



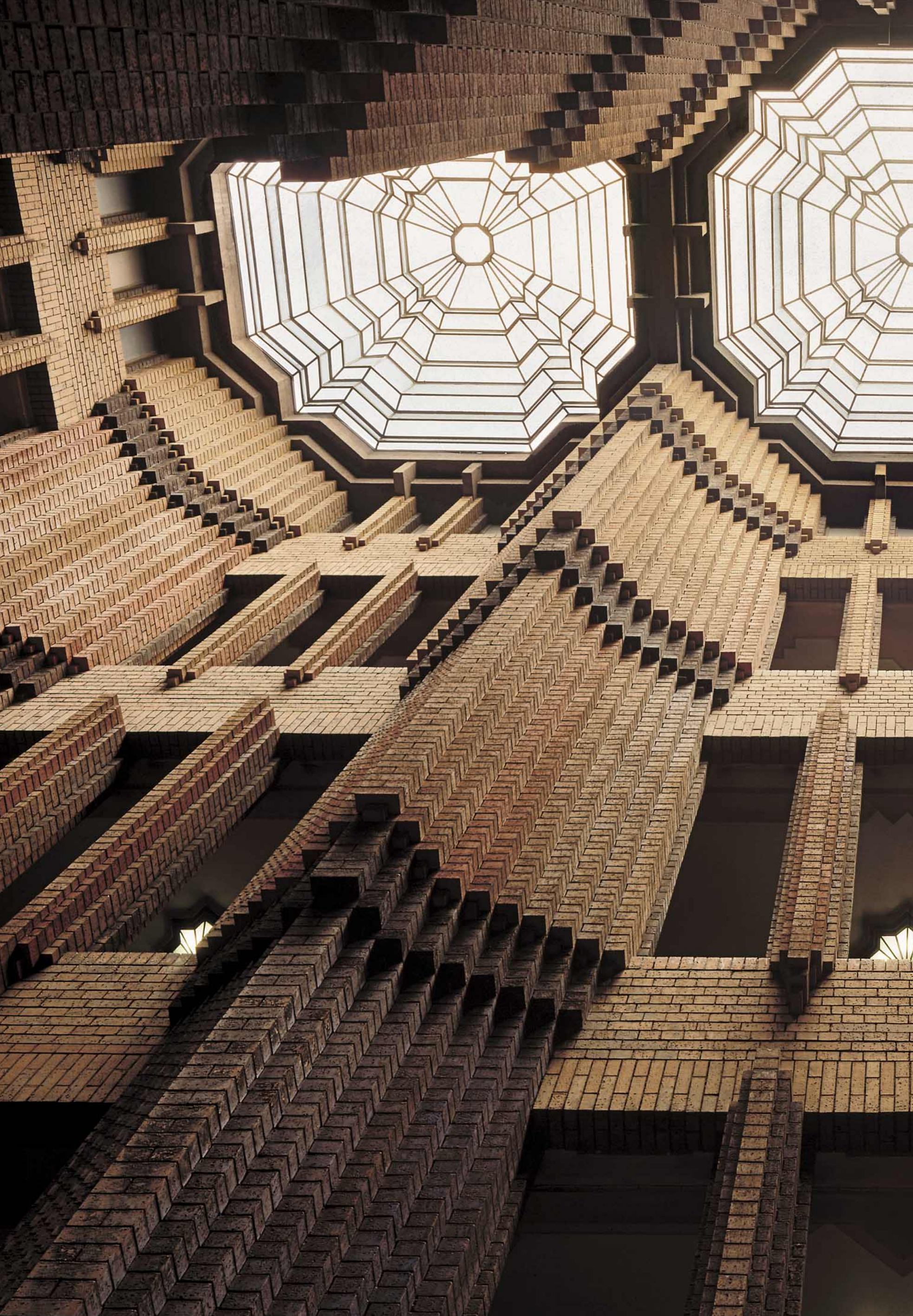
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**ART
DECOR**

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EDITORIAL NOTE



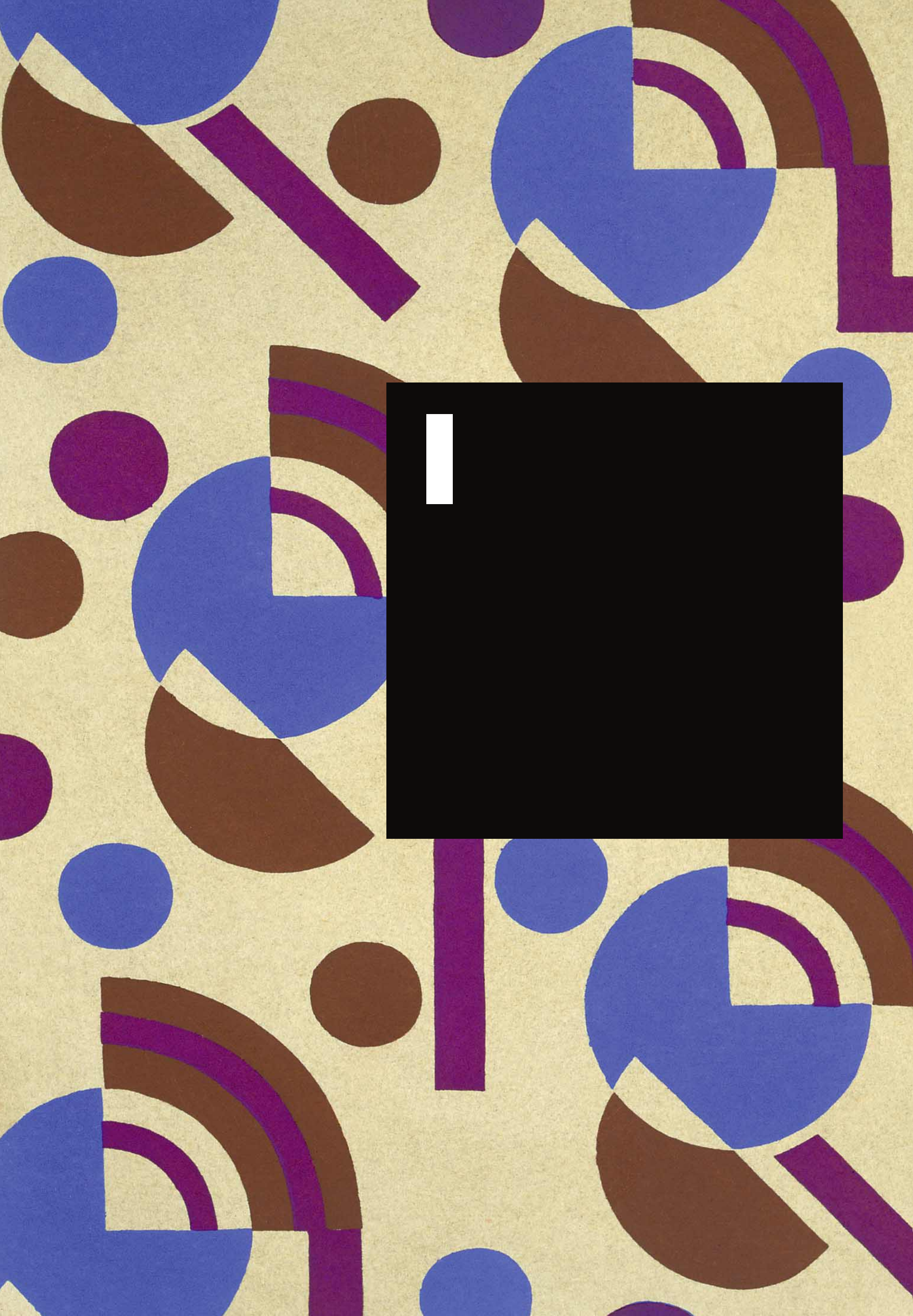
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the present book Art Deco is not treated under the auspices of the art and antiquities market. An abundance of literature on this already exists. My interest instead has been in the art historical circumstances as well as the preconditions of Art Deco within intellectual history and cultural politics. But—regardless of the general line of questioning—nor should the range of works and the aesthetic fascination of this movement, which flourished worldwide between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II, be short-changed. The posited goal seemed achievable to me only by discussing Art Deco against the background of parallel styles and “isms.” Of course, the resulting abundance of material could not—not even nearly—be comprehended in all its facets. Thus it was all the more important to give the individual steps of the argument exemplary significance.

To this end I was able to draw support from a wealth of scholarly stimuli, the listing of which would have far exceeded the space available. For this reason the bibliography is limited to important titles that are also relatively accessible to a non-specialist readership. I have reduced the footnotes

to an absolute minimum, including only the sources of quotations and important information and ideas gathered from the research. Those publications in the bibliography that are unmistakably devoted to a particular artist or theme have not, as a rule, been listed again in the footnotes. The birth-and-death dates of all the artists discussed in some detail have been noted in the index.

I would like to thank Prestel Verlag for its willingness and scholarly courage in allowing for a representation of Art Deco within such a wide-ranging context of meanings. Claudia Stäuble and Cilly Klotz were among those who supported my intentions most at all times. The realization of this book in such an ambitious form is thanks to the commitment and dedication of many colleagues at Prestel, among whom I would like to single out Julie Kiefer in particular. Eckhard Hollmann and Clemens Lucius carried out the corrections and editing with their usual mastery and aplomb. And finally I would like to express special thanks to Ilja Sallacz from LIQUID Design Agency for the book’s equally well thought-out and beautiful layout.

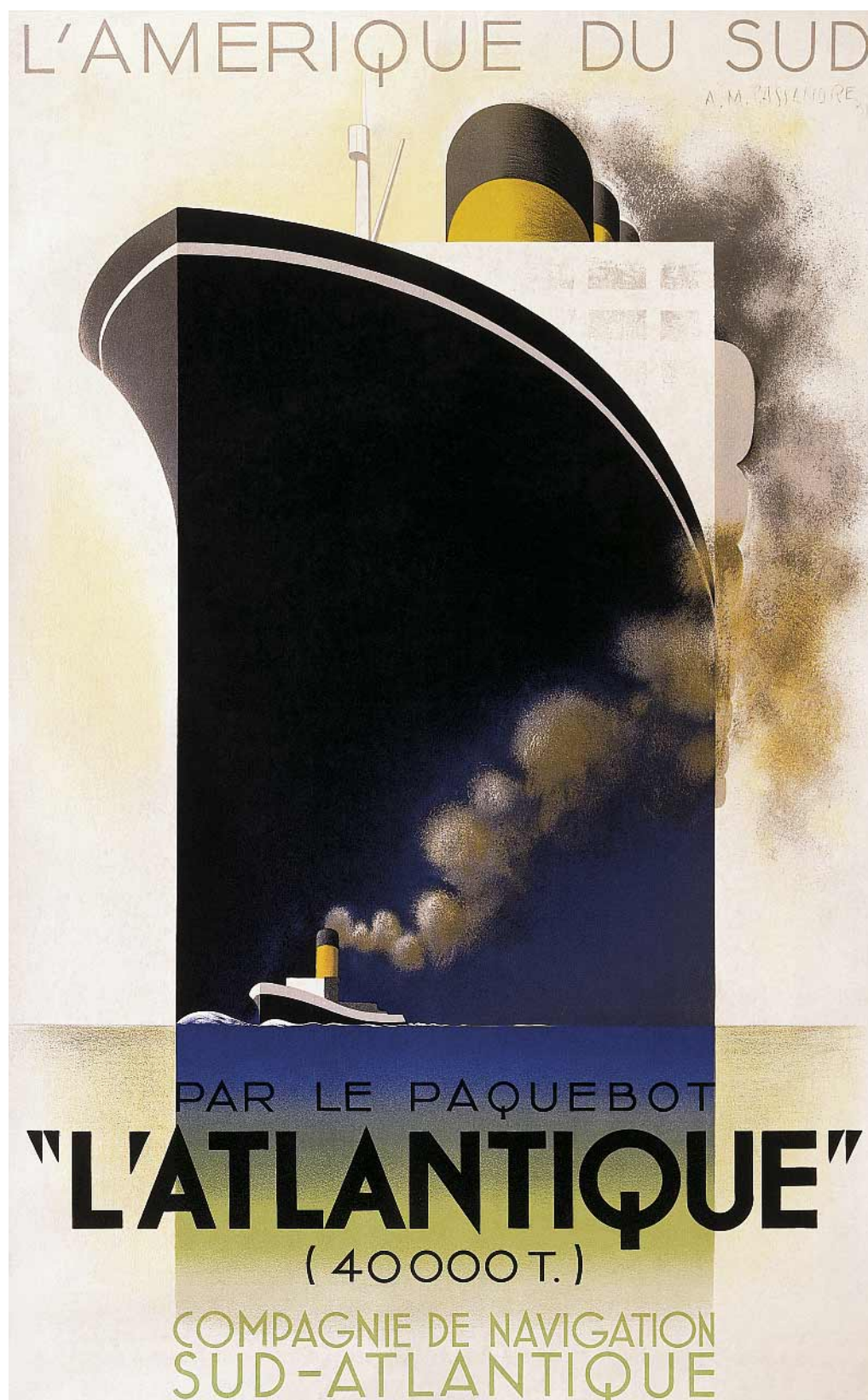


The background of the entire page is a textured, light beige or tan color. It is covered with a repeating pattern of abstract geometric shapes. These shapes include solid blue circles, solid brown circles, and solid purple circles. There are also larger, semi-circular or quarter-circle shapes in blue, brown, and purple, some of which are layered or overlapping. The overall aesthetic is reminiscent of mid-century modern or Bauhaus style graphic design.

**MODERNISM
BEAUTIFIED?**

One of the most spectacular posters of the 1930s boldly depicts the French ocean liner *Normandie* (fig.2). Shown in a precipitous perspective, the ship heads abruptly towards the viewer. The artist who designed the poster, Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron, known under the pseudonym Cassandre, also depicted the ship's hull from an extremely low vantage point, visually enlarging the colossus to the point of excess.

The elegance of the simplified contours, the geometric proportions of the spatial organization, and the decorative layout with its integrated promotional lettering form a delicate counterpoint to this monumentality. Like the sleek divine messenger of a new aesthetic, an aesthetic of the machine, the ship's bow breaches the picture plane in a monolithically stylized, steely precision. The interiors of such luxury liners, reserved for well-heeled passengers, were significantly less "cool," however.



In a 1928 edition of the Werkbund journal *Die Form*, Bruno Paul, the architect, designer, and co-founder of the Münchener Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk (Munich Unified Workshops for Art in Craft), rapturously described the furnishings of another French ocean colossus, the *Île de France*.¹ He emphasized the light and open effect of the interior space and continued, "The extensive use of mirrored glass and light is calculated to enhance society's self-image." In the vestibule all the walls are composed of "vitrines ... with beautiful objects, well-suited for arousing the purchasing desire of rich women and serving to promote the famous shops along the Rue de la Paix. France's highly developed trade in luxury goods celebrates a triumph here. ... In the rooms there are heavy and sumptuous carpets and soft furniture with lovely weavings. Everything is modern, in the newest 'French Style'."

1—A.M. Cassandre
L'Atlantique
1931, lithograph, billboard,
99.5 × 61.5 cm, Collection of
Posters Please, Inc., New York

[right page]
2—A.M. Cassandre
Normandie
1935, lithograph, billboard,
100 × 62 cm, Collection of
Posters Please, Inc., New York



NORMANDIE

C^{IE} G^{LE} TRANSATLANTIQUE

LE HAVRE — SOUTHAMPTON — NEW-YORK
SERVICE RÉGULIER
PAR PAQUEBOTS DE LUXE
ET A CLASSE UNIQUE



ICONS OF ART DECO

[left page]

3—Tamara de Lempicka
Tadeusz de Lempicki
1928, oil on canvas,
130 × 80.5 cm, Centre Georges
Pompidou, Musée national
d'art moderne, Paris

4—Dora Kallmus

*Tamara de Lempicka with
Hat and Fox Fur*
c. 1929, photograph

The interior furnishings of the *Normandie*, whose exterior Cassandre's poster had presented so impressively, were vastly more lavish even than the description just quoted. The luxury liner—at the time the world's largest ship—was launched on 29 October, 1932 and on its maiden voyage three years later its magnificent dining rooms and luxury cabins offered the rich and beautiful a floating Art Deco stage.

The shipping company had enlisted the leading squad of French interior architects and designers: Roger-Henri Expert, Jean Dunand, René Lalique, Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann, Louis Süe, André Mare, Raymond Henri Subes, and many others. Mirrored glass was framed by gold and silver, precious figurative lacquerwork by Dunand served as wall panels and represented somewhat stylized African fish, historical galleys, and sea monsters; in the “grande salle à manger” lamps extended like transparent cascades from the ceiling

to the floor; furniture was resplendently upholstered with bold floral patterns: to the present-day eye, a strangely eclectic mixture of modern/functional and relatively “plushy” formal elements.

Among the highly fashionable ladies who strolled, dined, or flirted in these grand interiors, one or two must surely have seemed like some luxurious creature that had alighted from the pages of a glossy magazine and styled her appearance into the same kind of fashionable and aesthetically inviolable perfection that the painter Tamara de Lempicka was portraying for the world at the time (fig. 4).² And in the *Normandie's* smoking salon, decorated by Dunand with reliefs and a great deal of gold leaf, many passengers may have resembled the distanced and arrogant guise of a Tadeusz de Lempicki, as depicted by his wife in 1928 (fig. 3).³ The skyscrapers in the background of the picture call to mind the fact that the *Normandie's* destination was New York. If they were interested in such things travellers could see elegant jewelry or upholstery fabric—familiar from the French Style—in the display windows of the luxurious shops there; but there were also annoying differences. This may have tempted one or another progressively



minded recent arrival in New York to pass a verdict like that of the painter Fernand Léger. He compared the *Normandie's* furnishings to New York's Radio City Music Hall and declared the French manner to be a mindless continuation of floral Art Nouveau, in brief: pathetic tastelessness.⁴ But even when their verdict was more moderate, many travellers to New York, upon seeing the Chrysler Building (fig. 6), will have spontaneously asked themselves whether this skyscraper belonged to the same artistic category as the contemporary buildings they had previously seen in Paris. The almost 320-meter-high skyscraper was constructed by William van Alen between 1928 and 1930 and was essentially a steel scaffolding hidden beneath a decorative cladding. Ornamental elements in the form of giant Chrysler radiator hoods as well as a tile frieze of wheel motifs were mounted on the thirty-first floor; at the pin-

nacle a twenty-seven-ton "needle" of nickel stainless steel grows out of the pyramidal, tapered "spire" of white tiles and nickel panels. Even today, the Chrysler Building is considered one of the most artistically compelling skyscrapers of the twentieth century and an Art Deco architectural icon.

It should be borne in mind that in the New York of the late 1920s and 1930s everyday objects (such as radios) made of Bakelite, garishly colored plastics, and other unusual combinations of materials could be seen and admired en masse (fig. 5), as well as cheap but strikingly styled consumer goods in aerodynamic forms, from automobiles to vacuum cleaners, from hair dryers to the streamlined chairs of Californian designer Kem Weber. A cultivated French globetrotter, in particular, long accustomed to identify this stylistic movement—which would later become known as Art Deco—with the sinfully expensive retro style of a designer like Ruhlmann, would have had difficulty placing these kinds of consumer goods on the same stylistic level as the elite Parisian products. This dilemma of the extraordinary heterogeneity of forms and objects attributed to Art Deco still confronts researchers today.



5—Walter Dorwin Teague
 Sparton "Bluebird" radio
 1933, Die Neue Sammlung,
 Munich

[right page]
 6—William van Alen
 Chrysler Building, New York
 1928–30



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