

The Influence of The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs  
et Industriels Moderne, Paris 1925 on Hollywood Films  
of the Late 1920s and 30s

by

Ann Rishell

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

Approved June 2014 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Beverly Brandt, Chair  
Diane Bender  
Gray Sweeney

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2014

## ABSTRACT

Abstract The Influence of The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925, on Hollywood films of the late 1920s and 30s Ann Snyder Rishell Arizona State University The author explores the influences on the interiors of Hollywood films of the late 1920s and 30s. The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925 is examined in historical context and its influence on design trends internationally. The Hollywood film industry is examined, in general, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and its longtime art director, Cedric Gibbons, in particular. Eight MGM films are discussed and their interiors analyzed for related influence from the 1925 Paris Exposition. The thesis makes a case for the influence of the 1925 Paris Exposition on Cedric Gibbons and the interiors of the MGM films of the late 1920s and 30s.

## DEDICATION

To my wonderful husband, Mike Rishell, who believed and encouraged me the whole long way. And to my creative daughter, Juliette Sabine, who amazes me every day.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all the people who have helped me through the thesis process. My brother-in-law, Mike Gebert, who, through late night talks after all the kids were put to bed helped form the germ of an idea that became this thesis. Also, my sister, Janet Snyder, who kept up the pep talks long distance.

My committee, Dr. Diane Bender, who taught me AutoCAD back at Michigan State and gave me my first opportunity to teach.

Dr. Gray Sweeney, who challenged me to think harder than I had ever before.

My committee chair, Dr. Beverly Brandt, who has shown nothing but grace and patience in dealing with my tangents. Thank you for keeping me focused on the real topic.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Research and Methodology.....	3
Concept Development .....	4
Justification.....	4
Literature Review.....	5
Research Methods .....	8
2 THE 1925 PARIS EXPOSITION .....	12
Prefacing the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925 .....	12
The Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes .....	16
Interiors of the 1925 Exposition .....	19
After the Exposition.....	31
Summary.....	34
3 THE EARLY FILM INDUSTRY .....	35
Hollywood in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century .....	35
4 FILMS .....	41
MGM Films from the 1930s.....	41
Our Dancing Daughters (1928).....	42
Our Modern Maidens (1929) .....	44

CHAPTER	Page
Our Blushing Brides (1930).....	50
The Divorcee (1930).....	57
Grand Hotel (1932).....	61
Dinner at Eight (1933).....	65
The Thin Man (1934).....	73
The Wizard of Oz (1939).....	76
Summary.....	79
5 CONCLUSION .....	80
6 ADDENDUM .....	89
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	90
Filmography.....	92
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	93

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1-1 — Research Conceptual Framework .....	3
1-2 — Sample of Art Deco Matrix.....	10
1-3 — Diagram of Research Approach .....	11
2-1 — The Plan of the 1925 Paris Exposition .....	15
2-2 — Poster advertising the Exposition .....	16
2-3 — Eiffel Tower.....	17
2-4 — The Pont Alexander III during the Exposition .....	18
2-5 — Alfred Levard, Hall, Primavera Pavillion. ....	20
2-6 — Alfred Levard, Swimming pool in a villa.....	21
2-7 — Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann (1879-1933). Bedroom, Pavilion of a Collector. ....	22
2-8 — Maurice Dufrene (1876-1955), Lady’s bedroom, La Maîtrise Pavillion. ....	22
2-9 — Pierre Block and Max Bloch, Young girl’s room.....	23
2-10 — H. & L. Barberis (architects), Salle de toilette. ....	24
2-11 — Lucie Renaudot (?-1939), Studio.....	25
2-12 — Georges Champion (1889-1940), Dining Room. ....	26
2-13 — Ghislain Ringuet (b.1907). Large Dining Room. ....	27
2-14 — Paul Follet (1877-1941), Dining Room, Pomone Pavillion. ....	27
2-15 — Paul Follet, (1877-1941), Grand Salon, Pomone Pavillion. ....	28
2-16 — Table of Art Deco interiors.....	29-31
2-17 — Top, Dining room designed by Eliel Saarinen for the 1929 Metropolitan ....	33
Museum of Art exhibition “The Architect and the Industrial Arts”.	
Bottom, Man’s Den designed by Joseph Urban for the same exhibit.	
3-1 — Organizational chart for preproduction and principal photography .....	36
3-2 — Cedric Gibbons .....	37
3-3 — Film still from <i>The Cheat</i> , 1915 .....	38
3-4 — Cedric Gibbons at home with his wife, Delores Del Rio .....	40
3-5 — Luxury apartment in <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> , MGM (1930).....	40
4-1 — Lobby card for <i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> (1928), MGM .....	42

Figure	Page
4-2 — Party scene from <i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> (1928), MGM .....	42
4-3 — Foyer from <i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> (1928), MGM .....	43
4-4 — Poster for <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929), MGM .....	44
4-5 — Living room from <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929), MGM.....	45
4-6 — A different angle of living room from <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929), MGM ..	46
4-7 — A third angle of living room from <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929), MGM.....	46
4-8 — Billie’s bedroom from <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929), MGM.....	47
4-9 — Sitting room from <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929), MGM.....	48
4-10 — Still from <i>The Kiss</i> (1929), MGM .....	48
4-11 — Interior from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	49
4-12 — Poster for <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930) MGM.....	49
4-13 — Show room scene from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM .....	50
4-14 — Show room scene from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM .....	51
4-15 — Josef Lorenzl, Dancer. ....	51
4-16 — Connie’s apartment living room from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM ..	52
4-17 — Long Island estate from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM .....	53
4-18 — Fountain from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM .....	53
4-19 — Lalique fountain at Paris Exposition .....	54
4-20 — La Porte D’Honneur entrance at Paris Exposition.....	54
4-21 — Tom’s tree house from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM.....	55
4-22 — Tom’s tree house from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM.....	56
4-23 — Tom’s tree house from <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930), MGM.....	56
4-24 — Poster from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	57
4-25 — Church scene from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	58
4-26 — Foyer from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	59
4-27 — Living room from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	59
4-28 — Living room detail from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	60
4-29 — Party scene from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM.....	60
4-30 — Kitchen from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930), MGM .....	61
4-31 — Poster from <i>The Grand Hotel</i> (1932), MGM .....	61

Figure	Page
4-32 — Lobby from <i>The Grand Hotel</i> (1932), MGM .....	62
4-33 — Overhead shot of balconies to lobby from <i>The Grand Hotel</i> (1932), MGM...	63
4-34 — The room of the secretary, <i>The Grand Hotel</i> (1932), MGM.....	63
4-35 — The bookkeeper’s room, <i>The Grand Hotel</i> (1932), MGM .....	64
4-36 — The business man’s room, <i>The Grand Hotel</i> (1932), MGM .....	64
4-37 — Legrange bookcase. ....	65
4-38 — Title screen from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM.....	66
4-39 — Ad for cigarettes featuring the cast of <i>Dinner at Eight</i> on set.....	67
4-40 — Mr. Jordan’s office interior from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM .....	68
4-41 — Mr. Jordan’s office interior from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM .....	68
4-42 — Larry Renault’s hotel room from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM.....	69
4-43 — Larry Renault’s hotel room from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM.....	69
4-44 — Jean Harlow interior from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM.....	70
4-45 — Jean Harlow interior from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM.....	70
4-46 — The Jordan’s living room from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM .....	71
4-47 — The Jordan’s living room from <i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933), MGM .....	72
4-48 — Nick and Nora from <i>The Thin Man</i> (1934), MGM.....	72
4-49 — The secretary’s apartment from <i>The Thin Man</i> (1934), MGM.....	73
4-50 — The ex-wife’s boudoir from <i>The Thin Man</i> (1934), MGM .....	74
4-51 — Publicity still from <i>The Thin Man</i> (1934), MGM.....	75
4-52 — A distant view of the Emerald City from <i>Wizard of Oz</i> (1939), MGM.....	75
4-53 — Production still of the Emerald City from <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> ,(1939), MGM ..	77
4-54 — Emerald City from <i>Wizard of Oz</i> (1939), MGM .....	78
5-1 — Living room from <i>The Divorcee</i> (1930) on top. The Grand Salon, .....	81
lower left, and the Dining Room, lower right, both from the Pomone Pavilion.	
5-2 — Top, the set of <i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929). One the left, the Hall of the.....	82
Primavera Pavilion designed by Alfred Levard. On the right, a studio	
designed by Lucie Renaudot.	

Figure	Page
5-3 — Top, the Long Island estate in <i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930). Left, La Porte d'Honneur entrance to the 1925 Paris Exposition. At the right, a fountain by Lalique at the Exposition.	.... 83
5-4 — Left, a scene from <i>The Thin Man</i> (1934). On the right, Lady's bedroom, La Maîtrise Pavilion, designed by Maurice Dufrêne.	..... 84
5-5 – Comparison table of Art Deco interiors to MGM film interiors.	..... 83-87
A-1 — Sample section of Art Deco matrix	..... 89

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The interior design depicted in a film set is as integral to the film as are the characters or the plot. The interiors convey information about the time period, the socio-economic status, taste and lifestyle of the characters, and sometimes even their mental state. Films say a great deal about the society that creates them. They are a powerful visual record of commentary about society, and of a time and a place. Studying what the interiors are communicating and how the designers achieve this can inform how we design interiors for films, or for living.

When watching a film, the interior design illustrated in the setting should not be of primary import. Rather, the interiors should be unremarkable as fitting with the period, the characters, and the plot. The story is where attention should be focused, and the interiors should play a supporting role. The sets can enhance the telling of the story within the film by using the visual cues of their style, providing an additional discourse for the film.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, when a set is poorly designed, it strikes a wrong note and distracts from the film.

Filmmaking in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was in its infancy. Sets were crude, lighting was inadequate, and editing was rough. The industry was feeling its way in a new medium. By the mid-1920s, the Hollywood film industry was beginning to mature. The films that came out of the studio system in the late 1920s through the 1930s became iconic for what they represented to the American public, an escape from the

---

1 Gee, James Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*. 2nd ed. New York and London: Routledge, 2007.

reality of their everyday lives. These films showed the public a fantasy world untouched by the Depression. Whether this was the “Golden Age of Movies” is debatable, but this was a medium that captured its audience’s imagination. The images that came out of that time became visual references for how we recall the America of the 1920s and 30s.

Following a review of the literature available on film interiors representing the Art Deco era, establishes a link between the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris in 1925 and the Hollywood films of the 1930s. This thesis posits that design ideas and concepts were disseminated from designers and design expositions to the wider public. Films, along with lifestyle and shelter magazines, were among one of the ways ideas trickled down during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the infancy of mass media such as the films produced by Hollywood studio system, the messages relayed by the interiors in these films are the first wide discourse upon design and thus the first to be relayed from an elite structure to a mass audience. The films of this era gave the general public a three dimensional view of how to decorate a room in an Art Deco style. The characters interacting with the space was a tryout of sorts and allowed the viewers to imagine that space as theirs.

Thus, the research question is: How did the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* of Paris in 1925 influence the Metro Goldwyn Mayer films of the late 1920s and 1930s? A secondary question is: What were the primary messages delivered by the interiors depicted within?

## Research and Methodology

My research is qualitative in orientation, as directed by the research question's inquiry toward messages and discourse. The lens I utilize is heavily informed by semiotics and other elements of post-structural thought, along with social Marxism that incorporates discrepancies illustrated within the film versus those experienced by the audiences, mired in Depression-era socio-economic situations. I focused solely on the MGM movies made in the 1920s and 30s, of which I selected eight films featuring Art Deco interiors as an integral part of the film's storytelling. Another component in the selection of films was the art direction. All the films that I selected featured Cedric Gibbons as the art director.

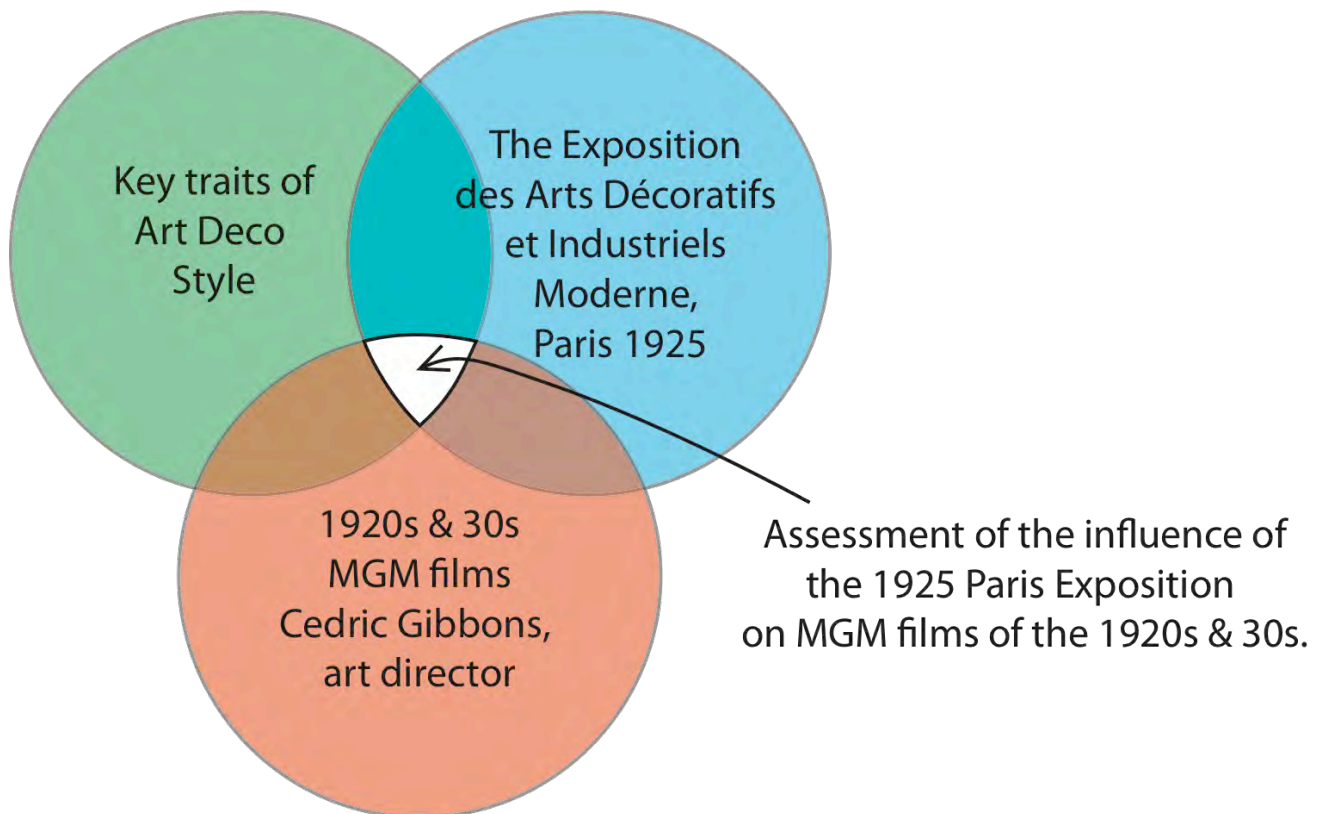


Figure 1-1 — Research Conceptual Framework

## Concept Development

In discussing films with Michael Gebert, independent film critic, we moved to the topic of interiors in film. He has extensive research in film and has published *The Encyclopedia of Movie Awards*, a compilation of movie awards history and short critical reviews. He posits that movies in the very early days were shot in rooms that resembled rooms that people lived in, similar to Victorian décor, and thus seemed crowded on film. This later changed, in his opinion, to sets that were less crowded to accommodate larger film and lighting equipment.<sup>2</sup> That discussion and many more led me to this study's exploration of how film influenced how the general public decorated their homes.

## Justification

I started watching old movies at a very young age. Movies were more interesting to me if they were black and white and if they featured witty and elegant characters. With my background as a practicing graphic designer and interest in interior design history along with my extensive study of film, I have an appropriate background to put these two topics together.

This study is timely as movies made of the time period of the 1920s and 30s continue to be produced. Baz Luhrmann remade *The Great Gatsby* in 2013 featuring many glamorous fashions and settings that seem straight from the 1925 Paris Exposition. Woody Allen's 2011 time traveling *Midnight in Paris* features clothing, cars, and interior design all accurately setting us in 1920s Paris. Other examples include 2009's *Coco Before Chanel*, 2004's *The Aviator*, and 2007's *Atonement*. These productions show that

---

<sup>2</sup> Gebert, Michael. 2006.

films set in this past era are still in demand by contemporary audiences. This study would help any production designer define the Art Deco style and accurately design the style of their film.

## **Literature Review**

The Art Deco style was not defined as such during the same time it was popular. As a result, most of what has been written was published much later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A definitive book on the subject is Victor Arwas' *Art Deco* from 1992. This book, while showcasing a wide variety of examples of Art Deco buildings, sculpture, furniture, ceramics, and textiles, also discusses the history leading up to the 1925 Paris Exposition and the Exposition itself.

Also important works are *Art Deco 1910-1939* by Charlotte and Tim Benton and Chislaine Wood from 2003. This book accompanied a 2002 exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It discusses the modern movement prior to the 1925 Paris Exposition. The book includes a broad selection of examples, but isn't necessarily focused on Art Deco, as it includes surrealist photos by Man Ray.

Another valuable resource is *The Impact of Art Deco: 1925-1940*. It is a book that accompanied a 1976 exhibit of Art Deco at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, curated and written by Mary K. Grimes and Georgiann Gersell. Another book that accompanied an exhibit is *Home in Manhattan: Modern Decorative Arts, 1925 to the Depression* by Karen Davies. This book focuses on the designers in the New York area active in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The books on exhibits are an excellent resource, as they

compile a large number of examples of Art Deco furniture and decorative items that could distill the creative zeitgeist that made its way into films.

For resources on film sets and the film industry, the book I found to be invaluable is *Architecture and Film* (2000), edited by Mark Lamster. In the book of essays is a biographical chapter written by Christina Wilson on Cedric Gibbons and his contribution to the films of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Other books written on film sets are *Screen Deco* by Howard Mandelbaum and Eric Myers (1985). This book includes information on different studio operations and features photos of full sets with lighting as well as publicity shots from a wide selection of films. In 2010, the book *Designs on Film: A Century of Hollywood Art Direction* by Cathy Whitlock came out. It featured a chapter on the art direction in Hollywood in the century of movie making. The book also has several photos of sets art directed by Cedric Gibbons.

Early written pieces on designing for the movies are a 1933 article “Designing Movie Sets” from the *Architectural Record* by A.B. Liang, and a 1937 article for *Theatre Arts Monthly* on Cedric Gibbons, “Designing for the Movies: Gibbons of MGM” by Morton Eustis, a New York drama critic. A much-cited book written in 1970 is *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions* by Leon Barsacq. Barsacq was a Russian born art director nominated for an Academy Award for *The Longest Day* (1962). This history of film design is written from a set designer’s point of view and includes many rare photographs from film sets, including a number of European films.

*Designing Women*, by Lucy Fischer, published in 2003, looks at the Art Deco design of the films in the 1920s and 30s as a beginning point of developing the idea of a New

Woman in American Society. With the subtitle of *Cinema, Art Deco, and the Female Form*, she focuses on the costuming and all other representation of the female form in Art Deco, such as sculptures and paintings.

Another book written on the movie industry of the 1920s and 30s is *From Scarface to Scarlett: American Films of the 1930s* by Frank Dooley. It features anecdotes about industry workings and the celebrities of the time. Additionally, *Hollywood in the Twenties*, by David Robinson, and *Hollywood in the Thirties*, by John Baxter, are smaller books that discuss behind-the-scenes details of deals brokered for movies.

An invaluable resource in the research on this topic, published in 1989, was *Authentic Art Deco Interiors from the 1925 Paris Exhibition* by Maurice Dufrene. Dufrene designed several interiors in the pavilions of the 1925 Paris Exposition, and this book gathers photographs of the interiors of all the pavilions at the Exposition. Another book that provided a first hand account of the Exposition is *Arts Décoratifs 1925: A Personal Recollection of the Paris Exhibition* by Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, published in 1975. The two were British designers working on their home country's pavilion before and during the Exposition. Their accounts encompass overall impressions of the Exposition and critiques of the design of other countries' pavilions.

Throughout the literature review I found books and websites that reviewed and critiqued movie set designs, but none that compared set designs to period interiors to contrast style. My study is distinctive as I created a method of defining a style and comparing a film's set design to that definition via a matrix.

## ***Research Methods***

I started my film research with *My Man Godfrey* (1936), *Top Hat* (1935), *Palm Beach Story* (1942), and *The Thin Man* (1934). While these are all excellent films and feature great interiors, I wanted a thread that would connect them all together. During my reading, I came across an article on Cedric Gibbons, art director for hundreds of films at Metro Goldwyn Mayer. This led to a narrowing of the selection of films to those where he had been the art director.

The eight films I eventually chose had to have Cedric Gibbons as art director; had to be easily available to view multiple times; and had to be at least a modest box office success, to ensure that it was widely distributed for a maximum possible audience.

In defining box office success, I looked at current box office criteria. In order to judge films from the 1920s and 30s, I had to modify the criteria. Revenue cannot be a reliable barometer in the 1920s and 30s due to an incomplete record of box office receipts. I therefore looked to awards won by the films, contemporary film reviews, and newspaper coverage of opening nights. There are lists of top films of each year, but the data is unreliable as to how they compiled the list.

While conducting my research I was faced with the problem of obtaining photos from the early films. Fortunately, Turner Classic Movies broadcast most of these films during the time I was researching the topic. I saved them through a TiVo system that was capable of burning them to digital video discs (DVD). After trying to screen grab the scenes I wanted to use from the DVDs with a computer, without

success, I set up a photography system in front of my television. It consisted of a tripod, a Nikon camera and my Sony flat screen television.

While replaying the movies, I selected the scenes I needed to document. Most of the time I could snap the photo while the film was running. Sometimes the action was too fast to capture, resulting in blurred photos, and I had to pause the DVD to get the photo. I found that photos from the paused DVD were more pixilated than the running film. This may be due to the resolution of the non-high definition cable from which the film was recorded. I replayed the recording on a high-definition television.

In addition to my film research, I reviewed hundreds of photographs of art deco interiors, sculptures, textiles, object d'art, and functional objects. To keep track of all the photos, I created an Excel file, titled the "Art Deco Matrix", to categorize the object, its designer, description, its style, and where I had found it. This enabled searches in different categories to identify trends and provided ease in finding definitions used in the coming chapter. The categories I included were: figural, abstract, Egyptian, chinoiserie, Mesoamerican, African, Caribbean, frozen fountain, stepped, tiered, radiating sun, pattern, animals, flowers/fruit, and repetition. (See appendix for full object analysis matrix.)







	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	
23	la danse.jpg		La Danse. Block printed cotton and linen for Bianchini-Férier.	France	1909-10	Raoul Dufy	X	X				X								X	X	
24	iribe.jpg		mahogany chest of drawers covered in green shagreen inlaid with a stylized flower basket in ebony with ebony handles and slate top.	Paris	c. 1912	Paul Iribe		X													X	
25	groult chair.jpg		ebony and satinwood chair with a painted floral spray by Marie Laurencin. Won 3rd prize shortly before the 1925 exhibition.	France	1925	Andre Groult	X													X	X	X
26	foliot chair.jpg		carved sycamore and ebony chair, upholstered in morroccan leather. The back is a carved basket of fruit. 1912 Salon d'Automne	France	1912	Paul Foliot	X	X													X	
27	groult chair2.jpg		chair, carved with a stylized basket of flowers	France		Andre Groult		X													X	
	legrain bookcase.jpg		Corner bookcase in gilt wood	Paris		Pierre Legrain														X		

Figure 1-2 — Sample section of Art Deco matrix

In starting the research for this thesis, I separated the literature review into three sections: the 1925 Paris Exposition, Art Deco style, and 1920s Hollywood. After the literature review, I then identified key traits of the art deco style and built a matrix further illustrating these characteristics. I focused on MGM films art directed by Cedric Gibbons, and I also collected period images from the 1925 Paris Exposition. Using the matrix of Art Deco images, I compared them to period images from the 1925 Paris Exposition and images of set designs of MGM films. This led to the conclusion about the influence of the 1925 Exposition on MGM films.

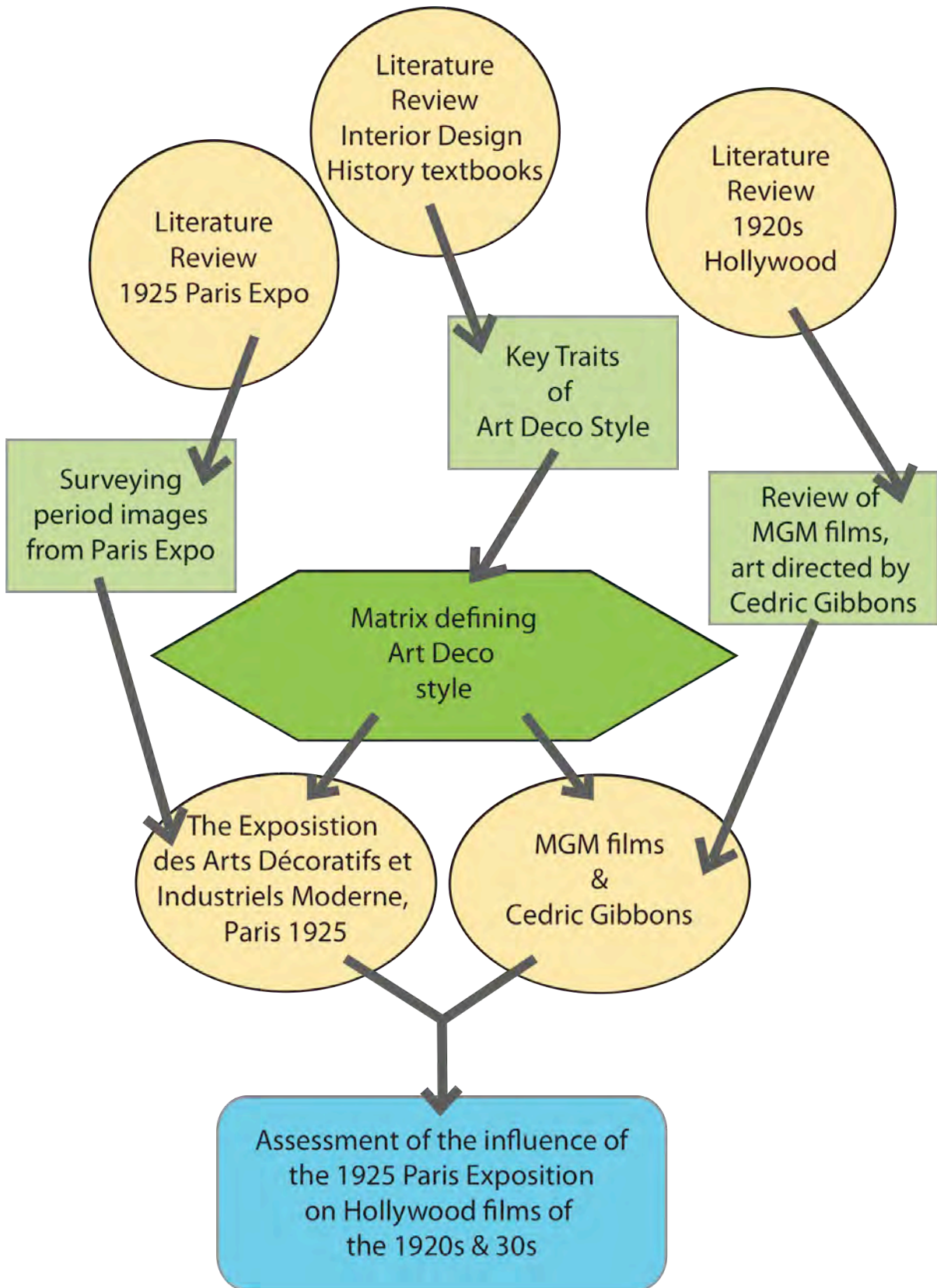


Figure 1-3 — Diagram of Research Approach

## CHAPTER 2

This chapter covers the development of Art Deco style and the history of The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925. I illustrate the Art Deco style with interiors from the Exposition that define what I then analyze in the Hollywood films.

### **PREFACING The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, France was in the midst of the Art Nouveau design period. Further north, England was still embracing the Arts & Crafts movement. The *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 in Paris was a celebration of the arrival of the new century and the “New Art” or Art Nouveau. Its exhibits displayed regional, traditional design but was not a cohesive display of any single design sensibility.<sup>3</sup> The originators of Art Nouveau sought to imbue inert material with an organic shape, treating furniture more as sculptural, rather than functional. The wholesale furniture manufacturers revolted against the Art Nouveau styles as being too complex and highly crafted. As those originators retired or died, the manufacturers co-opted the style in an applied decorative way not in the intended original design. As a result, popularized and often debased versions of the furniture and decorative items were sold to the public.<sup>4</sup>

It was the intention of the *Société des Artistes Décorateurs* to organize another international exposition soon after the 1900 Exposition. There was much bickering about formats and which country would sponsor the exposition. Finally, 1912 was decided as a

---

3 Arwas, Victor. *Art Deco* [in English]. Second ed. New York: Abradale Press, 1992.

4 Arwas 16

date, but was subsequently delayed three years to 1915. But with war breaking out in 1914, the project was indefinitely put on hold. After the Armistice in 1918, the *Société* announced they would hold the exposition in 1922. The proposed exhibition was viewed as a way to restore France's glory and boost their international trade position, but shortages caused by the war-affected construction. Finally, 25 years after the 1900 Exposition, the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* opened.

The intention of the *Société* was to not hold a historical exposition; rather, they wanted a forward-thinking event “open to all manufacturers whose product is artistic in character and shows clearly modern tendencies”.<sup>5</sup> Permission to participate in the exposition would only be granted to designers and their works that were deemed ‘modern’.<sup>6</sup>

The exposition was intended to be international in scope and to honor the Allies of the Great War. The Soviet Union was included even before France had officially recognized its government; however, Germany was not invited. Austria and Hungary were both on the invitation list, since Austria-Hungary, as their foe, no longer existed. The United States, misunderstanding the definition of ‘modern’ of the Exposition’s programme, declined to participate.<sup>7</sup> One textile manufacture, Horace Cheney of the Cheney Brothers, believed that requirements would exclude anything that had their “inspiration from so-called classic styles”. Though, at the time, he was developing

---

5 Arwas 13

6 The term “modern” in relation to the exposition was taken to mean forward or future thinking. The term in relation to architecture and interiors was not defined until the 1930s in conjunction with the International Style exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Jencks, Charles. *Modern Movements in Architecture*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973.

7 Arwas

textiles based on the ironwork of Edgar Brandt, a designer known for his Art Deco designs.<sup>8</sup>

In the period between the two expositions, the French design community emerged from a period of comparative malaise. In 1910 the *Deutsche Werkbund* was invited to exhibit at the *Salon d'Automne*, the annual art exhibit held in Paris, France. The *Deutsche Werkbund* was an association of German designers, architects, craftsman and artists founded in 1907. Critics derided the German designers, but the well-crafted furniture, use of exotic materials, and strong colors affected the Parisians who attended the exhibit. One result of this Salon was to galvanize French designers to express a revised style. French critic Frantz Jourdain wrote in *Le Salon d'Automne*, "This Bavarian exhibition... stimulated our emulation by restoring our faith in ourselves, a faith which had been awkwardly shaken. It is, indeed, from that day onward that the number of our interior designers, small until then, increased substantially, and our decorators accepted a unity of direction they had scarcely bothered with before".<sup>9</sup>

The energy of the French designers was palpable for the 1925 Paris Exposition. The length of time since the previous exhibition in 1900 made the French designers and craftsmen especially eager to showcase their modern and forward thinking style to the world. This perfect storm led to an Exposition whose style eventually touched not only architecture, interiors, furniture, and sculpture; but also automobiles, appliances, and everyday items such as telephones and fountain pens.

---

8 Friedman, Marilyn F. "The United States and the 1925 Paris Exposition: Opportunity Lost and Found." *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 13, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2005-06): 94-119.

9 Arwas 17





Figure 2-2 — A poster advertising the Exposition. A graphic with typical Art Deco motif, a leaping gazelle and nymph with flowers.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925***

The Exposition was held in the center of Paris from April to October 1925. The site of the Exhibition encompassed all of the Grande Palais, the Pont Alexandre III, the Esplanade de Invalides, and the Cours La Reine. The chief architect of the Exposition was Charles Plumet, with Louis Bonnier in charge of landscaping. The overall scheme was laid out in a main symmetrical axis aligned with the Pont Alexandre III. (See figure 1-1.) The bisecting axis was the Seine with pavilions placed along both banks. There were fifteen gateways; the main entrance was at the Grand Palais. Among the most

---

10 Davies, Karen. *Home in Manhattan: Modern Decorative Arts, 1925 to the Depression*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Art Gallery, 1983. Print.

impressive of the rest was the Porte de la Concorde, where there was a circle of plinths with a statue of a woman with arms wide in welcome at the center.<sup>11</sup>

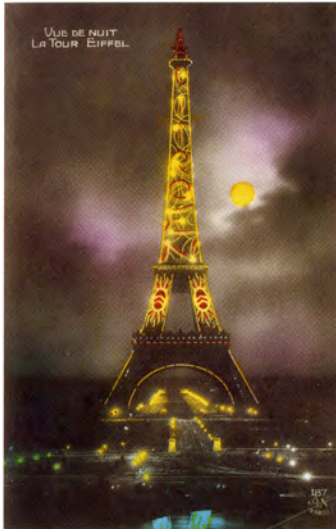


Figure 2-3 — The Eiffel Tower with advertising illumination (period photograph)<sup>12</sup>

The Eiffel Tower was used as an advertising sign for the automobile company Citroën with illuminated patterns of geometric arcs, comets, zodiac signs, and flames that were orchestrated from a keyboard. The Pont Alexandre III, built for the *1900 Universal Exposition*, had its Beaux Arts splendor concealed to hold commercial shops across its span. Fountains were placed below the span to make the entire bridge appear to be floating above a torrent of water pouring into the Seine. The water was illuminated amethyst and gold at night, with fountains shooting up from the center of the Seine

---

11 The majority of the information on the Exposition was pulled from a book written by Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, two British young people attached to the British section of the Exposition. Their book written to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Exposition shares their enthusiasm and recollections of their time in Paris. Their book is more than an autobiographic account; it also identifies Art Deco as a movement and helps chart the beginnings of a popular movement.

12 Scarlett, Frank and Marjorie Townley. *Arts Décoratifs 1925: A Personal Recollection of the Paris Exhibition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975. 12.

appearing like flames with low-level fireworks, while searchlights lit up the sky from the banks of the river.



Figure 2-4 — The Pont Alexandre III, during the Exposition, with night illuminations and a water display. (period photograph)<sup>13</sup>

The 1925 Exposition became a showcase for French designers and manufacturers. Foreign countries sent representatives to bring back reports and photographs. The United States (U.S.) delegation spent three weeks repairing the diplomatic ties that had been frayed in the U.S. decision to not participate in the Exposition. They also chose around 400 objects to tour eight American museums.<sup>14</sup>

---

13 Scarlet 17

14 Friedman 94

Art Deco design is partly a return to classicism, but also an absorption of the surface mannerisms of the Cubist, Fauvist, and Futurist movements.<sup>15</sup> The distinguishing definition of Art Deco is stylization. Surface treatment of furniture, buildings, and objects was the essence of the style. Characteristics of the Art Deco style are flat, highly abstract figures, animals, plants, or objects. Chevrons, stepped shapes, frozen fountains, sunbursts, and lightning could be applied to anything from architecture to toasters. Objects and interiors were decorated with luxurious finishes from ivory, to onyx, shagreen, leather, rosewood, satinwood, and mother-of-pearl. No surface was spared.

Increased exploration of Africa and South America inspired designers during this time. Carter's discovery of Tutankhamen's Tomb in 1922 provided an Egyptian influence. French colonization of the Congo inspired primitive textiles and the use of exotic woods.

### ***Interiors of the 1925 Exposition***

The interiors of the 1925 Exposition define Art Deco in France. Here are eleven interiors representative of the ideas presented at the Exposition.<sup>16</sup>

The common factors within these interiors are the use of luxury finishes and geometric styling. The interiors have a refined simplicity. These rooms are decorated with gold leaf, rosewood, mother of pearl inlays, and fur throws. Even the rooms that use less expensive or exotic materials use the finishes with attention to craftsmanship and quality.

---

15 Arwas 17

16 Dufrene, Maurice. *Authentic Art Deco Interiors from the 1925 Paris Exhibition*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collector's Club Ltd., 1989.



Figure 2-5 — Alfred Levard, Hall, Primavera Pavillion, Furniture by Sognot and others.

The Hall in the Primavera Pavillion (Figure 1-5) featured stylized foliage in square bas-relief panels on the wall; the same motif is echoed in the folding screen. The upholstered furniture is heavy to balance the weight of the geometric balcony.

The fluted columns are executed in a modern machine-influenced, rather than classical, style. The furniture is also very sculptural (but not based in the Art Nouveau tradition), in an abstract, geometric way.



Figure 2-6 — Alfred Levard, Swimming pool in a villa.

The swimming pool room (Figure 1-6) features exotic sculpture, luxury wall materials, fluted wall panels, urns, and sconces that resemble flowers. A mirrored floor simulates the water.

The bedroom in Figure 1-7 displays furniture with exotic veneers and inlays. The wallpaper is printed with metallic inks with a fan shaped sconce above the bed. The legs on the chair in front of the vanity resemble animal horns. The dresser has the typical native woman sculpture. There is also a bird sculpture on the armoire.



Figure 2-7 — Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann (1879-1933). Bedroom, Pavilion of a Collector.

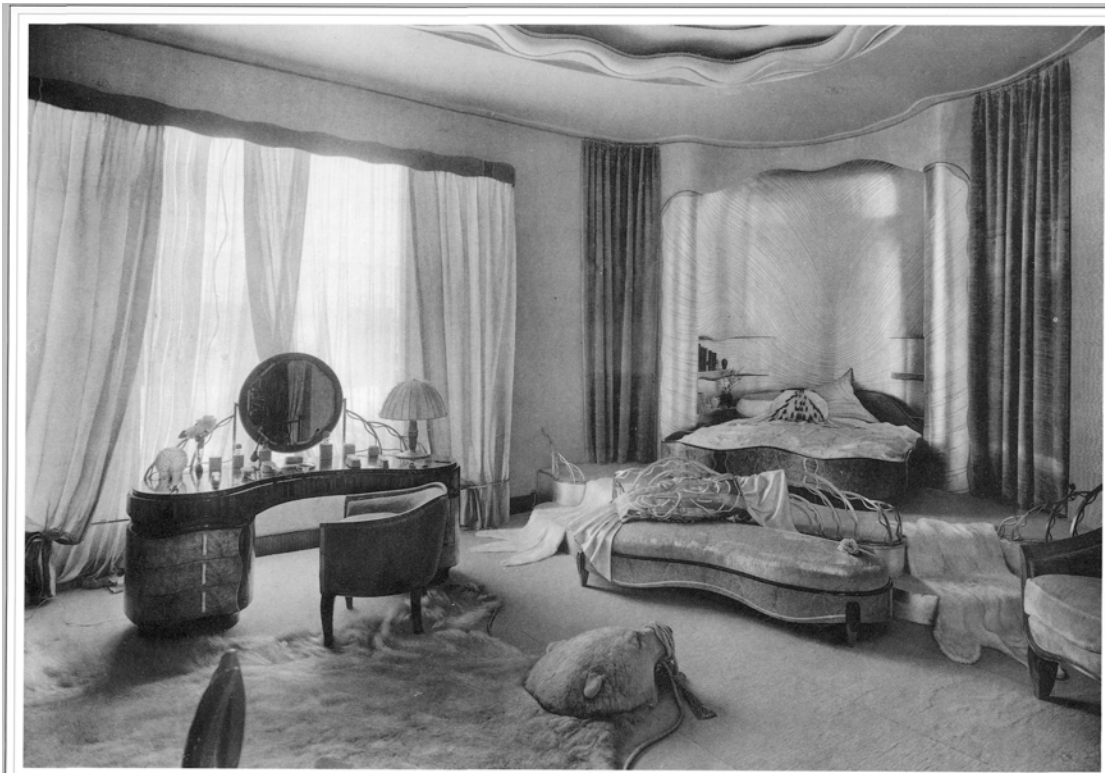


Figure 2-8 — Maurice Dufrêne (1876-1955), Lady's bedroom, La Maîtrise Pavilion.

Compared to the masculine bedroom (Figure 1-7), the bedroom in figure 1-8 is lighter as the curtains and woods are lighter in weight and value. They are both luxurious in the materials used. The vanity and bed have figured wood veneers. There is a bearskin rug and other fur throws over the carpeting. The raised platform of the bed area is surrounded with a graceful metal railing repeated on the vanity. Those curves are repeated throughout the entire room: in the curved furniture and in the carved wall surrounding the bed.



Figure 2-9 — Pierre Block and Max Bloch, Young girl's room.

While this additional bedroom from the Exposition in Figure 1-9 uses less luxurious materials, it still has veneered furniture, including Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann's "Soleil" bed with a headboard with a rising sun motif in wood. The highly polished bookcase table in the center of photo is an inverted cone shape contrasting with the lampshade in a stepped pyramid shape. The draperies echo that stepped pyramid in two dimensions.

The graphic nature of the decorations and furniture make this a distinctly French Art Deco example.



Figure 2-10 — H. & L. Barberis (architects), Salle de toilette.

The dressing room and bathroom (Figure 1-10) feature geometric treatments of the walls and a heavy carved ceiling that represents fabric with metal tassels. Contrasting starkly with the ceiling is a high contrast geometric patterned rug. Above the tub is a frozen fountain motif in stained glass, which works well with the curved doors and walls. The light fixture on the small table is patterned like fish scales. Luxury finishes of marble cover the floor, tub surround, and tabletops. The repeating geometric lines in the bathroom appear to be etched or inlaid.



Figure 2-11 — Lucie Renaudot (?-1939), Studio.

The round studio (Figure 1-11) has furniture in macassar ebony. The color rendering indicated the pleated wall panels were pale mauve/grey. The upholstery was in shades of pale green, grey and cream, with the circular rug providing a strong focal with its coloring of deep red, orange, dark brown, and pink. A domed silver leaf ceiling provided

indirect lighting, pleated draperies that echo the pleated wall panels, iron railings with a geometric motif, and a rug with a scalloped design. Luxurious fabric upholstery, accent pillows, and a fur throw add to the overall sumptuous feeling.



Figure 2-12 — Georges Champion (1889-1940), Dining Room. Rugs by Jules Coudyser, ceramics by Rouard.

The small dining room (Figure 1-12) features a dining set with highly figured wood veneer. The design of the furniture is a simplistic rectilinear design, to not compete with the intricate finish. The entire room is composed around that rectilinear plan, the only diagonals appear in the windows, the mirror, and the accent pillows in the window seating. The color rendering for this room indicated yellow and black check fabric that echoed the yellow color in the highly figured wood. The rug is colored grey and red.

The larger dining room (Figure 1-13) is more elaborate in its finishes than the previous room. The wall hangings represent a stylized forest, and the walls and tray

ceiling around them are painted in a dripping paint faux finish. The carpeting is a stylized rose reminiscent of the Macintosh Rose. The furniture has clean lines and a highly polished finish. The large stepped light fixture has a stylized petal motif.



Figure 2-13 — Ghislain Ringuet (b.1907). Large Dining Room



Figure 2-14 — Paul Follet (1877-1941), Dining Room, Pomone Pavilion (architect L.-H. Boillieu , with Carrière, Binet, and Théodoru).

This dining room (Figure 1-14) features a gold leafed tray ceiling and a mirrored wall behind the buffet. The wallpaper has stylized branches. The furniture is carved palisander. The buffet is carved with stylized leaves, the dining table pedestals carvings are more geometric. The color rendering indicated a color scheme of blue, green, beige-pink.



Figure 2-15 — Paul Follet, (1877-1941), Grand Salon, Pomone Pavilion.

This feature of this Grand Salon is the piano with elaborately carved legs. It is carved of macassar ebony, encrusted ivory and gilded wood around the edging of the body of the piano. The tray ceiling is decorated with a repeating fan motif with a carved frieze of grapes and leaves. Similar carvings are features on the curio cabinets. The upholstery was red-orange with curtains a darker red. The carpet was dark pink with a rug of shades of pink and grey with an outer band of red-orange to tie in with the upholstery.

A summary of the interiors showcased at the Exposition notes a liberal use of decorative ornament, in themes drawn from Cubism, Tribal Africa, Egyptology, and others. There are luxurious fabrics, exotic woods, and precious inlays. The predominance of geometric shapes in the furniture and architecture shows that this was the antithesis of the Art Nouveau.<sup>17</sup>







Following is a table showing select interiors of the pavilions of the Paris Exposition. Next to the photos are some of the hallmarks of the Art Deco style, such as frozen fountain motif, geometric furniture, tiered wall treatment, etc. The use of luxurious materials, geometric styling and patterns showed the Exposition attendees and the world how they could modernize their interiors.

Lucie Renaudot (?-1939),  
Studio.  
Tiered wall treatment,  
ironwork, statuette,  
sconces, luxurious fabrics  
and throws, gilded ceiling,  
graphic rug.



---

17 Dufrene 15

<p>Alfred Levard, Hall, Primavera Pavillion, Furniture by Sognot and others. Geometric wall treatment and furniture, graphic ironwork room divider, sconces.</p>	
<p>Alfred Levard, Swimming pool in a villa. Geometric wall treatment, sunken floor, ethnic statuary and textiles.</p>	
<p>Pierre Block and Max Bloch, Young girl's room. Geometric furniture and wall treatment.</p>	
<p>Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann (1879-1933). Bedroom, Pavilion of a Collector. Patterned wallpaper, statuette, graphic rug, geometric vase.</p>	
<p>Ghislain Ringuet (b.1907). Large Dining Room. Tiered doorway, large graphic artworks, highly patterned wall treatment, geometric light fixture.</p>	
<p>Paul Follet, (1877-1941), Grand Salon, Pomone Pavilion. Inlaid piano, sconces, geometric furniture, figurines, patterned rug.</p>	






<p>H. &amp; L. Barberis (architects), Salle de toilette. Shaped doorways, textured ceiling, geometric light fixtures, stained glass, graphic rug.</p>	
<p>Maurice Duf�r�ne (1876-1955), Lady’s bedroom, La Ma�trise Pavillon. Luxurious carpets and throws, shaped vanity featuring ironwork,</p>	
<p>Georges Champion (1889-1940), Dining Room. Rugs by Jules Coudyser, ceramics by Rouard. Geometric furniture and wall treatment, stained glass.</p>	
<p>Lalique Fountain. Frozen fountain motif, obelisk</p>	
<p>La Porte D’Honneur entrance. Frozen fountain motif in 2D ironwork and 3D on the tops of the towers, bas relief, tiered doorway, geometric ironwork gates.</p>	

Figure 2-16 – Table of Art Deco interiors.

***After The Exposition***

After the exposition, the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized a traveling show based upon the exhibits at the Exposition that toured American museums. In 1926, Macy’s department store organized an “Art in Trade” display in conjunction with the

show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was a series of rooms that featured designers specializing in Art Deco, including Eliel Saarinen and Joseph Urban. (Figure 1-16) The ‘modern’ component of this event was so emphasized that the style became known as Art Moderne or “the Moderne”, primarily in America.<sup>18</sup>

As the style was disseminated throughout America, it became more streamlined and less decorative than the original European examples. In 1929, the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized its own show called ‘The Architect and the Industrial Arts.’ Many will say, that beyond the 1925 Exposition pavilions, that there was no real Art Deco architecture in Paris.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, soon examples of American Art Moderne architecture were constructed, including the Chrysler Building (construction from 1928-30), Radio City Music Hall (1932) and the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln (construction from 1922–32).

---

18 The term “modern” in referring to architecture or design was used in the call for submissions to the Exposition “open to all manufacturers whose product is artistic in character and show clearly modern tendencies.” (Arwas 13) The term is also referred to in hindsight by Nicolas Pevsner in *Pioneers of Modern Design* (1966) to refer to the period from William Morris to Walter Gropius. (Jencks 11)

19 Arwas 25



Figure 2-17 — Top, Dining room designed by Eliel Saarinen for the 1929 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition “The Architect and the Industrial Arts”. Bottom, Man’s Den designed by Joseph Urban for the same exhibit.<sup>20</sup>

The Art Deco Style was not long lived. In France, many leading Art Deco designers went out of business and a few died within the decade after the Exposition.<sup>21</sup> The world-wide Great Depression that followed the United States 1929 stock market crash put many French design firms out of business. Those with wealth kept a low

---

20 Arwas 25

21 Arwas 22

profile and major commissions seemed to only come from governments. With the rise of Nazi Germany and Facism, avant garde experimentation effectively reached an end in Western Europe.

### **Summary**

With its highly decorative and highly graphic look, Art Deco was a natural fit in the glamorous world of Hollywood films, in part because the stylized flat graphics, bold geometric shapes, and strong value contrast translated well on the screen. Now that the Exposition had showcased the modern, it was time for Hollywood to attach narratives to the style.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EARLY FILM INDUSTRY

This chapter will introduce the film industry of Hollywood in the late 1920s that allowed Art Deco to become a hallmark style of the films of that time.

#### **Hollywood in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and The Art Director of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer**

The Hollywood studio system of the 1920s and 30s created an industrial movie making industry. Since the studios controlled the stars, the production of the film, and the distribution, the set design was merely a single cog in the larger machine of the film factory.<sup>22</sup>

The art departments were set up with a supervising art director as head. The art director oversaw the draftsmen, set designers, and all the anonymous crews that worked on the pictures created during this time. Control of visual aspects of a film would fall under that supervising art director.<sup>23</sup>

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's art director during this era was Cedric Gibbons. Although he was the supervising art director, according to his contract Gibbons received the art director credit on as many as 1,053 films during his tenure of 32 years. Of those 1,000 films, he had direct responsibility for around 150.<sup>24</sup> Gibbons was nominated thirty times

---

22 Esperdy, G. "From Instruction to Consumption: Architecture and Design in Hollywood Movies of the 1930s." *The Journal of American Culture* 30, no. 2 (2007): 198-211.

23 Barsacq, Leon. *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions*. English translation ed.: Little, Brown and Company, 1970.

24 Stephan, Ed. Cedric Gibbons biography. <http://www.imdb.com>.

for the Academy Award; he won eleven times. Gibbons himself designed the streamlined Oscar statuette in 1928 which epitomizes the Art Deco treatment of the human form.<sup>25</sup>

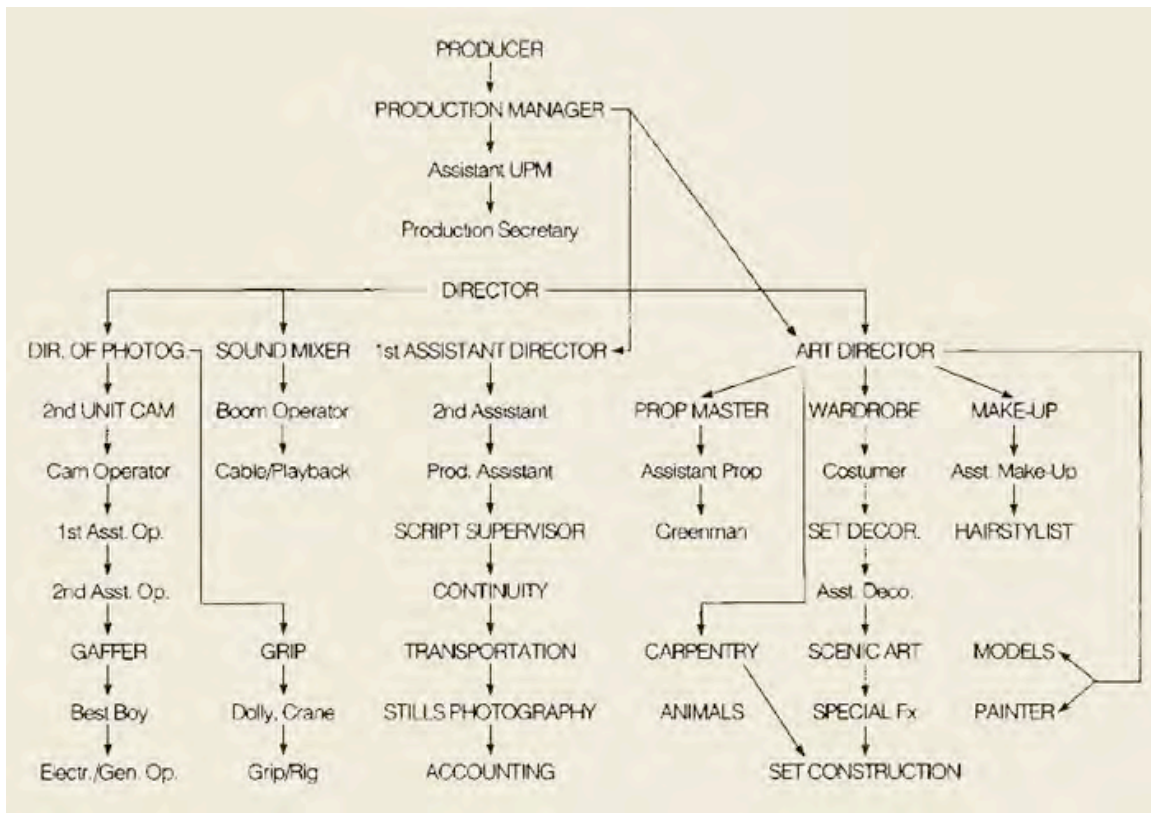


Figure 3-1: Organizational chart for preproduction and principal photography.<sup>26</sup>

25 Wilson, Christina. "Cedric Gibbons: Architect of Hollywood's Golden Age." In *Architecture and Film*, edited by Mark Lamster, 101 - 15. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000.

26 divadaniel. "Cinecollage.Net." <http://cinecollege.net/filmmaking.html>.



Figure 3-2 — Cedric Gibbons holding the Oscar statuette he designed.<sup>27</sup>

Not much is known of the early life of Cedric Gibbons. He was born in Dublin and raised in Brooklyn. He went to art school and joined Goldwyn Pictures, a small studio in New York, in 1918. After a short stint in the Navy during World War I, Gibbons moved to Goldwyn Studios in California. He was one of the few studio executives who survived the merger between Goldwyn, Metro Pictures, and The Louis B. Mayer Production Company in 1924.

Cedric Gibbons ran his art department similarly to an architecture studio and made it into one of the most efficient departments at MGM. MGM's annual output was fifty movies a year and each film required between fifteen and forty sets each. At the end of the 1930s, Gibbons was overseeing a staff of between fifty and eighty highly trained staff, including architects, decorators, renderers, draftsman, sketch artists, carpenters, painters, and secretaries.<sup>28</sup>

---

27 Wilson 100

28 Wilson 103

Cedric Gibbons' early sets were typical of the time. A good number of the early Goldwyn films have been lost, but photographs show that they, overall, had dark furniture, heavy fabrics, elaborate woodwork, and patterned wallpapers.



Figure 3-3 — A film still from *The Cheat*, 1915. A silent movie directed by Cecil B. DeMille. This scene shows a typical crowded scene with elaborately carved wood furniture and the backdrop in close.<sup>29</sup>

During this time, the studios all had their own “style”. Paramount promoted a sleek modern urbanism, RKO had its “great white set”, and Warner Brothers was known for its urban realism. Gibbons was responsible for the fashionable Art Deco look of the films produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.<sup>30</sup> He imposed his personal style on MGM. While Gibbons was with Goldwyn, he insisted on naturally constructed sets and became known as the man who “put the glove on the mantelpiece”. Painted backdrops were banished and constructed sets became the rule.<sup>31</sup>

The supervising art directors were responsible for presenting a fantasy for the audience: however, the set had to be “sufficiently authentic to hold carping fan mail to a

---

29 The Collective Picture. “Silent Film”. <http://www.collectivepic.com>.

30 Esperdy 200

31 Mandelbaum, Howard and Eric Myers. *Screen Deco*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. P. 32

minimum” meaning that an element of realism was important.<sup>32</sup> Gibbons described the art department’s job as “creating an illusion of reality”.<sup>33</sup> The movie-going public did recognize the sophisticated sets depicting ocean liners, nightclubs, and apartments, not from reality, but most likely from other films.<sup>34</sup> For example, the first ocean liner to fully reflect the modern look of Art Deco stem-to-stern was the Normandie, which launched October 29, 1932.<sup>35</sup>

The continuity in set design was an important part of the MGM brand, and Gibbons’s management of the look depended on keeping abreast of the latest developments in design. As you can see from how he arranged his personal space, his home with wife, Delores Del Rio (Figure 2-4), he lived in the height of the Art Deco style. The doorways have tiered openings. The overall look is spare, but elegant. Stepped walls provide space for artwork and luxurious fabrics on the seating banquette. It is close to the elegant apartment set he designed for *Our Blushing Brides* (1930).

---

32 Liang, A.B. “Designing Motion Picture Sets.” *Architectural Record* 74 (1933): 59-64.

33 Gibbons, Cedric. “The Art Director.” In *Behind the Screen: How Films Are Made*, edited by Stephen Watts, 41-50. London: Arthur Barker, 1938.

34 Esperdy 201

35 Ardman, Harvey. *Normandie, Her Life and Times*. New York: Franklin Watts. 86-87. 1985.



Figure 3-4 — Cedric Gibbons at home with his wife, Delores Del Rio<sup>36</sup>



Figure 3-5 — Luxury apartment in *Our Blushing Brides*, MGM (1930)

---

36 Eermans, Emily Evans. "The Del Rio - Gibbons House: Made for Black and White?". <http://emilyevanseerdmans.blogspot.com/2009/02/del-rio-gibbons-house-made-for-black.html>.

## CHAPTER 4

### FILMS

This chapter investigates the eight films chosen for their use of Art Deco interiors. It describes and analyzes the use of set design to enhance the films. (All photographs not otherwise footnoted were taken by the author in the method described in the introduction.)

#### **MGM films from the 1930s.**

Cedric Gibbons, Art Director for MGM, unveiled the imaginative Art Deco style that would make him a celebrated designer in a silent film *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928). There are differing accounts on whether Gibbons attended the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratif et Industriels Modernes shortly after the Goldwyn company was merged with the Mayer and Metro companies. The MGM records show that he was busy as art director for set production for several movies including *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925) and *The Big Parade* (1925).<sup>37</sup> But there is little doubt that the exposition in Paris defined his design sensibilities and changed the films of MGM.<sup>38</sup>

This study analyzes eight MGM films art directed by Cedric Gibbons and selected scenes that illustrate his use of Art Deco interiors. The selected films had to be easily available to view multiple times; and had to be at least a modest box office success to ensure widespread distribution to an audience at that time.

---

37 Wilson 105

38 Mandelbaum 32



Figure 4-1 — Lobby card for *Our Dancing Daughters*, MGM (1928)

### ***Our Dancing Daughters* (1928)**

*Our Dancing Daughters* features a young and vivacious Joan Crawford as a virtuous young lady, Di, who is the hit of the party. She and her selfish friend, Ann, played by Anita Page, vie for the same handsome millionaire. He chooses Ann, the wrong girl. Melodrama, heartache, and tragedy all play out in spacious modern settings with modern ideas of “petting parties” and frenzied dancing.



Figure 4-2 – Dancing party scene from *Our Dancing Daughters* with Joan Crawford dancing in the yacht club. The arched niches and sconces are decorated with Mediterranean motifs.



Figure 4-3 — Foyer in *Our Dancing Daughters*, (1929) MGM, featuring a tiered arch and fluted wall, geometric sconce, black statuette and urn in stark contrast to white walls.

MGM knew it had a hit with visual impact. The studio issued a press release touting the film's art direction albeit in a backhanded way:

Modernistic effects in furniture and architecture are being used with a vengeance by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Joan Crawford's new picture. Weird beds, almost on the floor, have little woodwork frame save foot-high boards which conceal the springs and do away with the conventional legs of a bed. These are set against a wall whose only ornamenting is the shape of the doors. Black statues set against gold-papered panels form the only ornamental note. The whole thing is being photographed under the huge new incandescent lights.<sup>39</sup>

---

39 Mandelbaum 33

Mandelbaum illustrates how the general public viewed the interiors of this film. The perception was not just of modernity, but as something from the exciting future. It had no relation to the rooms of the time with their dark and heavy Edwardian furniture or the oak lines of the Arts and Crafts period.



Figure 4-4 — Poster for *Our Modern Maidens*

### ***Our Modern Maidens* (1929)**

*Our Dancing Daughters* became a huge hit that resulted in the sequels, *Our Modern Maidens* (1929) and *Our Blushing Brides* (1930). The films created a sensation with their audiences who took the design style as something to strive towards. Middle America started redecorating. Those with money redesigned their entire houses in the new modern

style; those with fewer resources copied the films with touches such as venetian blinds, dancing statuettes, and indirect lighting.<sup>40</sup>

For *Our Modern Maidens*, Gibbons created an amazing set. The mansion is the heroine's father's place on Long Island. The set is capable of holding hundreds for a large rollicking party as well as a small scene with three characters. The set was shot from at least three different angles. (Figures 4-5, 4-6, 4-7)

This set has some touches of the Art Deco that was presented in Paris. It is similar in feeling to the geometric balcony in the large living room in Figure 2-5. It also shows some of the Machine Aesthetic that was gaining popularity since the turn of the century. The archways and the staircase together look like the cogs of a large machine.



Figure 4-5 — Living room set from *Our Modern Maidens* (1929), MGM. Note the heavily carved archways and the circular staircase that echoes the arches.

---

40 Mandelbaum 34



Figure 4-6 — A different angle on the living room set from *Our Modern Maidens* (1929), MGM. Other Art Deco features are the ironwork, the geometric patterning on the doorway, sculptural pieces of furniture and the graceful sculpture.



Figure 4-7 — Another view of the same set in *Our Modern Maidens* shot from above the balcony at the top of the circular staircase.

The characters are all from privileged society. They are new graduates from school; our heroine, Billie, and her beau, Gil, are set to make it big in society. Gil, played by Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., is gunning for a diplomatic job in Paris. Billie, played by Joan Crawford, is determined to get Gil that dream job.

She sets out to flirt with an older man who can be instrumental in getting Gil the Paris job. Her school chum, Kentucky, played by Anita Page, keeps Gil distracted. After a lot of miscommunications and some bruised feelings, Billie ends up falling for the older man. Gil ends up with Kentucky.



Figure 4-8 — Billie's bedroom. Note the geometric furniture similar to the furniture in the small bedroom, Figure 1-9, page 25.



Figure 4-9 — The men congregating in a sitting room before the wedding. *Our Modern Maidens*, MGM, 1929.



Figure 4-10 — A still from a deleted scene from *The Kiss*, MGM, 1929 with Greta Garbo. Reuse of art from *Our Modern Maidens*.



Figure 4-11 — Another reuse of the same art. This time in *The Divorcee*, MGM, 1930. This film will be discussed later in this chapter.



Figure 4-12 — Poster for *Our Blushing Brides* (1930) MGM

### ***Our Blushing Brides* (1930)**

While *Our Blushing Brides* features the same actresses as in *Our Dancing Daughters*, the girls: Connie, Frankie and Gerry, are now department store girls. Joan Crawford plays Gerry, the sensible one. Anita Page and Dorothy Sebastian play her roommates, Connie and Frankie, respectively. This last of the flapper trilogies<sup>41</sup> sees the Great Depression as something that the girls have to deal with. The girls want a way out of their workaday world, but are faced with making choices that go against the social mores of the time.

Part of their duties as department store girls is to model the clothing for sale. This usually takes place in a large room with a small audience of wealthy customers, women and men. The room has an elevated runway with a large black circle that rotates to white to enhance the outfit shown (Figures 4-13, 4-14). These fashion shows bring to mind stylized figurines (Figure 4-15).



Figure 4-13 — *Our Blushing Brides*, MGM, 1930. Show room with black backdrop

---

41 IMDB.com. “International Movie Database.” <http://www.imdb.com>.



Figure 4-14 — Show room with backdrop turned to show white



Figure 4-15 — Josef Lorenzl, Dancer. Cold-painted bronze on green onyx base.

Later in the film, Connie is living in a stylish apartment with one of Tom's friends (Figure 4-16). Connie's apartment is bright with indirect lighting, white upholstery and white lacquered desk. The walls have stepped detailing around the fireplace and dark

polished floors. Everything is elegant and shows off the Art Deco style to maximum effect.



Figure 4-16 — Connie’s luxury apartment

Tom arranges a style show using the girls from the department store at his Long Island estate (Figure 4-17). The estate’s garden features a massive terrace and fountain that the models use as a runway. The terrace and fountain feature many strong Art Deco stylistic characteristics (Figure 4-17, 4-18). The fountain looks very similar to the Lalique fountain and the Porte D’honneur entrance at The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925 (Figure 4-19, 4-20). On the pierced walls of the terrace, “frozen fountain” motifs are repeated. The piers are capped with ziggurats lit from within. There are lighted urns throughout the garden with lounges grouped in seating arrangements for the guests.



Figure 4-17 — Terrace and fountain at Tom's Long Island estate



Figure 4-18 — Closer look at fountain with models moving around it.

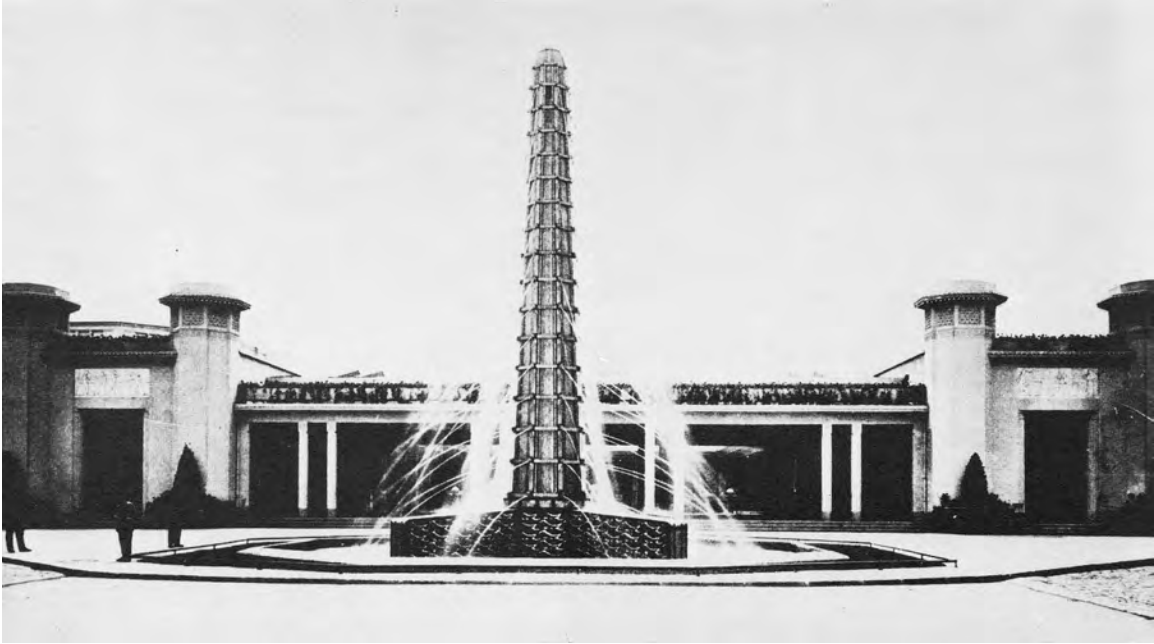


Figure 4-19 — Laliq fountain at Exposition.

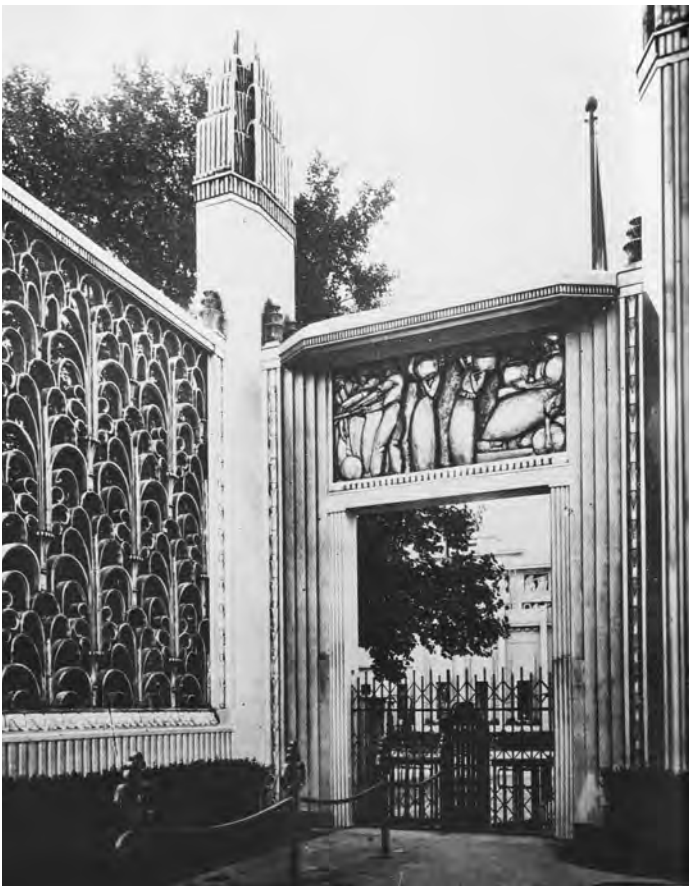


Figure 4-20 — Ironwork at the La Porte D'honneur entrance designed by Edgar Brandt at Exposition.

Tom manages to get Gerry alone at his tree house retreat (Figures 4-21, 4-22, 4-23). The tree house is ridiculously large and cannot truly be located in a tree, but the illusion is maintained by having foliage visible outside the large arched window.

She thinks she has figured out his ploy and will resist him. He proposes marriage and everything works out for a happy ending.



Figure 4-21 — Tom's Tree House



Figure 4-22 — Geri admiring the stylish radio in the tree house

As with every popular fashion, there were detractors. *The New York Times* review of *Our Blushing Brides* shows the critics had decided the modern style equated with a selling out to some sort of moral decadence: “All three girls [Joan Crawford, Anita Page, and Dorothy Sebastian] yearn for the trappings that make for a comfortable life, and the two who sacrifice their hall rooms for modernistic settings must pay the piper.” The review continues to discuss the Art Deco tree house where one of the male leads goes to ‘get away’: “If by getting away from it all he means the angular settings that Cedric Gibbons has conceived, he is justified”.<sup>42</sup>

---

42 Mandelbaum 34



Figure 4-23 — Poster for *The Divorcee* (1930) MGM

### ***The Divorcee (1930)***

*The Divorcee (1930)* was another instance of Hollywood attaching moral judgments to the characters and their surroundings. Scandalous when it came out, *The Divorcee* was a film based on the best-selling book, *The Ex-Wife* by Ursula Parrott, (1929), starring a surprisingly sexy Norma Shearer<sup>43</sup>, a role for which she won the Oscar in 1930. When Jerry's husband, Ted, confesses that he has cheated, but that it meant nothing, she cheats as well. After a pivotal scene where Ted asks to come back, Jerry informs him that she has "balanced their accounts". Ted cannot see her affair in the same light in which he expects his to be viewed. They part bitterly and

---

<sup>43</sup> Norma Shearer was known for "good girl" roles and had to lobby her husband, Irving Thalberg, head of MGM Studios, for the role. Thalberg was not persuaded that Shearer would be sexy enough for the role. She had glamour shots made of her wearing very little clothing and had the 8 by 10s delivered to Thalberg. She won the role. Mankowicz, Ben. *Movie bumper*. Turner Classic Movies, 2009.

Jerry sets out on a road of cocktail parties and liaisons before she takes Ted back in Paris rather unconvincingly.<sup>44</sup>



Figure 4-25 – Church scene, gothic arches and altar but redone in an all white palette.



Figure 3-26 – Foyer with stepped details, black and white checked floor and statuary on pedestal.

---

44 Dooley, Roger. *From Scarface to Scarlett: American Films in the 1930s*. New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Pub., 1979.

The interiors have all the hallmarks of a Gibbons set; white interiors with stepped moldings around the fireplace and the tall doors, geometric sconces, tasteful statuettes on fluted pedestals, checkerboard tile floors. The apartment is filled with modern art. The silver is elegant; the china is a geometric black and white.



Figure 4-27 – Tom & Jerry's living room with modern paintings and statuary, geometric sconces and furniture, piano with inlays



Figure 4-28 – Detail shot of the living room, showing the statuary



Figure 4-29 – Party scene in Paris, stepped details and stylized figures in paintings



Figure 4-30 — Kitchen scene with geometric pattern china and sleek silver.



Figure 4-31 — Poster from *Grand Hotel* (1932)

### ***Grand Hotel* (1932)**

*Grand Hotel* (1932) is a film that became more than just a film; it became a successful formula for studio production. The *Grand Hotel* formula gathers together a

cross section of humanity in a space, namely a hotel, which is the setting for the subsequent drama.<sup>45</sup> This film is set in Berlin's Grand Hotel with an aging ballerina, a dying bookkeeper, a ruthless industrialist, a baron, and a typist all spending a couple of days in an expensive hotel. The film had five splendid actors playing out the drama: Greta Garbo, Lionel Barrymore, John Barrymore, Wallace Berry, and Joan Crawford.



Figure 4-32 — The lobby of the *Grand Hotel* (1932)

Beside the *tour de force* of acting, the film is visually stunning. The opening shots establish the architectural space as a catalyst for the film's action.<sup>46</sup> Overhead shots of the lobby reveal a concentric black and white checkerboard tile floor echoed by the circular balconies that serve as transitions between scenes. It was a Continental vision few Americans had ever seen in 1932.<sup>47</sup>

---

45 Dooley 83

46 Wilson 106

47 Dooley 86



Figure 4-33 — Overhead shot down to the lobby in *Grand Hotel* (1932).



Figure 4-34 — The room of the secretary.

The interiors of the rooms show Art Deco touches. The window treatments include venetian blinds that are used to great effect with the dramatic lighting (Figure 4-34). The rooms are sometimes shot from extreme angles that highlight the geometric furniture (Figure 4-35).



Figure 4-35 — The bookkeeper's room



Figure 4-36 — The business man's room featuring an armoire/bookcase that is reminiscent of the Legrain bookcase. (Figure 3-37).



Figure 4-37 — Pierre Legrain bookcase, Paris, 1925

***Dinner at Eight (1933)***

One of the films that followed the *Grand Hotel* formula was the highly successful *Dinner at Eight* (1933). The film adaptation of the stage hit brought Wallace Berry and both Barrymore brothers back together. They join Marie Dressler and Jean Harlow, plus a wonderful supporting cast around the plot of planning a dinner party for visiting royalty.



Figure 4-38 — Opening title for *Dinner at Eight* (1933). The opening graphics feature a geometric clock that cross fades to a dinner plate. The actor's faces are then superimposed onto the plates.

Hobart Erwin and Fredrick Hope designed the *Dinner at Eight* sets, through only Erwin shared the art director credit with Gibbons. The Streamlined Moderne phase of Art Deco was becoming popular, as we can see in the residence of the Jean Harlow and Wallace Berry characters. Streamlined Modern is considered an American version of Art Deco. It has less surface ornamentation, and the shapes provide much of the decoration. Since Harlow and Berry were playing a spoiled *nouveau riche* couple, the rooms were not in the best of taste, however, they were incredibly white — eleven shades of white. This came to be known as the “white telephone” look.<sup>48</sup>

*Dinner at Eight* is about a dinner party, yet a dining room is only glimpsed once before the pocket doors are shut and the movie ends. We see quite a bit of the Jordan

---

48 Mandlebaum 34

household prior to the aforementioned dinner. We see a morning room, the living room, the foyer, the library, Mr. Jordan's master bedroom and, briefly, the kitchen.



Figure 4-39 — Ad for Coca-Cola featuring the cast of *Dinner at Eight* on set.

*Dinner at Eight* is set in New York City in the first years of the Depression. The film was adapted from the 1932 Broadway play by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. The characters are from the upper classes of New York society just now feeling the pinch of the Depression. The main character is Mr. Oliver Jordan, played by Lionel Barrymore, the owner of a shipping company facing a hostile takeover. Millicent Jordan, his wife, played by Billie Burke, is feverishly planning a dinner party for European royalty a week hence. The other players include a former actress who is “cash poor, asset rich”, a couple comprised of a successful business man from humble beginnings and his platinum blonde former coat check girl (now wife) the daughter of the host family, and an aging alcoholic movie star looking to move his career to the stage.

All of the action takes place in three locations: The Jordan's house, Mr. Jordan's shipping office, and the Versailles Hotel. The set for the hotel illustrates a discourse of a ragged future aligned with a glorious past. It is decorated in a Louis XV style.

Mr. Jordan's office is decorated in a traditional office style (Figures 4-46, 4-47). When Mr. Packard complains about the run down look of the offices, Mr. Jordan mentions that they have been in business for 70 plus years and they look like they have not been updated during that time. The accents in the office are models of ships, globes, and wall barometers. These are a visual representation of the shipping industry.



Figure 4-40 — Mr. Jordan's shipping company office. Note the very traditional wing chairs and an upholstered fireplace fender.



Figure 4-41 — Carlotta Vance visiting Mr. Jordan's office.

The Hotel Versailles is decorated in typically French style (Figures 4-48, 4-49). We see quite a bit of the room of the aging movie star, Larry Renault. Renault is played by John Barrymore. He and the Jordan's daughter, Paula, played by Madge Evans, have a secret affair. She is engaged to a well-to-do Ernest DeGraff, who is returning from Europe.



Figure 4-42 — Larry Renault in his hotel room in the Hotel Versailles. Louis XVth style, heavy brocade and gilt screens.



Figure 4-43 — Larry Renault in his room later in front of a marble topped dresser and gilt framed mirror.



Figure 4-44 — Jean Harlow, on her white telephone in her billowy all-white boudoir, in *Dinner at Eight* (1932), MGM.



Figure 4-45 — Kitty in her oversized Rococo white bed. The coffee set the maid carries has sleek geometric styling.

The Packard's apartment is where the Art Deco style is in full evidence, especially the bedroom of Kitty Packard, played by Jean Harlow (Figures 4-41, 4-42, 4-43). The bedroom is opulent, seemingly decadent, Kitty Packard, with her platinum blonde hair and white satin bias-cut gowns, completes the look.<sup>49</sup>

Mr. Jordan's house represents a tasteful understated Art Deco style. The overall impression of the house is bright with spare decoration. The foyer is a grand circular room with an impressive stairway.

The living room is luxurious, well appointed.



Figure 4-46 — The Jordan's living room. Note the fluted column to the left.

---

49 This is the set where the white telephone look is born. It was also referenced as the first on-screen words uttered by the lead character, Cecile, in the Woody Allen movie, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985). "A white telephone! I've always wanted one of those." Esperdy 198.



Figure 4-47 — A room off the Jordan's living room. Indirect lighting accents a vase.



Figure 4-48 — Nick and Nora getting ready for the dinner of suspects, *The Thin Man* (1934), MGM.

### **The Thin Man, 1934**

Based on a novel by Dashiell Hammett, *The Thin Man* (1934) is one of the classic films of the 30s. It spawned a popular series and well as the long-lasting cinematic pairing of William Powell and Myrna Loy. This witty comedy revolutionized the

detective genre.<sup>50</sup> Nick and Nora, and their terrier, Asta, bantering and drinking their way to solving the mystery, made the modernistic style very appealing to a mass audience. It was all the more alluring when juxtaposed with the Victorian interior of stuffy Nob Hill relatives in *After the Thin Man* (1936), featuring a young Jimmy Stewart.

The Thin Man used Art Deco as a defining characteristic of the apartments of the suspects. The Thin Man is an eccentric inventor of secretive equipment for the military. His secretary/mistress lives in a swank white apartment (Figure 4-50) visited by her criminal acquaintances. His remarried ex-wife and family live in an upscale spacious apartment (Figure 4-51). After the Thin Man's disappearance, Nick is lobbied to solve the case. This leads to the dénouement of all the suspects assembled at a dinner at Nick and Nora's hotel where the murderer will be revealed.



Figure 4-49 — The Thin Man's secretary's apartment. Note the geometric decoration over the fireplace, wall sconces and overall white scheme.

---

50 Dooley 356



Figure 4-50 — The boudoir of the Thin Man's ex-wife, Mimi. Nick Charles, center, Mimi, left, and the Thin Man's daughter on the right. This boudoir is very similar to the feminine bedroom from the 1925 Paris Exposition. (Figure 1-8, page 24)

The modern, luxurious interiors of the money-grubbing ex-wife and gold digging secretary add to the commentary on their character. They spend excessively even if they cannot afford it. Even though the scenes that Nick and Nora were primarily in were set in more bland interiors, the public relations sent out publicity stills of them on a totally different set from the movie with a more modern look. They are in their bathrobes talking to an unidentified man, but they are in the Thin Man's secretary's apartment. This scene and those bathrobes never appear in the film (Figure 4-51).



Figure 4-51 — Publicity still from *The Thin Man*, MGM, 1934.



Figure 4-52 — A distant view of the Emerald City, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), MGM.  
**The Wizard of Oz, 1939**

Designing sets for a fantasy world based in reality was one thing, but designing an entire fantasy world was another way to push the Art Deco style to new level. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) is a movie of the beloved children's novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum (1900). In the movie, the heroine, Dorothy Gale, is living in

Kansas with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry on their farm with her dog, Toto, and three colorful farm hands. Miss Gulch, the wealthy and vicious spinster in town, wants to have Toto destroyed for getting into her garden. Dorothy wishes to escape to a better place, “somewhere over the rainbow”. She runs away from home with Toto. On her way, she meets a traveling carnival magician who guesses her tale, looks into his crystal ball, tells her fortune, and convinces her to go back home. When Dorothy arrives back home, a tornado is bearing down on the homestead. Flying debris hits Dorothy’s head. While unconscious, Dorothy dreams of an adventure in the Land of Oz where she encounters characters that bear a great resemblance to the wealthy spinster, the magician, and the farm hands from home. She travels through the land, befriendng three companions along the way. Dorothy and her entourage then have to complete a near impossible task ensuring the Wizard will grant their requests. The architecture of the Emerald City is fanciful and modern, worlds away, and a clear indication that Dorothy is far from her humble home in Kansas.



Figure 4-53 — Production still of the Emerald City beauty parlor set from *The Wizard of Oz*, MGM, 1939.<sup>51</sup> Note the exaggerated geometric styling of the furniture and the repeating fan shapes between rooms.

On *The Wizard of Oz*, Cedric Gibbons had a supervising art director, Elmer Sheeley, and two other art directors, William A. Horning and Wade B. Rubottom.<sup>52</sup> They combed through MGM's research collection and found a photograph of a sketch from Germany that “looked like test tubes upside down... like some strange thing we had never seen before”.<sup>53</sup> It was most likely the “Crystal Mountain” from Bruno Taut’s *Alpine Architecture* from 1919. It served well as the inspiration for the Emerald City. Gibbons

---

51 Ripley. “Review: “Oz” More Than Adequate.” This and That/ Ripple's Web. <http://ripley.za.net/2013/03/news/review-oz-more-than-adequate>.

52 IMDB.com. “International Movie Database.” <http://www.imdb.com>.

53 Harnetz, Aljean. *The Making of the Wizard of Oz*. New York: Knopf, 1977.

and Horning seem to have used designs from Antoni Gaudi's 1890 *School of the Teresian Nuns* and the 1904 *Casa Battlo* for other Emerald City interiors, in particular, the Wizard's throne room and the long corridor leading to it.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 4-54 — The citizens of Oz storming the Wizard's mansion in panic. Note the tiered decoration around doors and the increasing star motif on the doors.

Before the *Wizard of Oz* was released, publicists from MGM sent out photographs of the movie's sets to home-decorating and architecture magazines realizing that the design magazines were a forum for introducing audiences to the studio's designs, as well as building momentum for the movie.<sup>55</sup> The film's gimmick of moving from black and white film to color helped to dazzle audiences in a very gray era.

---

54 Esperdy 205

55 Esperdy 206

## Summary

These eight films, through the use of Art Deco interiors, have enhanced character development and informed audiences of the potential effects that décor — particularly Art Deco — could have on their lives. The art director changes how he uses the Art Deco style from using the settings as commentary of a lifestyle in the film *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) to a more pervasive style that all the characters lived with in *The Thin Man* (1934).

The Art Deco style was particularly suited for set design. Its boldly geometric architecture, arresting textiles, and graceful statuary created interesting backdrops for the drama that was created for the audiences. Cedric Gibbons artfully used the Art Deco style to enhance the storylines and created an iconic look that the public wanted to emulate in their personal spaces.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

With very few interviews and other direct sources of commentary for Cecil Gibbons, it is challenging to know precisely how thoroughly he studied the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. I have no doubt that he and his department at MGM obtained all they could from the Exposition in Paris and incorporated the new style to enhance the look of the films. I posit that having the setting become a character of sorts that helped advance the story within the films, was not his primary or even a conscience goal.

To this end, I have presented the history of The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris 1925, and analyzed the representation of the Art Deco style there. I have presented eight films in which Art Deco interiors have played a significant role. Returning to my thesis question, I am confident the Paris Exposition did play a role in defining a contemporary style that was then utilized by Cedric Gibbons in the art direction of these films. A question for further study would be how other studios and art directors incorporated the Art Deco style within their films, such as the RKO Studios with all their Fred Astaire/Ginger Rodgers movies? Also, how did studios and art directors incorporate other styles into films? You could also apply this same research model to sets of period theatre productions.



Figure 5-1 — Living room from *The Divorcee* (1930) on top. The Grand Salon, lower left, and the Dining Room, lower right, both from the Pomone Pavilion designed by Paul Follet.

For example, in the living room of the film *The Divorcee* (1930), the grand piano is inlaid with mother-of-pearl similar to the one shown in the Grand Salon of the Pomone Pavilion designed by Paul Follet (lower left, Figure 5-1). The piano bench is a substantial plinth, with a surface treatment similar to the table supports found in the Dining Room of the Pomone Pavilion also designed by Paul Follet (lower right, Figure 5-1).



Figure 5-2 — Top, the set of *Our Modern Maidens* (1929). On the left, the Hall of the Primavera Pavilion designed by Alfred Levard. On the right, a studio designed by Lucie Renaudot.

Another example, featuring the film *Our Modern Maidens* (1929), a good portion of the action takes place in a massive hall with an archway that has distinctive geometric carvings, almost an accordion ribbing. This detailing is intriguing by itself,

but it seems related in style and scope to the Primavera Pavilion with its large Hall designed by Alfred Levard (Figure 5-2, bottom left). The ironwork of the spiral staircase is similar to the ironwork in the studio designed by Lucie Renaudot (Figure 5-2, bottom right).

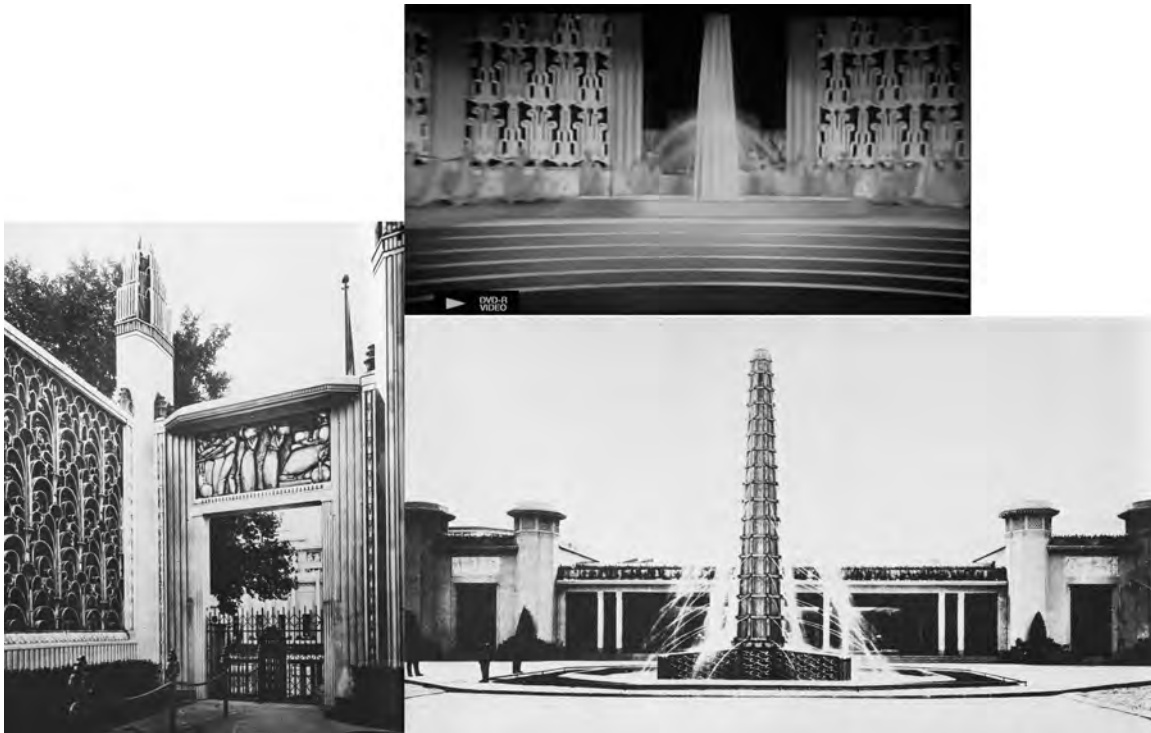


Figure 5-3 — Top, the Long Island estate in *Our Blushing Brides* (1930). Left, La Porte d'Honneur entrance to the 1925 Paris Exposition. At the right, a fountain by Lalique at the Exposition.

In the film, *Our Blushing Brides* (1930), the Long Island Estate that is the scene of a fashion show looks like it draws its inspiration from the fountain designed by René Lalique for a public space inside of Porte Grenelle entrance off the Place des Invalides at the Exposition. The walls around the fountain are ironwork in a frozen fountain motif very similar to the ironwork on walls of the La Porte d'Honneur entrance (Figure 5-3).


One last example pertains to the film *The Thin Man* (1934). The overall stylistic impression of the interiors in *The Thin Man* is very sumptuous, with rich fabrics and











tasteful furnishings. The vanity is similar to one in the Lady's bedroom in La Maîtrise Pavilion (Paris, 1925) designed by Maurice Dufrene. The sheer covered window behind the vanity is also replicated (Figure 5-4).












Figure 5-4 — Left, a scene from *The Thin Man* (1934). On the right, Lady's bedroom, La Maîtrise Pavilion, designed by Maurice Dufrene.

To repeat and expand upon the table in Chapter Two, stills from the film are matched with the interiors from the pavilions at the 1925 Exposition.

<p>Lucie Renaudot (?-1939), Studio. Tiered wall treatment, ironwork, statuette, sconces, luxurious fabrics and throws, gilded ceiling, graphic rug.</p>			<p><i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> (1928) Foyer Tiered walls and doorway, ironwork, statuette, sconces</p>
---	---	--	---

<p>Alfred Levard, Hall, Primavera Pavillion, Furniture by Sognot and others. Geometric wall treatment and furniture, graphic ironwork room divider, sconces.</p>			<p><i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929) Grand Hall Geometric wall treatment and furniture, statuette</p>
<p>Alfred Levard, Swimming pool in a villa. Geometric wall treatment, sunken floor, ethnic statuary and textiles.</p>			<p><i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930) Treehouse Geometric wall treatment, sunken floor.</p>
<p>Pierre Block and Max Bloch, Young girl's room. Geometric furniture and wall treatment.</p>			<p><i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929) Bedroom Geometric furniture and wall treatment</p>
<p>Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann (1879- 1933). Bedroom, Pavilion of a Collector. Patterned wallpaper, statuette, graphic rug, geometric vase.</p>			<p><i>Grand Hotel</i> (1932) Foyer Patterned wallpaper, statuette, geometric vase.</p>
<p>Ghislain Ringuet (b.1907). Large Dining Room. Tiered doorway, large graphic artworks, highly patterned wall treatment, geometric light fixture.</p>			<p><i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929) Club Tiered doorway, large abstract artworks, sconces</p>

<p>Paul Follet, (1877-1941), Grand Salon, Pomone Pavilion. Inlaid piano, sconces, geometric furniture, figurines, patterned rug.</p>			<p><i>The Divorcee</i> (1930) Living Room Inlaid piano, sconces, geometric furniture, figurines, patterned throw.</p>
<p>H. &amp; L. Barberis (architects), Salle de toilette. Shaped doorways, textured ceiling, geometric light fixtures, stained glass, graphic rug.</p>			<p><i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929) Bedroom Tiered doorways, textured walls, geometric light fixtures.</p>
<p>Maurice Dufrene (1876-1955), Lady's bedroom, La Maîtrise Pavilion. Luxurious carpets and throws, shaped vanity featuring ironwork,</p>			<p><i>The Thin Man</i> (1934) Shaped vanity featuring ironwork, sheers, luxurious fabrics.</p>
			<p><i>Dinner at Eight</i> (1933) Boudoir Geometric vanity draped in fringe, sheers, luxurious carpet.</p>
<p>Georges Champion (1889-1940), Dining Room. Rugs by Jules Coudyser, ceramics by Rouard. Geometric furniture and wall treatment, stained glass.</p>			<p><i>Our Modern Maidens</i> (1929) Sitting Room Geometric furniture and wall treatment</p>





<p>Lalique Fountain. Frozen fountain motif, obelisk</p>			<p><i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930) Fashion Show Frozen fountain motif, obelisk</p>
<p>La Porte D'Honneur entrance. Frozen fountain motif in 2D ironwork and 3D on the tops of the towers, bas relief, tiered doorway, geometric ironwork gates.</p>			<p><i>Our Blushing Brides</i> (1930) Fashion Show Frozen fountain motif, bas relief</p>

Figure 5-5 – Comparison table of Art Deco interiors to MGM film interiors.

As these examples show, the interiors of the 1925 Paris Exposition must have influenced the sets designed by Cedric Gibbons. Other questions for further research would be how studios used the Art Deco style as a comment on society or to convey a message to the viewers, like the flapper trilogy of *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928), *Our Modern Maidens* (1929), and *Our Blushing Brides* (1930). Did they, for example, equate the Art Deco style with a certain lack of moral character?

By comparing scenes from the films to photos of interiors from the Paris Exposition, we can see that Cedric Gibbons used the Art Deco style very effectively to convey a sense of luxury, sophistication, and wealth. The interior design and décor became increasingly evident in media, commerce, and popular culture. As the set designs enhanced the story, and as the box office receipts increased, Gibbons surely utilized this to his advantage to secure his position for a very long tenure. His contract allowed generous use of his name in the credits within the studio system.

Because of his work with MGM in the 1930s, he opened new vistas for the vision of the filmmaker as it related to set design.

CHAPTER 6

ADDENDUM

Included with this thesis is an Excel file, AnnRishell Art Deco database. This matrix gathers architecture, interior design, furniture, pottery, statuary, textiles, and other accessories that exhibit the Art Deco style. The categories I included were: figural, abstract, Egyptian, chinoiserie, Mesoamerican, African, Carribean, frozen fountain, stepped, tiered, radiating sun, pattern, animals, flowers/fruit, and repetition. (See appendix for full object analysis matrix.)

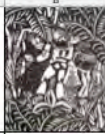





	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	
23	la danse.jpg		La Danse. Block printed cotton and linen for Bianchini-Férier.	France	1909-10	Raoul Dufy	X	X				X							X		X	
24	iribe.jpg		mahogany chest of drawers covered in green shagreen inlaid with a stylized flower basket in ebony with ebony handles and slate top.	Paris	c. 1912	Paul Iribe		X													X	
25	groult chair.jpg		ebony and satinwood chair with a painted floral spray by Marie Laurencin. Won 3rd prize shortly before the 1925 exhibition.	France	1925	Andre Groult	X												X		X	X
26	follot chair.jpg		carved sycamore and ebony chair, upholstered in morrocan leather. The back is a carved basket of fruit. 1912 Salon d'Automne	France	1912	Paul Follot	X		X													X
27	groult chair2.jpg		chair, carved with a stylized basket of flowers	France		Andre Groult		X														X
	legrain bookcase.jpg		Corner bookcase in gilt wood	Paris		Pierre Legrain																X

Figure a-1 — Sample section of Art Deco matrix

## CHAPTER 7

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Art Deco” A Dictionary of Modern Design. Jonathan Woodham. Oxford University Press, 2004. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Michigan State University Library. 6 December 2010.  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t160.e66>

Ardman, Harvey. 1985. *Normandie, Her Life and Times*. New York: Franklin Watts

Arwas, Victor. 1992. *Art Deco*. Second ed. New York: Abradale Press.

Benton, Charlotte, Tim Benton and Chislaine Wood, ed. 2003. *Art Deco 1910-1939*. Boston, New York, London: Bulfinch Press.

Barsacq, Leon. 1970. *Caligari's Cabinet and other grand illusions*. English translation ed: Little, Brown and Company.

Baxter, John. 1968. *Hollywood in the Thirties*. Oak Tree Publications.

Bouillon, Jean-Paul. 1989. *Art Deco 1903-1940*. Translated by Michael Heron. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

Davies, Karen. 1983. *At Home in Manhattan: Modern Decorative Arts, 1925 to the Depression*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Art Gallery. exhibition catalog.

divadaniel. 2012-14. “Cinecollage.net.” Accessed March 2014.  
<http://cinecollage.net/filmaking.html>.

Dooley, Roger. 1979. *From Scarface to Scarlett: American Films in the 1930s*. New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Pub.

Dufrene, Maurice. 1989. *Authentic Art Deco Interiors from the 1925 Paris Exhibition*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collector's Club Ltd.

Eermans, Emily Evans. 2009. “The Del Rio - Gibbons House: Made for Black and White?”. <http://emilyevanseerdmans.blogspot.com/2009/02/del-rio-gibbons-house-made-for-black.html>.

Esperdy, G. 2007. “From instruction to consumption: Architecture and design in Hollywood movies of the 1930s.” *The Journal of American Culture* 30 (2):198-211.

Fischer, Lucy. 2003. *Designing Women*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Friedman, Marilyn F. Fall-Winter 2005-06. "The United States and the 1925 Paris Exposition: Opportunity Lost and Found." *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 13 (1): 94-119.
- Gebert, Michael. 2006. "Conversations on Film over the Kitchen Table."
- Gee, James Paul. 2007. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Theory and Method*. 2nd ed. New York and London: Routledge.
- Gibbons, Cedric. 1938. "The Art Director." In *Behind the Screen: How Films are Made*, edited by Stephen Watts, 41-50. London: Arthur Barker.
- Grimes, Mary K. 1976. *The Impact of Art Deco: 1925-1940*. edited by The Indianapolis Museum of Art. Indianapolis, Indiana: Indianapolis Museum of Art.
- Harmetz, Aljean. 1977. *The Making of the Wizard of Oz*. New York: Knopf.
- IMDB.com. "International Movie Database." Accessed March 2014. <http://www.imdb.com>.
- Jencks, Charles. 1973. *Modern Movements in Architecture*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday.
- Liang, A.B. 1933. "Designing Motion Picture Sets." *Architectural Record* 74:59-64.
- Mandelbaum, Howard and Eric Myers. 1985. *Screen Deco*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Mankowicz, Ben. 2009. *Turner Classic Movies*.
- Ripley. 2010-14. "Review: "Oz" more than adequate." This and That/ Ripple's Web. Accessed April 2014. <http://ripley.za.net/2013/03/news/review-oz-more-than-adequate>.
- Robinson, David. 1968. *Hollywood in the Twenties*. Wh Smith.
- Scarlett, Frank and Marjorie Townley. *Arts Décoratifs 1925: A Personal Recollection of the Paris Exhibition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975.
- Stephan, Ed. Cedric Gibbons biography. <http://www.imdb.com>.
- The Collective Picture. "Silent Film". Accessed March 2014. <http://www.collectivepic.com>.
- Whitlock, Cathy. *Designs on Film: A Century of Hollywood Art Direction*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. 2010.

Wilson, Christina. 2000. "Cedric Gibbons: Architect of Hollywood's Golden Age." In *Architecture and Film*, edited by Mark Lamster, 101 - 115. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press.

<http://www.emporis.com/building/chryslerbuilding-newyorkcity-ny-usa>

<http://capitol.org/building/history/project-timeline>

## FILMOGRAPHY

*Dinner at Eight*. Dir. George Cukor. Art Dir. Cedric Gibbons, Hobe Erwin. Perf. Jean Harlow, John Barrymore. MGM, 1933.

*The Divorcee*. Dir. Robert Z. Leonard. Art Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. Norma Shearer, Chester Morris. MGM, 1930.

*Grand Hotel*. Dir. Edmund Goulding. Art Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. Greta Garbo, John Barrymore, Joan Crawford. MGM, 1932.

*Our Dancing Daughters*. Dir. Harry Beaumont. Art. Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. Joan Crawford, Anita Page. MGM, 1928.

*Our Modern Maidens*. Dir. Jack Conway. Art Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. Joan Crawford, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. MGM, 1929.

*Our Blushing Brides*. Dir. Harry Beaumont (uncredited). Art. Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. Joan Crawford, Anita Page. MGM, 1930.

*The Thin Man*. Dir. W.S. Van Dyke. Art Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. William Powell, Myna Loy. MGM, 1934.

*Wizard of Oz*. Dir. Victor Fleming. Art Dir. Cedric Gibbons. Perf. Judy Garland, Frank Morgan. MGM, 1939.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

With this thesis, Ann Snyder Rishell completes the requirements for her MS in design theory at Arizona State University. In addition to this degree, she holds a BFA in graphic design from Wichita State University and a BA focused on interior design from Michigan State University. Throughout her career, Rishell has worked in a number of environments and different media. She has been a set designer for an NBC network affiliate and created alumni magazines for Iowa State University, Fordham University, and the University of North Florida. Additionally, she has been an art director for a major symphony, restored fine art, and has created direct mail pieces for a large mail house. She has also been an adjunct member of design faculties at Michigan State University, Mesa Community College, and ITT Technical Institute. Rishell lives with her husband and daughter in Wichita, where she teaches at ITT Technical Institute and practices fine art restoration.