



## Book Reviews

***Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color*, by Patricia Phillips Marshall and Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll; foreword by Jeffrey J. Crow**

Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, in association with the North Carolina Museum of History, 2010, 320 pp., 243 black-and-white and 20 color illustrations, 4 maps, append., notes, bibl., index. HB 978-0-8078-3341-4. US\$40.00.

**Reviewed by Joseph McBrinn**

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Thomas Day (1801–1861), a free man of color from Milton, Caswell County, North Carolina, in pre-Civil War America, became one of the most successful cabinetmakers of his era, servicing the new wealthy planters and middle-class merchants of the South during a time when most blacks were enslaved and the movements and activities of the so-called free were highly restricted. Remarkably, by 1850 Thomas Day operated the largest cabinetmakers in a state where, out of the region's 377 registered workshops, ninety-six percent were white-owned. Even though bourgeois tastes were increasingly dictated by European standards, Day's work could compete with the finest work produced

in major cities such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, and his surviving furniture and architectural work embody the best of fine craftsmanship and robust design even by today's standards. As a figure who defied "the norms of an antebellum society" and the "expectations of history," Day's work has long been attracting interest, culminating in a so-called "renaissance" in the 1970s (p. xi). This important new book by the curator Patricia Phillips Marshall and the architect Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll brings together in a single volume research on Day that aims to pay as much attention to his interior and architectural work as to his furniture. Indeed, the authors contend that Day's diversification from furniture into interior design resulted in his tremendous success but also his significant contribution to design history.

The book contains a documentary survey of all known examples of Day's objects and interior designs, as well as critical analysis of Day's unique negotiation of aesthetics and taste, craft and manufacture, patronage and entrepreneurship, politics and economics. Although building on knowledge from the landmark exhibitions and publications on Day, and his wider context, in the 1970s and after, by historians such as John Hope Franklin and Rodney Barfield, this book is neither a catalogue raisonné nor a critical biography but an accessible, and rather satisfying, hybrid of the two. It contains six chapters that are informally divided into two sections – the first dealing with biography, background, and context and the second with analysis and detailed discussion of the furniture and the interiors. There are also two supplementary appendices of important primary material and an excellent bibliography.

Trained in the "art and mystery of cabinetmaking" by his father, a journeyman cabinetmaker from Virginia, Day settled in North Carolina's Caswell County in a burgeoning area of small farms and large plantations on the Dan river that gave the region access to "the larger Atlantic trade world beyond" (p. 12). Marshall and Leimenstoll argue that, although it was not unique for a free man of color to own a business, what set Day apart was his remarkable success, the extraordinary respect he commanded locally, and his sustained position in a precarious marketplace that depended solely on white consumers. This success may have been augmented by the fact that, the authors postulate, Day was the son of a mulatto (his father was mixed race) and he had a light skin tone and straight hair, which may have contributed to his "ability to gain other rights and privileges" at a point when the actions of whites in the South were largely engendered by fear of slave insurrection and the growing abolitionist movement (p. 21). Indeed, the authors show that the number of slaves Day owned himself "placed him closer to the white elite than to the white yeomen" (p. 27).

For the authors, Day's furniture and interiors may be "unique" in their "vernacular interpretation of nineteenth-century Anglo urban designs" but the "spontaneity and improvisational" elements within

the work, they suggest, conversely draw upon the complex traditions of African-American craft (p. 75). Here they build upon the ideas first voiced by John Michael Vlach in *By the Work of Their Hands. Studies in Afro-American Folklife* (1991), which suggested that the folk traditions of Africa were a living presence in the crafts of the African-American diaspora, an influence that had been much overlooked by historians of material culture. More recently, scholars have traced the influence of African tribal art on Day's work. However, the historian Jonathan Prown, in an important article on Day in the *Winterthur Portfolio* (1998), suggested that such an influence could easily be overstated in Day's case. With this in mind, Marshall and Leimenstoll show that Day also consciously played upon the Anglophile tendencies of his consumers. They show that Day's work was to some degree inspired by the furniture of Thomas Sheraton and George Smith through the use of widely circulated architectural pattern books: Day owned pattern books by the Americans Asher Benjamin, Owen Biddle, and Minard Lafever, and the Englishman William Pain (p. 137). A further reason for Day's success, the authors show, was clearly his ability to think progressively. For instance, he was quick to see the potential of mechanization and early on purchased a steam engine and belt-driven woodworking machines. The speed by which his workshop could cut wood and produce repetitive elements for furniture and interiors meant much greater productivity.

Establishing a business in the 1820s, at a time when "many whites considered any self-assertion by free people of color to be impudence," Marshall and Leimenstoll show how Thomas Day "trod a careful line, responding with surety but not arrogance" to social change (p. 40). Indeed, Day's story is a fascinating and compelling episode not just in the history of furniture or interiors but also in the history of craft. Marshall and Leimenstoll contend that "Day's cabinet shop was a place where race and culture came together with the same symmetry and balance found in his work," and that craft itself acted as a refuge from political persecution and social exclusion (p. 76). They also suggest that Day is a rare figure in his creation of a modern type of "interior space" and they further suggest that this can be understood as a prototype of what is today called "interior architecture," citing John Kurtich and Garret Eakin's *Interior Architecture* (1993), in which just three key examples of such hybridity are identified: Sir John Soane, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and Eileen Gray (p. 201). Certainly, Day's contribution to the history of interiors, architecture, and culture is unquestionably significant and it is finally given full exposition in this beautiful and highly readable book.

***Rethinking the Interior, c. 1867–1896.  
Aestheticism and Arts and Crafts, by  
Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart (eds)***

Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010,  
290 pp., 65 black-and-white illustrations, references,  
index. HB 978-0-7546-6817-6. US\$124.95.

**Reviewed by Alla Myzelev**

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Coffee-table books, biographies, monographs, and exhibition catalogs constitute the lion's share of the published body of work on Aestheticism and the Arts and Crafts movement. Thoroughly researched academic publications that offer innovative interpretations and stimulating analysis are rare. *Rethinking the Interior* is a recent contribution to the studies on late nineteenth-century architecture and interior design that challenges previous assumptions about interiors and stimulates readers to reinvestigate clearly defined Art and Crafts and Aesthetic Movement architecture, interior design, and art-making. The volume makes a significant contribution to studies on the interrelation between Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts interiors in Britain. Jason Edwards and Imogen Hart have chosen ten essays that together offer new perspectives on the study of two artistic movements that are usually considered oppositional in relation to their interior design philosophies. Thus the volume problematizes the concept that Arts and Crafts emphasized the handmade and preached the scarcity and even austerity of decoration while the Aesthetic Movement propagated a love of nonfunctional and purely decorative objects and glorified eclectic interiors filled up with antiques.

This volume, according to its editors, aims at showing more complex and multilayered relationships between the two movements while showcasing interiors as livable and at the same time highly public spaces. The volume then does exactly what it promises to do in its title, namely rethink and offer new methods of analyzing the interiors and exteriors of the Victorian and Edwardian period. The contributors review some of the best known Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts spaces such as Morris & Co's Green Dining Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum, William Morris's Kelmscott House, or Frederick Leighton's infamous abode. These inquiries shed new light on well-known spaces, for example Sally-Anne Huxtable convincingly argues that the Green Room was mainly the product of Morris's imagination, in spite of the fact that earlier scholarship attributed the design chiefly to Philip Webb. By comparing it to Morris's poem *The Life and Death of Jason*, she comes to the conclusion that the Green Room was "a poisonous pastoral" (p. 37) where the color green



signified nature and a desire to bring the countryside and natural world to the heart of London. Imogen Hart offers a detailed and keen investigation of Morris's London house. The house represents an interplay between Aesthetic eclecticism and the Arts and Crafts search for simplicity. It fits between the two movements and blurs clear-cut definitions and differences between excess and austerity. Jason Edwards offers no less a detailed and informed view of Leighton's house. Edwards convinces the reader that the house was conceived and used not only as an illustration of an artist's interest in both movements and practices but also as a kind of closet. Indeed, it becomes apparent that the house's design offered more opportunities for the observation of others than it did for Leighton showcasing his private life. This closet-like space was not in a hurry to reveal its secrets and in spite of its opulence and wealth, the interior had a layered quality that allowed Leighton to provide full access only to a small circle of chosen friends. Leighton's rich, tactile, and hedonistic interior appealed to the sense of touch no less than to sight, yet also reflected the artist's more socially attuned interests in Arts and Crafts.

The notion of queer space and its representation is one of the unifying threads of the volume. Thus, John Potvin contends that the artistic union and life partnership of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon was able to stay "under the radar" after the 1895 trials in particular because the interiors of their homes were less associated with the excessive eclecticism of the Aesthetic Movement and more with the contained domesticity and reduction of details characteristic of the Arts and Crafts philosophy. (I refer here to the trials of Oscar Wilde on accusations of sodomy that made the discourse of homoeroticism and homosexual fantasies part of contemporary debates in London.) Finally, Diana Maltz offers a discussion on Vernon Lee's experiences in Tangier and contrasts these with representations of the Middle-Eastern travels of John Singer Sargent. Maltz's interest lies in defining the queer space discussed in Lee's travel writings. Perhaps less convincing, but no less provocative, are the arguments with which she helps to construct verbal interiors that fit the goal of the book by rethinking and opening up new perspectives in design and architecture studies.

The volume also makes an invaluable contribution to the study of artists' spaces. Martina Droth offers a nuanced investigation of the significance of interiors occupied by sculptors in forming the taste of their potential patrons. Anne Anderson discusses the Aesthetes' interest in collecting blue-and-white china and the formation of a market for Japanese and Chinese ceramics in England. This same thread is also developed in several other chapters (Potvin, Edwards, and Hart). What transpires from this investigation is the extent to which spaces designed and curated by artists functioned as tacit taste guides for other members of their circles. Yet, as Morna O'Neill shows in her analysis of Walter Crane's murals in Newport, Rhode

Island, it was not only artistic spaces but also the spaces of patrons that had the ability to champion, educate, and appeal to audiences. O'Neill's contribution is especially valuable because she debunks yet another assumed binary between Arts and Crafts and Aestheticism – namely that the latter was completely divorced from socialist or even social concerns. Vinland's dining room frieze aimed at explaining and propagating Crane's socialist views through situating the mural in one of the most public rooms of the house.

This volume will be an invaluable read for any student of late nineteenth-century art, history, design, or architecture. Its value lies in the combination of intricately discussed case studies and the use of innovative methodologies and novel perspectives. British design of the period is often simply judged as Victorian, which, with the advent of modernism, became equated with overcrowded, indiscriminate, and excessive. Edwards and Hart demonstrate that the presumed “clutter” often had very strict organizational rationales and that “Victorians surely could not have been entirely immune to the discourse of camp, kitsch, and pastiche” (p. 13), thus already anticipating the Aesthetic Movement's austere, snobbish, and white-loving successor – modernism.

***Consuming Space. Placing Consumption in Perspective,* by Michael K. Goodman, David Goodman, and Michael Redclift**

Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010, 282 pp., with illustrations. HB 978-0-7546-7229-6. GBP58.50.

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Goodman, Goodman, and Redclift have assembled an interesting, and at times compelling, collection of essays that unravel many of the complex relationships between consumption and space in our ever-increasingly global context. The aim of the volume is to situate, spatially and geographically, commodities and consumers' interactions with them. This is set out by the editors in the first of three introductory essays that comprise the first of five discrete sections. As the editors assert, “we are where we consume” (p. 3).

Their introduction explores in painstaking depth the scholarship and myriad issues attending to the spatial dynamics of consumption,

though mostly (and oddly) neglects the important scholarship done by those exploring the sites and spaces of fashion. This absence is paralleled by the exclusion of a chapter on fashion. This marked absence aside, the editors and/or publisher have elected, nonetheless, to use as the cover an image of female mannequins on display, which clearly has no bearing on the contents of the volume, an effect that both misleads the viewer and demonstrates our current cultural obsession with fashion, proving the point that it sells – even academic volumes.

The volume's introduction is followed by two additional theoretically grounded essays. Trentmann's essay investigates the intersections between historical and geographical approaches to the study of the spaces of consumption. The author offers to investigate and unpack three dynamics at play that affect the spaces of consumption: the mental space of the consumer, the moral geographies of consumption, and the public/private dyad. The second essay, by Clarke, "The Seduction of Space," begins and remains in the densely and purely theoretical life-worlds of Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, effectively leaving space itself as a seemingly incidental facet of consumption.

By the end of reading these three inaugural essays, this reviewer could not help but be struck by the absence of a discussion on gender and sexuality and how the authors portrayed the actors of consumption as decidedly universal agents. Given that Chapter 2, for example, delves into the mental and moral aspects of consumption, both of which have grave implications in the gendered and sexual identities of those performing consumption, a discussion of these modalities of identity is certainly crucial, and its absence throughout the entire volume is particularly problematic. Parallel to this absence is the roster of contributors, which leaves one to conclude that consumer studies remains a heavily male-dominated academic discipline.

With a number of the chapters heavily indebted to the theoretical blueprint advanced by Henri Lefebvre, the volume is organized into four central themes: (1) the consumption of space and place; (2) consumption in space and place; (3) consumption as connection/disconnection/reconnection; and (4) consumption as production and production as consumption. The range of case studies in these sections includes tourist destinations, wood, wine, hotels, and food; the latter comprises one third of the nine case study chapters and as a result leaves the volume somewhat uneven in its purview. Although all authors provide detailed and well-researched analyses of their respective case studies, the lack of images, with one exception, leaves one wondering more about the concrete and specific realities of the actual spaces discussed. Chapter 8, by Jackson, Ward, and Russell, for example, importantly provides two images that visualize the historical and contemporary spatial confines of chicken production, though these are not given concrete explanatory details.

It's often easy to forget that violence, war, and acts of terrorism not only deeply affect the economy on a local and global level, but also alter the networks and patterns of consumption, as these changes might occur slowly over a period of time rather than as a rupture. Redcliff's fascinating exploration of the Mayan Riviera as a tourist destination and locus of consumption demonstrates how nature and society help to refashion meanings and spaces. As a site of tension and hybridization, the so-called Mayan Riviera, with its recent focus on cruise ship tourism and the development of new ports, is not only a result of the decline in American tourist numbers in the immediate post-9/11 period. This shift also marks the most recent articulation of various competing actors and forces in the region that have not necessarily understood or represented the region in similar ways or through identical notions of land and space. As part of an ongoing dialog between the local and the global, the volume subtly and smartly attends to the negotiations that cut across these economic realities. For example, given the glut of wine on the international market, Gwynne's exploration of the production and consumption networks and exchanges between Chile and the UK is a timely and fascinating one. Gwynne's essay forms an important part of the volume's fourth theme, the intersection of production and consumption, a relationship often neglected and usually dealt with as separate entities. As a result, the editors and authors in this section should be commended for attending to some of the complexities of this multivalent dynamic.

With this in mind, I wish to single out one essay in particular, "The Cultural Economy of the Boutique Hotel," by McNeill and McNamara. Given the purview of *Interiors*, this chapter is an especially exemplary analysis of the ways in which social, cultural, and design issues cohere within the spaces of hotel culture. In particular, the authors specifically narrate the case of Ian Schrager's influential hotels in New York. The essay looks at the specificities of actual spaces themselves in addition to the broader production of social developments that have taken place in the last forty years in tandem with Schrager's remodeling of the boutique hotel. Attending to the particularities of the actual design, these hotels were not only influential in the development of hotel design, but also corresponded with broader social and cultural happenings. After all, the spaces discussed throughout the volume are not simply and only economic, political, and/or discursive, but are also, importantly and concretely, designed.

