
The concern of Craft, Space and Interior Design is to explore the direct interactions between craft and space in Europe, Canada, and the United States during the period 1855 to 2005. The essays examine how craft “controls, manipulates, organizes, and defines space” specifically in relation to interior design and decoration, and to architectural space (p. 4). One of the central arguments of the book is that, despite the widely accepted misconception, high modernism did not erase the relationship between craft and space. To this purpose the editors have included a relatively large number of essays that argue for the continued intersection of modernism and craft from the era of the Arts and Crafts movement to the present.

Publications on craft and its links to other art forms are few and are to be welcomed. This volume adds to and complements recent publications, specifically Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity (Toronto, 2001), which explores craft’s engagement with industrialization and modernism. Several essays in the present volume offer new material relating to women artists’ contributions in the area of craft and design that adds to recent work in this field such as Professional Women Painters in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commitment, Friendship, Pleasure (Aldershot, 2000) and The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald (Manchester, 1996), and Anthea Callen’s earlier yet valuable Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870–1914 (London, 1979). Craft, Space and Interior Design is a significant contribution to the field in that its approach differs from other publications. It is unique for its sustained focus on craft’s relationship to design and architecture over time and its inclusion of work by both male and female artists.

The thirteen essays are diverse in focus, including a consideration of interior furnishings, material finishes, and craft and symbolism, and range geographically from case studies relating to the United States and Canada, England, Ireland, and Scotland’s Orkney Islands. One of the highlights is Janice Helland’s essay on the interior decoration of two Glasgow tearooms by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald. In it Macdonald’s work as both designer and crafts artist is examined and her importance to the artistic collaboration with the much better-known Mackintosh is emphasized. The theme of women as both designers and crafts artists is continued in the following essay by Annette Caruthers, and in Joseph McBrinn’s essay on the interior design of Belfast Cathedral, which discusses the work of Irish sculptor Sophia Rosamond Praeger (1867–1954) and mosaics by the sisters Gertrude (d. 1952) and Margaret Martin (active ca. 1925–35).

The collection as a whole offers remarkably diverse perspectives on the junctures of architecture and craft. One of the most engaging and highly accomplished is Annette Caruthers’ “Symbolism in a Scottish Arts and Crafts House,” which focuses on little-known Melsetter House in Scotland’s Orkney Islands. The house was designed in 1898 by the architect William Lethaby for his clients Thomas and Theodosia Middlemore. Caruthers explores how and why symbolism, in this case relating to the sea, boats, and the character of the Orkney Islands, was employed in the exterior and interior design, interior embellishments and furnishings of the house. A particularly strong feature of the essay is the way in which the author draws on unpublished family papers and correspondence to develop her exploration of the range and significance of the highly crafted components of the architecture and interiors of Melsetter. References to letters by May Morris, the daughter of William Morris and herself an artist and designer, are a fascinating addition. May Morris was a family friend who visited the house in 1902, and her designs for embroidery are shown in a photograph being worked by Theodosia Middlemore. Other textiles designed by William Morris, and worked by his wife Jane Morris, were part of the interior design of the house.

It is difficult to find any major fault with this book. Broadly speaking, the decision for the chosen time-span, 1855 to 2005, announced in the book’s title is addressed by the essays. The articles appear in roughly chronological order, beginning with John Potvin’s exploration of the design of a Turkish bath in London in the 1860s. The two final articles, devoted to more contemporary times, cover subjects located in Toronto. Sandra Alfoldy’s essay looks at a University of Toronto School of Architecture exhibition held in 1967, and Amy Gogarty’s essay examines artist-designed rooms commissioned in 2004 for the renovation of the Gladstone Hotel. However, with seven of the thirteen essays concerned largely with the years between 1900 and the 1930s, here lies the weight of the book. The reason for this weighting may be the aim of the editors to demonstrate how craft endured as an influence under modernism. This goal is important because it has previously been assumed that craft was extinguished and superseded by the advent and influence of modernism, that modernism in effect “erased the relationship between craft and space” (pp. 3–4). Alfoldy and Helland’s choice of essays convincingly show that this is a misconception and that during the time period 1855 to 2005, while there was a changing rapport between craft, architecture, and interior design, there is much that argues for a development of links and continuance between the nineteenth-century crafting of space and post-World War I high modernism. This volume challenges
the reader to consider this argument; it questions the view that
sees only the fissures between earlier craft aesthetic and mod-
ernism, or the wide-ranging disruption brought about by the
modernist movement. Allody and Helland's weighting of ar-
ticles towards the first third of the twentieth century may be
explained by a desire to focus on this period of rapid transition
from the late nineteenth-century promotion of craft, as seen
in the Arts and Crafts movement, into full-blown modernism.

The visuals in the book are interesting and of an adequate
number (forty-eight in total). The beautiful colour photograph
of the living room of Saarinen House was an inspired choice for
the book jacket. Most essays are enhanced by the illustrations,
which support the reader's understanding of the discussions and
analyses. While there are obvious restrictions of available histori-

cal/archival visual material, some of the illustrations, for exam-


ple in Tag Gronberg's "Josef Frank's 'Aralia" and Jim Cheshire's
"Space and the Victorian Ecclesiastical Interior," would have
been far more effective as colour reproductions.

To the book's credit is the fact that a number of the case
studies examined in the articles are relatively little known. Two
examples are Penny Sparke's essay on Elsie de Wolfe (1865–
1950) and Joseph McBrinn's essay, "Craft as Union, Craft as
Demarcation: The Decoration at Belfast Cathedral." Although
the audience for this volume is likely to be an academic one
with a prior knowledge of arts and crafts of the period, one
wonders why newer readings of previously covered material
were not included. With the exception of Helland's article on
the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdon-
ald, in a volume covering the period from 1855 to the present
there is no one essay specifically focusing on such leading and
influential players in the Arts and Crafts movement as William
Morris, Charles Ashbee, or May Morris. Indeed, while references
to May Morris and her work recur repeatedly in Carruthers' ar-
ticle, neither Morris is the essay's principle focus. Charles Rob-


ert Ashbee's (1863–1942) art production and design, and his
GUILD and School of Handicraft, trained and influenced many.
While the book is to be admired for its covering of new and
little-known territory, the inclusion of an article on Ashbee or
the multi-talented Morris family would have created a base and
context for the excellent and diverse analyses in the rest of the
book and made it accessible to a broader audience.

There is a discouraging conclusion inferred by the choice
of articles dealing with Canada. Sparke's article on American
interior designer Elsie de Wolfe examines her career in the
United States beginning in the 1890s. In contrast, the earliest
discussion of Canada is 1967. The choice to begin the analysis
in Canada's centennial year leaves the reader with the inaccurate
implication that nothing very much was happening in Cana-
dian craft and architecture prior to this date. There is much
that could have been explored in an earlier Canadian context,
such as, for example, George Agnew Reid's (1860–1947) work
in architectural and interior design, the interior mural com-
mission executed in 1913 by Mary Hiester Reid (1854–1921) for
the Weston Town Hall, and those done by Harriet M. Ford
(1859–1938) and other Canadian artists for the interior decor-
ation of the Charles Porteous house in Quebec in 1899. While
the volume includes Tanya Harrod's essay on influences of the
past and of modernism in twentieth-century studio pottery de-
sign and production, it excludes Canadian craft artists from the
period 1900 to 1930. Toronto sculptor and ceramicist Winni-
fred Kingsford (1875–1947), who designed and executed art
pottery and ceramic household objects such as lamp bases, and
also potter and jewellery designer Mabel Cawthra (1871–1943)
would have been especially relevant additions. Cawthra stud-
ied at Charles Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft in England and,
in 1905, she opened a Toronto franchise of English interior de-
sign firm W & E Thornton-Smith and Company, which sold
high-end furniture, fabrics, rugs, and curtains and won com-
misions to decorate city theatres and churches. In addition to
her mural painting Harriet Ford's artistic production included
interior furnishings such as screens designed and painted by her.
Frances Loring (1887–1968) and Florence Wyle (1881–1968),
largely known only for their sculptural production, also had a
long-standing, craft-related production of small-scale furnish-
ings, such as clock cases marketed through leading jewellers'
shops in New York, and fountains that were incorporated into
the garden designs of Canadian estates such as "Parkwood" in
Oshawa, Ontario, the home of car manufacturer Robert Sam-
uel McLaughlin. The little-known designer and entrepreneur
Marion A. Living (active 1894–1901) designed her own line of
carpet, which were manufactured in Toronto and sold under
her company name, Marion Living Designs.1

Clearly a fuller acknowledgement and inclusion of earlier
Canadian case studies such as these, which relate to the book's
aim of exploring the relationship of craft to architectural spaces,
would have improved Craft, Space and Interior Design. How-
ever, these points detract only a little from the larger, valuable
achievements of this book, in particular its innovative theme
and strong contributions.

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Notes

1 See also, Susan Butlin, "A New Matrix of the Arts: A History
of the Professionalization of Canadian Women Artists, 1880–1914,"
PhD Diss., Carleton University, 2008, 244–70.