

The Chrysler Building, 1926-1930 by William Van Alen [1883-1954]

1. Locate triangles, squares, rectangles, and semi-circles on the Chrysler Building.
2. Look at the metal sculpture detail in 15-B.4. What does it look like?
3. What might it symbolize?
4. Why does this look man-made rather than like a natural object?
5. Notice that this sculpture stands on a round base. Locate these large replicas of a 1929 Chrysler radiator cap on the corners of the thirty-first floor.
6. Notice worker waterproofing a detail ornament (15-B.3). What animal does the ornament represent?
7. Look at the elevator doors (lower left detail), and find the stylized flower and plant shapes. The large central flower is a lotus blossom, an important symbol in ancient Egypt. Notice how arcs divide this design into geometric shapes. Identify another vertical series of arcs on this building.
8. How is this building like an automobile?
9. Why did corporations and architects race to build tall skyscrapers in the 1920s?
10. Why do you think the spire was added to the top?
11. What happened in 1929 to halt this building spree?
12. New York City building codes required that tall buildings such as this step back their upper stories. What were the benefits of making tall buildings smaller near the top?

Historical Connections: modern age; machine age; automobile industry; skyscrapers; Roaring Twenties

Science: engineering; steel

Arts: Art Deco; architecture