



# THE GOLDEN AGE OF GLAMOUR

Art Deco, love it or hate it, is unmistakable, redolent of indulgence and money, and a touch of the forbidden. DANIEL ALLEN follows its trail, starting in London.



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Guy Oliver's table may be laden with tier upon tier of heavenly pastries, but the London-based design specialist only has eyes for his surroundings. With its green leather banquettes, silver-encrusted peacock feathers and crystal chandeliers, The Foyer in Claridge's Hotel ([claridges.co.uk](http://claridges.co.uk)) is undoubtedly an Art Deco masterpiece — the perfect backdrop for one of the English capital's most sumptuous afternoon teas. As Claridge's Art Deco consultant for nearly 20 years, Oliver has good reason to be proud.

"For me, Claridge's is a true labour of love," he explains. "Right down to the door handles, setting the right tone with design and decor has always been paramount here. As the epitome of elegance and good taste, this hotel has long been a focal point for London high society. Over the years I hope I've helped to maintain a glorious aesthetic that began when pioneering Art Deco architect Basil Ionides transformed this building back in the 1920s."

In London, as in many cities across the globe, the Art Deco movement reached its peak during the golden, inter-war years of the 1920s and '30s. The very term evokes the glamour of the age — sipping gin slings to the sound of big band jazz,

flappers in cloche hats riding in open-top sports cars, and the rise of early skyscrapers such as New York's Empire State and Chrysler Buildings.

"After the hardships of the First World War, English society quickly fell in love with Art Deco's frippery and sybaritic excess," explains Oliver. "Its streamlined forms and innovative use of materials were designed to be futuristic, and to the masses it embodied progress, style and sophistication. Born in an age of great socio-economic change and technological progress, its legacy today remains one of great beauty and creativity."

Oliver is looking forward to sharing part of that legacy when the groundbreaking Art Deco tours of Claridge's start in early 2011. Led by Oliver himself or another of the hotel's Art Deco experts, an hour of sightseeing will be capped by complimentary afternoon tea in The Foyer. The monthly tours are open to guests and non-guests.

"We decided it was time to share some of the hotel's less well-known treasures," explains Oliver.

"Guests and visitors typically enjoy >>>

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Art Deco is all about decadence, hedonism, elegance and progressive attitudes, an example being the Chrysler Building, one of the earliest skyscrapers in New York. OPPOSITE PAGE: Immerse yourself in the stylish '30s while savouring a fine cognac at the Fumoir in London's Claridge's Hotel.





CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Crystal chandelier from Park Lane Hotel Ballroom; gilded and curlicued motifs at the Savoy Hotel; Grays Antiques, home to one of the world's largest and most diverse collections of fine antiques, jewellery, and vintage fashion.

famous and more obvious examples of the hotel's Art Deco decor, such as the leaping stags in the Brook Street entrance or the gilt mirrors in The Foyer, but there's a whole lot more to see. The tours will give participants a real insight into the hotel and its design history."

London's Art Deco experience doesn't stop at Claridge's. "Many people don't realise it, but Art Deco abounds here in London," says Paul Nicholls-Whiteman of Art Deco Decadence ([artdecodcadence.co.uk](http://artdecodcadence.co.uk)), a UK-based consultancy specialising in Art Deco design and customised shopping trips. "From shopping for Art Deco objets d'art at Grays Antiques ([graysantiques.com](http://graysantiques.com)) to cocktails at Palm Court restaurant ([palmcourtlondon.co.uk](http://palmcourtlondon.co.uk)) in Park Lane Hotel ([starwoodhotels.com/sheraton](http://starwoodhotels.com/sheraton)), there's enough to keep aficionados and amateurs more than happy."

London's interest in all things Deco was recently heightened with the reopening of the Savoy

Hotel ([fairmont.com/savoy](http://fairmont.com/savoy)) — another of the capital's Art Deco institutions which first opened its doors in 1889. A three-year, US\$348 million revamp saw the addition of an extravagant new Art Deco bar, lavishly decked out in black velvet and gold leaf, while the hotel's celebrated Thames Foyer now boasts a stunning glass dome and silver gazebo.

While London may now be a feast for Art Deco lovers, the design style actually originated just across the English Channel, in Paris. It was there that a fertile concentration of influential and innovative French artists and designers such as Paul Poiret, Le Corbusier, Rene Lalique and Coco Chanel helped crystallise the Art Deco movement — covering everything from clothing to architecture — before it spread across the globe. These pioneers were greatly influenced by Art Nouveau, the general design style that preceded Art Deco, as well as Cubism, Futurism, Modernism, Neo-Classicism and Bauhaus.



Today, the French capital's Art Deco highlights include Palais de Tokyo ([palaisdetokyo.com](http://palaisdetokyo.com)), the Palais de Chaillot area, the resplendent Hotel Lutetia ([lutetia-paris.com](http://lutetia-paris.com)), and the huge antique market at Porte de Clignancourt – Les Puces ([parisperfect.com/paris-flea-markets.php](http://parisperfect.com/paris-flea-markets.php)). "This is a real treasure trove for Art Deco lovers," says Nicholls-Whiteman. "Whether you're looking for art, jewellery or furniture, wander the labyrinth of alleyways beside the Rue des Rosiers and you're guaranteed to come across some gorgeous Art Deco bargains."

Farther afield, the American take on Art Deco has produced one of the world's most enduring and iconic urban skylines. "New York was, and remains, a major centre for Art Deco architecture," explains Andrew S. Dolkart, associate professor of historic preservation at the city's >>





Deco architecture, they quickly moved to preserve the town's precious heritage.

"While Napier's Deco is small-town Deco — unlike Art Deco concentrations found in other large cities — it has numerous buildings of incredibly high architectural interest," explains Sally Jackson, general manager of Napier's Art Deco Trust. "These include the exuberantly-styled Daily Telegraph Building, Napier Municipal Theatre and former Hotel Central. One of the best times to visit Napier is in February, when we hold a five-day Art Deco festival. Visitors can enjoy everything from vintage cars, aerobatic flying displays and steam train rides to Great Gatsby picnics, dinner dances and free outdoor jazz concerts."

While Napier was rising from the ashes, a far grander urban >>

LEFT: The shops at the extensive antique market at Port de Clignancourt — Les Puces are an Art Deco heaven for collectors.

Columbia University. "The style was introduced by American architects who'd visited Europe in the 1920s. Skyscrapers such as the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings dominate people's attention, but you'll find everything from luxury hotels such as the Waldorf Astoria ([waldorfastoria.com](http://waldorfastoria.com)) to all manner of ornate apartment blocks and commercial buildings."

Thousands of miles across the Pacific, the New Zealand town of Napier offers an Art Deco haven ([artdeconapier.com](http://artdeconapier.com)) of a far more intimate nature. Destroyed by an earthquake and fire in 1931, much of the centre was subsequently rebuilt in Art Deco style, with local architects influenced by a movement that was rapidly sweeping the globe. In the early 2000s, when residents realised they were sitting on a gold mine of Art



CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT: There are more Art Deco-inspired buildings in Shanghai, such as Fairmont Peace Hotel, than anywhere else in Asia; in Napier, New Zealand, the town centre is replete with Art Deco architecture such as the clock tower and Masonic Hotel, and even has an annual Art Deco festival.



transformation was taking place on the Pacific Rim. No metropolis there embraced the gin-and-jazz culture of the era more than Shanghai, so it's little wonder that the city took Art Deco to heart in such a big way. With the city's economy displaying unrivalled growth, Shanghai-based architects of the time chose this new movement and grabbed the chance to design ever more flamboyant structures.

"There are more buildings from the 1920s and '30s here than anywhere else in Asia," says Spencer Doddington, a Shanghai-based architect who runs Art Deco tours of the city. "My favourite would have to be the recently-reopened Cathay Hotel, now the Fairmont Peace Hotel ([fairmont.com/peacehotel](http://fairmont.com/peacehotel)), which has been a Shanghai landmark for more than a century. With its over-the-top design palate, including racing greyhounds and the usual Deco chevrons and triangles, it's a must-see for Art Deco lovers. Other notable structures include the Gascogne and Savoy Apartment Buildings, and Rockbund Art Museum ([www.rockbundartmuseum.org](http://www.rockbundartmuseum.org))."

An eclectic mix of design, decor, ornamentation and fantasy, Art Deco still promises good times



and glamour. "People often ask me why Art Deco remains so popular," says Oliver. "Art Deco wasn't just about sunburst motifs or zigzag lines. It was a lifestyle choice — a lifestyle that people find just as appealing nearly a century later. Today, Art Deco remains synonymous with hedonism, elegance and progressive attitudes — that's a heady combination, whatever the century." ✉

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