

# THE COLOURS OF NAPIER

Napier's Art Deco buildings wouldn't attract the tourists nearly as much as they do if they hadn't been enhanced by their pastel colour schemes, which draw attention to the intricate *bas relief* decoration on their stucco facades. These have been encouraged by the Napier City Council's Art Deco Improvement Grants, which are paid to the building owners when they repaint, provided that the colour scheme has been approved by the Art Deco Trust.

In most cases, the Trust provides the colour scheme as well, using a palette of warm pastel shades, which are an echo of the original colours.

When Napier was rebuilt after the 1931 earthquake, the cement used in the stucco was tinted with oxides, including pink, green, blue and a variety of biscuit and

ochre shades. Although this resulted in a remarkably colourful townscape at a time when most inner city buildings were grey cement plaster or brick, and paint colours were limited, those buildings would be rather sombre compared with the huge range of paint colours that we're now used to seeing. So Napier today is more colourful

than it was in the 1930s, yet still retains the softness and warmth that it had in the 1930s.

The Art Deco Trust always specifies Resene in its colour schemes and works closely with the Napier Resene ColorShop to keep Napier's buildings resplendent in their Art Deco style.



# What is Art Deco?

The style we now call Art Deco originated in Europe in the early years of the 20th Century, and its heyday was from 1920 to 1940. It became widely known following the great *Exposition des Arts Modernes Decoratifs et Industriels*, held in Paris in 1925 and from which its name was ultimately derived. By the late 1930s it was in its streamlined phase and after World War 2, the International Style, devoid of all decoration, held sway. In the late 1960s, interest in the Art Deco style was rekindled and this interest has continued to grow.

Art Deco expressed all the vigour and optimism of the roaring twenties, and the idealism and escapism of the grim thirties.

Its decorative themes are:

- **Sunbursts and fountains** – representing the dawn of a new modern age.
- **The Skyscraper shape** – symbolic of the 20th century.
- **Symbols of speed, power and flight** – the exciting new developments in transport and communications.
- **Geometric shapes** – representing the machine and technology which it was thought would solve all our problems.
- **The new woman** – revelling in her recently won social freedoms.
- **Breaking the rules** – cacophonous jazz, short skirts and hair, shocking dances.
- **Ancient cultures** – for oddly enough, there was a fascination with the civilisations of Egypt and central America.

All of these themes are represented on the buildings of Napier, most of which are still standing today and are lovingly cared for by their owners.



*McDonalds: Walls: Resene Cumulus, steel windows: Resene Guardsman Red, foundations: Resene Rebel, entrance fascia: Resene Apricot, bands at top and bottom of border and fasciamotif/chimney: Resene Golden Glow, decorative sections of border: Resene Sunset, Resene Koromiko and Resene Golden Glow. Colour scheme devised to provide a harmonious backdrop for McDonald's corporate colours, to make a visual statement and to link visually with the Art Deco Taradale Town Hall across the road.*



*A B Hurst Building: Walls: Resene Rainee, side walls: Resene Mantle, narrow trim lines: Resene Finlandia, columns: Resene Gin, zigzags: Resene Xanadu, sunbursts: Resene Cream Can, central emblem: Resene Fuel Yellow, capitals and bases of columns: Resene Xanadu, triple horizontal bands: Resene Black, veranda hangers: Resene Palm Leaf, veranda soffit: Resene Mantle.*



# Why Art Deco?



*Bennett's Building: Side walls and edges of front wall: Resene Dutch White, front wall: Resene Chamois, eyebrow above windows: Resene Putty, palmettes and bands: Resene Cherokee and Resene Casablanca, columns: Resene Astronaut, Resene Blackcurrant and Resene Scarlet Gum, aluminium windows and veranda hangers: Resene Astronaut.*



*Jessica's Design Store: Walls: Resene Quarter Blanc, wide horizontal band and veranda fascia: Resene Biscotti, top and sides of parapet: Resene Florentine Pink, narrow bands: Resene Gunsmoke and Resene Lemon Grass, columns: Resene Gunsmoke, Resene Florentine Pink, Resene Lemon Grass, Resene Biscotti and Resene Gunsmoke.*

The Art Deco style was at the height of its popularity for buildings in 1931. Its clean simple lines and base relief decoration suited the needs of the new city...

- **Art Deco was fashionable.** With its past destroyed, Napier looked ahead and chose a style associated with Manhattan, the movies and modernism.
- **Art Deco was safe.** With its emphasis on low relief surface decoration, Art Deco forsook the elaborate applied ornamentation that had fallen from the buildings in the Napier earthquake and caused so many deaths and injuries.
- **Art Deco was cheap.** Its relief stucco ornamentation was an economical way to beautify buildings during the lowpoint of the Great Depression.

Other architectural styles for the period were also used - the **Spanish Mission** style from California, and both **Stripped Classical** and **Classical Moderne**, the styles of Greece and Rome but simplified and modernised. And local architect Louis Hay's work strongly reflects Frank Lloyd Wright's **Prairie Style** in the United States mid-west, which developed in the early years of the century.

The four architectural practices in Napier in 1931 banded together to share facilities and bring a unity of purpose to the task of rebuilding the town, working in shifts around the clock. But they continued (except in rare cases) to design the buildings individually. These firms were:

- E A Williams, who favored the Art Deco style.
- Finch & Westerholm, which designed mainly in the Spanish Mission style.
- J A Louis Hay, who usually designed buildings inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, and occasionally Louis Sullivan.
- Natusch & Sons, whose work tended to reflect the growing modern movement.

Other architects who worked in Napier in the 1930s were J T Watson who arrived in 1934 and became Borough Architect, and architects from other cities, chiefly Wellington, who were retained by banks, insurance companies and hotel chains to design their buildings throughout New Zealand.

# Art Deco Trust History

The Art Deco Trust was formed in February 1985 in order to promote the newly published 'Take a Walk Through Art Deco Napier' leaflet, which had been funded by the Hawke's Bay Museum, the Ministry of Works & Development and the Napier City Council.

In June 1985 it organised the premiere of Peter Wells' television film 'Newest City On The Globe'. On a fine winter Sunday afternoon, a crowd of 1100 people turned out to walk the streets of Napier and view its buildings, before viewing the film in a 340-seat theatre. The public's enthusiasm encouraged those involved to continue working for the preservation, enhancement and promotion of Napier's unique architecture, constructed after the 1931 Napier earthquake.

Legally incorporated in 1987, in 1992, with support from the Napier City Council, the Trust became a full-time operation with a salaried Executive Director and its own premises and shop at Deco Centre, once Napier's Central Fire Station in Tennyson Street, Napier.

Today the Trust occupies a hugely increased space at the renamed Deco Centre and employs a full-time staff of four, assisted by over 100 dedicated volunteers. In 2003/04, an estimated 33,000 people took an Art Deco Walk, 17,000 of them on guided walks led by the Trust's volunteer walk guides.

The Trust's objectives are:

- To encourage the retention, preservation, and use of buildings in the Art Deco and related styles as viable commercial properties to enhance Napier as 'The Art Deco City'.
- To promote the tourist potential of Napier as 'The Art Deco City'.
- To also encourage the retention, preservation, use and promotion of buildings in the Art Deco and related styles in Hastings and Hawke's Bay in particular and in New Zealand in general.
- To maintain a register of buildings in the Art Deco and related styles, especially in Napier.
- To encourage the appreciation of the Art Deco and related styles.
- To maintain worldwide links with other Art Deco interest groups.
- To support educational institutions in building awareness of the importance of Napier's Art Deco heritage.

The Trust's programme includes:

- Publishing educational material.
- Conducting guided walks and tours.
- Working with building owners to enhance their buildings.
- Working to influence public and political attitudes to the preservation of Napier's Art Deco and related buildings and their settings.
- Dealing with preservation issues and working to save threatened buildings.
- Promoting Napier nationally and internationally.

For more information on the Art Deco colours of Napier, the work of the Art Deco Trust, an extensive inventory of Napier's Art Deco buildings and the handy Art Deco Trust online shop to purchase publications on the Art Deco style and Art Deco Trust work, visit [www.artdeconapier.com](http://www.artdeconapier.com).

**ART DECO TRUST**  
N A P I E R • N E W Z E A L A N D

Deco Centre, 163 Tennyson Street, Napier (Opposite Clive Square)

Phone: 64 6 835-0022 Fax: 64 6 835-1912

[www.artdeconapier.com](http://www.artdeconapier.com)

**in Australia:**

PO Box 785, Ashmore City,  
Queensland 4214

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or email us at [advice@resene.co.nz](mailto:advice@resene.co.nz)