

News and Notes from the Deco Philes

Future of Lustron Homes In Doubt

The *Washington Post* recently reported that the Marine Corps plans to dispose of the largest single development of Lustron® homes in the United States, a group of 60 unique all steel houses on the grounds of the Quantico Marine Corps base (*Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2002). The homes, which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, were erected between 1948 and 1950.

Although the concept of an all steel home was introduced at the 1933 Chicago “A Century of Progress” world’s fair, it was not until Carl Strandlund proposed using the same porcelain-enameled steel panels previously used in constructing Standard Oil gas stations and White Castle restaurants to help ease the shortage of affordable housing for veterans returning from World War II that mass production was attempted.

The homes were designed by architects Morris H. Beckman and Roy B. Blass. The ranch-style homes were constructed of steel panels attached to a steel framing system. The conservatively-styled homes have low-pitched roofs, large picture windows, and radiant heat panels in the ceiling. Making maximum use of limited space, they included such features as a dishwasher that converted to a clothes washer, built in kitchen cabinet, a built in china cabinet in the dining room, a built in bookcase and vanity in the bedroom, and interior doors that slid into wall panels. Although the initial model had two bedrooms, a three bedroom model was later added, as were models with garages.

The homes were constructed at a former aircraft plant in Columbus, Ohio, leased from the War Assets Administration. (Initially, Strandlund planned to built the homes at a Chicago plant, but that plant had already been leased to the Tucker Motor Car Company.)

Only about 2,500 of the homes were erected nationwide, yet they enjoy an almost cult following. Numerous websites are devoted to the homes. In addition to Quantico, there are Lustron homes in the Washington area in Arlington and Lake Barcroft.

Although it appeared from the Post article that demolition of the homes is imminent, when ADSW Legal Counsel Carl Spataro called to inquire about the status of the homes, he was informed that there are no immediate plans to either demolish or sell the homes.

ADSW will continue to monitor the situation.

Trans-Lux to Accept Advertising

At its March meeting, the Board decided to begin accepting advertising in *Trans-Lux* as a way to help defray costs. Watch for advertising rates and submission deadlines in the June *Trans-Lux*.

Air and Space Museum to Commemorate Lindbergh Flight

The Smithsonian's Air and Space museum is putting together a special program on May 21st to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Lindbergh's transcontinental flight. Among the highlights of the program will be a 45 minute set of Lindy songs performed by Elizabeth Fitzpatrick, accompanied by pianist Alex Hassan. Hassan will continue playing 1927 pop tunes for the remainder of the evening.

Additional details, such as times and costs, are not yet available.

New Book Focuses on Art Deco Australia

The Art Deco Society of New South Wales recently announced the publication of the first major book about Australia's rich Art Deco heritage. *Art Deco in Australia: Sunrise Over the Pacific*, edited by Society President Mary Nilsson and Book Project manager, Mark Ferson, contains over 250 images, most in color. The book includes 20 essays from around Australia about a wide range of Art Deco topics, including architecture, painting, ceramics, and jewelry. It also includes a chapter on Australian Art Deco bookplates and book design.

New Book Focuses on "Capital Transit"

The National Capital Historical Museum of Transportation recently released *Capital Transit: Washington's Street Cars: The Final Era 1933-62*. To read more about this book go to <<http://www.dctrolley.org/kbook.htm>>.

The Stehli Silk Company Strikes Back – The Americana Series of the 1920s

By Megan Searing

Crazy about vintage clothing? When browsing – don't forget to look not only at the dress/blouse/skirt/scarf/coat etc. that you can't live without but also at the fabric out of which it's made. The fabric may, in fact, be more significant than the cut. Take, for instance, silks from the 1920s. American silk companies, along with many other United States industries, were criticized in the late teens and twenties for not offering more original, quality fabric designs. The consensus was that industrial arts in America were sorely lacking when compared to the French.



Stadium fabric possibly by Rene Clark

It's a well known fact that the United States did not exhibit at the International Exposition des Arts Decoratifs held in Paris in 1925. The U.S. government believed that as a country, the U.S. did not have anything to offer the world in terms of design or the decorative arts. This must have greatly irritated the leadership of many American silk companies as they were in direct competition with the French for their share of the silk market. Issues of the *American Silk Journal* from the early twenties, for instance, contained many articles which addressed the problem of lackluster, unoriginal American design.

In 1925, in response to this criticism, one business, The Stehli Silk Company, took matters into its own hands and commissioned several prominent American artists to produce silk designs for what they called the "Americana Series." The company, according to its promotional literature, "employed only first-rate artists, already successful and living the sophisticated life of their time, and hence capable of reflecting it in their work." This group of nationally known artists provided not only better quality designs than what Stehli had used before, but also lent name recognition to the endeavor. Names such as Neysa McMein, Clayton Knight, and later,

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John Held, Jr. were well known, and as such, were good for marketing the silks. Even the names of the fabrics themselves call to mind much of the flavor of the 1920s and what we now know inspired a great deal of art deco and modern design. For instance, in the series, Clayton Knight did "Manhattan," "Grand Canyon," and "The Jungle." Rene Clarke did "Jazz," "Revolt," and "Statistics." Ralph Barton did "My Trip Abroad" and "Tango Weed." Katharine Sturges did "Sargasso Sea," and "Plum Blossoms." Neysa McMein did "Hollywood," and Charles B. Falls did "Inca" and "Maya." The series must have been at least modestly successful, as the company went on to do two more series.

The publicity that the Stehli Silk Company received for all three Americana series, done in 1925, 1926 and 1927, respectively, was overwhelmingly positive and often mentioned both the male and female artists by name. An article in the trade magazine, *Silk*, claimed that the introduction of these specific silks would inspire fabric design both in the U.S. and abroad. The article also stated that the designs were artistically successful, partly because the "persons who created them are such ones who are constantly immersed in the stream of American civilization."

It is not hard to imagine that Stehli's "Americana Series" was widely discussed, as it was clearly exciting stuff in terms of the celebrity designers, catchy design names and the visual imagery itself. Though there are no corresponding images for some of the silk designs (check those attics and grandparents' closets, folks!) the ones that do exist are striking. Clayton Knight's "Manhattan," for instance, exhibits a striking geometric pattern created by loosely representational skyscrapers, a common Jazz age modern motif. The stylized buildings are interrupted by diagonal shafts of light suggestive of spotlight beams on a Broadway opening night.

Katharine Sturges, who at some point became Clayton Knight's wife, did a design called "Plum Blossoms" that depicts her version of the conventionalized flowers that were so popular in the 1920s. Interest in the arts of Asia was strong in the 1920s, as well, and Sturges studied Oriental art in Japan early in her career and was greatly influenced by it. The name "Plum Blossoms" reflects this as plum blossoms have traditionally been a common motif in Japanese art. Neysa McMein's design entitled "Hollywood" was no doubt as indicative of the era as these, but unfortunately her designs were not published with the others in advertisements and features, so we can't be sure unless a sample comes to light.

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Neysa McMein's artistic skill, however, can be seen in plenty of other places as she became a prolific illustrator in the 1920s and 1930s. She provides a good example of the kind of notoriety the artists involved in the series had achieved before they became involved in the project. By the time she did her first silk design for the Stehli Silk Company in 1925, she had established herself in New York City as a successful illustrator, well known for her images of pretty young women who adorned the covers of such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall's*, as well as many of the advertisements inside the covers (see Palmolive ad).



Top and right: Lucky Strike and Palmolive ads by Neysa McMein. Bottom left: Postage stamp with likeness of Neysa McMein

According to one of her contemporaries, "...every taxi-cab driver, every salesgirl, every reader of columns, knew about the fabulous Neysa" at the height of her popularity. She was equally well known as a member of the Algonquin Round Table. McMein's studio served as a casual salon to which members of the Round Table went for entertainment, and judging by first hand accounts, there was never a dull moment. You may have seen her work featured in the American Illustrator series of U.S. Stamps. Both her artistic talent and her fast-paced, well-publicized personal life made her ideally suited to fulfill the design and marketing needs of the Stehli Silk Company.

The second Americana Series, probably introduced in the fall of 1926 is composed of designs by the same artists who did the first with a few additions. The most well-known addition was John Held, Jr. He is often credited with inventing the visual image of the flapper. According to an article in *The American Silk Journal*, Held "...has put into his work the humour which is characteristic of him and has reproduced a number known as Collegiate, which features the immortal Charleston in a little check design." It depicts an all over repetitive pattern of a suited figure performing the famous Jazz Age dance.

Another design from this series was called "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." It was by Ralph Barton, and depicted conventionalized groups of brunette

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women moving in one direction and groups of gentlemen wearing top hats following a single blonde woman. Barton illustrated Anita Loos' 1926 novel of the same name (see image). Like the Charleston, it was representational, but the figures have been abstracted and conventionalized, typical of much of the art of the 1920s.



Illustration by Ralph Barton
for Anita Loos' *Gentlemen
Prefer Blondes*

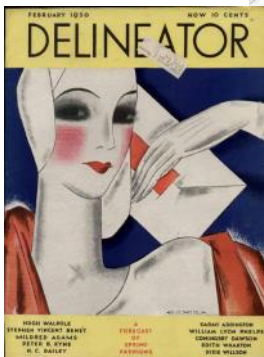


Warbirds by Clayton
Knight

Both Clayton Knight's "Manhattan" and Ralph Barton's, "My Trip Abroad," were continued from the first Americana series. Other titles from the second series include "War Birds" also by Clayton Knight (Knight had illustrated a book, *War Birds Diary of an Unknown Aviator*, in 1926 which, like Barton's work, probably inspired the fabric) and "Stadium" which may have been done by Rene Clark. The new artists, in addition to Held, were Edward A. Wilson, Helen Dryden and Ruzzie Green.

It was the third series of the Americana designs, however, that contained some of the most spirited and unconventional images. Included in this series were Ruzzie Green's "message prints" one of which featured the letters of the word "It," and the other the letters of the word "Cheerio." The word "It," used so often to describe the elusive quality possessed by Clara Bow, the famous Hollywood actress, is as indicative of the 1920s as skyscrapers and the Charleston.

Delineator cover illustrations
by Helen Dryden

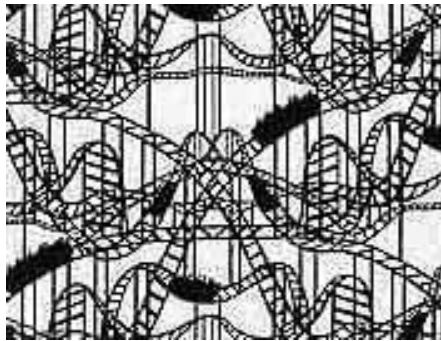


Katherine Sturges did "Tangle" for Series III and "a lovely (but unidentified) floral." Charles Buckner Falls, did "Ticker-tape." John Held, Jr. did "Rhapsody" which according to *Women's Wear Daily*, suggested the Gershwin song, "Rhapsody in Blue." Helen Dryden, did "Harvest" and Neysa McMein did "Chinese Legend." The continued success of the Americana Series again prompted the inclusion of

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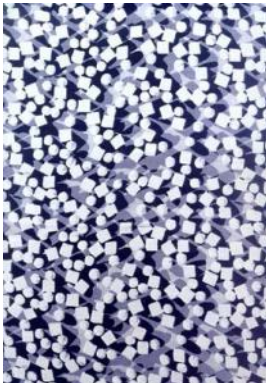
several new artists, F.V. Carpenter did "Gulls" and "Metropolis" and Dwight Taylor did "Thrill (see image)."



"Thrill" by Dwight Taylor

Photographer Edward Steichen was new to the third series as well. His experimental designs for fabrics using photographs of everyday objects such as sugar cubes, mothballs, and matches were well documented in a *Vogue* feature, "The Camera Works Out a New Theory of Design" (see image). The article stated that the idea of using a camera to create fabric design was

suggested to Steichen by the art director of the Stehli Silk Corporation, "who had, himself, experimented with the arrangement of such uninspiring things as bottles, cans, and poker chips." The truth of this statement is questionable, but what is important is that it underscored the Stehli Silk Corporation's willingness to experiment and try new things.



Fabric designs by Edward Steichen. Left: Mothballs and Sugar Cubes. Right: Matches.



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The *Vogue* article goes on to say that the designs were effective, would make good patterns for fabric and would be reproduced for spring silks. It stated as well that "they are undoubtedly the forerunners of a new school of industrial art." In many ways Steichen's designs were an ideal tool for Stehli. Designs for silks mechanically produced by a machine such as a camera symbolize an almost perfect union of art and industry. It would seem that the Stehli Silk Company's plan to improve its own and the American silk industry's design standards had, at least according to a source such as *Vogue*, succeeded.

It is difficult to discern how much of the popularity of the Americana Series was dependent on the artists-designers notoriety. But it is clear from articles such as "Stehli Puts Style into Harness" and "Art-directing the Marketing" that the company was counting on the names of the artists to be recognized and lend legitimacy to the endeavor. The company was clearly attempting to capture that elusive, nebulous notion of style. According to Kneeland Green, the art director, the company "decided that, whatever else, style should reflect good taste, good breeding, and smartness." Later, in discussing their advertising, he said that "although Stehli can boast nearly 100 years of leadership in the making of silk dress goods, none of the advertisements mention this. We wish to throw all the emphasis on our awareness of the demands of today." This indicates just how important it was to the company to present not only advertisements, but silk designs as well that were very much of the moment.

Stehli's promotional material boasted the following:

"Elegance. New weaves. New colors. The silks for 1928. Fabrics that carry out the promise of elegance--new and original, distinctly of the mode. Colors of bewildering versatility and charm--colors that reflect the spontaneity of Paris; the brilliance of modern New York."

It seems, in many ways that the company actually lived up to its advertising. The silks did offer the promise of elegance which was distinctly of the mode – as any lover of the art deco style could tell you upon gazing at the breathtaking fabrics. Unfortunately, they are now extremely rare and are for the most part tucked away in the storage areas of a very lucky few museums.

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It's also very hard to know how many of the designs were actually made into clothing. A search on the web did turn up at least one dress (see image). It features – “Tuesday Night at the Coconut Grove” by Ralph Barton. (This dress may appear in *Celebrity Caricature in America*, by Wendy Wick Reaves.)

Despite the silks' timeliness in subject matter, they were unusual and it would have taken a flapper with particular daring to be able to pull off a dress like this or an outfit featuring a silk with rollercoasters all over it. Some samples from some of the other silk companies in business at the time like Mallinson, for instance, were actually given to museums when they were first produced, no doubt in an effort to raise awareness that there was good design being produced in America.

Other examples have made their way into collections both public and private but are rarely seen because vintage fabrics can be extremely fragile and cannot survive being on display more than a few months at a time and then only if the lighting is dim enough to be harmless. There is hope, however.



Ralph Barton's design
“Tuesday Night at the
Coconut Grove” and a
dress made from the fabric

The Allentown Art Museum is collaborating with P&B textiles of California in the creation of “A Century of Progress” which is an art deco fabric line inspired by the Museum's textile collection. The Museum's website (<http://www.allentownartmuseum.org/gallery/textiles/P&B.htm>) notes that

“Over 500 colorful dress fabrics and scarves with images of the American Jazz Age are part of the Museum's textile collection. Ten of these '20s and '30s designs have inspired the A Century of Progress collection of printed fabrics introduced by P & B Textiles of California. The A Century of Progress collection is the first group of fabrics based on Art Deco designs by notable American artists

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such as John Held, Jr. and Walter Dorwin Teague. P & B Textiles has reproduced five designs by Teague with geometric patterns reflective of the Machine Age. Other designs include *Thrill*, a 1927 roller-coaster print, and John Held, Jr.'s *Rhapsody*, a design of orchestral jazz musicians inspired by George Gershwin's composition *Rhapsody In Blue*. A variety of colorways has been selected for each fabric design. Look for this unique collection in the Allentown Art Museum Store.”

The Allentown Art Museum mounted the exhibit *All That Jazz: Printed Fashion Silks of the '20s and '30s* in 1999, and published an accompanying catalogue (which is probably out of print) that would allow you to at least visually admire the beauty of the silks if not touch them! But none of this means that it's completely impossible that you could stumble across a sample, dress, or scarf with the letters IT all over it, or a swath of red covered with angular pegs. And if you do, you should certainly buy it!



“Pegs” by Charles B. Falls

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Call (202) 298-1000 to inquire about rates, submission requirements, and deadlines

Get Into Expo Free

The Annual Exposition of the Decorative Arts (Expo) is the Art Deco Society of Washington's primary source of revenue. Expo revenues support ADSW's preservation activities and help cover the costs of our monthly programs, *Streamlines*, *Trans-Lux*, the Preservation Ball, and the Fashion Show.

Unlike New York's Pier Shows and San Francisco's Art Deco to 60s Shows, which are operated by for-profit show promoters, ADSW's Expo is managed and operated entirely by volunteers. One hundred percent of the "profits" from the Expo are used to support ADSW's other activities.

While certain expenses, such as facility rental and security, are unavoidable, others can be minimized, or avoided altogether, if enough people volunteer to help in the setup and operation of the Expo. If the Expo is forced to hire staff, it reduces the funds available to mount effective campaigns to preserve Washington's rich Art Deco heritage.

Volunteers are needed during dealer setup on Saturday, June 8, 2002, to help check dealers in and direct them to their spaces. Volunteers are not expected to assist dealers in unloading. Setup begins at 7:00 A.M. and continues into the afternoon. Those who volunteer to assist during setup not only get into Expo free, but get an opportunity to shop before the Expo officially opens.

A volunteer is also needed to place directional signs at the Vienna Metro station and on the streets surrounding the Northern Virginia Community College early Sunday morning before the Expo opens.

Volunteers are needed during the Expo to help sell tickets, provide directions to customers, and sell memberships. Finally, several volunteers are needed to help direct dealer traffic after the show closes and to retrieve the signage.

To volunteer, call (202) 298-1100 and leave a voice mail message or send an e-mail message to ArtDecoDon@aol.com

Carl Paul Jennewein: The Sculptor Behind the Justice “Coverup”

By Jim Linz

Much has been written and reported these past few months about the Department of Justice’s “coverup” of the bare breasted “Lady Justice” and her skimpily clad male companion “Majesty of Law.” An \$8,000 drape was purchased to hide the two “risque” sculptures from public view during the Attorney General’s press conferences.

The great “coverup” drew the attention of both the national news media and the late night talk shows. Even entertainer Cher weighed in, commenting that “These statues have been there through other very conservative administrations, and no one has seen fit to put a curtain in front of them.” She went on the question “What are we going to do next? Put shorts on the statue of David, put an 1880s bathing suit on ‘Venus Rising’ and a shirt on the Venus de Milo?”



Greek Dance, 1926

So who was the artist whose work was considered so distracting that the Attorney General ordered it hidden from view during his news conferences?

The offending works are by one of the premier American sculptors of the 20th century—Carl Paul Jennewein. Jennewein, whose works are exhibited in major museums throughout the country, is listed in *Who’s Who in America*, 1936-37, and *Who’s Who in American Art*, 1940. He served for many years as the President of the Board of Trustees of South Carolina’s Brookgreen Gardens, America’s premier sculpture garden (See *Trans-Lux*, March 2000). Many of his works were prepared for schools, churches, memorials, and pub-

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lic buildings. His works often portray educational and patriotic themes.

Born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1890, Jennewein was apprenticing to artisans at the Stuttgart Art Museum by age 13. Three years later, he saw illustrations of the work of the New York architectural firm McKim, Mead, and White. Jennewein was so impressed with their work that he soon set sail for the United States to pursue his studies. He studied at New York's Art Students League, at the same time working for Buhler and Lauter, a firm specializing in architectural sculpting and commercial modeling. One of Buhler and Lauter's primary customers was McKim, Mead, and White.

At 21, Jennewein set out on his own, primarily receiving commissions for work at churches and schools. In 1916, he received a 3-year fellowship to study classical art in Italy as part of the prestigious Prix de Rome award for sculpture awarded by the American Academy in Rome. Jennewein remained in Italy until 1922, completing many of his most famous sculptures during this period. He served in the Red Cross during World War I.

Following his studies, Jennewein returned to New York, living in Larchmont, New York from 1924 until his death in 1978. He quickly received a commission for the Caruso Panel at the Metropolitan Opera House. A number of his works were purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He continued to receive acclaim for his works and, in 1933, was elected to the prestigious National Academy of Design and the Century Club. He also became a member of the National Institute of Arts and Sciences.

In addition to the 57 statues, pediments, and reliefs he prepared for the Department of Justice building, Jennewein's works in Washington, DC, include marble sculptures in front of the Rayburn House Office Building, allegorical relief panels in the White House, the Darlington Memorial Fountain, and the bas-relief eagles adorning the arches of Arlington Memorial Bridge.

“Where law ends tyranny begins.”

Carl Paul Jennewein

Jennewein's work is also on prominent display in New York, where nine of his bronze figures adorn the British Empire Building in Rockefeller Center, many of his sculptures are on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,

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and his bas relief sculptures adorn the entrance to the Brooklyn Central Library and the 1935 Federal Office Building. He also sculpted for the Woolworth and Cunard Buildings and created four entrance pylons for the 1939-40 New York World's Fair.



Stylized eagle by Carl Paul Jennewein for the 1935 Federal Building, New York City.

Jennewein appears to have been a favorite in Pennsylvania, contributing bas relief panels to the stunning 1932 Education Building (to be featured in the June 2002 *Trans-Lux*) as well as the Finance Building, and the pediment for the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Pediment, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Jennewein used polychromed terra-cotta tiles to create this classical Greek scene.

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Panels by Carl Paul Jennewein for the Education Building, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Jen-

newein served in the American Red Cross during World War I and created numerous war memorials, including the Providence (RI) war memorial and the American War memorial in Tours, France, *American Indian Releasing American Eagle*. Other Jennewein memorials include the Caruso Memorial at the Metropolitan Opera House, the Plymouth, Massachusetts memorial fountain, the Levi Tomb in Mt. Pleasant, New York, the Dudley Memorial Gateway at Harvard University, the War Memorial in Worcester, Massachusetts, the John Endicott Memorial in Boston, and the Spanish American War Memorial in Rochester, New York.

The most extensive research collection of Jennewein's work is located at the Tampa Museum of Art. Following Jennewein's death in 1978, his family donated over 2000 objects, drawings, paintings, and other items to the museum. Two of Jennewein's works—Greek Dance (1926) and Coral (c.

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1915-20) are prominently displayed on the museum's web site.



Coral, circa 1915-1920, Carl Paul Jennewein.

Tampa Museum of Art

Not particularly known as a philosopher, it is nevertheless fitting that it is Jennewein who is quoted at Tourmobile® stops at the Federal Bureau of Investigations—“Justice alone sustains society: founded on the principles of right, expressed in the national laws, administered by public officers”—and at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial—“Where law ends tyranny begins.” While the works of this remarkable sculptor and patriot may be covered up at the Department of Justice, they remain on view at numerous other locations in Washington and around the world.

“Justice alone sustains society: founded on the principles of right, expressed in the national laws, administered by public officers.”

Carl Paul Jennewein

For further information, see *C. Paul Jennewein: Sculptor* by Shirley Reiff Howarth, published by the Tampa Museum of Art.

*MOONLIGHT BECOMES YOU
IT GOES WITH YOUR HAIR
YOU CERTAINLY KNOW THE RIGHT THING TO WEAR...*

The Art Deco Society of Washington
presents its

***2002 Vintage Fashion Show
"Moonlight In The Garden"***

featuring
Authentic vintage garments from the '20s, '30s, '40s and '50s

Saturday, April 20, 2002, 8:00 p.m.
Woman's National Democratic Club
Near Dupont Circle Metro
Washington, D.C.

This year's fashion show starts off with a cocktail hour at 6:30, which includes hors d'oeuvres, a cash bar, and live music by **The Jazz Collaborative**. Guests will also be able to take a **self-guided tour** through the **historic Woman's National Democratic Club**, where they will be able to see pictures of past presidents, gorgeous Victorian antiques, and the actual rooms from which Eleanor Roosevelt gave her famous radio addresses.

The show features casual, day and evening wear provided by PollySue's Vintage Shop, Bebop Betty's Vintage Clothing, and Megan Searing. The show will include **historic commentary on the clothing**, and a **dance demonstration from each decade**, including the Charleston and the Swing, presented by the **Fidgety Feet** dance troupe. Also, back by popular demand, the **Silverliners**, former Eastern Airlines stewardesses, will make their appearance in vintage stewardess uniforms. After the show, guests will have the opportunity to **purchase the clothes** in the show.

Tickets are \$20.00 for members of the Art Deco Society of Washington, \$25.00 for nonmembers, and \$50.00 for Patrons. Patrons receive reserved seating and a free ticket to the Art Deco Society of Washington's June Expo. To order tickets and obtain location information, order online at www.adsw.org or phone 202-298-1100. Or, clip the coupon on the next page and mail to ADSW, PO Box 11090, Washington, DC 20008. Make checks payable to Art Deco Society of Washington.



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As We Celebrate the 75th Anniversary

**Of One of the Most Important Events
of the Art Deco Era:**

The Birth of Former ADSW President

Frances Scott

HAPPY BIRTHDAY FRANCES!



Fashion Show Order Form

Please reserve:

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___ Nonmember tickets @ \$25

___ Patron tickets @ \$50

___ Memberships @ \$30 single/\$40 family

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Address: _____

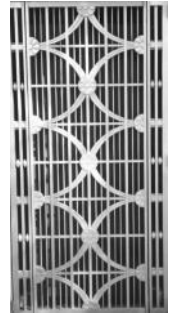
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Open the Gate

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Conservatory



The Art Deco Society of Washington
Presents the

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Pause for a cool drink at a desert oasis...



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sheltering
palms...

When: May 4, 2002 from 7:00 PM to 11:00 PM

Where: U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory, Maryland Avenue and
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Food and Beverages: Gourmet hors d'oeuvres and open bar

Attire: Black tie/white tie...vintage attire encouraged

See next page for ticket information



Preservation Ball Ticket Reservation

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___ Non Members @ \$ 125.00 each \$ _____

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(Includes 4 tickets, reserved seating, and program listing)

I/We wish to join ADSW (\$30 single/\$40 family \$ _____

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Are Available Online at

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Deco Bookshelf: New Deal in Tennessee

By **Jim Sweeney**

The New Deal is history, but it's definitely part of the present, as shown by *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook* by Carroll Van West (University of Tennessee Press, \$18.50 paperback, \$40 hardcover). He documents the massive impact Depression-era projects had on the state's government and economy, impacts that last to this day.

In the early 21st century, thousands of Tennessee children attend schools built with New Deal funds, Van West notes. Hundreds of state and local employees work in New Deal-era buildings.

In an era when, in some political circles, it's fashionable to trash FDR and the New Deal as outmoded symbols of a big government we no longer need, it's worth considering Van West's point.

The New Deal agencies "transformed the state's public landscape," Van West says. Often the transformation is more subtle--and more massive--than just a new courthouse or a bridge. It includes changes in the way farming was done, and how government operated. The New Deal agencies helped open up Tennessee to industrialization, by providing large power plants, courtesy of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

One of the state's biggest New Deal projects is Great Smoky Mountains National Park, one of the five most-visited national parks. The economic impact of the park's many visitors is a major reason that Tennessee does not have an income tax, according to an unofficial web site that promotes the park and surrounding communities.

The book isn't a comprehensive touring guide. Van West, who is projects director for Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation, highlights 250 representative projects and places. For the buildings, he includes an address, date, architect if known, and photos of many structures.

Van West doesn't ignore the negative impacts of New Deal projects, including population displacement and demolition of existing structures. By

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1946, TVA had 1.1 million acres, and had removed 72,000 people from their land.

Other parks and land projects had similar impacts, displacing many people, even entire towns. The National Park Service wanted nature to be the focus of its lands, so it demolished most structures within areas it took over, even historic structures.

The New Deal agencies also couldn't get around the racial politics of the South. African-Americans benefited far less from New Deal projects, and New Deal buildings continued policies of segregation. Two public parks were set up for blacks only; the rest were "basically off limits" to blacks.

Many of the projects had mixed impact. The 1938 Davidson County Public Building and Courthouse was Nashville's first building with central air conditioning. On the other hand, Van West notes, its construction required destruction of a Greek Revival masterpiece. Related federal projects resulted in the demolition of almost every historic building on Public Square, leaving the courthouse isolated.

Federal agencies helped to restore land that had been ruined by erosion and poor agricultural practices. A 1935 Agriculture Department report said "less than 4 million acres of the state's total of almost 27 million acres of farmland and forests were undamaged." The TVA planted 50 million trees by 1939.

But well-meaning Agriculture scientists introduced kudzu as ground cover. It has since become a major pest.

The New Deal projects also weren't immune to politics. The state's Sen. Kenneth McKellar was chairman of the post office committee and a ranking member of the appropriations committee.

So the state was "well positioned to receive more than its fair share of new postal facilities," Van West says. The scores of federally constructed post offices are "both the most obvious and the most lasting New Deal legacy across the state."

By 1938, various New Deal agencies had spent \$22 million in Memphis, in large part due to the clout of the city's political machine. A flood control program later added another \$13 million there.

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Memphis's undue influence over New Deal funds is illustrated by its Art Deco dog shelter, Van West says, suggesting that "no project was too small or inconsequential to receive funding" if it was in Memphis. The state government also comes in for criticism in the book. The legislature and governors didn't want to spend state money on relief projects. The Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration spent \$30 million in one year; 98% of the funds came from the federal treasury. TERA "kept thousands of citizens from homelessness and starvation in the early years of the New Deal," Van West says.

Van West's conclusion is that "Tennessee benefited significantly from the New Deal." The state "received thousands of miles of new roads, thousands of acres of restored land and forests, new lakes, huge new parks, hundreds of new schools, modern airports, many new buildings for community revitalization, and a modern electrical production and distribution network."

Even if a community's only New Deal project was a new school, that had a broad impact, Van West says. The school would have a library, electricity, sanitary restrooms, physical education facilities, a lunch room for hot meals. "The building was a demonstration of the amenities, and the necessity of modern technology, for a productive life," Van West says.

By 1938, the Works Progress Administration had built 123 new schools and renovated 480 schools. Federal programs also funded textbooks and library books.

People know a handful of New Deal agencies and projects. The WPA brought New Deal benefits "to almost every town and village in Tennessee," the book says, but there were many agencies and many projects.

The National Youth Administration provided Van Buren County with its first public high school. The NYA also built the 1938 Gibson County Central Library in Trenton; it was one of the state's first central libraries in a rural area. Van West stresses the importance of looking beyond individual projects, important as they may be for a community. He cites historian Roger Biles, who says that the New Deal "transformed southern agriculture from a plantation-dominated system to modern agribusiness."

The New Deal, Van West goes on, "created a foundation for the region's tourism industry and spurred larger industrial investments due to the re-

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gion's improved transportation and utility systems. These years spurred urban growth and established the first large public housing projects in the cities."

New Deal agencies also upgraded municipal utility systems and basic infrastructure. The WPA installed Woodbury's first concrete sidewalks in the late 1930s. Van West quotes the county historian as saying that Woodbury made more progress in the Depression years than it had in the previous hundred years.

These types of improvements are much less visible than dams or courthouses, Van West says, but just as important. Van West says the transportation network was a major focus of New Deal agencies in Tennessee. One reason was that a 1931 political dispute "had almost totally eliminated the state highway department, leading to the layoff of four thousand workers." Many of the hundreds of bridges the New Deal agencies built are still in use, he notes.

Many New Deal projects symbolize changes in government, Van West says. Until the state office building and the state Supreme Court building were built in Nashville in the 1940s, the entire state government was housed in the Capitol. "The new buildings reflected the expansion of state government in response to" New Deal programs, he says. Local projects often centralized county or municipal agencies in one large building, becoming a symbol of an expanding government presence in people's lives.

While many buildings were traditional or Colonial revival in style, the New Deal projects included Deco buildings. Van West mentions that many of the new armories were "striking" Art Deco buildings, although unfortunately there are no photos of them.

The 1937 Franklin County Courthouse in Winchester features a central clock tower. The three-story limestone building is set on a landscaped terrace five feet above the street, making it more prominent. The post offices often included murals or other art reflecting local history or industry. As in most states, there were sometimes disputes over subject matter or other details.

Treasury supervisors questioned Carl Nyquist's design for a mural on picking cotton for Bolivar's post office because all the cotton pickers

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were white. They were assured there were some white cotton pickers there. But Van West notes it would have been far more accurate to show some black cotton pickers.

The 1935 post office in Lewisburg, now the office of the local newspaper, has a mural showing pioneers crossing mountains. Van West thinks it's an odd choice of subject, considering that Lewisburg isn't in the mountains. While post offices tended to be architecturally conservative, the modernist style of TVA dams had a "significant" impact on American architecture, Van West argues. He says it's worth noting that in Kenneth Frampton's 1980 "Modern Architecture," the only example from Tennessee is Norris Dam.

TVA was also on the cutting edge in community design. Some of the communities that the agency built for its workers had greenbelt buffers. TVA also told construction crews to keep as many trees as possible on lots. That would be considered radical planning in many communities even today.

While the major federal parklands, such as Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Cherokee National Forest, were a major accomplishment, the New Deal agencies also had a major impact on state parks.

Van West cites the amazing fact that in 1921 Tennessee had no state parks. In 1925 the state established a parks commission, but it did almost nothing. The state park system, now considered "one of the true jewels of the state's public landscape," is largely due to the New Deal agencies.

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June 9, 2002

Northern Virginia Community College
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Deco Bookshelf: Detroit Theaters

By **Jim Sweeney**

Detroit's economic collapse in the decades after World War II helped preserve many of its movie theaters, according to *Motor City Marquees* by Stuart Galbraith (McFarland & Co. Inc., \$20, paperback). There wasn't a lot of new construction creating pressure to demolish them.

It's an interesting argument--a positive side to Detroit's troubles. Many theaters survived to be converted to concert halls or clubs, or even reopen as movie theaters. Others could still be saved.

Galbraith's tour of Detroit's theaters is a thorough investigation of moviegoing in one metropolitan area. You don't have to be from Detroit to learn something from it. It's a sometimes quirky, personalized tour; Galbraith inserts his opinions loudly at times. He says of the Abbey in Madison Heights that "It is a nice theater, despite what is probably the worst parking lot of any theater in this book." He refers to another theater's operations as "pathetic."

Not that theaters were immune to Detroit's problems. Many did close or deteriorate (Galbraith notes that Woodward Avenue is lined with shuttered theaters). Several closed after shootings or arson. Several had metal detectors while they were still in operation. The 2,500-seat Eastown, a neighborhood theater in Detroit, closed in the mid-1980s. Galbraith says "its bad location will probably prevent it from becoming a successful venue again."

Others suffered the usual fates: neglect, collapse, demolition, abandonment, conversion to other uses. The 4,000-seat Michigan Theater, a 1928 French Baroque palace by Rapp and Rapp, closed in 1967. It briefly reopened as a movie theater, became a night club, then a concert hall, then became a parking garage in the 1970s.

The lobby, upper balcony, projection booth and stage area are intact. Galbraith suspects the contractor feared that gutting the building completely would make it structurally unsound. The book includes a photo of people touring the Michigan's interior, with cars parked behind them.

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Detroit's Alhambra became a recording studio in the 1970s. Many theaters became churches or stores. Dearborn's Carmen, a stripped-down 1941 deco building, had a round lobby with a gearlike structure on top, perhaps a reference to nearby Ford Motor Co. It's now an auto parts store. The last incarnation of Walled Lake's now-vacant Lake Theater was as a live bait shop.

The author talks about how hard it is to verify information about old buildings. Current owners often knew nothing about their theaters. When theaters opened their owners often exaggerated seat counts to make them sound more impressive. Seat counts often changed, usually down. The addition of wider screens and renovations often reduced the number of seats, as did the fact that seats got wider as Americans got wider.

Galbraith often had to discount marketing hype. The original owners of the now-closed 1963 Mai Kai in Livonia claimed the parking lot held 3,000 cars. Galbraith estimates the 8.5-acre site could have held 500 cars. "I encountered (sometimes within a single publication) seating counts for some theaters that varied in the thousands, opening dates by decades, and building costs by millions of dollars," Galbraith notes. There's often lots of documentation for the movie palaces, but small neighborhood theaters are nearly invisible in the records, he found.

Similar or duplicate names, plus name changes, also make tracking theaters difficult. The listing for Detroit's 1919 Ferndale says "Not to be confused with the other Ferndale, which was actually located in Ferndale. This Ferndale was renamed the Capitol (not to be confused with the Capitol downtown, which was called the Paramount by then anyway) in 1932."

Even equipment moved. Galbraith found that the Fisher Theater's Wurlitzer organ was moved to the Iris by the Detroit Theater Organ Club in 1957. It is now in the Senate Theater. Organ concerts are held at the Senate, but no films are shown during the concerts; the projection equipment is long gone.

The descriptions of some of the theaters make you want to visit them. The 1922 Italian Renaissance Capitol Theater in downtown Detroit was the city's first real movie palace, Galbraith says. It was claimed to be the world's fifth largest movie theater when it was built, and "remains one of the largest standing film houses in the world." Current seating capacity is 3,367. It became an opera house in the 1990s.

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The 1928 Fisher in Detroit, a 2,711-seat palace, is described as a "wonderfully tacky Mayan design."

The 1928 Fox, in a "Siamese-Byzantine" style, now hosts live events and films. It cost \$3.8 million in 1928, and had a staff of 400. With over 5,000 seats, it is the world's largest operating original movie theater. (Galbraith points out that Radio City Music Hall is bigger, but it began as a music hall, although films were quickly added to the bill.) Waves of theater closings are not unique to our time, nor were they always due to Detroit's economy. In the 1940s, lack of air conditioning often caused theaters to close. Television caused many theaters to close in the 1950s. When the Terrace opened in Livonia in 1962, it was the first new theater in metro Detroit in 14 years.

Theaters often had several lives. The book notes that the 1911 Vendome in Detroit closed in 1932. It ran as the Sun from 1935 to 1937, then as the Seville from 1941 to 1958. Then it was an auto parts warehouse, and was razed. For many other theaters, in Detroit and elsewhere, the last attempt to stay open was showing adult films.

The book offers lots of interesting trivia. Pontiac had one of the nation's few 70-mm drive-ins. Ann Arbor's worst riot occurred when a dispute between an usher at the Star Theater and two University of Michigan students ended with the usher beating the students unconscious. Several thousand rioting students left the theater "a pile of rubble." This didn't happen in the 1960s but in 1908.

One of the most poignant factoids is Detroit's longest-running theater. The Adams was open from 1917 to 1988. The building still stands, vacant.

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