

Università Ca' Foscari – Venezia

Dottorato di ricerca in Lingue, Culture e Società – 22° ciclo

(A.A. 2006/2007 – 2008/2009)

THE DECORATION OF HOUSES,

BY EDITH WHARTON AND OGDEN CODMAN, JR.

INDIRIZZO DI STUDI IBERICI E ANGLOAMERICANI

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Introduction

In 2007, one hundred and ten years after it was first published, *The Decoration of Houses* was presented in the latest reprint's foreword as "among the most influential books about decoration and architecture ever published in the United States."¹

The book, co-authored by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., made its appearance on a market not exactly devoid of treatises on the subject: in the United States, after the Civil War, dozens of titles focused on what was not yet called "interior decoration"; they spanned from practical advice on domestic economy to the description of the interiors of the most luxurious houses in America.

It was in the 1830s that books on domestic advice became popular, as the Victorian era put a strong emphasis on home and family values, and one could detect a distinct pattern among the published works: women authors dealt mostly with the practical running of the household, "domestic" being the attribute most frequently used in the titles of their books. It immediately called to mind the warm, familiar atmosphere women were expected to be able to create and maintain in the household, and it was usually paired with terms like "house-keeping", "cooking", "comfort" and "common sense."²

Male authors, on the other hand, concerned themselves with the abstract concepts of "interior", "art", "beauty", "decoration".

Two highly influential books appeared in the U. S. A. in the 1870s: the first, a reprint of the English edition of 1868, was Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* (1874), followed in 1878 by America's Clarence Cook's *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds, Tables, Stools, and Candlesticks*.

Eastlake, a trained architect who never practiced but devoted himself instead to designing furniture, was an ardent promoter of the Gothic revival and shared the aesthetic ideals of artists like William Morris; *Hints on Household Taste* is believed to have strongly contributed to the success of the Arts and Crafts Movement, of which Morris was the foremost representative. In America, the book met with such success, that Eastlake was forced to add a note to the preface of the fourth edition: he meant to disown the furniture produced in the so-called "Eastlake style" which had started to appear on the market, "for the taste of which", he wrote, "I should be very sorry to be considered responsible."³

¹ Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, New York, Rizzoli and The Mount Press, 2007 – Foreword by Richard Guy Wilson.

² *The American Woman's Home; or, Principles of Domestic Science*, was among the most popular of these guides written in 1869 by Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, later the celebrated author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

³ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste*, New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1969, p. ix.

Clarence Cook's book, while moving from the same premises of Eastlake's, shows a more flamboyant approach through the insertion of scraps of poetry, the mention of classic English writers and catchy captions to the illustrations; as was the case with Eastlake's book, *The House Beautiful* also originated from a series of articles previously published. Both authors deplored the excesses of fashion, praised the value of hand-made objects as opposed to industrial products, and adhered to the Ruskinian principles of honesty applied to art and architecture.

Books such as these, as well as Eugene Clarence Gardner's *Home Interiors* (1878), William John Loftie's *A Plea for Art in the House* (1876), Marion Harland's *Common Sense in the Household: A Manual for Practical Housewifery* (1876), Harriet Prescott Spofford's *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (1877), Julia McNair Wright's *The Complete Home: An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Life and Affairs. The Household in its Foundation, Order, Economy ... A Volume of Practical Experiences Popularly Illustrated* (1879), Ella Rodman Church's *How to Furnish a Home* (1881), H. J. Cooper's *The Art of Furnishing: On Rational and Aesthetic Principles* (1881), Agnes Bailey Ormsbee's *The House Comfortable* (1892), Candace Wheeler's *Household Art* (1893), to name only a few, addressed themselves mainly to the vast audience of the American middle class.

Some of these authors, as for instance Spofford, Beecher or Hewitt, were familiar names to a large audience of magazine and newspaper readers: papers like *Godey's Lady's Book* or *The Ladies' Home Journal* featured articles on domestic economy as well as interior decoration and architecture. The readers were guided through the process of tastefully decorating a house room by room, they were presented with pictures of home interiors taken from all over the country, and, for those who were looking for qualified, affordable advice, the magazines mentioned above ran a series of articles featuring complete plans for specific types of houses, of different categories and prices, as prepared by the journal's architect.⁴

The authors of *The Decoration of Houses* were neither middle-class nor names familiar to a vast reading public – only one of them would become a famous writer, but when the book was published, they were both at the outset of their respective careers.

In 1897 Edith Newbold Jones, of an established upper-class New York family, had been married twelve years to a socially prominent Bostonian, Edward Wharton. She had dabbled in

⁴ *The Ladies' Home Journal* of December, 1897, for instance, featured a plan for a two-floors house at the cost of \$1000, fourth in a series called "The Ladies' Home Journal's Model Homes of Moderate Cost"; according to the publisher, these articles' aim was "to help its readers in their desires to build artistic homes." *The Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1897, p. 23.

poetry and tried her hand at short fiction, signing all her pieces with her married name⁵, and led the apparently idle life of the leisure class. Far from being herself a merely decorative society matron, Wharton was a linguist, an extremely well-read woman, and her wide-ranging cultural interests, and frequent travels and long sojourns in Europe, especially Italy and France, had contributed to shape her definite artistic taste and were establishing her as a connoisseur. In 1894, during a trip in the Tuscan hills, she had “discovered” a series of terra-cotta groups in the secluded monastery of San Vivaldo, and thanks to her report to the then director of the Royal Museum in Florence, their incorrect attribution had been rectified.⁶

Ogden Codman, Jr. was beginning to make a name for himself as an architect and interior decorator. About the same age as Wharton, he came from a well-to-do Boston family, and had formed his architectural taste in France, before briefly receiving formal training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.⁷ He met the Whartons in 1891, when the couple, looking to restore their Newport cottage, engaged what Edith Wharton would later call “a clever young Boston architect.⁸” Codman had by then opened a second office in New York, and he and Wharton gravitated mostly around the same social circles in the city, as well as in Boston and Newport. The chance meeting of these personalities, who discovered they shared similar views in the field of architecture and home decoration, was to result not only in a fruitful collaboration in the remodelling project of two Wharton homes and in the building of a third one; it also brought about a remarkable book and formed the basis of a lifelong friendship.

Wharton wrote in her autobiography that the task she and her husband had assigned to Codman was “a somewhat new departure, since the architects of that day looked down on house-decoration as a branch of dress-making, and left the field to the upholsterers, who crammed every room with curtains, lambrequins, jardinières of artificial plants, wobbly velvet-covered tables littered with silver gewgaws, and festoons of lace on mantelpieces and dressing-tables.

Codman shared my dislike of these sumptuary excesses, and thought as I did that interior decoration should be simple and architectural”⁹.

The excesses Wharton referred to were within reach of the author: Wharton’s biographers agree that the writer of *The Decoration of Houses* meant to strike a blow at the Victorian style which had plagued so many socially prominent dwellings, her own parents’ included, and against which she unconsciously rebelled even as a child. This style she and Codman viewed as heavy and sombre

⁵ By 1897 no less than four short stories signed by Edith Wharton had been published in *Scribners Magazine*, along with a few sonnets; her major works of fiction, however, were still to come.

⁶ The episode was fully related in *A Tuscan Shrine*, published in *Scribner’s Magazine*, January 1895.

⁷ After being enrolled in the year 1883-1884, he dropped out to apprentice at the firm of Andrews, Jacques & Rantoul, in Boston, and by 1891 he had opened his own office in the same city.

⁸ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, New York, Touchstone, 1998, p. 106.

⁹ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 106-107.

meant dark, stained woodwork and panelling, heavy curtains and carpets, luxuriant plants, overstuffed furniture and, above all, a profusion of objects (the so-called *bric-à-brac*, to which Wharton and Codman devoted an entire chapter of their book) scattered everywhere with apparent disregard to the laws of symmetry.

The stuffy Victorian interiors were not the only elements Codman and Wharton objected to, as regarded American architectural styles. They both found the exterior appearance of city houses dull and depressing, especially those built in the big eastern cities since the Civil War years, where brick houses had begun to be lined with brownstone. The feature became so widespread that the years between 1865 and 1895 came to be known as “the Brown Decades”.

The post-war years, however, were also marked by the appearance of the figures of the industrial tycoons, the financiers of Wall Street, the real estate speculators, and the railroad owners and managers, who climbed to the highest society ranks and claimed a place among the genteel families who formed the American aristocracy.

Those who set the standard in the circles Wharton and Codman frequented, the millionaires who hired the best architects to build their town and country houses in New York, Lenox or Newport, had actually begun introducing the new style in their cities' landscape as early as the 1880s. 1883 was the year in which the Vanderbilt family, immensely rich thanks to the railroad ventures of “Commodore” Cornelius Vanderbilt, but not as yet socially accepted in New York's restricted elite, had unveiled their new residence at 660 Fifth Avenue to an astonished crowd: designed by Richard Morris Hunt, it was a limestone French Renaissance-inspired chateau, which stood in striking contrast to the brownstone houses that made up the majority of Manhattan dwellings¹⁰. In his introduction to *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection*, a ten-volume book commissioned by W. H. Vanderbilt as a study of his house and a catalogue of his art collection, Edward Strahan wrote:

“The Country (...) has begun to re-invent everything, and especially the house.”¹¹

America was plunging into what Mark Twain would define the Gilded Age, and one of the aspects of social life in which this passage was to be more evident was domestic architecture. In the literature of the 1880s it was often implied that the house revealed its owner, and the interior decoration became an increasingly important subject. Indeed, it wasn't just periodicals or magazines that devoted sections to articles and pictures of real homes; between 1883 and 1884, D.

¹⁰ The residence of William K. Vanderbilt, part of the “Vanderbilt Row”, which housed four members of the family practically next door to one another, elicited comments also from the community of architects: Louis Sullivan, who would be a strong proponent of the so-calledStyle, called it “a contradiction, an absurdity, a characteristically New York absurdity”, whereas Charles McKim reportedly said that he “slept better knowing it's there.” (D. G. Lowe – *The Man Who Gilded the Gilded Age*).

¹¹ Arnold Lewis, James Turner, Steven McQuillin, *The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age*, New York, Dover Publications, 1987, p. 17.

Appleton and Company, in New York, published a two-volume work titled *Artistic Houses, Being a Series of Interior Views of a number of the Most Beautiful and Celebrated Homes in the United States with a Description of the Art Treasures contained therein*, with a commentary by an unsigned author, who has subsequently been identified as George William Sheldon. Printed in a limited edition of 500 copies, *Artistic Houses* contained over 200 pictures taken from the interiors of 97 buildings, among them the White House in Washington, D. C., and the New York homes of the likes of J. P. Morgan, Hamilton Fish, Henry Villard, Louis C. Tiffany, Egerton Winthrop, Bradley Martin, William F. Havemeyer, and William H. Vanderbilt.¹²

The homes of the elite, in New York as well as in other major cities, were naturally conceived to show the social prominence of their owners, and larger portions were designed in order to accommodate their art collections: Americans were rivalling Europe's museums and nobility in hoarding artistic objects, seen as yet another external sign of their social and business success. The consequent need to display them in adequate surroundings gave rise to an increasing tendency to emulate the architectural wonders of the European residences these treasures came from.

The concept of "artistic house" was so widespread that visual artists such as Louis C. Tiffany, John LaFarge or Augustus Saint-Gaudens started working on interior decoration¹³; William Sheldon, author of the descriptions contained in *Artistic Houses*, wrote: "the time must come when our best artists generally will contribute the creations of their genius to the adornment of the American homes in other shapes than in that of the oil-painting in a gilt frame."¹⁴ A cursory look at the pictures contained in *Artistic Houses* will show that most of these interiors were still fully Victorian in taste, others showed a strong Gothic influence, some were already adhering to the Beaux-Arts verb that was beginning to be preached by the likes of Hunt. However, the majority of them give an idea of the "sumptuary excesses" Wharton and Codman were opposing when, 13 years later, they embarked on the project of writing their book.

¹² The work of the architectural firms of R. M. Hunt or McKim, Mead and White was exemplified in these interiors, as was that of interior decorators such as Allard ad Sons, Herter Bros. and the same Louis C. Tiffany, whose company, Associated Artists, even though short-lived (1879-1883) was in high demand.

All the photographs contained in the book were reprinted in *The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age*, cited in the preceding note. The authors did an impressive work in recuperating all the illustrations, most of which had been printed reversed in 1883-1884. An informative introduction on the historical, social and artistic aspects of this period in American history is provided, along with detailed descriptions of the houses' interiors; needless to say, the 1987 text presents the pictures of these "opulent interiors" as they actually were.

¹³ The New York house of banker Henry G. Marquand was another example of this concept of "artistic house": completed by R. M. Hunt in 1884, it was modelled on various French Renaissance chateaus of the 16th Century, and it featured a Pompeian salon, a Moorish library, a Japanese drawing-room and a Spanish refectory. The interior decoration had been committed to the likes of Tiffany, La Farge, Leighton and Alma-Tadema.

¹⁴ A. Lewis, J. Turner, S. McQuillin, *The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age*, p. 18.

In the meantime, 1893 would be a seminal year for American architecture: the World's Columbian Exposition, celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the New World, had taken place in Chicago; it was a momentous event in the development of this new taste, which had been growing for almost two decades: in the Exposition's Court of Honor, America had come into contact with "monumental classical planning, architectural composition and decorative painting and sculpture on a vast scale"¹⁵. The centre of the Exposition, dubbed the "White City", provided an international showcase for the works of the architects who adhered to the principles of adaptation of the French Renaissance aesthetics, or the Beaux-Arts movement, among them McKim, Mead and White, who designed and carried out the project for the Agricultural Pavilion¹⁶.

By 1897, the Beaux-Arts taste was firmly established among the homes of the upper ranks of society, thanks to the works of the architects mentioned above, all of whom shared a solid apprenticeship in France (both Hunt and McKim had attended Paris' Ecole des Beaux-Arts). It was mostly to these architects' work (and to the vast echo of the success of the Chicago Exposition) that Wharton and Codman referred, when they wrote the opening statement of *The Decoration of Houses*:

"The last ten years have been marked by a notable development in architecture and decoration, (...) When we measure the work recently done in the United States by the accepted architectural standards of ten years ago, the change is certainly striking, especially in view of the fact that our local architects and decorators are without the countless advantages in the way of schools, museums and libraries which are at the command of their European colleagues."¹⁷

The Decoration of Houses dealt almost exclusively with homes on a large, if not grand, scale; it was obviously written with an eye to some of the "opulent interiors" produced in the previous twenty years, and more specifically those of the New York-Boston-Philadelphia-Newport society the authors used to frequent. Without ever mentioning specific instances or residences, Wharton and Codman aimed at rectifying taste blunders they had observed in the homes both of their youth and of their affluent relatives, acquaintances or clients, as was the case. The models they drew inspiration from were the grand European residences of Italian, English and French nobility, which

¹⁵ William A. Coles, *The Genesis of a Classic*, in *The Decoration of Houses*, New York, The Classical America Series in Art and Architecture, 1997, p. 258.

¹⁶ Theodore Dreiser, who had been sent to report on the Chicago Exposition by the *St. Louis Republic*, wrote that the visitors "would never forget its monumental stateliness and simple grandeur." (D. Garrard Lowe, *The Man Who Gilded the Gilded Age*)

¹⁷ Edith Wharton, Ogden Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, New York, Rizzoli and The Mount Press, 2007, p. 1. The first professional school of architecture in United States was established in 1866 by William R. Ware at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; in 1881, Ware opened a similar course at Columbia College.

Codman filtered through the sensitivity acquired in his training and the principles of the American Renaissance architecture movement.

It was all summed up in the opening sentences: the interior of the house was to be entrusted possibly to the same architect who had planned the external structure; this not always being the case, it should be decorated by a professional who had a solid architectural training, as the only way to achieve a balanced, pleasing result was to follow the basic laws of this science. Proportion, suitability, coherence in the choice of style were the tenets of Wharton and Codman's text, as they drew from an impressive tradition, witnessed by the bibliography that preceded the actual text of *The Decoration of Houses*.

This architectural approach to interior decoration was immediately recognized to represent the main novelty about the book, as was the assuredness of the historical precedents the authors had drawn upon, which testified to their taste and competence.

Chapter I

Writing The Decoration of Houses: Wharton and Codman's relationship's development, analyzed through their collaboration and correspondence

Wharton's autobiography opens with her first memories of childhood, a midwinter walk she took on Fifth Avenue with her father; along with the numerous details on her own outfit, she records this comment on the outlook of the street: it was "the old Fifth Avenue with its double line of low brown-stone houses, of a desperate uniformity of style."¹⁸

Whether or not the comment sprang from a vivid recollection or from a calculated re-enactment aimed at stressing the point that she had ever been acutely aware of her architectural surroundings, it is certain that her observation of the New York of her childhood would weigh on her future literary production.

The first impact presents a decidedly negative aesthetic reaction. Wharton's reminiscing is carried out more in depth in *A Little Girl's New York*, in which she gives an interesting glimpse of the lives lived behind the uniform brown-stone façades in the 1850s and 1860s, when New York was on the threshold of an amazing urban and architectural development. During the years Wharton spent there (1862-1866), the island of Manhattan was already laid out following the gridiron pattern we know today, and already experiencing the practical problems brought on by a high density of population, like the establishment of the tenement houses in the Lower East Side. Wall Street was firmly established as the business centre of the country, and Fifth Avenue was beginning to turn into the most exclusive residential street in the city.

New Yorkers were provided plenty of recreational buildings, prominent among them the Astor Place Opera, the Academy of Music and a score of theatres, located along Broadway in the southern tip of Manhattan. By the 1860s, New Yorkers were shopping in the newly founded stores of R. H. Macy (1858), A. T. Stewart (1869), and Lord and Taylor (1867), still among today's most recognizable shopping spots in the city. The rate at which New York was expanding came to be perceived as a threat as early as 1844, when William Cullen Bryant wrote of the need for public parks because "commerce is devouring inch by inch the coast of the island, and if we would rescue any part of it for health and recreation it must be done now." The *New York Times* added, "The huge

¹⁸ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 2

masses of masonry which are springing up in every direction seem to threaten us with a stifling atmosphere of bricks and mortar.¹⁹”

The planning of Central Park seemed an answer to these alarming cries; seen also as an investment in real estate value, it was laid out between 1857 and 1860, following the instructions of architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and became a favourite spot for New Yorkers thanks to the various entertainments it afforded them, from ice-skating in the winter months, to open-air concerts to the custom of “people-watching”. As Wharton remembers, “in those days the little brownstone houses (I never knew the technical name of that geological horror) marched up Fifth Avenue (still called “*the* Fifth Avenue” by purists) in an almost unbroken procession from Washington Square to the Central Park. Between them there passed up and down, in a leisurely double line, every variety of horse-drawn vehicle.²⁰”

Wharton remarks at every chance she gets on their modular matrix, and ironically remarks on their inescapable sameness when she writes: “the little brownstone houses, all with Dutch “stoops” (the five or six steps leading to the front door), and all not more than three stories high, marched Parkward in an orderly procession, like a young ladies’ boarding school taking its daily exercise. The façades varied in width from twenty to thirty feet, and here and there, but rarely, the line was broken by a brick house with brownstone trimmings; but otherwise they were all so much alike that one could understand how easy it would be for a dinner guest to go to the wrong house.²¹”

Negative impressions caused by childhood recollections are not limited to urban architecture: Wharton writes also of a summer visit to a paternal aunt, which took place presumably before 1866, and is described in her autobiography. This spinster aunt, who lived in a large neo-gothic mansion called Rhinecliff, on the Hudson River, is otherwise remembered by the author as a formidable lady; unfortunately the aspect of her abode remained forever paired with unpleasant sensations in Wharton’s mind: on a night she spent there, she relates she became persuaded that there must have been a wolf under her bed. Years later, the author gave her explanation for the unnamed fears that haunted her as a still inarticulate child: “The effect of terror produced by the house of Rhinecliff was no doubt partly due to what seemed to me its intolerable ugliness. My visual sensibility must always have been too keen for middling pleasures; my photographic memory of rooms and houses – even those seen but briefly, or at long intervals – was from my earliest years a source of inarticulate misery, for I was always vaguely frightened by

¹⁹ Eric Homberger, *The Historical Atlas of New York City*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2005, p. 71.

²⁰ Edith Wharton, *A Little Girl’s New York*, in *Edith Wharton – The Uncollected Critical Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 275.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 275.

ugliness. I can still remember hating everything at Rhinecliff, which, as I saw, on rediscovering it some years later, was an expensive but dour specimen of Hudson River Gothic.²²”

Such a bleak vision of American architecture was to be the last one for some time: in 1866, the Jones family moved to Europe, as did many Americans who found their incomes and possessions depreciated by the economic upheavals brought on by the Civil War.

It is to this “happy misfortune”, Wharton writes in her memoirs, that she owed the chance to spend six years in Europe, during which time her family moved from Spain to England, to Italy, France, Germany and Italy again. Wharton credits those crucial, formative years in her life with the birth and the first development of her visual taste, which would influence her future appreciation of art, beauty and aesthetic values. The European sojourn gave her “for the rest of my life, that background of beauty and old-established order! I did not know how deeply I had felt the nobility and harmony of the great European cities till our steamer was docked at New York.²³”

Unfortunately, the faint recollections of a four-year-old girl regarding the first few glimpses of her physical surroundings were to come back with a vengeance when, in 1872, Wharton landed again in New York, for a more conscious approach to her native city. Her impressions remain quite the same as six years before, if not worse: “in the mean monotonous streets, without architecture, without great churches or palaces, or any visible memorials of an historic past, what could New York offer to a child whose eyes had been filled with shapes of immortal beauty and immemorial significance? One of the most depressing impressions of my childhood is my recollection of the intolerable ugliness of New York, of its untended streets and the narrow houses so lacking in external dignity.²⁴”

If New York had proved a visual choc to Wharton, other major cities on the Eastern seaboard did not seem to meet her by then demanding aesthetic sensibility. On the occasion of a visit to the Annapolis Naval Academy, Wharton, then sixteen, was taken by her parents to see Baltimore and Washington on their way back north. The author admits that she found the old Academic buildings “charming”, but her reaction to the urban landscape of the nation’s capital or of Baltimore was not a positive one: “neither city offered much to youthful eyes formed with the spectacle of Rome and Paris. Washington, in the days before Charles McKim had seen its possibilities, and resolved to develop them on Major L’Enfant’s lines, was in truth a doleful desert.²⁵”

²² E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Wharton writes that the portion of New York she knew in the early 1870's was "a tiny fraction of a big city". During her European stay, a few changes had begun to take place, even in that tiny fraction, and she was not so unobservant as not to notice that "the little brown houses now and then gave way to a more important façade." Two of these important façades belonged to buildings erected on Fifth Avenue during the Civil War, and were briefly to set the standard for private residences; the first, completed in 1862, belonged to a Madame Restell, a notorious abortionist. Referred to as simply "The Palace", it was reportedly one of the finest residences in New York: "On the first floor are the grand hall of tessellated marble, lined with mirrors; the three immense dining-rooms, furnished in bronze and gold with yellow satin hangings, an enormous French mirror in mosaic gilding at every pane..."

The second house, built in 1864, was the private residence of A. T. Stewart, owner of the largest department stores in New York; at the price of \$2,000,000, it was the most costly private residence on the continent: "The marble work, which forms the most distinguishing characteristic of this palatial abode, receives its entire shape and finish in the basement and first floor of the building...The reception and drawing rooms, and the breakfast and dining rooms [afford] space for as splendid a promenade or ball as could be furnished probably by any private residence in Europe."²⁶

Wharton does not mention these buildings, nor did she probably ever set foot in them, though they, like all prominent citizens' residences, must have been amply illustrated and commented upon in papers and periodicals.²⁷ She refers instead to a series of buildings erected during her European sojourn, which were commissioned by her father's cousin Mary Mason Jones and completed in 1869: "The most conspicuous architectural break in the brownstone procession occurred where its march ended, at the awkwardly shaped entrance to the Central Park. Two of my father's cousins, Mrs. Mason Jones and Mrs. Colford Jones, bought up the last two blocks on the east side of Fifth Avenue, facing the so-called "Plaza" at the Park gates, and built thereon their houses and their children's houses; a bold move which surprised and scandalized society. Fifty-seventh Street was then a desert, and ball-goers anxiously wondered whether even the ubiquitous "Brown coupés" destined to carry home belated dancers would risk themselves so far a-field. But old Mrs. Mason Jones and her submissive cousin laughed at such apprehensions, and presently there rose before our astonished eyes a block of pale-greenish limestone houses (almost uglier than

²⁶ Both descriptions are found in E. Homberger, *The Historical Atlas of New York City*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2005, p. 73.

²⁷ A. T. Stewart's, with its 55 rooms, figured among the patrician houses listed in *Artistic Houses*. In its galleries, Stewart and his wife Cornelia displayed a collection of paintings, prints and sculptures which included works by A. D. Bouguereau, J. Meissonier, R. Bonheur, as well as one of the famous Niagara Falls views by F. Church.

the brownstone ones) for the Colford Jones cousins, adjoining which our audacious Aunt Mary, who had known life at the Court of the Tuileries, erected her own white marble residence and a row of smaller dwellings of the same marble to lodge her progeny. The “Jones blocks” were so revolutionary that I doubt whether any subsequent architectural upheavals along that historic thoroughfare have produced a greater impression.”²⁸

The impression produced on Wharton was such that, fifty years later, she used her “audacious” cousin as the model for Mrs. Manson Mingott, one of *The Age of Innocence*’s main characters, extending the parallel to her residence, which is described in Wharton’s most popular novel. The Mason Jones buildings, popularly referred to as “Marble Row” were commissioned to architect Robert Mook, who conceived a row of houses with a decided Parisian flavour.

In Wharton’s recollections, Mary Mason Jones’ house was the only one among her relatives’ which came close to her architectural standards – Wharton seemed at least impressed, and gave her cousin credit for boldly attempting to break with the aesthetic dictates of her era, with the brownstone façades and the Victorian schemes. Her tone had been decidedly different in describing another relative’s house, Aunt Elizabeth’s Rhinecliff; it is rather interesting to notice that she used the very same words in referring both to Rhinecliff and New York: both presented to her young eyes a look of “intolerable ugliness”.

As Wharton was to recollect much later, her teenage years in New York were also the last years of the “Brownstone decades”: a new rush was about to start among the wealthiest American families, and they would all try and outdo one another on Fifth Avenue, “the Millionaires’ Row”.

Wharton’s words may even seem tinged with regret, as she writes about the changes that took place in New York since her childhood – no foresight powers could have prepared her for what the city would see in a few decades: “What I could not guess was that this little low-studded rectangular New York, cursed with its universal chocolate-coloured coating of the most hideous stone ever quarried, this cramped horizontal gridiron of a town without towers, porticoes, fountains or perspectives, hide-bound in its deadly uniformity of mean ugliness, would fifty years later be as much a vanished city as Atlantis or the lowest layer of Schliemann’s Troy.”²⁹

By her own admission, such changes as those brought by the Gilded Age were thought inconceivable by her parents’ generation; “Even the old families, who were subsequently to join the newcomers in transforming Fifth Avenue into a street of would-be palaces, were still content with plain, wide-fronted houses, mostly built in the Forties or Fifties (...) whereas by the time the new

²⁸ E. Wharton, *A Little Girl’s New York*, in *Edith Wharton – The Uncollected Critical Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 279.

²⁹ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 55.

millionaires arrived with their palaces in their pockets, Fifth Avenue had become cosmopolitan and was prepared for anything.³⁰”

Coming from an “old New York” family, Wharton could not disguise her concern and disapproval at the social and economic changes already set in motion by the Nineteenth Century growing industrialization, and immensely sped up by the post-war economic markets expansion. Such was the business growth rate that New York, which in 1869 had seen the merger of the two largest stock boards into the New York Stock Exchange, had become the city with the highest percentage of millionaires; the word itself had been coined by journalists in the 1840s, and those belonging to the category were still such rarities, that the word was printed in italics. Those who made old New York society feel so threatened that it came up with the famous list of the Four Hundred, virtually moved to the city from all over the country, anxious to acquire visibility and a place in society commensurate to the amount of their fortunes. The increasing number of these nouveau riches and the social changes brought about by their presence in the great Eastern cities did not escape Wharton’s observing eye. The subject of many of her famous novels would be these families, their rush after profit, their greed, feuds, their frenzy to outshine their competitors, and especially the veiled rivalries among the society ladies, who, backed by their husbands’ millions, launched veritable campaigns to find eligible matches for their daughters.

Her masterful evocation of the society she had known, the subtle laws which ruled it, and the changes it went through had to be thinly disguised in her fiction (although she did not escape the hostility of a few society members who could recognize themselves only too well in a short story she wrote in 1900, *The Line of Least Resistance*); years later, in a tribute to one of her oldest friends, French writer Paul Bourget, she was of course more at liberty to analyze the social and economic changes she had witnessed in her youth, and her disapproval of the lowering of society’s standards caused by the arrival of the new breed of millionaires in the Gilded Age is clearly expressed in her words:

“The prodigious increase in the value of real estate in New York had created a small, rich society, idle and closed, where only few representatives of the new western classes, of no more than modest origins, but having earned in mines and railroads the millions that would soon eclipse the fortunes of old New Yorkers, had insinuated themselves. In the milieu in which I lived (...) one never heard talk of Wall Street (...) nobody was ‘in business’. (...) But with the construction of the great western railways, the men of this old milieu, especially the bankers and the big lawyers, were drawn to this new Eldorado (...) It was the western railroads that unsettled our little New York society by introducing not only the harsh desire for profit, and an immense increase in wealth, but

³⁰ E. Wharton, *A Little Girl's New York*, p. 280.

also the new element of big businessmen who, until that time, had been kept apart from the old society. It is from that time that New York high society, while parading its uncommon extravagance, lowered itself little by little to the social and intellectual level of the newcomers.³¹”

The uncommon extravagance Wharton refers to had its most conspicuous representative in the private residences these big businessmen commissioned for themselves. The adjective historians use most frequently, when describing the desire for wealth display which moved the builders of the Fifth Avenue mansions, is “Medicean”³²: indeed, the newly rich, who were often shunned by good society, and seen as vulgar, uneducated and greedy, meant for their houses to underline their similarity to the powerful Italian Renaissance families, who used their wealth and influence to enrich their own and their country’s cultural heritage.

The race to build the most splendid house did not limit itself to New York; Wharton, who, after her 1885 wedding, had set up houses both in New York and in the seaside resort of Newport, had the chance to witness the architectural changes which affected the once peaceful and quaint fishing village during the last quarter of the 19th Century.

She had been a regular visitor to the resort in the summer ever since her return to the United States in 1872; her parents owned a cottage there³³, on which grounds there was a smaller house, called Pencraig Cottage. It became the Whartons’ first house, and, as the writer recalls in her memoirs, “we (...) arranged it in accordance to our tastes, (...) and for a few years always lived there from June till February.”³⁴”

Wharton’s parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Frederic Jones, as well as her father’s cousin, Mary Mason Jones, were among the leading society hostesses in Newport when the village was already a fashionable resort, and most of the visitors would lodge in the few large hotels; only a cluster of distinguished families from out of town had their own cottages built by the sea: small, cosy houses where privacy would be preserved, and the pressure of running a large household would be lifted. When, in the 1870s “the tide of fashion set strongly toward Newport³⁵”, the town started experiencing a series of changes that involved not only its outward appearance: the arrival of the

³¹ *Memories of Bourget Overseas*, in *Edith Wharton – The Uncollected Critical Essays*, p. 216.

³² It had been Richard M. Hunt, apparently, who coined this phrase: the new market-lords were to him “the new Medicis”, and he often expressed the idea that they should inhabit Medicean dwellings.

³³ Mary King Van Rensselaer, *Newport – Our Social Capital*, North Stratford, Ayer Company Publishers, Inc., 1998, p. 83. Mrs. Van Rensselaer names Wharton’s mother and her cousin in this 1905 book, adding a couple of lines about the writer herself, who had just become widely known as the author of *The House of Mirth*: “Pen Craig Cottage was built by Mrs. George Jones, whose gifted daughter, Mrs. Edward Wharton, passed her girlhood days in these surroundings.” She would not be so appreciative of Wharton’s gift in her 1924 book *The Social Ladder*, where she would refer to Wharton’s veiled portraits of some key figures of the 1870’s New York society in her best-seller, *The Age of Innocence*. Van Rensselaer comments bitterly: “This book, which has added to the fame of its author, is notable to old New Yorkers less for its imagination than for the ghoulish enthusiasm with which it has exhumed the bones of old scandal.” (M. K. Van Rensselaer, *The Social Ladder*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1924, p. 38.

³⁴ Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 90.

³⁵ M. K. Van Rensselaer, *Newport – Our Social Capital*, p. 31.

business giants from the major eastern cities brought with it a change in customs and social intercourse which upset the tranquil life of Newport and put it in the eye of the storm during the months which constituted the “Season”, that is July, August and September.

The new dwellers had fashionable architects plan what they kept calling “cottages”, but which in reality grew closer to palaces; having bought wide stretches of land, they had the leisure to surround the buildings with a feature which they couldn’t afford in the city: gardens which stretched out to the sea, and which they could lay out through fancy landscape architectural devices, thus turning their “cottages” into veritable mansions immersed in stately parks.

Before Wharton wrote about it, another illustrious guest had witnessed with a pang of regret the birth and growth of the “white elephants” on the shores of Newport: we owe this curious but effective definition to Henry James, himself another frequent visitor of the seaside town, who reminisced about the ravages these builders perpetrated to the charming, secluded spot on the Oceanside he loved so much.

In *The American Scene*, James compared the delicate beauty of the place to a “little bare, open hand³⁶”, extended in a charming, helpless gesture to all respectful visitors who would enjoy the beauties of such a happily situated village. In James’ opinion, the only sensible thing to do, in the face of such an exquisite offer, was “to pay this image the tribute of quite tenderly grasping the hand, and even of raising it, delicately to his lips.³⁷”

James expressed his dismay at the invasion of the “pilers-on of gold”, who seemed to find Newport, this bare, open hand extended toward them, somewhat empty, and who set about purchasing the plots of land and building new summer residences. They were the same big businessmen Wharton would write about, who were determined to flaunt their power by recreating Fifth Avenue on Bellevue Avenue.

“They had begun,” wrote James, referring to the simile of the little white hand, “to put things into it, things of their own, and of all sorts and of many ugly, and of more and more expensive sorts; to fill it (...) with gold (...) until now it bristles with the villas and palaces into which the cottages have all turned, and (...) these monuments of pecuniary power rise thick and close.³⁸”

When Marble House and The Breakers, two of the most lavish among these “monuments of pecuniary power” were being built, Teddy and Edith Wharton were looking for a new house in Newport, an independent cottage suitable for a young married society couple. The building they chose in 1892, called Land’s End, was in need of remodelling, so they called upon the services of

³⁶ Henry James, *The American Scene*, London, Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1907, p. 210.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

Ogden Codman, who had supposedly done some adjustments at Pencraig Cottage earlier.³⁹ It was his work at Pencraig Cottage which apparently put him in a favourable light among prospective clients he had been seeking to approach in Newport since 1884.⁴⁰

Land's End, whose purchase had been made possible by an unexpected legacy Wharton received in 1888 from a distant cousin, was the first house on which Wharton would be able to fully experiment according to her taste, a living space she would shape and define; thankfully, the architect she and her husband chose for the job, shared most of the couple's views on decoration, and Wharton would commission to Codman also the remodelling of a house she bought in New York in 1891 (on the same legacy's money) and would enlarge in 1898.

In her autobiography, Wharton would remark that "the outside of the house was incurably ugly"; however, it had some redeeming features, namely "windows framing the endlessly changing moods of the misty Atlantic" and "interesting possibilities" to be developed indoors.⁴¹ According to Wharton, it was during the elaboration of the plans she and Codman laid out for Land's End that the two of them came up with the idea of writing a book on interior decoration; it would take a few years, assuming that their first encounter took place in 1891, but in the meantime Codman's practice and Wharton's travels and extensive reading would help to define their views and approach regarding the subject.

In 1892, when the Whartons had begun restyling their comfortable cottage, Newport had witnessed the unveiling of William K. and Alva Vanderbilt's mansion, Marble House, designed by Richard M. Hunt, who had become the resident architect of the Vanderbilts⁴². He seemed especially attuned to the taste of Alva Vanderbilt for the architecture of the French Renaissance chateaux, to which she had been partial ever since her first sojourns in France, as a girl. Had there been any residue doubts as to the Vanderbilts' social and artistic ambitions, Alva Vanderbilt definitely dispelled them through a significant detail: on the wall of the upper hall, overlooking the grand staircase, she had two portraits in bas-relief placed next to each other. One was of Richard

³⁹ Pauline C. Metcalf, Ed. By, *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, Boston, The Boston Athenæum, 1988; the notes on p. 179 try and determine the time when Codman might have started working on the Whartons' place, based on Codman's account books. Apparently dating is still tentative, as the books are described as "garbled", but there is evidence showing that works were under way in 1892, and would continue until 1895.

⁴⁰ In an 1891 letter to A. Little, Codman wrote: "Mrs. Cutting has just told me she wants me to do her house as a result of the Wharton house. It is rather encouraging...", in P. C. Metcalf, *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 9.

⁴¹ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 106.

⁴² Marble House, which takes its name from the large amount of marble employed for its construction, was completed in four years; costing a staggering \$11,000,000, it was modelled after the Petit Trianon at Versailles, with touches of the White House and of the Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis. Its inside decoration was commissioned to the French firms of J. Allard and H Dasso, which did several more of the Newport mansions; among its most impressive features are the Siena marble entrance hall and staircase, the pink Numidian marble-lined dining room, the Gold Ballroom, and the Gothic room, which housed Mr. Vanderbilt's collection of mediaeval objets d'art. Source: Thomas Gannon, *Newport Mansions: The Gilded Age*, Dublin, New Hampshire, Foremost Publishers, 1982

Morris Hunt himself, her very own architect; the other was of Jules Hardouin Mansart, the master architect of King Louis XIV⁴³.

By a curious coincidence, the latest of Newport's French-inspired mansions was visited by Paul Bourget, who, on a trip to the United States which would take him to the Columbian Universal Exposition in Chicago in 1893, spent over a month in the seaside town. Wharton would remember the thrill she experienced at meeting a writer she admired; accompanied by his wife, Minnie, he was a guest at lunch at the Whartons' "as soon as he arrived"⁴⁴. The Whartons and the Bourgets would immediately strike up a friendship which would last for years, and they would frequently join for motor trips in Europe, especially Italy. A strong partiality for Italian landscape, history and art were among the things which first brought them together; Bourget would be among the few connoisseurs who recognized, among the pieces of furniture at Land's End, the Venetian Eighteen-century objects Wharton had begun "picking up" during her journeys, following an 1886 episode she related in her memoir.⁴⁵

Bourget's impressions of the summer of 1893 in Newport are recorded in a series of articles he collected in a volume titled *Outre-Mer*; a lengthy portion of a chapter on society life centres on Newport's palaces, and one can guess Bourget's puzzled amusement at the unusual spectacle presented by the dwellings of Bellevue Avenue. He calls it "a town of cottages", and remarks on the curious chance that has gathered together, on a small island, English abbeys, French chateaux and gothic palaces, according to the owners' taste. Freed from the preoccupation of cost, the American millionaires were turning Newport into "some isle consecrated to the god Plutus", where "one of these men has spent some time in England, and it has pleased him to build for himself on one of these Rhode Island lawns an English abbey of the style of Queen Elizabeth."⁴⁶

In remarking on the accurateness of detail, the finish and the precious material employed in these buildings, Bourget described their interiors in no uncertain terms: "the furnishing of the

⁴³ A similar homage to the architect had been paid by the contractors at the completion of the Vanderbilt New York house: on the day of its unveiling, in March 1883, the architect, who was among the guest to the inaugural gala evening, was surprised to see his likeness, almost life-size, in the guise of a stonemason, positioned among the statues on the roof of the building. (David Garrard Lowe – *The Man Who Gilded the Gilded Age*) Aside from the many private houses Hunt designed, many of which have been torn down, especially in New York City, the architect's name is tied to such significant American landmarks as the Statue of Liberty, whose pedestal he designed, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

⁴⁴ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 103.

⁴⁵ Wharton recalled a series of sittings she did in Paris for Julien Story, in order to have her portrait painted, and remembered having noticed in his studio a piece of furniture whose outline particularly appealed to her. When Story told her it belonged to the Venetian Settecento period, remarking that it was a shame it wasn't better known, she decided to look further into the matter, and started learning about its history and purchasing items she would use in furnishing her houses.

⁴⁶ Paul Bourget, *Outre-Mer: Impressions of America*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896, p. 46. Marble House is described on the same page as "a marble palace precisely like the Trianon, with Corinthian pillars as large as those of the Temple of the Sun at Baalbek."

Newport houses betray (...) a constant, tireless endeavour to absorb European ideas”⁴⁷, resulting in a mockery, as “yes, it is indeed Europe, but overgrown, exaggerated”, due to the fact that “the American spirit seems not to understand moderation.”⁴⁸ Even admiring the ingenuity displayed by Americans in the devices they turn out to improve their standard of living, their enthusiasm, their “vigor of blood and nerves”, Bourget could not but criticize the greed with which American millionaires filled their houses with the spoils of their European campaigns, decked their wives and daughters with sumptuous jewels, or crammed the guest suites of their mansions with bric-à-brac. He seemed particularly impressed by the wholesale quantity of art objects contained in American private houses, as when he wrote: “In some Newport villas which I could name, is an entire private gallery, which has been transported thither bodily.”⁴⁹

Many of these considerations would resurface later in Wharton’s fiction, as evidence of the similarity of their views on the subject, but also of what must have been a constant topic in their conversation. Their meeting took place at a time when Wharton was beginning to put into practice, in her homes, the aesthetic and artistic theories she had read about, when she was shaping her environment according to a refined and fastidious taste she had been developing and cultivating during her trips, and when she had finally met an architect who saw eye to eye with her.

Bourget’s witty comments on Newport’s cottages might have been sharper, had his trip taken place a few years later. Right before his arrival, in November 1892, Cornelius Vanderbilt II’s cottage, the Breakers, burned to the ground; he immediately enlisted his brother’s architect, Hunt, to design a new one, which would become the largest and most opulent in town.⁵⁰ At the same time, Hunt was also working on yet another Vanderbilt residence, which would prove the most spectacular of them all. Biltmore, situated in Asheville, North Carolina, had been commissioned to him by George Washington Vanderbilt, Cornelius’ brother, in 1890. The largest private residence in the U. S., it was completed in 1895; both Edith Wharton and Henry James would be guests at Biltmore. James described it to Wharton as “a strange, colossal, heart-breaking house”, and the gardens surrounding it “a vast niggery wilderness”⁵¹. Wharton would apparently be more pleased

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁰ The Breakers, completed in 1895, was modelled after Genoa’s Palazzo Cambiaso and Turin’s Royal Palace. Its symmetrical, three-storey limestone structure encloses a Great Hall and over 70 rooms. Its grand scale dwarfs all other cottages, and Bourget would certainly have found it Newport’s most incongruous piece of architecture; beside Codman, Allard & Son were commissioned the interior decoration, and had several rooms built in Europe and shipped to the United States. Among the most notable features of the Breakers are the ballroom, the dining salon, the music room, the billiard room, the library, which contains a stone chimney from a French chateau, and the main hall, a variation on the theme of the Italian inner court, surrounded by an upper loggia, with the customary, spectacular grand staircase. In contrast with the opulent public rooms, the bedrooms decorated by Codman display a subtle elegance, delicate colour shades and his customary preference for personal adaptation of French models of eighteenth-century decorative patterns.

⁵¹ Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton*, London, Chatto & Windus, 2007, p. 47.

with it, approving especially of the garden's layout, which had been designed by Frederick Law Olmsted.

Incidentally, the Whartons were visiting at the Breakers the very same afternoon the fire broke out; Codman's introduction to Alice Vanderbilt at the hands of Wharton resulted in his first important commission, the decoration of the Breakers' bedrooms on the second and third floors.⁵² Wharton could thus follow closely the building of the new mansion and undoubtedly it gave her more than one source of inspiration for later considerations on interior decoration; she and Codman exchanged letters about the newly finished mansion, and apparently discussed "the vulgarity of the grandiose gold and marble of the ground floor."⁵³

While the actual drafting of the text of *The Decoration of Houses* did not take place until the autumn of 1896, Wharton's biographers concur in pronouncing it a product of Wharton and Codman's Newport experiences and "activities". It was not only a mutual dislike of "sumptuary excesses" that brought them together on their project; at its outset, at least, their relationship was so close that some friends perceived Codman as a third wheel to the Whartons' marriage. They saw a lot of each other and their collaboration on the interiors he designed for both Land's End and the Whartons' house in New York made them compare and analyze their approach to architecture; They would agree not only in condemning the burdensome decors of the Victorian Age, but also the absence of moderation Bourget had remarked upon in his articles on Newport's buildings, which had been designed according to principles of style adaptation and scientific eclecticism.

Wharton was developing the "crisp, brilliant prose" needed for a treatise on a subject which was mostly perceived as academic; she had been exploring the precincts of this fascinating subject by reading Fergusson's "History of Architecture", which she would later call "an amazing innovation"⁵⁴; Codman had the theoretical and technical knowledge, could draw from an extensive bibliography on the subject, and had been practicing (following the advice of his uncle, architect John Hubbard Sturgis) in making measured drawings of old buildings, particularly in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington. Such practice, which Sturgis had learned when he worked in England, and was instrumental in introducing in America, allowed Codman to train his acute vision, his sense of space, and to develop a quick grasp of the most appropriate styles he would apply both to architectural outlines and furniture arrangement in his future projects. Codman would also practice extensively on his family's ancestral house, "The Grange", which was situated

⁵² Codman's own testimony to the importance of Wharton's social network for his career comes from a letter he wrote to his mother immediately after learning of the Vanderbilt's commission: "Just think what a client! The nicest and richest of them all...I am going to thank Mrs. Wharton who brought this about." Quoted in Pauline C. Metcalf, *From Lincoln to Leopolda*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 12.

⁵³ Nicholas King, *Living With Codman*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 41.

⁵⁴ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 91.

in Lincoln, Massachusetts, and had belonged to the Russell-Codmans since 1741. The house, which was initially built in the Georgian style, had been through several alterations, and Codman, who not only associated with it a strong sentimental value, but saw it as the expression of his family's genteel tradition, kept forming plans to improve it throughout his life.

The occurrence which spurred the inception of the book has not been precisely determined, and Wharton herself is vague in reminiscing about the episode; she simply remarked that, "finding we had the same views we drifted, I hardly know how, toward the notion of putting them into a book."⁵⁵ They followed a reasoned approach, according to Edith's memoirs: "We went into every detail of our argument: the idea, novel at the time though now self-evident, that the interior of a house is as much a part of its organic structure as the outside, and that its treatment ought, in the same measure, to be based on right proportion, balance of door and window spacing, and simple unconfused lines." The basic lines were drawn, the principles agreed upon, and both Wharton and Codman "sat down to write the book"⁵⁶; as simple as this statement may seem, the process of expressing in appealing language the ideas that had been surfacing during their discussions would take several months. According to Wharton's biographers, the book was written between the autumn of 1896 and late summer of 1897; there still are doubts as to the contributions each brought to the project.

Wharton claimed that the first steps had been rather tentative, as "neither of us knew how to write! This was excusable in an architect, whose business it was to build in bricks, not words, but deeply discouraging to a young woman who had in her desk a large collection of blank verse dramas and manuscript fiction."⁵⁷ On Codman's side, there were words to the effect that "he had done all the book and Mrs. Wharton had merely polished off the forms of sentences etc."⁵⁸

The accuracy of both statements may be open to scrutiny: on one side, Wharton wrote about this episode thirty years later in her autobiography, and did not seem to regard *The Decoration of Houses* as a wholly literary achievement⁵⁹; on the other hand, Codman, who reminisced about the episode also after a considerable span of time, had not refrained from criticising the Whartons, when major arguments arose. Their friendship had its ups and downs, and after an initial period in which the two were very close, eventually it fell into the pattern of polite acquaintance; it would experience a severe strain especially after a strong disagreement they had regarding the plans for a new house they were to build in the Berkshire hills, after 1901. Even before that, however,

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁸ Florence Codman, *The Clever Young Boston Architect*, Augusta – Maine, Litho KJ, 1970, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Her words were: "The doing of *The Decoration of Houses* amused me very much, but can hardly be regarded as a part of my literary career." In E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 112.

Wharton's published short fiction *The Valley of Childish Things and Other Emblems* (1896) contained references to architects who would show either excessive ambition or a definitely greedy nature.

By January 1897 there must have been sufficient material for the two authors to bring their project to the attention of Charles McKim, one of the leading representatives of the American Renaissance, or Beaux-Arts movement, who would design the Boston Public Library and the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Wharton knew him socially; moreover, as founder of the American Academy in Rome, he enjoyed her full support in promoting the Institution, for which Wharton did organize several fund-raising activities. She sent McKim the pages she and Codman had produced so far, accompanied by a letter in which she stated:

"I should not have troubled you about the matter at all, if I had not fancied from some talks we have had together that you felt that there were things which needed saying on this very subject, and had I not hoped that, if Mr. Codman and I could say them in the right way we might, in a slight degree, cooperate with the work you are doing in your Roman academy."⁶⁰

McKim wrote both Codman and Wharton letters of appreciation and encouragement, offering them also advice about the introduction⁶¹. Codman would take up his advice, that he should provide "sound precedents" in order to demonstrate the goodness of his theories, thus making room in the text for reference to plenty of French and Italian buildings, and lending it the authoritative tone which would be recognized as one of the book's merits.

The search for a publisher proved a bit of a challenge; Wharton may have felt that "neither Codman nor I knew any of these formidable people"⁶², but that did not necessarily mean she had no contact whatsoever with them. She and Codman offered their manuscript to Macmillan (where Wharton's sister-in-law, Mary Cadwalader Jones, had an entry⁶³). An initial opening came from the editor, Mr. Brett, who however wished to change the title to *The Philosophy of House-decoration*⁶⁴.

The encouraging tone of McKim's letters and memoranda sent to both Wharton and Codman separately did not prevent them from arguing about several aspects of their venture; apparently Wharton took a leading role in dealing with the publisher, a field in which Codman would prove painfully incompetent: by the month of May, Brett called off the project. Wharton felt

⁶⁰ Richard Guy Wilson, *Edith and Ogden: Writing, Decoration, and Architecture*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 152.

⁶¹ In a letter dated Feb. 1897, Wharton wrote to Codman: "I think it would be well in some respects to remodel the Introduction...The other chapters he entirely agrees to, which is nice." This statement seems to prove that the text had been fully sketched by then. Cited in R. G. Wilson, p. 152.

⁶² E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 108.

⁶³ Wharton was very close to her brother Frederic's wife, referred to as "Minnie", who would be one of her best friends, confidante, a sort of older sister for the writer. She herself had written an article on "Women's Opportunities in Town and Country" which figured in "*The House and home - A Practical Book*", published in 1896. This was probably what Wharton referred to when she wrote "my sister-in-law had an entry at Macmillan" in *A Backward Glance*, p. 108.

⁶⁴ Letter from E. Wharton to O. Codman, Feb. 1897, cited in R. G. W., *Edith and Ogden: Writing, Decoration, and Architecture*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 149.

that Brett's withdrawal had come about after a disastrous meeting with Codman in March⁶⁵, and warned her co-author in a firm tone: "Before we embark on any other experiments with the book, I am going to make it a condition that you leave the transaction entirely to me."⁶⁶

Codman might have been slack according to Wharton's schedule, partly because his own schedule was becoming increasingly busy; the decorating job he did for the Vanderbilts helped circulate his name among the affluent visitors of Newport, and in 1897 he was attending to the design of two houses, one in Newport and one in Providence. They were his first commissions for whole buildings⁶⁷, as opposed to the previous ones he had, which regarded only interior decoration, and he eagerly accepted them, as he was aiming at obtaining membership in the American Institute of Architects, and applicants needed to have completed at least one original construction in order to qualify.

Wharton, whose short stories and poems had been published since in *Scribner's Magazine*, thought she would try and offer the manuscript to its editor, Edward Burlingame; he handed it over to William C. Brownell, in the publishing department, and the latter accepted it. From then on, Wharton collaborated closely also with the printing department at Scribner's, as the numerous letters she exchanged with Brownell attest. (See Appendix C) She asked for a higher number of illustrations than it had been agreed upon, and convinced Brownell to have Daniel Berkeley Updike design and print the book.

The correspondence between Codman and Wharton bears witness to a collaboration which did not run as smoothly as they desired. Theoretically, she would work on his outlines and architectural principles and articulate them in an adequate language, then send him the manuscript for approval or revision. Notes like: "I think I have mastered hall & stairs at last, & I should like to see all the French & English Renaissance house plans you have", or: "I have finished *walls* (which will have to be a chapter by themselves preceding the Chps. on openings) & I should like you to read it at once"⁶⁸, seem to indicate that Wharton took the greater part of the task on her shoulders.

As things turned out, Wharton would grow impatient when faced with Codman's delays or failures: a letter she wrote him in June clearly conveys her frustration and disappointment:

⁶⁵ R. G. Wilson quotes from a March letter Wharton wrote to Codman: "I don't wish to seem peremptory, but I think a good deal depends on the impression produced during that visit"; there are no particulars regarding the content of their conversation, but Wilson speculates that Codman might have offended Brett. In R. G. Wilson, *Edith and Ogden: Writing, Decoration, and Architecture*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 150.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁶⁷ The houses were commissioned by Mrs. Charles Coolidge and by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Coates. The former, "Seabeach", was later defined by Codman himself as "my poor little first attempt", and nicknamed by the Newport people "the mud palace"; not covered in stucco anymore, it is currently on the market with a price tag of \$6,100,00. The latter took inspiration from seventeenth-century English models. The citations are found in R. G. Wilson, *Edith and Ogden: Writing, Decoration, and Architecture*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151-152.

“Anytime in the last three months you could have made the whole bibliography in your office in an hour – I suppose now that will have to be left out too. I regret very much that I undertook the book. I certainly should not have done so if I had not understood that you were willing to do half, & that the illustrations & all the work that had to be done with the help of your books were to be included in your half. I hate to put my name to anything so badly turned out.⁶⁹”

In the summer of 1897, *The Decoration of Houses* was still a batch of “lumpy pages⁷⁰”, which Wharton had the chance to show to Walter Berry, a distant relative of hers, who would become a trusted friend, a man whom she described as endowed with “an exceptionally sensitive literary instinct”, and who agreed to examine the work and offer his advice to the budding writer⁷¹. Perhaps Wharton is bound to slip into sentimentality when she writes things like “in those weeks, as I afterward discovered, I had been taught whatever I know about the writing of clear concise English. The book was re-read by my friend, and found fit for publication.”⁷²

Further adjustments were to be done, however; among other things, Wharton had not decided on a definitive title, and in a July letter proposed to Brownell “Rooms and Their Reasons, or Logic in House Decoration⁷³.”

The manuscript was turned in in September, and Wharton spent the better parts of October and November 1897 correcting galleys and compiling the index; in her memoir, she would of course not provide explicit hints to the quarrelsome part of the text’s elaboration. Instead, she wrote that “Codman had been at great pains to cite suitable instances in support of his principles⁷⁴”; their letters following the outburst of June also seem to attest that they had come to an agreement. Walter Berry’s apparition on the scene might just have proved providential, since he apparently reassured Wharton on the fact that the manuscript was not as badly turned out as she

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 152.

⁷⁰ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 108.

⁷¹ Berry would not only offered his advice on the book, apparently Wharton took him along when she approached Brownell in Newport, in the summer of 1897. Brownell later wrote to Scribner: “She called on me the first Sunday I got here, bringing a man named Berry (I think) to help her explain our business to me. (...) She had a book-18th century, ‘when they made books in so much better taste than now’-which had a lot of plates massed at the end.” The book Berry brought along, with a cover he particularly liked, would serve to show Brownell “how important commercially covers were.” On the whole, it did not look like a very promising meeting, as Brownell wrote to his employers that he “saw her drive away in her victoria with her man Berry and two dogs, without a pang of regret, though she is certainly interesting...and writes a very fair...sonnet.” The episode is related in Marc Aronson, *Wharton and the House of Scribner: The Novelist as a Pain in the Neck*, *New York Times*, 2 January 1994, p. BR7.

⁷² E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 108. Even seen through the reticence with which Wharton always dealt with private matters, her autobiography contains quite a few passages in which it is not hard to identify Walter Berry as the man she considered the love of her life, in whom she maintained she found “a friend (...) who seems not a separate person (...) but an expansion, an interpretation, of one’s self, the very meaning of one’s soul.” (P. 115)

⁷³ H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 130. In a letter written to Brownell on 9 July 1897, Wharton lists about ten ideas she and Codman had been able to devise. As will be seen in Appendix C, it would take the authors a few more weeks to decide on “The Decoration of Houses”; Wharton’s letter to Brownell, dated 3 September 1897, contains their final decision concerning the book’s title.

⁷⁴ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 110.

had claimed, thus enhancing Wharton's self-confidence, which, in the first years of her literary apprenticeship, was, by her own admission, painfully lacking.

December 3, 1897 was the date set for publication; Wharton remembered: "The Scribners brought out a very small and tentative edition, produced with great typographical care, probably thinking that the book was more likely to succeed as a gift book among my personal friends than a practical manual."⁷⁵ Neither she nor Codman were prepared for the reception it received.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

Chapter II

Analysis of *The Decoration of Houses*' contents: bibliographic and architectural precedents, and comparison of the book with contemporary texts on interior decoration

In its final form, *The Decoration of Houses* contains sixteen chapters, to which the authors added an Introduction and a Conclusion⁷⁶. The chapter subdivision follows the outline of the most popular book on interior decoration at the time, Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* (1868), but it articulates the content following a more scientific and detailed scheme. The text could be divided in two parts, according to a symmetrical structure that is as studied and proportioned as the rooms it analyzes: the Introduction and the first seven chapters deal with the basics of architectural elements present in every house; from the eighth chapter onward, the reader is led by the authors through the various rooms of the house, in order of "apparition". From the general principles, Wharton and Codman lead the reader step by step to the single, particular instance, as is peculiarly illustrated by the distance between the subjects of the first and last chapters: *The Historical Tradition* and *Bric-à-Brac*. The former gives the appropriate veneer of an academic approach to the subject: it traces back to their origins the different architectural styles developed in Italy, France and England, and it establishes and underlines the relation of dwelling forms to the historical conditions in which their evolution took place. The latter deals specifically with matters of personal taste and with those small objects which more than anything in a house are an external manifestation of the culture, taste and spirit of its inhabitants.

⁷⁶ The following is the index in its final form; for a comparison with the proposed index, see Appendix B.

- Introduction
- I The Historical Tradition
- II Rooms in General
- III Walls
- IV Doors
- V Windows
- VI Fireplaces
- VII Ceilings and Floors
- VIII Entrance and Vestibule
- IX Hall and Stairs
- X The Drawing-Room, Boudoir, and Morning-Room
- XI Gala Rooms: Ball-Room, Saloon, Music-Room, Gallery
- XII The Library, Smoking-Room, and "Den"
- XIII The Dining-Room
- XIV Bedrooms
- XV The School-Room and Nurseries
- XVI Bric-à-Brac
- Conclusion

The authors took great care to present their work as a thorough, competent, and well-documented effort even in the book's arrangement: the title-page, in which the title is enclosed in a neo-classical frame inspired by Codman's favourite source book, Marot's *Das Ornamentwerk*, is followed by a quotation taken from Mayeux's *La Composition Décorative*; then come the table of contents, the list of plates, and the "Books consulted" section. The latter is of particular interest, though it would be impossible to determine the extent to which each of the authors had contributed to the titles' choice, or whether some of the books already figured in either of their libraries. The highest number of works cited is in French, followed by English, German and Italian titles; it may be assumed that texts such as D'Aviler's *Cours d'Architecture*, Blondel's *Architecture Française* and *Cours d'Architecture*, as well as Percier and Fontaine's *Choix de plus Célèbres Maisons de Plaisance de Rome et de ses Environs*, had been among those most often consulted by Codman, given his previous studies in France. Along with them, English titles such as Isaac Ware's *A Complete Body of Architecture*, or Joseph Gwilt's *Encyclopaedia of Architecture*, were standard textbooks in architectural schools. As regards Italian and German titles contained in the list, it is possible that their consultation was left to Wharton, who, other than French, spoke and read both German and Italian fluently. She mentions Fergusson's *History of Architecture* and Gurlitt's *Geschichte des Barockstiles in Italien* among the books she was most influenced by in the 1890's. Fergusson's work is cited among her "Awakeners":

"It shed on my misty haunting sense of the beauty of old buildings the light of historical and technical precision, and cleared and extended my horizon"⁷⁷, a statement which conveys the deep interest Wharton felt about all subjects which she desired to explore in depth, with an almost scientific approach. The Nineties were a period of intense and cultural discoveries for her, and in her frequent travels abroad with her husband she developed a strong partiality for Italy, where she would absorb innumerable details of culture, language, art, architecture; from the titles and contents of the writings she had published up to 1897, it is clear that history and art exercised a peculiar fascination on Wharton⁷⁸. From 1894 onward, thanks to Bourget's influence, she formed an acquaintance with Vernon Lee, who was instrumental in providing Wharton with access to

⁷⁷ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 91. Wharton mentions her discovery of Gurlitt's book on p. 102.

⁷⁸ *Scribner's Magazine* had published, among other short poems by Wharton, *The Last Giustiniani* (1889), and *Botticelli's Madonna in the Louvre* (1891); the former dealt with a historic episode concerning the last descendant of an aristocratic Venetian family, who was dispensed from his religious vows in order to marry and provide the family with an heir, the latter is a sonnet in which Wharton described her own emotional reaction as she contemplated the painting. *The Fulness of Life*, a short story published in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1893, has at its centre a similar episode of self-revelation through the contemplation of an artistic masterpiece; with *A Tuscan Shrine*, (1895), Wharton related her discovery of a series of terra-cotta figures in the secluded monastery of San Vivaldo, whose attribution was corrected after she brought them to the attention of the superintendent of Florence's Art Museum.

some celebrated Italian private residences, all historically or architecturally significant specimens she was to describe in a volume titled *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, published in 1904⁷⁹.

When the elaboration of *The Decoration of Houses* took place, Wharton was immersed in a serious study, if not a love-affair, with Italy and its civilization, as a letter written to Codman in 1895 attests: “The older I grow, the more I feel that I would rather live in Italy than anywhere. The very air is full of architecture – “la ligne” is everywhere. (...) I never weary of driving through the streets + looking at the doorways + windows + courtyards + wells + all the glimpses one gets. What an unerring sentiment for form! (...) oh, there is nothing like it in the world, + it breaks my heart every time I have to leave it.”⁸⁰ Mantua and Venice were among the cities she visited more frequently during this decade, so the titles which figure in the “Books consulted” dealing with these two cities possibly came from a direct suggestion by Wharton.

The list of “Books Consulted”, placed at the opening of the book, is instrumental in giving it a decidedly authoritative tone; it sets *The Decoration of Houses* apart from publications such as Estlake’s and Cook’s which, moreover, like most of the interior decoration books published at the time, were a collected edition of previously printed articles the authors had contributed to women’s publications. It would be almost impossible now to form an hypothesis on the content of each author’s library at the time they were working on the text of *The Decoration of Houses*; after Codman’s death (1951) his painstakingly collected architecture books were left to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, along with his “bookcases, chairs, tables, a rug, and framed prints, in order that the collection might as nearly as possible be housed as it might have been in an architect’s or interior decorator’s working library.”⁸¹ However, not long afterwards, it was dispersed, with Codman’s architectural drawings going to the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Wharton’s library suffered a worse fate; following her death in 1937, it was divided in two sections and, while over 2,000 books were bought back from one of the legatees and are now housed at The Mount, the library portion which comprised the books on art, history and architecture was destroyed in London during World War Two⁸². All the same, the surviving portion of the library contains nine volumes from the Bibliothèque de l’Enseignement des Beaux-Arts (printed between 1884 and 1900), including Henry Mayeux’s *La Composition Décorative* (1885),

⁷⁹ The meeting and following acquaintance with Vernon Lee and her brother, the poet Eugene Hamilton Lee, are described by Wharton in *A Backward Glance*, pp. 130-135.

⁸⁰ Edith Wharton to Ogden Codman, 8 May 1895. Ogden Codman Papers, Box 83, Fol. 1668, Historic New England (formerly Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities), Boston.

⁸¹ Both the quotation and the subsequent information about the dispersal of Codman’s library are found in Christopher Monkhouse, *The Making of a Colonial Revival Architecture*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, pp. 63-64.

⁸² More details on this are contained in the Introduction of George Ramsden, *Edith Wharton’s Library – A Catalogue compiled by George Ramsden*, Settrington, Stone Trough Books, 1999.

from which she took *The Decoration of Houses*' epitaph. There are also the ten volumes of E.-E. Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire Raisoné de l'Architecture Française du XIe au XVIe Siècle* (1858), Wilmot Harrison's *Memorable Paris Houses* (1893), and Joseph Keller's *Balthasar Neumann* (1896). A letter Wharton wrote to Codman on 5 December 1896, containing the first mention of a manuscript about house-decoration, cites some titles contained in her own library, and gives an interesting view on the depth to which she was accustomed to investigate the subjects she tackled:

“...I will give you all the help I can, though I am not able to tell you where to find details about Mme de Rambouillet. I know she introduced small rooms + sensible windows, + that is all. Can't you find more in *L'Architecture Française au temps de Richelieu et Mazarin*? You will certainly find a bibliography of books on the art + architecture of that period in my *Histoire Générale par Lavisse + Rambaud*, which I shall have in Park Ave. Also, in Larousse, which you can probably see at the Knickerbocker, you ought to find under Mme de R., a list of the books written about her. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gives the *Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux*, the *Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, by Somaize, + the modern biographies by Victor Cousin, Livet, + de Barthélémy.⁸³”

The Introduction explains firmly and simply the aim of the book: the much-discussed, much-illustrated discipline of house decoration needs to be led back to its roots, its soundest principles, which it shares with architecture. The two disciplines must follow the same rules, which had been laid out by the great architects of the past, otherwise the resulting work will show “a multiplication of incongruous effects”, owing to the clashing views of the architect and the decorator who are called upon to carry out the project of the same building.

Wharton and Codman stress the fact that “no study of house-decoration as a branch of architecture has for at least fifty years been published in England or America⁸⁴”, and their aim is to try and bring a small contribution in filling this void, to which end they find it necessary to include in the first part of their book a general view of the elements of the house seen from a strictly architectural point of view.

The sentence implies also a tacit critique of those professionals, both architects and decorators, who had practiced their skills without a solid background, without taking the trouble to acquire texts which may have been dated, but which contained the basic language decoration shared with architecture. Ignorance and vulgarity are cited in the Introduction as two of the obstacles the authors encourage the modern decorators to overcome, and they advise them to do so through the study of the best models and the observance of time-honoured precepts and traditions.

Another not-so-veiled critique is contained in the closing paragraphs: a large responsibility of what is seen pictured in newspaper sections dealing with real-life interiors, or described in articles all over America lies with the example set by those society people the “lower classes” read

⁸³ Ogden Codman Papers Collection, Box 83, Folder 1669, Historic New England, Boston.

⁸⁴ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. xx of the Introduction.

about, and whose lifestyle they strove to emulate. Wharton and Codman, who, in their correspondence were openly and sometimes scathingly critical of their acquaintances' tastes⁸⁵, summed up their theory in the following remark: "When the rich man demands good architecture his neighbors will get it too. The vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness."⁸⁶ They might also have added "in their efforts to outshine one another", in an apparently endless race to built the costliest, grandest, most luxurious house⁸⁷.

The chapter on Historical Tradition gives a description of the development of architectural styles in Italy, England and France; while it credits Italy with the undisputed pre-eminence in introducing the best examples of house-building and decoration through its Renaissance architects, it gives the reasons which should lead Americans to adopt later English and especially French variations on the classical Italian models. The lifestyle and social habits developed in England and France are perceived by the authors as closer to their country's way of life: "In France and England (...) private life was gradually developing along the lines it still follows in the present day. (...) what we call modern civilization was a later growth in these two countries than in Italy."⁸⁸ Thus, "the styles especially suited to modern life" are pointed to by Wharton and Codman as "those prevailing in Italy since 1500, in France from the time of Louis XIV, and in England since the introduction of the Italian manner by Inigo Jones."⁸⁹

These sentences seem to sum up the suggestion offered by Charles McKim to Wharton, when she had asked him for advice and sent him part of her manuscript at the beginning of 1897, and Wharton paraphrases McKim in the first chapter, where one reads: "modern architecture and decoration (...) can be reclaimed only by a study of the best models."⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Letter from Edith Wharton to Ogden Codman, 1 May 1897: "Teddy hasn't yet rallied from the effect of the Whitney house. It must indeed be a ghouls lair. I wish the Vanderbilts didn't retard culture so very thoroughly. They are entrenched in a sort of Thermopylae of bad taste, from which apparently no force on earth can dislodge them." Wharton is referring to Teddy's visit to the recently remodelled New York town house of William C. Whitney, by Stanford White, an architect both Wharton and Codman would include in the group of people who were stirring "the stagnant air of old New York", but who could occasionally fall into an excessive Beaux-Arts manner. The comment was extended by most Wharton biographers to all Vanderbilt houses as examples of architectural excess. In Ogden Codman Papers Collection, Box 84, Fold. 1671, Historic New England, Boston.

⁸⁶ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. xxi-xxii.

⁸⁷ The quest for social prestige, or a true passion for art and architecture were not apparently the only motives behind this race; Henry Clay Frick, who is today best remembered as a prominent art collector, became so embittered toward Andrew Carnegie after their friendship and business relation suffered a major fallout, that he would even see the building of his New York house as a means to humiliate his former employer. His mansion on Fifth Avenue (which today houses the Frick Collection), built between 1913 and 1914 by Thomas Hastings, according to Frick's intentions, should have made "Carnegie's place look like a miner's shack." In Les Standiford, *Meet You In Hell – Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the Bitter Partnership That Transformed America*, New York, Three River Press, 2005.

⁸⁸ E. Wharton – O. Codman, *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 6.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹⁰ The remarks written by McKim refer to a "conscientious study of the best examples of classic periods"; they are contained in a type-written, undated Memoranda I was able to read among the McKim Papers (Library of Congress, Washington D. C.), and it is mentioned in R. G. Wilson, *Edith and Ogden: Writing, Decoration, and Architecture*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 15p. 153.

Codman was a firm believer in the methods scientific eclecticism was adopting and spreading, which brought forth the development of an architectural style that drew inspiration from the classical models, and aimed at creating harmonious interiors by combining different elements chosen with great accuracy and reproduced with great accuracy. He would agree with McKim that “the designer must not be too slavish, whether in the composition of a building or a room, in his adherence to the letter of tradition”⁹¹; Codman’s works would show an extensive knowledge derived from a thorough study of architectural and decorative elements, and a precise use of the grammar he learned of each style.

The chapters on the basic elements which figure in every room (walls, openings such as windows, fireplaces, doors, and ceilings and floors) give examples of the best ways in which to decorate a portion of the room, or the ideal situation for an opening. They stress the importance of applying sound judgement and common sense in the choice of materials, or colors, as the layout of the rooms is of great importance for all the subsequent decorative work: “If the fundamental lines are right, very little decorative detail is needed to complete the effect; whereas, when the lines are wrong, no over-laying of ornamental odds and ends (...) will conceal the structural deficiencies.”⁹²

Each advice Wharton and Codman give is backed by a cited precedent and, if possible, by one of the plates contained in the book; throughout the first half of the text, the principles are exposed with clear, concise sentences, such as “Proportion is the good breeding of architecture”⁹³, or “Symmetry (...) may be defined as the sanity of decoration”⁹⁴; such sentences, given out in the form of axioms, are often developed with an eye to the reader’s literary background, a highly probable input from Wharton’s side. She may have been at the back of such considerations as these: “for years the Anglo-Saxons have been taught that to pay any regard to symmetry in architecture or decoration is to truckle to one of the meanest forms of artistic hypocrisy. The master who has taught this strange creed, in words magical enough to win acceptance for any doctrine, has also revealed to his generation so many of the forgotten beauties of early art that it is hard to dispute his principles of aesthetics. As a guide through the byways of art, Mr. Ruskin is entitled to the reverence and gratitude of all; but as a logical exponent of the causes and effects of the beauty he discovers, his authority is certainly open to question. For years he has spent the full force of his unmatched prose in denouncing the enormity of putting a door or a window in a certain place in order that it may correspond to another; nor has he scrupled to declare to the victims of this practice that it leads to abysses of moral as well as of artistic degradation.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ In Charles Follen McKim Papers – Library of Congress – Washington DC – Reel 3 – Memoranda.

⁹² E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 31.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁹⁵ E. Wharton, O. Codman, *The Decoration of Houses*, p.33-34.

Wharton, who, like many of her generation, formed her artistic taste following the “unmatched prose” of Ruskin’s books, would for the first time put in print her dissent from his doctrines; possibly she felt safer in doing so in a book co-signed by a male author, a professional architect, as it would be unlikely that Codman would feel so strongly Ruskin’s influence as to write words like “time has taken the terror from these threat (...) but in the lay mind there still lingers (...) a vague association between outward symmetry and interior discomfort.”⁹⁶

Far from betraying feelings of discomfort or inadequacy, Wharton and Codman’s prose is sure, clear, authoritative; in dealing with each element of the room, the authors point out the faults architects, decorators and their clients most often run into, such as the poor artistic value of American fireplaces, or the wrong use to which many rooms of the house are put. An example, probably suggested by Wharton based on her own experience, is found in the description of “the dreary drawing-room, in small town houses the only possible point of reunion for the family, but too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting-place than the vestibule or the cellar”.

The authors stress the importance of paying particular attention to the comfort and tastes of the inmates of the house, and to the needs of them as a family; a well-planned house must favour family relationships, intimacy, must preserve privacy and be an inviting place to someone who looks for rest and comfort, otherwise even familiar disruption may occur: “It is no exaggeration to say that many houses are deserted by the men of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find in their clubs⁹⁷” may sound like an exaggeration, but the authors’ point of view is borne out by the use of very convincing examples.

Along with proportion and symmetry, Wharton and Codman are strenuous proponents of the principles of moderation and suitability; they analyze various possible solutions in the planning and decoration of different portions of a room, citing the historical precedents and giving the reader the *raison d’être* behind the different treatments. Most important, for the contemporary reader is to recognize which solution is to be adopted in his own particular case, using his own judgment, and not obeying some fashion rule or following a rash suggestion by dealers who would have their clients believe that the style that is all the rage fits well in every room.

The chapters on doors and fireplaces must have been particularly close to Codman’s heart, as throughout his career he would dedicate special attention to the placing and decoration of these important architectural elements; both he and his co-author felt that these features had been neglected both by architects and by those who had previously written about house-decoration. They point out that “as an example of the extent to which openings have come to be ignored as

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

factors in the decorative composition of a room, it is curious to note that in Eastlake's well-known *Hints on Household Taste* no mention is made of doors, windows or fireplaces.⁹⁸ Wharton, too, recognized their importance not only as decorative pieces; moreover, as would often be the case in her subsequent fiction, she underlined social and emotional aspects linked to the use of these elements in a house.

Fireplaces are not only to be taken into account as wall-openings, or provided with pleasant-looking chimney-breasts or mantelpieces; "the fireplace must be the focus of every rational scheme of arrangement" conveys the central importance accorded to this architectural element, which comes to symbolize almost the spirit of hospitality which pervades a house, as exemplified by the following sentences: "The hearth suggests an idea of intimacy and repose," or "The hearth should be the place about which people gather, but (...) the fire is (...) rarely lit, and no one cares to sit about a fireless hearth"⁹⁹. "Without a fire, the best-appointed drawing-room is as comfortless as the shut-up 'best parlor' of a New England farm house. The empty fireplace shows that the room is not really lived in and that its appearance of luxury and comfort is but a costly sham prepared for the edification of visitors"¹⁰⁰.

Doors, which are considered by Wharton and Codman among the architectural elements most mishandled by American decorators, are presented almost as sentries who keep guard, in the house, to the privacy of the inmates. The authors show a marked distaste for the invention and the use of sliding doors, which are considered among the first culprits for the loss of privacy: "the difficulty of closing a very heavy sliding door always leads to its being left open (...) The absence of privacy in modern houses is doubtless part due to the difficulty of closing the doors between the rooms"¹⁰¹. If the reader bears in mind that, according to Wharton and Codman, "Under ordinary circumstances, doors should always be kept shut"¹⁰², it becomes clear why they criticize even more openly the widespread use of portières, which cause a break in the architectural lines, and do not serve any purpose other than causing decoration expenditures to soar. So averse were Codman and Wharton to this particular feature, that in describing its numerous drawbacks, they came up with a memorable sentence, in which the upholsterer, who, in the authors' view had subtracted yet another portion of the room from the architect's care, was called "the house dressmaker."¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 20 and p. 88.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 60.

All elements of the architectural language could benefit, according to Wharton and Codman, from a “return to better principles of design¹⁰⁴”; more attention must be paid to the general architectural lines of a room before applying any ornamentation to it, as well as to the choice of the most appropriate materials for each part, object or section. Thus many advices are given on the most appropriate materials for floors, doors or curtains, as well as the most fitting way to decorate walls and ceilings; among the most authoritative sources the authors often cite Inigo Jones as a brilliant interpreter of the classic Italian models, and Jacques Ange Gabriel, credited with the invention of the Louis XVI style of decoration¹⁰⁵.

The authors are firmly convinced of the need to dispel the all-pervasive ignorance to which both architects and their clients fall prey when the time comes to build or redecorate a house; an “archeologizing spirit” is not enough to guarantee sound choices or wise decisions in this field. Wharton and Codman believe in acquiring competence and in developing taste through study and careful observation, because ignorance, in architecture as in all things, lead to erroneous beliefs, inappropriateness, misuse, or vulgarity. This last flaw in particular is seen as an almost unpardonable excess, especially condemnable in houses where no expense has been spared in the interior decoration, and whose owners are expected by Wharton and Codman to cultivate their taste, since it is their example people will follow.

The authors do not mince words when it comes to giving an opinion on current furniture styles, or on the quality of decorative objects: manufacturers of machine-made goods only wait for a fad to spread, and they promptly inundate the market with “cheap machine-made furniture” or “trashy china ornaments¹⁰⁶” which will find their way in thousands of houses, as “the increasing demand for cheap effects¹⁰⁷” has not escaped Wharton and Codman’s observing eye. It is obviously easier to believe, as the modern manufacturer does, that “you only have to combine certain ‘goods’ to obtain a certain style¹⁰⁸”; but, as the authors constantly remind the reader, one had better strive after a sound knowledge of the best models, in order to bring about a widespread appreciation of better design. The tone of their sentences at times suggests that they might have regarded this book as a weapon in a crusade against bad taste and its possessors; words like “Nothing can exceed the ugliness of the current designs” or “it is to be hoped that the ‘artistic’ furniture disfiguring so many of our shop-windows will no longer find a market¹⁰⁹” may be variously interpreted. Goods produced on a large scale in the new, industrialized economy, the authors seem to imply, do not

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 56-57: “the influence of Gabriel began to simplify and restrain the ornamental details of house-decoration (...) Gabriel gave the key-note of what is known as Louis XVI decoration.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ Both quotations in this sentence are found on p. 26.

necessarily have to be modelled on poor specimens; it is important that, even allowing for fashions and the vagaries of taste, classic pieces be taken as models.

This line of reasoning is sometimes the aspect of the book which has prompted critics to label Wharton and Codman as “snob” or “elitist” writers; true, they belonged to a narrow minority who could afford to pick their furniture, *objets d’art* or domestic tools in European shops, and they took care that their purchases be hand-made and of the highest possible quality. However, throughout the book they propose alternative solutions to the examples of decorative devices they cite, often taken from palatial European residences, which contain, as the reader may be surprised to find out, “rooms as simple as those in any private house¹¹⁰”.

As regards the articulation of space in this ideal “private house” Codman and Wharton described in their book, the chapters in the second half clearly show that they were thinking of a luxurious type of dwelling, as it is supposed to contain an entrance-cum-vestibule, possibly separated from the hall and stairs; then at least a drawing-room and a boudoir. Listed under the heading “Gala Rooms are to be found the ball-room, the saloon, the music-room and the gallery, of which at least one is required; then come the library, the den, possibly a smoking room, the dining-room, the bedrooms and finally the school-room and nurseries. If compared with earlier nineteenth-century American treatises or books on architecture, *The Decoration of Houses* reads like a manual of good taste for the “higher Jones”.

As I mentioned earlier, in matters of household management, including house-furnishing, nineteenth-century publications, from newspaper articles to books devoted to the subject, were written by women. They were, however, mostly handbooks on practical house management issues, and often contained considerations of a more socio-political nature or plain moral precepts; in an 1885 book, titled *Practical Housekeeping*, one read: “the model house should not be large, nor too fine and pretentious for daily use...A great house, with its necessary retinue of servants, is not in keeping with the simplicity of a Republic.¹¹¹” Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1869 book *The American Woman’s Home* contained not only chapters on practical housekeeping; it touched upon such delicate issues as suffrage and the treatment of minorities, and it included chapters on “A Christian Family” and “A Christian House.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid., *Introduction*, p. xxii.

¹¹¹ Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart – A Cultural History of Domestic Advice*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, p. 20. A similar view is expressed by James Hammond, in *The Farmer’s and Mechanic’s Practical Architect* (1848), where he states: “We are all politically equal (...) Although we exceed other people in the ostentatious style of our private dwellings, we ought, more than any other people in the world, to adapt the style of our houses to the republican simplicity of our institutions. Let the decorations of a house be made as pleasing as they can be made to the eye, without extraneous ornaments, that it may seem to be the abode of a sensible and humble minded republican...”; this quotation in John Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, Minneapolis, London, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 193.

Influential texts written by men in the same period, while not specifically concerned with social issues such as women's rights or religious principles, showed a marked concern about the meaning of house-building from various theoretical points of view beside the architectural value: Andrew Jackson Downing, whose books had made him America's best-known architectural authority in the first half of the nineteenth century, did repeatedly stress the principle according to which the house constituted an outward expression of its owner's personality: his moral character, culture, and social status. Not only that, he considered the building of a sizable dwelling in a fine style almost a civic duty, as he wrote in an 1848 essay called *Moral Influence of Good Houses*: "...he who gives to the public a more beautiful and tasteful model of a habitation than his neighbors, is a benefactor to the cause of morality, good order, and the improvement of society where he lives."¹¹²

Other authors went as far as applying to architecture the principles that regulated the discipline of phrenology, as in *A Home for All*, written in 1848 by Orson Fowler, who implied in his text that "people's dwellings could bear a close resemblance to their respective characters. Intellect, ambition, fancy, and mentality all could be embodied in domestic design."¹¹³

Wharton and Codman's book did not concern itself with either the physiological or political interpretation of house-decorating. It did not contain, as most of Downing's books, any blueprints, plans or actual renderings of different categories or styles of dwellings, such as cottages, farmhouses or villas. Downing's 1850 book, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, provided dozens of designs for the three types of houses mentioned above; his designs served as models for the innumerable plans for houses that were to be found in American newspapers in the second half of the nineteenth century; in contrast with the long list of rooms contained in *The Decoration of Houses*, the designs for what would become the prototype of American suburban houses showed a somewhat restrained type of dwelling, with the customary vestibule and hall, dining-room, drawing-room, kitchen, pantry and sometimes a library on the first floor, whereas the second floor was reserved for the bedrooms, bathroom and a study.

One of the aspects of the *The Decoration of Houses* which clearly denotes its "social provenance" is the absence of a chapter on the kitchen and the very limited space accorded to bathrooms; different reasons may have stood at the root of this choice. Perhaps Wharton and Codman felt that there was no need to put their two cents' worth in a market already saturated with publications on the subject of equipping an efficient "service-room" such as the kitchen; more probably they were not familiar with the more prosaic aspects of housekeeping, so they lacked the necessary competence to provide the readers with such reliable advice that would be in keeping

¹¹² J. Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, p. 181.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

with the rest of the text. A chapter on “Servants’ Rooms” had been planned in one of the final drafts; it was included in the Table of Contents, but it never found its way in the draft itself, and consequently in the book. There are no witnesses as to whether it had actually ever been written; this may be yet another instance of either the publisher’s or the authors’ intentions of keeping their distance from social issues that might easily have engendered responses, debates or reactions far removed from the authors’ mind when they had started on the project.

Earlier books, such as those written by Beecher, tackled the issue of domestic labor from the point of view of women-householders: her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) had contained a rough sketch of a house plan drawn with an eye to minimizing household labor; in a later publication the plan had been further developed with the aim of minimizing female labor in all respects. Such aspects of the topic are totally absent from *The Decoration of Houses*: its authors addressed themselves mainly to a group of people whose means allowed them not only to “indulge their tastes”, but whose leisurely lifestyle needs were discreetly attended to by subordinates who dealt with all menial tasks, whereas Beecher wrote for bourgeois families, who very likely could not afford a household staff.

Codman and Wharton aimed principally at providing their book with a detached style and with a dependable amount of information, combined with the offering of sound and ever-reliable principles; no room takes pre-eminence over the others in their view, as the most important principle to be observed in house-decoration is to keep faithful to a coherent plan and to choose the most suitable and appropriate solutions for each instance. Since style, taste and culture are constantly cited as necessary components of the house’s occupants’ personality, allowing them to make the appropriate choices and to enjoy the outcome of their endeavour, it is likely that Wharton and Codman felt no need to deal with the servants’ quarters, nor with their appropriate decoration, as speculating about these people’s habits, tastes, education level and feelings would have proved decidedly awkward. In setting aside the issue of the limited scope of the book, if we choose to label it “limited” owing to its choice of dwellings and, consequently, of the restricted social group who could afford them, we will be able to read *The Decoration of Houses* as an extremely interesting analysis of the cultural level, tastes, lifestyle, social customs, and ambitions of the privileged class who laid the foundations of America’s capitalistic system in the nineteenth century.

Whereas earlier writers were still concerned about the need to show the republican character of a house’s inhabitants, Wharton and Codman, who wrote after the Republic had gone through the ordeal of the Civil War and the reconstruction political and economic issues, addressed an audience who had either been able to keep most of their assets, or who had profited from the new markets that trade, war, and the western expansion had suddenly thrown open to all

who were willing to invest in daring enterprises. *The Decoration of Houses*, however, did not aim at eulogizing the example set by the upper class and their architects in house-building; on the contrary, it contained a good number of passages in which the authors remarked on the poor judgement shown by making certain architectural choices, and the ignorance betrayed in the widespread forced adaptations and mixtures of styles that did not blend harmoniously with the surrounding quarters. From the privileged class, or at least from their architects, Wharton and Codman make clear that they expect nothing less than a well-educated taste, competence, professional rigor and knowledge, particularly when it came to adapting historical precedents to their customers' whims.

Architectural styles had been taken into account as a salient factor in earlier American publications, too; however, as the following passage from *The Architecture of Country Houses* illustrates, the subject could sometimes be approached from a decidedly oversimplified perspective, which likened the building of a house to a window-shopping experience:

“...the classical scholar and gentleman may, from association and the love of antiquity, prefer a villa in the Grecian or Roman style. He who has a passionate love of pictures and especially fine landscapes, will perhaps, very naturally, prefer the modern Italian style for a country residence. The wealthy proprietor, either from the romantic and chivalrous associations connected with the baronial castle, or from desire to display his own resources, may indulge his fancy in erecting a castellated dwelling. The gentleman who wishes to realize the *beau ideal* of a genuine old English country residence...may establish himself in a Tudor villa or mansion; and the lover of nature and rural life...will very naturally make the choice of the rural cottage style.”¹¹⁴

Wharton's acquaintances, many among whom were rapidly being included in Codman's clients list, could well dismiss such a narrow choice offer, being of the sort of “the wealthy proprietors” described above: some of them would combine, in their multi-storied mansions, rooms built in such distant styles as Gothic and Chinese. It would be almost impossible, when confronted with certain descriptions in *The Decoration of Houses*, not to think of some specific interiors Wharton at least, if not both authors, must have been familiar with in Newport and New York. Given the opinion the authors had exchanged as regarded the Vanderbilts' taste, it is very likely they had their Newport “cottages” in mind when writing certain detailed descriptions; Codman had worked on the decoration of “The Breakers” bedrooms two years before the book went to print, and in many instances he had manifested opinions that contrasted with those of the house's architect, Richard Morris Hunt¹¹⁵. Wharton kept closer friendship ties with the owners of “The Breakers” than with Cornelius Vanderbilt II's brother, William K. Vanderbilt, and his wife Alva, and while it is a matter of speculation how often she may have stepped over the threshold of the latter's “Marble

¹¹⁴ J. Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, p. 191.

¹¹⁵ For more details on Codman's collaboration with both Hunt and Allard in the building and decoration of the Breakers, see Pauline Metcalf, *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 12

House”, it is certain she and her husband had attended a gala dinner there, given by Alva Vanderbilt on 31 August 1895 in honor of her daughter’s soon-to-be betrothed, the Duke of Marlborough¹¹⁶.

One instance of the Wharton-Codman team’s camouflaged descriptions of a treatment not to be imitated may be the main door of the house: “Even the front door (...) has lately had to yield its place, in the more pretentious kind of house, to a wrought-iron gateway lined with plate-glass...”¹¹⁷

This description reads like a fitting depiction of the inner gate of Marble House¹¹⁸. Another example may be drawn from the chapter on Hall and Stairs:

“...in the greater number of large houses, and especially of country houses, built in America since the revival of the Renaissance and Palladian architecture, a large many-storied hall communicating directly with the vestibule, and containing the principal stairs of the house, has been the distinctive feature...this overgrown hall (...) The abnormal development of the modern staircase-hall cannot be defended on the plea sometimes advanced that it is a roofed-in adaptation of the great open *cortile* of the Genoese palace...”¹¹⁹ ”

Again, the instance cited by Wharton and Codman finds a punctual illustration in the Great Hall of “The Breakers”, one of the most impressive, over-decorated features of the mansion; the apparently generic reference to the Genoese palace serves as a clue towards an identification with “The Breakers,” as one of its models had ostensibly been a Genoese building, Palazzo Cambiaso. “Marble House”’s dining-room is yet another target in Wharton and Codman’s list of architectural offenses against appropriateness, and through their veiled criticism the reader might even sense a hint of social disapproval extended to the character of its owner, Alva Vanderbilt, whose lavish taste was always at the core of her architect’s choices:

“The dining-room of Madame du Barry at Luciennes (...) was a magnificent example of the great dining-saloon. The ceiling was a painted Olympus; the white marble walls were subdivided by Corinthian pilasters with plinths and capitals of gilt bronze, surmounted by a frieze of bas-relief framed in gold; (...) and the general brilliancy of effect was increased by crystal chandeliers, hung in the intercolumniations against a background of looking-glass. Such a room, the banqueting-hall of the official mistress, represents the *courtisanes*’ ideal of magnificence: decorations as splendid, but more sober and less theatrical, marked the dining-rooms of the aristocracy...”¹²⁰”

Among the subjects closest to Wharton’s heart was the treatment of the library, to which the authors however did not devote a chapter by itself; the library was examined together with two types of rooms, such as the Smoking-Room, and the Den, which were habitually the exclusive territory of the male head of the household. This “gendered” grouping of rooms, as has been noted

¹¹⁶ Amanda Mackenzie Stuart, *Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt*, London, Harper Perennial, 2006, p. 130.

¹¹⁷ E. Wharton, O. Codman, jr, *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 48.

¹¹⁸ The actual caption contained in the official guidebook to the Newport Mansions reads: “The entrance grille of steel and gilt bronze, one of the most distinctive features of Marble House, weighs more than ten tons.” In Thomas Gannon, *Newport Mansions – The Gilded Age*, Dublin, Foremost Publishers, Inc., 1982, p. 73.

¹¹⁹ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 116-117.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

in Archer's *Architecture and Suburbia*, gained increased space and importance in the nineteenth century, superseding what throughout the eighteenth century had been the central feature of the American house, the kitchen¹²¹.

Owing perhaps to the more severe taste of their usual occupants, these rooms were to be treated, according to Wharton and Codman, in a simpler style, adopting common-sense solutions in the choice for functional details, and reserving for them the most substantial, yet pleasing, furniture of the house. While the authors seemed to consider the smoking-room as an anachronistic concession to an outdated lifestyle, they observed that frequently the den, or master's lounging-room, incorporated the house's bookshelves, for lack of space. To a book-lover like Wharton, this was hardly a satisfactory solution, even though elsewhere in *The Decoration of Houses* one may read: "Those who really care for books are seldom content to restrict them to the library, for nothing adds more to the charm of a drawing-room than a well-designed bookcase: an expanse of beautiful bindings is as decorative as fine tapestry¹²²"; she had been accustomed to frequent childhood visits to her father's library¹²³, and her idea of a gentleman's library was clearly expressed in the following lines: "a great private library [combines] monumental dimensions with the rich color-values and impressive effect produced by tiers of fine bindings (...) The two-storied room with gallery and stairs and domed or vaulted ceiling is the finest setting for a great collection."¹²⁴

This view must certainly have been shared by Codman, who may not have enjoyed as close a physical relationship with books as Wharton admitted to since her childhood. However, he was a very punctilious compiler, also a book collector and, according to his foremost biographer, Pauline Metcalf, was very exacting in his taste for book bindings. According to Metcalf, "Codman's books were always beautifully bound, no matter what the content of the book itself. In the family house in

¹²¹ For more on the shifting in importance and function of specific quarters of the American house, see J. Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, pp. 196-202.

¹²² E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 130.

¹²³ Wharton wrote that, upon her family's return to New York in 1872, after having spent six years in Europe, she "was to enter into the kingdom of my father's library. (...) In my father's day, these libraries still existed, though they were often only a background (...) I pause on its threshold, averting my eyes from the monstrous oak mantel supported on the heads of vizored knights, and looking past them at the rows of handsome bindings and familiar names. The library probably did not contain more than seven or eight hundred volumes. (...) I could at any moment visualize the books contained in those low oak bookcases." E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, pp. 43-65. She would write a more detailed description in 1937, when she started planning a sequel to *A Backward Glance*; the article she wrote about New York in her childhood years was published only in 1938, a few months after her death. In our New York house, (...) the books were easily accommodated in a small room on the ground floor which my father used as his study. This room was lined with low bookcases where, behind glass doors, languished the younger son's meagre portion of a fine old family library. The walls were hung with a handsome wallpaper imitating the green damask of the curtains, and as the Walter Scott tradition still lingered, and there was felt to be some obscure (perhaps Faustian) relation between the Middle Ages and culture, this sixteen-foot-square room in a New York house was furnished with a huge oak mantelpiece sustained by vizored knights, who repeated themselves at the angles of a monumental table". In Edith Wharton, *Uncollected Critical Essays, Edited, With an Introduction by Frederick Wegener*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 282.

¹²⁴ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 151.

Lincoln, the library shelves are filled with elegant leather bindings, the contents of which are nothing more than cheap thrillers.¹²⁵”

Books were presented by Wharton and Codman not as merely decorative objects; they were likened to “human companions¹²⁶”, to be treated as a means to expand one’s horizons and culture, to acquire knowledge, to quicken one’s intellect, much in the sense Wharton used to consider her own reading experience, which, in her words, put her in touch with great minds, whom she called her “Awakeners”¹²⁷. Where they had to share space with other objects for lack of space, Wharton and Codman were reasonably tolerant; however, in the case of a house equipped with a library, their rules are quite clear and final: nothing has to come between the reader (or the occasional guest of the room) and the books, in terms of objects or decoration which may avert the eye from them. Above all, no small objects were to be admitted in the library, as “nowhere is the modern litter of knick-knacks and photographs more inappropriate than in the library.¹²⁸” The books themselves are the principal adornment of the library: “...it seems needful to point out how obvious and valuable a means of decoration is lost by disregarding the outward appearance of books. (...) Ordinary bindings of half morocco or vellum form an expanse of warm lustrous color...¹²⁹”.

Over-decorating the library, the authors imply, not only takes the focus away from its main feature, it also makes it hard for people to enjoy the company of a good book in a relaxed, informal atmosphere: “Even the visitor might be thought entitled to the solace of a few books; but as all the tables in the room are littered with knick-knacks, it is difficult for the most philanthropic hostess to provide even this slight alleviation.¹³⁰” Still, today’s reader may infer from the content of this chapter that even where there was no need to cut on space in the planning of a house, the owner was more concerned with the outward appearance of the room than with its content: like the rest of the house, it had to convey a sense of opulence, as clearly conveyed by this remark: “The general decoration of the library should be of such character as to form a background or setting to the books, rather than to distract attention from them. The richly adorned room in which books are but a minor incident is, in fact, no library at all.¹³¹”

¹²⁵ Pauline Metcalf, *Ogden Codman, Jr., Architect-Decorator: Elegance Without Excess*, Master Thesis of the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning – Columbia University, 1978, p. 63. The copy of Metcalf’s Master Thesis I was able to consult is at the Boston Athenæum. My research has also brought me “face to face” with Codman’s own copy of *The Decoration of Houses*, which is kept with the Codman Papers at the Historic New England Society, Box 116, Fol. 1900: it is indeed beautifully bound in peacock-blue leather, with the title printed in golden letters on the spine; the inside covers are lined with gold-and-blue marble paper, with an elaborate golden frame. The text has not been marked anywhere.

¹²⁶ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 146.

¹²⁷ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, pp. 72 and 91.

¹²⁸ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 150.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

The need for an improvement in America's wealthiest class's approach to culture was sorely felt especially by Wharton, who looked disapprovingly at the negligent attitude most millionaires kept toward those social graces and obligations she remembered as forming the basic requirements of "the complex art of civilized living"¹³². Thus the following remark, aside from the customary, apparently condescending tone of the authors, conveys their dismay at the lack of momentum behind the advancement of culture, which fails to keep pace with the growth of the millionaires' incomes:

"In America the great private library is still so much a thing of the future that its treatment need not be discussed in detail. Few of the large houses lately built in the United States contain a library in the serious meaning of the term; but it is to be hoped that the next generation of architects will have wider opportunities in this direction."¹³³

A voice quite like Codman and Wharton's can be heard also in Cook's advice on the furnishing of houses, as regards books in general and libraries in particular: he, too, maintained that books were to be situated in accessible spots throughout the house, and was a strong proponent of their use as an invaluable decorative device – "The books, with their various bindings and their varied shapes, make a handsomer wainscoting than can be else designed, and one that gives force and richness to the decoration of the wall above."¹³⁴

Cook's views on the intellectual companionship offered by books comes close to Wharton and Codman's words, too, as expressed in this sentence, where he motivates his concern that they be made accessible to the house's inmates: "For lovers of books, (...) a house without books is no house at all; and in a family where books make a great part of the pleasure of living, they must be where they can be got at without trouble, and, what is of more importance, where they can share in the life about them and receive some touches of the humanity they supply and feed."¹³⁵

However, true to his aim, as expressed in the second chapter of *The House Beautiful*,¹³⁶ Cook writes a few pages further: "There will often be a few books – rare editions in costly bindings – that are to be locked up, and not to be exposed to promiscuous handling; but these are not really books – they are bric-à-brac, curios, and no true lover of books would care to have many of them in his possession."¹³⁷ One can easily imagine Wharton's reply to such words, given her and Codman's

¹³² E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 60.

¹³³ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 151.

¹³⁴ Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful*, Mineola, NY., Dover Publications, Inc., 1995, p. 168.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³⁶ Chapter II – The Living-Room contains the rather emphatic sentence, in reference to the use of the term "Parlor": "As these chapters are not written for rich people's reading, and as none but rich people can afford to have a room in their houses set apart for the pleasures of idleness, nothing would be gained by talking about such rooms." In C. Cook, *The House Beautiful*, p. 45.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

opinion on the current quality of book-printing¹³⁸; the more so since she and Codman included a respectful handling of books as a means to accustom children to the appreciation of valuable objects¹³⁹.

The chapter on School-Room and Nurseries has been unfavourably commented by some reviewers of the book, who were quick to point out that neither author had a child of his/her own. It proves quite illuminating, however, in respect to what had been Wharton's upbringing and her much-analyzed refusal of the Victorian code of aesthetics seen by Wharton's biographers as her way of countering her mother's far-reaching influence in her life¹⁴⁰.

The first major point contained in the chapter deals with the necessity of treating the children's room not as if they were people of limited understanding, but rather with a special regard for their sensibility: "The æsthetic sensibilities wake early in some children, and these, if able to analyze their emotions, could testify to what suffering they have been subjected by the habit of sending to school-room and nurseries whatever furniture is too ugly or threadbare to be used in any other part of the house."¹⁴¹ "Ugly" refers certainly to a subjective concept, and, as remarked earlier, the word had been much used by Wharton in connection with the aspect of New York in her childhood, or of a particular house. As pertaining to the domain of the qualification of visual stimuli, it is here analyzed in relation with the emotional responses it engenders in the children's tender imagination: Wharton and Codman assert the right of a child to be exposed to objects whose pleasant appearance is paired with a real artistic value.

The idea according to which the house is not only an outward expression of its inhabitants' personality, but at the same time plays an important role in shaping their character and lives had been dealt with in several previous American books on architecture, including those of Downing and Beecher, who in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* had discussed the element of design from an educational perspective. Design, as the immediately perceptible aesthetic value seen in any object, could have a powerful influence on younger household members, as well as contribute to the education of all the inmates of a house in "refinement, intellectual development, and moral

¹³⁸ Wharton and Codman state matter-of-factly that "the modern book is too often merely the cheapest possible vehicle for putting words into print." In E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 148.

¹³⁹ "A well-designed bookcase with glass doors is a valuable factor in the training of children. It teaches a respect for books by showing that they are thought worthy of care; and a child is less likely to knock about and damage a book which must be taken from and restored to such a bookcase, than one which, after being used, is thrust back on an open shelf. (...) the better a book is bound the more carefully it will be handled." In E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁰ R. W. B. Lewis, in his presentation of Wharton and Codman's book, draws the following conclusions: "on a certain level, *The Decoration of Houses* is a paying off of scores against the physical surroundings Edith had grown up in and perhaps against her mother as their creator. (...) The cramped, crowded house of West Twenty-third Street (...) becomes the model of the cold, ugly, uncomfortable cluttered habitation the book was written to oppose." In R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton, A Biography*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁴¹ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 173.

responsibility¹⁴².” In 1856, a book titled *Villas and Farm Cottages*, written by Henry W. Cleveland, William Backus, and Samuel D. Backus, asserted that “the dwellings of men often exert a powerful influence on their habits and character”; Cook’s *The House Beautiful* expressed a similar idea, albeit associated with a different room: “I look upon this living-room as an important agent in the education of life; it will make a great difference to the children who grow up in it (...) whether it be a beautiful and cheerful room, or a homely and bare one, or merely a formal and conventional one.¹⁴³”

The educational principles expounded by Wharton and Codman may sound too detached from real-life parental concerns; however, the authors never meant to introduce new educational theories. As with the rest of the book, the main issue is a child’s aesthetic perception of his/her environment, which must be shaped by adults in order that the child may be able to form “a habit of observation and comparison that are the base of all sound judgment.¹⁴⁴” Thus parents are encouraged to expose children to the best examples of European art, possibly to be situated in the school-room following a rotating schedule: children, like adults, are to be spared the multitudinous decorative devices which too often make rooms uncomfortable. Simplicity is the rule also in the school-room, the more so since, if left to their own devices, parents would be apt to crowd the children’s quarters with all sorts of inappropriate things: “...the countless objects ‘too good to throw away’ but too ugly to be tolerated by grown-up eyes – the bead-work cushions that have ‘associations’, the mildewed Landseer prints of foaming, dying animals, the sheep-faced Madonna and Apostles in bituminous draperies, commemorating a paternal visit to Rome in the days when people bought copies of the ‘Old Masters’.¹⁴⁵”

The question of developing taste and art appreciation in children is closely linked with the content of the last chapter of *The Decoration of Houses*, which deals with the effective but dangerously vague definition of “bric-à-brac”. As a collective noun indicating a multitude of differently characterized artistic objects, Wharton and Codman remark at the chapter’s opening, it proves inadequate; the authors stress the fact that, from an exquisitely linguistic point of view, the French had solved the problem by using three terms, so as to put what Americans ordinarily call knick-knacks in an appropriate scale according to their quality. It is interesting to note that, even after offering a comparison between the terms in both English and French, Wharton and Codman found

¹⁴² J. Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, pp. 182 and 198.

¹⁴³ C. Cook, *The House Beautiful*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁴ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

it necessary to make clear what the English term denotes: “knick-knacks – defined by Stormonth as ‘articles of small value’.¹⁴⁶”

According to Wharton and Codman the employment of knick-knacks to decorate the house was a hazardous enterprise; *The Decoration of Houses* had repeatedly stressed the fact that, in the presence of a room planned according to sound architectural principles, where the main lines followed a balanced conception and the useful articles such as furniture, lamps, clocks, fire-screens, and bindings had been carefully selected with a conscientious adherence to a chosen style, very little was needed in terms of added decorative objects. The “indiscriminate amassing of ornaments¹⁴⁷” was seen by Wharton and Codman as a too-common practice, to be discouraged on grounds of unsuitability and bad taste.

The subject of knick-knacks was closely related, in the authors’ view, not only to decoration, but to issues such as art collecting, advertising techniques, mass-production and quality of the manufactured objects, ultimately touching upon the question of education and competence.

The passion for collecting artistic objects, the authors remarked, was at least as old as the Roman empire; the question was: was the collecting done by a serious connoisseur, or did it just answer a more prosaic need, such as a quest for social prestige? From yet another point of view, the question is charged with the aspect of the responsibility of the “rich people” referred to in the Introduction: their example is followed by many people, who replicate, on a smaller scale, the luxurious abodes pictured in the newspapers or described by reporters on the frequent occasions the leisure class amuses itself on a grand scale. Their much publicized art collection set standards, engendered fashion fads, lured people with much smaller means into believing that the display of innumerable objects was a mark of good taste and higher education.

Wharton and Codman put in very plain and forcible language their denunciation of the abuses brought on by ignorance, mass-production and the subtle advertising techniques through which the manufacturers were able to manoeuvre their clients’ taste. They urged their readers not to fall prey to the easy charm of an insidiously suave language, as is exemplified in this passage:

“It is well, as a rule, to shun the decorative schemes concocted by the writers who supply our newspapers with hints for ‘artistic interiors’, the use of such poetic adjectives as jonquil-yellow, willow-green, shell-pink, or ashes-of-roses, gives to these descriptions of the ‘unique boudoir’ or ‘ideal summer room’ a charm which the reality would probably not possess. The arrangements suggested are usually cheap devices based upon the mistaken idea that defects in structure or design may be remedied by an overlaying of colour or ornament. This theory often leads to the spending of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

much more money than would have been required to make one or two changes in the plan of the room, and the result is never satisfactory to the fastidious.”¹⁴⁸

The purchaser is further urged on to take charge in the all-pervasive mechanism of demand and offer, since the manufacturers’ production of goods is ultimately determined by the market’s demand: “It is not the maker but the purchaser who sets the standard; and there will never be any general supply of better furniture until people take time to study the subject...”¹⁴⁹”

The same held true for knick-knacks, which were seen as *objets d’art* by those who would not admit to their inferior quality in terms of artistic value; like all furniture styles “disfiguring so many of our shop windows”, currently produced knick-knacks were described as “showy rubbish forming the stock-in-trade of the average ‘antiquity’ dealer.”¹⁵⁰ Dealers played further on the aspect of good taste, which seemed to be warranted by an exorbitant price tag; charging prices equivalent to those of hand-made objects for machine-made bric-à-brac was a particularly deplorable custom in the eyes of Codman and Wharton, who wrote: “...cheapness and trashiness are (...) synonymous (...) in the case of the modern knick-knacks. To buy, and even to make, it may cost a great deal of money; but artistically it is cheap, if not worthless; and too often its artistic value is in inverse ratio to its price.”¹⁵¹”

The modern knick-knack’s artistic value, Codman and Wharton wrote, was much lowered by its being machine-made; throughout the book they underlined the superiority of hand-made articles to those produced by the thousands in factories, especially since the working techniques employed by artisans, handed down through many generations, were considered more reliable, thus guaranteeing a more durable product. Mass production, which meant a speeding-up of the production process, had forced manufacturers to adopt techniques which gave the finished product an appearance quite like the hand-made one, without possessing the qualities it derived from longer production times, or simply from different production techniques. The following passage illustrated their point with great effectiveness:

“Two causes connected with the change in processes have contributed to the debasement of bibelots: the substitution of machine for hand-work has made possible the unlimited reproduction of works of art; and the resulting demand for cheap knick-knacks has given employment to a multitude of untrained designers (...). It is an open question how much the mere possibility of unlimited reproduction detracts from the intrinsic value of an object of art.”¹⁵²

Unfortunately, until their clients acquired a more thorough competence in the field, manufacturers would not modify a production system which did everything in its power, at least

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 186

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 191.

according to the authors of *The Decoration of Houses*, to foster ignorance by sometimes providing inaccurate reproductions of good models, but more often by producing “that worst curse of modern civilization – cheap copies of costly horrors.”¹⁵³ Wharton and Codman took care to add, in the Conclusion, a recommendation to the effect of prompting their audience to read further on, either taking their cue from some of the titles provided in the opening pages, or by looking for specialized publications: “...this book is merely a sketch, intended to indicate the lines along which further study may profitably advance.”¹⁵⁴

Nor was careful study reserved to a hypothetical bourgeois reader, who wished to improve on his material surroundings by taking as examples the architectural wonders built for the wealthy class. Wharton and Codman were only too glad to remind the latter group of the responsibilities which came with a privileged position. High society, they felt, was too crowded with “new money”, who entered it thanks to a quick rise, which seemed to exempt them from the inherited obligations of the gentlemen of leisure of olden days. They both referred to their ancestors’ time even though apparently dealing with the Italian Renaissance, when they wrote about “a mellower civilization - of days when rich men were patrons of ‘the arts of elegance,’ and when collecting beautiful objects was one of the obligations of a noble leisure. (...) The man who wishes to possess objects of art must have not only the means to acquire them, but the skill to choose them – a skill made up of cultivation and judgment, combined with that feeling for beauty that no study can give, but that study alone can quicken and render profitable. Only time and experience can acquaint one with those minor peculiarities marking the successive ‘manners’ of a master (...). Such knowledge is acquired at the cost of great pains and of frequent mistakes;”¹⁵⁵

Wharton and Codman did not presume to provide their readers with a list of the “all time best”, even in terms of bric-à-brac; their polite respect for each person’s apprenticeship in matters of taste was a clear indication that they appreciated all honest efforts carried out in order to broaden one’s horizon, to increase one’s competence. Contrary to Cook’s book, *The Decoration of Houses* did not offer the reader a list of the manufacturers or the stores where he/she would find the faithful reproductions of the objects as seen in the newspapers; it drew inspiration from architectural precedents which had proved, through the centuries, to possess those elements of style in such a perfect combination so as to show their pre-eminence even after several centuries. The precedents Wharton and Codman cited, mostly from France and Italy, the countries in which they judged that the art of house-building had reached its highest expression, have lost none of

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 187.

their architectural appeal: indeed, neither will it be found that their sound precepts lost any of their value.

Chapter III

House interiors as physical and emotional surroundings and their relationship with the characters in Edith Wharton's fiction

Edith Wharton has been called “the poet of house-decoration” by Edmund Wilson, who no doubt meant to underline in a facetious way the frequent interior descriptions the writer included in her fiction. Wharton's sensitive eye has been recognized by all her critics who, in different measure, have attributed to it a primary function in providing the reader with as much information as possible not only on her characters' personalities, but on their emotional responses to the aesthetic elements of the background against which the action is set.

Wharton was undoubtedly behind the parallels drawn in the text of *The Decoration of Houses* between literature and architecture; she succeeded, through some well-chosen similes, to further illustrate her point, and made a very persuasive case for the rules she and Codman meant to uphold. One such instance is found at the beginning of the book, where the two authors meant to counter the influence of “fashion” and of the increasingly aggressive advertising techniques, which decreed that styles had to be original, in order to express a house owner's strong individuality. Wharton and Codman chose a firm and logic line of reasoning: in defining originality in art, thought, or literature, they stressed the importance of the principles which had been “proved by experience to be necessary¹⁵⁶”. That writers had to move between boundaries represented, as is the case in poetry, by the laws of rhythm, had never prevented anyone from creating new poems, nor from conjuring new daring images: “in poetry, originality consists not in discarding the necessary laws of rhythm, but in finding new rhythms within the limits of those laws (...) Thus all good architecture and good decoration (...) must be based on rhythm and logic.¹⁵⁷”

Whether or not Wharton had already consciously made the momentous decision to engage in a career as an artist, a writer, *The Decoration of Houses* shows that, in many of the principles she and Codman chose to present to their public, a search had begun on her part: already in the short stories which had been published by 1897 Wharton was trying to find her voice, her subject, the exact tuning of the instrument which she would develop into a tool with deep analytical powers.

In order to understand the elements at work to shape her mind at that time, we must rush forward to 1925, the year in which Wharton put into a small book, *The Writing of Fiction*, her own

¹⁵⁶ p. 9

¹⁵⁷ p. 10

considerations upon what her craft had become, and her explanation of the writing techniques which were most suitable for the different genres. Thus the reader discovers that the relationship she had developed with each book had led her to partake of a spiritual communion with the author; *The Writing of Fiction* was Wharton's love-story with literature, observed through her extremely clear sight, which was not blinded by the passion or the enchantment of her first approach to books, but which could judge of their merits and faults through a long familiarity with the subject.

Wharton's debt to French literature is acknowledged at length in this book, but what is mostly of interest, in light of the importance of physical backgrounds descriptions in her fiction, is that she seemed to have grasped from her first approach to literature the inter-connection existing between the characters and their milieu, and had consciously chosen to adhere to the scientific and aesthetic principles which stressed the effects that places have on well-being. She particularly praised Balzac for having been "the first not only to see his people, physically and morally, in their habit as they lived, (...) but to draw his dramatic action as much from the relation of his characters to their houses, streets, towns, professions, inherited habits and opinions, as from their fortuitous contacts with each other."¹⁵⁸ Wharton did follow in her fictions the naturalistic principles set forth in the great French novels of Zola, Maupassant, Flaubert, and stressed again the importance of the novelty brought to literature by Balzac and Stendhal: the fact that they viewed "each character first of all as a product of particular material and social conditions, as being thus or thus because of the calling he pursued or the house he lived in (Balzac)..."¹⁵⁹

It is interesting to note that, as she had made references to literature in *The Decoration of Houses* when she needed to draw a comparison that would help to clarify a debatable instance, so, too, where fiction is concerned, she frequently resorts to architectural or decoration metaphors, as when she wishes to give an effective illustration of the expression "economy of material". True to the principles of simplicity and moderation, she scolds those beginners, who insert into their fiction a multiplicity of minor episodes or elements, which have the effect of weighing down the story's structure the way bric-à-brac crowds a room's furniture: "Most beginners crowd into their work twice as much material (...) as it needs. The reluctance to look deeply enough into a subject leads to the indolent habit of decorating its surface."¹⁶⁰

The same principle holds true for the number of characters to be inserted in a short story or a novel; young writers, Wharton writes, possibly reminiscing about her own literary beginnings, have a tendency to crowd "their scene with supernumeraries. The temptation is specially great in composing the novel of manners. (...) how avoid a crowded stage? The answer is, by choosing as

¹⁵⁸ Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction*, New York, Touchstone-Simon and Schuster, 1997, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43

principal characters figures so typical that each connotes a whole section of the social background. It is unnecessary characters who do the crowding, who confuse the reader by uselessly dispersing his attention.” This last sentence is particularly close to the last paragraphs of the chapter on Bric-à-brac, where Wharton and Codman underline the importance of a careful choice of the artistic objects which will become the main feature of a room: a multiplication of knick-knacks distracts the observer’s eye from the fundamental lines of a room the way an overcrowded story prevents the reader from grasping the scope of the author’s vision, laid out in the main narrative line. Another unwanted side effect of “the Western passion for multiplying effects¹⁶¹” is the lessened effect of each separate object in the aspect of the room’s presentation (in house decoration) and in a somewhat less immediately perceptible importance of a character in the overall narrative scheme.

Analogies between literature and architecture allowed Wharton to compare the novel to a monument, or to a large-scale building; her choice of words was not incidental: the chapter on this form of narrative is titled “Constructing a Novel”, where the verb seems to further bring the two disciplines together. As in the planning and decoration of a building, so in the construction of the novel, according to Wharton, the sense of proportion is paramount: a great subject requires space in order to be allowed a harmonious development, the way a distinguished house needs to be planned along the lines of noble proportions. Again, in literature like in architecture, she acknowledged her debt to France, naming Balzac and Flaubert among the masters, those literary equivalents to Viollet-le-Duc or D’Aviler.

By 1924, the year in which *The Writing of Fiction* was published, Wharton had established a reputation also as a ghost-story writer¹⁶²; her supernatural subjects, always placed against ordinary backgrounds, drew much of their relief from her ability to introduce progressively and naturally disturbing elements in a seemingly normal life routine. A writer needed to be persuasive, she wrote, in order that the reader may effortlessly believe these types of stories: “You may ask your reader to believe anything you can *make* him believe,¹⁶³” is a concept which, many years earlier, had already found expression in one of *The Decoration of Houses*’ analogies about the supposed unsuitability of the use of some device in order to trick the eye into an overall impression of symmetry. Wharton and Codman showed no hesitation in approving of the use of *trompe l’oeil* or concealed doors, which did not meet with unanimous approval: “As in imaginative literature the author may present to his reader as possible anything that he has the talent to make the reader accept, so in decorative art the

¹⁶¹ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 195.

¹⁶² Among her gothic short stories are *The Duchess at Prayer* (1901), *The Moving Finger* (1901), *The House of the Dead Hand* (1904), *The Other Two* (1904), *The Lady’s Maid’s Bell* (1904), and *The Eyes* (1910)

¹⁶³ E. Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction*, p. 30.

artist is justified in presenting to the eye whatever his skill can devise to satisfy its requirements¹⁶⁴”.

The architect, Wharton seemed to say, was as much an artist as a novelist: the effect obtained by the best in their works, even though they may have had to resort to unorthodox methods or tools, was to be admired, not judged from any point of view that may be extraneous to art: “The decorator is not a chemist or a physiologist; it is part of his mission, not to explain illusions, but to produce them.”

Wharton’s analogies between house-building and literature touched also upon the formative process, which worked in a like manner through a person’s familiarity with the finest works each field has produced. The prospective architect was encouraged to study the best models in order to develop a sure eye and a fine skill in the adaptation of those models; where a person’s response to good literature was concerned, Wharton and Codman were firmly convinced that an equivalent “study of the best model” was to be started as early as possible, regardless that he or she may choose to become a writer. The chapter on School-room and nurseries is revealing in that it very likely contains Wharton’s hints at what her own childhood reading habits had been, under her mother’s supervision, and also her considerations on what early educational method might produce: “A child brought up on foolish story-books could hardly be expected to enjoy *The Knight’s Tale* or the *Morte d’Arthur* without some slight initiation into the nature and meaning of good literature; and to pass from a house full of ugly furniture , badly designed wall-papers and worthless knick-knacks to a hurried contemplation of the Venus de Milo or of a model of the Parthenon is not likely to produce the desired results. The daily intercourse with poor pictures, trashy ornaments, and badly designed furniture may, indeed, be fittingly compared with a mental diet of silly and ungrammatical story-books.¹⁶⁵”

There is a revealing episode Wharton chose to relate in her autobiography; it is a childhood episode which she seemed to make light of, and it significantly dealt with her first attempt at sketching a story. Apparently she had started writing some scrap of fiction, and had thought of showing it to her mother and of asking her opinion: “My first attempt (at the age of eleven) was a novel, which began: ‘Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Brown?’ said Mrs. Tompkins. ‘If only I had known you were going to call I should have tidied up the drawing-room.’ Timorously I submitted this to my mother, and never shall I forget the sudden drop of my creative frenzy when she returned it with the icy comment: ‘Drawing-rooms are always tidy.’¹⁶⁶” It may be seen as a consequence of Wharton’s reaction to that forbidding remark, that drawing-rooms were often described as

¹⁶⁴ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁶⁵ E. Wharton, O. Codman, *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 175.

¹⁶⁶ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 73.

“dreary” places in *The Decoration of Houses*; to Wharton and Codman, actually “the American drawing-room (...) often fails to fulfil its purpose as a family apartment.”

It is very likely that Wharton had operated a superimposition between her mother’s stern personality, her lack of expansiveness and the look of the most representative room in her parents’ house, the one in which social intercourse took place: rooms which were always supposed to look prim and immaculate closely resembled society ladies constantly keeping up a perfect appearance.

Wharton’s mother, Lucretia Jones, was remembered by her youngest child as “the best-dressed woman in New York¹⁶⁷”; some details of her house interiors were vividly portrayed by her daughter, such as the upstairs “white-and-gold” drawing-room, with tufted purple satin arm-chairs, and voluminous purple satin curtains festooned with buttercup yellow fringe¹⁶⁸. Here sometimes the ladies would retire for a quiet after-dinner conversation, while the men remained in the dining-room to enjoy their liqueurs and cigars; often it was the background for after-dinner visits, during which “the lonely little girl that I was remained in the drawing-room later than her usual bedtime, and the kindly whiskered gentlemen encouraged her to join in the mild talk.¹⁶⁹”

Wharton particularly remembered that her parents, like most well-to-do New Yorkers who invariably brought home from Europe works of art and antiques, had displayed in their house a copy of the fashionable Domenichino, which “darkened the walls of our dining-room”, and a Mary Magdalen, which, “minutely reproduced on copper, graced the drawing-room table (which was of Louis Philippe buhl, with ornate brass heads at the angles).¹⁷⁰” The drawing-room’s content did not escape her criticism; two elements, in particular, were to be denounced in *The Decoration of Houses* as expressions of poor taste, albeit decreed by contemporary fashion: the excessive draperies hung around the windows, and the inordinate display of bric-à-brac.

The superimposition of multiple layers of muslin and heavy curtains would forever remind Wharton of the “layers of under-garments worn by the ladies of the period and even, alas, by the little girls¹⁷¹”, and this analogy struck her so deeply that she would haughtily dictate, in *The Decoration of Houses*, that this sort of window-dressing was to be avoided, as “lingerie effects do not combine well with architecture.¹⁷²” A personal note was struck where bibelots were concerned, as Wharton’s disapproval for the inordinate amassing of these objects combined with her memories of her mother’s generation’s limited knowledge about art: in all brownstone drawing-rooms a

¹⁶⁷ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁶⁹ E. Wharton, *A Little Girl’s New York*, in *The Uncollected Critical Writings, Edited, With an Introduction by Frederick Wegener*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 283.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁷² E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 72.

prominent spot was reserved for a cabinet in which the house bric-à-brac was on display. Wharton's reminiscence of the contents of many such cabinets made her sigh, "Oh, that bric-à-brac! Our mothers, who prided themselves on the contents of these cabinets, really knew about only two artistic productions-old lace and old painted fans. (...) But as to the other arts universal ignorance prevailed, and the treasures displayed in the wealthiest houses were no better than those of the average brownstone-dweller."¹⁷³

Within her circumscribed sphere of action, her own and her husband's house, Wharton made visible changes, which expressed no more than a natural desire to shape one's own living space to his/her own taste, but which were perceived by members of the earlier generation as insubordination, where not an open threat to tradition. The clash between different generations, especially seen through groups of women trying to uphold and defend their inherited standards from the "attack" of new generations of daughters, nieces, daughters-in-law was a theme Wharton often introduced in her novels of manners. Apparently there was no worst injury for a society matron than to have a younger woman settle into her house and reset the family jewels or redecorate the rooms. Her own recollection gives the modern reader an inkling of the nature of the arguments she must have been likely to enter during her early marital life: "...among the many things I did which pained and scandalized my Bostonian mother-in-law, she was not least shocked by the banishment from our house in the country of all the thicknesses of muslin which should have intervened between ourselves and the robins on the lawn."¹⁷⁴

The theme of an attempt to translate one's own personality into the arrangement of the surrounding physical space was particularly felt by Wharton in relation with the female condition, as a woman's sphere of action and influence, even in society's higher strata, often limited itself to the house, which became a visible extension of the mistress of the family's character: its finishing touches, its management would clearly convey to her social circle her particular gifts or skills. It was understandable that a woman resented sharply another feminine intrusion into what she had toiled to shape in her own image.

Wharton doubtless referred to such emotionally-charged situations, along with the social norms which taught a passive reverence for long-established domestic habits, when she inserted the following sentence in *The Decoration of Houses*: "Everyone is unconsciously tyrannized over by the wants of others (...) The unsatisfactory relations of some people with their rooms are often to be

¹⁷³ E. Wharton, *A Little Girl's New York*, in *The Uncollected Critical Writings*, p. 277. In the same essay, Wharton recalled an episode in which an embarrassed Lucretia, after proudly showing to a visiting Italian minister the collection of Italian china at her Newport house, realized from his excessively appreciative comments that her Ginori wares were ordinary pottery specimens. Wharton thought the humiliation a salutary lesson, which subsequently restricted the scope of her mother's shopping; however, as Wharton herself reflected, her mother "was far worse than a collector-she was a born 'shopper'." In the previously cited *Edith Wharton – Uncollected Critical Essays*, p. 282.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

explained in this way. (...) It is only an unconscious extension of the conscious habit which old-fashioned people have of clinging to their parents' way of living.¹⁷⁵”

Wharton started introducing these reflections in her earliest New York novels, but before the first of them, *The House of Mirth* (1905), and even before the theoretical considerations contained in *The Decoration of Houses*, she had written a short story which contained a striking simile between the female personality and the outlay of a house. The story, titled *The Fulness of Life*, was printed in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1893, and its principal character, a dead woman whose soul is offered the chance to find its true soul mate in the after-life, closely reflected Wharton's emotional situation after eight years of marriage, which would lead her to experience a series of nervous breakdowns between 1895 and 1898¹⁷⁶. Wharton would later “disown” this story, as she judged it an expression of “the excesses of youth”, and called it “one long shriek¹⁷⁷”, but it remains as a clear indication of what her crushed hopes must have meant to her, and it expresses the degree to which her sensitivity was attuned to her physical surroundings. The much-quoted analogy has the dead woman's soul speak these words:

“I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a house full of rooms; there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.”

“And your husband,” asked the Spirit (...) “never got beyond the family sitting-room?”

“Never, (...) he was quite content to remain there. He thought it perfectly beautiful, and sometimes, when he was admiring its commonplace furniture, insignificant as the chairs and tables of a hotel parlor, I felt like crying out to him: ‘Fool, will you never guess that close at hand are rooms full of treasures and wonders, such as the eye of man hath not seen, rooms that no step has crossed, but that might be yours to live in, could you but find the handle of the door?’ (...)”¹⁷⁸

There is a disconcerting element in such a description, and it regards the “commonplace furniture” of the family sitting-room; it seemed as if Wharton had already drawn a definite parallel between the distinct social functions people were expected to carry out in each room of the house and the different sides of one's personality to be put forth according to the person one was dealing

¹⁷⁵ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁶ More details on these episodes of depression, which were at the time diagnosed as “neurasthenia”, and for which Wharton was treated by celebrated Philadelphia physician Silas Weir Mitchell, are contained in R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton – A Biography*, pp. 76, 82-84; Shari Benstock, *No Gifts From Chance – A Biography of Edith Wharton*, pp. 93-95, and H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, pp. 78-80.

¹⁷⁷ The definitions were included in Wharton's letter of 19 July 1898 to her Scribner's editor, Edward Burlingame, and are quoted in R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton – A Biography*, p. 65, S. Benstock, *No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994, p. 72, and H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 160. A clue as to *The Fulness of Life's* close resemblance to Wharton's emotional situation was the fact that she never allowed it to be reprinted during her lifetime.

¹⁷⁸ E. Wharton, *The Fulness of Life*, in *Edith Wharton-Collected Stories, 1891-1910*, New York, The Library of America, 2001, pp. 14-15.

with. The “social” rooms of the house were thus distinct from the “family” rooms, much as the intellectual and emotional expressions one reserved for casual or socially-imposed acquaintances was completely separate from those reserved for members of the immediate family. If so, one wonders, why consciously encumber one’s soul’s “family-room” with commonplace, insignificant furniture?

Wharton’s view of the platitudes she often heard uttered in high society must have prompted her to write this way, as she considered that doubtless there were people whose minds articulated themselves in a series of increasingly finely decorated rooms, to keep up her analogy, while others had no “private suites of rooms” behind an apparently well-appointed, but ordinarily furnished mind. A mind whose intellectual furniture is likened to that of a hotel parlor draws a dismal but perfect analogy to a person whose ideas are as impersonal as a hotel background, and where, like hotel guests, thoughts do not dwell too long on a certain subject.

The main character in *The Fulness of Life* longs to spend the after-life with her newly found companion, who shares her tastes in house-planning, among other things. The place where they dream of a blissfully shared existence was sketched by Wharton in all-too-concrete details, which reflected her main interests and personal taste, but touched on an involuntary ironic note when applied to such an incorporeal subject as the after-life: “Let us go (...) and make a home for ourselves on some blue hill above the shining river. (...) Have I not always seen it in my dreams? It is white, love, is it not, with polished columns, and a sculptured cornice against the blue? (...) Indoors our favourite pictures hang upon the walls and the rooms are lined with books.”¹⁷⁹

Not all women, however, were endowed by Wharton with this special sensitivity; if she applied this line of reasoning to everyone she knew, she did so particularly with her own mother. The ties between Lucretia and her daughter were not based on a particularly close companionship or on shared interests; even to the last, Wharton reminisced about their incomplete relationship in terms she drew from the architectural field, describing her mother’s detached attitude towards her as a “mysterious impenetrability, a locked room full of bats and darkness.”¹⁸⁰ This gothic image of the most hidden part of a personality, as perceived by one who lived close by, was undoubtedly linked to the gloomy impressions Wharton retained of the interiors of her parents’ house. She kept her childhood Victorian home interior as model for the brownstone interiors in her fiction: like the Archers’ place, in her 1920 novel *The Age of Innocence*, set in 1870’s New York, where the Archers are representatives of the “old guard” and of the social and aesthetic values it stood for.

Newland Archer, the young lawyer whose wedding to May Welland is announced at the book’s opening, feels the multiple strictures his social position subjects him to, and Wharton gives

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹⁸⁰ H. Lee, Edith Wharton, p. 37.

him a sensitivity close to her own in his ability to observe particular shapes and styles; her tastes in books and travel are reflected in this character's thoughts, but ultimately he is not as assertive as the other character in which Wharton has poured part of her enterprising spirit. Ellen Olenska, the cousin of Newland Archer's fiancée, a cultivated American unhappily married to an European nobleman, mirrors the Edith Wharton who shocked her mother-in-law by eliminating from her drawing-room the triple layer of curtains "no self-respecting mistress of a (...) brownstone house could dispense with, when she adds her little personal touches to the interior of an otherwise gloomy brownstone. A scene in which Newland Archer is made to wait for her in her drawing-room gives Wharton the chance to describe the subtle changes Olenska has brought to the room, which has become "something intimate, 'foreign', subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments"¹⁸¹ – it is still a brownstone drawing-room, hung with damask as was the fashion, and with the expected pictures of the "Italian" school, but the inmate's personality and taste have taken a concrete shape in the particular arrangement of the furniture and the choice of the Italian paintings, which are not the customary ones, and bewilder Archer, as "they were like nothing that he was accustomed to look at (...) when he travelled in Italy."¹⁸²

Archer's character, however, is not as assertive as Olenska; as regards the style of the house he is supposed to move in with his new bride, he shows a streak of passive acquiescence, which ultimately leads him into all his decisions. When he tries to imagine what his own house will look like, there is nothing of the excited anticipation ordinarily felt by someone who has a chance to build his future, and not just metaphorically, beside a loved one; on the contrary, he

"felt that his fate was sealed. For the rest of his life he would go up every evening between the cast-iron railings of that greenish-yellow doorstep, and pass through a Pompeian vestibule into a hall with a wainscoting of varnished yellow wood. (...) He knew the drawing-room above had a bay-window, but he could not fancy how May would deal with it. She submitted cheerfully to the purple satin and yellow tuftings of the Welland drawing-room, to its sham Buhl tables and gilt vitrines full of modern Saxe. He saw no reason to suppose that she would want anything different in her house; and his only comfort was to reflect that she would probably let him arrange his library as he pleased-which would be, of course, with 'sincere' Eastlake furniture, and the plain new book-cases without glass-doors."¹⁸³

The "Pompeian vestibule" and the library furniture, which Archer mentally projected in his future home's interior, had been made popular in Wharton's parents' generation by Eastlake's book, where one found the following advice, as regarded the proper decoration for the hall and vestibule: "Where (...) there is plenty of light, the dull red hue, which may still be traced on the

¹⁸¹ E. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, New York, Penguin Books, 1996, p. 69.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70. The Pompeian red vestibule, the Buhl table and the cabinets for the display of collections of lace or china all figured in Wharton's description of her parents' house in *A Little Girl's New York*, pp. 276-277, and 280.

walls of Pompeii, and on the relics of ancient Egypt, will be found an excellent surface colour.¹⁸⁴”

The same Pompeian vestibule had been included by Wharton among the details of a much shabbier house, in her first full-length New York novel, *The House of Mirth* (1905); it forms the background of the last step in Lily Bart’s descent from social grace into a quasi-destitute position. When Lily enters her boarding-house accompanied by Wall Street millionaire Simon Rosedale, it is through the latter’s eyes that the reader observes the dingy interior of the outdated building: “the blistered brown stone front, the windows draped with discoloured lace, and the Pompeian decoration of the muddy vestibule¹⁸⁵” it casts a gloomy, bitter light on a decoration style Wharton had been familiar with since her childhood, which, at the time when the novel was set, had become an obsolete relic of the brownstone era. At the same time it is meant to give a visual equivalent to the depressing emotional state Lily Bart is experiencing in her attempt to manage to achieve a decent lifestyle through her skills, which prove to be insufficient.

The device of describing the interior decoration through a chosen character’s eyes was carefully carried out by Wharton in almost every one of her novels; she would explain this method in *The Writing of Fiction* by employing again an architectural metaphor: “It should be the story-teller’s first care to choose this reflecting mind deliberately, as one would choose a building-site, or decide upon the orientation of one’s house, and when this is done, to live inside the mind chosen,¹⁸⁶”. The interiors in which Wharton’s characters acted, moved, lived were thus depicted in numerous descriptive passages through a mimetic process, which underlined these physical environments’ importance as relevant data: they were instrumental in helping the reader to define the character’s personality, his/her moral perspective.

In *The House of Mirth* Wharton “lives inside” Lily Bart’s mind, as regards the character’s sense of style; Lily moves in a wide circle of acquaintances, and her aesthetic responses vary according to her physical surroundings. It is Wharton’s taste, applied to Lily’s character, which comes through

¹⁸⁴ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste*, New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1986, p. 53. Eastlake’s book became extremely popular in America, where nine editions were published between 1872 and 1886. (source: Lesley Hoskins, *The Aesthetic Interior*, in *The House Beautiful – Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior*, Aldershot, Lund Humphries and the Geffrye Museum, 2000, p. 109.

¹⁸⁵ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 229.

¹⁸⁶ E. Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction*, p. 36. On p. 63, Wharton explains the concept further, applying it to the character’s observation of his/her surroundings: “The impression produced by a landscape, a street or a house should always, to the novelist, be an event in the history of a soul, and the use of the “descriptive passage”, and its style, should be determined by the fact that it must depict only what the intelligence concerned would have noticed, and always in terms within the register of that intelligence.”

¹⁸⁶ The nickname “Lily” appeared mostly in the correspondence between Wharton and the Rutherford sisters, Louisa and Margaret, who were among the Jones’ Newport friends and neighbours; in H Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 59, and S. Benstock, *No Gifts from Chance, A Biography of Edith Wharton*, p. 43.

in this novel (interestingly enough, Lily was among Wharton's nicknames as a girl¹⁸⁷), and not surprisingly it reflects many of the principles contained in *The Decoration of Houses*. Lily Bart is an odd specimen, a beautiful 29-year-old woman still unmarried, brought up in a pampered atmosphere, and programmed to be a decorative appendage to a husband with the means to provide her with a life of luxury; until this wealthy provider materializes, however, she is forced to live with Mrs. Peniston, a widowed aunt, whom she resents as much as she dislikes the interiors of her opulent house.

Wharton endowed Lily with a visual taste close to her own, but unsupported by her cultural experiences; her taste is an instinctive necessity, the visual stimuli she needs in order to thrive are of a high aesthetic order, but her appreciation of beauty, proportion and harmony are nothing like those of the author of *The Decoration of Houses*. Wharton expressed through this character her opinions on the subservience to a style which ruled her parents' generation, on the excesses of the nouveaux riches, whose ignorance and ambition were openly displayed in over-ornate palaces, on the striking differences between the housing facilities of working people and those of the privileged class, and on the recklessness of those who lived beyond their means. However, her reflector seems to be one of those precocious children described in *The Decoration of Houses*' "The School-Room and Nurseries", whose aesthetic sensibility has spun out of control and, not being supported by a solid education, or a firmer personality, ultimately takes hold of her rational judgment, and becomes a major symptom in her overall depressing mood.

At the book's opening Lily's dearest wish is to change her aunt's house's furniture, as she jokingly tells Lawrence Selden, the young lawyer she feels the closest affinity with, but whose financial means are decidedly limited: "It must be pure bliss to arrange the furniture just as one likes, and give all the horrors to the ash-man. If I could only do over my aunt's drawing-room I know I should be a better woman."¹⁸⁸ The object of Lily's disapproval is a drawing-room closely resembling the one Wharton described in *A Little Girl's New York*, which the reader is able to visually reconstruct through several descriptive passages: it displays "purple satin curtains, the Dying Gladiator in the window, and the seven-by-five painting of Niagara which represented the one artistic excess of Mr. Peniston's temperate career."¹⁸⁹ Its chandelier is lighted only on social occasions, and it emanates a "cheerless blaze"¹⁹⁰; the fireplace is equally icy, being lit only when there is company; its arm-chairs are covered in glossy purple, an Axminster carpet with "monstrous

¹⁸⁸ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

roses¹⁹¹” covers the floor, the table is the unavoidable buhl piece of furniture, and the mantelpiece serves as a support to display an ormolu clock with “a helmeted Minerva and two malachite vases.¹⁹²” Lily’s impression of this room is one of “glacial neatness¹⁹³”.

The shrouded furniture of the drawing-room is the external expression of a narrow-minded person, someone who obeys traditions through a forced sense of duty, “a looker-on at life,” whose “mind resembled one of those little mirrors which her Dutch ancestors were accustomed to affix to their upper windows, so that from the depths of an impenetrable domesticity they might see what was happening on the street.¹⁹⁴” Such a drawing-room, which not even the smell of cooking is supposed to penetrate, had an immediate precedent in *The Decoration of Houses*:

“Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing-room, (...) too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting-place than the vestibule or the cellar? The windows in this kind of room are invariably supplied with two sets of muslin curtains, one hanging against the panes, the other fulfilling the supererogatory duty of hanging against the former; then come the heavy stuff curtains, so draped as to cut off the upper light of the windows by day, while it is impossible to drop them at night (...) close to the curtain stands the inevitable lamp or jardinière, and the wall-space between the two windows, where a writing-table might be put, is generally taken up by a cabinet or console, surmounted by a picture made invisible by the dark shadow of the hangings. The writing-table might find a place against the side-wall near either window; but these spaces are usually sacred to the piano and to that modern futility, the silver table.¹⁹⁵”

Wharton and Codman had criticized the habit of arranging a drawing-room so that it was “sacred to gilding and discomfort, the best room in the house” but ultimately uninhabitable; no wonder, then, that their verdict had been that the American drawing-room often failed to fulfil its purpose as a family room, and it became a source of expenses frankly inadequate to the time people actually spent in it, as it was “occupied at most for an hour after a ‘company’ dinner.¹⁹⁶” Its “gilt chairs covered with brocade, its *vitrines* full of modern Saxe, its guipure curtains and velvet carpets” characterize it as a “gilded wilderness,¹⁹⁷” a place where an appearance is kept up not only by furniture, but by people, who move, talk and act according to a shared, tacit code.

Mrs. Peniston’s sitting-room, where the old lady metes out her sentence against Lily, after having heard that the girl has indulged in a questionable social pastime like bridge, and her name has been associated with that of a married man, is a smaller version of the drawing-room; in this particular instance it is seen through Lily’s eyes as a court-room, and two decorative elements strike the girl’s imagination during the dramatic scene: the “black satin arm-chair tufted with

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁹⁵ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

yellow buttons” on which Mrs. Peniston sits, and “a bronze box with a miniature of Beatrice Cenci in the lid” (a distant reference to the Mary Magdalene of her parents’ drawing-room, perhaps), sitting on a small table. The box becomes a living object, like many of the things that surround Lily in her moments of crisis: “the pink-eyed smirk of the turbaned Beatrice was associated in her mind with the gradual fading of the smile from Mrs. Peniston’s lips.¹⁹⁸”

Lily’s sense of beauty and fitness is injured whenever ugliness becomes a physical entity: “she was not made for shabby surroundings, for the squalid compromises of poverty. Her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in,¹⁹⁹” but the luxury of Mrs. Peniston’s house is not to her taste, as it is paired with an unsatisfactory human relationship with its owner. The anxiety which seizes Lily when she is confronted with her bedroom in Mrs. Peniston’s house is a projection of her financial worries, of the void Lily feels behind the social intercourse in the milieu in which she is trying to acquire a stronghold, of the lack of a familiar presence beside her, and ultimately of her dislike of her own thoughts, amplified by loneliness: “She had a vision of herself lying on the black walnut bed-and the darkness would frighten her, and if she left the light burning the dreary details of the room would brand themselves forever on her brain. She had always hated her room at Mrs. Peniston’s-its ugliness, its impersonality, the fact that nothing in it was really hers. To a torn heart uncomforted by human nearness a room may open almost human arms, and the being to whom no four walls mean more than any others, is, at such hours, expatriate everywhere. 118”

Wharton introduced a bitterly ironic note in this novel, presenting a character with such definite tastes where decoration is concerned who was not allowed to build her own house, to create her ideal physical environment the way she had just done in real life;²⁰⁰ the issue was closely linked to women’s social role and position, and their ability to achieve financial independence. In Wharton’s fiction apparently the fulfilment of one’s aesthetic wishes was a privilege reserved only to the upper classes, and women who found themselves in an unsettled economic situation, when not downright poverty, were forced to resort to all sorts of devices, in order to secure for themselves the “external finish of life²⁰¹” they were partial to.

Twenty years later, another of Wharton’s character observed through her eyes his architectural surroundings and expressed a sensation of imprisonment close to Lily Bart’s, as he duly conformed to the inherited obligations of his own and his wife’s family in old New York. *The Age of Innocence*, set in the 1870’s, would prove for Wharton yet another means through which she

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., both this and the previous quotation are on p. 135.

¹⁹⁹ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 33.

²⁰⁰ The Whartons had purchased in 1901 a portion of land in the Berkshire hills, in Lenox, and they had built an English Renaissance style villa there, The Mount.

²⁰¹ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 22.

could analyze the society which had shaped her childhood and adolescence; her opinions, as far as her mother's generation's taste in interior decoration, had not changed: the minutely depicted traditional, stifling drawing-rooms of the Archers and the Wellands are a clear replica of Mrs. Peniston's, with even closer personal references.

Mr. Welland's drawing-room is described as a "wilderness of purple satin and malachite,²⁰²" while Mrs. Archer's drawing-room, on the upper floor of the house, contains "a Carcel lamp with an engraved globe, (...) a rosewood work-table with a green silk bag under it."²⁰³ The combined force of the tradition-shaped tastes of the two families will result in a perfect replica of the previous generation's house interiors, when the novel's male protagonist, Newland Archer, marries beautiful and dull May Welland: their house has a Pompeian vestibule, and May's drawing-room is thought a great success. In it "a gilt bamboo jardinière, in which the primulas and cinerarias were punctually renewed, blocked the access to the bay window (where the old-fashioned would have preferred a bronze reduction of the Venus of Milo); the sofas and arm-chairs of pale brocade were cleverly grouped about little plush tables densely covered with silver toys, porcelain animals and efflorescent photograph frames; and tall rosy-shaded lamps shot up like tropical flowers among the palms."²⁰⁴ Most importantly for the reader, in order to achieve a perfect identification with Wharton's memories of her own childhood home, its curtains are "nailed to a gilt cornice, and immovably looped up over layers of lace."²⁰⁵

Newland Archer's feeling of inescapability is stronger after he has come into contact with people, like Countess Olenska, who have seized their chance to break with tradition, both in the social customs and in the arrangement of their house. However, while society shows an amused appreciation of Ellen Olenska's skills as an interior designer (venerable Mr. van der Luyden's favourably comments on her "clever arrangement of her drawing-room"²⁰⁶), its members present a compact front against her decision to divorce her depraved European husband. Olenska's books "scattered about her drawing-room (a part of the house in which books were usually supposed to be "out of place"), ...had whetted Archer's interest with such new names as those of Paul Bourget, Huysmans, and the Goncourt brothers."²⁰⁷ Through these books, which are an indication of

²⁰² E. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, London, Penguin Classical Books, 1996, p. 284. See also the excerpt on p. 55.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 298. Compare this with the description on p. 58, from *The Decoration of Houses*.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Wharton kept constantly abreast of the recent publications in French literature; her library shows that she owned the complete works of Balzac and Flaubert. Huysmans and Edmond de Goncourt doubtless appealed to her interest in the Aesthetic movement; her own copy of *La maison d'un artiste*, by E. de Goncourt, contained a newspaper clipping with an article on the auction of de Goncourt's house-contents. Owing to her appreciation of Paul Bourget's *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*, she shared his analysis of the widespread fashion for "domestic" collecting, which had transformed nineteenth-century homes into small-scale museums, of which *La Maison d'un Artiste* was an exemplary

Wharton's own readings, Olenska breaks with the traditional aesthetic values expressed in people's arrangement of their house interiors according to authorities like Ruskin or Eastlake, whose works Archer has conscientiously read and still shape his idea of interior decoration. Archer had prevailed upon his wife when they had to reach a decision concerning the decoration of "his new library, which in spite of family doubts and disapprovals, had been carried out as he had dreamed, with a dark embossed paper, Eastlake book-cases and "sincere" arm-chairs and tables."²⁰⁸ Moreover, like Wharton's own breaking with traditional arrangements, he had decided that "the library curtains should draw backward and forward on a rod, so that they might be closed in the evening."²⁰⁹

Unfortunately, Archer's small adjustments merely remain a symptom of his restlessness; his efforts to create something different in his own house pale next to the truly personal way in which Olenska has reorganized the space around her, or the way in which she is trying to reorganize her life, and the consciousness of being destined to miss his opportunity to express his true self is perceived by Archer as a distinct blow when he contemplates his everyday surroundings from this dismal prospect: "he looked about at the familiar objects in the hall as if he viewed them from the other side of the grave."²¹⁰

Wharton did not infuse Archer's personality with an exasperated aesthetic sensitivity like that of Lily Bart, which was more acceptable in a female character; however, Archer, too, projects his feelings on the objects contained in the homes he inhabits or visits. Thus, when he visits the most prestigious and respected members of "Old New York" society, Mr. and Mrs. Van der Luyden, he finds himself wondering at the similarity between the elderly couple and the cold, gloomy interiors of their Madison Avenue mansion, with its "shrouded rooms,"²¹¹ the ormolu clocks whose ticking is sometimes the only audible sound in the house, and the pale drawing-room contrasting sharply with the black walnut dining-room. Archer, like other members of his social set, is awed by the van der Luyden's wealth and status, but their house's overall effect on his imagination conjures up rather morbid images: the owners seem to him to have been "rather gruesomely preserved in the

representation. The process of "bibelotization" of art objects was dealt with at length in *The Decoration of Houses'* last chapter, devoted to bric-à-brac.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 206. Even though Wharton and Codman were not too admiring of the American version of Eastlake-inspired designs, Archer's choice was certainly coherent with his tastes, and represented a definite change from a library such as Wharton's father's, "a full blown specimen of Second Empire decoration, the creation of the fashionable French upholsterer Marcotte". In Edith Wharton, *A Little Girl's New York*, p. 282. Its description is found in note 119, p. 38.

²⁰⁹ E Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 236

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 316.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 52.

airless atmosphere of a perfectly irreproachable existence, as bodies caught in glaciers keep for years a rosy life-in-death.²¹²”

Mrs. Manson Mingott, another one among of *The Age of Innocence*'s representatives of the old, established families in New York society, has, like her niece Ellen Olenska, a freer, healthier relationship with her physical surroundings; she represents the individual who does not wish to feel weighed down by tradition in shaping her living environment, and who has the means to carry out her designs, regardless of society's opinion. Wharton had famously modelled this character on her father's distant cousin, Mary Mason Jones, and on her decision to build her own and her family's houses in what was considered an unfashionable area in upper Manhattan. Mrs. Manson Mingott “put the crowning touch to her audacities by building a large house of pale cream-coloured stone (when brown sandstone seemed as much the only wear as a frock coat in the afternoon) in an inaccessible wilderness near the Central Park. (...) the cream-coloured house (supposed to be modelled on the private hotels of the Parisian aristocracy) was there as a visible proof of her moral courage.²¹³”

Mrs. Manson Mingott also embodies Wharton and Codman's convictions, which made them state in *The Decoration of Houses* that a house was to represent the inmates' personality; the elderly lady is an imposing figure, due also to her physical appearance (she has such a weight problem that she has been forced to move her living quarters on the ground floor), but in her mansion one hardly breathes the same chilly air as at the van der Luydens'. On the contrary, “her visitors were startled and fascinated by the foreignness of this arrangement, which recalled scenes in French fiction, and architectural incentives to immorality such as the simple American had never dreamed of. That was how women with lovers lived in the wicked old societies, in apartments with all the rooms on one floor, and all the indecent propinquities that their novels described.²¹⁴”

Wharton's descriptions stress the importance of shaping one's own surroundings, in order to enjoy a balanced relationship with one's own house; the case of Lawrence Selden, in *The House of Mirth*, serves to illustrate her point. The young man lives in what is considered a small apartment, if measured against the standards of the wealthier members of society he and Lily Bart assiduously frequent; however, it bears his unmistakable stamp, it has a narrow hall “hung with old prints”, and Selden has turned the library into his drawing-room, which is small, with shabby leather chairs, “dark but cheerful, with its walls of books, a pleasantly faded Turkey rug, a littered desk, and, (...) a tea-tray on a low table near the window.²¹⁵”

²¹² Ibid., pp. 49-50.

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 10-11. Wharton's recollection of Mrs. Mason Jones is quoted on pp. 11-12

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

So powerful is the charm of a room which bears a close resemblance to the personality of its inhabitant, that in her moment of despair Lily's wish to be close to Selden translates in her "vision of his quiet room, of the bookshelves, and the fire on the hearth."²¹⁶ This room, which gratifies the aesthetic conceptions of two kindred spirits, is furthest removed from Newland Archer's library, which answers exclusively to his own taste, and seems to acquire a hostile character after his own wife has added a few ashtrays and moved some objects: "The room looked at him like an alien countenance composed into a polite grimace; and he perceived that it had been ruthlessly "tidied."²¹⁷

Wharton's interest in the effect of home interiors on her characters' emotions took a different turn in her 1912 novel, *The Reef*, in which she analyzed the relationship between an American expatriate widow, Anna Leath, and her fiance George Darrow, who are reunited after fifteen years and whose upcoming wedding is threatened by his affair with a young girl. Anna and George are chosen by Wharton as the reflectors whose visual sensitivity allows them to grasp the finer nuances of their physical surroundings; likewise, they are both keenly aware of the presence of ugly or disturbing elements, and their response to the visual stimuli is linked with their experiences and their intellectual abilities, whereas the young girl is portrayed as "hardly conscious of sensations of form and colour, or of any imaginative suggestion."²¹⁸

Darrow carries on his brief affair with Sophy Viner while he is staying in Paris, waiting for Anna to summon him to her place, a French château her late husband has left her at Givre. As with all house interiors in whose shaping one did not take an active hand, the hotel room occupied by George appears at first drab and impersonal to him, and he pays little attention to its decoration details. As soon as he has started feeling guilty about his affair, however, the room seems to acquire a personality: "There was something sardonic, almost sinister, in its appearance of having deliberately 'made up' for its anonymous part, all in noncommittal drabs and browns, with a carpet and paper that nobody would remember, and chairs and tables as impersonal as railway porters."²¹⁹

Once the guilt has exacerbated George's aesthetic perceptions, he feels the room getting on his nerves, and each detail of its décor becomes an obsessive image in his mind: "It was extraordinary with what a microscopic minuteness of loathing he hated it all: the grimy carpet and wallpaper, the black marble mantel-piece, the clock with a gilt allegory under a dusty bell, the

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 237.

²¹⁷ E. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 332.

²¹⁸ E. Wharton, *The Reef*, New York, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1996, p. 48.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

high-bolstered brown-counterpaned bed, the framed card of printed rules under the electric light switch, and the door of communication with the next room.²²⁰”

George’s evolving relationship with his hotel room, like all the rooms he inhabits, is analyzed by the character, who finds rational explanations to his reactions, and does not let these latter rule him. In a similar way Wharton describes Anna’s evolving relationship with her late husband’s family home, the château at Givre, since her arrival as a bride:

The possibilities which the place had then represented were still vividly present to her. The mere phrase ‘a French château’ had called up to her youthful fancy a throng of romantic associations, poetic, pictorial and emotional; and the serene face of the old house seated in its park (...) had seemed, on her first sight of it, to hold out to her a fate as noble and dignified as its own mien.

Though she could still call up that phase of feeling it had long since passed, and the house had for a time become to her the very symbol of narrowness and monotony. Then, with the passing of years, it had gradually acquired a less inimical character, had become (...) the shell of a life slowly adjusted to its dwelling.”²²¹

Anna has established a balanced relationship with a physical environment she had at first resented, as something forced upon her, and in doing so she has made some of the château’s rooms her own; she had made the transition from the perception of Givry as an expression of her husband’s “neatly balanced mind”, whose very walls “had shed a glare of irony²²²” on her dreams, to an attitude of respect which has become mutual. Anna’s acceptance of the house as a part of her experience is shared by George, who meets her in “the spacious booklined room above stairs in which she had gathered together all the tokens of her personal tastes: the retreat in which, as one might fancy, Anna Leath had hidden the restless ghost of Anna Summers;” the shared intimacy of space becomes also sharing of feelings and tastes, as George remarks about the room: “It ‘s just like you-it is you,” to which she replies: “It’s a good place to be alone in-I don’t think I’ve ever before cared to talk with anyone here.”²²³”

This novel is Wharton’s only piece of fiction in which she allows the contemporary existence, under the same roof, of a genuine version of the two decorative styles she saw as perfect opposite: her mother’s generation’s overcrowded rooms are represented by Anna Leath’s former mother-in-law’s apartment, while the classical French models she and Codman proposed as examples in *The Decoration of Houses* are contained in the original rooms of the château:

“...Madame de Chantelle’s apartment ‘dated’ and completed her. Its looped and corded curtains, its purple satin upholstery, the Sèvres jardinières, the rose-wood fire-screen, the little velvet tables edged with lace and crowded with silver knick-knacks and simpering miniatures, reconstituted an almost perfect setting for the blonde beauty of the ‘sixties. Darrow wondered that Fraser Leath’s

²²⁰ Ibid., pp. 80-81.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 88.

²²² Ibid., p. 96.

²²³ Ibid., p. 151.

filial respect should have prevailed over his aesthetic scruples to the extent of permitting such an anachronism among the eighteenth century graces of Givré.²²⁴”

The simultaneous presence of different styles under the same roof was strongly condemned in *The Decoration of House*, but Wharton would observe it as an all-too common practice in a special type of house, which she described at length in most of her fiction, and towards which she always maintained the same critical attitude, so that it may be said that, whenever the subject is touched upon, it is invariably Wharton’s voice which speaks through the lips of her characters: the *nouveaux riches*’ New York and Newport palaces.

Between 1880 and 1930, the millionaires who had made fortunes in the short span of a generation, from railroads, oil, mining, retail distribution, real estates or Wall Street speculations, and wanted to carve their niche in society’s upper echelons, built their mansions by the dozen in New York, Newport, the Hudson valley and the Berkshire hills, in Massachusetts. Wharton and Codman had been referring to some of these palaces, when they wrote the introduction, remarking about the vulgarity and excess of decoration, which was being reproduced on a large scale for every house-owner in America, who could decorate his own home in imitation of the lavish interiors of the “dollar aristocracy”.

At a time when popular newspapers regularly featured architectural sections with articles on methods of decorating a house for reasonable prices, and one-family houses were examined and described in detail, even advertised as ready-made manufactured goods, in various sizes, with prices ranging from \$1,000 to \$13,000, the money spent by families like the Vanderbilts, Villards, Astors, Mills, Carnegie, or Huntington for their houses (ranging in the millions) must have appeared appalling, both to workers, and to members of the upper classes like Wharton and Codman.²²⁵

The House of Mirth contains strongly scathing descriptions of these palaces, and not-too – appreciative considerations about the habit of squandering colossal sums in order to appear conspicuously on every social occasion. “Conspicuous” is a key-word in this Wharton novel, and it is often associated with Lily Bart’s reflections on the lifestyles of her rich acquaintances.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 179. After her conversation with Darrow in the very same room, Madame de Chantelle admits to being “old-fashioned-like my furniture.” P. 182.

²²⁵ *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, founded in New York in 1883, featured a series of articles on ‘Model Homes of Moderate Cost’ in 1897. Most of the plans, proposed ‘By the Journal’s Special Architect’, had prices ranging between \$1,200 and \$2,600, with a Feb. 1900 article devoted to ‘The Actual Cost of Furnishing a House’, in which the final figure was ‘\$524.05, plus \$35 for additional expenses. However, architects like Frank P. Allen of Grand Rapids, Michigan, whose advertisement for his book, titled *Artistic Houses*, appeared in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* issue of February, 1898, offered plans for homes costing from \$600 to \$13,000.

For the representatives of the old guard, like Mrs. Peniston, the word retains a negative meaning, and it is significantly chosen by Wharton as an accusation flung by a distant, envious cousin, who thus disgraces Lily Bart before her aunt. Ironically, in this society where values seemed to be reversed, a girl who made herself conspicuous deserved to be disinherited by Mrs. Peniston, while all around her the well-to-do were engaged in an endless competition to outdo one another. These behaviours had been analyzed in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) by Thorstein Veblen, whose definitions of the categories of conspicuous consumption, leisure, waste and vicarious consumption were a faithful rendering of the lifestyle of Edith Wharton's millionaires: where Veblen put his analysis in the form of a case study, Wharton, especially in *The House of Mirth*, and later in *The Custom of the Country*, gave detailed descriptions of the behavioural patterns theorized by Veblen.

Three instances may serve to underline the analogy between *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, *The Decoration of Houses*, *The House of Mirth*, and *The Age of Innocence*: in Wharton and Codman's book, which antedated Veblen's, the authors had launched an attack against the indiscriminate amassing of objects such as machine-made bric-à-brac, or the buying frenzy which had seized the public, who blindly followed the advertisers' advice and changed furniture with every change of fashion.

Veblen's words to this effect, two years later, would be: "Under the requirement of conspicuous consumption of goods, the apparatus of living has grown so elaborate and cumbrous, in the way of dwellings, furniture, bric-à-brac, wardrobe and meals, that the consumers of these things cannot make way with them in the required manner without help."²²⁶ When applied to the millionaires' class, these outward expressions of wealth were so inflated, that even Wharton hesitated to include some of them in her fiction²²⁷; however, her nouveau riches' houses and entertainments answer to Veblen's prescription to "give valuable presents and expensive feasts,"²²⁸ such as the Wellington-Brys do in *The House of Mirth* or Julius Beaufort does in *The Age of Innocence*. The passage in which Veblen describes jewels and analyzes their objective and aesthetic value,

"Great as is the sensuous beauty of gems, their rarity and price adds an expression of distinction to them (...) their chief purpose is to lend éclat to the person of their wearer (or owner) by comparison with other persons who are compelled to do without"²²⁹

²²⁶ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, London. Penguin Books, 1994, p. 66.

²²⁷ Alva Vanderbilt had given a costume ball in Newport in honour of the Duke of Marlborough, in the summer of 1895, at which the guests were supposed to dig in the sand with silver shovels to recover the favours, consisting in jewels made of rubies, emeralds, sapphires and pearls. The most notorious episode involved the Bradley-Martins, a couple who periodically staged a major event and invited large numbers of very important people as a means to gain access to the summit of New York society. The fancy-dress ball they gave on 10 February 1897, attended by 600 guests, cost a reported \$369,000; the condemnation of such careless expenditures in time of recession weighed heavily on the Bradley-Martins' reputation, and a year later they moved permanently to England. Source: A. Lewis, J. Turner, S. McQuillin, *The Opulent Interiors of the Gilded Age*, p. 82.

²²⁸ T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 75.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

has surely been in Wharton's mind as she placed Lily Bart and her friend Gerty Farish face to face with the opulence of Gwen van Osburgh's wedding presents, all amassed on a glittering display in one of the drawing-rooms of the van Osburgh mansion:

“They had paused before the table on which the bride's jewels were displayed, and Lily's heart gave an envious throb as she caught the refraction of light from their surfaces – the milky gleam of perfectly matched pearls, the flash of rubies relieved against contrasting velvet, the intense blue rays of sapphires kindled into light by surrounding diamonds: all these precious tints enhanced and deepened by the varied art of their setting. The glow of stones warmed Lily's veins like wine.”²³⁰

Wharton let her dislike filter through her descriptions of the mansions in which the society climbers carried on their luxurious, careless existence; architecturally, they made no sense to her, and culturally she considered them void of all the significance history had bestowed upon their European models. But Wharton could be critical also of her own set, as when someone decorated and furnished his house impeccably and, instead of living in it, treated it like a museum.

In *The House of Mirth*, Gus Trenor's Hudson Valley house, Bellomont (whose likely model was the Mills Mansion at Staatsburg, renovated by McKim, Mead and White in 1897²³¹), featured an arcaded hall “with a gallery supported on columns of pale yellow marble. Tall clumps of flowering plants were grouped against a background of dark foliage in the angles of the walls. On the crimson carpet a deerhound and two or three spaniels dozed luxuriously before the fire, and the light from the great central lantern overhead shed a brightness on the women's hair and struck sparks from their jewels as they moved.”²³² This view of the hall, as seen through Lily Bart's eyes, enhances the elegant effect obtained by the use of the architectural elements advised on in *The Decoration of Houses*, such as the marble coverings and the choice of a lantern as a light source, though the open fireplace would not have been approved by the authors.²³³

Bellomont's library was also an example of what Wharton and Codman had termed “the richly adorned room in which books are but a minor incident,”²³⁴ again it bore a close resemblance to the library at Mills Mansion, which had been described in Stanford White's New York as “short on books but long on pilasters and panelling.”²³⁵ Lily's observant eyes see beyond the mere

²³⁰ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, pp. 71-72

²³¹ “The Mills Mansion, like Bellomont, had at its core an older home (...) in the Greek revival style. McKim, Mead and White enlarged and remodelled this base into a Beaux-Arts palace of sixty-five rooms and fourteen bathrooms. (...) The mansion is constructed of brick with a stucco façade adorned with an impressive portico, pilasters, balustrades, fluted columns, and floral swags. The sumptuously decorated interior is primarily in the styles of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. Numerous Louis XV and Louis XVI pieces are featured. Decorative elements such as parquet floors, molded-plaster ceilings, marble fireplaces, and oak panelling dominate many rooms.” In Theresa Craig, *Edith Wharton – A House full of Rooms: Architecture, Interiors and Gardens*, New York, The Monacelli Press, 1996, p. 63.

²³² E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 22.

²³³ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 115, 118-119.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²³⁵ T. Craig, *Edith Wharton – A House full of Rooms: Architecture, Interiors and Gardens*, p. 62.

appearance of the library, and her description supplies the reader with further elements about the house guests and the owners' habits:

“The library was almost the only surviving portion of the old manor-house of Bellomont: a long spacious room, revealing the traditions of the mother-country in its classically-cased doors, the Dutch tiles of the chimney, and the elaborate hobgrate with its shining brass urns. A few family portraits of lantern-jawed gentlemen in tie-wigs, and ladies with large head-dresses and small bodies, hung between the shelves lined with pleasantly shabby books: books mostly contemporaneous with the ancestors in question, and to which the subsequent Trenors had made no perceptible additions. The library at Bellomont was in fact never used for reading, though it had a certain popularity as a smoking-room or a quiet retreat for flirtation. It had occurred to Lily, however, that it might on this occasion have been resorted to by the only member of the party in the least likely to put it to its original use. She advanced noiselessly over the dense old rug scattered with easy-chairs, and before she reached the middle of the room she saw that she had not been mistaken. (...) a lady whose lace-clad figure (...) detached itself with exaggerated slimness against the dusky leather of the upholstery.²³⁶”

Much as their library's use might have been objectionable by Wharton's standards, the Trenors were not repeated offenders where interior decoration was concerned. In *The House of Mirth* this distinction was reserved for two families who were trying to climb the social ladder through the conspicuous display of their recently amassed fortunes: the Wellington-Brys and the Greiners.

The former, a couple formed by a “lady of obscure origins and indomitable social ambitions” and a man who “was known as ‘Welly’ Bry on the Stock Exchange and in sporting circles,²³⁷” host large-scale entertainments, like the one in which Lily Bart takes part in a series of *tableaux vivants*. Their mansion answers to all the prescriptions for social prestige and display which had replaced the principles of propriety Wharton had been familiar with as she was growing up in the genteel atmosphere of Old New York: its interiors must function as a *mise-en-scène*, rather than a “frame for domesticity,” thus every detail in it is exaggerated in order to impress the guest. On the night of the party, its appearance is so effective that people see it as one of those fairy-tale castles, conjured up overnight by a sorcerer's spell: “so recent, so rapidly-evoked was the whole *mise-en-scène* that one had to touch the marble columns to learn they were not of cardboard, to seat one's self in one of the damask-and-gold arm-chairs to be sure it was not painted against the wall.²³⁸”

The immense ball-room, which holds the stage for the performance of the *tableaux vivants*, has festooned and gilded walls, and a Venetian ceiling, whose “flushed splendours” elicit a naïve and eminently practical comment from one guest: “...Someone told me the ceiling was by Veronese (...) I suppose it's very beautiful, but his women are so dreadfully fat. Goddesses? Well, I can only

²³⁶ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 48.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²³⁸ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 104.

say that if they'd been mortals and had to wear corsets, it would have been better for them.²³⁹ Another guest's comment, in keeping with his position as member of an older, more established family, expresses the fine nuances of distrust and low consideration the Old Guard would employ in judging and classifying society's newcomers: Gus Trenor refuses a cigar on the grounds that "you can't tell what you're smoking in one of these new houses."²⁴⁰

Wharton, who had made sufficiently clear that gilding was to be moderately used, even in rooms of a certain importance, and who prescribed mirrors and marble, paired with crystal chandeliers, for the decoration of a ball-room, seemed, however, as amused in describing the scene as her detached reflector, Lawrence Selden, who observed it with "frank enjoyment"; the guests at the Wellington Brys' party seem to fulfil the task Wharton and Codman assigned to the temporary occupants of a ball-room in *The Decoration of Houses*²⁴¹: "The company, in obedience to the decorative instinct which calls for fine clothes in fine surroundings, had dressed rather with an eye to Mrs. Bry's background than to herself. The seated throng, filling the immense room without undue crowding, presented a surface of rich tissues and jewelled shoulders in harmony with the (...) walls, and the (...) ceiling."²⁴² A different character, Ned Van Alstyne, holds a rather different view altogether of the exterior decoration of the millionaires' palaces, the old ones as well as the newly built; he classifies the characters based on the conspicuousness of their homes, and his words contain Wharton's shrewd observations about some architects' adaptability, as well as a hint to the bitter rivalries which sprung up from the comparisons among the "castles" of the dollar aristocracy:

"Mrs. Bry thinks her house a copy of the *Trianon*; in America every marble house with gilt furniture is thought to be a copy of the *Trianon*. What a clever chap that architect is, though-how he takes his client's measure! He has put the whole of Mrs. Bry in his use of the composite order. Now for the Trenors, you remember, he chose the Corinthian: exuberant, but based on the best precedent. The Trenor house is one of his best things-doesn't look like a banqueting-hall turned inside out. I hear Mrs. Trenor wants to build a new ball-room, and that divergence from Gus on that point keeps her at Bellomont. The dimensions of the Bry's ball-room must rankle: you may be sure she knows 'em as well as if she'd been there last night with a yard-measure." (...) "They've bought the house at the back: it gives them a hundred and fifty feet in the side street. That's where the ball-room's to be, with a gallery connecting it."²⁴³

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 104. *The Decoration of Houses* contained several examples of frescoed ceilings, whose unsurpassed authors were thought to be Italian painters from the Renaissance onwards. The text frequently mentioned Giambattista Tiepolo, undoubtedly on Wharton's suggestion, as the author of particularly sumptuous scenes. Wharton had been the first major American writer who had dared to defy the ban imposed by Ruskin on the Settecento painters, as Rosella Mamoli Zorzi has punctually remarked upon in an article which analyzes the different responses to Tiepolo on the part of Henry James and Edith Wharton. Mamoli Zorzi particularly underscores the close relationship Wharton enjoyed with both Tiepolo and his city, Venice, whose Settecento furniture she was among the first to rediscover. See Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, *Tiepolo, Henry James, and Edith Wharton*, in *The Metropolitan Museum Journal*, No. 33, 1998.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁴¹ "A gala room is never meant to be seen except when crowded: the crowd takes the place of furniture." E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 135.

²⁴² E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 104.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 126; the enlargement of the Trenors' house, with a back ball-room had certainly been suggested to Wharton by a similar remodelling of Mrs. Astor's New York residence in 1896. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, who would rule New York society for over two decades in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, shared her giant ballroom with her

The Greiners meet a decidedly worse fate, in their attempt to enter the ranks of New York's high society: like many Wall Street speculators in Wharton's fiction, they lose their rapidly amassed fortune in a crash, and are forced to sell their newly-built mansion on Fifth Avenue²⁴⁴; their attempt at gaining social prestige through lavish entertainments and the purchase and display of a collection of "old masters" had not been backed by either luck or an adequate competence in handling an inherited estate. In the rapidly evolving world of financiers, industrial entrepreneurs and "robber barons", however, there is a continuous replacement of such adventurers, and Wharton uses the character of Jewish financier Simon Rosedale to exemplify the rapid evolution of taste which, in these uncultivated people, takes the place of a painstakingly acquired education: Rosedale is rapidly ascending the social ladder, and promptly buys the Greiners' house, as it presents all the outward signs of power he wants his social image to convey. Once in the inner circle, Rosedale, like others before him, will realize the nuances which tell the raw newcomer apart from the refined gentleman of leisure, and his house will need to display his improvement as well; the concept is dryly expressed by Wharton again through Ned Van Alstyne's comment: "That Greiner house, now-a typical rung in the social ladder! The man who built it came from a milieu where all the dishes are put on the table at once. His façade is a complete architectural meal; if he had omitted a style his friends might have thought the money had given out. Not a bad purchase for Rosedale, though: attracts attention, and awes the Western sight-seer. By and bye he'll get out of that phase, and want something that the crowd will pass and the few pause before. (...) That's the next stage; the desire to imply that one has been to Europe, and has a standard."²⁴⁵

The Greiner palace has, in Wharton's witty description, a "wide façade, with its rich restraint of line, which suggested the clever corseting of a redundant figure."²⁴⁶ The composite style had undoubtedly been an ironic touch, a sort of architectural equivalent to those Italian *capriccios* Wharton was acquainted with through her European sojourns; little did she know that,

son, John Jacob Astor IV, who lived next door. Source: Michael Kathrens, *Great Houses of New York, 1880-1930*, New York, Acanthus Press, 2005, pp. 72-73.

²⁴⁴ The Greiners' predicament may have been suggested to Wharton by a notorious case, which in 1883-84 had involved the family of transportation baron Henry Villard. The owner of New York's *Evening Post*, he had tried to counter J. P. Morgan's growing influence in the management of the American railroads system by forming a joint venture between Northern Pacific and Oregon Railway and Navigation Company. During his tenure as president of NP, however, expenses had vastly overrun company estimates, and Villard was forced to declare bankruptcy by the end of 1883. He had commissioned to the firm of McKim, Mead and White a palace on Madison Avenue, which he occupied for just a few months, before being forced to sell it. The building, a complex of six houses around a central courtyard, was inspired by the Cancelleria and the Farnese Palace in Rome. Sources: Jean Strouse, *Morgan-American Financier*, New York, Harper Perennial, p. 240; Michael Kathrens, *Great Houses of New York, 1880-1930*, p. 44.

²⁴⁵ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 96; note also Ned Van Alstyne's comment on the lack of money needed to complete the house, another reference to the Villard case.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

only three years after *The House of Mirth* was published, New York would actually witness the building of a mansion which would elicit a storm of disparaging comments.

The house built on Fifth Avenue by Montana senator and copper king William A. Clark would be commented by critics in much harsher tones than those of Ned Van Alstyne's: comments ranged from "a perfect home for P. T. Barnum" to "an aberration." *Collier* magazine went as far as publishing a ditty about it²⁴⁷. The fact that senator Clark was a discerning art collector, whose purchases over the years had included paintings by Corot, Rembrandt, Gainsborough, Raffaello, Titian, Van Dyck and Mariano Fortuny did not suffice to shield him from the newspapers' and the critics' scorn.

Wharton introduced in *The Age of Innocence* Julius Beaufort, another character who, like the Greiners, had shone for a brief season in the firmament of high society, then had been forced to retreat; his Wall Street manoeuvres constantly exposed him to the risk of financial ruin, but his will to force himself through the tight fabric of a social network which shunned him was especially symbolized by the opulence of his New York house and the grand entertainments he gave there. Architecturally, Beaufort's house displays elements of which *The Decoration of Houses* approved: a ball-room expressly planned for its purpose, an enfilade of drawing-rooms, each decorated with a dominant theme or colour, an imposing library and an exquisite conservatory.

Beaufort's *mise-en-scène*, however, was all the more deceiving as, being so appropriate, it made up "for whatever was regrettable in the Beaufort past,"²⁴⁸ its deceptive quality had

²⁴⁷ The ditty, written by Will Irwin, is an interesting document in illustrating the general public's reaction to the material instances of conspicuous consumption, especially as practiced by such exposed personalities as politicians, whose category had been openly criticized also by Wharton in *The Age of Innocence*. The content, which contains an echo of Ned Van Alstyne's "composite orders" in the final lines, is as follows:

Senator Copper of Tonopah Ditch
Made a clean billion in minin and sich
Hiked for Noo York, where his money he blew
Buildin' a palace on Fift' Avenoo.
"How," sez the Senator, "Can I look the proudest?"
Build me a house that'll holler the loudest-"
Forty-eight architects came to consult,
Drawin' up plans for a splendid result;
If the old Senator wanted to pay,
They'd give him Art with a capital A.
Pillars Ionic
Eaves Babylonian,
Doors cut in scallops, resemblin' a shell;
Roof wuz Egyptian,
Gables caniption,
Whole grand effect, when completed,
Wuz-Hell!

Source: Michael Kathrens, *Great Houses of New York, 1880-1930*, pp. 210, 213.

²⁴⁸ E. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 16.

temporarily blinded Newland Archer, too, on the occasion of the annual ball at which, “under the myriad candles of the ball-room (...) he had seen her (May Welland) appear, tall and silver-shining as a young Diana.²⁴⁹”

The two contrasting images of Beaufort’s house, presented during a night walk in which Archer mused on the meaning of his milieu’s intersecting behavioural codes, the propriety of manners behind which society hid its hypocrisies and its tribal rituals, and the part he had been playing in it himself, came to symbolize the difference between Archer’s own high expectations and the unfulfilling emotional and intellectual life he had chosen for himself. The house, which had been “one that New Yorkers were proud to show to foreigners, especially on the night of the annual ball,²⁵⁰” loomed ahead of Archer, and he instantly recalled its appearance on those ball nights, when “he had seen it blazing with lights, its steps awninged and carpeted, and carriages waiting in double line to draw up at the curbstone; (...)now the house was as dark as the grave.²⁵¹”

Wharton’s criticism was not aimed so much at Beaufort’s taste, rather at the way he ostentatiously showed his disregard for social proprieties; the degree to which society would become tolerant was expressed at two different moments in the novel, which were separated by a span of thirty years, significantly set against the background of Archer’s library. In the first instance, during an after-dinner conversation among male guests, someone uttered this rather shocking prediction: “we shall see our children fighting for invitations to swindlers’ houses, and marrying Beaufort’s bastards,²⁵²” causing an indignant reaction among his listeners.

The same room, thirty years later, presented a different look, as it had been remodelled by Archer’s son Dallas, an architect; here Archer would reminisce about how all the significant episodes in his life seemed to have taken place in his library and, as its Gothic appearance has yielded that of a room “with English mezzotints, Chippendale cabinets, bits of chosen blue-and-white and pleasantly shaded electric lamps²⁵³,” so had Archer’s views on respectability seemed to give way to a fatherly understanding, which allowed him to look with a tolerant eye upon his son’s betrothal with the daughter Beaufort has had by his former mistress.

The Age of Innocence showed, if not Wharton’s understanding of the new trends and fashions, at least her acknowledgment of changes brought about by the evolution of taste in the new generations; *The Custom of the Country*, on the other hand, stands out as her sharpest critique of the slackened morals of social adventurers, both men and women; the 1913 novel contains several interesting observations on the changing habits of Americans who were beginning to show the

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 309.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 341.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 350.

alarming effects of consumerism on every behavioural level. If the preceding novel, *The House of Mirth*, contained a tragic implication in Lily Bart's death, which was the "frivolous society's (...) power of debasing people and ideas,²⁵⁴" *The Custom of the Country* dealt with society's increasing frivolity and vulgarity by satirizing its attitudes, by over-blowing the characters who inhabited it, turning them into "a monstrously perfect result of the system."²⁵⁵

In *The Custom of the Country*, Lily Bart has metamorphosed into Undine Spragg, the female equivalent of a robber baron, in her rapacious instinct of acquisitiveness and relentless pursuit of her chosen target. In her constant search for a more conspicuous social position (she an avid reader of the society columns, and a strong believer in the strategy of well-planned appearances at key events, for which purpose she hires a press-agent!), she goes through four marriages with the apparent ease with which she goes through a different wardrobe every season. Her character expresses a total lack of culture; Undine's superficiality in matters of taste and education prevent her from forming a true discerning faculty of appreciation, thus she only sees objects in terms of their commercial value.

Her visual sensitivity feeds on the artificial effects of cheap imitations, from small knick-knacks to the outer appearance of an entire building: she cannot tell the difference between art objects and trashy bibelots, and appreciates a glamorous background only as an appropriate setting for her beauty: "she liked to see such things about her-without any real sense of their meaning she felt them to be the appropriate setting of a pretty woman, to embody something of the rareness and distinction she had always considered she possessed."²⁵⁶

The appropriate setting for this sort of creature, who cannot distinguish between an historic chateau in France or a hotel in New York is the luxury hotel, a kind of abode that Wharton introduced and described at length in the novel as a new, fashionable form of dwelling for the category of rich, uncultured Americans. The large, opulent hotels of New York, replicated in all large cities in the United States, seemed to have been laid out in evident disregard for all the principles contained in *The Decoration of Houses*, and Wharton listed the architectural details of their interiors with a disconsolate tone, tinged with her customary reserve, which seemed to permeate all opulent suites, halls, and drawing rooms with a chill breath of disapprobation.

Twenty years earlier, it had been the turn of Paul Bourget (who had in the meantime become one of Wharton's closest friends) to give a startled account of "the New York hotel" in his articles, and his descriptions must not have been overlooked by Wharton who, if anything, had

²⁵⁴ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 207.

²⁵⁵ E. Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, London, Penguin Classics, 2006, p. 127.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.335.

noticed that the trend started in the Nineties had grown into an unmanageable architectural building frenzy, and had promptly charged it with decidedly negative social implications.

Bourget, who had observed that “in every country, hotels have this documentary value, that they give what the people of a country ask for,²⁵⁷” had described their interiors as “foolishly sumptuous”, and their rooms and drawing-rooms as “a meaningless luxury of woodwork and draperies²⁵⁸”; he did nonetheless marvel at the engineering skill required for the building and maintenance of such complex establishments. Wharton, on the other hand, had remarked on the changed function of hotels, which had grown in importance, so as to replace the house in the lodging custom of the most affluent people: “all the fashionable people she knew either boarded or lived in hotels” (...) “It was natural that the Americans, who had no homes, who were born and died in hotels, should have contracted nomadic habits.²⁵⁹” Eight years earlier, in writing *The House of Mirth*, Wharton had inserted Lily Bart’s moving to a hotel suite, as the secretary of a shadowy character, as a socially questionable step, which denoted inexorability of the heroine’s descending parable:

“She was unacquainted with the world of the fashionable New York hotel – a world over-heated, over-upholstered, and over-fitted with mechanical appliances for the gratification of fantastic requirements, while the comforts of a civilized life were as unattainable as in a desert. Through this atmosphere of torrid splendour moved wan beings as richly upholstered as the furniture...”²⁶⁰

Wan beings or nomads, who move restlessly from a hotel to another, Wharton implied, had no interest in shaping their dwelling according to their taste and personality; they came to move, act, exist against a standardized background, which endlessly repeated itself in every hotel of this kind on both sides of the Atlantic, whose decorator’s motto seemed to have drawn from *The*

²⁵⁷ P. Bourget, *Outre-Mer, Impressions of America*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1896, p. 31.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33. Among the “New York hotels which had been pointed out to me as most recently built,” Bourget might have observed the brand-new, thirteen-story high Waldorf Hotel, built between 1892-1893 by William Waldorf Astor, nephew of New York society’s queen, Caroline Astor. Bourget noted: “They are all edifices of the kind which, in Chicago, they call ‘sky scrapers’, and ‘cloud pressers’. One is ten stories high, another twelve, another fourteen. The last and newest has seventeen. First comes the marble hall, more or less splendid in decoration, upon which frequently opens a restaurant, or bar, a cloak-room, a book-store, and other shops. (...) Behind a grating are the elevators, -four, five, six, -ready to mount up with the rapidity of an electric despatch. Yesterday I felt as if the Americans made the streets walk; to-day I feel as if they made the floors of their houses fly. These hotels, foolishly sumptuous, have carpets only on the passageways. The stairways show their naked marble, on which no one ever sets foot.” *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁵⁹ E. Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, pp. 10, 314. The astonishing variety of services offered by hotels, whose aim was to provide the guest with a home-like, individual service, had been ironically remarked by Bourget in the following passage: “My attention is attracted by a mysterious disk covered with printed characters, to which a needle is attached by a pivot. My guide explains to me that by pressing a button the traveller can order to be brought him the thing to whose name he has directed the point of his needle. I glance at the curious list, and perceive that I may thus procure for myself, within five minutes, the whole series of cocktails and champagnes, all the newspapers and reviews, a one- or a two-horse carriage, a doctor, a barber, a railway ticket, all sorts of cold or warm dishes, or a theatre ticket. The only wonder is that the machine has not been so far perfected as to offer the means of being married or divorced, of making one’s will, and of voting.” P. Bourget, *Outre-Mer*, p. 33.

²⁶⁰ E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 213.

Decoration of Houses list of caveats. The same decorator had followed its indications on the supremacy of French eighteenth-century designs only to have them altered and adapted to the false sense of luxury and opulence the public was demanding. It is of particular interest to note that Wharton makes this perversion of a foreign style (Louis XV or Louis XIV) coincide with the mispronounce of its name: “The Spragg rooms were known as one of the Looey suites.”²⁶¹

Wharton used also the names she chose for these hotels to convey the sense of their pretentiousness, and the principle which ruled their conception and management, which was that of a superficial impression of luxury: Undine Spragg and her parents move from small Apex City to the Hotel Stentorian, and the reader is told that the other New York hotels she has considered as her choice options all have equally high-sounding names: “the Olympian, the Incandescent, the Ormolu, moored like a sonorously named fleet of battle-ships along the upper reaches of the West side.”²⁶² The summit of this increasingly majestic list is reached by the European version of American luxury hotels, the Nouveau Luxe hotel chain, implying the unstoppable spreading of a disease-like artificial taste (note its similarity with “Art Nouveau,” and its obvious reference to its higher standards of accommodation), which aims at replicating its trademark, taste-proof interiors for the benefit of travellers who will feel “at home” at every corner of the globe.

The Incandescent enjoys the peculiar association with electric light, which Wharton and Codman had reluctantly accepted as a necessary evil in some areas of the house, but had firmly banished from rooms such as the drawing-room or the ball-room, because of the vulgarity its harshness attributes even to the most exquisitely carved pieces of furniture: “The proper light is that of wax candles. Nothing has done more to vulgarize interior decoration than the general use of gas and of electricity in the living-rooms of modern houses; (...) it would be difficult to account for the adoption of a mode of lighting which made the salon look like a railway station, the dining-room like a restaurant.”²⁶³

Undine Spragg visually embodies the vulgarity of this artificial mode of lighting: her aggressive physical beauty finds its ideally complementing background in these hotel rooms, in which “blazing wall-brackets” cast such “untempered a glare (that) would have been destructive to all half-tones and subtleties of modelling; but Undine’s beauty (...) defied the searching decomposing radiance” being “as vivid, and almost as crude, as the brightness suffusing it.”²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ E. Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, p. 3

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 18. The analogy to the fleet of battleships is a conscious choice by Wharton, sadly mocking the senseless ambition of those builders who chose impressive names and slogans for their daring enterprises: a year earlier, the world had witnessed the shocking tragedy of the Titanic, among whose casualties was John Jacob Astor IV.

²⁶³ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 126.

²⁶⁴ E. Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, p. 14.

The liberal use of lighting fixtures, artificial or otherwise, was certainly aimed at enhancing the opulent effect of the golden reflections coming from all corners of the rooms, which Wharton often described as “gilded wilderness” or “gilded void,” where mahogany wainscoting was paired with either white or soft green panels, or salmon-pink damask-covered walls, and furniture, cornices, mouldings, lamps, and mirror frames had all been dipped in gold. *The Decoration of Houses* had warned against the misapplication of this decorative process to objects and ornamental details, but the authors already seemed conscious of having been in the presence of an unstoppable trend, which would only have grown worse with the increasing commercial reproduction of objects seen by the reading public in the pictures representing celebrated interiors on newspapers.²⁶⁵

Along with the excessive use of gold, which turned every room into a ball-room, Wharton underlined the continuous presence of the triple-layer lace curtains, which gave the hotel guests the illusion of preserving their “gilded privacy;²⁶⁶” she also drew an ironic parallel between the incoherent mixture of styles found in the rooms’ decoration, and the “sodden splendour of the Stentorian breakfast-room,²⁶⁷” where apathetic guests were treated to an equally absurd array of “gastronomic incompatibilities.²⁶⁸” The author’s dislike for such large, pretentious and impersonal establishments was expressed also by the following remark, which reiterated the concern she and Codman had expressed in their book for the need to accord the proper importance to practical considerations closely linked to health issues, such as cleanliness: “...the spongy carpet might have absorbed a year’s crumbs without a sweeping.²⁶⁹”

Undine Spragg and her fellow hotel-guests, however, were far from feeling any concern about such trifling issues: she occupied each hotel room, which would normally “show no trace of human use,²⁷⁰” by adapting “her usual background of cushions, bric-à-brac and flowers—since one must make one’s setting ‘home-like,’ however little one’s habits happened to correspond with that particular effect.²⁷¹” Her marriage to an impoverished French Marquis, which brought Undine into close contact with art and history through the contents of her husband’s country estates and his family’s *hôtel particulier* in Paris, did not improve her aesthetic appreciation abilities; far from feeling any need to discover the historical significance or the personal value of her husband’s family heirlooms, she significantly “stared” at them, instead of casting an observant, curious glance in their direction. Her suite at the Stentorian Hotel, had been “adorned with oval portraits of Marie

²⁶⁵ “To-day, after a period (...) during which all gilding was avoided, it is again unsparingly used, under the mistaken impression that it is one of the chief characteristics of the French styles now once more in demand. The result is a plague of liquid gilding.” E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 193.

²⁶⁶ E. Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, p. 9.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Antoinette and the Princesse of Lamballe,²⁷²” but her visual insensitivity was paired with such ignorance that, once in the homeland of all the historic personages whose portraits all rich Americans were accustomed to hanging to their drawing-, dining-, or ball-room walls, she was not able to recognize the historical importance of a royal gift (in the form of a series of tapestries) bestowed upon her husband’s family by Louis the Fifteenth.

Undine, like her fourth husband, American millionaire and railroad king Elmer Moffatt, established an eminently consumeristic relationship with her third husband’s French château and its contents (Wharton never termed a house “Undine’s house”, as this character never seemed to inhabit a place long enough to make it hers, certainly not the way *The Reef’s* Anna Leath had done with Givre): the building, which to her had no historical meaning whatsoever, functioned almost as a warehouse, and if she had been given free rein by the Marquis, she would have ended up by converting to cash all its valuable artefacts. Wharton gave the reader an effective insight of Undine’s utilitarian, greedy personality in the episode of the sale of her husband’s Boucher tapestries: to the Marquis these historic objects, like most of the contents of his ancestral home, had come to acquire almost human senses, and he was described by Wharton as roaming the rooms of his château and sadly contemplating its dilapidated conditions, brought about by his lack of funds: “Everything in the great empty house smelt of dampness: the stuffing of the chairs, the threadbare folds of the faded curtains, the splendid tapestries, that were fading too,²⁷³” as their “fabulous blues and pinks (...) looked as livid as withered roses.²⁷⁴”

Undine’s reaction is not nearly as deeply felt as her husband’s: all she could think of, after talking to the representative of an antique dealer who selected rare artefacts in order to offer them to his American clients, was: “There are a good many Paris seasons hanging right here on this wall.²⁷⁵”

Wharton did not depict only American millionaires as hopelessly ignorant characters; the Marquis’ brother and his wife were introduced to show that lack of aesthetic and artistic appreciation could be equally “contracted” by the scions of noble families, if they did not take the pains to acquire and maintain a satisfactory degree of knowledge and competence. The treatment this couple reserved for the family’s Parisian *hôtel* was indicative of the effects of the same careless disregard for tradition and culture which had shaped the interiors of the new breed of luxury hotels: “the young couple, not content with having had their lodgings piped, illuminated and heated, had moved doors, opened windows, torn down partitions, and given over the great

²⁷² Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷³ Ibid., pp. 300-301.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 305.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 328.

trophied and pilastered dining-room to a decorative painter with a new theory of the human anatomy.²⁷⁶”

Against such widespread vulgarity, even the subdued descriptions of New York’s “old guard” interiors were ineffective: *The Custom of the Country*, set slightly later than *The Age of Innocence*, would establish an inter-textual link to the latter through the occasional resurfacing of the same background characters, such as old Urban Dagonet, whose house was depicted by Wharton as an outward projection of the owner’s set of values. In this excerpt, Ralph Marvell, Undine’s second husband, who has realized he has been used by her as a mere step in the social ladder she was determined to climb, reflected on the analogies between the insubstantial boundaries of society’s frame and the structure of its members’ houses:

“Ralph Marvell, mounting his grandfather’s doorsteps, looked up at the symmetrical old red house-front, with its frugal marble ornament, as he might have looked into a familiar human face (...) his mother and old Mr. Urban Dagonet, both, from Ralph’s earliest memories, so closely identified with the old house in Washington Square that they might have passed for its inner consciousness as it might have stood for their outward form; and the question as to which the house now seemed to affirm their intrinsic rightness was that of the social disintegration expressed by widely-different architectural physiognomies at the other end of Fifth Avenue. (...) Ralph (...) passed into a hall, with its dark mahogany doors and the quiet ‘Dutch interior’ effect on its black and white marble paving, he said to himself that what Popple called society was really just like the houses it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin steel shell of utility. The steel was built up in Wall Street, the social trimmings were hastily added in Fifth Avenue; and the union between them was as monstrous and factitious (...) as that between the Blois gargoyles on Peter van Degen’s roof and the skeleton walls supporting them. (...) the Dagonet view of life, the very lines of the furniture in the old Dagonet house expressed (old society’s disapproval of new society’s custom).²⁷⁷”

From a descriptive point of view, Wharton’s choice to juxtapose the vulgar interiors of luxury hotels to the subdued tones of a more appropriate interior decoration style was an effective means to prove the point she and Codman had previously stressed in *The Decoration of Houses*, that in decoration, as in human behaviour, “vulgarity is always noisier than good breeding²⁷⁸”; thus in this novel the descriptive passages containing references to the showy interiors of questionable taste are apt to stand out more vividly in the reader’s imagination. The same point is illustrated in the description of Mr. Moffatt’s bedroom in Paris’ Nouveau Luxe hotel:

“The big vulgar writing-table wreathed in bronze was heaped with letters and papers. Among them stood a lapis bowl in a Renaissance mounting of enamel and a vase of Phoenician glass that was like a bit of rainbow caught in cobwebs. On a table against the window a little Greek marble lifted its pure lines. On every side some rare and sensitive object seemed to be shrinking back from the false colours and crude contours of the hotel furniture.²⁷⁹”

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 309.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁷⁸ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, p. 190.

²⁷⁹ E. Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, p. 347

The *Custom of the Country* closed with a long descriptive passage, in which Wharton significantly employed as a reflector little Paul Marvell, son of Undine and of Ralph Marvell, the only other character who had showed traces of a cultivated taste, but whose defeat and suicide would symbolize the surrender of Old New York's citadel to the overwhelming forces of the *nouveaux riches*. Wharton would guide the reader through the rooms of Undine and Elmer Moffatt's huge, new Parisian house, by making the little boy, left alone by his mother, wander around in search of something to do. The passage contained references to the mishandling of the nursery's and school-room decoration, as proposed in *The Decoration of Houses*, and a marked autobiographical note in the little boy's desire to commune with books, for lack of a human companion:

"The hotel was big and strange, and his own room, in which there was not a toy or a book, or one of his dear battered relics (...) seemed the loneliest spot in the house (...) the newness and sumptuousness of the room embarrassed him - the white fur rugs and brocade chairs seemed maliciously on the watch for smears and ink-spots - his solitary luncheon, (was) served in the immense marble dining-room.

He went to all the rooms in turn his mother's first, the wonderful lacy bedroom, all pale silks and velvet, artful mirrors and veiled lamps, and the boudoir as big as a drawing-room, with pictures he would have liked to know about, and tables and cabinets holding things he was afraid to touch. Mr. Moffatt's rooms came next. They were soberer and darker, but as big and splendid; and in the bedroom, on the brown wall, hung a single picture-the portrait of a boy in grey velvet-that interested Paul most of all. The boy's head rested on the head of a big dog, and he looked infinitely noble and charming, and yet (...) so sad and lonely that he too might have come home that very day to a strange house in which none of his old things could be found. (...) the library attracted him most: there were rows and rows of books, bound in dim browns and golds, and old faded reds as rich as velvet: they all looked as if they might have had stories in them as splendid as their bindings. But the bookcases were closed with gilt trellising, and when Paul reached up to open one, a servant told him that Mr. Moffatt's secretary kept them locked because the books were too valuable to be taken down. This seemed to make the library as strange as the rest of the house, and he passed on to the ball-room at the back. (...) Paul went on to the drawing-rooms, steering his way prudently between the gold arm-chairs and shining tables, and wondering whether the wigged and corseted heroes on the walls represented Mr. Moffatt's ancestors, and why, if they did, he looked so little like them. The dining-room was more amusing, because busy servants were already laying the long table (...) the centre of the table was empty, but down the sides were gold baskets heaped with pulpy summer fruits-figs, strawberries and big blushing nectarines. Between them stood crystal decanters with red and yellow wine, and little dished full of sweets; and against the walls were sideboards with great pieces of gold and silver, ewers and urns and branching candelabra, which sprinkled the green marble walls with starlike reflections. (...) he strayed back to the library. The habit of solitude had given him a passion for the printed page, and if he could have found a book anywhere-any kind of a book-he would have forgotten the long hours and the empty house. But the tables in the library held only massive unused inkstands and immense immaculate blotters: not a single volume had slipped its golden prison. (...) the masseuse was established in one of the grand bedrooms lined with mirrors (...) with a pink arm-chair (...) a pink-shaded electric lamp (...) an immense pink toilet-table."²⁸⁰

In the 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed*, which would be completed in 1932 by *The Gods Arrive*, Wharton doubled in two characters, and paid a moving tribute to two familiar figures and

²⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 354-356.

their home surroundings, her own father and his library, and “aunt” Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones and her Hudson Valley home. The main character, Vance Weston, a young aspiring writer from an Illinois small town, shared Wharton’s literary dreams, her acute sensitivity to natural landscapes as well as to architecture, and the curious biographical fact of having survived an attack of typhoid fever. The character of the deceased Miss Lorburn, who cast a somewhat benignant shadow on her empty house (The Willows) through her portrait placed in the library, seemed to combine Wharton’s figure as a woman book-collector, and the author’s childhood reminiscence of a relative whose house had left a haunting impression on her.

Wharton recorded in her autobiography her impression of “this aunt, whom I remember as a ramrod-backed old lady compounded of steel and granite,²⁸¹” and remembered associating, even as a child, a person’s physical appearance with the exterior of the house he/she inhabited: “from the first I was obscurely conscious of a queer resemblance between the granitic exterior of Aunt Elizabeth and her grimly comfortable home, between her battlemented caps and the turrets of Rhinecliff.²⁸²” The overall impression of Rhinecliff on Wharton was decidedly negative, and it may have insinuated itself in her subconscious more deeply than she would care to admit: she would vividly recall it after seventy years, and confess: “I can still remember hating everything at Rhinecliff, which, as I saw, on rediscovering it some years later, was an expensive but dour specimen of Hudson River Gothic.²⁸³”

The choice of *Hudson River Bracketed* as the title for this strongly autobiographical novel was evidently made so as to draw a parallel between Wharton’s own and Vance Weston’s experience: Wharton had probably paired the mysterious feeling Rhinecliff had awakened in her (she confessed to having been frightened by its intolerable ugliness, and its gloomy atmosphere had influenced her to the point that she was convinced there was a wolf under her bed) with the anxious expectation Vance experienced at the prospect of visiting a very old house for the first time in his life. His visit to the Willows’ library, in which a portrait of the former owner looked down on the room (the very arm-chair she occupied when she died, and the table next to it, with her last book still open at the page she didn’t finish) is tinged with the apprehension felt by Vance at the thought of her lingering presence among the books, and with his sense of exhilaration as he crosses the threshold of literature’s fascinating universe through the library books.

Vance is led through the house by his cousins and a girl, Halo Spears, who explains to him the origin of its peculiar architectural style:

²⁸¹ E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 27.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

“It must be one of the best specimens of Hudson River Bracketed that are left (...) our indigenous style of architecture in this part of the world (...) I perceive that you are not familiar with the epoch-making work of A. J. Downing Esq. on Landscape Gardening in America. (...) It is too long to read aloud; but the point is that Mr. Downing, who was the greatest authority of the period, sums up the principal architectural styles as the Grecian, the Chinese, the Gothic, the Tuscan or Italian villa, and Hudson River Bracketed. Unless I’m mistaken, he cites the Willows as one of the most perfect examples of Hudson River Bracketed (this was in 1842), and yes, here’s the place: ‘The seat of Ambrose Lorburn Esq., the Willows, near Paul’s Landing, Dutchess County, N. Y., is one of the most successful instances of etc., etc....architectural elements ingeniously combined from the Chinese and the Tuscan’.”²⁸⁴

By placing such an important “revelation” scene as the discovery of literature’s masterpieces in the library of an old house decorated according to standards that by 1929 had become an historical curiosity, Wharton seemed to draw to a close the full circle she had started tracing in her father’s Gothic library; there, the gloomy surroundings had not prevented her from widening her horizon. On the contrary, she implied, by starting from there and moving always forward she had been able to form a vision of life which had brought her from subject to subject, from author to author, in an endless pursuit which had soon led her far beyond the narrow scope inside which most people remained trapped. Wharton underlined the importance of the chances offered by libraries such as her parents’, or the Willows’, where, in spite of an outdated, gloomy décor, books had been more accessible than they were in the millionaires’ palaces: there, amidst marble halls, frescoed ceilings, tapestried walls and gilded furniture, the relationship of man with the noblest products of thought and imagination was irreparably warped, when actually non-existent.

Wharton significantly placed in this story a forged quotation from one of the most influential architectural books published in America in the nineteenth century: through it she established a continuity with a tradition which did not need to hide its cultural and structural deficiencies behind a distorted model, adapted in an unsatisfactory way, and whose only function was reduced to conspicuous display of wealth. The protagonist of *Hudson River Bracketed* became the witness of the impending doom reserved to the splendid New York mansions which, contrary to the Willows, by the 1920’s had already begun to fall under the wrecker’s ball.

With these words, pronounced by the boy who is providing the commentary to a car-load of tourists starting on a tour of Manhattan, Wharton wrote an astonished epitaph to the decades of extravagant expenditures, of lavish entertainments, of reckless economic enterprises, and of the American millionaire’s dream-palaces (mirrored in the choice of the verses read by Vance Weston on the pages of Miss Lorburn’s open book: *In Xanadu did Kubla Khan / A stately pleasure-dome decree*):

“This vacant lot on your right (...) was formerly the site of Selfridge B. Merry’s five million-dollar marble mansion, lately sold to the Amalgamated Searchlight Company, who are about to erect on it a twenty-five-million-dollar sky-scraper of fifty stories, with roof gymnasium, cabaret terrace, New

²⁸⁴ E. Wharton, *Hudson River Bracketed*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957, pp. 66-67.

Thought church and airplane landing...We are now approaching the only remaining private residence on Fifth Avenue, belonging to one of the old original society leaders known throughout the world as the Four Hundred.”²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 195-196. The name Selfridge B. Merry bears a striking resemblance to Elbridge T. Gerry, whose 1893 mansion had been designed by Richard Morris Hunt. By 1925, the house of the former “queen” of the Four Hundred, Caroline Astor, had also been demolished, to make room for Temple Emanu-El. Source: M. Kathrens, *Great Houses of New York, 1880-1930*, pp. 16, 80.

Chapter IV

The Decoration of Houses as a source for Ogden Codman's buildings, and Elsie de Wolfe's *The House in Good Taste*

Ogden Codman's career as architect and interior decorator, at the time *The Decoration of Houses* was published, had just made the transition from the small to the big league. Since the opening of his Boston (1891) and New York (1893) offices, he had mostly been commissioned the remodelling or decoration of few rooms in a house. His clients would include mostly members of Boston's oldest families, such as Coolidge, Winthrop, Wharton, Thayer or Miller.

Teddy and Edith Wharton were among his first clients, and Codman begun working for them on two projects at about the same time: their Newport cottage, Land's End, and their New York house, at 882-884 Park Avenue, both in need of restoration. As a result of the work he did for Edith Wharton's Newport house, he gained more commissions, from the circle of Wharton's friends: in 1891, he would write to a friend: "Mrs. Cutting has just told me she wants me to do her house as a result of the Wharton house. It is rather encouraging...I am to decorate it in the French taste. And we are to get the furniture in Paris next spring."²⁸⁶ The most conspicuous client was to be another of Wharton's acquaintances, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, who had commissioned R. M. Hunt the building of a new summer house in Newport, after a fire had destroyed the old one in 1892²⁸⁷.

The Vanderbilts' cottage, the Breakers, the most opulent among Newport's summer villas, would certainly not have encountered neither Wharton nor Codman's approval, at least where the interior decoration style was concerned: the most obvious reason would have been the quite startling decision to have three different firms working on the building, whereas *The Decoration of Houses* would later express a partiality for house-projects carried out by the same architect, both for the house structure and the interior decoration. The Breakers thus presents a disconcerting mixture of Italian Renaissance in the exterior, modelled after Genoa's Palazzo Cambiaso, and interiors which range from the lavishly decorated rooms of the first floor to the elegant simplicity of the bedrooms of the second floor.

²⁸⁶ P. Metcalf, *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, Boston, The Boston Athenaeum, 1988, p. 9.

²⁸⁷ "On November 25 (1892), a cold, windy afternoon, Alice welcomed Pussy Jones, now wed to Edward Wharton. While they gathered, quietly talking, an unexpected racket arose from the servants' quarters. The house was on fire, the voices shouted; they must flee immediately." In Theresa Craig, *Edith Wharton, A House Full of Rooms: Architecture, Interiors, and Gardens*, New York, The Monacelli Press, 1995, p. 67.

The first floor, decorated by the French firm of Jules Allard et Fils (which figured regularly as a partner decorator in Hunt's houses) featured among other rooms a great hall which recalled a covered *cortile*, a two-story dining-salon with arched ceilings decorated with cherubs and gilded bronze, a music-room with an Adam-style frescoed ceiling, a billiard-room, a library with a stone chimney-piece from a French château and a ball-room, all heavily gold-encrusted, with marble fireplaces, and gilt furniture. Codman certainly had in mind many of the details displayed in these rooms, when a couple of years later he contributed his portion to the book he and Wharton wrote: the wooden floor, heavy curtains and overcharged decoration on the walls of dining room go against the book's advice: "The avoidance of all stuff hangings and heavy curtains is of great importance (...) A bare floor of stone or marble is best suited to the dining-room (...) the walls should be sufficiently light in color to make little artificial light necessary."²⁸⁸

Allard's interiors' opulence is in striking contrast with the bedroom suites on the second floor, where Codman planned elegant and subdued rooms in a pastiche Louis XV style, with pale-tinted walls treated with orders and stucco bas-reliefs. In all likelihood, Codman was hired by Alice Vanderbilt, a close friend of Wharton's, for the more "private" portion of the house, while the "public" rooms, which were supposed to display the Vanderbilts' economic power and social pre-eminence, were entrusted to the official family architect and decorators, who had just provided Cornelius' brother, William K. Vanderbilt, with the sumptuous "Marble House".

Where Wharton's New York place was concerned, Codman was requested to alter two adjacent townhouses, both externally and inside; though his plans were not carried out as far as the façade was concerned, he offered Wharton valuable advice on the choice of wallpapers and furniture, and did over the dining-room, where the wall-paper displayed a taste for *chinoiserie* motifs the two authors would praise in their book, in the chapter devoted to Bedrooms. While the final result pleased Wharton very much, Henry James would describe it as a "bonbonnière of the last daintiness naturally."²⁸⁹

It would not be until 1897 that Codman could complete a house of his own design: it was commissioned to him by Mrs. Charles Coolidge Pomeroy, in Newport and, due to its outer plastered finishing, the locals nicknamed it "the mud palace". Pauline Metcalf, Codman's principal biographer, described it as "an interrupted cube with a classical pediment, corbels, and arched windows on the first floor."²⁹⁰ Codman himself apparently later referred to it as "my poor little first attempt"; today's Sotheby's real estate agents give this somewhat more flattering description: "*Seabeach*, an exceptional waterfront 'Newport Cottage' of the Gilded Age, is an elegant historic

²⁸⁸ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 159-160.

²⁸⁹ P. Metcalf, *From Lincoln to Léopolda*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 21.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

estate disguised as a shingled beach house. Designed by Ogden Codman and built in 1897, this exquisite property commands unobstructed ocean-views from a splendid setting on Ocean Drive. Wonderful period detail in the Palazzo-style main residence includes a gracious marble-floored foyer entrance and Grand Salon with fireplace. The 6,200 sf, 17-room residence offers great entertaining spaces as well as cozy corners. Triple arched French doors off the living room lead to an ocean side patio with magnificent water views.²⁹¹”

When, in 1900, Codman designed *Villa Rosa*, the Newport house of Mr. Rollins Morse (no longer extant), he introduced in its ballroom the lattice design, or trellis, for the first time in America, developing a motif which was praised in *The Decoration of Houses* among other French-inspired models.

The following year, Codman was again approached by Wharton on an ambitious project: the writer had purchased an estate in Lenox, Massachusetts, and meant to build a house which would physically translate the precepts she and Codman had laid down in their book. In her autobiography, Wharton refers to the enterprise as to an ordinary episode, smoothly carried out²⁹²; in reality the building of The Mount occasioned a rift in the Codman-Wharton relationship. The initial plans took an English manor, Belton House in Lincolnshire, as a model; after Wharton and Codman had their first falling-out, she hired Francis Hoppin, a former employee of the firm of McKim, Mead & White. Codman did contribute to the first project, however, which consisted in an H-shaped plan; the house was to be built on top of a hill, and it would command a beautiful view. Hoppin kept the Codman plan, and introduced elements from various traditions, such as a courtyard, derived from French models, an Italianate terrace, and the exterior color-scheme, a green-and-white which was customary in New England estates.

Wharton was able, through the use of much tact and diplomacy, to make things up with Codman, who stepped back on the project and managed the interior decoration; the final result would please Wharton, a little less Codman, seen that he did not approve of his “competitor’s” work. The house, which develops on four floors, closely follows the structure recommended in *The Decoration of Houses*, as far as space articulation and decoration are concerned. The vestibule has tile floors and marble benches, as prescribed in the book;²⁹³ the hall has a wooden staircase with a black-painted iron railing, like the French ones Wharton and Codman had praised for their

²⁹¹ Source: www.gustavewhite.com/Sotheby's International Realty (14/11/2009)

²⁹² “We sold our Newport house, and built one near Lenox, in the hills of western Massachusetts, and at last I escaped from watering-place trivialities to the real country (...) life in the country is the only state which has completely satisfied me (...) On a slope overlooking the dark waters and densely wooded shores of Laurel Lake we built a spacious and dignified house, to which we gave the name of my great-grandfather’s place, the Mount. (...) The Mount was my first real home.” In E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, pp. 124-125.

²⁹³ “The floor should be of stone, marble, or tiles”; E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 104-105

exquisite design.²⁹⁴ In the layout of the bedroom suites, the plan faithfully reproduced the sequence presented in the book: bedroom, bathroom, boudoir and dressing-room, with separate doors for the servants, so as to preserve the inmates' privacy.

On the main floor, the gallery would display, as recommended, a vaulted ceiling, a few statues strategically placed, elegant pieces of furniture, and an inlaid marble floor, which Wharton and Codman had praised as a particularly elegant scheme: "The inlaid marble floors of the Italian palaces, whether composed of square or diamond-shaped blocks, or decorated with a large design in different colors, are unsurpassed in beauty."²⁹⁵

Naturally a special treatment was reserved for the library, which was conceived to preserve the occupants' privacy, but also contained an area where guests could hold polite conversations over a cup of tea. The walls have oak panelling of Codman's design, with scrolls and garlands in the upper section, while three out of four walls have built-in bookcases, as prescribed in *The Decoration of Houses*; in this warm room, the book bindings actually form an important part of the overall decoration, as Wharton often remarked in her descriptions of "real" libraries; the furniture was Louis XV²⁹⁶.

The 35-room villa in which Wharton would write her first best-seller, *The House of Mirth*, and a number of short stories²⁹⁷, enjoy the country life, and entertain her guests, Henry James among them, was built on a 113-acre portion of land, which was also carefully laid out in separate gardens by Wharton herself, Codman and Wharton's niece, Beatrix Jones Farrand, one of America's first women landscape designers. Although the house could not be called large, if compared to the neighbouring estates (Lenox had become a fashionable spot where millionaires built their cottages, like they had done at Newport), Henry James once described it as "a delicate French château mirrored in a Massachusetts pond."²⁹⁸

In consequence to the quarrels which ensued during the Mount's construction, Wharton and Codman's relationship cooled out, only to be resumed after World War I in France, where they

²⁹⁴ "The use of wrought-iron in French decoration received a strong impulse from the genius of Jean Lamour, who (...) adorned (Nancy's) streets and public buildings with specimens of iron-work unmatched in any other part of the world." Ibid., pp. 112-113.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 169-170.

²⁹⁶ Wharton could be extremely fastidious regarding the choice of her pieces of furniture, as this letter's witty remarks clearly convey, referring to a bed that was to be installed in the Whartons' New York house: "By the way, Teddy (...) claims you can't stand imitation Florentine and would wake in spasms unless Louis XVI be substituted." Walter Berry to E. Wharton, 12 January 1899. In Edith Wharton Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSS42, Box 23, Folder 711.

²⁹⁷ Between 1901 and 1911, the year she decided to sell the Mount, Wharton wrote *Sanctuary-A Novella* (1903), *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904), *Italian Backgrounds* (1905), *A Motor-Flight Through France* (1908), a book of poems, *Artemis to Actaeon and Other Verses* (1909), and the short story collections *The Descent of Man and Other Stories* (1904), *The Hermit and the Wild Woman and Other Stories* (1908), *Tales of Men and Ghosts* (1910); she also completed the novel *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907) and did early work on *The Custom of the Country* (1913).

²⁹⁸ H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 144.

both had permanently moved in the meantime. Their temporary estrangement and the letters they exchanged, and particularly those addressed by Codman to his mother (his closest confidante where his customers were concerned) may serve to draw a better picture of his temperament, which many of his clients found hard to cope with. Codman had been “fired” by the Whartons on account of the amount of his fees, deemed exorbitant by Edith; seeing that he owed her having been introduced to some of his wealthiest clients, and considering that she had repeatedly warned him in the past about customers who had been complaining about his prices, one would have expected Codman to treat Wharton with a particular eye to their close friendship.²⁹⁹

Apparently much of the friction was caused by Teddy Wharton’s personality and interference: Codman “was one of the first people to see, as early as 1902, that Teddy was a deeply unstable person,³⁰⁰” and it was becoming increasingly clearer to him that the Wharton marriage was doomed. In their period of estrangement, it is curious to note they both expressed similar, antagonistic feelings toward each other’s spouse: Codman’s frequent remarks about Teddy’s stupidity and aggressiveness (he wrote to his mother: “There are times when I fully realise what an idiot Teddy is.”) had been adapted in his letter to his co-author and friend to a milder, albeit no less indiscreet “It was entirely Teddy who had such a big head & thought he owned the earth.³⁰¹” On the other hand, Wharton had dryly commented to Bernard Berenson on Codman’s wife’s character: “...her Art pose is such that she is the only woman I have ever known who has tempted me to personal violence.³⁰²”

By a striking coincidence in the same year, 1901, Codman was hired by Broadway actress and New York socialite Elsie de Wolfe to remodel her Irving Place residence’s drawing-room, and the two struck up a friendship which would prove momentous for de Wolfe’s career choices. De Wolfe had been much impressed by the contents of *The Decoration of Houses* and, when the time came for redecorating the various houses she and her partner Elisabeth Marbury alternately owned, she

²⁹⁹ Codman often referred to Wharton with appreciation and in affectionate tone, when he wrote about her to his mother, such as in the following instance: “I wish she would come home, she is not easy to replace. Certainly she is the cleverest and best friend I have ever made-and I owe all this to her-I must say I think I have profited by her advice and it must be a pleasure to her to see it.” Eleanor Dwight, “Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman-Co-authors, Comrades, and Connoisseurs”, *Historic New England*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Summer 2007, p. 18.

³⁰⁰ H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 138. Lee quotes a letter Codman wrote to his mother, which is a sad testimony of the state of affairs: “Teddy Wharton seems to be losing his mind which makes it very hard for his wife. You know they had to shut old Mr. Wharton up about seven years before he died as he got so strange and irritable...Well he has been queer for a long time getting slowly worse. I noticed it the day he came into my office two years ago...Part of the time he sat with his arms on the table and held his head in his hands. He looks very old and broken and has lost most of the hair on his head.

He brought up a lot of strange accusations such as that I had written letters no gentleman would write to his wife...no one wants to quarrel with a maniac...after telling me that of course I was losing all my business because he had found me so hard to get on with he departed slamming the door...He has always been very strange about paying his bills...I am sure Mrs. Wharton is much troubled and worried about him. I suppose she wants to put off shutting him up as long as she can, as he will probably never get any better.” In H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 138.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

turned to Wharton and Codman's precepts, cleverly adapting them to a smaller scale such as that imposed by a townhouse. De Wolfe and Codman's 1910 remodelling of a brownstone house at 131 East 71st Street, New York, received much publicity, and was hailed as a successful decorating experiment. Her own version of the episode was related in de Wolfe's autobiography:

By 1910, as I had enough money to warrant my making an experiment, I bought one of these houses on East Seventy-first Street, and Ogden Codman, the distinguished architect, and I waved the divining-rod which brought its latent graces to the surface.

Removing the high stoop, we made a little court which we paved with stone flagging and surrounded with a high iron grill against which we planted a border of clipped evergreen hedge. In the center of the court was the new entrance door, highly lacquered in dark green and with a bright and shining bronze knob in its center. (...) Inside we paved the entrance hall in large squares of black and white marble. And in a recess of the white walls we set an old French porcelain stove. In the center of the house a spiral staircase wound its graceful way from the ground floor to the top. With a very narrow balustrade, it was light and gay. On each floor were small landings. In this way the dining-room, drawing-room and bedrooms were given the full width of the house, which was only eighteen feet. (...)

In furnishing I gave much thought to color values. The drawing-room, which had not a great deal of sun, was done in the hues of the large Savonnerie rug—rose, cream, bright blue, and black. There were several nationalities and periods of furniture, but they got along beautifully together in both their frames and their upholsteries. The window curtains were of fine white muslin, and the inner hangings were of shot rose silk. (...)

When it was finished Ogden Codman and I gave a reception to which all of New York flocked, and went away applauding this perfect solution of transmuting an unattractive house into a romantic and unusual dwelling-place. Soon the process of bringing to a second blooming was copied not only in New York, but throughout the country in cities so long overburdened with the dull and heavy façades of these mid-Victorian relics. Financially, too, our adventure was a success, as the house was sold at an encouraging profit."³⁰³

Details such as the bronze knob of the entrance door, the black-and-white marble entrance floor, the French porcelain stove set in one of the entrance's recesses, or the Savonnerie rug of the drawing-room denoted a faithful observance of Codman's precepts. De Wolfe, who in 1905-06 had decorated the interiors of New York's first "ladies' club" the Colony Club, was on her way to become a successful interior decorator, who would count among her clients millionaire art collectors like Henry Clay Frick, or movie stars like Gary Cooper. She was especially clever in absorbing much of Codman's practical examples and advice, and in using them to advantage adapting them to the particular instances the different houses presented; while her circle of acquaintances sometimes overlapped Wharton's, and the two women's lives show some extraordinary similarities³⁰⁴, they were known to cordially dislike each other.

³⁰³ Elsie de Wolfe, *After All*, New York and London, Harper Bros., 1935, pp. 123-126.

³⁰⁴ Like Wharton, de Wolfe described herself as an aesthetically sensitive child, "conscious of ugliness and its relation to myself and my surroundings", and she shared Wharton's memories of New York's "long, dull row of brownstone fronts, those hideous outcroppings of Victorian architecture at its worst." She underscored the fact that she had been visually dazzled even as a child by Europe's art and architecture, and that, like Wharton, she had written and published a travel article in *Scribner's Magazine*. The list of similarities is too long to be presented here, going from the accounts of de Wolfe and Marbury's bicycling tours in Europe, to the bestowal upon both Wharton and de Wolfe of the Order of the Légion d'Honneur for services rendered during World War I. The quotations are found in E. de Wolfe, *After All*, pp. 3-4.

De Wolfe wrote about Wharton in her memoirs, relating an episode in which the latter comes out as a decidedly snobbish lady, though de Wolfe hastened to pay an admiring tribute to her ability as a novelist:

“Edith Wharton, as I remember her-I have not seen her for many years-was handsome, small and slight and with a wealth of blond hair. There was something sharp about her and she had a forbidding coldness of manner. Calling upon her in her home in upper Park Avenue, when Mr. Wharton was living, I noticed but eight chairs in her dining-room. I remarked about this to her, as it was then the custom to give large and formal dinners.

“Yes, Miss de Wolfe,” she replied, “there are but eight people in the whole of New York whom I care to have dine with me.”

Whatever her coldness, she is a great artist. When I read the efforts of some of our younger generation of self-elected geniuses, I contrast their hurried style with the careful craftsmanship of Edith Wharton, and I wonder if ever again we shall have any figure in American letters with her capacity for taking pains.”³⁰⁵

De Wolfe did not dwell at length upon either her “apprenticeship” with Codman or *The Decoration of Houses* in her autobiography, as she probably did not mean to attract excessive attention to the similarities between Wharton and Codman’s book and her own book on interior decoration, which was published in 1913 with the title *The House in Good Taste*, and which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Codman’s career touched another high point when he was commissioned the interior decoration of Kykuit, Standard Oil magnate John D. Rockefeller’s Hudson Valley mansion; the house, built between 1905 and 1909 on a sprawling estate of over two thousand acres in the town of Pocantico, was at the center of yet another of those architectural squabbles Codman seemed so talented for getting involved in. As had been the case in the Breakers’ construction, Kykuit’s project was carried out by three different personalities, attending to the building’s structure (the New York-based firm of Delano and Aldrich), the interior decoration (Codman) and the gardens’ outlay (Welles Bosworth³⁰⁶).

The Rockefeller house, which displays an eclectic style in the outside elevations, was intended to convey its owner’s taste for a restrained lifestyle; upon its completion, an article in *House Beautiful* declared that its principal qualities were “comfort, refinement and reserve”, and that its Adam-style dining-room was “entirely removed from the elaborate and overdone schemes often found in the homes of American millionaires.”³⁰⁷ This was one of the main objectives of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., when he obtained by his father permission to build the house: not only the family

³⁰⁵ E. de Wolfe, *After All*, pp. 107-108.

³⁰⁶ Welles Bosworth, a graduate of the MIT architectural program, had trained at the Ecole de Beaux-Arts in Paris, and studied painting in London under Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema in the early 1890s. He was appointed *Sécrétaire Général du Comité pour la Restauration* when John D. Rockefeller, Jr. gave a major donation to the French government for the restoration of the Royal Palaces of Versailles. His plans for Kykuit’s gardens were much influenced, among other books, by Wharton’s *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, published in 1904.

³⁰⁷ Robert F. Dalzell, Lee Baldwin Dalzell, *The House the Rockefellers Built*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 2007, p. 79.

was under attack on account of the articles published in *McClure's Magazine*, exposing Standard Oil's purportedly monopolizing practices; the Rockefellers meant also for their house to avoid the conspicuous look of most of the monumental country houses that had been built in the Gilded Age.

Before Thorstein Veblen's 1899 criticism of society's system of conspicuous consumption, *Scribner's Magazine* had published an article by E. L. Godkin, titled *The Expenditure of Rich Men*, in which the author denounced: "To erect palatial abodes is to flaunt, in the faces of the poor and the unsuccessful and greedy, the most conspicuous possible evidence that the owner not only has enormous amounts of money, but does not know what to do with it." In 1907 Herbert Croly wrote in his *Houses for Town or Country*: "Americans do everything with their wealth except 'forget it'. The result is that there is too much of everything: too much gilt, too much furniture, too much upholstery, too much space, too many styles, too much ceiling. (...) these houses are places in which a man not stupefied by his own opulence could not possibly live."³⁰⁸

The impression of subdued elegance given out by Kykuit can doubtless be ascribed to Codman's treatment of the interiors; when John D. Rockefeller, Jr. hired him, he was conscious that the architect-decorator would provide his house with the distinguished, restrained elegance his father had taught him to appreciate.³⁰⁹ Codman personally selected and bought many pieces of furniture both in London and in Paris; upon Junior's request, he decorated the study of John D. Rockefeller in a style almost identical to his own, with stained oak panelling, and adopted an English-inspired style for the whole house, taking as models the seventeenth-century Ashburnham House in London, and the interiors designed by Robert Adam and William Kent for the music room and the library.

The overall impression conveys the grace, symmetry and proportion which Codman deemed paramount in every architectural project; to today's visitors Kykuit's poised character could hardly be associated with its laboursome construction, during which Codman frequently disagreed with Delano and Aldrich, and had several alterations executed regardless of the delays they may have caused, or of the structural changes they involved. He claimed they were all made in the interest of symmetry and convenience, but in several instances John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had to mediate between Delano and Aldrich and his capricious interior decorator,³¹⁰ who often kept him waiting for news about his European purchases and would ultimately demolish and completely remodel the

³⁰⁸ The present and the previous quotations are in R. Dalzell, L. Baldwin Dalzell, *The House the Rockefellers Built*, p. 53.

³⁰⁹ In the catalogued library of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and his wife Abby Aldrich Rockefeller were listed two copies of the original edition of *The Decoration of Houses*.

³¹⁰ A notable instance involved the construction of an oculus in the music-room (the only "entertainment" room in the house, which featured no ball-room since the Rockefellers, who were devout Baptists, did not dance, play cards, or drink). Codman's idea for the opening in the room's ceiling was based on an English model, London's Ashburnham House, designed by Inigo Jones. The work required new drawings, and it involved the removal of the steel beams which had already been placed on the second and third floor, causing long delays.

building's entrance façade, after writing to his own office manager: "I am glad to hear that Mr. Rockefeller is going to try to improve those horrid little attic rooms; I feel sure he cannot hurt the looks of the exterior of the house; for it is so ugly already...what a pity he did not have the house built by a real architect."³¹¹

After moving to France, Codman would incessantly look for the house most suited to his taste and character, as his correspondence with Wharton would indicate³¹²; in the winter of 1928-1929 he was finally able to purchase a spectacular property, formerly belonging to King Leopold of Belgium, on the hills of the French Riviera, at Villefranche-sur-mer, and he set out to plan the remodelling of a pre-existing building. The sources Codman was to draw upon were Italian and French eighteenth-century decorative elements; however, he planned for the house to have all modern conveniences, such as lighting, heating, plumbing and an elevator.³¹³

Codman went carefully over *The Decoration of Houses*, in order to draw inspiration for his treatment of the interiors of the house³¹⁴, which he named La Léopolda; he meant it to possess the qualities of symmetry, proportion and elegance he and Wharton had chosen as the paramount virtues of a perfectly-planned house. La Léopolda situated on a hillside, features an Italian-inspired scheme, a balustraded terrace with double staircase. The central block has two projecting wings and two side extensions, which connect it to two octagonal towers. In planning the inside, Codman arranged spaces so as to preserve the inmates' privacy and to articulate areas according to their destinations.

On the main floor, the public areas of the house would include a library, a drawing-room, a dining-room and a ball-room placed in *enfilade*, (to this architectural scheme he combined the effect obtained by a strategic placement of mirrors, which would multiply the perspective) and opening

³¹¹ R. Dalzell, L. Baldwin Dalzell, *The House the Rockefellers Built*, p. 103.

³¹² On 22 June 1920, Codman wrote to Wharton asking whether a house called "Le Louat" was available for rent; a few days later he received the news it was not, and expressed his requirements to Wharton: "What I really want is a place not unlike this apartment, with a few more rooms, where I could have a big room and collect my books, or a series of libraries would do, and something dilapidated and cheap, so that the rent would be small, and I could spend my money in repairs and ameliorations, and not in taxes."

Wharton promptly offered to send him details about "an interesting property near here for sale cheap, house tumbling down, but old gardens said to be beautiful," to which Codman replied on 27 June 1920: "Your words 'an interesting property near here for sale cheap, house tumbling down, but old gardens said to be beautiful' is almost a repetition of what I wrote you was my dream, and much more appealing than 'Betsey Talleyrand's Ducal Mansions'. Do take me there soon (...) I am looking for a little Trianon, preferably dilapidated." Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum. See more details in Appendix A – Correspondence.

³¹³ It may have contravened their own principles, but both Wharton and Codman asked for up-to-date conveniences when it came to their comfort, electrical outlets included.

³¹⁴ In a letter dated 18 April 1937, Codman wrote to Wharton: "I read it over very carefully when I was planning "La Léopolda" with the result that I built the Italian Saloon, a cube of Thirty Feet, cutting out what seemed to me like a not very necessary bedroom and bath room on the first floor, and giving me the most magnificent room to decorate of my whole architectural career. This I owe entirely to re-reading that book for which I am extremely grateful.

It still seems to me a book that most architects, and all their clients, should buy – "To read, mark, learn, inwardly digest and profit thereby". Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

onto the terrace; to complement the seaside-villa character of the building, Codman had planned two symmetrical and almost identically decorated Sun Rooms.

On the first floor there were four bedroom suites, including the owner's, all of them laid out following the proposed plan contained in *The Decoration of Houses*: ante-chamber, bed-room, dressing-room and bathroom, with a lodging especially intended for a trained nurse. Codman dealt cleverly with a series of practical considerations, incorporating in the house plan all possible devices for comfort and convenience: in one of the octagonal towers he placed a water reservoir, the basement contained eleven servants bedrooms and service areas such as several caves, kitchen, laundry room, main boiler room, and pantry.

Unfortunately, Codman's timing for building his architectural masterpiece proved disastrous: the 1929 financial crisis prevented him from ultimately being able to afford maintaining such a large estate (which he had been able to purchase and plan thanks to the financial boom of 1927-28³¹⁵), and his letters to Wharton bear witness to his frustration at US President Roosevelt's economic policies, his pride in having (almost) achieved a lifetime dream, and his anxiety about being able to find a buyer.³¹⁶

Codman would periodically visit La Léopolda, where he would reside in one of the smaller buildings which belonged to the estate; he would live almost permanently at the Château de Gregy, near Paris and, when possible, he and Wharton organized fund-raising visits to La Léopolda to subsidize their French charities. Wharton expressed her admiration for his achievement in various occasions, particularly in this message she sent to him from her house at Hyères: "My dear Cuddy (...) I enjoyed my visit to La Léopolda greatly, though I was sorry to see it through a cloud of grippe.

³¹⁵ Codman's letter to one of his brothers, who had expressed concern about the high cost of the operation, conveys his marked optimism regarding his financial position, and the enthusiasm which he was pouring into what he felt would be the pinnacle of his career: he felt sure that the increase in the value of his stocks in General Electric and City Bank in 1928 would "more than build and furnish the house, and leave an appreciable margin, and I shall have a place so beautiful that it seems like a fairy tale, and I feel somehow it can not be true." Quoted in P. Metcalf, *From Lincoln to Leopolda*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 39.

On 7 September 1931, a disheartened Codman wrote to Wharton: "How foolish I was to tie up so much income in that Villa, when there were so many better and more interesting things to do with the money. If I had only trusted my own judgment more than that of my Financial advisers, and sold out in time, as Mme de Beauchamp did, I could have done both perfectly comfortably, but there it is." Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

³¹⁶ He was particularly proud of La Léopolda's grand ballroom, of the gardens, and related to Wharton the flattering comments he received on the property; in particular he sent her copy of a very appreciative article published in *La Vie à la Campagne* in late 1936, and on 19 July 1936 he wrote to Wharton: "H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught who came to see it one day told me that in his opinion I had secured the finest situation and built by far the most magnificent house on the whole Riviera, and coming from a son of Queen Victoria, who had come to pass his winters on the Riviera for many years, I value the compliment very highly." Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

You have really done a very beautiful +harmonious thing – that always gladdens my heart. Yours sincerely E. Wharton.³¹⁷”

In the spring of 1937, Codman and Wharton exchanged a few letters debating about the feasibility of writing a new edition of *The Decoration of Houses*, for which Codman had very definite ideas. He wrote: “Do you think it might be a good plan to get out a new edition of “The Decoration of Houses”? It is quite out of print, and increasingly hard to get second hand copies. I do not think it has been superseded by any book that has appeared since 1896, which is quite a long time ago. Every time I look it over, I like it better, and I do not believe there would be much to change in it, do you? I want very much to talk it over with you when you return to the North.”³¹⁸”

Wharton seemed at first hesitant; two years earlier she had suffered a minor stroke, and she was experiencing increasingly frequent health troubles. The two were keeping up a steady correspondence, and met whenever possible, but more and more often one saw Wharton’s secretary answering his letters under dictation.³¹⁹

Codman pursued his objective; his argumentation included the intentions to publish a cheaper edition, which should have contained a preface and, most importantly, an illustrated section which would serve to prove the feasibility of the book’s principles:

“As the book is entirely out of print, I want a second edition to put it within everybody’s reach.

I think a brief preface to the second edition, with perhaps a few additional illustrations showing rooms that have been decorated since it was published, and in which the precepts laid down in the book had been followed, as has been done at “La Léopolda”, at Grégy, at N° 15 East 51st Street, and at 7, East 96th Street, not to speak of many other houses, would make it easier for the readers to grasp what we were trying to inculcate.

The book has sold very readily in the past forty years or so and I see no reason why it should not sell well now. Nothing any thing like as good has appeared since to my knowledge, and I have tried to add all books of any consequence about Architectural decoration to my library.

When I was in London last spring Batsford told me a new edition was required, and would sell, and I fancy Scribner, and any dealer in books about architecture and decoration would say the same. Yesterday, Monsieur Maumené, the editor of “Vie à la Campagne” lunched at Grégy. He published an article on the exterior of La Léopolda quite lately, to be followed quite soon by one about the interior, so he told me.”³²⁰

³¹⁷ E. Wharton to O. Codman, 18 February 1931. In Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

³¹⁸ O. Codman to E. Wharton, 30 March 1937. In Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

³¹⁹ Wharton’s secretary answered Codman’s proposal with the following letter: “Monsieur, Madame Wharton croit vous avoir écrit au sujet d’une nouvelle édition de votre livre ensemble, mais comme c’est au moment où elle était assez malade avec la grippe qu’elle pense l’avoir fait, et qu’elle n’a pas noté comme elle le fait d’habitude qu’elle vous avait écrit, elle me prie de vous dire de sa part que l’idée l’intéresse beaucoup, mais qu’elle craint qu’il y a une objection, c’est à dire que votre livre ayant été inspiré par la lutte contre les tapissiers auxquels, à cette époque, on confiait toute la décoration des maisons, il lui semble qu’il faudrait refaire tout le livre, puisque vous avez eu gain de cause, et que les tapissiers ne jouent plus aucun rôle dans l’architecture intérieure des maisons.

Quant à refaire le livre, ceci lui paraît impossible.” E. Wharton to O. Codman, 16 April 1937. In Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

³²⁰ O. Codman to E. Wharton, 18 April 1937. In Ogden Codman, Jr., Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

Wharton's interest in Codman's proposal, as conveyed in her answer a few days later, largely seemed to take into account the new book's prospective buyers, perhaps a different reading public from the people who had made her novels so successful; her prompt offer to contact their old publisher gives a glimpse of Wharton as an enthusiastic woman, ready to take up yet another challenge, almost oblivious of all the toils and anxieties and quarrelsome letters she had exchanged with Codman when they had written their book together:

"Dear Cuddy,

I dictate this line in haste in answer to your letter which has just come.

Your arguments in favour of a new edition of "The Decoration of Houses" seem to me very convincing, especially if Batsford thinks it a good idea. I will willingly fall in with your suggestions, which seem to me excellent. I expect to get to St-Brice by the middle of June, and we could then talk the new edition over, and see what alterations can be made. I do not believe there would be much use in trying to change the text; it would be better, probably, to deal with the new situation in a preface. (...) my first impulse was against a new edition, as it seemed to me that the bogey we had been fighting had long since been destroyed, though only to be replaced by worse things. However, the fact that the publishers seem interested is a pretty good sign that the book would still find a public, and I am in hearty approval.

What should you think of placing the matter in the hands of Pinker, the agent in London and New York? He does a good deal for me nowadays, and I find him very satisfactory; but, of course, if you have a definite proposal from Batsford, it is perhaps hardly worth while. Do you want me to write to Scribner on the subject?"³²¹

Codman was not just anxious to co-author another, up-to-date version of their old successful book; by 1937 his pressing economic cares had made him give up hope of ever keeping La Léopolda as his own, and he was thinking, as an advertising device, of writing and printing a booklet which would help him find a wealthy purchaser for his spectacular villa. He meant to ask Wharton to use her literary flair and her experience so that the booklet would not contain mere captions to the pictures of La Léopolda, but a learned and sophisticated commentary on a building that proved the value of the theories they had laid down together thirty years earlier.

It is not clear whether he had time to explain this project to Wharton. On 25 May 1937, while visiting Codman at his castle in Grégy, Wharton suffered a major stroke; she died at her home in St. Brice-sous-Forêt, after lingering on for about two months.

Codman seemed to have rallied quickly enough from the loss of one of his closest friends; left with the problem of finding an author for his booklet, he entrusted the job to a ghostwriter and

³²¹ E. Wharton to O. Codman, 21 April 1937.

To this he promptly replied the following: "Dear Mrs Wharton, Many thanks for your letter of April 21st. It seems to me a very good idea to place the matter in the hands of Pinker, the agent, in London and New York, as Batsford could be supplied by him, and Helburn the dealer in Architectural books as well. I think the book will sell in the United States even better than in England, there ought to be a big demand for it there, bigger than in England, where in their ignorance, they think nobody can teach them much about the fine arts, in spite of which idea they bought the book very well. In America they are more ready to learn. I shall look forward to seeing you at St. Brice in the middle of June. We can talk the matter over then and there. O. Codman to E. Wharton, 21 April 1937.

Both letters in Ogden Codman, Jr. Papers, Box I. B., Vol. 27, Folder Mss. L 409, The Boston Athenaeum.

had the booklet privately printed in 1939 in Paris. *La Léopolda, A Description by Ogden Codman – Architect and Owner* certainly has the fault of *not* having been written by Wharton; even though it was carefully laid out to show to advantage the impressive façade and monumental structure of the villa, its exquisite interiors, and its magnificent gardens, the flat prose style made it no more than a cleverly contrived list of the house’s features and its decorative items³²².

The text paid tribute to Wharton, in citing her collaboration with Codman on the writing of their book; it also inevitably echoed several of the concepts the two had presented in *The Decoration of Houses*. Codman acknowledged his debt to the Italian architects whose buildings he had taken as models for La Léopolda by naming them in the opening pages³²³; he then offered a brief self-presentation in which he stressed the importance he ascribed to such rules as “building with the greatest simplicity, (...) avoiding unnecessary ornament, (...) depending almost entirely upon the proportions of voids and masses, and (...) searching always for a tradition or precedent.”³²⁴

These words were undoubtedly a reminder to Codman: he had stated that *The Decoration of Houses* had been with him during the planning of La Léopolda, and the text of the 1939 booklet contained several references to the use of suitable materials according to a room’s destination, or to the climate, to ceilings decorated in the appropriate manner, to the elegant French tradition and the exquisite Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture both he and Wharton had praised, and made references to some of the French architects, decorators and sculptors whose names appeared in their book. The dining-room, in particular, as described by Codman, seemed to represent the literal rendition of the model he and Wharton had proposed: in its side walls, he had planned niches which would contain “terra cotta pedestals supporting plaster groups of lifesized girls, who hold vases of fruit. (...) Placed as they now stand they are the culminating point of the scheme for the interior decoration of La Léopolda, which has been most carefully studied and carried out in the architectural manner as were all the decorations of palaces in France and Italy during the eighteenth century.”³²⁵

³²² Codman had expressed his regret at not having been able to pair the visual renditions of his masterpiece with the elegant prose of his famous novelist friend: ““Mrs. Wharton would have made a literary achievement of it as she did out of *The Decoration of Houses*, but (mine) will be a sort of suite to that.” P. Metcalf, *Design and Decoration*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, p. 110. Unfortunately the real-estate advertisement tone of the commentary is paired with several orthographic and grammatical errors; if anything, Wharton’s painstaking care in reviewing her galleys, as shown in her early correspondence with Scribner’s editors, would have doubtless prevented such typographic blunders.

³²³ The architects were cited along with the buildings; they were Giocondo Albertolli, who designed Villa Belgiojoso in Milan and Villa Melzi at Bellagio, and Dominique le Brun, who built Villa Borelli at Marseilles.

³²⁴ O. Codman, *La Léopolda, A Description*, Paris, N. R. Money, 1939. The booklet’s pages are not numbered.

³²⁵ *Ibid.* This passage echoes the description of state dining-rooms of the eighteenth century, which “were treated with an order, niches with statues being placed between the pilasters (...) a life-size group or a statue.” In E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 157-158.

The history of La Léopolda's construction, its various tenants, its successive owners and remodelings would deserve a study in themselves; during Codman's lifetime, it would be rented for several months at a stretch, but Codman would be extremely fastidious as to its prospective tenants' choice. He famously refused to let La Léopolda to the Dukes of Windsor in 1938;³²⁶ in 1948 he granted permission to shoot a scene of the film "The Red Shoes" on the grounds.³²⁷

After Codman's death, La Léopolda was purchased by Italy's car manufacturer Giovanni Agnelli in 1952 for 10,000,000 Fcs; it has subsequently known various owners: in 2008 there were insistent talks about it being once more on the market. Its last owner, Mrs. Lily Safra, reportedly put a price tag of €390,000,000 on it; there are no updates as to the most recent bidders, although the world-wide-web is rife with speculations on prospective purchasers which ironically sound like modern-day versions of the Gilded Age robber barons Wharton so cleverly described.

Wharton and Codman's book, and Codman's practical works were indirectly responsible for an interesting, albeit on their part unforeseeable development in the field of home-decorating advice books in America. Former Codman client and protégée Elsie de Wolfe had been receiving an increasing number of requests as a home-decorating consultant, and since 1911 had regularly signed a column on both *The Delineator* (upon request by its editor, Theodore Dreiser) and *Good Housekeeping*, where she answered readers' questions concerning interior decoration; in 1913 she collected and rearranged several of her previously published articles in a book titled *The House in Good Taste*, which would prove both very popular and influential.

The similarities between the principles expounded in both books are striking, and in many instances de Wolfe obviously quoted Wharton and Codman verbatim. De Wolfe named a long list of historical precedents for her decorative treatments, which faithfully mirrored those contained in *The Decoration of Houses*, without however providing her text with a list of books consulted. Moreover, the chapters in her book, devoted to the different rooms that constituted a house, analyzed each room from an analogous perspective as Wharton and Codman's; they contained the same conclusions, often expressed in similar wording: "...junk-this heterogeneous mass of ornamental 'period' furniture and bric-à-brac bought to make a room 'look cozy'. Once cleared of

³²⁶ The Duke and Duchess of Windsor, who did not object to the rent's amount, had expressed their intention to operate several substantial modifications to Codman's interior decoration (furniture removal, painting of the walls, change in the disposition of the statuary), at which point he prepared a four-page list of conditions, and demanded a hefty sum as a guarantee, hoping to discourage them; after yet another meeting, called by the Dukes in Paris, Codman is said to have taken his leave with a formal: "I regret the House of Codman cannot do business with the House of Windsor." Quoted in P. Metcalf, *From Lincoln to Leopolda*, in *Ogden Codman and the Decoration of Houses*, pp. 36-37.

³²⁷ In the celebrated M. Powell-E. Pressburger production, the scene makes the most of the grand staircase, lined with cypresses, leading from the Avenue Léopold II to the villa; Codman particularly appreciated its scenic impact, as he described it in a letter to Mrs. Alfred Coats, one of his earliest Newport clients: "leading down from the terrace on the side towards the sea is a flight of 260 steps rather like the wonderful staircase of the Villa d'Este, at Tivoli, near Rome." O. Codman to Mrs. Alfred Coats, 19 July 1936, in *Ogden Codman, Jr. Papers*, Box I. E., Vol. 49, Boston Athenaeum.

these, the simplicity and dignity of the room comes back, the architectural spaces are freed and now stand in their proper relation to the furniture. In other words, the architecture of the room becomes its decoration.³²⁸” One only needs to compare it with this excerpt from *The Decoration of Houses* to realize that de Wolfe must have known by heart her good friend and mentor Codman’s book: “Decorators know how much the simplicity and dignity of a room are diminished by crowding it with useless trifles. Their absence improves even bad rooms (...) It is surprising to note how the removal of an accumulation of knick-knacks will free the architectural lines and restore the furniture to its rightful relation with the walls (...) in other words: the architecture of a room became its decoration.³²⁹”

De Wolfe shared Codman and Wharton’s dislike for cluttered rooms, triple-layered curtains, large sheets of glass employed as window-panes, portières, the vulgar effect of lace curtains in well-appointed rooms, the stiff formality of drawing-rooms sacred to discomfort and filled with bric-à-brac, and the “overcharged house of the average American millionaire, who builds his home with a hopeless disregard for tradition.³³⁰”

As for the details they all seemed to agree on, they are too many and too specifically presented in de Wolfe’s book for the fact to be a mere coincidence, from the praising of the decoration of the Sala del Cambio at Perugia, to the detailed history of the development of the modern drawing-room, to the explanation of the origin of *toiles de Jouy*’s method of fabrication. De Wolfe, who did not seem at all bothered by the chance that anyone would notice such similarities, paid covert tributes to the authors of *The Decoration of Houses*: “I do not purpose in this book, to go into historic traditions of architecture and decoration-there are so many excellent books it were absurd to review them.”³³¹ An even more specific instance is the anecdote in which De Wolfe disguised Wharton’s identity with that of an Englishwoman, in presenting an instance of fastidious good breeding as opposed to the pretentiousness and ignorance of people who presumed to decorate their rooms according to manufacturers and antique dealers’ labels:

“I remember taking a clever Englishwoman of much taste to see a woman who was very proud of her new house. We had seen most of the house when the hostess, who had evidently reserved what she considered the best for last, threw open the doors of a large and gorgeous apartment and said: ‘This

³²⁸ Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste*, New York, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2004, p. 18.

³²⁹ E. Wharton, O. Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses*, pp. 185 and xix of the Introduction.

³³⁰ E. de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste*, p. 3.

³³¹ De Wolfe had certainly Codman in mind when she wrote in her memoir: “The architect (...) need not be a Beaux Arts graduate.” Codman’s relationship with De Wolfe, as opposed to Wharton’s detached attitude towards her, was alluded to in this passage: “...a brilliant coterie who gathered at our hearth now and then included Ogden Codman, Henry Adams, Walter Gay, and Mrs. Don Cameron. When they were together there was always sure to be good talk.” In E. De Wolfe, *After All*, pp. 86 and 107.

is my Louis XVI ballroom.' My friend, who had been very patient up to that moment, said very quietly, 'What makes you think so?'"³³²

The House in Good Taste carefully avoided mentioning previous books on house decorating, or names of leading contemporary architects or decorators other than De Wolfe's own³³³: the underlying concept behind it differed from *The Decoration of Houses* in that it looked to establish a close, almost intimate relationship with the reader (owing to its having started as a piece of journalism), while obeying to the commercial strategies which were extensively being applied in all aspects of social life. For this purpose, De Wolfe introduced less lofty examples than those presented by Wharton and Codman, who had established an historical and emotional distance between themselves and the people inhabiting the rooms illustrated in *The Decoration of Houses*. On the contrary, De Wolfe chose to symbolically draw the reader inside the circle of her acquaintances and wealthy clients, by including pictures of her own home and those she had decorated; thus the book provided De Wolfe's readers with fashionable, real-life models whose lifestyles could be emulated by following her advice in decorating their own homes.

This appeal to imitation would prove irresistible, as Wharton and Codman had foreseen in their book's introduction, when they reflected on the instinctive tendency of members of the so-called lower classes to ape their betters' lifestyles and attitudes, and to conform to their set of standards. *The Decoration of Houses* had been criticized by some reviewers for being too detached from the needs and possibilities of the average American house-maker, and its authors had been presented as members of the privileged class, who would not give their due importance to the practical considerations which the working-class faced daily.

As a matter of fact, in *The Decoration of Houses*, every ideal interior, every theoretical example, and every description of the perfectly appointed room was followed by the authors' advice on how to achieve similar, appropriate results on a limited budget. Moreover, Wharton had been long observing the disastrous consequences of publicity's repeated appeals to the human instinct for emulation, which encouraged people to overextend their incomes and brought on innumerable instances of families who lived beyond their means. In *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart and Lawrence

³³² E. de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste*, pp. 15-16. The very same anecdote is ascribed to Wharton, in H. Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 152.

³³³ The article which reported on the remodelling and re-decoration of the house she and Codman redecorated in New York (mentioned on pp. 86-87) followed this self-promoting strategy, in evidencing de Wolfe's name in the article title and in giving him a passing mention in the opening lines: "Mr. Ogden Codman reconstructed the narrow small house into a seemingly spacious, well-lit one. And when his work was finished Miss de Wolfe took charge of it and furnished it." The articles then dwells at length on the cleverness of de Wolfe's decorating schemes. In *The Art of Decorating a House Charmingly Displayed in a Fifth Avenue Home by Miss Elsie de Wolfe*, *The New York Times*, 15 January 1911.

Selden were the unwitting products of just such an unhealthy attitude towards financial matters.³³⁴

The smaller scale of houses to which the majority of people had to adapt itself was constantly underlined in de Wolfe's book, which nonetheless promised these houses would retain a gay, pleasant and elegant atmosphere, if its precepts were faithfully carried out. One of *The House in Good Taste's* merits was that its author(s) had taken into proper consideration the changes intervened in the fifteen years since Wharton and Codman's book had been published, and accordingly had proceeded to declare:

“What do we mean by the best standards? Certainly not those of the useless, overcharged house of the average American millionaire (...) this is the age of the apartment (...) the apartment has come to stay (...) a decade ago the apartment was considered a sorry makeshift in America (...) the apartment is the solution of the living problems of the city, and it has been a direct influence on the houses of the towns.”³³⁵

More importantly, another change on which de Wolfe capitalized in writing her book was women's muted social role, and the author's self-presentation as a successful self-providing woman, whose glamorous lifestyle was a result of her entrepreneurship, was instrumental in establishing a strong identifying process between de Wolfe and her reading public. She indirectly encouraged her female readers “to embrace modernity by taking individual control over their material surroundings and creating a domestic space that would express their own individuality.”³³⁶

In Wharton and Codman's book there would absolutely have been no question of presenting the house as an exclusively female domain, as was the case in *The House in Good Taste*: the discreet personality of a woman whose first published book would see her name paired with a male co-author would never have put in writing such ideas as “we take it for granted that the American home was always the woman's home: a man may build and decorate a beautiful house, but it remains for a woman to make a home of it for him. (...) the modern house (is) the woman's house (...) all that is intimate and charming in the home as we know it, has come through the unmeasured influence of women.”³³⁷

Ironically, Wharton's real-life experiences would prove that she somewhat embodied de Wolfe's theories, as her Lenox house was undoubtedly an expression of her own ideas, and her unhappy marriage would translate into practice de Wolfe's axiom, which declared that “men are

³³⁴ “Mrs Bart was famous for the unlimited effects she produced on limited means; and to the lady and her acquaintances there was something heroic in living as though one were much richer than one's bank-book denoted.” “Neither one of the couple cared for money, but their disdain of it took the form of always spending a little more than was prudent.” Both quotations are found in E. Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, pp. 26 and 120.

³³⁵ E. de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste*, pp. 3 and 147.

³³⁶ Penny Sparke, “The ‘Ideal’ and the ‘Real’ Interior in Elsie de Wolfe's *The House in Good Taste* of 1913”, *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2003, p. 69.

³³⁷ E. de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste*, pp. 4 and 6.

forever guests in our homes³³⁸”; both women, moreover, knew perfectly the importance of a carefully planned publicity campaign. De Wolfe made an overt use of advertising and marketing strategies, by constantly emphasizing the importance of her own personality³³⁹, Wharton discovered very early the mechanisms regulating the writer-editor relationship, and her attention for her publisher’s marketing strategies was apparent even from the letters she exchanged with Scribner’s representatives at the time of the publication of *The Decoration of Houses*.³⁴⁰

Undoubtedly De Wolfe’s editorial choices had answered to a brilliant advertising strategy, but perhaps her attitude masked a deeper, undisclosed sense of inferiority on her part. Wharton apparently shared Codman and little else with her; her literary stature was considerable by 1913, not to mention the fact that Wharton’s social milieu’s inherited views on social mobility strongly influenced her opinions about a woman who, even though she had been presented at the English Court,³⁴¹ had no qualms about embarking upon such a questionable career such as the theatre, and who had entered the circle of society’s wealthiest members through a much publicized friendship with theatrical agent Elisabeth Marbury. Moreover, De Wolfe herself was no author, as all her articles and her book had been ghost-written by a young editor, Ruby Ross Wood.³⁴² Wharton and de Wolfe, however, have secured themselves each a separate niche in posterity’s view of their contribution to the subject: where the former has been credited by the invention of the modern concept of interior decoration, the latter is considered the first modern interior decorator³⁴³.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

³³⁹ Before the *Delineator* started publishing de Wolfe’s articles in 1911, it paved the way for an adequate reception for such a fashionable personage on the part of its readers. It featured an article, written by Ruby Ross Wood and entitled *Our Lady of the Decorators*, which, after explaining that de Wolfe had already distinguished herself as “the best gowned woman on the American stage”, stated: “She is going to talk to you, our readers, of interior decoration. She knows more about it than any woman in America!” In P. Sparke, *The ‘Ideal’ and the ‘Real’ Interior in Elsie de Wolfe’s The House in Good Taste of 1913*, p. 67.

³⁴⁰ One of de Wolfe’s trademark devices was to present her interiors’ photographs printed with her own written signature below it, so as to enhance in the reader’s mind an instant identification between the product and the author, thereby creating the figure of the ‘signature-designer’. Wharton’s quick grasp of editorial practices was shown in her letters to Codman, in which she expresses her wish to obtain favourable reviews and named ‘desirable’ reviewers as opposed to ‘undesirable’ ones. See Appendix C, letter of 9 November 1897.

³⁴¹ Wharton’s view about Americans who fought to obtain a presentation to St. James’ Palace is well expressed in this remark she wrote in her autobiography: “The Americans who forced their way into good society in Europe were said to be those who were shut out from it at home. (...) as for the American women who had themselves presented to the English Court-well, one had only to see with whom they associated at home!” In E. Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 62.

³⁴² Ruby Ross Wood, at the time she was hired to work alongside De Wolfe for *The Delineator*, had had little experience in journalism as an editor for William Randolph Hearst. After her collaboration with De Wolfe, which included a series of articles for the *Ladies Home Journal*, written after *The House in Good Taste* was published, she left journalism to write her own book on interior decoration, *The Honest House*, in 1914, and to become a fashionable decorator herself.

³⁴³ “It has been said that the person who invented the concept of interior decoration as we know it today was the novelist Edith Wharton, who started her career as a writer by collaborating with Ogden Cookman (sic!) on a volume called *The Decoration of Houses*, which was published in 1897. She preached a cautious, sensible good taste, albeit on rather a grand scale, which has been the stock-in-trade of most professional decorators ever since. The first person to practise decorating as a profession was the ex-actress Elsie de Wolfe”. Edward Lucie-Smith, *Furniture: A Concise History*, Oxford University Press, New York and Toronto, 1979, p. 168.

Wharton's attitude toward the overwhelming popularity of the new generation of decorators, influenced by de Wolfe's book, and her opinions about the hectic lifestyle of the "new woman," who had replaced the dignified society ladies she identified with her parents' and grandparents' generation, is perhaps best illustrated in her 1927 novel, *Twilight Sleep*. In its varied menagerie of Old New York remnants, aspiring film actors, Oriental gurus, hyperactive socialites, bored rich girls, psychic mind readers, and philandering rich businessmen, she seamlessly inserted a fashionable interior designer and a prominent, middle-aged society lady, who shared some of the much-publicized habits of America's queen of tasteful decoration. Tommy Ardwin is "the new decorator", whose creed is summed up in words like "I hate things that are really where you think they are. (...) Everything in art should be false", and whose looks remind Nona Manford³⁴⁴ of "a cross between a Japanese waiter and a full-page advertisement for silk underwear."³⁴⁵ He devises interiors which need to be changed every few months, to prevent boredom and to help people integrate smoothly in the flow of energies that is called life. To Nona, modern decors are puzzling and impersonal, like the one she surveys in her married step-brother's house:

"The drawing-room (...) looked, for all its studied effects, its rather nervous attention to 'values', complementary colours, and the things the modern decorator lies awake over, more like the waiting-room of a glorified railway station than the setting of an established way of life. Nothing in it seemed at home or at ease (...) a ridiculous house in which no one ever opened a book. (...)Mrs. Manford had paid for the house and its decoration. It was not what she would have wished for herself-she had not yet caught up with the new bareness and selectiveness."³⁴⁶

Pauline Manford, on the other hand, represents the "lady" of the Gilded Age mansions, whose New York house has kept all the luxurious details of the turn-of-the-century Beaux Arts palaces (marble hall and staircase, gilded furniture, a Gainsborough, an expensively bound library, tapestries and 'period' furniture included), to which she has added "a huge bathroom (...) which looked like a biological laboratory, with its white tiles, polished pipes, weighing machines, mysterious appliances for douches, gymnastics and physical culture."³⁴⁷ Pauline Manford's house reflects her obsessions: her efforts to pursue eternal youth are shared by all those "bright elderly women, with snowy hair, eurythmic movements, and finely-wrinkled over-massaged faces" who

³⁴⁴ Nona Manford, one of *Twilight Sleep*'s main characters, is the reflector through which Wharton conveys her critical views on the disintegration of social customs and her aesthetic views on art and architecture. Her mother, Pauline Mansford, embodies the middle-aged society lady, who manages her emotional life with the same systematic precision with which she follows her social duties.

³⁴⁵ Edith Wharton, *Twilight Sleep*, New York, Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997, p. 78.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31 and 108.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

keep their daily schedules crowded with “plans for a rest cure, for new exercises, for all sort of promised ways of prolonging youth, activity and slenderness.”³⁴⁸

Perhaps the reader may find the ultimate expression of Wharton’s relationship with houses in the words and thoughts of Nona Manford, who moves against the backgrounds of differently appointed dwellings, each the product of a different epoch’s idea of style and comfort, and of muted social conditions. She confesses herself “pricked” by the Eustons’ drawing-room (a perfectly preserved relic of the brownstone age: a drawing-room with with a triple layer of sour-apple curtains, an Aubusson carpet with huge cabbage roses, hostile gilt seats, marqueterie cabinets with blue china dogs and Dresden shepherdesses, spectacle-cases and opera-glasses, an alabaster Leaning Tower and a copy of Carlo Dolci’s Magdalen), yet she is amazed at her own detachment in observing its “queer dead rubbish.”³⁴⁹ Her acute sensitivity allows her to smile at it, to detect signs of “filial piety” in the preservation of personal items, which had belonged to one’s own beloved relatives, and to reflect on the various levels of significance people attach to objects: “Where indeed-she wondered again-did one’s own personality end, and that of others, of people, landscapes, chairs or spectacle-cases, begin?”³⁵⁰

In Wharton’s experience, much of what was seen in houses’ interiors was not so much a matter of expression of one’s own personality, as of a traditional set of values and standards, handed down from one generation to the next; most people would not dare to deviate from the given course, others chose things just because everyone else had them. This resulted, in every epoch, in innumerable replicas of the same room, be it the dreary drawing-room of Wharton’s childhood, the pretentious gilt salons or bedrooms of the Gilded Age, or the Cubist houses of the Roaring Twenties. The apparent outrage at daring decorative schemes would repeat itself with the new fashion standards each generation is destined to adopt, and it is expressed in *Twilight Sleep* by Mrs. Manford’s opinion on her daughter-in-law’s Cubist sculpture, which echoes the scandalized comments Old New York uttered at “Beaufort’s audacity in hanging ‘Love Victorious’, the much-discussed nude of Bouguereau.”³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 11 and 83. These details contained a veiled reference to de Wolfe’s lifestyle, which was widely publicized as she became increasingly successful in promoting her image both as a successful decorator and as an international celebrity. She was known to be a vegetarian, to periodically undergo facial peeling procedures, and to adhere to a strict programme of calisthenics and yoga, and would often do headstands in public to demonstrate her agility. Source: Jane S. Smith, *Elsie de Wolfe, A Life in the High Style*, pp. 131, 200-201, 260-61.

³⁴⁹ *Twilight Sleep*, p. 201.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 200-201.

³⁵¹ E. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p. 101. Compare it with Pauline Manford’s attitude as regards the younger generation’s taste: “she had even digested (...) Lita’s black boudoir, with its welter of ebony cushions overlooked by a statue as to which Mrs. Manford could only minimize the indecency by saying that she understood it was Cubist.” In E. Wharton, *Twilight Sleep*, p.

Culture was ultimately the key-word, both in Wharton and in Codman's approach to art and architecture; in Wharton's subsequent analysis of characters and backgrounds, between which she perceived a deep inter-connection, she was always able to grasp and render precisely the innumerable material and emotional links between people and places.

Her vision of the developments of modern art and decoration blended with her observation of cultural and social changes, and combined to enrich, sometimes at a high personal cost, her own experiences: she had been through a painful divorce, a relocation from her native country in her mature years, and, on a larger scale, had been an involved witness of the collective tragedy which was World War I.

True to her keen spirit of observation, which she always strove to exercise from a broad perspective, in the fiction of her old age she was to express yet again in her beloved architectural metaphors her piercing observations about people's unvarying habit of superficially approaching life's deepest aspects: intellectual involvement, social awareness, emotional relationships, and respect for culture's immeasurable contribution to the human race's improvement.

Her *Twilight Sleep* characters are too self-absorbed and vacuous to see beyond appearances, and they sum up their boredom at life's uneventfulness in an eloquent exclamation: "Life itself is such a bore - You can't redecorate life!"³⁵²; certainly not, Codman and Wharton would have added, merely through a superficial application of ornament.

³⁵² E. Wharton, *Twilight Sleep*, p. 34.

Conclusion

The *Decoration of Houses* can be seen as a remarkable piece of writing in many respects: as a fruit of a seemingly unlikely collaboration, that of a practicing professional and his client, whose bond grew thanks to the constant exchange of ideas and stimuli originating from a shared, genuine passion for strong cultural and historical values.

The influence this text exercised, which went well beyond the authors' expectations, finds perhaps an adequate explanation in its contents' quality which, allowing for the authors' socially elevated position, nevertheless offered its readers an authoritative and instructive insight in the process of carefully cultivating discernment and taste through what both Wharton and Codman perceived as an absolute necessity – knowledge.

The authors' critical disapproval of the architectural excesses of their epoch and social milieu, and their upholding of more suitable and refined models offer a valuable documentation about their cultural background and about their unbiased judgment of the wealthy class' attitude towards what Wharton and Codman regarded as a historically significant artistic and scientific product of human intellect.

Wharton's particularly pointed judgment of the rising culture of consumption found expression in her descriptive analysis of the shallow life led by her privileged-class characters, whose physical surroundings were houses that had ceased to be homes, and become a theatrical backdrop against which wan, empty shadows played out their spoiled lives like senseless pantomimes, needing a different "scene" (as in the theatre) to sleep, change clothes, eat breakfast, eat dinners, smoke, listen to music, meet their children, entertain close friends, throw opulent, large-scale entertainments, deal with the servants, read a book, but never seem to be able to lead a truly fulfilling, deeply felt family life.

On his part, Codman, who is today probably best remembered for his literary collaboration with Wharton, translated into practice the rigorous, albeit sometimes academic approach he reserved to all subjects which caught his attention. He was not only a brilliant, if somewhat diligent architect. His engagement in compiling punctual documentations, be they of historical buildings' elevations, genealogies of Boston families, historical decorative details, or French châteaux, are a testimony to his deeply-felt interest in history and culture, to which he felt he owed the tribute of a precise appreciation.

The two authors of *The Decoration of Houses* showed a sincere appreciation of each other's merits, and the privilege of accessing their private correspondence has provided me with a more comprehensive view of their stimulating relationship which, although it experienced alternate

phases, as all friendships do, can nevertheless be easily seen as a meeting of two strong, complementary personalities, who truly enriched each other's lives.

It was ultimately to be regretted that both Wharton and Codman, whose keen aesthetic sensitivity allowed them to feel such a deeply-rooted appreciation for all artistic expressions, did not have the chance to enjoy for a longer time the houses they had been able to create each in his/her own image, The Mount and La Léopolda.

Appendix A
The Decoration of Houses' publishing history – Following editions -
Reviews - Translations

The *Decoration of Houses* was published first in New York by Charles Scribner's Sons on 3 December 1897; Batsford published a first British edition in 1898. Both sold well, and there were regular reprints until 1919. After that, owing both to a decrease in interest in Wharton as an author, and the appearance of new texts, the contents of the book seemed to have lost most of their appeal. Rizzoli's most recent edition, presents a reproduction of its original typographic appearance. The 1997 Norton edition, which appeared on the book's centennial year, is of particular interest as it contains a section of images, illustrating later house interiors decorated according to the book's principles.

Following the list of successive editions is a selection of twenty reviews and notices published in America in the months following the book's publication; it will be seen that some did not hold back negative comments, especially the unsigned one published in *The Nation*, which caused one of Wharton's rare outpourings of anger (see E. Wharton's letter to Ogden Codman, p. 197)

My research in respect to existing translations of *The Decoration of Houses* has so far proved fruitless.

1897 Scribner's Sons 1st edition

1898 Batsford London 1st British Edition

1902 Scribner's Sons 2nd edition

1904 New York: Charles Scribner's; London: B. T. Batsford

1907 SCRIBNER'S SONS

1912 Batsford, 8vo. Hardback. Reprint.

1919 New York And London Charles Scribner's Sons And B. T. Batsford

1978 W.W. Norton & Co., New York

1997 W. W. Norton and Company, New York

1998 W W Norton & Co Inc, Scranton, Pennsylvania

2007 Rizzoli International Publications

2008 Cosimo Classics, London

2008 Kessinger Publishing, London

Reviews and Advertisement Notices for *The Decoration of Houses* Arranged in Chronological Order

Charles Scribner's Sons

Publish today:

The Decoration of Houses

By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. With 56 full-page illustrations. Large 8vo, \$4.00

This important volume will be found most helpful to all the thousands of people who are striving to "make the best" of their surroundings, aesthetically speaking. The problems continually encountered in the effort to get the best effects, architectural as well as decorative, are here met by suggestive descriptions and a series of fifty-six photographic illustrations which show what the artistic taste of different periods has already devised.

The Nation – p. 48 (Undated - Probably written before December 10, 1897 – see letters Edith Wharton to Ogden Codman 9 November 1897 and December 1897, undated, but contained in an envelope post-marked 7 December)

The Decoration of Houses. By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1897

One opens a new book on decoration with a weary anticipation, remembering how much has been lately written on the subject for Americans, and to how little purpose; but now the whole style and practice of decoration has changed, and the teaching of the last generation has become obsolete. "The Decoration of Houses", a handsome, interesting, and well-written book, not only is an example of the recent reversion to quasi-classic styles and methods, but signalizes the complete reaction that has thrown to the winds, even before the public discovered it, perhaps, the lately accepted doctrines of constructive virtue, sincerity, and the beauty of use. The authors take the new ground uncompromisingly, snap their fingers at sincerity, have no horror of shams, and stand simply on proportion, harmony of lines, and other architectural qualities. "Any *trompe d'oeil* (SIC) is permissible in decorative design," they say, "if it gives an impression of pleasure." To this have we already come; yet it seems not to have produced harmony between the outside and the inside of their volume.

The thread of their discussion is historical. Its fifty illustrations, taken from Italian, French, and English interiors, with a somewhat omnivorous appetite, are of various interest; but the book is the fruit of study, and of larger knowledge of examples than has commonly been the case with its predecessors. It is aimed, not at professional readers, but at the public, whom it instructs with many intelligent criticisms and sensible directions, calling their attention to artistic aspects of decoration which have been neglected by writers of the last dispensation. It touches the root of present difficulty when it says, in the preface, that "the vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness." But, to the authors, architectural fitness means agreeable proportions and combination of lines, and no more.

The temptation of the literature that we have left behind was that any ready-witted writer could discourse magisterially about decoration; and, inasmuch as his material was pure theory, it called for neither experience nor knowledge, nor yet for artistic or technical acquirement; in truth, after the beginning, the writers were mainly literary men and amateurs. Nevertheless there were valuable truths in their writings, and principles which, under due limitation, should have infused freshness, vitality, and manliness into decorative work. If these have been forgotten before they have borne their due fruit, the fault may have been in the narrowness, vehemence, and want of technical enlightenment with which they were urged. But whether we are morally wise, or

historically, the things we need for decorative work are taste and instinct for form-qualities which still wait their development among Americans. Till these are evolved, we must either intrust ourselves to professional hands, or be left to vibrate between the dicta of dilettanti in the one hand and doctrinaires on the other.

18/12/1897 *The Boston Daily Advertiser*, 145, p. 8.

Just published:

The Decoration of Houses

By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. With 56 full-page illustrations. Large 8vo, \$4.00

“The result of a woman’s faultless taste collaborating with a man’s technical knowledge. Its mission is to reveal to the hundreds who have advanced just far enough to find that they can go no farther alone, truths lying concealed beneath the surface. It teaches that consummate taste is satisfied only with perfected simplicity; that the façades of a house must be the envelope of the rooms within and adapted to them, as the rooms themselves are to ‘those who dwell therein’; that proportion is the backbone of the decorator’s art; and that supreme elegance is fitness and moderation; and, above all, that an attention to architectural principles can alone lead decoration to a perfect development.” New York Evening Post.

21/12/1897 *The Advertiser*- Boston

Interior Decoration

A book whose value to the house-holders of the present day it would be hard to overestimate, is a work on interior decoration entitled “The Decoration of Houses”. It is written by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, jr. The chief element in this much-needed work is its strong characteristic of common sense. Combined as this is to such an unusual degree, with a true appreciation of beauty, we might say that its chief characteristic was uncommon sense. The keynote of the work is that the truly beautiful and the essentially practical should go hand in hand in the decoration and furnishing of our dwelling houses. It is time that such a work as this were placed in the hands of the people. Our houses are so filled with bric-a-brac that there is almost no room left for the family. Too many houses resemble upholstered work-boxes. What to get rid of and what to keep is the problem that is seriously presented to many a weary housewife of the period.

To such as wish to have the home beautiful, and who also wish to have the care of the house simplified, this work will be welcomed as a valuable text-book. It is worthy of note that a man and a woman worked together as its authors. The result is far better than if either had written it alone. Many details are discussed which would not have been included if there had been but one author, or two authors of one sex.

In the table of contents are 16 chapters, which deal with the house as a whole, then with walls, doors, windows, fireplaces, and so on; then are discussed rooms for special purposes, such as the drawing-room, library, dining-room, bedrooms, school-rooms and nurseries. There are 56 plates used as illustrations for the work, and they are taken from examples of the best that has been done in the various lines of decoration discussed. The illustrations are chiefly taken from houses of importance in Europe. This has been done that only such apartments that are essential to the traveller might be given as examples. The authors judge that unprofessional readers will probably be more interested in studying rooms that they have seen, or at least heard of, than those in the ordinary private dwelling; and the arguments advanced are directly sustained by the most ornate rooms here shown, since their effect is based on such harmony of line that their superficial ornament might be removed without loss to the composition. Moreover, as some of the illustrations prove, the most magnificent palaces of Europe contain rooms as simple as any in a private house; and to point out that simplicity is at home even in palaces is perhaps not the least service that may be rendered to the modern decorator.

In the hands of decorators who thoroughly understand the fundamental principles of their art, say the authors, the surest effects are produced, not at the expense of simplicity and common sense, but by observing the requirements of both. These requirements are identical with those regulating domestic architecture, the chief end in both cases being the suitable accommodation of the inmates of the house. The fact that this end has been in a measure lost sight of is perhaps sufficient warrant for the publication of this book. No study of decoration as a branch of architecture has for at least 50 years been published in England or America.

If it be granted for the sake of argument that a reform in house decoration, if not necessary, is at least desirable, it must be admitted that such reform can originate only with those whose means permit of any experiments which their taste may suggest. When the rich man demands good architecture his neighbors will get it, too. The vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness. Every good moulding, every carefully studied detail, exacted by those who can afford to indulge their taste, will in time find its way to the carpenter-built cottage. Once the right precedent is established, it costs less to follow than to oppose it.

The chapter dealing with rooms in general is one which severely criticizes many of the present modes of house construction and decoration yet extracts from it give a good idea of the book as a whole, for while the volume is not so fault-finding throughout, it nevertheless is not vaguely visionary, but is practical from first to last.

Before beginning to decorate a room, say the authors, it is essential to consider for what purpose the room is used. It is not enough to ticket it with some such general designation as "library," "drawing-room" or "den." The individual tastes and habits of the people who are to occupy it must be taken into account; it must not be "a library," or "a drawing-room," but the library or the drawing-room best suited to the master or mistress of the house which is being decorated. Individuality in house furnishing has seldom been more harped upon than at the present time. That cheap originality which finds expression in putting things to uses for which they were not intended is often confounded with individuality; whereas the latter consists not in an attempt to be different from other people at a cost of comfort, but the desire to be comfortable in one's own way, even if it be thought the way of a monotonously large majority. It seems easier to most people to arrange a room like some one else's, than to analyze and express their own needs. Men, in these matters, are less exacting than women, because their demands, besides being simpler, are uncomplicated by the feminine tendency to want things because other people have them, rather than to have things because they are wanted. People whose attention has never been called to the *raison d'être* of house furnishing sometimes conclude that because a thing is unusual it is (?????) that through some occult process the most ordinary things become artistic by being used in an unusual manner; while others, warned by the visible results of this theory of furnishing, infer that everything is artistic that is unpractical. In the Anglo-Saxon mind beauty is not spontaneously born of material wants, as it is with the Latin races. We have to make things beautiful; they do not grow so of themselves. The necessity of making this effort has caused many people to put aside the whole problem of beauty and fitness in household decoration as something mysterious and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. The architect and decorator are often aware that they are regarded by their clients as the possessors of some strange craft like black magic or astrology.

This fatalistic attitude has complicated the simple and intelligible process of house furnishing, and has produced much of the discomfort which causes so many rooms to be shunned by everybody in the house, in spite (or rather because) of all the money and ingenuity expended on their arrangement. Yet to penetrate in the mystery of house furnishing it is only necessary to analyze one satisfactory room and to notice wherein its charm lies. To the fastidious eye it will, of course, be found in fitness of proportion, in the proper use of each moulding, and in the harmony of all the decorative processes; even to those who think themselves indifferent to such details much of the sense of restfulness and comfort produced by certain rooms depends on the due adjustment of their fundamental parts. Different rooms minister to different wants; and while a room may be made very

livable without satisfying any but the material requirements of its inmates, it is evident that the perfect room should combine these qualities with what corresponds to them in a higher order of needs. At present, however, the subject deals only with the material livableness of a room, and this will generally be found to consist in the position of the doors and fireplace, the accessibility of the windows, the arrangement of the furniture, the privacy of the room and the absence of the superfluous.

The position of the doors and fireplace, though the subject comes properly under the head of house-planning, may be included in this summary, because in rearranging a room it is often possible to change its openings, or at any rate, in the case of doors, to modify their dimensions.

The fireplace must be the focus of every rational scheme of arrangement. Nothing is so dreary, so hopeless to deal with, as a room in which the fireplace occupies a narrow space between two doors, so that it is impossible to sit about the hearth. Next in importance come the windows. In townhouses especially, where there is so little light that every ray is precious to the reader or worker, window space is invaluable. Yet in few rooms are the windows of easy approach, free from useless draperies and provided with easy chairs so placed that the light falls properly on the occupant's work.

It is no exaggeration to say that many houses are deserted by the men of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find at their clubs: windows unobscured by layers of muslin, a fireplace surrounded by easy-chairs and protected from draughts, well-appointed writing tables and files of papers and magazines. Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing-room in small townhouses, the only possible point of reunion for the family, but too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting place than the vestibule or the cellar? The windows in this kind of room are invariably supplied with two sets of muslin curtains, one hanging against the panes, the other fulfilling the supererogatory (sic) duty of hanging against the former; they (sic; should be "then") come the heavy stuff curtains, so draped as to cut off the upper light of the windows by day, while it is impossible to drop them at night; curtains that have ceased to serve the purpose for which they exist. Close to the curtains stands the inevitable lamp or jardinière, and the wall-space between the two windows, where a writing table might be put, is generally taken up by a cabinet or console, surmounted by a picture made invisible against the side wall near either window; but the spaces are usually sacred to the piano and to that modern futility, the silver table. Thus of necessity the writing table is either banished or put in some dark corner, where it is little wonder that the ink dries unused and a vase of flowers grows in the middle of the blotting pad.

Privacy would seem to be one of the first requisites of civilized life, yet it is only necessary to observe the planning and arrangement of the average house to see how little this need is recognized. Each room in a house has its individual uses; some are made to sleep in, others for dressing, eating, study or conversation; but whatever the uses of a room, they are seriously interfered with if it be not preserved as a small world by itself. If the drawing room be a part of the whole and the library a part of the drawing-room, all three will be equally unfitted to serve their special purpose. This indifference to privacy which has sprung up in modern times, and which in France, for instance, has given rise to the grotesque conceit of putting sheets of plate-glass between two rooms, and of replacing doorways by openings 15 feet wide, is of complex origin.

No room can be satisfactory unless its openings are properly placed and proportioned, and the decorator's task is much easier if he has also been the architect of the house he is employed to decorate; but as this seldom happens, his ingenuity is often taxed to produce good design upon the background of a faulty and illogical structure. Much may be done to overcome this difficulty by making slight changes in the proportions of the openings; and the skilful decorator, before applying his scheme of decoration, will do all that he can to correct the fundamental lines of the room. But the result is seldom so successful as if he had built the room, and those who employ different people to build and decorate their houses, should at least try to select an architect and a decorator trained in the same school of composition, so that they may come to some understanding with regard to the general harmony of their work.

When a room is to be furnished and decorated at the smallest possible cost, it must be remembered that the comfort of its occupants depends more on the nature of the furniture than of the wall decorations or carpet. In a living-room of this kind, it is best to tint the walls and put a cheerful drugget on the floor, keeping as much money as possible for the purchase of comfortable chairs and sofas, and substantial tables. If little can be spent in buying furniture, willow armchairs with denim cushions and solid tables with stained legs and covers of denim or corduroy will be more satisfactory than the parlor suite turned out in thousands by the manufacturer of cheap furniture, or the pseudo-Georgian or pseudo-Empire of the dealer in "high-grade" goods. Plain book-cases may be made of deal, painted or stained; and a room treated in this way, with a uniform color on the walls and plenty of lamps and books, is sure to be comfortable and can never be vulgar.

23/12/1897 *The New York Observer and Chronicle* – Among the Books, 75, 51, p. 865.

The Decoration of Houses. By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. Interior house decoration is a branch of architecture which is often neglected or accomplished in a perfunctory and tasteless manner, and this book is the first of its kind on the subject which has been published in England or America. It is ably and intelligently written. The first chapter is a comprehensive study of the old forms of decoration in France, and the progress and development in our own country. In the following chapters the author considers rooms in general, their different parts, such as doors, windows, fire places, etc., and later the special decoration of library, dining room and the other rooms that make up a home. There is an interesting chapter on bric-a-brac, which is certainly an important element in this subject, as its fitness or unfitness may make or mar the beauty of an apartment. Throughout the work the motto is "simplicity" and "sincerity" in architecture, and these two virtues characterize the text, which is free from technical terms, easily read and understood. Over fifty excellent plates are included in the volume which is both handsome and useful. Charles Scribner's Sons.

25/12/1897 *The Outlook* – New York – Miscellaneous, vol. 57, iss. 17, p. 1016 (file)

The Decoration of Houses, by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., is a much more valuable product of good taste and expert knowledge than the first glance at the bizarre binding and inappropriate illustrations would lead the reader to expect. The authors have made a readable, instructive, and authoritative plea for the elegance of simplicity and fitness as opposed to the vulgarity of display and overelaboration. (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.)

25/12/1897 *The Literary World* - Boston – Holiday Books (by Sir Toady Lion) (file)

In looking for holiday books do not overlook Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman's on *The Decoration of Houses* (Scribner);

01/01/1898 *The House Beautiful - The Chap-Book; Semi-Monthly. A Miscellany & Review of Belles Lettres*, Chicago, Vol. 8, Iss. 4; p. 185.

THE DECORATION OF HOUSES.-By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. 4to. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, \$4.00.

The great revival of interest in household decoration is shown by the number and character of the books recently published upon the subject. Last year we had *The Art of the House*, by Mrs. Marriott-Watson; this year comes *The Decoration of Houses*, a serious discussion of the subject from the standpoint of the architect in contradistinction to that of the upholsterer. It is certainly true that modern architects invariably neglect their work upon the interior of our houses. They leave the designing of the "trim" and hardware, and the general balancing of openings and wall spaces to

subalterns, devoting themselves almost exclusively to the decorative effects of the exterior. The result is that the entire interior embellishment devolves upon the decorator, in whose hands “form is sacrificed to color and composition to detail.”

The most successful decorators of the past strove for “architectural proportion,” those of the present are satisfied with the modern practice of superficially applied ornament. In expanding this idea the authors fall into an error which will nullify for a large number the many admirable qualities of the book. Neither the climate of North America nor the life and customs of the people can allow any practical use to be made of examples drawn from the Italy and France of the seventeenth century. Yet the advice here given is based almost exclusively upon such models. Marble walls and floors, stone stairways with cast iron balustrades, and frescoed ceilings are not applicable to our uses.

Historically, the book is very interesting in tracing the origin of various rooms and in detailing the decorations and uses to which they were formerly subjected. Epigrammatic statements of valuable truths abound, and, in reading, one is constantly surprised by the juxtaposition in succeeding sentences of the most excellent ideas and the worst application of them.

The curious thing is that the authors do not seem to realize that we have but just emerged from a period for which the examples they so freely recommend were unknowingly the standards; wretchedly carried out it is true, but no worse than all copies of a grandiose and magnificent style are sure to be. It was not over twenty years ago that it was a common enough sight to see hall-ways with a checker-board marble floor, walls with imitation marble paper, a niche upon the stairway for a plaster bust, a few over-fed angels badly painted over a blue ceiling, and the never-to-be-forgotten marble-topped table near the door. Yet these very things, or rather the genuine things of which these are merely inevitable imitations, are written of, illustrated, and commended throughout the volume.

A later review, published by *The House Beautiful* in March 1898, was decidedly hostile: “were the influence of the book to be generally accepted (...) it is safe to say the progress of good decorative art would be set back not less than thirty years, on a level with the ways directly after the [Civil] war. The book is especially dangerous as it hides in the soundest precepts insidious advice and execrable taste. It is hoped that its price will soon deter many from buying it, who might be misled.” Wharton and Codman’s sin had been to illustrate and praise interiors well beyond the means of the average householder. Wharton and Codman also objected to the tendency among late nineteenth-century critics to pronounce moral judgments on questions of design.

(Gail Caskey Winkler, Roger W. Moss, *Victorian Interior Decoration – American Interiors 1830-1900*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1986, p. 184.)

08/01/1898 *The Critic*, n. 829 (file)

Literature

Hints for Home Decoration

The Decoration of Houses. By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. Charles Scribner’s Sons.

Progress in ideas regarding the beauty and fitness of the ordering of house interiors is registered by the appearance of a book like this. Hitherto such works have been of a general nature, covering much ground and teaching general elementary facts concerning the adornment of the home. Into the finer shades of house decoration it was not thought necessary or wise to go, because the public was not ready for it. There was still much education in such matters required before people should become knowing and fastidious enough to pick and choose among the abundant material gathered and still being gathered in the countries where specimens of old and modern decoration worthy of adaptation or direct imitation abound.

The salient feature of the present work is the effort of the authors to separate the decoration of palaces and grand houses from that of simpler residences and homes, thereby keeping always in the

mind of the reader the needfulness of adapting decoration to the place where it is to remain. The great majority of people who may consult a book of the kind are not owners of palaces, but when they travel in Europe it is palaces for the most part which they examine, and even if the palace contains apartments and suites arranged for the simple requirements of a family, the tourist rarely sees them, because they are not supposed to care for them, or because only the gala rooms and chambers are open to the public.

The illustrations, however, are largely drawn from just such magnificent places of temporary abode or festal use, so that to a person turning over the leaves of this book a false idea of its contents is conveyed. Not that the text ignores the decoration of splendid interiors. There is stuff here for the delectation and instruction of those who propose to build the most elaborate Newport palace-villa or the most modern of highly decorated hotels. But the authors thoroughly appreciate that the ordinary well-to-do person is not by way of decorating anything so costly, and have arranged their materials to suit him rather than the millionaire.

A note struck at the outset vibrates through the whole book, and it is a strong and true note. The decoration of an interior should harmonize with-nay, it should naturally be based upon-the architecture of the building. The discordance of decoration with architecture found so constantly nowadays is traced to the variety of styles demanded of the architect. "Before 1800 the decorator called upon to treat the interior of a house invariably found a suitable background prepared for his work, while much in the way of detail was intrusted to the workmen, who were trained in certain traditions, instead of being called upon to carry out in each new house the vagaries of a different designer." The leading part played by architecture in the proper decoration of an interior is emphasized; the authors go so far as to forbid the hanging of pictures tilted outward from the wall because these no longer take their true position as part of the architectural decoration of an interior, as they might if flat against the wall.

After a chapter on the "historical tradition", in which is noted the fact that the burgher of one generation lives more like the aristocrat of a previous generation than like his own predecessors, and that modern houses should look for precedents to the smaller apartments of palaces rather than the gala rooms, the subject of rooms in general is taken up. Here some pertinent remarks on fireplaces and furniture are introduced. The chapter on walls begins with the axiom "Proportion is the good breeding of architecture"; that on doors considers the iniquity of sliding doors and portières. In the fifth chapter windows are considered and many sensible remarks are made concerning curtains, shades and shutters. The same may be said of the chapter on fireplaces. Ceiling and floor, hall and stairs, drawing-room, boudoir and morning-room are treated in three chapters. Gala rooms come next, followed by library and smoking-room. Dining-rooms, bedrooms and school-room occupy three chapters and a concluding chapter is given to bric-à-brac. "Taste attaches but two conditions to the use of objects of art: that they shall be in scale with the room and that the room shall not be overcrowded with them." "Any work of art, regardless of its intrinsic merit, must justify its presence in a room by being more valuable than the space it occupies-more valuable, that is to say, to the general scheme of decoration."

These are a few principles laid down for the guidance of people striving to make their houses within not only comfortable but enduringly beautiful. Some of the æsthetic conclusions reached by the authors will seem too finely drawn; others are certainly too sweeping; but it is clear that much reading, much travel in Italy and France and a good deal of independent thinking stand behind this pretty book. The illustrations are abundant, and while not intended as examples to imitate, reinforce the arguments in the text. They comprise simple pieces of furniture from different epochs as well as details of interiors in famous palaces of Italy and France. It depends very much on the kind of house to be decorated, whether a reader will get much direct aid and comfort from the book. Yet it is certain that no one can fail to learn a great deal from it and become, through reading it, more appreciative of what is worth noting in modern architecture as well as in the old buildings of Europe.

The development of our National architecture during the past three-quarters of a century has been manifestly an external one, that is to say, we have paid relatively far more attention to the so-called architectural design, meaning thereby the appearance of the exterior, than we have to either the planning or the designing of the interior work. This is notably true of what we are pleased to call our best private dwellings, which present the appearance of a fine casket but are only too often without the enclosed gem, so that when we have shown our friends the outside of the house we have only the ordinary comfort of our home life reserved. There has developed more recently a good deal of interest in interior decoration, a term which is used to cover a multitude of sins, and, as commonly applied, includes much that is not decoration, as such, but is fundamentally and essentially architecture. The available literature upon the subject, however, is very slight. We have had books on household taste, works like those by Christopher Dresser and Eastlake, whose influence, when not positively bad, has been rather negative; but no study of house-decoration as a branch of architecture has for at least fifty years been published in America or England, and, although France is always producing admirable monographs on isolated branches of this subject, there is no modern French work corresponding to such comprehensive manuals as d'Aviler's "*Cours d'Architecture*" or Isaac Ware's "*Complete Body of Architecture*". After a period of eclecticism which has lasted long enough to make architects and decorators lose a great deal of their traditional habits of design, and which has also, unfortunately, operated to sever the logic and really necessary connection between the exterior and internal treatment of the house, there has arisen a sudden demand for style. Not the style typified by the so-called Colonial house, where stair-rails are used as roof-balustrades, or mantelpieces as external entablatures, but the spirit which is manifested by an appreciation of artistic conditions, a conformity to recognized and traditional canons, and, in fact, a return to the spirit of the times which gave us good interiors. This period, after all, does not reach back so very far as one might suppose. It is only since the time of Louis XIV that even palaces can be said to have been really comfortable or livable. The Italian work of the early Renaissance is full of ideas in detail which can be used to advantage in every department of modern designing, and there is a wealth of material at hand in the English work of corresponding, or little later, periods which will repay study; but the essential arrangements in these periods which constitute the basis for any real architectural effect are almost hopelessly cold, unsatisfactory and unfit for our practically æsthetic wants. It is only in the smaller and later Italian palaces and in the French work dating from after the time of Louis XIV that we find really satisfactory interiors, considered both as to arrangement and as to design. A book which collects the typical work of these latter periods, and endeavors to formulate therefrom the conditions of successful house-decoration, presenting the right kind of authority for its statements, can surely be of great value. The volume before us (1) might perhaps more properly be styled a "*History of Interior Domestic Architecture as applied To-day.*" Its chosen title arouses a species of *ex-cathedra* antagonism, which disappears, however, when one considers what it is rather than what it purports to be, for decoration in the sense of applied ornamentation is hardly treated at all, and it is really a treatise on a certain phase of architecture. We might wish the authors were not quite so severe upon American work and did not feel called upon to reiterate so often the statement that certain artistic products cannot be obtained in this country, when, as a matter of fact, nowhere else in the world does the market offer such possibilities, especially for those who are blessed with an abundance of money – and to such does this work especially address itself, because, as it is very truly said, if it be granted that a reform in house-decoration, if not necessary, is at least desirable, it must be admitted that such reform can originate only with those whose means permit of any experiments which their taste may suggest. When the rich man demands good architecture his neighbors will get it too. The vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness. Every

good moulding, every careful detail, exacted by those who can afford to indulge their taste, will in time find its way to the carpenter built cottage. Once the right precedent is established, it costs less to follow than to oppose it. For this reason, it is eminently proper that this book should deal with the higher class of interiors, those in which considerable money is, of necessity, expended. It is also equally fitting that the illustrations, which are very freely spread through the book—all reproduced from photographs, and most excellently chosen—should be drawn from the palatial type rather than the humble cottage example. This book is quite free from the twaddle and pedantic bigotry of the writers of the age of Eastlake. It is fundamentally architecture. It admits the necessity of an architectural treatment and then shows how this treatment can be applied to the different portions of a house, taking up in succession the question of historical tradition, rooms in general, the walls, doors, windows, etc. as well as different styles of rooms. It is of course hard to avoid a certain amount of pedantry when one writes as one having authority, but, on the whole, the volume is far ahead of anything of the kind we know of within the last half-century; and it is so full of good ideas that it cannot fail to accomplish a very valuable missionary work. The chapter on the treatment of windows is particularly sensible and straightforward, and embodies an explanation why architects who are keenly alive to the niceties of their profession do not enjoy plate-glass. The windows at Versailles, the Trianon, and Hotel de Soubise, and other equally celebrated *hôtels* which are so much admired, were not divided into small lights because of any lack of plate-glass in those days, for the walls of these very palaces were frequently lined with large plate-glass mirrors far exceeding the dimensions of the windows, but the French architects of that period appreciated, as few of us do now, that a window is not a hole in the wall; that, while its primary purpose is to light and afford vision, it has a distinct part in the decoration of the interior, and to simply knock a hole in the wall and to fill it with nothing in the shape of plate-glass, is totally destructive of any æsthetic effect. By avoiding the self-imposed limitations which many of the past writers on interior decoration have made for themselves, these authors are able to take a wide, catholic view of the possibilities of interior work and to select from all of the best sources. They are not troubled, nor do they wish their readers to be troubled, by restrictions which would make us shut our eyes to beautiful plaster-work because it looks like some stone example, or even to wood vaulting, like the work in Memorial Hall, Cambridge, about which so much comment was made a number of years ago. In interior work the end very largely justifies the means, admitting, of course, certain fundamental necessities of fitness and balance. The fear of insincerity, in the sense of concealing the anatomy of any part of a building, troubled the Renaissance architect no more than it did his Gothic predecessor, who had never hesitated to stretch a *ciel* of cloth or tapestry over the naked timbers of the mediæval ceiling. The duty of exposing structural forms—an obligation that weighs so heavily upon the conscience of the modern architect—is of very recent origin. Mediæval as well as Renaissance architects thought first of adapting their buildings to the uses for which they were intended and then of decorating them in such a way as to give pleasure to the eye; and the maintenance of that relation which the eye exacts between main structural lines and their ornamentation was the only form of sincerity which they knew or cared about. If a flat ceiling rested on a well-designed cornice, or if a vaulted or coved ceiling sprang obviously from walls capable of supporting it, the Italian architect did not allow himself to be hampered by any pedantic conformity to structural details, and the Italian decorator felt no more hesitation in deviating from the lines of the timbering than he would have felt in planning the pattern of a mosaic or a marble floor without reference to the floor-beams beneath it. Such a straightforward, sensible view of the situation is refreshing, even though it might make some of our past generation of critics turn in their graves.

To the trained architect who has studied his profession thoroughly this book contains nothing essentially new, though it has much that can be recalled to advantage, and in the system of kindergarten treatment which so many of us have to administer to our clients this book might be made to play a very desirable part. A copy presented to a rich client might operate to open his eyes and make him avoid that cheap originality—so often confounded with individuality—which finds

expression in putting things to uses for which they are not intended, and would perhaps offset a little of the feminine tendency to want things because other people have them rather than to have them because they are wanted. The treatment of the subject is necessarily from the standpoint of disregard of the expense. But after all art is not a matter of money, and the time for economy is after the general scheme has been settled upon irrespective of cost.

In conclusion, the book is to be approved, both as an example of printer's art and for what it contains, and we hope it may lead to the preparation of a second volume brought down perhaps more to the scale of the average home-builder.

(1) "*The Decoration of Houses.*" By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Price \$4.00.

23/01/1898 *The New York Herald*

Have Art With Comfort at Home-And Keep Hubby from the Club

How to Decorate Your House Prettily, Yet Have It Comfortable

How far does bad art in interior decoration interfere with comfort? Here are two authorities, who hold that bad art drives men away from home to the club, and that art with comfort should be the keynote of every scheme of interior decoration.

How properly to decorate a house is a matter which concerns many people. Probably the majority of houses in this country, even many of those in which wealthy people live, offer object lessons in how not to decorate.

In a book just published by Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, "*The Decoration of Houses*" by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., the authors not only give valuable advice in regard to household decoration but also condemn in sweeping terms the glaring faults in decorative art shown in many American houses. By illustrations of famous interiors abroad they further show how even in palaces decorations may be simple yet highly artistic, and at the same time not interfere with comfort. In fact, art without sacrifice of comfort is the keystone of their theory of decoration.

The authors at the outset lay down the common sense rule that in deciding upon a scheme of decoration for a room it is necessary to keep in mind the relation of furniture to ornament and of the rooms as a whole to other rooms in the house. A room decorated in a very rich manner will make the simplicity of those about it look mean. There must be no violent break in the continuity of treatment. If a white and gold drawing room opens on a hall with a Brussels carpet and papered walls the drawing room will look too fine and the hall too plain.

Bad Art Drives Men to Clubs.

Referring to drawing rooms, the authors point out that only too frequently in this country the drawing room is considered sacred to gilding and discomfort, and the convenience of the household is sacrificed to a vague feeling that no drawing room is worthy of the name unless it is uninhabitable. This may be defined as a remnant of the "best parlor" superstition. It is really curious to note how to this drawing room, from which the inmates of the house instinctively as soon as their social duties are discharged, many necessities are often sacrificed.

"It is no exaggeration to say," write the authors, "that many houses are deserted by the men of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find at their clubs: windows unobscured by layers of muslin, a fireplace surrounded by easy-chairs and protected from draughts, well-appointed writing tables and files of papers and magazines. Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing room, in small town houses the only possible point of reunion for the family, but too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting place than the vestibule or the cellar?"

Avoid Furniture Epidemics.

When a room is to be furnished and decorated at the smallest possible cost, it must be remembered that the comfort of its occupants depends more on the nature of the furniture than of the wall

decorations or carpet. In a living-room of this kind it is best to tint the walls and put a cheerful drugget on the floor, keeping as much money as possible for the purchase of comfortable chairs and sofas, and substantial tables.

The authors find many defects in our furniture. These they consider largely due to desire for novelty, not always regulated by good taste or sense of fitness. No sooner is it known that beautiful furniture was made in the time of Marie Antoinette than an epidemic of supposed “Marie Antoinette” rooms breaks out over the whole country. Only the few real decorative artists stop to enquire wherein the essentials of the style consist. The others learn that the rooms of the period were usually painted in light colors, and that the furniture (in palaces) was often gilt and covered with brocade; and it is taken for granted that plenty of white paint, a pale wall paper with bowknots and fragile chairs, dipped in liquid gilding and covered with a flowered silk and cotton material, must inevitably produce a “Marie Antoinette” room. According to the creed of the average modern decorator, you have only to combine certain “goods” to obtain a certain style.

How to Hang Paintings.

Concerning the difficult question of color, the authors are of the opinion that the fewer the colors used in a room, the more pleasing and restful the result will be. A multiplicity of colors produces the same effect as a number of voices talking at the same time. The voices may not be discordant, but continuous chatter is fatiguing in the long run. “Each room should speak with but one voice; it should contain one color, which at once and unmistakably asserts its predominance.”

To attain this result it is best to use the same color, and, if possible, the same material for curtains and chair-coverings. This produces an impression of unity and gives an air of spaciousness to the room. Where the walls are hung with a large number of pictures, or, in short, are so treated that they present a variety of colors, it is best that curtains, chair coverings and carpet should all be of one color and without pattern. (...) Nothing is more distressing than the sight of a large oil painting in a ponderous frame seemingly suspended from a spray of wild roses or any of the other naturalistic vegetation of the modern wall paper. It is also important to avoid hanging pictures or prints too close to each other. Not only do the colors clash, but the different designs of the frames, some of which may be heavy, with deeply recessed mouldings, while others are flat and carved in low relief, produce an equally discordant impression.

Dreary Drawing Rooms.

The authors point out the importance of the fireplace to the decoration of a room. They hold that the fireplace must be the focus of every rational scheme of arrangement. Nothing is so dreary, so hopeless to deal with, as a room in which the fireplace occupies a narrow space between two doors, so that it is impossible to sit about the hearth. Next in importance come the windows. In town houses especially, where there is so little light that every ray is precious to the reader or worker, window space is invaluable. “Yet in few rooms are the windows easy of approach, free from useless draperies and provided with easy chairs so placed that the light falls properly on the occupant’s work.”

The hearth should be the place about which people gather; but the mantelpiece in the average American house, being ugly, is usually covered with inflammable draperies; the fire is, in consequence, rarely lit, and no one cares to sit about a fireless hearth. “Besides, if it is in the drawing room, there probably is, on the opposite side of the room, a gap in the wall eight or ten feet wide, opening directly upon the hall, and exposing what should be the most private part of the room to the scrutiny of messengers, servants and visitors.”

Down on Sliding Doors.

This opening is sometimes provided with doors, but these as a rule are either slid into the wall or are unhung and replaced by a curtain, through which every word spoken in the room must necessarily pass. In such a room it matters very little how the rest of the furniture is arranged, “since it is certain that no one will ever sit in it except the luckless visitor who has no other refuge.” Aside from the question of health and personal comfort the authors hold that nothing can be more cheerless and depressing than a room without a fire on a winter day. “The more torrid the room, the

more abnormal is the contrast between the cold hearth and the incandescent temperature." Without a fire the best appointed drawing room is as comfortless as the shut up "best parlor" of a New England farmhouse.

In a chapter devoted to knick-knacks the authors proceed to demolish bric-à-brac as thoroughly as the traditional bull in a china shop. They point to the not uninteresting fact that we have no English word to describe the class of household ornaments which French speech has provided with at least three designations, each indicating a delicate and almost imperceptible gradation of quality. In place of bric-à-brac, bibelots or objets d'art we have only knick-knacks, defined by Stormonth as "articles of small value."

29/01/1898 *The Milwaukee Journal*

Art and Comfort at Home

Lack of Them Drives Many a Benedict to His Club

In a book just published by Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, "The Decoration of Houses" by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., the authors not only give valuable advice in regard to household decoration but also condemn in sweeping terms the glaring faults in decorative art shown in many American houses. By illustrations of famous interiors abroad they further show how even in palaces decorations may be simple yet highly artistic, and at the same time not interfere with comfort. In fact, art without sacrifice of comfort is the keystone of their theory of decoration.

The authors at the outset lay down the common sense rule that in deciding upon a scheme of decoration for a room it is necessary to keep in mind the relation of furniture to ornament and of the rooms as a whole to other rooms in the house. A room decorated in a very rich manner will make the simplicity of those about it look mean. There must be no violent break in the continuity of treatment. If a white and gold drawing room opens on a hall with a Brussels carpet and papered walls the drawing room will look too fine and the hall too plain.

Referring to drawing rooms, the authors point out that only too frequently in this country the drawing room is considered sacred to gilding and discomfort, and the convenience of the household is sacrificed to a vague feeling that no drawing room is worthy of the name unless it is uninhabitable. This may be defined as a remnant of the "best parlor" superstition. It is really curious to note how to this drawing room, from which the inmates of the house instinctively as soon as their social duties are discharged, many necessities are often sacrificed.

"It is no exaggeration to say," write the authors, "that many houses are deserted by the men of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find at their clubs: windows unobscured by layers of muslin, a fireplace surrounded by easy-chairs and protected from draughts, well-appointed writing tables and files of papers and magazines. Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing room, in small town houses the only possible point of reunion for the family, but too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting place than the vestibule or the cellar?"

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drawing room, there probably is, on the opposite side of the room, a gap in the wall eight or ten feet wide, opening directly upon the hall, and exposing what should be the most private part of the room to the scrutiny of messengers, servants and visitors.”

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30/01/1898 *The Age Herald* – Birmingham (AL?)

Scribner’s Sons have just published a volume entitled “The Decoration of Houses”, which is the result of a woman’s faultless taste collaborating with a man’s technical knowledge. Its mission is to reveal truths lying just beneath the surface. Possibly it isn’t “taste” that many of us lack here, but “money” with which to decorate.

10/03/1898 *Architectural Review*, n. 5, p. 20.

A New Book on Interior Decoration

Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., have brought to their work “The Decoration of Houses” not merely the plausible reasoning and æsthetic appreciation that have heretofore been considered sufficient in this branch of art, but also the thorough discipline and technical knowledge absolutely indispensable to success, and which are gained only by long experience. Former books, for the general reader, on interior decoration, have been written, for the most part, by clever amateurs or artistic dogmatists; and, except for a few scattered ideas and as a record of outgrown follies, they are almost valueless. In this new book our present need for greater simplicity and architectural unity in the treatment of our interiors, has been considered in a readable and suggestive way.

An interesting theoretical and historical introduction is followed by a consideration of the requirements of rooms in general, with chapters upon walls, doors, windows, fire-places, ceilings and floors. The authors then consider, successively, the different rooms of a house; entrances and vestibules, halls and stairs, living and gala rooms, dining-rooms, with an interesting account of their evolution, and bedrooms. After this follows a very attractive chapter on school rooms and nurseries; and finally a chapter on bric-à-brac. The one predominating doctrine is that decoration is not an extended application of the practice of upholstery but an integral part of architecture.

The merits of the book are its dislike of the useless and unnecessary, and its demand that the general treatment of interiors shall be architectural. Unfortunately, however, it recognizes no architectural treatment except that based upon classic models. It aims at continuing the traditions of house decoration abandoned at the close of the eighteenth century. Its admiration for everything of the period of the Louis’ amounts almost to superstition, and the authors, when confronted with a difficulty, recommend “treating it with an order,” as if such treatment were, in itself, sufficient to cure any malady. Although, whenever the artistic aspects of the question are considered, the book is traditional in sympathy, yet when it comes to the adaptation of houses to the requirements of every-day life, the authors are unhampered by prevailing usage, and are keenly alive to whatever is really desirable. They say: “The material livableness of a room...will generally be found to consist in the position of the doors and fireplace, the accessibility of the windows, the arrangement of the furniture, the privacy of the room and the absence of the superfluous.”

The illustrations are unfortunate in not being examples of that simplicity which the text preaches, though they doubtless possess the good points for which they were selected. The casual and unimaginative reader is first impressed by their ornateness, expensiveness and over-decoration. He might search almost in vain for pictures of rooms which would serve as examples for his own guidance.

The subject of color is scarcely even alluded to; and when mentioned it is with a chilling lack of appreciation.

The reader could, however, scarcely find a better statement of the ideal of decoration than the following: "A room should depend for its adornment on general harmony of parts and on the artistic quality of such necessities as lamps, screens, bindings and furniture. Whoever goes beyond these essentials should limit himself in the choice of ornaments to the labours of the master artist's hand."

19/03/1898 *The Literary World*

Minor Notices

The Decoration of Houses

That the architecture of a house should be noble in itself, independent of its decoration, and that the relation of proportion to decoration should be recognized, is the gist of this volume by Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr.; one replete with common sense, based upon feeling for proportion and harmony, with sufficient expert knowledge to render both writers authorities. The modern "gilded age of decoration" is marked by striving for novelty rather than fitness. Unfortunately, many of the lecturers on house decoration are faddists, who talk of simplicity as of it were extraneous to, instead of inherent in, purpose. Such persons can learn from this volume how walls, doors, windows, fireplaces, ceilings, stairs, halls, rooms, should be treated. In the chapter on school-rooms and nurseries we gladly note the objection to "namby-pamby prettiness" in pictures. A room should depend for its adornment on general harmony of parts and on the "artistic qualities of such necessities as lamps, screens, bindings, and furniture." The copious index, the list of books consulted, and the 56 plates are all admirable; the letter-press too is well executed; but the novel binding may remind one as unpleasantly of castile soap as of marble. [Charles Scribner's Sons. \$4.00.]

27/03/1898 *The New York Times*

How To Arrange a House

Life has become complicated in so many other ways that it is not strange if the decoration of a house interior at present should be a problem that brings the boldest to a stand. Formerly architects wrought in some one of several thoroughly conventional styles, either Gothic (what amazing things have not been dubbed Gothic) or Elizabethan or Queen Anne or Empire or Colonial. They had merely to consult some well-thumbed authority, and after the correct and conventional interior was ready, furnish and decorate that interior in the conventional and correct way.

But that is all changed now. People are no longer possessed with the idea that because the Brown-Jones Robinsons have a house of a certain kind with the decorations which are supposed to fit, therefore they must have one like it in every respect. The clients of to-day expect of their architects something quite different from the house of their friends the Brown-Jones Robinsons. With the growth of luxury and the spread of taste for bric-à-brac and art, the devil of originality has entered people's minds and rides them like a night hag-or, rather, rides the architect who is expected to be original.

Complicated lives demand complicated houses and interiors. Some people have actually reached the pass that a drawing-room wall thickly covered with second-rate pictures does not impose on

them and a clutter of tables crammed with a worse clutter of cheap figurines and silver trinkets is not regarded as a sign of aestheticism. People are reasoning with their architects and trying to evolve something new. They no longer regard with awe the big houses in which a Japanese room succeeds a Persian antechamber and is followed by a Moorish boudoir and a French salon. People are thinking over architecture and decoration. And because they are thinking such books as this one are apt to meet an appreciative public at least of reasonable size. The great majority of houses, however, are still turned over to common decorators who furnish and decorate with little consideration of the style of the architecture and may even heap up senseless "decorations" that directly violate the essence of the style.

As a result of division of labor between architect and decorator house decoration has ceased to be a branch of architecture remark these authors. "The upholsterer cannot be expected to have the preliminary training necessary for architectural work, and it is inevitable that in his hands form should be sacrificed to color and composition to detail. In his ignorance of the legitimate means of producing certain effects, he is driven to all manner of expedients, the result of which is a piling up of heterogeneous ornament, a multiplication of incongruous effects, and lacking, as he does, a definite first conception, his work becomes so involved that it seems impossible for him to make an end."

The modern "decorator" applies ornament superficially, seeking to astonish one by the eccentricity of the work or costliness of the materials; but such was not the way of the old architects who designed interiors to suit the building decorated. The present work therefore draws largely on famous buildings of past centuries in Italy, France, and England for examples and in the text dwells upon the architectural side of the work of the old decorators. "The effects that they aimed at having been based mainly on the due adjustment of parts, it has been impossible to explain their methods without assuming their standpoint—that of architectural proportion."

Not only the text but the plates of this work refer to grand edifices in Europe which are not exactly models for dwellings and residences on this side of the Atlantic.

But the authors point out that while such buildings have some very highly decorated gala apartments, they also possess living rooms and suites admirably simple, yet worthy of study and imitation. Moreover they say with perfect truth that the course of history in architecture shows that the interior suitable for the aristocrat of one age became the interior used by the burgher of the next. "When the rich man demands good architecture, his neighbours will get it too. The vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness. Every good moulding every carefully studied detail, exacted by those who can afford to indulge their taste, will in time find its way to the carpenter-built cottage. Once the right precedent is established, it costs less to follow than to oppose it."

Many who have not studied furniture will become for the first time aware, when reading this book, how much art goes to the making of beautiful chairs, tables, beds, clothes presses. From the fifty-six plates seven have been chosen in order to give some idea of the scope of the work; there are reproduced here a carved door at Versailles, a mantelpiece in the Duke's palace at Urbino, an antechamber in the Villa Cambiaso, Genoa, a staircase in the City Hall at Nancy, a door and panel painted in the Chinese porcelain style at Chantilly, a corner of Louis XVI's library at Versailles, and a bathroom in the Pitti palace at Florence decorated by Cacialli in the last century. These are in a way representative, but the entire fifty-six plates are, of course, merely the faintest echo of that wealth of examples which can be drawn upon to instance what should be the principle in decorating rooms of a given kind.

The literature of decoration is an immense one, largely, if not chiefly, compiled in French, German, and Italian books; the authors have drawn freely from these, but the greater number of instances are taken from Italian and French examples made since the classic revival in architecture, as the most suitable to modern needs.

After a chapter on the need of following tradition in architecture, in which the advance in matter of decoration as well as external architecture in the United States is acknowledged, a second chapter

is devoted to rooms in general, and in a third the authors come to the walls of rooms, starting out with the dictum: "Proportion is the good breeding of architecture," soon followed by another: "Symmetry is the sanity of decoration." Here a strong protest is entered against the Anglo-Saxon's fad for irregularity; the tall dado, out of all proportion to the room, is severely dealt with. Wall papers and chintz hangings are scorned and the use of stucco is defended; pictures should not be hung from nails or molding, but fastened flat against the wall, their frames acting a part in the architectural arrangement of the room.

In the chapter on doors, the sliding door is reprobated, and the concealed door, so common in France and Italy, accepted as a thing that has its good use at times. In that on windows, it is counselled that the top be as near the ceiling as possible, on account of light and ventilation. Those on fireplaces and ceilings and floors contain much sensible reasoning and not a few conclusions which will find little favour because too sweeping. Entrance and vestibule, hall and stairs, are considered in turn, and then the various rooms of a well-appointed house-drawing, dining, morning room, boudoir, ball and music room, gallery and saloon, library, smoking room and "den," bedrooms, school-room, and nurseries. A final chapter treats of bric-à-brac in a cursory way.

Necessarily there is much hasty reasoning in a book that traverses so large a field, and there is often a tendency to enlarge on comparatively unimportant matters. But, on the whole, the treatise has kept the sense of proportion very well. An attempt to draw the big lines is found in the following words: "The supreme excellence is simplicity. Moderation, fitness, relevance-these are the qualities that give permanence to the work of the great architects. There is a sense in which works of art may be said to endure by virtue of that which is left out of them, and it is this 'tact of omission' that characterizes the master-hand. There is no absolute perfection; there is no communicable ideal; but much that is empiric, much that is confused and extravagant, will give way before the application of principles based on common sense and regulated by the laws of harmony and proportion."

The volume reflects much credit on Mrs. Edith Wharton and Mr. Codman; it is to be warmly recommended to people who are about to finish their homes. Practicing architects will find in it, if not a wealth of ideas with which they are unfamiliar, at least many reminders of the principles underlying good decoration.

(Charles de Kay)

Apr. 1898 *The Bookman - A Literary Journal* - New York, Vol. 7, Iss. 2, pp. 161-163 (W. Berry)

The Decoration of Houses

It is said by Vasari that Brunelleschi's chief desire was to bring back good architecture, the good orders, in place of the barbarous style which had effaced them. This effacement of the good by the barbarous, and, following the barbarous, a revival of the good-by a return to past forms, past ideals, are part of a law of ebb and flow everywhere visible in art. In every science the condition of progress is a continuous straining forward; in art and its allied branches this condition is often reversed: to advance may be to look backward. In analyzing the latter proposition the first cause occurring in explanation is that of the loss, or at least the dulling, of the sense of simplicity. In the best Greek architecture, for instance, a small quantity of exquisite ornament is surrounded by plainness, making both doubly beautiful; in French renaissance architecture, every surface is covered, leaving no spot on which the eye can rest, so that the whole becomes immoderate, confused, bewildering. This sense of the value of plainness is characteristic of every great age of art; in every period of decline exaggeration, pretentiousness, display, are dominant.

In no branch of art has a period of decline been more distinctly marked than in the decoration of houses during the last eighty years. The traditions of centuries, the ultimate tests of excellence-moderation, fitness, proportion-have become obscured, and what was once interior architecture has degenerated into mere upholstery. Indeed, so completely have these traditions been lost sight of, that for the last half century not a single work on house decoration as a branch of architecture has been published in England or in America.

It is to remedy this deficiency that *The Decoration of Houses* has been written, and the result is a work of large insight and appreciation, one that is certain to exert lasting influence in the revival of a subject generally misunderstood and mistreated.

The main theories which the book works out are simple, and may be summed up in a few words:

First. The true standpoint of interior decoration is that of *architectural proportion*, in contradistinction to the modern view, which is that of *superficial application of ornament*.

Second. Only a return to architectural principles, to the traditions and models of the past, can raise house decoration from incongruity and confusion to organic unity.

Third. Given the requirements of modern life, these models are chiefly to be found in buildings erected in Italy after the beginning of the sixteenth century, and especially in France and England after the full assimilation of the Italian influence.

Following the lines here indicated, the opening chapter, entitled "The Historical Tradition", after a brief outline of the stormy, unsettled conditions of Mediæval life and the consequent impress of such conditions on both exterior and interior architecture, indicates the persistence of this feudal period, owing to the conflicts between the great nobles and the kings, both in France and in England. In Italy, however, social intercourse advanced more rapidly, and it is clearly shown that the rudimentary plan, the characteristic tendencies of our own house-planning, were developed from the mezzanine or intermediate story of the Italian Renaissance palace. Thus it may be said that Bramante is the father of the modern dwelling, but as the use of the mezzanine was not fully developed until the time of Peruzzi, the year 1500 represents an imaginary line drawn between Mediæval and modern ways of living and house-planning.

Taking this as a starting-point, the process of development of house interiors is luminously traced: in Italy, from the "Massimi alle Colonne" to Palladio and to the decadence; in England, from the introduction of the Italian manner by Inigo Jones down to the Georgian models—those models which were afterward transported bodily to America and christened "Colonial"; in France, throughout that long succession of artists, craftsmen, and artist-craftsmen who, from the ending of the Fronde almost to the present time, have ever remembered that the essence of a style lies not in its use of ornament, but in its handling of proportion, and of whom it may be said that whatever the hand found to do, that it did under the guidance of artistic fancy and feeling.

The broad lines been laid down, the fundamental principle—the importance of the right treatment of the component parts of an undecorated room—is fully developed. It was once thought that the effect of a room depended on the treatment of its wall-spaces and openings; now it is supposed to depend on curtains and portières, on furniture and bric-à-brac. In the best period of architecture, decoration was subordinate to architectural lines, and as the effect produced by a room depends mainly on the distribution of its openings, it becomes apparent that unless these and the surrounding wall-spaces are in right proportion, there can be no harmony among the decorative processes. This factor, so fully dwelt upon by all the old decorators, from Vignola to Ware, has fallen into decay, and it is curious to note that in Eastlake's well-known *Hints on Household Taste* no mention whatever is made of doors, windows, and fireplaces.

The importance of the relations between proportion and decoration, between structure and ornament, having been strongly emphasized, each of the many rooms in a modern house is treated in turn, first from the evolutionary point of view, afterwards from artistic and practical considerations. Not the least interesting part of the book is this tracing back the use of a room to its origin, showing that sometimes the present misuse is but a survival of older social conditions, or but the result of a misapprehension in regard to old customs through confusion of two essentially different types of rooms designed for essentially different phases of life.

From ball-rooms to nurseries, no part of the interior architecture of a house is omitted, the organic unities being always insisted on: the relation of a room as a whole to other rooms in the house, the relation of ornament to structure, the relation of furniture to ornament. Looking down the enfilade of the three great centuries, one is shown the incomparable ceilings of Mantegna, of Araldi, of Bérain; the perfect doors in the Ducal Palace of Mantua; the staircases of De Corny, the stair-rails of

Jean Lamour and D'Ivry; the frescoes of Tiepolo and Le Riche; the carvings of Grinling Gibbons; the statues of Pajou; the mirrors of Mario dei Fiori. In these lucid pages and in the illustrations accompanying them, what rooms are held perfect, what models are in every sense worthy of admiration, all these, from a gala-room decorated by Giulio Romano to Cacialli's bath-room in the Pitti Palace, are made to demonstrate that, however splendid, however ornate, their effect is based on such harmony of line that their superficial ornament might be removed without loss to the composition.

It is for this reason that a return to the traditions and models of the past is insisted on as the true way out of the labyrinth of incongruity wherein most modern decorators are helplessly wandering. The definite first conception—that decoration must harmonise with the structural limitation—a conception that held its own throughout every change of taste until the second quarter of the present century, has been effaced by a piling up of heterogeneous ornament, a multiplication of incongruous effects, much of which is held in admiration on account of its so-called originality. In art, "originality" is almost as fatal a term as "restoration." Ignorant of the traditions of old, unskilled in legitimate artistic requirements, the average decorator stands in firm belief that to bend to the acceptance of rules, which experience of centuries has established as the best, is to preclude the exercise of individual taste and to become subservient and servile, forgetting the admirable precept of the forgotten Isaac Ware, that while "it is mean in the undertaker of a great work to copy strictly, it is dangerous to give a loose to fancy *without a perfect knowledge how far a variation may be justified.*"

It is clearly in the attempt to help on toward this "perfect knowledge" that the present book has been written.

It is not propose to discuss at length the various features of this work, or to go into detail regarding the many subjects there treated. The purpose of this review is to differentiate *The Decoration of Houses* from the many *Suggestions on Household Taste*, and the like, most of which have served only to aggravate the very defects which the present book is attempting to remedy. If the distinctive underlying principle—that the true expression of interior decoration rests not in superficial application of ornament, but in architectural proportion—has been plainly indicated, it is enough, and one need only add by way of summary the comprehensive words of the Conclusion: "The relation of proportion to decoration is like that of anatomy to sculpture: underneath are the everlasting laws."

Walter Berry

14/07/1898 *The Independent* – New York

THE DECORATION OF HOUSES. By Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr. (Charles Scribner's Sons. \$4.00)

Since the publication of "The House Beautiful" Americans interested in the construction and furnishing of refined homes have had no offering brought to them of equal value with this. The scope of this present work is different and relates more exclusively to the decoration and furnishing of dwellings. As a work which is rendered as a service to beauty should be this volume is itself beautiful in form, in execution, and in the great refinement of its rich and numerous illustrations. It is an attempt to connect architecture and decoration. The author breaks away at the very threshold from the notion that house decoration is merely the superficial application of ornament. The view presented in this book is that all must go together, architectural proportion, the purpose and uses of the house and rooms, and the other facts of its situation and character. Naturally, the illustrations are drawn for the most part from rich and costly examples; but they are used only because they illustrate the pint better and bring out the principles that should control the furnishing of more simple dwellings. The volume begins with a chapter on "Rooms in General." Then in succession we have others on "Walls," "Doors," "Windows," "Fireplaces," "Ceilings and Floors," "Entrance and Vestibule," "Hall and Stairs," "The Drawing Room, Boudoir and Morning

Room," "Gala Rooms," and so on through every variety of apartment required for the comfort or convenience of a family. Each topic is developed in the historical manner, and these historical sketches will attract many readers to the book who will feel that the construction, decoration and furnishing is wholly beyond their reach. It is, at all events, a matter of interest to all curious and active minds to know how such fixtures in our homes as dining-table, mantel, chairs and the other features and conveniences of the house were developed into the modern form. The American house is a development of the middle-class English house. It cannot be transformed into a nobleman's residence by adding new rooms. Social usages must be changed before the Italian *palazzo* can be useful in this country. We have no grand society whose occupation is to fill the stately gala rooms which appear so stiff and cold in their empty uselessness. Doors, windows, floors, wainscots, have all passed through a process of historical development and adaptation to social life which the reader, curious as to such matters, will find traced for him in Miss Wharton's beautiful volume. He will find in her, also, a guide who appreciates simplicity, and who has conducted her readers into the palaces of nobles, kings and princes, not to teach them to pine for what they find there, but to teach them the greater lesson that, after all, what satisfies the mind there will satisfy it as much and as long in the simple relations of simpler life.

Appendix B

Chapter II: Ogden Codman's Typescript Version Compared with the Published Version – Italian Translation

A typescript copy of *The Decoration of Houses* is to be found among the Codman Papers at Historic New England (formerly the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities), Boston. (Location: Historic New England – Codman Family Manuscripts Collection, Box 115, Folder 1899)

As it bears no date, it is impossible to establish the stage of the book's elaboration it refers to; it contains several pencilled notes and fountain-pen notes; many of them are unmistakably in Wharton's handwriting. In examining the folder, I noticed the text presented many discrepancies with the printed version, and proceeded to do a cursory comparison of the contents of the two texts.

The table of contents, in the first page, differed from the printed version's in that it introduced a chapter on servants' room and offices before the closing chapter on bric-à-brac; the typescript, however, does not contain a draft of such chapter, nor does it contain the chapters devoted to the dining-room and the library. "Hall and Stairs" is thus followed by "Drawing-room, morning-room, and boudoir"; the order is again reversed in the case of Chapters XIV and XV, presenting first "Children's rooms, nurseries, etc.", then "Bed-rooms, guests' rooms, etc." before the final chapter on bric-à-brac.

In the passage between this and the publishing stage, four chapters changed names, notably "Dining-room, breakfast-room, etc." became "The Dining-Room", "Library, billiard-room, smoking-room, etc. became "The Library, Smoking-Room, and 'Den'", while "Bed-rooms, guests' rooms, etc." became "Bedrooms", and "Children's rooms, nurseries, etc." became "The School-Room and Nurseries".

The text referred to as Introduction in the typescript became chapter I, entitled "The Historical Tradition": the Introduction published with the final version of the text was written and added at a later stage; also added later were the "Conclusion", the list of "Books Consulted", and the "Index of Plates", which did not figure in the typescript copy's list of contents.

A front-page bears the title "House-decoration", followed by a page with the quotation from Mayeux that also appears in the printed text: "Une forme doit être belle en elle même et on ne doit jamais computer sur le décor appliqué pour en sauver les imperfections."

Henry Mayeux: *La Composition Décorative*

The list of contents is then presented as follows:

- I. Introduction
- II. Rooms in General
- III. Walls
- IV. Doors
- V. Windows
- VI. Fireplaces
- VII. Floors and ceilings
- VIII. Entrance and vestibule
- IX. Hall and stairs
- X. Dining-room, breakfast-room, etc.
- XI. Library, billiard-room, smoking-room, etc.
- XII. Drawing-room, morning-room, and boudoir.
- XIII. Gala rooms: Ball room, saloon, music room and gallery
- XIV. Bed-rooms, guests' rooms, etc.
- XV. Children's rooms, nurseries, etc.
- XVI. Servants' rooms and offices.
- XVII. Bric-a-brac.

The text opens with the caption “The Philosophy of House-Decoration” – “Introduction”; this was one among the provisional titles Wharton and Codman had proposed to Scribner’s Editor, W. C. Brownell (see Appendix C, letter of 9 July 1897). As both did not reach a decision regarding the title until 3 September, Codman’s typewritten copy may be dated prior to that day.

The following pages contain a page-to-page comparison between Chapter II – *Rooms in General*, in which are reproduced the contents of Codman’s typescript and that of the chapter’s final version in *The Decoration of Houses*. The type-written text of chapter II does not contain the footnotes present in the published text.

II

Rooms in general

Before beginning to decorate a room it is essential to consider what the room is to be used for. It is not enough to ticket it with some general designation as “library,” “drawing-room,” or “den.” The individual tastes and habits of the people who are to occupy it must be taken into account; it must be not “a library,” or “a drawing-room,” but the library or drawing-room best suited to the master or mistress of the house which is being decorated. Individuality in house-furnishing has rarely been more insisted upon than nowadays; but it does not follow that it is often seen. Too often it is confounded with that cheap “originality” which finds expression in putting things to uses for which they were not intended; whereas it really consists not in an attempt to be different from other people at the cost of common sense, but in the desire to be comfortable in one’s own way, even though it be the way of a monotonously large majority. The truth is that sincere individuality is as difficult to find, and perhaps to practice, as the other forms of sincerity. It is really easier to most people to arrange a room like somebody else’s than to analyze and meet their own practical needs. Men, in these matters, are more straightforward than women, because their demands, besides being simpler, are uncomplicated by the feminine tendency to want things because other people have them, rather than to have things because they are wanted.

II

ROOMS IN GENERAL

BEFORE beginning to decorate a room it is essential to consider for what purpose the room is to be used. It is not enough to ticket it with some such general designation as "library," "drawing-room," or "den." The individual tastes and habits of the people who are to occupy it must be taken into account; it must be not "a library," or "a drawing-room," but the library or the drawing-room best suited to the master or mistress of the house which is being decorated. Individuality in house-furnishing has seldom been more harped upon than at the present time. That cheap originality which finds expression in putting things to uses for which they were not intended is often confounded with individuality; whereas the latter consists not in an attempt to be different from other people at the cost of comfort, but in the desire to be comfortable in one's own way, even though it be the way of a monotonously large majority. It seems easier to most people to arrange a room like some one else's than to analyze and express their own needs. Men, in these matters, are less exacting than women, because their demands, besides being simpler, are uncomplicated by the feminine tendency to want things because other people have them, rather than to have things because they are wanted.

It must never be forgotten that every one is, in an odd, unconscious way, tyrannized over by the wants of others, - the wants of dead and gone predecessors, who have an inconvenient way of thrusting their different habits and predilections across the current of later existences. The unsatisfactory relations of some people with their rooms are often to be explained in this way. They have still in their blood the traditional uses to which these rooms were put in times totally different from the present. It is only an unconscious extension of the conscious habit which old-fashioned people have of clinging tenaciously to their parents' way of living. The difficulty of reconciling these inherited instincts with our own comfort and convenience leads to various odd compromises in the adjustment of our rooms, which will be more fully analyzed in discussing the rooms separately. Meanwhile it is hardly necessary to point out that to go to the opposite extreme and discard things because they are old-fashioned is equally inadvisable. The golden mean lies in trying to arrange our houses solely with a view to our own comfort and convenience; and it will be found that the more closely we follow this rule the easier our rooms will be to furnish and the pleasanter to live in. Some rooms at once impress those who enter them as the rational expression of the occupant's daily requirement, while others seem to have been furnished on the Jackdaw plan, as that eclectic bird fits up his nest. In the latter kind of room nothing answers to a real want. The chairs and tables seem to have been bought because other people have them. Or else the owner's train of thought has been: 'I saw that and it was pretty, so I must find a place for it somewhere;' or, more often still: 'It seems that cradles made into flower-stands are all the fashion this year. I saw one at Mrs. So-and-so's. Isn't there one in grandmother's attic that we could fetch down and fill with ferns? I'm not going to be outdone by Mrs. So-and-so!'

People whose attention has never been specially called to the *raison d'être* of house-furnishing sometimes rashly conclude that because a thing is unusual it is artistic, or rather that through some occult process the most ordinary things become artistic by being used in an unusual manner; while other people, warned by the visible results of this theory of furnishing, are apt to infer that everything artistic is unpractical. In the Anglo-Saxon mind beauty is not spontaneously born of material wants, as it is with the Latin races. We have to *make* things beautiful; they don't grow so of themselves. The necessity of making this effort has caused many people to put aside the whole problem of beauty and fitness in household deco-

But it must never be forgotten that every one is unconsciously tyrannized over by the wants of others,—the wants of dead and gone predecessors, who have an inconvenient way of thrusting their different habits and tastes across the current of later existences. The unsatisfactory relations of some people with their rooms are often to be explained in this way. They have still in their blood the traditional uses to which these rooms were put in times quite different from the present. It is only an unconscious extension of the conscious habit which old-fashioned people have of clinging to their parents' way of living. The difficulty of reconciling these instincts with our own comfort and convenience, and the various compromises to which they lead in the arrangement of our rooms, will be more fully dealt with in the following chapters. To go to the opposite extreme and discard things because they are old-fashioned is equally unreasonable. The golden mean lies in trying to arrange our houses with a view to our own comfort and convenience; and it will be found that the more closely we follow this rule the easier our rooms will be to furnish and the pleasanter to live in.

People whose attention has never been specially called to the *raison d'être* of house-furnishing sometimes conclude that because a thing is unusual it is artistic, or rather that through some occult process the most ordinary things become artistic by being used in an unusual manner; while others, warned by the visible results of this theory of furnishing, infer that everything artistic is unpractical. In the Anglo-Saxon mind beauty is not spontaneously born of material wants, as it is with the Latin races. We have to *make* things beautiful; they do not grow so of themselves. The necessity of making this effort has caused many people to put aside the whole problem of beauty and fitness in household deco-

ration as something mysterious and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. The architect and decorator are often aware that they are regarded by their clients as the possessors of some strange craft like black magic or astrology.

This fatalistic attitude has done much to complicate the simple and intelligible process of house-furnishing, and has produced much of the discomfort which causes so many rooms to be shunned by everybody in the house, in spite (or rather because) of all the money and ingenuity expended on their arrangement. Yet to penetrate the mystery of house-furnishing it is only necessary to analyze any one attractive room and to notice wherein its charm consists. To the fastidious eye it will, of course, lie in a great measure in fitness of proportion, in the proper use of each moulding and the harmony of all the decorative details; and the present writers hope, later on, to show that even to those who profess themselves indifferent to such matters, much of the sense of restfulness and comfort produced by certain rooms depends on the due adjustment of their fundamental parts. Different rooms minister to different faculties and while a room may be made very livable and pleasant without satisfying any but the material requirements of its inmates it is evident that the perfect room should combine these qualities with what corresponds to them in a higher order of needs. At present, however, the subject under consideration is merely the material livableness of a room, and this will generally be found to consist in five things: the position of the doors and fireplace, the accessibility of the windows, the arrangement of the furniture, the privacy of the room and the absence of superfluities.

The position of the doors and fireplace, though it comes properly under the head of house-planning, may fairly be included in this analysis, because in rearranging a room it is often pos-

ration as something mysterious and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. The architect and decorator are often aware that they are regarded by their clients as the possessors of some strange craft like black magic or astrology.

This fatalistic attitude has complicated the simple and intelligible process of house-furnishing, and has produced much of the discomfort which causes so many rooms to be shunned by everybody in the house, in spite (or rather because) of all the money and ingenuity expended on their arrangement. Yet to penetrate the mystery of house-furnishing it is only necessary to analyze one satisfactory room and to notice wherein its charm lies. To the fastidious eye it will, of course, be found in fitness of proportion, in the proper use of each moulding and in the harmony of all the decorative processes; and even to those who think themselves indifferent to such detail, much of the sense of restfulness and comfort produced by certain rooms depends on the due adjustment of their fundamental parts. Different rooms minister to different wants and while a room may be made very livable without satisfying any but the material requirements of its inmates it is evident that the perfect room should combine these qualities with what corresponds to them in a higher order of needs. At present, however, the subject deals only with the material livableness of a room, and this will generally be found to consist in the position of the doors and fireplace, the accessibility of the windows, the arrangement of the furniture, the privacy of the room and the absence of the superfluous.

The position of doors and fireplace, though the subject comes properly under the head of house-planning, may be included in this summary, because in rearranging a room it is often pos-

sible to change its openings, or at any rate, in the case of doors, to reduce their size.

The fireplace must be the nucleus of every rational scheme of arrangement. Nothing is so dreary, so hopeless to deal with, as a room in which the fireplace occupies a narrow space between two doors, making it impossible to form a centre of life about the hearth. (1?) Next in importance come the windows. In townhouses especially, where there is so little light that every ray is precious to the reader or worker, the space about the window is the most valuable in the room. Yet in how many rooms are they easy of approach, free of useless draperies and provided with easy-chairs so placed that the light falls properly on the occupant's work. Many windows are as successfully fenced off from the profane as the sanctuary of a Greek church; the housemaid being apparently the only being who is privileged to penetrate to the holy of holies. That the habit is as dear to the idle as to the industrious every club-window testifies. Even the most high minded persons have occasionally been known to look out of the window; and heads of families and Bank Presidents have been heard to swear when their rush to the window to see a passing fire-engine was impeded by an irrelevant table with a lamp, a jardinière, or a rickety pedestal holding a china vase.

It is no exaggeration to say that many houses are deserted by the masculine members of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find at their clubs: windows unobscured by layers of muslin, a fireplace surrounded by easy-chairs and protected from draughts, well-appointed writing-tables and neatly-filed papers and magazines. Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing-room, which in small town houses is the only possible point of reunion for the family, but which, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, is of no more use as a meeting-place than the vestibule or the cellar? The windows in this kind of room are invariably supplied with two sets of muslin curtains, one hanging against the panes, the other fulfilling the supererogatory duty of hanging against the former. Then come the heavy stuff curtains, so draped as to cut off the upper light of the window by day, without its being possible to drop them at night: curtains which have thus ceased to fulfil the sole purpose for which they exist. Close to the curtains stands

sible to change its openings, or at any rate, in the case of doors, to modify their dimensions.

The fireplace must be the focus of every rational scheme of arrangement. Nothing is so dreary, so hopeless to deal with, as a room in which the fireplace occupies a narrow space between two doors, so that it is impossible to sit about the hearth.¹ Next in importance come the windows. In town houses especially, where there is so little light that every ray is precious to the reader or worker, window-space is invaluable. Yet in few rooms are the windows easy of approach, free from useless draperies and provided with easy-chairs so placed that the light falls properly on the occupant's work.

It is no exaggeration to say that many houses are deserted by the men of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find at their clubs: windows unobscured by layers of muslin, a fireplace surrounded by easy-chairs and protected from draughts, well-appointed writing-tables and files of papers and magazines. Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing-room, in small town houses the only possible point of reunion for the family, but too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting-place than the vestibule or the cellar? The windows in this kind of room are invariably supplied with two sets of muslin curtains, one hanging against the panes, the other fulfilling the supererogatory duty of hanging against the former; then come the heavy stuff curtains, so draped as to cut off the upper light of the windows by day, while it is impossible to drop them at night: curtains that have thus ceased to serve the purpose for which they exist. Close to the curtains stands

¹There is no objection to putting a fireplace between two doors, provided both doors be at least six feet from the chimney.

the inevitable lamp or jardinière, like the drawn sword at the gates of Eden, and the wall-space between the two windows, (where a writing-table might be put) is generally taken up by a cabinet or console, often surmounted by a picture which is rendered invisible by the dark shadow of the curtain draperies. There are two other possible situations for the writing-table in such a room: that is, against the wall near one or the other of the windows. But a prior right to these places is generally conceded to the upright piano and to a table which might be used for writing, were it not for the paramount necessity of covering it with china knick-knacks and photographs. Under these circumstances the writing-table is either banished or relegated to a dark corner, where it is of so little use that the inkstand is left empty, and a vase of flowers put in the middle of the blotting-pad.

The fire-place remains as a possible centre; but as, in the average New York house, the mantel-piece is ugly, it is usually covered with draperies which make it as well, on the whole, not to light the fire any oftener than can be helped. Besides, just behind it, on the opposite side of the room is a gap in the wall eight or ten feet wide, opening directly upon the hall, and exposing the most intimate part of the room to the scrutiny of messenger boys, servants and visitors. This gap is sometimes provided with doors; but, as a rule, they are either slid into the wall, or unhung and replaced by a curtain through whose folds (even if they are not drawn back) every word spoken in the room must necessarily pass. Thus the hearth is robbed of its significance as the centre of family life; and that being the case, it really matters very little how the rest of the furniture is arranged, since it is certain that no one will ever sit in the room except the luckless visitor who has no other refuge.

Even this inoffensive victim (having invariably to wait for the mistress of the house, who is sitting somewhere upstairs, in a comfortable room with a fire) might be thought entitled to the solace of a few books and magazines; but the fact that all the tables in the room are littered with miscellaneous knick-knacks, makes it impossible for the most philanthropic hostess to provide even this slight alleviation for her guests.

When the town-house is built on the basement plan, and the drawing-room is up-stairs, there generally exists

the inevitable lamp or jardinière, and the wall-space between the two windows, where a writing-table might be put, is generally taken up by a cabinet or console, surmounted by a picture made invisible by the dark shadow of the hangings. The writing-table might find place against the side-wall near either window ; but these spaces are usually sacred to the piano and to that modern futility, the silver-table. Thus of necessity the writing-table is either banished or put in some dark corner, where it is little wonder that the ink dries unused and a vase of flowers grows in the middle of the blotting-pad.

The hearth should be the place about which people gather ; but the mantelpiece in the average American house, being ugly, is usually covered with inflammable draperies ; the fire is, in consequence, rarely lit, and no one cares to sit about a fireless hearth. Besides, on the opposite side of the room is a gap in the wall eight or ten feet wide, opening directly upon the hall, and exposing what should be the most private part of the room to the scrutiny of messengers, servants and visitors. This opening is sometimes provided with doors ; but these, as a rule, are either slid into the wall or are unhung and replaced by a curtain through which every word spoken in the room must necessarily pass. In such a room it matters very little how the rest of the furniture is arranged, since it is certain that no one will ever sit in it except the luckless visitor who has no other refuge.

Even the visitor might be thought entitled to the solace of a few books ; but as all the tables in the room are littered with knick-knacks, it is difficult for the most philanthropic hostess to provide even this slight alleviation.

When the town-house is built on the basement plan, and the drawing-room or parlor is up-stairs, the family, to escape

a small room opening off the hall of the ground floor, where the family may escape from the horrors of the drawing-room; but even if it be fairly habitable it is, in the average-sized house, of very restricted dimensions; and the inmates of the house instead of sitting in a room twenty or twenty-five feet wide, are packed into one less than half that width and exposed to the inconvenient publicity from which, in basement houses, the drawing-room is free. Too often, however, the "little room down-stairs" is arranged less like a sitting-room in a private house than a waiting-room at a fashionable doctor's or dentist's. It has the inevitable yawning gap in the wall, giving directly on the part of the hall nearest to the front door; and it is either the refuge of the ugliest and most uncomfortable furniture in the house, or, even if furnished with a certain amount of taste, is arranged with so little regard to comfort that it might as well have its walls removed and be thrown into the hall, as is often done in rearranging old houses. This habit of sacrificing a useful room to the really useless widening of the hall is the natural outcome of furnishing this class of rooms in such an unpractical way that their real usefulness has long since been lost sight of. The science of restoring wasted rooms to their proper uses is one of the most important and least understood branches of house-furnishing, and the authors hope to develop it more fully in treating in detail of the different portions of the house.

Privacy has already been named as one of the essentials of a liveable room, and it might seem superfluous to give any reasons for so obvious a statement. Yet it is only necessary to observe the planning and arrangement of the average house to see how little this first requisite of civilized existence is really considered. Each room in a house has its individual uses; some are made to bathe in, others are for dressing, eating, sleeping, or conversation. But whatever the uses of a room, they are seriously interfered with if the room be not preserved as a small world by itself. If your drawing-room is a part of the hall and your library a part of the drawing-room, they will all three be equally unfitted to serve their special purposes. The curious indifference to privacy which has sprung up in modern times, and which even in France

from its discomforts, habitually take refuge in the small room opening off the hall on the ground floor; so that instead of sitting in a room twenty or twenty-five feet wide, they are packed into one less than half that size and exposed to the frequent intrusions from which, in basement houses, the drawing-room is free. But too often even the "little room down-stairs" is arranged less like a sitting-room in a private house than a waiting-room at a fashionable doctor's or dentist's. It has the inevitable yawning gap in the wall, giving on the hall close to the front door, and is either the refuge of the ugliest and most uncomfortable furniture in the house, or, even if furnished with taste, is arranged with so little regard to comfort that one might as well make it part of the hall, as is often done in rearranging old houses. This habit of sacrificing a useful room to the useless widening of the hall is indeed the natural outcome of furnishing rooms of this kind in so unpractical a way that their real usefulness has ceased to be apparent. The science of restoring wasted rooms to their proper uses is one of the most important and least understood branches of house-furnishing.

Privacy would seem to be one of the first requisites of civilized life, yet it is only necessary to observe the planning and arrangement of the average house to see how little this need is recognized. Each room in a house has its individual uses: some are made to sleep in, others are for dressing, eating, study, or conversation; but whatever the uses of a room, they are seriously interfered with if it be not preserved as a small world by itself. If the drawing-room be a part of the hall and the library a part of the drawing-room, all three will be equally unfitted to serve their special purpose. The indifference to privacy which has sprung up in modern times, and which in France, for instance

has given rise to the grotesque conceit of putting sheets of plate-glass between two rooms, and of replacing doorways by chasms fifteen feet wide, is of rather complex origin. With us, however, it is probably mainly due to the fact that our houses are often built and decorated by people whose habits of life are totally different from our own. In many cases, the architect and decorator live in a much more simple manner than their clients, and it is precisely for this reason that they are so ready to sacrifice the details of a form of comfort of which they have never felt the need to the cheap “effects” obtainable by vast openings and extended “vistas”; just as any lady who should commission her cook to buy dresses for her, would probably find herself supplied with a far more gorgeous and less serviceable wardrobe than she would have selected for herself.” To the untrained observer size always appeals more than proportion and costliness than suitability. In a handsome house such an observer is attracted rather by the ornamental detail than by the underlying purpose of planning and decoration. He sees the beauty of the detail, but not its relation to the whole. Hence he regards it as elegant but useless; and his next step is to infer that there is an inherent elegance in what is useless.

Before beginning to decorate a house it is necessary to make a prolonged and careful study of its plan and elevation, both as a whole and in detail. The component parts of an undecorated room are its floor, ceiling, wall-spaces and openings. The openings consist of the doors, windows and fireplace; and of these, the most important in the general scheme of decoration is the fireplace.

No room can be satisfactory unless its openings are properly placed and proportioned, and the decorator’s task is an infinitely easier one if he has also been the architect of the house he is employed to decorate. But as this is seldom the case his ingenuity is frequently taxed to produce a good design upon the background of a faulty and illogical structure. Much may be done to overcome this difficulty by making slight changes in the proportions of the

has given rise to the grotesque conceit of putting sheets of plate-glass between two rooms, and of replacing doorways by openings fifteen feet wide, is of complex origin. It is probably due in part to the fact that many houses are built and decorated by people unfamiliar with the habits of those for whom they are building. It may be that architect and decorator live in a simpler manner than their clients, and are therefore ready to sacrifice a kind of comfort of which they do not feel the need to the "effects" obtainable by vast openings and extended "vistas." To the untrained observer size often appeals more than proportion and costliness than suitability. In a handsome house such an observer is attracted rather by the ornamental detail than by the underlying purpose of planning and decoration. He sees the beauty of the detail, but not its relation to the whole. He therefore regards it as elegant but useless; and his next step is to infer that there is an inherent elegance in what is useless.

Before beginning to decorate a house it is necessary to make a prolonged and careful study of its plan and elevations, both as a whole and in detail. The component parts of an undecorated room are its floor, ceiling, wall-spaces and openings. The openings consist of the doors, windows and fireplace; and of these, as has already been pointed out, the fireplace is the most important in the general scheme of decoration.

No room can be satisfactory unless its openings are properly placed and proportioned, and the decorator's task is much easier if he has also been the architect of the house he is employed to decorate; but as this seldom happens his ingenuity is frequently taxed to produce a good design upon the background of a faulty and illogical structure. Much may be done to overcome this difficulty by making slight changes in the proportions of the

openings; and the skilful decorator, before applying his scheme of decoration, will do all that is in his power to correct the fundamental lines of the room. Still, the result is rarely as satisfactory as though he had built the room, and clients who employ different people to build and decorate their houses should at least try to select an architect and decorator trained in the same school of composition, so that they may come to some understanding with regard to the general harmony of their work.

In deciding upon a scheme of decoration for any room, two more things are to be considered: the relation of the furniture to the decoration, and of the room as a whole to the other rooms in the house. Just as the rooms in a small house will be dwarfed by the addition of a very large room, so one room decorated in a very rich manner will make the simplicity of those about it look mean. There should be, in every well-decorated house, a carefully graduated scale of enrichment culminating in whatever is the most important room in the house; but this should be carried out with such due sense of the relation of the rooms to each other that nowhere is there any violent break in the continuity of treatment. If a white-and-gold drawing-room opens on a hall with a Brussels carpet and papered walls the drawing-room will look too fine and the hall squalid.

And in regard to the furnishing of each room the same rule should be even more carefully observed. The simplest and most cheaply furnished room (provided the furniture be good of its kind, and the walls and carpet unobjectionable in color) will be more satisfactory to the fastidious eye than one in which carved and gilded consoles and cabinets of Buhl stand side by side with cheap machine-made furniture, and delicate old marquetry tables are covered with trashy china ornaments.

It is, of course, not always possible to refurnish a room when it is redecorated. Many people have to content themselves with

openings; and the skilful decorator, before applying his scheme of decoration, will do all that he can to correct the fundamental lines of the room. But the result is seldom so successful as if he had built the room, and those who employ different people to build and decorate their houses should at least try to select an architect and a decorator trained in the same school of composition, so that they may come to some understanding with regard to the general harmony of their work.

In deciding upon a scheme of decoration, it is necessary to keep in mind the relation of furniture to ornament, and of the room as a whole to other rooms in the house. As in a small house a very large room dwarfs all the others, so a room decorated in a very rich manner will make the simplicity of those about it look mean. Every house should be decorated according to a carefully graduated scale of ornamentation culminating in the most important room of the house; but this plan must be carried out with such due sense of the relation of the rooms to each other that there shall be no violent break in the continuity of treatment. If a white-and-gold drawing-room opens on a hall with a Brussels carpet and papered walls, the drawing-room will look too fine and the hall mean.

In the furnishing of each room the same rule should be as carefully observed. The simplest and most cheaply furnished room (provided the furniture be good of its kind, and the walls and carpet unobjectionable in color) will be more pleasing to the fastidious eye than one in which gilded consoles and cabinets of buhl stand side by side with cheap machine-made furniture, and delicate old marquetry tables are covered with trashy china ornaments.

It is, of course, not always possible to refurnish a room when it is redecorated. Many people must content themselves with

using their old furniture, no matter how ugly and ill-assorted it may be, and it is the decorator's business to see that his background helps the furniture to look its best. It is a mistake, however to think that, because the furniture of a room is vulgar and ugly, a good background will make it look worse. It will, on the contrary, be a relief to the eye to escape from the bad lines of the furniture to the good lines of the walls; and should the opportunity to purchase new furniture ever come, the client will have a suitable background ready to show it to the best advantage. The furniture of many rooms is a jumble of good, bad and indifferent. In such cases, it is best to let the decorator suit his treatment to the few really good pieces of furniture which it contains, and resolutely to discard the hopelessly bad and vulgar pieces, replacing them if necessary by willow chairs and stained deal tables, or putting up with a few vacancies until it is possible to buy something really good. In cases where the room is to be refurnished as well as redecorated, the client is apt to buy the furniture without regard to the decoration. Besides being an injustice to the decorator, by making it impossible for him to harmonize his decoration with the furniture, this practice generally results unsatisfactorily for the client. It is impossible that either decoration or furniture, however good of their kind, should look their best unless each is chosen with an eye to the other. It is therefore essential that the decorator, before planning his treatment of a room, should be told how his client means to furnish it. If for instance, a set of gilt furniture be put in a room of which the walls are treated in low relief and painted white, the high lights of the gilding will destroy the delicate values of the decorator's mouldings, and the walls, at a distance, will look like flat expanses of white-washed plaster.

Where a room is to be furnished and decorated at the smallest possible cost, it should be remembered that the comfort of its occupants depends more on the nature of the furniture than of the

using their old furniture, no matter how ugly and ill-assorted it may be; and it is the decorator's business to see that his background helps the furniture to look its best. It is a mistake to think that because the furniture of a room is inappropriate or ugly a good background will bring out these defects. It will, on the contrary, be a relief to the eye to escape from the bad lines of the furniture to the good lines of the walls ; and should the opportunity to purchase new furniture ever come, there will be a suitable background ready to show it to the best advantage.

Most rooms contain a mixture of good, bad, and indifferent furniture. It is best to adapt the decorative treatment to the best pieces and to discard those which are in bad taste, replacing them, if necessary, by willow chairs and stained deal tables until it is possible to buy something better. When the room is to be refurnished as well as redecorated the client often makes his purchases without regard to the decoration. Besides being an injustice to the decorator, inasmuch as it makes it impossible for him to harmonize his decoration with the furniture, this generally produces a result unsatisfactory to the owner of the house. Neither decoration nor furniture, however good of its kind, can look its best unless each is chosen with reference to the other. It is therefore necessary that the decorator, before planning his treatment of a room, should be told what it is to contain. If a gilt set is put in a room the walls of which are treated in low relief and painted white, the high lights of the gilding will destroy the delicate values of the mouldings, and the walls, at a little distance, will look like flat expanses of whitewashed plaster.

When a room is to be furnished and decorated at the smallest possible cost, it must be remembered that the comfort of its occupants depends more on the nature of the furniture than of the

wall-decoration or carpet. In a living-room of this kind it is best to tint the walls and put a cheerful drugget on the floor, keeping as much money as possible for the purchase of comfortable chairs and sofas and good, substantial tables. if only a very small (amount) can be made in buying furniture, willow arm-chairs with denim cushions and kitchen tables with stained legs and covers of denim or corduroy will be more satisfactory than the horrible "parlor suit" of the cheap furniture dealer, or the pseudo-Georgian or pseudo-Empire of his more expensive rival. Simple book-cases may be made by fixing deal shelves to the wall, and painting or staining them; and a room treated in this way, with a plain color on the wall, and plenty of lamps and books, is sure to be comfortable and can never be vulgar.

It is to be regretted that, in this country and in England, it should be almost impossible to buy perfectly plain but well-designed and substantial furniture. Nothing can exceed the atrocity of the current designs; the bedsteads with towering head-boards fretted by the versatile jig-saw; the execrable "bedroom suits" of "mahoganzed" cherry, bird's eye maple, or some other crude-colored wood; the tables with meaninglessly turned legs; the "Empire" chairs and consoles stuck over with ornaments of cast bronze washed in liquid gilding; and, worst of all, the supposed "Colonial" furniture, that miserable travesty of an admirably plain and dignified style. All this tawdry stuff has arisen in answer to the increasing demand for "cheap" effects in place of unobtrusive merit in material and design; but now that an appreciation of better things in architecture is becoming more general, it is to be hoped that public opinion will ostracize the "artistic" furniture which disfigures so many of our shop windows.

wall-decorations or carpet. In a living-room of this kind it is best to tint the walls and put a cheerful drugget on the floor, keeping as much money as possible for the purchase of comfortable chairs and sofas and substantial tables. If little can be spent in buying furniture, willow arm-chairs¹ with denim cushions and solid tables with stained legs and covers of denim or corduroy will be more satisfactory than the "parlor suit" turned out in thousands by the manufacturer of cheap furniture, or the pseudo-Georgian or pseudo-Empire of the dealer in "high-grade goods." Plain bookcases may be made of deal, painted or stained; and a room treated in this way, with a uniform color on the wall, and plenty of lamps and books, is sure to be comfortable and can never be vulgar.

It is to be regretted that, in this country and in England, it should be almost impossible to buy plain but well-designed and substantial furniture. Nothing can exceed the ugliness of the current designs: the bedsteads with towering head-boards fretted by the versatile jig-saw; the "bedroom suits" of "mahoganzed" cherry, bird's-eye maple, or some other crude-colored wood; the tables with meaninglessly turned legs; the "Empire" chairs and consoles stuck over with ornaments of cast bronze washed in liquid gilding; and, worst of all, the supposed "Colonial" furniture, that unworthy travesty of a plain and dignified style. All this showy stuff has been produced in answer to the increasing demand for cheap "effects" in place of unobtrusive merit in material and design; but now that an appreciation of better things in architecture is becoming more general, it is to be hoped that the "artistic" furniture disfiguring so many of our shop-windows will no longer find a market.

¹Not rattan, as the models are too bad.

There is no lack of models for the manufacturers to copy, if their clients will only demand good things. But, of course, until the general public exacts them, these will be more expensive than the trashy production now in the market. That they need not necessarily be so, any study of the old models will prove. France and England, in the eighteenth-century, abounded in plain, inexpensive furniture, made of walnut or mahogany, or painted. Simple in shape, substantial in make, and correct in design, this kind of furniture was never tricked out with cheap bronzes and machine-made carving, or smeared with liquid gilding, but depended for its effect upon the solid qualities of good material, good design and good workmanship. The eighteenth-century cabinet-maker never tried to make cheap copies of costly furniture; the common sense of his client would have resented such a perversion of taste. Were the modern public as scrupulous, it would soon be easy to obtain good furniture for a moderate price; but until people recognize the essential badness of the brummagem article now in the market, manufacturers will continue to turn it out in preference to a better but less showy kind of furniture.

The worst characteristics of the furniture now designed in America is due an Athenian thirst for novelty, not always regulated by an Athenian sense of fitness in things aesthetic. No sooner is it known that beautiful furniture was made in the time of Marie-Antoinette than an epidemic of supposed “Marie-Antoinette” rooms and furniture breaks out over the whole country. Neither purchaser nor manufacturer has stopped to enquire wherein the essentials of the style really lie. They know that the rooms of the period were usually painted in light colors and that the furniture (in palaces) was often gilt and covered with brocade, and it is taken for granted that plenty of white paint, a pale wall-paper with bow-knots, and spindly chairs dipped in liquid gilding and covered with a flowered silk-and-cotton material, must inevitably unite to produce a “Marie-An-

There is no lack of models for manufacturers to copy, if their customers will but demand what is good. France and England, in the eighteenth century, excelled in the making of plain, inexpensive furniture of walnut, mahogany, or painted beechwood (see Plates VII-X). Simple in shape and substantial in construction, this kind of furniture was never tricked out with moulded bronzes and machine-made carving, or covered with liquid gilding, but depended for its effect upon the solid qualities of good material, good design and good workmanship. The eighteenth-century cabinet-maker did not attempt cheap copies of costly furniture; the common sense of his patrons would have resented such a perversion of taste. Were the modern public as fastidious, it would soon be easy to buy good furniture for a moderate price; but until people recognize the essential vulgarity of the pinchbeck article flooding our shops and overflowing upon our sidewalks, manufacturers will continue to offer such wares in preference to better but less showy designs.

The worst defects of the furniture now made in America are due to an Athenian thirst for novelty, not always regulated by an Athenian sense of fitness. No sooner is it known that beautiful furniture was made in the time of Marie-Antoinette than an epidemic of supposed "Marie-Antoinette" rooms breaks out over the whole country. Neither purchaser nor manufacturer has stopped to inquire wherein the essentials of the style consist. They know that the rooms of the period were usually painted in light colors, and that the furniture (in palaces) was often gilt and covered with brocade; and it is taken for granted that plenty of white paint, a pale wall-paper with bow-knots, and fragile chairs dipped in liquid gilding and covered with a flowered silk-and-cotton material, must inevitably produce a "Marie-An-

toinette” room. Who cares for proportion or design? According to the creed of the modern manufacturer, you have only to combine certain “goods” to obtain a certain style.

This quest of artistic novelties would be one of the most encouraging signs of the day were it based on the real desire to have something better than is now obtainable. And perhaps, after all, it is; only the purchaser who wants something better is too apt to confound novelty with improvement. This tendency to dash from one style to another, without stopping to assimilate the essential qualities of any, has nullified the efforts of those who of late years have tried to inculcate the true principles of furniture-designing by a return to the best models. If people will buy the stuff now offered them as Empire, or Sheraton or Louis XVI, the manufacturer is not to blame for making it, it is not the maker but the purchaser who sets the standard in such matters, and there will never be any general supply of better furniture until people take time to study the subject, and find out wherein lies the radical badness of what they are now forced to put up with.

Until this golden age arrives the householder who cannot afford to buy old furniture or to have old models copied by a skilled cabinet-maker, had better restrict himself to willow or plain upholstered chairs and stained or painted deal tables, relying for the embellishment of his room upon good book-bindings and one or two old porcelain vases for his lamps.

As regards the difficult question of color, it is safe to say that the fewer colors are used in a room, the more pleasing and restful the result will be. A multiplicity of colors produces the same effect as a number of voices talking at the same time. The voices may not be discordant, but continuous chatter is fatiguing in the long run. Each room should, as it were, speak with but one voice: in other words, it should contain one dominant color, which should at once and unmistakably assert its pre-eminence, in obedience to the rule that, where there is a division of parts one part shall visibly dominate over all the others.

To attain this result of one ruling element it is best to use the same color and, if

toinette" room. According to the creed of the modern manufacturer, you have only to combine certain "goods" to obtain a certain style.

This quest of artistic novelties would be encouraging were it based on the desire for something better, rather than for something merely different. The tendency to dash from one style to another, without stopping to analyze the intrinsic qualities of any, has defeated the efforts of those who have tried to teach the true principles of furniture-designing by a return to the best models. If people will buy the stuff now offered them as Empire, Sheraton or Louis XVI, the manufacturer is not to blame for making it. It is not the maker but the purchaser who sets the standard; and there will never be any general supply of better furniture until people take time to study the subject, and find out wherein lies the radical unfitness of what now contents them.

Until this golden age arrives the householder who cannot afford to buy old pieces, or to have old models copied by a skilled cabinet-maker, had better restrict himself to the plainest of furniture, relying for the embellishment of his room upon good bookbindings and one or two old porcelain vases for his lamps.

Concerning the difficult question of color, it is safe to say that the fewer the colors used in a room, the more pleasing and restful the result will be. A multiplicity of colors produces the same effect as a number of voices talking at the same time. The voices may not be discordant, but continuous chatter is fatiguing in the long run. Each room should speak with but one voice : it should contain one color, which at once and unmistakably asserts its predominance, in obedience to the rule that where there is a division of parts one part shall visibly prevail over all the others.

To attain this result, it is best to use the same color and, if

possible, the same material, for curtains and chair-coverings. This produces an impression of unity and thereby gives an air of spaciousness to the room. Where the walls are simply panelled in oak or walnut, or painted in some neutral tones, such as grey and white, the carpet may contrast in color with the curtains and chair-coverings. For instance, in an oak-panelled room crimson curtains and chair-coverings may be used with a dull green carpet, or one of dark blue with a small Persian pattern in subdued tints. Or the color-scheme may be reversed, and green hangings and chair-coverings combined with a plain crimson carpet.

Where the walls are covered with tapestry, or hung with a large number of pictures, or, in short, are so treated that they present a variety of colors, it is best that curtains, chair-coverings and carpet should be of one color and without pattern. Graduated shades of the same color should almost always be avoided in such cases; theoretically they may seem harmonious, but in reality the light shades usually look faded in proximity with the darker ones. As regards the exact matching of the carpet and hangings, exception must always be made, whatever the decoration of the room, in favor of a really fine old Eastern rug. The tints of such rugs are too subdued, too subtly harmonized by time to clash with any colors the room may contain; but those to whom such floor coverings are unattainable will do well, as a rule, to use carpets of uniform tint, rather than the garishly-hued modern Oriental rug. Here, again, however, another exception may be made. In rooms where the furniture is dark and substantial, and the predominating color is a strong green or crimson, a red and green Turkey carpet of good quality is never amiss. These Smyrna carpets, as they are called in the trade, are usually well designed; and provided their colors be restricted to red and green, with a small admixture of dark blue, they are well-suited to a room of the kind above described.* Especially to be shunned

* For further details concerning carpets see chapter

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Where the walls are covered with tapestry, or hung with a large number of pictures, or, in short, are so treated that they present a variety of colors, it is best that curtains, chair-coverings and carpet should all be of one color and without pattern. Graduated shades of the same color should almost always be avoided; theoretically they seem harmonious, but in reality the light shades look faded in proximity with the darker ones. Though it is well, as a rule, that carpet and hangings should match, exception must always be made in favor of a really fine old Eastern rug. The tints of such rugs are too subdued, too subtly harmonized by time, to clash with any colors the room may contain; but those who cannot cover their floors in this way will do well to use carpets of uniform tint, rather than the gaudy rugs now made in the East. The modern red and green Smyrna or Turkey carpet is an exception. Where the furniture is dark and substantial, and the predominating color is a strong green or crimson, such a carpet is always suitable. These Smyrna carpets are usually well designed; and if their colors be restricted to red and green, with small admixture of dark blue, they harmonize with almost any style of decoration. It is well, as a rule, to shun the decorative schemes

in house-decoration are the color-schemes concocted by the writers whose fervid fancy supplies our daily and weekly journals with hints for “artistic interiors.” The lavish use of such poetic terms as jonquil-yellow, willow-green, shell-pink, ashes-of-roses, and so forth, gives an undeniable glamour to their written descriptions, and it is easy to understand the fatal charm which they must exercise over the inexperienced house-furnisher. The worst of it is that almost all such descriptions of “ideal summer rooms” or “unique boudoirs” are based on supposed cheap expedients for rearranging or disguising at a trifling cost the ugly room or the badly-designed furniture of the credulous reader. The whole theory is founded on the false idea that an overlaying of colour or ornament can remedy radical defects in structure or design. How many people have been induced, on this theory, to paint cover their ugly but unobtrusive black walnut book-cases with Aspinall’s white enamel paint picked out with gilding! How many yards of expensive plush or damask have been bought to loop over an offending door or mantel-piece, how much cheap crockery accumulated to fill an ebonized cabinet of which the shelves ‘looked bare’! Such devices are apt to lead in the end to the spending of more money than would have been required to replace the ugly book-cases and mantel-piece with others more simple but of good design; and the result is never satisfactory to a fastidious eye. It is, in fact, a good deal like the juggler’s familiar manoeuvre of talking very loud to distract the attention of his audience from what he is really doing.

To put it plainly, there are but two things to do to a room which is fundamentally ugly: one is to accept it, and the other is courageously to correct its fundamental ugliness. Half-way remedies are a waste of money and serve rather to call attention to the defects of the room than to conceal them.

concocted by the writers who supply our newspapers with hints for "artistic interiors." The use of such poetic adjectives as jonquil-yellow, willow-green, shell-pink, or ashes-of-roses, gives to these descriptions of the "unique boudoir" or "ideal summer room" a charm which the reality would probably not possess. The arrangements suggested are usually cheap devices based upon the mistaken idea that defects in structure or design may be remedied by an overlaying of color or ornament. This theory often leads to the spending of much more money than would have been required to make one or two changes in the plan of the room, and the result is never satisfactory to the fastidious.

There are but two ways of dealing with a room which is fundamentally ugly: one is to accept it, and the other is courageously to correct its ugliness. Half-way remedies are a waste of money and serve rather to call attention to the defects of the room than to conceal them.

The following pages contain a translation of the same chapter, in its published form, into Italian.

II

ROOMS IN GENERAL

BEFORE beginning to decorate a room it is essential to consider for what purpose the room is to be used. It is not enough to ticket it with some such general designation as "library," "drawing-room," or "den." The individual tastes and habits of the people who are to occupy it must be taken into account; it must be not "a library," or "a drawing-room," but the library or the drawing-room best suited to the master or mistress of the house which is being decorated. Individuality in house-furnishing has seldom been more harped upon than at the present time. That cheap originality which finds expression in putting things to uses for which they were not intended is often confounded with individuality; whereas the latter consists not in an attempt to be different from other people at the cost of comfort, but in the desire to be comfortable in one's own way, even though it be the way of a monotonously large majority. It seems easier to most people to arrange a room like some one else's than to analyze and express their own needs. Men, in these matters, are less exacting than women, because their demands, besides being simpler, are uncomplicated by the feminine tendency to want things because other people have them, rather than to have things because they are wanted.

II

Le stanze in generale

Prima di iniziare a decorare una stanza, è indispensabile considerarne la destinazione. Non è sufficiente attribuirle un'etichetta con un' indicazione vaga come «biblioteca», «salotto», o «studio». Si dovranno tenere presenti gusti ed abitudini delle persone che la occuperanno; non si dovranno arredare «una biblioteca» o «un salotto», ma la biblioteca o il salotto più consoni al padrone o alla padrona della casa. Raramente si è insistito fino all'esagerazione, come si fa al giorno d'oggi, sull'individualismo nell'arredamento di una casa. Quel tipo di originalità volgare, che trova la sua espressione nell'adibire gli oggetti ad usi per i quali non furono intesi, è spesso scambiata per individualismo, laddove questo non consiste tanto nel tentativo di essere diversi dagli altri, sacrificando la comodità, quanto nel desiderio di sentirsi comodi, secondo il proprio gusto, fosse anche quello della stragrande maggioranza della gente. A molti sembra più semplice disporre una stanza in modo analogo a qualcun altro, piuttosto che riconoscere ed esprimere le proprie esigenze. In questo campo gli uomini sono meno esigenti delle donne, poiché, oltre ad avere bisogni più elementari, essi sono privi della predisposizione tutta femminile di desiderare di qualcosa perché ce l'ha qualcun altro, anziché procurarsi qualcosa di cui hanno realmente bisogno.

But it must never be forgotten that every one is unconsciously tyrannized over by the wants of others,—the wants of dead and gone predecessors, who have an inconvenient way of thrusting their different habits and tastes across the current of later existences. The unsatisfactory relations of some people with their rooms are often to be explained in this way. They have still in their blood the traditional uses to which these rooms were put in times quite different from the present. It is only an unconscious extension of the conscious habit which old-fashioned people have of clinging to their parents' way of living. The difficulty of reconciling these instincts with our own comfort and convenience, and the various compromises to which they lead in the arrangement of our rooms, will be more fully dealt with in the following chapters. To go to the opposite extreme and discard things because they are old-fashioned is equally unreasonable. The golden mean lies in trying to arrange our houses with a view to our own comfort and convenience; and it will be found that the more closely we follow this rule the easier our rooms will be to furnish and the pleasanter to live in.

People whose attention has never been specially called to the *raison d'être* of house-furnishing sometimes conclude that because a thing is unusual it is artistic, or rather that through some occult process the most ordinary things become artistic by being used in an unusual manner; while others, warned by the visible results of this theory of furnishing, infer that everything artistic is unpractical. In the Anglo-Saxon mind beauty is not spontaneously born of material wants, as it is with the Latin races. We have to *make* things beautiful; they do not grow so of themselves. The necessity of making this effort has caused many people to put aside the whole problem of beauty and fitness in household deco-

Non si dimentichi che ognuno è inconsciamente tiranneggiato dai bisogni altrui – esigenze di progenitori morti e sepolti, che hanno la sconvenienza di spuntar fuori con i loro diversi gusti ed abitudini nel fluire quotidiano delle esistenze dei posteri. In questo modo si possono spesso spiegare i legami infelici tra alcune persone e le loro stanze. Costoro conservano ancora nel proprio sangue le tracce della destinazione originale di tali stanze in un'epoca molto diversa dal presente. Si tratta semplicemente di un'inconscia manifestazione dell'abitudine, tipica delle persone all'antica, di rimanere attaccate allo stile di vita dei loro genitori. La difficoltà di conciliare tali istinti con la propria comodità e con le convenienze, e i molti compromessi che ne derivano, nella sistemazione delle nostre stanze, verranno più ampiamente trattati nei capitoli successivi. Portarsi all'estremo opposto, e disfarsi di qualcosa solo perché è all'antica, è parimenti irragionevole. L'aurea moderazione risiede nel cercare di disporre le nostre abitazioni tenendo presenti i nostri agi e comodità; e si scoprirà che più seguiamo da vicino questo principio, più agevole sarà arredare le nostre stanze, e ancor più piacevole abitarvi.

Coloro i quali non hanno mai particolarmente prestato attenzione alla *raison d'être* dell'arredamento talvolta giungono alla conclusione che, poiché un oggetto è insolito, debba essere artistico, o piuttosto, che gli oggetti più comuni diventino artistici tramite qualche processo occulto, facendone un uso insolito. Altre persone invece, rese guardinghe dai risultati concreti di questa teoria dell'arredamento, deducono che tutto ciò che è artistico debba essere poco pratico. Nella mentalità anglosassone la bellezza non è spontaneamente generata dai bisogni materiali, come si ritiene invece tra le genti latine. Noi dobbiamo rendere belle le cose; esse non lo divengono da sé. La necessità di compiere tale sforzo ha fatto sì che molti accantonassero completamente la questione della bellezza e dell'adeguatezza nella decorazione

ration as something mysterious and incomprehensible to the uninitiated. The architect and decorator are often aware that they are regarded by their clients as the possessors of some strange craft like black magic or astrology.

This fatalistic attitude has complicated the simple and intelligible process of house-furnishing, and has produced much of the discomfort which causes so many rooms to be shunned by everybody in the house, in spite (or rather because) of all the money and ingenuity expended on their arrangement. Yet to penetrate the mystery of house-furnishing it is only necessary to analyze one satisfactory room and to notice wherein its charm lies. To the fastidious eye it will, of course, be found in fitness of proportion, in the proper use of each moulding and in the harmony of all the decorative processes; and even to those who think themselves indifferent to such detail, much of the sense of restfulness and comfort produced by certain rooms depends on the due adjustment of their fundamental parts. Different rooms minister to different wants and while a room may be made very livable without satisfying any but the material requirements of its inmates it is evident that the perfect room should combine these qualities with what corresponds to them in a higher order of needs. At present, however, the subject deals only with the material livableness of a room, and this will generally be found to consist in the position of the doors and fireplace, the accessibility of the windows, the arrangement of the furniture, the privacy of the room and the absence of the superfluous.

The position of doors and fireplace, though the subject comes properly under the head of house-planning, may be included in this summary, because in rearranging a room it is often pos-

come si trattasse di qualcosa di arcano ed incomprensibile ai non iniziati. Spesso architetto ed arredatore si sentono considerati, dai loro clienti, come i possessori di arti misteriose, quali la magia nera e l'astrologia.

Questo approccio fatalista ha reso complicato il semplice e logico processo di arredare una casa, ed ha prodotto gran parte del disagio che fa sì che molte stanze vengano evitate dagli inquilini, nonostante – o piuttosto proprio a causa di – tutto il denaro e l'inventiva profusi nella loro sistemazione. Eppure, per decifrare il mistero dell'arredamento d'interni, è sufficiente analizzare una stanza realizzata in maniera appropriata, e osservare in cosa consista la sua attrattiva. Uno sguardo meticoloso riconoscerà tale attrattiva nell'esattezza delle proporzioni, in un uso indovinato dei profili di stucco, e nell'armonia complessiva dei procedimenti decorativi; perfino per coloro che si ritengono indifferenti a tali dettagli, buona parte della sensazione di comodità e di quiete indotta da certe stanze dipende da un'equilibrata combinazione delle loro parti fondamentali. Stanze diverse si adattano ad esigenze diverse e, mentre una stanza può essere resa decisamente vivibile soddisfacendo null'altro che i bisogni materiali dei suoi inquilini, risulta evidente che la stanza ideale dovrebbe unire queste ad altre qualità corrispondenti in un diverso ordine di bisogni. Per il momento, tuttavia, l'argomento riguarda solamente l'abitabilità concreta di una stanza, e ciò si individua per lo più nella collocazione di porte e caminetto, nell'accessibilità delle finestre, nella disposizione del mobilio, nell'intimità della stanza e nell'assenza di elementi superflui.

La collocazione delle porte e del caminetto, sebbene sia argomento più appropriato ad un capitolo sulla progettazione, può essere incluso in questo esordio perché, nella sistemazione di una stanza spesso è possibile

sible to change its openings, or at any rate, in the case of doors, to modify their dimensions.

The fireplace must be the focus of every rational scheme of arrangement. Nothing is so dreary, so hopeless to deal with, as a room in which the fireplace occupies a narrow space between two doors, so that it is impossible to sit about the hearth.¹ Next in importance come the windows. In town houses especially, where there is so little light that every ray is precious to the reader or worker, window-space is invaluable. Yet in few rooms are the windows easy of approach, free from useless draperies and provided with easy-chairs so placed that the light falls properly on the occupant's work.

It is no exaggeration to say that many houses are deserted by the men of the family for lack of those simple comforts which they find at their clubs: windows unobscured by layers of muslin, a fireplace surrounded by easy-chairs and protected from draughts, well-appointed writing-tables and files of papers and magazines. Who cannot call to mind the dreary drawing-room, in small town houses the only possible point of reunion for the family, but too often, in consequence of its exquisite discomfort, of no more use as a meeting-place than the vestibule or the cellar? The windows in this kind of room are invariably supplied with two sets of muslin curtains, one hanging against the panes, the other fulfilling the supererogatory duty of hanging against the former; then come the heavy stuff curtains, so draped as to cut off the upper light of the windows by day, while it is impossible to drop them at night: curtains that have thus ceased to serve the purpose for which they exist. Close to the curtains stands

¹ There is no objection to putting a fireplace between two doors, provided both doors be at least six feet from the chimney.

spostare le aperture o, comunque, nel caso delle porte, modificarne le dimensioni.

Il caminetto deve essere il fulcro di ogni progetto razionale. Nulla è tanto cupo o irrecuperabile quanto una stanza in cui il caminetto occupi uno spazio angusto tra due usci, dimodoché sia impossibile raccogliersi intorno al focolare³⁵³. Seguono, per importanza, le finestre. Soprattutto nelle case di città, dove la luce è talmente scarsa che ogni raggio di sole è prezioso per chi lavora o legge, l'ampiezza delle finestre non ha prezzo. Ciononostante sono poche le stanze in cui l'accesso alle finestre sia agevole e in cui esse si presentino sgombre da inutili tendaggi, con poltrone sistemate in modo che chi vi si siede possa svolgere la propria occupazione nella giusta luce.

Non si esagera certamente se si afferma che molti uomini disertano la propria abitazione a causa della mancanza di quei piccoli tocchi di comodità che trovano invece nei loro club: finestre libere da strati di tendaggi, un caminetto circondato da comode poltrone, al riparo da correnti d'aria, scrivanie ben attrezzate e pile di quotidiani e periodici. Chi non ricorda quei deprimenti salotti, nelle piccole case di città, unico possibile luogo di ritrovo per la famiglia, ma troppo spesso, a causa della loro squisita scomodità, non più idonei a riunirvisi di quanto non lo fossero un vestibolo o una cantina? In questo genere di stanze, le finestre sono immancabilmente provviste di due strati di tende di mussola, l'uno direttamente a contatto delle vetrate, l'altro a soddisfare, in un eccesso di zelo, l'esigenza di pendervi al di sopra; quindi è la volta del tendaggio pesante, così drappeggiato da isolare la luce proveniente dalla parte superiore delle finestre di giorno, mentre la sera è impossibile calarlo: in tal modo le tende cessano di servire al loro scopo. Accanto alle tende è posta

³⁵³ Nulla vieta di collocare un camino tra due porte, purché entrambe distino da esso almeno mt. 1,80.

the inevitable lamp or jardinière, and the wall-space between the two windows, where a writing-table might be put, is generally taken up by a cabinet or console, surmounted by a picture made invisible by the dark shadow of the hangings. The writing-table might find place against the side-wall near either window ; but these spaces are usually sacred to the piano and to that modern futility, the silver-table. Thus of necessity the writing-table is either banished or put in some dark corner, where it is little wonder that the ink dries unused and a vase of flowers grows in the middle of the blotting-pad.

The hearth should be the place about which people gather; but the mantelpiece in the average American house, being ugly, is usually covered with inflammable draperies; the fire is, in consequence, rarely lit, and no one cares to sit about a fireless hearth. Besides, on the opposite side of the room is a gap in the wall eight or ten feet wide, opening directly upon the hall, and exposing what should be the most private part of the room to the scrutiny of messengers, servants and visitors. This opening is sometimes provided with doors; but these, as a rule, are either slid into the wall or are unhung and replaced by a curtain through which every word spoken in the room must necessarily pass. In such a room it matters very little how the rest of the furniture is arranged, since it is certain that no one will ever sit in it except the luckless visitor who has no other refuge.

Even the visitor might be thought entitled to the solace of a few books; but as all the tables in the room are littered with knick-knacks, it is difficult for the most philanthropic hostess to provide even this slight alleviation.

When the town-house is built on the basement plan, and the drawing-room or parlor is up-stairs, the family, to escape

l'inevitabile lampada, o *jardinière*, e la parete che separa due finestre, cui si potrebbe addossare uno scrittoio, è solitamente occupata da una mensola, o da uno stipo, sormontato da un dipinto oscurato dall'ombra dei tendaggi. Lo scrittoio potrebbe allora trovare una collocazione accanto alle pareti laterali, adiacenti alle finestre; ma questi spazi sono tradizionalmente riservati al pianoforte, e a quella moderna frivolezza che è il *silver-table*. Perciò detto scrittoio viene necessariamente bandito, o piazzato in qualche angolo scuro, dove non ci si stupisce che l'inchiostro si prosciughi e, dal bel mezzo dei fogli di carta assorbente, spunti un vaso di fiori.

Il caminetto dovrebbe essere il luogo attorno al quale si riuniscono le persone; ma, essendone la cornice esterna, nell'abitazione americana media, di linea piuttosto sgradevole, viene rivestita da tessuto infiammabile; di conseguenza il fuoco viene acceso di rado, e nessuno si cura di sedere accanto a un focolare spento. Si aggiunga che, sul lato opposto della stanza, in genere si trova un'apertura della larghezza dai due ai tre metri, che dà direttamente sull'atrio, esponendo quella che dovrebbe essere la zona più riservata della stanza allo sguardo di fattorini, visitatori e servitù. A volte tale apertura è provvista di porte, ma queste ultime vengono sospinte solitamente nel muro, se scorrevoli, oppure rimosse dai cardini e sostituite da un tendaggio pesante, dal quale passa inevitabilmente ogni parola pronunciata all'interno. In una stanza siffatta, è del tutto trascurabile come venga disposto il resto dell'arredamento, poiché è sicuro che nessuno vi si accomoderà mai, eccetto lo sfortunato ospite occasionale cui non si offra altro riparo.

Perfino un ospite può aver diritto al conforto della lettura; ma, poiché su ogni tavolo della stanza si affollano innumerevoli soprammobili, sarà arduo anche per la più filantropica padrona di casa provvedergli un simile passatempo.

Nei casi in cui l'abitazione cittadina venga realizzata utilizzando il pianterreno e collocando salotto, o soggiorno, al piano superiore, la famiglia, per evitarne

from its discomforts, habitually take refuge in the small room opening off the hall on the ground floor; so that instead of sitting in a room twenty or twenty-five feet wide, they are packed into one less than half that size and exposed to the frequent intrusions from which, in basement houses, the drawing-room is free. But too often even the "little room down-stairs" is arranged less like a sitting-room in a private house than a waiting-room at a fashionable doctor's or dentist's. It has the inevitable yawning gap in the wall, giving on the hall close to the front door, and is either the refuge of the ugliest and most uncomfortable furniture in the house, or, even if furnished with taste, is arranged with so little regard to comfort that one might as well make it part of the hall, as is often done in rearranging old houses. This habit of sacrificing a useful room to the useless widening of the hall is indeed the natural outcome of furnishing rooms of this kind in so unpractical a way that their real usefulness has ceased to be apparent. The science of restoring wasted rooms to their proper uses is one of the most important and least understood branches of house-furnishing.

Privacy would seem to be one of the first requisites of civilized life, yet it is only necessary to observe the planning and arrangement of the average house to see how little this need is recognized. Each room in a house has its individual uses: some are made to sleep in, others are for dressing, eating, study, or conversation; but whatever the uses of a room, they are seriously interfered with if it be not preserved as a small world by itself. If the drawing-room be a part of the hall and the library a part of the drawing-room, all three will be equally unfitted to serve their special purpose. The indifference to privacy which has sprung up in modern times, and which in France, for instance

i disagi, prende l'abitudine di rifugiarsi in una piccola stanza attigua all'atrio, al pianterreno; così, anziché accomodarsi in una stanza ampia sei-otto metri, si ritrova affollata in un ambiente grande la metà, spesso esposto alle frequenti incursioni cui è immune il soggiorno delle abitazioni a un piano. Troppo spesso, però, anche la «stanzetta a pianterreno» è sistemata in modo più simile alla sala d'attesa di un dentista o di un dottore alla moda, che al soggiorno di un'abitazione privata. Presenta l'inevitabile apertura spalancata nella parete che dà sull'atrio, nelle vicinanze della porta d'ingresso della casa, ed è il deposito del più orribile e scomodo mobilio della casa oppure, quand'anche arredata con gusto, è sistemata con tale scarso riguardo per la comodità, che tanto varrebbe incorporarla nell'atrio, come spesso si procede ristrutturando le vecchie case. L'abitudine di sacrificare una stanza utile all'inutile ampliamento di un ingresso è chiara e logica conseguenza dell' avere arredato stanze di questo tipo in maniera così improponibile, che la loro reale utilità ha cessato di essere evidente. La scienza di recuperare stanze neglette alla funzione loro propria è una delle più importanti ed incomprese branche dell'arredamento d'interni.

La tutela del privato dovrebbe essere uno dei requisiti principe dell'esistenza civilizzata, eppure è necessario solo osservare progetto e sistemazione dell'abitazione media per accorgersi quanto poco peso abbia tale esigenza. In una casa, ogni stanza ha un suo preciso scopo: alcune sono fatte per dormirvi, altre per abbigliarsi, altre ancora per mangiare, studiare, o per la conversazione; ma qualunque sia la destinazione di una stanza, viene gravemente compromessa se essa non viene considerata come un piccolo mondo a sé. Se il salotto è parte dell'atrio, o la biblioteca parte del soggiorno, tutti e tre questi ambienti saranno egualmente inadatti ad adempiere al loro scopo particolare. L'indifferenza nei confronti della *privacy*, esplosa ai nostri giorni, e che in Francia, per dirne una,

has given rise to the grotesque conceit of putting sheets of plate-glass between two rooms, and of replacing doorways by openings fifteen feet wide, is of complex origin. It is probably due in part to the fact that many houses are built and decorated by people unfamiliar with the habits of those for whom they are building. It may be that architect and decorator live in a simpler manner than their clients, and are therefore ready to sacrifice a kind of comfort of which they do not feel the need to the "effects" obtainable by vast openings and extended "vistas." To the untrained observer size often appeals more than proportion and costliness than suitability. In a handsome house such an observer is attracted rather by the ornamental detail than by the underlying purpose of planning and decoration. He sees the beauty of the detail, but not its relation to the whole. He therefore regards it as elegant but useless; and his next step is to infer that there is an inherent elegance in what is useless.

Before beginning to decorate a house it is necessary to make a prolonged and careful study of its plan and elevations, both as a whole and in detail. The component parts of an undecorated room are its floor, ceiling, wall-spaces and openings. The openings consist of the doors, windows and fireplace; and of these, as has already been pointed out, the fireplace is the most important in the general scheme of decoration.

No room can be satisfactory unless its openings are properly placed and proportioned, and the decorator's task is much easier if he has also been the architect of the house he is employed to decorate; but as this seldom happens his ingenuity is frequently taxed to produce a good design upon the background of a faulty and illogical structure. Much may be done to overcome this difficulty by making slight changes in the proportions of the

ha diffuso la grottesca procedura di collocare lastre di vetro tra due stanze, e di sostituire gli archi delle porte con aperture larghe cinque metri, ha origini complesse. In parte essa deriva probabilmente dal fatto che molte case vengono costruite ed arredate da persone ignare delle abitudini dei loro clienti. Può darsi che architetto ed arredatore vivano secondo uno stile più semplice rispetto ai clienti, e che perciò siano propensi a sacrificare certi vantaggi, di cui non avvertono il bisogno, ad effetti ottenibili per mezzo di larghe aperture e viste estese a perdita d'occhio. L'osservatore inesperto è più spesso colpito dalle dimensioni e dal lusso piuttosto che dalle proporzioni e dall'adeguatezza. In una bella abitazione, un simile osservatore è attratto più dai dettagli ornamentali che dal principio che dà forma al progetto e alla decorazione. Egli nota la bellezza del dettaglio, non la sua relazione con l'insieme. Perciò lo considera elegante ma inutile; e il passo successivo sarà di dedurre che vi sia un'eleganza insita nelle cose inutili.

Prima di iniziare ad arredare una casa, è necessario studiarne scrupolosamente pianta e proiezioni prospettiche, sia in generale che in dettaglio. Una stanza al grezzo si compone di pavimento, soffitto, pareti e aperture. Le aperture sono porte, finestre e caminetto; e di queste, come è già stato sottolineato, il caminetto è, nel disegno generale della decorazione, la più importante.

Nessuna stanza può dirsi riuscita se le sue luci non sono posizionate appropriatamente e proporzionate debitamente, e il compito dell'arredatore è assai semplificato se egli stesso è stato anche l'architetto della casa che è chiamato ad arredare; ma, dato che ciò accade raramente, alla sua inventiva viene spesso richiesto di ricavare un buon *design* partendo da una struttura incoerente e difettosa. Per superare un simile ostacolo si può far molto apportando leggere modifiche alle dimensioni delle

openings; and the skilful decorator, before applying his scheme of decoration, will do all that he can to correct the fundamental lines of the room. But the result is seldom so successful as if he had built the room, and those who employ different people to build and decorate their houses should at least try to select an architect and a decorator trained in the same school of composition, so that they may come to some understanding with regard to the general harmony of their work.

In deciding upon a scheme of decoration, it is necessary to keep in mind the relation of furniture to ornament, and of the room as a whole to other rooms in the house. As in a small house a very large room dwarfs all the others, so a room decorated in a very rich manner will make the simplicity of those about it look mean. Every house should be decorated according to a carefully graduated scale of ornamentation culminating in the most important room of the house; but this plan must be carried out with such due sense of the relation of the rooms to each other that there shall be no violent break in the continuity of treatment. If a white-and-gold drawing-room opens on a hall with a Brussels carpet and papered walls, the drawing-room will look too fine and the hall mean.

In the furnishing of each room the same rule should be as carefully observed. The simplest and most cheaply furnished room (provided the furniture be good of its kind, and the walls and carpet unobjectionable in color) will be more pleasing to the fastidious eye than one in which gilded consoles and cabinets of buhl stand side by side with cheap machine-made furniture, and delicate old marquetry tables are covered with trashy china ornaments.

It is, of course, not always possible to refurnish a room when it is redecorated. Many people must content themselves with

aperture; l'arredatore esperto, prima di realizzare il proprio progetto, farà tutto quanto necessario per correggere i tratti salienti di una stanza. Ma raramente l'esito è altrettanto buono che se avesse costruito la stanza egli stesso; coloro che ingaggiano diversi professionisti per costruire ed arredare le loro case dovrebbero almeno cercare di scegliere un architetto ed un arredatore seguaci della stessa scuola, in modo che giungano ad un'intesa su ciò che determini l'armonizzarsi complessivo del loro operato.

Al momento di scegliere lo schema decorativo, occorre considerare la relazione esistente tra il mobilio e la decorazione, nonché tra una stanza nel suo insieme e le altre della casa. Analogamente a quanto accade in una casa di dimensioni contenute, in cui una stanza grande sminuisce tutte le altre, così un ambiente dalla ricca ornamentazione farà sembrare misera la semplicità delle stanze adiacenti. Ogni casa dovrebbe essere arredata seguendo nella decorazione un andamento progressivo, che culmini nella stanza più importante; ma un tale progetto deve essere condotto con un'adeguata consapevolezza del legame esistente tra le varie stanze, in modo da non presentare brusche interruzioni nello svolgersi dell'ornamentazione. Un salotto con decorazioni bianco ed oro, che dia su una sala con tappeti di Bruxelles e pareti rivestite di carta da parati, sembrerà troppo elegante e farà sembrare a sua volta squallida quest'ultima.

Un simile principio si dovrà sempre tenere presente nell'arredare ciascuna stanza. Anche l'ambiente più semplice, dal mobilio più economico (purché beninteso i mobili siano di buona fattura, e pareti e tappeti siano di tinte ineccepibili) potrà soddisfare uno sguardo esigente più di quanto accadrebbe in presenza di mensole dorate e armadietti con intarsi in oro o tartaruga, accostati a mobili prodotti in serie, di bassa lega, o alla vista di tavoli dall'intarsio delicato, letteralmente coperti di pacchiani ninnoli di porcellana.

Naturalmente ammobiliare ex-novo una stanza risistemata non sempre è possibile. In molti devono accontentarsi di

using their old furniture, no matter how ugly and ill-assorted it may be; and it is the decorator's business to see that his background helps the furniture to look its best. It is a mistake to think that because the furniture of a room is inappropriate or ugly a good background will bring out these defects. It will, on the contrary, be a relief to the eye to escape from the bad lines of the furniture to the good lines of the walls ; and should the opportunity to purchase new furniture ever come, there will be a suitable background ready to show it to the best advantage.

Most rooms contain a mixture of good, bad, and indifferent furniture. It is best to adapt the decorative treatment to the best pieces and to discard those which are in bad taste, replacing them, if necessary, by willow chairs and stained deal tables until it is possible to buy something better. When the room is to be refurnished as well as redecorated the client often makes his purchases without regard to the decoration. Besides being an injustice to the decorator, inasmuch as it makes it impossible for him to harmonize his decoration with the furniture, this generally produces a result unsatisfactory to the owner of the house. Neither decoration nor furniture, however good of its kind, can look its best unless each is chosen with reference to the other. It is therefore necessary that the decorator, before planning his treatment of a room, should be told what it is to contain. If a gilt set is put in a room the walls of which are treated in low relief and painted white, the high lights of the gilding will destroy the delicate values of the mouldings, and the walls, at a little distance, will look like flat expanses of whitewashed plaster.

When a room is to be furnished and decorated at the smallest possible cost, it must be remembered that the comfort of its occupants depends more on the nature of the furniture than of the

utilizzare i vecchi mobili, per quanto brutti o male assortiti; è quindi compito dell'arredatore realizzare un contesto che valorizzi il mobilio. E' un errore credere che un ambiente ben rifinito faccia risaltare i difetti di mobili dalle linee sgradevoli, o del tutto fuori posto. Al contrario, sarà un sollievo per lo sguardo sottrarsi alle forme sgradevoli dei mobili per posarsi sulle linee eleganti delle pareti; e, qualora si presentasse l'occasione di acquistare mobili nuovi, sarà già pronto uno sfondo adatto ad esaltarne i pregi.

Nella maggior parte delle stanze si trovano vari generi di arredamento, di fattura buona, mediocre o anonima. E' meglio armonizzare la scelta della decorazione con i pezzi più pregiati, e scartare quelli di cattivo gusto, sostituendoli, se necessario, con sedie di vimini e tavoli di legno verniciato d'abete o di pino, finché non sarà possibile comprare pezzi migliori. Quando sia il mobilio che la decorazione sono da rinnovare, generalmente il cliente effettua i propri acquisti senza tenere in conto lo stile della decorazione. Così, oltre a fare un torto all'arredatore, che non riuscirà ad armonizzare il proprio lavoro con l'arredamento, il risultato non soddisferà il padrone di casa. Per quanto siano di qualità, né decorazione, né arredamento saranno adeguatamente valorizzati se non verranno scelti tenendo conto l'uno dell'altra. Pertanto è necessario che l'arredatore, prima di iniziare la stesura del progetto, sappia quale sarà il contenuto della stanza. Se un insieme di mobili dorati viene collocato in una stanza dalle pareti trattate a bassorilievo e dipinte di bianco, la forte luminosità della doratura annullerà le volute delicate delle modanature e le pareti, in distanza, sembreranno superfici piatte tirate a gesso.

Dovendo arredare e decorare una stanza con la minor spesa possibile, si tenga a mente che la comodità dei suoi inquilini dipenderà più dalla natura del mobilio che da quella delle

wall-decorations or carpet. In a living-room of this kind it is best to tint the walls and put a cheerful drugget on the floor, keeping as much money as possible for the purchase of comfortable chairs and sofas and substantial tables. If little can be spent in buying furniture, willow arm-chairs¹ with denim cushions and solid tables with stained legs and covers of denim or corduroy will be more satisfactory than the "parlor suit" turned out in thousands by the manufacturer of cheap furniture, or the pseudo-Georgian or pseudo-Empire of the dealer in "high-grade goods." Plain bookcases may be made of deal, painted or stained; and a room treated in this way, with a uniform color on the wall, and plenty of lamps and books, is sure to be comfortable and can never be vulgar.

It is to be regretted that, in this country and in England, it should be almost impossible to buy plain but well-designed and substantial furniture. Nothing can exceed the ugliness of the current designs: the bedsteads with towering head-boards fretted by the versatile jig-saw; the "bedroom suits" of "mahoganized" cherry, bird's-eye maple, or some other crude-colored wood; the tables with meaninglessly turned legs; the "Empire" chairs and consoles stuck over with ornaments of cast bronze washed in liquid gilding; and, worst of all, the supposed "Colonial" furniture, that unworthy travesty of a plain and dignified style. All this showy stuff has been produced in answer to the increasing demand for cheap "effects" in place of unobtrusive merit in material and design; but now that an appreciation of better things in architecture is becoming more general, it is to be hoped that the "artistic" furniture disfiguring so many of our shop-windows will no longer find a market.

¹Not rattan, as the models are too bad.

stucature o dei tappeti. In questi casi è meglio tinteggiare le pareti del salotto, e sul pavimento mettere una *moquette* di colore vivace, risparmiando più denaro possibile per l'acquisto di tavoli robusti e comodi sofà e poltrone. Se la cifra destinata all'acquisto dei mobili è modesta, poltrone di vimini³⁵⁴ con cuscini di stoffa *denim* e robusti tavoli con gambe dipinte e copritavoli in *denim* o velluto a coste saranno più adatti dei completi da salotto prodotti a migliaia dai fabbricanti di mobili di bassa lega, o dei cosiddetti stili Georgiano o Impero proposti dagli specialisti in «beni di lusso». Librerie semplici possono essere realizzate in pino, lucidato o dipinto; una stanza arredata in questo modo, con pareti di tinta uniforme e lampade e libri in abbondanza, non mancherà di comodità e non sarà mai volgare.

E' un peccato che in questo Paese, e in Inghilterra, sia quasi impossibile comprare mobili semplici e di buon disegno, o arredamenti robusti. Nulla supera la bruttezza delle linee moderne: telai di letti con imponenti testiere intagliate a traforo, mobili coordinati da camera da letto in ciliegio simil-mogano, acero *simil-radica* o imitazioni analoghe di legnami pregiati; tavoli dalle gambe inutilmente contorte; poltrone e mensole in stile Impero, oberate da motivi ornamentali di bronzo fuso e dorato e, cosa ancora peggiore, il cosiddetto arredamento «Coloniale», indegna parodia di uno stile semplice ed austero. Tutta questa merce vistosa è stata prodotta per adeguarsi alla crescente richiesta di effetto a buon mercato, in luogo dei pregi più discreti del materiale e del disegno; ma ora che si sta diffondendo una certa rivalutazione degli elementi architettonici validi, c'è da augurarsi che il mobilio «artistico», che deturpa tante vetrine dei nostri negozi, non trovi più acquirenti.

³⁵⁴ Si eviti il *rattan*, proposto in modelli troppo scadenti.

There is no lack of models for manufacturers to copy, if their customers will but demand what is good. France and England, in the eighteenth century, excelled in the making of plain, inexpensive furniture of walnut, mahogany, or painted beechwood (see Plates VII-X). Simple in shape and substantial in construction, this kind of furniture was never tricked out with moulded bronzes and machine-made carving, or covered with liquid gilding, but depended for its effect upon the solid qualities of good material, good design and good workmanship. The eighteenth-century cabinet-maker did not attempt cheap copies of costly furniture; the common sense of his patrons would have resented such a perversion of taste. Were the modern public as fastidious, it would soon be easy to buy good furniture for a moderate price; but until people recognize the essential vulgarity of the pinchbeck article flooding our shops and overflowing upon our sidewalks, manufacturers will continue to offer such wares in preference to better but less showy designs.

The worst defects of the furniture now made in America are due to an Athenian thirst for novelty, not always regulated by an Athenian sense of fitness. No sooner is it known that beautiful furniture was made in the time of Marie-Antoinette than an epidemic of supposed "Marie-Antoinette" rooms breaks out over the whole country. Neither purchaser nor manufacturer has stopped to inquire wherein the essentials of the style consist. They know that the rooms of the period were usually painted in light colors, and that the furniture (in palaces) was often gilt and covered with brocade; and it is taken for granted that plenty of white paint, a pale wall-paper with bow-knots, and fragile chairs dipped in liquid gilding and covered with a flowered silk-and-cotton material, must inevitably produce a "Marie-An-

Non mancano modelli a cui i fabbricanti possano ispirarsi, per clienti che esigano la qualità. La Francia e l'Inghilterra, nel XVIII secolo, eccellevano nella produzione di mobili semplici ed economici di noce, mogano o faggio verniciato (vedere tavole VII-X). Di linea semplice e di fattura robusta, questo tipo di mobili non era mai agghindato con bronzi fusi o intagli fatti a macchina, oppure dorati, ma traeva effetto da qualità concrete come buone materie prime, un bel disegno e una buona fattura. Il mobiliere del XVIII secolo non tentava di produrre volgari imitazioni di pezzi pregiati: il buonsenso del suo cliente avrebbe rifiutato una simile perversione. Fosse così scrupolosa anche la clientela moderna, si giungerebbe in breve ad acquistare mobili di qualità a prezzi modici; ma finché la gente non riconoscerà l'innata volgarità della mercanzia di princisbecco che, invasi i nostri negozi, si riversa sui marciapiedi, i fabbricanti seguiranno a proporre simili articoli preferendoli a linee migliori ma di minor effetto.

I peggiori difetti dei mobili attualmente prodotti in America derivano da una inesauribile sete di novità non sempre controbilanciata da pari buongusto. Non appena si sparge la voce che, ai tempi di Maria Antonietta si producevano bellissimi mobili, in tutto il Paese scoppia un'epidemia di stanze pseudo Maria Antonietta. Né l'acquirente, né il fabbricante si sono chiesti per un attimo in cosa consista l'essenza di tale stile. Essi sanno che, in quel periodo, le stanze erano solitamente dipinte a colori tenui, e che l'arredamento (nei palazzi) era spesso dorato e rivestito di broccato; così si dà per scontato che un'imbiancatura generale, una carta da parati chiara a fiocchi, e poltrone di linea delicata, bagnate nell'oro e rivestite di tessuto fiorito in cotone misto seta, producano immancabilmente una stanza «Maria

toinette" room. According to the creed of the modern manufacturer, you have only to combine certain "goods" to obtain a certain style.

This quest of artistic novelties would be encouraging were it based on the desire for something better, rather than for something merely different. The tendency to dash from one style to another, without stopping to analyze the intrinsic qualities of any, has defeated the efforts of those who have tried to teach the true principles of furniture-designing by a return to the best models. If people will buy the stuff now offered them as Empire, Sheraton or Louis XVI, the manufacturer is not to blame for making it. It is not the maker but the purchaser who sets the standard; and there will never be any general supply of better furniture until people take time to study the subject, and find out wherein lies the radical unfitness of what now contents them.

Until this golden age arrives the householder who cannot afford to buy old pieces, or to have old models copied by a skilled cabinet-maker, had better restrict himself to the plainest of furniture, relying for the embellishment of his room upon good bookbindings and one or two old porcelain vases for his lamps.

Concerning the difficult question of color, it is safe to say that the fewer the colors used in a room, the more pleasing and restful the result will be. A multiplicity of colors produces the same effect as a number of voices talking at the same time. The voices may not be discordant, but continuous chatter is fatiguing in the long run. Each room should speak with but one voice : it should contain one color, which at once and unmistakably asserts its predominance, in obedience to the rule that where there is a division of parts one part shall visibly prevail over all the others.

To attain this result, it is best to use the same color and, if

Antonietta». I moderni fabbricanti sono convinti che basti accostare determinati articoli per ottenere un determinato stile.

Tale ricerca di novità artistiche sarebbe anche incoraggiante, se si basasse sul desiderio di qualcosa di meglio, piuttosto che di qualcosa di diverso. La tendenza a rimbalzare da uno stile all'altro, senza fermarsi ad analizzarne le qualità intrinseche, ha vanificato gli sforzi di coloro che avevano tentato di insegnare i reali principi della progettazione del mobilio rifacendosi ai migliori modelli. Se la gente ora acquista ciò che le viene proposto come «Impero», «Sheraton» o «Luigi XVI», non è colpa dei fabbricanti di mobili. Non sono essi a fissare lo *standard*, bensì l'acquirente; e fino a quando la gente non dedicherà un po' di tempo ad esaminare l'argomento e non capirà in cosa consista la totale inadeguatezza di ciò che ora la soddisfa, non vi sarà una maggiore diffusione di mobili migliori.

In attesa che giunga quest'età dell'oro, il padrone di casa che non può permettersi pezzi d'antiquariato, o di farsi realizzare copie di mobili antichi da un abile artigiano, farà meglio ad accontentarsi di un arredamento più semplice, affidando il compito di ingentilire le sue stanze a rilegature pregiate e ad uno o due vecchi vasi di porcellana come basi di lampade.

In merito alla delicata questione del colore, è prudente affermare che meno colori si utilizzeranno in una stanza, più il risultato sarà piacevole e riposante. Una gran varietà di colori produce lo stesso effetto di troppe voci che parlino tutte insieme. Possono anche non essere discordi, ma un chiacchiericcio continuo alla lunga è snervante. In ogni stanza si dovrebbe udire una sola voce: essa dovrebbe presentare un colore che si imponga subito e chiaramente, in ossequio alla regola secondo cui dove c'è una suddivisione di parti, una debba predominare sulle altre.

Per raggiungere questo risultato, è meglio usare lo stesso colore e, se

possible, the same material, for curtains and chair-coverings. This produces an impression of unity and gives an air of spaciousness to the room. When the walls are simply panelled in oak or walnut, or are painted in some neutral tones, such as gray and white, the carpet may contrast in color with the curtains and chair-coverings. For instance, in an oak-panelled room crimson curtains and chair-coverings may be used with a dull green carpet, or with one of dark blue patterned in subdued tints; or the color-scheme may be reversed, and green hangings and chair-coverings combined with a plain crimson carpet.

Where the walls are covered with tapestry, or hung with a large number of pictures, or, in short, are so treated that they present a variety of colors, it is best that curtains, chair-coverings and carpet should all be of one color and without pattern. Graduated shades of the same color should almost always be avoided; theoretically they seem harmonious, but in reality the light shades look faded in proximity with the darker ones. Though it is well, as a rule, that carpet and hangings should match, exception must always be made in favor of a really fine old Eastern rug. The tints of such rugs are too subdued, too subtly harmonized by time, to clash with any colors the room may contain; but those who cannot cover their floors in this way will do well to use carpets of uniform tint, rather than the gaudy rugs now made in the East. The modern red and green Smyrna or Turkey carpet is an exception. Where the furniture is dark and substantial, and the predominating color is a strong green or crimson, such a carpet is always suitable. These Smyrna carpets are usually well designed; and if their colors be restricted to red and green, with small admixture of dark blue, they harmonize with almost any style of decoration. It is well, as a rule, to shun the decorative schemes

possibile, lo stesso materiale per le tende e il rivestimento delle poltrone. Ciò produrrà un'impressione di omogeneità e farà sembrare più grande la stanza. Se le pareti sono semplicemente rivestite da pannelli di quercia o noce, o dipinte a colori neutri, come grigio o bianco, i tappeti potranno offrire un contrasto cromatico con le tende e i rivestimenti delle poltrone. Ad esempio, in una stanza rivestita di legno di quercia, si potranno accostare tende e rivestimenti cremisi a tappeti color verde spento o blu scuro con motivi di tinte discrete; oppure, invertendo lo schema dei colori, si potranno accostare tendaggi e rivestimenti verdi a semplici tappeti cremisi.

Se le pareti sono tappezzate, o vi è appeso un gran numero di quadri, oppure presentano una certa varietà di colori, sarà il caso di uniformare il colore di tende, rivestimenti e tappeti, rinunciando ai motivi decorativi. Sfumature graduali dello stesso colore andranno generalmente evitate; in teoria sembrano armonizzare, ma nella realtà le sfumature più chiare paiono sbiadite accanto a quelle più scure. Sebbene sia buona regola coordinare tendaggi e tappeti, si può fare senz'altro un'eccezione per un bel tappeto orientale antico. I colori di questi tappeti sono così tenui, e resi delicatamente omogenei dal tempo, da non porsi in contrasto con alcun colore si scelga per una stanza; ma chi non può adornare i pavimenti con tappeti di questo tipo farà bene a sceglierli in colori uniformi, anziché quelli dalle tinte forti oggi prodotti in Oriente. Fanno eccezione le attuali importazioni da Smirne e Turchia. Se il mobilio ha tonalità scure ed è di linea solida, e i colori dominanti della stanza sono cremisi o verde intenso, questi ultimi tipi di tappeto sono sempre adatti. Quelli prodotti a Smirne presentano in genere motivi gradevoli; se la gamma dei loro colori si limita ai rossi e ai verdi, cosparsi qua e là di blu scuro, si armonizzano praticamente con ogni stile. E' buona norma evitare comunque le proposte decorative

concocted by the writers who supply our newspapers with hints for "artistic interiors." The use of such poetic adjectives as jonquil-yellow, willow-green, shell-pink, or ashes-of-roses, gives to these descriptions of the "unique boudoir" or "ideal summer room" a charm which the reality would probably not possess. The arrangements suggested are usually cheap devices based upon the mistaken idea that defects in structure or design may be remedied by an overlaying of color or ornament. This theory often leads to the spending of much more money than would have been required to make one or two changes in the plan of the room, and the result is never satisfactory to the fastidious.

There are but two ways of dealing with a room which is fundamentally ugly: one is to accept it, and the other is courageously to correct its ugliness. Half-way remedies are a waste of money and serve rather to call attention to the defects of the room than to conceal them.

escogitate dagli esperti che forniscono ai giornali suggerimenti per «interni artistici». L'uso di aggettivi poetici come *giallo giunchiglia*, *verde salice*, *rosa conchiglia*, o *rosa cipria*, attribuisce a tali descrizioni di «boudoir senza eguali» o del tinello estivo ideale un fascino probabilmente non riscontrabile nella realtà. Le sistemazioni così suggerite sono in genere trovate di bassa lega fondate sull'errata convinzione che si possano correggere una struttura o un disegno difettosi ricoprendoli di colori e decorazioni. Una simile teoria porta spesso a spendere molto più di quanto sarebbe invece costato apportare una o due modifiche alla pianta della stanza, e il cliente esigente non è mai completamente soddisfatto del risultato.

Ci sono solo due modi di trattare una stanza nata brutta: uno consiste nell'accettarla, l'altro nel farsi coraggio e correggerne le brutture. Rimedi parziali sono solo uno spreco di denaro, e servono più a richiamare l'attenzione sui difetti della stanza che a nasconderli.

Appendix C:
Personal Correspondence: Edith Wharton – Ogden Codman
Edith Wharton – William Crary Brownell

This section contains excerpts from letters written by Edith Wharton to Ogden Codman between 1895 and the date of publication of *The Decoration of Houses*. They bear evidence of their developing relationship, and contain also personal comments on the buildings and places Wharton visited during her frequent trips to Europe.

The correspondence was particularly frequent in the first years of their acquaintance, at times they would write more than once a day, and it shows clearly that Wharton took a personal interest in Codman, aside from her appreciation of his professional skills.

Of particular interest is the letter she wrote Codman on 5 December 1896, which contains the first mention of a manuscript about decoration, and of how Codman had always told her he would like to write something on the subject. Also Wharton's enthusiastic reports on what she and her husband Teddy were seeing and buying in Italy bear witness to their shared artistic interests, paired with a sincere personal attachment which Wharton sometimes expressed in her wishing Codman were with them in Europe, or in her nickname for him, Coddy.

It was at times arduous to establish a correct chronologic succession for all letters, as some did not bear a date; I have tried to place them according to their content's relation to other letters, and included a few messages from Teddy Wharton, which show his participation in his wife's first major literary enterprise.

Historic New England
Ogden Codman Papers Collection
Correspondence – Edith Wharton

Box 83 – Folder 1668

5 May 1895

Edith Wharton (EW) to Ogden Codman (OC)

May 8 – Paris

Dear Mr. Codman,

We have suddenly decided to sail on June 1st in the Touraine, instead of taking a bad steamer a week later. We shall be in Newport on June 9th, + (...), won't you catch it if the glass verandah isn't ready. The panels started for Newport a week ago, but even if they don't arrive as promptly as you might wish, you know perfectly well that, with Jansen's sketch, + the measures + all you can get on without them - + all I can say is that if, on the 9th of June, I tumble over paint-pots + carpenter's brushes(?) in stepping into my glass-verandah for afternoon tea, the M. Starr-Millers will be

merciful in their comments on you, compared to what I shall say. I shall give out that you design all Vernon's furniture for him, that you built Mrs. Admiral Baldwin's house, + that it was you who inspired the F. Vanderbilt hall + billiard-room!! + if that doesn't blast you, I'll withhold from you all the Mantua photographs, + give them to Father Newton!!!!

I am so glad that you have been ahead to send in designs for the Knickerbocker – M. Winthrop, who is with us, was much interested to hear it, + we all liked immensely your suggestion of noyer + gilt panels.

The older I grow the more I feel that I would rather live in Italy than anywhere. The very air is full of architecture – “la ligne” is everywhere. Everything else seems coarse or banal beside it. I never weary of driving through the streets + looking at the doorways + windows + courtyards + wells + all the glimpses one gets. What an unerring sentiment for form! And if I could only get you to see that on this side of the Alps the Roman tradition continues unbroken, + that through what you call the barbaric period one may trace the same exquisite refinement + fitness of line + ornament – oh, there is nothing like it in the world, + it breaks my heart every time I have to leave it.

Now, then, jump into the next train for Newport, + don't stop to dally at the Château brown, but make a straight line for Land's End.

We shall go straight to Newport by afternoon boat if we arrive in time, otherwise you will find us for the night either at the St. James or Cambridge. Yours sincerely E. Wharton

We told Robert to ship Mr. Vanderbilt's panels to the usual agent, at the Grand Central Station.

P. S. I enclose Jansen's bill stating the price of Mr. Vanderbilt's panels. Please give this to Mr. Vanderbilt instead of a bill as we have had the panels put on our bill, not wishing Jansen to know that we had bought them for Mr. Vanderbilt.

BOX 83

Folder 1669

EW to OC

Ravenna 17 April 1896

Dear Coddy,

Why have you not let yourself be heard of since our memorable farewell on board of the Touraine? I am afraid I have been more constant in my thoughts than you, for I have been trying, without much success, to get you photos of Parma + Modena, where there are some delightful palaces which you ought to see. Alas, however, there I apparently no “call” for anything in architecture later than the 18th century, + all the lovely barocco fountains, palaces, staircases, + etc. remain unphotographed. I only succeeded in getting you two wretched little reproductions of the Ducal Palace at Modena, + the Maison de Plaisance of the Dukes of Parma.

We left Paris about eight days ago, + came to Italy by way of Milan – from there we went to Parma, Modena, then to Bologna + Ferrara, + yesterday we came here. Tomorrow we are going on to Rimini, Urbino, Ancona + Loreto, + by the end of the month we expect to be in Venice. So far we have had perfect weather, + have done a good deal of bicycling. The roads in this part of Italy are capital, + you can't fancy what fun it is to jump on one's bicycle at the railway station + fly about one of these queer little towns! When you come abroad you must get your bike a willow-case in Paris.

Have you read in the April Cosmopolis Yriarte's article, “Une Petite Athènes au XVI Siècle” – an account of the little Duchy of Sabbioneta, between Parma + Mantua? It is most interesting, + we should have gone there from Parma, if it had not involved spending another night in the inn at Parma, which is the most “fetid” I ever was in!

We expect to be in Venice about 10 days, + then we shall prowl about in the neighbourhood + work our way gradually to the Lakes, where I think the bicycling will be divine.

Do let me know soon about your places + what you are doing with yourself. Oh, the architecture we have been seeing!
Yrs sincerely E. Wharton

4 May 1896, Venice

EW to OC

Dear Coddy,

You are a heartless wretch not to write to me, + I shan't give you any of the nice photos I have been collecting for you – so there!

Now for business (no commission, though). You may remember that I told you that I own a little shanty in Park Ave., n° 884, I think between 71st +72nd St- I meant to go + take a look at it before sailing, for I thought it might be possible to use it as a pied à terre for a couple of months in the winter, when we return to America, as we certainly shall next year. However, I never carried out my intention of inspecting the house, + now I want you to take a look at it for me. I have therefore written to Mr. George Baldwin, 32 Nassau St., to give you a permit, if you apply to him for it. I don't want a measured plan of the house, but should simply like you to tell me how many rooms there are, + about what their size is. Also, please take a look at the plumbing, + whether you think it would be possible to build out a pantry + add an attic with servants rooms, + whether the house is well enough built to warrant such additions. Bear in mind that we only want it as a cheap pied à terre, that, on account of the bicycling, I would rather be up there in a "bicoque" than down town in the Waterbury house, for instance.

I am hoping to hear before long that you are sailing for this part of the world, + I do trust that you will come by Genoa + join us somewhere in Italy. We have been in Venice about ten days, + are going off the day after tomorrow to spend two weeks on the Lakes + coming back here again towards the end of May to see the Tiepolo exhibition + loaf about here in really warm weather. I have got some nice furniture for the morning-room, + such a nice 18th Century picture of a Carnival scene! The "pickings" here are very pleasant, for people who adore simple 18th Century Italian furniture, as I do more and more every day. It is still to be had for the asking, too. We are negotiating now for a beautiful arm-chair covered with old silk for 40 francs! I wish you were here to poke about with us, + I hope you may be when we return.

Now do take a careful observation of my Park Avenue Château, for if it is at all possible, I really think we'll recupy(?) it. Yours sincerely Edith Wharton

8 June 1896 - Aix-les-Bains

EW to OC

Dear Coddy, I found your letter concerning Park Ave awaiting me here on our arrival last night, + I must first of all tell you how much we are disappointed to hear that you are not coming abroad. We had really counted on a little trip with you, + had lingered in Italy in the hope that you would turn up. I hope it mean that you are too busy to leave (you don't give any reason for your change of place) but all the same I am very sorry you are not coming.

I am much obliged to you for going to see the Park Avenue shanty, + it is really too good of you to have made me a present of the plans. I shall "remember it against you", as Teddy says, + I am awaiting their arrival with impatience. When you have time, by the way, do write me some more details, such as: Does the plumbing look as it could be left as it is? Would it be easy to enlarge the pantry? Do you think the situation sufficiently good to warrant adding another story? We have been having lots of fun since I last wrote you, picking up odds + ends of furniture. I never before realized the absurd cheapness of XVIII Century furniture in Italy, + there is so much of it left. I suppose you will think me crazy when I say that I infinitely prefer it to French, but I think in time you will come round to my way of thinking, + so will others, then the prices will go up. Meanwhile, here are some of our purchases: white+gold 2 large armchairs, very late Louis XIII, very ornate, + in perfect condition, the pair for 80 lire!

Late Louis XVI commode, white+gold, very much ornamented, marble top, 125 lire!

6 Louis XVI armchairs, 100 lire! All I can say is, wait until you see the morning-room!! We have just come from Turin, where we found some of the richest "pickings" of the whole trip, + where we made an expedition out to Stupinigi, the royal hunting-lodge built by Juvara, during every moment of which we simply groaned for you. I wish I could give you an idea of it. Outside it is a charming small palace, with a central dome (like Vaux-le-Vicomte) surmounted by a splendid bronze stag. In the centre (under the dome) is an immense ball-room, four stories high, with music galleries entirely decorated in very bold frescoes, in the style of the Villa Rotunda at Vicenza. On either side are the wings, there we must have walked through at least thirty rooms, all in perfect order, with walls, ceilings, doors, mantelpieces, furniture, pictures, absolutely intact, the decorations being chiefly the most brilliant Italian rococo, or very rich Louis XIII, with one or two purely Italian Empire rooms. The Louis XVI rooms are especially splendid; a whole suite with walls hung in delicate embroidered silk, with screen, furniture coverings + bed-curtains to match, + such mirrors, + such consoles! But still more fascinating are the rococo rooms, with wainscots, shutters + doors painted with the most fanciful leaves, flowers, + paysages on yellow or blue or green ground, + the walls adorned with panels representing hunting-scenes, landscapes, etc. The boudoir is hung in white silk, painted with the most exquisite "Chinoiseries". Another room is frescoed with medallion views of classic ruins en grisaille. Another represents the royal hunting party starting out from Stupinigi, picnicking at another palace, etc.

The Chapel (dedicated to St. Hubert, patron saint of the chase) is covered with rosy cupids + clouds + roses, with a picture over the altar of a delicious St Hubert in a Watteau costume kneeling in ecstasy before the stag with the Mystic Cross! Even the fireplaces are filled in (each + all) with canvas panels painted to match the rooms with landscapes, flowers, cupids, etc. Many of the mirrors have family portraits set in the centre, with garlands of carved flowers + leaves festooned about them – this treatment is peculiarly Italian, + extremely pretty.

The Louis XIII mirror frames are painted in bright colours, + have wreaths of flowers painted on the glass. In short you can picture nothing more gay, pimpant and charming than the whole suite of rooms. Versailles, though of course much grander, does not compare with it, to my mind, in charm + suggestiveness. There is one very curious thing about the palace. No "stucchi" are used anywhere. The ceilings are all painted, + the walls either frescoed or hung with silk. There are no tapestries, either, + no boiseries, + even the doors + shutters are almost without mouldings, + depend entirely for their effects on the exquisitely varied paintings which adorn them.

I don't apologize for this long story, for I think it will interest you.

We found it rather hot in Italy, + like an idiot I persuaded Teddy to come here, + when we arrived yesterday. I had always heard it was a most beautiful place, + fancied it was like Baden or Homburg, but it is the most ghastly hole I ever got into, + I think we shall soon decamp. I don't know where to. The fact is that Italy spoils me for everything else. I only wish it wasn't quite so hot there. It is really awfully poky in Europe in summer, for the nice, interesting places are all hot + fetid, + the cool places too dull for words + one does get so weary of living objectlessly in hotels, for more than three months!

We are thinking seriously of going home in October, just for the joy of being "dans nos meubles" once more.

Write me soon + tell me all about what you are doing + about Mr. Whitney's house.

Ys sincerely Edith W

EW to OC

Undated – Saturday [1896?] written in pencil

Dear Mr. Codman,

The more I think the matter over, the more I wish that you had another project to show for the drawing-room; not because I don't like this, but because it is so different from anything they are familiar with that if you have no alternative to present it may disconcert them. Couldn't you knock

together, at least in pencil, one side of another drawing R.. either something very cold, à la Bramante, with a frieze of garlands, fluted pilasters, pediments over doors, + niches for statues – or else a XVII century room, with heavy stucchi in the angles of the cornice, big medallion paintings framed in stucchi over the doors, + panel pictures of gods + goddesses? I have always thought you ought to have two projects for so important a room, + though you haven't much time I should try to get just a sketch if you can.

I think your morning-room will suffer very much unless the draughtsman can take off that dark (?) from the upper part of the panels + make them a uniform pale pink.

In a design which depends solely on colour + not on form, such an effect of colour does great injury, + might prejudice them altogether against the decoration.

And don't, don't, don't forget to have croisées put in all the windows!

Yours sincerely E. Wharton

Sewgty has already accepted my offer for the terra-cottas...

Do please have the morning-room changed before you show it. I am sure it will never be understood or accepted as it is.

On the back of the envelope of this letter.

On second thought I would rather have the morning-room done over properly than try to get another drawing ready for the Drawing-room. I expect you at dinner on Monday.

EW to OC

24 June 1896 (146 Champs Elysées – Paris; addressed to Ogden Codman Jr. Esquire – Passenger S. S. Campania [from New York] Cunard Line - Liverpool)

Dear Coddy,

We were delighted to get your cable the other day + find that you are coming abroad after all.

We are staying with my brother Harry at present, but early next week we go out to the Hotel du Réservoir at Versailles, where we expect to stay for three weeks, + I hope that we shall see something of you there.

If you come at once to Paris, look us up here as our rooms at Versailles may not be vacant until July 1st, but after that date we shall certainly be found there.

We have lots + lots to tell you about furniture etc. it is too interesting + I know you will love the things we have got. In haste to catch the mail, Ys sincerely E. Wharton

EW to OC

29 June 1896 (addressed to the Garland Hotel in Suffolk, then crosser over and redirected to c/o Howard Sturgis Esquire – Queen's Acre – Windsor)

Dear Coddy,

I am sorry to find that you may have to go to Germany, but hope you will think better of this ill-advised scheme to come to Versailles.

In case we don't see you just yet, however, will you drop me a line to say whether the fire-places at 884 Park Ave. have projecting chimney breasts? I cannot quite make out from the plan, + as I have seen some "occasion" mantelpieces very inexpensive, which would fit à peu près, I want to now at once about the chimney-breasts. If they are visible, I suppose the mantelpieces must fit exactly, must they not?

If you are coming to Versailles any time this week, don't bother to answer.

Yours in haste Edith Wharton – Hotel des Réservoirs – Versailles today

EW to OC

20 November 1896 (from Land's End)

Dear Coddy,

I think your suggestions regarding 884 Park Ave. are most admirable, + I am much obliged to you for making them, as I was in town so short a time that many little details escaped me. I had

intended to put a door of ordinary dimensions between the hall + dining room, but when I was in the house I saw that the dining room is going to be very dark, owing to the intrusion of the house in 78th St., which shuts off all light from the west + to our increased 10 fts of pantry; the two together really make the yard a mere well, + there is no doubt that, at luncheon, we must either borrow light from the hall + front door, or eat by gas-light. That was my only reason for leaving the hole in the wall, which I hate as much as you do. Between the library + hall of course I am going to have a decent door. As to the wainscot in the dining-room, it is not very pretty, as you say, but I kept it because I have a white paper with trees + birds + chinoiserie, + that kind of paper loses all its character if it goes down to the ground + has furniture put in front of it. Your suggestion about widening the landing on the 1st floor is excellent. I could not sacrifice the whole closet, + did not realize there was space enough to allow a foot or two more in the landing + still keep my closet. If you are going to Boston for Thanksgiving, can you not come here the next day + stop over Sunday? I want to have a talk with you about your affairs. I have heard some things that I think it would be well for you to know of + to consider, in regard to your work. Let me now if you can come. Ys sincerely Edith Wharton

EW to OC

28 November 1896 (from Land's End)

Dear Cuddy,

We are awfully sorry that you can't come today, + Teddy, who has postponed going to Lenox for two days, is especially grieved.

Could you by any chance come on Tuesday? It would be a real godsend if you could, for T. W. goes to Lenox on Tuesday morning, + I shall be alone with the utter aloneness of Newport R. I. in December. C'est tout dire! Do come if you possibly can. I don't appeal to your kind heart because you haven't any, but I will venture upon a plea to your digestive organs, by mentioning that we have a cook who is to the culinary art what you are to decoration + her best shall be at your disposal if you come. Ys in haste E. Wharton

EW to OC

5 December 1896 (stamp on the envelope from Land's End) Saturday

Dear Cuddy,

I am very sorry that you are not coming today after all, for though we have a house full (which seems a wonder in December, doesn't it?) we were prepared to feed you to the best of our ability, + on Tuesday morning we are going to town to spend a few days with Mr. Winthrop + try to hustle them a little at 884, so if you come on Monday we shall miss your visit altogether. Can't you postpone it another week without damage to your client?

It is simply heavenly here today, just like June. We have (list of guests), + it would have been so jolly if you had turned up too. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

I am so anxious to see your m. s. You know I have always wanted you to do that, + I will give you all the help I can, though I am not able to tell you where to find details about Mme de Rambouillet. I know she introduced small rooms + sensible windows, + that is all. Can't you find more in L'Architecture Française au temps de Richelieu et Mazarin? You will certainly find a bibliography of books on the art + architecture of that period in my Histoire Générale par Lavis + Rambaud, which I shall have in Park Ave. Also, in Larousse, which you can probably see at the Knickerbocker, you ought to find under Mme de R., a list of the books written about her. The Encyclopaedia Britannica gives the Historiettes de Tallemant des Réaux, the Dictionnaire des Précieuses, by Somaize, + the modern biographies by Victor Cousin, Livet, + de Barthélémy.

BOX 83
FOLDER 1670

EW to OC

17 January 1897 (from New York)

Dear Coddy,

Please send Jackson's man to put in these grates today (I mean the ash-pans) or we shall be frozen stiff tomorrow. Now don't forget. I could have done it just as well, only you remember you said you wanted to.

I enclose an Opera ticket for tonight. We have M. Belmont's box, + if it is not too much trouble, you might speak to him when you come into the box. Of course I simply throw this out as a suggestion.

In haste ys E. Wharton

I send remainder of bric à brac article.

P. S. N° 1

Why on earth don't you send out that circular? Someone spoke to me the other day again about your high charges.

Box 84 Folder 1673

EW to OC (undated card)

Dear Coddy,

I have re-written part of Bric-à-Brac but could do no new work today. Let me have it back tonight type-written, + I will work at it tomorrow. Have had a charming note from Mr. McKim, + shall send what I can to him at once. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

Thursday 1896

EW to OC (on light blue paper marked 884 Park Ave, with [1896?])

Dear Coddy,

Mr McKim has sent me three pages of notes on the Introductory chapter of the book, + as some of his suggestions are very good, + as he represents the "high-water-mark" of criticism in that line in America I think it would be well in some respect to remodel the Introduction – or rather, a few pages of it. The other Chapters he entirely agrees to, which is nice. I send you a page of the Introduction to be re-typed, as I found, to my mortification, when Mr. McKim returned the Chapter, that half of the most important sentence on that page had been left out, making utter drivell. As I have not got the ms I must leave the correction to you. I have marked the places thus (large asterisk).

I also send "bedrooms" as far as I have done it - + I should like the concluding pages of bric à brac, which you have had for a week- I can judge of things so much better when I can re-read a whole chapter.

I have had a talk with Minnie, who says that McMillan will be the best publisher, + will receive such a book with enthusiasm.

I think for the Chapter on bedrooms I should like to ask the Heurille's (?) leave to reproduce some of their old stuffs. I suppose they have toile de Jouy or Indiennes?

We are unfortunately very busy this week, but I am very keen to go on with the work, + if you will come to dine on Sunday we'll try to get going on the McKim's notes.

I shall be in at tea-time any day, but I can't work then, so it isn't much use.

Ys sincerely E. Wharton

EW to OC

20 February 1897 (Saturday – from 884 Park Ave.)

Dear Coddy,

I have lots of good news about the book. McMillan accepts it positively, but advises not bringing it out until September, for reasons which I shall give when I see you. This does not, however, allow of any loafing, as the book must be finished + placed in the publisher's hands this spring.

Moreover, Mr. Brett, who sails on March 18th for his annual spring visit to the London firm, wishes before leaving to see as much as possible of the book, including the illustrations + the book-cover.

I wonder if you could come up tomorrow afternoon, any time after 4, + I will give you details. By the way, Hall + Staircase was finished early yesterday + I sent it at once to Risenfield's with the request to send it on to 16th St. tonight if possible. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

McMillan thinks our title not ambitious enough, + prefers something like The Philosophy of House-Decoration.

NO DATE – PROBABLY FEBRUARY 1897 – Wednesday Box 84 Folder 1673)

EW to OC (from 23 East 33rd Street)

Dear Coddy,

I am in despair! Mrs Livingston has sent for me to go to dinner tonight without Teddy (...) If you would like to come at 4.30 I shall be at home, or if not, please surely send me the bit I have written on stairs + I will do a lot more work tomorrow. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

NO DATE – SUNDAY PROBABLY FEBRUARY 1897 (Box 84 Folder 1673)

EW to OC (from 884 Park Ave)

Dear Coddy,

In case I don't see you today or tomorrow, I write to ask if it would be convenient to have me come to the office on Tuesday morning soon after 11 + work for a couple of hours?

I think I have mastered halls + stairs at last, + I should like to see all the French + English Renaissance house-plans you have. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

EW to OC

24? February 1897 (from Land's End)

Dear Coddy,

Can you come here tomorrow at 5:30?

I am obliged to dine out tomorrow evening, but if I could show you what I have done since yesterday to walls it would be a help, especially as Minnie now writes that I need not go to see Mr. Brett till Monday, which will enable me to finish this Chapter + have it type written in time to show him. Ys sinclly E. Wharton

Card from 884 Park Avenue (undated) – Thursday 11.45

EW to OC

Dear Coddy,

I have finished walls (which will have to be a Chapter by themselves, preceding the Chap. on openings) + I should like you to read it at once, + unless there is something radically wrong about it, send it on this afternoon to Miss? Resenfield (o Risenfield), as I should so like to have it ready by Saturday, so that I can take it to Mr. Brett on Monday.

As to the other few pages, they are simply the winding-up of hall + stairs, + a revised table of contents.

Please send these also to be type-written.

Expect you at tea time. Ys in haste E. Wharton

EW to OC

2 March 1897

Dear Coddy,

I am decidedly going to Mr. Brett tomorrow, probably alone, so please send me here without fail before one o'clock tomorrow all the photographs you can (among the illustrations which we picked out) + also if possible the sketch for the book cover.

I don't wish to seem peremptory, but I think a good deal depends on the impression produced during this visit, as Mr. Brett sails next week, + I want him to have a clear report of the book + its appearance to take to England. You remember you promised me the book-cover a week ago, when I was first to have seen him. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

Please note that the things must be sent here as I am not going with Minnie. If you can lay your hands on the list of illustrations please send that also.

I shall arrange with Mr. Brett to go to see him with you - one day before he sails - as soon as possible, in fact. Could you go on Friday afternoon?

EW to OC

NO DATE possibly April 1897 FROM NEW YORK

Dear Coddy,

I wish that I had heard from you a little sooner, as I wrote to McMillan this morning, + sent the letter. However, I do not think that any one could find anything to object to in what I wrote. I simply said that, as Mr. Brett, when we saw him, had agreed to return the ms to me with a letter containing a business proposition from the firm, we were at a loss to understand why he had left without communicating with us. I went on to say that as I was leaving New York for good in five weeks, you + I were anxious to settle all details respecting the publication of the book before that time, + that Mr. Brett having left us without any answer, we should now have very little time (that is, after waiting to writ to him) to make other arrangements if the negotiations with McMillan were not concluded. I put it better than that, but you will seize the idea.

I went on to say that I had asked Mrs. Jones to read the ms. + hand it to McMillan, because I thought it more courteous, as she was one of their readers, to send the ms through her; but that you and I had never meant to trouble her with the business transactions regarding the book or to take up her time by communicating with the firm through her; + that I supposed that this had been made clear during our visit with Mr. Brett.

The above statement is, I think, quite civil, + I see no reason for not making it. Our work during the next few weeks will be much complicated by not knowing what our relations with McMillan are, how soon the book is to be ready for the press, how much it is to cut(?) etc. + if we find, on Mr. Brett's return, that he proposes to give us one per cent instead of ten or twelve, it will be rather late to look for another publisher. I wish while you were about it, you had told me what my sister-in-law said to you; but for my part, I am sick of doing business in the "she said that he said" plan, + I don't see why McMillan should not be made to see this. I don't think, moreover, that by this method either side is likely to be accurately represented. I expect you at dinner tomorrow.

Ys sincerely Edith Wharton

EW to OC

NO DATE FROM LAND'S END

THURSDAY

Dear Coddy,

In writing you the other day on the subject of the bibliography I accidentally left out the list of books I had prepared, + as I got your letter saying you could not go to the office only few minutes after posting mine, I saw it was useless to send the list at all. Any time in the last three months you could have made the whole bibliography in your office in an hour. I suppose now that will have to be left out too. I regret very much that I undertook the book. I certainly should not have done so if I had not understood that you were willing to do half, + that the illustrations + all the work that had to be done with the help of your books were to be included in your half. I hate to put my name to anything so badly turned out as the book is bound to be, + wish now that when McMillan refused it we had let it drop. Mr. Brownell has sent me three copies of the agreement between ourselves + Scribner, which you must sign + have witnessed.

Please let me know as soon as possible where to send them to you, as he wants them back.

Ys in haste E. Wharton

30 April 1897

EW to OC

Dear Cuddy, I am very glad to hear from your letter, just received, that you are getting on so well with F. of G. W. V. Who can tell? Perhaps you may get some of the other rooms? (...)

The library is a real pleasure to us both + we consider it a perfect success. The morning-room is in a state of suspense, as Sharp refuses to answer our numerous appeals for the chintz.

I hope by this time you and Brett are bosom friends, + the fate of the book settled.

Ys sincerely E. Wharton

BOX: 84

FOLDER: 1671

1 May 1897

EW to OC (from Land's End)

“the terrace nearly finished, the stone steps being set, + we are now going to campaign among the gravestone-makers around the cemetery, in search of columns + urns. Teddy hasn't yet rallied from the effect of the Whitney house. It must indeed be a ghoulish lair. I wish the Vanderbilts didn't retard culture so very thoroughly. They are entrenched in a sort of Thermopylae of bad taste, from which apparently no force on earth can dislodge them.

I see no signs of Egerton's mantelpieces being put up. (...) I don't want you to get into the way of shirking small jobs for big ones. If you only would believe me when I tell you it's bad policy! The people who give you small jobs are always the ones who are on the look-out for being shirked, + they require to be ménages much more carefully than the millionaires – witness the Millers + Lispenard Steward(?). It's no use to say – Oh, but such poor clients aren't worthwhile. People who are not worth while directly may be so indirectly, + you can never tell, till afterwards, what a small job may bring you in the way of big jobs, nor, on the other hand, what incalculable harm the dictum of a dissatisfied client may do you behind your back. I shall always preach this at you, as long as we are on speaking terms; for I know that success lies in this direction.

4 May 1897

EW to OC (from Land's End)

Dear Cuddy,

The savage tone of your letter of yesterday is an infallible proof that you secretly agree with what I told you, I have never known this evidence to fail!!

All the same, I think I shall go out of the business of being a Mme Candour, + reverse my present place of saying disagreeable things to your face + pleasant ones behind your back. I rather think the opposite course makes one more popular with everyone.

I'm sorry you have a sore throat, but I'm glad it's from over-work + not from under-work. Come to Land's End on Friday with your spray + your medicine bottles + you'll find the change of air + the sight of the garden will cure you in no time. I suppose you have been to see Mr. Brett, + that something has happened, + that some day I shall hear about it; but so far the only allusion you have deigned to make to the subject is the somewhat enigmatical remark: "I wonder who the man is to whom Brett has given the book." So do I, indeed; I wonder how he got the book + what he means to do with it, but in all your voluminous correspondence there is no other reference to the subject; so I am quite in the dark.

Joking apart, I think you might have let me know something about it. It is now a week since you returned to New York, + you promised that you would see Brett as soon as possible + send me a full account of the interview. "The rest is silence."

The flower-garden is too pretty! (etc.) Yours sincerely E. Wharton

9 May 1897

EW to OC (from Land's End)

Dear Cuddy,

Before we embark on any other experiment with the book, I am going to make it a condition that you leave the transaction entirely to me. I will manage it to the best of my ability, but I confess I think our chances of finding a publisher are very slender, fro the reason that I don't know of a reader likely to be able to judge the book on its merits.

The first thing to do, therefore, is to send me the book at once, for before submitting it to another publisher it had better be finished.

Please send it by express, as there are several of the ms Chapters which I have no copy of, + it would be rather sickening to lose it.

I am not sure when the Whartons will leave us, as Mrs. Wharton is still in bed with bronchitis, but I will let you know later what they decide on.

I think it might be rather a good idea to add a Chapter on formal gardening to the book.

Yours sincerely E. Wharton

13 May 1897

EW to OC (from Land's End)

Dear Cuddy,

My reason for asking you to send me the book was precisely that I might have the remaining Chapters type-written. I did not think it necessary to do so when the book was, as I supposed, positively accepted by McMillan; but now that it has to be shown to various publishers it had much better be entirely type-written I think your suggestion of sending it to Professor Norton a very good one, especially as he has always expressed an exaggerated but gratifying admiration for my small literary efforts.

I shall get at it again in a few days, as soon as I have got over the disgust I fee about the McMillan episode, + then I shall consider what had better be done next.

EW writes she wishes to see him, she has a maid ill, Mrs Wharton is better, she can feed OC if he stops at Newport, and she asks for more help with the terrace. (...) Don't be an idiot, but stop over Sunday. Ys sincerely E. Wharton

BOX: 84

FOLDER: 1672

14 July 1897 (from Land's End)

EW to OC

Dear Coddy,

Mr Brownell is very impatient to have the illustrations organized at once, + I can do nothing until you give me the plan for the bedroom suite + photos of a Gothic chest, a Gothic chair, a Louis XIV armchair, Louis XV bergère + Louis XV or Louis XVI lit de repos. You know I have been asking for these since February, + if you can't take a (brace?) + get them together this week I don't know what I shall say to Mr. B. who is clamouring. Surely it isn't such a gigantic task! Only five photos to choose, + one little plan. Choose any photos you like, don't wait to consult me, but follow your own inclination. They will surely be right. I can't bear to have the book collapse again for such a small matter, + I'm afraid Mr. Brownell will say there is not time enough if he doesn't get the things soon. EW writes how happy Mr. Winthrop is with his house.

26 July 1897

EW to OC

I'm sorry to nag you about the book, but I confess I should feel badly if it could not be brought out in the autumn after all, + I am tied hand + foot unless you will do one or two simple things which, for some mysterious reason, you appear to regard as mountains!

I have entirely rewritten the bibliography, which was mis-spelled + muddled in every way, + if you will send me the catalogue of art book which I telegraphed for last week I can put dates to nearly all the books; but there are some such as Letarouilly du Cerceau, Oppenard, etc which have gone through endless editions, + the proper thing in their case is to give the edition which we have really consulted. I enclose a list of these books, + it would not take you twenty minutes to glance at them in turn, + jot down the dates in pencil on my list.

Won't you please do this + let me have it.

2nd. Are you going to make the plan for the bedroom suite or not? Because, if not, I must rewrite that part of the Chapter.

3rd. I asked you some time ago to complete the illustrations by sending me a Gothic chair, a Gothic chest, a Louis XIV arm-chair, a Louis XV or Louis XVI bergère, + a lit de repos.

You wrote back that all you had were in books, but last winter I myself picked out the lit de repos from your photos of the detached prints of the French Portefeuille des Arts Décoratifs. The Louis XIV arm-chair was covered with tapestry, I think. Can you not let me have these this week?

Mr. Brownell arrives on August 1st, + what am I to say if he again asks for the illustrations, when I have already put him off for six weeks? (...)

Yours sincerely E. Wharton

17 August 1897

Teddy Wharton to OC

Puss is hard at work on the book, do be decent + send her about 30 more illustrations, she can't do this + you can, so as you have done no work lately on the book, don't be a beast but do as she asks you.

BOX: 84

FOLDER: 1673

31 October 1897

EW to OC (from Land's End)

Dear Coddy,

Your sudden alarm about the illustrations of the book is quite unfounded. Scribner's illustrated books are always most beautifully done, + their magazine illustrations were for a long time the best in America. The title-page itself is most beautifully engraved; the only fault lay with the italics, which are in the printing department; but he reproduction of the design of the title-page was

faultless. You may be sure that they are not going to neglect the illustrations of a book which they give to DeVine to print! I only wish they would hustle it + bring it out.

EW writes some remarks about OC's satisfied clients.

9 November 1897

EW to OC (from Land's End)

Dear Coddy,

You must excuse my not having written to thank you (...) I was completely overwhelmed all last week by the fearful work of indexing the book + had to let everything else slide.

The illustrations are beautiful, but I thought six of them rather small + these are to be enlarged, I believe. The whole thing is done now, excepting the correction of the index-proofs, which will probably turn up in a day or two - + Berkeley, who was here for a night last week, seemed to think that the book ought to be out in four weeks. It is to their interest to hustle it, of course.

Mr. Sheldon is going to ask Mr. Godkin to prevail upon Mr. Hastings to write the review in the Nation, + in any case Russell Sturgis is not to touch it; but please don't breathe this to anyone. I will see that Bates & Guild get a copy. I am also trying to get W. J. Loftie to review it in one of the English papers, + to get a "bonne presse" in the Athenaeum - if one may apply so general an expression to one paper. I want you to write to Champeaux + send him a copy, that we may get a word or two in the Gazette des Beaux Arts.

EW then urges OC to make amends for a letter he wrote to a Mrs. Caufield.

8 December 1897

Teddy W to OC (from Land's End)

"Do write Puss anything you hear about the book."

13 December 1897

Teddy Wharton to OC

Several copies of the book have been sold here + in Boston there is a lively demand for it for the Xmas trade."

EW to OC

December 1897 (written in pencil, no precise date, in an envelope written by Teddy, post-marked 7 Dec.)

Friday afternoon - 884 Park Avenue

Dear Coddy,

Here we are safe and sound + eager for all the news. You had better come + dine tomorrow at 8 + then we can have a quiet book-talk.

If Russell Sturgis didn't write that article I don't know anything. Besides, there can't be two such d-fools living in the same place at one time. I think we shall have a good review in the Critic, + oh, if you can only induce Mr. Crowninshield to write one, it may help to counteract the fool in the Nation. Intelligent disagreement is helpful + stimulating, but such blind stupid, total misapprehension akes me sick.

I wish I knew Mr. Crowninshield. Couldn't you bring him some Sunday, or does he "make it a rule not to visit ladies"? Yours sincerely E. W.

What do you say to doing this winter a little book called "Garden-Architecture or The Garden in Relation to the House"? I'm game. I hear that House-Decoration is selling splendidly.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN EDITH WHARTON AND HER EDITORS AT
SCRIBNER'S SONS -1897 – 1898 – 1899
FIRESTONE LIBRARY PRINCETON – BOX 167 Folder 1

The letters contained in the Edith Wharton Folder at the Scribner's Archive do not cover the whole period in which she had been in correspondence with the publishing house's editor, William Crary Brownell; the first letter, dated 7 July 1897, indicates that there had already been several meetings, and that she and Codman had sent Mr. Brownell a manuscript and some illustrations.

The material contained in the folder also presents some gaps, as between the last November letter and the date of publication.

The following quotations are not complete transcriptions of the letters' contents, as I chose to reproduce here only the sections in which Wharton directly referred to the process of text-writing and publishing details. The letters clearly show her deep involvement not only in the writing process, but especially in the practical details regarding the final phases of the book's publication.

She could be very exacting, as she showed in personally selecting Updike for the cover and illustrations, and she showed a great typographical care in noticing the smallest details, from lettering to the shades in which the illustrations were to be printed. Her powers of observation proved particularly useful in correcting the galleys, and in searching for the correct forms of names and proper identification of styles.

One can almost sense the growing sense of assurance Wharton displayed in these letters to her editor, which go from an almost apologetic form, in trying to propose an adequate title for the book, to the appreciation she expressed on receiving the first copies of the book, not overlooking, however, the precise corrections she sent to Brownell, especially those regarding the pictures' captions.

The letter dated 3 September 1897 is the one in which the definitive title is finally agreed upon; Wharton did not betray any apparent sense of relief, as the manuscript was turned in in its entirety, on the contrary she shows her involvement in the amendments and corrections to the last minute.

7 July 1897

Edith Wharton answers to a letter of July 5 "The proposition it contains in regard to the publication of «House decoration» is quite satisfactory to Mr. Codman and to me."

9 July 1897

Dear Mr. Brownell,

I agree with you that «House decoration» is a little “see”, but Mr. Codman and I have vainly racked our brains for a satisfactory title for our book. “Hints on Household Taste” and “Art in the House” are the kind of thing one ought to be able to devise; but the enclosed page contains the best that we can propose, + we should be most grateful for any suggestion you may offer.

(on the enclosed sheet)

- Rooms and Their Reasons, or Logic in House Decoration
- The Logic of House Decoration
- The Philosophy of House Decoration (too solemn)
- House Decoration – *A Study* Including the Architectural Treatment of interiors (or, of rooms?)
- House Decoration in architectural principles
- A Study in House Decoration
- Architecture Indoors; A Study in House Decoration
- Indoor Architecture; A Study in H+C
- Studies in Interior Decoration

15 July 1897 To W. C. Brownell

As nothing has been decided as yet regarding the outward garb of the book on House-decoration, I have asked my friend Mr. Berkeley Updike, of the Merrymount Press, Boston, to call on you while he is in New York this week, + show you some “projects” for binding + dressing up the volume in a way somewhat less banal than the conventional maudlin(?) cover. If you will be kind enough to see Mr. Updike for a few minutes, he will explain to you more clearly than I can how we thought the book might be arranged.

22 July 1897 To W. C. Brownell

I think your title very good; thanks for helping us. The two missing chapters + the bibliography will be sent to you in a few days. With regard to the illustrations, if you do not object, Mr. Codman + I have decided that we should both prefer to omit the cut in the left , + have simply full-page half-toned; + if you will kindly let us know how many such illustrations our book may reasonably contain, we will cut our cloth accordingly.

4 August 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Pray do not think me a bore if I ask you one more question about the “House-decoration” book. It was written rather hurriedly – as far as its final casting into shape is concerned - + now that I have read it over after an interval of several weeks I feel dissatisfied with the way in which it is put together, + should very much like to re-write certain parts of it, which seem to me unnecessarily wordy + clumsily expressed. I therefore write to ask how long I may keep the ms. without interfering with your arrangements. I must also apologize for the delay in returning to you the “contrat de mariage” between ourselves + Messrs. Scribner. This was due to the fact that my poor co-author has had a sunstroke from which he is only just recovering-

8 August 1897 To W. C. Brownell

E.W. has not yet heard about the number of illustrations she can fit in “the book on House-decoration” . Decides to send him the illustrations.

P. S. Don't you think that “Of the Decoration of Houses would be a better title than “House-decoration, including the Architectural Treatment of Interiors”?

12 August 1897 To W. C. Brownell

“The allowance of full-page illustrations which you name is much smaller than that which we had counted on, which I confess, seems to me necessary in any hand-book of decoration.”

16 August 1897 To Messrs. Scribner's Sons

Wharton sends them a book called *Burns and His Times* as "a sample of the kind of binding that Mr. Codman + I would like for our book on House-decoration. Mr. Brownell, who has seen the book, agrees with us in thinking that such a binding would be both new and appropriate; he also approves of the title-page which I sent with the book."

20 August 1897 To Messrs. Scribner's Sons

Dear Sirs, I am glad you accepted the suggestion of the "Burns" cover for my "Decoration of Houses"

20 August 1897 To Messrs. Scribner's Sons

Dear Sirs, your letter of Aug. 19th duly received. I am glad you accepted the suggestion of the "Burns" cover for my "Decoration of Houses". Please let me know what you think would be best as a substitute for the proper label. Is there any objection to having the "title-page" copied as it is, changing only the wording? Very truly yours Edith Wharton

21 August 1897 (Aug 24 written in pencil) To Messrs. Scribner's Sons

Dear Sirs, finding it impossible to complete the revision of the manuscript of the "Decoration of houses" before Sept. 15th, I sent word to this effect to Mr. Brownell, who replied that if everything should be in your hands by that date, it would be all right. Today I received a letter from Mr. Brownell in which he suggests that I had better communicate with you in regard to the matter. Please let me know by return mail if such date (Sept. 15th) will be satisfactory. If necessary I can let you have a part of the manuscript sooner. P. S. There will be 56 full-page illustrations, but no cuts in the text.

3 September 1897 (or is it 9th?) To Messrs. Scribner's Sons

Gentlemen, I send you today by express the first 189 pages of my book on house-decoration. The entire collection of illustrations will be sent on Monday, + the remainder of the ms – about 125 pages – will follow as promptly as possible. Mr. Codman and I have decided upon "**The Decoration of Houses**" as the title for the book, + we prefer that there should be no sub-title. I should be glad if you could let me have two sets of proofs, in order that the book may be indexed. Thanking you for your courtesy in according me a slight delay in sending my manuscript.

15 September 1897 To Messrs. Scribner's Sons

Gentlemen, I send herewith by express chapters X, XI, XII + XIII of "The Decoration of Houses". The three remaining chapters will follow in a few days. In my opinion the book would be greatly improved by eight additional pictures. Should this arrangement be possible I will send them at once. P. S. I have received no answer from you in regard to the binding + title-page of the book.

Undated letter - could be around Sept. 22-24 1897 To W. C. Brownell

(...) not wish more than are strictly needful. In order to put into the text the references to the additional plates, I shall have to delay sending the last chapters until tomorrow. I enclose herewith the specimens of title-page. The reproduction is very successful, + will of course look much better on the paper used for the rest of the text than on this highly-glazed surface. I have indicated in pencil on one title-page the manner in which I think the title, (too?), should be placed. Of course, the "cachet" of the whole depends on reproducing the beautiful old italics, + I return the original title-page to you for this purpose. I wish to thank the firm through you for their courtesy in allowing me so much time for the revision of the book. I was anxious to make it as thorough as possible, + to present the parts to the best advantage, + I trust you will find that my work has to some extent justified the delay. In its present form, the book would be improved by a short "Conclusion" of five or six pages, summing up the arguments, + serving as a sort of "pendant" to the

introduction. I do not wish to ask for further delay, but I shall send this conclusion in four or five day, leaving it to you to decide if it is possible to include it. You need not trouble yourself to write me on this point. Yours sincerely Edith Wharton

P. S. I have been obliged to number two of the plates 44A + 48A in order that they may come in proper sequence in the book so that it would perhaps be best to renumber all.

23 September 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I was about to send off the last three chapters of "The Decoration of Houses" when I received your note of yesterday, enclosing samples of pages, + asking for the extra illustrations. Your choice of page is also mine, + I am gratified that you should have been sufficiently pleased with the book to give it to De Vinne. With regard to the extra illustrations, I have decided to send six instead of eight, as I know you do (incomplete)

27 September 1897 Western Union Telegram To Charles Scribner's Sons

Shall send tomorrow conclusion to house decoration. Edith Wharton

29 September 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I am new at proof, + don't know in what order they are generally sent, but as it seems odd to receive the first chapter before the Introduction, I send this line to ask if the latter reached you safely with the rest of the ms. [Thanks for your suggestion about the (whicthen?). they "foisonnent" on page 1.] – Your sincerely Edith Wharton

1 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I do not think it is worth while to change the numbering of the Introduction; but I should like it to be incorporated with the rest of the book in the sense of not being divided from the first chapter by the table of contents; as a preface sometime is. I changed the name from preface to Introduction because people so often skip a preface; + it is essential to the understanding of what follows that these few first pages should be read. I am glad you like the book; + need I say that I am most grateful for any marginal hints? I meant to express, in my telegram, that I thought it best to omit the last six illustrations sent, keeping the original 56. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

3 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I have just received the title-page with the title + c in "French script", + shall return it to you by tonight mail, enclosed in the last batch of proofs. I suppose the title-page was sent to me I order that I might express my opinion on the lettering. You have been so kind in adopting my suggestions regarding the make-up of my book that I dare say I have already gone beyond the limits prescribed to a new author in the expression of opinion; but, since you send me the title-page, I shall consider myself justified in criticizing it. To anyone who cares for old Italics, such lettering seems very inadequate, especially in the very ornate and somewhat massive seventeenth-century design enclosing it. When I sent the model title-page to Mr. Marvin, early in the summer, I hoped that if he decided to use it, he would entrust the work to my friend Mr. Updike, simply because I believe him to be better equipped for such work than any one else in America. I don't know to whom you have given it, but I cannot think that any competent designer can consider the title-page, as it now stands, an appropriate introduction to a treatise in Proportion! If I am saying more than is warranted, you must lay the blame upon my fondness for the details of book-making, + also upon your own courtesy in consulting me in the matter. The title-page has been most beautifully reproduced, but I do think it a pity that Italics of the same period cannot be used in the lettering. Thank you again for your marginal annotations. – (I did repeat the phrase you printed, but did so by way of emphasis) – believe me. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

5 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I have just discovered that I had accidentally failed to profit by two of the excellent suggestions you made on the margin of the galley proofs of my first chapter. When I received the two sets of proofs of this chapter, I noticed that you had made marginal notes on one set, + reserving that for correction, I sent the other to a friend who is helping me to make an index. My friend has just returned to me this second set of proofs, + has pointed out to me that thereon you had made two notes which did not exist on my set. I fear it is too late to make the changes before the page-proofs come out, but on the chance that something may be gained by my writing to you at once, I enclose the emendations made according to your suggestion. Thank you again most heartily for taking such interest in the book. I hope you see how the oversight occurred. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

Do not take the trouble to answer this

P. S. The reference to the knights fighting about the colour of the shield, marked by you with a query, is taken from Chap. I of Herbert Spencer's "First Principles".

6 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I return the old title-page as you requested. When I wrote to Mr. Marvin on the subject early in the summer, I told him that the title-page was Mr. Updike's (...) Mr Updike is, I think, the most "artistic" (odious word) printer that we have here, + has specially devoted himself to old Italics. He was for many years with Houghton-Mifflin, but has lately set up for himself in Boston, + has already been very favourably spoken of by the English papers as a book-maker. The list of illustrations to be omitted is quite correct. Thank you again for your interest in my book. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

On re-reading the lit, I find one mistake. The "ornamental sculpture from Ménars" (plate 37) is to be left in, + the "bronze Venetian andiron" from the Spitzer Collection (I do not recall the number, but it was one of the last in the series) is to be omitted.

8 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I return by this mail the page-proofs of chap. I of "The Decoration of Houses". I notice that on pages 4, 10, + 16 the lines of type are very irregular; + as I do not know the technical way of indicating this, I am obliged to write to you. Pray pardon my inexperience, believe me. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

15 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, unfortunately I mailed to you yesterday the galleys from which the page of ms was omitted, so I think the simplest way is to send the "Context" in the ms. The paragraph omitted is a "thing apart" + in reading the proofs I noticed no break in continuity, though I rather wondered that the paragraph in question had not turned up. In a moment of aberration I struck out instead of confirming your correction, degli for dei sposi, in the last galleys; but of course you are right + I will correct my slip in the page-proofs. Thank you so much for calling my attention to these lapses. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

22 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

(It is the chapter on "Windows")

Dear Mr. Brownell, in transmitting the page-proof of "House-decoration" to the friend who is helping me with the index, I have lost chapter V. Would it be possible, at some stage in the book's growth, to let me have back the other set of page-proofs of that chapter? Yours sincerely Edith Wharton

28 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, you have caught me rapping again. Of course it should be à l'italienne; I quite overlooked the "caps" in correcting the proofs. Did I ever tell you that I looked up the question of "De Cotte" versus "de Cotte", + I found that, even when the surname is not preceded by a Christian name or a title, the "particule" does not take a capital letter? You are most kind to keep a sharp eye on the proofs. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

31 October 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I have just received the illustrations. They are beautifully done, but judging from the size of the specimen page that was sent to me some time since, they seem to me needlessly small. It is as important, in a book like "House-decoration", that the illustrations should give as much detail as possible, that I supposed that the half-tones would extend to within an inch or so of the margin, as they do in Anderson's "Italian Renaissance", a book of about the same size. I hope you will not think that I am unreasonable in making this suggestion. It seems to me that it is as much a matter of interest to Messrs. Scribners as to me, to make the book attractive + serviceable, + a few of the illustrations can hardly be said to answer to these requirements. I have no knowledge of the half-tone process, + do not know how much the book would be delayed, or the expense increased, by enlarging seven of the most defective illustrations; but if this could be done the gain would be great, + there seems no reason why the half-tones should not vary in dimensions, as they do in Anderson's book. The illustrations to which I refer are as follows:

11. Drawing Room in Berkeley Square
12. Room in the Villa Vertemati
13. Drawing Room at Easton (Preston?)
43. Ball Room in the Royal Palace in Genoa
44. Saloon in the Villa Vertemati
45. Sala dello Zodiaco, Mantua
26. Ceiling in the style of Bérain

In these cases, the original photograph has been so reduced, in order to preserve the "meadow of margin", that *the* many important details, to which reference is made in the text, have been lost. I will only add, if my opinion seems to be expressed rather late in the day, that I was not consulted in any way about the illustrations + had no idea what their size was to be. One last question: is it intended that I should place the illustrations between the pages, in the order that seems best? Or is this done by the publisher? If I am to do it, do you object to grouping ten or twelve at the back of the book, as I suggested? Pray make allowances for my inexperience + tell me what to do. Thanks for your suggestions on the margin of the last galleys. I have taken advantage of them in nearly every case, but I kept "Saxe" (in place of Dresden) because the former is the generic name, + the one always used by collectors, in writing English as well as French. "Process" was used because "method" had been so overlooked (in the same chapter) + while it is open to the objection you make, the dictionary definition does not restrict it to mechanical modes of production, so I thought that it might pass. I cannot sufficiently express to you how helpful your suggestions + criticisms have been to me. Sincerely yours Edith Wharton

1 November 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, on going over the list of illustrations, I find that one of the original 56 – namely, n° 36 (a Louis XIV room at Fontainebleau) – has been omitted, + a one of the six additional rejected illustrations (n° 57, Louis XV armoire) substituted for it. N° 56, (French statuary from Ménars) has also been omitted, + one of the rejected illustrations (ve n° 59, Bronze Andirons, Venetian XVI century) put in its place). You may recall that, when it was finally decided not to use the extra six illustrations, you wrote me that these had been confounded with the original 56; + I then sent you a list of the six that were to be omitted, i. e. : 44A Louis XVI table, 48A Bureau à cylindre, 57 Louis XV press, 58 Marriage chest, Italian, 59 Andirons Venice, 60 Stucco Madonna. As each of the photographs had a label attached to it, with a n° and a description of the subject, there can have

been no difficulty in separating these six plates from those originally chosen. I give these details in my own defense, as I really cannot hold myself to blame for the mistakes made. With regard to the substitution of n° 59 (Andiron) for n° 56 (French statuary), I have no objection to make, for it so happens that n° 56 is not referred to in the text; but n° 36 (Louis XIV room at Fontainebleau) is referred to *a* on p. 78, 85, 139 +c – so that it cannot possibly be omitted. If these substitutions were made because the photographs originally chosen were not available for reproduction, I could have selected others, had I been notified; but, as you see, it is now too late to change 36. Yours sincerely
Edith Wharton

P. S. None of the rejected photograph have been returned to me, so n° 36 must be in your possession at present.

2 November 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I send this afternoon by express the entire set of proofs, captioned, and with plate-enumeration and page-indication. I have in three or four instances grouped together two plates having a bearing on the same subject; the remainder are pretty evenly distributed through the book. The seven proofs that in my opinion need enlargement are marked with a cross in blue pencil. A “list of plates” accompanies the proofs. Please note: 1st, that Plate XXXVI (Salon in Palace of Fontainebleau) is missing, another photo having been substituted for it by mistake, as I wrote you yesterday. The number, caption, and page-indication of this plate will be found in their proper place in the “list of plates”. 2dly, not having received the page-proofs of the last two chapters, I am unable to give the page-indication of plate LVI, and have therefore left a blank in the list, *a* noting on the proof itself that it is to face the first page of the chapter on Bric a brac. As you wish the proofs at once, I thought it better to do this than to wait the arrival of the pages. Yours sincerely
Edith Wharton

I have marked only six plates for enlargement, as the seventh seems to me/be less important.

2 November 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, on correcting the batch of page-proofs that I sent you yesterday, I overlooked one mistake. On page 150, line sixth from top of page, “Plate XLVI” should read XLVII. I have telegraphed to have the page held, + trust it is not too late. I find the illustrations distribute themselves so well through the book that it will not be needful to group a number of them at the back, as I had expected. Yours sincerely
Edith Wharton

2 November 1897 TELEGRAM To C. Scribner’s Sons

Please hold page 150 of my book for slight correction have written. Edith Wharton

3 November 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Dear Mr. Brownell, I infer from your telegram of this morning, asking for the original photographs of the plates to be enlarged, that you wished me to send you the said originals in the first instance.

4 December 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Mr. Godkin has asked me to send him a copy of “The Decoration of Houses” as soon as it appears. He wishes it sent to his house, 36 West 18th St. + not to the Evening Post office. Will you kindly have this done?

4 December 1897 To W. C. Brownell

Just after writing to you this morning I received the three copies of “The Decoration of Houses” + I must tell you at once how gratified I am by the appearance of the book. Paper, style and binding seem to me admirable, + Mr. Codman, who is here with us, desires to join me in thanks to the Messrs. Scribner for the very handsome and dignified dress in which they have clothed us. Mr.

Codman begs me to say that he will be much obliged if you will kindly have his three copies of the book sent to his office, 281 Fourth Ave., New York. When I found that the book was out, I telegraphed to have a copy sent at once to Mr. Godkin at his house, as he had particularly requested to have it sent as soon as it appeared. As this is for reviewing, I suppose it is included in the copies sent out by the firm, is it not?

25 February 1898 To W. C. Brownell

The corrections to be made in "The Decoration of Houses" are as follows:- but I will write them on a separate page.

12 March 1898 To W. C. Brownell (incomplete)

Could you send me a couple of copies of plate XVIII from "The Decoration of Houses"? I want to send them to Mr. de Melhae [(?) o Melhac], the curator of the Palace, he is writing about it and I want him to tell (...?)

5 September 1898 To W. C. Brownell

You really ought not to send me so much money all at once: la joie fait peur! Such returns are certainly an incentive to lead laborious days in the cause of good architecture, + I shall at once start a sequel to "The Decoration of Houses". Meanwhile I have just finished a volume of stories, to which I hope you will give your blessing.

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Dottorato: UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI VENEZIA – CA' FOSCARI - SCUOLA DI
DOTTORATO IN LINGUE, CULTURE E SOCIETA – INDIRIZZO DI STUDI IBERICI E
ANGLOAMERICANI

Ciclo: 22° (A. A. 2006/2007 – 2008/2009)

Titolo della tesi: THE DECORATION OF HOUSES BY EDITH WHARTON AND OGDEN
CODMAN, JR.

Abstract:

This dissertation sketches a reconstruction of the social, cultural and personal conditions which brought about the writing of Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr.'s book *The Decoration of Houses* in 1897. Through the analysis of its text many elements can be singled out, which provide a wealth of information about the book's cultural and historical roots. Strong traces of its influence are to be found in Wharton's successive fictional works, in Codman's architectural projects, and in later books on the same subject. The book proved also a challenging experience from the point of view of text translation, as it required particular attention to its numerous foreign references, the historically relevant details it contained and the need to adopt a language which would adequately render its concise, clear prose.

In questa dissertazione si è cercato di presentare una ricostruzione delle condizioni che hanno favorito l'elaborazione di un testo quale *The Decoration of Houses*, di Edith Wharton e Ogden Codman, Jr, dai vari punti di vista della formazione culturale degli autori, della loro posizione sociale e della storia personale. L'analisi del testo ha fornito molti spunti per ulteriori approfondimenti nella ricerca delle radici culturali e storiche di questo libro, che ha successivamente esercitato un forte influsso sulla produzione narrativa di Edith Wharton, sulle realizzazioni architettoniche di Ogden Codman, e su testi più tardi riguardanti argomenti analoghi. Anche dal punto di vista della traduzione in italiano il testo si è rivelato una sfida impegnativa, per la necessità di avvalersi di una documentazione precisa sulle sue varie fonti straniere, le numerose citazioni storiche e per poter rendere adeguatamente lo stile chiaro e conciso.

Firma dello studente