


## Episode #6 Show Notes: Egyptomania!

My mom has a necklace that was part of my perennial get-up when playing make-believe as a little girl. I can't remember a time when that necklace wasn't in her jewelry drawer, though strangely, I never recall her wearing it. That's a shame, because, all these years later, it retains its drama and exotic charm. Resting just below the collar bone, it's not quite a choker, but close. It has fantastic movement, like weighted fringe, and makes a delicate little sound like tiny fairy bells each time the wearer turns her head or shifts her shoulders. Gold (tone) cylindrical beads, two inches in length, dangle side-by-side around the neck, with a small faux pearl at the end of each one. While I don't know where the pearls fit into the equation (did ancient Egyptians wear fine pearls?), the style of my mom's necklace seems a subtle nod to the wave of Egyptomania that gripped the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s.

I recently learned that there have been many waves of "Egyptomania," that is to say an intense public interest in all things ancient "Egypt" that influences art, design, architecture, etc. A significant wave in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was touched off by Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign aimed at protecting French trade, among other things. This was around the same time the Rosetta Stone, on which were chiseled an ancient decree in three languages (one being Greek), that unlocked the secret of the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

My mom's necklace may be a relic from the Egyptian craze of the 1960s when women saw the glamour of Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra and wanted to emulate it. That was followed by another wave of Egyptomania in the 1970s, the era in which King Tut traveled to America for what, according to an article on the National Endowment for the Arts website, was a "blockbuster traveling exhibit." In the Seventies, that exhibit was the hottest thing going. I was very small back then, but even I remember all the hype surrounding that exhibit. (Incidentally, the National Endowment for the Arts has a fascinating article about how that exhibit came to be. I've provided the link below.) Of course, the 1970s is just beyond the borders of Circa 19xx Land.\* *My* interest is in the Egyptomania of the 1920s. It was in that decade that the greatest archeological discovery was carved into the annals of history: King Tutankhamun's tomb!

We've all seen pictures of Tut's priceless, gleaming gold mask; if you think the geometry and styling of it bears a resemblance to what, 3,000 years later, would come to be called "Art Deco," you are correct. Ancient Egyptian iconography and motifs had a tremendous influence on Art Deco design. The gold, the imagery, the glamour of Hollywood, the mystery of an ancient, far-away world, meets the bright, futuristic style of an aesthetic movement; Egyptian Deco brings it all together. What's not to love?



~ Jennifer Passariello, Circa 19xx

*Article from the National Endowment of the Arts:*

<https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2015/septemberoctober/feature/king-tut-classic-blockbuster-museum-exhibition-began-diplom>

\*The "Circa19xx.com Era" begins around 1875 and has a hard stop at 1964, the year of the New York World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens.

The Discovery...

*What follows is an excerpt from the article "Watch Like an Egyptian," by Bruce Handy in the January, 2008 issue of the online Vanity Fair magazine. This article is about the rise of Egyptian-themed movie theaters in the 1920s. Fabulous read! Here is the article in its entirety: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/01/egyptomania200801>*

The time is fall 1922. The place is the Valley of the Kings, where the English archaeologist Howard Carter is searching for the tomb of an obscure 18th-dynasty pharaoh, Tutankhamen. It is a hunt that has been going on for six fruitless years. And yet, though frustrated and faced with imminent loss of his financial backing, Carter refuses to give up...

Then, one day in November, Carter's men uncover a small stairway cut into rock and leading down to what appears to be a sealed door. Carter's heart leaps with "ill-suppressed excitement," as he later notes. Could this be it? Three weeks of cautious, preliminary excavation ensue, revealing a second sealed door. And finally, "the decisive moment." Carter's patron, the dashing Earl of Carnarvon, is now on hand, along with Carnarvon's daughter, the lovely Lady Evelyn Herbert, and Carter's trusted assistant A. R. Callender. Carter will later memorialize the discovery in his book, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen*. He writes:

*With trembling hands I made a tiny breach in the upper left-hand corner [of the second door] ... Candle tests were applied as a precaution against possible foul gases, and then, widening the hole a little, I inserted the candle and peered in, Lord Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn and Callender standing anxiously beside me to hear the verdict. At first I could see nothing, the hot air escaping from the chamber causing the candle flame to flicker, but presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold—everywhere the glint of gold. For the moment—an eternity it must have seemed to the others standing by—I was struck dumb with amazement, and when Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the*

*suspense any longer, inquired anxiously, "Can you see anything?" it was all I could do to get out the words, "Yes, wonderful things."*

The world agreed. This was the first royal Egyptian burial chamber to be discovered more or less intact—and arguably the greatest find in archaeological history. Within days, the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb had become a front-page sensation in London, New York, and elsewhere around the globe...

The discovery [of Tut's tomb] unleashed one of the West's greatest waves of Egyptomania, as the vogue for things Egyptian—or, more often, Egyptian-ish—is known. By the spring of 1923, steamship lines were hawking Egyptian-themed passenger lounges, Southern California citrus growers were packing Tut-brand lemons, and French fashion houses had begun showing boy-killing couture. (Fashion historians credit the body-hugging Egyptian style with helping to popularize the narrow silhouette already adopted by flappers.) Were fans of the trend so inclined, they could also buy Egyptianized plates, lamps, handbags, cigarette cases...and pretty much anything else upon which manufacturers could stamp a scarab or lotus.

#### Meet Howard Carter: His Biography in Seven Bullets

Howard Carter was not what you would call a warm and amiable man. He lived a solitary life—which may not have been all that unusual among his contemporary Egyptologists. Egyptology was an obsession for many of them—and not just due to their shared love and admiration for an ancient culture. Carter's circle was competitive; Each person wanted to make a name for himself with the "holy grail" of archeological finds: an intact tomb, untouched by ancient fortune-seeking grave robbers (by the way, you might say these ancient grave robbers had a great deal in common with the Egyptologists of Carter's era!). And, of course, there was the gold—and other priceless artifacts. By law, archeological finds were to remain in Egypt. Valuable relics had a way of traveling the world, however. There have been recent allegations that Carter made off with more than a few treasures.

*One example is an Ushabti, a funerary figure on show in the Louvre that bears Tutankhamen's name and can only have come from the pharaoh's tomb, said Christian Loeben, an Egyptologist at the August Kestner museum in the German city of Hanover. A museum in Kansas City, Missouri, has two golden falcon's heads which, an examination revealed, came from a collar placed around the mummy's neck. There are further examples in other museums.*

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/howard-carter-stole-from-tomb-of-tutankhamen-1.532457>

Carter was frequently at odds with his colleagues—and just about everyone else—and he died a bitter man. So, what do we know about Carter?

- Howard Carter was a British archeologist born in 1874. His father was the artist and illustrator Samuel John Carter. Samuel helped develop Howard's artistic abilities, which was important, because it was those abilities that opened the door that would ultimately lead to Howard's work as an Egyptologist.
- For much of his childhood Carter lived with relatives in Swaffham. Didlington Hall, the mansion of the Amherst family, was nearby, and it held a huge collection of Egyptian antiques, which piqued Carter's interest at a young age.
- At 17, Carter traveled to Egypt to help an Amherst family friend copy tomb decorations discovered in the excavations at Beni Hasan. His career in Egyptology began as a skilled illustrator hired to "record" wall reliefs. He was soon supervising entire excavations, during which time he developed a grid-block system for searching for tombs.
- In 1907 Lord Carnarvon hired Carter to supervise excavations near Thebes, and then, in 1914, Carnarvon was given concession to dig in the Valley of the Kings. The digging was interrupted by WWI, then resumed near the end of 1917. In 1922 Carnarvon, weary of so few results despite years of digging, told Carter he had one more season of funding in which to work. It was in November of that year that Carter found the tomb.
- Carnarvon and Carter had a falling out in early 1923, and excavation ceased temporarily. Work began again in early March, and shortly thereafter Carnarvon contracted blood poisoning while staying near the tomb site. He died in April.
- Carter continued cataloging thousands of objects from the tomb until 1932. He also authored a number of books. In 1924 he visited the United States giving lectures about his discoveries. The lectures sparked the "American Egyptomania."
- He never married, had no children, and when he died in 1939 at the age of 64 from Hodgkin's Disease, few people attended his funeral.

Resources:

*The Search for Tutankhamun*, BBC docu-drama  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFUiE2MWR\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFUiE2MWR_8)

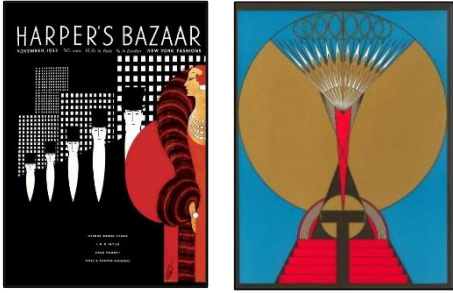

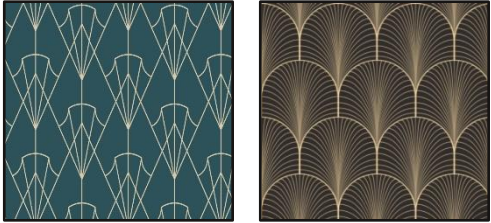

*In the Valley of the Kings: Howard Carter and the Mystery of King Tutankhamun's Tomb*, by Daniel Meyerson

*Howard Carter: Before Tutankhamun*, by C.N. Reeves

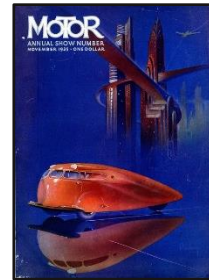
*The Highclere Castle Egyptian Exhibit*:  
<https://www.highclerecastle.co.uk/egyptian-exhibition>

## Art Deco

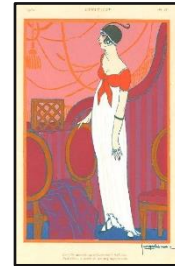
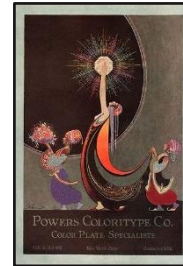
The term “Art Deco” was first coined in the 1960s to describe works exhibited at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925. Its scope has widened, and now refers to the form of design that was predominant in the period just before World War I through 1939. It had many influences, from avant-garde Cubism, to the productions of the Ballets Russes, to the exotic styles of China, Japan, India, and ancient Egypt. Common Art Deco motifs are presented below.

Motif	Example
Geometric shapes (triangles, circles, rectangles, arches)	 The first example row contains two posters. The left poster is for Harper's Bazaar, featuring a stylized cityscape with white buildings on a black background and a red, curved architectural element. The right poster is a fan illustration with a large blue circle at the top, a red fan, and a red staircase leading up to it.
Symmetry (balanced, mirrored features)	 The second example row contains two posters. The left poster is for the Chicago World's Fair, showing a symmetrical, stylized building with two tall spires. The right poster is for The New Yorker, featuring a symmetrical, stylized cityscape with blue and yellow buildings.
Patterns (chevrons, curves, hard edges, zigzags)	 The third example row contains two pattern posters. The left poster is a dark teal background with a repeating pattern of white, stylized fan or chevron shapes. The right poster is a dark grey background with a repeating pattern of light grey, stylized fan or chevron shapes.
Sleek design (suggestion rather than detail)	 The fourth example row contains two posters. The left poster is for Vogue, featuring a woman in a red and yellow dress. The right poster is an airplane illustration with a white airplane flying over a red background.

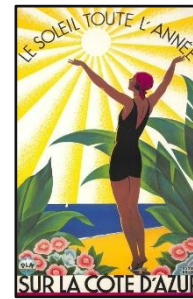
Futuristic imagery  
(metallics, machinery)



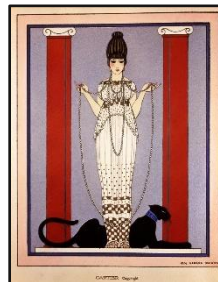
Bold colors



Stylized natural world  
(animals, leaves, sunbursts)



Ancient exoticism  
(Egypt, the Orient)



### Egyptian Iconography



Lotus flower



Sphinx



Pyramids



Feathers



Eye of Horus



Sun disk



Cat



Scarab



Ankh

## Decorate in Deco Style

There are few interior décor styles that are more glamorous and sophisticated than Art Deco. It's sleek, modern—and a complete departure from the rustic farmhouse aesthetic that has been so popular in recent years. If you're ready for a change, The Spruce has a style guide to help you achieve the Art Deco look in your home. A few of their tips are listed below. Check out the entire article here: <https://www.thespruce.com/decorating-in-art-deco-style-1976535>.

To make over your home in Art Deco style, incorporate the following into your design scheme:

- Stainless steel, mirrors, chrome, glass, lacquer, inlaid wood, marble, and rare woods
- Bright yellows, reds, greens, blues, and pinks *or* creams and beiges
- Large-scale furniture with mirrored features or exotic woods
- Fabrics in either solid colors or geometric patterns. (No florals or plaids!)
- Linoleum in abstract designs or black and white tiles, or lacquered or parquet floors
- Rugs with geometric patterns
- Glass and chrome light fixtures, including colored Tiffany-style glass

## Favorite Thing of the Week

Spotted in Kansas City this week: a relic from 1920s Egyptomania! I've been spending a lot of time researching both Art Deco and Egyptian influences on that movement lately, so when I was shopping in a local antique mall TODAY, I couldn't believe it when I spotted a pair of Egyptian-inspired candlesticks from the 1920s. This was astounding for two reasons: first, I rarely encounter 1920s Egyptian Deco in my travels. I know it's out there, but I just don't see it here in the Midwest. Second, I NEVER bump into things I am currently researching. I had literally been reading and writing all day about Egyptomania, then took a break to check out Kansas City's Brass Armadillo, and—gasp!—there they were, two candlesticks. I love, love, love the look. This little duo is my favorite thing of the week.



If you would like to see more pictures of these candlesticks, and all kinds of other representative examples of Egyptian Deco, check out my Pinterest site, which includes a board on Egyptian Art Deco.

<https://www.pinterest.com/circa19xx/>