What Makes a New York Building Art Deco?
Part I
Structure
ALL BUILDINGS HAVE BOTH STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

Internal structure refers to many parts of a building that:
• Give it support
• Keep it standing
• Allow the building to function

Structure can also be viewed as the overall structural form (the silhouette) of a building.

Empire State Building
THE STRUCTURE OF ALL BUILDINGS INCLUDES:

- Walls
- Windows
- Roofs
- Entrances

Some buildings may also include outdoor spaces like:

- Gardens
- Courtyards
- Playgrounds

Noonan Plaza

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WHICH PARTS OF THE STRUCTURE DO YOU SEE IN THIS ART DECO BUILDING?

Structure Key
• Walls
• Windows
• Roofs
• Entrances
• Gardens
• Courtyards
• Playgrounds

Dunolly Gardens
THE PERSON WHO DESIGNS A BUILDING IS CALLED AN ARCHITECT.

How the architect puts these structural parts together determines the style of a building:

• Walls
• Windows
• Roofs
• Entrances
• Outdoor spaces
• Interior spaces

Famous architects dressed like the buildings they designed in New York

From left to right: Stewart Walker (Fuller Building), Leonard Schultze (Waldorf-Astoria), Ely Jacques Kahn (Squibb Building), William Van Alen (Chrysler Building), Ralph Walker (1 Wall Street), D.E.Ward (Metropolitan Tower), and Joseph H. Frelander (Museum of New York) at the 1931 Beaux Arts Ball.
The Art Deco style of architecture became popular in the 1920s and 1930s.

Deco Buildings were designed with features that reflected changing times in America.

- Modern cities were developing.
- As more people moved to Manhattan, New York expanded outwards toward what are now the outer boroughs, as well as upwards.
- Buildings were being made taller and taller creating the modern skyscraper.
- There were many new materials being created, such as aluminum alloys and plastics.

Aluminum alloy decoration on 70 Pine Street
• Even though buildings are made of the same structural parts, each building is unique in its appearance.
• However, like people in a family, most Art Deco buildings share similar, but not identical, features.
DO YOU NOTICE ANY SIMILAR FEATURES IN THESE BUILDINGS?

1001 Jerome Avenue

Sears, Roebuck & Company Building

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MASSING

- Massing refers to the general shape and size of a building.
- Art Deco skyscrapers normally have different levels of massing, making them look similar to a Mayan stepped pyramid.
Vertical accentuation refers to lines that make your eye move from the bottom all the way up to the top.

In Art Deco buildings, these lines are often made using windows that line up from the bottom of the building to the top.

Architects then often spoke of “the vertical style” when referring to buildings we now call Deco.

The Bronx County Building
**WRAP AROUND WINDOWS**

- Wrap around windows are windows that wrap around the corner of a building.

- This type of window is very common in Art Deco apartment buildings.

265 Cabrini Boulevard
FLAT ROOFS

- Flat roofs are roofs that have no angle at all, unlike most houses that have a slanted roof.
- Some Art Deco buildings have flat roofs, or multiple layers of flat roofs that make the building look narrower at the top.
- Some flat roofs have gardens.

Rockefeller Center rooftop gardens on a flat roof

Multiple layers of flat roofs

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Part II
Design
ALL BUILDINGS HAVE BOTH STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

• Although every building is made of the same structural parts, they all look different because of how a building is designed or decorated.

• When creating a building, architects make artistic choices that affect the look of a building.

• All of those artistic choices are known as “design.”
DESIGN OF ALL BUILDINGS INCLUDE:

• Materials that make up the outside of the building.
• What the entrance looks like.
• The colors.
• How the windows are shaped, framed or accented.
• Patterns on the walls or around doors.
• The addition of objects to decorate walls or even the top of a building.

American Radiator Building

Which parts of the design do you see in this Art Deco building?
SURFACE MATERIAL

- The exterior of buildings can be made of various materials, which could be:
  - Brick
  - Metal
  - Stone
  - Glass - some buildings even look like they are made of glass because of their big windows.
COMMON DECO SURFACE MATERIALS ARE:

Limestone – a smooth stone that was often made into very large blocks that made a very smooth surface.

Granite – a natural stone that could be highly polished was used to make a very luxurious surface.

Limestone blocks used in the Brooklyn Public Library

Polished black granite on the base of 275 Madison Avenue

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DECORATIVE SURFACE MATERIALS

- Surface materials like limestone and granite are often used for the majority, or a large portion, of a building’s exterior.

- While designing a building architects will add smaller sections of decoration out of other surface materials.

Above the entrance of 30 Rockefeller Plaza
DECORATIVE SURFACE MATERIALS

- Decorative surface materials are often used to add decoration to the outside of a building.

- In the 1920s and 1930s, there were many new materials that were added to buildings of the Art Deco style to make them look different from buildings of other styles.

- Some of these materials were metal alloys which were created during this period.
  - Metal alloys were used to make buildings seem modern.

Metal alloy and glass doors of the Chrysler Building

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MORE DECO SURFACE MATERIALS WERE:

Mosaics - a picture or design made from small pieces of colored glass or ceramic tiles.

Terracotta - a red clay often used for ceramic bowls, vases, or artistic works was used in the decoration of a building. Terracotta can bring bright colors to a building’s surface.

Mosaics at the entrance of the Fish Building

Painted terracotta on the outside of Gramercy House
SCULPTURAL RELIEF

• Relief is a form of sculpture in which the figure or design is raised from the background, similar to a coin.

• Relief sculptures were often used to enhance entrances, make borders around windows, and along roof edges.

Sculptural relief above the entrance of the Daily News Building

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SPANDREL

• Spandrel panels are decorative pieces that fit between windows of different floors that are directly above one another.

• In Art Deco these often had a decorative pattern such as abstract geometric shapes and were made of metal alloys, terracotta, or stone.

Spandrels between the windows of 1001 Jerome Ave

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Many architects in the 1920s and 1930s used geometric shapes and lines to make patterns such as zigzags.
Geometric shapes became so popular that architects and designers began to simplify other natural shapes into simple geometric forms.

Some of these were:
- fountains
- leaves

Art Deco fountain at 181 Madison

Art Deco Leaves on the Chanin Building

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PARAPET

- A Parapet is a low wall along the edge of a roof, bridge, or balcony.

- In Art Deco buildings a parapet can sometimes extend far above the roof to make it a decorative focal point.

- This is why many Art Deco buildings look like they are wearing a crown.

Parapet on top of 55 Central Park West
This presentation was designed to offer a basic understanding of New York Art Deco architecture. There is much more to discover about 1920s and 1930s New York at ArtDeco.org.

We invite you to explore the city to find more examples of the Art Deco style. The New York Art Deco Registry at ArtDeco.org is a great source to find Deco Buildings in your area.