

Experience L.A.

Art Deco Walking Tour

Friday, September 27, 2019
Downtown Los Angeles

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Art Deco was a major movement in the functional and decorative arts in the United States and Europe in the 1920s and '30s.
- With streamlined, geometrical, and often vertically thrusting lines, Deco architecture represented a spirit of modernity and progress in the years between the two world wars.
- Downtown L.A. is home to several Art Deco buildings.

ART DECO

Art Deco, or style moderne, was a major movement in the decorative arts and architecture in the United States and Europe in the 1920s and '30s. With mass production on the rise, artists and designers were inspired to bring beauty to mass-produced and functional items, from household furniture to entire buildings. Art Deco works are characterized by sleek designs, geometric motifs, curvilinear forms, defined outlines, and often bold colors, evoking a modern spirit of speed, sophistication, power, and progress.

Influenced by fine arts movements such as Cubism and De Stijl, Art Deco represented the translation of modernism into the popular and functional arts. The style evolved in the early 1920s and was first exhibited at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925.

Art Deco was a predominating aesthetic influence of the period between the first and second World Wars—the Gatsby era, marked by extravagance and an exuberant celebration of the modern—before the Great Depression provoked a shift in taste back to the simpler and more austere. Art Deco experienced a revival in the 1960s.

STREAMLINE MODERNE

An international style of Art Deco architecture and design that is also prominent in Los Angeles. Inspired by aerodynamic design, streamline architecture favored curving forms and long horizontal lines, and stripped down the ornamental design elements in European-style Art Deco. Examples of Streamline Moderne buildings in Los Angeles include the Crossroads of the World, El Rey Theatre, Hollywood Palladium, Paramount Pictures, and Thomas Jefferson High School.





Los Angeles Central Library

ART DECO BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN L.A.

Los Angeles Central Library

630 W. 5th St.

Architects: Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, Carleton M. Winslow, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates

Year of Completion: 1926 (renovated 1993)

L.A.'s Central Library was the last work of the major American architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. The limestone sculptures on the exterior are by Lee Lawrie. Don't miss: The tile pyramid atop the building and the light-filled dome rotunda on the second floor. Twelve murals painted by Dean Cornwell in 1933 depict the history of California.

Eastern Columbia Lofts

849 S. Broadway

Architect: Claud Beelman

Year of Completion: 1930

This 13-story building was constructed in just nine months to be the headquarters of the Eastern Outfitting Company and the Columbia Outfitting Company. In 2006, it was converted into luxury condos. The Eastern Columbia building is made of steel-reinforced concrete clad in turquoise, dark blue, and gold terra cotta. Don't miss: The colorful terrazzo sidewalks on the Broadway and Ninth sides of the building.

Title Guarantee and Trust Building

411 W. Fifth St.

Architects: Parkinson & Parkinson

Year of Completion: 1930

Everything above the 12th floor of this building is unoccupied, which allowed the builders to go higher than would otherwise have been permitted at the time of construction—topping the building with a Gothic tower that includes flying buttresses. The building is currently apartments. Check out: The interior murals of Southern California history by Hugo Ballin.

Oviatt Building

617 S. Olive St.

Architects: Walker & Eisen

Year of Completion: 1927–28

Originally the headquarters of one of the most expensive haberdasheries (men's clothing stores) in L.A., the building housed the shop as well as a penthouse for owner James Oviatt, who attended the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925 and was inspired to decorate his building in the new Art Deco style. Don't miss: The lobby forecourt, which originally contained more than 30 tons of glass by designer Rene Lalique. A few original pieces of glass remain in the panels at the top of the lobby columns.

Los Angeles Jewelry Center

629 S. Hill St.

Architect: Claud Beelman

Year of Completion: 1930–31

Constructed as the Sun Realty Building, the building features fourteen stories of blue-green terra cotta. Many original items—such as a marble floor in the lobby—were removed in a 1970s remodel. Look for: Original details on the elevator doors.



Oviatt Building



Los Angeles Jewelry Center



Ninth and Broadway

Ninth and Broadway

850 S. Broadway
Architect: Claud Beelman
Year of Completion: 1930

Here, tan terra cotta is used to resemble stone. Don't miss: The two-story arched entrance, with tiered metal grilles on the sides.

The CalEdison

601 W. Fifth St.
Architects: Allison & Allison
Year of Completion: 1931

Named for the utility company that originally occupied it, the CalEdison was one of the first fully electrically heated and cooled buildings in the western United States. The lower stories of the steel-framed building are limestone, while the upper stories and tower are clad in terra cotta. The figures by sculptor Merrell Gage at the entrance represent light, power, and hydroelectric energy. Don't miss: *Power*, a mural in the lobby by Hugo Ballin.



The CalEdison

Wholesale Jewelry Mart

635 S. Hill St.
Architects: Curlett and Beelman
Year of Completion: 1925

The vertical thrust, setbacks, and recessed windows of this building are signatures of the Art Deco style. The building also features Gothic details such as the gargoyle-like heads. Of note: This was one of the first Style Moderne projects by architect Claud Beelman, who would later make the Eastern Columbia Lofts, Ninth and Broadway, and other downtown L.A. Deco buildings.

PacMutual

523 W. Sixth St.
Architects: Dodd & Richards, Parkinson & Bergstrom
Year of Completion: 1908, 1921, 1926, 1936

This building started as a Beaux Arts building in 1908, making it the oldest remaining structure on Pershing Square. It was expanded with a series of renovations for the next couple of decades, including a major one in 1936 that prompted a change in the exterior design from its original Beaux Arts roots to the Deco style that by then predominated. Of note: The L.A. Conservancy makes its home in this building.



PacMutual

Fox Jewelry Plaza

608 S. Hill St.
Architect: S. Tilden Norton
Year of Completion: 1932

This building, originally built for movie-studio owner William Fox, is notable for the lack of signature Art Deco setbacks. Check out: The original entry, cast-iron Art Deco railings on the back stairs, and patterned wood on the rear door.

L.A. CONSERVANCY

The L.A. Conservancy, founded in 1978 as part of an effort to prevent the demolition of L.A.'s Central Library, is a nonprofit organization that works to recognize, preserve, and revitalize historic architectural and cultural resources of L.A. County.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What does the look of an Art Deco building evoke for you?
- L.A. Conservancy says, “As people rely more on technology and virtual connections, and as cookie-cutter development makes cities look more and more alike, we have a growing need for authenticity, character, and distinction.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
- L.A. is known for its architectural diversity. What do you think this does for the character of the city?
- What do you make of the changing occupancy, or usage, of the different buildings over time?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Other tours, including self-guided tours, by L.A. Conservancy www.laconservancy.org
- The USC School of Architecture <https://arch.usc.edu>
- USC buildings named Historic Cultural Monuments <http://bit.ly/USChistoricbuildings>

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BOOKS

- Cooper, Suzanne Tarbell, Amy Ronnebeck Hall, and Frank E. Cooper. *Images of America: Los Angeles Art Deco*. Chicago: Arcadia, 2005.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: NA735.L55 C66 2005

- Hines, Thomas S. *Architecture of the Sun: Los Angeles Modernism, 1900-1970*. New York: Rizzoli, 2010.
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- Schwartzman, Arnold, and Bevis Hillier. *Deco Landmarks: Art Deco Gems of the City and County of Los Angeles*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: NA735.L55 S38 2005

DATABASES

ProQuest Art & Architecture Archive
Public Art Archive

ARTICLES

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Pacitti, Michael. “All About Art deco. (Period Design Series).” *Art Business News* (March 22, 2014).

JOURNALS

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VIDEO

- Jeans, Katherine A., Holly Larocque, Ed Kucerak, and Michael Laewen. *Art Deco/art Moderne*. Ottawa, Canada: Sound Venture Productions, 2004.
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY: AFADVD 607
- Lamb, Matt. *The Architects of Time: Art Deco Architecture in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: RuffHouse Studios, 2006.
LEAVEY LIBRARY: LVYDVD 2115

