Foreword

This book represents a major contribution to our understanding of Art Deco, and of the muddled definitions of modernity, modernization, and Modernism. Rather than become submerged by any one theoretical position, Michael Windover deftly employs a series of analytical frames, chiefly those associated with lifestyle mobility. Thereby he both recognizes Deco's inherent fascination with stylism while disclosing the equally fascinating preoccupation of its purveyors with surface but also substance. For his book is built around four major commissions that demonstrate, in a novel manner, the global reach of Art Deco. These studies of Deco at work begin at the western edge of Dominion Canada, travel to the emergent populist cultural capital of

Los Angeles, the late imperial proto-independent Bombay/Mumbai, and finally to the radical re-staging of life around the radio. Windover literally tunes us into the dynamics of the Art Deco: its colonization of high-end as well as low-cost commodification, clever negotiation of contesting identities both national and individual, its visual normalization of aristocratic and archaeological precedent, plus its brilliantly elegant coating of base commercialization. He displays it as progeny of the Beaux-Arts, but cousin of its eventual nemesis, the Modern Movement. Through his study, Art Deco re-emerges as the visualization of the "democracy" of consumerism, but moulded by privileged aesthetic values and guided by cosmopolitan (as against mass) objectives.

The travel of Art Deco around the old world of empire into the new culture of consumption is mapped out in the Introduction. Windover cleverly establishes the sharp outlines of Deco's transcontinental architecture through the metaphorical and virtual example of The Cross Roads of the World shopping precinct in Los Angeles. Its modern yet historicized articulation reflected the nearby factory of fantasy at Hollywood, where the myriad and exotic relics of disintegrating European hegemony and its imperial mythology congregated: from such historical romps as *Gunga Din* to the counter-Depression filmic novellas choreographed around Savile Row-tailored, Deco-furnished Fred Astaire. Appropriately The Cross Roads was built around the automobile since some of the most attractive modern machines were Deco-bodied grand touring cars of the 1930s, notably those crafted by Rolls Royce, Delage and Bugatti and their coach-builders. Similarly, Deco managed to combine the desperate post-World War I clutching onto privilege and tradition with the eager embrace of technocracy, functionalism, and consumption. The Cross Roads also foreshadowed the repositioning of power—economic, military, cultural—out of Northern Europe via the United States into the wider Pacific Rim. Windover's perceptive scholarship alike holds in balance Deco's solid design credentials in the academic tradition but also its iconographic appropriations.

The spaces of spectacular business enterprise and decorative urbanism reconfigured by Art Deco are first examined in Vancouver, British Columbia, an apt inaugural site because it demonstrates the trans-oceanic appeal of Deco for professional and public. Deco's etymological and aesthetic origins may have resided in Paris or East Coast America but its ethos and practice resonated globally. Better yet, Windover's site is the Marine Building, commissioned just before the fracture of post-1918 paper wealth but completed soon after the low point of the Depression. Those events both marked and enabled Art Deco, much as the Modern Movement really owed its genesis to the rupture of hierarchical convention but strange rapture for technology bequeathed by the First World War. The Marine Building, like its Deco decoration, slides between riches and poverty, conservative values and contemporary attitudes, but also between functional substance and ornamental scenery—literally a modernizing Cathedral of Commerce in the genus of such Yankee skyscrapers as the contemporary

Chrysler or Empire State buildings. In that sense Art Deco is firmly anchored in modernity, that long gestated dressing of radical new technique in the garb of tradition.

The amalgam figured in Windover's next case study, Bullock's Wilshire department store in Los Angeles. Its streamlined towers and fluted massing attained distinctive street presence amidst the capital of accessible glamour and virtual reality. Once again he reveals the hydra-headed nature of Art Deco design practice. For Bullock's was as elegant as efficient, and as influential upon everyday fashion as geared to exclusive taste. He aligns its celebration of glamorous consumption with a 1936 Hollywood cinematic cartoon, *Page Miss Glory*. The cartoon narrated the make-believe of materialist success that eluded so many people who yet so delighted in the visual appeal of Art Deco. The rift between Deco modernization and Modernism becomes especially clear when Windover moves us to the yet newer centre of late-late Modern praxis, Mumbai, or as it was still then denominated, Bombay. Specifically he examines three cinemas, two built as modern palaces of cosmopolitan entertainment by members of the Parsi business community allowed to prosper under the Raj. The cinemas paralleled the market, instead of proposals for social housing in the Back Bay Reclamation District; Deco acting as conduit of entrepreneurial activity instead of the Modernist social reconstruction Nehru would import into independent India post-1947. But the Deco cinemas fabricated a perhaps more robustly diverse and vibrant community around the glitzy pleasures of entertainment and desire.

The deeper politics of Deco resound more cohesively in Windover's final case study. His subject is the ethereal presence of radio transmission and its power to aggregate community whether aimed at commercial or national objectives. He returns us to Canada because of the tremendous expansion in mass media facilitated by Edward Rogers, a native of Ontario who developed the AC tube. Radio thereby could occupy a staggering proportion of ordinary social space. The Deco idiom colonized broadcast facility, from the world's metropolis in London to the North American prairie, and instrument, the radio cabinet, in the houses of the prosperous to the relatively poor. He reminds us also of the distinguished designers associated with what Canadian theorist Marshal McLuhan termed the tribal drum, most notably Raymond Loewy, Norman Bel Geddes and Wells Coates.

So here is an admirable chart to explore deeper understandings and, yes, appreciation, of Art Deco. The chart comprises Windover's astute selection of objects for analysis, attention to prior scholarship and contextualization of Art Deco practice, architecture and society. Above all he achieves the remarkable richness of inquiry that recovers Deco's place at the crossroads between modernity and Modernism, populist technocracy and privileged taste, global aspiration and local association, and between heightened aestheticism and mere opportunism.

Rhodri Windsor Liscombe

Preface

In the very early hours of November 26, 2008, I was awakened to the sound of my cell phone. I had just arrived in Mumbai a couple of days earlier, and after two somewhat frustrating days, I was starting to feel more comfortable and confident that I would be able to handle the challenges of researching in an environment very different from what I was accustomed to. It was my wife Rebecca on the phone asking if I was okay. That is how I learned about the terrorist attacks going on around me. For the next three and a half days, I was mostly quarantined in my Art Deco hotel, a few blocks away from one of the sites under siege and from the principal sites of my research.

As an historian of architecture and visual culture I have asked myself (or have been asked), "What is at stake with this project?"—basically, "Why do what you're doing?" Being so close to the brutality of terrorism in some ways provided for me one answer. I had already done a fair amount of work on the material related to Bombay, including some reading about the Taj Mahal Hotel. The photographs I took of that enormous structure (see fig. 3.13, p. 184) are rather unsettling for me since they are full of anticipation of what would transpire just a day later, and they blur together with the televisual images I watched constantly for three days. In asking myself what is at stake in studying places of public culture like hotels, movie theatres, department stores, train stations, etc., I saw firsthand the symbolic potency of such spaces. That the attacks on Mumbai—the financial heart and considered the most "Westernized" city in India—were aimed not at financial institutions but at sites of public culture and mobility reinforced for me the idea that these spaces carry a significant socio-political valence that is often overlooked. The Art Deco spaces I investigate in this book—spaces that might be characterized as everyday and in some cases frivolous sites of escape—likewise should be seen as socially, culturally, and politically significant.

Introduction
Art Deco at a Crossroads

The position an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgments about itself. Since these judgments are expressions of the tendencies of a particular era, they do not offer conclusive testimony about its overall constitution. The surface-level expressions, however, by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things. Conversely, knowledge of this state of things depends on the interpretation of these surface-level expressions. The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally.

Siegfried Kracauer, 1927[1]

1. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," in Thomas Y. Levins [trans., ed., and introduction], *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essay*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 75.

Contemporary style we can define only as a living, changing, pulsating, transforming energy. It is changing before our very eyes, assuming forms which seem to elude definition. Yet the spirit of the time—the Zeitgeist—enters into every one of our creations and constructions. Our very gestures, our carriage, our dancing, our pastimes, our ways of preparing food, our methods of transportation, our systems of banking or shopping, our advertisements, our restaurants, our manners—if we could only detach ourselves from their pressing immediacy—would reveal a fundamental pattern of mind which seeks expression in these disparate activities.

Paul T. Frankl, 1930[2]

In the years between the world wars, a modern design idiom emerged and found expression on the surfaces of everyday life. Commonly referred to as "Art Deco" today, the style transcended social, geographical, and medium lines, and while the mode has received some critical assessment, few scholars have considered how it was substantial, how it came to be adopted across the globe and adapted to different public cultures.[3] In this book I take up this issue by developing a framework that situates mobility at the heart of the disparate cultural production associated with Art Deco. Mobility is present on the very surfaces of Deco objects and architecture—in iconography and general formal qualities (whether the zigzag rectilinear forms popular in the 1920s or curvilinear streamlining of the 1930s). While mobility has consistently been a significant concern for architects and designers,[4] the interest in it during the years between the wars mirrored the near obsession with speed and movement (both physical and social) popularly held at the time. A "user-friendly" mode, Art Deco seemed to suit both the optimism indicative of skyscrapers of the 1920s and a desire for control in the disempowering days of the Depression, as evinced, for example, in the design of new appliances. By focusing on the theme of mobility as a means of tying the seemingly disparate qualities of Art Deco together, I will examine how the surface-level expressions correspond as well to underpinning systems of mobility, thus exposing some of the socio-political consequences of the style. It is precisely because Art Deco appealed to the eye and mind in a legible manner that it penetrated the practices of daily life, fashioning lifestyle. And that it frequently flirted with the fantastic or encouraged escape meant that it had serious socio-political implications and indeed was taken seriously by many at the time. The mode marked the urban landscape in dramatic yet accessible ways, from major monuments, such

2. Paul T. Frankl, *Form and Re-Form: A Practical Handbook of Modern Interiors*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1930, p. 21.
3. The most comprehensive, global studies are Dan Klein, Nancy A. McClelland, and Malcolm Haslam, *In the Deco Style*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1987; Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escritt, *Art Deco Style*, London, Phaidon Press, 1997; and Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood (eds.), *Art Deco 1910–1939*, London, Bulfinch Press and AOL Time Warner Book Group, 2003—the catalogue that accompanied the vast Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition. Patricia Bayer offers an international survey of architecture with *Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1992.
4. To indicate the longevity of such interest, we might recall for example the theorization of movement in architecture by Robert Adam and James Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, [London, Academy Editions, 1773] New York, St. Martin's Press, 1975 [rev. and enl. version of the 1902 ed. published by E. Thécard Fils, Dourdan, France; edited with an introd. by Robert Oresko].

as Rockefeller Center, to the fluid forms of automobiles. In framing Art Deco as a mode of mobility, I propose a new perspective that underlines how the style was embedded in local, public culture while gesturing to other places. Art Deco was a cosmopolitan style, travelling the world while marking aspects of the everyday built environment closer to home.

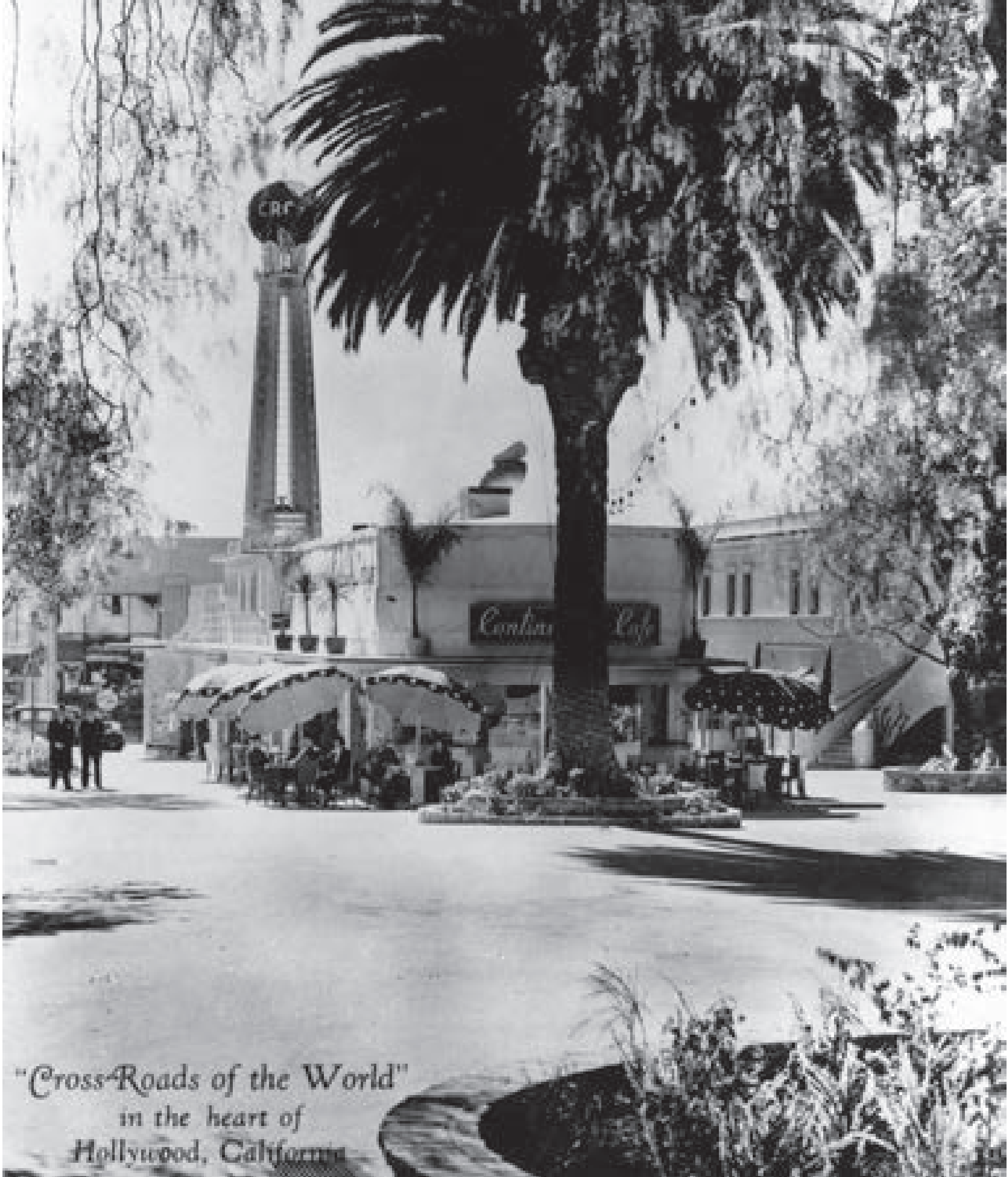
The Cross Roads of the World, a unique shopping centre on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, California (fig. I.1) that opened on October 29, 1936, offers a way of introducing these ideas and establishing a kind of figure for approaching Art Deco. Resembling an ocean liner docked at some foreign port, the entire complex was based on surface appeal, framing the activity of shopping as an imaginative adventure of mobility, picking up on contemporary infatuations with speed and travel, not to mention the virtual travel of movies shot on nearby studio lots and screened in nearby picture palaces. This early shopping mall aestheticized a series of intersecting forms of mobility. Its sixty-foot high "modernistic" tower responded to an automobile consumer base. After parking, the pedestrian shopper would engage in virtual travel, strolling leisurely from shop to shop—nation to nation—assuming the role of a cosmopolitan of discerning tastes (fig. I.2). The 57 shops and 36 office suites were garbed in styles evocative of architecture from around the world. They were to bring together goods and services from foreign lands to the citizens and tourists frequenting "Hollywood's only out-of-door department store," as

Figure I.1.
The Cross Roads of the World (south façade), Los Angeles (CA), architect Robert V. Derrah, 1936–1937.

Michael Windover (2008)

the shopping court was described on the occasion of its first anniversary.[5] In this way, The Cross Roads implicated larger, international networks of commerce and trade. The centre included a wide range of fashionable shops dedicated to women's and men's apparel, arts and crafts, candy, flowers, and health food, a barber shop, and many other speciality shops. The site also provided photography and architectural studio space,

Figure I.2.
The Cross Roads of the World, 1937.



Security Pacific National Bank Collection / Los Angeles Public Library

5. Patricia Killoran, "First Anniversary Marked by Gala Fete; Special Values Offered by Cross Roads' Merchants," *Hollywood Citizen-News*, October 27, 1937.

dancing and voice schools, and offices for physicians and dentists. As well, visitors could dine in the restaurants and cafés dotting the contained yet cosmopolitan, consumerist environment.[6]

As a figure for Art Deco, The Cross Roads works stylistically, suggesting an assembly of references from different places and time periods. Developing in the late-imperial, transatlantic world, the omnivorous style consumed a wide range of sources from history and colonial worlds (from the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Americas, Louis XVI and *Directoire* era French design, European folk traditions, etc.), as well as from different contemporary movements in Western art and architecture (the Ballets Russes, Futurism, Cubism, Constructivist aesthetics, German Expressionism, etc.). To illustrate the great variety of Art Deco material and sources, we might compare a dressing table by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, with its reference to nineteenth-century models and playful allusion to linen (the *toile* from which *toilette* is derived) in inlaid ebony and ivory (fig. I.3),[7] to a combination desk and bookcase by the Austrian-American designer Paul T. Frankl (fig. I.4), which represented the dynamic silhouette of contemporary New York skyscrapers for tenants living in those very buildings, in some cases. Or we might consider the hybridity of Charles Sargeant Jagger's patinated and cast bronze relief "Scandal" and accompanying cast-iron fire basket designed for the drawing room of Henry and Gwen Mond's Mulberry House in London (interior architect, Darcy Braddell, 1930) (fig. I.5). In a flattened mode recalling ancient Assyrian sculpture, the relief monumentalizes the theme of high-society gossip, with a naked couple standing before outraged onlookers dressed in contemporary fashions. And the similarly ancient Assyrian-inspired fire box, with snarling cats facing each other through female masks (indicating the duplicity and "cattiness" of society) flanking a macaw (mindless repetition), supports this theme, which apparently was meant to comment on the love match between the heir to the Imperial Chemical Industries fortune and his "colonial" wife (from an "unknown"

6. By the time of the first anniversary, the stores included women's fashion salons "Billie's Smart Shop," "DuLaine Bennati," and "Jeannette Distinctive Dresses"; handkerchief shops "John Macsound Kerchief Bar" and "Fashion-Fold MFG Co."; restaurants "A Bit of Sweden," "La Merienda," and "Jules Metropole Cafe"; "Ann Herbert Chocolates"; "Don's Beauty Salon"; perfume and powder shop "Marcy de Paris"; antique and modern jeweller's "Traders in Treasures"; importers "Lequia-Oliphant Staff of Expert Trade Engineers" (from Central and South America), "A.J. Mathieu Co.," "Peasant House and Garden Imports," and "Macdonald-Meyers" (from Peipang and Shanghai); "Worthwhile Hand Knitting Shop"; "Barber of Seville"; "El Fumador De Seville"; "Jax Secretarial Service"; newspaper and magazine shop "Jack B. Rohan"; "Burr McIntosh" (greeting cards); "Tobey Otto Glassware"; "The House of Gifts"; "Ryan's Religious Art"; "Brightwood Weavers"; "The Linen Closet"; "The Beacon Arts and Crafts Shop"; "La Cabana Mexican Arts"; "The Ardyce Knight Children's Shoppe"; "Mayfair Bags"; "Cal Essey Furniture and Carpets"; "Artcraft Drapery Studio"; "Millinery for Milady"; health food consultant "Marguerita Miller"; and "The Camera Center." Tenants advertised on its opening also included the "Pan-American Fellowship," which was described as "[o]rganized to promote friendship, understanding and trade between all countries of the Western Hemisphere."

7. For more on this piece, see the Victoria and Albert Museum website: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>, accessed December 2011.

Figure I.3. *Dressing Table, Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann,* ca. *1919–1923. Oak, Andaman and purpleheart veneer, inlaid ivory and ebony, mahogany drawers, silvered bronze mirror and fittings (119 × 76 × 52.5 cm).*

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

South African family) as well as humorously referring to their *ménage à trois* with writer Gilbert Cannan.[8] These examples emphasize the diversity of stylistic references incorporated into Deco design.

Despite the range of sources, Art Deco was self-consciously a *modern style*. While the idea of discussing style may seem outmoded in contemporary scholarship, I argue that it is essential to a consideration of Art Deco. We cannot divorce the notion of performativity from the style, especially if we are interested in its social import. Theatricality or at least emphasis on presentation was integral to the interwar mode. Art Deco

8. For more on the relief and basket, see the description and bibliography on the Victoria and Albert Museum website: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O113323/fire-basket-the-melchett-fire-basket/>, accessed December 2011.

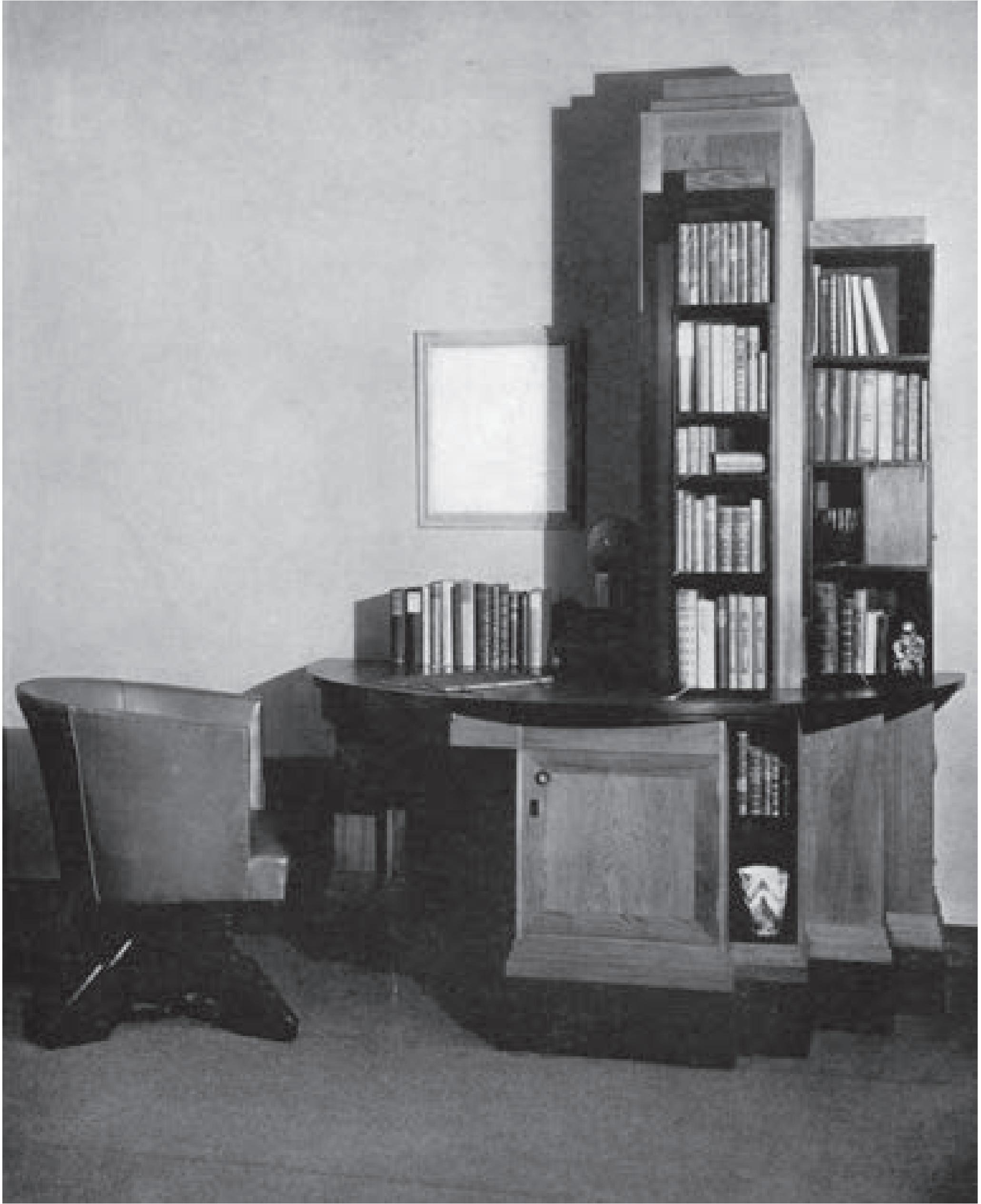


Plate 21 from Paul T. Frankl, *New Dimensions: The Decorative Art of Today in Words & Pictures*, New York, Payson & Clarke, 1928

Figure I.4. *Combination desk and bookcase, Paul T. Frankl,* ca. *1927.*

was imbued with a particular sense of historicity, one which, as we saw in the epithet by designer Paul T. Frankl, was constantly changing, adapting to life in the fraught interwar years. Architects, designers, and their patrons were actively trying to represent what they thought modernity *should look like* based on the conditions they faced—*e.g.*, mechanized and mass production, new technologies of transportation and communication, increasing urbanization, and heightened nationalism. We thus cannot

Figure I.5. *Relief "Scandal" and the Melchett Fire Box, Charles Sargeant Jagger, 1930. Relief: bronze, cast and patinated (161.4 × 149 × 72.5 cm); fire box: cast iron (91.5 × 75.5 × 33 cm). Purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Friends of the V&A, and Old Possum's Practical Trust.*

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

approach the cultural production known today under the banner "Art Deco" without keeping in mind its "styleness" or "stylishness" and implications for *lifestyle*.

The figure of The Cross Roads also works spatially, where the style of Art Deco emerges at the intersection of the international or imperial with the local, and, in its reconfiguration at a crossroads, it often suggests a sense of the cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitanism, a term I will return to below, evokes the sense of mobility I see inherent to Art Deco as well as the global reach of the style, but does not suggest universalism, which "internationalism" calls to mind, since it is premised on mutual recognition of distinct sovereignty. This leaves room for Art Deco spaces to be read as locally produced responses to conditions of modernity, yet bound to larger interpenetrating forms of mobility.