

EXPLORING DECO IN . . . LOWER MANHATTAN’S WEST SIDE

BY MATTHEW A. POSTAL

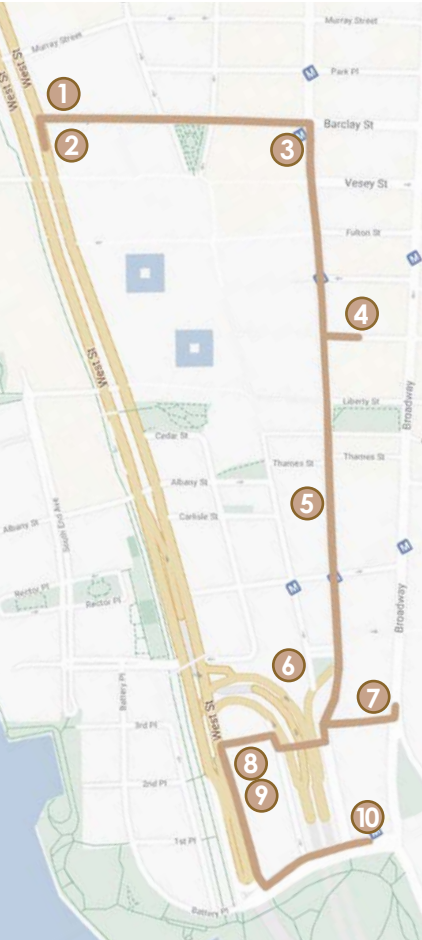
Lower Manhattan has many superb Art Deco buildings. While most tours emphasize the area in and around Wall Street, this route highlights the blocks to the west, where streets that once led to the Hudson River are now separated from the waterfront by Battery Park City. While some of our stops, such as the American Stock Exchange on Trinity Place, have a direct connection to Wall Street, other structures were commissioned to serve the financial industry and those who worked in it.

Fashion and city regulations shaped these buildings’ design. In 1916, a significant new zoning resolution specified where certain types of buildings could be erected, as well as their general architectural form. To increase sunlight and improve air circulation, floors were required to step or set back, diminishing in volume until they covered just 25% of the site. It is because of such rules that many Art Deco buildings are compared to ziggurats and wedding cakes. There is, of course, marvelous ornamentation to be savored en route—trimming the setbacks, around the entrances, and in the lobbies. Of particular interest is the elegant marble hall that leads to the post office at 90 Church Street and the well-preserved lobbies inside 29 Broadway and 21 West Street.

Our route covers ten stops at celebrated buildings and lesser-known gems. You’ll see one of the first Art Deco buildings in the United States, several richly decorated office towers, a skyscraper clubhouse, a monumental bank, and even a streamlined parking garage. Explore and enjoy!

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1. 125 Barclay Street
The former World-Telegram Building, designed by the Ohio firm Howell & Thomas in 1930–32. Embellished with decorative brick and brightly colored medallions, it is now occupied by District Council 37, a municipal union.

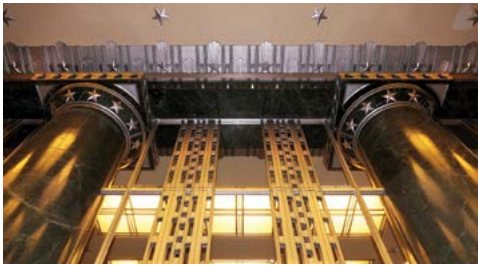


2. 140 West Street
The Barclay-Vesey Building was constructed as the headquarters of the New York Telephone Company in 1923–27. Designed by Ralph Walker of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, it’s considered one of the first Art Deco buildings in the United States.



3. 90 Church Street

Designed by Cross & Cross, this Federal Building dates to 1933–37. Reflecting the building’s purpose, the ornamentation of the limestone façade incorporates stars and stripes, in addition to monumental stylized eagles.



4. 22 Cortlandt Street
Built in 1934 as the main office of the East River Savings Bank, this impressive structure was designed by Walker & Gillette. The somewhat somber Cortlandt and Dey Street portals incorporate deep arches and ornate metal doors.



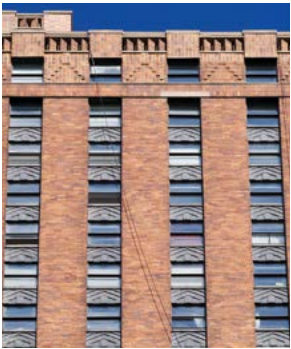
5. 86 Trinity Place
Starrett & van Vleck designed the former American Stock Exchange in 1929–31. Stylized reliefs depict the various industries whose stocks brokers once traded here.



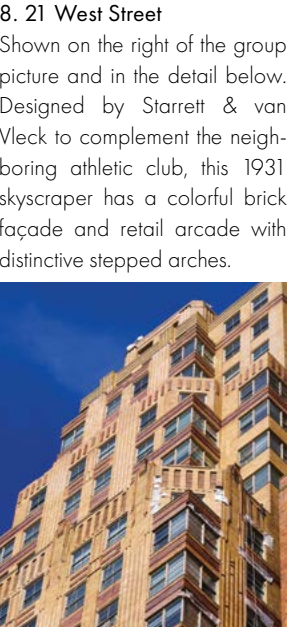
6. 70 Greenwich Street
Despite a late date of 1948–50, this sleek, streamlined parking garage will certainly appeal to fans of Art Deco. It was designed by Singstad & Kehart, engineers of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel.



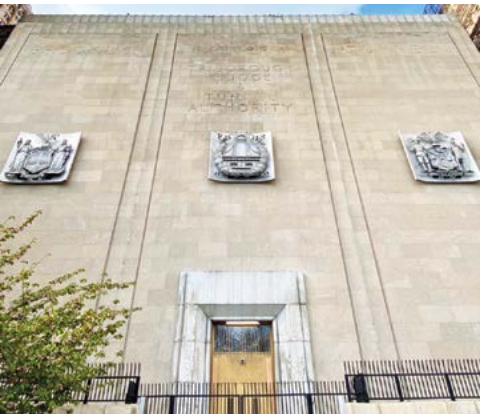
7. 29 Broadway
This slender white brick tower was built by Sloan & Robertson in 1929–31. Entered through an open vestibule wrapped in marble, mosaics, and aluminum detail, the blocklong lobby features one of Manhattan’s most impressive mailboxes.



9. 19 West Street
Shown on the left of the group picture and in the detail above. Celebrated by the architect Rem Koolhaas in his 1978 book *Delirious New York*, the former Downtown Athletic Club was designed by Starrett & van Vleck in 1929–30.



8. 21 West Street
Shown on the right of the group picture and in the detail below. Designed by Starrett & van Vleck to complement the neighboring athletic club, this 1931 skyscraper has a colorful brick façade and retail arcade with distinctive stepped arches.



10. Battery Place between Greenwich Street and Washington Street
The Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel’s Moderne-style ventilation tower, designed by Aymar Embury in 1949–50, displays three ten-foot aluminum squares by Paulanship, sculptor of *Prometheus* at Rockefeller Center. Commissioned for the New York Coliseum in 1956, these 1,500-pound reliefs were relocated circa 2000.