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Jules Bouy

Another New York furniture maker who made a successful transition to the Moderne style was Jules Bouy (1872-1937). Born in France and trained as a metalsmith, he arrived in New York City just before the First World War. For a time he worked in the New York office of a Parisian decorating firm while selling the ironwork of Edgar Brandt on the side. By 1928 he had his own firm, Bouy, Inc. He could design entire interiors and fabricate any kind of furniture, but he seems to have specialized in iron and other metals. His clients were among the most sophisticated in the city, including Lizzie P. Bliss, one of the founders of the Museum of Modern Art.

Much of Bouy's surviving work was designed in the period styles favored by his conservative clients. But he was aware of the latest developments in Paris, and he favored luxurious materials and tropical hardwoods. In the middle of the Depression, Bouy introduced a system of detachable paneling that could be installed in an apartment but removed if the client moved away. This was advertised as a gesture to economy. Of course, the paneling was made of ebonized holly wood and English sycamore, hardly low-end materials. Matching cupboards were made from lace wood, ebony and holly, embellished with rock crystal fittings and built-in indirect lighting. A satinwood table that could be expanded to seat 12 was also available.¹

Another Bouy piece from the early '30s is an exotic wooden jardinière with a drawer and mirror, now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum. Stepped wings project from opposite sides. A series of half-arches underneath each step create a peculiar, top-heavy profile. Presumably houseplants would be placed in the three chambers in each wing. The drawer front

projects outward: it, too, is supported by a half-arch profile. The drawer is faced in a light-colored wood that contrasts with the dark body of the piece, and a tall mirror completes the composition. While this jardinière may not be the best of Bouy's designs, it shows his willingness to stretch form well beyond the demands of function. Like van Nessen's table, it's almost as much abstract sculpture as it is furniture.