

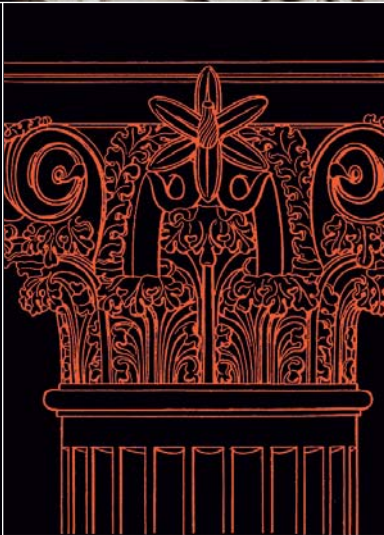


**FOURTH IN A SERIES OF 5**

# *The Detailed Beauty of Texas Courthouses*

The late 1920's to the early 1940's marked the Art Moderne and Art Deco trend of courthouse design in Texas. Exceedingly popular designs used across the country in skyscrapers and commercial and institutional buildings, Art Moderne and Art Moderne with Art Deco broke with revivalist traditions of architecture and focused on the future rather than the past. With the help of the Public Works Administration, Art Deco construction provided job opportunities to designers, architects, artists and sculptors. With its distinct geometric patterns and 20th Century crisp form, Art Deco is perhaps the most easily recognizable category of Texas county courthouses.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER NOVAK





# *Moderne with Art Deco*

## Eastland County

Art Deco buildings are recognized by their stripped-down form and distinctly styled ornamentations, often sculptural. The look is named after the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, and was popular in the United States from the late 1920's into the 1940's. Commonly associated with buildings funded by the Public Works Administration during The Depression Era, Art Deco is a category of design that can also be applied to jewelry and clothes as well as architecture. Regardless of the medium, Art Deco was a deliberate complement to modernity and the machine age. The Eastland County courthouse, with its symbolic and beautiful ornamentation, was designed by Lange and Witchell and built in 1928.



While not a skyscraper, the actual height of the Eastland courthouse is exaggerated by the use of vertical bands. The window planes are slightly sunken, and protruding vertical shafts similar to classical pilasters coax the eye upwards.



The Art Deco courthouse is a series of straight lines and angular, often recessed, geometric shapes. The surface appears sleek, and in keeping with the impression of height, there is no conclusive roof.

One approach to Art Deco ornamentation was to confine a motif to a panel that appeared to float in front of the surface of an exterior wall.



While eagles had long been used as symbolic ornamentation on courthouses, they became a standard sculptural adornment to public buildings funded by the federal government during the Depression. However, it is the repetition of pattern on the surface sheathing both beside and below the eagle that is most indicative of Art Deco.







The Art Deco period saw numerous experimentations with metal alloys. And metal work was used functionally and aesthetically, as in the case of this radiator grill. Along with metal, certain colors (such as tan, green, and blue) were hallmark of the Art Deco style, likely used as a reference to the automobiles of the day.

# *Art Moderne*

## Upton County

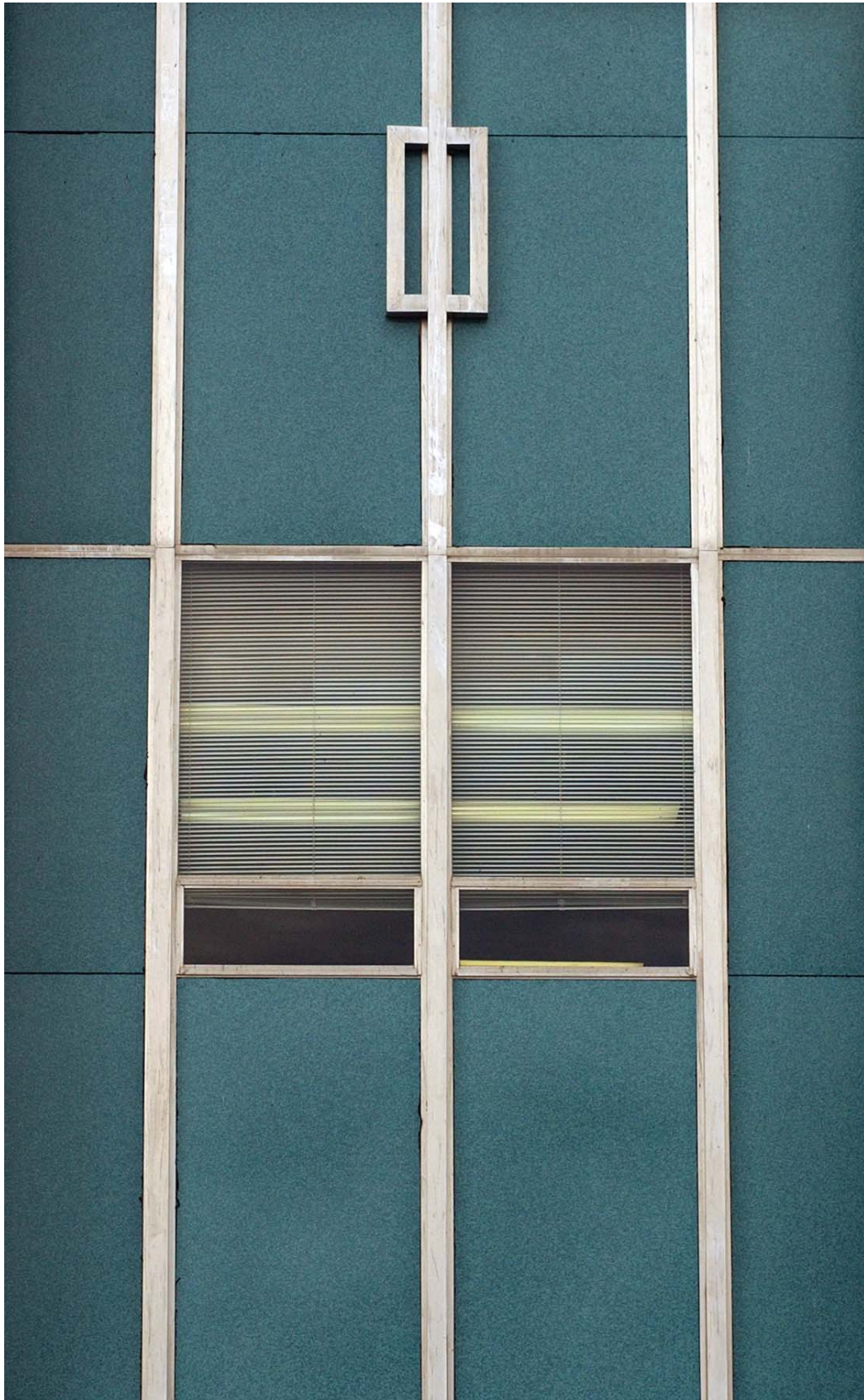
The Upton County Courthouse in Rankin, Texas, employs sleek horizontal lines and a smooth façade without the exterior or interior embellishments characteristic of Art Deco. Built in 1926 in Moderne style, and remodeled in 1958 with new materials, the building may be viewed as both a precursor and postscript to the Streamline Moderne style which began to flourish towards the end of the Depression.



Following the continuum from Art Deco to Arte Moderne, the overall orientation of the Rankin County courthouse is more horizontal than vertical. But graceful setbacks are still used to reduce building mass and create distinct geometric shapes.



Instead of the elegant and expensive-looking materials typical of Art Deco construction, the Rankin courthouse utilizes mass-produced components of metal and man-made materials.





White tiles adorn interior walls, creating a smooth texture.

The flat roof of the Upton courthouse is mimicked by the projecting, thin-slab awning over each entryway.



The subtle decorative band embedded in the brick near the top of the Upton courthouse, along with the blue paneling that disrupts the columns of windows between floors suggest horizontal movement radiating out of the center vertical mass. ★