CHAPTER SIX

THE HAUNTED INTERIOR: MEMORY, NOSTALGIA AND IDENTITY IN THE INTERWAR INTERIOR

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Abstract

Various accounts of personal possessions and the home suggest that history, memory and nostalgia play important roles in expressing, stabilising and binding personal and familial relationships, and materialising narratives of personal and cultural identity. This preference for mnemonic objects, furniture, furnishings and artworks remains a largely unacknowledged and unexplored narrative in the development of the modern interior. While explicitly present in most fashionable middle-class interiors until the 1930s, this “ghost” in the history of the interior has been suppressed or denied by most narratives of the origins and development of the interior. Using the example of once-popular woven tapestries from the 1920s and 1930s, this chapter argues that a search for identity through an associational or relational past remains an unacknowledged presence in the history and theory of the modern interior.

Introduction: The Paradox of the “Backward Glance” in Modernity

A neglected paradox in the history of the interior is the “problem” of the so-called “period style” that dominated middle-class homes on both sides of the Atlantic from around 1900 to 1940. Instead of diminishing in popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the advent and spread of industrial systems—such as the development of modern kitchens, bathrooms and electric lighting—the popularity and ubiquity of a return to the “antique” and period styles in furniture, furnishing textiles and decorative arts, as in domestic architecture in general, seems to have continued unabated, and even increased. Despite a cascade of technological innovations from the 1880s to 1930s, including a plethora of life-changing technologies, it seems that a majority of middle-class people in Europe and America, when furnishing their homes, did not choose a modern style, but preferred antiques or reproduction furniture and textiles. This period-style interior was designed to recall an earlier pre-industrial age, devoid of machines and even the systems that might have been found proudly displayed in the same homes’ kitchens and bathrooms, not to mention apparent in its heating, lighting and plumbing services.

This persistent historicism forms an essential background to the Modernist polemic against the tyranny of middle-class taste, its worship of the past and “excessive” feminine decorative domestic interior. An instructive insight into this historicism is contained in a little book defending “original, modern design”, Goodbye, Mr Chippendale, by the British-born American critic and designer, TH Robsjohn-Gibbings. In this, he declares that there is now (in 1940), “a young generation of Americans to whom it seems as natural to find antique and reproduction furniture and textiles. This period-style interior was designed to recall an earlier pre-industrial age, devoid of machines and even the systems that might have been found proudly displayed in the same homes’ kitchens and bathrooms, not to mention apparent in its heating, lighting and plumbing services.”

In his book, Robsjohn-Gibbings goes on to point out that, over the previous 30 years (from 1910 until 1940), approximately 1 billion US dollars had been spent in Europe buying antiques for middle-class

1 The author would like to thank Ellen Kravet for permission to make use of the Lee Jofa archive in her possession in New York (hereafter Lee Jofa Archive) and the GP and J Baker archive in Oxfordshire (hereafter Baker Archive), and Dr Philip Sykas, keeper of this archive, for his kind assistance. I would also like to thank the Trustees at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum in Birkenhead for permission to cite and make use of the A.H. Lee archive held there (hereafter Lee Archive).


6 Robsjohn-Gibbings, Goodbye, Mr Chippendale, 3.

homes in America.\(^8\) Considering the much smaller numbers within the middle-class market for these goods at this time, this is indeed a staggering sum—approximately US$16 billion in today’s terms—and no doubt matched by similar sums expended in Europe and across the English-speaking world.\(^9\) This trade in antiques and reproduction furniture, textiles and decorative arts—including antique dealers; dealers in architectural salvage; manufacturers of reproduction furniture and textiles; art galleries; and many designers, design writers and the occasional historian—was not a marginal affair, but lay at the centre of the business of design and retail for the interior in both New York and London.\(^10\) Even the US Department of Commerce, in promoting the “correct” domestic use of wood, published a booklet of advice On the Period Styles in Furniture: Their Selection and Usage.\(^11\)

To explain this paradox of an apparent resistance to modernity in the living room, and an acceptance of it in the bathroom and kitchen, is not so easy. Some scholars have drawn attention to what might be termed a “backward glance” within modernity itself, which seeks to compensate for the remorseless forward movement of what is ultimately an unsettling, global, “nomadic” and continually changing state of being that necessarily erases the materials and visual reminders of the past.\(^12\) This looks to the remnants of the past, such as in public rituals, “invented traditions” and ancient monuments, to express cultural difference and identity, and retrieve a meaningful relationship to place, nature and community.\(^13\) Modernity’s erasure of the past through continuous change also generates nostalgia for what was once there, and this bittersweet longing can become a powerful motivator for both preservation and historicism in design, architecture and especially the interior—the arena of design most closely associated with homemakers’ values, attitudes, aspirations and dreams.\(^14\)

Others have noted that people accumulate possessions in the interior over time, layering them to strategically produce and extend a sense of self, meaning and identity, via possessions that might remind them of others dear to them, or of particularly significant times and places in their lives. Old or antique possessions are especially important in this regard.\(^15\) The antique, even when its origins are unknown, embodies the past through its mere presence, and bestows its reified memory on the self, granting it a depth and stability that modernity seems to continually unsettle.\(^16\) Decorating strategies often relate closely to existing or prior individual and familial ties, upbringing, past experience, memory and expectations. They frequently give pride of place to that which is old, inherited, or have particularly significant associational memories, even if these items have seemingly little conventional aesthetic merit.\(^17\) Remnants from the past are not merely collected and placed in the home for social effect—they can lead to self-discovery through further exploration and investigation, as individuals seek their own or familial origins and ancestral relationships, perhaps through travelling, reading, watching films and exploring museums and significant places.\(^18\)

It is also important to consider the actual historical context of this return to the past in the extraordinary expansion of the period-style interior. While it is true that this period-style interior can be seen to be a later development of earlier Victorian fashions for various historical or exotic period styles, the intensification and further democratization of this fashion distinguishes it in a number of ways from the late Victorian passion for historicism in the home.\(^19\) The early twentieth-century period style was centred on a steadily expanding array of vested commercial interests, of antique dealers, department stores, books and magazines that worked to stimulate the belief and habitual expectation that a modern home full of reminders of a pre-industrial past would be a more comfortable, convenient and socially

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\(^8\) Robsjohn-Gibbings, Goodbye, Mr Chippendale, 5.
\(^15\) See Andrea Deciu Ritivoi, Yesterday’s Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
\(^17\) Belk, “The Role of Possessions.”
\(^18\) Grant McCracken, Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning and Brand Management (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), 18–47.

Valuing the Antique and Period Style

The history and aesthetics of our fascination with the antique is a complex one, although the elevated value given to the antique relies to a great extent on its capacity—often as an object of considerable beauty and rarity—to embody a vanished world. The habit of collecting, finding and displaying rarities and ancient objects closely accompanied the development of court society in Renaissance Italy. From the archives of rare manuscripts; collections of coins, statues and other ancient relics; and first modern literary works that attempted to interpret or make sense of what was being collected, this fascination with the antique strengthened, becoming a flood during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and resulting in a vast increase in collecting and dealing with antiques during the nineteenth century. In Wedgwood’s extraordinary entrepreneurial skill in copying ancient ceramics and decorative items, we find the beginning of a long tradition of turning the antique into a commodity—a “democratisation of luxury” that lies at the basis of consumer culture. The transformation of collectors into consumers can be seen in this nineteenth-century historicising of the interior, as designers and retailers profitied from the market for gothic or “medieval”, Tudor or neo-classical–inspired interiors, displayed in sets of matching furniture the buyer could see and mentally try out. This historicising was reflected in a burgeoning literature of advice that inspired confidence partly through its often highly critical dismissal of the historical faux pas taken by buyers lacking the requisite education and taste.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, history itself had become a sort of cultural “master discipline”, developed and invoked continuously by those interested in religion, nations, political institutions, law, science, art and architecture, as an exemplary explanatory tool, with the museum its key institution. It was assumed that understanding the past—including that of languages, religions, monuments, cultures, empires and relationships—would enable the living to better understand themselves, others and the wider world. Remnants of this past, from the treasures of the Acropolis to the manuscripts of ancient India, were brought back to various collections, and eventually to the larger museums, and patiently deciphered, described and displayed for the edification of all to see.34

20 Edwards, Turning Houses into Homes; Muthesius, “Why Do We Buy Old Furniture?”.
21 Edmondson, “The Tension between Art and Industry.”
23 Harris, Moving Rooms.
26 Rosenstein, Antiques: The History of an Idea, 14; Belk, “The Role of Possessions.”
27 Joseph Alsop, Rare Art Traditions: The History of Art Collecting and its Linked Phenomena Whereever These Have Appeared (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).
30 Edwards, Turning Houses into Homes.
31 Imogen Hart, Arts and Crafts Objects (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Edwards, Turning Houses into Homes.
33 Kriegel, Grand Designs.
As this suggests, the discovery, display and interpretation of ancient or rare objects was closely linked to the expansion of scholarship in history, anthropology and the natural sciences, and more practically in the entrepreneurial transformation of the desire for the rare and luxurious antique into a commodity for mass consumption. However, the lure of collecting remained. By the mid-Victorian era, collecting had been substantially democratized and become something of a middle-class passion closely tied to the purpose and goal of education itself—a way of extending the understanding of favoured objects or places through comparison and research. More and more individuals became involved in the buying, selling, collecting and display of curios and other old items. Civilisation, often conceived of in national and imperial terms, increasingly became measured by a canon of national arts and literature collected in both the museum and the library, one of whose main purposes was the education to appreciate and value what they contained. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, not only distant ancient statues or other works of art, but whole rooms and built environments, from Renaissance church interiors to medieval cloisters, were demolished and reassembled within museums to heighten this effect.

While collecting became a respectable pursuit, it was underscored by a nostalgic understanding that what was being collected was being “saved”, since it had been somehow “left behind” by continuous, and not always welcome, social and technological progress. A wistful backward glance was everywhere visible in the nineteenth century. William Morris’s influence on this appreciation of the past was remarkable, even if his accompanying socialism was not so readily understood or appreciated. His imaginative reconstruction of the past, founded in Ruskin’s aesthetic appreciation of the Venetian Gothic, was pitted against the dominant utilitarianism of Victorian Britain—its slave-like factory system; environmental destructiveness; and shoddy, poorly designed, mass-produced goods. The combination of a nostalgic backward glance to a reimagined poetic, utopian pre-industrial world, and a modern obsession with social amelioration, worker education and meaningful work, became consistent characteristics of the Arts and Crafts movement, as can be seen in their many social and artistic experiments conducted on both sides of the Atlantic. It can also be seen as a prime reason for the Arts and Crafts’ “failure” as a movement, with the demands of socialism within an industrial society inevitably tearing away from the aesthetic demands of making, enjoying and appreciating the handmade object as an emblem of a more productive and useful life.

In her memoir, *Period Piece*, the artist, illustrator and granddaughter of Charles Darwin, Gwen Raverat, recalls this apparent dichotomy, with some tongue-in-cheek humour, in her description of the home of one of her Darwin uncles:

Uncle Richard had adored Ruskin, and worshipped Morris, and had slept for years with a copy of *In Memoriam* under his pillow. In fact, Uncle Richard had done everything that an enlightened person, flourishing in the middle of the nineteenth century, ought to do: taught at the Working Men’s College, organised great country walks, admired Nature, and all the rest of it. The old house at Kensington Square had a very strong flavour of its own. It was a peculiar kind of earthly paradise—earthly, not celestial. It was a tapestry, worked in rich, bright colours to a complex pattern, a Morris tapestry, not a medieval one. The food was delicious, the beds were soft, the rhythm ran smoothly, everyone was kind and good and true and happy; and it seemed as if evil could never come near.

While the Arts and Crafts movement cannot be held responsible for a Victorian passion already well established, Morris and his followers infused this backward glance with a renewed moral and political authority, making the handmade object a statement of ethical, social and aesthetic import. All over the English-speaking world, this legitimised a renewed and moralised return to the past in the home, often framed within a romantic and nostalgic vision of an authentic “English” (or “colonial” American) national or regional identity. From London to Melbourne and New York, “old style” cottages, terrace houses and grander homes were constructed, incorporating a few antiques and some genuine (historically verified) reproduction furniture and textiles, all asserting some romantic ancestral

37 Kriegl, *Grand Designs*.
40 Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*.
47 Kinna, “William Morris.”
identity to be expressed by the homemaker.48 This Arts and Crafts vision of a village-based way of life, paradoxically, did not free the industrial worker, but instead became a material “standard of decency” indicating the liberal intention of benevolence and progress for the middle-class homemaker.49 Even in 1935, when Edward Hayward—the owner of a local department store and avid collector of antique English oak furniture and modern European and Australian art—built his early eighteenth-century style English manor house (Carrick Hill) on the outskirts of Adelaide in South Australia, the house was designed around an eighteenth-century oak staircase bought from a demolished country house in Durham.50 The “imagined” past given to its owner by such reified references to the past provided both a sense of social and ancestral place, linking the Haywards with their origins, and displaying their education and taste for their many guests.51

Education was a critical factor in engaging with the material and visual remnants of the past. It was not enough just to like something—one also had to understand its origins and appreciate its beauty and value. This need was fulfilled by museum “period rooms”, house museums, large numbers of books of advice and history, and magazines such as Country Life and Connoisseur that took their eager readers on a journey—each month using black and white photography to explore “authentic” examples of old furniture and interiors, stately homes and their gardens, surrounding countryside and unique histories.52 In many respects, the Haywards’ Carrick Hill, like Lady Hayward’s parents’ many Morris-inspired houses and interiors, was a product of this polite, genteel, socially progressive, middle-class culture.53

The importance of being able to judge one period from another, the origins and meaning of each popular antique, and what kind of furnishing cloth and pattern would be suitable with a particular piece of furniture was a boon to writers and publishers. It generated a number of pioneering works of historical scholarship—most notably Edwin Foley’s lavish, expensive and detailed Book of Decorative Furniture,54 and Percy Macquoid’s History of English Furniture.55 This was soon followed by other popular surveys, a number of which were produced by the larger museums, or directly funded by the more important dealers, manufacturers or retailers. Many of these abstracted the information found in earlier, more scholarly books.56 By the 1930s, books on period-style furniture became a fixture in the literature on the home, along with many articles containing potted histories of furniture and furnishing.57 In this way, styles deriving from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, often strangely located in otherwise modern suburban bungalows or Arts and Crafts-influenced “cottages”, became enshrined in interwar Anglo-American interiors. These were “timeless”, suggesting good taste, aesthetic “balance” (a favourite word) and continuity with a national (and, in America, colonial) identity.58

**Period-style Textiles: AH Lee and Sons**

The fashion for period-style furniture was especially valuable to luxury furnishing textile manufacturers. For example, in 1903, the large bespoke furniture manufacturers, Gillows, opened a textile factory in France to solely produce fine period-style fabrics to cover their reproduction furniture.59 This area again indicates the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. In fact, the origins of a number of the leading English makers of period-style textiles and tapestries were closely tied to the Arts and Crafts–led renaissance in textile design of the 1870s and 1880s, including Warner and Sons, GP and J Baker, and Arthur H Lee.60 Lee’s is of particular interest here because, before World War II, the company was also famous for its tapestries, and, like many companies influenced by the Arts and Crafts, soon

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51 Heathcote, *Carrick Hill*.


made their way to America.61 The family of the founder, Arthur Lee, had been involved in the textile industry in Manchester for many years (in Tootal Broadhurst and Lee). However, as a young man inspired by the example of Morris, in 1888, Arthur established a large workshop at Warrington under his own name to manufacture high-quality furnishing textiles and tapestries in hand-dyed wool. At first, Lee used his own designs and those of some of the leading Arts and Crafts designers, such as Voysey and Crane; however, by the time the firm moved to a larger factory in Birkenhead, in 1908, the bulk of their production was devoted to period designs that were carefully worked up from museum or private collections. A large part of their efforts was devoted to woven tapestries, again based on historical models.62 As Lee’s few surviving design books show, Arthur and his son, Thorold, who did the bulk of the designing, would work from museum or private collection exemplars, carefully linking their own adaptive designs to their historical originals.63

Fig. 6-1. Page of the design book of Arthur and Thorold Lee, c. 1917.64

Around the time that they set up in Birkenhead, Arthur Lee sent his youngest son, Humphrey, to New York to establish an office to sell and distribute their textiles across the US and Canada. Up to 60 per cent of their business was overseas—in Australia, South Africa, Canada, the US and continental Europe.65 Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the history of this company in any detail, three concerns of its business are particularly important here. First, an important component of the work of the factory was commissioned handmade woollen tapestries, often to designs reworked from museum exemplars, and sold to wealthy homemakers, institutions such as banks and other companies, and luxury ocean liners.66 Tapestry weaving, revived by William Morris and his followers, was a prime candidate for “historicising” any interior, with tapestries being luxurious “picture windows” to an imagined past. Of the few examples of Lee’s tapestries reproduced or referred to in their archives, most were derived largely from pastoral eighteenth-century paintings or other tapestries.67 Lee’s tapestries (the factory was locally named Lee’s Tapestry Works) were designed and made from wool that was hand-dyed and hand-stitched at the factory.68 Remarkably, a very large number of Lee’s “girls” were employed in the tapestry section, with around 54 employed on what became probably the largest tapestry ever produced in England—a suitably extravagant concoction of heraldic devices and allegorical landscapes produced for the boardroom of the Midland bank.69

Fig. 6-2. Colour sketch design for a hand-woven tapestry panel (no date) from Lee’s.70

Second, and again influenced by its Arts and Crafts origins, Lee’s also produced embroidered crewelwork for chair coverings, and crewelwork kits. Lee’s even published a number of Arts and Crafts–influenced guides to crewel embroidery techniques, carefully printed on handmade paper with wood-blocked illustrations to highlight their relationship to the noble history of this valued English craft. In these guides, much was made of the historical origin of crewel embroidery, and of its particular associations with medieval and early modern England.71

Third, Lee’s also sold a large quantity of high-quality woollen furnishing fabrics, woven and over-blocked in their factory at Birkenhead. This used a technique that Lee himself had developed, involving small hand-blocks of colour overlaid onto the two colours of a sturdy woven woollen “arras” or tapestry cloth. These could be hung as cheaper substitutes for tapestries, since they were, technically speaking, “tapestry cloth”—another craft technique revived by the indefatigable Morris, who apparently installed a small loom of this type in his own bedroom.72 Arthur Lee himself was a highly skilled weaver, and had invented a version of Morris’s arras work that became a profitable part of his business.

Fig. 6-3. A prototype of a woven arras design, in which the over-blocking codes and colours have been affixed to the pattern, c. mid-1930s.74

61 Alan Johnson and Kevin Moore, Lee’s Tapestry Works: Life and Work in the North End of Birkenhead (Birkenhead: Liver Press, 1987); S. P. B. Mais, Fifty Years of Fabrics (Birkenhead: A. H. Lee and Sons, 1938).
63 Lee Archive (Birkenhead: Williamson Art Gallery and Museum). See note 1 above.
64 Source: Reproduced with permission from the Williamson Museum, Birkenhead (photograph by author).
65 Lee Jofa Archive, cuttings (New York) See note 1, above.
67 Lee Archive; Baker Archive (High Wycombe, Oxfordshire). See note 1, above.
68 Johnson and Moore, Lee’s Tapestry Works, 3.
69 Johnson and Moore, Lee’s Tapestry Works, 3.
70 Source: Baker Archive, High Wycombe. With permission of the Baker Archive (photograph by author).
71 A. H. Lee and Sons, Crewel—Craft: Whence it is Come and of what it Does Consist and Wherein Lies its Charm (Birkenhead: A. H. Lee and Sons, n.d. [c.1930]).
72 McCarthy, William Morris, 40ff.
73 Lee, “Hand Blocked and Embroidered Tapestries.”
74 Source: Baker Archive, High Wycombe. With permission of Baker Archive (photograph by author).
In Lee’s business, and in that of their many retail clients, the design, overall construction and sale of the various elements of the period-style interior required a good knowledge of the history of furniture, furnishing textiles and contemporary interior design practice. Pattern in furnishing textiles was complicated then, as now, by the ephemeral and complex derivation of most patterns, with many renewed through adaptation, and others migrating across time and borders, and from one type of textile to another. The kaleidoscope of variations available in textiles after 1900 made the job of those interested in the period style particularly difficult:

Many books have been written on the subject of period furnishing, and trustworthy information is easily accessible to all who desire it, but it is quite otherwise with regard to what we may call period fabrics. No standard works, no hand guides exist, to aid the man who would have his valuable old pieces, or his modern reproductions, covered with fabrics in perfect keeping with their style and period. However excellent his taste, he is inevitably at a loss. He would give much to know with what bravery of adornment his Tudor stools—his Restoration chairs—first faced the world—what light or sombre curtains hung beside them. It is just such knowledge that the publishers of the Period Guide hope to place with more or less precision before him.76

So wrote the author of Lee’s The Period Guide to Fabrics in their Relation to Furniture, which the company published between 1928 and 1934. Issued as a series of large-format Arts and Crafts–style block-printed cards by subscription for their retail clients, the Period Guide was unusual in its depth and level of detail, with trade reviewers often remarking on the fact that there was no other guide then available as comprehensive.77 Its detailed organisation, period-keyed layout and line-drawn illustrations (to scale) made it especially useful to homemakers, designers and retailers. Loosely following the structure of books such as Macquoid’s History, the Period Guide was divided into sections based on the woods commonly associated with the reigns of the kings and queens of England.

Fig. 6-4. A card from Lee’s Period Guide Satinwood period, typical chair types (A series)—note that the text concentrates on coverings.78

The Period Guide grew eventually (in 1934) to around 85 cards, comprising six alphabetical series, including Early Oak (Tudor period), Oak (Stuart period), Walnut (early eighteenth century), Mahogany, Satinwood and Sonduries (which included the “modern” Victorian period, and was illustrated by Morris’s own work). The card series “Modern Adaptations” presented most clearly the expected outcome of how a period-styled interior should look. It suggested how to imagine the way a room containing various antiques and reproduction pieces might be unified and transformed through careful selection of appropriate fabrics. This was an adaptive design exercise in many ways typical of early Arts and Crafts interiors: drawn to scale and in elevation, the various textile elements in Lee’s Period Guide were picked out in colour to emphasise their important role in integrating and harmonising the interior. Pattern and colour authenticated this schema—an inappropriate pattern would destroy the desired effect and render the whole “unbalanced” or in some way “inauthentic” to the educated eye.

This carefully designed and arranged room represents a strangely modern and disciplined return to an imagined past. Its modern aspect can be seen in its post–Arts and Crafts open spaces and freedom from clutter; conscious pursuit of a carefully considered stylistic unity; careful handling and presentation of colour, pattern and form; and, of course, the designer’s obligatory concern for modern comforts and convenience (even if these were placed out of sight—such as under wood panelling, as in Carrick Hill). The period-style interior is thus markedly different from the more dense and overcrowded revivals of the Victorian era, or the dark, gloomy, cold and decidedly uncomfortable interiors of the real seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Like the popular history and myth embedded in today’s heritage reconstructions and more up-market country-style interiors, the period-style interior is a modern configuration of the past to suit the needs of the present, and embodies a still common desire for stability, identity, continuity, cultural depth and place.79

Figure 6-5. Lee’s Period Guide’s “Modern Adaptations” card from the Satinwood period (1765–).80

This reminds us that the period-style interior must be understood in relation to a broader cultural fascination with the past, and one that is tied to the more negative disorienting experience of modernity and deeper questions of identity, continuity, environment, legacy and social and geographical place—questions that cannot be dismissed as simply expressions of some vaguely offensive and reactive aesthetic conservatism.81 The period-style interior, as this

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78 Source: Lee, Period Guide (photograph by author).
79 Ward, “English Country House Style.”
80 Source: Lee, Period Guide (photograph by author).
paper has sought to demonstrate, is explicitly linked—often in the words and visual language of the Arts and Crafts—
to a national cultural memory that involves “old English” (or American) ways of making and arranging the home, and
borrows much of the moralised vision of this craft aesthetic in its promotional materials. Its importance to design
history lies in underscoring some of the outstanding and unsettled issues accompanying industrialisation and
modernisation, including damaging environmental changes; the design, durability and longevity of the goods produced
in larger factories; and the dominance of a consumer culture that continually privileges fashionable, stylised, cheap,
but “shoddy” goods that began to shape middle-class urban culture during this period. Like a prologue to the history of
sustainable design, much of the discourse around Arts and Crafts, echoed and maintained in the period style,
emphasises not only the superior qualities and longevity of the products themselves, but also their long-term aesthetic
fulfilment of real needs. The period style’s attempt to consciously embody the desirable qualities of the antique also
suggests an underlying awareness of the loss of the past created by modernisation—a destruction of cultural
memory—an awareness made all the more poignant for many through the still recent experience of World War I.

Conclusion

This essay began with the problem that the period-style interior was a long-lasting and popular middle-class
fashion that has been almost entirely ignored in the history of the interior. As Robsjohn-Gibbings complained, it was a
fashion that resulted in living rooms full of antiques or reproduction furniture and furnishings, and kitchens and
bathrooms displaying all the mechanical conveniences of modernity. This paper emphasised the important role of the
antique as a reified memory to counter the influence of modernity’s tendency to continually erase the past, and along
with it those features of culture, nature and landscape that distinguish and identify individuals and groups. By doing
so, this paper argued that the period-style interior was a significant and modern trend that revealed the close
relationship between collecting, consumption and social and aesthetic knowledge. The period-style interior also
involved the considerable investment and commitment of a large number of designers, retailers, dealers and importers
between 1900 and 1940—all promoting the notion that a period-style interior could provide a secure sense of place
and belonging that passing “fads”, such as Art Nouveau and Art Deco, could not.

This paper also argued that one of the important incentives to buy period-style furnishings was ethical—an
incentive defined by Morris and his followers that was eagerly taken up and reified in the period-style interior. This
“moralising” imperative can be seen not only in surviving examples such as Carrick Hill, but also in the large
volume of surviving promotional and explanatory material in archives and museums around the world. This paper
used AH Lee’s Period Guide as a means of revealing the importance of the aesthetic and historical knowledge used to
construct a culturally “correct” period-style interior. This guide also emphasised the modernity of its results—an open,
uncluttered, designed interior, where balance, authenticity and historical references were brought together, hopefully
to express the personal and social identity of the homemaker. That the period-style interior remains a “ghost” in the
history of the interior, directly opposing the anti-historical rhetoric of early Modernism, should not act to discourage
its further investigation.

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