

bibliography make no mention of work by Robert Trent, Robert St George, Bernard Cotton, or other scholars who have produced more theoretically sophisticated case studies. Such works may not have provided helpful images of related examples for comparative purposes (he dismisses American "overviews or specialized analyses" as irrelevant on page 12), but would have provided helpful models for the exploration and analysis of local material expression and shed light on the process of creolization.

Current American scholarship might also have helped Fleming understand that issues of high style versus vernacular style are not simply explained through an urban versus rural model. Shops in either location might make painted pine furniture or varnished butternut or birch furniture in more academic styles. Even the joiners who made elaborate work for the wealthy of Montreal were in some respects "vernacular craftsmen" when compared to the Royal workshops back in France — they had to work within local economies for specific local needs. A better sense of lines of production within different types of shops would have added significantly to the discussion of changing patterns of furniture consumption over time and between locations. Such patterns are lost in the parade of colour plates.

Throughout the volume, I sensed a greater concern with the crustiness of an original finish and an interpretive direction that privileged the present condition and merely projected a meaning back into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Fleming emphasizes the meaning "in the evidence of worn surfaces or repairs and the aesthetic dimensions of colour that had

oxidized and softened with age and the marks of human activity" (p. 102). The captions for the colour plates all focus upon the layers of colours, for example noting the "pleasing surface colors" produced by the oxidation of original blue paint (p. 42). The design of the book further underscored the aesthetic presence of the objects and precluded the development of an interpretive argument. The plates are interspersed throughout the volume without consideration of the points made in the adjoining text. Colour photographs even appear within the footnotes and bibliography, making the book seem like a picture book with some text accompanying the images.

In the preface, Fleming writes that his book may be controversial in that it challenges certain myths about French Canadian furniture. Instead I would argue that the book does not live up to its intent to incorporate new material culture perspectives, but rather remains very traditional in its approach. Fleming's descriptive assessment of aesthetic intent and formal analysis are reminiscent of John Kirk's *Early American Furniture: How to Recognize, Evaluate, Buy, and Care for the Most Beautiful Pieces — High Style, Country, Primitive, and Rustic* (New York: Knopf, 1976). Fleming's *The Painted Furniture of French Canada, 1700–1840* will certainly get readers to look more closely at and appreciate the elements of the region's furniture but will not satisfy furniture historians more interested in analysis. It does not sufficiently explain the world of the furniture craftsmen and the context and meaning of their products. In the end Fleming has written a book that will not replace Palardy but rather should be used in conjunction with it.

Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, *The Arts and the American Home, 1890–1930*

ELIZABETH C. CROMLEY

Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, eds., *The Arts and the American Home, 1890–1930*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994, xxiv + 194 pp., 58 illus. Cloth \$32.95, ISBN 0-87049-825-8.

In essays on the arts and the American home (from the McFaddin-Ward House Conference in

1990) nine authors have researched diverse aspects: music, the piano, reading, needlework, paintings, photographs, furniture, and fireplaces. The time period begins with Victorian clutter and sentiment and ends with modernity and "rationalism," giving the authors an opportunity to account for major shifts or continuations. Women's contributions are given a central

place. The writing is accessible, although the chronological-development structure leads to repetitiveness; the interesting documentary illustrations are mostly well reproduced.

Kenneth L. Ames' "Introduction" provokes the reader with his claim that the home, more than public life, has "the greatest significance in our psychological, social, and cultural lives." Because of male prejudice in the writing of history, Ames asserts, things associated with homemaking and women have been trivialized. Historians of "great male architects" neglect the (usually) women who make the "architectural shell into a nurturing and supportive environment." To ignore these contributions to domestic architecture is "both sexist and socially destructive" (xvi).

The shift from homemade entertainments and goods to those publicly-produced is the focus of Karal Ann Marling's essay. What kinds of art are appropriate for the home in an age of mass culture: traditional or modern in style? Comforting and sentimental or challenging and intellectual? She explores the pleasures of the ready-made for consumers of the 1920s, set against the persistent belief, at least among academics, that one-of-a-kind art is the only kind with meaning.

Clutter and plenitude, characteristic of Victorian interior decoration, gave way to simplicity and clarity in the early twentieth century. Although both eras liked historic revival styles, Bradley Brooks explains, they composed their interiors according to very different principles. Densely arrayed accumulations of goods, often from far-flung sources, gave a cosmopolitan gloss to 1880s interiors. Yet this "labyrinth of dubious eclecticism" (Wharton and Codman, quoted on p. 22) was rejected by about 1900. New rules for arranging historic revival pieces recommended hierarchy in composition and a single focus of interest. Brooks considers upper middle-class books as well as books advising lower-income home-decorators, and observes (as does Marling) that 1920s interiors combine a modernism of plumbing and lighting with the anti-modernism of period furniture.

Needlework, paintings and photographs were three common ways to ornament the Victorian house, and all went through simplifying changes as the new century came in. Needlework was made by women, writes Beverly Gordon, and has often been seen as slight. Yet needlework parallels in its styles the major artistic currents of the turn of the century, from the Aesthetic Movement to rustic Arts and Crafts, and is one of the ways that women created homes out of houses. William Ayres

traces the changing ideals in picture hanging in the home. Victorians liked pictures with uplifting messages. Hanging pictures in Victorian profusion, at an angle to the wall, and at many heights gave way to simpler rules. Arts and Crafts interiors have few (or even no) pictures hung on the walls. At the same time, art collectors began to build special galleries which removed painting from domestic space, paving the way for museums and art for its own sake.

Victorians were fond of portrait photographs, posed in "artistic" studios, and displayed in albums in the parlour. Shirley Wajda traces their various forms, noting that amateur photographers encroached on the studio portraitist's business by the 1890s; then the twentieth-century taste for simplification cleared away generous parlour-displays of photographs. By the 1920s, the "active, rational" family had outgrown the studio-posed display of relatives and the emotions they were meant to evoke.

The strong desire for a focus (Latin for "hearth") in American houses manifests itself in fireplaces, which continue to be installed long after their usefulness as heat sources has ended. Kate Roberts traces, in a too-terse photo essay with captions, the image of the hearth as a point around which the family gathers, one later appropriated by advertisers of radiators and radios.

Two chapters locate music and the piano as fixtures of the Victorian home and trace their twentieth-century changes. Jessica Foy finds that home-produced music was a vehicle for the development of moral character and discipline. Victorian era hymns and "parlour songs" promoted moral uplift, while popular songs dating from the later 1890s and the twentieth century were more fun.

The phonograph became an important force in the 1890s and in the 1920s, the radio. Mechanically and electronically produced music made some observers fear that mothers would forget how to sing lullabies. "Artistic self-expression was transferred from music-making to creating artistic, harmonious surroundings for music" (p. 81) as music became a pleasurable background for other household activities.

The role of women in promoting music in the home is a theme of Craig Roell's chapter. Girls were the majority of piano pupils, learning modest deportment (feet together, straight posture) and how to perform for the pleasure of others. The piano top was used like a mantelpiece upon which were displayed photographs and mementos. A cartoon of the 1890s shows a boy playing the mother's desire for culture and

discipline (she makes the boy practice) against the father's desire not to be bothered with his son's banging on the piano (he makes the boy quit). This is one of the few moments in the book that acknowledges conflict.

Reading together is another lost art of the Victorian home, reports Anne Scott MacLeod. The adults read aloud to children and to each other in the 1890s, and read a diversity of texts, from Homer to Dickens; but professional child experts defined a separate literature that was good for children and not appealing to adults. Alongside the wholesome approved literature, a trash literature of adventure stories and westerns caught children's attention, while adults turned to more realistic fiction, and "the days of reading in the family circle were...over" (p. 122).

This anthology raises the question of whose taste is worth the historian's attention: only

cultures with "good taste" or the diversity of tastes found in American houses across classes? While many of these authors espouse an inclusive posture, nonetheless the essays depend a great deal on middle-class prescriptive literature and evidence. The working class gets few mentions. Likewise, the un-idealized aspects of these arts get little attention: Roell mentions the piano in the speakeasy; what about the racist lithograph or radio show?

Kenneth Ames, in his "Conclusion," believes that "the inner world of the home...evolves at a quieter and more serene rate" than the outside world (p. 185), and that much of the culture described in these essays is still with us, in spite of modernization and mass culture. The home as benign, made homelike by the feminine nurturing hand, may live still in imagination, but does not match up well with women's realities of the 1990s.

Nicole Eaton and Hilary Weston, *At Home in Canada*

JOAN MATTIE

Nicole Eaton and Hilary Weston; photography by Joy von Tiedemann, *At Home in Canada*, Toronto: Viking-Penguin, 1995, 158 pp., illus. Cloth \$55, ISBN 067084988X.

Beautiful in its photographs and layout, but eclectic and intellectually light in its content, *At Home in Canada* will disappoint anyone looking for a meaningful exploration of Canadian homes of a particular genre. The treatment is more like a glossy spread in the "Homes" section of a newspaper or magazine, with upbeat prose about charming owners.

Divided into 23 chapters representing individuals, couples, or groups (in the case of the Cistercian Monks in southwestern Ontario), the book attempts to show a politically-correct and geographically-inclusive spectrum — from the likes of an upper-class Chinese immigrant couple in Vancouver, to Alberta ranchers, a Sioux-Mohawk blended family in Saskatchewan, Blacks and Jews in Toronto, a painter returned to his working-class roots in Quebec, "old money" in New Brunswick, and so on. Not all are extremely wealthy, but most are super-achievers in their chosen fields — and some, such as Alex Colville, Mordecai Richler, and Governor-General Raymond Hnatyshyn, are

decidedly famous. Certainly all have the wherewithal to express themselves well, usually with flair or cultivated taste, in their home environments. About half are, in fact, involved in the arts in some way. The authors, whose careers have touched on the fields of theatre and television (Eaton) and exclusive retailing (Weston is deputy chairman of Holt Renfrew), admit that their choices were based on "personal and visual appeal."

The book often suffers from a lack of conceptual focus, however. In a number of instances (perhaps when the homes offered limited photogenic opportunities, or when the photographer had particular luck away from the business at hand), attention is switched almost entirely to some other part of the subject's life or environment — canoeing on Georgian Bay, for example, or fishing in the Cascapedia River, cycling on a windswept beach, tending a cemetery, or preparing cattle for auction. Another of several tangents pursued is food, including gorgeous picnic fare, a splendid Easter feast, a Christmas table setting in a perfectly decorated Victorian home. The seductively artistic presentation of these objects, contexts and activities seems to distract from, rather than add to the exploration of "home."