

FOOD & WINE

MARCH 2005

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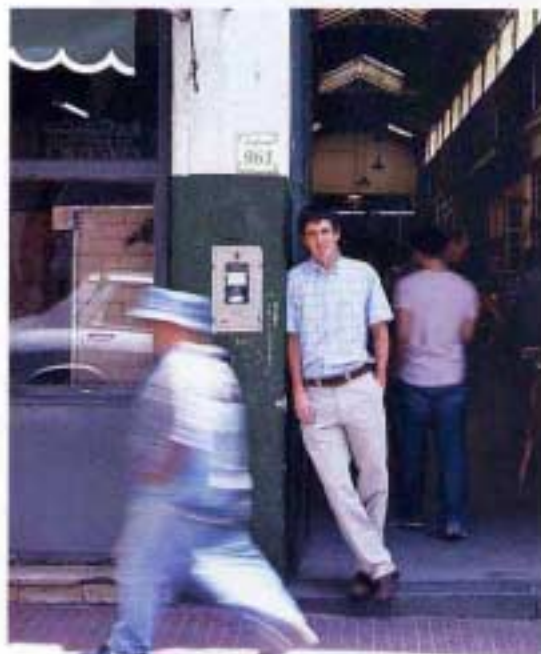
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AOL KEYWORD: FOOD & WINE



Discovering Deco in Buenos Aires

Who knew that the Argentinean capital has a stockpile of bargain-priced Art Deco furniture? A design lover goes shopping.

BY STEPHEN HENDERSON

I ONCE WORKED IN NEW YORK CITY'S ROCKEFELLER Center, where I spent many happy lunch hours studying its streamlined Art Deco architecture. I discovered sculpted panels by artists ranging from Gaston Lachaise to Isamu Noguchi and was amazed at the way the buildings used new materials like Bakelite and aluminum. Art Deco, I learned, was the first truly international style of interior design, and it swept through fashionable rooms from Paris to Tokyo from the mid-1920s to the 1940s.

Those decades coincided with Argentina's golden age. Such vast quantities of beef and grain were shipped from the port of Buenos Aires that money flowed in like the tide. Famous architects and designers, including Le Corbusier and Jean-Michel Frank, worked there. And affluent *porteños*, as residents of the city are called, brought roomfuls of fashionable furniture home from Europe. So when a decorator friend returned from South America with news that Buenos Aires is a great place to

find Art Deco furniture at bargain prices—a result of the country's 2001 financial crisis—I decided to see for myself.

Now undergoing a post-crash renaissance, but still full of excellent bargains, the Argentinean capital is attracting ambitious, creative people like Emmanuel Burgio, a young Frenchman who was once a banker at Credit Suisse First Boston in Manhattan. In 2002 Burgio launched Blue Parallel, which tailors itineraries to South America's most exotic locales for individual clients. He fell in love with Buenos Aires during his own travels and decided to base his company there. (Blue Parallel also has an office in Potomac, Maryland.)

Though he specializes in luxury outdoor adventures to places like Machu Picchu and Patagonia, Burgio didn't skip

TOP: Travel guru Emmanuel Burgio, **LEFT,** can map out a tour of Buenos Aires shops like H.B. Antiques, **RIGHT,** which features Art Deco pieces in a sea of gilt and rococo.



Tips for an Art Deco Pilgrimage

• HOTELS

Alvear Palace Hotel

A 1932 classic.

DETAILS Doubles from \$440; Avenida Alvear 1891; 011-54-11-4804-7777.

Bo-Bo A seven-room hotel in the trendy Palermo neighborhood.

DETAILS Doubles from \$80; Guatemala 4882; 011-54-11-4774-0505.

Faena Hotel + Universe

Over-the-top design from Philippe Starck.

DETAILS Doubles from \$300; Martha Salotti 445; 011-54-11-4010-9148.

• RESTAURANTS

Cluny Chef Matías Zuccarino showcases local ingredients in his pork with tapenade.

DETAILS El Salvador 4618/22; 011-54-11-4831-7176.

La Cabaña This classic reopened in October 2003 with a hip crowd and meat-centric menu.

DETAILS Rodríguez Peña 1967; 011-54-11-4814-0001.

Patagonia Sur Try the rib-eye steak grilled with rosemary salsa.

DETAILS Rocha 801; 011-54-11-4303-5917.

Sucre The young and beautiful flock here for braised lamb gigot or buffalo carpaccio.

DETAILS Sucre 676; 011-54-11-4782-9082.

• SHOPS

H.B. Antiques Art Deco pieces in a sea of gilt and rococo.

DETAILS Defensa 1016/18; 011-54-11-4361-3325.

Arte Étnico Argentino

Wood furniture and wool rugs of traditional Argentinean design.

DETAILS El Salvador 4600; 011-54-11-4833-6661.

Gropius Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Bauhaus furniture.

DETAILS Honduras 5851; 011-54-11-4774-1535.

Guevara Gallery One of Buenos Aires's largest collections of Art Deco furniture.

DETAILS Defensa 982; 011-54-11-4362-7718.

La Pasionaria Antiques from the 1920s through the '60s.

DETAILS Godoy Cruz 1541; 011-54-11-4773-0563.

Laura O. Minimalist house and kitchen wares from Laura Orcoyen, one of Buenos Aires's leading designers.

DETAILS Uriarte 1554; 011-54-11-4832-8778.

• TRIP PLANNER

Blue Parallel Customized itineraries for touring South America.

DETAILS Rates start at \$6,000 per week; 800-256-5307 or blueparallel.com.

a beat when I asked him to plan my Argentinean vacation around antiquing. Within hours, he e-mailed a comprehensive list of shops and arranged for Yvonne Videla, a personal shopper for guests at Buenos Aires's posh Alvear Palace Hotel, to be my guide.

Videla and I hit the ground running. A driver whisked us in 10 minutes from the Alvear to the city's oldest neighborhood, San Telmo, where cobblestoned streets are home to dozens of antiques shops. Along the way, Videla

offered acerbic opinions about everything from the best vineyards for Argentina's cherished red wine, Malbec (Altos Las Hornigas), to cosmetic surgery (many women of a certain age in the wealthy Recoleta section look eerily alike because they use the same doctor).

As we drove, I could see why Buenos Aires is often called the Paris of South America. Although the metropolis sprawls over 75 square miles, the center of the city is a charming series of neighborhoods linked by wide boulevards and landscaped parks and plazas. There was traffic and frenetic street life, but there were also purple-flowering jacaranda trees and handsome, fin de siècle buildings.

"During the '30s and '40s, when we were fantastically rich, there were both lots of imports and a tremendous amount of furniture manufacturing here," explained Claudio Caruso, owner of **Gropius**, as he showed me around his store. Here, Deco pieces sit near examples of Art Nouveau, which preceded the Art Deco era, and of Bauhaus, which followed it.

While I gazed at a 1930s mirrored vanity, its drawer fronts bowed into perfect half circles, with lustrous silver drawer pulls, I imagined Evita Perón seated before it, admiring her reflection. This piece, Caruso said, was made locally in the style of Art Deco master Jacques-Emile Ruhlman. At around \$650, it's a steal—maybe even a third of what I'd pay in New York.

