

# **CARCHITECTURE**



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HOUSES WITH HORSEPOWER

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**“If houses were  
built industrially,  
mass-produced like  
chassis, an aesthetic  
would be formed with  
surprising precision.”**

*Le Corbusier, architect*

# CHAPTERS

Classical Gas

7

Brutal Power

19

Contemporary Architecture

51

European Modernism

111

Space Rage

125

Case Study Cars

145

# ESSAYS

Art Deco: the search for the perfect machine

16

Why Le Corbusier might better have been called Le Carbusier

46

Why Saab was the architect's car par excellence

106

The car as the architect's utopia

136

How the car became Frank Lloyd Wright's ultimate muse

182

**“A car is not a horse,  
and it doesn’t need  
a barn.”**

*Frank Lloyd Wright, architect*



**CLASSICAL**  
**GAS**



# 570

## FERRARI 458 ITALIA

**ARCHITECTURE** What's that Ferrari doing at La Venaria Reale, Turin's seventeenth-century Versailles? It's simple, really. Turin is inextricably linked to the automobile industry. It is where Fiat started production in 1899 and where Pininfarina was founded in 1930. In the 1920s, Giovanni Agnelli built the famous Lingotto factory, whose rooftop test track became immortal thanks to the film *The Italian Job*. The rest is history.

**CAR** When designing the Ferrari 458 Italia, Pininfarina took aerodynamic efficiency as its main criterion, resulting in a down force of 300 pounds at 120 mph. That the mighty V8 engine was on view under a transparent pane wasn't new, but with this car Ferrari made a huge leap forward compared to its predecessor, the 430. The 458 Italia is a brilliant, razor-sharp, and comfortable driver's car. The best ever, better than an F40, Jeremy Clarkson said. With 570 HP, an acceleration of zero to 60 mph in 3.4 seconds, and a top speed of 195 mph, this "basic" model beat that super sports car from 30 years earlier in the figures too. The comparison may not be entirely fair. Nevertheless: they are getting more and more powerful, faster and faster, and better and better, and one wonders where it will end.





## **FX4**

**ARCHITECTURE** The Castle of Leeuwerghem near the Belgian town of Zottegem was designed in 1762 after the classical French model. That is why the collection of London taxis belonging to one of the castle's inhabitants comes across as rather out of place. The private park was inspired in part by Versailles and in part by English gardens.

**CAR** It doesn't get more British than this. The so-called FX4 was used as a taxi in London from 1958 to 1997 and is known for its super-short turning radius of 24 feet (7.6 meters). The car underwent many modifications over the years, but its appearance remained almost identical. The design was the result of a collaboration with Austin Motor Company, taxi dealer Mann & Overton, and Carbodies. It was sold by Austin until 1982, when Carbodies, which had previously produced it, took over the rights. In 1984, Carbodies became part of London Taxis International. Diesel and gasoline engines from Austin, Land Rover and Nissan were used. Here we can see a rare specimen from 1976 without a taxi sign. They were built in small numbers as limousines under the type designation FL2. This metallic-blue specimen for British Airways served, according to the current owner, as transportation to Heathrow Airport for passengers who flew with the Concorde. The leather seats are as comfortable as a Rolls-Royce. Instead of the usual luggage area, there is a seat next to the driver for the steward who was picking up the customer. The luggage was transported in another car.

# 1958

# LOUIS XI

## Daimler DS 420

**ARCHITECTURE** Twelve miles south of Angoulême, in the French department of Charente, stands the Château de Puycaty, an impressive fifteenth-century fortified manor. Although the date is not quite certain, it is said to have been built around 1465 under Louis XI. The domain was originally completely walled-in with a round tower on each corner. Only the east tower and a few monumental fireplaces still date from medieval times, because the manor was renovated in the seventeenth century. The most recent owners are a couple from Miami, who sold their villa and threw themselves into this meticulous restoration project in rural France, with due respect for the property's original "bodywork", which has been a listed monument since 1987. Isn't it about time that certain classic cars could receive that title too?

**CAR** The Daimler DS 420 is known as the Queen Mum's Car. The photographs from 1970 in which she admires her first ordered model with glistening eyes in the Vanden Plas-owned factory Kingsbury Works in London are world famous. After Vanden Plas closed down in 1979, the limousine was finished in Browns Lane, the Jaguar factory in Coventry. Nearby, Park Sheet Metal took care of the basic assembly of chassis and body. The DS 420 was Daimler's last flagship as a car brand. The car was custom made, and there was absolutely no limit as to what was possible. Billionaire Howard Hughes reportedly ordered one with a toilet under the back seat. Production ran from 1968 to 1992. Three of the last four cars to be produced were destined for Buckingham Palace, including one for the Queen Mum, her fifth. The DS 420 was or still is in use by the Danish and Swedish royal families and by the Grand Duke of Luxembourg. Some 900 cars were built as hearses. The most famous one became Princess Diana's last means of transportation at her funeral on September 6, 1997.







## BMW 502

**ARCHITECTURE** Like Notting Hill, Hampstead is a posh area of London that lent its name to a feature film in 2017. What's more, the film Notting Hill was partly shot in Hampstead, because it is home to such an interesting cluster of nineteenth-century buildings in the Georgian style. The area also has a literary history. The poet John Keats lived at Wentworth Place from 1818 to 1820, but strangely enough, Keats's house wasn't used as a film location for Bright Star, Jane Campion's film about his love life. The picturesque streets around the beautiful park Hampstead Heath —where this Georgian house was photographed— are mainly home to wealthy intellectuals looking for some peace and quiet in North London. To be honest, the narrow, cobbled roads are better suited for walks than for a road trip. Nevertheless, it is only when in a beautiful classic car that the area really has a cinematic feel.

**CAR** Introduced in 1952, the 501 was the first post-war BMW. After the board members had seen Peter Schimanowski's prototype, they decided to team up with Pininfarina. But when their design was too similar to that of the Alfa Romeo 1900, the Germans went back to Schimanowski's work. The result was an extravagantly designed luxury sedan. Two years later, the quasi-identical 502 with V8 engine, which we and, above all, see here, came on the market. It was more luxurious and above all much faster. But it was also very expensive, which meant that it was very rare. The 501 and 502 were called "Baroque Angels," and are in essence the ancestors of the 7 series. Baur and Autenrieth also built coupe and convertible versions to order.

# 1952

# Art Deco: the search for the perfect machine

The key period during which architecture and car design influenced each other the most? Undoubtedly it was the Art Deco period. However, the common term “Art Deco Cars” is rather unfortunate. Strictly speaking, “Art Deco” is a term that originated on the occasion of the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925. Typical features included geometric patterns and luxurious materials, ranging from chrome to marble, from ivory to exotic wood. This style seeped through to design, everyday objects, furniture, jewelry, fashion, and graphic design. But that aesthetic is also to be found in cars, trains, motorcycles, airplanes, and ocean liners. And, of course, in architecture. The most famous Art Deco building is perhaps the inimitable Chrysler Building in New York, built in 1930, and not coincidentally linked to the automotive industry.

In the 1930s, the opulent Art Deco evolved to a more corporate style without too many frills: Streamline Moderne or *Style paquebot*. The emphasis was more on streamlined designs than on geometry. Call it “the search for the perfect machine”: in both Europe and the United States, carmakers and coachbuilders were under the spell of the “smooth curves” and graceful symmetry that typify the style. Their creations exude the belief in progress characteristic of the Machine Age. At the same time, they bear witness to the obsession at the time with speed and aerodynamics. Yet collectors and museums prefer to call the cars from that period “Art Deco Cars” rather than simply “Streamline Moderne Cars”.

Art Deco cars are also an important turning point in the history of the automobile for another reason. Previously, the car’s design was subordinate to its function: a car was a mechanical assembly of parts, which ideally was meant to reach as large a target group as possible. From 1908 onwards, Ford turned the car into a readily available means of transportation that could be produced cheaply and quickly. In the late 1920s, the car evolved into an ex-

pressive accessory. Aesthetics dominated mechanics, as a result of which the car evolved from a functional everyday object into a status symbol. Arthur Drexler called that category of cars “rolling sculptures”. As the curator of architecture at The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, he organized the first exhibition on cars in 1951. He was widely criticized for his decision, because, critics said, Art Deco Cars didn’t belong among paintings by Picasso and Matisse. However, history ultimately proved him right: cars have become collector’s items, including for museums.

The key period of the Art Deco Cars was the Chicago World’s Fair in 1933–34. Several carmakers presented cars in the Streamline Moderne style to the general public. Instant classics were the Cadillac V-16 Aero-Dynamic Coupe, the Studebaker Land Cruiser (1934), the Chrysler Airflow (1934), the Pontiac Silver Streak (1935), the De Soto Airflow (1936), and the Cord 810 Phaeton (1935). In Europe, too, carmakers experimented with cars in the *Style paquebot*. That generated voluptuous designs by, amongst others, Delahaye, Delage, Talbot-Lago, Voisin, Hispano-Suiza, and, of course, Bugatti. As was customary at the time, the bodies were often the work of coachbuilders such as Chapron, Figoni et Falaschi, Gangloff, Vanvooren, Labourdette, Letourneur et Marchand, and Saoutchik.

Specific examples are the Peugeot 402 Darl’mat Coupe and the Voisin C27 Aerosport Coupe (1934). Unlike the other French coachbuilders, Gabriel Voisin did not revert to soft, feminine curves. He was mainly inspired by aviation—his original métier—and by architecture, which resulted in unique geometric and sharp designs, both on the exterior and in the interior. This one-off is in Peter Mullin’s museum in Oxnard, California, the most beautiful in the world when it comes to French Art Deco cars. They are set in the movement’s wider artistic environment, including sculptures and paintings. “An architect’s dream”, says Mullin about that Voisin.

Europeans travel there specifically to see it for their own eyes. The museum is also where you'll find the C27 Grand Sport Convertible (1934), originally ordered by the Shah of Persia. The Mullin Automotive Museum has many high-flyers, such as the Delahaye Type 135M (1937) with coachwork by the Paris workshop of Figoni et Falaschi. They also designed what to many is the most beautiful car ever: the Talbot-Lago T150-C SS (1937). It was inspired by the most aerodynamic of all forms: that of a drop of water. It was built in a very small edition, for people who had no need to inquire about the price. In 2017, one was auctioned by RM Sotheby's for \$3,500,000 (€3,360,000)—and it had a new bodywork built in 2000. Anyone who contemplates such a beauty and is more concerned with art than with cars might wonder whether the engine is still relevant here. It certainly is. Such visual expression also deserves subconscious, mechanical beauty. Finally, the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had already written in 1909 in his "Manifesto of Futurism": "We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed." In the "Goutte d'Eau", as this Talbot-Lago is called, an air-cooled four-liter, six-cylinder engine produced about 140 HP and a maximum speed of about 80 mph (130 kph).

The experimental Bugatti Type 57 Aerolithe (1935) led to the Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic (1936), four of which were built—one of which has not been traceable for more than 80 years. In addition to Ralph Lauren, the Mullin Automotive Museum also owns one, albeit together with former Walmart chairman Rob Walton. It is said that he bought the car for \$40 million in 2010, making it the most expensive car in the world at the time. In 2011 the "Mona Lisa for car collectors" won the Peninsula Classics Best of the Best Award in Paris, where the winners of the world's eight most prestigious concours d'élégance are pitted against each other.

Carmakers and coachbuilders also jumped on the Art Deco bandwagon outside of France. An illustrious example is the jet-black Rolls-Royce Phantom I Jonckheere Coupe. Originally built as an ordinary Phantom I, the first owner cancelled the order before it was even delivered. During the next ten years of its existence, the car regularly changed owners, as if it were an unwanted child. In 1935, it received its breathtaking coachwork by Belgian company Jonckheere. The round doors made it world-famous. Shortly afterwards, it won the Prix d'Honneur at the Concours d'élégance in Cannes in 1936. It may have been built for this purpose as well: driving it on the road is highly impractical. We don't know who ordered the bodywork or who designed it: the related archives were destroyed in a fire at Jonckheere in the late 1930s. The car was then shipped to the US, where it had numerous owners before temporarily ending up in a junkyard. Later, it was painted white, then painted gold, before being used as a fair-ground attraction, before once more being neglected and forgotten. In 2001, a Japanese collector sold it to the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, one of the most important car museums in the US. Having been fully restored, it is now the museum's showpiece. Among other awards, it won the Lucius Beebe Trophy for best Rolls-Royce at the Pebble Beach competition.

And yet, the car is controversial among classic Rolls-Royce followers, who don't always see sufficient elegance in it. It may be streamlined, but it also measures nearly twenty feet (six meters) and is downright massive. Rolls-Royce also paid homage to the Art Deco period in 2012, although the homage was limited to a subdued game of colors and details on and in the existing Ghost and Phantom. The voluptuous coachwork forms have not returned as yet. Now that we are entering a new '20s, perhaps a real revival awaits us.

**“It is not understood  
that housing is  
constructed in two  
years and the auto-  
mobile in two hours.”**

*Jean Prouvé, architect*



**BRUTAL**  
**POWER**



## Porsche 924

**ARCHITECTURE** Raw horsepower emanates from Juliaan Lampens' Villa Van Wassenhove in Sint-Martens-Latem. Dating from 1970–74, the private house was designed for a teacher who was a bachelor. Rough-cast concrete, wood, and glass: that's all that the Belgian architect needed to make quite a statement. Call it a radical residential sculpture, a Brutalist cave, in which all the spaces merge smoothly. You sleep in an open, three-foot-high wooden cylinder—privacy is so passé—and you eat at a floating concrete table with basic wooden stools. Lampens may have been indebted to Le Corbusier, but he constructed his own idiosyncratic masterpiece.

**CAR** The Porsche 924 was commissioned by Volkswagen, which initially meant to include it in its range of models, but reneged on its decision because of the oil crisis. Porsche believed in the 924 as a cheaper alternative to the 911. However, production was entrusted to Volkswagen. But the four-seater sports car with a front-mounted, water-cooled, four-cylinder engine by Audi went down poorly with both press and Porsche purists. It did bring in many new customers, however. Between 1975 and 1988, about 150,000 units were produced, delivering a boost to turnover that Porsche desperately needed at the time. Like the earlier 914, the 924 was vilified for a long time, but it is now gradually being appreciated, especially the Turbo, the Carrera GT, and the later 924S with Porsche engine. With its almost ideal weight distribution of 48/52, it is in itself a great drive.





# 48/52



1978



## Saab 900

**ARCHITECTURE** The Saab 900 was launched in 1978, and the foundation stone of the Ismaili Centre in London was laid in 1979. Neither the car nor the building were exactly widely acclaimed when they were revealed to the world. Designed by the architects' collective Casson Conder Partnership for the Ismaili Muslims, the center had to blend in with the nearby Victoria and Albert Museum, the Museum of Natural History, and other classical English façades in the South Kensington residential area. An almost impossible demand, which in 1982 earned the building the very first Sir Hugh Casson Award: the prize for the worst new building of the year, awarded by the satirical magazine *Private Eye*.

**CAR** In its 65 years of existence as a car builder, the idiosyncratic Saab didn't make all that many models, but the ones they did have left quite a lasting impression. The Saab 900 Classic was produced from 1978 to 1993—and the convertible a year longer. Production was expensive and barely profitable, but the car grew into an icon of style, smart design, and durability. About 900,000 cars were built. The 900 Turbo was a handy five-seat sedan with the performance of a sports car and a wonderful turbo boost. A car for individualists. Very Swedish and very distinct.

# W123

## Mercedes E-Class

**ARCHITECTURE** Organic like the hilly surroundings, rough like the weather: in Alacar, Portugal, Vitor Vilhena designed a contemporary house that is perfectly suited to its environment. The house resembles a boomerang embracing the landscape. On the outside, rough concrete predominates, while inside, the spaces are bathed in a sea of white. Vilhena interpreted the holiday home as a primeval hut, under which man and car seek shelter.

**CAR** Mercedes-Benz is even more impressive than Saab when it comes to astronomical mileage. And certainly the indestructible W123. Almost 2.7 million units of the grandfather of the E-Class were built between 1976 and 1985 as a sedan, estate car, coupé, and limousine. At the time, it was the smallest Mercedes. A workhorse from the higher classes, and a trusted taxi. When it was launched, it was so popular that there were waiting times of more than two years and some paid a premium on top of the purchase price. The diesels were exasperatingly slow, but so good that some people who bought new ones at the time are still driving them. A car that will last a lifetime? It's possible with a W123, provided it receives the necessary care. And maybe it can even last another generation after that, because as a vintage car, the model also has a great appeal for young people.



