

Travel

SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2004

P
Motorcyclists
rev and rally in
Sturgis, S.D.
Page 2



R

P6 SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2004

Wherefore Art Deco? Jackson, Miss.

ART DECO, From P1

the world wars than from its Confederate heyday.

That's no surprise to the natives, whose grandparents dubbed the city "Chimneyville," after Gen. Sherman burned it (three times). Of the major pre-Civil War buildings, only the Old Capitol, the Governor's Mansion and part of City Hall remain. That war brought devastation and then the period named, ironically, Reconstruction.

Fortunes turned, however, in 1903, when the legislature moved into a new neoclassical Capitol. Soon powerful banks and insurance companies brought the will and means to rebuild on all those desolate plots, and they wanted soaring structures with the worldly, progressive look of deco. Now "Paris Moderne: Art Deco Works from the Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris" provides a between-the-wars lens for seeing Jackson in a new way.

The show's most dazzling display is an 18-by-18-foot plaster wall of 45 lacquered gold-leaf panels, all low reliefs by Swiss master screen designer Jean Dunand. The subject: the Olympics, a series of robust images designed for the first-class men's smoker of the cruise ship Normandie.

Five galleries are filled with "ensembles" of furniture and fine art—objects frivolous and functional, many commissioned by wealthy patrons, cruise lines and the nation of France. Each space reflects a particular taste or inspiration. In one, a drop-dead-deco chaise plays off a suite of ivory-upholstered chairs embossed with Greek figures. Nearby, a life-size gilded bronze Diana confirms a 1930s reverence for Napoleonic style.

Another room teases with things exotic, such as python skin chairs and drawings of wild animals. The next strikes a feminist tone with a ladies' tambour desk of rosewood and a Romaine Brooks portrait of an aristocratic horsewoman. Juxtaposed throughout are paintings by modern masters (Leger, Braque, Matisse, Modigliani, Delaunay, Picasso, a 19-foot Dufy) and furnishings by big names like Jules Leleu and Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann. In all, there are more than 80 objects, including nearly 30 paintings.

For those pursuing deco merchandise, Jackson's not the place. (Victorian-era antiques are more likely finds.) But for architecture buffs like us, the landscape promised enough Depression-meets-the-Ritz to send us off in a rental car. In a matter of hours, we scouted downtown and hit a few neighborhoods. And deco? We found it high and low.

Throughout the sleepy city center, we discovered skyscrapers of medium size (18 stories or less) but impressive scale. The geometric, earth-toned **Plaza Building** (120 N. Congress) looms on the east side of



The former Greyhound bus station is one of many buildings in Jackson, Miss., with art deco designs.

Smith Park with the panache of New York's Dakota. Nearby, the gleaming white neo-Gothic **Lamar Life Building** (315 E. Capitol St.) rises 10 stories to a clock tower that looks a lot like London's Big Ben. The citizens of Jackson still set their watches by that clock, the glass discolored by nearly 80 winters.

The 1929 **Standard Life Building** (206 W. Pearl St.), now the offices of city bureaucrats, dominates a corner of Roach and Pearl streets. Its step-pyramid silhouette is echoed in zig-zag-shaped windows and parapets. We entered an eye-popping foyer of chevrons and stripes and then a mirrored, marble lobby. Terrazzo floor diamonds pointed us toward a pair of

elevators where a pleasant man stood ready (is this 1930?) to be our "operator."

Heading east to State Street, we arrived at Jackson's purest example of deco style—the 1939 **War Memorial Building** (Old Capitol Green). Dedicated to Mississippi veterans of all wars, the building features a lobby marked by massive pink marble columns, floors of gridded stars and "fountain" lights worthy of a Great Gatsby drawing room. The entry courtyard packs a punch—three gleaming cast-aluminum doors, each with octagonal coffers of translucent glass.

And that neon greyhound? We found it glowing red, white and blue (it's lit nightly till midnight) high on the marquee of the former **Greyhound bus terminal** (219 Lamar St.). The bright blue 1937 landmark witnessed the comings and goings of Freedom Riders during protest days. Now architect Robert Parker Adams, who says he also dates from 1937, has restored the building as his office. "Sometimes people drop off their kin to catch the bus, so one of us will drive them over to the new station." Others happen in, too, intrigued by the glass brick entry or the vintage pinball machine and greyhound oculus inside.

Longtime resident Adams points out that "Jackson never had real highs or lows during the Great Depression. And the war years brought a boom with military bases and manufacturing." That prosperity affected several neighborhoods, now preservation zones like the **Farish Street Entertainment District**, an African American community struggling to preserve its character. The deco destination there is the **Alamo Theatre** (333 N. Farish St.), a movie palace-turned-concert hall. Bright blue letters shout "ALAMO" from atop its streamlined marquee.

To reach up-and-coming **Fondren**, head north on North State Street (about 2½ miles from the present-day Capitol). Some of Fondren's prime sites date from deco times—**Brent's Drugs** (655 Duling Ave.), with a period soda fountain; **Woodland Hills Shopping Center**, from the early 1940s (Duling Street); the in-renewal **Pix Theatre** (3021 N. State St.), with a starburst terrazzo floor; and **Walker's Drive-In** (3016 N. State St.). Many consider this last stop the city's best restaurant. Chef-owner

Derek Emerson gave the former drive-up cafe a bright turquoise paint job but kept two doors with porthole windows.

Adams lives just east of Fondren in Woodland Hills, and his house, **Fountainhead**, merits a drive-by (but don't knock). Even though it's almost invisible nestled against a slope in a wooded glen, its low copper roof and slab chimneys declare "Frank Lloyd Wright." Yes, the great architect designed it (though he never came here) for a "wildcat" oilman named J. Willis Hughes. It's an intriguing, admittedly high-maintenance house that Adams says "just grows out of the ground." He relishes its outer walls angled to match the slope, its Prairie roof and interior walls aligned as parallelograms, and the gate, composed of triangles on a matrix of bars. "It's subliminal, but there are no 90-degree angles." (To find the house: Go north on Old Canton Road, then right on Glenway to No. 306.)

South of Fondren, the **Belhaven** district touts its architectural variety and history. Eudora Welty spent most of her life at **1119 Pinehurst St.** in a 1925 Tudor Revival house. After a restoration overseen by Adams, it's to be a "literary house museum." Nearby, at **807 Pinehurst**, a 1939 Art Moderne house showcases its original owner's source of income—glass bricks.

The most impressive deco-era structure in Belhaven is the **Bailey Magnet School** (1900 N. State St.). Architect N.W. Overstreet made the cover of a 1938 *Life* magazine for the school's forward look and his revolutionary technique of formed-in-place concrete. But the real drama is in the details; flanking the front steps are carved stone reliefs of Andrew Jackson (the city's namesake) with his troops and Chief Pushmataha with his braves, allies in the Indian wars. On a schoolday, visitors can enter terrazzoed halls and a lofty auditorium with ornate columns and a stylized horse-and-rider sculpture.

Jean Lawlor Cohen is editor of *Where* Washington magazine.

Doing Deco, Y'All, in Jackson

By JEAN LAWLOR COHEN
Special to The Washington Post

Antebellum ... Mississippi ... Jackson. The words conjure visions: a streamlined marquee, a neon greyhound, a leopard-skin settee.

Okay, so that's not what comes to mind. But this summer in the Southern capital of Jackson, the word "antebellum" evokes that other before-the-war time—the 1920s and '30s of the art deco years.

And the reason? "Paris Moderne," a dazzling exhibition at the Mississippi Museum of Art through Sept. 6. Any Decophile worth his cocktail shaker should check out this luxe installation of exuberant design and modernist art. Paris, after all, was the moderne mother lode.

With a family wedding to attend and the pull of deco objects unseen, my husband and I headed to Jackson for the weekend. We saw the Paris show, toasted the bride and groom and, in less than 48 hours, learned this: The stronghold of the Old South in the 19th century boasts more architectural eye candy from between

See ART DECO, P6, Col. 1



Art deco aficionados can find examples throughout Jackson, Miss., including the War Memorial Building.



THE WASHINGTON POST