

The background of the book cover is a vibrant, stylized Art Deco illustration. It features a large, angular, blue and white geometric shape on the left, possibly representing a building or a piece of furniture. Below this, there are stylized orange and white flame-like or leaf-like shapes. To the right, a red wall is decorated with a blue and white geometric pattern. In the bottom right corner, there is a cluster of stylized flowers in orange, blue, and red, with green leaves. The overall style is bold and geometric, characteristic of the Art Deco movement.

# ART DECO INTERIORS

DECORATION AND DESIGN CLASSICS  
OF THE 1920s AND 1930s

PATRICIA BAYER

# ART DECO INTERIORS

DECORATION AND DESIGN CLASSICS  
OF THE 1920s AND 1930s

PATRICIA BAYER



THAMES AND HUDSON

*For Michael Goldman*

*FRONTISPIECE*

**Lobby of the Chrysler Building**, New York, 1927-30

(photo: Norman McGrath).

Any copy of this book issued by the publisher as a paperback is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including these words being imposed on a subsequent purchaser

© 1990 Thames and Hudson Ltd, London

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher

Printed and bound in Singapore by C. S. Graphics



## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION 7

#### CHAPTER 1 THE ART DECO INTERIOR 15 ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES

#### CHAPTER 2 SHOWCASE INTERIORS 27 THE GREAT EXHIBITIONS

#### CHAPTER 3 FRENCH INTERIORS 47 THE PARISIAN ENSEMBLIERS

#### CHAPTER 4 STREAMLINE MODERNE 97 THE ART DECO INTERIOR WORLDWIDE

#### CHAPTER 5 ART DECO IN PUBLIC PLACES 141 TRANSPORT, THEATRES AND CINEMAS, STORES, HOTELS, BARS AND OFFICES

#### CHAPTER 6 THE ART DECO INTERIOR REVIVED 195 RENEWAL AND RESTORATION IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 214

### GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS 215

### BIBLIOGRAPHY 216

### INDEX 219

# ART DECO INTERIORS



# ART DECO INTERIORS

DECORATION AND DESIGN CLASSICS  
OF THE 1920s AND 1930s

PATRICIA BAYER



THAMES AND HUDSON

*For Michael Goldman*

*FRONTISPIECE*

**Lobby of the Chrysler Building**, New York, 1927-30

(photo: Norman McGrath).

Any copy of this book issued by the publisher as a paperback is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including these words being imposed on a subsequent purchaser

© 1990 Thames and Hudson Ltd, London

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher

Printed and bound in Singapore by C. S. Graphics



## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION 7

#### CHAPTER 1 THE ART DECO INTERIOR 15 ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES

#### CHAPTER 2 SHOWCASE INTERIORS 27 THE GREAT EXHIBITIONS

#### CHAPTER 3 FRENCH INTERIORS 47 THE PARISIAN ENSEMBLERS

#### CHAPTER 4 STREAMLINE MODERNE 97 THE ART DECO INTERIOR WORLDWIDE

#### CHAPTER 5 ART DECO IN PUBLIC PLACES 141 TRANSPORT, THEATRES AND CINEMAS, STORES, HOTELS, BARS AND OFFICES

#### CHAPTER 6 THE ART DECO INTERIOR REVIVED 195 RENEWAL AND RESTORATION IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 214

### GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS 215

### BIBLIOGRAPHY 216

### INDEX 219



Dining Room by Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, from his pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exposition.



## INTRODUCTION

During the period between c.1910 and 1939, the multifaceted design style known as Art Deco took root, blossomed, flourished and faded, only to be revived again, as are most classics sooner or later, in the recent past. From its rich Parisian beginnings – pure, high-style Art Deco – to its jazzy, Streamline Moderne American offshoots, Art Deco has come to be viewed as the most exciting decorative style of the century, introducing or utilizing such diverse elements as the richly lacquered, Oriental-style screen; the sleek, tubular-steel chair; the ebony-veneered, ivory-dotted writing desk; the vivid, geometric-patterned carpet; the sunburst-decorated stained-glass window; the starkly angular ceiling or wall light fixture; the classically or coquettishly draped glass figurine; the stylized ceramic polar bear. It also ushered in the era of the ‘total’ interior.

The Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, the world’s fair held in Paris in 1925 and from which the style derives its name (although the term ‘Art Deco’ did not come into widespread use until the late 1960s), played a central and crucial role in dictating the appearance of the Art Deco interior. Not only did the Exposition feature the works of Ruhlmann, Süe et Mare, Chareau and others, but it also represented the apogee of pure French Art Deco – an opulent, luxuriant design style whose own origins extended as far back as the eighteenth century, appropriately enough to the great French *ébénistes* such as Jean-Henri Riesener and Charles Cressent; it also recognized the influence of African tribal art, Japanese lacquer-work, contemporary abstract painting and sculpture, and diverse other elements.

In truth, the Art Deco interior is many things to many people, and even in its country of origin it was a horse of variegated colours. There were the opulent, plush salons of antiquity-inspired Armand-Albert Rateau and Ballets Russes-influenced Paul Poiret, dripping with tassels, awash with puffy pillows and floor cushions, and punctuated by exotic, often glittering, patterns on walls, floors and screens; there were also starker Modernist settings, for example, by Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand and Eileen Gray, with their chromed-metal and leather chaises-longues, pure-white walls, sleek modern floors covered with carpets woven with complementary geometric motifs, and simple, squared-off end tables, surmounted perhaps by abstract or primitive sculptures. And there was a host of permutations in between, incorporating elements of the opulent Deco and the minimal Moderne, making new and exciting statements, borrowing from past sources and exotic cultures.

Art Deco went one step beyond its immediate predecessor, Art Nouveau, which was the first style to break with the repetition, redundancy and sheer weight and dullness of its late-nineteenth-century contemporaries. Art Deco was the first truly modern style of interior decoration in its use of new technologies and materials, in thrall to traditional craftsmen as well as talented

## INTRODUCTION

emergent industrial designers, making simpler, more practical furniture for smaller rooms. Its exponents broke barriers, embraced innovation, honoured the past, but most of all put together the elements of a room, a whole apartment or house, a cinema or theatre, a hotel or an ocean liner, in a thoughtful, dynamic, integrated way, employing a kind of *gesamtkunstwerk* design methodology which at its best resulted in a unified, handsome whole.

The classic elegance and good taste of high-style Art Deco can best be seen in the outstanding Parisian interiors of the 1920s (and, to a lesser degree, the late 1910s and early 1930s), which were often the collaborative effort of furniture and textile designers, painters and sculptors, and an array of other artists and craftsmen. It was during this fecund interwar period that the *ensemblier* came to prominence, with such notables as Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Eileen Gray, Jules Leleu, Maurice Dufrêne (for La Maîtrise), Paul Follot (for Pomone), and Süe et Mare's Compagnie des Arts Français being commissioned to create the total design of a room, in other words, its *ensemble* – from floor to ceiling, side table to settee, ashtray to chandelier.

The Art Deco interior in the United States was at times a reflection of its high-style Parisian counterpart – with gleaming lacquered surfaces, plump *fauteuil* chairs and stylized floral motifs – and at times a mirror-image of the functionalism of Le Corbusier or Marcel Breuer. But there developed a distinctly American Art Deco hybrid in the late 1920s and 1930s which was largely indebted, if not to indigenous, at least to recently transplanted sources – these ranging from the glitzy Hollywood set to the glittering Manhattan skyline, from the streamlined, aerodynamic forms of nascent industrial design to modern developments in plastics and other synthetic substances. Designers like Donald Deskey, Paul T. Frankl, Wolfgang Hoffmann, Winold Reiss, Gilbert Rohde, Eliel Saarinen, Eugene Schoen and Kem Weber – many of these recent *émigrés* from a strife-torn Europe – applied their talents to creating interiors for a wealthy, discerning clientele.

Then, too, there were the often massive public spaces these and other notables were commissioned to design and furnish: hotel and restaurant interiors, the lobbies of office buildings, the waiting rooms of airports and railroad terminals, the auditoriums of ever-increasing, ever more lavish movie houses, often known as, appropriately, 'picture palaces'. There were also the interiors that filtered down to the Middle American mass market, usually dining-, living- and bedroom suites containing watered-down elements of Art Deco and combined with mass-produced lamps, carpets, and other room fixtures and accessories, the occupants having been inspired, perhaps, by a recent excursion to the cinema, or a browse through one of the popular home-decoration magazines that were published, such as *House and Garden* and *Good Furniture*.

Eileen Gray put together this casual, multipurpose living room for E. 1027, Jean Badovici's house in the south of France, built in 1929. The rugs and chairs ('Bibendum' left, 'Transat' right) are Gray designs. A large marine chart decorates the walls.





The English Art Deco interior is often popularly seen as an everyday 1930s sitting room, something that would have been found in an Ideal Home exhibition – complete with cheerful, overstuffed settee and chairs, boxy wireless, geometric throw-rugs, gleaming electric fire and brightly patterned curtains outdone by an even more vividly hued tea set displayed in a glass-doored cabinet. But there were also domestic and public spaces in Britain which could hold their own with some of the most notable Art Deco interiors of Paris and New York. Many a British Odeon or other cinema, for instance, boasted splendid décors, ranging from the most subtle Streamline Moderne to the most lavishly ornamented baroque.

The authentic Art Deco interior was also created in countries far away from Europe and North America. Often such spaces were designed by Europeans (or designers educated abroad), or at least largely furnished with Continental pieces, and many of them, having been commissioned by necessarily ultra-wealthy clients, were prime examples of high-style Paris-inspired Art Deco.

In the 1970s and 1980s, numerous architects, designers, decorators and collectors began to devote their energies and apply their skills (or, in the case of the latter, empty their wallets) to the end of achieving an Art Deco-style interior. The elegance and classicism of this style appealed to a new generation, tired perhaps of the postwar-practical followed by Op Art-Psychedelic designs of the fifties and sixties, and desirous of a return to beauty, or at least a dramatic sea change from what they were used to, what they had grown up with. As designs seem to take a half century or so to be fully appreciated, assessed and consequently revived, the 1970s was the time for 1920s Art Deco to come into its own.

At the same time, many authentic Art Deco interiors – those which had not been senselessly demolished by unthinking building developers – were dusted off, shined up or otherwise restored to their original elegance. Sometimes period interiors were enhanced with contemporary touches, which were in part an homage to Art Deco but at the same time very much of the present in conception and execution. The extensive 1979-83 renovation of Unilever House in London, masterminded by Theo Crosby of Pentagram Design, is a superb example of a modern refurbishment of an Art Deco building. The Post-Modern creations of the Memphis Group and of such architects and designers as Michael Graves, Hans Hollein, Andrée Putman and Charles Jencks – though decidedly of the here and now – nonetheless pay tribute to the Art Deco past, and in some avant-garde interiors coexist quite comfortably with their ancestors in design from earlier in the century.



## INTRODUCTION

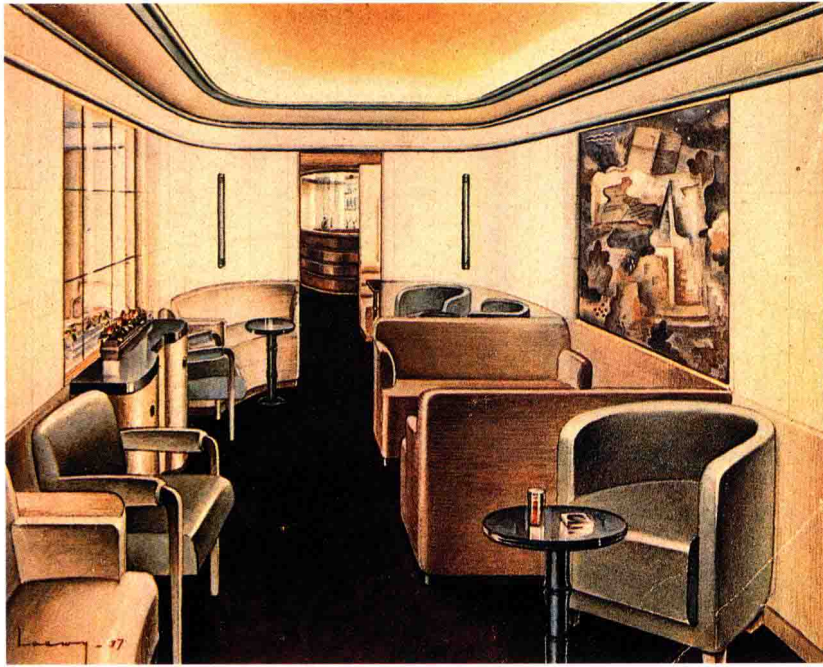


A chic shipboard interior (*left*) in the 1930s mode was created in the late 1980s by stage and film set designer Tony Walton, for the London revival of the Cole Porter musical *Anything Goes*.

The 1929-30 Pantages Theater in Los Angeles (B. Marcus Priteca, architect) (*below*) was one of America's most dazzling cinemas, with a fretwork of sunrays and scrolls surrounding a massive chandelier and a wealth of classic Art Deco motifs – blossoms, volutes, lightning bolts – around the glittering auditorium.







Multi-talented industrial designer Raymond Loewy conceived this streamlined, cool-toned bar car (*left*) for the Pennsylvania Railroad's *Broadway Limited* in 1937.

The private bar was one of the new elements to be found in domestic Art Deco interiors (*below left*). This mid-1930s English model – mainly of black and primrose Vitrolite (an opaque coloured glass) – was designed by Kenneth Cheesman and made by the British Vitrolite Company.

The interiors of London's Unilever House (*below*) were in large part restored by Theo Crosby of the design firm Pentagram in 1979-83. Exuberant lighting fixtures and capitals, among other decorative elements, were added to the entrance hall.





## INTRODUCTION



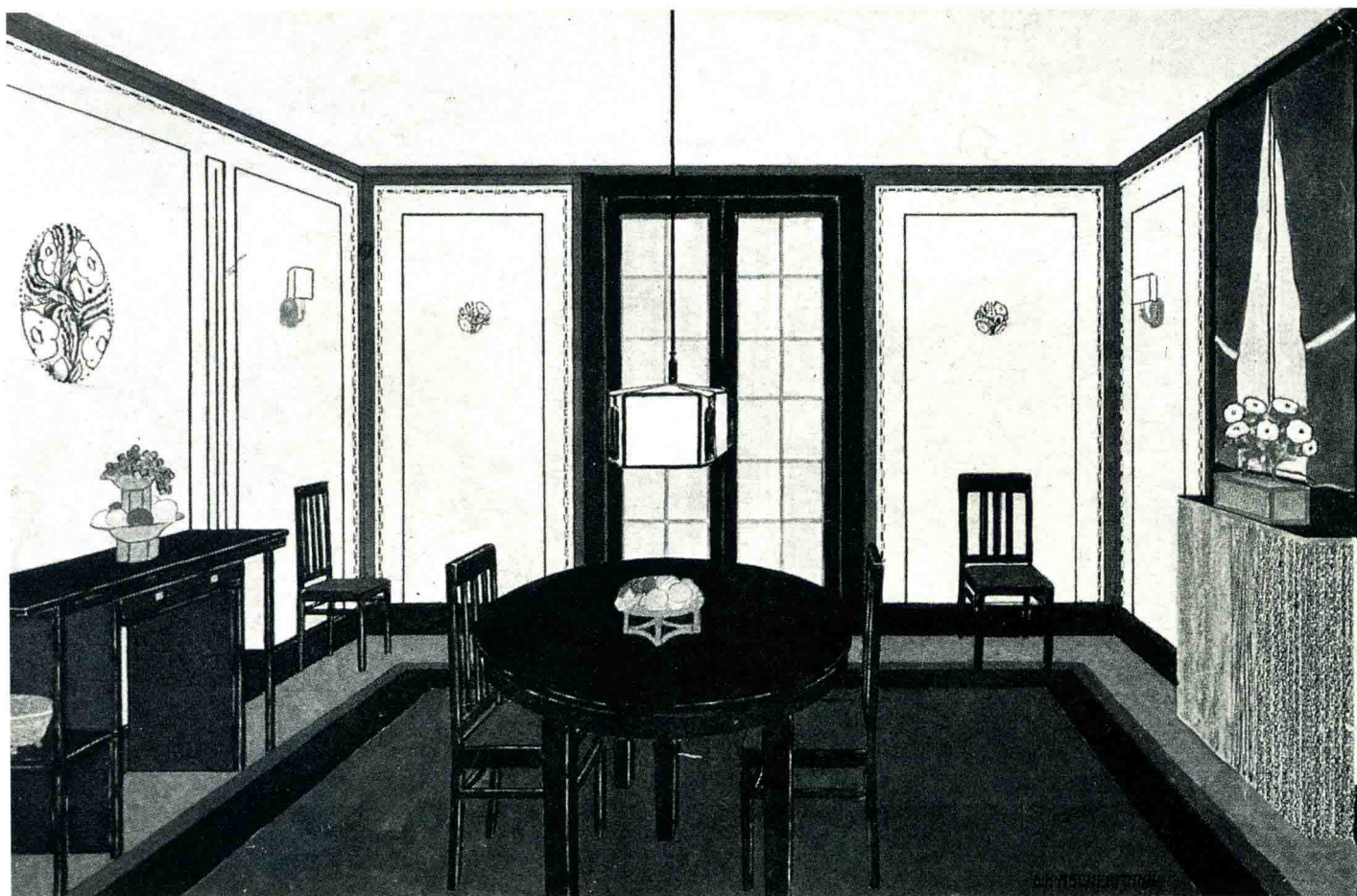
A French Art Deco influence can be seen in the pillow-laden divan (left), but the glittering screen and stepped sconces are more American, specifically, Hollywood: the film is *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928, Cedric Gibbons, art director).

The stylized floral forms of the metalwork, the geometric design on the pelmet and the gleaming tubular metal of the furniture combined to make the Wonder Bar cocktail lounge, in St Louis's Roosevelt Hotel (below left), a smartly Moderne meeting place.

English designer Betty Joel produced these handsome pieces (below), part of a sycamore bedroom suite from 1929 and one of her many practical but attractive interiors designed with the working woman in mind. Note the emphatic patterns on the wood veneer, a Joel speciality.







New York's Aschermann Studio designed this space for a bachelor's home in Forest Hills, Long Island. With its subtle floral highlights and largely rectilinear forms, this blue- and black-dominated dining room (*above*) is highly reminiscent of earlier Vienna Secession interiors.



Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, created this austere, eminently functional lady's bedroom (*left*) in 1926 at Dessau. Decorative elements are non-existent, even around the dressing table.