

Spotlight on Washington Deco: The Lost Deco Bar at the Carlton Hotel

By Richard Striner

*In 1984 Hans Wirz and I published, via Smithsonian Press, **Washington Deco: Art Deco Design in the Nation's Capital**. Since then, ADSW has done great things to save Deco buildings in Washington. And thanks to the energetic work of hundreds of ADSW volunteers, we have learned a lot more about Deco buildings that we either missed the first time around or else addressed with only limited background information. In *Spotlight on Washington Deco*, "a continuing Trans-Lux feature, I will share some of this new information.*

In the course of examining photographic collections during research for *Washington Deco*, I discovered a remarkable sequence of pictures by Theodor Horydczak, a renowned commercial photographer, depicting an Art Deco lounge that had been added sometime in the 1930s to the older (1927) Carlton Hotel (later the Sheraton Carlton), which stands to this day at 923 Sixteenth Street, N.W.



The lounge—long since destroyed before I discovered the pictures in 1983—contained, among its other exquisite features, an extraordinary Art Deco bar in which the bartender evidently sat concealed. We included these photographs in *Washington Deco*, duly noting in the picture captions that the facts about the bar's design and designer remained unknown to us.

In 1988 -- four years after the publication of our book -- the facts were unearthed and published by historians Sue A. Kohler and Jeffrey R. Carson.

Kohler and Carson co-authored Volume 2 in the series *Sixteenth Street*

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Architecture, published by the Commission of Fine Arts. The authors' research documented the addition of the bar and lounge in 1934. The lounge was part of the "Carlton Club and Garden." Kohler and Carson quoted the following account of the Club from the Washington Herald of July 10, 1934:

"Designed by Nat Eastman, the new rendezvous features murals in striking color, red and white chairs of modernistic shape, and a hidden bar which adds genuine novelty to the room. There are no clashing colors or discordant notes in the club, which is truly a delightful place in which to dine or dance. The cocktail room opens out onto a garden which completes the setting. In the afternoons it is a colorful spot, gay with awnings and tables while in the evenings carefully lighted fountains give an added effect to the whole."

The authors also discovered a write-up of the hidden bar in the December 1934 issue of Fortune magazine:

"The small and exquisite Carlton Club has the smartest bar, as well as a series of rooms famous as birthplaces of New Deal legislation. You will note that, since the District of Columbia won't let you see the bartender, drinks appear through a revolving servidor, like those at the automat."

Kohler and Carson added the following detailed description of the bar:

"The tiered servidor was framed out in a variety of burnished metals and inset with illuminated etched glass panels. The etched metal revolving counter canisters concealed individual drink orders. The top of the bar contained a fountain centered by a sculpture of Diana of the Hunt in what appeared to be bronze vermeil. This exceptional room was apparently destroyed in the 1958 remodeling (certainly no later); the priceless bar and enameled wall panels disappeared."

Kudos to the member of ADSW who discovers the fate of the servidor bar! And a tip of the hat to the ADSW member who can track down the D.C. law that required hidden bartenders.