

# Art deco concepts and ideas | history of art



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Throughout history, man has observed and experienced numerous movements and births in the world of art and architecture that influenced life and dwelling. Some movements were mere fads that lasted several seconds in the larger scale of time, others were strong influencers that lasted beyond their years, either physically or in the minds and hearts of many. Art Deco, a movement that started in the early 1920's in the arts that translated immediately into architecture is undeniably one of the strongest iconic movements that effected the lives of many and has it's dominant mark on the physical world. The movement still remains alive in various forms of pop culture reappearances and in actual physical standing buildings and structures and not as a movement in action, but simply in examples to remind people of a certain time's allure. What set's Art Deco apart from other movements is it's collectivity of several other movements and attempts in the world of art and architecture. The purpose of this paper is to identify and elaborate on the myriad of art and architectural styles that contributed into making Art Deco what it was/is. Also, since Art Deco was a dominant force made up of many successful styles, what made it last a relatively short period as a movement, yet some of it's characteristics are used and found in subsequent styles still.

The Beginning of Art Deco (a history):

The birth of Art Deco was interesting in the sense that the movement started before the birth of the name " Art Deco" in 1968 where it was first used by Bevis Hillier as the title for his book on the decorative arts of the 1920's and the 1930's that are the actual years the movement belonged to. The Term originated from the distinguished exhibition of decorative and industrial arts

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held in Paris, France in 1925 called "Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes". In terms of the concept and feel of the exhibition, "The Paris exhibition is like a city in a dream, and the sort of dream that would give the psychoanalysts a run for their money" (Vogue, London August 1925). The exhibition was a gathering pot where many artists and architects unveiled their works of art that later strengthened and inspired the concoction of the decorative motif style. The use of Art Deco as a label at that time was non-existent and the contemporary art was called Art Modernes in France and Modernistic art in the United States. Although numerous people think of the United States and American artists when it comes to Art Deco and the birth of Art Deco, the movement was actually birthed by European styles. The two chief countries that sparked the Art Deco motion were Germany and France. The movement was not an instant spark, it evolved quietly throughout the early 1920's and saw its climax at the Parisian exhibition, then it gradually saw its way across many countries especially the United States in a concentrated way which is why many people think of the Art Deco style as an American style.

#### Defining Art Deco/Influences:

Art Deco as a movement is almost impossible to define in a brief sentence or idea. The movement incorporated many elements, genres of design, and artistic/architectural movements that it becomes necessary to view and appreciate it as a large sum of minor components rather than a single entity. Some of the components that birthed Art Deco may even seem to clash or repel each other, yet, in reality they work harmoniously. For example, Germany and France in the immediate years post World War1 had different

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styles in art and architecture. The German approach was more towards “Modernism”, meaning having crisp and angular functionalism in design and an emphasis on clean geometry. Paris however had a style that was delightfully playful, a decorative style that is closest to the Art Nouveau Vernacular which was to be eradicated by its disciples. These two extremes are the two major movements that make up Art Deco as we know it, however, they are not the only movements or influences. At that time, the more lively style that is described as leisurely, comforting, and a representation of wealth arrived to the United States before the rigid German style thus helping the growth and spread of Art Deco’s decorative ways in the country.

Along side the German modern style of design and the Art Nouveau movement, Art Deco borrowed influences and inspiration from many styles. Not only did Art Deco include many art or architectural styles, it was also influenced by historical aspects and futuristic ideologies. Deco was described as to contain elements “from the ancient past to the distant future” (Duncan, Alastair, 7). A past historical influence that is very evident in the style of Art Deco is the Ancient Pharaoh civilization and the Egyptian culture mania that overtook Paris after Tutankhamun’s tomb discovery by Howard Carter in 1922. Combined with the mesmerizing Egyptian elements that were easily adopted as decorative motifs in Art Deco, more exotic inspirers played a role in influencing the style, such as Mayan temples, tribal African sculptures, the Ballets Russes, and Japanese lacquer-work. The decorative motifs of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Sumer cultures also influenced and stimulated some Art Deco architects as did the Medieval and Byzantine

architecture. Further more, classical structures and sculptures of the Roman and Greek cultures also played a part in the forming of Art Deco, however, the Art Deco architects were against the Beaux-Arts Neoclassicism, thus they adorned their classically based buildings and structures with modernized elements and figures of classical mythology in a playful strictly aesthetically decorative manner.

Since Art Deco is not an instant reaction to another style's action, it truly had lesser rules in style than most other movements, and it probably had the most relaxed and forgiving rules when it came to re-interpreting another style's elements, or completely borrowing an element. For example, if an architect was commissioned by a client who is fascinated by maritime activity, and wanted to have elements of that show in the building, an Art Deco architect would design an art piece of a boat or an anchor in the exact same forms and colors from a decorative material and adorn the building with it. What makes this action possible and feasible is Art Deco's strong dependency on Industrial design. The strong streamlined forms of industrial design and techniques of art creating through industrial commercial ways truly helped the Art Deco movement and added another very powerful component to the previously mentioned elements that make up the fabric of the movement.

As previously mentioned, it seems that the components of Art Deco are countless, all equally stimulating and important in their own right. The French Rationalism style of building and the Art Nouveau movement in the early 1900's before the 1920's for example were important precursors of Art Deco. Auguste Perret's Rue Franklin apartment building, c. 1902, which was <https://assignbuster.com/art-deco-concepts-and-ideas-history-of-art/>

extensively glazed and revolutionized the building techniques with the use of reinforced concrete works as a foreshadow of Art Deco and what was to come. The heavy ornaments on Perret's building work as a bridge from the more stylized floral style decorations to the ordered and less organic famous floral motifs of Art Deco such as the lotus leaves. Along side Art Nouveau, another powerful movement that influences many Art Deco buildings is Expressionism in both its industrial German style and the brick building Dutch style. The style of the Expressionist architecture in its emotional and beautifying methods is clearly visible in the Art Deco designs. Although the movement was prior to the First World War, it had a strong comeback in the 1920's and famous expressionist buildings such as Peter Behren's monumental glass and steel turbine factory, c. 1908, served as a model and inspiration for Art Deco designs. The Exhibition hall by Hans Poelzig in Poznan, Poland, c. 1911, also worked as a muse and model for following Art Deco artists. In terms of the brick building expressionism, three major Dutch influencers of Art Deco were Johan Melchior van der Mey, Michel de Klerk, and Piet Lodewijk whose work included brick, glass, and concrete in a stylized structural and decorative manner that can be linked directly to Art Deco.

Italian Futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia was another major influencer on the Art Deco movement although a few rare projects of his were built and the majority remained sketches on paper. Sant'Elia's Monza cemetery, 1912, is an example of his work where decorative designs and heavy use of ornamentation in glass and concrete may be found and linked to Art Deco. In the United States, the Chicago School of Architecture's massive vertical steel

skeleton buildings made in the Moderne style from 1875-1910 count as influencers of Art Deco. From that group, Louis Sullivan and his student Frank Lloyd Wright specifically are the two architects whose works most hold links and bridges to Art Deco. Frank Lloyd Wright's work included many heavily ornamented buildings both in the exterior and interior with sharp geometry and studied repeated patterns and motifs in brick and concrete that are very much Art Deco-esque such as the Midway Gardens in Chicago built in 1914.

(first half)

\*In Addition to the prior information, the following outline titles will be discussed in the second half, which is the more theoretical part structural wise.

Elements of the Art Deco style: The characteristics that make a design original Art Deco, and specific elements that art deco must attain.

Examples of famous art deco buildings: The buildings, and the theories and messages behind them.

Writer's opinion and analysis: My own personal opinion on the movement the and theories behind the movement, also, why I believe the movement failed to live longer even though it seemed ultimately powerful ( the answer to my proposed question).