

Moderne love

Treasures of Art Deco lure visitors to Cleveland

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There's tourism, there's ecotourism, defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions, and it looks like Cleveland's about to be the beneficiary of design tourism.

A group from North Carolina has organized a tour of Cleveland attractions that feature Art Deco architecture and design.

The tour, being held Wednesday, Sept. 13, through Sunday, Sept. 17, and organized by Twentieth Century Society of the Carolina Mountains (www.tcscm.org), includes access to places usually closed to the public, including the observation deck and Greenbrier Suite at Terminal Tower, the Federal Reserve Bank and a private tour of Severance Hall. Depending on activities at Severance that day, tour-goers might be able to go behind the stage to see the massive organ.

Ann Telzrow was once president of the Cleveland Art Deco Society, before it disbanded in 1996. While she's unable to go on the tour, she's impressed by the group's interest, and knowledge of, Cleveland's Art Deco history.

"They knew a lot of the hidden treasures," she said. "It's here, you just have to search for it."

The five-day walking-and-bus tour is being organized by Michael Beyer of the Twentieth Century Society, a West Side native who organized Art Deco tours to Cleveland in 1999 and 2002 while active in the Chicago Art Deco Society, where he was living at the time.

"Chicagoans weren't familiar with [Cleveland]," Beyer said. "And there were a lot of good examples of Art Deco design, even though it's not a big Art Deco city."

As of mid-August, 17 people have signed up for the tour. The visitors will stay at the Hyatt Regency Cleveland at the Arcade in downtown Cleveland. They'll go on a minibus to the various locations around town over the tour.

Beyer started the Twentieth Century Society as a way for lovers of 20th-century art and design -- from Art Deco to Art Moderne, Arts and Crafts to Art Nouveau -- to come together.

"It was such a unique style, and I love the bold geometric designs," Beyer said of Art Deco. "It didn't resemble anything that came before it. I heard someone say once that it's what the future is supposed to look like, and I've always liked that description."

One of the most visible Art Deco landmarks is the Lorain-Carnegie (Hope Memorial) Bridge, with its 43-foot Guardians of Transportation pylons.

\There's some Art Deco influence here, Telzrow said, because the 1920s and 1930s are when cities like Cleveland were building up their downtowns. "If you wanted to be seen as a modern, forward-looking city then, you had to do Art Deco," she said.

The AT&T Building, originally the Ohio Bell Huron Building, East Eighth Street and Huron Road, is one of the stronger examples of the style. Reportedly the inspiration for the Daily Planet in the Superman comics, the building is also Cleveland's tallest Art Deco structure. It's on a downtown walking tour that also highlights the War Memorial Fountain, between St. Clair and Frankfort avenues near East Fifth Street, and the Silver Grille restaurant in the old Higbee building, 200 W. Prospect Ave.

The Western Reserve Historical Society Museum on East Boulevard is another stop, showcasing Art Deco fashion and the 1937 Great Lakes Exposition that featured so much Art Deco design. Tour-goers will get a sneak preview of an exhibit called "Treasures," a selection of some of the historical society's best pieces of art and fashion, which opens to the public Friday, Sept. 29.

You can find Art Deco in the most unlikely places - like the Rocky River Public Library on Hampton Road. It houses the Cowan Pottery Museum. Cowan Pottery was started by R. Guy Cowan in 1912 in Lakewood and is world-renowned for its Art Deco designs by artists like Viktor Schreckengost. Schreckengost's career went on to include industrial and military design and teaching at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

The tour also will stop at Cleveland landmarks such as Lake View Cemetery to examine the Art Deco influences there, including the monuments and mausoleums at Lake View. The Greyhound Station at East 14th Street and Chester Avenue is another stop. Its Streamline Moderne style earned it a spot in 1999 on the National Register of Historic Places.

Beyer is looking forward to the Severance Hall tour. It shows, he said, how local treasures should be cherished.

"It's a magnificent building, such attention to detail," he said. "And the restoration was beautiful."

Beyer is glad to show off his old hometown. He's including non-Art Deco stops on the tour, including the West Side Market, historic bank lobbies with styles including Arts and Crafts and Neoclassical, lunch at Sokolowski's University Inn, and a tour of St. Theodosius Russian Orthodox Cathedral, best known outside of Cleveland as the location for the wedding scenes in "The Deer Hunter."

"I don't think people really know Cleveland," he said. "There wasn't a negative reaction when I mentioned we were going to Cleveland, but more neutral."

Telzrow said she hopes the tour can help revive the Cleveland Art Deco Society. If people are interested, they can contact Telzrow through the Web site listed with this story.

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