



Streamline Moderne: Houses, Furniture & Architecture

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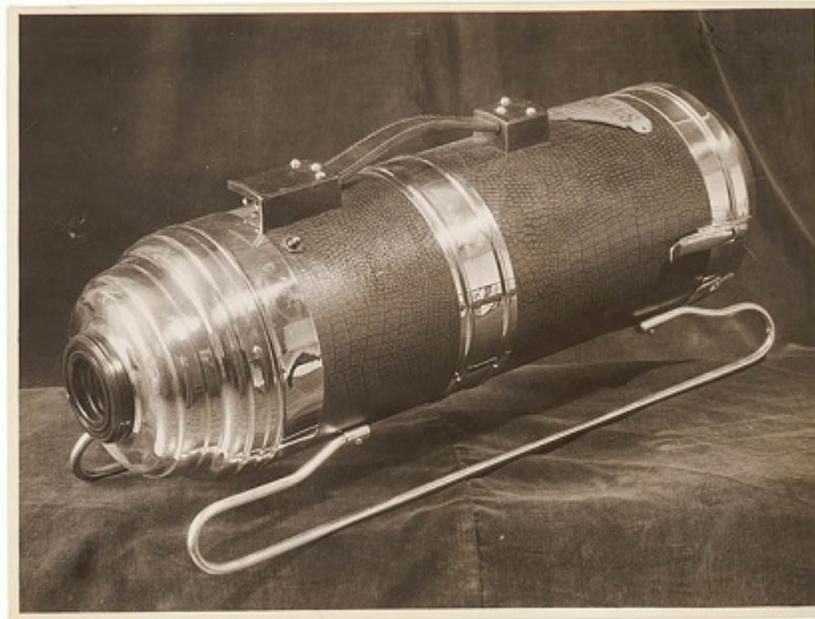
Learn about Streamline Moderne and see how it was influenced. Study Streamline Moderne architecture characteristics and see Streamline Moderne furniture examples.

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What is Streamline Moderne?

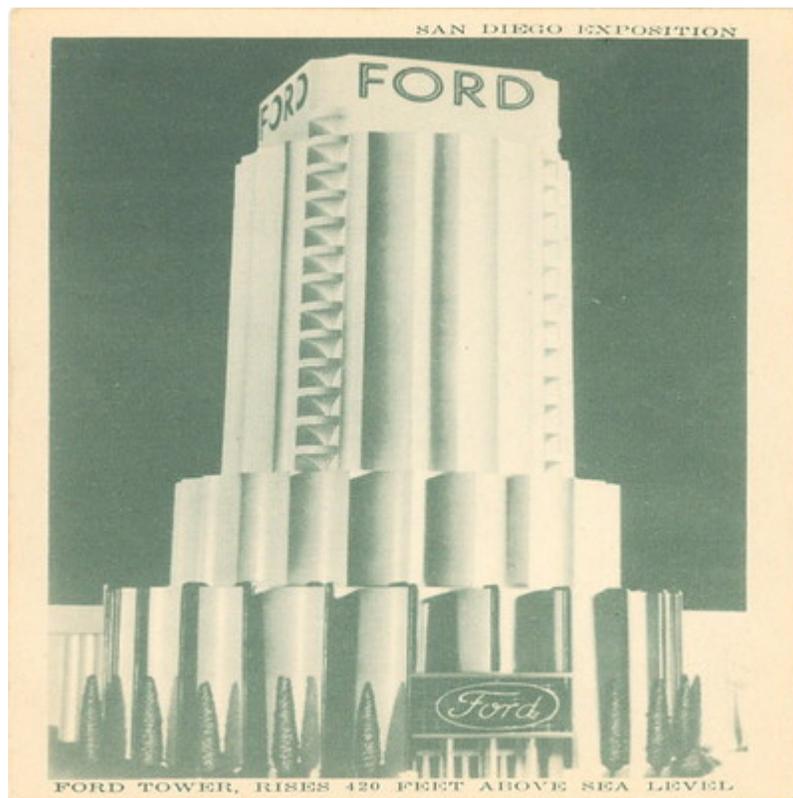
Streamline Moderne style, sometimes called Art Moderne, was a popular design movement in the early 20th century. A continuation and adaptation of the Art Deco style that emerged during the 1920s, Streamline Moderne shared many characteristics with the earlier movement, including sleekness, an appreciation for simple lines, and a modern feel. While **Art Deco** luxuriated in the wealth and luxury of the new Industrial Age, it was primarily a movement of wealthy consumers. With the onset of the Great Depression in the late 1920s, the emphasis on modern luxury gave way to an interest in a style still very much rooted in industry but in a more accessible way for all consumers. Streamline Moderne, which is sometimes described as the final movement of the Art Deco style, shared its love of chrome and metal but took it further, creating an aesthetic very much rooted in modern industry. Soon, commercial buildings representing Art Moderne architecture were plentiful, easily identifiable by their rounded, sleek corners and horizontal lines. By the 1940s, the style had entered the homes of consumers who were hungry for the modern, sleek look of both the home design and appliances. Streamline Moderne is also credited as being one of the first movements to take a step toward Modernist design, which removed ornamentation almost entirely from spaces and objects.



Streamline Moderne Vacuum

This new style was particularly interested in the transportation industry, which was booming due to innovations in automobiles, the airline industry, rail lines, and modern shipping. Soon, the style's popularity was cropping up in other public buildings, such as amphitheatres, retailers, and motels. Streamline Moderne relished these new developments in **aerodynamics**, speed, and ballistics. It often presented shiny chrome- and aluminum-laden elements with rounded lines, a horizontal emphasis, and a sense of motion. The movement first took hold in the United States in the early 1930s but soon spread across the globe. In France, it was called *paquebot style*, which referred to the ocean liners it often based its aesthetic on. Today, around the world, Streamline Moderne is one of the easiest style influences to spot and identify.

Streamline Moderne in Architecture and Design



Ford Building

Art Deco design had its roots in the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, where it was eagerly embraced by European audiences for its notes of luxury and modernism. Enchanted by new materials like plastic and chrome, Art Deco style relished cleaner, more geometric lines. Art Deco enthusiasts found their style a perfect antidote to the stuffiness and ornateness of Victorian design that was popular at the turn of the century. Art Deco used ornaments and decoration more sparingly but also catered to wealthy homeowners who could afford its rich materials and style. Buoyed by the prosperity of the Roaring Twenties and the social climate of the Jazz Age, Art Deco flourished. Many early skyscrapers, such as the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building were designed in the Art Deco style, which also influenced art, furniture design, fashion, and manufacturing.

Nearly a decade later, two World's Fair events shaped the proliferation of Streamline Moderne architecture and design in contemporary culture: the 1933 Chicago Century of Progress and the 1939 World of Tomorrow in New York. Both fairs featured exhibits that typified the Art Moderne aesthetic, much of it centered on transportation giants like Ford, who built large pavilions. Both fairs brought the beauty of Streamline architecture in front of audiences and inspired the architectural style's boom in certain areas of the country, such as Miami Beach and Los Angeles, both of which still harbor a number of structures created in the Streamline Moderne style.

Characteristics of Streamline Moderne Design

Characteristics of Streamline Moderne design include rounded edges and undulating lines. Buildings were often curved and avoided right angles. While the previous Art Deco architecture emphasized soaring heights (like the Empire State Building), Streamline design emphasized the horizontal lines of the structure. Buildings were either sprawling or given the illusion of being so with use of horizontal elements. Buildings and homes were often made out of stucco or brick with a preponderance of metal accents and trim.

With an emphasis on industrial material, Art Moderne often involved a lot of chrome, metal, and aluminum elements. For windows, glass bricks were popular, as were strip windows, narrow bands of windows that ran around the perimeter of a structure. Circular windows also appeared frequently, echoing the build of a ship. Streamline Moderne largely took its motifs from the transportation industry, whether it was the sleekness of the bullet train or the nautical feel of a steamliner. Colors were often pastels, white, or cream. Unlike Art Deco's love of ornamentation, the sleekness of Art Moderne eschewed ornamentation in favor of industrial simplicity.



Greyhound Station

Streamline Moderne Furniture Examples

As the popularity of Art Moderne architecture proliferated, industries of other varieties embraced the modern form. Appliances influenced by Streamline Moderne were plentiful and included toasters, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, lamps, and fans. Furniture makers embraced the rounded

lines and silhouettes of Streamline Moderne style, including the popularity of chrome and aluminum aspects as additions to upholstered and wood surfaces.



Art Moderne Radio

Lesson Summary

While it went out of fashion around the time of World War II, Streamline Moderne (or Art Moderne) style left an enduring legacy in both architecture and product design. While its roots are found in the **Art Deco** movement of the 1920s, Art Moderne left behind the geometric preciseness of Art Deco and moved toward curved lines and horizontal planes. It also stripped the Art Deco style of much of its ornamentation. Streamline Moderne took its inspiration from industry and new developments in automation, **aerodynamics**, and ballistics. Initially popular in commercial buildings, the style soon moved to homes, where it was manifest in many buildings made of stucco and employing strip windows or glass blocks. Industrial designers met the demand in the 1930s and 1940s for homes looking to encapsulate Streamline Moderne style by designing utilitarian objects, including toasters, lamps, and vacuum cleaners.

Video Transcript

What Is Streamline Moderne?

Have you ever seen a building that resembled a ship or a bullet? In the 1930s, a style of architecture and design got its inspiration from just such objects. It was called Streamline Moderne.

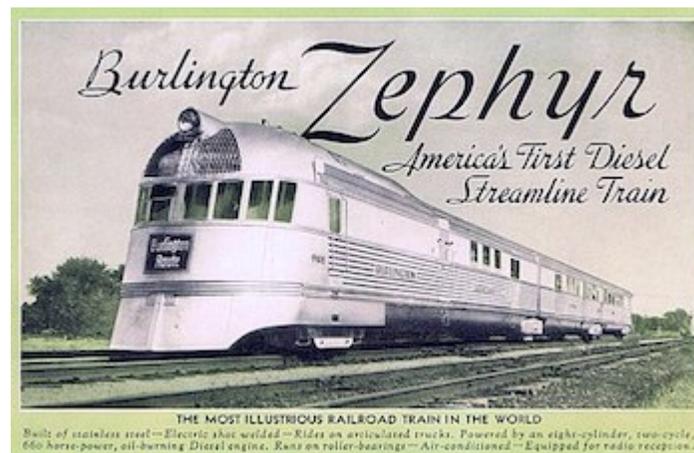
Streamline Moderne as a style grew out of a slightly earlier style called **Art Deco**, which had gained prominence after a major 1925 art and design show in Paris. Art Deco was full of geometric patterns like zigzags, modern materials like plate glass and chrome, and bold colors.

In the early 1930s, a more pared-down version of Art Deco began to appear. It removed excess ornamentation and reflected the clean lines of machine-age engineering. This late phase of Art Deco style became known as Streamline Moderne. It developed in the United States but then spread to other parts of the world.

Streamline Moderne in Architecture and Design

Elements of Streamline Moderne were strongly influenced by studies in **aerodynamics**, or the way air moves around objects, and **ballistics**, the study of how projectiles move in flight. And yes, that meant things like bullets. It was the modern age of machines, and that modern world filtered into many aspects of design.

These 20th-century scientific ideas influenced the shape of transportation vehicles like planes, locomotives, ocean liners and automobiles, many of them new and revolutionary machines. Their rounded forms, slick surfaces and horizontal lines emphasized speed and motion. Those same design elements also filtered into architecture, furniture design and industrial design.



The modern design of transportation vehicles like locomotives reflected Streamline Moderne style

Architects began to take these ideas and use them on buildings, especially commercial structures like gas stations, movie theaters and new structures called motor hotels or motels. **Industrial designers**, people who designed the look and feel of products meant to be mass-produced for sale in many places, incorporated similar design elements into many kinds of objects, including furniture and appliances like refrigerators, radios and toasters.



Even mass-produced objects like toasters reflected Streamline Moderne style

Across the United States, especially in places like Los Angeles and Miami Beach, Streamline Moderne structures emphasized the modern age. The style remained popular through the 1930s and into the early 1940s before fading from prominence around World War II.

Characteristics of Streamline Moderne

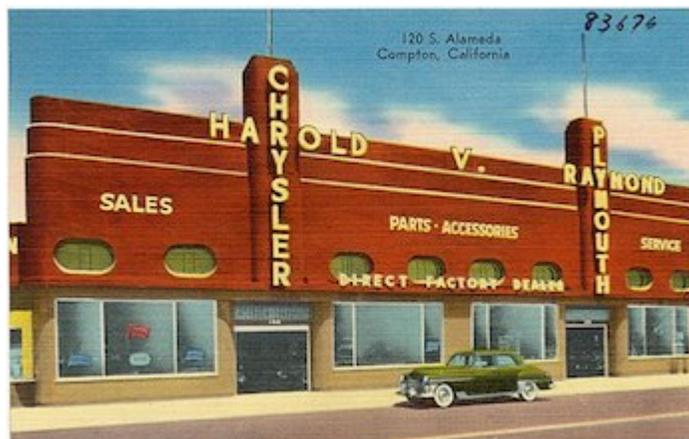
Architecture, furniture and other objects made in the style of Streamline Moderne had several important elements in common. All tended to have smooth, polished surfaces full of curves and a strong emphasis on horizontal line. They didn't have excess ornamentation. Whether the object in question was a home or a sofa, you might see shapes similar to teardrops or torpedoes. Furniture had a strong geometric emphasis without ornament. Materials might be modern metals, leather or wood.



Gas station done in Streamline Moderne

Buildings tended to be asymmetrical with flat roofs. Often, but not always, they were one-story structures longer than they were tall. Colors could be white or pastels with modern metals like aluminum, stainless steel and chrome used around doors and windows. Other modern materials

included glass block and plate glass. Some structures even had round or oval windows that suggested nautical transportation like ships.



Another example of a Streamline Moderne building. Notice how these windows resemble those of an ocean liner

Streamline Moderne was used more for commercial structures than for homes, but some houses were built in the style. They tended to have the same horizontal emphasis, curved shapes and clean lines, and were often done with walls of white stucco and **strip windows**, thin, narrow bands of windows in a horizontal line. Interiors often featured modern metals and bold color contrasts like black and silver.

Although Streamline Moderne was popular for a relatively brief period of time, it proved very influential to modern design. As you travel, keep your eyes open for those sleek curves and horizontal lines. It's a very distant style and when you see it, you can't mistake it for anything else.

Lesson Summary

Streamline Moderne was an architecture and design style that developed out of an earlier style called **Art Deco**. In the early 1930s, studies in new fields like **aerodynamics** and **ballistics** impacted the design of modern transportation vehicles like airplanes, ocean liners and automobiles. Architects and **industrial designers** began using the style elements of those vehicles in a wide range of buildings and objects, including furniture and appliances mass-produced for the home. Characteristics of Art Moderne in architecture and design included sleek, curved surfaces without excess ornamentation, strong horizontal lines, and the use of modern materials like aluminum, chrome and block glass. Furniture tended to have strong geometric shapes and was made of modern metals, leather and wood. Homes, while never as common as commercial buildings, had white stucco walls and **strip windows**.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between Art Deco and Streamline Moderne?

While their preference for sleekness and simple lines were similar, Streamline Moderne took these elements further, avoiding all ornamentation and focusing on curved and horizontal lines. Art Deco's emphasis on luxury and modernity was replaced with a focus on aerodynamics and automation.

What is Streamline Moderne architecture?

Streamline Moderne architecture is marked by rounded corners, horizontal lines, and an abundance of chrome or metal accents. Inspired by automation and aerodynamics, Streamline Moderne was popular on commercial buildings at first but was later embraced in residential structures.