

# ART DECO

## ELEGANT FUTURE OR DRAMATIC PAST?

*Is Art Deco back in vogue or were my customers way ahead of their time?*

*words by Toby Smith*

About a year ago on a Saturday afternoon a customer came into our showroom enquiring about a display cabinet, sideboard, mirrors and nest of tables for their home which was due to undergo some refurbishment. Our remit was that they wanted something "Different, Elegant, and Art Deco ish"! We did a few sketches and our customer left with a rough design and a vague estimate! Almost a year on following the completion of building work and refurbishment the brief remained the same – "Art Deco style furniture"

To be perfectly honest, I know very little about this particular subject, so the computer was switched on and I went searching – thank goodness for Google! I started with the most obvious choice – the Hoover Building. We had all talked about this at school and it was almost the only example I could easily think of from this period. My search was illuminating and informative. I discovered that just after the First World War there was a huge social change which influenced furniture trends and created a need, for those who could afford it, to own well designed decorative furniture with a high degree of functionality. Exotic woods were used and decoration incorporated materials such as ivory, tortoise shell, glass etc. Of course, these days we would never use the real thing since we can achieve the same look using a variety of man made materials.

Many hours were spent browsing through hundreds of images of Art Deco style lights, sofas, cabinets etc until I was totally confused! I decided that the best course of action was to start again – at the beginning! So, back to the Hoover Building! I was drawn to the designs above the main entrance door – tapered sides,

plain and simple yet decorative at the same time. We agreed that the furniture needed to be American Maple, an extremely elegant timber, light in colour with a soft pink grain. When finished properly this timber can feel like porcelain.

We needed to incorporate glass into the display cabinet and decided to add more interest to this feature by adding a piece of fret work to the doors. We also painted the inside of this piece in blue to marry the unit to its space. However, I still felt that something was "missing". On closer inspection I saw that the Hoover Building had been designed with dark red stripes framing the central design so we decided to incorporate some dark American black walnut beading to frame the drawers, doors and side panels. Along with a good choice of handle the furniture came alive!

So back to my original question – is Art Deco becoming popular again? In the early 1930's it was definitely on the wane with more geometric and streamlined designs taking over. Simple and plain designs using chrome and glass became far more popular. This sounds familiar – isn't this where we are at now - lots of contemporary designs using leather, metal and glass?

Maybe it's time for a change? Contemporary designs may be a safe bet, however, isn't it nice to be a little different and not have the same "look" as many others have in their homes? Are we now craving a more elegant, rich and sophisticated design? Personally we are seeing a lot more customers wanting heavily embossed wall coverings and very "different" materials in their homes these days.

In summary, I really feel that furniture is "on the turn" and thank my customer for being "ahead of the times", not by much, but enough for us to be involved in the design and manufacture of several pieces of unique furniture, or should I say unique pieces of Art?!

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