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***An Architectural Cocktail:
Art Deco Architecture in the Cosmopolitan Midwestern Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul***

The term Art Deco is used broadly to describe the modernistic approach to art, decorative art and architecture during the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s. It drew its inspiration from the French modern design movement and focused primarily on ornament and self-indulgence. As Alastair Duncan has argued in his seminal study, *American Art Deco*, it is a useful term as long as one remembers that no single phrase can possibly describe all the interrelated forces at play in the art of the era.

The meaning of Art Deco as it relates to American architecture has become particularly muddled in regionalist studies. There are a myriad of terms used to categorize the manifestations that evolved throughout the period – Zig-Zag Modern, Jazz Modern, Art Moderne, American Perpendicular, Streamlined Moderne and PWA Moderne. Perhaps as Duncan suggests, the field really is too broad to accurately define Art Deco architecture in America? Or perhaps it has been made too complicated by an intense focus on stylistic analysis. This paper argues that all the “styles” can justly be attributed to a single movement, that of Art Deco and its ideology of progressiveness, which was the architectural response to an era defined by extremes.

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul contain the necessary ingredients to mix this architectural cocktail, a fitting analogy for the period. They are cosmopolitan cities – one a commercial center, the other a transportation hub – created by a progressive, hardworking Midwestern population. They also have escaped Art Deco analysis. This study identifies a number of structures within the two cities representing the various “styles” of Art Deco and then examines their context utilizing top scholarship on the Art Deco period. What emerges is a story, illustrated in architecture, about the extremes of public and private, government and commerce, and austerity and luxury during the interwar period.