

The year 2000 marks the 75th anniversary of the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, from which the Art Deco movement draws its name. In this issue of *Trans-Lux*, we take a look back at the Exposition itself and some of the controversies surrounding the transition from hand-crafted to machine-made furniture and accessories, explore the decision of the United States not to participate in the Exposition and the subsequent development of Art Deco in the United States, and discuss the efforts of Chase Brass and Copper to make modern lighting designs available to middle class Americans. Finally, the Exposition was not the only hot ticket in Paris in 1925. Bob Merchant portrays the life of the incomparable Joséphine Baker, an American who took Paris by storm in late 1925 and became the most popular performer in Europe.

A Message from the Editor

In an effort to improve the quality of *Trans-Lux* and reduce mailing costs, ADSW engaged the Internet publisher Eletter® to prepare and mail the April *Trans-Lux*. Eletter produces newsletters on whiter, heavier weight paper than we have been accustomed to and offers lower postage because of its ability to presort mail by 9-digit zip code. Although the mailing was submitted to eLetter on March 25th with a promised turnaround of 1-4 days, Eletter was unable to complete the mailing in a timely manner.

When fewer than 100 of the 570 copies of *Trans-Lux* had been mailed by April 10, 2000, the decision was made to cancel the April "Show and Tell" program. We apologize for any inconvenience caused by the cancellation of the April program and hope that you will bear with us as we continue efforts to institute improvements in *Trans-Lux*. The Show and Tell program will be rescheduled for a later date.

Eletter attributed the problems to an upgrade in its system and provided a full credit for the cost of the mailing. ADSW's second mailing using Eletter—nearly 6,000 postcards for the Expo, proceeded smoothly.

July Programs to Focus on Kennedy-Warren Apartments and Tamara de Lempicka

Two programs are tentatively scheduled for July. First, final details are being worked out for a behind the scenes tour of Washington's famous Kennedy-Warren apartments. Longtime residents may remember the Kennedy-Warren's ballroom as the former home of Doc Scantlin and his Imperial Palms Orchestra. Although the Kennedy-Warren is part of the annual Art Deco bus tour, this tour will provide access to parts of the building generally off limits to the public.

The second program, scheduled for July 27, will feature a slide presentation on Art Deco painter Tamara de Lempicka by critically-acclaimed author Laura Claridge. Polish-born Lempicka was an active participant in the debaucheries of Paris in the 1920s before moving to the United States in 1939. Claridge's book *Tamara de Lempicka: A Life of Deco and Decadence* was described in the *New York Times Book Review* as "...a well-deserved and sympathetic account of Lempicka's life." Similarly, *Publisher's Weekly* states that "Even a reader with doubts about de Lempicka's artistic output will be charmed by the eccentricities described in this feminist-flavored, engrossing account of the bawdy and amusing painter..." A book signing will follow the presentation.

Check next month's *Streamlines* or the website (www.adsw.org) for times and places for these exciting

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE DECO PHILES

Clive Foss Article Featured in *Modernism*

“Paris in Texas: The Centennial Buildings in Dallas’ Fair Park,” an article by ADSW member Clive Foss, is featured in the Spring 2000 issue of *Modernism*. Many of the buildings from the 1936 exhibition celebrating the Texas Centennial have been restored and Foss has captured them beautifully in a series of color photographs. Foss, a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, is also a member of the Art Deco Society of Boston.

The same issue includes an article on Kentuck Knob, a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home in Chalk Hill, Pennsylvania, not far from another of Wright’s designs, Falling Water. Both the Wright homes and Dallas’ Fair Park are great Deco Destinations.

Coming Soon: Free ADSW Classifieds

ADSW will soon add free classified advertisements to its web site (www.adsw.org) enabling both members and nonmembers to post ads in a variety of categories. Check the web site for details on how to take advantage of this exciting new service.

Exhibit Opens at Metropolitan

A new exhibit, “American Modern: 1925-1940—Design for a New Age,” opened May 16 at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. The exhibit runs through January 9, 2001.

Sully Meet Expected to Draw 400 Antique Autos

Over 400 entrants are expected at the 27th annual Sully Plantation Antique Car Show, Sunday, June 18th, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The show, cosponsored by the Fairfax County Park Authority and the George Washington Chapter of the Model A Ford Club of America, is one of the largest antique car shows in the Washington area. The setting, an 18th century plantation rather than a parking lot, adds to the enjoyment of this popular show, located just a few miles south of Dulles Airport on Route 28. Admission prices—\$7 adults, \$6 seniors, \$4 children—include a tour of the former home of Richard Bland Lee.

Sherrill’s Bakery Closes

The building housing Washington’s most famous Art Deco eatery, Sherrill’s Bakery, has been sold to the Starbucks’

coffee chain. Sherrill’s, which has been at the same location since 1924, is located at 233 Pennsylvania Ave, SE. It is not clear when the restaurant will be closed and what changes Starbucks plans for the Art Deco interior.

Bethesda Theatre Café to Close

The Bethesda Theatre Café will close at the end of the year to allow for construction of a massive apartment building on top of the National Register-listed Art Deco theatre. The construction was approved by the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission last December over the objections of ADSW and nationally-recognized preservationists. (See Richard Striner’s op ed article on page 4, reprinted from the *Montgomery Journal*.)

According to the *Gazette Community News*, Developer E.M. Smith told them that although the sector plan **recommends** that the space continue to be used as a theater or performance stage, he has not decided what type of tenant is best. Smith was evasive when questioned about the future use of the theatre, but ruled out use as a playhouse because there is not enough space behind the stage to accommodate live performances.

Grimm Joins Board

Joan Grimm was elected to the Board of Directors at the May Board meeting. She will serve as Deputy Publicity/Public Relations Chair.

Help Update Metro Deco

Metro Deco, ADSW’s pocket guide to metro-accessible Art Deco architecture in the Washington area, will be updated this fall. If you would like to help, please contact Jim Linz. A preliminary planning meeting is scheduled for July.

Preservation Committee Voices Concerns About Change in Plans for Canada Dry Building

In the April Trans-Lux, Richard Striner wrote about the Canada Dry bottling plant in Silver Spring and plans by AT & T to convert the building to a switching station. Although original indications were that the building would be preserved, recent developments raise concerns about the future of the building.

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ARCHITECTURE

Spotlight on Washington Deco: The Hecht Company Warehouse

By Richard Striner

(In 1984 Hans Wirz and I published, via Smithsonian Press, *Washington Deco: Art Deco Design in the Nation's Capital*. "Since then, ADSW has done great things to save Deco buildings in Washington. And thanks to the energetic work of hundreds of ADSW volunteers, we have learned a lot more about the Deco buildings that we either missed the first time around or else addressed with only limited background material. In *Spotlight on Washington Deco*, "a new Trans-Lux column, I will share some of this new information).

In 1984, all that we knew about the Hecht Company Warehouse at 1401 New York Avenue, N.E., was that it was built in 1937, that it was designed by Abbott, Merkt & Company, that it won a prize in a competition sponsored by the Pittsburgh Glass Institute, that it was lauded both in the local press and in the national architecture journals for its innovative use of glass block, and that it was obviously one of the most magnificent specimens of streamlined Art Deco design in greater Washington.

In 1990, ADSW and the Committee of 100 on the Federal City applied for local landmark status for the building. Cracks and deterioration in the building's corner tower mandated repairs, and we feared that the building might be ruined if the owners should flinch from a costly first-class restoration.

The landmark nomination was approved. Moreover -- pleasant surprise! -- Hechts discovered that a fine restoration would veritably make them money because of the federal tax credits that they could obtain for doing it. So the building was repaired to the highest preservation standards, with original materials replicated throughout. PPG actually manufactured a limited run of glass blocks in a discontinued size for this one particular job.

The background materials used in the historic landmark application made heavy use of the recent scholarship of Prof. Richard Longstreth -- a powerful friend and ally of ADSW in many preservation battles -- especially his studies on the history of department store development.

Within the retail industry in 1937, the Hecht Warehouse represented a new trend in department store theory and



Rendering of the Hecht Co. Warehouse by J Floyd Yewell for Abbott Merkt, & Co. *Pencil Points*, December 1936

practice: the use of what was called a "remote delivery station." No longer did precious floor space at the main store have to be used for storage instead of sales. Instead, most storage and shipping were consolidated at a single warehouse built at the periphery of the city (where land costs were lower) and convenient to

both road and rail transportation.

The Hechts Warehouse was designed as a key element in the firm's fortieth-anniversary program to expand and upgrade its services. Hechts announced simultaneous efforts to install air conditioning at its main store downtown, to create a six-month budget plan for installment sales (a precursor to the charge account), and to construct the warehouse to improve and speed up delivery.

The cornerstone was laid on November 23, 1936 and speakers at the ceremony included the firm's President, Alexander Hecht, D.C. Commissioner Melvin Hazen, and U.S. Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland, who, according to the *Washington Star*, "praised the company officials for the 'do and dare' philosophy that led them to build the huge new warehouse which, he said, will stand as a monument to the 'business genius which has made America the country it is.'" Why all the fuss about a warehouse? Consider: this was pointed praise in the Great Depression, when many businesses played it safe and kept their operations stabilized at a minimal but low-risk level that left the economy stagnant.

We now know that the warehouse was designed by Gilbert V. Steele, P.E., of the New York-based engineering and
(Continued on page 15)

Even as Montgomery County's Historic Preservation Commission Votes to Sacrifice the Bethesda Theatre to Development...

Editor's Note: In December 1999, the Montgomery County, Maryland, Historic Preservation Commission approved the construction of a massive apartment building on top of the Art Deco Bethesda theatre, a National Register listed property. The following article by former ADSW President Richard Striner first appeared in the Montgomery Journal, April 19, 2000. It is reprinted with the permission of the publisher.

Viewpoint: Is Preservation Reality or Farce in Montgomery County?

On the eve of a remarkable triumph for historic preservation in Silver Spring, Montgomery County's historic preservation program is, ironically, losing its soul.

That is the paradoxical contrast presented by the imminent fates of the Silver and Bethesda theatres. Both of these art deco cinemas were built in 1938. Both were designed by nationally renowned theater architect John Ebersohn. Both were the object of preservation campaigns that I started and have led. They are *now* about to be treated in manners so different, it suggests something close to schizophrenia.

The Silver is about to be lavishly restored by Montgomery County, with state assistance, to serve as the dazzling new home of the American Film Institute. But the Bethesda Theatre is about to be ruined—ruined with the ignorant blessing of county Historic Preservation commissioners and staff who are absolutely the worst of any I have seen in more than 15 years of volunteer activism in Montgomery County.

I am capable of dishing out praise as well as blame.

Montgomery County's historic preservation leaders were once outstanding, and that—together with the policies of current elected leaders—is why the Silver Theatre is about to be treated so well.

Without the heroic leadership of former Historic Preservation Commission chair people such as Eileen McGuckian and Philip Cantelon, the Silver and Bethesda theatres both would have been destroyed in the 1980s. Without the courageous leadership of past staffers such as Marti Reinhardt decision-makers would never have had the opportunity to take a strong stand in such cases.

And without the subsequent vision of elected leaders such as County Executive Douglas M. Duncan and the members of successive county councils, the Silver Theatre would never have gotten the blue-ribbon treatment that will turn it into a national preservation showplace next year.

These Montgomery County leaders had courage and principles. In contrast, the people who have sealed the fate of the Bethesda Theatre showed little more than cowardice.

Here is how the sell-out happened: A developer named Gene Smith bought the Bethesda Theatre and consolidated it into a development parcel encompassing the better part of an entire square block. He then cut a deal with the neighborhood behind the project through an offer to pull the development out of their faces by piling most of it right on top of the historic theater.

The neighbors, out of pure self-interest, were glad to go along.

The theater was nominally protected on the county's Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The plan gives the county's Historic Preservation Commission discretion to approve major changes to historic buildings.

However, the HPC can turn a project down if it would ruin an irreplaceable resource. That's the kind of power it possesses, and that's the kind of power it squandered when the Bethesda Theatre case came before it.

Smith had the audacity to ask for the HPC's permission to envelop almost 80 percent of the Bethesda Theatre in new development. The apartment tower Smith is trying to cram on top of the theater leaves only the ornamental entrance and a bit of side wall visible. Most of the 1938 theater is totally swallowed up in the bowels of Gene Smith's building.

Testifying against the shocking plan, Society of Architectural Historians President Richard Longstreth said that it makes the Bethesda Theatre look like a "codpiece" for the apartment building behind and on top of it.

Preservationists from all over the county—and beyond—opposed the codpiece plan before the HPC. Leading the opposition was the Art Deco Society of Washington, the nonprofit group that launched the campaigns to save the Silver and Bethesda theatres in 1984. I led the campaigns in my 10 years as the Art Deco Society's president.

Smith and his bought-off neighborhood cheerleaders argued that the Art Deco Society is "unwilling to compromise." But the society endorsed a much-publicized plan 10 years ago to save the Greyhound Bus Terminal in downtown Washington—a compromise worked out in circumstances similar to those of the Bethesda Theatre case.

But there is a crucial difference as well. While the

Greyhound compromise permits an office tower to exist behind the historic building and overlapping the back of it, the society had to fight for more than five years in order to force developers to shove back the new construction far enough to give the low-rise terminal sufficient “breathing room” to be itself—to maintain its visual identity. As a result of this hard-won victory, most of the terminal is visible and free-standing to this day. Anyone can see this at 1100 New York Ave. in Northwest Washington.

Conversely, most of the Bethesda Theatre will disappear from view forever when the Smith plan begins construction later this year. The difference between these compromises is simple: the Greyhound compromise is decent; the Bethesda Theatre scheme is obscene. A 10-year-old child could tell the difference.

But the staff of the Montgomery County Preservation Commission could not. They actually hectored us to our faces with the “Greyhound precedent” as they rushed to endorse to endorse the Smith scheme. The staff report threw the HPC into the kind of disarray that would be funny if it weren’t so appalling.

To their credit, one or two commissioners found the Smith project impossible to stomach. But they couldn’t get an HPC majority to join them in voting it down.

For hours the HPC dithered as one failed motion after another was offered in increasingly feeble attempts to get the whole thing over with. The members seemed almost clueless on matters of procedure as a 4-4 deadlock developed.

They then proceeded to collide and recoil from each other like a scene reminiscent of the Keystone Kops. Dreary minutes were wasted on fretting over how to “save” particular miniscule bits and pieces of the building that was headed toward entombment. At last the exhausted commission caved in. So the Smith plan is going ahead.

What are we to make of this debacle? The preservation movement in Montgomery County is in danger right now of losing any semblance of moral coherence. The staff and commissioners are shadows of the people who launched the county’s preservation program 20 years ago.

It is time for the county to decide: When a building is given protection under the law, can citizens relax about its ultimate fate in Montgomery County? Or is it time to get busy and rebuild the county’s preservation movement from bottom to top?

Take a careful look at what happens to the Silver and Bethesda theatres next year as the months of construction play out. Only you can decide whether preservation is reality or farce in Montgomery County.

...Other Local Communities Work to Restore Their Art Deco Treasures



The restored marquee of the Greenbelt Theatre

While Bethesda community leaders made little or no effort to preserve the Bethesda theatre, essentially giving the Historic Preservation Commission the cover it needed to strip the community of one of its few remaining buildings of historic significance, other Maryland communities and neighboring Washington, DC and Virginia see their historic theatres as a way to revitalize their communities. In a recent segment of Bob Vila’s “Restore America” pro-

gram (Sundays at 10 pm on HGTV) focusing on Maryland, the restoration of an Art Deco theatre in Cumberland was one of the featured stories. The theatre, which had been “modernized” and converted into a furniture store in the 1950s, was restored and reopened as a theatre, bringing new life to the community. Similarly, the “Restore America” segment on Washington, DC focused on efforts by Columbia Heights residents to restore the 1924 Tivoli theatre as the cornerstone of their revitalization efforts. And, Wes Waters reports that, on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, Easton’s Art Deco theatre has recently been restored.

Perhaps the most sensitive to its past, however, is Greenbelt, Maryland. In the last issue we reported that the *Madonna and Child* statue had been restored. Now, word comes that the marquee for the Greenbelt theatre has been restored. Greenbelt continues to restore rather than replace its Art Deco commercial buildings.



Madonna and Child

Chase Lights the Way

Although the Chase Brass and Copper Company is best remembered today for its “Chase Specialties” line of cocktail and beverage items, smoking accessories, and serving pieces, Chase also produced complete lines of lamps and lighting fixtures, maintaining a separate New York showroom.



Left: The “Maryland” (No. F137) was described as blending well with all types of decoration from 1800 to the present day. It is finished in Federal brass.

Right: The “Victor Hugo” (No. G401) is part of the Georgian-design group. It was available in Regent Red, Adam Green, or Black with trimmings in Georgian Brass.



From the inception of its Specialties line in 1931, Chase had manufactured a number of novelty flashlights and small lamps. According to President F.S. Chase, the popularity of these novelty items led to the development of a line of more expensive lamps to harmonize with different periods of decoration. In Mr. Chase’s words, “Our judgment was that people would welcome a line of lamps which would be moderate in price, designed to harmonize with different periods of decoration, and which would use brass, copper, and chromium plated brass in a new way.



Chase hired famed industrial designer Lurelle Guild to design complete lines of lamps and lighting fixtures in five period collections: Early American, Georgian, Federal, Empire, and Classic Modern. A sixth line, known as American Adaptations, contained lamps and lighting fixtures by other designers, such as Ruth Gerth and Walter Von Nessen.

The “Victory” (No. F139), another of the Federal style lamps, features a globe banded with a row of 13 stars and surmounted by the American eagle. It is finished in Federal brass with a black-topped base.

Although the Early American designs are of little interest to Art Deco collectors, there are lamps in each of the other period lines that blend well with Art Deco interiors.

Chase was generally very good about marking its gift ware items, but lamps are another story. Few Chase lamps, other than those that were offered through the Specialties catalog, were marked. Those that were marked often had only a paper label that is long gone. As a result, identifying Chase lamps without a catalog is difficult. Identification should be simplified once the long anticipated book on Chase lamps and lighting fixtures is released.

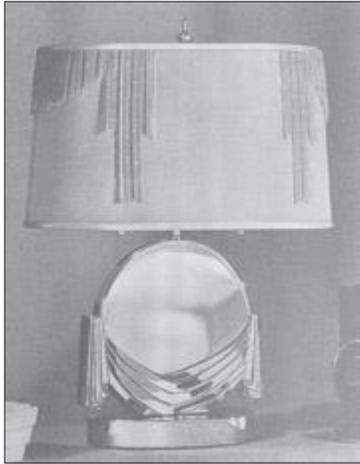
“It was our object in creating this line of lamps to give you not necessarily the largest, but the most complete, carefully styled, freshly inspired line on the market in a price range that would be no obstacle to possession.”

Lurelle Guild, 1934



The “Adams” (No. F552) was a Federal style floor lamp finished in polished chromium with a black base. It was also available in Federal brass with a brass base. Take one look at the base design and you know instantly that this “Federal” lamp will fit in nicely in any Moderne home.





The "Arcadia" (No. M50), part of the Classic Modern series, has a polished chromium base with shade that mirrors the drapery design on the base.

The "D'Orsay" (No. E400), one of Chase's Empire-design lamps, has a base bordered in stars and finely modeled arrows leaning against a black sphere. Finished in Empire brass.



In designing the modern lamps, so refreshingly new in spirit, we have utilized the popular sheen of chromium in combination with black and colors, and sparkling crystal in forms that are fitting to the ultra-modern penthouse but that are conservative enough to be a real note of beauty in a setting that is classic modern.

Lurelle Guild, 1934

The "Lady Godey" (No. E207), part of the Empire collection, is "perfectly suited to Empire or Victorian decoration. The hand is made of the finest procelain, with the cuff, lamp-base, and column in Empire brass. The shade is of Wedgwood blue Claire-de-Lune, trimmed with white braid and chromium balls.



Flea Market Finds

I found this Chase floor lamp at a flea market in Brimfield, Massachusetts in May. It was the first Chase floor lamp I had seen in 25 years of collecting. The lamp is not marked, but I knew instantly that it was Chase from the 1934 lamp catalog. The full length picture is from the catalog, the close up of the base is my new lamp. As rare as Chase lamps are, I somehow managed to find a second floor lamp at a small antique mall in Plantsville, Connecticut. Sadly, I found no Chase in Waterbury and no Manning Bowman in Meriden.



The "Doric" (M506), from the Classic Modern collection, has a fluted column of polished chromium supporting a royal blue Biedermier glass ball. Its base is decorated with a modernized version of swag design.

The Delphic (No. M 353), is from the Classic Modern collection and comes finished in polished chromium with white enamel trim.



Send a picture and brief description of your latest "find" to Editor, Trans-Lux, PO Box 11090, Washington, DC 20008.

VIVA LA DIFFERENCE: Interpretations of Moderne at the Paris Exposition

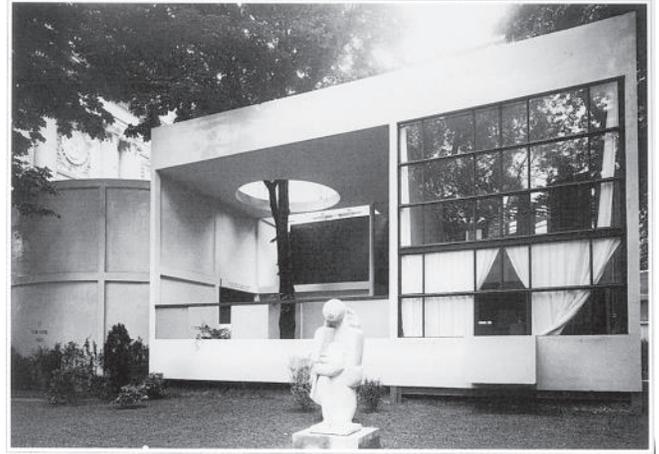
By Amy Donnebeck Hall

*Editors Note: Reprinted with the permission of the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles. The article, the second in a series of articles commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the 1925 Paris Exposition., appeared in **The Exposition**, the Newsletter of the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles, Volume 11, No. 2. Ms. Hall is a Board Member and Assistant Editor of **The Exposition**.*

One of the things I like most about Art Deco is its wide-ranging influences and end results. Art Deco is quite difficult to define and when attempted, will, undoubtedly, provoke some sort of argument. Art Deco is different things to different people. I am guilty of possessing an occasionally narrow definition of it myself. At the library I looked through “Encyclopedie des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes” which consists of twelve volumes (in French) cataloging the Exposition. While thumbing through these volumes and looking at the fabulous photos, I found myself at various times thinking, “that’s not Art Deco”. Wrong. I should say, “that’s not Art Deco to me”. Art Deco as a style brings together disparate people, cultures and ideas. That fact was just as true seventy-five years ago as it is today and can be seen through the different interpretations and manifestations at the Exposition.

There were twenty-two international pavilions all with similar goals of creating fresh and modern designs as well as proclaiming their nationalism. Throughout the Exhibition, there was far more involved with the various pavilions besides design for design sake. To some, there were political and sociological messages to get across to the public, to others it was simply a matter of artists’ egos. To France, for example, the Exposition was a celebration of triumph. Paris was the crossroads of international society, as well as an important market for trade. They wanted to reassert their superiority in the design world.

The space occupied by the French took up at least two-thirds of the entire Exposition. All of the exhibits on the Esplanade des Invalides were French with the foreign pavilions located along the Seine. The location of a nation’s pavilion was a factor in its design. There were limitations as to views, narrow roads and the fact that it was forbidden to cut down a single tree. Besides the individual entries to the Exhibition, the layout of the Exhibition itself had to be designed. The idea was that the visitors had to be dazzled at each point of entry and from every perspective. Charles Plumet was chief architect for the Exhibition and Louis Bonnier was in charge of the land-



Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau Pavilion

scaping. The Societe des Artistes Decorateurs was also instrumental in the conception and promotion of the Exhibition.

There were two basic schools of thought in approach to the Exposition. The first, called “contemporary”, focused on traditional, luxury craftsmanship, and was represented by artisans such as Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Sue et Mare and Andre Groult. The second, called “modern”, focused on democratic, mass-produced, machine-age industrial design and was represented, in part, by Le Corbusier, Pierre Chareau, Eileen Gray and Robert Mallet-Stevens. The “moderns” were influenced by the Bauhaus and De Stijl designers (both absent from the Exposition). These two factions would passionately disagree. Le Corbusier, seemingly never without an opinion, said of Ruhlmann’s Townhouse of a Wealthy Collector, “The near hysterical rush of these last few years towards an almost orgiastic decoration is only the final spasm of an already foreseeable death”.

On the other hand, the contemporaries viewed themselves as renewing tradition and did not believe in “standardized furnishings” or “art with a social purpose”. Andre Vera said in the book titled *Modernites* (1925), in part, “The contemporary style will be characterized by elegance: that of the thoroughbred, produced by selection, glowing-coated and indubitably domesticated, mimesis now being ruled out”. Some viewed the French contemporaries’ emphasis on bourgeois luxury as a nationalistic statement to contradict German avant-garde design.

There was controversy over Le Corbusier’s “L’Esprit Nou-

(Continued from page 8)

veau pavilion in that his ideas and work product were very different from many of the other participants. His concrete and glass structure was stark and practical. It was designed as a single unit that could be stacked or multiplied, as required. L'Esprit Nouveau pavilion so horrified the Exposition's chief architect, Charles Plumet, he immediately ordered a fence be put up to disguise it. In the end, the Fine Arts Ministry intervened and ordered the removal of the fence. Le Corbusier believed that many of the other artists/architects were elitists and he envisioned a more democratic approach to design. He said, in part, "My conception was thus to show something conceived for the machine, thus conceived for mass-production". Le Corbusier believed that he would triumph in the end and wrote in 1925: "Right now one thing is sure. 1925 marks the decisive turning point in the quarrel between the old and the new. After 1925, the antique lovers will have virtually ended their lives, and productive industrial effort will be based on the "new". Progress is achieved through experimentation: the decision will be awarded on the field of battle of the "new".

While there wasn't a shortage of debate between the various artists throughout the Exposition, that is not to say that there wasn't some compromise and cooperation between some participants in the two ideologies. A notable example: The Ambassade Francaise. Besides the wealth of talent involved in the embassy, it also had the benefits of a prominent position on the Esplanade des Invalides, as well as being sponsored by the state. Modernist Robert Mallet-Stevens designed the entry hall, while contemporary artists such as Francis Jordain, Paul Follet and Jules Leleu also contributed designs. Pierre Chareau, generally thought of as a modernist, produced some designs that could be viewed as contemporary. In his design for the embassy library, Chareau used fine and rare woods such as palmwood, mahogany and rosewood combined with modernist design elements which made for a striking presentation. It is most appropriate that it was the Embassy project that brought so many artists of differing ideologies together.

Konstantin Melnikov designed the Russian Pavilion and, like Le Corbusier's Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau, it was the subject of much discussion and controversy. It was an avant-garde glass and painted red wood Constructivist structure. Within the building there was a "workman's club" designed by Alexander Rodchenko. The pavilion won an award by the French commission, but Melnikov was most thrilled by the recognition given it by Josef Hoffman, director of the Vienna School of Art and Architect of the Austrian pavilion, who stated that it was "the best pavilion in the entire exhibition". Apparently other participating architects (all "moderns", of course) such as August Perret, Le Corbusier and Robert Mallet-Stevens agreed with his assessment. Again, the pavilion was more than just a design statement. Russian architect, Konstan-

tin Melnikov, said about USSR's pavilion, "I think, furthermore, that this building must serve as an emblem of the forthcoming triumph and might of Communism, not only here but in the West".

Although the French dominated the Exposition, it should not be forgotten that other countries contributed in varying degrees as well. The Austrian pavilion (designed by Josef Hoffman of the Wiener Werkstatte) was a general public success, but a failure in the eyes of its countrymen and urban Parisians. Ironically, Parisian consumers had moved on to French designs that had been influenced by Hoffman's pre-War work and weren't as responsive to his new designs. The pavilions produced by Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden and Denmark and others were all interesting, but historically they have not been perceived as having the long-term international influence that the French artisans had.

What we all understand to be Art Deco today wasn't conceived or born at the Exposition. The design ideas had been developing throughout the world over many years. The Exposition simply assembled the elements of what would become a unique, international style and introduced and popularized it to a new audience. The controversies that erupted within the Exposition itself are really a microcosm representing the intense sociological and industrial changes taking place throughout the world. The bottom line is that each country adapted these new international design forces to suit its own needs, with remarkably differ-



Russian Pavilion

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America Reacts to the Paris Exposition

By Jim Linz

In 1923, President Hoover declined an invitation to participate in the 1925 Paris Exposition, stating that America *had* no modern art to display. While Hoover's assessment of the state of art in the United States may have been a bit overstated—just check out the stunning Art Deco covers and illustrations in *Vogue* magazines from the teens and early twenties or some Hollywood sets from the early 1920s—it fairly described the state of home decoration.

In her 1939 book *Modern Interiors: Today and Tomorrow*, Emily Genauer noted that America was still undergoing a post war building boom in 1925 but that

“the new houses were being rapidly filled with the same taupe-mohair, three-piece, overstuffed suites which had pocked the face of America for more than a decade. Grand Rapids manufacturers found that they could not turn out enough of that cheap, over-elaborate, poorly constructed and even more poorly-designed stuff known to the trade as ‘borax,’ or Bronx Renaissance to meet the demand for it. There were many persons not yet aspiring even to this mire of mohair. These were still in the golden-oak era.”

Genauer, the editor of the fine and decorative arts sections of the *New York World-Telegram*, had even harsher words for the tastes of the well-to-do:

“The more affluent minority were the slaves of the simon-pure period decorators. No tudor oak refectory table was used in a room whose simple, light walls would set off the better the dark, rich beauty of the aged wood. No, the walls had to be lined with ancient, worm-eaten paneling carted over from some manor-house in England. The draperies could be no fresh and colorful modern versions of a traditional English chintz, because dark, red velvet or heavy crewel work were more ‘correct.’ ”

Although the United States did not exhibit at the 1925 Exposition, it sent a contingent of young designers, many of whom had been educated abroad, to Paris to tour the exhibits. Although their reports were enthusiastic, American furniture manufacturers initially had little interest in the new modern movement. By 1927, however, major department stores put together exhibits of interiors similar to those that had created such a stir at the Paris Exposition. Public reaction to the department store exhibits was so strong that manufacturers could no longer ignore the modern style. Ms. Genauer reports that

“They determined, at last, to do something about this new style, and not a few of the more daring among them did put out some furniture they considered pretty fine modern. But

they knew nothing about new forms, and it was not surprising that the great portion of the American public would not accept the strange monstrosities put out by the manufacturers in their blindness. Then, when the new ‘modernistic’ furniture did not at first go over, they were inclined to dismiss the whole thing as a fad.”

Rejecting the efforts of the major furniture manufacturers, the designers who had been to Paris began to create their own designs and have them executed by small workshops. In addition, they imported European pieces. The designers, many of whom had previously been employed by Hollywood or Broadway as set designers, became known as industrial designers.

Although their designs initially emulated European designs, slowly an American style emerged. French Art Deco pieces tend to be massive with their bulkiness exaggerated by the use of exotic veneers. The American designed pieces became smaller and simpler, often using undecorated walnut or lacquer. In addition, the early skyscraper set-backs popularized by Paul Frankl gave way to designs so straight and geometrical that they took on “packing-case contours.”

Modernism in America remained, however, primarily for the well-to-do. Although Manning-Bowman made some stunning Art Deco coffee services and cocktail sets in the late 1920s, these sets were not intended for middle America. Some of the sets sold for \$95. Similarly, Chase Brass and Copper began marketing Art Deco giftware in 1931, but the early designs were too expensive for a nation just beginning to emerge from the Great Depression.

In some respects, Hoover was wrong and America was at the forefront of the development of the Art Deco movement. That development, however, largely took place in the fantasy world of Hollywood. In 1921, Joseph Urban became the first American art director to use modern décor, using modern furnishings in the Marion Davies film *Enchantment*. That same year, Natacha Rambova designed modern sets for *Camille*. Urban and Rambova again used modern sets the following year in *The Young Diana* and *Salome*, respectively.

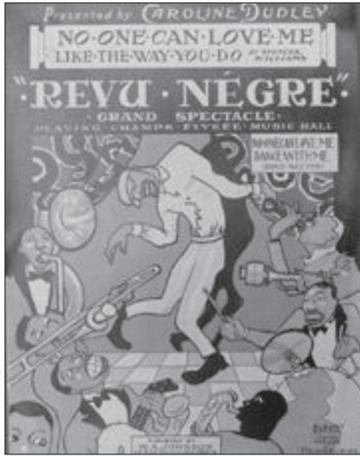
The development of art deco through Hollywood set design is not surprising in that many of the men and women who would become America's foremost industrial designers during the late 1920s and 1930s began their careers in set design. These include Norman Bel Geddes, Russel Wright, Henry Dreyfuss, and Lurelle Guild. Guild even enjoyed a brief career as a Hollywood actor.

(Continued on page 12)

An American in Paris: La Belle Joséphine

By Bob Merchant

Although the United States did not participate in the Exposition Des Arts Décoratifs et Industriel Modernes, it provided the star attraction at the second major exhibition to open in Paris in 1925, *La Revue Nègre*. Just as the Exposition set the pace and defined an entire era for the decorative arts in all areas of applied arts and pure decoration, the arrival of a nineteen-year-old American named Joséphine Baker set Paris on its ears. She quickly established herself as the most talked about and exciting celebrity of the next decade and beyond on the European continent. She personified the Syncopated Jazz age for Paris in the last half of the flamboyant twenties, just as she would define chic and glamour in the thirties.



Joséphine Baker was born in St. Louis on 3 June 1906, the illegitimate child of Carrie MacDonald and Eddie Carson. She had a dismal childhood of poverty in a city beset with tense race animosity and prejudice that would eventually erupt into one of the worst race riots in American history. Her dream was to escape and the goal of any aspiring young person set on a career in show business then, as now, was New York. It happened.

Joséphine was first noticed in "Shuffle Along," the 1921 show with a score by Sissle & Blake. She was hardly a star and was simply noted as "The Comedy Chorus Girl". In these days Joséphine had a talent for mugging and crossing her eyes much to the delight of audiences and much to the chagrin of her fellow chorines. But she was on her way.

Next came another Sissle & Blake effort called "Bamville". The show eventually opened on Broadway in September 1924 as "Chocolate Dandies" with Joséphine Baker by now billed as one of the stars along with the likes of Elisabeth Welch and Valiada Snow.

In the spring of 1925 "Chocolate Dandies" closed. Shortly thereafter, Spencer Williams and Caroline Reagan offered Joséphine a salary of \$250 a week to appear in Paris in "La Revue Nègre". At the time, Baker was working at the Plantation Club for \$125 a week. Despite the high wages of-

ferred for the Paris engagement, Baker found it difficult to give up the steady employment at the Plantation Club for an iffy show to be produced in a foreign country where she was not known and did not even speak the language. But finally Joséphine was persuaded and the company of "La Revue Nègre" sailed 21 September 1925 on the Berengaria.

The rest, as they say, is history. *La Revue Nègre* opened to rave reviews and Joséphine Baker was instantly a sensational new super star. She had three songs in the show but it was her dancing that scandalized and thrilled the audiences. Known as "Danse Sauvage" Joséphine Baker appeared in only a few pink ostrich feathers contorting and cavorting in a wild and uninhibited expression of African-American syncretized rhythms....a free and wild spirit the likes of which had never been seen before. The craze for Jazz and the age named after it had truly begun for sophisticated Parisians.

In the years that followed, Joséphine Baker went from strength to strength appearing in the "Folies Bergère" 1926-1927, the Casino de Paris, and even at her own fabulous *Chez Joséphine*.

She made a brief and unhappy return to the United States in 1936 to appear in *The Ziegfeld Follies*, becoming the first, and the last, Black woman to star in the Follies. She was turned away by the New York hotel at which she had reservations so as not

to offend the hotel's Southern clients. American audiences simply could not accept a black artist of such a glamorous and exotic persona. American critics panned her performance. Soon returning to France, she became the highest paid entertainer in Europe making appearances in Berlin and London as well as Paris.

Of course, there is a lot more drama in a career like this. A career that spanned over fifty years of adulation, loves, unhappiness, and comebacks. There's Joséphine fleeing Paris in 1940 with her maid in her Custom Super 8 Packard, Jo-

(Continued on page 12)



America Reacts (Continued from page 10)

The movies helped raise American's consciousness about the emerging and evolving style. Following the Paris Exposition, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's 1928 hit *Our Dancing Daughters*, starring Joan Crawford, became the first Hollywood picture to feature all art deco sets. The sets were designed by Cedric Gibbons.

The movie palace itself also helped introduce the public to the art deco style. Although the most lavish theatres were built in the major cities, even small towns got a taste of the new style as the popularity of the talkies created unprecedented demand for new theatres.

Fan magazines also helped flame the public's interest in Art Deco with elaborate layouts on the homes of the Hollywood stars, many of which were decorated to recreate the feel of the Hollywood set.

Although the movies piqued the public's interest in the new and evolving style, they basically took them on a short visit to a fantasy world. Art Deco home furnishings remained beyond the reach of most Americans. That was to change, however, with the opening of the Chicago "A Century of Progress" Exposition in 1933.

At the Chicago Fair, millions of Americans were introduced to mass produced art deco home furnishings as they visited the row of model homes. Emily Genauer noted that

"...the country-wide popularity of the new style dates from the time they came upon it accidentally in Chicago, admired its simplicity, its directness, its straight simple lines and chunky forms, and most of all, its patent livableness."

In many respects, it was the opening of the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress Exposition that signaled the transition of the Art Deco movement in the United States from hand-crafted furniture and decoration to machine-made furniture and decorative items.

The rest is history. Both Chase and Manning Bowman introduced new, lower-priced, lines of chromium-plated giftware in 1933, followed in 1934 by Kensington, and in 1935 by Revere. Low price lines of glass, pottery, and other giftware were also introduced. Mail order firms like Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward introduced new lines of inexpensive furniture in "waterfall" designs. The rails made the latest designs available even in rural America. America's love affair with modern design had begun in earnest.



Buy Your Preservation Ball Tickets NOW!

Free Dance Lessons

Joséphine Baker (Continued from page 11)

Joséphine entertaining the allied troops in North Africa, Joséphine being awarded the Croix de Lorraine by General De Gaulle for her support of the French resistance during the Second World War, and her triumphant return to Paris after the war as a patriot and heroine.



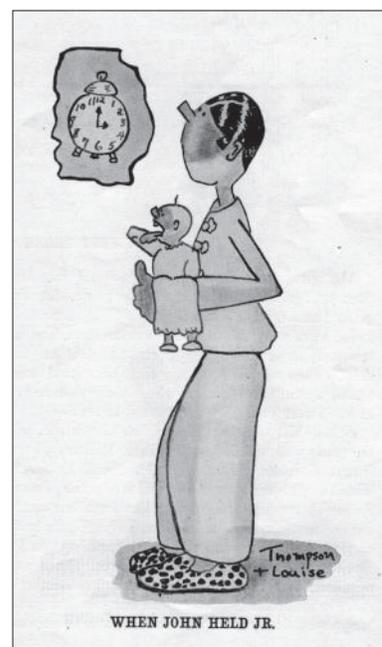
Joséphine Baker was a very prolific gramophone artist in Europe from 1926 onwards. Her style and range as a singer are rather remarkable. One listens to a "Jazz Baby" on a 1927 Odeon and a sultry ultra-sophisticated chanteuse on a 1937 Columbia. Can this be the same woman? Yes, of course it is and it is all rather delightful. Happily most of these old 78's are available right now and are beautifully remastered on a number of CDs.

Not satisfied with merely listening to Josephine Baker? Baker made two films—*ZouZou* in 1934 and *Princesse Tam Tam* in 1935. Both films are available on videotape from Kino.

Further reading:

JOSÉPHINE BAKER by Patrick O'Connor & Bryan Hammond (Jonathan Cape, London 1988)

NAKED AT THE FEAST by Lynn Hanley (Dodd, Mead & Co. NYC 1981)



VMI Sniper, Nov. 22, 1926

Deco Bookshelf

Review by Jim Sweeney

Art Deco architecture shouldn't be seen in isolation from what went on before, during and after the Deco era. With *Twentieth Century American Architecture: A Traveler's Guide to 220 Key Buildings* by Sydney LeBlanc (second edition, Whitney Library of Design/Watson-Guptill Publications, \$19.95 paperback) you can view Art Deco in context.

There are relatively few guidebooks on contemporary architecture, so this book helps in that regard. It's small enough to pack in a suitcase or backpack, and has regional maps. In selecting buildings, LeBlanc says he chose the most important buildings, while also striving for a balance of styles, building types, regions and architects.

A plus is that another criteria was to favor buildings that are accessible or can be seen from the street. LeBlanc provides hours and numbers for buildings you can visit. For the most part, this book lists individual structures, but it also includes groupings such as Miami Beach's Art Deco district.

LeBlanc's selections illustrate that the Art Deco style was heavily influenced by what went before it, and continued to exert an influence well into the 1950s. The 1918 Woodbury County Courthouse, Sioux City, Iowa, is a prairie style building, but the architectural rendering and detail photo show the elements of this style that would be picked up in Art Deco. LeBlanc comments that the courthouse shows "a hint of streamlining."

LeBlanc provides a capsule history of each building. Of the 1929 Bullocks Wilshire store in Los Angeles he notes that the architect's original plan was torn up after a visit to the 1925 Paris expo, to be replaced by a pyramidal design that was fairly radical for a retail structure.

He also notes that Raymond Hood's American Radiator building in Manhattan doesn't look as good as it once did. The dark exterior de-emphasized the windows, in contrast to light-colored buildings where windows appear as black rows from a distance. The windows stand out more now since the addition of white shades. Also, the roof's gold terra cotta has darkened, changing the balance of color.

Other Deco sites in the book include: the Chrysler Building, Daily News Building, RCA Building at Rockefeller Center, Empire State Building, McGraw-Hill Building, all in New York; L.A.'s city hall, central library, Graumann's Chinese Theater, and Sunset Towers, which LeBlanc calls "one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in Los Angeles"; the Nebraska State Capitol; Washington's Folger Shakespeare Library; Philadelphia's PSFS tower; and Cincinnati Union Terminal.

*(Editor's Note: A revised and expanded third edition, now titled **The Architectural Traveler: A Guide to 250 Key 20th Century American Buildings** is expected to be released shortly.)*

News and Notes (Continued from page 2)

In a recent letter to Peter Franchot, a Member of the Maryland House of Delegates, Preservation Chair Tony Wilner wrote that

"...we were greatly disappointed to learn recently that ATT may have changed its plans about preserving the building. We hope the news is untrue. It would be a tragedy to lose this structure, a superb example of industrial Art Deco design constructed in the era of streamline Moderne."

Wilner, along with members of the Silver Spring Historical Society, hope to meet with Franchot to enlist his help in ensuring that the Canada Dry Building is appropriately preserved.



Punch Bowl, University of Pennsylvania, October 1926

That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It

Preservation Ball Tickets Now on Sale

Purchase your tickets early for this year's Art Deco Society Of Washington Preservation Ball! The ADSW has the pleasure of celebrating the restoration of the Historic Terminal A at Ronald Reagan National Airport.

Dance the night away in the streamlined modernism of the Main Waiting Room restored to the condition at its opening in 1941. Ball revelers will have the unique opportunity to view the restored President's Room which is not normally available to the public. The Exhibit Hall will also be open for viewing and it is likely that a vintage plane or two will be displayed on the tarmac outside the Main Waiting Room.

The original National Airport Main Terminal received world-wide attention for its innovative and efficient design when it opened in 1941. The preservation of this important Art Deco landmark by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority will be officially recognized at the Ball by the ADSW. Lend a hand in applause for the preservation work superbly executed by the MWAA, and celebrate with the people responsible for this achievement.

The original National Airport Terminal is one of the locations on the annual spring Deco Bus Tour which highlights important examples of the Art Deco architecture in Washington. The terminal has one of the best examples of the polychrome process of concrete mosaic work in the panels and ceiling of the exterior portico to the left of the main entrance facing the building. The interior and exterior of the Terminal are adorned with many exquisite Art Deco ornamental details; metal carvings, mosaics, and etched glass. Once the restoration is complete, the Main Terminal will return to its original use, airline ticketing.

The room will soar with period music from Doc Scantlin and His Imperial Palms Orchestra. Purchase Ball tickets before August 15 and receive free admission to the Pre-Ball Fashion Show and the series of ballroom dance lessons. The Ball is Saturday, November 4, 2000 and tickets are: \$70.00 (ADSW members), \$80.00 (non-ADSW members), and \$775.00 for a reserved table for 10. This is genuinely a once in a life time opportunity. This is the first and last public event that will be held in the Main Waiting Room. You won't want to miss this very special event.

For tickets call: (202) 298-1100 or pay online at www.adsw.org.

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Preservation Ball, ADSW, PO Box 11090, Washington, DC
20008

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Hecht's (Continued from page 3)

architecture firm of Abbott, Merkt & Company. Founded in 1921 by engineers Hunsley Abbott and Otto Merkt, the firm was principally an engineering concern with specialties in industrial buildings, power plants, warehouses, wharves, and the like. Abbott, Merkt designed the J.L. Hudson Company Warehouse in Detroit, the United Parcel Service Delivery Station in Los Angeles, the L. Bamberger and Company Warehouse in Newark, N.J., and the bulk of the Port Authority Building in New York City.

Retained on a steady basis by the Hecht Company, Abbott, Merkt & Company also designed the 1947 Art Deco Hechts branch store in Silver Spring, which is now a part of the City Place mall complex. The Silver Spring Hechts building -- also a milestone in department store development as an early suburban extension of a downtown store -- opened precisely ten years after the completion of the 1937 Hecht Company Warehouse.

Of special historical interest is Longstreth's finding that the 1937 Hechts Warehouse was designed in advance for possible conversion later on into a store in its own right. This never took place, and the warehouse continues to serve its original function sixty three years later.

Calendar

ADSW Events

June 11—Art Deco Expo (Ernst Community Cultural Center, Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale, Virginia)

July —Tour of the Kennedy Warren Apartments (date to be determined; members will be notified)

July 27—Laura Claridge will provide a slide-illustrated on Tamara de Lempicka followed by a book signing.

Other Events

June 18—Antique Automobile Meet at Sully Plantation, Chantilly, Virginia

Exhibitions:

“Frank Lloyd Wright: Windows of the Darwin D. Martin House” through August 20, 2000 at the National Building Museum.

“The Corner Store” through August 6, 2000 at the National Building Museum.

“See the USA: Automobile Travel and the American Landscape,” through July 9th at the National Building Museum.

“Picturing the Century: Part II: 100 Years of Photography from the National Archives” through July 4, 2001 at the Archives, 8th & Constitution.

“American Modern: 1925-1940: Design for a New Age” opened May 16th at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York.

“Ben Shahn’s New York: The Photography of Modern Times” opens June 10th at the Philips Collection, 1600 21st St NW. (202) 387-2151

The Radio-Television Museum, 2608 Mitchellville Road, Bowie, Maryland, houses a permanent collection of radios, televisions, and related memorabilia. (301) 390-1020

Write to publications@adsw.org or phone (202) - 298-1100 to have your event listed

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Northern Virginia Community College
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