

Art Deco Architecture in Montreal: A Visual Reconstruction of a Period of Effervescence

Caroline Thomasset-Laperrière



Figure 1.

ACCORDING TO AN old French saying, an image is worth a thousand words. But it is not a simple task to use photographs to transmit the essence of an architectural movement. The exercise is more complex than it seems, especially when dealing with the history.

This photographic essay was meant to be experienced as an exhibition. Almost twenty plates were grouped under specific themes in order to reach towards the essence of Art Deco. The images spoke by themselves, leaving space for different levels of interpretation within each theme. This essay presents only a selection of the plates, so it seemed appropriate to give a brief introduction to the complete work.

A first series of themes introduced at a general level the mood in which the Art Deco movement took place, suggesting the social values expressed through architecture and design: **emancipation**, the new post-Great-War lifestyle and the new presence of women professionally; **new technology**, the fast evolution of technology denoted a strong desire to go beyond the natural limits of human power; **exoticism**, the desire and the new ways to explore the unknown, enhancing requests for luxurious and exclusive imports; **the total look**, a global design of the entire lifestyle, from fashion to architecture, including furniture, jewelry and accessories.

A second series of themes arose from photographs of architectural details taken from extant buildings in Montreal: the constant ambivalence between **nature and the machine**, where architectural ornament constitutes a materialized witness of a progressive evolution from organic figurative traditions (Art Nouveau) towards decorative abstraction (streamline style and modernism); the metaphorical expression of the technological revolution (speed, communication, power and energy) through architectural emphasis on **verticality, geometry** and the **Ziggurat** (zigzagging 2-D and 3-D patterns that recall lightning).

And now, let the images begin their discourse!

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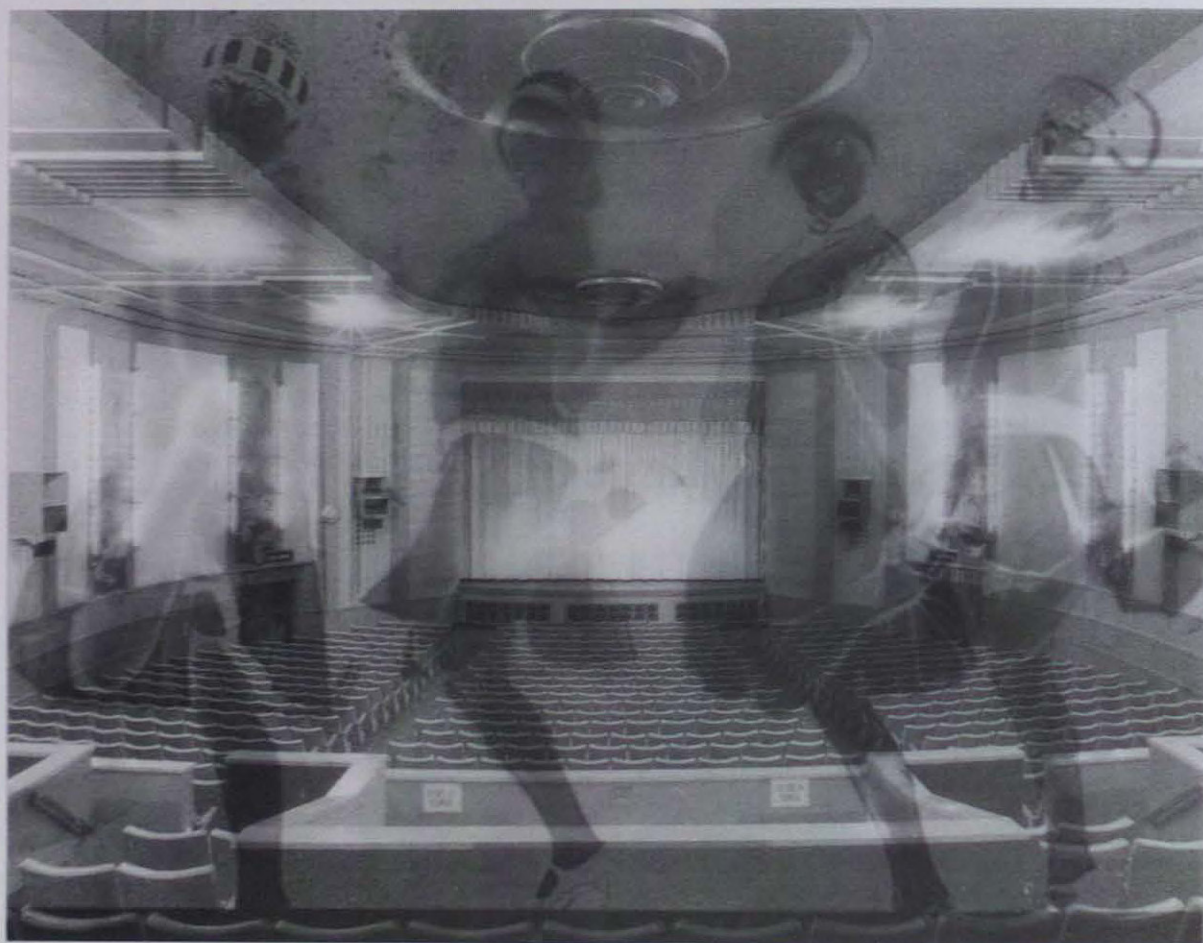


Figure 2.

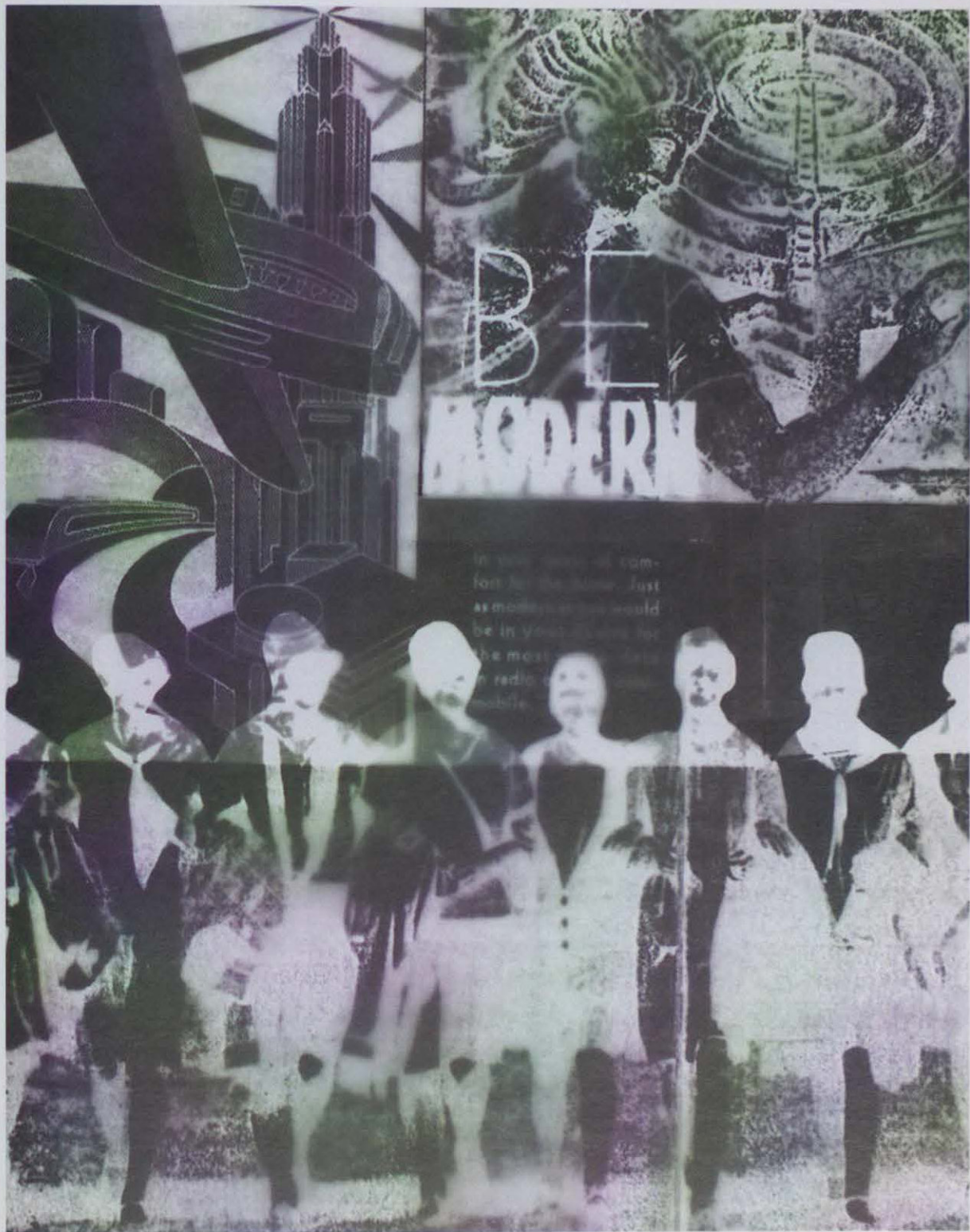


Figure 3.



Figure 4.

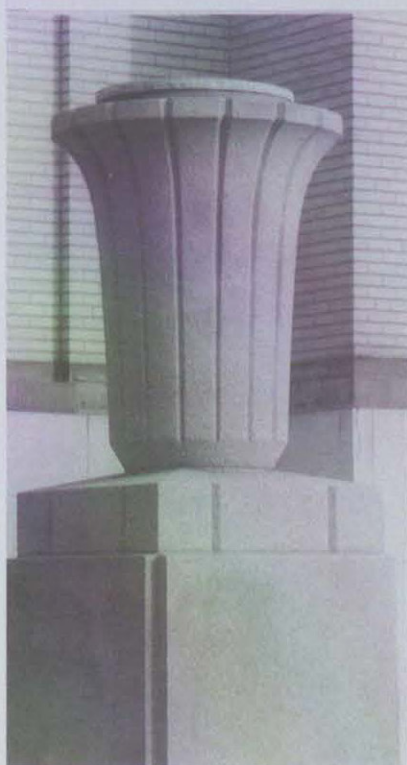
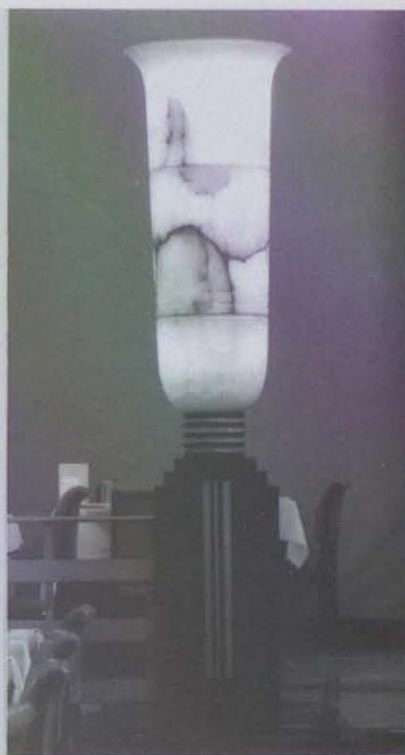


Figure 5-8 (clockwise from top left).

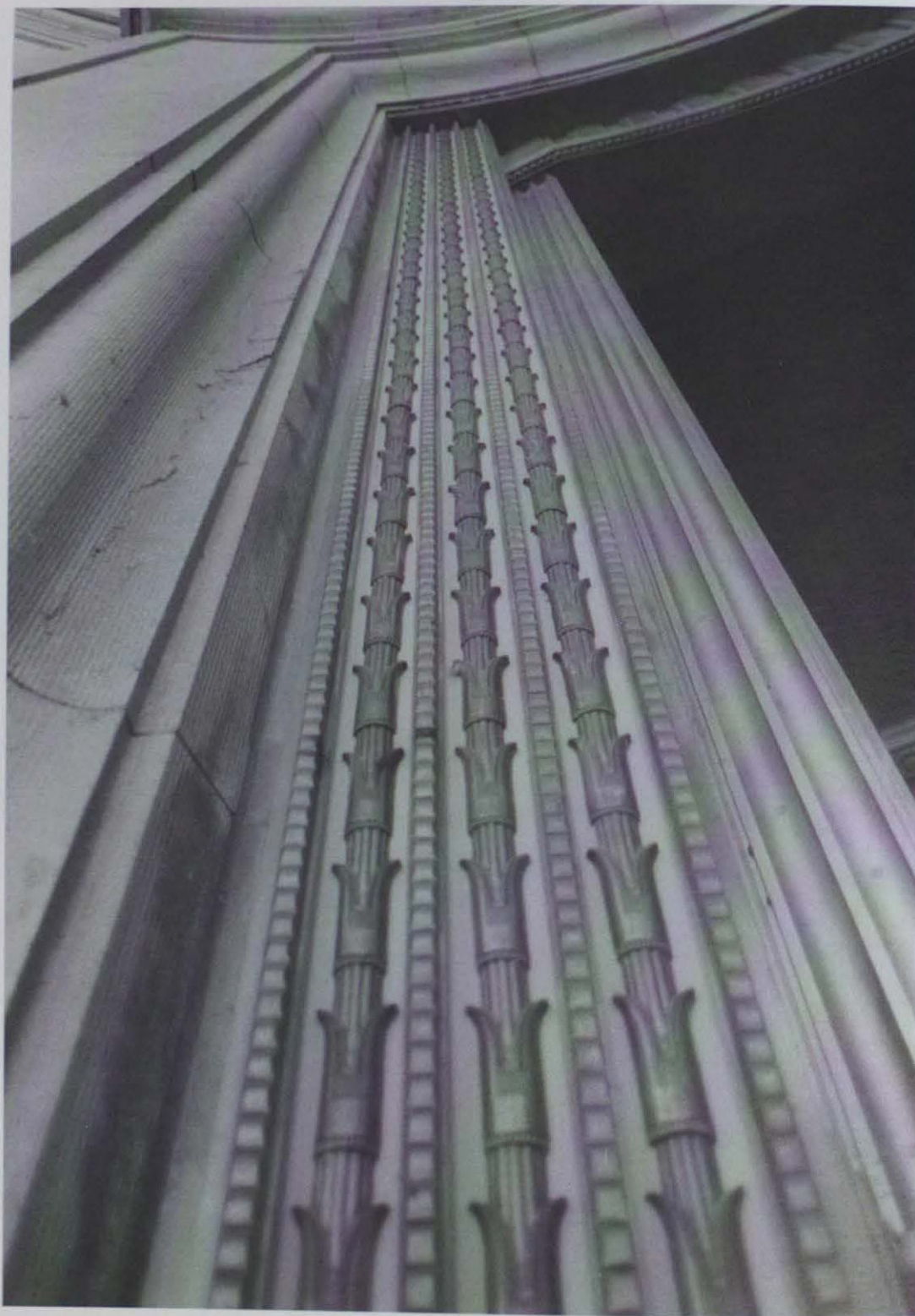


Figure 9.



Figure 10-13 (clockwise from top left).



Figure 14.

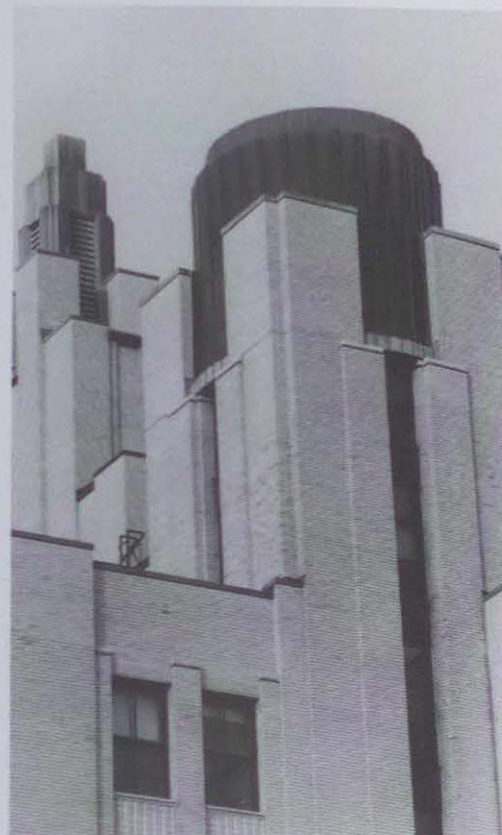


Figure 15.

1. Layer 1: Art Deco Jewellery (Raymond Templier, 1928, made for Brigitte Helm). Image from Sylvie Raulet, *Art Deco Jewellery*, (New York: Rizolli, 1984): 206.

Layer 2: Eaton's Ladies Room, Ninth Floor Restaurant.

Layer 3: Sketch of an evening dress (Lucien Lelong, 1928).

2. Layer 1: The Charleston image taken from Jaqueline Beaudoin Ross, *Delire Deco* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1995): 32.

Layer 2: The York Theater (Emmanuel Briffa, decorator, 1938), image taken from Dane Lanken, *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938* (Waterloo: Archives of Canadian Art, 1993): 190.

3. Layer 1: New technologies image taken from Jaqueline Beaudoin Ross, *Delire Deco* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1995): 9.

Layer 2: Bas-relief detail from King building (demolished).

Layer 3: The Female Contingent of the class of 1928, University of Toronto, image taken from *Years of Hope: 1921-1929* (Toronto: Grolier, 1988).

4. Eaton's Ninth Floor Restaurant (Jacques Carlu, decorator, 1931).

5. Brass Lamp (Edgar Brandt, 1922) in the Entrance of the Montreal Courthouse Annex (Ernest Cormier and Sax & Amos).

6. Alabaster Urn (Jacques Carlu, 1931) from Eaton's Ninth Floor Restaurant.

7. Urn in the entrance of Royal York Apartment Building (1120 Bernard St.).

8. Urn of Knowledge, Detail from Université de Montréal's Main Pavilion (Ernest Cormier, 1924-1942).

9. Portico of Montreal Courthouse Annex (Ernest Cormier and Sax & Amos, 1922).

10. Doorway detail from Robert Simpsons Department Store (Chapman and Oxley, 1930).

11. Bas Relief detail from the Maison Cormier (Ernest Cormier, 1930-1931).

12. Bas Relief detail from the Aldred Building (Barrott and Blackader, 1929).

13. Detail of a brass lamp (Edgar Brandt, 1922) in the Entrance of the Montreal Courthouse Annex.

14. Aldred Building (Barrott and Blackader, 1929).

15. Université de Montréal Main Pavilion (Ernest Cormier, 1924-1942).

16. Detail from Snowdon Theatre (Emmanuel Briffa, decorator, 1936).

17. Detail from Simpsons Department Store Doorway (Chapman and Oxley, 1930).

18. Detail of Ventilation Grill (Jacques Carlu, 1931) Eaton's 9th Floor Restaurant.

Montreal Art Deco Address Book:

Ernest Cormier House: 1418 des Pins Ave. West

Montreal Courthouse Annex: 100 Notre Dame St. East

Simpson's Department Store: 977 St. Catherine St. West

Snowdon Theatre: 5225 Decarie Blvd

Aldred Building: 507 Place d'Armes

Eaton's: 677 St. Catherine St. West

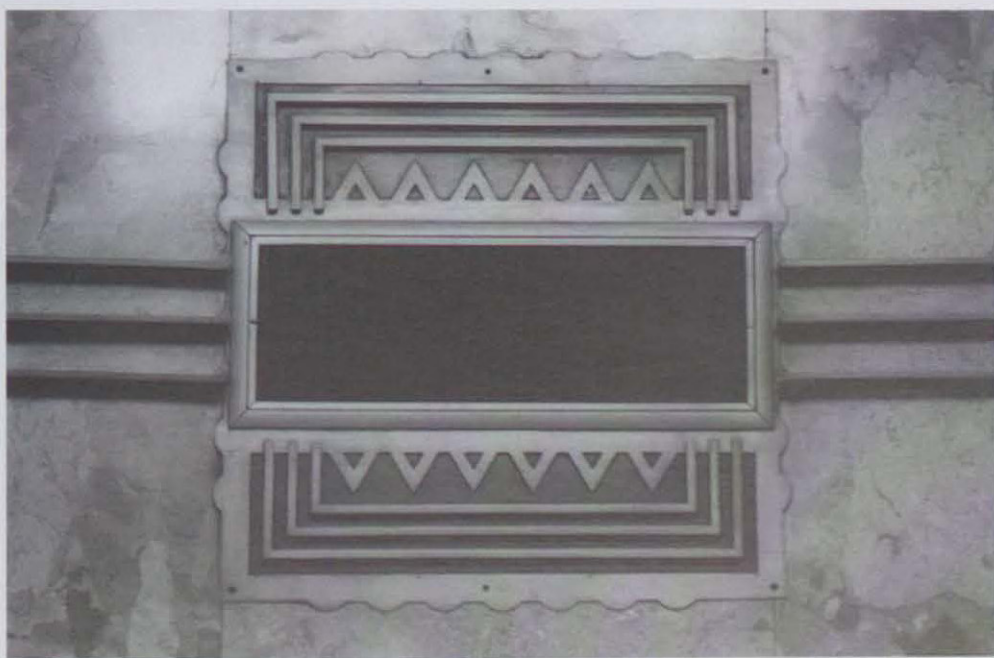
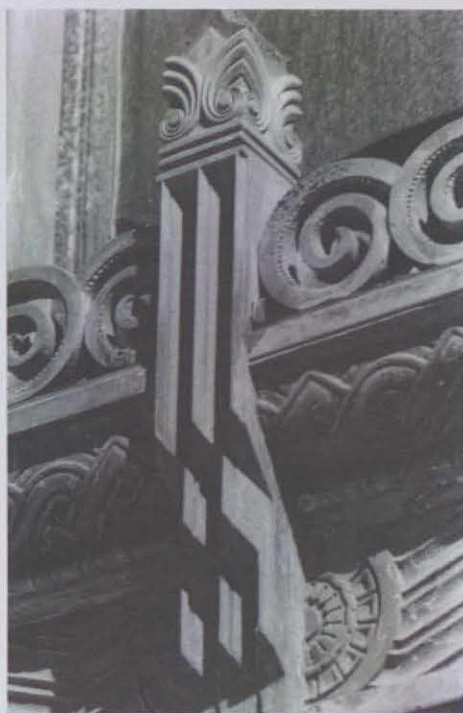
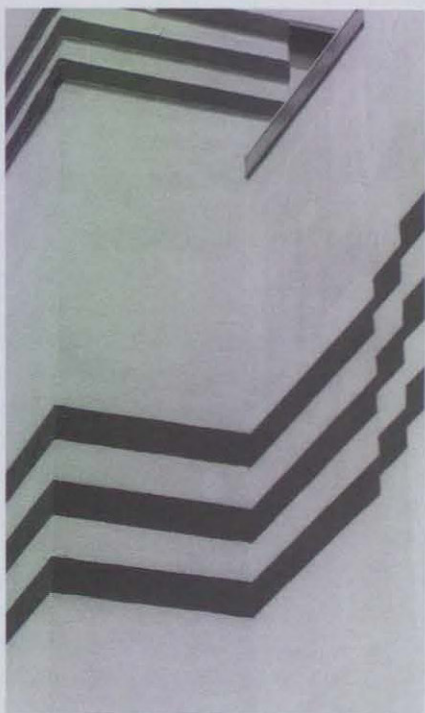


Figure 16-18 (clockwise from top left).