

**Choose Your Own Adventure:
Typography Trends of Art Deco**

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Typography Trends in

ART DECO

Looking back one hundred years ago to the design trends of the roaring 1920s, we find ourselves in the middle of the Art Deco period. Art Deco is an era in art that took place in the years 1900 - 1945, but is probably most recognizable for its specific style in the 1920s (Glennon, 2016). This was an important time for visual art, architecture, interior design and theatre, but the real defining element of this era was in graphic design and typography. After all, the 1920s hold the year when the term “Graphic Design” was first coined in 1922 by the American type designer W.A. Dwiggins (White, 2020).

The name inspiration for Art Deco came from where the style was exhibited first; at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, held in Paris in 1925. This world fair made both the design and architectural style extremely popular around the world for the next two decades (Findling, 2018). Even though the style differed slightly from one geographic area to the next, Art Deco is easily recognizable by its sense of glamour, elegance and optimism for the future (Blackman, 2020)

The Art Deco Style

The Art Deco style was a direct opposition response to the style of Art Nouveau which came before it, lasting the years from about 1890 to 1905. While Art Nouveau was extremely ornate, full of organic shapes and expressive lines (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019), Art Deco is heavily geometric, sleek with straight, smooth lines and hard edges (Schenker, 2018). These two styles both strived for a sense of elegance but in two completely opposite ways (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019).



A huge influence for the Art Deco style in the 1920s was the discovery of King Tut's tomb in 1922. The world was obsessed with the Egyptian aesthetic and this definitely crept through into Art Deco designs. Triangles and pyramid shapes, fanning reeds and stylized wings all made their influence on architecture, furniture, fashion and design at the time (Johnson, 2018).

The style characteristics of Art Deco include:

- (Schenker, 2018) (Johnson, 2018)
- Zigzags, chevrons, zigurat patterns
- Sunrise or sunburst motifs
- Geometric, symmetrical patterns
- Straight lines with hard edges
- Intricate line art
- Symbolizing wealth and sophistication

The colours used in Art Deco designs were also a defining characteristic of the era. Metallic colours such as bronze and gold were common in design, especially in graphic design and typography. In general, rich, vibrant, kitschy colours were used quite a bit for fashion and decoration, an influence that came from the Fauvism art style which was popular in the years 1905-1910 (Blackman, 2020).

Typography Trends

Just like the general design style of Art Deco, the typography of the era was very different from the typography of the Art Nouveau era. While Art Nouveau used cursive, scrolling typography, Art Deco went in the direction of streamlined, geometric design (Etynkowski, 2010). Additional thick strokes replaced elaborate flourishes, giving the typefaces a less “femenine” feel than other ornate styles that had come before (Cousins, 2018). Type designers at the time used extremely varied line weights and diagonal lines in their designs to keep the lettering interesting and able to compete with the intricacy of the Art Nouveau typefaces that people were used to seeing.

Style characteristics of Art Deco typefaces are: (Cousins, 2018) (Johnson, 2018)

- Very thick strokes and contrasting thin strokes used on a sans serif base
- Alternating lines or fills
- Exaggerated x-height, generally tall lettering
- Characters are very straight up and down
- High crossbars evoke the thought of skyscrapers and futuristic architecture
- All capital letters, some popular typefaces did not even include lowercase letters

ITC Anna

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Broadway

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

CORMIER

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z



The overall style of Art Deco typography was largely set by an artist and type designer who worked in the 1920s named Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron, who worked under the pseudonym Cassandre. He designed some of the most famous typefaces from the era including Bifur and Acier Noir. He worked quite a bit with poster design, including being the designer of the very famous poster Au Bûcheron. His cubism and surrealism inspired design really set the tone and style for his typeface designs as well as all the Art Deco typefaces created by others (Vucic, 2020).

These characteristics can clearly be seen in Art Deco style typefaces (Cousins, 2018). The typeface **ITC Anna**, demonstrates this style with all uppercase lettering, straight lines with hard angles, thick strokes and sharp diagonals for example in the “N” and “W”. The whole **Broadway** typefamily includes many Art Deco typography characteristics. Similarly to ITC Anna, the typefaces are made up of many straight lines, but added to this there are also exceptionally varied line widths between horizontal and vertical strokes. The typefamily includes an alternating fill option with the Broadway Engraved typeface as well. The **Cormier** typeface continues to show the Art Deco style too, through uppercase letters and use of varied line widths on sans serif bases.

Art Deco in 2020

Dynastea

This tea packaging shows Art Deco influence in more than just the typography. The whole package design is filled with the era's style characteristics. Zigzags, diagonals and intricate line art are beautifully used on each package. The flavour names specifically display Art Deco styled typography and even hint to the idea with titles like "Strawberry 1920s" and "Mango Deco" (Stefanija, 2020).



 DYNASTEIA

Cafe Bonneville

Art Deco style clearing had an influence on this cafe, it can especially be seen with the typography and logo. The clean, sleek letters with variation in line width and prominent diagonals are nicely complimented with a fan shaped logo, a nod all the way back to the Egyptian styles that were such an influence in the era (Fapama, 2020).



Snob Hotel

This hotel in Paris really recognizes the city's past with its Art Deco inspired logo. The metallic chrome typography showcases the characteristics of high cross bars, in the "N" and straight vertical lines, for example in the "B". This logo definitely captures the sleek, elegant look of Art Deco (Stefanija, 2020).



Conclusion

So, here we are, one hundred years later. Even after all this time, the Art Deco era still continues to influence design today. Brands in 2020 are still looking to what designers made a whole century ago to provide inspiration and style for their designs and typography. The Art Deco era may have only officially lasted around 45 years, and only be most famous for one decade in the 1920s, but the trends that it set carry on because of their unique look that just can not be substituted.

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