

THE ECHO OF

DECO



The poster for the upcoming Art Deco at the Ark film series, as designed by Pete McKeeman. He took the photo, as well as the detail from the Yaquina Bay Bridge, top right.

Newport's city center took its cue from the Art Deco styling of the 1936 Yaquina Bay Bridge. How local businesspeople are working to preserve this neighborhood's heritage

By Niki Price
OREGON COAST TODAY

What does Newport, Oregon, have in common with San Francisco and Miami Beach? Fortunately, at least to our way of thinking, not much. But these three cities do, in fact, share something special: a group of historic buildings that were built in the Art Deco style.

These buildings were constructed from 1925 to 1940, and feature the sleek lines, modern materials, cool colors and architectural motifs that made Art Deco famous. Newport may not have as many of these lookers as San Francisco, but it does have its own official Art Deco Heritage District. Designated in June by the Newport City Council, the district radiates two to three blocks from the intersection of Coast Hwy. (Hwy. 101) and Hurbert St.

It contains two dozen buildings that were built in the 1930s or have Art Deco elements, including the Lincoln County School District office, the old City Hall and the Yaquina Broadcasting Center. The district's most prominent landmark, however, is the renovated 1937 Midway Theatre, which is now called The Ark.

This Saturday, Dec. 8, the theater will host the district's first cultural event, "Art Deco at the Ark." It's a series of six monthly events celebrating the style, featuring classic movies from the 1920s and 1930s, and modern films set in that era, along with newsreels, shorts and previews. There will be a short discussion at intermission, an Art Deco trivia contest, an auction and dancing afterwards.

Movie-goers dressed in Art Deco style — elegant, modern clothing like you'll see in 1935's "Top Hat," the first film in the series — will get in for half price. You might not know what to wear, however, if you're unfamiliar with the style. Here's a quick primer.

What is it?

The term refers to a movement in design that was most popular between the World Wars I

and II, both in Europe and the United States. It was applied to interior decoration, including furniture, textiles and accessories, in both custom-made luxury items and mass-produced items, as well as architecture. At the time, it was called "moderne," because it embraced simple, clean shapes with a streamlined look inspired by the aerodynamic technology of the new ships, boats and planes.

Many devotees of this new style were on hand for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925; later in the century, the style would take its name from that exhibition.

The idea was to stylize traditional or representational forms, borrowed from Native American, Egyptian and Oriental sources, or to create a pleasing form out of artful geometric shapes. Common Art Deco motifs include animals, foliage, nude female figures, chevrons, lightning flashes and sunbursts.

Famous buildings designed in this style include Rockefeller Center, the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building, all in New York City. In the 1930s, when the Golden Age of Hollywood was dawning bright, many movie theatres — like the Paramount, in San Francisco, among many others — were built in grand Art Deco style.

A little bit of that glamour arrived in Newport in 1936, at the opening of the Yaquina Bay



Pete McKeeman, hamming it up inside The Ark. OCT photo.

Bridge. Designed by Conde B. McCullough, the bridge is famous for its graceful steel arches, sculpted concrete geometric details and artful, circular pedestrian walkways. It introduced a new, modern age of highway transportation to Newport, connecting the Coast Highway and creating a new central business district. As the area began to grow, many of the new buildings adopted the same style as the bridge, using Art Deco-inspired elements and motifs.

Moderne, modern?

Seventy years later, Pete McKeeman was also inspired by the Yaquina Bay Bridge. McKeeman is the owner of Scanners, a digital media cafe and copy center just off Hurbert St., and the president of the City Center Newport Association. In late 2006, he happened to be driving

→ across the bridge, when the equivalent of an antique black lacquered table lamp suddenly switched on, in his head.

"I've driven by those columns many times, but I've never noticed (the Deco details) before. I thought 'Deco bridge,' and 'Deco theatre.' Then I saw it all over. Deco, deco, deco," McKeeman said.

The newly-formed CCNA had been trying to define its identity, he said, and he thought he might have the answer.

McKeeman took photos of all the Art Deco elements he saw in the city center, and turned them into a PowerPoint presentation for his fellow CCNA members. They liked the idea, fleshed it out and did a little research at the Lincoln County Historical Society before presenting it to the city council in March. The council approved the district three months later.

But there's no code enforcement or zoning overlay involved. Right now, association members are simply trying to

Art Deco at the Ark

A monthly series of films from and about the Art Deco period

When: Saturday nights at 7 p.m. at The Ark, 453 SW Coast Hwy./Hwy. 101

Admission: \$12, \$10 for City Center Newport Association members

For details: 541-574-3333 or citycenternewport/filmseries.html

Schedule

Saturday, Dec. "Top Hat" (1935)
This joyous Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musical features an Irving Berlin score and the classic duet "Cheek to Cheek." Astaire stars as Jerry Travers, a singer-dancer who auditions some new moves for producer Horace Hardwick at his hotel. The beautiful Dale Tremont (Rogers) is staying downstairs and the wackiness begins when she mistakes Jerry for Horace in this romantic comedy that received an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture.

Jan. 12 "Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow" (2004)

Feb. 9 "Footlight Parade" (1933)

March 8 "Victor Victoria" (1982)

April 5 "After The Thin Man" (1936)

May 3 TBA

inform property owners what history they might possess, and helping them preserve and enhance it, McKeeman said.

"We are all merchants who are striving to make this a better place to do business. And this district gives our revitalization effort a focus, a face, a name and identity, something that's marketable," McKeeman said.

He's using computer software and digital photos to help owners see what their buildings would look like with a restored façade, for example, or a Deco District-friendly color palette.

In this, as well as many other aesthetic matters, they've had help

from an Art Deco expert who goes by just one name: Stephan. An artist in residence for the Art Deco Society of California, Stephan now lives in Depoe Bay.

The Ark, which painted its exterior in three shades of blue, with copper, rust and borscht accents, was one of the first adopters.

Mike Larsen, who owns one of the

buildings currently occupied by Oregon Coast Community College, plans to renovate his office building's facade in 2009, when the college moves to its new permanent campus. "It gives me more hope that we're going to continue to be a viable district. Now, as you drive through at 25 mph plus, you might not see a lot of things. If we get more buildings done (like The Ark), we'll get people to stop and pay attention," Larsen said.

Members of the City Center Newport Association, the businesspeople behind the new district, are mostly focused on revitalization. But they hope that with events like "Art Deco at the Ark," they can enjoy themselves a little, too.

"In other Art Deco societies, in the

Bay Area in particular, their primary goal: having fun. They have these huge balls and Gatsby afternoons, and everybody dresses. You don't get in if you don't dress," said McKeeman. "Our focus is mostly revitalization, but we wanted to start promoting the popular culture – the fun and social side of it, too."

Priscilla Klein, who represents the Bank of the West on the CCNA board, said that the Deco District has invigorated Newport's old downtown.

"This is a neat area, with a lot of neat businesses and a lot of neat people. Like Pete says, we want this to be some place to go to, not through," Klein said. "It's good for our business. It's good for our lives. It's good for the community." ★

Coast weather almanac

	Nov. 2007	Nov. Avg.	Nov. 1997
Total Rain	6.9 in.	12.04 in.	8.3 in.
<i>Record Rainfall 21.17 – Recorded in 1999</i>			
Maximum Wind	59 mph		52 mph
<i>Record Windspeed 65 mph – recorded in 2006</i>			
Low Temperature	36.1		41.2
<i>Record Low Temp 25.7 – recorded in 1994</i>			
High Temperature	61.7		66.2
<i>Record High Temp 66.2 – recorded in 1997</i>			
Total Rainfall	Cum. total 2007: 54.93 in.		Cum. total 1997: 73.4 in.

*Weather Statistics recorded by Sheridan Jones in Roads End, near Lincoln City. All temperatures Fahrenheit. **Noteworthy:** From Nov. 1 to 8, there was no precipitation, followed by 15 days of precip with a 5-day dry spell. The first storm of the season was on Nov. 12, with 59 mph winds causing minor damage. The first frost of the season occurred on Nov. 25. **In 1997:** At this time 10 years ago, we had already seen the seventh and eighth storm of the season. They both included heavy rain. November 1997 saw 13 dry days, but only four bright and sunny days. **Outlook:** Expect unstable weather for December, warmer than average with below average precipitation.*

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