

An Art Deco Society Self Guided Walking Tour

Central London Gems

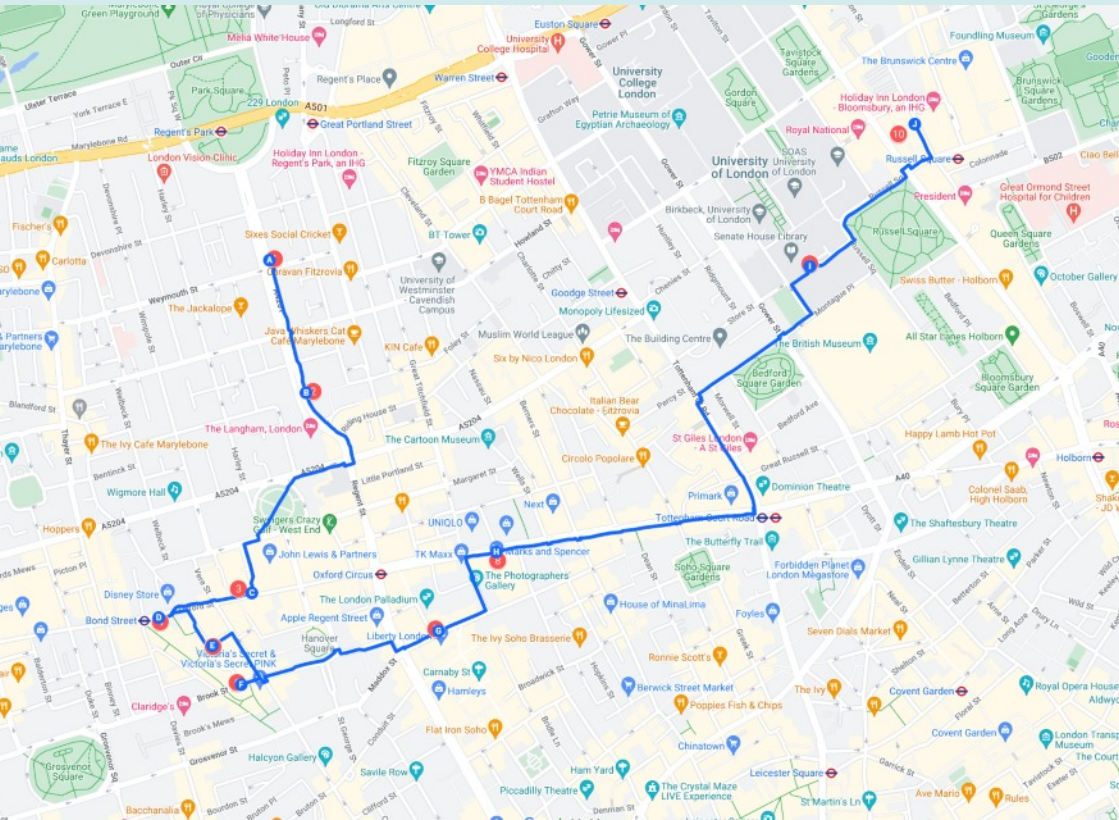


Central London Gems

Welcome to the first in a series of self-guided walking tours from the Art Deco Society UK. This walk is approximately 2.5 miles long, and will take you on a route from the Marylebone area, via Mayfair and Soho to Bloomsbury, stopping at ten Art Deco gems on the way. These are:

1. The Royal Institute of British Architects
2. BBC Broadcasting House
3. (Former) D.H Evans Department Store
4. HMV Oxford Street
5. Bonhams Auction House
6. Greybrook House
7. Palladium House
8. Marks & Spencer Pantheon
9. Senate House
10. (Former) Daimler Hire Garage

Clicking on the below map will take you to GoogleMaps where you can see the route more closely.



We start our walk at Portland Place W1. The closest Underground station is Regent's Park on the Bakerloo Line. Exit the station onto Marylebone Road in either direction, before taking the first turning onto Park Crescent. Follow this to Portland Place, and walk approximately 200 meters to number 62, your first stop.

1) Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

This building was completed in 1934, and was designed by George Grey Wornum, constructed using a steel frame clad in Portland Stone. It has bronze entrance doors which are flanked by two columns topped with Egyptian style sculptures showing the spirit of man and woman as creative forces. Above the entrance is a sculpture depicting Architectural Aspiration. There are five sculptures on the side of the building depicting a painter, a sculptor, an architect, an engineer, and a working man.

The cafe is open to the public, and there is an excellent bookshop, so it is worth popping in if you have time.



From RIBA, continue walking down Portland Place another 300 meters to your next building.

2) BBC Broadcasting House.

The home of British Broadcasting, Broadcasting House opened in 1932. It was designed by George Val Myer and Watson Hart. This is a huge nine-storey building, built using a steel frame clad in Portland Stone. It features a curved facade, with an elaborate clock at the top. The Architectural Review of 1932 described it as the new Tower of London. The asymmetrical shape of the building is because the original plans had to be altered, as residents in Langham Street complained about loss of natural light due to the shadow cast by the building. A number of familiar names designed studios within the building, notably Wells Coates and Serge Chermayeff.

The building was extended significantly between 2005 and 2013 and continues to be used for many of the BBC's radio and TV programmes.

From here, continue down the road a short distance until the junction with Cavendish Place. Take a right, and walk 100 metres to Cavendish Gardens. Cross over, and walk through the park. Cross over and take a left down Old Cavendish Street to Oxford Street and our next location, on the corner to your right; the former D H Evans Department Store.



3) Former D. H. Evans Department Store

D H Evans was opened in 1879 by Dan Harries Evans, a Welsh Draper, at 320 Oxford Street.

The next forty years saw various moves, and expansion, before the firm was merged with Harrods. This ultimately led to the building of a new store on land bounded by Oxford Street, Old Cavendish Street, Henrietta Street and Chapel Place in 1935. The architect chosen was Louis Blanc and the new store fully opened in 1937 after being built in two phases. In 2001, the store was rebranded under the House of Fraser name, but closed permanently in January 2022.

It has recently been redeveloped, converting six floors of the building into offices, with an indoor pool, gym area and a rooftop restaurant .



Take a right, and walk 200 meters down Oxford Street to your next stop, HMV at number 363.

4) HMV

HMV's origins lie in 'The Gramophone Company', who in 1899 bought the copyright to a painting by Francis Barraud. The painting shows a dog called 'Nipper' listening to his late master's voice coming from a gramophone.

In July 1921 the first dedicated gramophone store was opened by Sir Edward Elgar at 363 Oxford Street. The store stocked gramophones, radios and popular music hall recordings. On Boxing Day 1937, a fire destroyed the store, and the Nipper logo was all that remained unscathed from the blaze. It was rebuilt and reopened two years later on 8th May 1939. Sir Thomas Beecham, the famous conductor opened the store. The new shop was designed by Joseph Emberton, who was also responsible for the Simpsons Menswear store in Piccadilly built in 1935. There are similarities in the upper floor window arrangements of the two buildings.



The golden era of record sales encapsulated the Rock 'n Roll era of the fifties, through Beatlemania and flower power, to the Glam Rock days of the Seventies.

By the new millennium, people were buying music in different ways, and this store closed in 2019 when HMV fell into administration. It spent some years lying empty with a brief spell as an American candy store, but reopened as HMV under new ownership in 2023.

From HMV, retrace your steps back down Oxford Street, taking the second right onto Woodstock Street. Your next location is at the end of the street.

5. Blenstock House (Bonhams Auction House)

Bonhams, were established as an auction house in 1793, and have been the current owners of this building since 2001. Blenstock House can be found at the junction of Blenheim Street and Woodstock Street, hence the naming of this building Blenstock House! It was designed by Fuller, Hall and Foulsham and built in 1937. Fuller, Hall and Foulsham were also responsible for designing the much larger Ixex House in the Minories area of Whitechapel, also completed in 1937. Blenstock House was built as offices and showroom for Phillips Auctioneers. The frontage has a curved stair tower to the left with curved central long vertical window flanked by rectangular windows to each of its three upper floors. The steel framed building is clad in buff faience with highlights in yellow and peach colours. It retains several original external features, including the flagpole and bronze doors.





From Bonhams, continue along Blenheim Street, taking a right onto New Bond Street at the end. Walk down New Bond Street until the junction with Brook Street. Take a right. Your next stop is a very short walk down the street, at the junction of Haunch of Venison Yard.

6. Greybrook House

Situated on Brook Street, Mayfair is Greybrook House. This building was commissioned by Bechstein, the German piano manufacturer in 1928. Bechstein, was founded by Friedrich Wilhelm Carl Bechstein in 1853, and had supplied Queen Victoria gilded art-case pianos, and had sold up to 2,500 pianos a year in Britain before 1914. The business was wound up by the Board of Trade in 1916, and the business sold to Debenhams. Following WWI, Bechstein re-established it's business and Sir John Burnett and Partners designed this six-storey building as a showroom with practice rooms and offices on the upper floors. Thomas Tait, (Sir John Burnett's partner), was in charge of the design, which was built using Portland Stone in a Moderne style with fluted panels and a striking octagonal window. The ground floor is currently occupied by Joseph, a clothing retailer. The offices on the upper floors were converted into three-bedroom luxury apartments in 2017.

If you look over your shoulder, you'll see Handel Hendrix House. A museum dedicated to the lives and works of the composer George Frideric Handel and the rock singer-guitarist Jimi Hendrix, who lived at 25 and 23 Brook Street respectively.

Turn around, walking back down Brook Street, passed New Bond Street to the junction with Regent Street. Carefully cross over, taking Great Marlborough Street (almost opposite, to the right). Your next stop is a short distance down on your left, at the junction of Argyle Street.

7) Ideal House/Palladium House

The architect for this building, Raymond Hood was better known for his skyscrapers in New York. Ideal House was built in 1928-29 as the showroom and offices of the American Radiator Company, Raymond Hood had designed the company's head office in New York, and this is the only European building he designed. Ideal House was built as a showroom for the British subsidiary, using polished black granite with gold trimmings to symbolise coal and flames, which was the livery of the company. When it was first built it comprised seven storeys with a recessed attic, decorated with oriental motifs. It extended for four bays along Argyll Street.

In 1935 a further seven bays were added to that elevation by Gordon Jeeves, the architect who had supervised the original building work. This extension is noticeable when looking at the spacing between the fourth and fifth bays on that street. It was renamed Palladium House after its neighbour, the Palladium Theatre. Restaurants currently occupy the ground floor, and private companies the upper storeys.



From Ideal House, continue down Great Marlborough Street, taking the first left up Ramilies Street to Oxford Street. Take a right, walking down to your next stop 169-173 Marks & Spencer.

8) Marks & Spencer 'The Pantheon'

This building was designed by WA Lewis & Partners in collaboration with Robert Lutyens, (the son of Edwin Lutyens) in 1937-38 for Marks and Spencer, but its name Pantheon is a reminder of something far more flamboyant. The Pantheon was a place of public entertainment that opened in 1772. The architecture was inspired by its Roman counterpart built in 120AD. This domed building was converted into an opera house before burning down in 1792 . It was rebuilt as an entertainment venue, but in 1830 became a shopping bazaar, and later offices. The site was then sold to M&S in 1937. The store was constructed in 1938 originally on the site of the Pantheon, at number 173, but was extended in the '60s to include the sites of numbers 169-171.

The Pantheon store was set apart from other M&S branches by its size, sophistication and its superior location. One of its architects recalled that it was "the store to out-store all stores". It opened in October 1938, and included amenities for staff welfare and training. As well as sales floors there was also a cafe and basement stock rooms. Successive refurbishments of the interior have left no original features behind the facade.



From here, we have a slightly longer walk to our next stop, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile away. Continue down Oxford Street, heading east, until you reach the junction with Tottenham Court Road. Turn left onto TCR, taking the third right onto Bayley Street. Following Bayley Street, passed Bedford Square Garden, turning left onto Malet Street. Your next stop is a short distance up on your right.

9) Senate House

Senate House is the administrative centre of the University of London, built between 1932 and 1937, it was designed by Charles Holden, chosen because of the work he had recently completed on 55, Broadway for the London Underground. His brief required Senate House to harmonize with the surrounding buildings. At nineteen storeys, and a height of 210 feet, this is an immense and impressive building. The original plan was for further wings and courtyards, but a lack of funds and the onset of World War II, meant that only Senate House was completed. Despite this, when standing at ground level and looking up, this is an awesome building. It's no wonder George Orwell used Senate House as the inspiration for 'The Ministry of Truth' in his 1948 novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

It is often possible to walk through the main hall of Senate to the Russell Square entrance/exit. Failing that, walk around the building in either direction to the rear.





Walk around or through Russell Square, to the northern corner, exiting onto Bernard Street. Take the first left, up Herbrand Street, to our final stop.

10) Former Daimler Hire Garage

Designed by Wallis Gilbert and Partners in 1931, this is a striking and glamorous building, originally home to a Daimler Hire Business. The firm provided chauffeur driven cars, apparently for £5 per week, for those people who did not wish to own a car in London. Finished in pristine white render, the Crittall window frames and the doors are in green, as are the typical Art Deco designs above the doors. The large window on the ground floor to the right was the vehicle entrance, behind which was a spiral ramp taking cars to the upper floors. There was also a basement. Wallis, Gilbert and Partners were best known for their huge factory buildings on the Great West Road, notably the Hoover Factory, so it's interesting to see their work on a smaller scale.

We hope you have enjoyed this little tour around central London.

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Regarding the use of mobile phones in London whilst on the tour, please be aware to the potential of phone thefts, and to be vigilant at all times.

The words for this guide were written by Paul Smith, and formatted for the Art Deco Society UK by Philip Butler. The images are largely taken from Google Streetview, but it also features a few of Paul & Philip's own.

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