

French entry (“areste”) meaning a sharp ridge created when two planed surfaces meet. I felt empowered and, if humanly possible, more educated than Brad for a nanosecond. I lost the temporal advantage when “trunnion” was not found and linguistic mastery returned to my mentor and his description of Charleston furniture turnings and joints. Yet, having taught a class on “fasteners” at McGill last year I had hoped but failed to find an entry on “Velcro” (*velour crochet*) — a material used more today for fastening cushion upholstery. In other words, Edwards is a great companion book but is far from “encyclopedic” in content.

As a historian of furniture I am really interested in chronological events, discovery firsts, and their implications for society. While Edwards boldly asserts terminology was “first used” at a given time — it is difficult to accept this “fact” as the geographical net is flung to encompass terms only from Britain and America (no, not Canada). Edwards covers a wide assortment of secondary literature but what about the rest of the world? Just as the invention of buttons and buttonholes revolutionized costume manufacture — where do screws play a role? Witold Rybczynski’s *One Good Turn* tells the history of the “world’s greatest little invention” — the screw. An entire text on the screw and its drivers suggests encyclopedic knowledge. Edwards’s entry is a short three paragraphs and slightly misleading at that (“In 1731 three gross of wood screws were valued at £4. 1s.0d.” What does this imply, what salary did the manufacturer make and, lastly, another pet peeve of mine is how to write poundage properly — is that £4:01:00? I am also reminded that Brits name their currency after the weight and value of *nails*).

Obviously, Clive Edwards has spent an inordinate amount of time pulling this “encyclopedia” together. And, yes, I did enjoy looking at it (barring the cover). But I will still use John Gloag’s

A Complete Dictionary of Furniture, Thomas Corkhill’s *The Complete Dictionary of Wood*, and Harold Osborne’s *Oxford Companion to the Decorative Arts* to help fill in the gi-normous gaps in Edwards’s. Even Helena Hayward’s *World Furniture* is good for “dipping” into. This text has been hailed as a “scholarly encyclopedia” but I ask “is this all that furniture has to offer if it is presented in only 254 pages?” Granted that the font size is miniscule, a plot by eye doctors to sell glasses, I still think that there is much much more out there. Consider Rauschenberg and Bivins writing nigh on 1500 pages — with two volumes on Charleston furniture construction details.

Sometimes as a British–American–Canadian furniture expert, I spend time defending each country to another. In this case I feel that Edwards would have better spent his time in Ottawa (Canada) than in High Point (United States), knowing about the *Material History Review* (particularly volume 15) as well as Delaware’s *Winterthur Journal*, accessing our authors’ works rather than just the Americans. On the other hand, I know how time consuming and expensive it is to travel everywhere some other person thinks you ought to go on whichever weekend you have off using that paper that literally grows on trees.

Despite being far from definitive, I must still say that this “encyclopedia” is very informative. I enjoyed seeing what was there while pining for what was missing. I read quotes I had not seen before, while knowing there were others out there more useful. The bottom line is that I wanted an interwoven encyclopedic story but got a smattering of selective shorts; this is not a scholarly encyclopedia but an antiquarian listing. As I keep all my twenty-three dictionaries on their sides — as they are short and stocky, Edwards’s tome will not be found amongst them, as it is tall and thin. It will be stored elsewhere and thus rendered, alas, a secondary less-consulted text.

Bradford L. Rauschenberg and John Bivins, Jr, *The Furniture of Charleston, 1680–1820*

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Rauschenberg, Bradford L., and John Bivins, Jr. *The Furniture of Charleston, 1680–1820*, Vol. I: *Colonial Furniture*; Vol. II: *Neoclassical Furniture*; Vol. III: *The Cabinetmakers*. The Frank L. Horton

Series. Winston–Salem, N.C.: Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 2003. 1440 pp., 1400 illus., including colour, 679 craftsmen biographies, US\$325, ISBN 0-945578-05-9.

In 1983 Bradford L. Rauschenberg introduced me to the magical world of furniture. At that time he had already spent several years investigating Southern furniture in the United States as a researcher at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA). "You know, there's some great furniture in Charleston," he coyly intrigued me, "why don't you write your thesis on that?" I had wanted to work on pottery as my parents had a business promoting ceramicists in England but John Bivins had already written a great text on Southern potters, so I looked more intently at South Carolina cabinetmakers. Brad told me about the joys of trying to sit in one place on local "jogglin' boards" and the work of immigrant Scot, Thomas Elfe and a famous fret (the fallen figure eight with central diamond motif). After one visit to coastal Charleston, I was hooked. Here are found amazing houses with spiral staircases, the wealth of yesteryear generated on the backs of Blacks who cultivated rice, indigo and cotton for colonial export. Charleston traditionally was also considered "the London of the South," which appealed to me as a student from England. Brad showed me his photographs and news clippings, part of a phenomenal (pre-computerized) card catalogue system started by Frank L. Horton and staff. The diversity of material available (rarely used by researchers at that time) cried out for attention.

Thus, I have waited twenty years for this book, or should I say books, as there are three volumes in this finely crafted set. Divided by time period of furniture (colonial and neoclassical) as well as known makers, this collection makes accessible the information amassed by numerous researchers affiliated with MESDA over the years — under the direction primarily of Rauschenberg and rallied together by the late John Bivins, Jr. Before I opened the texts, I had wanted to sit with a mint julep with my feet up on the back porch. Life in Montreal dictated otherwise; as the snow fell I tried to muster together Southern memories and aromas. What did I want to find in these books? Naturally, as an expatriate I have always been interested in immigrant cultures and their impact on society. With respect to the South, I also wanted to see something about Black artisans. And what about vernacular as well as high-style products? I had not found much of the former collected in Charleston. Then I wanted to see how the furniture could be matched to their makers and how this information is interwoven with pre-1821 lifestyles. More importantly, I wanted to be able to define what was Charleston about the furniture, and whether city production differed from county and provincial manufactures — thus addressing issues of whether there are local, provincial and/or regional styles — and even foreign

influences. It turned out that not all these questions are answered in these texts, but the information that is here is exhaustingly factual and provides a terrific springboard for future research.

It took seven days to read the three volumes. I may have retained three percent of the information, rendering it imperative to have the texts on hand for future use. In fact how, without such texts, can we remember all 75 000 craftsmen, 126 trades and 13 000 objects MESDA relates to the pre-1821 South? I might add that not all made it into these texts. There are innumerable (hundreds) of Charleston furniture items and just short of 700 artisans discussed here. The most painful part of putting together the existent compilation is clearly "what was left out." Another problem that is referred to repeatedly through the text was the "looming" publication deadline that made it impossible to investigate recent findings, such as the *W/A* chiseled on a case piece (CC-18a). Even this is exciting, for even after more than thirty years of research the authors acknowledge that there is much yet to learn and that work is far from definitive but ongoing. Encouragingly, rather than being territorial, Rauschenberg and MESDA promote the participation of all in the future chase for knowledge.

In terms of content, each of the two object-related volumes is subdivided into chapters dealing with specific furniture forms. For example, there are chapters on case pieces, tables, seats and bedsteads for both colonial and neoclassical furniture periods. Overall, furniture is presented to us chronologically, with the least known information appearing with respect to the earliest furniture that "could represent" or "could well have been made" by someone "almost certainly" working in a "unique regional style" (introduction, and 22–25). The chapters begin with a brief historical discussion. For example, one entry investigates ethnicity explaining the historical interplay of Scots, Scots-Irish, Welsh, Germans, Swedes, Dutch, Caribbean English and French Huguenot immigrants in Charleston (162–176). The main body of each chapter then consists of descriptions of furniture items presented with detailed photographic illustrations, highlighted sparingly with visual design sources or contemporary artwork representations — all judiciously placed next to the corresponding text.

The joys of having a Hasselblad, an eye for detail, and last but not least, funding, inevitably combine to ensure images are clear, crisp, informative and of publication quality. Again, we wonder which images have been omitted but sometimes we wonder why detailed images are included — for example, the leg turnings in detail E-4a are actually less visible than in the original three-quarter

shot. The detail of a Chippendale print of a desk interior in CC-13e is actually confusing — there seems no comparison to the desk illustrated as CC-13b — the drawer compositions are different and the plate has no central prospect door.

Yet Rauschenberg is not remiss in linking cabinetry with house carpentry and building practices — later illustrating 60 Church Street and the Pompian Hill Chapel, for example. He also refers to architectural detailing, the influence of Batty Langley, Ionic denticulation and Georgian detailing. The written entries for each item impressively detail appearance, construction techniques and pertinent historical details in sophisticated and knowledgeable language. From here should cataloguers of furniture take their nomenclature — and standardize North American construction terminology. Each furniture item is clearly identified by accession number, primarily MESDA-related although some examples come from other collections. A final note to each entry consists of a formal catalogue that includes materials, imperial dimensions, condition, construction, markings, and history (provenance). These sections are distinguished from the main text by another font type — which was not entirely necessary. Thus, the first two volumes illustrate the actual tactile material evidence — furniture in the raw.

The third volume, *The Cabinetmakers*, actually covers a number of related artisans such as chairmakers, carvers, turners, gilders, and decorators for the period 1680–1820. Alphabetized by family name, these entries draw on the extensive transcriptions of information purloined from primary documentation. If there are any discrepancies in information, such as multiple listings (e.g., John Smith), Rauschenberg discusses what this means and his logic in separating out the information. The end of the volume consists of appendices first listing the artisans alphabetically, then by year of operation, and finally by artisan address. The latter is extremely interesting — here we can pinpoint not only major artisanal areas of operation in the city, but also who lived with whom and therefore might be associates. There are three street plans included, the last most important (Fig. A-3), but alas you must turn the page to find the key that explains the streets and buildings (Fig. A-3a). This volume terminates with a reference list for specific sources as well as a bibliography (the index and concordance are in Vol. I).

The major players of the Charleston cabinet-making world are revealed in Vol. III. Most familiar is Thomas Elfe, active preceding the American Revolution, who has received most attention in the Southern furniture world because of the survival of

an account book. He is the Southern equivalent of colonial immigrant Thomas Nisbet of Saint John (New Brunswick, Canada) and Thomas Chippendale working in London (England). We know most about these people because they left detailed accounts, published designs, and/or labeled furnishings with furniture firmly attributed to them. The tendency by folk to attribute fine furniture to Elfe is akin to the historic home claiming “Washington slept here.” Rauschenberg and Bivins skillfully avoid this pitfall — they use Elfe’s work sparingly yet forcefully and when discussing the maker emphasize the complexity of shop life — the outsourcing of work, the turnover of carvers. They do not emphasize Elfe at the expense of other workers; after all there are 678 more craftsmen listed here. Indeed, Rauschenberg includes stamped furniture from W. Carwithen, Deming & Bulkley (D&B), J. Humeston, labels from Elfe as well as D&B, William Jones, William R. Rawson and Robert Walker with signatures by J. Smith and Walker.

Of great interest are the detailed geographical wanderings of each artisan — some like Humeston spent time in Halifax, N.S. This is what should sell the volumes to every museum along the eastern seaboard as well as Europe, as such places are sources and destinations of artisanal itinerancy. And, yes, the input of Blacks is referred to constantly; even women like Anne Fowler who inherited their husband’s shops are listed here — although I find it sad that we fail to link both Blacks and female artisans to their furniture accomplishments. But then again, we often cannot attribute furniture to many of the almost seven hundred artisans listed here. Rauschenberg eloquently explains why. As the artisan entries are taken from factual primary sources, there is little to criticize in terms of content — we see cold hard facts. Rauschenberg leaves interpretation to the more daring. There is little controversy here.

While there are stories to be told about life in the South by extracting myriad realities from Vol. III, the preceding volumes rely instead on the furniture itself. The majority of the more than 800 pages in the first two texts consist of brilliant descriptions of cabinet and chairmaking techniques and methodologies that will make today’s cabinetmakers drool. In fact, Charleston reproduction furniture would be tasty grist for the likes of Thomasville who might like to add some spunk beyond their Ernest Hemingway series, not that I would like to see this happen. While the technical details presented to us are clearly advanced the terminology is not always explained. An “arris knee” (Fig. CTS-2) is one such example that lay people will not understand and when I asked a conservator friend at the National Conservation Institute what

"trunioned" meant he, like myself, did not know (neither does my spell checker). In fact it would have been really useful if the image captions told why the images presented were important (rather than having to search the entire text in hope of answers) — in addition to what the technical words themselves meant. In other words, there is no glossary. I remember what fun my doctoral defense was as I described how stiles affected the overall appearance of furniture and the departmental examiner thought I meant "styles." I was, however, impressed with the detailed "concordance" or cross-referencing information at the end of Vol. I — furniture images are linked here to all pertinent discussions according to page and figure number. Other time-consuming additions to the end of Vol. I are the much-needed index and bibliography.

One minor downside to the text is the linkage of cabinetmaking traditions to Europe. Invariably referred to as "Continental" forms or "British" traditions, we wonder exactly what this means. In the primary focusing on the products of a single city, i.e., Charleston, how is it justified to compare such with an entire nations' products? Are all "urban British" products the same? In looking at a chair type (E-2f), known more specifically to Canadians as in the style of "Île d'Orléans," is it sufficient merely to refer to it as from "France or French Canada"? Yet researchers simply cannot know everything, they cannot travel everywhere, they do not have access to all furniture. Failing to be specific should not be overly challenged. However, this is grist for the "is there a discernible regional tradition?" debate (cf. Donna Keith Baron). We may reduce ourselves to debating wood types rather than regional types in this process.

Perhaps a disappointment is the failure to actually tell the story — to link furniture, maker and owner to events such as the Revolution. The scenes needed to be better set, then penetrating conclusions made. However, these were not the intended goals of the authors when they commenced this project, and thus is not the strong point of this work. In fact, Rauschenberg excels in the details, with descriptive terminology of woodworking and tools, techniques and materials — particularly when talking about woods. Indeed, the identification of Charleston furniture revolves around wood types (are components cypress, red cedar, hickory, mahogany, red bay, black walnut, yellow pine, tulip poplar or ash?). The triumvirate of ascertaining Charleston furniture origins for Rauschenberg is: wood type (primary and secondary), provenance (a strong Charleston family heritage), and labelling or marking. The consistency in styles suggesting schools of

manufacture is important but equivocal. In reality, Rauschenberg clearly, concisely and with great logical common sense tells us "what is." It is up to us to draw conclusions about "what it means."

The most interesting sections of the text for myself were the introductions to each chapter that had short yet comprehensive and condensed histories of place, person and product. Easy to read, these sections set the scene for discussions of furniture and maker. Cast throughout the text are gems of information such as clock owners tending also to be slave owners. The authors also suggest that there is much yet to be accomplished — from an individual text on the life and times of the Charleston Museum's esteemed E. Milby Burton to a comprehensive analysis of Carolina's Backcountry products as well as a post-1820 survey. I was also pleased to see how the work had evolved and the trials and tribulations of getting such a monumental project into print were overcome. This approach to introducing the latest project in the Frank L. Horton Series appears refreshingly honest; those of us who work hard to get texts into print would be reassured to have a Frank L. Horton of their own.

I cannot leave discussion of these texts without joining the authors in singing the praises of Southern furniture. In no way inferior to Northern productions, Charleston furniture not only equals but also often surpasses the quality produced to the north in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Salem. Examples include the cabinet on chest (CC-6), the Mitchell family desk and bookcase (NC-1), the Charleston Museum's inlaid library bookcase (CC-43), the Garvan Collection's library bookcase (NC-6), a secretary wardrobe (NC-10), the Smith dressing table (CT-35), a Pembroke table (NT-58), and the Royal Governor's armchair (Cch-5). More unusual are the likes of the breakfast table with each leg made from four turned columns (CT-61) and the neoclassical triple chests (NC-2,3). It was refreshing to see the text written from a Southern perspective — from discussing the War of Northern Aggression (xxxiv) to the quotes of residents who would live nowhere else.

Despite minor setbacks, this set of texts achieves its goal of revealing to some, or reinforcing to others in the know, the fact that the South has much to offer. The work of Frank Horton, MESDA and his dedicated researchers Bradford L. Rauschenberg and the late John Bivins, Jr, are admirably captured in these texts.

Are they worth those expensive \$350 U.S. dollars? Absolutely. I have been working with furniture collections for twenty years but this is the single most revealing text on construction techniques that I have ever read — setting a perhaps way too high

bar for those wishing to follow in Rauschenberg and Bivins' steps. Learning more in seven days than in seven years, it is difficult to say anything against this compilation. It might be possible to summarize for you what is Charleston about Charleston furniture, but you really should find that out for yourself by reading these texts. In fact, all furniture texts should be rewritten using the same terminology and in-depth analysis. It is the foundation resource for all to use and should reset and standardize all descriptive registrarial and research documentation

hereon. Thus I cry out for someone learned to write a guide for a standardized cataloguing terminology system, but insist that they use Rauschenberg and Bivins as their launch pad. These volumes sit in an honoured place in my home office and while I would like to share them with you, I'll probably be re-reading them when you call. So, in order to see future studies like this published and to witness fundamental furniture research at its best, it is essential that you buy this phenomenal compilation yourself!

Christina Garsten and Helena Wulff, *New Technologies at Work: People, Screens, and Social Virtuality*

Eric Higgs, Andrew Light and David Strong, *Technology and the Good Life?*

DAVID MCGEE

Garsten, Christina and Helena Wulff. *New Technologies at Work: People, Screens, and Social Virtuality*. Oxford: Berg, 2003. 224 pp., cloth, US\$74.95, ISBN 1859736440; paper, US\$24.95, ISBN 1859736491. Higgs, Eric, Andrew Light and David Strong. *Technology and the Good Life?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 384 pp., cloth, US\$65, ISBN 0-226-33386-8; paper, US\$25, ISBN 0-226-33387-6.

The jacket copy for *New Technologies at Work* shouts that the new information and communication technologies have completely revolutionized our work practices, career patterns, professional identities, and generally everything in the workplace, as a result of far-reaching, fundamental and irrevocable changes that have had a huge impact on the workplace in an amazingly short time.

This is the usual breathless technological determinism linked to yet another technical revolution that has been used to sell books about technology since Jacques Ellul's *Technological Society* (1964) and Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970). According to the determinist story, new technology comes along like an invading army, reshaping the world and controlling our lives whether we like it or not. Very frequently, the pitch is coupled to a heroic stance along the lines of: "The invader is at the gate. Read here to find out how we can stand up and defend our freedom against the machines."

The problem with this approach is that if the premise of technological determinism is correct,

then by definition there is *nothing* that can be done — so why read the book? If something *can* be done, then the premise of the book is false. So why read it?

They say, however, that you should not judge a book by its cover and this is particularly true of *New Technologies at Work*. Far from being filled with tales of technological determinism, inside this edited volume are a series of "ethnographic studies," almost all of which are more or less explicitly anti-determinist in orientation. In fact, most focus explicitly on the ironic discrepancies between determinist hype about information technology (like that found on the book cover) and the actual realities of the workplace. None involve any heroic stance of workers fighting against the machine. Almost all reveal workplace denizens in a familiar, all-too-human muddle, as some attempt to use information technology to accomplish their goals, while others adjust their behavior to finesse both the intended and unintended consequences.

Daniel Miller makes this theme explicit in his introductory "Living with New (Ideal of) Technology," which is perhaps the most stimulating essay of the book, and provides an insightful summary of the other articles as well. According to Miller, "virtual" means "ideal," and particularly the separation of ideals from actual practices of people and their labour. What he refers to are statements like: "the internet will bring democracy;" the "technologies of the open office will bring a