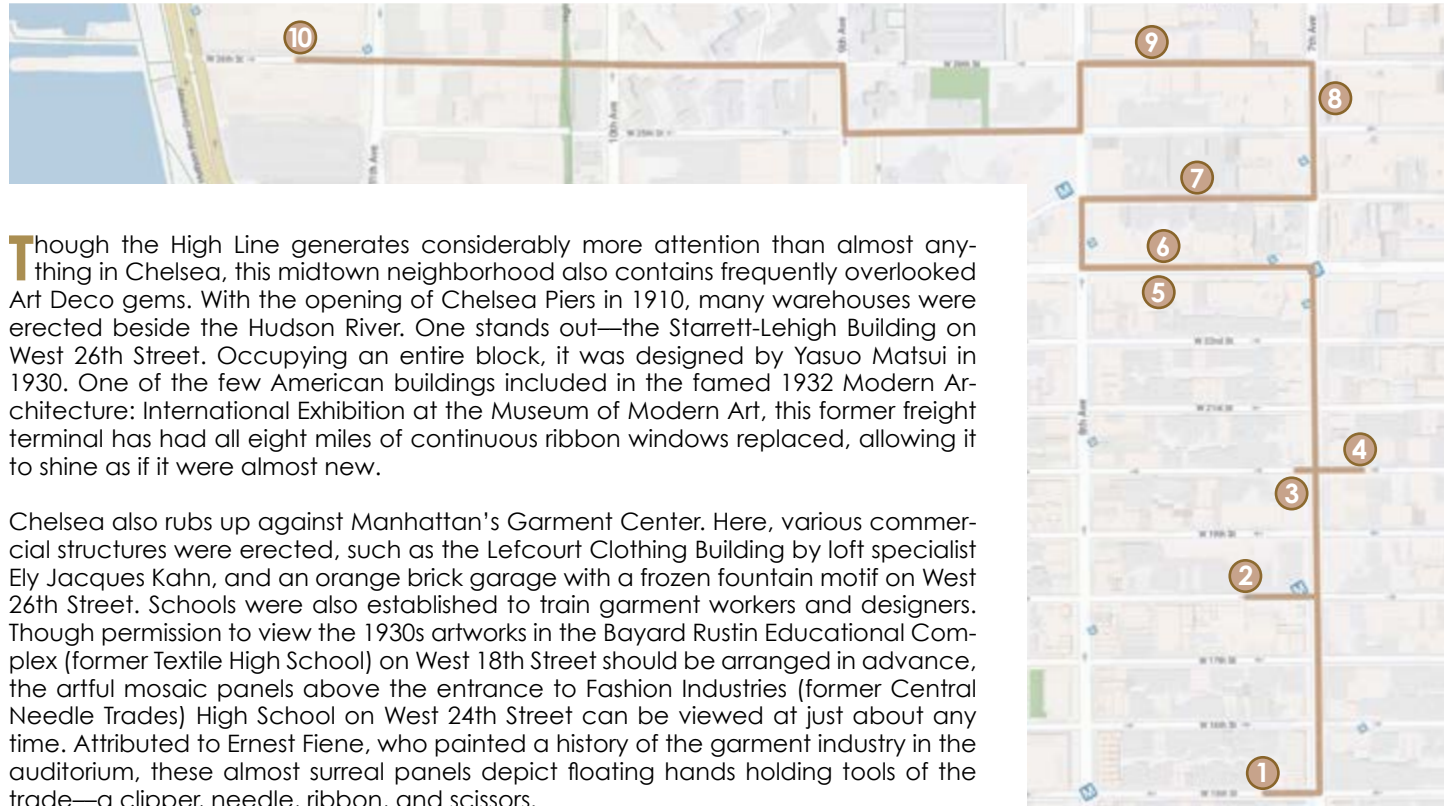


EXPLORING DECO IN . . . CHELSEA

BY MATTHEW A. POSTAL



Though the High Line generates considerably more attention than almost anything in Chelsea, this midtown neighborhood also contains frequently overlooked Art Deco gems. With the opening of Chelsea Piers in 1910, many warehouses were erected beside the Hudson River. One stands out—the Starrett-Lehigh Building on West 26th Street. Occupying an entire block, it was designed by Yasuo Matsui in 1930. One of the few American buildings included in the famed 1932 Modern Architecture: International Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, this former freight terminal has had all eight miles of continuous ribbon windows replaced, allowing it to shine as if it were almost new.

Chelsea also rubs up against Manhattan's Garment Center. Here, various commercial structures were erected, such as the Lefcourt Clothing Building by loft specialist Ely Jacques Kahn, and an orange brick garage with a frozen fountain motif on West 26th Street. Schools were also established to train garment workers and designers. Though permission to view the 1930s artworks in the Bayard Rustin Educational Complex (former Textile High School) on West 18th Street should be arranged in advance, the artful mosaic panels above the entrance to Fashion Industries (former Central Needle Trades) High School on West 24th Street can be viewed at just about any time. Attributed to Ernest Fiene, who painted a history of the garment industry in the auditorium, these almost surreal panels depict floating hands holding tools of the trade—a clipper, needle, ribbon, and scissors.

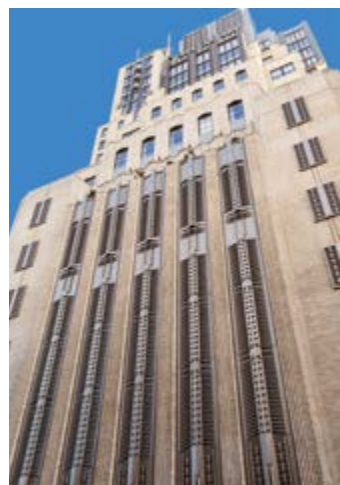
Perhaps Chelsea's most conspicuous Deco structure is Walker Tower, on West 18th Street. Designed by Ralph Walker, this telephone company facility has recently been partly transformed into apartments. The original ornamentation has been mostly restored and the elevations gleam as they never have—even when originally built—through the addition of new, yet complementary, bronze grilles, windows, and spires.

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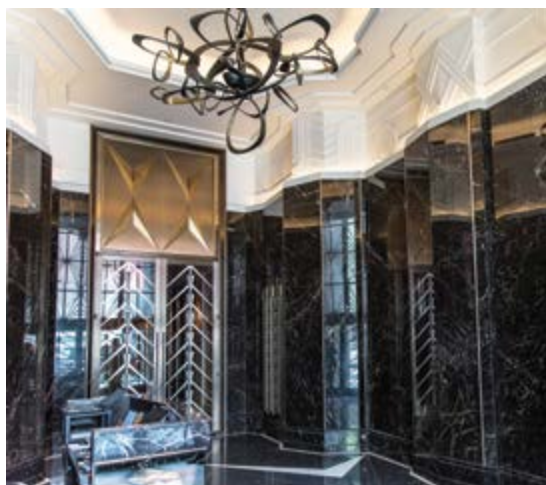
All Photos: Lynn Farrell



1. 205 West 15th Street
The Chelsmore Apartments were designed by Horace Ginsbern in 1940. On the northwest corner of Seventh Avenue, both façades display fine staccato brickwork.



2. 212 West 18th Street
Designed in 1929 by Ralph Walker, who designed many memorable buildings for the New York Telephone Company, Walker Tower has a distinctive stepped silhouette. Constructed for telephone operators and switching machinery, it has been mostly converted to condominiums, adding complementary decorative grilles and spires to the exterior.



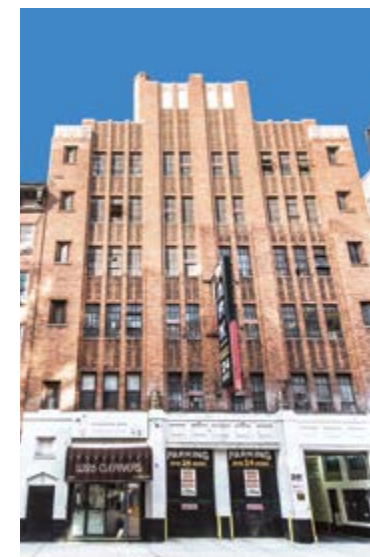
3. 200 West 20th Street
Emery Roth designed Kensington House in 1937–38, a late work by this noted architect. Tenants enter through an unusual concave entrance embellished with colorful mosaic bands.



6. 255 West 23rd Street
The 1937 Chelsea Gardens is a rare garden apartment building in Manhattan. The main entrance features an ornate surround and apartments overlook a central garden.



8. Lefcourt Clothing Center, 275 7th Avenue
One of many speculative structures in Manhattan designed by Ely Jacques Kahn, this block-long 1928 garment industry building has distinctive brickwork and tiered massing. Though the elevator lobby has unfortunately been modernized, some original Deco details remain.



9. 241 West 26th Street
Slee & Bryson designed this delightful parking garage in 1930. Faced with tawny brick, the base incorporates frozen fountains, a familiar Art Deco motif.



4. 155 and 165 West 20th Street
On the northeast corner of Seventh Avenue, the Warren Apartments feature ornamental brickwork, corner windows, and handsome lobbies with brightly colored terrazzo floors. It was designed in 1938 by Horace Ginsbern, architect of the "Fish Building" on the Bronx's Grand Concourse.



5. 250 West 23rd Street
Built in 1948, Broadway Savings Bank, designed by Harold Reeves Sleeper, is monumental in scale. The bold façade incorporates delicate floral ornament and aluminum spandrels.



7. High School of Fashion Industries, 225 West 24th Street
Originally called Central Needle Trades High School, this 1940 school incorporates four mosaics by Ernest Feine, as well as a remarkable mural inside, depicting the history of the garment industry.



10. Starrett-Lehigh Building, 601 West 26th Street
An architectural masterpiece designed in 1930 by the Japanese-American architect Yasuo Matsui for Cory & Cory, this massive freight terminal and warehouse structure combines Art Deco and modernistic features. Not only could trains pull directly inside, but trucks could be driven from the street to any level.