



# Art Deco Society Northwest

<http://www.artdeconw.org>

Fall/Winter 2000

## ART DECO FILMS

**Pat Sonnenstuhl, ADSNW, Publisher**

We have decided to dedicate this issue of our Newsletter to Art Deco films. We were sent two great books to review, Screen Deco and Forties Screen Style by the authors Howard Mandelbaum and Eric Myers. Several of us were able to meet Eric this summer at a presentation he did in Seattle. The black and white photos in his collection, and his personal understanding of Art Deco films and sets was truly inspiring.

Two of our members, Bob Dome, and Walt Sonnenstuhl have reviewed these two books, and you will enjoy their perspectives. The authors have also allowed us to include several photos. Your best bet is to seek these books out yourself, and become familiar with them yourself. Both of these books are available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

Joyce and I both have fond memories of Hollywood. My uncle was a film editor in the film industry, and his home backed on one of the sets used for westerns.

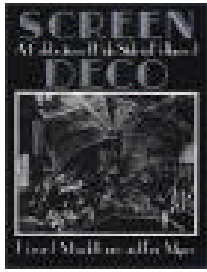
We publish our newsletter twice a year, in the fall and in the spring. We are always looking for articles from our members, and others, and themes for our newsletters. We have increased our size to six pages, to allow for more extensive articles and reviews. If you have ideas for topics, please let Joyce or me know, and we can start collecting articles.

## HOLYWOOD, REMEMBERED

**Joyce Colton, ADSNW, President**

Growing up in Hollywood and being part of the film industry by way of family involvement, was exciting and fun. I was as 'hooked' on films as anyone. Saturday afternoon matinees were an every week outing. I remember the movie theatres, having stage performances, all kinds of giveaways and drawings to entice children and people into the shows. I remember standing in line for hours to get into special movies at Grumman's Chinese and the Carthay Circle theatres; checking out the footprints and hands of the stars and having hot fudge sundaes at Brown's next door to the Chinese theatre, riding the 'Big Red Cars' up to Hollywood.

Films were often shot in local neighborhoods in the '20s and '30s as well as on studio sets. It was my good fortune to go on to the sets and watch the filming, as well as to attend previews and to go to the studio every weeknight and see new films. In those days I was not as conscious of Art Deco as I am today, but I loved everything about the movies. Today, we know that its influence was worldly, and that Art Deco became the dominant achievement internationally in architecture, furniture, accessories, fashion, and art during the '20s, and '30s and even into the early '40s.



## Screen Deco

Howard Mandelbaum and Eric Myers

Hennessy and Ingalls: Santa Monica, CA (1985)

Walt Sonnenstuhl, ADSNW, Member at Large

This book presents us with a great historical perspective of Art Deco films. The black and white photos are dramatic, and reflect the sets and backgrounds of the movies of the Art Deco period. The best way to review this book is to touch on the main chapters, and highlight the text and major films of the time.

When I first opened Screen Deco one of the 1<sup>st</sup> pictures to catch my eye was *Paradise for Three* (1938) showing Frank Morgan (later to become the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)) tuning a magnificent chrome Art Deco Scott Radio. In the early '50s I had the pleasure of working on one just like it and it too was not in a cabinet.

This Modern Age: Introduction The first Art Deco Film, from France, was *Le Carnival Des Verites* (1919). The U.S. was slow to warm to Art Deco, but William Randolph Hearst's Production *Enchantment* (1921) starring Marion Davies was the first American movie to utilize modern décor. Americans were didn't initially use Deco to accent their homes, but welcomed it in the movies.

The Rich are Always With Us: Parlor, Bedroom and Bath Cedric Gibbons, the supervising Art Director of MGM and married to actress Delores DelRio, attended the 1925 Exposition des Artes Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, and shaped his Art Deco Style in movies. His landmark film *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) depicted a dream world of the well-to-do as did many of the Deco films.

Success at Any Price: Places of Business With the number of Art Deco skyscrapers being built in the '20s and '30s, quite a few movies used them for backdrops and interiors. *Citizen Kane* (1941) used the coldness of Deco.

New York Nights: Nightclubs By the early '30s some of the greatest Art Deco clubs appeared but most of the movie sets of clubs were had no real-life equivalent.

Transatlantic Merry-Go-Rounds: Ocean Liners: Many of the French Ocean Liners' interiors were decorated in Art Deco, but few were used in Deco films. Two notable French films using the ocean liner Normandie were *Les Perles de la couronne* and *Paris-New York* (1940). The authors suggest other Art Deco liners would have been ideal for motion pictures, but the closest these ships came to Hollywood was New York. They go on to say, "Hollywood chose to design its own ocean liner interiors within its studios, and exteriors could always be filmed at the harbor in nearby San Pedro." Ocean liners were perceived by the general public as sleek symbols of the Machine Age, and Hollywood was more than willing to promote this image.

Go Into Your Dance: Musicals and Extravaganzas The best of the Deco musicals/extravaganzas would be the Astaire-Rogers series, such as *Top Hat* (1935) and the Busby Berekely's Films, such as *Gold Diggers of 1933*, and *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* (1933).

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Just Imagine: Fantasy and FuturismThe futuristic style of Art Deco fit well with Science Fiction type movies. *Things to Come (1936)* was one of the best as it goes into the far future. This is my personal favorite. I saw it many years before I was aware of the term Art Deco. I have always loved Science Fiction films. I am amazed there weren't more of Deco Science Fiction movies being made.



This book traces Deco movies from 1919 to 1941. Thanks to the movies of the '20s, '30s, Art Deco became more familiar to the public. Hollywood helped propagate Art Deco. The book is filled with 100s of spectacular black and white pictures and I particularly liked the 'Set Test stills, which were pictures of the sets without actors. It would be interesting to see a follow-up book of the 2 color Technicolor movies made in the late '20s and '30s. The two colors used in this process were peach and turquoise, two very Art Deco colors.

### **WEB SITE UPDATES**

One of my projects this summer was to freshen up our Art Deco web site, and make it easier to add new pages. I have a large collection of buildings from the NorthWest, and always appreciate photos our members have contributed. I also am always on the lookout for new web sites that give us an Art Deco flavor. Here are some pages you might enjoy visiting:

Seattle AD: Bob Dome: <http://www.artdeconw.org/seattlead.htm>

Seattle Interiors: <http://www.artdeconw.org/seattleadint.htm>

Spokane AD and preservation of the Fox Theater :

Sandra Romero: <http://www.artdeconw.org/spokanefox.htm> and Photo Gallery:

<http://www.artdeconw.org/EasternWAAD/index.htm>

WA State Capitol:

Exterior: <http://www.artdeconw.org/capitolartdecext.htm>

Interior: <http://www.artdeconw.org/capitolartdecint.htm>

Lighting: <http://www.artdeconw.org/capitollight.htm>

Historic Theaters and Theater Restorations: <http://www.artdeconw.org/theatres.htm>

Suggestions for web pages, programs and articles always welcome.

### **Calendar of Events**

Holiday Celebration: Pot Luck

December 15, 2001

Location to be announced

*Swing Time* Film Night

January 9, 2002

Astaire-Rogers

The United Churches

Annual Business Meeting: Pot Luck

February 13, 2002

Pat and Walt's House

2510 Walnut Rd NW, Olympia

A History of Radios

March 13, 2002

Walt Sonnenstuhl

The United Churches

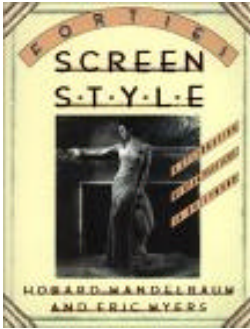
## Forties Screen Style

Howard Mandelbaum and Eric Myers

Page 4

St. Martin's Press (1989), New York (1989) \$29.95

A Review by Bob Dome, ADSNW, Member at Large



This 209-page book by Howard Mandelbaum and Eric Myers is the sequel to their previous book Screen Deco. All of the 218 illustrations are in black and white, a bow to the time when the standard studio publicity release was an 8 x 10 glossy. With the exception of complex expensive Technicolor and Kodachrome systems, color movie films until well into the 1960's were of such poor archival quality that color movies of that era are now lost forever.

As early as page 8, the authors declare Art Deco passé, quoting an interior design publication of 1947, "The first Modern furniture to appear in the United States made such a complete disavowal of the past, was so utterly unlike anything we had seen before, that it was not acceptable...a gawky infant, precocious and over-startling. "Though Art Deco touches persisted after the early '40s in autos, kitchen appliances or isolated architectural examples, art critics from New York to Hollywood had turned their backs on it.

The Art Deco style developed because the social, political and historical upheaval at the end of WW I. Art Deco burst forth after World War I with that abrupt break from the old ways, radiating from a naughty and rambunctious Paris, France, the City of Light. The infusion of newness, Art Deco, was as profound as it was vulnerable.

Vulnerable because at its core it was founded by a society entering a bright modern world, free of the scourge of war. Art Deco declined first in Europe, and then, after the 1939-40 World's Fair in the US, when WW II had begun, it (Art Deco) ended hope too.

The movie moguls and closed-contract studio entities, of the '40s scrambled to meet the violent changes of their times by either refining successful formulas of past days such as Warner Bros' Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall pictures or big studio musicals, or by seizing on styling boomlets that had been abandoned and updating them, such as science fiction and 'heaven' pictures.

Mandelbaum and Myers name this widely eclectic style "High Pastiche" and suggest it is the blend of motifs and design factors that the movies elaborated into the architecture of dreams. Six major categories or elements of High Pastiche are given in the introductory chapter:

1. Early American settings inspired by the Williamsburg, VA colonial restoration of 1937. This is illustrated in the Astaire-Rogers musical *Carefree* (1938), which signaled the end of the series' Streamline Moderne look.
2. Victorian styles and themes were seen in movies such as in *Gaslight* (1944), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) and *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1944). A great number of films set around the turn of the century.
3. Tropical, sometimes called Tropical Deco because of its carryover from pictures of the Art Deco period, was seen in the movies *Down Argentine Way* (1940) and *Moon Over Miami* (1941),
4. Surrealist Worlds showed how fantasy crossed into delightful silliness, Dali-esque limp pocket watches, and lobster claw telephones, and sexual symbolism were seen in films such as Busby Berkeley's *The Gang's All Here* (1943) with Carmen Miranda, in Technicolor and *Spellbound* (1945). Carmen Miranda can best be remembered for wearing her gigantic fruit hat for her "Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat" number. Many surrealistic touches were used to accent sophisticated interior designs.
5. Contemporary settings as seen in Returning GI movies often showed moderately priced single family homes; the precursor to Suburbia that soon modified American culture away from the old limits of having to choose between city or country. In commercial architecture the modern American office high rise (L. Mier van der Robe, others) comes of age. *Fountainhead* (1949) with Gary Cooper and architecture inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright is mentioned.

- 6 Period Revivalism (or Neo-Baroque) was an intentionally anachronistic style, mixing Classical Greek with swirling drapery, Victorian bric-a-brac, and Chinese elements. The authors discuss "Historic Chic" and the work of Elsie de Wolfe, who is credited with launching Period Revivalism. In 1937. Syrie Maugham, her rival, designed sets in varying shades of white. A Louis XVI Period Revival championed by Elsie de Wolfe was seen in *Mazie Goes to Reno (1944)* Ann Southern.

This section of the book concludes with: "High Pastiche sucked in style elements like a vacuum cleaner. In movies of the forties, there were always decorative surprises....Would settings be homespun, elegant or flamboyant? Whatever they were, they certainly reflected the tastes and dreams of a society shaped by war and its aftermath."

Living in a Big Way explains that the extrovertly showy sets as we saw in *Top Hat (1935)* are no longer 'in'. "Rich is never having to buy slipcovers." This chapter expands upon the Contemporary elements while admitting that Hollywood will be Hollywood so that where extravagance creeps into movie set, it is subdued, more believable than in Art Deco sets. *Mildred Pierce (1945)* with Joan Crawford, and *Sentimental Journey (1946)* are good examples, as is. *Mr. Blanding Builds His Dream House (1948)*. All of the movies have an upper middle class feel to them, an achievable standard for many.

Manpower discusses wartime issues with some remarkable stills from anti-Nazi films 1939 to 1944, *Escape (1940)* with Robert Taylor at Gestapo Headquarters is shown anxiously awaiting interrogation in a set by master designer Cedric Gibbons. The clean white walls, modern indirect lighting, and immaculately uniformed armed guards contrast with a shabby looking bare wooden bench where Taylor and another prisoner await their fate.

On the Town touches upon the influences nightclubs in the films of the time. Who wouldn't like to own and manage Rick's Café American or even the rival Blue Parrot? With plenty of defense plant money and military pay but no TV or gasoline or new car, nightclubs flourished as never before or since the 1940s. *Ciros, El Morocco, Stork Club, 21*, and the *Rainbow Room* evokes memories of the liveliest social activity of the period. Closely related hotel rooftop clubs and ballrooms were venues for big bands of the swing era.

Where Do We Go From Here? reminds us of the wonderful railroad system Americans once enjoyed, before cheap and safe jet airlines were developed for longer trips or Interstate highway systems were developed for shorter distance motor trips. Both trains and ocean liners made great 'location' sets for romantic adventure or sinister mystery. *Suspicion (1941)* with Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine plus *I'll be Seeing You (1944)* with Joseph Cotton and Ginger Rodgers are two of the better remembered movies that incorporated train travel as plot vehicles.

The authors touch briefly on the treatment of the '40s revision of the '30s style musicals, surrealism (and exotic location movies like *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves (1944)* with Maria Montez and *Sinbad the Sailor (1947)* with Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and Maureen O'Hara. Great stills highlight both.

Mandelbaum and Myers save the best for last. The concluding chapter Bring on the Girls is a collection of stills of the female movie stars of the era. Rita Hayworth, Esther Williams, and Betty Grable were just a few of a bevy of American beauties who reminded GIs why they were fighting and who was waiting for them back home. Over 25 pages of photos give one a clear feeling of the style of the time.



The two books together provide us with a glimpse of Hollywood and also a feeling of what life was like, both in reality and fantasy. This remains true today in our films.

## **Art Deco Society Northwest**

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## **Art Deco Society Northwest**

The Art Deco Society Northwest is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and education about all aspects of the Art Deco period. The Art Deco Period encompasses the years between World War I and World War II (1918-1941). Our goal is to increase awareness, appreciation and education of art deco, especially in the Pacific Northwest. Our activities center around preservation, education, history, and entertainment.

Our activities include preservation projects which support the preservation of buildings in the Pacific Northwest considered to be of the Art Deco Period.

Meetings are held every other month, and the programs vary from speakers on a variety of topics, such as architecture, interior design, fashion, jewelry, movies, music, art and vintage transportation.

**About Art Deco:** Art Deco is an artistic expression which gained prominence from the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes held in Paris. The exposition's theme was based on the future and on an artistic expression which complemented the machine age. Art Deco motifs were applied to all design objects including clothing, jewelry, furniture as well as the interiors and exteriors of buildings. The 1930's style turned to aerodynamic forms and was termed The Machine Age.

