

MODERNISTIC STYLE GROUP

European Modernists did not significantly impact American residential design during the period between World War I and World War II, but their impact began to be felt in industrial and commercial architecture. The exodus of progressive intellectuals and artists from Europe prior to World War II brought many of these innovators to the United States and had had a lasting influence on American design. [Handline: 2004].

Modernistic Styles reflected a streamlined geometry, with minimal surface ornament, and often incorporated new materials such as plywood, plasterboard, reinforced concrete, steel and chrome. This style was applied to everyday objects such as furniture and clothing as well as to architectural design. Examples of this style generally fall into two distinctive types.

- **Zig-Zag Moderne**
- **Streamline Moderne.**

ZIG-ZAG MODERN OR ART DECO (1920-1935)

Zig-Zag Moderne is popularly known as Art Deco, and derives its name from the 1925 Paris exhibition of “Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes.” This style was an attempt to unite arts and industrial design and is characterized by patterned wall surfaces with geometric motifs influenced by exotic cultures, rich materials and use of color. The Art Deco style was embraced as a style of decoration which became popular in the United States by the end of the 1920s for everything from cigarette lighters to public buildings. This style was never common for residences but did find favor in commercial storefronts, schools, theaters, restaurants and offices and apartment buildings.

Character-Defining Features

- Flat roof
- Smooth wall surface, usually stucco
- Applied, concentrated decoration including zigzags, chevrons, on façade.
- Towers and other vertical projections above the roof line emphasize the vertical
- Stylized forms, tropical motifs on doors
- Reeding and fluting often around doors and windows
- Rich materials such as marble, colored terrazzo, chrome



STREAMLINE MODERNE (ca. 1930-1945)

Streamline Moderne architecture was inspired by industrial design and is characterized by smooth wall surfaces, flat roofs, the use of horizontal grooves or “speed lines” in a wall, and curved corners. Buildings might be composed of adjoining sections with roof lines at various levels. Moderne structures were characteristically asymmetrical, with little unnecessary ornamentation and simple aerodynamic curves of concrete, plaster and glass block. The popularization of this new modern style was reinforced by the government during the depression as government funded New Deal projects adopted the style as the embodiment of government efficiency. This new Streamline style was a stark contrast to the lavishly ornamented Art Deco and Period Revival buildings of the pre-Depression years which had come to represent government waste and excess. The Streamline Moderne style pre-dates mass tract development and was not as widely accepted as the Revival styles for residential properties. It may be found more often in commercial buildings, educational institutions, and public facilities.

Character-Defining Features

- Flat roofs with coping or flat parapet
- Asymmetrical façade
- Horizontal massing and emphasis
- Curved building corners
- Corner windows, may curve around corner, horizontal ribbon windows
- Glass block in window, or as entire section of wall
- Steel sash windows
- Stainless steel window and door trim
- Smooth Stucco or concrete exterior finish
- Horizontal accents, or “speedlines”, and restrained detailing
- Curved horizontal steel tube railings, overhangs, and coping with horizontal projections above doorways and at the cornice line.
- Round “porthole” windows and nautical theme.

