

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The Archtourist

A tour through art deco Toronto



Author Tim Morawetz sleuths downtown streets for the tell-tale signs of a Jazz Age flavour



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Tim Morawetz stands on the steps of the Mayfair apartments on Avenue Road in Toronto. After a lightning session pointing out the traits that place this handsome building firmly in an earlier period of art deco than neighbouring buildings up on St. Clair - strong verticality, piers with multiple planes and low-relief carvings of Jazz Age owls, lotus buds and sunbursts - he cranes his neck to take a closer look at one of the lighting sconces that frame the doorway.

"Look" he says, pointing to a mounting bracket that passersby and, likely, building residents never see. Here too, there is a flourish, a detail that evinces a brain rather than a machine was behind the design. "Deco went from the largest, broadest detail about the building design right down to the most subtle detail," he says, clearly pleased.

And so, too, does his new self-published book, *Art Deco Architecture in Toronto: A Guide to the City's Buildings from the Roaring Twenties and the Depression* (Glue Inc., 2009). It takes a wide view of the style while drilling down to the smallest detail and, as such, it's a feast for armchair architourists and urban walkers alike.



The Pylon Theatre (now the Royal), built in 1939 by Benjamin Swartz.

After a foreword by local legend Eberhard Zeidler and a wonderful scene-setting essay by Paul G. Russell, Mr. Morawetz gently prepares the reader for the literary journey ahead with a primer: Pyramidal massing, banded windows, decorative spandrel panels, Vitrolite glass and sexy speed-stripes are introduced.

Next comes a rich catalogue of over 70 buildings wearing some, or all, of that deco finery. Mr. Morawetz reintroduces old friends such as Baldwin & Greene's 1928 Concourse Building (with its J.E.H. MacDonald-designed mosaic panels), Roy H. Bishop's 1929 Tip Top Tailors office/warehouse, Eaton's College Street and the "most decorated Art Deco apartment building in the city" at 2837 Yonge St., the Glen Grove. Better yet, lesser-known gems share the spotlight, such as Mathers and Haldenby's 1931 Campbell's Soup building on Birmingham Street, James H. Haffa's 1941 Saints Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church near Trinity-Bellwoods Park and a little creampuff of a house with rounded corners, metal railings and octagonal windows in Cedarvale (1938, architect unknown).

To represent the glitzy side of the style, there is a chapter on movie houses, covering everything from the grandiose 1934 Eglinton by theatre-masters Kaplan and Sprachman to the smaller 1939 Pylon (now the Royal) by Benjamin Swartz.

Two maps help readers locate what's still standing, since it was Mr. Morawetz's goal to write a book that "you'd be proud to leave out and flip through while you're having a glass of wine, or that you can put in your backpack on a nice Saturday and stroll through your neighbourhood and actually go see 10 buildings."

Throughout, connections are made. For instance, city of Toronto architect J.J. Woolnough not only designed the CNE's Horse Palace, but also Firehall No. 12 at 840 Gerrard St. E. and Police Station No. 12 at 2398 Yonge. Knowing this, it becomes easy to spot similarities between them. For connections of a different kind, there are over 60 invaluable architect biographies prepared by architect Robert G. Hill.



The rounded corners, metal railings and octagonal windows in this Cedarvale home built in 1938 are all hallmarks of the art deco style.

The deco bug bit the 51-year-old business writer during his college years. In the decades since, Mr. Morawetz has travelled to attend and lecture at many of the ten World Congresses on Art Deco, including one in Perth, Australia and created walking tours for Toronto Arts Week.

The book, in fact, was self-published in order to make it available to attendees of the Tenth World Congress on Art Deco in Montreal this past May. Mr. Morawetz stresses, however, that the soft-cover tome isn't just for globetrotting scholars: "Art deco, intrinsically, is a very friendly, accessible, popular style. I bet if you took a hundred people and showed them an art deco building, a modern building, a gothic church or an old fashioned bank with columns at the front, more than half of them would say 'The deco building speaks to me, I get it, I don't have to have an art degree to understand it.' "

Making it even easier to "get it" are 230 photographs taken by the author between 1980 and 1995 - meaning buildings now lost are represented - and their delightful captions, which often note items or interrelationships even the most seasoned observer might miss. "I wrote most of this book in a ski chalet up in Collingwood," he explains. "When my family was out skiing on weekends, I would be down in the basement with my computer on one table and my slide projector up on a box just gazing at the slides. And when you look at slides for five minutes, that's when [you find] the extra level of detail."

Now in front of Page and Steele's 1938 Park Lane Apartments on St. Clair West - famous for being classical pianist Glenn Gould's home for many years - Mr. Morawetz stops, mid-sentence, during a discussion of the streamlined moderne style: "I just noticed this now," he says, pointing to a brick post beside the parking ramp. It's capped with a stone that, rather than being a plain square, is stepped ever so slightly.

Yet another detail discovered... might be time to start planning the second edition.

For where to find Art Deco

Architecture in Toronto or to

order online, visit <http://www.artdecotoronto.ca>.