

All old styles are destined to become cool again eventually. Good designers know this and great designers know how to work it. The call for “retro” has maybe never been louder than it is now and with the roaring 1920s taking culture by storm these days (Downton Abbey on TV, The Great Gatsby)we’re thinking Art Deco will be making a serious comeback in graphic design.

Deco is a strong, beautiful style. Here is the history you need to know, to do it right.

Art Deco

Art Deco, a term first heard in Paris in 1925, is a hard style to define. We can list its common qualities— **geometric shapes, bold curves, strong vertical lines, aerodynamic forms, motion lines, airbrushing and sunbursts galore** — but this really does not do justice to the style. Memorize this list alone, and your design may still miss the Deco spirit.

So let’s take a visual tour of the 1910s, 20s and 30s —



(clockwise from left) [Table by a Window](#), 1917, a cubist painting by Jean Metzinger; the [20th Century Ltd. locomotive](#), designed by Henry Dreyfuss, 1938; New York City’s [Times Square in 1927](#)

The Roaring 20s was a time of rapid cultural change. Transportation technologies (cars, trains, planes) were getting faster, buildings taller, cities more packed. It was also a time of incredible wealth, especially in the United States. The result of all this was a feeling of dizzying speed, which you’ll see in the cubist and futurist artwork of the time, paired with an obsession with luxury, speed and power.

In a word: Art Deco.

Deco architecture

Note the strong vertical lines in Singapore's Parkview building, the sunburst facade of New York City's famed Chrysler building — the peak of Art Deco architecture — and the metallic embellishments on this building on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles.



(left to right) Parkview Building

Chrysler Building facade

a building on Hollywood Boulevard

Deco patterns

New York's Radio City Music Hall (below) is

one big sunburst. The elevator in the Chrysler building is a collection of geometric shapes, curves, metal embellishments and vertical lines. The doorway surround top right is Deco at its most powerful... and very bold.



(clockwise from left) Chrysler Building elevator interior

an art deco entrance facade

Radio City Music Hall interior

Deco objects

The architectural and ornamental motifs noted below take new form in this selection of Deco-inspired jewelry and a sweet pair of headphones



(left to right) a Deco-inspired ring; necklace; headphones

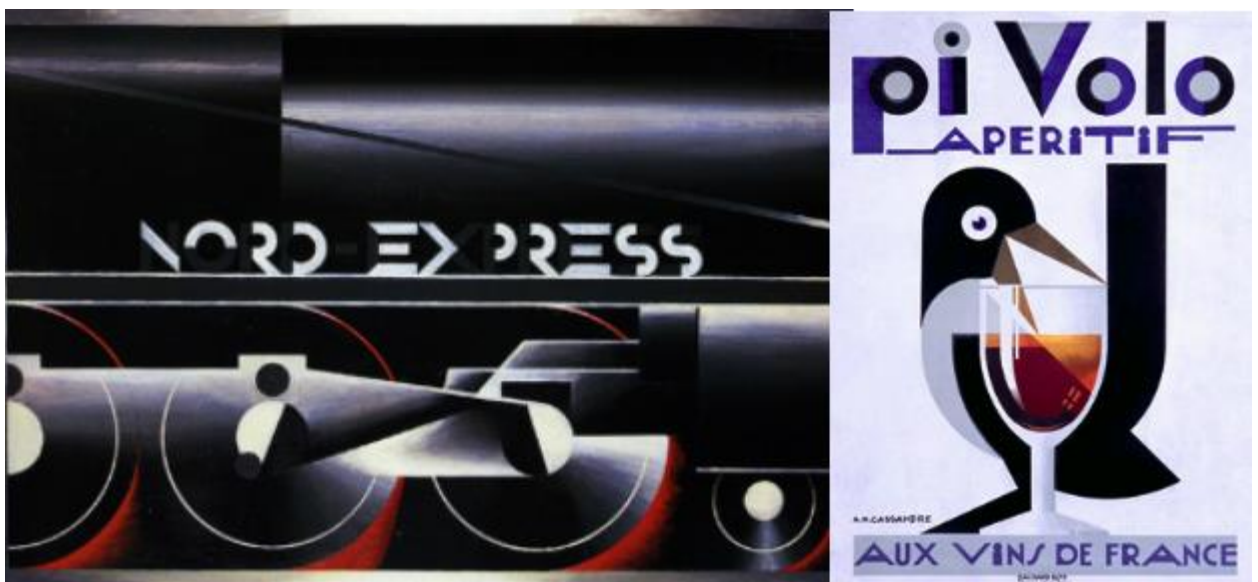
Deco posters

We move from architecture to graphic design with French designer A.M. Cassandre, its unparalleled leader.

Note the huge power of the ship in “L’Atlantique,” the cubist and futurist inspiration in the posters for “Nord Express” and “Clipper 314,” and the flat geometric quality to Cassandre’s Pivolo ad — perhaps the most famous Art Deco poster of all time.

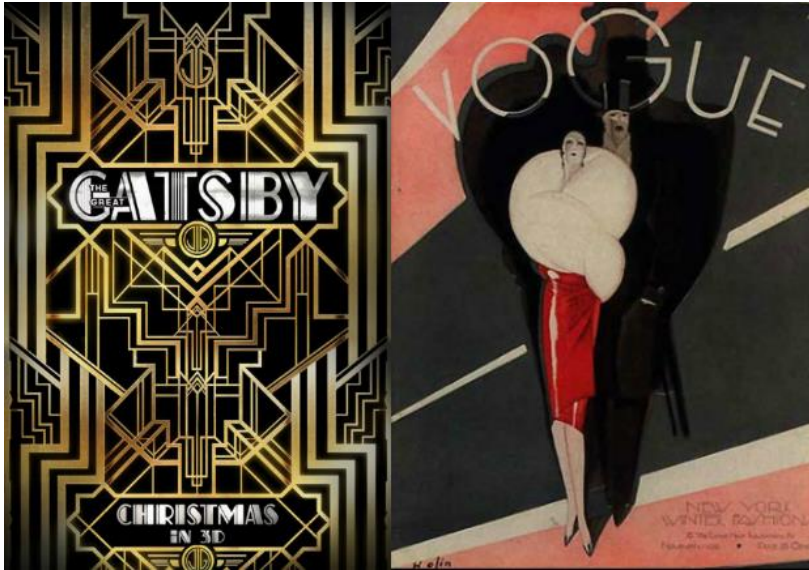


[L'Atlantique](#) by A.M. Cassandre and [Clipper 314](#), by Michael Kungl



[Nord Express](#) and [Pivolo](#), by A.M. Cassandre

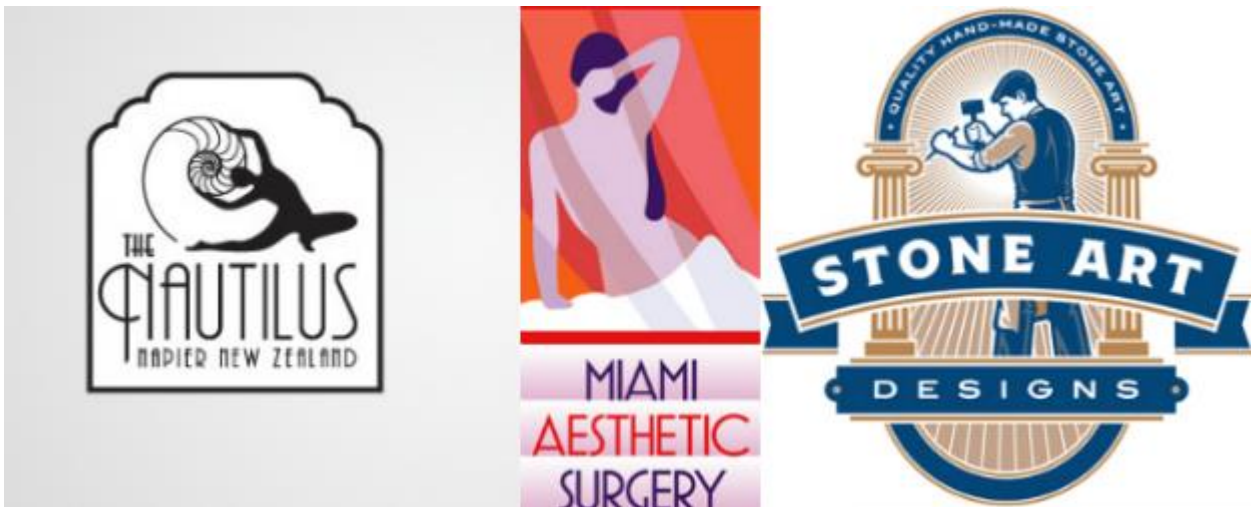
The movie poster (below) for Baz Luhrmann's new cinematic imagining of *The Great Gatsby* sports a very heavy Art Deco look.



[Poster for The Great Gatsby](#), 2012, and the [cover of Vogue magazine](#), November 1926, by Guillermo Bolin

Deco logo

Today, Art Deco makes frequent appearances in the world of logo design. Just look at the verticality, sunbursts, airbrush effects and typeface choices in the below three designs.



[Logo for The Nautilus Napier](#) hotel, by Mel Gardner; logos for Miami Aesthetic Surgery and Stone Art by [GDS](#)

Deco typography

Last, but certainly not least, Art Deco has made an incredible impact on typography. A.M. Cassandre's Bifur typeface, composed of thick base forms ornamented with thin filler lines, is nothing short of brilliant. Broadway and Peignot are two other Deco typefaces we see all the time.



**The quick brown
fox jumped over
the lazy dog.**



(clockwise from left) [Bifur](#), [Peignot](#) and [Broadway](#) typefaces