

ART DECO STYLE

Art Deco is a style of design and decoration that immediately followed Art Nouveau at the end of the 19th century and reached its peak between the two world wars, the period from 1919 and 1939. Generally, the WWI is considered the dividing line between **Art Nouveau** and the **Art Deco eras**. The Art Deco name was derived from the *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels* held in Paris in 1925 at the height of the Roaring Twenties. **Art Nouveau** was preoccupied with lavish, intricate ornamentation, superlative craftsmanship and fine materials; **Art Deco** architecture and arts expanded on other movements – Constructivism, Cubism, Modernism, Bauhaus, and Futurism.

Art Deco was the **first truly 20th century style**. It upheld the importance of craftsmanship, but benefitted from the industrialized world of the early 20th Century, mass production and the growing impact of the machine. It was age of the Motor Car and the elegant transatlantic liner, filled with promise, fueled by prosperity and driven by technology.

Art Deco was a **sumptuous style** – luxurious, elegant, and dramatic. Purely decorative, thoroughly modern, it had very distinct characteristics: repeating or overlapping images – chevrons, zigzags, and lightning bolts – arranged in geometric patterns. Streamlined forms, bold colors and exotic motifs – flora and fauna, young maidens and fountains – became the principles of a new and dynamic design.

Art Deco was an **international style** that could be adapted to man-made objects. It was functional, accessible to ordinary people, and a no-nonsense simplicity. Art Deco was also the **total style**. It could ornament a house, a yacht, a knife, a radio set or a building.

In deepest gloom of the Depression, the Art Deco period was also the age of feverish, youthful vitality. This new age demanded new architecture. The Art Deco movement greatly influenced many architects and was the foundation for extraordinary achievements.

ART DECO EXAMPLE - THE HOOVER DAM

Hoover Dam is compared to the great pyramids of Egypt and belongs to the sagas of the daring. It represents the building genius of America, a monument to the country's ability to construct monolithic public works projects in the midst of adverse conditions.

Conceived by Arthur Powell Davis in 1902 (nephew of John Wesley Powell, who first explored the Colorado River in 1869), the Boulder Canyon Project Act was signed by President Coolidge in 1928. The job was too big for one company. Under direction by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Dam was built by The Six Companies consortium - Bechtel, Kaiser, MacDonald (1st Golden Gate Bridge General Manager, 1928 to 1932) and Kahn, Utah Construction, Morrison-Knudson Co., J. F. Shea and Pacific Bridge Co. Their bid of \$48.9 million won the contract on March 3, 1931. Work started April 20, 1931 and within four and half years, Hoover Dam was dedicated by president Franklin D. Roosevelt on September 30, 1935. All features were completed by March 1, 1936, ahead of schedule.

Architect Gordon V. Kaufmann, who designed the Los Angeles Times Building, simplified the Dam's design with the flowing lines of Modernism and Art Deco. The four areas where his influence is most visible are the power plant, dam crest, spillways and the four intake towers sticking up from the top of dam. The middle two are elevators, decorated with bas-relief

panels. The five bas-reliefs on the Nevada elevator tower depict the multipurpose benefits of Hoover Dam – flood control, navigation, irrigation, water storage and power.

Hoover Dam is a National Historic Landmark and was named by the American Society of Civil Engineers as one of America's Seven wonders of Modern Civil Engineering Wonders, along with two other iconic Art Deco structures – the **Empire State Building** and the **Golden Gate Bridge**, which became the symbol for San Francisco and California.

ART DECO THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

Chief Engineer Joseph B. Strauss' original 1922 Bridge design called for a hybrid cantilever and suspension structure across the Golden Gate. His initial plan was generally regarded as unsightly and a far cry from the elegant, understated lines that define the Bridge today. In 1929, Consulting Engineer Leon S. Moisseiff theorized that a long span suspension bridge could cross the Gate. A suspension structure of this length had never been tried before. Moisseiff and Strauss began to refine a new design.

Strauss sought out architects, signaling that the Bridge's design would be a fusion of form and function. In 1929, renowned Chicago theater architect John Eberson introduced Art Deco ideas that were costly. On recommendation of artist Maynard Dixon in 1930, Strauss replaced Eberson with Irving Foster Morrow, who lacked Eberson's national reputation, but knew local politics, landscape and art. An obscure San Francisco-based architect who designed houses, Irving Morrow was brought in very early in April 1930 as consulting architect to design an architectural treatment for the Bridge. Strauss told Irving and his wife, Gertrude, to "make it beautiful." They believed an architecture work should stand on its own, not reflect European or classical design. Morrow's initial conceptual drawings were influenced by Maynard Dixon's early renderings and vision for the Bridge. In charcoal drawings, he freely refined and translated his vision into architecture terms.

By mid-1930, Morrow had eliminated the mechanical look of Strauss' earlier designs, in favor of sleek, modern, simple, lightweight towers and artfully curved cables. Angular forms of the concrete pylons marked the entrance to the Bridge and set the stage for the view of the towers. The towers' improved design emphasized the towers' soaring height. As the four rectangular tower portals decreased in width, the stepped-back towers rose ladder-like from the roadway and ascended into the sky. He embellished the towers by adding wide, vertical fluting stamped into the steel-plated housings covering the horizontal bracing struts between the two tower legs. Their stylized geometry in the era's Art Deco style caught the sun's light on the structure, creating dramatic, changing shadows. Morrow designed and introduced small features like streamlined, angled light standards, pedestrian walkways, and uncluttered bridge railings to allow motorists and pedestrians an unobstructed view of the Bay and ocean.

Irving Morrow was responsible for the iconic features and architectural enhancements which define the Golden Gate Bridge's Art Deco form. These are admired the world over and contribute to people's view of the bridge as a sculpture.

Morrow undertook the great task of designing the lighting system that lighted the bridge. Two important factors came into play when considering the type and style of lighting desired for the bridge: the enormous size of the project and the tremendous scale and dignity of the project

(Thoma). "Because of the Bridge's great size, Morrow did not want the same intensity of light on all of its parts. The effect would seem too artificial. The towers, for example, were to have less light at the top so they would seem to soar beyond the range of illumination" (Thoma). He believed flashy lighting would distract from the structure's magnificence so he selected low pressure sodium vapor lamps, that gave off a subtle amber glow, to line the roadway. These original low pressure sodium roadway lights were replaced with high-pressure sodium vapor lamps 45 years later. Plastic amber lens were added to preserve the original warm glow. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funds, the tower lighting was not installed during the building of the bridge. Not until the bridge's 50th anniversary were lights installed, accenting the great height of the towers. Pacific Gas & Electric Company funded much of the money needed for the tower lighting, which cost \$1.2 million.