



# CHICAGO ART DECO SOCIETY

March  
2013  
Special  
Issue

Magazine

**A Meeting  
in Havana:  
A Preview of the  
12<sup>th</sup> World Congress  
on Art Deco**

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**Havana  
Art Deco**

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**Bacardi  
Building**

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**Buenos Aires  
Art Deco**

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**Puerto Rican  
Art Deco**

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**Aracaju,  
Brazil Art Deco**

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**Art Deco  
Graphics**

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**Coolidge  
Corner-Deco  
Theatre**





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INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF ART DECO SOCIETIES

ICADS is a voluntary alliance of societies from around the world which strive to inform and educate the public on the important contributions made by artists, designers and architects of this period.

Members assist each other with support during battles for the preservation of architecture from the period. ICADS conducts a bi-annual World Congress on Art Deco in cities where a member society nominates itself as a host.

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## President's message

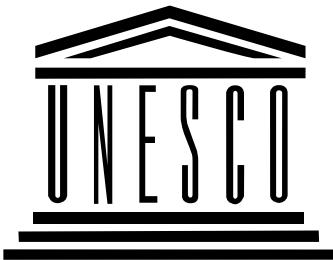
The Chicago Art Deco Society is pleased to collaborate with Habana Deco to bring you this special World Congress supplement of the Chicago Art Deco Society Magazine. The articles highlight many of the Art Deco treasures in Havana and other parts of Cuba included on the itinerary for the 12th World Congress on Art Deco. CADS greatly appreciates Habana Deco's commitment to the organization of what promises to be a unique and outstanding conference.

Joseph Loundy / President, Chicago Art Deco Society.

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# A gift to my country

By: Geo Darder

I owe my happiness and love of country to a style that was introduced years before my creation. I was born in Havana Cuba in 1963. Soon after my parents left to Miami before I could claim any childhood memories. Recollection of my early years in Miami was visits to see my great grandmother Margarita, mother of Abuela Dora, on an island across the causeway called Miami Beach. These trips were always scary for me because I had to stay in the car while my parents went in for a quick visit. Waiting in the car I would observe the old people sitting in rocking chairs on porches of funny buildings with odd shapes and neon lights. This would be my first introduction to Art Deco. Little did I know then it would become such a big part of my life.

I spent my teens working at Miami Beach hotels, sunbathing during work breaks and lunches at David's Café and Puerto Sagua. I fell deeply in love for the streamline style and knew someday South Beach would be home. I was fortunate to be part of the renaissance of SoBe thanks to Barbara Capitman. I enjoyed Art Deco weekends with never ending openings and inaugurations of renovated deco landmarks. South Beach Art Deco District became the new

American playground and home to fashion models, Miami Vice, Versace and me.

I met Kathy Hausman who introduced me to the Deco mecca of the world, NYC, with its skyscrapers Rockefeller, Chrysler and Empire Buildings. I participated in Art Deco lectures, exhibits and congresses. I experienced a new understanding and monumental admiration to the deco style.

But it was not until my first return visit to my native Island nation at the age 30 that I would learn of my passion for my country and Habana Deco. This trip ignited a new passion to reconnect with my Cuban family, culture and heritage. Habana Deco awareness became my mission: to let the world know of the true treasures my island held.

In the year 2000 the first conference to promote the Deco heritage took place in Cuba and the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) served as the meeting venue. Thanks to the collaboration of Dr. Graziela Pogolotti and architect Juan Garcia.

From that moment on I was committed to help build a bridge of better understanding by organizing groups of

collectors, architects and historians from the United States interested in visiting this wonderful city. This began a 13-year quest to reach the dream of international recognition of this unique Art Deco heritage. Even though a tough labor, most of the time anonymous. I suffered my family's incomprehension and some of my friend's rejection, while gaining support of others.

2001 was the next step forward toward my dream when a small Cuban delegation, headed by architect Juan Garcia and Patricia Semidey assisted the Art Deco World Congress held in Oklahoma. During this meeting the academic exchanges strengthened and made possible in 2003, the second Cuba/US encounter. Habana Deco Conference was held at the National Museum of Decorative Arts, which lead to the forming of Habana Deco Group in 2009.

Many conferences followed and it was true progress when deco societies acknowledged and welcomed Latin American countries like Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. This lead to the new creation of Deco groups for ICADS and an approval to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil as the first Latin American country to host a World Congress. Now the Caribbean Island Nation of Cuba will finally have the opportunity to share with the world its Art Deco heritage with this 12th ICADS Congress, its 250 international participants and 15 countries in attendance. Thank you to so many that made this World Congress a reality. This gathering is not just a congress it is a celebration!

I am positive that this Congress will serve as a stage to create restoration projects and resurgence to the interest of the cultural heritage of Cuba for the world. I just turned 50 and my commitment to this Island, which I never gave up, remains intact. My true cause transcends gods and borders, governments and laws, family and friends; because no matter where I am, I am also Cuba.

I dedicate this issue to my mother María Teresa Darder López who taught me the true essence of conviction and the Sacred Mother of all Cubans, La Caridad del Cobre, for guiding me back to my home. ■



# A Meeting in Havana: A Preview of the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Art Deco

By: Lic. Gustavo López González

Pictures: Arch. Félix Eduardo Borges Ibáñez

Once again, Art Deco scholars and devotees will meet in an exciting venue for the biennial World Congress on Art Deco. The location for the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress, scheduled to take place March 14 through 21, 2013, is Havana, Cuba.

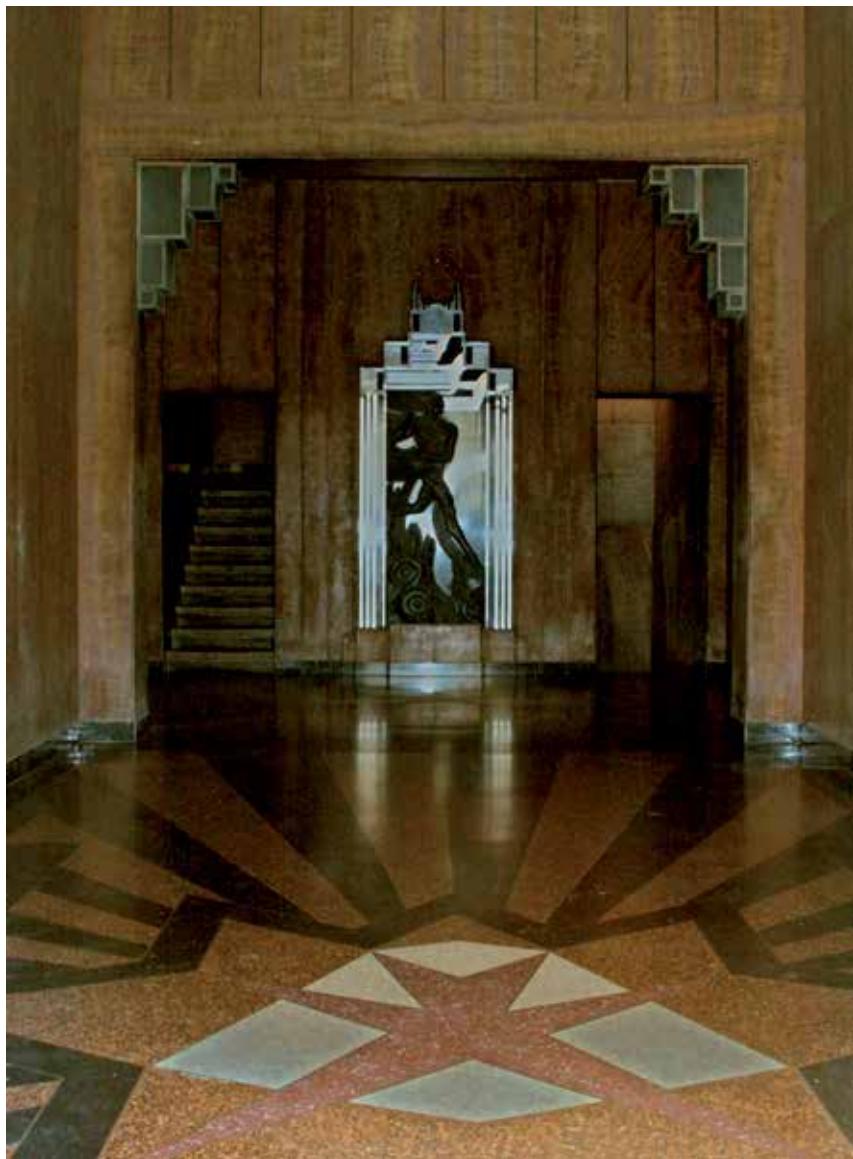
Official headquarters of the Congress will be the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, a historic institution with a more than eighty-year tradition of hosting visitors to Havana. Since 1930, the Nacional has welcomed such diverse guests as the Duke of

Windsor, film stars Ava Gardner and Frank Sinatra, crime boss Santo Trafficante, singer Nat King Cole, and model Naomi Campbell.

The program designed by the Congress Organizing Committee features both lectures and visits to Havana's Art Deco buildings and monuments. The presentations will take place at Hotel Nacional de Cuba with special lectures held at Casa de Las Américas, a Cuban cultural institution for more than half a century and one of the most attractive Art Deco buildings in the city. Papers will examine such topics as the characteristics of Art Deco in Havana and other Cuban cities; the societal influence of Art Deco and its adaptation to different social levels; the typology of Havana cinemas and theaters; the magnificent Art Deco residences in the neighborhoods of Vedado and Miramar; and Cuban graphic arts and films of the Art Deco period.

Other presentations will examine the impact of Art Deco worldwide. Barbara Billauer Bailey of the Washington Art Deco Society will address Art Deco in Israel; Paula Duffy Baker of the Chicago Art Deco Society will explore The Connections between Chicago and Latin American Muralists; and Peter Sheridan of Australia will speak on Radio, an Unacknowledged Art Deco Icon. Noted speakers Alistair Duncan, Hermes Mallea, Fabio Gremeni, Wolney Unes and Mitzi Mogul will be in attending.

Tours in Havana will include such buildings as the Bacardí, Havana's first skyscraper and the most significant example of Cuban Art Deco, and important residences, such as the home of Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baró, the Francisco Argüelles house, Cuba's first Art Deco building, and the Manuel López Chávez house. Visits to Art Deco cinemas and theaters—the America, Arenal, Fausto, and Ludgardita; Art Deco hospitals, including the Maternidad Obrera and América Arias; monuments such as the superb obelisk honoring Dr. Carlos J. Finlay, in Marianao; and the amazing marble, stone, and



Lobby of the López Serrano Building in Vedado.



*Exterior view of Maternidad Obrera Hospital.*

bronze mausoleums of the Cementerio de Colón.

Delegates will also participate in receptions, dinners, luncheons, and social events at venues such as the Hotel Nacional, Havana Club, the DuPont house in Varadero beach and will enjoy a performance by the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, led by Alicia Alonso as well as visits to museums and exhibitions in Havana.

The post-Congress tours (March 21 to 27) will explore other Cuban cities to learn about the Art Deco and colonial architecture in the central and eastern areas of the island. In historic Trinidad,



*Exterior view of the López Serrano Building.*

participants will travel to the beautiful Topes de Collantes nature reserve to visit the Art Deco sanatorium built in the mountains in the 1940s. In Santiago, they will walk the central street of Enramada and visit the sanctuary of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's patron saint, with its magnificent view of the landscape of the eastern region.

The opportunity to learn more about Art Deco in Cuba and other parts of the world from an international panel of specialists, combined with visits to areas of Cuba known for their beauty, architecture, culture, and history, promises to make the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Art Deco a memorable experience.■

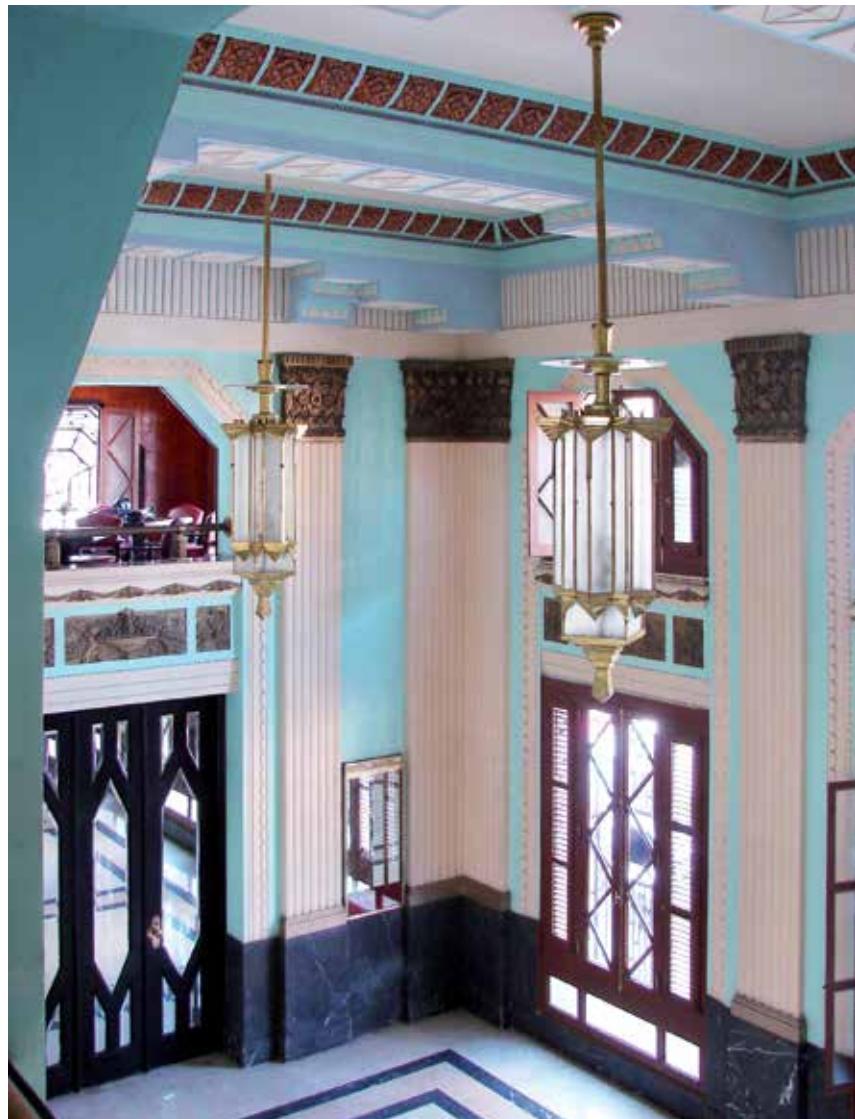
# Art Deco in Havana: An Historical and Cultural Context

By: Lic. Alejandro G. Alonso

*This article is excerpted from the book Deco in Old Havana to be published by Boloña Publishing House, Office of the Historian of the City.*

Current research based on geographic, temporal, and stylistic considerations suggests that Art Deco in Old Havana arose within two clearly defined poles. The Bacardí Building (1930), an Art Deco jewel in Monserrate Street at the former boundary of the defensive wall, marks the first; the Navy Building (1951) at 102 San Pedro Street, the second. Stylistically, a profusion of ornament associated with the variant known as "Zigzag" distinguishes the Bacardí, while the Navy Building represents the simpler, more functional "nautical" variant. Separated by twenty years, the two buildings demonstrate Art Deco's longevity among those who financed such projects and, of course, the architects.

The early phase of Art Deco in Cuba, manifested by the Bacardí Building, developed during the first term (1925-1929) of General Gerardo Machado, who initially served as president but later became a sanguinary dictator reluctant to abandon power and determined to be elected. The later pole, represented by the Navy Building, occurred during the final term of the military leader Fulgencio Batista, who regained control of the country through a 1952 coup d'état. The years between the construction of these two landmark buildings was marked by fraudulent elections and politicians in the magistrate who were totally uninterested in solving the great needs of the nation. Two economic crises, two world wars, the nationalist revolution of 1933 and the frustrations it precipitated, adoption of the Second Constitution of the Republic, interventions by the United



Interior lobby of Bacardí building.

States government, and the widespread influence of North American culture into national life also characterized this period.

In spite of this turbulence, Cuba readily accepted Art Deco. The island's fundamental cosmopolitan nature,



Navy building on Avenue of Port of Havana.

combined with its dynamic racial mixture and acknowledged power of assimilation, made it fertile ground for the new. Furthermore, Art Deco arrived in Cuba amidst a wave of nationalism that impacted all cultural spheres—literature, music, and the arts. The most distinguished representative of this nationalistic fervor was Nicolás Guillén, a mulatto poet whose universal verse was capable of conveying the rhythm of son, which later evolved into “salsa.” This powerful nationalistic movement aspired to international understandability and authenticity. Its principles were exemplified by Grupo Minorista, a social movement led not by a party but created and supported by the best intellectuals in all fields. This group’s role was extremely influential from the start.

Any analysis of the role of publications in the dissemination of new modes of expression must also include the magazine Social. Grupo Minorista’s members were friends

of the magazine and, even more important, collaborators in the task of enlightening a bourgeoisie that was beginning to show entrepreneurial capacity.

A representative example is Alejo Carpentier, one of the best Spanish-language writers of the twentieth century, as well as a musicologist and essayist. Writing from Paris under the pseudonym “Jacqueline,” Carpentier would send articles on all aspects of avant-garde culture, from the music of Stravinsky to the painting of Picasso and Parisian fashions, considered an artistic discipline itself. The articles appeared in the pages of Social, which was founded and directed by Conrado Walter Massaguer, a member of Grupo Minorista. The magazine addressed topics such as industrial development, feminism, and racial origins as elements of a national identity, all with the magazine’s worldly view. Such articles appeared side by side with reviews of a dance in historical costumes or stories about the wedding

of the tycoon Serra’s daughter or the splendid house of Catalina Lasa, a woman who would become a living legend and who commissioned the best Art Deco interior in Havana in 1927. That year is fundamental for Cuban art. It marked the construction of the first Art Deco buildings in the country and the emergence of Cuban “modern” visual artists, prefigured in the work of the designers of art and entertainment magazines such as *Carteles* and *Bohemia*.

The great examples of Art Deco architecture remaining in Cuba can be traced to various sources. Some of the first buildings that appeared in the early phase of the style were the result of private initiatives. However, as early as 1930, Govantes and Cabarrocas designed

two of the best hospital facilities in the country, thanks to the actions of Gerardo Machado (although those projects as well as the great work of the Central Road correspond to his first term as constitutional president). Like their European fascist counterparts, the Cuban dictators favored the Art Deco variant known as Modern Monumental, giving rise to a number of hospitals, squares, homes for the elderly, barracks, and civic institutions, including structures built under the mandate of other de facto authoritarians such as Batista. This is no coincidence; the colossal scale of the Modern Monumental style well matches the psychology of such political figures.

These important events, significant historical occurrences, and astonishing art works constitute a momentous era for Cuba, which treasures the legacy of its national interpretation of Art Deco like a radiant jewel. ■



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# The National Museum of Decorative Arts - Headquarters of Habana Deco

By: Gustavo López

A beautiful French-inspired mansion in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana, designed in 1927 by French architects Paul-Jean-Emile Viard and Marcel Dastugue, houses the National Museum of Decorative Arts, open to the public since 1964. This unique building is especially noted for the quality of the materials used in its construction, its magnificent ambiance, and one of its former owners, María Luisa Gómez Mena, Countess of Revilla de Camargo. This aristocratic woman commissioned the Maison Jansen of Paris to create the sumptuous interiors. Today, visitors to the museum can view many of those valuable furnishings and original decorative features, including the countess' splendid Art Deco bathroom with Italian marble tiles and light fixtures designed in Paris by Marius-Ernest Sabino.



*The countess in the dining room of her residency.*



*Maria Luisa Gómez Mena.  
Countess Revilla of Camargo.*



*Main bathroom of the countess residency.*



*Museum of Decorative Arts.*



*Ceiling lamp of Museum of Decorative Arts  
(countess residency).*

For more than a year, this important Cuban cultural institution has been the headquarters of Habana Deco and the site of the group's meetings and social events. During the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Art Deco, participants will visit the museum to view the collection and will enjoy a luncheon there as well. ■

# Art Deco in Education and Health Care

By: Luz Merino

Improvements in education and health care were among the objectives of government initiatives undertaken in the 1930s and 1940s to modernize Cuba. These years corresponded with the peak popularity of Art Deco and its various hybrid expressions in Cuban architecture. It is therefore not unexpected that many of the government-sponsored schools and hospitals established during these decades were designed in the Art Deco style. Many of these institutions were constructed under the auspices of the Health Technical Service, the National Corporation of Social Work, the National Council for Tuberculosis, and the Civil Military Institutes system, all created in 1936.

The first Civil Military Institute opened in Ceiba del Agua near Havana in 1936. The design of the building with its clean volumes and restrained ornamentation is derived from the Streamline variant of Art Deco and provides a visual interpretation of the modernity inherent in its purpose. The Abalí Hospital, a sanatorium for children completed in 1944, was a project of the National Council for Tuberculosis. Located on the outskirts of Havana, the aerodynamic lines of the structure exemplify the Streamline style fashionable at the time.

Another facility for the care of patients with tuberculosis was the Hospital Ambrosio Grillo in the Eastern province of Santiago de Cuba. Its light, aerodynamic design, which resembles a bird, incorporates elements of tropical Deco.

Hospital Topes de Collantes is located in a nature reserve in the Escambray Mountains in central Cuba. Construction of this massive structure with its monumental entrance, rounded corners, and interior courtyards began in the 1940s, although it was not completed until the mid-1950s.

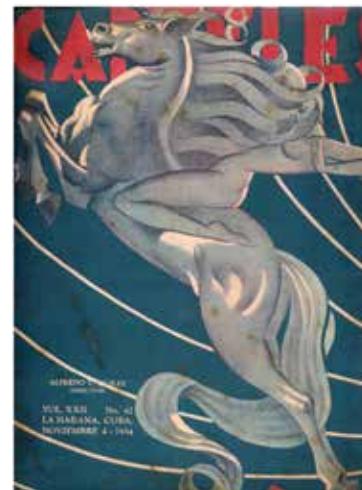


*Lux Magazine Cover from 1942.*



*Carteles Magazine Cover from 1935.*

In addition to large hospitals, smaller clinics connected with the National Corporation of Social Work and the Health Technical Service were also established. The standardized designs combine a vertical emphasis with clean



*Carteles Magazine Cover from 1934.*

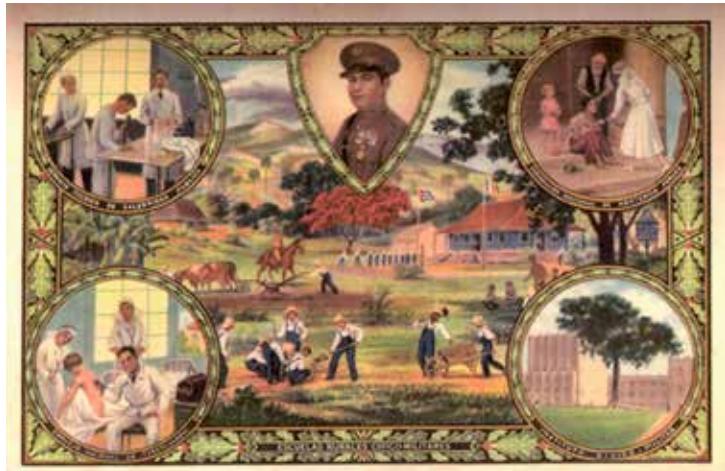


*Interior photo page from Carteles Magazine.*

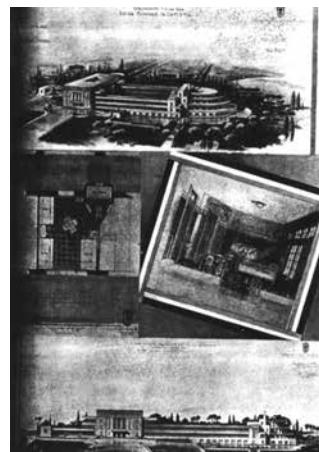
volumes that harmonize with the desire for modernity.

The Art Deco Maternidad Obrera Hospital occupies land in Marianao that was once part of the Columbia Military Camp. Designed by Emilio de Soto and completed in 1939, the hospital has a curvilinear facade that emphasizes the portico, which is capped by a sculpture of Mother and Child.

The Maternidad Obrera Hospital is adjacent to Fourth of September Square, now known as Finlay Square, designed by José Pérez Benitoa and completed



*Ad for the Civic-Military Schools.*



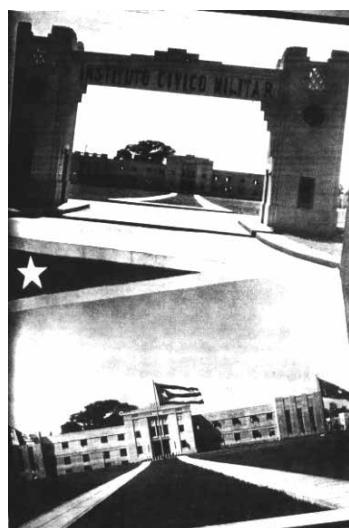
*Interior photo page from Carteles Magazine.*



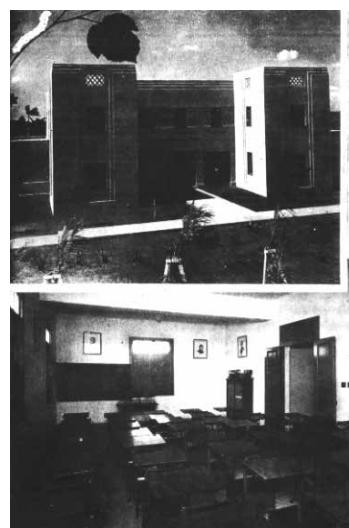
*Picture of the Marti's Flower Condecoration.*



*Interior photo page from Carteles Magazine.*



*Interior photo page from Carteles Magazine.*



*Interior photo page from Carteles Magazine.*

in 1940. The buildings surrounding the square's obelisk were connected with the government programs of the time. Three were schools and the fourth was a residence for the elderly.

Also adjacent to Finlay Square is José Pérez Benito's Military Hospital. Larger than the other buildings in the square, the hospital is topped with a four-story tower that mirrors the central obelisk. Five narrative murals by Enrique García Cabrera relating the history of medicine highlight the hospital interior.

The hospitals and schools constructed in Cuba during the 1930s and 1940s are emblematic of both the government's commitment to modernization and the modern aesthetic that characterized the architecture of this time. ■

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Photos: Avalon Casino,  
J. Christopher Laun  
Queen Mary, Brian Boskind

# The forgotten glamour of García Cabrera

By: Pepe Menéndez

Enrique García Cabrera (Havana, 1893-1949) remains today a relatively unknown Cuban artist. Although a painting and two of his magnificent illustrations have been on view at the National Museum of Fine Arts since 2002, he has received little mention, and his work has seldom been exhibited or reviewed in recent decades. The nonexistence of a museum dedicated to the history of Cuban graphic design accentuates the injustice of our time against the generation and trends of the first three decades of the twentieth century. García Cabrera was a very distinguished member of that generation.

As a young boy, he had already demonstrated talent at charcoal and pastel drawing and watercolor painting. He honed this talent during his formal artistic training, first at the Academy of Arts of San Alejandro (Havana) and later in Rome and Paris. He attracted attention at a very young age when, after returning from Europe, he received several awards in public commercial



Cover of *Universal* magazine, 1920.

poster contests. For around forty years, he worked simultaneously as a painter and commercial artist. When he died, he left an unfinished canvas, which became

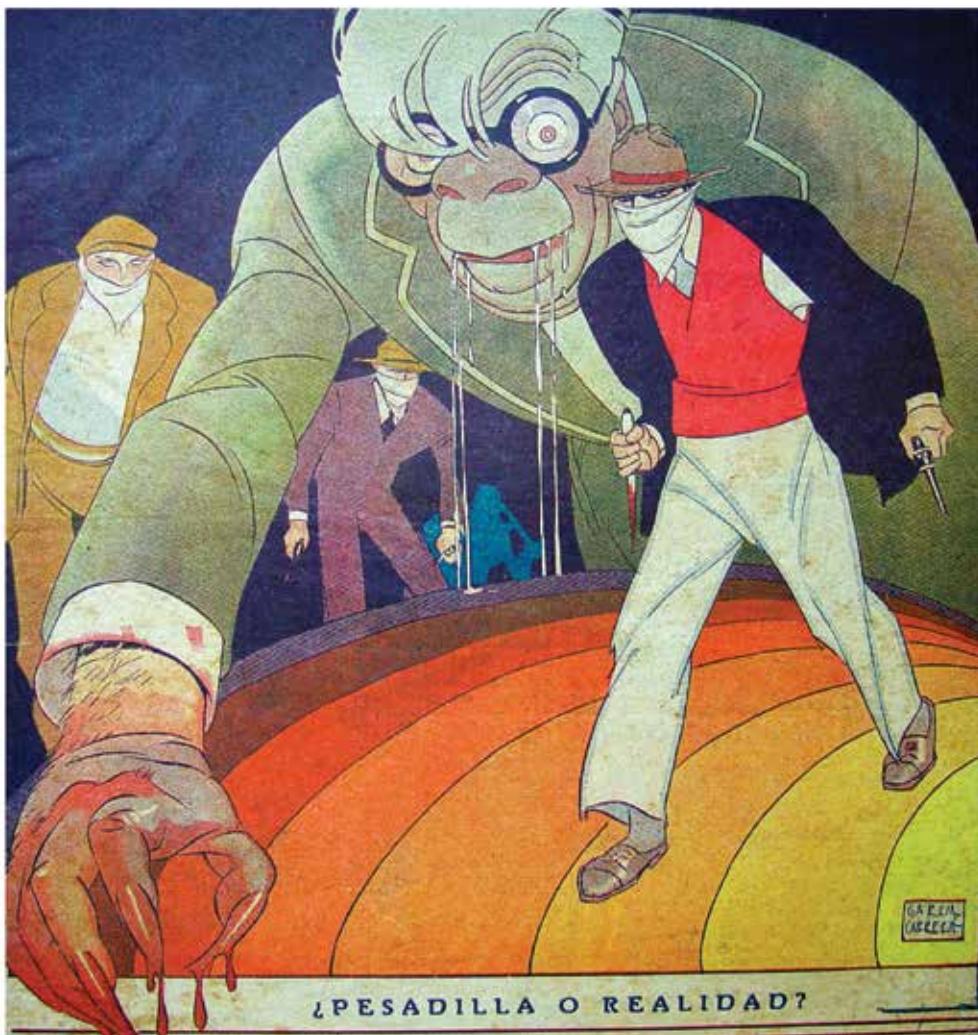
the focus of a posthumous exhibition organized the following year as an homage to him. That last work was his farewell statement, and, unfortunately, he remained associated with it for a long time. His lack of acceptance among the avant-garde artists casts a shadow over the greatness of his other work, namely, his graphic illustrations, which he himself considered minor. His death interrupted a journey that might have been expected to make major contributions to Cuban graphics, although he instilled a feeling of admiration among many.

With time and the advent of photography, which became the predominant mode of graphic communication, García Cabrera's validity was lost and even questioned. In the book *Diez Dibujantes Cubanos. Apuntes sobre la Ilustración Gráfica* (Ten Cuban Draftsmen. Notes on Graphic Illustration) by Luis Alonso Fajardo, published in 1958, the powerful influence



Covers of *Bohemia* magazine.





"Madness", illustration.

he had over a wide group of artists was branded disproportionate and retardative. Although acknowledging the artist's masterful technique, the author stated, "García's advertisements, underlined by his affection, never reached the category of seriously studied advertisements. On the contrary, there was so much respect for the most important standards, it excelled so much in pure art, that the art made the advertisement disappear, always degenerating into a painting."

This is a curious point of view, more so if we consider that García Cabrera himself regarded painting and illustration as two completely different art forms. It is possible that the motive resides in the period and medium in which it was

developed, and the way in which the artists of those years were later viewed. Along with García Cabrera, other graphic artists of his time, such as Jaime Valls, Rafael Blanco, and Conrado Massaguer, have not been systematically studied, nor have they received the honor they deserve.

With the upsurge of the more progressive ideas in art that resulted from the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959 and the necessary rehabilitation of the former urges of the avant-garde, the figure of Enrique García Cabrera entered into oblivion. Furthermore, the social prominence of publicity ceased. Academicism was negated. The cultural avant-garde and the political avant-garde

left no opportunity to look back critically, so that other perdurable values could be identified in the past, values that today reveal themselves to us as solidly interwoven in the national identity. Illustration, caricature, commercial graphics, which are the seeds of present Cuban graphic design, can and should be recognized as our cultural heritage.

García Cabrera died believing he would be remembered as a great painter, when in reality he was a wonderful illustrator. He pioneered education in the decorative arts in Cuba, yet the Academy San Alejandro, where he taught for more than two decades, has practically no memory of him. A man ahead of his time, he marveled the readers of Havana magazines with the modernity of his European-inspired line, the synthesis of forms, and his novel compositions. Enrique García Cabrera is a fascinating figure, "one of the most surprising draftsmen ever produced in America," according to painter Armando Maribona;

a talent wasted in the insignificant graphic work, as stated by Jorge Mañach. The pejorative vision that some artistic sectors had of graphic illustration surfaced at the 1926 Hall of Painting, as revealed by his comment on García Cabrera's participation: "I say it is a surprising canvas because we did not expect such an effort from García Cabrera. And not because we disregard his ample aptitude, but because the man is so much involved in his mercantile occupations—in those immaculate drawings delightfully truthful that the pages of the newspapers fill with advertisements—that we could not suspect such a surprise. The Press is a canvas of considerable dimensions. The fact that the artist painted it in a few days, according to what he told us, only goes



Covers of "La Semana" magazine.



Panlet "Tuberculosis".

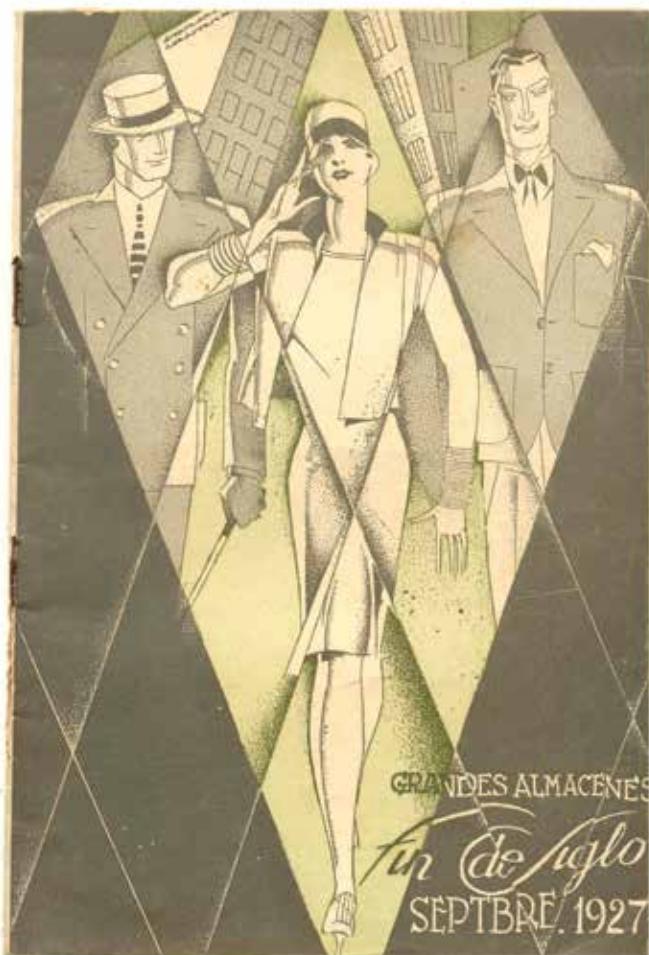


Label "Pelipeina"

to show the powerful talent of García Cabrera. It is truly sad that such a talent be wasted in the struggle for the daily bread."

Such struggle yielded lucrative dividends, even bigger than those obtained from painting. García Cabrera had the satisfaction of commanding very high prices for his collaborations, to apply later selflessly in the project of some magazine. His work was in great demand, to the extent that a dispute for his talent almost caused a commercial war between two of the largest department stores in Havana. His designs were valued as the key to success for products, stores, or welfare campaigns.

He worked indefatigably designing posters, brochures, brands, publicity advertisements, and calendars. He illustrated stories and poems in periodicals



Advertising "Fin de Siglo" store.

and executed political caricatures. He contributed to nearly twenty magazines, and served as art director of several of them. For *Bohemia* alone, he created over 150 covers between 1935 and 1939. He developed all graphic support for a national anti-tuberculosis campaign. He was art director for the famous stores *Fin de Siglo* and *El Encanto*. He became very popular for his drawings of women, always voluptuous, many times in cunning scenes. As a journalist of his time described them, "García Cabrera created a type of Havana woman; not that he copied her submissively in his drawings; but little by little the Havana woman was stylized, she became his drawings. In the same way that the Madrid girls drawn by Ribas –tight skirt, silk stockings, small feet—started to resemble those of the great Galician draftsman, who can be said is the Spanish García Cabrera, as of García Cabrera we could say is the

Cuban Federico Ribas [...]. And the truth is that no one drew them as he did. His artist sensuality caressed with the pencil the fruit lips, the eyes of humid blackness, the magnolia breast, and above all the succumbing gesture, as the siesta languor of who is listening to the faraway [street seller's] cry that tastes like mango and coconut ice cream."

Some of his creations can be enjoyed today in Havana's public spaces and should not be missed. The remarkable reliefs depicting Cuban history on the huge doors of the National Capitol building are based on drawings by García Cabrera. Another example, perhaps the most outstanding because of its expressiveness and finish, is the clock in the López Serrano building, where the passion of the time for movement and speed becomes visible within a polished Art Deco style.





Advertising "Michel".



Logo CMCD.



Cover of Bohemia magazine.

As a teacher, García Cabrera achieved a well-earned prestigious reputation, as shown by the quality and number of his students, to whom, according to the testimony of Enrique Valderrama, "he gave paid work in his private workshop, applying a modern teaching of out-of-school orientation. His designs with chalk on the classroom blackboards had the beauty and originality of all his work; and though lost because of their teaching nature, they were collected in study notebooks made by the students; thus leaving, in watercolor paintings and pen drawings, a testimony of his faculties for modern teaching."

If on the one hand, García Cabrera was highly respected by his colleagues,

students, and clients, on the other, his historic shortsightedness gained him powerful adversaries, particularly after his unwise expression of his opinions regarding European avant-garde art. A change had taken place in him. The fascination of his youthful years in Paris and Rome, his restless searches for forms in the magazine illustrations during the teens and 1920s progressively gave way to an accommodating attitude, also reflected by the commercial success he achieved. He was unable to understand the direction that avant-garde painting was taking. But most of all, he was unable to understand that his graphic work undoubtedly constituted the avant-garde in Cuba, because Cuban editorial and publicity illustration at the beginning of



*Exterior detail of García Cabrera house.*

the century was ahead of the avant-garde in painting and prefigured, at least in terms of form, a new language.

In light of the seemingly endless debate on the differences and similarities between the plastic arts and graphic design, the work of Enrique García Cabrera is of special interest. He was an enthusiast of both expressions of the visual. His work, in the words of Jorge Bermúdez, "will be torn between the conflict that provokes in an artist the mass work made by the machine and the unique and original work of 'pure' art. Paradoxically, all that Enrique García Cabrera wanted to be as a painter, he attained only in the communication graphics. If we compare just one of his oil paintings with one of his illustrations for publicity, the dilemma becomes quite clear. With the first way of artistic creation he wanted to be . . . With the second he was, is, and will always be one of the pioneers of modern graphic design in Cuba." ■



*Interior views of García Cabrera house.*



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# Cuban Art Deco Architecture: A Heritage of Undeniable Value

By: María Elena Martín Zequeira

Art Deco occupies a preeminent position within the context of twentieth century Cuban architecture. The influence of this decorative trend, which successfully integrated architecture, interior design, visual arts, and graphic and industrial design, was manifested in a wide variety of programs throughout the island.

The rule of the twice-elected president of the Republic of Cuba, General Gerardo Machado (1925-1933), was one of the periods of the greatest flowering of Art Deco in Cuban architecture and urbanism. This era was marked by a special interest in modernizing Havana and placing it in a privileged position relative to its American neighbors. Despite political support for the aesthetic of the famed École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, a new style, initially labeled Modern but known today as Art Deco, found favor in Cuba at this time. Art Deco symbolized modernity and spread rapidly throughout the country.

Student travel abroad, visits of foreign artists and designers, and reports of fashion trends and international exhibitions in specialized journals and magazines circulating on the island influenced the taste of Cuban professionals of the time. The 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, the 1928 Exposition of Czechoslovakian Culture in Brno, and the 1931 Salon des Artistes Décorateurs in Paris were among the events covered in popular publications of the day. Extensive reviews, accompanied by photographs, documented European modern aesthetics and updated professionals on the formal and conceptual details of the latest design trends.



*Pic. 1. Detail of the Entrance of the Argüelles House.*

Early Art Deco works in Havana, such as the house of Francisco Argüelles in Miramar (1927) (Pic. 1); the restaurant and cafeteria at 5th Avenida and 34, also in Miramar (1927, demolished in 1999); and the automobile service station at Malecón and Escobar (1928) illustrate the application of the avant-garde to diverse building types. Art Deco proved appropriate for all types of structures, from public, industrial and recreational buildings to private residences and apartment houses. It was used in the design of public open-air spaces and left its imprint on monuments, sculptures, and other elements of the urban landscape (Pic. 2) still extant in various parts of the country. Also noteworthy are the great variety and large number of tombs and mausoleums in Cuban cemeteries that



*Pic. 2. Monument to Juan Carlos Finlay in Marianao.*



*Pic. 3. Catalina Lasa tomb in Havana Cemetery Cristobal Colón.*

incorporated the Art Deco aesthetic. The mausoleums of the celebrated Catalina Lasa in the Cristóbal Colón cemetery in Havana (Pic.3) and the National hero José Martí in the Santa Ifigenia cemetery in Santiago de Cuba (Pic.4) are just two of the most significant examples.

Although Art Deco became immensely popular in Cuba, the designers of many of the buildings representative of the country's economic and political status did not subscribe to this new aesthetic. Monumental works such as the National Capitol or Capitolio, the Asturian Center, and the Cuban Telephone Company, although constructed during the peak popularity of Art Deco in the late 1920s

and early 1930s, reflect the eclecticism that was regarded as a symbol of the political, social, and economic power epitomized by these institutions. The most distinguished examples of eclecticism in residential architecture were also completed during this time.

Theaters, cinemas, and department stores, however, passionately embraced the modern and carefree lines of Art Deco. Outstanding examples include the Fausto Theater, the Arenal movie house, and the Almacenes Ultra department store, all in Havana (Pic.5). Art Deco was also a popular style for houses and apartment buildings for both the middle class and those of more modest means throughout Cuba. (Pic.6)



*Pic. 4. José Martí tomb in Santiago de Cuba.*



*Pic. 5. Fausto Theater in Havana Paseo del Prado.*



*Pic. 6. Apartment building for middle income families in Centro Habana.*

The rapid and extensive proliferation of this style is indicative of one of the most distinctive characteristics of Art Deco in Cuba, namely, its popularity. Formally, it was expressed by great simplicity, while still maintaining elegance and refinement. Art Deco was frequently preferred for the decoration of facades and was also expressed in the elements



*Pic. 7. Use of tropical images in design.*



*Pic. 10. Verticality tendency.*

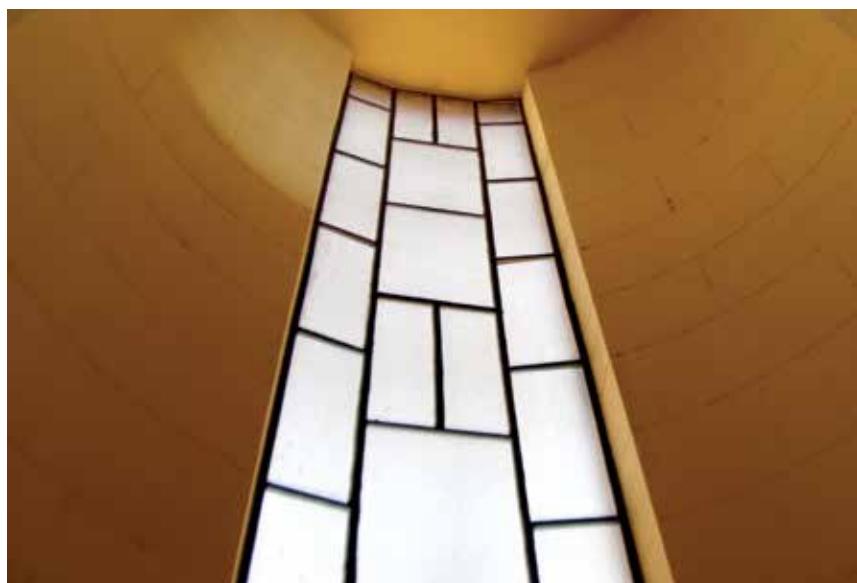


*Pic. 8. Stylized architectural elements.*



*Pic. 9. Pure volumes in facades.*

of composition, as manifested by the geometrization of forms and the use of tropical images (Pic.7); the stylization of architectonic details and elements (Pic.8); pure volumes, both on the exterior and in the interior (Pic.9); a trend toward verticality (Pic.10); the integration of polished finishes with bright particles embedded in plaster; and the use of large glass panels allowing light to pass into the interior. (Pic.11)



*Pic. 11. Glass panels permit natural illumination in the interiors..*

Unfortunately, another characteristic common to almost all Art Deco buildings in Cuba is their unfortunate state of preservation. Some important Art Deco structures have been lost forever and others no less significant show a high degree of deterioration, with respect to both the structure and the decorative details. The loss of their multicolored floors, decorative ceilings and light fixtures, and exquisite Art Deco façade

ornamentation is a testimony to the complete apathy and abandonment to which these buildings have been subjected.

The collection of Art Deco buildings constructed in Cuba from the final years of the 1920s through the 1940s represents a heritage of undeniable value. These structures must be preserved for future generations. ■

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# Art Deco in Havana Housing: Tropical Deco and Streamline

By: Pilar Fernández Prieto

For some time, Art Deco had no precise definition, due largely to the numerous and sometimes contradictory influences that contributed to its emergence—Art Nouveau, pre-Hispanic and Eastern cultures, the “isms” of European avant-garde artistic movements, and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, among others. Despite this diversity of cultural antecedents, Art Deco acquired distinctive features that gave the style its own personality. The result was a complex decorative system that integrated many facets of design and came to characterize and symbolize an era.

As a transitory trend, Art Deco established a bridge between eclecticism (already empty of vitality) and the explosive radicalism of the European artistic avant-gardes. Its expression differed among the various regions, areas, or cities where it developed. Art Deco in London is not like Art Deco in Paris, nor in New York, California, Oklahoma, or Florida.

Modernism, the term Art Deco was known by in Cuba in its time, reached Havana via various channels, including specialized publications, study in the United States, architecture curriculums based on North American models, movies, music, travel, and fashion. Without aspiring to the radical dynamism of the European avant-gardes, it offered a modern alternative to academicism and contributed to the demise of the then-dominant eclecticism.

Writing in 1950, architect Joaquín Weiss described the significance of the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes for the development of Art Deco in Cuba:

Stylistically this period (1930-1940) was nurtured to a great extent by the Decorative Arts Exposition held in Paris

in 1925, which tried to update the French in architectural matters, achieving only a conservative result. However, . . . the new French variant of architectural trends was able to be introduced in American countries that, like ours, were struggling to free themselves from the clutches of eclecticism.

Tropical Deco, a name American scholar Laura Cerwinsky proposed, had an important influence on Cuban architecture. The term refers to a specific phase in the development of the style expressed in hotels, movie theaters, restaurants, and houses in Miami Beach from the 1930s until the 1940s. This variation is especially prevalent in the area known as the Art Deco Historic District in South Miami. Tropical Deco is an adaptation of Northern models.

Its combination of horizontal lines and fantasy infuses buildings with a sense of delight that distinguishes them from the industrial Deco of more urban areas.

Tropical Deco incorporates the flora and fauna of the region in its building decoration, creating an Art Deco variant that differs from both the sophisticated New York and the prolific Hollywood varieties. The taste for horizontal and vertical lines and pastel colors such as sea green, light blue, dusty pink, and bright yellow, enrich and add complexity to the design. The distinct visual effect that results exudes a sense of rest, simplicity, and happiness. The horizontality, panels with geometric ornaments, simple geometric volumes, and pastel colors of Tropical Deco appeal particularly to a public accustomed to the climate, light, sea, and environment of Havana.

Transatlantic ships, airplanes, trains, and automobiles provided models and motifs for another variation of Art Deco, commonly known as Streamline Moderne. This variant is characterized by curvilinear parallel lines, metallic elements, rounded corners, circular windows, chrome railings, and white walls, a repertoire that suggests speed, progress, and the aesthetics of the machine. The new variant was more closely linked to the World of Tomorrow showcased at the 1939 New York World's Fair than with the famous 1925 Paris exposition.



Single-family homes and apartment buildings in Havana reflect the gradual change from a vertical emphasis, characteristic of skyscrapers, such as the López Serrano building, to a horizontal emphasis seen in the Cantera, Solimar, and Santeiro apartment buildings. Art Deco and Streamline Moderne converge in the multifunctional America building, despite the prevalence of the Streamline style in Havana during this period. Deco



*Arquitectura y Artes Decorativas*, architect Juan E. O'Bourke analyzed a new building in Vedado designed by architect and city planner Pedro Martínez Inclán:

Horizontality, sensation of calmness and dignity; continuous side-by-side balconies with rails that evoke those of ships; projecting terraces, hardly supported in their base with octagonal columns, large broad windows. A very 20<sup>th</sup> century building. The most similar to the works of Wright, Le Corbusier, Gropius.

The architectural firm Maruri/Weiss created a boat-like design for the Matanzas Tennis Club, which Weiss explained in the June 1932 issue of *Arquitectura y Artes Decorativas*:

What was required there was not a Versailles palace but a machine . . . a social entertainment and sports machine with all the simplicity, solidity and efficacy of a mechanical device.

Havana welcomed the repetitive ornament fashionable in Miami Beach, with decorative panels embellishing facades in endless combinations of

also intermingled with the remnants of the neoclassical style and began to harmonize with Havana's first expressions of the international style.

In his paper "Of New Architecture," published in April 1932 in the journal



exuberant, fantasy designs. Geometric flowers or plant elements and squares, rhombuses, and triangles abounded in contrasting textures and slight variations in color.

This alternative approach to Deco inserted itself into an island tradition that



can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century. Many of the Art Deco buildings are rooted in the traditional apartment building scheme of a commercial establishment on the ground floor

with housing above, both organically integrated into the urban landscape. In other buildings, such a Neptuno 56, Art Deco features coexist with traditional elements, such as blinds, grilles, and stained-glass windows, but now with a new and varied design.

This architectural hybrid added a new visual dimension to the urban landscape. The repetition of decorative Art Deco elements in different neighborhoods of the city acted as a unifying factor. And the spread of Art Deco-inspired work from the professional level to widespread popularity provides a lesson in architectural coherence and integration. The result is an architectural expression of a distinct appearance generated by modernity and innovation.

Its adoption by non-architects represented true local re-interpretations of Art Deco in vernacular architecture during the 1930s and 1940s. It also demonstrated the persistence of middle class cultural values



Traditional architectural history failed to acknowledge Art Deco since it did not coincide with the international style. This point of view stresses the conflicting character of the two styles rather than their common features and overlooks Art Deco as an alternative expression of modernity.

Art Deco's diversity of sources and widespread application help explain the plurality of its manifestations. With the self-assurance of a new sensibility, it developed a language that incorporated diversity to formulate a style with its own personality and expression of the new.

Art Deco helped transform visual experience at both the artistic and the everyday level. In its dynamism and variety, Deco in all its variants, including Tropical, Streamline, and Modern Monumental, contributed in different ways to the evolution of modernity. ■





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# An Art Deco Square in Havana Honoring a Renowned Cuban

By: Gustavo López

Finlay Square, located in the municipality of Marianao, is one of the best known in Havana. Its celebrity is attributable to the tall tower or obelisk at its center that originally functioned as a beacon for planes from the neighboring airport of the former Columbia military barracks.

Unveiled by former Cuban ruler Fulgencio Batista in 1944 under the name Fourth of September Square, the monument commemorated the soldiers of the Columbia base who initiated the coup d'état against President Gerardo Machado on that date in 1933. In 1948, however, Cuban physicians asked President Ramón Grau San Martín to change the name to Finlay Square in homage to the distinguished Cuban physician and scientist who identified the mosquito as the carrier of yellow fever. A commemorative plaque on the tower reads: "To the memory of Scientist Carlos J. Finlay (1833-1915)."

The tower stands at the center of a landscaped ellipse within a traffic circle and is surrounded by four two-story buildings.

The architectural assembly was designed by engineer José Pérez Benitoa with the support of what was then known as the Ministry of Public Works. The tower rises 32 meters (105 feet) and is faced with Jaimanitas stone. Black granite covers the base, which measures 8 meters (26.25 feet) on each side. The base contains a classical frieze with allegorical figures designed by sculptors Navarro and Lombardo. The shaft of the tower is decorated with open geometric motifs that allow air and light to enter the interior and ends in a balcony that serves as a mirador.

A beacon and a needle-shaped lightning rod crown the tower.

The concave shape of the four buildings surrounding the tower accentuates and complements the layout of the square. The buildings are visually united by porticos supported by ten columns clad in Jaimanitas stone. The names of the institutions formerly housed in these structures are carved on flat frontispieces at the top of the porticos. All four buildings have a central patio and garden and a parking area in the front. Although the function of these buildings has changed, sculptural reliefs reflecting their original purpose remain on the wall panels separating the windows.

The Finlay Square tower is the tallest structure in the neighborhood, making it a landmark for Havana residents traveling in the area. Cubans have christened the Finlay Square obelisk "The Syringe" because of its resemblance to this medical instrument.■



Obelisk square in marianao neighborhood.



San Alejandro art school in marianao square.



Detail of the grounds of the obelisk.



Detail of the top of the obelisk.



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# A Pioneer of Modernity Leonardo Morales and the Beginnings of Cuban Art Deco

By: María Victoria Zardoya Loureda

At the corner of Belascoín and San Martín streets in Havana stands a five-story building that has gone largely unnoticed by both architecture experts and nonspecialists. It is difficult to categorize this structure as a specific style. The arches of the attic suggest a historicist influence. However, the vertical continuity of the windows and piers, the absence of stringcourses, the paucity of decorative elements, and the ziggurat finials represent a departure from the treatment of tall buildings designed in

the eclectic style. The entrance on San Martín Street is topped by an atypical, quadrant-shaped lintel with parallel linear incisions alien to any form of historicism. The simplicity of the small lobby adds to the austerity of the exterior, and the remaining interior spaces lack any type of decoration.

The intended function of the building may account for the simplicity of the ornamental treatment. It appears to have been designed to house commercial

interests or services. Today it is an apartment building.

The building resembles those of the late 1940s, the final phase of the Art Deco era. The checkerboard pattern of the tiles just below the roofline may represent a “naïve” interpretation of majolica ceramic designs. However, the knowledge that the building dates to 1927 and was designed by the prestigious Cuban architect Leonardo Morales places it in a different perspective. It appears to be a missing



*Detail of the rooftop of the san martin corner building in Havana central.*



*Full view of the building in San martin's corner at havana central.*

link in the historical chain of Havana architecture.

Art Deco reached Cuba two years after it was introduced to an international audience at the 1925 Exposition

International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderne in Paris. Its arrival is considered to mark the beginning of modernity in Cuba. The formal language of this new style represented a move away from the eclecticism that

had characterized Cuban architecture since the beginning of the twentieth century. Writing in *Arquitectura y Artes Decorativas* in 1932, Professor Joaquín Weiss noted: "... architecture of our time is already apparent in the 'primary' or 'primitive' phase of a rising style, linear in character, although in composition it leans more to 'compensation' or 'balance' than to 'symmetry' and 'formalism'..." Art Deco maintained decoration as an essential component of architecture and retained academic principles of composition but was characterized by an array of totally new linear elements that at the time were labeled "modern art."

The house of Francisco Argüelles, designed by architect José Antonio Mendigutía and completed in 1927, is generally acknowledged to be the first Art Deco building in Cuba. According to Weiss, it was "... the first serious attempt at 'modern' architecture in this country."

The building at Belascoain and San Martín was also designed and constructed in 1927. Although not as complete an expression of the Art Deco vocabulary as the Argüelles house, it is very significant because of the germ of modernity it incubated in its use of such simple decoration and the treatment of a tall building in a manner unprecedented in Cuba until then. Some of the formal elements it employed were repeated later in a more elaborated way in the well-

known trio of Art Deco towers that dominate the skyline of Havana, which by the time of their completion, was already heading to modernity—the Bacardí (1930), the López Serrano (1932), and the América (1941).■

# Cuba's Cristóbal Colón Cemetery: An Open-Air Museum

By: Gustavo López

The Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus) Cemetery in Havana is an open-air museum as well as a Cuban national monument and a significant urban-scale project. Its construction was authorized by royal decree on July 28, 1866, and construction began on October 30, 1871. Almost fifteen years later, on July 2, 1886, the cemetery was completed.

Covering 57 hectares (approximately 140 acres), the Cristóbal Colón is the most important cemetery in Cuba and the largest in the Americas. Because of its magnificent sculpture and impressive monuments representing a wide variety of artistic styles, many specialists consider it second only to the Staglieno cemetery in Genoa, Italy in terms of worldwide significance. The cemetery is rich in myths and legends, and its grounds are covered with greenery, which provides a striking contrast to the cold white marble structures that hold eternal memories.



Falla Bonet's Mausoleum.



Veterans mausoleum.



Detail of veterans mausoleum.



The Pieta sculpture of Rita Longa.

Art Deco designs are among the cemetery's principal attractions. Notable examples include the Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baró mausoleum, the Pieta sculpted by the renowned Cuban artist Rita Longa,



Cespedes family's mausoleum.

the tomb of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a former president of the Republic of Cuba, the mausoleum of the Falla Bonet family, and the impressive Pantheon of the Veterans of the Wars of Independence.■

# Art Deco: Style, Trend, or Fashion?

By: Mario Coyula

In Cuba, the “new art” that arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century more closely resembled Catalan modernism than Belgian or French Art Nouveau, the Austrian Vienna Secession, German Jugendstil, Italian Liberty, or English or Scottish Modern Art. Though initially trendy, ultimately, its popularity was short-lived and never captivated the upper class or the first architects educated in Cuba.

This break with historicism was followed by a generalized return to historic forms, as Beaux Arts eclecticism imposed itself on the design of both residential and public buildings, sustained by a period of economic prosperity known as *Las Vacas Gordas* (The Fat Cows). The combination of the subsequent Cuban economic crisis related to the worldwide depression and a political and social crisis led to the overthrow of the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado in 1933. The old elite that had looked to Europe for cultural leadership was supplanted by populist governments, democratically elected during the 1940s although tainted by corruption and inequality. The cultural and architectural models to follow crossed the Atlantic, shifting from Paris to New York and a small, sleepy town on the other side of the Florida Straits called Miami.

Within this context, and with a boost from the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, Cuban architecture became re-inspired. In its time, the new approach to design was known by the imprecise term “modern,” but it became universally known as Art Deco in 1966. In Cuba, architects rapidly assimilated its formal features, despite the lack of the underlying conceptual support that had provided the basis for European modernism, a movement that

arrived later in Cuba where it became highly diluted by tropical hedonism. Art Deco also influenced graphic arts, typography, and fashion and acquired an aura of the superficial, the decorative, the trendy, and the chic. Its best example is the spectacular crown of the Chrysler Building (1930), a masterpiece by William Van Alen and an imposing image that appears in almost any film set in New York.

In 1926, the first Art Deco interior was created in Cuba for the Vedado mansion of the famous couple Juan Pedro Baró and Catalina de Lasa. The exterior designed by Evelio Govantes and Felix Cabarrocás was in the Italian Renaissance style, but the interiors, supervised by Catalina's son Pedro Estévez who traveled from New York expressly to oversee the project, were Deco. René Lalique, a friend of the family, designed the glass. In 1932, Lalique conceived the best Art Deco mausoleum at Havana's Cristobal Colón Cemetery, incorporating the rose motif, a reference to the flower created as an homage to Catalina's extraordinary beauty. Landscape and urban architect Jean-Claude Nicholas Forestier, coordinator for the 1925 Paris Exposition, designed the gardens.

Other outstanding Art Deco structures at the cemetery, which was declared a National Monument in 1987, are the mausoleums of the De Céspedes, Casteliero, Steinhart, and Gómez Mena families, Rita Longa's late streamline style Pietá for the Aguilera mausoleum, and the Independence War Veterans Pantheon by architects Enrique Luis Varela and Luis Dauval, with friezes by Juan José Sicre and Florencio Gelabert.

In 1932, architects Emilio Govantes and Felix Cabarrocás designed the Paramount



Exterior of the Lopez Serrano building.



Exterior of the Lopez Serrano building.



America Theatre's building in Havana Central.



*Maternidad Obrera's hospital facade.*

Theater in the Rancho Boyeros neighborhood of Ludgardita. Three years earlier, they had drafted the urban plan for Ludgardita, with approximately 100 low-cost houses, industry, schools, and a park. The theater at Ludgardita has an impressive Art Deco interior with exotic Mayan elements, perhaps due to the lack of an important Cuban pre-Columbian heritage from which to draw inspiration.

is the 1930 Bacardí building by Esteban Rodríguez Castells, José Menéndez, and Rafael Fernández. This magnificent project had historicist origins but was transformed after the architects came in contact with the latest European styles. A comparison of these two jewels illustrates the changes in the model of reference over only two years, which corresponded with the previously mentioned economic, political, and cultural influences. In the depression years of the early 1930s, Cuban architects were no longer looking toward Europe but to the United States.



*City Hall interior.*

The sumptuous Art Deco ornamentation of the elegant buildings of the era relied on the refined management of textures and materials, including imported marbles and nickel-plated steel; the meticulous integration of designs for floors, ceilings, and lamps, with the pioneering use of neon light and indirect lighting; and iron fittings, jardinières, grilles, and sculptural details. This attention to detail complemented the emphasis on verticality to express energy and speed, a late influence of Italian Futurism. All these features are united in the beautiful, though today shabby, lobby of the 1932 Lopez Serrano building by Ricardo Mira and Miguel Rosich in the Vedado neighborhood. This building with its beautiful nickel-plated steel, bronze, and enamel reliefs by

Enrique García Cabrera exemplifies the widespread use of Art Deco motifs in apartment buildings, a new building type of the time. This modernity with ornamental accents was intended to lure potential clients who expected lavish decoration in their residential buildings.

Another classic of Cuban Art Deco

The angular verticality of the “classic” Art Deco style subsequently evolved into that of the Streamline Moderne with its emphasis on horizontality, curvilinear lines, and rounded corners but similar decorative elements. The influence in this case was Miami Beach. A good example is the Fausto movie theater of 1938 by Saturnino Parajón, which received the Gold Medal award of the Architects Association. Like the eclecticism that had predominated in Cuban cities previously, Art Deco, and specifically the Streamline variation, expanded throughout Havana neighborhoods to modest houses intended for low-income residents or as rentals. The Streamlined style lowered building costs without completely eliminating the ornamentation demanded by petit bourgeois taste. It also became very common in apartment houses. The “democratized” decoration, contemporaneous with the New Deal and recovery from the Great Depression, used pre-cast mortar elements, sometimes reduced to a few horizontal lines or grooves on the façade.

One of the finest Art Deco buildings in Havana is the America (Fernando Martínez Campos and Pascal de Rojas, 1941), which combines strong verticality in its tall body with horizontality on the ground floor. The Streamline influence is evident in the theater’s luxurious interior, fortunately well preserved. Such overlaps of style are characteristic of Havana Art Deco, and many architects moved from one style to another. Perhaps the most notable example was young Rafael de Cárdenas, who built a near-replica of the



*Catalina Lasa's dome.*



Catalina Lasa's Palmas salon.



Interior of the Maternidad Obrera's Hospital.

Venetian Ca' d'Oro in 1930 for Estanislao del Valle, yet was able in 1931-1934

to design a residence for Hilda Serra in which traces of Art Deco yielded to proto-rationalism.

European influence reappeared in the Modern Monumental style that originated from the Parisian Trocadéro Group and the great monuments of L'EUR for the 1942 World's Fair in Rome, the pride of Mussolini. In Cuba, this trend appeared only in public buildings. In Marianao's Finlay Square (José Pérez Benitoa, 1944), four very similar buildings with concave façades surround a rotunda with an obelisk that anchors the group. This monument is the closest application of Art Deco on an urban scale that exists in Cuba, although the proportions and especially the spirit were already Modern Monumental. A few years earlier, Emilio De Soto designed the Maternidad Obrera, or Workers Maternity (1939), with its magnificent oval multistory lobby, an example of the transition from Streamline to Modern Monumental. The curved floor of the building mirrors the

uterus, ovaries and Fallopian tubes of the female reproductive system.

In spite of the relatively short life of these styles, the changes in form brought by Art Deco and later Streamline, with its European contemporary Moderne, had a significant impact on the image of the city. Unlike Art Nouveau from the beginning of the twentieth century, which was identified with humble Catalan master builders, Art Deco was deeply rooted among the most important architects and the upper class of Havana and its diluted version extended further to the more modest social and urban sectors. It was a movement that was born nameless. It did not create a solid and characteristic body of theory and it did not reach the urban scale. Its rapid acceptance and stylized and glamorous image, exemplified in Conrado Massaguer's beautiful covers for the magazine Social, left the impression of a world that had forgotten the First World War while unconsciously approaching the Second. ■

# The Champagnat School in Camagüey

By: Wilfredo Rodríguez Ramos

## The Railroad and the City of Camagüey

Between 1841 and 1846, one of the first railroads in the world was constructed in Cuba. The railroad connected the northern port of Nuevitas with the prosperous city of Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe, known today as Camagüey, a city that had previously been isolated from the island's centers of finance and power. This isolation led to the development of a distinctive culture still evident today.

The railroad irrevocably changed the life of the city. Between 1900 and 1930, Puerto Príncipe grew considerably as new residential neighborhoods were created to house railroad owners and workers. The combination of splendid buildings and vast, modest housing projects in these neighborhoods imposed a new form on the old colonial city inherited from the Spanish.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a group of buildings linked to the railway was constructed near Plaza del Vapor, the open market that is Carlos J. Finlay Park today. The complex included a passenger depot (1908), a freight depot (1914), the Plaza Hotel (1915), and a magnificent neoclassical office building housing the Cuban Consolidated Railroads (1925). Beginning in 1900, development began to the north of these buildings along the main artery now known as

Martyrs Avenue. This area was laid out in 90-by-90-meter (295-by-295-foot) blocks linked by a system of secondary streets and avenues lined with trees and flowerbeds, an urban scheme imported directly from the United States by North American investors in the joint railroad enterprise.

This new neighborhood was called La Vigía (Watchtower). The principal avenue had four lanes separated by a central barrier and sidewalks with continuous porches typical of Cuban architecture. It followed the path of the old colonial Reina Street (now Republic Street) to the historic center with its labyrinth of streets and radial typology.

## Catalan Architects in the La Vigía Neighborhood

By the end of the nineteenth century, the city of Camagüey was already famous for its architecture, primarily for having the largest number of colonial Catholic churches in the country. In the twentieth century, its architectural reputation was enhanced by the eclectic designs that were introduced by a migratory wave of Catalan architects and master builders from Spain, specifically Barcelona.

The combination of these new architects and Camagüey's fondness for impressive buildings stamped a new architectural imprint on many areas of the city. The first four blocks of grand Martyrs Avenue in La Vigía became a virtual architecture museum offering unique examples of all the styles of the first half of the twentieth century as well as an irreplaceable example of colonial military architecture, the Cavalry Barracks. Converted to a hotel in the early twentieth century, it became the Provincial Museum Ignacio Agramonte in 1948. At that time, the Havana architect Raúl Otero added a monumental modern portico with Art



Details of the champagnat school facade.

Deco features to the neoclassical colonial façade reminiscent of the grandiloquent architecture of Hitler and Mussolini.

One of the finest architectural groupings in the city surrounds the barracks, a collection of private homes designed in the various architectural styles of the first half of the twentieth century. Notable buildings extend from the barracks toward both ends of the avenue—the House of the 8 Cariátides (1905) by Catalan Claudio Muns Piqué; the neo-Gothic Saint Joseph Church (1936), the neo-colonial Saint Paul Episcopal Church and school (1931), and the Hotel Residencial (1946) with its steep tower, impressive late Art Deco façade, and metal frame, all by Claudio Jaime Muns Blanchart, son of Claudio Muns Piqué; and the Banco de los Colonos building (1957) by local architect Melitón Castelló Verde, a classic work of the modern movement little replicated in Havana. The fourth masterpiece of architect Claudio Muns Blanchart in La Vigía is the Champagnat School (1941), the principal Art Deco work in the city and the province of Camagüey.

By 1940, Art Deco architecture already had a long history in Camagüey and Cuba and only eclecticism outranked it as the most popular style in traditional Cuban cities. Deco motifs decorated the facades of hundreds of modest structures, perhaps because it cost less than the ornate eclecticism or because the day's tastemakers linked it to the future and modernity.



Detail of the champagnat school facade.



Champagnat school facade.

The first Art Deco buildings in Camagüey date from approximately 1935, but the style peaked between 1938 and 1945, when it began to give way to the Modern Movement. The Catalan architects and master builders were responsible for many of the Art Deco facades designed during this period. In both La Vigía and the oldest area of the historic center, the eclectic facades that had already “modernized” the old Baroque and neo-classical structures were gradually replaced by the new neo-colonial and Art Deco styles. With a few notable exceptions, Art Deco in Camagüey is predominantly a decorative style applied to buildings that retained the old eclectic, and occasionally colonial, plan. It is not unusual in Camagüey to find an austere nineteenth century plan or wooden beams from the late eighteenth century hiding behind a New York-inspired Art Deco façade.

This practice began changing in the late 1930s and early 1940s when reinforced concrete came into widespread use. Wooden ceilings, Baroque central patio floors, and Catalan tiles surrendered to the plastic and durable possibilities of reinforced concrete. The designs of the Catalan architects and their descendants, however, continued to reflect their Barcelonian heritage. In Camagüey they designed everything from the only known re-interpretation of architect Antonio Gaudí's Casa Batlló from Barcelona, to the Catholic church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1912-1919), the most spectacular church in the city and the second tallest in Cuba. They were also responsible for

the humorous and unusual façade of a small house on Los Pobres Street that combines the very essence of Art Deco with pure Catalan traditions of the early twentieth century.

### **The Champagnat School in Camagüey**

When a school in Camagüey founded by the Marist Brothers in 1935 outgrew its building, Claudio Jaime Muns Blanchet was hired in

1940 to design a new school funded by the Franco-American Educational Society. The C-shaped plan of the new building was organized around a typical central garden patio, a classic element of Cuban architecture that serves as a thermo-regulator in the tropics. The complex included a gymnasium and a swimming pool and large outdoors sports areas in addition to the three-story main building.

No part of this main building escaped the decorative patterning of Art Deco. The school's monumental facades and all the decorative elements are Art Deco, including, the embossed letters and the school's symbol on the facade, beautiful iron gates enclosing the property, the base of the banister of the interior stairs, the plaster work and polychrome floors of the lobby, the ceiling moldings, and the capitals of the twenty-two columns that support the galleries of the interior patio.

The three-story main facade is composed of five sections, three vertical projecting elements at the center and the corners and two others set back on either side where the largest number of classroom windows is located. The vertical components are framed by huge projecting pilasters. The central section contains the arched entrance with the Marist symbol etched on the glass tympanum. The Cuban flag flies from a monumental flagpole inserted into an impressive Art Deco pinnacle atop the entrance, visible even from the interior patio and the sports areas.

When the Cuban educational system was nationalized in 1959, the beautiful



Interior playground of the champagnat school.

Carrara marble sculpture of Marcelino Champagnat (the French saint who founded the Marist order in the nineteenth century) designed and sculpted in Italy, was removed.

The second-story chapel, the most important Art Deco interior in the city, was also destroyed. All that remains of the space today are archival photographs in old school yearbooks. The original Art Deco furniture has also been lost, along with the original light fixtures and bathroom appointments.

The building now houses an elementary school. During a 2002 refurbishment, the first in its history, the original interior and exterior woodwork were repaired and the upper terrace behind the façade was roofed with a light metallic structure designed in the Art Deco style.

Camagüey's Office of Cultural Heritage has given this building the Degree I of Protection, the city's highest rating assigned to a work of architecture. The school is architecturally significant for two reasons. First, it is most likely the best and most complete Art Deco building in the province and city, which is known for Art Deco works that, although modest, are architecturally valuable.

The second reason is more complex and rewarding. The school's austere Art Deco design reflects New York Art Deco. However, the verticality and the profusion of stylized plant forms in the decorative panels is accompanied by classical arches above the windows and doors, an unmistakable symbol of the colonial past and the primordial essence of this city, which has existed for almost a half millennium.■

# Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baró, a Havana Legend of Love and a Story of Two Art Deco Monuments

By: Gustavo López

The love of Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baró is more than a story. It is a legend that has attracted followers for decades. In 1898, the beautiful, young Catalina Lasa married Luis Estévez Abreu, son of Marta Abreu, patriot of the wars of independence, and Luis Estévez, the first vice president of the República founded in 1902. Catalina, famous for her beauty and a beauty contest winner in 1902 and 1904, later met Juan Pedro Baró at one of the fabulous soirees of those times. The rich



Juan Pedro Baró.

landowner fell in love with her gracefulness, and she was entranced by the young man's demeanor.

The couple was consumed by a sudden limitless passion and began meeting secretly. When their affair was discovered, it became the talk of high society. Because divorce laws had yet to be enacted in Cuba, Catalina Lasa dared to ask her husband for a separation. When he denied her request, she decided to leave him and live with Juan Pedro. It was a decision fueled by love that would bring the couple many unpleasant moments.

The prejudices of the times and pressure from the members of his family led Luis Estévez Abreu to initiate judicial proceedings against Catalina, and an order



Marble and rod iron work, Catalina Lasa home.

was issued for her arrest on charges of bigamy. Immediately, Catalina and Juan Pedro secretly fled Cuba for Paris. They would, however, continue to be pursued in other countries.

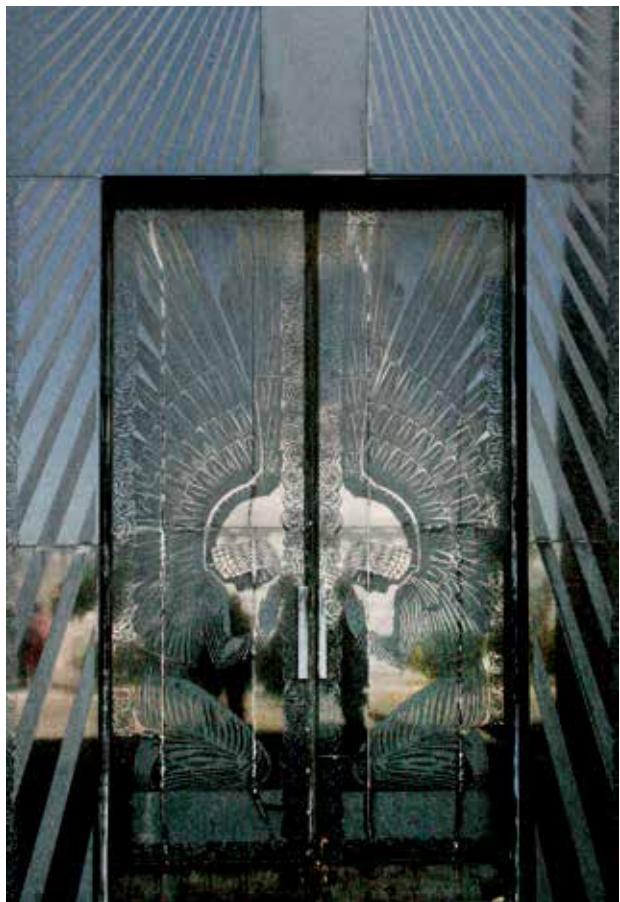


Catalina Lasa.



Lalique glass work, Catalina Lasa home.

Disguised and traveling via different routes, the couple arrived in France and reconnected in Marseilles before leaving together for Italy. They reached Rome where they were received by the pope, who listened to their story. The pope, the supreme authority of the Catholic Church, blessed them and annulled the religious marriage between Catalina Lasa and Luis Estévez Abreu.



Catalina Lasa's mausoleum.

In 1917, President Mario García Menocal, passed divorce laws in Cuba. That same year, the separation of Catalina and her first husband was registered. Catalina and Juan Pedro returned to Havana, where they were again accepted in the high society parlors that had once condemned their union.

That moment marks the beginning of the story of one of the most famous architectural mansions in Havana. The couple commissioned the celebrated architects Evelio Govantes and Félix Cabarrocas to design their new home, an Italian Renaissance-inspired mansion on the aristocratic Avenida Paseo with a cornice inspired by the Palazzo Strozzi and gardens designed by Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier. Catalina and Juan Pedro inaugurated the house in 1927 with a grand reception.

bedroom. A hallway between the two bedrooms led to a room from which the entrance of the house and the Avenida Paseo were visible.

Catalina seemed to have it all when Juan Pedro presented her with an unforgettable surprise. He had ordered the floriculturists of Jardín El Fénix to create a new flower, unknown until then, for his beloved wife, a unique rose in her favorite color, yellow, that he named the Catalina Lasa after his eternal love. According to legend, Juan Pedro presented her with a beautiful bouquet of these yellow roses on her birthday.

After the couple moved into the house, Catalina's health began to decline. Juan Pedro took her to France, hoping to find a cure, but she died in Paris in 1930. Her embalmed body was returned to Cuba and placed in a provisional tomb in the

The Art Deco style predominates in the interior of this luxurious mansion, classified as the most beautiful in Havana and completed two years after the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. The main stairway had laminated silver banisters and stained-glass windows of Baccarat crystal. The walls of Catalina Lasa's bedroom were covered with mirrors, allowing her to contemplate the attributes that had won her titles in the beauty contests of the early twentieth century and so bewitched Juan Pedro Baró. Precious woods covered the walls of Juan Pedro's



Ceiling lamp of the Juan Pedro Baró's bedroom.

Cristóbal Colón cemetery while the mausoleum that would harbor her mortal remains forever was constructed at a cost of one-half million pesos.

The exceptional white marble mausoleum, designed by René Lalique in the Art Deco style, was placed along the central avenue of the cemetery in front of the great monument to the firemen who perished in the fire of 1890. Catalina's body was placed in the mausoleum in 1932 along with a bouquet made of replicas of the roses that bore her name fabricated from precious stones. Ten years later, Juan Pedro Baró died in Havana. Both his and Catalina's tombstones were cast in concrete *in situ* to prevent desecration. And, it is said that Juan Pedro asked to be buried standing up to allow him to watch over the eternal sleep of the woman he so loved. ■

# Discovering Art Deco in Havana: A Personal Revelation

By: Vivian Figueredo



It all started when my daughter asked me, "Mom, do you have any Bacardi Building photos?"

Yes, I do! So off she went to show my photos of the Bacardi to Geo Darder for the *Chicago Art Deco Society Magazine*. And off I went with my two little point-and-shoot cameras, and my husband, to walk the city in search of Art Deco buildings.

Our first destination was Centro Habana, or Havana Central, today a municipality between Old Havana and the Vedado neighborhood. Some of Havana's most outstanding Art Deco buildings are located in this area, including the America building, the Fausto Theater, and many smaller buildings—some unkempt, most modified in some way by the residents, some unattractive, and some

still holding onto their past glory despite time and decay.

Our second stop was the Cristóbal Colón cemetery in the heart of Vedado. The four main streets of the cemetery are lined with Art Deco mausoleums, many of them breathtaking. You cannot believe the beauty and elegance of the Catalina Lasa mausoleum, the solemnity of the Cespedes family sepulcher, and the gracefulness of the almost hidden Pietá of the Aguilera grave. And then, at the end of the principal street of the cemetery, across from the church, is the Steinhart mausoleum. A leisurely look around the grounds



Corner of Monserrate and San Juan de Dios (across Bacardi Building), Old Havana.



Corner of Neptuno and San Nicolás Streets, Havana Central.



26 St. between 21st and 23rd Streets, Vedado.



12 St. between 17th and 19th Streets, Vedado.



23rd St. between 18th and 20th streets, Vedado, (Architecture Award winner).



*San Rafael Street (1937).*

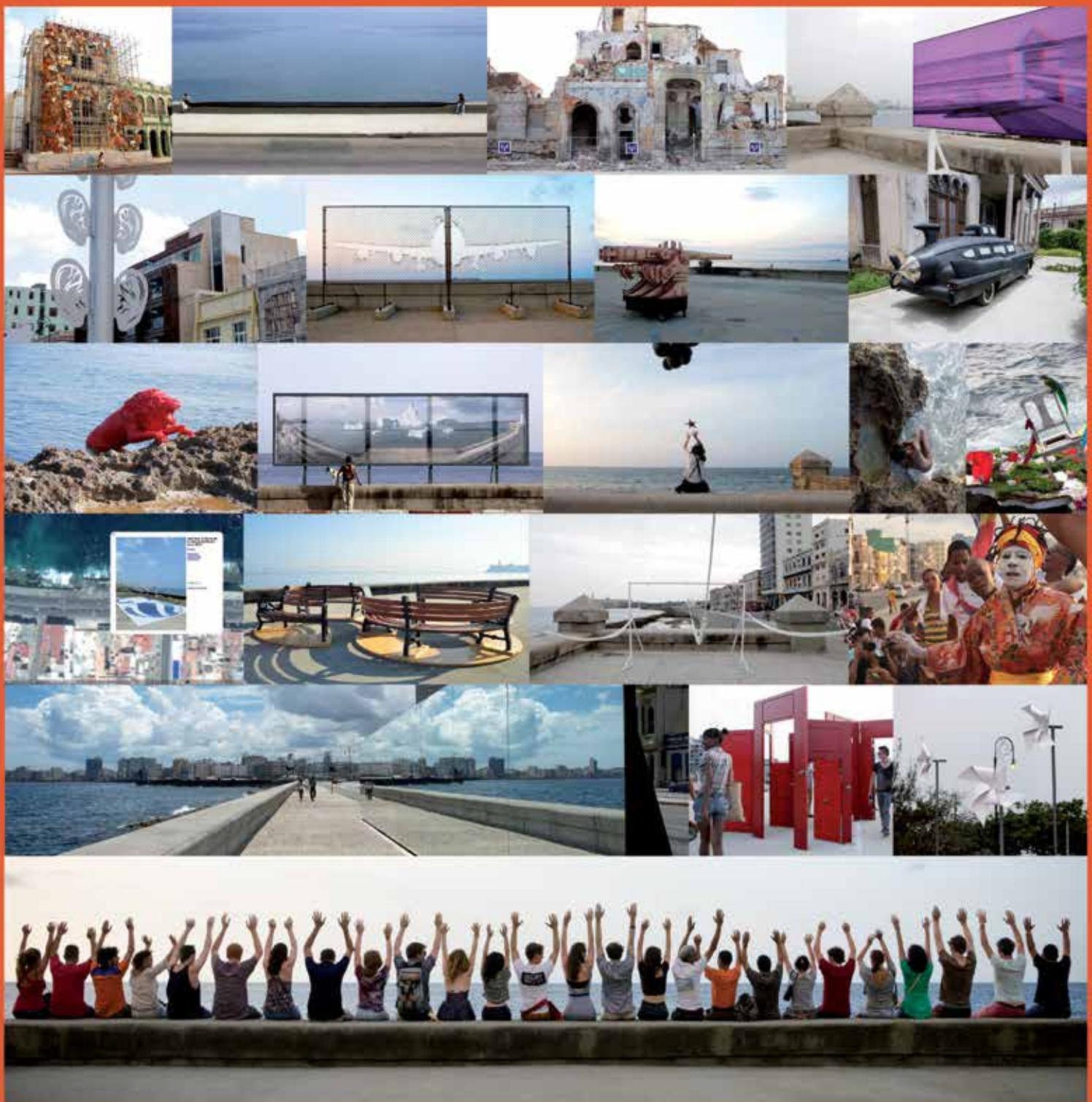


*23rd Street between 26th and 28th streets, Vedado.*

reveals a surprising number of Art Deco or Art Deco-inspired monuments. You feel like the great explorer who has hit the archaeological jackpot! It's amazing!

As we left the cemetery to head back home via Twenty-Third Street, the neighborhood I have lived in for fifty years, I crane my neck and there, right in front of me, I see, beside the Cinematheque movie theater, a two-story, Art Deco building with an art gallery on the ground floor. In the block ahead of me, toward the sea, there is another, then another. . . I had no need to leave Vedado to search for Art Deco. Wherever you look in this neighborhood, you will find an example of its influence.

Havana is full of Art Deco buildings, not all beautiful or breathtaking, but you might be surprised at the richness. All you need is a good pair of walking shoes, a strong neck to hold up your head, and the hunter's disposition. ■



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# Social, a Pioneer in Cuban Graphic Arts

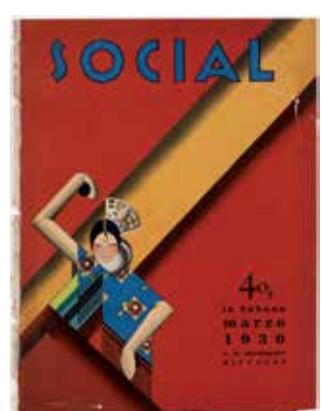
By: Vicki Gold Levi

Several cosmopolitan magazines published in Havana during the first half of the nineteenth century resembled leading American and European

periodicals. However the Havana-based *Social*, *Carteles*, and *Bohemia* magazines presented a true sense of Cubanness.

*Social* was founded in 1916 by the caricaturist and illustrator Conrado Massaguer. The book *Cuba Style: Graphics from the Golden Age of Design* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002) by Vicki Gold Levi and Steven Heller includes a chapter devoted to Cuban magazines that addresses the impact of *Social* on Cuban culture. As Heller writes: "*Social* was dedicated to creating a new cultural environment through the celebration of Cuban architecture, interior decorating, fashion, social events (motoring and yachting), and artistic endeavors (opera, ballet, and film). It supported the idea that European and American cultures had influenced the arts, yet praised the strong national painting that had emerged in Cuba. *Social* and subsequent journals contributed to or produced by the talented Massaguer, whose influence was indeed ubiquitous, placed Cuba on equal footing with other countries in Latin or North America. *Social*'s graphic covers emulated Cubism, Futurism, and Art Deco."

The *Social* covers reproduced in this article are from the author's private collection, which she has donated to the Wolfsonian-FIU in Miami Beach, Florida. ■



# Eusebio Leal: Past, Present, and Future

By: Gustavo López

Dr. Eusebio Leal Spengler, Historian of the City of Havana, is among the contemporary Cuban personalities known to all citizens of the Cuban capital. Throughout the years, Leal has not only worked to preserve and restore Cuba's historic buildings but has also fostered a positive attitude essential for safeguarding Cuba's cultural and historic heritage, both material and intangible. His educational, altruistic, resolute, and continuous efforts have been acknowledged by Cubans for many years.

For Leal, historic restoration means more than returning beauty to a building. It also implies the transformation of a monument into an occasion for remembrance and reflection, a testament to what we were, are, and will be as a neighborhood, city, or nation.

Leal's involvement in the preservation of Cuba's heritage began at a young age under the guidance of his mentor, Dr.

Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring. Since then he has waged a daily, restless struggle to preserve important examples of Havana's architectural history and protect them from deterioration and impending destruction.

He has raised public awareness, causing Cubans to look at Havana with different eyes, eyes that know what the city was and where the future of its buildings, parks, monuments, traditions, and customs is heading. His work as leader of the Office of the Historian of the City encompasses not only the preservation of buildings but also the welfare of the inhabitants of the historic quarters, a concern for other Cuban cities and areas beyond our coasts as well. His restoration projects have been an inspiration for UNESCO and numerous cities in Latin America and other parts of the world, and he has received recognition and awards from universities, cultural institutions, and

governments, both in Cuba and other countries.

Leal's efforts and his vision that colonial buildings are not the only "patrimonially savable" structures has led to the rescue of such significant structures as the Palacio Cueto, the Lonja del Comercio (Merchant Guild), the monument to José Miguel Gómez, and the Green Tile House. Today preservation efforts are underway at Havana University, the Colon Cemetery, the Martí Theater, and the National Capitol. The Bacardi Building, Havana's most important example of Cuban Art Deco, is another structure that has been rehabilitated thanks to Leal's vision and the commitment of the office he heads to buildings from different periods of Havana's history.

Leal's support for the three Havana Art Deco workshops that have been conducted over the past ten years further demonstrate his interest in preserving all of Havana's built heritage. His encouraging words have established the course to follow in defending and protecting Cuban Deco. His actions teach us that we should not only look back, but must also focus on those with whom we live today and on future generations. ■



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# The Coolidge Corner Theatre Brookline, Massachusetts

By: Susan Quinn

*Much of the material in this article is derived from Only at the Coolidge: The Story of a Remarkable Movie Theater.*

The Coolidge Corner Theatre is New England's most successful independent, not-for-profit cinema. Built as a church in 1906, it was redesigned as an Art Deco movie palace in 1933 and has never closed its doors to the public since then. Located in the heart of Brookline, Massachusetts, it was the community's first movie theater and now, a non-profit foundation since 1988, it celebrates the experience of cinema by presenting the finest international, documentary, animated, and independent film selections and series.

From the sponsoring of china giveaways during the Depression to the prestigious Coolidge Award events inaugurated in 2004 honoring groundbreaking international artists from the world of film, the Coolidge Corner Theatre has played a unique and indelible role in the development and social history of the town of Brookline.

The many changes at the Coolidge in recent years have greatly altered the perception of the Theatre in the eyes of the public. The Coolidge has, in fact, experienced nothing short of a renaissance, transforming itself from a down-at-heel but beloved experimental arts venue to a stable, prosperous, and highly valued institution in the community.

## HISTORY

In 1933, the Harvard Amusement Company received approval from the Town of Brookline to build a 1500-seat movie theater over the Romanesque revival structure of the 1906 Beacon Universalist Church. The architect Ernest Hayward was hired, who proceeded with a "moderne" style which provided, for only 33 cents, the opportunity to escape the Depression and feel, for a few hours, as rich as a Rockefeller.

The interior was described by Julius Kaplan for the local paper: "Passing

from the lobby into the foyer, a vague impression of pomp grows upon one, a deepening consciousness of unmitigated luxury...voluptuous carpeting leads up the staircase with shining chromium banisters...The mezzanine lounge continues the riot of sumptuousness... From the balcony...a fantasia of pigment will burst upon moviegoers. Color and more color, design, pattern, angles, lines, curves, figures... The motley ceiling is stepped from the sides... The central panel is adorned with a series of large, stellar, fantastic patterns, painted in silver and hues of red, green, and blue."

The "art deco" Coolidge echoed a number of fashionable trends in the interwar years. It made use of Egyptian motifs, popular ever since the discovery of King Tut's tomb in 1922, and it had touches of Buck Rogers, particularly in the Saturn lighting fixtures. And like larger movie palaces, it was designed to dazzle. Luxurious materials abounded: walnut and ebony graced the foyer; gold sparkled from the bas-relief classical figures above the proscenium and from the curtain; the movie seats were pigskin, with plush backs. Some seats were even equipped with audiophones, so that the hard of hearing could enjoy the talkies.

"Once over the threshold," noted reporter Julius Kaplan, "you are in the land of oblivious make-believe and prepared for whatever romanticism and fantasticality the silver screen should serve up."

## ART HOUSE TRANSFORMATION

The Coolidge lasted several decades as the go-to movie palace for the Brookline area, but like many local cinemas, it began to struggle financially in the 1970s, as multiplexes in malls proliferated. In 1977, under the ownership of Justin Freed, the Coolidge was transformed into an art house cinema, showing classic

revivals, foreign movies new and old, and independent films – programming that greater Boston movie lovers could see nowhere else.

Another of Freed's important accomplishments was the twinning of the Coolidge theater in 1979. Preservationists might complain that closing off the balcony and creating a second screen destroyed the theater's architectural integrity. And Freed remembers "sitting there in the rubble and thinking 'what have I done?'" But having the two theaters allowed him to do repertory, mixing and matching films for the smaller and larger spaces.

## RESTORATION

In 1988, no longer to afford the day-to-day operation of the cinema, Freed put the Coolidge up for sale. Unable to find a way to preserve the theatre, he reached a purchase-and-sale agreement with a developer, who planned to either demolish the building or convert it to retail and office space. Fortunately, a grassroots effort from the local community saved the Coolidge from this fate, and the non-profit Coolidge Corner Theatre Foundation was formed in 1989.

While the Coolidge was able to keep its doors open as a movie theater, continuing financial struggles saw the building fall into disrepair. When Joe Zina, a local artist and dancer, became Executive Director of the Coolidge in 1999, one of his first orders of business was to restore the cinema to its original grandeur.

Right from the start, Zina began working with volunteers on Saturdays and Sundays to restore some of the art deco surfaces. "The walls were all draped in gold fiberglass curtains," Zina remembers. "They whitewashed and covered up the beautiful original décor and they stapled or nailed into the plaster – big nails. And then there was water damage from the roof being poorly maintained."

Over time, Zina oversaw the replacement of the sound system, and raised money for a new roof, new flooring, a reconfigured foyer and concession stand, a retractable stage, and lighting to go with it. The seats were replaced, and in 2009, with new Executive Director Denise Kasell at the helm, the beautiful art deco ceiling murals were restored.

It has been a long road, but the Coolidge is now among the most financially – and aesthetically – successful non-profit cinemas in the region. ■

# Casa de las Américas, a House for all!

By: Gustavo López

*Casa de las Américas*, located on Avenida de los Presidentes (Presidents Avenue) in the Havana neighborhood of Vedado, is a unique institution

within the Cuban and Latin American cultural scene in terms of both its illustrious work and the building that it occupies.

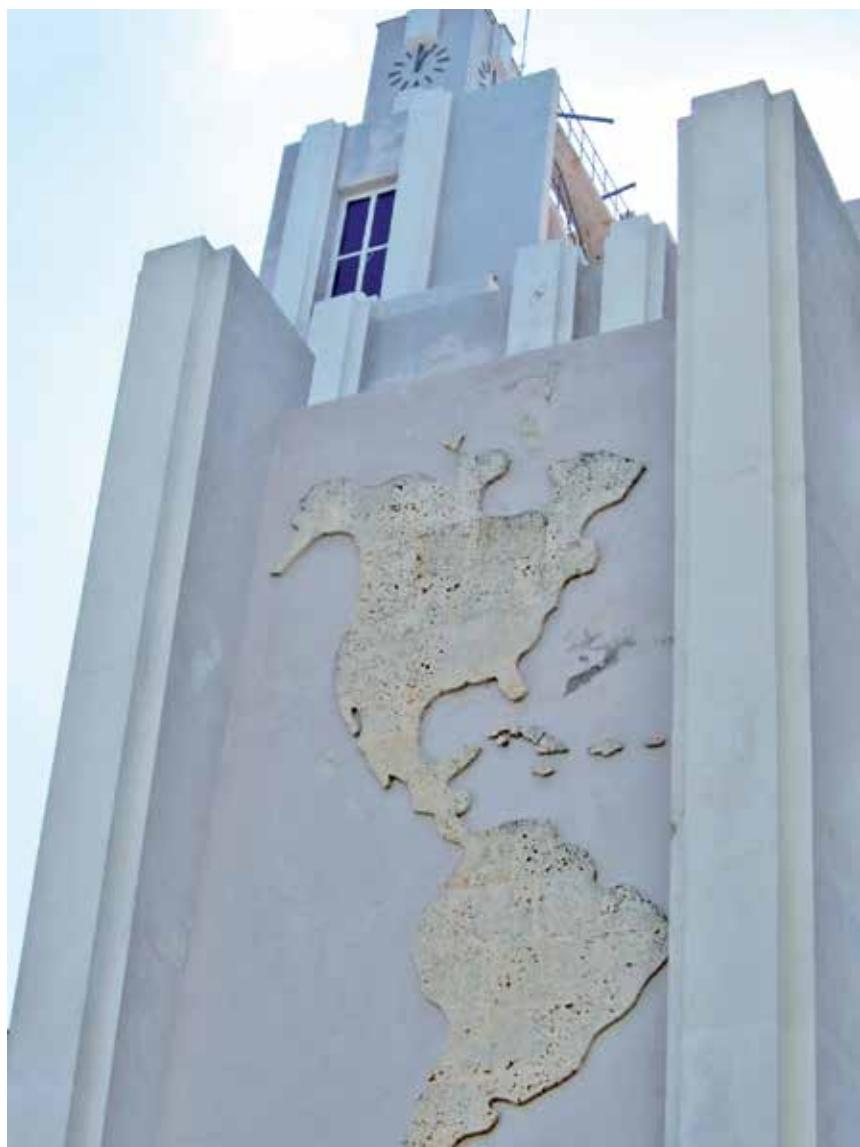
The *Casa de las Américas* institution was founded in 1959 with the purpose of researching, promoting, and awarding various types of artistic expression throughout Latin American and the Caribbean. The organization established the *Casa de las Américas* Literary Award in 1959. Other awards and meetings sponsored by the group are dedicated to theater, music and the visual arts.

The *Casa* library is one of the most extensive of its kind in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially with respect to literature of the second half of the twentieth century, and is the most complete in Cuba for that time period. The collection is the result of the collaboration of a broad and diverse group of intellectuals and academicians, institutions, and universities from countries throughout the region.

Among its most celebrated



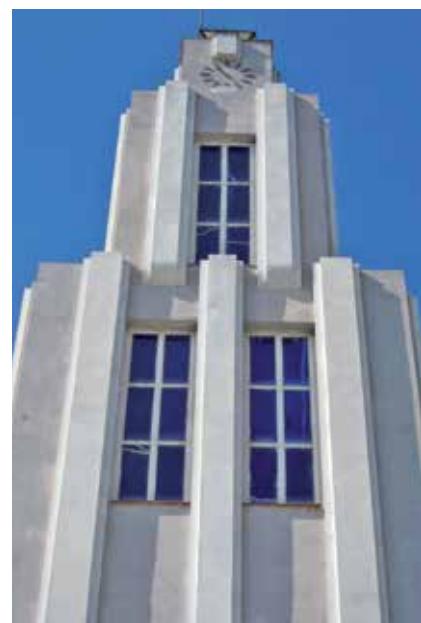
*Casa de las Américas.*



*Detail of Casa de las Américas.*

publications is *Revista Casa de las Américas*, a journal of the arts and ideas founded in 1960 by Haydeé Santamaría. It is one of the longest published journals of its kind in Latin America and the Caribbean. Other Casa de las Américas publications include *Anales del Caribe* (*Annals of the Caribbean*) and the *Music Bulletin*. The organization also has a record label, *Casa*.

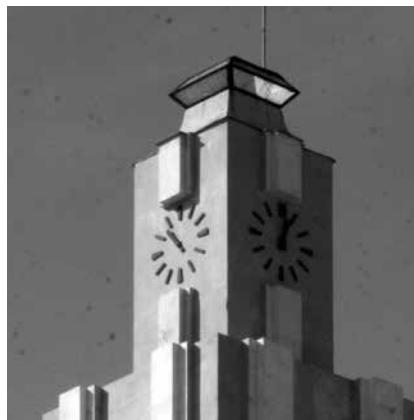
A remarkable Art Deco building, originally the luxurious home of María Luisa de Betancourt y Castillo, serves as the



*Detail of Casa de las Américas.*

headquarters for *Casa de las Américas*. In 1947, the Association of American Writers and Artists purchased the house, and in February 1953 it became the Continental House of Culture during the Congress of Writers Followers of Martí. In 1959, it became *Casa de las Américas*.

The house is a three-level horizontal block. A Jaimanitas stone sculptural relief representing the American continents, the symbol of the institution, adorns the façade at the second level. A handsome two-story staggered tower rises from the third level. A small cubic block containing a clock crowns the tower, which is topped by a spire of stained glass.



*Detail of Casa de las Américas.*

This prestigious institution will be the venue for the lecture program at the 12<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Art Deco. Delegates will gather in its spacious conference hall to discuss various subjects and issues. An exhibition of Cuban World Heritage Sites will also be on view during the Congress.

Once again, *Casa de las Américas*, as a leading cultural institution in Latin America and the Caribbean, will be our host. Always, the house of all!■

# ART DECO CATALOG BUENOS AIRES ARCHITECTURE

By: Adriana Piastrellini

Art Deco emerged in Buenos Aires architecture by the mid-20s. In each of its neighborhoods, the city of Buenos Aires produced an interesting catalog of deco buildings of very good quality.

In all typologies, whether humble one story houses, complex industrial constructions or magnificent residences, an attractive ornamental repertoire is exhibited, where the straight line and the superimposed or staggered levels prevail.



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## Costanera Sur (Buenos Aires)

Costanera Sur is an old coast esplanade in Port Madero, Buenos Aires. It operated as a public resort up to the 80s, when the shore was banked up and the South Coast Ecological Reservation was created, and the resort's function was lost forever.

During the 20s, there were many taverns and restaurants along the resort, and some of the buildings, designed by Hungarian architect Andrew Kalnay still exist though recycled. Today, there are food vans, small food posts with barbecue where steaks and sandwiches, among others, can be eaten.



The old  
Cervecería  
Munich (1927),  
today Museum  
Center.



The esplanade was an instant success and became an established stroll for the middle and lower-middle classes during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; thus, in 1924 the municipality of Buenos Aires requested Hungarian architect Andrew Kalnay the construction of a number of buildings and establishments to lease as restaurants and taverns. The most outstanding was occupied by Cervecería Munich, and the smaller by Carvecería Don Juan de Garay, *Brisas del Plata*, *La Perla* and *La Rambla*. Decades later, all closed and were abandoned, some were demolished, one became a convention hall and the Munich tavern became Telecommunications Museum and today is the venue of Buenos Aires Museums Center.

**The tavern group Brisas del Plata and Don Juan de Garay (demolished).**

the style had stopped being avant-garde. Its façade is impressive, showing a central volume with curved lines with columns and many elongated windows, it tops in a recognizable telescopic tower that gives the building its identity. At its ends, the front is paneled in black granite, and with an axial symmetry it shows two fringes covered with glass pieces that draw concentric semicircular patterns very characteristic of art deco decoration. The marquise is another element of great importance of the façade, since at night three large lamps of circular necks light the pavement constantly changing colors.



**OPERA THEATER**



**FORMER NEWSPAPER CRÍTICA**

### **The building today**

The first theater building dates 1870. In 1935, the Belgian architect Albert Bourdon designed the present Opera Theater, with characteristic Art Deco façade (inspired by the movie house *Le Gran Rex* in Paris). The theater has 2500 seats, a stage suitable for different shows and a large film screen.

The Opera Theater is one of the most important Buenos Aires buildings, and one of the finest Art Deco architecture pieces in the city, in spite of its late character, since by the time it was built

Though the first headquarters of the newspaper *Crítica* was at 800 Sarmiento St., they were really rented offices. It was in the mid-20s that the newspaper bought one of the few still free lots in Avenida de Mayo, with the purpose of building a big newspaper empire.

For that aim, the Hungarian architects Andrew and George Kalnay were hired, who in 1926 made the building's project. According to several sources, the building would have been mostly designed by George, while only the ornaments and the façade's decoration were of Andrew. The *Crítica* palace was inaugurated in

September, 1927, with a grand festivity as corresponded to the importance that the newspaper had at that time.



**MONUMENTAL MOVIE THEATER**

Located at the pedestrian street Lavalle, Movie Theater Monumental was opened the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 1931, on the initiative of the entrepreneurs Coll and Di Fiore, and very soon it received the

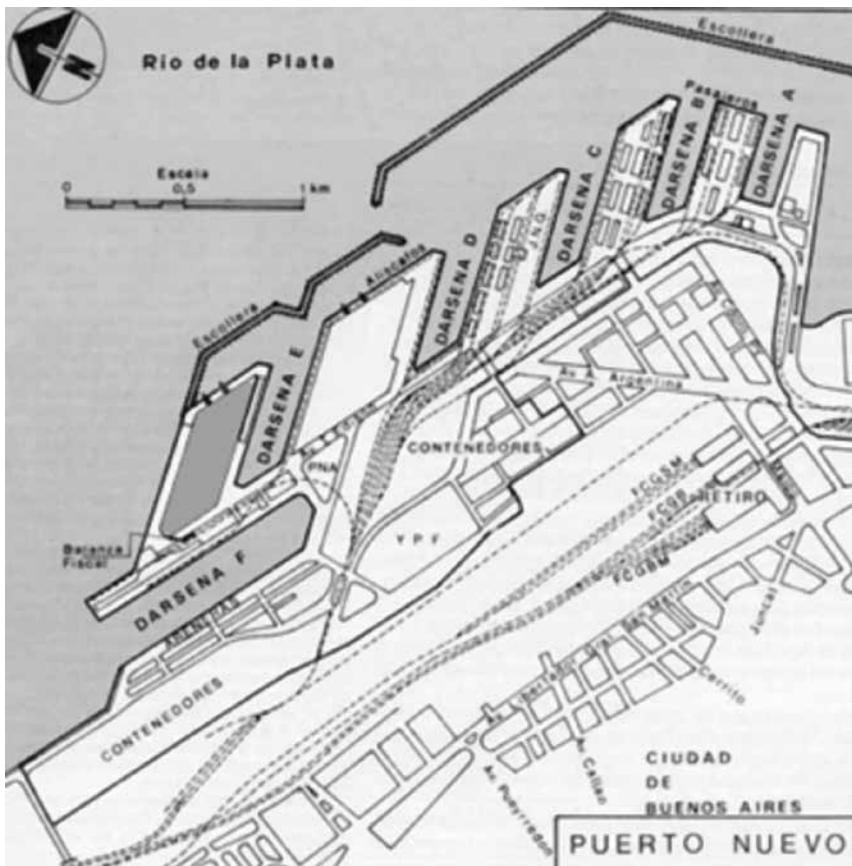
alias "the Argentinean Movie Cathedral", due to the importance that this theater gave to the incipient national film production.

During World War II because it was impossible to import films from other continents, the building was used for other shows (radio-plays

and plays), where famous companies and actors performed.



**SUPER USINA BUILDING**



Interesting examples of art deco expression were also industrial buildings. Here the Super Usina "Dr. Carlos Givogri" (electricity company) can be mentioned, planned in 1928, built in 1930 and inaugurated in 1933.



THE THEATER HOUSE



SHELL BUILDING

This is a large art deco style corporate building whose project was made by the architectural group of Héctor Calvo, Arnold Jacobs and Rafael Giménez and built by the enterprise Mulville y Cía, Ltd., the building was completed in 1936. It's located in a corner where two streets converge. It is topped by a clock identical to the one of Shell Mex headquarters in London, UK. It's an example of corporate architecture, with branch buildings in other countries following the features that identify them.



HOTEL MORENO

Hotel Moreno is a boutique hotel located in Monserrat neighborhood in Buenos Aires, near the May Square and Defense St.

Hotel Moreno is a boutique hotel located in Monserrat neighborhood in Buenos Aires, near the May Square and Defense St.

It was designed as an office building by the Hungarian architect Johannes Kronfuss in 1929 in art deco style and built by the company F.H. Schmidt SA. In 2006, this building was refurbished and restored by the Fernández-Huberman-Otero Studio to become today's hotel.

a film and play theater, but today it only functions as a play theater.

The ceiling had paraboloid form, which gave excellent acustics without echos or reverberations, while also giving good ventilation. It had a 12 meter (39.37 ft) projection over the stalls, central airconditioning and 2265 seats. The 19th of October, 1931, Carlos Gardel sang in this theater.



BROADWAY  
MOVIE  
THEATER

The Broadway Movie Theater is a 1929 project by Hungarian architect George Kalnay. This architect in his early years and working with his brother Andrew, was influenced by the architecture of his country of origin, later he made incursions into art deco to end within the functionalism movement.

The building was built by the German enterprise Wayss and Freytag and inaugurated October 11th, 1930, period in which movies had reached a peak in Argentina and small theaters had to adapt to perform plays and show films. Broadway Movie Theater was born as



KAVANAGH BUILDING

Kavanagh Building is a tall apartment building located in Florida St., facing San Martin Square, in the neighborhood Retiro of Buenos Aires.

The building was inaugurated in January 3, 1936. With its 120 m (393.70 ft) it was the tallest reinforced concrete building in South America of its time. It was also the first apartment building in Buenos Aires to have central air-conditioning system.

Work began on April 16, 1934, and the structure reached its maximum height very quickly (November 3, 1934). The building was built by Eng. Rodolfo Cervini's enterprise. The American Association of Civil Engineering distinguished this building in 1994 as a landmark in international engineering history.

There is much more to see and know about this fascinating style in our city of Buenos Aires, such as the work of architect Alejandro Virasoro, but that we will leave for another opportunity.



HouseVirasoro,  
2038 Agüero St. (1925)■

# Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Arquitectura Histórica (SPAH)

By: David Soto Padín



Sandy beaches, historic architecture and nice tropical countryside are what make Puerto Rico stand out as a destination for deco enthusiasts. Art Deco is one architecture style you will not miss while on the Island. The style's popularity exploded almost after 1930, and quickly established its identity as local architects helped make it their own.

From Pedro Méndez's tropical deco Miami Building to Jorge Juliá Pasarell's lighthouseinspired El Faro, there are many reasons to love Puerto Rican deco. There are buildings all over the island, of wide-ranging uses and importance. One place that can't be missed is Avenida Juan Ponce de León in San Juan, which in the past was known as "Puerto Rico's Broadway" due to the number of movie theaters along this avenue. Late in the 1930s, the government gave another push to art deco as it constructed educational facilities and government buildings in a more streamlined style, and extended art deco throughout the Island. Many locals naturally fell in love with the style and also built their own buildings in art deco fasion. Some even gave it their own flavor by combining deco styles with their own heritage through Spanish Revival



and Mediterranean Revival styles. Like our beautiful Island, Puerto Rican Art Deco was made to enchant. If you would like a tour

while on the Island, please coordinate with me, David R. Soto Padín by emailing me at [artdecopr@gmail.com](mailto:artdecopr@gmail.com). ■



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# Art Deco in the Ecclesiastical Architecture of Cuba

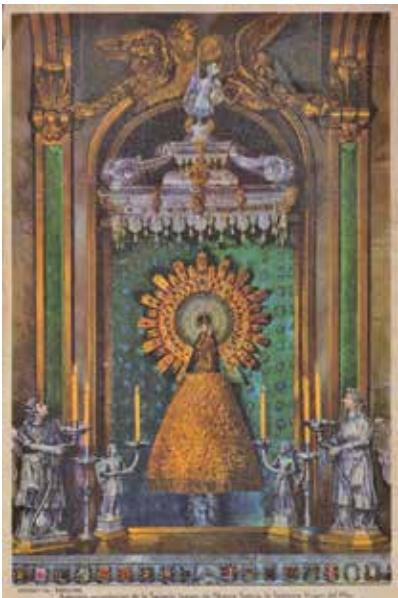
By: Gustavo López

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Gothic, Romanesque, Neocolonial, and Baroque precedents served as models for Cuban church design. By about 1930, however, the new modernity that introduced Art Deco to the national architectonic environment began to be reflected in the expressive shapes of new religious buildings.

In 1936 in the city of Cienfuegos, architect Luis Dauval designed a Baptist church unique in its lines and its location on a corner of the Cienfuegos Prado, the most important artery of the town. Located a few blocks away in the Convent of Servants of Mary is a Catholic chapel from 1940 designed by Federico Laureano Navarro Taillacq in a distinct Art Deco style.

The church that is today the Cathedral of Ciego de Ávila is a later example of the influence of Art Deco on Cuban houses of worship. The church that had previously occupied the lot had been dedicated in 1890 and extended in 1913.

It was demolished in 1947 to make way for a larger, more modern and functional building. On May 20, 1951, the new church, conceived by Cuban architect Salvador Figueras Peña, was dedicated with a solemn mass officiated by Monsignor Ríos y Anglés, bishop of Camagüey. On April 30, 1996, the church was designated



*Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's Patron Saint.*

a Cathedral, a rank that it highly deserves. The building's façade contains a statue of St. Eugene of La Palma, patron saint of the city of Ciego de Ávila. The church is currently being appraised in anticipation of its declaration as a National Monument of the Modern Movement.

In 1950, the Church of Saint Rita of Cassia, designed by architect Víctor Morales, was built on Quinta Avenida and 26 in the Miramar neighborhood of Havana. Prominent

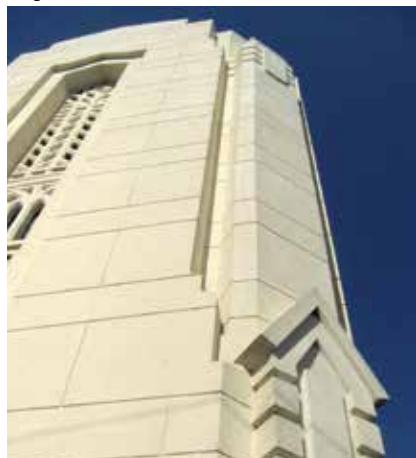
features of this work include the succession of arches in the interior ceiling, the strong geometric volume of the altar, and the extraordinary image of Saint Rita, the work of the famous Cuban sculptor Rita Longa. The following year, another ecclesiastical building belonging to the Art Deco architectural movement, the Methodist Church and Student Center of Vedado, received the Gold Medal Award, recognizing it as the most outstanding work of 1951. The architect was Ricardo E. Franklin Acosta.



These examples and the many other Art Deco churches in Cuba illustrate how deep-rooted the style is in this country and how Art Deco influenced all building types in Cuba. These buildings constitute what is today our Cuban Art Deco heritage. ■



*Ciego de Ávila's Cathedral.*



*Baptist church, Cienfuegos, Luis Dauval, 1936.*



*Methodist Church and Student Center of Vedado, Ricardo E. Franklin Acosta, 1951.*

# Locally Universal: A Trend in the Art Deco Era

By: WolneyUnes

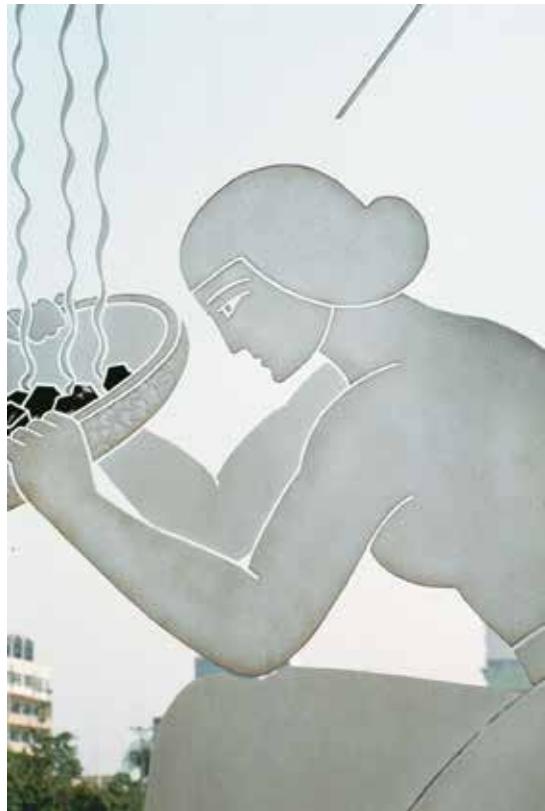
A hotel in Auckland displays a Norfolk Island Pine in the window, while in Porto Alegre, the façade of a cozy little building depicts a local araucaria. Palm trees ornament a theatre in Bogotá and more than one American building exhibits the American eagle. What these have in common is the urge to establish local links, typical to the products of the universal Art Deco era – contradictory as it may seem.

On the verge of the emerging industrial assembly line, with international trade increasing to never-before-seen figures, the need for marking the origin of a product was a natural path. Made for the world, yet with a local brand. Brazilian Art Deco was no different and buildings all around this continental country show off local plants, animals, and regional cultural references alike.

Thus, in Salvador, the old Brazilian capital amid cocoa plantations proudly exhibits cocoa leaves on its façades. In São

Paulo, the city was booming with rocketing international coffee prices at the time, so coffee beans and leaves make their appearance. Of course, cattle and the emerging local industry also appear on many of São Paulo's façades. However, cattle was also a popular choice in many glass windows in the new towns of the Midwest, where settlement started systematically only in the 1930s, sharing space with other traditional local trade, such as mining and agriculture. In Southern Brazil, references include local plants, such as the elegant and slim araucaria (*Araucaria brasiliensis*), a local pine tree.

One major Brazilian theme is undoubtedly the Indian, who appears nationwide. It is

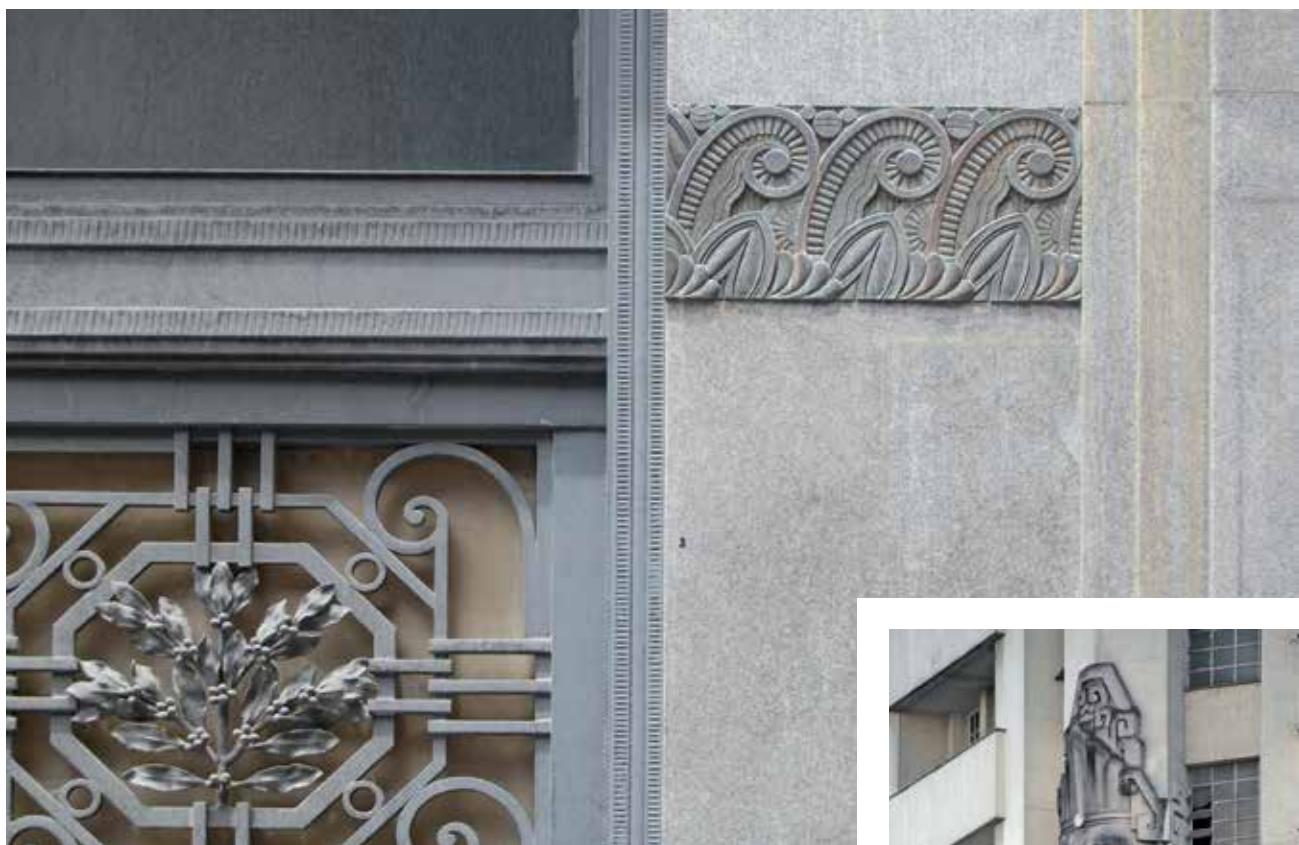


*Female figure prospecting gold on a stained window in Goiânia.*



*Indian face on the base of a monument in the port city of Santos (São Paulo).*

only natural that Indian characters would appear in a square in the Amazonian town of Santarém, while in southern Porto Alegre they pay tribute to the ancient Guarani nation. Colonial life in the large port of Santos was also characterized by trade and cultural relations with local tribes, which justify their presence there too. But only a strong move towards the imaginary could justify Indian faces showing up in the ancient mining territory of Minas Gerais: there, not only do small towns present Indian faces on the façades of their houses, but also one of the first skyscrapers (1943) in the newly built capital, Belo Horizonte, displays



Coffee beans and leaves on a bank in a São Paulo skyscraper façade.



Indian faces and geometric ornamentation on a façade in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul).

single huge Art Deco Indian face as its sole ornamentation. Not surprisingly, the 29-story skyscraper bears the name Acaíaca, the ancient Indian word for a Brazilian cedar (*Cedrelafissilis*). And again, the name is not a caprice, but part of a forceful tendency in Brazil.

Apart from images, names of buildings have also followed the trend in local art deco references. Picturesque building names of Indian origin (real or imaginary) can be found everywhere in Brazil and, of course, they are always in their typical colonial spelling: *Itahy*, *Tuyuty*, *Guahy*. Indian building names may rank high in the preference, but are not exclusive as family names and, again, local plant and animal names are also depicted in many façades.

For the modern passer-byer, this is surely an anachronism in the context of



An Indian face as single ornamentation on the façade of a 29-story skyscraper in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais).

the shift towards today's popular Brazilian fashion of adopting names in English. Today, barely 100 years after the Art Deco era, the world is still global. But being local is out. ■

# Aracajú, a hidden Art Deco treasure

By: Geo Darder

Just halfway between the huge cities of Salvador de Bahía and Recife, in the Brazilian Atlantic coast, lays a tiny place: Aracajú, the capital of Sergipe, the smallest among the Brazil states.

Aracajú was founded in 1855 and nowadays has a population of

nearly half a million people. Even in this remote location of the South American subcontinent we can find the echoes of Art Deco, showing once again how deeply this art expression has permeated the aesthetics of an entire progress founding generation. ■



*Views of the Aracajú Art Deco, Brazil.*



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# HAVANA ART DECO ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE

Available Fall  
2013



MARÍA ELENA MARTÍN ZEQUEIRA

The *Havana ART DECO Architectural Guide* is the first to recognize the enormous importance of Cuba's Art Deco architecture. It features over 200 structures, including hotels, churches, theaters, social clubs, and private residences. Street maps for all neighborhoods as well as archival and contemporary photographs supplement the texts. This is an essential source book of Art Deco architecture for travelers and architects alike.

[www.havanadecoguide.com](http://www.havanadecoguide.com)

# Books summary

## Catalina

Mario Coyula

Editorial Renacimiento, 2011.



Catalina by Cuban-born author Mario Coyula, an architect and urban planner, celebrates the frustration of searching for the impossible. The novel describes the quest of a man for an extremely beautiful woman who died before he was born

and is based on the real-life figure of Catalina de Lasa (1875-1930), considered the most beautiful woman in Havana's Belle Époque at the turn of the nineteenth century. The text is written primarily in the form of long monologues by the three main characters, Catalina, the Husband, and the Architect, with frequent overlapping as the architect follows the couple's trail. He also remembers his own childhood and youth in the 1940s and 1950s. The story offers a view into the values, habits, and lifestyle of the Cuban upper bourgeoisie from aristocratic descent, a social class that was displaced from economic and political power three times between 1868 and 1959.

## Havana, Cuba. An Architectural Guide

Maria Elena Martín Zequeira and Eduardo Luis Rodríguez Fernández

Cuidad de la Habana, 1998.

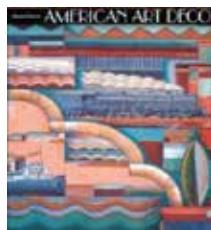


This indispensable guide contains 252 examples of Havana architecture and urban design, including squares, promenades, buildings, and urban assemblages ranging from colonial fortresses, churches, and palaces with thick walls of fossiliferous stone

to modern reinforced concrete constructions. Historic and contemporary photographs, engravings, lithographs, and architectural plans accompany the descriptions of these works. Entries are organized into nine geographic areas, each with a map of that section of the city, and are indexed by building name, the names of architects and artists associated with the work, and the year of completion.

## American Art Deco

Alastair Duncan



Art Deco was the most important decorative style of the late 1920s and 1930s, and its expression in America was seen in virtually every area of the fine and decorative arts: architecture, sculpture, furniture, textiles, ceramics, silver, graphic arts, and jewelry.

This splendid book explores the indigenous tradition of Art Deco in America and, in over 500 illustrations, reveals the beauty and extent of the style as it was manifested here. Most of the important buildings, in all parts of the country, were embellished with strong Art Deco themes. William van Alen, Ely Jacques Kahn, and Joseph Urban, among others, created some of the most memorable architecture of the century: the Chrysler Building and Radio City Music Hall in New York; the Union Trust Building in Detroit; the Richfield Oil Building and the Pan-Pacific Auditorium in Los Angeles. Furniture, whether in homes, offices, restaurants, or nightclubs, was revolutionized by Art Deco's modernist stylizations (including the uniquely American skyscraper motif), and American designers from Paul Theodore Frankl to Donald Deskey to Russel Wright to Walker von Nessen created sofas, screens, and dressing tables in the Art Deco spirit. On radios, book covers, fabrics, automobiles—the influence of Art Deco abounded.

This beautifully produced volume brings American Art Deco to life with illustrations of objects ranging from cocktail shakers to the Trylon and Perisphere of the 1939 World's Fair in New York. Alastair Duncan, an internationally acknowledged authority on Art Deco and Art Nouveau, and author of many books on the subject, has written the definitive volume on the American interpretations of one of the most successful design styles of the century. Illustrated in color and black-and-white throughout.

## Great Houses of Havana: A Century of Cuban Style

Hermes Mallea



GREAT HOUSES OF HAVANA: A Century of Cuban Style (The Monacelli Press, November 2011) architect and author Hermes Mallea gives the first-ever insider tour of Havana architectural gems. Great

Houses of Havana brings the reader inside never before published homes, presenting their fascinating personal histories alongside Havana architectural patrimony.

Great Houses of Havana invites the reader to experience the privileged life within the gated mansions of the city grandest neighborhoods. The book is unique in incorporating the reminiscence of eyes witnesses - architects, historians, present and former homeowners whose memories of mid-century Havana were on the verge of being lost. These anecdotes bring alive the larger than life personalities including sugar barons, a rags-to-riches newspaper magnate, a lady anthropologist, an influential arts patroness and the hostess to the early Jet Set.

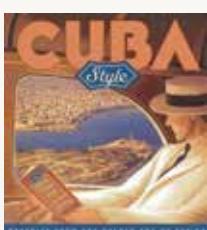
Mallea, a Cuban American expert in resident design, presents portraits of important homes built in the city between 1860 and 1960, beginning with the extraordinary images taken by American photographer, George Barnard, who was permitted to bring his camera into the intimacy of the Palace of the Counts of Santovenia. These pictures set the standard for giving the reader access inside a famously closed world.

For over four hundred years, Havana was the center of Spanish trade in the western hemisphere. With the expansion of the sugar industry, independence from Spain, and North American investment, Havana became a city of great wealth, great style, and great houses - the Paris of the Caribbean with impressive public works projects asserting the city international standing.

<http://www.greathousesofhavana.com>

## Cuba Style: Graphics from the Golden Age of Design

Steven Heller and Vicki Gold Levi



This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the national republic of Cuba. To usher in the centenary, Steven Heller and Vicki Gold Levi have collected hundreds of vintage graphics of Cuba from the 1920s to the 1959

revolution. Cuba Style recalls the days of glory when the island was a veritable resort colony for Americans and Europeans who came in search of Latino music and dancing, gambling, tropical romance, and the best beaches in the Americas. To advertise these attractions, Cubano graphists combined elements of Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Bauhaus modernism, and Vegas-style kitsch in a distinctly Cuban sensibility. Cuba Style, the first book of its kind, reproduces a treasure trove of graphics from popular magazines, packaging, posters, and indigenous products such as liquor

# Books summary

and cigars. It is a visual history of Cuba in its golden age as well as a wellspring of capitalist extravagance, seen here through the rare graphics of its extraordinary and now lost popular culture. Published October 1st 2002 by Princeton Architectural Press.

## Havana Deco

Alejandro G. Alonso, Pedro Contreras and Martino Fagioli  
W. W. Norton & Company, 2007

Cuban artists and architects of the 1920s through the 1940s embraced the innovative, modern approach to design now known as Art Deco but infused it with a distinctive Latin flavor. Their unique tropical interpretation of this stylistic movement can be seen in the architecture, interiors, furniture, and graphics of that period showcased in Havana Deco, an excellent introduction to the Art Deco treasures that await visitors to the Cuban capital.

The book's 175 pages trace the evolution of Art Deco architecture in Cuba from its introduction in the late 1920s through its later manifestation in the Streamline designs of the 1940s. The authors also address the adoption of Art Deco for diverse building types ranging from commercial towers to single- and multifamily residences to hospitals, theaters, and churches. Color photographs document such Cuban Art Deco icons as the polychromatic Bacardí Building with its stepped tower, the interior of the home of Catalina Lasa and Juan Pedro Baró, and the monuments of the Cristóbal Colón cemetery, as well as lesser known yet architecturally significant projects such as an early Art Deco office building designed by Leonardo Morales. The influence of Art Deco on the visual arts is also examined through the Deco-era work of painter Amelia Peláez, graphic artist Conrado Massaguer, sculptor Rita Longa, and other Cuban artists of the time.

As David Unger writes in the preface, "This book bears testimony to the need to protect and restore Havana's Deco past to the same degree that the guardians of Cuba's architectural history have restored and replenished dozens of buildings in Habana Vieja [Old Havana]."

## The Havana Guide: Modern Architecture 1925-1965

Eduardo Luis Rodriguez  
Princeton Architectural Press, 2000

While Havana's colonial mansions have recently received worldwide attention, the immense wealth of modern architecture in Cuba has long been neglected.

The first half of the twentieth century was a culturally rich era for Cuba, a time in which the architects of the Modern Movement

sought to define an identity for this Caribbean nation. However, within a few years after the revolution of 1959, design ideology became allied with the mass-production aesthetic promoted by the Soviets, and many Cuban architects fled to seek creative and political freedom abroad.

The Havana Guide is the first to recognize the enormous importance of Cuba's modern architecture. It features over 200 structures, including hotels, churches, theaters, social clubs, and private residences. Street maps for all neighborhoods as well as archival and contemporary photographs supplement the texts. Also included is a history of modern architecture in Cuba. This is an essential source book of modern architecture for travelers and architects alike.

## Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub

Rosa Lowinger and Ofelia Fox  
Harcourt, Inc., 2007

At the Tropicana nightclub you could play the roulette wheel, dance to the latest mambo or rumba, or simply ogle the parading goddesses of the flesh. It was the brightest jewel in 1950s Cuban nightlife, and Nat "King" Cole, Liberace, Josephine Baker, and Carmen Miranda performed there before audiences that included Ernest Hemingway, Marlon Brando, and Joan Crawford.

In Tropicana Nights, Rosa Lowinger and Ofelia Fox, widow of Martin Fox, the club's last owner, take readers back to its glory years. Ofelia, the "first lady" of Tropicana, shares her memories, undimmed by decades of exile, with Rosa Lowinger, also a Cuban exile, whose parents frequented the club in its heyday. Together, Lowinger and Fox vividly portray the cultural richness and roiling social problems of pre-Revolutionary Cuba and take the reader on a tour of one of the world's most glamorous venues at its most brilliant moment.

## Havana, Then and Now

Lillian Llanes  
Thunder Bay Press, 2004



Established in 1519 as a harbor city to service the fleets bound for Spain from Mexico and Peru, Havana became the busy portal to the vast Spanish colonial empire.

Largely unharmed by war or weather, many great examples of Spanish colonial architecture

survive today. Dozens of archival photographs from Havana's mid-twentieth-century heyday as a posh vacation spot are featured here opposite contemporary photographs, portraying a beautiful city undergoing restoration and struggling to regain its glory days.

## Buenos Aires Art Deco and Rationalism

Fabio Gremontieri  
Ediciones Xavier Verstraeten, 2008

The book, which belongs to the "Buenos Aires Art Nouveau" saga, provides a broad view of the Buenos Aires Art Deco and Rationalist heritage, pointing out its values as an important component of the city's architectural and cultural heritage. Scattered throughout the city are buildings of diverse styles that constitute areas and neighborhoods that are valuable and worth preserving.

Buenos Aires, unlike other cities, especially European cities, was not developed and unified in a specific period or style, for example, Gothic, Baroque, Art Nouveau, or Art Deco. Because of this patrimonial nature of Buenos Aires, preservation is approached from two points of view: the urban landscape and the architectonic objects or cultural assets of the city that constitute our heritage systems.

This book attempts to propagate the value of the Art Deco and Rationalism heritage system and the need for its preservation.

## The Houses of Old Cuba

Lillian Llanes and Jean-Luc de Laguarie  
Thames & Hudson, 2001

From the indigenous simple huts known as bohios to sumptuous neoclassical villas, from the grand palaces of the Spanish occupation to luxurious quintas or country mansions, all the secrets and enchantments of Cuban life, past and present, remain intact today in the city of Havana, in the towns of Trinidad, Camaguey, and Santiago de Cuba, and in the countryside. This superbly illustrated book reveals a Cuban architectural heritage that is often ignored or hidden from the view of visitors to the island.

Drawing upon local archives, museum records, memoirs, diaries, and other native sources, Lillian Llanes describes Cuba's architectural history from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The evolution of Cuban architecture, influenced by climate and by social conditions, parallels the cultural, political, and economic history of the island, and the houses and their decoration reflect periods of greater or lesser prosperity, as well as social inequalities.

# Deco Delights

By: Geo Darder

It is 2013. The past wants to be reborn. Memories of the 30's, 40's, 50's are on the verge of moving into a Cuba that renews itself on a daily basis. But the structures have lost their shape, straight lines are today full of bends, and the sense of verticality is no longer so imposing. Only the will to rescue, the dreams, the sounds, the smells remain. Aromas that pierce the memory, control time and settle into houses. Private houses turned into exclusive restaurants, called paladares.

Cuban paladares are becoming more popular everyday. The places were you want to explore and learn the creativity of the locals that turn ruins into paradises. Key places to feel the flavor of Cuban cuisine and know its people. Needs was perhaps the main reason for this phenomenon, but I want to believe it was ingenuity. I see the drive for progress, the desire to transform reality and a governmental opening as the generators of the change, of many houses turning into paladares. That is the spirit of the Cuba I know, 'the real and marvelous'.

Countless are the spots to delight the palate, however, within the great cuisine, exclusiveness will stand out. And those unique lights in the city of Havana only exist in those houses where architectural beauty blends with the delicious aroma of Cuban cuisine.

**Le Chansonnier** stands out for its excellent design and stylish interior decoration. The food is exquisite as the dishes they are served on.

Address: Calle J No. 259, e/ 15 y Línea.  
Tel. 07/832-1576.

**Vistamar** is a seafront duplex house of the 1950's in the Miramar neighborhood. This wonderful house has one of the first infinity pools built in Havana. The view from the paladar offers beautiful sunsets and synchronized waterworks directly from Mother Earth. Vistamar is known for their seafood dishes.

Address: Ira. Ave. #2206 e/ 22 y 24.  
Tel. 07/203-8328.

**La Fontana**, located in Miramar, this 1950's home is a favorite of Cuban artists. They are known for their meats and seafood. Depending on the night, there is live music. They offer in-/out-door seating.  
Address: Calle 3ra. A. esq. 46 No. 305  
Miramar.  
Tel. 07/202-8337.

**La Esperanza**, a charming art deco home located in Miramar is lavished with beautiful antiques. You enter a Cuban era gone by. Owner Hubert and staff are very flamboyant in their style of serving. They serve a bit of attitude with their delicious cuisine. And, rightfully so! This paladar is a favorite to diplomats and foreign investors.  
Address: Calle 16 entre Ira. y 3ra.  
Miramar.  
Tel. 07/202-4361.

**La Casa**. A family owned paladar located in the neighborhood of Nuevo Vedado is a wonderful example of modern 1950's architecture with its green terrazzo floors and indoor fresh water ponds. La Casa

promises a relaxing dining environment. "This is run by a family who always does its best". Lovely house with an interior turtle pond in one of the rooms. The family (including grandma) will take good care of you.  
Address: Calle 30 #865, e/ 26 y 41.  
Tel. 07/881-7000.

**La Guarida**, is located in a tenement building and well known for being the location for the famous Cuban film called Strawberry and Chocolate. A favorite for tourist.

Address: Concordia #418 e/ Gervasio y Escobar, Centro Habana.  
Te. 07/866-9047.

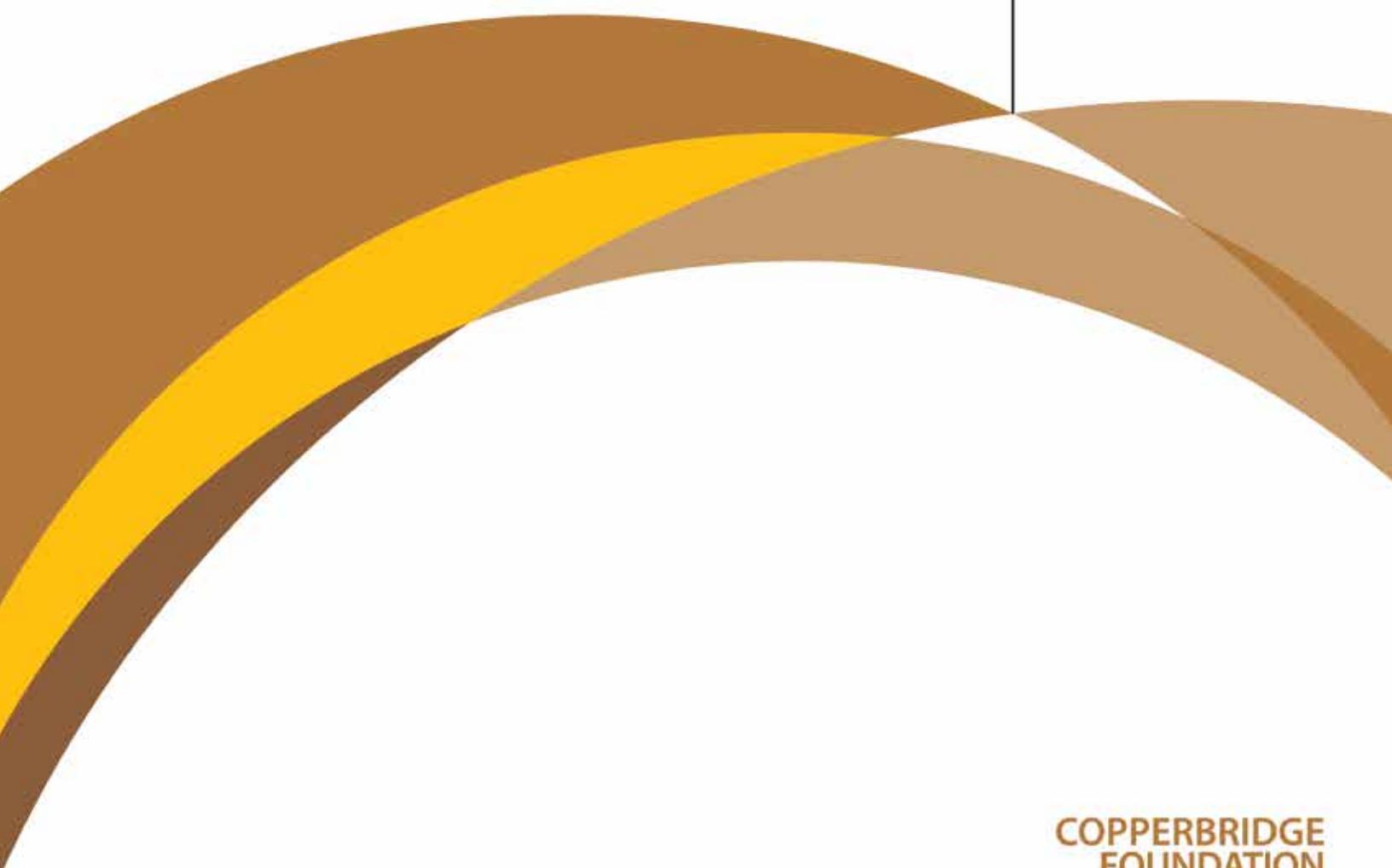
**Buena Vida**. Vegetarian restaurant located in Playa neighborhood. It is a charming art deco house with wonderful decor.  
Address: 46 esq. 11, Playa.  
Tel. 07/202-5816.

**Atelier**. Elegant Mediterranean home with a spacious outdoor roof top patio. Great ambiance.  
Address: 5ta. e/ Paseo y 2, Vedado.  
Tel. 07/836-2025.

**Chanchullero**. A new hip local joint offering inexpensive but very good food. Cool place to meet interesting people.  
Address: Tte. Rey e/ Cristo y Bernaza,  
Old Havana.  
Tel. 07/862-8227.

**Carboncita**. The best pizza parlor in Havana. Good Foccacia and Pasta.  
Address: 3ra. e/ 38 y 40, Miramar.  
Tel. 07/203-0261.

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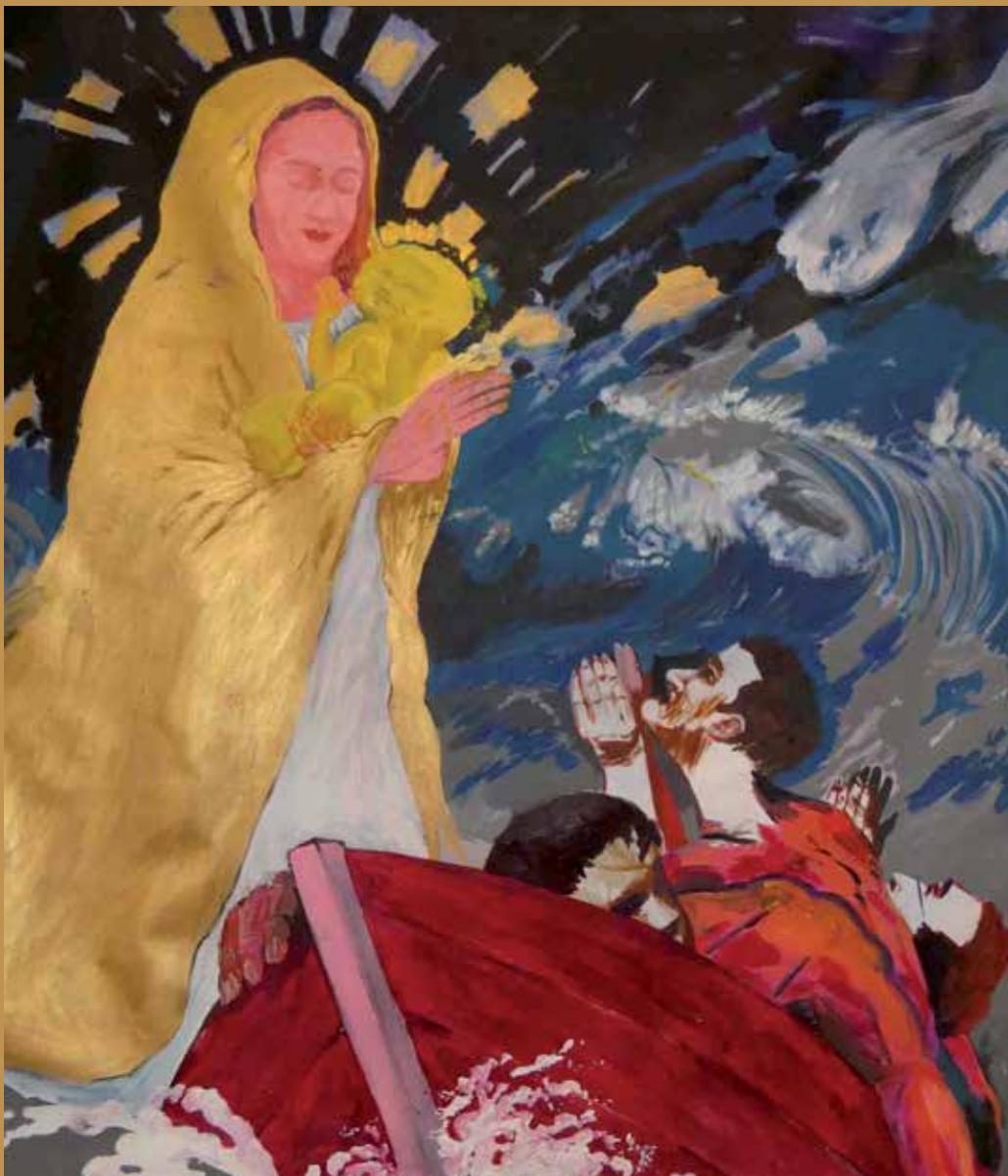
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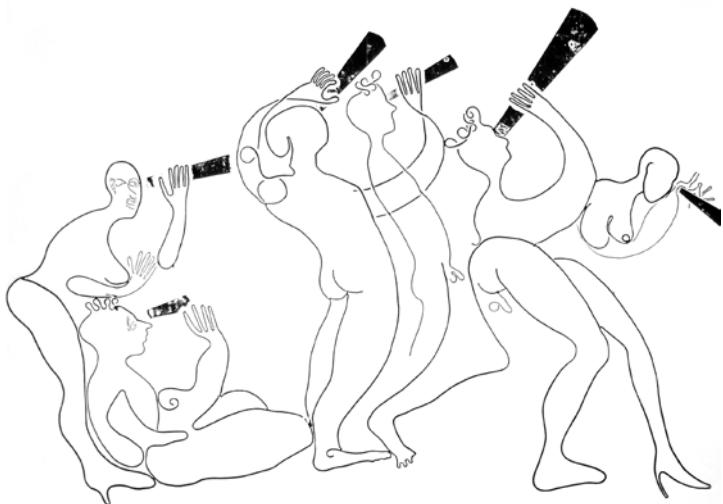
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*Hepatitis I-II-III.* Acrílico sobre tela,  
137 x 157cm 124 x 123cm 106 x 161cm, 2008



*socialismo.com, 2011.*



*Vigilancia Colectiva.* Díptico alambregrafia,  
610 x 170 cm, 2009.

## Noel Morera Cruz

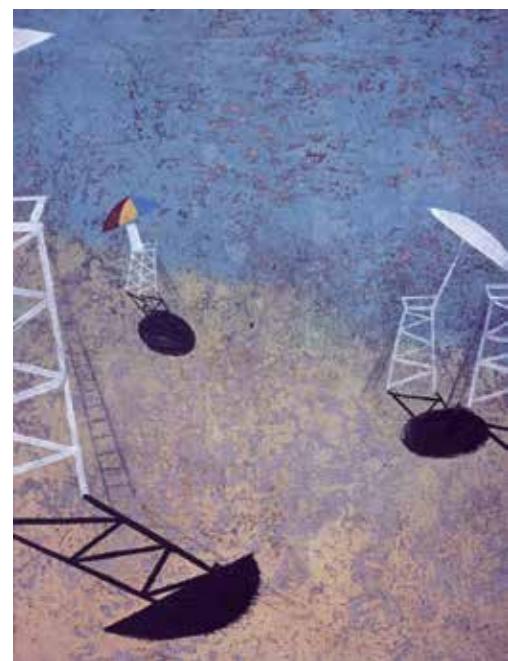
Mantanzas, 1962.

Noel Morera is a painter, draftsman, engraver, gold-silversmith, ceramist, and set designer. He was forced to interrupt his studies in the 1980s for expressing his political ideas. He is a countercurrent artist. During his artistic career, there have been no reiterations, he has always shown himself to be a nonconformist, ready for change but without renouncing his own style, a very peculiar poetry.

One of the most emblematic figures found in his work is the Zorro (Fox) character.



Puerto #50. Desecho petrolífero de la Bahía de La Habana  
Lienzo, 150 x 200cm. 2006.



Vistas de Altura. Mixta tela, 200 x 150 cm, 2005.

Showing a delicious sense of humor, the artist sarcastically laughs at the Zorro, turning him into an anti-hero.

Noel expresses himself in different techniques and media: on canvas and in engravings, drawings, objects, and furniture-sculptures, all of which display his dexterity, command of color, and talent at set design. He has also forayed into the audiovisual, as in his collaboration with artists like X Alfonso and the recent film by actor and director Jorge Perrugorría,

*Se Vende* (2012), inspired by episodes of the artist's life and illustrated with his most recent work.

"I do not believe in a Virgin caring for all of us, I believe in a Virgin that exists within all," he stated in explaining the series *Madre de Todos los Cubanos* (Mother of all Cubans). Here he discourses from his own perspective on the religious devotion of Cubans living in the island or abroad, converted or not converted, committed or not to the

revolutionary Government, all believers in a Virgin, the *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* (Virgin of Charity of the Copper mine).

His courage to think for himself and his tolerance to accept all manifestations of life are obvious. He destroys and builds the myth of the modern man. He is not interested in the market, nor in art magazines. He is not a member of any political party. His true affiliation is his family; his trade is to be Cuban.

## Nicomedes Díaz Gijón

Holguín, 1967.

Nicomedes Díaz Gijón is a self-taught artist who in the 1990s was a disciple of master Cosme Proenza in whose workshop he studied painting and other disciplines. His talent, apparent from the very beginning of his career, has allowed him to develop his own work independently and creatively. His first exhibition of religious painting was held in 1994 at the Cathedral of Holguín in Cuba.

Nicomedes's work demonstrates his mastery of many disciplines, with an emphasis on painting, ceramics, work with precious metals, polychromatic wood sculptures, and restorations. He focuses on religious themes and has dedicated the majority of his time to creating images of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (Patron Saint of Cuba). His replicas of the Virgin are found in several parishes in Cuba, including Saint Augustine in Havana, as well as in the church of Saints Aquila and Priscilla in Rome, Italy. Most recently, he restored the Vera Cruz Christ in Trinidad, the Cuban city founded nearly 500 years ago. His paintings have been successfully exhibited throughout the world, and are found in important European collections.

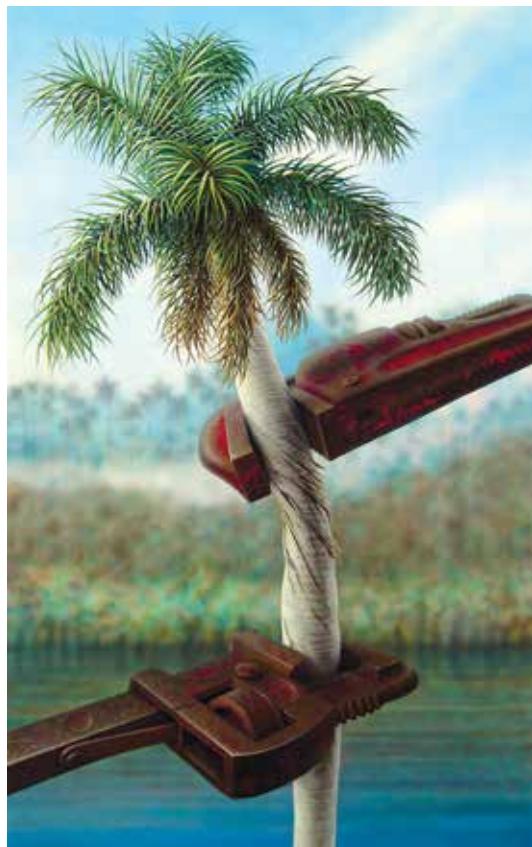
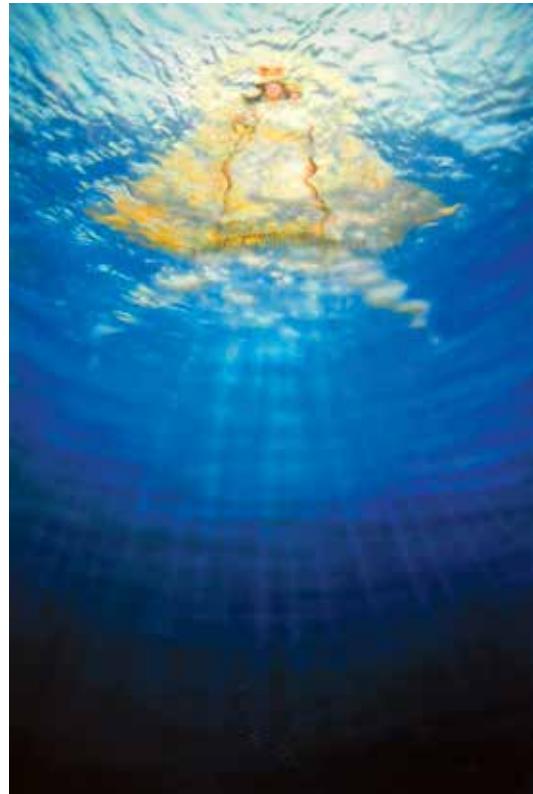
Nicomedes is a creator living in our time, although his real time is in previous centuries, for his talent reflects the aesthetics of the past.

Only a few understand his true trade and applaud his divine hand as a restorer of the soul of an icon of the Cuban nation.



Replica of Our Lady of Charity created for the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the appearance of the Virgin. Convent San Francisco de Asís, La Habana Vieja, 2012.

*"Bienaventurados los mansos, porque ellos poseerán en herencia la tierra." San Mateo 5.4.*  
183 x 114 cm.  
Acrylic / canvas  
2011



## Alan Manuel González

Havana, 1972.

Alan Manuel grew up playing with watercolor and drawing and architectural instruments found in his father's drawers. He continued experimenting on paper and later took art lessons at the local cultural house. He graduated from the Arts Vocational School Paulita Concepción in 1986 and in 1990 from the Academy of Fine Arts of San Alejandro, where he had his first exhibition.

In 1994, the dismal economic situation in Cuba caused Alan to interrupt his studies at the Higher Institute of Art (ISA). In 1998, he immigrated to the United States, where he worked for six years as a cake decorator. The artist describes his creations from this time as "empheral art," three-dimensional

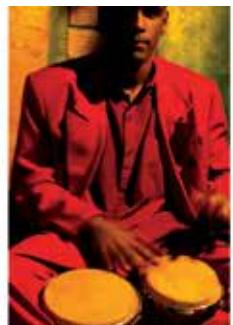
sculptures and high reliefs, all very sweet and appetizing, airbrushed with edible colors. This experience allowed him to develop the type of work he does today. His new incursion into art, alternating with cake decoration, began with acrylic on canvas.

Alan returned to Cuba to be with his mother in 2004, and since then, he has dedicated himself solely to painting. In 2007, he once again began exhibiting his work in galleries and museums, first in a group exhibition at La Acacia Gallery and then in a solo exhibition, La Luz del Mundo (The Light of the World), in 2008. Seven more solo exhibitions followed. The most recent, Ruega Con Nosotros (Pray with Us), was held in the Cathedral of Havana in 2012.



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# The Festival's House

By: Oscar Ruiz de la Tejera

Born in Havana on December 3, 1979, the New Latin American Film Festival is and has been an occasion for solidarity and festivity for all authentic film projects rooted in the region's culture. This event has always been open to the most revolutionary currents of thought and modes of expression. The festival is an irreconcilable enemy of any canonization of the expression of rusticity, any discriminating trend, whether elitist or populist, and, well, any dogma or manifestation signifying cultural impoverishment.

## On the Headquarters

Twenty-two festivals have taken place in the building on Twenty-third Street in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana, but the event will never again be held there. The State Council of Cuba has decided to create a headquarters for the Festival in a recently refurbished mansion, undoubtedly solid and magnificent, representative of those

that predominated in Vedado during the first half of the twentieth century. The headquarters is on Second Street between 17th and 19th Street, midway between the ICAIC building and the Hotel Nacional (the usual center of activities and preferred accommodation for delegates and guests to the film festival). The building is impressive due to the solidity of its walls, the absence of ornamentation, and the suggestion of movement it conveys.

## On the Former Residents

The mansion, characteristic of the high bourgeoisie of the first half of the twentieth century, was commissioned by Hilda Sarrá Larrea when she married the lawyer Juan Portela. Hilda Sarrá's father, Ernesto Sarrá, amassed a great fortune marketing pharmaceutical products. Her mother, Dolores Larrea, was a descendant of the wave of Spanish immigrants that came to Cuba at the beginning of the twentieth century and

made a fortune in sugar production. This so-called sugar aristocracy imitated the manners and styles of the more cultured Europeans, changing the traditional life modes of the island's wealthy classes.

In 1949, the family, following the fashion, escaped the invasion of commercial establishments and apartment buildings that began contaminating the once exclusive neighborhood of El Carmelo in Vedado by moving west to the heights of Miramar. The house was subsequently rented to Dutch diplomats and later became the Ambassador's Residence and Chancellery of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1999, the noise generated by the building's neighbors caused the Chancellery to move elsewhere.

## On the Architectonic Style

Designed in 1934 by the prestigious Cuban architect Rafael de Cárdenas, the mansion is one of the most original exponents of the period's residential architecture. It was one of the first houses in the city to use elements of the rationalist style, although these features are mixed with soft curves reminiscent of the Streamline trend in fashion in the United States at the time. The lack of ornament enhances the appreciation of the vigorous, rectilinear volumes. The design also incorporates undulating forms, and the circle, semicircle, and ellipse of the plans create a sense of movement.

## On the Grounds

A dense and beautiful garden surrounds and isolates the house. Each side of the garden differs and it becomes surprisingly transformed depending on the direction from which it is viewed. Staggered terraces climb toward the west, turning the first story of the lower portion house into the basement of the higher section. To the south, it appears horizontal. Toward the east, two levels, a tall and a low one, separated by a retaining wall are



*Interior staircase of Festival House.*



*Interior staircase of Festival House.*

visible. There is a gradual descent to the north. A high fence on the west separates the house from the neighboring mansion once owned by Pedro Baró and Catalina de Lasa and today Casa de la Amistad. A rectangular pool is located on the higher level in front of the fence.

### On Function Distribution

The ground floor contains rooms for servants, the garages, and a side entrance that leads to the main staircase and the staircase that communicates directly with the kitchen and the pantry. The second, or main, floor includes the entrance hall and reception room, a bar, the terrace, the dining room, bathrooms, and vertical passageways. The bedrooms occupy the third floor. The single large hall on the fourth floor, surrounded by terraces accessed solely via the service stairs, was probably a library or private living room. A one-story pavilion, originally the bowling alley and game room and later modified to house the Chancellery, stands in front of the north façade.

Between the pavilion and the house, there is an interior drive perpendicular

to Second Street that provides access to both the pavilion and house. It ends against the fence that separates the neighboring mansion on the east. The disconcerting location of the entrance conceals the main façade hindering its full appreciation.

### On the Poetic Expression of the Architecture

“...the beautiful rhinoceros wants to dance; all say it cannot be done, but maybe...”

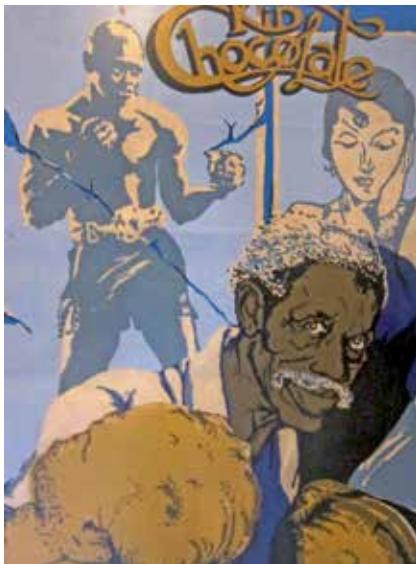
This phrase perhaps suggests the poetry expressed by the architecture of this house. Architectonic language generally manifests itself in two spaces. The first is a visible, concrete one where we compose, organize (according to diverse laws) volumetric masses of different shapes, sizes, proportions, colors and textures, where we preferably play with lights and shades. The second is virtual, imaginary, suggested by the above passage. Here is where the expression of subjectivity occurs. It is in this “other space” where the imprint, the atmosphere of the architecture manifests itself.

The center of the composition is a solid prism with a rectangular base of smooth walls devoid of ornament, with discreet flounces on balconies and heavy parapets. A prism that in spite of its solidity tries to convey to us the illusion that it can spin and dance; an illusion of movement created by the shape and arrangement of the different architectonic elements.

On the main floor to the south, the cylinder that holds the bar and the terrace with its wood latticework roof served as a breakfast, snack, or informal dinner dining room. The balconies that emerge on the third floor embrace two of the opposite corners, following the diagonal of the prism. Their discreet flounces and undulations



*Detail ceiling lighting of Festival House.*



Film posters collection from Festival House.

simulate their separation from the walls. The two towers on the fourth floor have semicircular plans. One serves as the service staircase and the other as a water tank.

Finally, the cylindrical volume of the main staircase covers the second and third floors. This staircase, impressively beautiful, is undoubtedly the most successful space of the entire design. Inside, soft waves undulate in a spiral movement; outside, an almond-shaped wall with vertical openings filled with glass attempts to move but is unable to free itself from the prism that has it trapped.

### On Its Cultural Function

Coenraad Stork, ambassador during the 1980s, transformed the residence into a privileged place for many Europeans living in Cuba who were familiar with our cultural life. A devotee of art and literature, a diplomat who became a fraternal friend of our intellectuals and artists to whom he opened the doors of the residence, Stork contributed to the battle against the isolation that has always attempted to stigmatize the Revolution. Leo Brower, César López, Jorge Luis Prats, Pablo Armando Fernández, Reinaldo González, and Naty Revueltas were among the frequent guests.

### On the Purposes

Today the house is no longer an embassy, but it will continue serving culture—not only ours, but that of the entire region. It will host the continuous work of organization, sometimes exultant, other times distressing, that allows us to hold a new Festival each December. It will be a cultural center committed to encouraging and promoting the authentic manifestation of true art. It will surprise, destroy absurd schemes and anachronistic concepts, and continue convincing us of its liberating, revolutionary vocation. It will be a

meeting place for dialogues and debates defending our rich and diverse identity in the face of the trend that banalizes, standardizes, and globalizes, which impoverishes world culture.

Disconcerting, but beautiful, opulent but austere, solid but dancing, novel in its old age, the house still remains silent, but will revive it, giving it a new life, a new function. It will grow authentic, vigorous, fast, with strong roots deeply buried in our fatherland, our larger fatherland, our America. ■

# Come to see, love and save

By: Juan García Prieto

In 2000, the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) sponsored and organized the International Encounter, "Havana 2000, Design, Culture, City." Invitations were extended to "the designers, architects, artists, intellectuals, and those who think, feel, and love Havana, to exchange reflections and discuss action proposals for this city."

The National Union of Cuban Construction Architects and Engineers (UNAICC) was a co-sponsor of this event. Dr. Graziella Pogolotti served as Honorary President. President was sculptor and architect José Villa Soberón, who at the time was Chief of Staff of the Plastic Artists Association of UNEAC. Architect and UNAICC President Norma Diaz held the position of Vice-President, and I, Juan Garcia Prieto, an architect and then- President of Havana's Architecture Society of UNAICC and also a member of UNEAC, was the General Coordinator.

Geo Darder arranged for the Art Deco Society of New York (ADSNY), led by President Kathryn Hausman, a member of the International Coalition of Art Deco Societies (ICADS), to be part of Havana Encounter 2000. The society has a great interest in architecture and in the Art Deco culture in general and assisted in organizing the Havana Deco Workshop within the International Encounter. The workshop, sponsored by ADSNY, ICADS, and UNEAC, featured "a series of specialized conferences, city tours, and guided visits to buildings and museums, and encounters with specialists related to the Deco culture in Cuba and the United States." As a result of the exchanges established through the Encounter and the workshop, Cuba, through its specialists, began to acquire greater access to research, publications, and activities related to the Deco culture.



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**PROGRAMA**

Announcements of Havana Encounter 2000.



Habana Deco Postcard.

Architect Pilar Fernández and I were invited to attend the Sixth World Congress on Art Deco in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2001, and I delivered a lecture on

Cuba. Also present at the Congress was Patricia Semidey Rodriguez, Cultural Attaché of the Cuban Intersection in Washington, who proposed that

the possibility of celebrating a Deco Congress in Havana be considered. I was subsequently invited, along with Geo Darder, to participate in the ICADS Executive Committee meeting, where Cape Town, South Africa was ratified as the venue for the Seventh World Congress on Art Deco in 2003, and New York City was approved as the location of the Eighth World Congress in 2005.

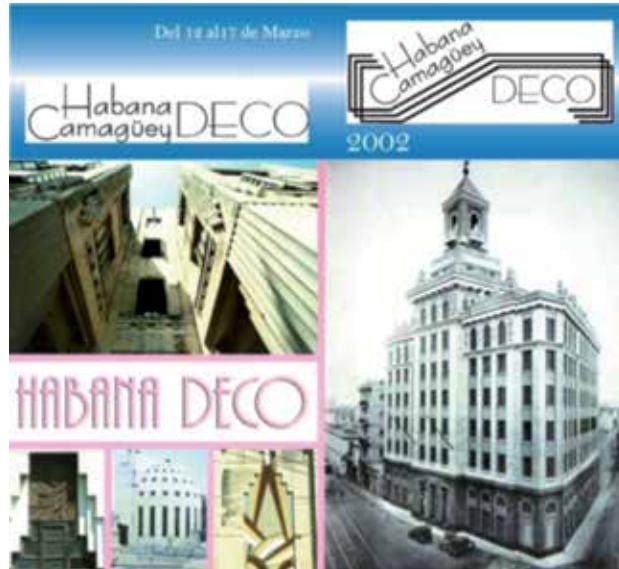


*Patricia Semidey, Juan Garcia, Kathryn Hausman, and Geo Darder in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2001.*

In March 2002, the Havana/Camagüey Encounter took place, followed in 2003 by the Havana/Santiago de Cuba Encounter. Both were organized by Geo Darder and sponsored by UNEAC. The second Havana Deco Workshop and International Encounter were also held in 2003, and that same year the Havana Deco Society, or Habana Deco, was finally created.

Melbourne, Australia, was the site of the Ninth World Congress in 2007. At the Tenth World Congress in Montreal, Canada in 2009, Kathryn Hausman, Robin Grow, and Geo Darder officially requested that the Twelfth World Congress on Art Deco be held in Havana in 2013, pending ratification by Cuba, through Habana Deco, at the 2011 World Congress in Brazil. Upon approval of the proposal in 2011, Havana, Cuba officially became the venue for the Twelfth World Congress.

In September 2009, "Attending the requirements for the Havana XII Art Deco World Congress in 2013, the National Cultural Heritage Council (CNPC) of the Culture Ministry"



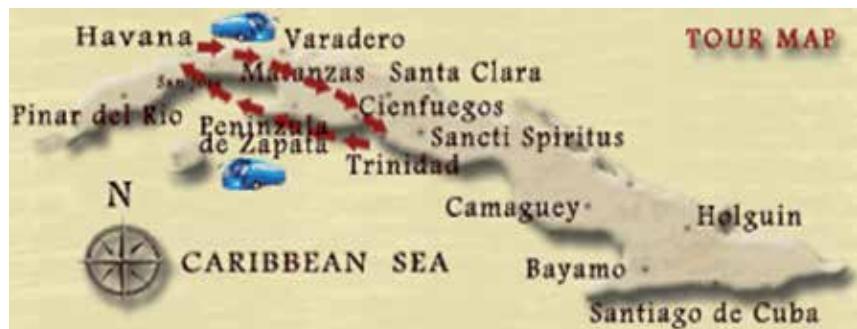
*Logotype, Postcard, Camagüey Workshop Diploma, and Map of Cienfuegos Tour.*

acknowledged the CUBADECO Work Group. Margarita Ruiz, President of the CNPC, originally presided over this group, which was "integrated by

institutions with a professional capability to be responsible for being an organizing committee." In 2012, Gladys Collazo assumed responsibility for the group in her new position as CNPC President. The following specialists are also recognized for their involvement: Luz Merino, Eduardo Luis Rodriguez, Eliana Cardenas, Pilar Fernandez, Nelson Melero, Gustavo R. Lopez, Felicia Chateloin, Jose A. Choy, Alina Ochoa, Juan Garcia, and Lohana Aruca.

From that moment on, the engine started, and the machinery has continued nonstop. Architect Mario Coyula had asked years ago, "How can the intellectuals and the artists intervene in the city's formation? What should the relationships be with economic promoters, decision makers and other professionals? How can we handle the changes and how do we turn problems into opportunities?" Back then we used to talk about the Art Deco legacy, how that enormous heritage was physically damaged due to the passage of time, the lack of resources, and many other factors. Yet this heritage had been neither demolished nor abandoned. Now we had the answers to our questions and a ray of hope that our Art Deco heritage might be rescued.

The situation is much different today. Buildings are being demolished, and their





Veterinary School at corner of Ayestarán and Carlos III in 2001 (left) and today (right).



Pedro Borrás Hospital in 2001 (left) and today (right).

inhabitants moved. Even worse, the demolition plans are unquestionably at a government level.

Havana—a city abandoned to its ruins, a country losing its memories, its identity,

and its social and cultural cohesion. It is great to be the venue for the Twelfth World Congress on Art Deco.

Thank you Geo Darder, thank you Kathryn Hausman, thank you to all the

*The original elevator doors and its ornaments are being eliminated to replace them with the new elevator systems. That heritage is being lost.*

Cuban Deco and Cuban culture lovers, thank you Eliana Cardenas.

The Twelfth World Congress on Art Deco, Havana, Cuba, 2013—Come to see, to love, and to save.■

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# THE ARGÜELLES HOUSE: A PIONEER LANDMARK OF CUBAN ART DECO ARCHITECTURE

By: Eduardo Luis Rodríguez



*Entrance of the Argüelles House.*

At a corner of Miramar's Fifth Avenue, in Havana, is the house of Francisco Argüelles, one of the most important Cuban Art Deco works, both for its design, very avant-garde within the national context in the moment it was built, and for the visibility given by its location. Other Havana buildings contemporarily share the same formal language, such as the house of Juan Pedro

Baró and Catalina Lasa, finished in 1927 in Vedado. But while in this last one the Deco forms were limited to some interior spaces, in the Argüelles house this style can be coherently seen both in the interiors and the facades. With its distinguished, balanced and even monumental image it must have been a renovating presence within the Cuban architectonic panorama of the second

half of the 1920s, and with influence in the following decade, when Art Deco became the main character of the changes occurring by then in national architecture.

The Argüelles house was the result of a private contest carried out in 1927, in which the young architect José Antonio Mendigutía Silvera, who had graduated at the Havana University in 1922, was the winner. Before designing this house, Mendigutía had done several houses in the typical eclectic style of the period, which he continued mostly using in his subsequent works. This fact, as well as not having produced another Art Deco work of relevance during his entire career, originates the question as to up to what point the artistic wishes of the clients—the Argüelles family—could have had more repercussion on the final design of the house than the taste and intentions of the architect himself.

Whichever the case, the resulting work, due to its renovating characteristic and own values, can be placed among the most outstanding of the twentieth century in Cuba. The fact that it was designed only two years after the holding of the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris indicates the speed with which the new style was assimilated in Cuba, and also defines the Parisian event as the main reference for Cuban architects in



Balcony of the Argüelles House.

the expression change's initial moment. Several pavilions of the exhibit seem to have influenced in the general conception, composition and decoration of the Argüelles house, above all the Lafayette Galleries designed by Joseph Hiriart, Georges Tribout and George Beau. Like this pavilion, the Argüelles house has an entrance staircase on the diagonal axis of the construction, which leads to the main door located in a volume perceived as a tower thanks to its vertical proportions and because it is taller than the rest of the building. At both sides of this tower that acts like a visual pivot, extend the two main facades that open with roofed terraces toward the facing streets. On top of the door's threshold is a relief by the prominent Cuban sculptor Juan José Sicre

who was then in the early stages of his artistic career.

The entrance hall of the house, of oval plan, has a small symmetrical staircase with two branches; the hall gives access to two circulation corridors that lead, on the left, to the living-room, dining-room and terrace; and, on the right, to the kitchen, two bedrooms, the palm-room and another terrace. On the upper floor, the oval space on top of the entrance hall is occupied by a large hall; in the remaining area there are bedrooms, bathrooms, and unroofed terraces. The decoration is elegant and relatively simple, based on geometrical forms and occasionally with stylized allusions to floral elements. The original furniture, made at the furniture

workshop of Merás y Rico, regrettably lost today, were of Art Deco style, while the decorated glass windows were made by Ballesteros y Cia. Both manufacturers were among the best of the country in their respective specialties.

The Argüelles house was pioneer in Cuba in the introduction of an avant-garde architectonic language that, with its renovating decorative system, would significantly mark the urban spaces of all Cuban main cities with an imprint of a new type of modernity. This house and many other works of Cuban Art Deco constitute a very important part of the local architectonic heritage that deserves recognition and complete protection.■

# Art Deco Architecture in Holguín

By: Angela C. Peña Obregón



San Isidoro de Holguín, today the capital of the province of Holguín, is located in the eastern mid-north region of Cuba. It was founded as the principal city of the territory during the first decades of the eighteenth century. For centuries, this area had been home to native villages occupied by speakers of the Aruaca language. In October 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed through the bay of Key Bariay and landed in the region, which borders the Atlantic Ocean on the north. This event sealed the “encounter between the old and new worlds.” Nipe Bay in what is now Holguín province is the site where in 1612 Cubans recovered the image of La Virgen de la Caridad (Virgin of Charity), the patron saint of Cuba venerated in the national shrine in the town of El Cobre in Santiago de Cuba.

In a regional economy based on livestock and subsistence crops, the city was only consolidated in the first decades of the twentieth century. Large investments of

North American capital in the territory's railroad, sugar, and mining industries fueled economic and cultural exchange with U. S. cities. This interaction, which was further promoted by publicity, business dealings, and trips by Cubans, especially those from Holguín, to the United States for study or pleasure may explain why Holguín society of the time gravitated toward Art Deco.

A variety of small buildings and houses with decorative Art Deco elements began to appear in the 1930s. They were not only modern but economical and could be easily adapted to different construction systems. The presence of Art Deco in Holguín updated the architectural forms and decoration of the city's houses, theaters, churches, hospitals, lodges, clinics, convents, schools, warehouses, stores, and funerary monuments.

Art Deco's influence on the historic center and certain neighborhoods and

*Wenceslao Infante  
Theater, now Comandante  
Eddy Suñol Theater.*

cities in the territory lasted into the 1950s. Verticality predominated in its initial stage, but buildings soon took on the streamline look of horizontality, soft curves, and angled corners. The transition from eclecticism to Art Deco began in 1937, transforming parapet balustrades and interior arcades into staggered pyramidal forms. Most houses of the period exhibit both styles, although pure Deco elements do exist.

The first Art Deco structure in the city, the Theater Frexes, was inaugurated on October 27, 1938. The 1864-seat theater by Holguín architect Alfredo Escalona Mastrapa featured straight lines, staggered openings, and a ceiling with a wooden truss.

The next year, the most important theater ever constructed in Holguín, the Wenceslao Infante Patrimony, opened. The theater departed from traditional architectural styles of the time and had a significant artistic-architectonic impact. Neighbors copied its design and re-created the building's decorative elements in their homes.

The theater's architect Saturnino Mario Parajón of Havana was already famous in Cuba for his Fausto Theater (1938) in Havana's Paseo del Prado, for which he received the Gold Medal from the Architecture Association. The budget for Infante Theater was \$200,000. It incorporated a highly technical structural system based on steel provided and installed by Casa Juaristi of Havana and featured the same state-of-the-art projection equipment exhibited at the 1939 New York World's Fair.



*Main building of the Technical Institute of Holguín Calixto García complex, currently Informatics Polytechnic Institute.*

The three-story theater has a rectangular plan and seats 3,000 people. Two wings on either side house offices and stores. The principal exterior features include geometric motifs, decorative bands, and projecting vertical elements culminating in pinnacles. Colored stone and terra cotta further ornament the façade, where three balconies front tall glass windows with Deco details. At night, blue neon dramatically lit up the luxurious center façade and the marquee with the theater's name. The theater's interior design also incorporates Art Deco elements, including pilasters with zigzag lines and friezes over the center stage.

Another example of Art Deco architecture in Holguín is the Holguín Medical School, a magnificent vertical design with zigzag decoration. Art Deco elements also appear on the meeting

hall, which features concave molding and decorative bands of yellow against the building's white walls.

Art Deco two- and three-story apartment buildings can be found throughout Holguín. Blocks might contain three or four such structures, characterized by verticality and streamlining. Other Art Deco buildings in the city, primarily mixed use and residential construction built for the upper classes from the late 1930s through the 1940s, were designed by Idelfonso Moncada Madariaga of Santiago de Cuba and Juan Abalo Bartlet of Havana.

The most important building constructed between 1939 and 1944, the Technical Institute of Holguín (ITH) Calixto García, inaugurated in February 1944, was part of the national plan carried out by Colonel

Fulgencio Batista, President of the Republic from 1940 to 1944. Though not unique (a similar project was completed in 1936 in Ceiba del Agua, Havana), Holguín's enormous complex had a total of twelve buildings: a school center, theater, pavilions for boys and girls with a capacity of 1,200, a library, a newspapers and periodicals library, a clinic, printing shops, a dining hall, a kitchen with bakery, accommodations for teachers, and an aqueduct.

Engineer Cristobal Diaz was the general manager of the project, which over the course of its construction also involved several other engineers, including Juan Llinas, Manuel Gartey, Vazquez Tobalina, and Manuel Jesus de Gongora. The complex was built facing Carretera Central, the principal national road to Havana, in a natural area where its

*House of the Ferrero Sede family,  
today the headquarters of iAhora! Newspaper.*

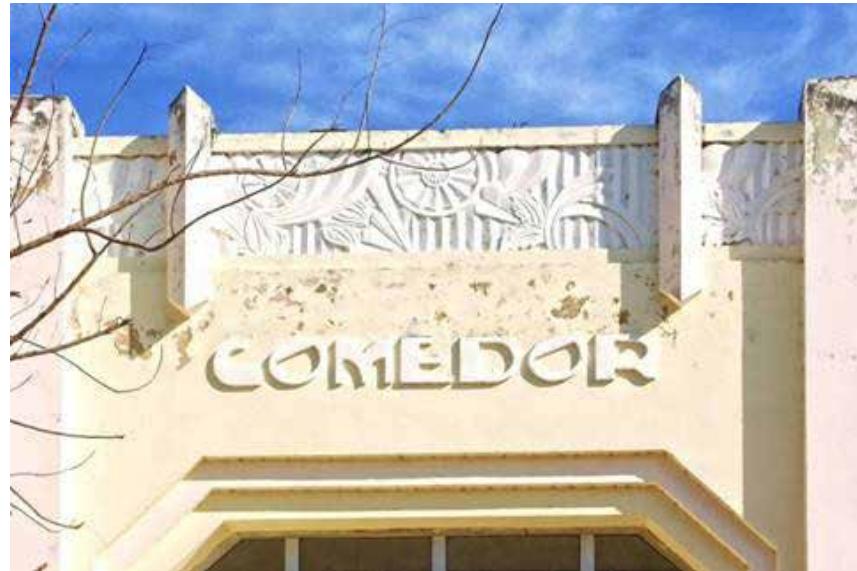


*House in the La Aduana neighborhood.*

imposing size and its architectonic and artistic values can be appreciated best. Conceived as blocks of different buildings connected by scenic gardens and roads, the complex features alternating recessed and projecting elements and carved bands of geometric ornamentation. The large lobby of the central building has a terrazzo floor with a design of the school's logo. A carved floral design embellishes the beautiful still original theater behind it.

Art Deco in Holguín persisted into the 1950s. Projects from that time include the Hotel Tauler, today the Hotel Turquino, a streamlined variant with five stories designed by J.E. O'Bourque, and the Roxy Movie Theater (Baría) by Luis F. Rodríguez Columbie, crowned with vertical lines expressed as a mural on the marquee. Some of the city's houses from that period, such as that of Ignacio Wong, were completely designed and constructed by master builders, including masons and carpenters Juan and Elpidio Tejeda and the self-taught plasterer and artist Pedro Machado.

Significant examples of Art Deco can also be found in municipalities of the province, primarily Banes and Sagua de Táamo. Banes had strong ties to the United States through the United Fruit Company,



*Decoration above the entrance to the kitchen-dining hall building  
of the Technical Institute of Holguín Calixto García complex.*

located there since the early years of the twentieth century. The town's architecture was characterized by wooden structures imported from cities in North America, distinguished by other elements peculiar to the area and created by local master carpenters. In the 1930s and 1940s, however, Banes embraced Art Deco, and diverse and important works, including a movie theater, a church, a parish house, a convent, schools, stores, lodges, a hospital, and other types of buildings were constructed in this style. Many of these designs are the work of Saturnino Mario Parajón, whose movie theater Hernandez recalls Havana's Fausto.

An eclectic style of architecture with geometric elements predominates in Sagua de Táamo, part of the province of Guantánamo prior to 1976. An example is the Church of the Holy Trinity in the central park Jose Martí. The church was originally built in 1878, but a slender vertical tower crowned by a cross was added in 1952. Other towns, including Gibara, Buenaventura, and Cueto, have modest houses, stores, and other building types designed in the Art Deco style.

Art Deco in Holguín can be said to have established a trend. Differing from the traditional, rural architecture that



*Medical School,  
Carlos Manuel de Céspedes park.*

preceded it, it gave the city new cultural images. It promoted the spread of taller buildings, both residential and multi-functional, and it renewed urban life with the construction of new theaters and hotels. These valuable exponents of Holguín's heritage remain preserved in the city's streets, neighborhoods, and communities.■

# Santiago de Cuba at the Gates of Modernity

By: Elidar Puente San Millán



*Apartment building, 351 San Gerónimo at Reloj Streets, historic center.*

Art Deco is an important component of Cuba's architectural heritage from the first half of the twentieth century. Such renowned Iberian-American architectural historians and critics, such as Roberto Segre, Carlos Sambricio, Eliana Cárdenas, Pilar Hernández, Luz Merino, Lohana Aruca, and Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, among others, consider the trend of great significance because of its widespread dissemination and its role as gateway to the Modern Movement in Cuba.

In Santiago de Cuba, the country's second most important and populated city, Art

Deco appears in diverse expressions with singular characteristics. The historic center of the city in particular has more than two hundred buildings that show an Art Deco influence. These structures were built during the 1930s and 1940s, a period that coincides with a 1932 earthquake that had a major impact on the city's built environment. That situation contributed to the city's acceptance and propagation of this new style.

Today Santiago de Cuba's Art Deco buildings are undergoing constant transformations. Their severe deterioration

has gradually undermined both their value and authenticity. There is therefore a need to acknowledge and increase awareness of this priceless heritage.

## Historic Roots

The introduction of Art Deco in Cuba was limited by the presidency of General Gerardo Machado, who took office in 1925, and the years of constitutional reform. It waned with the second military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista that began in 1952 after a coup d'état. The republican era (1902-1958) was



Moncada Barracks (School City 26 de Julio), 1937.

characterized by great political, economic, social, and cultural upheaval.

The provincial conditions in cities far from the capital resulted in even more complex problems in the eastern region, and Santiago was not exempt from the climate in the rest of the country during that period. The city's economic development benefited a small group of upper class families frustrated by the dominance of foreigners who exercised control over the territory through large North American companies and enterprises.

This influence extended into the cultural sphere, primarily among society's elite. As Alejandro G. Alonso has noted, "... the

Cuban middle and upper classes educated their children in North American colleges and universities, were associated with social organizations of North American origin—Vista Alegre Tennis Club, the San Carlos Club, Cuidamar Yacht Club, the Country Club—and copied to the smallest details the American way of life."

Added to this political, economic, and social situation was the government's neglect of the city. Many articles in *Arquitectura y Urbanismo* (Architecture and Town Planning) and *Acción Ciudadana* (Citizens' Action) of Santiago de Cuba, published during the 1930s and 1940s, refer to the need to balance investments and to address urban planning in Cuba's eastern capital. Electric lighting, streetcars,

and the railroad were introduced at the beginning of the century, but the city long lacked such basic services as an aqueduct, a sewer system, and paved streets.

An earthquake of considerable intensity struck Santiago de Cuba



Provincial  
Oriente Prison

in 1932. It affected approximately eighty percent of the existing structures and was recorded as one of the saddest events ever to occur in the territory. Significantly, the first Art Deco buildings emerged in the city the same year. The need for widespread rebuilding after the earthquake, combined with the inhabitants' ideas of progress, led Art Deco to become prominent in the architectural features of buildings constructed at that time in Santiago de Cuba.

## Art Deco Architecture in Santiago de Cuba

Examples of Art Deco architecture still exist in the historic part of Santiago as well as in the neighborhoods and suburbs created during the city's important period of growth during the first half of the twentieth century. At that time, the areas of Vista Alegre, Sueño, and Santa Barbara emerged, along with a belt of workers' neighborhoods around the traditional center, such as Veguita de Galo, Chicharrones, Mariana de la Torre, Flores, Los Olmos, and San Pedrito.

Art Deco was most closely associated with the middle and working classes, accounting for its sober formal characteristics; its essence is expressed primarily by a variety in composition and the materials that were used. Apartment buildings never surpassed four stories and included such features as geometric caps and pilasters incorporated into the façade to emphasize the verticality of the building, and simple decorative geometric designs, like rhombi and squares. Among the most relevant examples are the apartment building at 351 San Gerónimo Street at the corner of Reloj Street in the historic center, and the house at 253 Fourth Street in the Vista Alegre neighborhood.

Although Art Deco was used most extensively for residences, important examples of the style appeared in other building types, such as the Belleau y Hermanos stores, the El Encanto department store, the theater Oriente, the theater Aguilera (demolished), and the Brothers La Salle School. The Art Deco characteristics of these buildings



*Financial Bank, 451 Calvario at Enramadas Street, 1942, Francisco Ravelo Repilado.*

were similar to those seen in residential architecture, but they were taller and had more elaborate designs related to their function.

The Art Deco works constructed under the governmental initiative were characterized by marked monumentality. Among these were the Ambrosio Grillo Hospital and F. S. Hartmann Anti-Tuberculosis Clinic, which were built as part of the government's anti-tuberculosis campaign. Military structures included the Moncada Barracks, the provincial Oriente Prison, a Pantheon for the Armed Forces, a number of wooden houses for recruits, and the Palace of Justice (law courts), whose initial Art Deco features subsequently gave way to the Monumental Moderne style that followed. The historic center of Santiago with its

significant collection of Art Deco buildings was declared a National Monument in 1979. This area of historic buildings representing the many architectural styles that emerged over time is distinguished by its centrality and its value to the city's cultural heritage. It is characterized by the adaptation of an irregular layout on a changing topography, a compact plan defined by square, rectangular, and trapezoidal blocks, juxtaposed lots, and buildings with party walls enclosing interior patios on the ground-floor.

Two variants of Art Deco have been identified in Santiago. The first is represented by traditional Hispanic structures built around a central patio with changes limited to the facade. The second, less widely adopted variant consisted of new plans that evolved into a functional scheme, manifest mostly in public and apartment buildings. The need to adapt the building models to meet the area's climate demands led to the development of small patios in party-wall buildings, as well as



comb-shaped plans for buildings located in open lots, such as the Moncada Barracks (School City 26 de Julio).

Documents in the Municipal Historic Archives identify the principal architects and master builders who designed Santiago's Art Deco buildings. The most outstanding examples were the work of experienced professionals, such as Antonio Bruna Danglad, Ulises Cruz Bustillos, Gerardo Vega Wright, Sebastián Ravelo Repilado, José Federico Medrano, Idelfonso Moncada, Francisco Ravelo Repilado, and Felipe Fontanills Roca. Based on the dates of these projects, the Art Deco era in Santiago extended from 1932 to 1948, with a peak between 1935 and 1941.

Art Deco is reflected in the formal components of the façade of buildings designed by these architects. These works also demonstrate the simplification of ornamental elements over time. During the style's first decade, designs were characterized by textured surfaces decorated with vertical or horizontal incisions and geometric motifs on the pilasters and parapet, colored tiles in rhomboid shapes, and elaborate ironwork, fanlights, and railings. During the 1940s, however, the decoration gradually diminished and was eventually reduced exclusively to pilasters and staggered parapets.

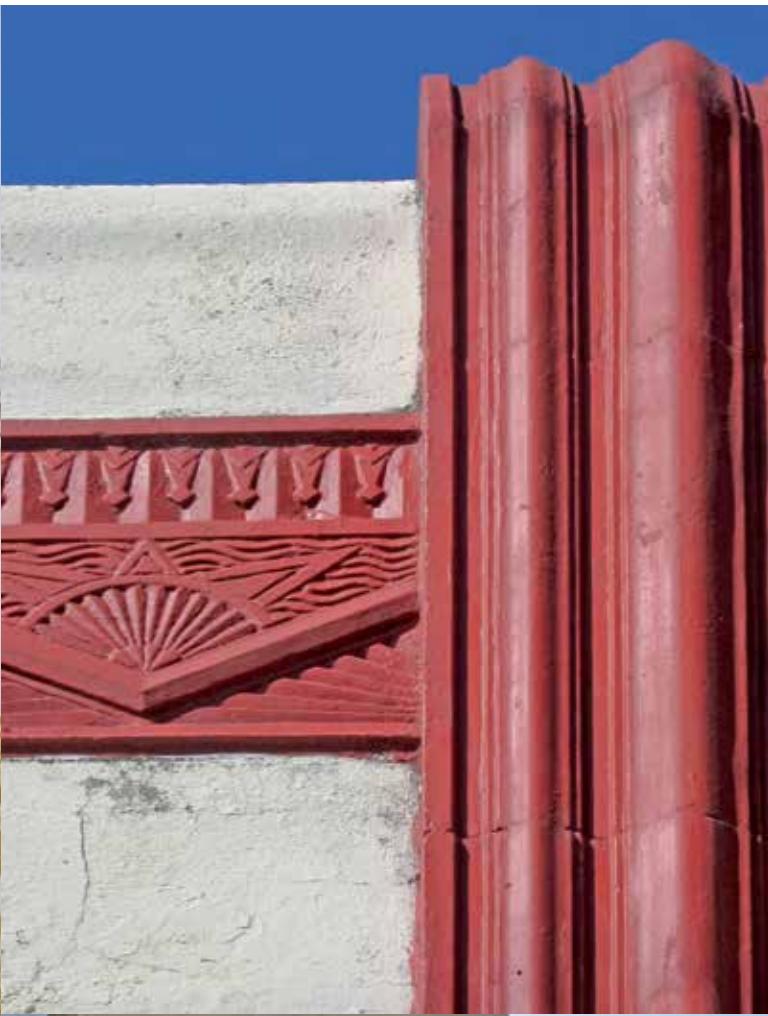
Interior features consisted essentially of ceiling decorations and ornamentation between loadbearing walls dividing the public rooms. The decoration assumed multiple shapes that corresponded to that on the façade and combined Art Deco with previous and later styles.

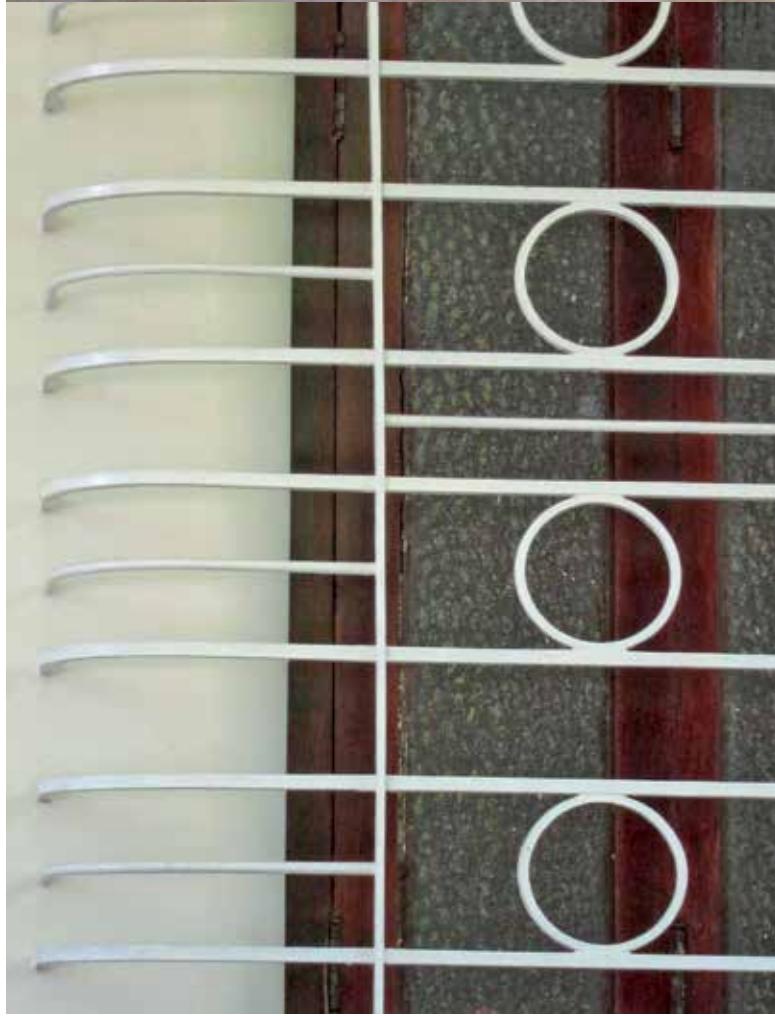
Art Deco architecture in Santiago de Cuba, particularly in the historic center, developed during the 1930s and 1940s and coincided with the city's recovery after the 1932 earthquake. Throughout the city, the style can still be seen in local landmarks and a large number of houses that give identity to different sectors. Although most are modest, these buildings constitute a significant part of Santiago de Cuba's historical memory, a distinctive architectural design variant in the eastern portion of the country that deserves to be preserved. ■



*House, 268 Carnicería Street between Habana and Trinidad, historic center, 1935, Antonio Bruna Danglad.*









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## Una cita en La Habana: El próximo Congreso de Art Deco

Por: Lic. Gustavo López

Nuevamente los amantes y estudiosos del Art Deco tendrán una nueva cita y una nueva sede para su congreso. La Habana, entre los días 14 al 21 de marzo de 2013 ofrecerá esta nueva oportunidad de convocatoria para todos los interesados en participar en el 12 Congreso Mundial de Art Deco.

El hotel sede será el Hotel nacional de Cuba, una institución turística e histórica, con más de 80 años de tradición y que desde 1930 ha hospedado a personalidades tan diversas como los Duques de Winsord, Ava Gadner y Frank Sinatra, Santos Traficante, Nat King Cole o Naomi Campbell.

El Comité Organizador del evento ha diseñado un programa que incluye conferencias y visitas y recorridos por edificios y monumentos Art Deco de la ciudad.

Las sesiones de ponencias tendrán como sede a la Casa de las Américas, una institución con una labor cultural que pasa el medio siglo y que está ubicada en uno de los más llamativos edificios Art Deco de la ciudad.

Los temas a tratar versarán sobre las características del Deco en La Habana y diversas ciudades cubanas, sus influencias en la sociedad de la época y su adaptación a los diferentes niveles sociales; la tipología de los cines y teatros habaneros; el esplendor de residencias construidas en esos años en los barrios de El Vedado y Miramar; la gráfica y el cine cubanos de esos momentos, entre otros muchos contenidos de gran interés.

Las conferencias internacionales versarán sobre temáticas tan disímiles como El Art Deco en Israel, por Barbara Billauer Bailey, de la Sociedad Art Deco de Washington; Las conexiones entre los muralistas de Chicago y Latinoamérica, de Paula Duffy Baker, de la Sociedad Art Deco de Chicago. También desde Australia tendremos la ponencia El Radio, un no reconocido ícono Art Deco, por el Dr. Peter Sheridan. Sharon Koskoff, Presidenta Fundadora de la Sociedad de Palm Beach hablará sobre el Art Deco en esa localidad y David Soto, un joven y entusiasta estudiante puertorriqueño, presentará una Colección de algunos de los edificios más destacados de estilo Art Deco en Puerto Rico. De igual forma, el gran investigador del Art Deco, Alastair Duncan, ha manifestado su interés de participar en este evento.

Los recorridos por el Art Deco habanero incluirán edificios tan importantes como el Bacardi, el primer rascacielos habanero y la obra más significativa del Deco cubano. También podrán ser apreciadas residencias importantes como las de Catalina Lasa, la Casa del Festival de Cine Latinoamericano, la Casa Argüelles (la primera edificación Art Deco de Cuba) y la López Chávez. También serán vistos cines y teatros, entre los que se cuentan América, Arenal, Fausto y Ludgardita. Se podrán admirar las fachadas de los hospitales Maternidad Obrera y América Arias y monumentos tales como el soberbio Obelisco dedicado al sabio Carlos J. Finlay, en Mariano y los increíbles panteones de mármoles, piedras y bronces del Cementerio Cristóbal Colón, considerado un museo al aire libre por su alto valor patrimonial.

También los delegados podrán participar en recepciones, cenas, almuerzos y eventos sociales en el Hotel Nacional, el Club Habana, la Casa Dupont en la playa de Varadero y el Capitolio, disfrutar de una función del Ballet Nacional de Cuba, dirigido por Alicia Alonso y conocer otros museos y exposiciones en la Habana.

Como evento Post Congreso, entre los días 21 al 27 de marzo de 2013, los asistentes tendrán la oportunidad de conocer diferentes ciudades el centro y el oriente de la Isla. Centros urbanos como los de Cienfuegos, Trinidad y Camagüey, proclamados Patrimonio de la Humanidad, podrán ser visitados y conocer de sus valores arquitectónicos en Art Deco y del periodo colonial. En Trinidad, ciudad histórica-artística cubana, podrán conocer el macizo montañoso de Topes de Collantes, con sus bellezas naturales y apreciar el sanatorio de estilo Art Deco, construido entre esas montañas en la década de 1940. También se verán las ciudades de Holguín y Santiago de Cuba, disfrutar de sus construcciones Art Deco, caminar por la céntrica calle santiaguera de Enramada y visitar el Santuario de la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Patrona de Cuba y poder apreciar el maravilloso paisaje de esa zona oriental.

Los participantes en el 12 Congreso Mundial tendrán numerosas oportunidades de disfrutar del conocimiento de los especialistas en Art Deco cubanos e internacionales, de conocer ubicaciones y territorios singulares por su belleza, su arquitectura y su cultura e historia que harán de estos días una experiencia inolvidable.■

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## Fragmento del texto del libro Deco en La Habana Vieja por Alejandro G. Alonso. En proceso de diseño para ser publicado por el editorial Boloña, Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad

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Puede decirse que el desarrollo del Art Deco en la Habana Vieja, hasta donde nuestra actual investigación permite situar -en lo geográfico, temporal y estilístico- tiene dos polos claramente definibles. El primero, marcado por esa joya del estilo ya citado que es el Edificio Bacardí (1930), sito en la calle Monserrate, precisamente por donde corría la muralla defensiva en su límite de tierra; y el otro, definido por el Edificio de la Marina de Guerra (1951), cuya situación en la calle San Pedro 102 limita con el Canal del Puerto. Las diferencias se encuentran, asimismo a partir de variantes estilísticas: el Bacardí se ubica plenamente en el momento de eclosión ornamental de la variante conocida como Zigzag (profuso despliegue de materiales y riquísimo diseño); mientras que el segundo pertenece a la definida como náutica, portadora de una consecuente simplicidad y claro funcionalismo. Ambas construcciones, separadas por dos décadas, ejemplifican a nivel verdaderamente colosal, la considerable permanencia del Deco en el gusto de quienes tenían la posibilidad de financiar tales proyectos y, por supuesto, de los arquitectos.

Ahora, recordemos que el marco temporal dentro del cual se desarrolla el Art Deco en tierra caribeña, tiene una frontera inicial en el primer gobierno del general Gerardo Machado –devenido sangriento dictador- empeñado en ser elegido y no abandonar el poder. El límite posterior está en el último mandato de otro militar –Fulgencio Batista- quien volvió al control del país por un golpe “de facto” en 1952. Entre uno y otro hito, las varias ocasiones en que éste o aquél asumieron el poder, elecciones fraudulentas, presencia en la alta magistratura de políticos sin interés alguno por remediar las grandes necesidades de la nación. Dentro del período: dos crisis económicas, las dos Guerras Mundiales; una revolución nacionalista –la de 1933- con su consecuente secuela de frustraciones; la segunda constitución de la República, una de las dos intervenciones del gobierno de los Estados Unidos de América y la omnipresente presencia de la cultura norteamericana en muchos aspectos de la vida nacional. En el plano de los conceptos, es fundamental la actitud siempre cosmopolita, abierta al mundo de los habitantes de este país, hecho de todas las sangres y en cuyo mestizaje tiene su mayor factor dinámico. Lo otro es la belleza de su naturaleza y clima, más una posición geográfica

privilegiada que lo han hecho –al mismo tiempo- apetecible y vulnerable.

Un último factor destacable: nuestro inmenso y reconocido poder de asimilación. El arribo de los primeros influjos del Art Deco se produce dentro del marco de una consciente afirmación de la nacionalidad. Todas las esferas de la cultura experimentan este impacto que tiene en Nicolás Guillén a su más conspicuo representante: un poeta mestizo que fue capaz de trasladar el ritmo del son (devenido luego “salsa”) a su universal modo de versificación. Ser entendible internacionalmente y auténtica, son principios que conformaron la legítima aspiración del poderoso movimiento que incluyó a la literatura, la música y las artes visuales. Buen ejemplo de este afán fue la creación del Grupo Minoristas, movimiento de activismo social no dirigido por ningún partido, sino creado y sostenido por los mejores intelectuales de toda clase. Su papel en el momento de arrancada de aquellos esfuerzos fue de raigal importancia; cuando se analiza el papel de las publicaciones en la difusión de los nuevos códigos de expresión, siempre habrá que destacar el papel de la revista Social y dentro de ella, la presencia de miembros del Grupo de Minoristas amigos de la revista y –mucho más importante– colaboradores en la tarea de ilustrar a una burguesía que había demostrado, o estaba en vías de hacerlo, su capacidad empresarial. Caso representativo es el de Alejo Carpentier, uno de los mejores novelistas en lengua española del siglo XX, musicólogo, ensayista, quien desde París enviaba artículos de índole cultural en –prácticamente– todos los campos de la cultura: desde la música de Stravinsky a la pintura de Picasso; esto sin descontar sus trabajos sobre la moda parisina (entendida como disciplina artística) que servía bajo el seudónimo de Jacqueline; sí, todo, a través de las páginas de social que fundara y rigiera un Minorista, Conrado Walter Massaguer. Aspectos fundamentales del período, ya fuera el maquinismo, el feminismo o el tema negro como definidor de la identidad nacional, fueron reflejados a través de la óptica un tanto mundana de la publicación; pero allí estaban, al mismo tiempo que se reseñaba un baile con trajes históricos, la boda de la hija de un potentado como Sarrá o la estupenda casa de Catalina Lasa, mujer que se convertiría en toda una leyenda, y no sólo porque para ella fuera diseñado el mejor interior Deco en fecha tan temprana para Cuba como 1927. Ese año es fundamental para el arte cubano; pues contempla la edificación de las primeras construcciones del estilo así como las iniciales muestras de artes visuales de los artistas “modernos” nacionales, gesto que tuvo su indiscutible antecedente en la labor de los diseñadores de las revistas de arte y de “entretenimiento”; entre estas últimas, debe

subrayarse también el rol desempeñado por Carteles y Bohemia.

Debemos decir, para una mejor comprensión de las obras, que algunos de los grandes ejemplos de la arquitectura Deco que han quedado, se asocian a diversas fuentes. Están los generados por la iniciativa privada en los albores de la presencia del estilo en Cuba; e inmediatamente, en fecha tan temprana como la de 1930, dos de los mejores proyectos de instalaciones hospitalarias del país, serían diseñados por Govantes y Cabarrocas, merced a la gestión de un gobernante funesto para Cuba como Gerardo Machado; aunque aquellos correspondan a su primer período como presidente constitucional, al que se debe también la magna obra de la Carretera Central. Pero no puede negarse que entre la variante Deco conocida como Monumental Moderno y los dictadores del patio –tal como ocurría en el fascismo europeo– hubo cierta correspondencia que dio lugar a una serie de hospitales, plazas, asilos, cuarteles e institutos cívicos levantados también bajo algunos de los mandatos de otros autoritarios sin cuenta, Fulgencio Batista. No es casualidad, ya que en el sentido colosal del Monumental Moderno, hay algo que casa muy bien con la psicología de tales personajes. Estas grandes cosas, otras pequeñas, íntimas; muchos eventos de importancia, significativos hechos históricos, estupendas obras de arte, jalonaron una época tan importante para Cuba que, como resplandeciente gema atesora el legado del Art Deco en versión nacional.■

semejante en las diversas regiones, zonas o ciudades de su desarrollo. No fue similar en Londres o en París, ni siquiera en Nueva York, California, Oklahoma o la Florida.

En la región antillana debe analizarse como una tendencia vinculada a las circunstancias constructivas de su tiempo; allí las fronteras se desdibujan, las miradas se tornan flexibles y los proyectos se presentan de una manera propia y particular.

En Cuba, tiene una recepción particular a partir de las influencias europeas y norteamericanas. Ambos referentes modélicos contribuyeron a una progresión de la sensibilidad que, unida a la creatividad de los profesionales cubanos, propiciaron una renovación creadora reflejada en diversas modalidades artísticas. Más que una alternativa transicional fue una tendencia, una otra mirada que coexistió con diversas expresiones visuales, sin perder su esencial concepto decorativo y, además, favoreció sin teorías sofisticadas, la entrada de una mayor modernidad. Se extendió hasta los años cuarenta aunque reaparecería después en ejemplos puntuales.

El repertorio déco se introdujo en el contexto habanero a través de fundamentaciones diversificadas. Por una parte, respondió a la disyuntiva de la burguesía de continuar disfrazando el universo representativo de la modernidad o de renovar su sistema simbólico ambiental. A su vez, los profesionales de la construcción asimilaban los modelos europeos y norteamericanos aunque ya la balanza se inclinaba con mayor peso hacia los referentes de la arquitectura estadounidense. Todo se encaminaba a las búsquedas de experiencias renovadoras de la arquitectura que se introducían por diversas vías: a través de las publicaciones especializadas; del completamiento de estudios en Estados Unidos; de la conformación de los planes de estudio de la carrera de arquitectura a partir, preferentemente del modelo institucional norteamericano; del cine, de la música, de los viajes y de la moda que, en su conjunto, devinieron canales que interactuaron entre los arquitectos cubanos con los nuevos planteamientos y sus búsquedas de la modernidad. Ello implicó el imprescindible entronque con el binomio cliente-constructor, con el gusto del inversionista, lo que benefició, fundamentalmente, a las obras promovidas por la iniciativa privada y muy especialmente de la vivienda.

En Cuba, el repertorio déco expresó una alternativa moderna que establecía distancias con el academicismo y ofrecía la oportunidad de estar a la moda. No se pretendió, salvo excepciones, ni formulaciones teóricas, ni obras vinculadas al dinamismo radical de las

## **El Art Déco en la vivienda habanera: tropical déco y streamline**

Dra. Pilar Fernández

Durante mucho tiempo al art déco no podía aplicársele una definición precisa, ya que recibió una pluralidad de influencias a menudo contradictorias tales como: el art nouveau, las culturas prehispánicas y orientales; los ismos de algunos movimientos de la vanguardia plástica europea; los diseños de Diaghilev para el ballet soviético y otras. No obstante, a pesar de esta diversidad de referentes culturales alcanzó rasgos peculiares que le otorgaron su propia personalidad. Por ello su resultante ha sido altamente compleja. Integrador de todas las gamas del diseño creó un sistema decorativo caracterizador de una época, y aunque fue una tendencia fugaz y transitoria, una tendencia que estableció un puente entre el ecletismo, ya carente de vitalidad propia y el radicalismo explosivo de las vanguardias artísticas europeas, ha resultado una alternativa de difícil definición temporal, que no se expresó de manera



vanguardias europeas, sino a la estética del art déco. El modernismo, denominación empleada por los especialistas cubanos de entonces, fue una de las posibilidades que contribuyó a destrozar al eclecticismo como valoración constructiva dominante y a conformar una trama moderna, diferente.

Al referirse a la Exposición parisina de 1925 el arquitecto Joaquín Weiss señaló:

(...) Estilísticamente este período (1930-1940) se nutrió en gran parte de la Exposición de Artes Decorativas celebrada en París en 1925, que trató de poner al día a los franceses en materia arquitectónica sin lograr más que un resultado conservador. Sin embargo, no hay dudas que por ello mismo y por su carácter ornamentista con cierto dejo de art nouveau, las nuevas corrientes arquitectónicas de sello francés lograron abriese paso entre los países americanos que, como el nuestro, se debatían entre las redes del eclecticismo (...) (1950, p.31)

Se puede apreciar que este autor valoraba la significación del art déco en su variante francesa, como una expresión de lo moderno, del cambio, de la renovación, como una fase imprescindible para el progreso arquitectónico republicano, liberado del embrujo ecléctico. Pero también hay que considerar las diversas variantes discursivas del déco y la pluralidad de programas constructivos que abarcó. Entre ellas se encuentra el llamado tropical déco que representó una zona de influencia importante para la arquitectura cubana. Esta denominación cualifica una fase particular de la tendencia que se expresó en hoteles, cinematógrafos, restaurantes y viviendas de Miami Beach a partir de los años treinta y sobre todo en la década del cuarenta. También conocido por Distrito Histórico Art Déco (The art déco Historic District) situado al sur de Miami. La producción constructiva de esta zona se caracteriza por una readecuación de los modelos del norte con un sentido de mayor deleite que conjuga líneas horizontales y fantasía, lo cual le otorga una visión diferenciada de la gran ciudad, del déco industrial. Por ello el nombre de tropical déco propuesto por la investigadora norteamericana Laura Cerwinsky, nos resulta apropiado pues identifica este espacio urbano y sus particularidades.

En este conjunto se retoman las tradiciones locales, la flora y la fauna de la zona, evocada en la decoración de los edificios y se despliega una novedosa variante del repertorio déco que no asimila ni la sofisticación neoyorquina ni la prolífica variedad de Hollywood. El gusto por la líneas horizontales y verticales, los colores pasteles como el verde mar, el azul luz, el rosa quemado, el amarillo sol crean propuestas sugestivas y diferenciadas que enriquecen y, a

la vez, complejizan la tendencia estudiada. Se percibe una visualidad diferente que ofrece una sensación de reposo, de mayor sencillez y alegría.

Múltiples han sido los nombres de los estilos que tratan de identificar esta versión decosiana del viejo Miami. No obstante, la presencia de los diseños horizontales; las placas con ornamentos geométricos; el placer por los volúmenes y los colores pasteles estaban más próximos al gusto de un público habituado al clima, la luz y el mar, condiciones ambientales que favorecieron este modelo para las construcciones habaneras. Asimismo, aparece otra visión que, sin abandonar del todo al déco, inicia nuevas rutas que van marcando los rasgos de una arquitectura que, sin desvincularse totalmente del déco, se diferencia y enfatiza el componente purista de la línea y una de sus claves de lo moderno es cronotópica. Trasatlánticos, aviones, trenes y automóviles conforman el campo modelador de un discurso que asientan sus rasgos en: líneas paralelas curvas; elementos metálicos; formas redondeadas en las esquinas; ventanas circulares, barandillas cromadas y paredes blancas repertorio que intenta simbolizar el progreso a través de la estética de la máquina, del movimiento de los nuevos tiempos.

En sus viviendas, ya sean individuales o en edificios de apartamentos, La Habana demostrará este cambio paulatino visualizador de una inversión del signo: de la vertical, característica del rascacielos, (López Serrano) a la horizontalidad de los edificios de apartamentos (edificio Canteras; líneas de diseño apaisado que delimitan los volúmenes con una marcada utilización del blanco. Sirvan de resultantes visuales los edificios Solymar (Soledad y San Lázaro); el residencial Cantera (Infanta y Humboldt) y el Santeiro (G y 25) denotan los cambios del contexto constructivo. El edificio multifuncional América puede considerarse un ejemplo síntesis, donde confluyen el art déco y el streamline, aunque ya por estos años prevalecerá este último en las construcciones capitalinas. Se entrelazan de manera continua, el déco estandarizado con los restos del neocolonial y se inicia la articulación con las primeras expresiones de estilo internacional.

En el trabajo De la nueva arquitectura del arquitecto Juan E. O'Bourke publicado en la revista Arquitectura y Artes Decorativas (abril, 1932) este profesional centra su análisis en la obra proyectada por el arquitecto y urbanista Pedro Martínez Inclán en 23 y 21, Vedado:

(...)Horizontalidad, sensación de calma y majestad; balcones corridos a uno y otro lado con barandas que evocan la de los barcos; terrazas voladas, apenas sostenidas en su

arranque con columnas octogonales, amplios ventanales. Una construcción muy siglo XX. La más parecida a las obras de Wright, Le Corbusier, Gropius.

or su parte el arquitecto Joaquín Weiss hace referencia a esta obra y determina su importancia para la arquitectura moderna. La firma Maruri /Weiss realiza un proyecto tipo barco para el edificio del Tennis Club de Matanzas y Weiss –uno de sus autores- señala:

(...) Lo que allí se requería no era un palacete versallesco sino una máquina... una máquina de recreo social y deportiva con toda la sencillez, la solidez y la eficiencia de un aparato mecánico (...) (Arquitectura y Artes Decorativas, junio, 1932, p.25-28)

La Habana resulta un escenario favorecido por esa recurrencia ornamental repetitiva tan en boga en Miami Beach. De manera creadora se puede observar esa tipología lineal geométrica de los frisos y de los elementos divisorios de volúmenes y planos, del sistema de placas decorativas colocadas en la superficie de las fachadas con infinitas combinaciones que desbordan la fantasía popular. Flores y elementos vegetales geometrizados o formas como cuadrados, rombos, triángulos, etc. Tanto los contrastes de texturas como las ligeras variaciones del color complementan la creatividad de los constructores populares.

Pero si bien esta es otra vía del déco, no es menos cierto que se inserta en una tradición ampliamente extendida en la Isla, de estructuras y elementos seriados, rastreables en la vivienda desde fines del siglo XIX. Estructuras diferenciadas, portadoras también del déco, son los edificios multifamiliares enraizados en el tradicional esquema de un establecimiento comercial en la planta baja y la vivienda en la planta alta, e integrados ambas, orgánicamente al tejido urbano. Volúmenes de fuerte visibilidad como el de Belascoáin esquina a San José que definen y estructuran verticalmente la caja muraria; las placas y los elementos de cierre completan esta sencilla combinación. En otras construcciones (Neptuno 563), el déco coexiste con elementos de la tradición como persianas, rejas, vitrales, pero ahora conformado por un nuevo y variado diseño.

Arquitectura estandarizada que conformó una tipología entrelazada en las principales avenidas de la ciudad. En este sentido, el déco aportó un novedoso repertorio ornamental; combinaba así la concepción tradicional, notable por su regularidad y carácter repetitivo, pero a la vez, tributaria de los ejemplos cultos habaneros. Es decir, que la adecuación del sistema decorativo déco se adaptó al predominio de las superficies lisas, desde la escala de la vivienda

individual hasta el edificio en altura y generó una nueva dimensión plástica del contexto urbano. En sus múltiples versiones, en las superficies delimitadoras de las calles y las avenidas estableció sutiles soluciones plásticas. La reiteración de esos elementos decorativos en distintos barrios de la ciudad actúa como un factor unificador del hecho singular dentro del tejido urbano. Lección de coherencia e integralidad arquitectónicas, logradas a través del nexo entre las elaboraciones de nivel profesional y su popularización y divulgación a escala urbana. Resulta sin duda, la expresión de una visualidad distinta surgida de los cambios, de la modernidad y de la renovación.

Urzází Lares plantea desde su experiencia en la ciudad de Mérida:

(...) Mientras aparecían uno a uno los ejemplos cultos de la arquitectura déco, surgieron otros muchos diseñados y fabricados por maestros de obras, alarifes o por los propios dueños de los mismos. Estos imitaban los modelos cultos adaptándolos a sus recursos disponibles y al propio gusto popular (...) (1990, p.70)

Esta cita sirve de muestra para exemplificar la influencia del déco en las regiones americanas y las reformulaciones realizadas en los contextos particulares. Estas apropiaciones del hombre común se convirtieron en verdaderas reinterpretaciones locales del art déco por parte de la arquitectura vernácula, generalizada en las décadas del treinta y del cuarenta del siglo pasado. Ello representó también, la persistencia de los valores culturales en el hábitat popular y de la clase media, antes de la crisis definitiva producida por el pragmatismo funcionalista. En este sentido Roberto Segre, Luz Merino y Pilar Fernández han planteado:

(...) A partir de la recuperación económica que sucede a la gran crisis económica de 1929, de inicia un crecimiento acelerado de la población urbana en América Latina. La estructura compacta y continua de las ciudades cede ante la expansión suburbana. En el centro comienza la presión ejercida por el alto costo de los terrenos y surgen los bloques compactos de apartamentos. La especulación de la tierra y de la vivienda acompaña la creciente dilatación de los sectores medios. A su vez, la difusión de la estructura de acero y la generalización del hormigón armado, reduce la libertad planimétrica, espacial y decorativa que caracterizaba la producción artesanal. Lo seriado y lo típico definen el paisaje urbano, cada vez menos vinculado a la participación de los arquitectos. (...) (1989)

Sin duda, la nueva operatoria (búsqueda de la verticalidad, los volúmenes, las líneas curvas, las barandillas cromadas, las ventanas circulares) respondía a la estética de la máquina, rasgos

que estaban más cerca de la exposición de Nueva York de 1939: El mundo del mañana, que de la famosa muestra de Artes Decorativas e Industrias Modernas de París de 1925. El streamline o estilo aerodinámico moderno aparece como una expresión constructiva más allá del déco, que permeó de una manera particular las construcciones del Distrito Histórico y las de la ciudad de La Habana. Otro reto que se ancló entre lo nuevo y lo añejo, entre tradición y modernidad siguiendo una de las líneas alternativas del desarrollo constructivo republicano.

El art déco y su pluralidad discursiva contribuyó a una transformación de la sensibilidad al propiciar una visibilidad que se expresó en diversas modalidades constructivas. Esta tendencia se incorporó a las búsquedas renovadoras de nuevas experiencias y proyectos arquitectónicos del hábitat en las décadas del treinta y del cuarenta. La historiografía tradicional no solía reconocer al déco en la medida en que este discurso no coincidía con el estilo internacional, mirada que privilegia más el carácter antagónico que el coexistente entre ambos. No se advirtió que esta alternativa se desarrolló como otro canal de la modernidad, toda vez que posibilitó la renovación constructiva y la gráfica.

El déco exploró y se apropió de fuentes diversas de ahí su pluralidad e inclusivismo. Con el desenfado de una nueva sensibilidad estructuró un lenguaje marcado por la unidad de lo diverso. Con una personalidad propia soslayó los conflictos y se incorporó a la expresión de lo novedoso.

Entre sus resultados está el haber contribuido con profesionalismo y desenvoltura a una transformación de la visualidad, tanto a nivel artístico como de la conciencia cotidiana. Su dinamismo demuestra que tanto el déco como sus variaciones más directas, ya sea el tropical déco, o más alejadas, como el streamline y el monumentalismo moderno contribuyeron de maneras diversas al reto de la modernidad con una prolífica vocación creadora. ■

### **Plaza Habanera Art Deco para un sabio cubano**

Lic. Gustavo López

La Plaza Finlay, ubicada en el Municipio de Marianao es una de las más conocidas de la ciudad. Su celebridad se fundamenta en la alta torre que centra su rotonda, cuya funcionalidad original era la de orientar a los aviones en el aeropuerto de la base del antiguo campamento militar Columbia que existía aledaño.

Inaugurada por Batista en 1944, con el nombre de Plaza 4 de Septiembre, se pretendía así recordar a los militares que en Colombia comenzaron un golpe de Estado contra Machado en esa misma fecha del año 1933. No obstante, en 1948, los médicos cubanos pidieron al Presidente Ramon Grau San Martin que el nombre fuera cambiado por el de Plaza Finlay, como homenaje al destacado sabio cubano. Desde entonces se observa colocada, en uno de sus frentes, una placa que reza: "En memoria del científico Carlos J. Finlay (1833-1915)".

El conjunto en su totalidad es obra del Ingeniero José Pérez Benitoa, tanto el Obelisco central y los cuatro edificios que lo rodean, con apoyo del entonces Ministerio de Obras Públicas.

La torre es una estructura de 32 metros de alto, por 8 metros en cada uno de sus lados, está recubierta en piedra de Jaimanitas y su basamento es de granito negro, sobre el que está ubicado un friso de los escultores Navarro y Lombardo, con figuras alegóricas y de composiciones clásicas. El centro del cuerpo de la torre está decorado por motivos geométricos para permitir la entrada de aire y luz, este segmento termina en un balcón que sirve de mirador. Remata la construcción un fanal y un pararrayos en forma de aguja.

Rodean esta estructura cuatro edificios de forma cóncava, para acentuar y apoyar el mismo trazo de la plaza. Estas edificaciones de dos pisos poseen como características unitarias el tener un portal a la altura del edificio conformado por 10 columnas recubiertas en piedra de Jaimanitas. Encima de cada pórtico existe un frontis plano donde se talló el nombre de la institución en sus inicios. Cada uno de estos inmuebles cuenta con un patio central y al frente áreas para jardines y parqueo. Hoy sus funciones han cambiado con respecto a las que fueron concebidas, pero aun se mantienen entre los paños de pared que separan las ventanas de ambos pisos, relieves escultóricos que indican las actividades de cada uno de esos centros.

La altura de la torre, que no tiene competencia con ningún edificio en derredor, hace de ella un punto de referencia para el habanero que viaja en esa dirección. El pueblo, atendiendo a su forma y elevación, ha bautizado al Obelisco de la Plaza Finlay como "La Jeringuilla" por su semejanza a este instrumento médico. ■

## Un pionero de la modernidad Leonardo Morales y los inicios del Art Decó

*Maria Victoria Zardoya Loureda*

En la calzada de Belascoáin esquina a San Martín, en La Habana, se yergue un edificio de cinco pisos que ha pasado inadvertido tanto a profanos como a entendidos en arquitectura.

Sería difícil atribuirle un estilo a esta construcción, pues si bien los arcos del ático denuncian la presencia de elementos historicistas, la continuidad vertical de las ventanas y paramentos, la ausencia de cornisas entre niveles, la parquedad de elementos decorativos, así como el remate en forma de zigurat del pretil, evidencian un distanciamiento del tratamiento dado por la arquitectura ecléctica a las edificaciones altas. A esta simplicidad del tratamiento exterior, se suma la sencillez de un pequeño vestíbulo al que se accede por la calle San Martín, con un atípico dintel en forma de cuarto de circunferencia, sobre el cual se aprecian incisiones lineales paralelas, ajena a cualquier historicismo. En el resto de los espacios interiores no existe ningún otro tipo de decoración.

La función a la que se destinó este edificio, declarada en la memoria descriptiva y en los planos del proyecto, contribuyó a la simplicidad de su tratamiento ornamental. Se concibió para establecimientos, tal vez comerciales o de servicios. Actualmente está destinado a viviendas.

Parece un edificio de los últimos momentos del Art Decó a finales de la década del 40. La combinación en damero de los azulejos en el pretil pudiera asociarse con las "ingenuas" interpretaciones hechas por constructores y usuarios inspirados en las decoradas mayólicas, características de este estilo. Sin embargo, cuando se sabe que fue construido en 1927 según proyecto del prestigioso arquitecto Leonardo Morales, la obra invita a ser apreciada con una óptica diferente y a realizar algunas consideraciones.

El Art Decó llegó a nuestro país dos años después de ser reconocido y bautizado internacionalmente, en 1925, durante la Exposición de Artes Decorativas de París. Se considera que este estilo marcó el inicio de la modernidad en Cuba, al asumir un repertorio formal distante del eclecticismo que desde comienzos del siglo XX había caracterizado a la arquitectura cubana. En 1932, el profesor Joaquín Weiss escribió: "...la arquitectura de nuestra época se haya ya al comienzo de la fase 'primaria' o 'primitiva' de un estilo naciente

de carácter lineal, aunque inclinándose en la composición más a la 'compensación' o 'balanceo' que a la 'simetría' y el 'formalismo'..."

Conservando la decoración como componente inseparable de la arquitectura y haciendo uso todavía de principios de composición académicos, se apeló a un repertorio de elementos lineales totalmente novedosos que en su momento fue denominado arte moderno.

Existe consenso en reconocer que la residencia de Francisco Argüelles, proyectada por el arquitecto José Antonio Mendugutía y construida en 1927, fue la primera edificación Art Decó en Cuba. Fue "...el primer serio ensayo de arquitectura 'moderna' en este país".

El edificio que nos ocupa también se proyectó en 1927 y se terminó en diciembre de ese año, y aunque no es un exponente tan completo del vocabulario Art Decó como su contemporáneo, resulta muy significativo por el germe de modernidad que incubó al utilizar una decoración tan simple y asumir el edificio alto con un tratamiento inédito hasta entonces en Cuba. Algunos de los recursos formales que empleó se repitieron posteriormente de manera más elaborada en el conocido trío de torres Art Decó que sobresalió en la silueta de La Habana ya abocada a la modernidad: el Bacardí (1930), el López Serrano (1932) y el América (1941).

Valga este pequeño comentario para ubicar un eslabón perdido en la cadena histórica de la arquitectura habanera. ■

### Catálogo de Arte Deco Arquitectura porteña

*Adriana Piastrellini*

El Art Decó en la arquitectura porteña aparece en la segunda mitad de la década del 20. La ciudad de Buenos Aires generó en cada uno de sus barrios un interesante catálogo de edificios decó de muy buena calidad.

En todas las tipologías, ya sea modestas viviendas de una sola planta, complejas construcciones industriales o magníficas residencias, se exhibe un atractivo repertorio ornamental donde predomina la línea recta y los planos superpuestos o escalonados.

La Costanera Sur es un antiguo paseo costero en Puerto Madero, ciudad de Buenos Aires. Funcionó como balneario público hasta que durante la década de 1980, se rellenó la ribera y se creó la Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur, haciendo que el balneario perdiera para siempre su función.

En la década del '20, abundaron las cerveceras y restaurantes frente al balneario, y algunos de sus edificios diseñados por el arquitecto húngaro Andrés Kalmay sobreviven reciclados. En la actualidad hay "carritos", pequeños puestos de comida al paso con parrillas donde se puede comer choripán y sándwiches de bondiola de cerdo, entre otras comidas.

El paseo fue un éxito instantáneo, y se transformó en un paseo obligado de la clase media y media-baja durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX, de tal forma que en 1924 la Municipalidad de Buenos Aires ordenó al arquitecto húngaro Andrés Kalmay la construcción de un conjunto de edificios y locales para alquilar como restaurantes y cerveceras. El más imponente fue ocupado por la Cervecería Munich, y los más pequeños por la Cervecería Don Juan de Garay, la Brisas del Plata, La Perla y La Rambla. Décadas más tarde, todas cerraron y quedaron abandonadas, algunas fueron demolidas, otra fue reciclada como salón para eventos y la Munich fue Museo de Telecomunicaciones y ahora es la sede de la Dirección de Museos de Buenos Aires. El primer edificio del teatro data de 1870. En 1935 el arquitecto belga Alberto Bourdon concibió el actual Teatro Ópera, de característica fachada Art Decó (inspirada en el Cine Le Gran Rex de París), con capacidad para 2.500 personas, escenario apto para diversos espectáculos y una pantalla de cine de grandes dimensiones.

En definitiva, el Teatro Ópera es uno de los más importantes a nivel edilicio en Buenos Aires, y una de las mejores piezas de arquitectura art decó en la ciudad a pesar de su carácter tardío, ya que hacia el momento de su construcción, ese estilo ya había dejado de ser vanguardia. Su fachada es imponente, luciendo un volumen central de líneas curvas con columnas y numerosas ventanas alargadas, que remata en una torre telescopica totalmente reconocible que da identidad al edificio. En sus extremos, el frente está revestido en granito negro, y con simetría axial luce dos franjas revestidas en trozos de vidrio dibujando patrones semicirculares concéntricos muy característicos de la decoración art decó. La marquesina es otro elemento de gran importancia en esta fachada, ya que de noche tres grandes lámparas de garganta circulares iluminan la vereda y cambian constantemente de color.

Aunque la primera sede de la redacción de Crítica se encontraba en la calle Sarmiento al 800, se trataba de oficinas alquiladas. No fue hasta mediados de la década de 1920 que se adquirió uno de los pocos terrenos libres que quedaban en la Avenida de Mayo, con el objetivo de construir el gran palacio periodístico.

Para ello, Botana contactó a los arquitectos húngaros Andrés y Jorge Kalnay, quienes en 1926 proyectaron el nuevo edificio. Según algunas fuentes, la obra habría sido en su mayoría diseñada por Jorge, siendo de Andrés sólo los ornamentos y decoración de la fachada. El Palacio de Crítica sería inaugurado en septiembre de 1927, con un gran festejo correspondiente a la importancia que tenía el diario en ese momento.

Se encuentra en la calle peatonal Lavalle, eje tradicional de las salas cinematográficas gracias al asentamiento masivo de estos espacios en su sector céntrico (desde Florida a Carlos Pellegrini). El Cine-Teatro Monumental fue inaugurado el 23 de octubre de 1931 por iniciativa de los empresarios Coll y Di Fiore, y rápidamente recibiría el apodo "la Catedral del Cine Argentino", gracias a la importancia que le dio esta sala a la incipiente producción nacional.

Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial y ante la imposibilidad de importar films de otros continentes, se dio lugar a espectáculos de radioteatro y teatro. Llegaron a actuar las compañías de Florencio Parravicini, Olinda Bozán, Enrique Santos Discépolo y Luisa Vehil.

Otros ejemplos interesantes de la manifestación de este estilo fue la arquitectura industrial entre ellos la Súper Usina "Dr. Carlos Givogri". Ex CATE, Ex Compañía Italo Argentina de Electricidad (C.I.A.E). Año de proyecto: 1928. Año de construcción: 1930. Año de inauguración: 1933.

En 1912 la Compañía Italo Argentina de Electricidad -fundada en 1911- comienza a producir y distribuir energía eléctrica en el país para el servicio de alumbrado público y privado, fuerza, tracción y demás aplicaciones. La CIAE -junto con otras compañías- cubrió los servicios eléctricos de parte de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, más tarde extendiéndose a varios partidos aledaños. A diferencia de CATE, esta compañía comenzó con plantas pequeñas de provisión de electricidad para el consumo familiar. El destinatario era el gran grupo inmigratorio de origen italiano asentado en Buenos Aires. En 1914 inauguró sus servicios desde un edificio ubicado en la calle José Andrés Pacheco de Melo, entre Coronel Díaz y Billinghurst.

Se trata de un gran edificio corporativo proyectado por el estudio de los arquitectos Héctor Calvo, Arnold Jacobs y Rafael Giménez, de estilo art déco, construido por la empresa Mulville y Cía Ltd. y terminado en 1936. Protagoniza una amplia esquina de la diagonal con dos calles en simultáneo. Está coronado por un sobrio reloj, idéntico que la sede central de Shell Mex en Londres, Inglaterra. Se trata de

un ejemplo de arquitectura corporativa, con las sucursales en distintos países siguiendo un aspecto que las identifica.

El Moreno Hotel es un hotel boutique que se encuentra en el barrio de Monserrat en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, cercano a la Plaza de Mayo y a la calle Defensa.

Fue establecido en un edificio de oficinas proyectado para Adolfo Hirsch, Bernardo Zollfrei, Bruno y Ricardo Sadler por el arquitecto húngaro Johannes Kronfuss en 1929, en estilo art déco y construido por la compañía F.H. Schmidt SA. A lo largo de los años este edificio alojó, entre otros, al Centro de Importadores de Buenos Aires y a la Editorial Kapelusz. En 2006 fue sometido a una remodelación y restauración a cargo del estudio Fernández-Huberman-Otero, para transformarlo en el actual hotel.

El Cine-Teatro Broadway fue proyectado por el arquitecto húngaro Jorge Kálnay en 1929 para Augusto Álvarez, empresario cinematográfico de origen español. Kálnay fue reconocido durante sus primeros años, en los cuales trabajaba en sociedad con su hermano Andrés, por sus edificios con influencia de la arquitectura de su país de origen, luego transitó por el art déco y terminó dentro de la corriente racionalista.

Construido en terrenos de la familia Gourdy por la empresa alemana Wayss y Freytag, fue inaugurado el 11 de octubre de 1930 por la empresa A. Alvarez & Cía, en un período del auge del cine en la Argentina, en el cual los viejos teatros tuvieron que adaptarse a los cambios para realizar tanto obras teatrales como proyecciones cinematográficas. El film que se estrenó ese día fue La Tragedia Submarina, del sello 2th. Century Fox. El Broadway nació como cine-teatro, pero actualmente es solamente teatro, y se especializa en obras de revista. Hasta 1939, bajo la dirección de Alvarez, el Broadway fue sala de estreno de los principales sellos norteamericanos, entre ellos la Metro Goldwin Mayer, 20th. Century Fox, Paramount y Columbia y hasta 1935 de películas de producción nacional.

El techo de la sala única original era de forma paraboloidal, ayudando a brindar una excelente acústica, sin ecos ni reverberaciones, y ayudando a una mejor aireación del espacio. Tenía un voladizo de 12 metros sobre la platea, innovador aire acondicionado central, y capacidad para 2265 personas.

El 19 de octubre de 1931, Carlos Gardel cantó en este teatro.

El Edificio Kavanagh es una torre de departamentos situada en el n.º 1065 de la

calle Florida, frente a la Plaza San Martín, en el barrio de Retiro de la ciudad de Buenos Aires.

Inaugurado el 3 de enero de 1936, con sus 120 m. fue en su momento el edificio de hormigón armado más alto de Sudamérica y el primer edificio para viviendas de Buenos Aires que contó con equipo de aire acondicionado centralizado provisto por la firma estadounidense Carrier.

Las obras habían comenzado el 16 de abril de 1934 y la estructura llegó a su altura máxima muy rápidamente, el 3 de noviembre de ese mismo año.

El edificio fue construido por la empresa del Ingeniero Rodolfo Cervini.

La Asociación Estadounidense de Ingeniería Civil lo distinguió en 1994 como hito histórico internacional de la ingeniería.

Queridos amigos amantes de este apasionante estilo, hay mucho más por conocer en nuestra extraordinaria Buenos Aires, será un gusto poder ofrecerles en una próxima oportunidad las obras del Arq. Alejandro Virasoro.■

## Un museo al aire libre en Cuba: la Necrópolis de Cristóbal Colón

Lic. Gustavo López

Existe en La Habana un museo al aire libre de características únicas. El Cementerio de Colón, Monumento Nacional, es una obra importante a escala urbana. Su construcción fue autorizada por Real Decreto el 28 de julio de 1866 y el 30 de octubre de 1871 se inició la construcción. Las obras fueron concluidas casi quince años después, el 2 de julio de 1886.

Con sus 57 hectáreas, es el cementerio más importante del país. Posee un gran número de obras escultóricas y arquitectónicas, razón por la cual muchos especialistas lo sitúan como segundo de importancia mundial, precedido solamente por el de Staglieno en Génova, Italia.

La mayor necrópolis de América, una de las más valiosas a nivel cultural debido a la riqueza de sus esculturas y formas arquitectónicas. En él podemos encontrar numerosas obras de variados estilos artísticos, con impresionantes construcciones y fabulosas esculturas.

Las obras de estilo Art Deco ocupan un lugar importante en la visualidad del cementerio, exponentes como el panteón de Catalina Lasa y Juan Pedro Baró, la versión de la Pietá, esculpida por la afamada Rita Longa, el Panteón del presidente de la República Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, el de la Familia Faya Bonet o el

impresionante Mausoleo de los Mártires de la Guerra de Independencia.

Llena de mitos y leyendas, la necrópolis ocupa una extensa área en la capital, en la que contratan el verde de la vegetación con el blanco frío de los mármoles que guardan recuerdos eternos. ■

## Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas: Sede del Grupo Habana Deco

Lic. Gustavo López

En el céntrico barrio del Vedado habanero encontramos un hermoso palacete de estilo francés que alberga el Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, abierto al público en 1964. Esta mansión singular dentro de la arquitectura habanera, se destaca por la nobleza los materiales empleados en su construcción, lo fastuoso de sus ambientaciones y por haber sido la residencia de María Luisa Gómez Mena, Condesa Revilla de Camargo; una mujer aristocrática que convocó a la Maison Jansen, en París, para recrear lujosos decorados en la casa. Muchas de esas valiosas obras hoy pueden ser apreciadas en los salones del museo, destacándose el lujoso cuarto de baño de la Condesa, en estilo Art Deco, recubierto de mármoles italianos y con luminarias realizadas por Marius Ernest Sabino, en París.

Desde hace poco más de un año, esta importante institución cultural cubana es sede del Grupo Habana Deco, siendo escenario propicio para sus reuniones y eventos sociales. ■

## Art Decó, ¿Estilo, tendencia o moda?

Mario Coyula

En Cuba, el “arte nuevo” que llegó tardíamente a principios del siglo XX tuvo más de Modernisme catalán que de Art Nouveau belga o francés, Wiener Secesión austriáca, Jugendstil alemán, Liberty italiano o Modern Art inglés y escocés. Aquella fue en definitiva una tendencia de corta vida que nunca llegó a prender en las clases altas ni en los primeros arquitectos graduados en Cuba. Tras romper con los códigos historicistas, hubo un regreso generalizado a ellos; y el Eclecticismo Beaux Arts se impuso tanto en la vivienda como en los edificios públicos, sustentado en una bonanza económica que fue bautizada como las Vacas Gordas. La posterior crisis económica asociada a la Depresión mundial se combinó con la crisis política y social que derribó en 1933 a la dictadura de Machado y marcó el fin de la

República de Generales y Doctores. La vieja élite que culturalmente miraba a Europa fue desplazada del poder directo por gobiernos populistas, democráticamente electos durante la década de los Cuarenta, pero viciados por la corrupción y la desigualdad. El modelo a seguir cruzó a este lado del Atlántico, y las pautas de referencias arquitectónicas y estilo de vida pasaron de París a Nueva York y un pequeño pueblo soñoliento al otro lado del Estrecho de la Florida llamado Miami.

En ese contexto de parteaguas la arquitectura cubana recibió un aliento renovador impulsado por la Exposición de Artes Decorativas e Industriales Modernas de París en 1925. La nueva manera de hacer fue en su momento identificada con el término impreciso y necesariamente efímero de moderno; y solamente vendría a ser conocido universalmente como Art Decó mucho después, en 1966. Esa renovación formal fue rápidamente asimilada, aunque llegó sin la sustentación conceptual que había servido de base a las vanguardias europeas del Movimiento Moderno, cuya influencia llegaría a Cuba tardíamente y muy diluida por el hedonismo tropical. También se manifestó en la gráfica, la tipografía y la moda. Todo ello marcó al Arte Decó con una aureola de novedad superficial, decorativa, trendy y chic –y aquí el uso de términos extranjeros es deliberado. Su mejor ejemplo es el espectacular coronamiento del edificio Chrysler (1930), obra maestra de William Van Alen –una imagen impactante que ninguna película que suceda en Nueva York se priva de mostrar.

En 1926 se hizo el primer interior Art Decó en el palacete vedadense de la célebre pareja Juan Pedro/Catalina de Lasa. El exterior de Evelio Govantes y Félix Cabarrocas era todavía ecléctico –renacentista italiano– pero un hijo de Catalina, Pedro Estévez, vino expresamente desde Nueva York para ocuparse de los interiores, donde además René Lalique hizo los elementos en vidrio. Lalique, amigo de la familia, haría en 1932 el mejor panteón Art Decó en el cementerio de Colón, utilizando el motivo de la rosa creada en homenaje a la extraordinaria belleza de Catalina. Por cierto, los jardines fueron diseñados por el paisajista y urbanista Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier, quien había sido el coordinador de la Expo de 1925 en París.

Otros panteones notables Decó en el cementerio, declarado Monumento Nacional en 1987, son los de las familias De Céspedes, Casteleiro, Steinhart, Gómez Mena, entre varias; la sobria Pietá Streamline tardía de Rita Longa en el panteón Aguilera (1958); y especialmente el Panteón de los Veteranos de las Guerras de Independencia (1945) de los arquitectos Enrique Luis Varela y Luis Dauval,

con frisos de Juan José Sicre y Florencio Gelabert. En 1932 los arquitectos Govantes y Cabarrocas hicieron el teatro Paramount en el reparto Lutgardita de Rancho Boyeros, donde tres años antes ellos mismos habían hecho una urbanización con alrededor de cien casas económicas, industrias, escuela, guardería infantil y parque. El interior del teatro fue tratado en un Decó impresionante con exóticos elementos de la cultura maya, quizás a falta de un patrimonio cubano precolombino importante donde buscar inspiración.

El característico despliegue Decó en edificaciones lujosas descansaba en el manejo refinado de texturas y materiales, incluyendo mármoles importados y acero níquel; con el minucioso diseño integral de pisos, techos, lámparas –y el uso pionero del neón y la iluminación indirecta–, herrajes, jardinerías, rejas y detalles escultóricos. Este manejo del detalle complementaba el énfasis en la verticalidad y la expresión de energía y velocidad, influencia tardía del futurismo italiano. Todo esto aparece concentrado en el hermoso pero descuidado vestíbulo del edificio López Serrano (Ricardo Mira y Miguel Rosich, 1932), en El Vedado; que se focaliza en el bello relieve en acero níquel, bronce y esmalte de Enrique García Cabrera. Este edificio ejemplifica el amplio uso de los códigos Decó en edificios de apartamentos, un programa nuevo por aquellos años. Había que atraer a los posibles clientes con un reclamo de modernidad que sin embargo cumpliera con su expectativa de una decoración, distinta pero decoración al fin.

Otro clásico del Art Decó cubano es el edificio Bacardí (Esteban Rodríguez Castells, José Menéndez, Rafael Fernández, 1930), un lujoso proyecto originalmente historicista que fue rápidamente transformado por sus arquitectos tras entrar en contacto con le dernier cri en Europa. Comparando estas dos joyas del Arte Decó cubano es interesante observar cómo en dos años se produjo un cambio en el modelo de referencia, que se corresponde con un cambio en la influencia económica, política y cultural antes mencionada. La mirada ya no se dirige a Europa, sino a los Estados Unidos.

La verticalidad y angulosidad del Decó “clásico” cambió posteriormente con el Streamline y su énfasis en la horizontalidad, las líneas curvas y las esquinas redondeadas, aunque los elementos decorativos se mantuvieron parecidos. En este caso, la influencia vino de Miami Beach. Un buen ejemplo fue el cine-teatro Fausto (1938), por Saturnino Parajón, que recibió Medalla de Oro del Colegio de Arquitectos. Como había sucedido antes con el Eclecticismo Menor, que formó la masa central de las ciudades cubanas, el Decó –especialmente el streamline– se extendió por

los repartos de la capital en casitas bajas de clase media-baja o hechas para alquilar, donde resultó muy conveniente para reducir los costos de fabricación sin renunciar totalmente a la ornamentación que demandaba el decoro pequeñoburgués. También se utilizó mucho en un nuevo tipo edificio en Cuba, el edificio de apartamentos. Esa decoración democratizada, a tono con el New Deal y la recuperación de la Depresión, utilizaba elementos profundos de mortero, y a veces se reducía a unas franjas horizontales en la fachada principal, trabajadas como ranuras o tiras de azulejos.

Uno de los mejores edificios Art Decó de La Habana fue el América (1941) de Fernando Martínez Campos y Pascual de Rojas, que combina la fuerte verticalidad del cuerpo alto con la horizontalidad de la planta baja, que muestra ya la influencia Streamline sobre todo en el lujoso interior del teatro, afortunadamente bien conservado. Solapes como éste caracterizan al Art Decó habanero, y llegan hasta los propios arquitectos, muchos de los cuales se movían indistintamente de un estilo a otro. Quizás el caso más notable fue el joven Rafael de Cárdenas, que habiendo construido una casi réplica de la Ca' d'Oro veneciana en 1930 para Estanislao del Valle, podía hacer entre 1931-1934 para Hilda Sarrá un ejercicio con vestigios Decó que ya entraba resueltamente en un protorracionalismo.

La influencia europea reapareció en el Monumental Moderno, viniendo tanto del Grupo Trocadero de París como del gran conjunto de L'Eur para la Feria Mundial en Roma (1942); orgullo de Mussolini. Esta tendencia en Cuba solamente apareció en edificios públicos. La Plaza Finlay en Marianao (1944), de José Pérez Benitoa, tiene cuatro edificios muy similares de fachada cóncava que rodean una rotonda con un obelisco central como ancla del conjunto. Esto fue lo más cercano que se produjo en Cuba a una intervención a escala urbana con los códigos Decó, si bien las proporciones y sobre todo el espíritu ya eran propios del Monumental Moderno. Algo anterior fue Maternidad Obrera en Marianao (1939), de Emilio de Soto, con un magnífico vestíbulo oval de varios pisos, exemplificando una transición del Streamline hacia el Monumental Moderno. Con humor cuestionable, pero humor al fin, De Soto remedó en la planta curvada del edificio el útero, los ovarios y las trompas del aparato reproductor femenino...

A pesar de su corta vida, la renovación formal que trajeron el Art Decó y después el Streamline, con su contemporáneo europeo Moderne, tuvo un impacto sensible en la imagen de la ciudad. Eso motivó que un especialista reconocido como Eduardo Luis Rodríguez no aceptase el criterio que los

limita a una transición entre el historicismo y el Movimiento Moderno (Rodríguez, 1996, p 271). A diferencia del Art Nouveau de principios de siglo, identificado con humildes maestros de obra catalanes, el Decó tuvo mucho arraigo entre los arquitectos más importantes y la clase alta habanera; y en su versión diluida se extendió a sectores sociales y urbanos más modestos. Pero fue un movimiento que nació sin nombre, no construyó un cuerpo de teoría sólido y propio, y no alcanzó a la escala urbana. Su rápida aceptación y su imagen estilizada y glamorosa, exemplificada en las hermosas portadas de Conrado Massaguer para Social, no borran la impresión de un mundo que ya olvidó la Gran Guerra mientras se acerca inconscientemente a la Segunda.

Mario Coyula Cowley (La Habana, 1935). Arquitecto, diseñador urbano, crítico, autor. Premio Nacional de Arquitectura 2001, distinción nacional Habitat 2004, Profesor de Mérito, Académico de Mérito. ■

## El Colegio Champagnat de Camagüey

Arq. Wilfredo Rodríguez Ramos

El Ferrocarril y la ciudad de Camagüey. La enorme concentración de capital que se produjo en la ciudad cubana de Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe (hoy Camagüey) a mediados del siglo XIX y su más que probada ilustración en aquel "Siglo de las Luces" propiciaron entre 1841 y 1846 la construcción de uno de los primeros ferrocarriles del mundo, que unió al norteño puerto de Nuevas con Puerto Príncipe, la ciudad legendaria y mediterránea que, alejada siempre de los centros financieros y de poder de la Isla (es decir totalmente incomunicada desde todos los puntos de vista) había desarrollado una cultura muy peculiar que terminaría siendo, hasta hoy, su principal carta de presentación.

El ferrocarril cambió para siempre la vida citadina. Para el periodo entre 1900 y 1930 la ciudad se había visto sensiblemente ampliada con nuevos repartos residenciales que respondían a las necesidades de los trabajadores y propietarios vinculados con el ferrocarril. Y en cada nuevo reparto, sumptuosos edificios junto a modestos y vastos conjuntos habitacionales que establecerían una continuidad formal con la antigua ciudad colonial heredada de los españoles.

Alrededor de la Plaza del Vapor, hoy parque Carlos J. Finlay, fue edificado uno de los conjuntos arquitectónicos de más valía en la ciudad, vinculado al tema ferroviario (la

Estación de Viajeros de 1908, la Estación de Carga de 1914, el Hotel "Plaza", de 1915 y el magnífico y neoclásico edificio de oficinas de los Ferrocarriles Consolidados de Cuba, de 1925). Y al norte de este conjunto a partir del año 1900 se fue ampliando, a tenor de un eje central estructurante que constituye hoy la avenida de los Mártires, un gran conjunto habitacional de estilo ecléctico, tanto por sus arquitecturas como por los códigos urbanos empleados en su trazado, una retícula perfecta de manzanas de 90 x 90 metros comunicadas por un sistema de calles secundarias y avenidas de jerarquía variable con arbolado y parterre en la casi totalidad de las vías interiores,... un esquema urbano importado directamente de los códigos de moda en los Estados Unidos, de donde habían venido los inversionistas que habían formado empresa común para el negocio ferroviario.

El nuevo barrio fue llamado "La Vigía", y la avenida central, de 4 carriles con partidor y tipología arquitectónica de portales corridos en ambas aceras, es continuación de la vieja calle colonial de la Reina (hoy calle República), que se introduce en las profundidades del centro histórico fundacional, de calles retorcidas y tipología radial y de "plato roto", constituyendo la única vía en todo el Centro orientada al norte franco.

## Los arquitectos catalanes en el barrio de La Vigía

Aunque a fines del siglo XIX la ciudad de Camagüey tenía ya una bien ganada fama arquitectónica, ante todo por poseer el mayor conjunto de templos católicos coloniales de todo el país, con el advenimiento del XX la herencia constructiva se vio reforzada por los cánones del eclecticismo y bajo la batuta de una oleada migratoria de arquitectos y maestros de obra que arribaron provenientes de la región de Cataluña en España, específicamente de la ciudad de Barcelona.

En muchas zonas de la ciudad fue puesta la huella de la nueva arquitectura en el nuevo siglo, de los nuevos arquitectos catalanes y de la pasión camagüeyana por los buenos edificios. Pero las primeras cuatro cuadras de la gran avenida de los Mártires en la Vigía parecen constituir, de manera fortuita, un museo arquitectónico en el que están representados, a través de ejemplos únicos, todos los estilos de la primera mitad del siglo XX, incluyendo un ejemplar notorio e irrepetible de la arquitectura militar colonial, el Cuartel de Caballería, devenido hotel a principios del siglo y Museo Provincial "Ignacio Agramonte" a partir de 1948, cuando el arquitecto habanero Raúl Otero le adicionó a la fachada colonial neoclásica un pórtico monumental moderno con reminiscencias Art Decó, símbolo del poderío oficial del momento, recuerdo de

la arquitectura grandilocuente de Hitler y Mussolini.

Alrededor de este último edificio se conforma uno de los conjuntos urbano-arquitectónicos más cualificados de la ciudad, pues junto a las viviendas privadas que se extienden en línea a ambos lados de la avenida, se insertan edificios símbolo de los más variados estilos arquitectónicos de la primera mitad del siglo XX: la casona de las 8 Cariátides (1905) del catalán Claudio Muns Piqué, la iglesia neogótica de San José (1936) de su hijo, el arquitecto catalán Claudio Jaime Muns Blanchart, la neo-colonial iglesia y colegio Episcopal de San Pablo (1931) del mismo arquitecto, la empinada torre del hotel "Residencial" (1946), donde el arquitecto Claudio Muns hace, sobre la única estructura de esqueleto metálica para un edificio alto en la ciudad, una fachada Art Decó tardío, pero imponente por su hieratismo, y el "Banco de los Colonos" (1957), del arquitecto camagüeyano Melitón Castelló Verde, una obra clásica del Movimiento Moderno replicada en la ciudad de La Habana con muy poco éxito.

La cuarta obra maestra del arquitecto Claudio Muns Blanchart en La Vigía es el edificio del "Colegio Champagnat" de 1941, la principal obra Art Decó en la ciudad y provincia de Camaguey.

Para 1940 el estilo Art Decó tenía ya una larga historia en Camaguey y en Cuba. Después del eclecticismo, es el estilo más popular en las ciudades tradicionales cubanas y el que ocupó el papel decorativo en cientos y cientos de modestas y pequeñas fachadas, tal vez por la economía que representaba su bella austerioridad frente al caro recargamiento del eclecticismo, tal vez porque los más adelantados veían en él precisamente su esencia, la belleza ligada al futuro y a la modernidad.

Las primeras edificaciones Art Decó de la ciudad de Camaguey datan de alrededor de 1935, pero el estilo se solidificó y alcanzó plenitud entre 1938 y 1945, fecha en que comenzó a ceder terreno al Movimiento Moderno. Los arquitectos y maestros de obra catalanes tuvieron en su haber gran parte de las fachadas Art Decó construidas en este periodo. En la barriada de La Vigía como en la zona más antigua del centro histórico las fachadas eclécticas, que ya habían "modernizado" las viejas estructuras barrocas y neoclásicas de la colonia, fueron sustituidas poco a poco por los nuevos estilos del momento, el neocolonial y el Art Decó. Por esta razón, y salvo muy contadas y valiosas excepciones, el Art Decó camagüeyano es un estilo predominantemente decorativo que se presenta sobre todo en las fachadas de viviendas privadas que mantienen el viejo esquema ecléctico de la planta.....y en ocasiones colonial. No es extraño encontrar

en Camaguey una complicada y neoyorkina fachada Art Decó detrás de la cual aparece una planta austera del siglo XIX y una techumbre de rollizos de madera que nos remonta aun más atrás, a los finales del XVIII. Esta situación comenzó a cambiar a partir de finales de los '30 y en la década de 1940 en que el hormigón armado fue usado ampliamente por todos los estratos sociales para la cimentación y construcción de las cubiertas y entrepisos de sus edificaciones.

Los techos de madera, las plantas de patio central barrocas y las losas catalanas cedieron ante las posibilidades plásticas y duraderas del hormigón armado. Los arquitectos catalanes y sus descendientes, sin embargo, continuaron una brillante carrera edilicia en la ciudad. Siempre lo habían hecho desde su llegada, porque esa era la herencia traída de Barcelona. En Camagüey lo hicieron todo, desde la única reinterpretación que existe en el mundo de la fachada de la casa Batlló, del arquitecto Antonio Gaudí en Barcelona, pasando por la construcción del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, la más espectacular iglesia católica de esta ciudad (1912-1919) y la segunda más alta de Cuba, hasta la muy jocosa e inusitada fachada Art Decó de una casita en la calle de los Pobres, en la que se suman la esencia misma del estilo con la más pura tradición catalana de principios del siglo XX.

#### **El colegio Champagnat de Camaguey**

Desde mediados de los años 1930, los Hermanos Maristas de la Orden homónima tenían interés en construir una escuela en la ciudad de Camaguey. La establecieron alrededor de 1935 y poco tiempo después hubo de diseñarse un edificio nuevo, ante el aumento de los alumnos matriculados cada año.

De una sólida tradición pedagógica, la Orden Marista tenía colegios instalados en las principales ciudades de Cuba. El de Camaguey, financiado por la "Franco American Educational Society" y proyectado en 1940 por el arquitecto catalán Claudio Jaime Muns Blanchart (Barcelona, España, 1898 - Puerto Rico,?) fue construido en el plazo récord de 10 meses. La primera piedra fue colocada el 2 de enero de 1941 y estaba totalmente terminado en el mes de octubre, aunque fue inaugurado oficialmente en noviembre de ese año.

El edificio tiene una planta en "C", alejada ya del antiguo esquema escolar de planta claustral (ninguno de los colegios maristas del país tenían planta de claustro) y se organiza alrededor del consabido patio central ajardinado, elemento clásico de la arquitectura cubana de todos los tiempos por constituir el regulador térmico por excelencia de un edificio en el trópico. Las propiedades de la escuela ocupan un super lote de 6324.00 m<sup>2</sup> de superficie en el que se

incluye un gimnasio, piscina y amplias áreas deportivas exteriores y el edificio principal, de tres plantas, posee un área total construida de 2370.00 m<sup>2</sup>.

Nada escapó en este inmueble al vicio decorativo del estilo. Art Decó son las fachadas monumentales y cada uno de sus elementos decorativos, la letrografía del frontis con el símbolo del colegio, la bella cerca de hierro que cierra la propiedad al frente y a un lateral, el arranque de la barandilla de la escalera interior, las escayolas del vestíbulo y sus pisos policromos, las molduras y yeserías de los techos y el remate de las 22 columnas que sostienen las galerías techadas en los dos niveles del patio interior, todas rectangulares, de fuste liso y clave Art Decó.

Los tres niveles ocupan solamente la primera crujía, a todo lo largo de la fachada principal, compuesta por 5 cuerpos (tres verticales, salientes, y dos algo más retirados, contenedores del mayor número de ventanas de las aulas). En la fachada principal, los cuerpos verticales (2 extremos y uno central) se encuentran enmarcados por enormes pilas de gran fuerza vertical que se proyectan al cielo en doble escalonamiento, hacia el frente y hacia arriba.

El cuerpo central incluye el vano de entrada, un arco de medio punto abocinado con el símbolo marista esmerilado en el vidrio de la luceta.. Y en el extremo superior el frontis, sostenido por las grandes pilas, contenedor del símbolo marista y del nombre del colegio, un elemento verdaderamente imponente que fue diseñado para que se viera perfectamente, inclusive desde el patio interior y las áreas deportivas, porque en su pináculo Art Decó se inserta el asta monumental de la bandera cubana.

A partir de 1959 fue nacionalizada la educación en Cuba y el colegio pasó a manos del nuevo estado ateo. Por este motivo fue retirada de la fachada la bellísima escultura en mármol de Carrara de Marcelino Champagnat (el santo francés fundador de la Orden de los Hermanos Maristas en el siglo XIX), diseñada y esculpida en Italia y colocada en la acera frente al edificio alrededor de 1957. También fue destruida la capilla del segundo nivel, el más imponente interior Art Decó de la ciudad y de la que solo quedan algunas fotografías de archivo en los antiguos anuarios escolares y algún que otro plafón de yeso en las salidas eléctricas de los techos, que perdieron para siempre el escalonamiento Decó original por haber sido subdividida la capilla en tres nuevas aulas. Con el tiempo se perdió el mobiliario original, todo Art Decó, a juzgar por los escasos ejemplos que se conservan (un banco de la antigua capilla y un mural en madera preciosa). Se perdieron las luminarias originales y el mobiliario y

enchapes de los servicios sanitarios, que también seguían las líneas clásicas del estilo.

Actualmente es una muy buena escuela para la educación primaria. En 2002 fue objeto de la primera remodelación de su historia, en la que se rescató la carpintería original dañada en las fachadas e interiores y fue techada la terraza superior detrás del frontis con una estructura metálica ligera, toda diseñada con códigos Art Decó.

La Oficina de Patrimonio Cultural de Camagüey ha otorgado a este inmueble el Grado de Protección I y la categoría de obra arquitectónica de máximo valor en la ciudad.

Sin embargo, el valor arquitectónico de este edificio singular tiene al menos dos lecturas importantes. La primera radica en la evidencia de ser, con mucho, la mejor y más completa obra Art Decó de la provincia y ante todo de una ciudad que, aunque modestas, cuenta con obras arquitectónicas Art Decó de gran valía.

La segunda es más compleja y también más gratificante. El colegio Champagnat de Camagüey fue proyectado con formas Art Decó muy duras, ortodoxas y austeras, más cercanas a la cultura del Decó de Nueva York o de cualquier otra gran ciudad americana de los años 1940. Pero una cosa es el proyecto y otra el resultado final construido. En sus bellas fachadas, junto a la jerarquía de las formas verticales del Art Decó y a la profusión vegetal en los enormes y geométricos paños decorativos, el arquitecto cambió su proyecto.....tal vez por una sugerencia ciudadana, y modificó los vanos de ventanas y puertas en rotundos arcos de medio punto, símbolo inequívoco del pasado colonial, esencia misma de esta ciudad que cumplirá en breve medio milenio de vida, comprensiblemente conservadora e inclusiva moderna.■

## Catalina Lasa y Juan Pedro Baró: Una leyenda de amor en La Habana y dos monumentos Art Deco.

Lic. Gustavo López

La relación de amor entre Catalina Lasa y Juan Pedro Baró más que una historia es ya una leyenda que ha mantenido admiradores a través de las décadas.

Catalina era una hermosa joven que se había casado, en 1898, con Luis Estévez Abreu, hijo de Marta Abreu, patriota de las guerras independentistas, y de Luis Estévez, el primer vicepresidente de la República fundada en 1902.

Catalina Lasa, que era famosa por su hermosura pues había ganado concursos de belleza en 1902 y 1904, conoce a Juan Pedro Baró, en uno de los fabulosos saraos de la época. El rico hacendado queda prendado de la gracia de esta chica y ella queda admirada del porte del joven. Surgió entre ellos una pasión súbita, sin límites, y comenzaron los encuentros a escondidas entre Catalina y Juan Pedro. De un inicial carácter reservado, trascendieron en comentarios de la alta sociedad. Como aún no había sido aprobada en Cuba la Ley del Divorcio, Catalina Lasa se atrevió a pedir a su esposo la separación, pero este no quiso aceptar. Fue entonces que ella determinó irse a vivir junto con Baró, decisión que, si bien significó una realización sentimental, también trajo momentos muy desagradables a la pareja. A causa de los prejuicios de la época y presionado por miembros de su familia, Luis Estévez Abreu mandó a abrir un expediente judicial contra Catalina, y se dictó una orden de captura por bigamia. De inmediato, ella y Baró salieron secretamente de Cuba, aunque serían perseguidos en territorios de otros países. Huyeron a París. Despues, disfrazados y por rutas diferentes, arribaron a Italia, el reencuentro tuvo lugar en Marsella, donde disfrutarían de la belleza de este centro urbano, y, finalmente marcharon juntos a Italia. Su objetivo al llegar a Roma era ser recibidos por el Papa, con quien lograron entrevistarse y les escuchó la historia. La máxima autoridad de la Iglesia Católica los bendijo y anuló el matrimonio religioso de Catalina Lasa y Estévez Abreu.

El presidente cubano Mario García Menocal aprobó en 1917 la Ley de Divorcio en la isla caribeña. Ese mismo año se registró la separación de Catalina de su primer esposo. En ese mismo año regresan a La Habana y son aceptados nuevamente en todos los salones de la alta sociedad y la antes reprochada unión se trocó en aceptación general. Desde ese momento se comienza a proyectar lo que sería uno de los palacetes más famosos de la arquitectura habanera. Son contratados los famosos arquitectos Evelio Govantes y Félix Cabarrocas, quienes crean en la aristocrática Avenida Paseo, un edificio que exteriormente tendrá líneas del renacimiento italiano, con una cornisa inspirada en el Palacio Strozzi, repellos de arenas del Nilo, estucados realizados por firmas parisinas como la Casa Dominique y jardines planeados por el francés Forestier. En su lujoso interior llama la atención la concepción de la decoración, de un modernismo vanguardista para la época, a dos años de haberse celebrado la Exposición Internacional de Artes Decorativas e Industriales Modernas de París. Su escalera principal, con pasamanos de plata laminada, está adornada con vitrales elaborados con fondos de copas de cristales de Bacará.

El cuarto de Catalina Lasa fue ideado con paredes cubiertas de espejos para que la bella mujer contemplara sus atributos femeninos, los mismos que fueron reconocidos en los concursos de belleza de inicios del siglo XX, y que encantaron a Juan Pedro Baró. El cuarto de Pedro Baró se ubicaba a la izquierda y está forrado con maderas preciosas. Entre las dos recámaras existe un pasillo interno con una habitación que permite contemplar la entrada de la mansión y la céntrica avenida de Paseo.

El estilo Art Deco domina los interiores de esta lujosa mansión, donde se dice que estuvo puesta la mano de Lalique y que fue calificada como la más bella de la Habana y fue inaugurada con una gran recepción en 1927. Parecía que Catalina lo tenía todo, cuando Juan le dio una sorpresa imborrable: ordenó a floricultores del Jardín El Fénix crear una flor para su única rosa, que tuviera el color preferido de su amada. Dicen que era el cumpleaños de ella y él la agasajó con un hermoso ramo de rosas amarillas.

Esa rosa de pétalo ancho y puntiagudo, desconocida hasta entonces, la bautizó Juan Pedro con el nombre de su eterna amada: Catalina Lasa.

Al mudarse a la lujosa residencia, la salud de Catalina empeoró a deteriorarse, Baró se la llevó a Francia y allí falleció en 1930. Su cadáver, sometido a un proceso de embalsamamiento, fue trasladado a Cuba y lo colocaron en una bóveda provisional en la Necrópolis de Colón, mientras se levantaba el panteón que albergaría para siempre sus restos mortales, el panteón costó medio millón de pesos. El increíble panteón fue ubicado frente al gran monumento a los Bomberos, en la avenida central del cementerio y creado en estilo Art Deco es una edificación funeraria que acuna la majestuosidad del principal camposanto cubano.

En este recinto funerario fue depositada en 1932 con un ramo de las rosas que llevan su nombre, pero hecho de piedras preciosas. Diez años después de enviudar, Pedro Baró murió en la Habana. Las tumbas de él y Catalina fueron clausuradas con losas de hormigón fundidas in situ para evitar que alguien las profanase. Y, según se cuenta, se hizo enterrar de pie para velar el eterno sueño de la mujer que tanto amara.■

## Eusebio Leal: historia, contemporaneidad y futuro

Lic. Gustavo López.

De entre las personalidades cubanas contemporáneas existe una que para nadie del pueblo es un desconocido. El Dr. Eusebio Leal Spengler ha desarrollado durante décadas una labor, no solo conservadora y restauradora, sino también en la consolidación de un pensamiento positivo y atento hacia la preservación de los valores culturales e históricos, tanto materiales como intangibles. Esta labor educativa, altruista, esforzada y continuada es reconocida por los cubanos desde hace muchos años.

Para Leal, la restauración no es solo devolver lo bello a un edificio, es más que eso... es hacer de ese monumento un motivo de remembranza y de reflexión con mirada futura a lo que fuimos, somos y seremos como localidad, ciudad o nación.

Nuestro Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana comenzó desde muy joven en los andares de la preservación de nuestro patrimonio, conducido por el Dr. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, su maestro y guía. Desde entonces su lucha ha sido diaria y sin descanso, no solo por restaurar sino por proteger del deterioro y la desaparición inminente a importantes exponentes de la historia arquitectónica habanera. Su alma educadora ha propiciado la concientización de los habitantes hacia mirar la Habana con otros ojos, con los ojos de saber que fue y hacia donde se encamina el futuro de las edificaciones, de los parques, de los monumentos, de las tradiciones y las costumbres. Su obra al frente la Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad, donde no solo es restaurar los edificios, sino también cuidar de las personas que habitan el sitio histórico, es un tema referencial no solo para otras ciudades cubanas, sino más allá de nuestras costas. La UNESCO y numerosas ciudades de América Latina y otras partes del mundo se han inspirado en su proyecto restaurador. De igual manera el Dr. Eusebio Leal es reconocido y premiado en las más importantes universidades, catedras, instituciones culturales y gobiernos de Cuba y de diferentes latitudes del mundo.

Gracias a sus esfuerzos y su visión de que no solo lo colonial es lo único "patrimonialmente salvable", la ciudad ha podido recuperar edificios importantes como el Palacio Cueto, La Lonja del Comercio, el Monumento a José Miguel Gómez o la Casa de las Tejas Verdes. Otros como la Universidad de la Habana, el Cementerio Colón, el Teatro Martí o el Capitolio Nacional, se están interviniendo para

su preservación. El Edificio Bacardí, nuestro más importante ejemplo del Art Deco cubano, también ha sido uno de los que han recibido esa rehabilitación necesaria y acertada, por esa visión amplia y valedera de la Oficina que dirige, para la recuperación de edificios de diferentes épocas de nuestra historia. El apoyo de Eusebio Leal ha sido importante en la celebración de los tres talleres Habana Deco, realizados a inicios de la década del 2000, hecho que demuestra su interés en conservar todo el patrimonio edificado. Sus palabras inaugurales han sido alentadoras y afirmativas en el rumbo a seguir hacia la defensa y protección del Deco cubano. Su actuar demuestra que no solo debemos mirar atrás, sino que tenemos que proyectarnos hacia los que convivimos y hacia las generaciones que nos continuarán.■

## La Casa de las Américas, una Casa para todos!

Lic. Gustavo López

La Casa de las Américas, ubicada en la Avenida de los Presidentes, en el barrio habanero del Vedado es una institución singular dentro del panorama cultural cubano y latinoamericano, por su labor ilustrativa y por el edificio donde se ubica.

Como institución fue fundada en 1959, con el propósito de investigar, promover y premiar la obra de artistas del continente, de diferentes manifestaciones artísticas.

Entre sus líneas de trabajo fundamentales está el Premio Literario Casa de las Américas, desde 1959, y organiza también otros premios y encuentros dedicados, esencialmente, al teatro, la música y las artes plásticas.

La Casa cuenta una biblioteca que es una de las más abarcadoras en su género (ámbito latinoamericano y caribeño), sobre todo en lo que concierne a la producción literaria de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, período para el cual es evaluada como la más completa en Cuba. La amplia y diversa colaboración de intelectuales y académicos, instituciones y universidades, de los países del continente, ha contribuido al desarrollo de sus colecciones.

Entre sus publicaciones más reconocidas están la Revista Casa de las Américas, revista de letras e ideas fundada en 1960 por Haydee Santamaría como órgano de la institución homónima, es una de las publicaciones periódicas de su tipo que más larga vida ha logrado en el continente y en el ámbito de la lengua. Cuenta además con otras publicaciones como Anales del Caribe, el Boletín Música y el sello discográfico Casa.

Esta singular institución cultural cubana está emplazada en un llamativo edificio de diseño Art Deco. En sus orígenes existía una lujosa casa de dos plantas, propiedad de la señora María Luisa de Betancourt y Castillo. En 1947, la casa es vendida a la Asociación de Escritores y Artistas Americanos y años después, en febrero de 1953, el edificio se inaugura como Casa Continental de la Cultura, durante la celebración del Congreso de Escritores Martianos. En 1959 pasa a ser Casa de las Américas.

En su estructura exterior se caracteriza por poseer un bloque horizontal de tres niveles. Exteriormente, en el segundo nivel, se encuentra adosado a la fachada, el mural en relieve escultórico que representa las Américas, símbolo de esta institución realizado en piedra Jaimanitas. En el tercer nivel se eleva una apuesta torre escalonada, de dos niveles, coronada por un bloque cúbico pequeño que ostenta un reloj y que culmina rematada por una aguja de vitrales.

Esta prestigiosa institución será la sede para el evento teórico del 12 Congreso Mundial de Art Deco. En su amplia sala de actos, los delegados podrán compartir las diferentes temáticas a debatir y en otro de sus salones apreciarán una exposición de los sitios cubanos Patrimonio Cultural de la Humanidad.

Una vez más, Casa de las Américas nos acoge como institución líder de la cultura de nuestro continente y como lo que siempre ha sido, la Casa de todos!■

## La Casa Argüelles: un edificio pionero de la arquitectura Art Deco cubana

Eduardo Luis Rodríguez

En un amplio lote de esquina de la Quinta Avenida de Miramar, en La Habana, se halla la residencia de Francisco Argüelles, una de las obras más importantes del Art Déco cubano, tanto por su diseño, muy de vanguardia en el contexto nacional en el momento en que fue construida, como por la visibilidad que le proporciona su notable emplazamiento.

Otros edificios habaneros abrazaron el mismo vocabulario formal contemporáneamente, como la casa de Juan de Pedro Baró y de Catalina Lasa, terminada en El Vedado en 1927. Pero mientras en ésta el empleo de las formas Déco se limitó a algunos espacios interiores, en la casa Argüelles este estilo se puede apreciar coherentemente tanto en los interiores como en las fachadas. Con su imagen distinguida, equilibrada e incluso monumental,

debió ser una presencia renovadora en el panorama arquitectónico cubano de la segunda mitad de los años veinte y con influencia en la década siguiente, cuando el Art Déco fue el protagonista principal de los cambios que ocurrieron por entonces en la arquitectura nacional.

La casa Argüelles fue el resultado de un concurso privado realizado en 1927, en el que resultó vencedor el joven arquitecto José Antonio Mendigutía Silvera, quien se había graduado en 1922 en la Universidad de La Habana. Antes de diseñar esta casa Mendigutía había realizado varias residencias en el lenguaje ecléctico típico de ese momento, el que también continuó empleando mayormente en sus obras posteriores.

Ese hecho, y el no haber vuelto a producir una obra Art Déco de relevancia en toda su carrera, plantea la interrogante de hasta qué punto los deseos artísticos de los clientes —la familia Argüelles— pudieron haber tenido más repercusión en el diseño final de la casa que los propios gustos e intenciones del arquitecto.

En cualquier caso la obra resultante, por su carácter renovador así como por sus propios valores, se puede ubicar entre las más notables del siglo XX en Cuba. El haber sido proyectada sólo dos años después de la celebración de la Exposición Universal de Artes Decorativas de 1925 en París indica la rapidez con la que se asimiló el nuevo estilo en Cuba y también define al evento parisino como la principal referencia de los arquitectos cubanos en el momento inicial del cambio de expresión: varios pabellones de la exposición parecen haber influido en la concepción general, en la composición y en la decoración de la casa Argüelles, sobre todo el de las Galerías Lafayette, proyectado por Joseph Hiriart, Georges Tribout y George Beau. Como éste, la casa Argüelles posee una escalinata de acceso por el eje diagonal de la construcción, la cual lleva a la puerta principal ubicada en un volumen que se percibe como torre gracias a sus proporciones verticales y a poseer mayor altura que el resto del edificio. A ambos lados de esta torre, que funciona como pivote visual, se desarrollan las dos fachadas principales, las que se abren mediante terrazas techadas a las calles que enfrenta. Sobre el vano de la puerta se emplaza un relieve del destacado escultor cubano Juan José Sicre, que por entonces se encontraba en la etapa inicial de su carrera artística.

El vestíbulo de la residencia, de planta oval, posee una pequeña escalera de dos ramas, simétrica, y a través de él se accede a los pasillos de circulación que conducen, por la izquierda, a la sala de estar, el comedor y la terraza, y por la derecha, a la cocina, dos

dormitorios, el palm-room y otra terraza. En la planta alta el espacio ovalado sobre el vestíbulo es ocupado por un gran salón, y en el resto del área se ubican dormitorios, baños y terrazas descubiertas. La decoración es elegante y relativamente sencilla, basada en formas geométricas y con estilizadas alusiones ocasionales a elementos florales. El mobiliario original, fabricado en los talleres de muebles Merás y Rico, y hoy lamentablemente desaparecido, también era de estilo Art Déco, mientras que las vidrieras decoradas fueron confeccionadas por Ballesteros y Cía. Ambos fabricantes se encontraban entre los mejores del país en sus respectivas especialidades.

La casa Argüelles fue pionera en la introducción en Cuba de un lenguaje arquitectónico de vanguardia que, con su sistema decorativo renovador, marcaría significativamente los espacios urbanos de todas las principales ciudades cubanas con la huella de una modernidad de nuevo tipo. Ella y muchas otras obras del Art Déco cubano conforman una parte muy importante del patrimonio arquitectónico local que merece todo reconocimiento y plena protección. ■

## Religión y Art Deco en Cuba

Lic. Gustavo López

En las décadas iniciales del siglo XX, la iglesia en Cuba empleaba para la construcción de sus templos códigos derivados del gótico, el románico, el neocolonial y el barroco. Sin embargo, hacia 1930 los nuevos aires de modernidad que trae el Art Deco al ambiente arquitectónico nacional influyen de igual manera en las formas expresivas de los nuevos templos construidos.

En 1936, en la ciudad de Cienfuegos, el arquitecto Luis Dauval diseña una Iglesia Bautista, singular edificio por sus líneas y su ubicación en esquina en el Prado cienfueguero, la arteria vial más importante de la villa. A escalas cuadras, en el Convento de las Siervas de María, se construye en 1940 una Capilla Católica, de marcado estilo Art Deco, obra del arquitecto Federico Laureano Navarro Taillacq.

El edificio que hoy constituye la Catedral de Ciego de Ávila, fue construido en 1951, anteriormente existió un viejo templo, inaugurado en 1890, remodelado y ampliado en 1913 y finalmente demolido en 1947 para edificar una iglesia mayor, más moderna y funcional. El 20 de mayo de 1951 se inauguró el nuevo templo que concibiera el arquitecto cubano Salvador Figueras Peña en solemne misa oficiada por Monseñor Ríos y Anglés, obispo de Camagüey. El 30 de abril de 1996 el inmueble recibió la denominación de Catedral,

rango que ostenta meritariamente. En su fachada se ubica la estatua de San Eugenio de la Palma, santo patrón de la ciudad. Actualmente está siendo valorado para ser declarado como Monumento Nacional del Movimiento Moderno

En La Habana, en 1950 Se construye la Iglesia Santa Rita de Casia, en Quinta y 26, en Miramar, por el arquitecto Víctor Morales. Destacan en esta obra la sucesión de arcos en el techo interior, la fuerte volumetría geométrica de su altar y la singular imagen de la Santa, obra de la afamada escultura cubana Rita Longa.

Al año siguiente se inaugura la Iglesia Metodista y Centro Estudiantil del Vedado, en la esquina de K y 25, perteneciente al movimiento arquitectónico Art Deco, obtuvo en 1951 el Premio Medalla de Oro como obra más sobresaliente del año. El arquitecto de esta obra fue Ricardo E. Franklin Acosta.

Estos edificios, como muchos otros templos de estilo Art Deco en Cuba, son ejemplos del arraigo de este estilo en el país y su influencia en todos los temas de la arquitectura nacional, conformando lo que es hoy nuestro patrimonio Art Deco cubano. ■

## Venir para ver, querer y salvar

Arq. Juan García Prieto

En el año 2000 la Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, UNEAC, aprobó la realización del Encuentro Internacional, La Habana 2000, Diseño, Cultura, Ciudad. En la ocasión, se invitaba “a los diseñadores, arquitectos, artistas, intelectuales y a los que piensan, sienten y aman La Habana, para intercambiar reflexiones y discutir propuestas de acción sobre esta Ciudad”.

Coauspiciado por la Unión Nacional de Arquitectos e Ingenieros de la Construcción de Cuba, UNAIC, tuvo a la Dra. Graziella Pogolotti como Presidenta de Honor y al Escultor y Licenciado José Villa Soberón como Presidente, quién estaba entonces al frente de la Asociación de Artistas Plásticos de la UNEAC, asociación en la que se agrupan aun los arquitectos, Norma Díaz como Vicepresidenta y quién fue la Presidenta de la UNAICC y Como Coordinador General -quién escribe esta nota- el Arq. Juan García Prieto, entonces Presidente de la Sociedad de Arquitectura

de Ciudad de La Habana de la UNAICC y también miembro de la UNEAC.

Ya en el proceso final de organización del Encuentro Habana 2000, Geo Darder trae la solicitud de la Sociedad DECO de Nueva York -ADSNY- presidida por Kathy Hausman y del mismo Congreso Internacional de Sociedades DECO –ICADS- para sumarse al encuentro, con un marcado interés por la Arquitectura y en general por la cultura DECO. Se organiza de esta manera el Taller Habana DECO en el marco mismo del Encuentro Internacional.

Taller auspiciado por la ADSNY, el ICADS, y la UNEAC, donde se planteaba realizar “un ciclo de Conferencias Especializadas, Recorridos por la ciudad y visitas dirigidas a Obras y Museos, y el Encuentro con especialistas sobre la cultura DECO en Cuba y Estados Unidos”.

Después de celebrar este Encuentro y Taller, y de establecer intercambios, Cuba, a través de sus especialistas, comienza a tener un acercamiento mayor a investigaciones, publicaciones y actividades relacionadas con la cultura DECO.

La isla participa en Congresos Internacionales como el de Tulsa, Oklahoma, en el 2001, donde fueron invitados la Licenciada Pilar Fernández y el Arquitecto Juan García; llevé la ponencia de Cuba. En aquella ocasión contamos también con la participación de Patricia Semidey Rodríguez, Agregada Cultural de la Sesión de Intereses de Cuba en Washington, quién propuso, se tomara en consideración la posibilidad de celebrar un Congreso DECO en La Habana.

Al finalizar el encuentro, fui invitado junto a Geo Darder a participar en la reunión del Comité Ejecutivo del ICADS. En esta reunión se ratificó a la Ciudad del Cabo en Sudáfrica como sede del próximo Congreso a celebrarse en el 2003, y la ciudad de Nueva York presentó su propuesta – que fue aprobada- para celebrar allí, en el 2005, el octavo congreso.

Se realizan encuentros en Cuba en el año 2002 –Habana/Camagüey- Marzo 10 al 17- y en el 2003, Habana/Santiago de Cuba. Ambos organizados por Geo Darder y con el auspicio de la UNEAC de la Habana y de las provincias de Camagüey y de Santiago de Cuba se crea

también ese año el Grupo Habana Deco o Sociedad Habana Deco.

Después de Tulsa se celebraron los Congresos internacionales del 2003 en Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica, el del 2005 en Nueva York, EE.UU, y el del 2007 en Melbourne, Australia. En el 2009, durante el Congreso de Montreal, Canadá, y a instancias de Kathy Hausman, Robin Grow y Geo Darder, se propone La Habana para realizar un Congreso en el 2013, para lo que debería Cuba, a través de su Sociedad DECO, ratificar en el encuentro de Brasil en el 2011, su voluntad de ser sede. Para esta fecha se proponía también la candidatura de Shangai como organizador del evento. Finalmente, en el Congreso de Brasil se decide ratificar a La Habana como centro del Congreso Internacional del 2013 y a Shangai para el 2015.

De esta manera, en Septiembre del 2009, “Atendiendo a los requisitos para la celebración en la Habana del XII Congreso Mundial Art Deco 2013, el Consejo Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural del Ministerio de Cultura” reconoce la creación del Grupo de Trabajo CUBADECO “integrado por instituciones con capacidad profesional para ser responsables de gestiones y coordinaciones en el Comité Organizador”, invitando a integrarse como miembros a 11 instituciones y finalmente ,a personas naturales con dominio del estilo Art Deco. Este grupo lo presidió en aquel momento la Sra. Margarita Ruiz al ser la Presidenta del Consejo Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural de Cuba. En el 2012 asume la responsabilidad de presidir el Grupo la Sra. Gladis Collazo, en su condición de nueva Presidenta de Patrimonio.

De ese Encuentro, recordamos a: Luz Merino, Eduardo Luis, Eliana Cárdenas, Pilar Fernández, Nelson Melero, Gustavo R. López, Felicia Chateloin, José A. Choy, Alina Ochoa, Juan García, y Lohania Aruca.

A Semanas de la celebración del 12 Congreso Mundial de Art Deco en La Habana, el Dr. Arq. Mario Coyula planteaba ¿Cómo intervienen en su conformación –de la ciudad- los intelectuales y artistas? ... ¿Cuál debería ser su relación con otros profesionales, con los promotores económicos y con los que toman las decisiones? Y después de otras interrogantes

finalizaba: “quizás todo esto se reduzca a una gran pregunta ¿Cómo manejar el cambio, convirtiendo los problemas en oportunidades?” en aquel Llamado también se hablaba, refiriéndose al legado del Art Deco, de que “ todo ese enorme fondo edificado se encuentra físicamente dañado por el tiempo, la sobre explotación y la carencia de recursos, y deformado por una multitud de obras improcedentes”, y continuaba afirmando, que sin embargo “los edificios no han sido demolidos ni sus habitantes desplazados por los mecanismos de mercado”.

Una ciudad que se abandona a sus ruinas, el país pierde su memoria, su identidad y su cohesión social y cultural. Si no actuamos, la historia no nos absolverá. Es bueno tener la sede del 12 Congreso Mundial Art Deco.

Gracias Geo. Gracias Kathy. Gracias a todos los amantes de la Cultura y del DECO Cubano. Gracias Eliana Cárdenas.

Más que nunca urge convertir los problemas en oportunidades.

Venir, para ver, querer y salvar.■

## Aracajú, un Art Deco escondido

Geo Darder

Entre las grandes urbes brasileñas de San Salvador de Bahía y Recife en la costa atlántica brasileña, se encuentra justo a mitad de camino, una pequeña ciudad, Aracajú, la capital del estado más pequeño de Brasil, Sergipe.

Aracajú fue fundada en 1855 y cuenta actualmente con una población cercana al medio millón de personas. Pues en este lugar remoto lugar del subcontinente americano también encontramos las reminiscencias del Art Deco, para mostrar una vez más que esta expresión artística caló profundamente la estética de toda una generación fundacional del progreso.■

## El Art Decó en la arquitectura Holguinera

MSc. Angela C. Peña Obregón

La Ciudad de San Isidoro de Holguín, hoy capital de la provincia homónima se localiza en el centro norte de la región oriental de Cuba. Fue fundada en las primeras décadas del siglo XVIII como cabecera de un territorio marcado, desde siglos antes, por la presencia de aldeas indígenas de lengua aruaca. Limítrofe al norte con el Océano Atlántico recibió por Cayo Bariay, en la bahía de igual nombre, el arribo del Almirante Cristóbal Colón en octubre de 1492, hecho que grabó el “Encuentro mutuo entre el viejo y nuevo mundos”. Hacia el este, en las aguas de la bahía de Nipe, vino al encuentro de los cubanos, en el año 1612, la imagen de la Virgen de la Caridad, Patrona del pueblo de Cuba, que se venera en el Santuario Nacional del poblado de El Cobre, en la provincia de Santiago de Cuba.

Caracterizada la base económica de la región por la crianza de ganado y cultivos de subsistencia, la ciudad vino a consolidarse urbanísticamente en las primeras décadas del siglo XX. Grandes inversiones de capital de procedencia norteamericana en las industrias ferroviarias, azucarera y minera, permitieron el intercambio económico y cultural entre el territorio que hoy conforma la provincia de Holguín y ciudades de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica. Esa interrelación, impulsada además por la propaganda y viajes de negocios, estudios o de placer de cubanos, y en particular de holguineros, hasta ese país, quien, sabe, fueran las causas de que la sociedad holguinera de esa época, sintiera un gusto especial por el Art Decó y construyera, a su escala de ciudad municipal, caracterizada por raíces campesinas, una variada temática de pequeños edificios y viviendas con elementos decorativos propios de ese estilo, los que, además de modernos, les resultaba económicos, y sobretodo se adaptaban fácilmente a los distintos sistemas constructivos. La presencia del Art Decó provocó en Holguín la puesta al día en materia del diseño decorativo y arquitectónico. Se edificaron viviendas, teatros, iglesias,

hospitales, logias, clínicas, conventos, escuelas, centros escolares, almacenes, comercios, arquitectura funeraria, entre otras tipologías arquitectónicas.

El Art-Decó hace su aparición en Holguín tamizadamente a finales de la década de 1930 en viviendas y teatros, se disemina por el centro histórico, algunos barrios y ciudades del territorio, con un carácter renovador que rebasa la década de 1940 y se extenderá aún hasta los años 50. En un primer momento predominará el sentido vertical de las obras pero pronto asimilará la tendencia Streamline hacia la horizontalidad y líneas curvas, principalmente hacia el ángulo de las esquinas de calles.

A partir de 1937, aparecen las primeras viviendas en un periodo de transición del eclecticismo, transformando los pretilés abalastrados y arcadas interiores a la forma de pirámide escalonada. Esta relación que se establece entre los dos estilos marcará mayoritariamente la vivienda del periodo tratado, aunque existen algunos ejemplos en que se aprecian los elementos decó bastante puros.

El 27 de octubre de 1938 se inauguraba la primera obra Art Decó en la ciudad. Se trataba del Teatro Frexes, obra del arquitecto holguinero Alfredo Escalona Mastrapa, de líneas rectas y diseño escalonados en los vanos, cercha de madera para el techo y capacidad para 1864 localidades.

Un año más tarde el 2 de junio de 1939 se inauguraba el más importante teatro holguinero de todos los tiempos por la Sucesión de Wenceslao Infante, nombre que tomó el coliseo. Su imagen repercutió en un revuelo artístico-arquitectónico que rompió con la arquitectura tradicional construida hasta entonces, y fue copiado por vecinos que recrearon en sus viviendas los elementos decorativos del teatro.

Fue proyectado y dirigido por el arquitecto habanero Saturnino Mario Parajón, quien era ya famoso en el país, con la obra del Teatro Fausto (1938) en el Paseo del Prado, con la cual obtuvo Medalla de Oro. El Infante fue

presupuestado en \$200,000.00, usándose en su construcción el más sofisticado sistema estructural a base de acero, comercializado y montado por la Casa Juaristi, con sede en La Habana, y se le colocaron los equipos de proyección más avanzados para ese entonces en el mundo, iguales a los exhibidos en la feria Comercial de Nueva York ese mismo año de 1939. De planta rectangular, tres niveles de piso, con capacidad para unas 3000 localidades, le fueron agregados dos cuerpos laterales que se integraron al diseño, destinados a comercios y oficinas. En su fachada predominan los motivos geométricos, paños decorativos y la línea vertical con terminación en pináculos, y se expresaba además por una gama pictórica en la que prevalecía el color piedra de su terminación y los paños decorativos en terracota. De noche esa riqueza decorativa se enaltecía con luces azules de neón a todo lo alto y centro de su fachada y sobre la marquesina que exhibía el nombre del teatro. Interiormente también fue decorado con elementos usados por el Art Decó. Pilastres decoradas con líneas en zig-zag y grecas sobre la boca del escenario, complementada por los diseños de vanos escalonados y el de los grandes ventanales de cristal en posiciones geométricas que anteceden a los tres balcones de la fachada.

Otro destacado arquitecto habanero, pero, radicado en Holguín donde desarrolló su obra, la que en toda la década de 1940 trabajó este estilo en proyectos de edificios de apartamentos, viviendas, rehabilitaciones y en instituciones no estatales como el Colegio Médico de Holguín, magnífica obra de línea vertical decorada con las de tipo zig-zag en su fachada. El salón de reuniones también fue decorado con elementos Art Decó, a base de escocías y paños decorativos de color amarillo sobre el blanco de sus muros.

Otros edificios Art Decó construidos en la localidad fueron proyectados por el arquitecto santiaguero Ildefonso Moncada Madariaga, entre ellos edificios mixtos y residencias de la clase alta; y el habanero Juan Abalo Bartlet, entre finales de la década de 1930 y la de 1940, cuando apenas los arquitectos Escalona y Menéndez comenzaban su labor en la ciudad.

Al tratar el estilo en la ciudad de Holguín, no podemos dejar de mencionar la obra de mayor envergadura construida durante el periodo de 1939 a 1944 y que formaba parte de un amplio plan nacional llevado a efecto por el Coronel Fulgencio Batista, Presidente de la República desde 1940 a 1944. Nos referimos al Instituto Técnico de Holguín (ITH) Calixto García.

Inaugurado el 23 de febrero del año 1944, la obra no es única en el país, ya en 1936 el proyecto se había realizado en Ceiba del Agua, provincia Habana, pero el de Holguín fue ampliado, a un total de 12 inmuebles: centro escolar, teatro, pabellones para varones y hembras (1200 capacidades), biblioteca, hemeroteca, clínica, talleres con imprenta, comedor, cocina con panadería, alojamiento para profesores, acueducto, etc.

La dirección general del proyecto estuvo a cargo del ingeniero Cristóbal Díaz, y trabajaron en su ejecución en distintos momentos los ingenieros: Juan Llinas, Manuel Gartey, Vázquez Tobalina y Manuel de Jesús de Góngora.

El conjunto fue edificado, en el sitio La Pantoja, enfrentado a la Carretera Central vía Habana, en un espacio natural donde realmente resulta sorprendente la magnitud de la obra y la riqueza arquitectónica y artística que posee. Logrado por distintos bloques de edificios articulados por hermosas áreas verdes y viales, en sus diseños predominan los entrantes y salientes y paños decorativos a base de elementos geométricos calados, entre ellos el edificio central con su gran vestíbulo en cuyo piso de terrazo se encuentra al centro el logotipo del centro escolar y detrás de este, el hermoso teatro, aún autentico, con su diseño floral calado.

La ciudad en la década de 1950 recibirá aún elementos del Decó. Entre las obras edificadas entonces se distinguen el Hotel Tauler, actual Hotel Turquino, proyectado por el arquitecto J. E. O` Bourque, de cinco niveles, trabajado con la variante del Streamline, y el Cine Roxy (Baría) con un coronamiento de líneas verticales, expresado como un mural sobre la marquesina que lo preside, obra del arquitecto

Luis F. Rodríguez Columbié.

Debe destacarse que, algunas de las viviendas de la ciudad, como fue la casa de Ignacio Wong, trabajaron maestros del patio, elaborando los diseños de los paños y la carpintería: los albañiles y carpinteros Juan y Elpidio Tejeda y el yesista y artista autodidacto Pedro Machado.

En ciudades municipales de la provincia, como Banes y Sagua de Tánamo principalmente, encontramos valiosos ejemplos del Art Decó. La primera, con significativas relaciones con los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica por la presencia de la United Fruit Company, desde los primeros años del siglo XX se caracterizó por construcciones de madera exportadas desde ciudades del norte, con la particularidad de que, maestros carpinteros de la localidad, introdujeron valiosos elementos, pero entre las décadas de 1930-1940 se vio atraída por el Art Decó y edificó un variado e importante repertorio: cine, iglesia, casa parroquial, convento, escuelas, comercios, logias, hospitales, entre otras tipologías funcionales. Muchas de estas obras fueron proyectadas por el arquitecto saturnino Mario Parajón, como fue el cine Hernández que rememora al Fausto habanero.

Por su parte Sagua de Tánamo, población que antes de 1876 pertenecía a Guantánamo, conserva una arquitectura ecléctica donde predominan los elementos geométricos, y en su parque central José Martí, se alza la iglesia católica Santísima Trinidad (1878), presidida por una esbelta torre de líneas verticales, rematada por una cruz, erigida en el año 1952.

Otras ciudades, entre las que se encuentran Gibara, Buenaventura y Cueto edificaron al estilo Decó modestas viviendas, comercios y edificios.

En fin, a manera de resumen, al tratar la significación del Art Decó en Holguín podemos aseverar que sentó tradición. Incorporó a la ciudad nuevas imágenes culturales, renovando la arquitectura anterior, arcaica y de carácter rural, permitió que proliferaran edificios de mayor altura, ya mixtos y de apartamentos, renovó la vida urbana con teatros y hoteles, y hoy, en sus calles, repartos y barrios suburbanos se conservan valiosos exponentes como parte integrante del patrimonio holguinero.■

## Santiago de Cuba a las puertas de la modernidad

*Elidar Puente San Millán*

### Introducción

El Art Decó constituye parte importante del patrimonio arquitectónico desarrollado en Cuba durante la primera mitad del siglo XX. Esta tendencia ha sido valorada por reconocidos historiadores y críticos de la arquitectura iberoamericana como Roberto Segre, Carlos Sambricio, Eliana Cárdenas, Pilar Hernández, Luz Merino, Lohana Aruca, Eduardo Luís Rodríguez, entre otros; quienes le han otorgado gran significación por su amplia difusión y por su papel primordial como puerta de entrada al Movimiento Moderno.

En Santiago de Cuba, segunda ciudad en importancia y población del país, la expresión de este estilo se torna diversa, y asume rasgos identitarios singulares. Su Centro Histórico en particular contiene más de doscientas edificaciones de influencia Decó surgidas en las décadas del treinta y cuarenta, período que coincide con los sucesos del terremoto de 1932 que afectó en gran medida las construcciones existentes en la ciudad. La proliferación de estos códigos, puestos de manifiesto tanto en edificios públicos como de viviendas, constituyó una alternativa decorosa ante la situación por la que atravesaban los habitantes y la urbe.

En la actualidad estos inmuebles son sometidos a constantes transformaciones y muestran un alto nivel de deterioro, lo que conduce a la pérdida paulatina de los valores y la autenticidad de esta arquitectura. Por tanto, se hace necesario propiciar el reconocimiento y la revalorización de este valioso patrimonio.

### Antecedentes históricos

El contexto temporal en el que se desarrolló el Art Decó en Cuba estuvo limitado primero, por el período de mandato político del General Gerardo Machado, quien inicia en 1925 e insiste en permanecer en la presidencia respaldado por una reforma

constitucional; y después por la segunda dictadura militar de Fulgencio Batista iniciada en 1952 tras un golpe de estado. La etapa republicana (1902-1958) se caracterizó por los grandes contrastes en el orden político, económico y sociocultural.

La ciudad de Santiago de Cuba no quedó exenta a lo que ocurría en el país en este período, siendo la problemática en la zona Oriental más compleja debido a la situación de atraso que vivían estas ciudades alejadas de la capital. El desarrollo económico de Santiago de Cuba beneficiaba a un pequeño grupo de familias de la alta burguesía, quienes aún así manifestaban frustración ante la supremacía del capital foráneo que controlaba el territorio a través de las enormes compañías y empresas norteamericanas.

Esta influencia también se expresaba en el ámbito cultural, manifestándose sobre todo en las relaciones de la sociedad adinerada, pues “[...] los burgueses cubanos educaban a sus hijos en los colleges y universidades norteamericanos, militaban en organizaciones sociales de origen norteamericano - Vista Alegre Tennis Club, el Club San Carlos, el Ciudamar Yacht Club, Country Club- y copiaban en sus más mínimos detalles el modo de vida estadounidense.”

Sumada a esta situación política, económica y social se evidenciaba el abandono de la ciudad por parte del gobierno. Disímiles artículos de la revista Arquitectura y Urbanismo , y del Boletín Acción Ciudadana de Santiago de Cuba , publicados en los años treinta y cuarenta, se refieren a la necesidad de equilibrar las inversiones y otorgar importancia al desarrollo urbano de la Capital del Oriente de Cuba. Si bien la ciudad contaba con el alumbrado eléctrico, tranvía y ferrocarril desde inicio de siglo; le faltó por mucho tiempo servicios básicos como: el acueducto, el alcantarillado y la pavimentación de sus calles.

A inicios de la década del treinta tiene lugar en Santiago de Cuba un fenómeno sísmico de considerable intensidad. El terremoto de 1932 quedó registrado en la historia como uno de los hechos más tristes para la localidad, que

afectó aproximadamente el 80 porciento de las construcciones existentes.

Resulta significativo que la fecha de datación de las primeras edificaciones Art Decó surgidas en la ciudad coincide con el año en que sucede esta tragedia, lo que permite pensar que esta situación coyuntural, adicionada al deseo acumulado de progreso de los habitantes, condicionó la elevada presencia de los rasgos del renovador estilo en Santiago de Cuba.

**Arquitectura Art Decó en Santiago de Cuba**  
 La arquitectura Art Decó está presente en la trama histórica de la ciudad, y se extiende además a los barrios y repartos de nueva formación, pues la ciudad había experimentado un crecimiento importante en la primera mitad del siglo XX, dando lugar a los Repartos de Vista Alegre, Sueño y Santa Bárbara y a un cordón de barrios obreros alrededor del centro tradicional como: Veguita de Galo, Chicharrones, Mariana de la Torre, Flores, Los Olmos, San Pedrito, entre otros.

La apropiación del Art Decó fue mayor por parte de la pequeña burguesía y el proletariado, debido a ello su expresión formal es mayoritariamente sobria, teniendo su esencia en la variedad compositiva y el uso de materiales discretos. Los inmuebles dedicados a la función habitacional, en todas sus tipologías, no sobrepasan los cuatro niveles, presentan remates geometrizados y pilastres adosadas al plano de fachada que enfatizan la verticalidad de la construcción, y elementos decorativos con diseños de figuras geométricas simples como el rombo o el cuadrado.

Dentro de los ejemplos más relevantes se encuentran: el edificio de vivienda en apartamentos de la calle San Gerónimo No 351 esquina Reloj en el Centro Histórico y la vivienda individual ubicada en calle 4 No 253 del reparto Vista Alegre.

A pesar que la vivienda es el tema donde mayor difusión alcanzó el estilo, es preciso referir la existencia en la ciudad de importantes exponentes asociados a la función social como los almacenes de Belleau y Hermanos, la tienda por departamentos El Encanto, el teatro

Oriente, el desaparecido teatro Aguilera y el colegio Hermanos La Salle; los cuales presentan características similares a las manifiestas en la arquitectura doméstica, aunque poseen mayor altura y diseños con alto grado de elaboración, respondiendo a la función que desempeñan.

Bajo la iniciativa estatal surgen además algunas obras que se caracterizan por su marcada monumentalidad. Dentro del tema militar se construye el Cuartel Moncada, la Cárcel Provincial de Oriente, un Panteón-capilla para las Fuerzas Armadas, un conjunto de viviendas de madera para los alistados, y el Palacio de Justicia que en el proyecto inicial mostraba los rasgos del Art Decó y terminó siendo un claro exponente de la llamada arquitectura Monumental Moderna. Como parte de la campaña contra la tuberculosis se desarrollan otras obras de carácter social, como el Sanatorio Ambrosio Grillo y el Dispensario antituberculoso “F. S. Hartmann”.

En el Centro Histórico se encuentra una muestra significativa de obras Art Decó. Este ámbito urbano, declarado Monumento Nacional en 1979, destaca por su marcada centralidad y el valor patrimonial que posee la zona, otorgado por la antigüedad y la presencia de edificaciones de todos los períodos evolutivos de la arquitectura y la ciudad. Se caracteriza de forma general, por la adaptación de un trazado irregular sobre una topografía cambiante, y el desarrollo de una trama compacta definida por manzanas cuadradas, rectangulares y trapezoidales, lotes yuxtapuestos y edificios medianeros, que establecen la presencia de la planta con patio interior.

En este contexto la influencia Art Decó se desarrolló en dos variantes, la primera representó sólo un cambio formal a nivel de fachada en las edificaciones de la etapa hispánica, manteniéndose intacta la disposición tradicional de los espacios, organizados alrededor del patio interior. Este hecho estuvo condicionado por la propia estructura y morfología urbana del Centro Histórico, donde la medianería entre construcciones constituye el factor determinante. De esta forma, se evidencia que todas las viviendas

individuales se desarrollan dentro de esta variante, predominando la planimetría en forma de L, U y C.

La segunda variante, promovida en menor medida, dio lugar a las construcciones de nueva planta. Esta evolución de los esquemas funcionales se manifiesta fundamentalmente en los edificios públicos y en los edificios de apartamentos. La necesidad de adaptar dichos modelos edificatorios al clima de la localidad potenció la presencia de patinejos en edificios medianeros, y el desarrollo de plantas en forma de peine para edificios ubicados en lotes exentos, como el Cuartel Moncada (Ciudad escolar 26 de Julio).

La documentación encontrada en el Archivo Histórico Municipal permitió conocer los nombres de los principales arquitectos y maestros de obras que proyectaron con los códigos del Art Decó. Se destaca la producción de experimentados profesionales como: Antonio Bruna Danglal, Ulises Cruz Bustillos, Gerardo Vega Wright, Sebastián Ravelo Repilado, José Federico Medrano, Idelfonso Moncada, Francisco Ravelo Repilado y Felipe

Fontanills Roca. Se pudo precisar también el período de desarrollo del estilo, el cual se enmarcó entre los años 1932 y 1948 según las fechas de proyecto, y la etapa de auge asociada al número de obras proyectadas se refleja entre 1935 y 1941.

La evolución que alcanza la arquitectura Art Decó se reflejada sobre todo en los componentes formales a nivel de fachada. En estas edificaciones se percibe la continua simplificación de los elementos ornamentales, pues en la primera década de desarrollo se encuentran obras de superficies texturadas, decoradas a partir de incisiones verticales u horizontales, con motivos geometrizados en las pilastras y el pretil, azulejos en forma de rombo imprimiendo colorido al plano de fachada, así como diseños elaborados en herrería de lucetas y barandas. Sin embargo, en los años cuarenta la decoración disminuye paulatinamente hasta quedar identificado el estilo exclusivamente por la presencia de pilastras y el escalonamiento del pretil.

En los interiores la ornamentación se manifiesta fundamentalmente en los plafones para

lámparas y en el elemento divisorio entre las dos primeras crujías, donde se localizan espacios de uso social. Este último asume múltiples formas, que se corresponden con las expresiones utilizadas a nivel de fachada, mostrándose de igual modo la combinación del Art Decó con estilos precedentes o posteriores.

Finalmente se puede plantear que la arquitectura Art Decó en Santiago de Cuba, y en su Centro Histórico particularmente, se desarrolló en las décadas del treinta y cuarenta, coincidiendo con el período de recuperación de la ciudad después del terremoto de 1932. En toda la urbe existen exponentes que constituyen hitos locales, y un considerable número de viviendas que analizadas en su conjunto aportan identidad a la imagen urbana de distintos sectores.

Estas obras, aunque en su mayoría modestas, constituyen parte indisoluble de la memoria histórica de la ciudad de Santiago de Cuba, variante distintiva del quehacer arquitectónico en la zona Oriental del país que merece ser conservada. ■



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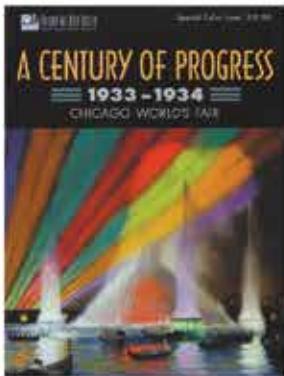
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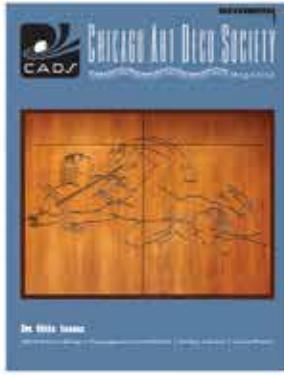
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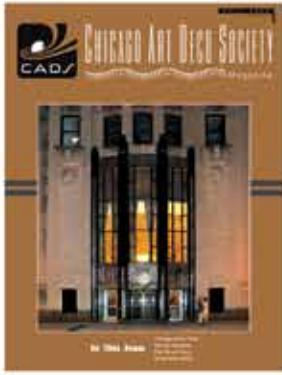
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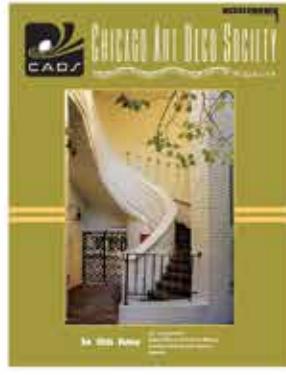
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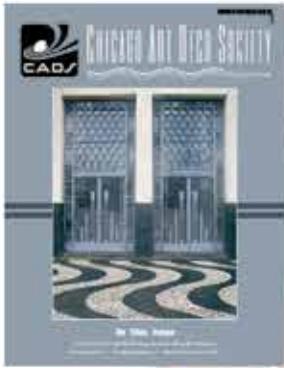
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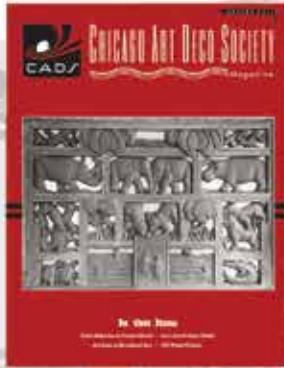
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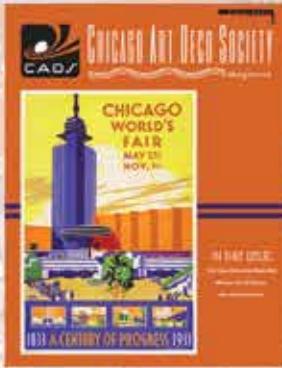
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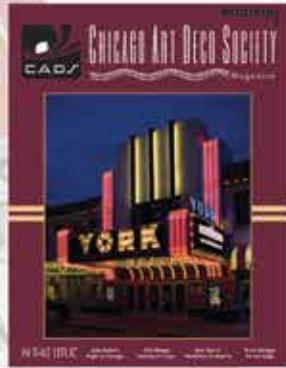
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