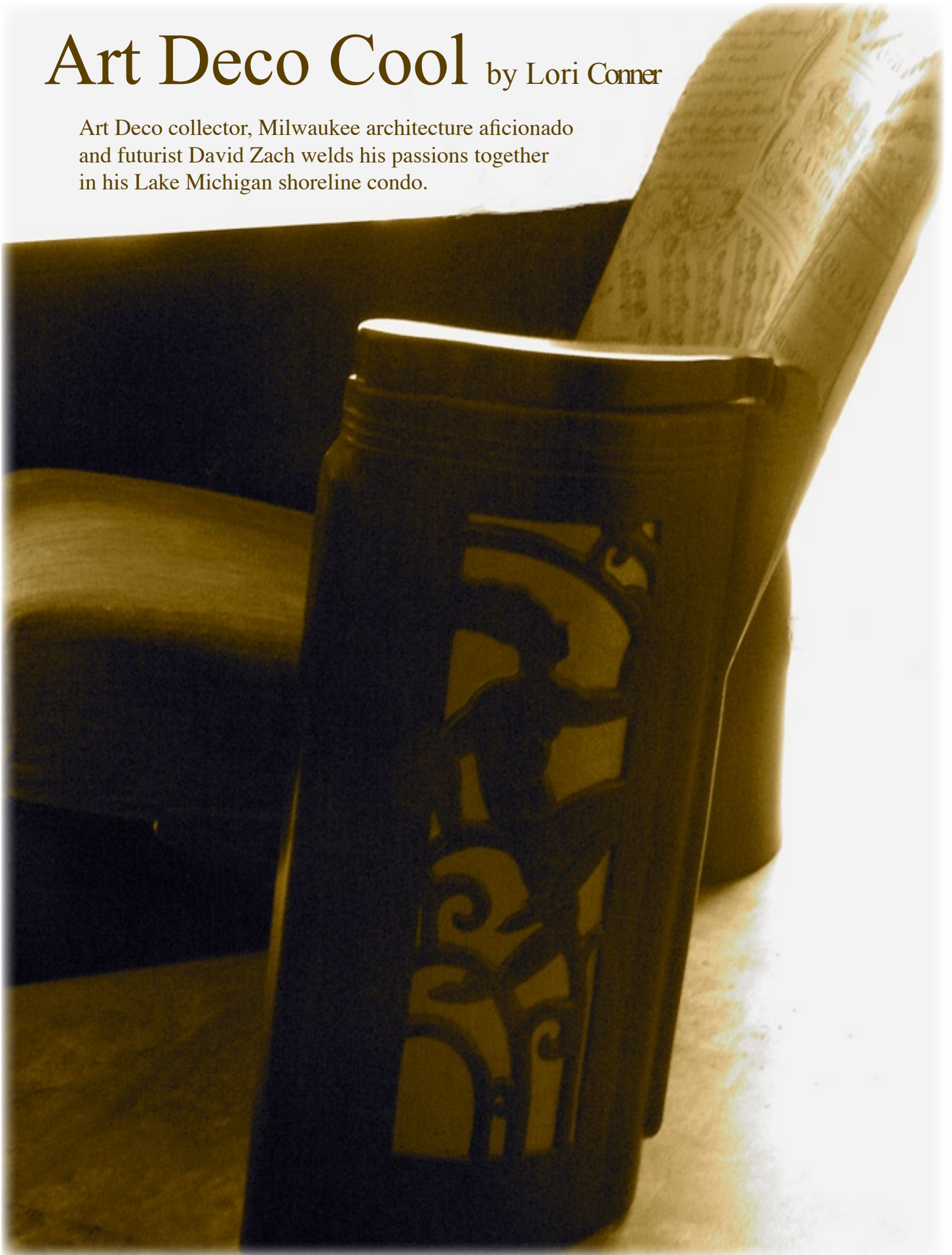


Art Deco Cool by Lori Comer

Art Deco collector, Milwaukee architecture aficionado and futurist David Zach welds his passions together in his Lake Michigan shoreline condo.





David Zach, a successful futurist who speaks to corporate clients and organizations across North America and Europe, is also on the board of directors for the American Institute of Architects-Wisconsin, leads occasional Art Deco tours of the city of Milwaukee, and owns an impressive collection of authentic Art Deco which he displays in his remodeled condominium beside stunning views of the city skyline, yacht club and Lake Michigan.

The Art Deco style began in France in the 1910s, but is most noted in the U.S. during the 1920s and '30s when it introduced streamlined modernity into many homes along with an almost irresistible belief that the future was only going to be better. While Art Deco celebrates modernization with depictions of stylized gears, wheels and mechanical parts, it also embraced natural themes, and, thanks to burgeoning television and travel industries, international culture. "To me," Zach says, "Art Deco is a perfect blend of the power of machine capabilities, with the artist's eye for beauty and a designer's approach to elegance."

Even Zach's business logo is from the Art Deco period — an adaptation of the comet from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair logo. "That era is when the future started as far as the concept of preparing for, planning for, and designing for the future," Zach explains. "It's when the U.S. came into its own as an industrial powerhouse with its own identity."

"History is like the future, except now it's behind us — and just because it's in the past, that doesn't mean it's outdated or should be replaced by something new. If something is exceptionally well designed, it can often stand the test of time and in that sense, be as modern as anything new. I love thinking in 'panoramic time,' and that's often missing from the notion of planning today, which tends to only look forward," he concludes. "And not using the past is like leaving half of your best tools untouched."

When Zach travels, he likes to visit both museums and antique stores. "Museums are better organized and presented for learning, but you can learn a lot in antique stores too — and they let you walk out with the best pieces." He considers his acquisitions

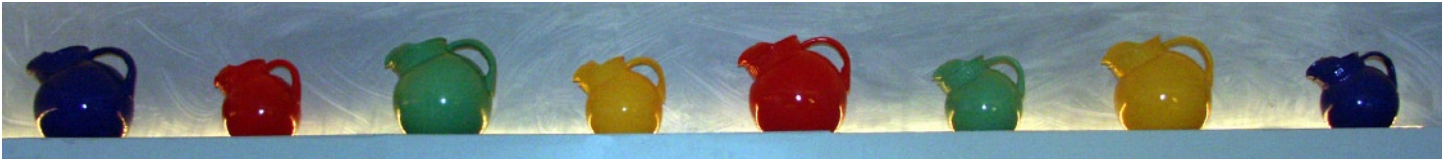


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the bounty of an ongoing treasure hunt and with every acquisition also comes a great story, whether a globe-trotting airplane-base table lamp, a copper and silver cocktail shaker, or a delicate Gerhard Schliepstein sculpture appraised near a thousand dollars, purchased for pocket change. “It’s one of those things where you’re amazed it survived from the 1930’s,” he comments.

In keeping with the Art Deco period, metal — especially chrome, steel and copper — are found throughout the home not only in the collection, but in the architectural elements. Copper tubing decorating glass block columns that bracket kitchen pass-throughs and doorway were introduced in a recent renovation. They elegantly tie different spaces together; the extra light they allow highlights the bold silhouettes of Deco artifacts, and shots of crisp reflected light add an overall feeling of brightness.



For an engaging focal point, Zach sandblasted vintage cast metal theatre seats, painted them black, and then gilded the background in gold to highlight a woman walking in clouds (a superlative Art Deco theme). The custom, capsule-shaped table that sets between the chairs for a harmonious seating arrangement was created by Todd Burton, a local artist.



her daughter, and she began collecting them. “When I traveled I would find more of them for Mom and eventually I collected my own set,” Zach says. “New stuff is just so easy to find, and unfortunately too often boring and throwaway,” he adds.

A child’s chrome and blue faux leather chair matches the grown-up sofa next to it. When friends come with children in tow, they’re simply delighted. It’s an astute metaphor for two things: Zach’s sense of playfulness and his deep appreciation for the dynamics of time — both concepts shine throughout the entire condo.

The coffee table was also cobbled together by Burton, using legs salvaged by Zach. Its casual presence creates a fun counterpoint to the masculine decisiveness of the rest of the room.

The dining area’s original Deco dining suite and bookcases display a portion of his 125 volume Art Deco book collection, and an assortment of fanciful, book-themed bookends from the era are especially fetching.

Zach’s grandmother was given three 1930’s orange dishes for her wedding, which passed down to



Zach designed his custom fireplace with Mike Rostanowski, a local artist who worked on Sauce Restaurant and other commercial projects in and around Milwaukee. The design, particularly the steel hearth, takes advantage of the unit’s wedge shape, and features rows of tile in a Ginkgo leaf pattern. Stylized flora and fauna were popular in Deco design, and the Asian-inspired Ginkgo leaf also works well with eastern artifacts displayed in the stairwell and bedroom. “It’s a beautiful and incredibly ancient tree and so it seems to fit,” Zach points out.

He discovered the angular copper and steel staircase railing at Architectural Artifacts, a salvage shop in Chicago. Inside the stairwell, a tile, glass block and copper tubing display mantel showcases several of his Japanese antiques, including a wood carving of a dragon and another of a goddess purchased when he was only ten years old.

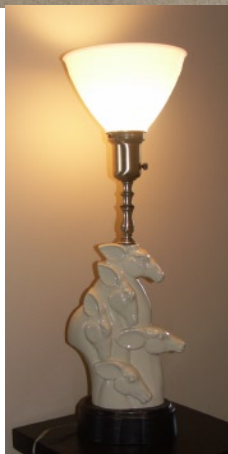


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The master bedroom maintains the era's mood, but without the stark metallics. It has a decidedly softer feel, beginning with tarnished copper walls created with dark green faux patina paint with splatterings of coppery color. The room is filled with bookshelves and books. Art Deco ceiling light fixtures are outfitted as upright sconces, and rustic Japanese tansu cabinets with handles that snap up for storage, down for carrying.

A three foot tall Milwaukee harp street lamp from the turn of the century rests near the bed. Zach says these were once found throughout Milwaukee, and today are recreated to line boulevards like Lincoln Memorial Drive, leading to the art museum.



Zach says philosopher James Carse's concept of infinite games provides a good metaphor for his collection. "A *finite* game is one where there are winners and losers," he explains. "I once missed



out on buying a vintage Charlie Chaplin movie poster for \$500 that sold at auction for over \$5,000. (Oh well.) For me, collecting Art Deco is an *infinite* game — the goal is to play. There is no final place where I ‘win’ — it’s an evolution, an intelligent playground that allows me to be continually inspired by all of this history and great design.”

He doesn’t claim a favorite piece, but says the overall collection enriches him and gives him a sense of accomplishment. “I like being in this environment,” concludes Zach. “It adds to my ability to be creative.”



© 2004, Lori Conner. Lori is a Madison, Wis. based freelance writer who specializes in architecture and design. Her website is www.loriconner.com

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