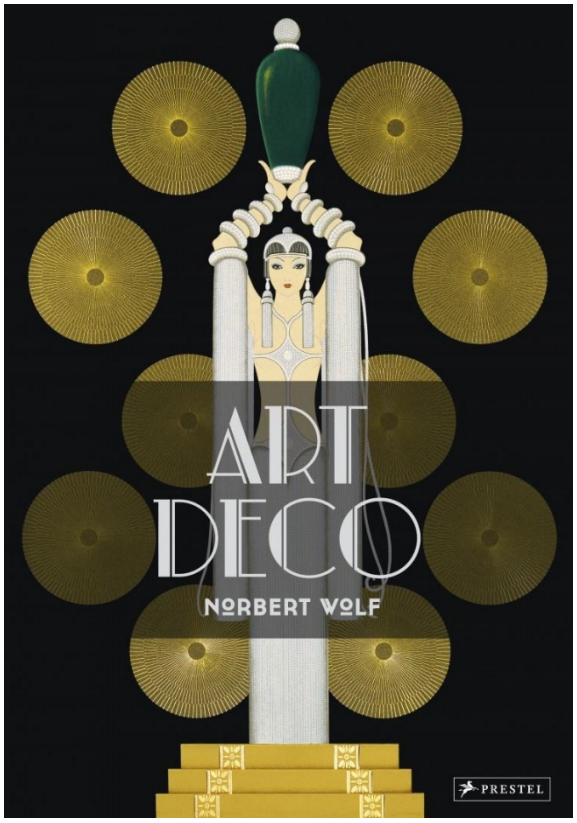

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STYLE OR FASHION?

Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escritt have claimed that there has never been a set of guidelines, accepted by experts and of proven value, for interpreting Art Deco with any kind of authority.[5] This seems to be substantiated by the very fact that—in contrast to Art Nouveau (Jugendstil)[6]—the term "Art Deco" first emerged in literature *ex post facto*: it was initially limited to the retrospective discussion of a historical exhibition, and spread more widely only later.

The exhibition in question took place in Paris in 1925 and bore the title *Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*. Around forty years later, in 1966 to be exact, many of the objects from the earlier exhibition were reunited in Paris in the retrospective exhibition *Les Années 25* at the Musée des arts décoratifs. The accompanying catalogue stimulated a stylistic discourse on the subject.[7] The curators loaded both exhibitions with examples of works that at the time were referred to as Style Moderne, French Style, and Style 25. In the same year, Hilary Gelson employed the term "Art Deco" in the title of his article in the *Times* and the following year Osbert Lancaster used the term for the first time in a published book.[8] With Bevis Hillier's 1968 book the term "Art Deco" took firm root in the English-language countries, "although Martin Battersby and the American authors David Gebhard and Harriette von Breton mounted a rearguard action in favor of 'the Jazz Age' and 'Modern Style'. The word is used in English as both a noun and adjective. Today the term Art Deco can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary."[9]

In the 1920s and 1930s various words were thus used to designate contemporary innovations predominantly in the applied arts: modernistic, the modern age/modernity, the Jazz modern, the zigzag style.[10] Whereas these catchwords are more descriptive of a zeitgeist, or in the case of zigzag allude to a fashionable ornamental form, the term "Art Deco," meanwhile established, concentrates on the dominance of decorative design intentions, and thus first and foremost on the category of the applied arts and the decorative ornament applied to buildings.

THE CULT OF THE DECORATIVE

Starting in the late 1960s the name Art Deco rapidly gained a foothold in the art and antiquities trade. Under its auspices specific objects from the 1920s and 1930s were delineated from the preceding creations of Jugendstil, especially from its more "flowery" variant. These were generally pieces of furniture and other furnishings and objects of everyday use distinguished by their sophisticated design or their use of exotic and/or exquisite materials, but also objects—formerly economically priced, mass-produced goods (made of plastic, chrome-plated metal, etc.)—derived from industrial design. Their common denominator was frequently an abstracting ornamentation.

In Art Deco's early years, this ornament often made use of a historicizing vocabulary, which, however, was soon simplified and adapted to a functional elegance, which was seen as modern. And when the objects dispensed with surface ornament, they adopted the decorative aspect as an intrinsic feature of their design. This is exemplified by the streamlined automobile of the 1930s and the "aerodynamic" kitch-