

Exploring the Evolution of Philippine Design: A Book Review of Gerard Lico's *Siglo 20: A Century of Style and Design in the Philippines*

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Navigating the Style and Design in the Philippines through the Decades

Siglo 20: A Century of Style and Design in the Philippines (2024) by Gerard Rey Lico¹ offers a comprehensive exploration of Philippine design throughout the twentieth century. The book delves into each decade, highlighting landmark architecture, interior design, industrial design, and fashion through captivating archival photographs.

The book covers the period from 1900 to 1999. The book begins with 1900 to 1919 and describes the start of the American colonial empire and their benevolent assimilation of the Philippines. Meanwhile, 1920 to 1929 covers the Art Deco Decadence and the Jazz Age while 1930 to 1939 illustrates the Peacetime and Streamlining. Chapters 1 to 3 (1900 to 1939) explore how American colonial influence shaped Philippine design, leading to a blend of Western and indigenous styles.

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Chapter 4 captures 1940 to 1949 from War, Destruction, and Nostalgia for the Nation. For this chapter, it examines the impact of war on design, including the rebuilding efforts and the emergence of new architectural styles.

Chapter 5 illustrates 1950 to 1959, a decade of Postcolonial Modernity happening after World War II, while Chapter 6 is 1960 to 1969 highlights the Cult of Youth and Social Decadence during the Space Age. The post-independence era discussed how Philippine design evolved, reflecting a desire for modernity while maintaining cultural roots.

Meanwhile, Chapter 7 is about 1970 to 1979 and describes New Society and the Neurosis for Identity under the rule of Martial Law. Chapter 8 tackles 1980 to 1989 which marked the Edsa Revolution and the New Design Resolution. The last chapter is from 1990 to 1999, which showed Post-modernity, Sustainable Design, and the "Anything Goes Style."

Lico divided the book into nine chapters based on each decade. Each chapter tackles a specific period, analyzing the design trends and their connection to the prevailing social and political climate. Lico delves into the search for a unique Filipino identity amidst the influences of colonialism, internationalism, and neo-colonialism.

Thus, the book takes readers on a journey through the decades, highlighting the contrasts and evolutions in fashion and graphic design as well as the diverse and ever-changing nature of Filipino design. The book also identified the appliances and furniture that have shaped the lives of Filipinos over the years from sewing machines, radio, TV, and personal computers. In each decade, the book illustrates the consistent pursuit of a better future through technology and the assimilation of foreign styles.

Analysis of the Book's Framework and Presentation

Lico's discussion utilized a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on architectural theory, cultural studies, and historical analysis to offer a comprehensive study of design in the Philippines. This includes archival research and a critical analysis of visual materials to support his arguments.

With its compelling narrative and insightful commentary, the book offers valuable insights into a century of Philippine design. As the country navigated the comings and goings of empire, design became a powerful tool for asserting national pride and character. The book examined the tension between looking inward for inspiration and embracing internationalism as a means of progress. The book delves into the quest for a unified style that defines Philippine design, highlighting the challenges and triumphs in this pursuit.

The book offers a broad survey of the historical, social, political, economic, and ideological conditions that influenced design in the Philippines. The broad survey of Philippine design allows readers to grasp the dynamic changes and influences that shaped design in the Philippines over time from the momentous transition from Spanish to American colonial rule, to the impact of Japanese occupation, and the aftermath of World War II.

Structured in sections, each chapter covered a specific decade and featured landmark reproductions of archival photographs that integrate architecture, interior design, industrial design, and fashion. This structure allows for a coherent and organized exploration of Philippine design history, providing a deep dive into the design trends, influences, and societal shifts of that era.

The book's presentation featured archival illustrations and stunning photographs that highlight various design disciplines, such as fashion trends, furniture and interior design, industrial products, and graphic design from each decade. These visuals evoke a sense of nostalgia while highlighting the diversity and uniqueness of design in the Philippines.

The book's visual and textual narratives provide a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped the Philippines' distinctive aesthetic identity. With this visual journey, readers have an opportunity to transport back in time and witness the evolution of Philippine design as they navigate each chapter.

Art Deco in the 1920s–30s

Art Deco emerged in the early twentieth century and featured the use of geometric patterns, bold lines, and decorative elements. American influence significantly shaped Philippine Art Deco and culture in the 1920s and 1930s.

Chapter 3 specifically examines the cultural and artistic shifts in the Philippines during the 1920s and 1930s that showed American influence and a departure from Hispanic traditions. It highlights the embrace of modern trends like jazz music, flapper fashion, and the Art Deco architectural style.

Art Deco was brought to the Philippines by Filipino architects like Andres Luna de San Pedro, Pablo Antonio, and Juan Nakpil who studied abroad in Europe and America. Filipino architects incorporated indigenous motifs and tropical elements into Art Deco designs. For example, some buildings featured stylized representations of native flora and fauna.

The introduction of sound in cinemas had a major impact on theater design. Talkie fever swept Manila, and Art Deco was employed in the facades of new cinemas. Likewise, upscale department stores like Heacock's, which opened in the 1920s, carried clothing, shoes, cosmetics, jewelry, and sporting goods from American manufacturers. Household appliances became more common, and the cabinet-type refrigerator was a status symbol.

The growing accessibility of household appliances and modern conveniences changed Filipino lifestyles and spaces. Hence, there was a shift from classic art styles to modernism, which had an initial impact on Filipino cinema and advertising.

Celebrating Filipino Architecture and Design

Lico cites architects, designers, filmmakers, and fashion icons who played a vital role in shaping the nation's visual identity. The book pays homage to the influential figures who have left an indelible mark on Philippine design. Their masterpiece not only changed the lives of Filipinos across decades of the twentieth century but also invoked nostalgia and remembrance of the past. It is also a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Filipino

designers, who have successfully indigenized and transformed foreign styles without falling into the trap of mimicry.

From Juan Arellano, Tomas Mapua, Juan Nakpil, Leandro Locsin, and Francisco Mañosa in architecture to Fernando Amorsolo, Arturo Luz, and Botong Francisco in the visual arts, the book highlights the contributions of these visionaries in shaping the nation's design landscape. Their works not only reflect the Filipino spirit but also serve as a testament to the country's rich cultural heritage.

The book covered the significance of architecture as a celebration of Filipino identity and articulated how architecture responds to the everyday needs of Filipinos while expressing their unique culture. The book also explored the relevance and significance of Art Deco showing how architecture reflects who we are as Filipinos.

Postmodernism in Philippine Architecture

Postmodernism in Philippine architecture emerged in the late twentieth century with its eclecticism, playful forms, and the reintroduction of historical and cultural references. Chapter 6 examines the postcolonial modernity of the Philippines from 1950–1995, focusing on the cultural and architectural shifts following World War II. It highlights the rise of a “new look” aesthetic inspired by international trends and technological advancements, influencing fashion, design, and the arts.

Chapter 6 also cited the growth of media like cinema and television, and the efforts to address postwar housing shortages through modern construction techniques, marking a period of reconstruction and cultural redefinition.

Filipino architects embraced postmodernism by incorporating local traditions, historical elements, and vernacular styles into their designs. For instance, postmodern buildings often feature traditional *bahay kubo* (nipa hut) or *bahay na bato* (stone house) elements, reinterpreted in contemporary forms. Architects like Francisco Mañosa championed the use of indigenous materials and traditional forms in his designs.

Beyond Aesthetics: A Legacy of Transformation

Lico argues that Philippine architecture embodies the essence of Filipino culture, responding to everyday needs and reflecting the “lightness of the Filipino spirit.” Lico explores the significance of Art Deco in shaping Filipino identity and emphasizes the ingenuity of local designers who adapted foreign styles to suit the Philippine context.

The emphasizes that Philippine design history is not a linear progression of styles, but rather a complex interplay of political, economic, and social forces. The book highlights the unprecedented changes that shaped Filipino design in the post-war era, fostering a new optimism and desire for a better life in the 1950s and 1960s.

This was followed by the shift toward postmodernism in the 1970s that incorporated local traditions and symbolism. This ongoing negotiation and adaptation highlight the dynamism and resilience of Filipino design.

The book argues that Philippine design is not just about materiality, but a powerful narrative of the nation’s transformative capacity. It is a testament to the Filipino spirit of constantly seeking and defining a unique aesthetic identity.

The Transformative Capacity of Design and Architecture

Chapter 13 offers a review of Philippine art, architecture, design, and fashion trends from 1990–2024. It explored how design and architecture have the power to transform societies by shaping the physical environment and influencing cultural identity. Lico’s book shows that architecture serves as a medium for preserving and promoting Filipino heritage, ensuring that traditional forms and practices are not lost in the face of modernization.

Likewise, a well-planned design can address social issues, such as housing shortages and urban congestion, by creating spaces that are functional, sustainable, and inclusive. Lico’s book illustrated how architecture can shape national identity evident in the way architects integrate local materials, motifs, and traditions into their designs.

Looking Forward: The Future of Filipino Design

This book recognizes and appreciates how Filipino designers have been able to readjust the local context without falling into the pitfall of stylistic imitation. Philippine design history in the last five decades is more than a mere catalog of styles or a canon of formal rules as it is a complex enterprise of political, economic, and intellectual thoughts.

In this book, the readers will see the transformative capacity of the Filipino people and their pursuit of aesthetic and cultural standards. This book serves as a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and creativity of Filipino designers throughout the past century. It is a tribute to the progression of styles, icons, visions, and visionaries that have defined the Filipino identity.

From the turmoil of World War II, Filipino designers have shown resilience and creativity in the face of adversity. Now that we are in the twenty-first century, we are now seeing the arrival of futuristic styles and leading-edge trends in architecture and other design professions.

Significance to Philippine History, Culture, and Architecture

Siglo 20: A Century of Style and Design in the Philippines offers a comprehensive and insightful look into the evolution of Philippine design. It provides a detailed survey of design trends and delves into the socio-political contexts that shaped them. By highlighting key designers and movements, Lico's book contributes significantly to the understanding of Philippine history, culture, and architecture. Scholars and general audiences alike will find this book to be a valuable resource for understanding the role of design in shaping national identity and cultural heritage.

Lico's work is a crucial contribution to the understanding of Philippine history and culture because it reveals how design served as a tool for asserting cultural identity in the face of colonialism and globalization. Examining the historical conditions and specific manifestations of design, the book sheds light on how design both shapes and reflects societal values and aspirations.

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Highlighting the work of pioneering designers and architects, the book highlights the rich heritage of Philippine design and its impact on the built environment. Moreover, the book's exploration of design during periods of conflict and reconstruction sheds light on the resilience and adaptability of Filipino creativity. Through its engaging narrative, comprehensive analysis, and visually captivating presentation, the book offers a rich understanding of the evolution of Philippine design throughout the twentieth century.

Christine Marie Lim Magpile is a teacher, book editor, textbook author, and creative writer. She has a BS Education – History (cum laude) from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila and currently finishing her MA in Araling Pilipino (Philippine Studies) from the University of the Philippines, Diliman. She is a fellow of several national writers' workshops in the Philippines such as the Iligan National Writers Workshop (2024), DLSU Young Screenwriters Workshop (2023), LIRA Poetry Workshop (2023 and 2007), La Salle Kritika National Workshop on Art and Cultural Criticism (2019), 6th Angono Writers' Summer Workshop (2018), and the UST National Writers' Workshop (2008).

ENDNOTE

¹ Gerard Rey Lico, PhD is a full professor from the UP College of Architecture where he teaches history, theory, criticism, and design. As an architect, Lico practices heritage conservation, designer of institutional buildings and civic spaces, and heads a multidisciplinary, research-oriented design consultancy practice.

As a scholar and researcher, Lico has authored articles on Filipino architecture and cultural studies, curator of architectural exhibitions, and director of documentaries on Philippine architecture. Lico has been involved in the conservation of landmarks such as the Manila Metropolitan Theater, the Rizal Memorial Coliseum, and the core buildings of the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Lico also served as a consultant for conservation planning initiatives for other local and national heritage sites across the country.

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