



UPPER LEFT:
Ministry of Social Affairs

*Images by Robin Grow
& Robyn Saalfeld*

What better way to escape a Melbourne winter than to head to the blue skies and warm nights of France – firstly to Perpignan, in the South, for the fun of the second Art Deco weekend organised by Philippe Latger, President of Art Deco Perpignan. Then it was off to Paris on the TGV to meet Pascal Yves Laurent, President of Paris Art Deco Society, and his team of helpers. There we joined a group of Deco enthusiasts from New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Paris for a full week of events that included tours of some of the historic Deco gems of Paris. Naturally the World Expositions of 1925 and 1937, together with the Colonial Exposition of 1931, provided major anchor points in the places we visited.¹

Pascal had organised access to the roof of a number of buildings so we could view Paris from different perspectives. He had also organised lunches and dinners at a number of the most notable restaurants, including the legendary La Coupole in Montparnasse,

The week's events were based on a number of themes. In the modernist stylish suburb of Boulogne Billancourt, we took in the spectacular Hotel de Ville (Town Hall), and visited the wonderful Museum of the 1930s, before embarking on a walking tour that took us down streets lined with villas and mansions, including some designed by Le Corbusier, Robert Mallet Stevens and other prominent French architects. A highlight of this area (and elsewhere in Paris) was the number of beautifully crafted gates and entrances. The day finished with a visit to the Piscine Molitor, a 1929 swimming pool recently converted to an up-market hotel, where we enjoyed a drink on the rooftop terrace – most welcome on a hot Paris day.

On the Left Bank we were fortunate to be able to explore the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the world's centre for architectural education from 1860 to 1939. A highlight was visiting Maison de Verre (House of Glass, 1928-31), designed by Pierre Chareau for Dr. Jean Dalsace. The three-storey



structure served as a family home and as the practice for the good doctor. Entering the house via a framed metal structure that supports panels made of glass blocks, we marvelled at the many innovative ways that rooms were insulated from each other, including wooden or metal sliding or revolving doors. Glass blocks or panels separate the different areas, and the rear flagged garden is a joy to sit in on a hot Paris day. Whilst a family home, the owners generously allow small tour groups to visit and admire. But no photographs!

Another day was spent retracing the sites of the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne (International Exhibition of Arts and Techniques in Modern Life). Less ambitious than the 1925 exhibition, the fair focused on France's place in the modern world as reflected through achievements in science and technology, unconsciously marking the end of the Art Deco era.² But the day started with, in my

opinion, the highlight of the week - a visit to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Rue Duquesne, perhaps the best-kept secret in the world of Art Deco, not even known to many Parisians. Following legislation that created a social security system in 1928, the building was designed by Guillaume Tronchet and constructed in 1928-30. After a welcome in the room by the architect currently responsible for the building, we stood under an exquisite glass roof created by Jacques Gruber and admired the bas reliefs produced by the legendary Martel brothers.

Our 1937 trek took us to the Palais de Chaillot in the 16th Arrondissement, an immense pseudo-classical building constructed in 1937. Its gracious, curved wings are decorated with giant sculptures by Henri Bouchard and Paul Belmondo and inscriptions by Paul Valéry. In the east wing are the Théâtre National de Chaillot, with its outstanding Art Deco lobby, and the restaurant which provides a wonderful vista. We dined in front of a

UPPER LEFT:
Maison de Verre
(House of Glass)

UPPER RIGHT:
Hotel de Ville

LOWER LEFT:
Ministry of Social Affairs

LOWER RIGHT:
Modernist house in
Boulogne Billancourt



UPPER LEFT:
Palais de Chaillot

RIGHT:
Grand Rex Cinema

LOWER LEFT:
Picine Molitor

panoramic view of the Eiffel Tower (adorned with a soccer ball as the Euro Cup was being fought out in France), whilst in the forecourt below a group of Parisians practised the tango.

Cinemas are essential viewing in any Art Deco tour and a highlight was a visit to the 2nd Arrondissement and the Grand Rex cinema, built in 1932, with a capacity of over 3,000. Here we stepped back into the golden age of cinema, under a ceiling that represents a star-spangled sky. The exterior of the cinema is topped with a spectacular tower adorned with lettering that spells out Rex. From there we headed to Porte Doree Palace, site of the state-sponsored Exposition Coloniale, an enormous display of French colonial culture held in 1931. The exterior is dominated by a bas relief by sculptor Alfred Janniot depicting scenes from French colonies in Africa and Asia that illustrate the wildlife and products and goods gained (or plundered?) from these faraway and exotic places. The two oval lounges on each side of the building are regarded as masterpieces – the first, inspired by the art of Africa, includes pieces of furniture by Jacques-Emile Rulmann, while the second, inspired by Asia, was furnished by Eugene Printz.

Another outstanding space beckoned to us when we visited the Provinces Opera Hotel, reputedly untouched since 1925, with richly sculpted decoration that includes elements of Nouveau and Deco design. Decorative arts were celebrated with a visit to Musee des Arts Decoratifs, next to the Louvre, which includes in its collection items

acquired after the 1925 Exposition. As well as furniture pieces by Robert Mallet Stevens, Michel Roux-Spitz and Eileen Grey, we viewed stained glass by Jacques Gruber and gates by Edgar Brandt. The collection also contains a number of desks, complete private apartments and dining room settings.

Another walking tour took us up into the 8th Arrondissement to the very stylish Avenue Montaigne and Champs Elysees, with standout buildings such as the former home of Rene Lalique, Banque Transatlantique and the Théâtre des Champs Élysées. Finished in 1913, the theatre is one of the finest Art Deco buildings in Paris, blending symmetry and adornment with simplicity and functionality. The week ended with a visit to the largest antique market in the world, at Porte de Clignancourt.

Pascal and his team did a wonderful job in organising the tour, hotels, transport and restaurants and it is certain that a World Congress in Paris would be a wonderful event, hopefully soon.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925 was a vast state-sponsored fair that dazzled more than 16 million visitors during its seven-month run. The works exhibited—everything from architecture and interior design to jewellery and perfumes—were principally intended to promote and proclaim French supremacy in the production of luxury goods
- 2 Jared Goss, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, June 2010



SPRIT OF PROGRESS

JOURNAL OF ART DECO AND MODERNISM SOCIETY INC.

issue 66

WINTER 2016
volume 17 number 3

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NEON-A SURVIVOR

GENTLEMEN'S TIE ACCESSORIES

PARIS

BACARDI CUBA & MIAMI



Member of ICADS
International Coalition
of Art Deco Societies

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CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

Articles about the Art Deco era and Modernism for publication in this journal are very welcome. Our aim is to include material covering a spectrum of subjects such as architecture, restoration and renovation, landscaping, interior design, furniture, fine arts, fashion, jewellery, books, travel and transport.

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Spirit of Progress is a journal of information and opinion on all aspects of the Art Deco era and Modernism related topics. Spirit of Progress is published four times a year by Art Deco & Modernism Society Inc., PO Box 17, Camberwell Victoria 3124 Australia. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor or Publisher.

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

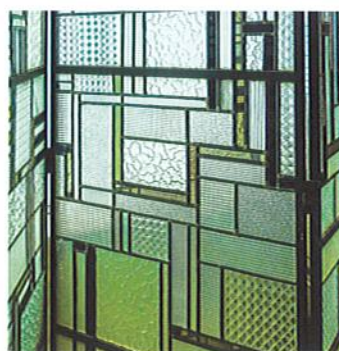
All Roads Lead to Cleveland!	5
<i>by Robin Grow</i>	
Neon – A Survivor	8
<i>by Julie Lord</i>	
Gentlemen's Tie Accessories – Style Restrained	11
<i>by Brian Scott</i>	
We Love Paris!	14
<i>by Robin Grow</i>	
Europe's First Skyscraper	17
<i>by Ken McGillivray</i>	
Centrespread: Deco Advertising	18
A Night on the Town	20
<i>by Kathy Hope</i>	
Under the Sign of the Bat	24
<i>by Robin Grow</i>	
Between the Wars in Sth Melbourne	28
<i>Walk report by Robin Grow</i>	

FORUM

President's Report	4
Membership	31
Deco Directory	31
World News	32

COVER

Screen by Louis Barillet
(1930), Museum of the 30's,
Billancourt, Paris



WINTER 2016

Volume: 17
Number: 3
Issue: 66
ISSN: 1443-7554