

American Arts & Crafts: Virtue in Design

by LESLIE GREENE BOWMAN

A major exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *American Arts & Crafts: Virtue in Design*, presents a comprehensive display of the finest works of the Craftsman era in the United States, dating from the 1890's to about 1930. The exhibition includes more than 250 examples of furniture, metalwork, ceramics, glass, books, drawings, prints, and textiles by the period's finest artisans, art potteries and architects. The exhibition showcases the outstanding collection of Max Palevsky and his wife, Jodie Evans, and includes related works from the Museum's holdings. The Palevskys committed their collection to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1984, and have shaped it to that purpose ever since. Selected contemporary European examples illustrate the relationship between American arts and crafts and foreign design sources. The collection gives the museum one of the strongest and most distinguished public holdings of this material in the country. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue of the same title.

Max Palevsky, a Los Angeles electronics entrepreneur, began collecting arts and crafts in the early 1970's. As he explains in the preface to the catalogue:

I grew up in the age where 'modern' was defined as the International Style. Characterized by the works of Mies van der Rohe, Saarinen, and Breuer, modern design was severe and simple, with lots of chrome and high seriousness. In the early 1970's I started to notice pieces of American arts and crafts furniture. Made of quarter-sawn oak instead of chrome, they shared, I saw, the same sense of austere simplicity. The thirty or so years that separate the arts and crafts and International Style movements in the United States

represent not only a change in furniture technology but also in outlook. Those thirty years altered the insular, inward-looking attitude of American society (and art) and moved the country, with some resistance, into an international role (and into the avant-garde). After acknowledging the crucial influence of the English arts and crafts movement, American arts and crafts designs are, perhaps, the closest embodiment we have of the 'American style'. This is the style of that idealized country that politicians often recall - simple, honest, laconic, quaint, and sometimes movingly beautiful.

The exhibition opens with a gallery illustrating the diversity of artistic interpretations embraced by the movement. Not a style at all, the arts and crafts movement was a philosophy about the nature of art and craft in everyday life. Conceived as a talisman against the undesirable effects of industrialization, the movement elevated crafts into the realm of the fine arts to protect them from extinction as a result of mechanization. A moral imperative accompanied this redefinition of craft as art; arts and crafts proponents cited the therapeutic influence of these objects in the domestic sphere. Functioning as art in the homes of the less affluent, crafts provided essential contact with human creativity, promoting appreciation for their virtues: design suited to function; solid, natural materials; and sound, quality craftsmanship. These became the tenets of arts and crafts design, permitting variations ranging from Louis Comfort Tiffany's art nouveau glass to Frank Lloyd Wright's plank and spindle chairs.

Following the introduction is a sampling of European arts and crafts decorative arts, illustrating the origins of the movement and the various interpretations that

informed America's unique response. Textiles by William Morris's Morris and Company (1861-present), a sideboard by C. F. A. Voysey (1857-1941), silver and furniture by C. R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft (1888-1907), and metalwork by Liberty & Company (1875-present) illustrate seminal English designs. Furniture by Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) and E. A. Taylor (1874-1951) characterize the Glasgow style adapted in America by the Roycrofters, Harvey Ellis, and Greene & Greene, among others. Furniture by Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956) and Joseph Olbrich (1867-1908) provide an understanding of the geometric Vienna secessionist style influential to designers at Limberts, Shop of the Crafters, and the Roycrofters. A cabinet by Hector Guimard (1867-1942) exemplifies the art nouveau style interpreted by Louis C. Tiffany, Charles Rohlf, the Gorham Manufacturing Company, and the Van Briggie Pottery.

From this European context the exhibition explores the depth and range of American arts and crafts decorative arts. Twenty-five works by Gustav Stickley (1858-1942) illustrate his leading role as the chief promoter of arts and crafts in America. A veteran of the furniture business, Stickley was converted to arts and crafts ideas while on a visit to England in the late 1890's. Already familiar with the writings of Ruskin and Morris prior to this trip, he was, upon his return, moved to found United Crafts (later the Craftsman Workshops), in order:

to promote and to extend the principles established by Morris, in both the artistic and the socialistic sense . . . to substitute the luxury of taste for the luxury of costliness; to teach that beauty does not imply

elaboration or ornament; to employ only those forms and materials which make for simplicity, individuality and dignity of effect.¹

Stickley called his new factory 'a guild of cabinet makers, metal and leather workers,' and articulated the moral validity of arts and crafts in the home:

Just as we should be truthful, real and frank ourselves, and look for these same moral qualities in those whom we select for our friends, so should the things with which we surround ourselves in our homes be truthful, real and frank. We are influenced by our surroundings more than we imagine.²

Stickley admitted that 'massive simplicity is the leading characteristic of (his) style'.³ His Craftsman furniture is noted for thick boards of quarter-sawn white oak, visible mortise-and-tenon joinery, and heavy, cast and hammered hardware, as seen in the Sideboard (Plate 1). Stickley was mistrustful of design for its own sake; his forms rarely attain the graphic impact of pieces by Charles

Rohlfs (see Plate 5) or Charles Rennie Mackintosh. He expected his forms to express 'the primitive structural idea: that is, the form which would naturally suggest itself to a workman were he called upon to express frankly and in the proper materials, the bare essential qualities of a bed, chair, table, or any object of this class.'⁴ Spurning ornament except for a brief period, Stickley deliberately over-constructed much of his furniture; exaggerated stretchers, joints and hinges function decoratively as well as structurally. Wrote Stickley, 'the structural lines should be obtrusive rather than obscure Furthermore, these same lines must contribute to the decoration of the piece, which should result principally from such modification of the constructive features as will not impair their validity.'⁵

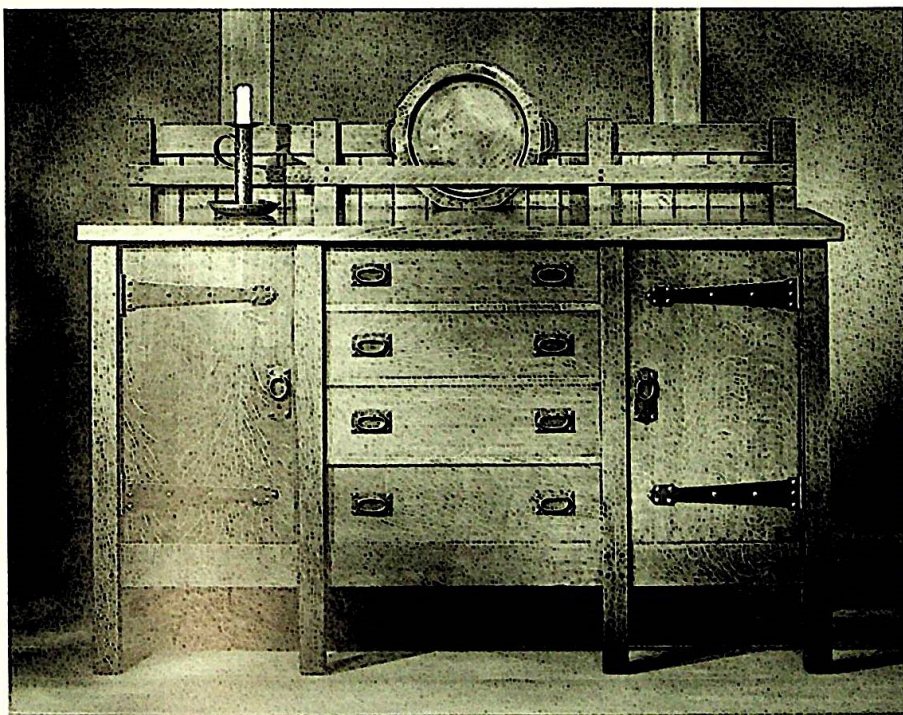
This structural style changed when Stickley hired a designer in 1903, architect Harvey Ellis (1852–1904). Ellis' designs for furniture contrasted with Stickley's straightforward, muscular forms. The architect was conversant with



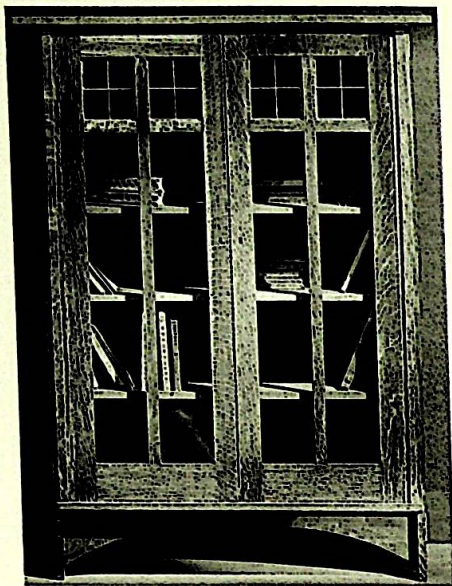
2 Library Table, 1903–4, designed by Harvey Ellis and made by Gustav Stickley's Craftsman Workshops (1899–1916), Eastwood, New York; oak, lemon wood, sycamore, exotic woods, copper, pewter and brass; 29 7/8" h x 41 1/8" w x 25 1/8" d (75.9 x 106.4 x 63.8 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

British arts and crafts vocabulary; his motifs and drawings reveal a strong allegiance to the works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Ellis refined Stickley's style, introducing an alluring sensitivity. He elongated and lightened the pieces with taller proportions, thinner boards, broad overhangs, and arching skirts. He maintained the direct integrity of Stickley's look, but dispensed with oversized joints and hardware in favor of line and form. The Library Table (Plate 2) displays his characteristic use of ornament – dramatic attenuated inlays of stylized floral patterns in pewter, copper and exotic woods – to effect a unique balance of European sophistication with American simplicity. Despite their aesthetic success, the inlaid designs were labor intensive and expensive. Their rarity today reinforces evidence that production probably did not exceed the promotional needs of retailers.⁶ Stickley discontinued most of the inlaid lines after Ellis' death in 1904, but the architect's refinements of Stickley's style remained in the Craftsman Workshops repertoire, as seen in the Double-Door Bookcase (Plate 3) with its taller proportions, overhanging top and curving skirt.

The success of Stickley's Craftsman



1 Sideboard, 1912–16, made by Gustav Stickley's Craftsman Workshops (1899–1916), Eastwood, New York, designed 1901; oak, mahogany and iron; 50 1/2" h x 70" w x 25 1/4" d (127.3 x 177.8 x 64.1 cm); Collection of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.



3 Double-Door Bookcase, 1907–9, made by Gustav Stickley's *Craftsman Workshops* (1899–1916), Eastwood, New York; oak, glass and brass; 57 $\frac{3}{8}$ " h × 45 $\frac{3}{8}$ " w × 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ " d (147 × 115.9 × 36.4 cm); Collection of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

Workshops resulted from his clever marketing. Stickley recognized the difficulty of persuading customers to visit craft studios and special exhibitions of arts and crafts. He introduced his lines of arts and crafts furniture at the country's major furniture trade show, the Grand Rapids Furniture Fair in 1900. His success inspired numerous imitators among furniture manufacturers. While he exhibited in arts and crafts arenas as well, he was careful to keep his products available in mainstream retail establishments, furniture companies in cities across America.

Middle class America became aware of arts and crafts not only through the retail marketing of entrepreneurs like Stickley and his imitators, they read about it in period journals such as *House Beautiful* and *International Studio*. The most successful such journal devoted entirely to the American movement was *The Craftsman*, published and edited by Gustav Stickley from 1901 to 1916. Styled as a how-to manual for living the arts and crafts lifestyle, *The Craftsman* offered articles on handcraft, craftsmen, home

furnishings and interior design, recreation, hobbies, literature, music, gardens and travel. Stickley's journal was the arts and crafts entry in a burgeoning realm of late nineteenth-century American publications: instruction and etiquette manuals. Such publications were monitored by middle-class readers so that they could adjust their conduct as they moved up the rungs of the social ladder.⁷ *The Craftsman* assisted its readers in implementing new ideas of art, taste, decoration, and education. As architect of both the journal and a prospering commercial empire, Stickley was instrumental in establishing the predominant traits of the arts and crafts movement in the United States.

Another of the great proselytizers of the American arts and crafts movement was Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915), founder of the Roycroft Shops in East Aurora, New York. Like Stickley, Hubbard was inspired by a trip to England, specifically by a visit he paid to William Morris at Merton Abbey. Hubbard devoted himself to his newfound passion for the arts and crafts with the same zeal that had made him a successful soap promoter for the Larkin Company in Buffalo. Already a budding author, Hubbard established his own version of Morris's Kelmscott Press in 1895, calling it the Roycroft Press after the seventeenth-century bookbinding partners, Samuel and Thomas Roycroft. Hubbard also appreciated the name's literal translation, 'kings craft', with its appropriate guild connotations. The press begat a bindery, which in turn begat a leather shop, giving substance to Hubbard's dream of a utopian craft community. Keenly aware of the power of the pen, Hubbard published two periodicals appropriately titled *The Fra* and *The Philistine*, as philosophical mouthpieces for his arts and crafts ideas and their embodiment at Roycroft. Fra Elbertus was a charismatic secular evangelist with an acute sense of marketing and

psychology. The title of *The Fra* reflected the fraternal concept of the community and referred to the chief 'brother', Hubbard himself. The title of *The Philistine* suggested the unconventional, avant-garde philosophies of the community.

Furniture was produced as early as 1896 for internal use, offered in mail order catalogues by 1901, and distributed nationally to hundreds of retailers between 1915 and 1938. The need for suitable furniture hardware spawned a metalworking component, which became the Copper Shop in about 1903. Collectively the Roycroft craftsmen were known as Roycrofters, and Hubbard marketed the community as well as its products, opening an inn in 1903 to serve the lucrative tourist trade. Hubbard's zealous and wily promotion of Roycroft made it the most prosperous craft commune in America.

Aesthetically, Roycroft's finest contributions were books and copper. The fine art editions produced at Roycroft were distinguished by hand-illuminated designs by Englishman Samuel Warner (1872–1847), William Wallace Denslow (1856–1915), who later illustrated L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and the brilliant young Dard Hunter (1883–1966). The exhibition includes four Roycroft books designed by these artists, as well as eleven additional examples of furniture and metalwork.

Hunter came to Roycroft at the age of nineteen. Through such European art journals as *Dekorative Kunst*, *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, and *Dekorative Vorbilder*, he became interested in Viennese arts and crafts. The young designer went to study in Vienna from 1908 to 1909; the distinctive secessionist style seen in certain Roycroft books and metalwork is directly attributable to Hunter's interest. The Hanging Lantern from the Roycroft Chapel (*Plate 4*) shows Hunter's influence in its geometric design and the repetition of small squares. Never in production, the lantern originally hung with nine



4 Hanging Lantern from the Roycroft Chapel, c. 1908–10, made by The Copper Shop of the Roycrofters (c. 1903–38), East Aurora, New York; copper and leaded glass; $8\frac{1}{2}$ " h \times $14\frac{3}{4}$ " w \times $8\frac{3}{4}$ " d (21.6 \times 37.5 \times 22.2 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

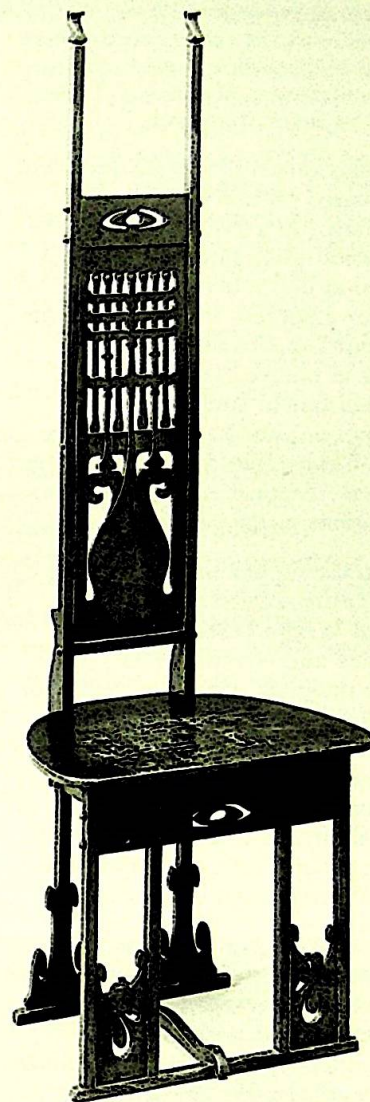
others in the Roycroft Chapel. The term chapel was not used in the religious sense at Roycroft, but referred to the word's archaic meaning as a meeting house for printers. The Roycroft Chapel served as the community's auditorium.

The most creative and eccentric furniture designs of the American arts and crafts movement came from the Charles Rohlf's Workshop of Buffalo, New York, as illustrated by the nine works on view. Charles Rohlf's (1853–1936) imbued his pieces with vitality and movement, celebrating structure and materials with animated carvings. Most American designers subscribed to the Stickley school of restraint, mistrusting both Victorian ornamental abuse and art nouveau's unfettered meanderings. Rohlf's, however, delighted in using decorative motifs from other cultures, incorporating in his works styles as varied as medieval, art nouveau, prairie school, Moorish, Chinese, and Norwegian. The dominant influence in his work was art nouveau.

Rohlf's turned to woodworking after abandoning a theatrical career as a

condition of marriage – his first efforts motivated by the need for furnishings in this own home – sometime in the 1880's.⁸ His distinctive designs won wide recognition, and he opened a commercial workshop in 1898. Marshall Field and Company sponsored an exhibition of his pieces in 1900, and his exhibits at international expositions were well received. After one held in Turin in 1902 (as the only American woodworker invited), Rohlf's was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in London and commissioned to provide a set of chairs for Buckingham Palace. Rohlf's employed as many as eight assistants to produce his designs and aid him with the custom commissions he favored.

Like Mackintosh, Rohlf's conceived of furniture as intensely visual utilitarian constructions. The Hall Chair (Plate 5) is one of his most graphic and dramatic forms. The planar quality of his designs balances the curves and whimsies of his carvings, asserting a dominant rectilinear structure that visually contains the decoration and distinguishes it from mature French art nouveau. Despite its highly



5 Hall Chair, c. 1900, made by the Charles Rohlf's Workshop (1898–1928), Buffalo, New York; oak; $56\frac{3}{4}$ " h \times 19" w \times 15" d (144.1 \times 48.3 \times 38.1 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

decorative character Rohlf's furniture is characteristically arts and crafts in its use of quarter-sawn oak, emphatic joinery, and vernacular design. Although less rhetorical than Stickley, Rohlf's sympathized with the movement as evidenced by his philosophy of design:

'Does it enhance the appearance of the piece as a whole? Is it the natural outgrowth of the main idea? Is it suitable to the use to which the piece is put? All nature answers

these questions for its own handiwork. My effort was to follow the guiding spirit of the manifestations of nature – I could do no more, if as much.⁹

Rohlfs's *raison d'être* for ornament was based on unity with his medium: 'My feeling was to treat my wood well, caress it perhaps, and that desire led to the idea that I must embellish it to evidence my profound regard for a beautiful thing in nature. This embellishment consisted of line proportion, and carving.¹⁰ The Hall Chair (Plate 5) is one of three known, identical except for minor variations in the carving.

Outstanding among American arts and crafts architects were Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) and Greene and Greene (1893–1922). Both designed entire environments for their clients, believing in arts and crafts principles of harmonious design integrating furnishings with architecture, and the whole wed to the natural site. They consistently used natural materials, and derived motifs from organic sources.

Frank Lloyd Wright must be considered the most influential architect to emerge from the American arts and crafts movement. The exhibition includes ten works by Wright in furniture, glass, and works on paper. The seminal member of Chicago's greatest contribution to the period, the prairie school, Wright described the inspiration for the style:

We of the Middle West are living on the prairie. The prairie has a beauty of its own and we should recognize and accentuate this natural beauty, its quiet level. Hence, gently sloping roofs, low proportions, quiet sky lines, suppressed heavy-set chimneys, and sheltering overhangs, low terraces and out-reaching walls sequestering private gardens.¹¹

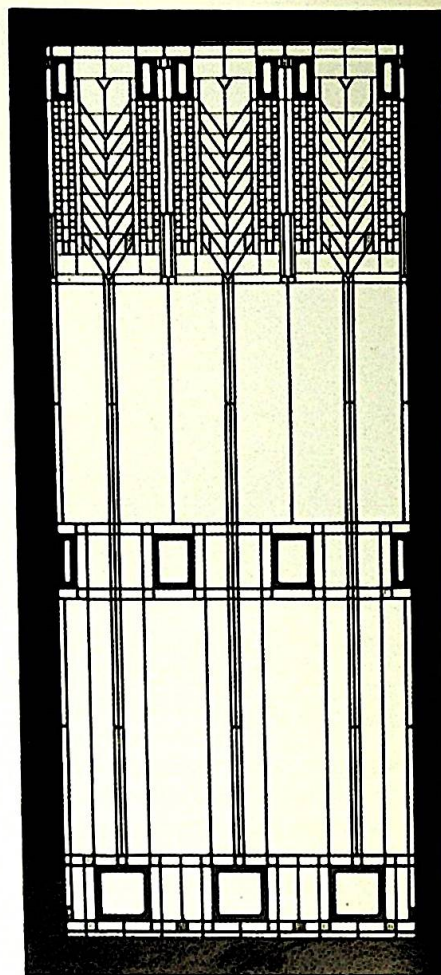
Like other prairie school architects Wright had worked in the Chicago office of Louis Sullivan. He left Sullivan's employ to establish his own practice in 1893. From his Oak Park home and studio he

developed his own distinctive style of domestic architecture. He conceived of decorative arts as interior architecture, forms that contributed to a unified design scheme:

The 'grammar' of the house, is its manifest articulation of all its parts – the 'speech' it uses . . . When the chosen grammar is finally adopted (you go almost indefinitely with it into everything you do) walls, ceilings, furniture, etc. become inspired by it. Everything has a related articulation in relation to the whole and all belongs together because all are speaking the same language.¹²

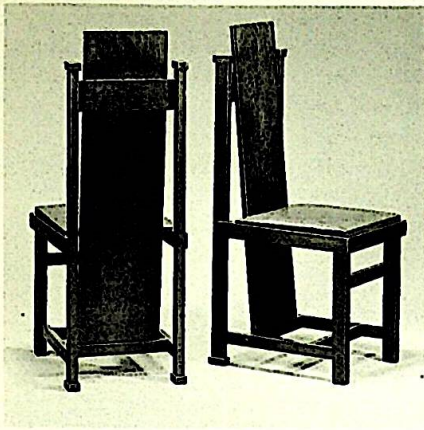
Wright repeatedly stressed the organic conception of his designs, which reduced nature to geometric abstractions. He was strongly influenced in this by Japanese art and architecture. He visited Japan in 1905, frequently praised Japanese design, and considered the Japanese the only people who understood the beauty of wood, who had not 'universally abused and maltreated it.'¹³ He followed their lead in his conception of architecture as interior spaces that determined the nature of exterior structure. A sentence quoted by Wright from *The Book of Tea* by Okakura Kakuzo sums up his ideas: 'the reality of a room was to be found in the space enclosed by the roof and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves.'¹⁴

Wright strove to break the traditional box in his architecture, designing walls of windows to admit light and integrate the home with its environment. Frequently these windows were of art glass, with stylized geometric abstractions of natural motifs. Wright was outspoken against the Tiffany style of stained glass commenting, 'Nothing is more annoying to me than any tendency toward realism of form in window glass, to get mixed up with the view outside.' Like most of Wright's art glass windows, the Darwin Martin example (Plate 6) is of clear glass with an abstracted tree of life design in yellow and green.



6 Window from the Darwin D. Martin House, Buffalo, New York, 1903–5, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959); leaded glass; 65 ¼" h × 25 ¾" w (165.7 × 65.4 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, promised gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

Wright helped to found the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society in 1897 and was a philosophical follower of the movement. His views on machinery, however, contrasted with the typical rationalizations that excused machinery as legitimate aids to the work of the hand.¹⁵ Wright revelled in the new possibilities machinery provided and hailed 'the metamorphosis of ancient art and craft.' He went on to proclaim that 'the machine is capable of carrying to fruition high ideals in art – higher than the world has yet seen,' enabling the designer to produce art inexpensively, affordable for the poor as well as the rich.¹⁶



7 *Pair of Side Chairs from the Frank Lloyd Wright Studio, Oak Park, Illinois, 1898–1902, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959); oak, pine and (replaced) leather; 40 1/8" h x 15" w x 18 1/8" d (101.9 x 38.1 x 47.9 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Elma Shoemaker, Daisy and Dan Belin, and Susan and Robert F. Maguire III, through the 1989 Collectors Committee.*

Thus Wright openly designed for machinery and dispensed with arcane allusions to handcrafted construction. He appreciated the machine's ability to produce smooth, finished boards that showed the true nature of the material without the distraction of plane or saw marks. The Pair of Side Chairs from his own studio (Plate 7) were designed to maximize the use of machinery. Comfort was less important to Wright than visual effect and integration with surrounding design. Like Mackintosh, who also drew inspiration from the Japanese, he designed chairs that are visual statements. This pair, originally from a set of four, was designed for Wright's studio late in the 1890's, and descended in the family of his first wife, Catherine Tobin Wright. The earliest examples of a seminal design, these chairs are also part of the flowering of Wright's mature, rectilinear, prairie school style in furniture. With characteristic emphasis on visual and spatial effects he masterfully orchestrated angles and proportions to produce a geometric composition about sitting.

Like Frank Lloyd Wright, the

architect brothers Charles Sumner Greene (1868–1957) and Henry Mather Greene (1870–1954) were also influenced by Japanese design. indeed they were compared to Wright in the period by English arts and crafts scion, Charles Robert Ashbee:

I think C. Sumner Greene's work beautiful: among the best there is in this country. Like [Frank] Lloyd Wright the spell of Japan is on him, he feels the beauty and makes magic out of the horizontal line, but there is in his work more tenderness, more subtlety, more self effacement than in Wright's work. It is more refined and has more repose. Perhaps it loses in strength, perhaps it is California that speaks rather than Illinois, anyway as work it is, so far as the interiors go, more sympathetic to me . . .

. . . his workshops . . . [make], without exception, the best and most characteristic furniture I have seen in this country . . . [with] a supreme feeling for the material, quite up to the best of our English craftsmanship.¹⁷

Charles and Henry Greene attended one of the first arts and crafts academies in America, the Manual Training High School in St. Louis, where they were exposed to concerns of design and material. Architectural training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology followed; they graduated in 1891. In 1893, on the way to visit their parents, who had recently retired in Pasadena, the brothers viewed the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. They were most impressed with the Japanese exhibit, particularly a timber-framed temple with exposed construction. They subsequently began to collect oriental art and were later to incorporate oriental design into their work. The brothers were also influenced by English arts and crafts, more directly so after Charles's 1901 honeymoon trip to England.

The Greenes remained in California and established a practice in the rich and scenic resort of Pasadena. By 1907 they had perfected their style and were

attracting wealthy clients with lucrative commissions. Their 'ultimate bungalows' date from this period, houses in excess of five thousand square feet where the Greenes controlled the architecture, furnishings, and landscape.¹⁸ The earliest of these commissions was also one of the largest. For Robert Roe Blacker (1847–1931) the Greenes designed a mammoth 12,000-square-foot home, a tour de force creation carefully sited in order to minimize its scale.

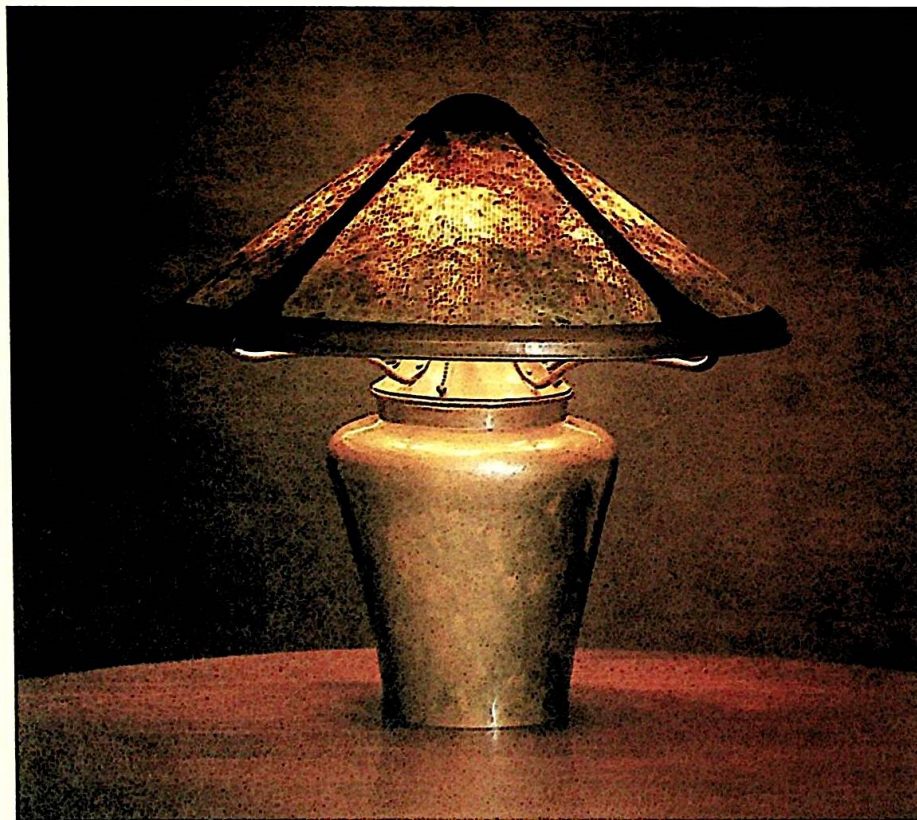
The Blacker House was the most oriental of their commissions. Broad, overhanging timber construction housed interiors paneled with teak and mahogany and hung with Asian-style, stained glass lanterns. The architects incorporated Japanese motifs into the furniture's feet, brackets, drawer pulls, and carvings. The Greenes consciously selected specific woods and motifs for use in certain rooms. The entry hall furniture was crafted in teak and included in addition to the Hall Cabinet (Plate 8), a table, hanging mirror, armchair, settle, two Morris chairs, and another case piece. The Hall Cabinet is distinguished by landscape scenes of California oak trees carved by Charles Greene in asymmetrical Japanese arrangement.

A distinguishing feature of furniture by the Greenes is the rounded treatment of the edges and corners, which contributes to the tenderness and subtlety cited by Ashbee. This softened effect contrasts markedly with the strong, sharp character of furniture by Gustav Stickley and Frank Lloyd Wright. Whereas Stickley and Wright accentuated the strength and thrust of the medium, the Greenes glorified the craftsman's ability to make it appear sensitive and pliable. The exhibition includes eight pieces from the Blacker House and a lantern from the Robinson House, Pasadena, designed in 1906.

Among the most distinguished metalworkers of the American



8 Hall Cabinet from the Robert R. Blacker House, Pasadena, 1907, designed by Greene and Greene (1893–1922); teak and ebony; $36\frac{1}{2}$ " h \times $60\frac{3}{4}$ " w \times $20\frac{3}{4}$ " d (92.7 \times 154.3 \times 52.7 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.



9 Table Lamp, 1911–c. 1912, made by the Dirk van Erp Copper Shop (1908–77), San Francisco; copper, mica and paper; $22\frac{1}{4}$ " h \times 24" w (57.8 \times 61 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, promised gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

movement was Dirk van Erp (1860–1933) of San Francisco. Like many of the period's artisans, van Erp worked primarily in copper. Copper was a favored metal because it was cheaper than silver, and removed from the elitist associations of precious metals. Dutch-trained van Erp was a commercial coppersmith in the San Francisco shipyards before he turned to art copper as a career. His hobby of hammering brass shell casings into vases and art wares led to his establishment of the Copper Shop in 1908. With a small group of assistants van Erp produced all manner of handwrought metalwork, including lamps, vases, candlesticks, bookends, and desk and table accessories. His copper and mica lamps are among the most important contributions to lighting of the period, and inspired many imitations. The Table Lamp (Plate 9) is one of the largest models, and is distinguished by the subtle iris design in the shade, accomplished by layering cut paper stencils between sheets of mica.

Art pottery was the most prolific product of the American arts and crafts movement, and the exhibition contains more than 100 examples. Clay was an everyday material, familiar, inexpensive, and less daunting to amateurs subscribing to craft as therapy. The results provided an inexpensive art form for the home. Further, ceramics provided an avenue of respectable employment for many lower and middle class women. Hundreds of art potteries sprang up across the country, many staffed by semi-skilled women decorators.

One of the most influential art potters in America was Frederick H. Rhead, who immigrated from England in 1902. Previously involved with English art potteries, he directed or taught at nine different American potteries, and his writings on technique were influential to the art pottery movement. The Vase (Plate 10) is perhaps his finest work, and illustrates Rhead's preference for



10 Vase, 1911, made by Frederick Hurten Rhead (1880–1942) at the University City Pottery (1909–15), University City, Missouri; earthenware; 17¼" h × 5½" d (43.8 × 13 cm); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, promised gift of Max Palevsky and Jodie Evans.

carved and excised decoration. Rhead made it during his brief tenure at the University City Pottery in University City, Missouri, where he and a few other selected potters were invited to

pursue their craft in a specially-designed, state-of-the-art pottery, as part of a teaching enterprise. Rhead, along with the premier French potter, Taxile Doat of Sevres, and the distinguished American potter, Adelaide Alsop Robineau, produced some of the movement's greatest pottery at University City before it encountered financial difficulties and closed in 1915.

Although isolated artisans continued to ply their craft, the American arts and crafts movement was largely over by 1930, the victim of World War I and the Depression. Its influence was far more enduring, however, on the course of studio craft and design. The 250 artworks in the exhibition illustrate not only the finest accomplishments of the period, but remind one of the movement's legacy, still palpable a hundred years later.

American Arts & Crafts: Virtue in Design is on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from September 23, 1990 to January 6, 1991. Author Leslie Greene Bowman is curator of decorative arts at the Museum, curator of the exhibition, and author of the accompanying catalogue, *American Arts and Crafts: Virtue in Design*. Portions of this article have been excerpted from the catalogue, available softbound through the Museum shop, and hardbound through Bulfinch Press.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *The Craftsman*, vol. 1 (October 1901), p. i.
- 2 *The Craftsman's Story* (Eastwood, New York, 1905), pp. 22–23.
- 3 As quoted in Stephen Gray and Robert Edwards, eds. *Collected Works of Gustav Stickley* (New York: Turn of the Century Editions, 1981), p. 19.
- 4 Gustav Stickley, *What is Wrought in the Craftsman Workshops*, 1904, reprint ed. (Watkins Glen, New York, 1982), p. 18.
- 5 Gustav Stickley, 'The Structural Style in Cabinet-Making', *The House Beautiful*, vol. 15, no. 1 (December 1903), p. 21.
- 6 David Cathers, *Furniture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement: Stickley and Roycroft Mission Oak* (New York: New American Library, 1981), p. 49.
- 7 Susan Williams, *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books in association with the Strong Museum, 1985), p. 17.
- 8 Robert Judson Clark, ed., *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1876–1916* (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 1972), p. 28.
- 9 As quoted in Michael James, 'The Philosophy of Charles Rohlf: An Introduction,' *Arts and Crafts Quarterly*, vol. I, no. 3 (April 1987), pp. 14–18.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 As quoted in David Hanks, *The Decorative Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979) p. 73.
- 12 As quoted in Sharon Darling, *Chicago Furniture: Art, Craft, and Industry 1833–1983* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1984), p. 257.
- 13 As quoted in Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, 1960, reprint ed. (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 66.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- 15 See Gustav Stickley's 1906 article, 'The Use and Abuse of Machinery, and Its Relation to the Arts and Crafts,' as quoted in Barry Sanders, ed., *The Craftsman: An Anthology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1978), pp. 87–88; and Sharon Darling, *Chicago Metalsmiths* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1977), p. 37, where the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society's views on machinery are quoted.
- 16 As quoted in Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, 1960, reprint ed. (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 55.
- 17 As quoted in Randell Makinson, *Greene and Greene: Furniture and Related Designs* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1979), p. 150.
- 18 Randell Makinson, *Greene and Greene: Architecture as a Fine Art* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1977), p. 150.