

# A Streamlined Surprise

BY KARL KESSLER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOMASZ ADAMSKI

**B**uildings of art deco design, that defining esthetic of the 1920s and '30s, are rare locally. Art moderne buildings, a variant of art deco, are too, but the front of Neo Architecture Inc. in Kitchener is an exception.

Art deco's geometric ornaments and bold embellishments usually were played over larger "canvases" in prominent locations at the centre of things: civic buildings, high-rises, headquarters. Art moderne often graced smaller, utilitarian buildings, sometimes on the outskirts.

Streamlined and curving, it evoked transportation, technology and the pace of modern living. It scaled back high-design art deco, bringing it down to earth: diners, bus depots, gas stations, but also theatres, office blocks, shops, even private homes. However, moderne's modesty worked against its longevity – demolition and remodelling has erased much of it.

In 1929 the Pinto family built diminutive 243 King St. E. as a produce shop, with their apartment above. Sisters Caroline and Victoria later converted it to a clothing store, which remained in business for decades. Architect Laird Robertson bought it in 2014, promising the Pintos it would be preserved. It houses Robertson's practice with Doug McIntosh: Neo Architecture. Neo has created a contemporary workspace inside, while preserving the excellent front.

Strong verticals emphasize its slenderness. The corners are slim concrete bands, rising from the sidewalk, extending past the



roofline. Between them, a display window spans the first floor. Above, vertical strips with set-in windows divide ochre-coloured brick. All vertical elements have stepped edges, creating more ascending lines, and all curve backward at the top, suggesting they could continue out of view. The designer of this lovely bit of street sculpture is not known.

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*Karl Kessler is co-ordinator of Doors Open Waterloo Region.*



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