CREATIONS OF DOMESTIC TASTES: PORTIÈRES IN THE AMERICAN INTERIOR, 1876-1910

by

Kristin Skinner
A Thesis
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of
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Committee:

______________________________ Director

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________ Program Director

______________________________ Department Chairperson

______________________________ Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

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Creations of Domestic Tastes: Portières in the American Interior, 1876-1910

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts History of Decorative Arts at George Mason University

by

Kristin Skinner
Bachelor of Arts
Grand Valley State University, 2012

Director: Heidi Nasstrom Evans, Professor
Department of History of Decorative Arts

Fall Semester 2015
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my first tastemaker, my mother, and to the memory of my father. Their love, support, and guidance have kept me strong.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family and friends for all of their support and motivation (thank you for listening to me lament on my love for portières and Candace Wheeler designs). Thank you to Cindy Williams, Angela George, and Melanie Carroll for their support throughout the process. I would also like to thank my advisor Heidi Nasstrom Evans for her guidance since the very beginning of my time in graduate school (thank you for not tiring of me writing about portières and Candace Wheeler). Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the many librarians and digitation specialists who work meticulously in order to make period materials accessible through a vast amount of online resources.
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ABSTRACT

CREATIONS OF DOMESTIC TASTES: PORTIÈRES IN THE AMERICAN INTERIOR, 1876-1910

Kristin Skinner, M.A.

George Mason University, 2015

Thesis Director: Dr. Heidi Nasstrom Evans

This thesis examines portière designs found in journal and newspaper articles aimed at American middle-class domestic women during the height of the Aesthetic Movement to the end of its major influence in the United States. These designs illustrate a popular artistic style influenced by Aestheticism and high-style works and taste literature, and a distinction is needed between such popular artistic style and high-style artistic design in contemporary scholarship.
INTRODUCTION

Post-Civil War Americans lived in an era opulent in design and lifestyle influences from European and far Eastern countries as well as economic prosperity, but they also were exposed to uncertainty of their country’s standing in relation to the world as well as issues of class, gender, and race. Existing societal structures were altering, with such changes as women entering the workforce and a growing middle class of consumers. At the center of this culture was the domestic realm; a space in which shifts in wealth, consumerism, cultural appropriation, and gender roles were visibly apparent in purchased and handmade goods. Interiors incorporated objects and furnishings made by the female homemaker, displaying her needlework skills and knowledge of popular decoration trends. Ornamentation inspiration was found in period literature that displayed instructions in how to create goods, including decorative door hangings, or portières.

Portières were used well before the second half of the nineteenth century as integral design elements within domestic spaces. Victorians revived the popularity of door hangings because portières were able to reflect multiple design interests, such as historicism in reflecting past ornamentation as well as artistic aspirations influenced by the English Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetic Movement encompassed design influences from English Arts and Crafts artists as well as spread the idea of an artistic
lifestyle. Such a lifestyle required ‘art for art’s sake,’ in which importance was solely placed on beauty rather than on moral or functional values. Design that encompassed this aspect appropriated diverse ornamentation concepts from multiple areas of the world including Asian cultures.

Portières perfectly complimented such interiors. Portières could display needlework inspired by Japanese and contemporary English designs. Hangings were eclectic, and homemakers interested in an artistic style could create portières found in magazines and newspapers that were reflective of artistic concepts and works found in professionally designed interiors and door hangings. As described in such period publications and articles aimed at domestic women, homemade portières were integral elements of late Victorian interior design and were indicative of Aesthetic Movement ideals in interiors decorated according to popular artistic trends influenced by high-style artistic taste. An examination of portière designs that displayed artistic taste for use in middle-class interiors reflective of popular trends is needed in contemporary scholarship.

Victorian rooms reflected their designers, and as makers, consumers, and decorators, women participated in the creation of an American decoration identity that was heavily influenced by English Aestheticism and European and ‘exotic’ cultures. England was an exceptional model for American design because it had a design trove of national inheritance, including the medieval past revived by Arts and Crafts artisans influencing Aestheticism, as well as of appropriated cultures. English design literature, such as Owen Jones’ The Grammar of Ornament and Christopher Dresser’s Principles of Decorative Design, was disseminated in England and the United States, and such
literature was very popular in America and would have been widely available to consumers, creating a following of English design within the emerging middle class.

The American middle class during the first half of the nineteenth century was largely landowning and entrepreneurial. Charles Wright Mills in his publication, White Collar: The American Middle Classes, refers to the population during this time as a “middle-class society.”¹ Self-employment and the model of the successful businessman characterized this period. In contrast, Mills explains that the second-half of the nineteenth century led to a different type of middle class that encompassed white-collar workers earning salaries. He states that in 1870 more than seventy-five percent of workers were employed in the manufacturing of objects.² This new middle class was a reflection of the industrial revolution and growing economy, with middle-class women working outside of the home in businesses associated with the arts.³ Fueling this growth was the mass manufacturing of commodities and designs, including an influx in periodicals and publications covering home decoration, aiding in creating jobs and making goods affordable to many Americans. Homemakers could afford to decorate their dwellings with commercially produced fabrics, including textiles used in the creation of portières, and decorate according to popular interior trends influenced by artistic taste disseminated through major cultural events.

² Ibid., 5, 63-66.
³ Catherine Welcome Zipf’s dissertation “Professional Pursuits: Career Opportunities for Women in the American Arts and Crafts Movement,” is a good source that covers women in the workforce during this time in comparison to the Arts and Crafts movement, correlating with the popularization of Aestheticism in America.
An event that had an enormous impact on Victorian American interior decoration and that influenced portière design was the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in which English and other cultural displays were on view. Open to the public for 159 days, an estimated ten million attendees saw the vast variety of displays from around the world. Middle-class homemakers attended the exhibition, examining the needlework displays of European women as well as exoticism of cultural displays. They entered the Main Exhibition Building, seeing American exhibits alongside countries such as Great Britain, India, France, and Japan, and viewed objects such as paintings, sculptures, textiles, costume, and ceramics. Entire interiors were also elaborate displays, such as the Japanese Bazaar, created specifically for the sale of Japanese goods.

Japanese aesthetics were integral to aesthetic interiors, influencing portière designs. The American populace was first widely introduced to Japanese design at the Centennial. Two Japanese buildings, the Japanese House, a residence for many of the exhibitors, and the Japanese Bazaar, were very popular and served as the first experience of the East by many Americans. Both buildings were similarly constructed of wood with open latticework, and the area surrounding the bazaar created an experience of a natural and faraway landscape brought to the United States: “situated on a natural terrace gently

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4 Doreen Bolger Burke, et. al., "Preface," in In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Rizzoli, 1986), 19. The authors explain the Centennial and proliferation of taste literature as major factors in the popularization of Aestheticism in America. This is supported by the variety of portière designs published in newspapers and magazines that reflect artistic designs.


sloped, covered with green grass and adorned with artistic groups of rough rocks, and the whole place was shaded by oaks and chestnut trees.” Reflecting this description, similar scenes were incorporated into portière designs, beckoning nature indoors. Visitors walked through a Japanese landscape without leaving the United States and purchased decorative goods including bronze, tortoise shell, and porcelain objects, experiencing a culture removed from reality, an important artistic concept to be discussed in the coming chapters.

The popularity of Japanese exhibits was a result of the opening of Japan in 1854 by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, signaling the craze to come in interior and portière designs of the American middle-class. Until then Japan had been in national isolation, with trade forbidden to the United States. After the opening, an influx of foreign goods created a large market of foreign objects available to American buyers. Specialty stores emerged in cities, offering a variety of items that represented new and ‘exotic’ designs and objects to American consumers. American interior design was evolving to incorporate the European and the ‘exotic,’ and domestic women played an active role in purchasing and creating goods reflective of artistic style and popular trends influenced by objects and designs discovered through trade as well as the Centennial.9

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9 Hoganson’s chapter, “Cosmopolitan Domesticity, Imperial Accessories: Importing the American Dream,” in Consumer’s Imperium, is very influential in describing women as
The Women’s Pavilion was also a vital influence for American domestic design, with the incorporation of textile designs and portières. The textile works of Great Britain were among the most admired displays at the fair, with period literature incorporating British designs by the Royal School of Art Needlework, founded as the School of Art Needlework in South Kensington, for use in domestic textiles.\(^{10}\) Female homemakers viewed “artistic needlework” such as embroidered works of silk, appliqué, and crewels, created by English women, influencing portière designs in popular literature.\(^{11}\)

The exhibit also included at least one portière. An article in a Chicago newspaper from 1876, which is an excerpt from the English publication, *Pall Mall Gazette*, references a specific portière that was to be displayed at the entrance of the needlework exhibit. It was designed by a Mr. Pollen, of the Kensington School of Art Needlework, and included needlework and appliquéd ornamentation:

The main part of the curtain is of cream-colored Chinese silk edged with bands of salmon-colored silk. On the junctures of the salmon and cream-colored silks is traced, in embroidery stitch, a delicate mediæval pattern of roses and leaves inter-twined. The outside borders are of broad bands of dull, red-figured silk, to which is applied a cut velvet conventional pattern of deeper red. The whole of this velvet applique is effectively outlined with som-ber green cord twisted with gold.\(^{12}\)

This description will be vital in comparing American portière designs in popular publications to English designs and inspiration, including medieval needlework.

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\(^{10}\) “History,” The Royal School of Needlework, http://www.royal-needlework.org.uk/content/13/history.


\(^{12}\) “ART NEEDLEWORK. The Embroideries From the Kensington School of Art for the Centennial,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, Vol V, No. 7 (April 1, 1876), 10, http://infoweb.newsbank.com/.
championed by Arts and Crafts artists such as William Morris. American tastemakers took inspiration from such designs as well as in nonwestern cultures.

As has been summarized, period context of exoticism and European influences popularized by the opening of Japan and by the Centennial, reflected an American culture accepting of design influences that referenced cultures from around the world as well as historical time periods. Victorian women utilized the abundance of new and inexpensive textiles, available to them because of the industrial revolution, in order to cover any and all surfaces within the home and created works such as portières to showcase their needlework skills and design sensibilities.

Portières were integral parts of interior treatments that referenced artistic style, as evidenced in period photographs and literature, which will be discussed more in depth in the following chapters. Popular publications, including journals and newspapers, offered decorating advice and instructions on portière styles that were historical, with influences such as medieval embroidery and eighteenth-century French styles, and incorporated ‘exotic’ elements, following artistic taste. Such complex design influences require appropriate scholarship specifically on portières and their cultural context. This study will examine portière designs in the popular artistic style, found in newspapers and magazines aimed at middle-class homemakers.

The first chapter, “Scholarly Sources,” will briefly describe scholarly works on American Victorian interiors and portière design, including the main work on late nineteenth-century door hangings, a Master’s thesis by Terrance Uber titled, “Portiere Designs in the United States Between 1870 and 1900 as Documented in Journals of the
Period.” Describing scholarship on the topic will allow for an examination of terminology used by scholars when discussing period interiors, indicating the lack of references to popularized artistic style within domestic interiors illustrated by period taste literature. Chapter two, “Defining Portières in the Victorian Interior,” will set up cultural and design context by defining portières and giving a short history of portières within the interior beginning with the Renaissance and ending with Aestheticism, focused on the importance of European design on American design. An examination of the artistic interior will also be included, with period photographs referenced by scholarship, that include portières. This will aid in describing high-style artistic elements that were influential on popular artistic aesthetic. Chapter three, “High-Style Artistic Taste Influencing Popular Trends,” will describe professional designers and authors who advocated high-style artistic design, influencing portière design and popular trends aimed at domestic homemakers. These chapters set up the context for the last chapter, “Portières in the Popular Artistic Style,” in which journal and newspaper articles of portière instructions and descriptions are examined. A study of a sampling of articles will illustrate how they relate to period styles and trends, including artistic influences, and how portières were integral elements of late Victorian interior design. The argument for defining designs in the popular artistic style when studying late Victorian middle-class interiors that were influenced by high-style artistic taste will be the common link between the chapters.
CHAPTER ONE: SCHOLARLY SOURCES

What is lacking in both scholarship on Victorian interiors and the American Aesthetic movement is a study of designs for domestically created portières that illustrates popular artistic style, influence by high-style taste, that was disseminated in period newspapers and journals. This popular artistic design incorporated Aesthetic Movement concepts, such as simplicity in design as well as ‘exotic’ influences. This study will elaborate on popular artistic style distinctions and the cultural significance of portières, using portière design instructions aimed at domestic women found in period newspapers and journals.

Few scholarly sources focus on portières. One that does is Terrance Uber’s Master’s thesis, “Portiere Designs in the United States Between 1870 and 1900 as Documented in Journals of the Period,” from 1980. Uber combed through three publications, Godey’s Lady’s Book, Harper’s Bazaar, and The Ladies’ Home Journal, gathering data on all portière mentions from 1870 to 1900. He also cited period taste publications in aiding with his findings, culminating in three design evolutions that coincided with the decades of 1870 to 1880, 1880 to 1890, and 1890 to 1900. The 1870 to 1880 portières had the most influence from European design in draping, were very elaborate with multiple parts, and were looped back. In contrast, 1880 to 1890 saw simpler styles without cornices or lambrequins, and instead had more mentions of
valances. There was less drapery, but more advice focused on embroidered and appliquéd designs. Lastly, 1890 to 1900 had a return to elaborate draperies of the 1870s to 1880 period due to the popularity of historical styles, with a continuation of simpler designs as well.

Uber’s study is thorough in his attention to the three periodicals used and his inclusion of other taste publications that described hangings. This study will elaborate on Uber’s findings by incorporating a wider variety of newspaper and journal articles, as well as by focusing on designs intended to be created in the home by the homemaker. Cultural context of art movements and nonwestern designs that influenced interior decoration and door hangings will also be examined in this study. A discussion of the tastemakers who influenced domestic women, the primary creators of portières and active consumers in home decoration, how the hangings reflected cultural appropriation through ‘exotic’ interpretation, as well as how portières were integral to artistic design will be further examined. This study will also differ from Uber’s work in that focus will not solely be on the changes in styles, but also on how finished works echoed Aesthetic Movement concepts, creating a popularized artistic style.

In addition to Uber’s work, another Master’s thesis describes the use of portières in American middle-class interiors. Karina Helen Hiltje Corrigan’s work, “Turcoman Portieres and Arabia's Sweetest Perfumes: The Turkish Style in American Middle-Class Interiors, 1890-1930,” describes Victorian Americans’ fascination with Eastern cultures, focusing on Turkish influences found in interiors including textile furnishings as well as architectural elements such as cozy corners and smoking rooms. Similar to Uber,
Corrigan used popular publications including Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogues, in examining period styles, with a brief focus on portières. Unlike Uber and this study, Corrigan’s focus is not on designs to be executed by the female homemaker. However, her examination of Turkish interior elements is helpful in understanding the multitude of cultural influences on Victorian design.

It is also pertinent to explain other scholarship focused on Victorian interiors and material culture. Kristin Hoganson’s chapter, “Cosmopolitan Domesticity, Imperial Accessories: Importing the American Dream, in her publication Consumer’s Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920, is relevant in describing women’s roles as active consumers and portrayers of style. Hoganson’s focus is on the Victorian interior, specifically “cozy corners” meant to embody an ‘exotic’ land through decorative objects and design. She describes such interiors as embodying a “cosmopolitan ethos,” derived from worldly experience and knowledge associated with urban life. This is descriptive of certain interiors and is more appropriate than solely describing Victorian interiors as ‘artistic,’ which scholars continue to use, but still is descriptive of a certain lifestyle either unobtainable or unintended by middle-class Victorian women.

However, Hoganson does illustrate important cultural concepts not incorporated by Uber. She explains important parallels to European cultures in women acting as active consumers and aligning themselves in the business realm, a realm of men, while also participating in an acceptable domestic realm appropriate for women. She also explains the appropriation of cultures thought to be ‘uncivilized’ in purchased goods.
brought into the moral space of the Victorian home. An interesting comparison to
domestically created portières, works that took design inspiration from such ‘immoral’
cultures, can be made that further comments on the American crusade to tame the
uncivilized by domesticating foreign design.

Further scholarship on the Victorian interior also focuses on the idea of the home
and domestic homemaker as the moral centers of the family. Katherine C. Grier’s well
known work *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*,
centers on the parlor, meant for displaying comfort but representing a culture of industry
in the goods displayed and society in its presentation. What is not included in Grier’s
work is the concept of theatricality of interior spaces, but still is useful in understanding
the approaches by scholars to Victorian interiors that do not argue for a distinction in
design.

In addition, authors tend to focus on the overall interior rather than specifically on
portières. In their work, *English and American Textiles from 1790 to the Present*, Mary
Schoeser and Celia Rufey dedicate multiple passages to portières, but do not specifically
discuss handmade works, which encompassed the majority of portières. In *Victorian
Interior Decoration: American Interiors 1830-1900*, Roger W. Moss and Gail Caskey
Winkler mention portières in the chapter on decorating during the 1870 to 1890 period,
giving a very general description of design and mentioning ‘exotic’ materials, but do not
study in depth the implications of cultural appropriation reflective of artistic style and
popular trends.
Lastly, Joanna Banham’s *Encyclopedia of Interior Design* does give an overview of the history of portières within the interior with stylistic trends, citing paintings and inventories. Included is a description of the Aesthetic movement that introduces a few tastemaking publications. However, an examination of portière designs to be handmade by female homemakers is not given. The work serves as a good overview of portière designs, and is helpful in understanding interiors of multiple periods.

In addition to scholarship on interiors, works on the English and American Aesthetic movements are useful in examining portière context and descriptions. The exhibition catalogue, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*, remains an invaluable resource on the American Aesthetic movement. The chapters explain the influence of England on American design, including descriptions of portières. However, these descriptions focus on professionally designed hangings such as those created by Candace Wheeler, and on artistic interiors, rather than on the average middle-class home. The work is useful in comparing examples of portière descriptions form publications used in this study to high-end makers and design.

Furthermore, Mary Warner Blanchard’s *Oscar Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age*, discusses the Aesthetic movement as well as domestic interiors. Blanchard states that the movement brought about a change in the decoration of the home: “theatrical not moral, aesthetic not utilitarian, eclectic not ordered.”\(^\text{13}\) This is vital in describing artistic interiors as a stage wherein the world is displayed, but clarification is needed that not all Victorian interiors at this time were artistic and reflective of an

artistic lifestyle. A few decorating techniques such as displaying easels did not necessarily reflect a cohesive artistic interior, but rather a room influenced by popular artistic design. Blanchard also occasionally mentions portières when discussing the theatricality of artistic interiors, an important concept of Aestheticism, but does not fully elaborate on portière design and the multitude of design influences for door hangings.

As this overview of scholarship has shown, it is necessary to study portière designs found in widely disseminated literature in order to understand the popularized artistic style aimed at middle-class homemakers. A sampling of articles will be examined according to Uber’s findings as well as period descriptions and depictions of Victorian interiors in order to show how the Aesthetic Movement affected popular artistic design. The interiors will aid in displaying artistic influence in popular trends, evident in portière designs. High-style, professionally designed portières for display in designed interiors will be used to illustrate the similarities between professional hangings and designs aimed at middle-class domestic women.
CHAPTER TWO: DEFINING PORTIÈRES IN THE VICTORIAN INTERIOR

In order to distinguish late Victorian design trends and artistic influences, it is vital to analyze the history of portières displayed in domestic interiors. This chapter will trace the usage of portières from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, establishing portière functionality and ornamentation throughout multiple design periods. The main focus will be on European influences, including cultural appropriation within European design, with American designers following suit. Furthermore, English artists such as Charles L. Eastlake and William Morris had a major impact on American arts, and the English Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements will be described in order to compare American artistic designs. Outlining the historical context of portières will illustrate how late Victorians in the United States used multiple design references from Europe and the rest of the world in the creation of complex American designs. In addition, the artistic interior will be examined to establish high-style artistic spaces that influenced popular artistic styles. Depictions and illustrations of historical portière designs will be compared to Victorian designs in later chapters, illustrating the importance of historicism to popularized artistic style. Portières of the period reflected such abundance of influences, representing artistic concepts utilized in the creation of popular decorative trends advised by tastemakers.
The Portière and Its Decorative and Functional Qualities

For the purpose of this study, a portière is defined as a decorative door hanging made of textiles, often with surface embellishment.\(^\text{14}\) However, it is important to note that not all portièrées were created from fabric. An article in *The Christian Science Monitor* from 1914 described a door hanging made from strung corn.\(^\text{15}\) In 1898 *The Philadelphia Inquirer* described a portière made of corks also strung on cord (Figure 1).


\(^{14}\) This definition is influenced by multiple scholarship as well as period literature. John Fleming and Hugh Honour define a portière as “A curtain, often of tapestry, made to hang over a door,” in *The Penguin Dictionary of Decorative Arts*, New Edition (London: Penguin Group, 1989), 646.

Corks, at least to that author, were apparently stylish in the summer. Such usage of obscure materials for hangings were described throughout the late nineteenth century, including a portière of rose petals that was on public display, described in the Los Angeles Times in 1911. These materials seem to be more reflective of a display of creativity and leisure time, rather than as actual suitable portières for interiors. Furthermore, materials such as bamboo were used for the purpose of cleanliness as well as ‘exotic’ design, differing from the fabrics such as denim and cotton associated with fabric portières. While hangings of a variety of materials existed, an abundance of articles found in period newspapers and journals describe patterns for fabric portières that homemakers could replicate for their own interiors, replacing the door.

The distaste for doors was a popular sentiment during the late nineteenth century, aiding in further defining the popularity of the portière. According to one author in Arthur’s Home Magazine from 1882, “PORTIERES, or door-hangings, make a great difference in the appearance and comfort of a room, for few things are more unsightly.

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18 Augusta Salisbury Prescott, “A Summer Room,” Godey’s Lady’s Book, Vol. CXXIV, No. 744 (June 1892), 538-539, http://www.accessible.com.mutex.gmu.edu/. This article includes advice on using a bamboo hanging and will be examined further in the last chapter.
19 There was literature arguing against the use of portières because of health and privacy reasons. One author wrote in 1890 in The Washington Critic of a story of a young man who did not get a chance to propose to his beau because portières did not give enough privacy to the couple, with the woman’s family always able to hear the lovers’ conversations.
than a blank door meeting one at every turn.”

An article in the Chicago Daily Tribune from 1908 stated that portières were helpful in concealing doors, the “most unsightly things which could possibly be imagined,” and to hide defects in the architecture.

Constance Cary Harrison in her 1881 publication, Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes, preferred portières as well over the “blank, inartistic monotony of our ordinary painted doors.” As Harrison states, portières enabled more freedom in decoration than doors, with endless possibilities for embroidered and applied ornamentation, colors, patterns, and fabrics. The hangings were also more inviting than doors within the interior, embodying elegance and hospitality, as described in Clare Bunce’s article for Harper’s Bazaar from 1896. In addition, portières were more easily replaced than a heavy door and were not intended to be permanent, a factor in the lack of surviving works today.

Portières were even sometimes referred to as works of art, and were decorative as well as functional. They were mostly in doorways of public spaces within the home, replacing the door or occasionally displayed with a door. Portières served as barriers between spaces that offered privacy but also were inviting in pleasant decoration and

showcasing skills of the homemakers. A New York Times article from 1893 identified this usage of the portière: “Door hangings should always have a rather heavy effect, as seeming to say, ‘I am useful as well as beautiful, and can shut out sights and draughts, if you will.’” Multiple articles stressed this importance of protection against drafts, and portières were well suited to serve this function as well as to demonstrate the tastes of the makers, more so than doors that did not offer such a variety in construction and decoration, unsuitable to changing popular trends.

The History of Portières in Historic Interiors

A brief history of door hangings is essential in order to identify the influences on late American design. While the term ‘portière’ implies a French origin, period literature alluded to an Eastern beginning. Constance Carry Harrison described in Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes that the origin was the Jewish Tabernacle. Harrison cited a “hanging for the tabernacle door, of blue and purple and scarlet, and fine twined linen and needlework.” This is interesting in the use of needlework to decorate the hanging, drawing parallels to the popularity of embroidery used for surface ornamentation by Victorian women.

Furthermore, Harrison stated that “there is something thoroughly Eastern in the conception of a portière,” with references to the “far Cathay,” an Orientalist vision of the

27 Constance Cary Harrison, Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes, 160.
East, as well as the *Arabian Nights*, an English title for the Middle-Eastern work of tales titled *One Thousand and One Nights*. A few passages from the work describe door hangings, including a hanging “with a ‘rich silk stuff, delicately embroidered with large flowers in various colors.'”

Embroidery is again referenced, reinforcing commonalities between the East and Victorian surface design. Coinciding with the popularization of Asian aesthetic in the United States, Harrison’s work was published five years after the Centennial, which was a period in which Americans continued to be fascinated by the ‘untamed’ and newly accessible world.

During the same period, a revived interest in antiquity entered American popular design. Period archaeological evidence from excavations of such cities as Pompeii suggested that portières were used during ancient times. They were used as room dividers and were displayed on rods, similar to many Victorian designs that call for rod and rings when hanging the finished work.

This functionality during antiquity, to deter from drafts as well as to serve as partitions, also is similar to previously described Victorian taste-making literature that stressed the usefulness of fabric hangings rather than heavy doors.

A publication by August Mau from 1899 titled, *Pompeii: Its Life and Art*, describes door hangings of antiquity. Mau stated that portières were displayed between pilasters at the entrance to a room in a home, with the drapery most likely drawn and fastened at the sides. He described such surviving fastenings made of “bronze disks from

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28 Constance Cary Harrison, *Woman's Handiwork in Modern Homes*, 160-161.
which a ship’s beak projected, attached to the pilasters,” found in an excavated structure.  

This tieback method is similar to Victorian design literature and illustrations, and Victorian homemakers would have had access to publications on archeological news, basing interior design on such findings. His inclusion of portières reinforces the influence of ancient styles on Victorian portières, especially with late nineteenth-century historicism in design.

A further influence on Victorian portière usage was the Renaissance, as described in the second volume of the Encyclopedia of Interior Design, edited by Joanna Banham. Portières were used during this period in apartments, bedchambers, grand rooms, and were meant to communicate luxury. Peter Thornton’s The Italian Renaissance Interior: 1400-1600, is very helpful in studying portières of this period. Thornton researched period paintings, sketches, inventories, and other renderings, discovering that portières were an integral design feature of interiors during the 1400s. He gives multiple examples of hangings shown in surviving artwork and explains that embroidery was often used for surface decoration, including figural representations, coats of arms, and other decorative depictions. Tapestries were also often used for door hangings, and he gives an example of a Florentine depiction of a verdure tapestry attached to a wall on two hooks (Figure 2).

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Portières were most likely en suite with the other wall hangings during this period and were embroidered, similar to the surface embellishment of late Victorian portières.\(^{32}\)

Portières of the 1500s were more easily identifiable with decorating trends in Italy. Thornton explains that portières during this period were often en suite with wall hangings.\(^{33}\) Similar use was found in France and England in the 1600s, with Renaissance decoration heavily influencing Northern Europe. The portières of this period aid in understanding the en suite style of door hangings that were popular in the renewed interest in historic styles during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, as well as the importance of symmetry within design.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 341.

French design also incorporated door hangings. Multiple Victorian tastemakers and publications cited French inspiration in portière designs, including Constance Cary Harrison, stating that “French people have a peculiar right to dictate to us in portières, so long have these been associated with their dainty apartments, aristocratic hotels and stately chateaux.” In France, tapestries were hung over doorways, often in rooms with walls covered in multiple tapestries, adding insulation, and eighteenth-century French designs displayed divided portières in rooms. However, towards the end of 1700s to the beginning of the 1800s, portières seem to fall out of fashion in favor of luxurious wall and window textiles, but there was a renowned interest in the 1820s, coinciding with the exploration of design of the past.

An important art and design movement that incorporated historical design and portières into interior decoration was the English Arts and Crafts movement. With the ideology of the movement focused on the traditional craftsman, portières that displayed embroideries were valued because of their associations to the hands of the maker. Medieval art and crafting methods were models of good design during this time, reflective of a belief that there was a devaluing of the artist within English society due to industrialization. The functionality of portières, rather than on the more lavish designs of French and Italian hangings, as well as their historical significance within the home, were important considerations of English artists, including William Morris.

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35 Constance Cary Harrison, *Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes*, 161.
37 Ibid., 992.
38 Ibid.
Morris, an English designer, was very influential to American design, with strong use of embroidery in his works mirrored in portière decoration. A figured panel designed by Morris and worked by his wife Jane is depicted in Thomas Matthews Rooke’s painting of the dining room of the The Grange, home of the painter Edward Burne Jones (Figure 3 and Figure 4). The work, originally displayed in Morris’ Red House, was given to Burne Jones in 1865. The motif is of St Catherine standing by a tree, stylistically similar to medieval embroidery in depiction of foliage and treatment of the figure, and similar to works by his daughter, May Morris.39

Figure 3 Thomas Matthews Rooke, *The Grange, North End Road, Fulham, London*, 1904, Watercolour on paper/panel, 20.5 x 14.5 in. (52 x 36.8 cm). In the collections of Bateman’s, East Sussex, London. Image courtesy of the National Trust. http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/760752.

William and May Morris were interested in medieval embroidery and learned traditional techniques. William’s company, Morris & Co., incorporated an embroidery department headed by May from 1885 to 1896. Influenced by the Morris & Co. example, the School of Art Needlework in Kensington, later renamed the Royal Society of Art Needlework, established in 1872, modeled itself on the revival of craft spearheaded by Morris. As previously stated, the school exhibited at the Centennial in Philadelphia, having an enormous influence on American visitors and needlework designs.

Additionally, May Morris was very active in Arts and Crafts design. William and May published writings and designs, and notably May’s article on embroidery from 1893 in The Decorator and Furnisher is pertinent in her explanation of stitches as well as design. Included in her article is an illustration of a “Simple Door Drapery,” depicting a portière with two panels over a door that is displayed on a rod and hung on rings, similar to historical portières, with one panel tied back (Figure 5). The depiction most likely shows appliquéd and embroidered all-over floral ornamentation, inspired by medieval embroideries. Her article is useful in comparing surviving examples of her work to the importance placed on embroidered domestic hangings.

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A surviving set of four embroidered portières designed by May Morris that were originally commissioned by an American client, are in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 6). The ground fabric for the hangings is a floral silk damask made by Morris & Co. between 1880 and 1881. They are embroidered in silk with representations of trees with various fruits, a variety of floral motifs, as well as ogival patterns, with fringe on the edging. Medieval influence is evident in the embroidered natural motifs that mimic the vivid foliage of verdure tapestries as well as in the use of fringe, similar to Peter Thornton’s description of interiors between 1400 and 1600. The

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42 Other designers of the period, such as Louis Comfort Tiffany, had employees who worked the designs.
style is which the trees are rendered is also similar to her father’s panel of St Catherine. Morris’ representation of natural motifs aligns with period design principles in that she interpreted the natural world rather than realistically copied it, a vital principle also used in Aesthetic interiors and American design.

Figure 6 Portière made from Morris & Co. Oak damask (one of four), Design by May Morris, Fabric by William Morris for Morris & Co., 1892–93, Made in England, Silk damask, embroidered with silk, with silk fringe and cotton lining, 102 x 54 in. (259.1 x 137.2 cm) (including fringe). Image courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. http://www.mfa.org/.
Coinciding with Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement was the English Aesthetic Movement, referred to as the artistic movement during the period and also termed Aestheticism by scholars. Aestheticism often overlapped with Arts and Crafts design, with designers such as William Morris integral to artistic interior design. Similar principals of natural beauty brought into the home and inclusion of handworked goods were vital to both movements.

A major influence on American design was the English tastemaker Charles L. Eastlake and his 1860s publication, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details*. Eastlake’s book was widely disseminated in America, influencing the creation of Eastlake style furniture and architecture that stressed handwork and historicism. His publication was valued by homemakers and designers because of his stress of simplicity in design as well as hand embroidery. This was similar to views expressed by William and May Morris, influencing homemakers in portière creations.

Pertinent to this study is Eastlake’s portière descriptions and inclusion of illustrations of hangings. He describes designs by the architect A. W. Blomfield and C. Heaton, and illustrates two curtain designs by Heaton (Figure 7). The works by Blomfield and Heaton used velvet fabric, hand embroidery, and deep borders, elements that Eastlake states had been used in successful hangings of the past decade. This is important in that it aligns Eastlake’s design principals with historical styles, similar to William Morris, and coinciding with Arts and Crafts aesthetic.44

The two illustrations of designs by Heaton further reiterate Eastlake’s historicism and stress of simplicity in design.\textsuperscript{45} The design on the left is very simplistic, relying on horizontal bands for the main ornamentation of the hanging. Appliqué work and embroidery are most likely used for the bands and surface ornamentation. The design on the right is more elaborate, depicting characters from Æsop’s fable, “The Fox and the Stork,” done in appliqué work.\textsuperscript{46} There are horizontal bands as well, with allover floral designs perhaps intended to be embroidered along with complex figural appliqué work. The design remains somewhat simplistic in that each element is relegated to a band,

\textsuperscript{45} Eastlake labels C. Heaton’s designs as “Embroidered Curtains,” giving their descriptions in the text along with portière designs. Period literature often used multiple terms for door hangings. Heaton’s designs could have been intended for window or door hangings because designs for both hangings were often similar.

\textsuperscript{46} Eastlake, \textit{Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details}, 92.
keeping the work symmetrical and ordered. These illustrations and Eastlake’s descriptions will be useful in later chapters to compare American portières to Eastlake style, with similar characteristics of design simplicity and incorporation of embroidery and appliqué work.

Many aesthetic designers and artists also stressed the importance of simplicity and beauty. Designers such as Bruce James Talbert, a purveyor of Gothic reform, emphasized simplistic hangings displayed on rods and rings, similar to Eastlake. Additionally, Japanese design was integral to aesthetic designers. Popular in the United States was the English designer E.W. Godwin and his Anglo-Japanesque furniture. Marilynn Johnson’s chapter, “Art Furniture: Wedding the Beautiful to the Useful,” in In Pursuit of Beauty, describes Godwin’s influence. Godwin collected Japanese goods and immersed himself in Japanese culture and design, creating works that unified Japanese principles such as straight lines, use of negative space, and simplistic ornamentation. Similar to Eastlake’s writings, Godwin’s aesthetic influenced American artistic design in simplicity and Japanese influence, seen in popular design trends.

Another major figure in the English Aesthetic movement who was also influential in American aestheticism and popular design was Oscar Wilde. Wilde lived an artistic lifestyle based on ‘art for art’s sake,’ lecturing in America during 1882. Venues included New York, Boston, and Leadville in the Rocky Mountains. Many Victorians attended his lectures, including working- and middle-class individuals. He lectured on various topics.

48 Marilynn Johnson, “Art Furniture: Wedding the Beautiful to the Useful,” in Doreen Bolger Burke, et. al., In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement, 149.
including the creation of artistic objects, as well as on design including representations of aesthetic symbols such as the sunflower and lily. Wilde’s celebrity status within the American middle-class helped to popularize artistic concepts integrated into American interiors and portière designs. Wilde, Morris, Eastlake, and other designers and style icons influenced Americans in creation of artistic interiors.

The Artistic Interior

For the purposes of this study, an artistic interior is defined according to Roger B. Stein’s description in, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*. Stein uses the example of Olana, the home of painter Frederic E. Church, finished in the early 1890s and located in Hudson, New York. Church worked with architect Calvert Vaux to construct the home based on Middle Eastern architecture and design inspired by Church’s trips abroad. Church designed ornamental elements for the interiors, influenced by Moorish design, and filled the rooms with furnishings from around the world.

The interior of Court Hall displays a variety of decorating devices and ornamentation, including Moorish side tables and oriental rugs (Figure 8). Objects such as large Asian ceramics are specifically arranged around the interior, recalling a stage set, with the open architecture of doorways adding to the interior drama. There are also portières draped across a rod between the large expanse that leads to the upstairs.


hangings are similar to period Bagdad draperies, which were of imported Oriental fabrics, and heighten the play on colors used throughout the interior.\textsuperscript{51}

Multiple design influences were used in the decoration of Olana, and reflected a disassociation of historical styles, time periods, and geographic places.\textsuperscript{52} Stein states the following about the home: “Olana draws upon, indeed it ransacks, the high art forms of the Western and Eastern worlds with carefree abandon and with rich visual playfulness; and though it is “eclectic” in its use of various styles, that is not an adequate label to apply.”\textsuperscript{53} It is apparent from Stein’s description that Olana did not just display goods from around the world in pleasing arrangements nor reference one specific historical style—its interiors beckoned the core of Aestheticism in disassociating meaning from objects and design for the sake of beauty, defining an artistic interior.

\textsuperscript{51} See pages 43 to 49, and 101, in Karina Helen Hiltje Corrigan Master’s thesis, “Turcoman Portieres and Arabia’s Sweetest Perfumes: The Turkish Style in American Middle-Class Interiors, 1890-1930,” for a discussion of late nineteenth-century Sears catalogue portière descriptions including a mention of Bagdad hangings, and for an illustration of a 1902 Sears, Roebuck and Company advertisement.
\textsuperscript{52} Roger B. Stein, “Artifact as Ideology,” in Doreen Bolger Burke, et. al., \emph{In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement}, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 25.
Stein’s description of an immersive artistic interior like Olana serves to describe the goal of the Aesthetic Movement in creating a home transformed into a theatrical space in which the world is displayed. Church, a professional artist, designed his home based on Middle Eastern influences, creating a sanctuary of world knowledge and objects removed from their history. Such interiors, designed by artists and tastemakers, served as models for high-style artistic design in popular literature. Victorian women were inspired by objects and design associated with Aestheticism, and many middle-class interiors incorporated popularized artistic design aspects in order to create drama and rooms reflective of the homemakers’ tastes.

Aiding in examining artistic interiors as well as in understanding how scholars refer to popular aesthetic, are photographs found in Mary Warner Blanchard’s *Oscar*
Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age. In her publication, Blanchard examines important aspects of artistic interiors, such as the disappearance of the door and in its place an artistic element to be used in the design of a space.\textsuperscript{54} She depicts period interiors including professionally designed rooms, often combining phrases such as “artistic interior,” “artistic spaces,” and “aesthetic touches,” in captions for photographs of different interiors. An examination of such interiors can be aided in discussing popularized artistic style found in portière designs.

An interior referenced by Blanchard is depicted in two different photographs of a parlor in the home of James Nevins from the late nineteenth century (Figure 9 and Figure 10). A door hanging of ropes tied in knots that end in tassels is shown in the interior. She states that the hanging “invokes an oriental flavor,” but she is not specific in influences. A display of needlework skill and refined knowledge of nonwestern design that is usually evident in surface decoration is lacking in the hanging. The work is rather a display of the owner’s taste in nautical materials for interior decoration, which Blanchard states that Nevins worked at a fish hatchery, as well as is reflective of popular trends in ‘exotic’ influences.\textsuperscript{55}

Also included in the interior is a tea table set with china, wallpaper of stylized depictions of leaves and vines, and an “artistic corner” that includes an artist’s easel and various paintings displayed on the floor, easel, and wall. Artistic elements include props such as paintings positioned throughout the interior, creating theatricality also embodied

\textsuperscript{54} Mary Warner Blanchard, Oscar Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age, 94 and 122.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 108 and 117.
through the door hangings. Personal interests and artistic elements are combined in the interior, contributing to the popularized artistic influences found in period taste literature. Blanchard states that such decorative elements were prevalent in many middle-class interiors, supporting the popularization of artistic styles.

Figure 9 “Parlor of the James Nevins house, Madison, Wis. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. Schildauer Collection. WHi(X3) 29542, lot 2775.)” Photograph from Oscar Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age, Mary Warner Blanchard. Page 108.
Another photograph used by Blanchard depicts an interior with a portière from the same period (Figure 11). She notes the inclusion of artistic props, similar to other period photographs, such as pillows displayed on the floor. The portière creates a frame for the room, important in creating theatricality of a space, and her theatricality argument could be aided in dissecting the dramatic drapery.56

The portière has allover embellishment, similar to Wheeler’s designs and coinciding with portière designs of the 1880s described by Terrance Uber that displayed lambrequins, drapery folds at the top of a hanging, as well as embroidery. The surface decoration could be needlework or woven, which a glimpse of the reverse side is shown in the lower left of the photograph and the panels seem to be in the reverse of both sides. The pattern is similar to the fleur-de-lis motif, coinciding to interest throughout the later-

half of the nineteenth century in French design in portière decoration. The incorporation of tassels is also reflective of popular artistic taste. The portière is important in illustrating the interest in European style reflective in popular artistic taste and in comparing to designs in popular literature that incorporated needlework and appliqué similar to patterns found in purchased hangings.

Blanchard also includes a photograph of a designed Moorish interior that most likely included purchased hangings (Figure 12). The interior is similar to the artistic studio model, with an easel displaying a painting, elaborate draperies, and various
furniture influenced by Moorish and ‘exotic’ designs. The ‘exotic’ influence is more prevalent in this interior mimicking an artist’s studio, including the portières.

Two entryways display portières, hung by one ring in an upper corner on each side of the doorway, with elaborate swags of looped fabric at the top of the hangings. As described by period taste literature, the portières could have been purchased oriental rugs, similar to mentions of Baghdad portières, and the hangings most likely were purchased by the male interior designer and not handmade by the homemaker. However, the portières are pertinent to this study because of the hanging methods shown in elaborate drapery, often referred to as ‘artistic folds,’ as well as in exemplifying ‘exotic’ influence in Moorish design, similar to Church’s Olana, serving as a model to homemakers creating their own interiors based on professional designs.

Figure 12. Professionally decorated interior in Minneapolis by John Bradstreet. “Minnesota Historical Society. GT2.21/p84)” Photograph from Oscar Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age, Mary Warner Blanchard. Page 120.

Mary Warner Blanchard, Oscar Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age, 120.
A study of photographs incorporated by Blanchard in context of portière design and functionality aids in understanding the terminology used by scholars when discussing late nineteenth-century American domestic interiors. Consistency in referring to popularized artistic style in relation to high-style period literature is needed in examining interiors inspired by aesthetic ideals that appropriated historical and cultural designs. Such interiors were not solely professionally designed, and middle-class consumers could achieve artistic decoration through taste publications.

As has been illustrated, English design movements such as Aestheticism, as well as historical styles, had tremendous influence on American aesthetic including portière designs found in popular literature. Historic design aspects of antiquity, the Renaissance, and eighteenth-century France, were utilized in American hangings to recall the great cultures of the past as well as timeless design, and the English Arts and Craft and Aesthetic movements further commented on historical styles while also incorporating principals of simplicity and emphasis on handwork. Combined with nonwestern design popularized by the opening of Japan and the infatuation with the ‘exotic,’ Americans created a popularized design aesthetic influenced by high-style artistic interiors and designs. An examination of taste literature will now aid in understanding such popularized artistic design.
CHAPTER THREE: HIGH-STYLE ARTISTIC TASTE INFLUENCING POPULAR TRENDS

This chapter will describe the high-style artistic influences on popular taste including English and American designs, artists, and purveyors of taste, such as the Royal School of Art Needlework, Louis C. Tiffany, and Candace Wheeler. An overview of period literature by women such as Constance Cary Harrison, an upper-class taste and fiction writer, in which portière and interior descriptions are given, as well as a case study of the professional designer Candace Wheeler, will aid in illustrating how professional, high-style artistic taste influenced popular interior design. This examination will also provide high-style comparisons to the popular portière designs found in newspaper and journal articles aimed at middle-class women, described in the next chapter. Male designers will also be examined in order to show how men gave legitimacy to interior design as well as served as high-style influences on female homemakers and popular trends. Examining a portion of the most popular period taste literature available to middle-class homemakers, in conjuncture to surviving works, will enable an investigation of high-style artistic design elements incorporated into a popularized artistic aesthetic.

Men as Tastemakers

Male designers helped to legitimize the design industry, aiding in the public’s acceptance of women such as Candace Wheeler in business fields associated with the
home. Male artists and authors, such as Charles L. Eastlake, Oscar Wilde, and others previously described, were tastemakers whose design principals were the pinnacle of artistic aesthetic, illustrated in newspapers and journals, and whose publications were widely disseminated to middle-class female consumers. In order to fully comprehend the many influences for portière designs aimed at middle-class homemakers, it is vital to examine the artistic designer.

A popular professional male designer, whose interiors were described in newspapers and journals, was Louis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany employed women to execute his designs, including Candace Wheeler, who worked for Tiffany and his Associated Artists. An examination of an interior designed by Associated Artists will be beneficial in illustrating Aesthetic style.

Around 1881, Tiffany designed the Veteran’s Room in the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York (Figure 13 and Figure 14). Amelia Peck and Carol Irish describe the interior, in which Wheeler worked the window and door hangings most likely based off of Tiffany’s designs. Architectural features included wainscoting and other wood carving by Stanford White, stenciling influenced by Samuel Colman, stained-glass and furniture designs by Tiffany, and a high frieze painted by Francis D. Millet and George H. Yewell that depicted warfare scenes throughout history.²⁸

Constance Cary Harrison described Wheeler’s portière for the room, which could have been designed by Tiffany with Wheeler executing his drawings, similar to the South

Kensington School portière previously described, in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1884. Harrison gave the following description of the Veteran’s Room portière:

Made of dull Japanese brocade, bordered with plush representing leopard-skin. Upon the main space of the curtain are worked square appliqués of vel-vet, each one embodying some design suggesting the days of knighthood and romantic warfare. The intermediate spaces of the brocade are covered with overlapping rings of steel, to represent a coat of mail.  

The portière combines Japanese fabrics, the ‘exotic’ in the use of animal skin, and the medieval in knighthood scenes and ornamentation. Artistic and English Arts and Crafts influences, in representation of multiple historical and cultural elements, are apparent in this combination of ornamentation. Furthermore, Wheeler appliquéd elements, saving time as advised in multiple publications aimed at a middle-class readership.

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Figure 13 "VETERANS' ROOM," From “The Seventh Regiment Armory,” The Decorator and Furnisher, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May 1885), page 43. Image courtesy of JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25584255. Wheeler’s portière is shown on the right side of the illustration.
In addition to the multi-influenced portière design, in 1885 the interior was described in *The Decorator and Furnisher* as a mixture of styles, figuration, and colors, with exotic and war themes: “The preponderating styles appear to be the Greek, Moresque, and Celtic, with a dash of the Egyptian, the Persian and the Japanese in appropriate places.” However, with this mixing of styles came a sense of singularity: “The result, instead of being confusing or crowded as one would suppose, is pleasant and strong and forces one to a realization that he is in the midst of artistic surroundings.”

It is evident that merely eclectic was not sufficient in describing the multitude of historical and cultural design influences used by Tiffany in this designed interior. This is an important aspect in interpreting period rooms and the incorporation of high-style artistic elements, as evident in popular literature. While his interiors were discussed by multiple period periodicals and his designs served as influences for interior decoration and portière patterns, the inherit sophistication of design found in his interiors differed from many middle-class interiors that took inspiration from such professionals, including female tastemakers.

**Period Taste Publications By Women**

Professional women were integral to domestic tastemaking, and publications by female authors are invaluable in examining portière designs found in period journals and newspapers. The following authors and publications reflect a portion of the most popular taste writings that were influential to middle-class homemakers, and are referred to in

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other scholarly works. The writers were artists and design experts, who were involved in the arts communities and were knowledgeable of the artistic style.

As has been described in the previous chapter, an important taste author was Constance Carry Harrison. Harrison was part of an upper-class family, educated in the arts and other subjects in Europe and Virginia, and had ties to New York City society. She was exposed to high-style design, such as works by Candace Wheeler, and wrote profusely on multiple subjects including fictional stories and decorating advice that incorporated portière designs. Her writings, aimed at a middle-class audience, were published independently as well as in journals such as *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.61

An important work by Harrison that describes portière design is her taste publication, *Woman's Handiwork in Modern Homes*. Harrison describes how portières should be hung, stating that looping back the draperies is unattractive in that the fabric is not allowed to naturally hang. Rings that allow the drapery to slide on a rod, a hanging technique used in antiquity and during the Renaissance, and that was preferably made of brass, were the most effective hanging method. This allowed the curtains to slide back and forth, and occupants could move easily between rooms. While closed, the hangings protected against drafts, which was an important feature stated by multiple authors during the period. The portière also should be hung a few inches lower than the frame of the

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door, enabling light to flow between rooms. Harrison’s description illustrates the functionality of portières as well as is elicit in proper portière installation—vital in comparison to journal and newspaper portière descriptions that will be examined in the next chapter.

Harrison also includes proper stylistic elements. She states that within the same room, portières and curtains should not be exactly the same in style, but should compliment one another, important in creating interior color harmonies. She is very descriptive in color usage: “Seal-brown, nut-brown and fawn; old gold, orange, maize, amber; garnet, wine color, pomegranate, Indian-red, crushed strawberry; peacock, turquoise, celestine, drake’s neck, Damascus blue and robin’s-egg blue; olive, sage, myrtle, jasper and résédas or mignonette green.” Such colors reflect the creativity in design during the period, similar to many of the articles that will be discussed in the next chapter, and is indicative of the wide variety of fabrics that were available at the time.

Harrison notes examples of more expensive as well as cheaper textiles used for door hangings, important in this study of popular periodicals. She states that Indian, Chinese, and Turkish fabrics, along with rugs, tapestries, velvets, silks, plushes, momie cloth, jutes, and fashion draperies, are suitable for hangings. This hinted to the wide variety of textiles available to the consumer that reference multiple cultures.

Harrison’s descriptions of portière usage are helpful to this study, further aided by her inclusion of a design by Samuel Colman for Cornelius Vanderbilt II (Figure 15).

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62 Constance Cary Harrison, *Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes*, 161-162.
63 Ibid., 163.
64 Ibid., 165.
65 Ibid., 164.
Colman, a landscape painter, worked with Tiffany to create high-style artistic interiors for elite patrons such as the prominent Vanderbilt. Such interiors were described in *Artistic Houses*, a limited-edition two-volume publication for subscribers that documented opulent interiors of the wealthy. While Colman’s designs encompass high-style influences, his works were published in literature aimed at middle-class consumers, such as in *Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes*, and were incorporated into portière designs that displayed popular artistic style.

Colman’s design is tripartite, which mirrored Aesthetic wall treatments. Such treatments were divided into three areas, with wainscoting or a dado at the lower part of the wall, a large area often decorated with paper in the middle, and a frieze at the upper part of the wall that could be ornamented or consist of a cornice. Colman’s design is similarly divided into three areas, with birds in flight, an aquatic scene, and decorative scrollwork encompassing the sections. His design illustrates color harmonies, vital to portière design as discussed by Harrison and other tastemakers, Japanese design influence in naturalistic representation, and the importance of embroidery in surface decoration.
Embroidery is a key element of the portière. Workers of the Society of Decorative Art, founded by Candace Wheeler, embroidered the piece following Colman’s design, important in understanding the influence of male designers on artistic style. Harrison states that the needlework is very exquisite, and “is only to be accomplished through hours of patient painstaking by skilled embroiderers, sitting statue-like at their frames.”66 This contrasts with many portière designs of popular periodicals, which the authors stressed timesaving ornamentation such as appliqué because the average middle-

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66 Constance Cary Harrison, *Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes*, 163.
class homemaker did not have time to spend embroidering elaborate hangings. Colman’s
design represents an artistic work in such aspects, including design.

The stylized naturalistic irises, birds, and lily pads, along with the tripartite
arrangement of motifs similar to period wall treatments, add to the artistic quality of the
design. Colman references Asian design in gold embroidery: Harrison states that “a few
lines of gold suggest cloud and landscape sketched after the Japanese method,” imitating
linear aspects of Japanese art as interpreted by popular Western design. All of these
elements merge to form a cohesive artistic work that depicts nature brought into the
interior through Japanese stylistic representation and color harmonies, as well as time-
consuming embroidery. This design is important in comparison to similar portière
designs of less elaborate ornamentation that were found in journals and newspapers in
that it is a work by a professional artist included in literature aimed at middle-class
homemakers. Domestic women looked to this design for inspiration, serving as a work
that influenced artistic taste in popular trends.

Another period taste publication that describes portière designs that are
comparable to designs in newspapers and journals is Maria Oakey Dewing’s book,

*Beauty in the Household*, from 1882. Dewing was an accomplished painter who studied
in the United States and in France with well-known artists such as John La Farge, who
also worked with Tiffany. She wrote multiple publications and articles on painting and

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67 Constance Cary Harrison, *Woman’s Handiwork in Modern Homes*, 164.
decoration that were disseminated to a middle-class readership. Her writings were influential because she herself was an artist and was affiliated with artistic designers.68

A portière described by Dewing compliments furnishings in the room description, similar to other period designs. The colors of the interior include orange, chestnut, and various shades of yellow, brown, and gold. Window curtains are of a brown plush embroidered “in shades of yellow from pale gold to an orange that becomes brown…lined with cream-white, or with yellow,” harmonizing in color with the rest of the interior.69 Gold was continuously mentioned as an artistic color, due to its ability to capture light and entice the eye. Gold along with the other colors described by Dewing are similar to other period designs and are important in creating harmonies within interiors and an artistic taste.

Dewing’s portière description echoes the harmonies in the interior:

The door, the same color as the mop-board, may be covered with a portière of a shade of orange, a little lighter than the wall, and embroidered in brown and gold, and lined with a pale tone of greenish blue, like a green turquoise, so that it is difficult to say if it be green or blue. If this, in its turn, were ornamented with a facing of about two feet wide, which showed an embroidered pattern of brown and orange, the effect would be charming.70

While this description seems unique in that both a door and portière are used, which Dewing may have been referring to the door trim, other period articles mention the combination of portières and doors. Dewing’s design focuses on the harmony between

70 Ibid., 109.
the portière and the interior, as well as the use of artistic color choices, referencing the Aesthetic adoration of the peacock in the green-blue effect. It is also important to note that embroidery for surface decoration is recommended, similar to popular periodical portière designs.

Dewing’s description is an example of high-style artistic taste in an interior because of the details she gives on colors, decorations, as well as objects to be displayed. She continues to reference embroidery and to give illustrations of possible cushion designs such as stylized lily pads and fauna.\(^{71}\) She describes objects including paintings and ceramics filled with flowers, such as a “china bowl of yellow roses.”\(^{72}\) Such artistic details in Asian ceramics, along with interior color harmonies, created an interior inspired by artistic concepts, similar to professionally designed interiors.

Another publication, authored by the professional designer Candace Wheeler, aids in identifying artistic elements within interiors. Wheeler’s *Principles of Home Decoration, With Practical Examples*, from 1903, is vital in interior design and portière description, albeit a later publication. Similar to Dewing, Wheeler also stresses harmony with interiors, especially wall treatments. Portières are also central to the design scheme, integral to the interior treatment as well as occasionally serving as works of art on their own.

In Wheeler’s chapter on draperies, she likens portières to pictures, “hang-ing in everybody’s sight,” and the color must be harmonious or have a design that is a work of

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 110.
However, she acknowledges that contemporary homemakers do not have the adequate amount of time to create elaborate embroideries, but older embroidered hangings work well as portières, “where they may appear indeed as guests of honour—invited from the past to be counted by the present.”\textsuperscript{74} Wheeler’s imaginative vocabulary is interesting in referencing the past, which portière designs after 1900 often cited ‘antique’ fabrics as suitable textiles for hangings.

Wheeler also gives examples of suitable fabrics for portières, including inexpensive textiles such as cotton, linen, and denim.\textsuperscript{75} Her stress of inexpensive materials is comparable to period newspaper and journal portière designs as well as in illustrating that artistic interiors were not relegated to the wealthy—middle-class homemakers could achieve popular artistic effects through the use of simple materials and ornamentation. While needlework could be time-consuming, designs often included minimal needlework and incorporated quicker and easier appliqué work. Wheeler describes time and cost saving alternatives, which aids in comparing other period tastemakers.

Also helpful in comparing designs of tastemakers is Wheeler’s description of an interior. She offers a complete and immensely descriptive account of an artistically decorated dining room in a home located in New York.\textsuperscript{76} Color treatments include “ochre-coloured bronze,” ceiling treatments, with walls and door-casings “painted a dark

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 149 and 153.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 218-219.
indigo, which includes a faint trace of green.” These color choices are similar to Dewing’s descriptions as well as other period publications, illustrating popular color trends that were indicative of high-style artistic taste.

Wheeler goes on to describe the window and door treatments. The upper sections of the windows are of green silk with appliqué that is similar to the design of the frieze on the walls. The same shade is used for the silk under-curtains, with silk over-curtains of indigo, matching with the wall color. This peacock effect is similar to other taste publications, and is also used in the portières that separate the dining and drawing rooms, which are of green brocade, similar in color to the silk under-curtains, and in design to the plasterwork. The portières harmonize with the entire interior treatment and become part of the artistic design.

The description of the space reinforces the idea of the room decorated as a whole, with furnishings complementing the total aesthetic, including portières. The portière was not the art object in this interior, but rather an artistic element supporting the entire design. The color harmonies echoed in wall and drapery, ceiling and stenciling, display subtleties in indigo and green, and ochre and bronze, popular colors in the artistic aesthetic. Such descriptions of high-style interiors by professional tastemakers that include portières, are vital in understanding popular artistic trends influenced by the Aesthetic Movement and professional designers like Candace Wheeler.

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78 Ibid., 220-221.
79 Ibid., 221.
Candace Wheeler and Artistic Portières

It is necessary to examine Wheeler because not only was she a successful business woman based in New York who published descriptions of interior designs aimed at domestic middle-class readers, but she also created portières for professionally designed homes. Her designs were widely disseminated in popular literature, reflecting high-style works influencing popular artistic style. In addition, her designs are reflective of the height of artistic influence in the 1880s and 1890s, as well as the lingering artistic inspiration of the early 1900s.

As evident in her design writings, embroidery and colors were central to her works, influenced by European and ‘exotic’ inspiration. Like many middle-class women, she visited and was inspired by the displays of needlework including the South Kensington School at the Philadelphia Centennial, and shortly thereafter she founded the Society of Decorative Art of New York City in 1877 and the Women’s Exchange in 1878. Wheeler founded these organizations based on the idea that women could support themselves in a business directly connected to the home, motivated by the South Kensington School. Wheeler was adamant that middle-class women could support themselves through selling homemade goods, and an extension of this idea was that

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80 For more information on the life, career, and works of Candace Wheeler, see the exhibition catalogue, Candace Wheeler: The Art and Enterprise of American Design, 1875-1900, by Amelia Peck and Carol Irish. For a case study of Wheeler’s professional career in association with the American Arts and Crafts movement see Catherine Welcome Zipf’s dissertation, “Professional Pursuits: Career Opportunities for Women in the American Arts and Crafts Movement.”
homemakers could also create successful artistic interiors by displaying inexpensive goods and handmade designs such as portières.  

Wheeler was also connected to many artists and designers in the period, including the painters Thomas Cole and George Henry Hall, as well as Louis Comfort Tiffany and John La Farge in Tiffany’s Associated Artists, beginning in 1879. As a designer in Tiffany’s Associated Artists, Wheeler was responsible for the execution of textile designs such as those included in the decoration of the Veteran’s Room in the Seventh Regiment Armory. She would go on to design after the disbanding of Tiffany’s Associated Artists in 1883, continuing to use the Associated Artists name until 1907. She was also the Director of the Bureau of Applied Arts for the display of New York and the Color Director for the Women’s Building at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. Wheeler’s career differed from that of the average domestic woman, but an examination of her designs is useful in describing her association to professionally designed interiors and collaboration with male tastemakers.

Two surviving works designed by Wheeler are useful in discussion of similar designs found in articles described in the next chapter. *Irises panel* and *Tulips panel*, in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, represent professional works that were published and referenced in popular literature, such as in articles by Constance Cary Harrison. Most likely meant to be part of panels for portières, the works are pertinent to

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82 Ibid.
this study in their high-style artistic attributes in comparison to period portière designs in popular taste literature (Figure 16 and Figure 17).

*Irises panel*, from 1883, is hand embroidered on a specially made cloth of Wheeler’s design that served as a useful ground for needlework. It depicts irises in a golden field with various insects throughout the motif. The design is influenced by Japanese art in all-over patterning, stylized natural depictions, as well as in perspective that pushes the entire design to the foreground. The Japanese influence is important in comparison to the Aesthetic Movement and artistic taste popularized in portière designs published in newspapers and journals.83

*Irises panel* is also a striking example of skill and time commitment. It is a piece that the average middle-class homemaker most likely would not have had the time for nor the funds to create, in contrast to popular designs found in period newspapers and journals that stressed inexpensive and quickly worked hangings. However, certain design aspects of the work, such as the somewhat fluer-de-lis arrangement of the foliage, was mimicked in more simple designs, as will be illustrated in the next chapter. Therefore, *Irises panel* aids in discerning portières as actual works of art versus harmonious treatments that added artistic touches to interiors.

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Figure 16 Irises panel, Designed by Candace Wheeler, Made by Associated Artists, Ground fabric manufactured by Cheney Brothers, 1883, Made in New York, New York, Silk embroidered with silk and metallic-wrapped cotton threads, metal sequins, and cut-glass beads, 67 1/2 x 45 in. (171.5 x 114.3 cm). Image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/.

Figure 17 Tulips panel, Designed by Candace Wheeler, Made by Associated Artists, Ground fabric manufactured by Cheney Brothers, 1883–87, Made in New York, New York, United States, Silk and metallic cloth appliqued with silk velvet and embroidered with silk and metallic-wrapped cotton threads, 74 x 50 1/2 in. (188 x 128.3 cm). Image courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/.
In contrast, *Tulips panel*, an unfinished work from 1883 to 1887, serves as a more achievable design for middle-class homemakers. Similar to the *Irises panel*, an allover design of tulips, stems, and leaves are depicted in a stylized naturalistic representation. The design is also simpler than *Irises panel* because the work has elements that are appliqué as well hand embroidered. Appliqué was stressed by many period authors, such as Wheeler, as a more efficient and cheaper method of surface decoration. This design could be more easily followed by a middle-class woman because of the more simplistic ornamentation, and can be compared to period portière designs that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Examining Wheeler’s portières aid in identifying high-style artistic elements that were incorporated into popular artistic design by middle-class women. These women were influenced by professional designs and designers through publications such as taste journals that described designed interiors of the upper class as well as imagined middle-class interiors with artistic influences. Such design examples were often modeled on high-style interiors created by male designers.

Many popular portière designs illustrate that homemakers utilized high-style artistic objects and decorations, with designs found in taste periodicals, in creation of rooms reflective of their own tastes. Tastemakers, including artists and designers, popularized artistic design to the American masses through books, newspapers, manuals, and journals. An examination of portière designs found in newspapers and journals will now reveal high-style artistic inspiration on popular design.

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CHAPTER FOUR: PORTIÈRES IN THE POPULAR ARTISTIC STYLE

After identifying the major design influences on popular artistic decoration in the preceding chapters, including high-style artistic taste, it is now possible to examine in depth a sample of period portière descriptions and instructions found in journals and newspapers aimed at the female middle-class homemaker. A sampling of around fifty articles was found on various online periodical databases. Articles that include helpful illustrations will be specifically described, representing the final sample group. The findings will be ordered chronologically and will be compared to other period literature described in earlier chapters in order to identify high-style artistic influences on popular designs. Data on specifics such as hanging methods, colors, surface decoration, and materials will not be categorized into lists and tables in order to find stylistic distinctions in the separate decades. Rather, a discussion of popular portière elements will examine the overall concepts of design, including ornamental motifs, in order to dissect high-style artistic influences including exoticism, historical styles, and theatricality of hangings. By doing so, it will illustrate how portière construction and ornamentation followed high-style artistic concepts advised by professional tastemakers, creating a popular artistic aesthetic that was dependent upon tastes of female middle-class domestic homemakers.
Publications to be Examined

The newspapers and journals that were examined reflected both urban and rural readership, with nationwide and local circulation, and represented the over 10,000 American publications in circulation in the late nineteenth century. Such publications are vital in examining interior decoration, with newspaper excerpts reflecting advise found in magazines aimed at a domestic and artistic audience. This study combines articles found in both types of press, including journals such as *The Decorator and Furnisher, Harper’s Bazaar, Arthur’s Home Magazine*, and *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and newspapers such as *Boston Daily Globe, Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*, all aimed at middle-class homemakers.

The journal and newspaper articles included portière designs of tastemakers, works on exhibition, as well as professionally designed hangings. Illustrations sometimes accompanied designs, depicting not only portières in ornamentation, drapery, and hanging style, but also occasionally showing interior views. Affordability and ease in making were integral concepts to many designs, which were often to be handworked in embroidery and appliqué techniques, reflecting professionally created portières and artistic influences of motifs and design.

Articles will be grouped together by two time periods, 1875 to 1900 and 1900 to 1910. Period literature of the previous chapter will be compared to the journal and newspaper articles in order to illustrate influences of professional high-style design found

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85 Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History 1690-1960* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963). This publication is thorough in examination of American periodicals and has been referenced by many scholars, including Terrance Uber.
in popular artistic style. Also, continuity in decorating advice was found in both newspapers and journals, with similar and identical articles printed in both types of publications. This further reiterates the popularization of artistic style, with professional tastemakers writing for multiple publications aimed at a domestic middle-class readership.

**Summary of Findings**

This sampling of articles found similar stylistic elements included in Uber’s decades of styles, but the distinguishes between decades were not as pronounced in this sampling as in Uber’s study, nor were they as applicable to the examination of artistic ornamentation. As described by Uber, the decade between 1870 to 1880 was mostly influenced by European designs and included elaborate portières. This study found similar results in that surface ornamentation of English handwork motifs was very influential to American designs, based on South Kensington patterns, but this influence extended past 1880 and continued to be of importance to embroidered portière designs. Also, the English Aesthetic Movement was the impetus for American Aestheticism, and as a result, European influence was seen throughout the nineteenth century in the United States. Additionally, Uber’s period between 1880 to 1890 included more simplistic designs compared to the previous decade. Again, this study saw simplicity in design throughout the late nineteenth-century rather than just during this decade. Lastly, as described by Uber, the decade between 1890 to 1900 included portières influenced by historicism as well as more elaborate designs. This study found similar results in the use of historical styles, as well as in the appropriation of ‘exotic’ elements within interiors.
such as artists’ studios, but the renewed interest in historic American design was more prevalent after 1900 in this sampling.

Uber’s study was thorough in his examination of three publications and portière designs, and differences in this study reflect a wider usage of publications available to the contemporary researcher because of online access to periodical databases. Unlike Uber’s study, this sampling incorporates newspaper articles in addition to journal articles. This study also was not focused solely on specific portière treatments, but rather on artistic elements that spanned throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, Uber’s findings varied slightly from this sampling because he included every portière description and illustration, such as exhibited portières and professional designs. In contrast, this study focused mainly on instructions for designs to be made by the female reader, although some professional designs were studied. This was done in order to examine works most likely included in middle-class homes, illustrating the emergence of a popular artistic style for the middle-class domestic interior.

**Portière Designs, 1875-1900**

Portière designs of this period reflect the height of artistic influence on door hangings, coinciding with the popularity of the American Aesthetic Movement. Important influences on portière designs were historical styles, exoticism, and other artistic elements. Major characteristics include naturalistic folds in silk, the use of inexpensive fabrics such as denim, burlap, canton flannel, and surge, as well as colors that harmonize with interiors including blues and browns. Harmony with other interior
furnishings and colors, as recommended by tastemakers such as Maria Oakey Dewing and Candace Wheeler, was prevalent in articles. Rod and rings installation is also depicted, similar to historical styles including Renaissance hangings, as described in the second chapter.

These findings are fitting in comparison to the English portière based on Mr. Pollen’s design, which was mentioned in the introductory chapter. Pollen’s design, made for display at the Centennial, included natural and medieval motifs of roses and leaves, similar to May Morris’ portières that were embroidered and appliquéd, as well as a harmonious color scheme mainly of salmon, red, and cream. Bands were also used in decoration for Pollen’s design, which many publications advised the use of band borders. In addition, Chinese silk was used for the ground fabric, which many portière designs called for the use of silk. This description is vital in comparing works of this period because of its use of English Arts and Crafts Movement elements that were incorporated into the American Aesthetic Movement.

English embroidery was a major influence for American portière designs during this period. An article from 1882 in Harper’s Bazaar gives instructions and illustrations for South Kensington patterns of sunflower and iris designs (Figure 18 and Figure 19). The sunflower design is worked entirely or partly of appliqué with such fabrics as flannel, an inexpensive textile, with embroidery stitches for accents in the background. The iris design mainly uses embroidery, unless appliqué work is preferred by the unskilled homemaker or to save time. Both designs are meant to be displayed as panels,

86 “ART NEEDLEWORK. The Embroideries From the Kensington School of Art for the Centennial.” Daily Inter Ocean.
similar to hanging methods described by Constance Carry Harrison. Stylized natural elements are depicted, adhering to Arts and Crafts decoration.⁸⁷

These designs are also comparable to high-style artistic taste publications by such designers as Candace Wheeler, who emphasized timesaving methods and natural, simplistic ornamentation, and was inspired by English needlework. Artistic influence is also referenced in the use of sunflowers and irises, symbols of the Aesthetic Movement, popularized by figures such as Oscar Wilde who would sometimes wear or hold a sunflower while lecturing.⁸⁸ The professional designs, aimed at the middle-class homemaker, reflect English high-style artistic influence on popular portière design.

⁸⁸ A vast amount of period articles reference Wilde and his love of the sunflower, as well as describe how attendees would often bring sunflowers to his lectures.

Other American portière designs were inspired by English examples as well in the incorporation of appliquéd elements. An article from 1881 in *Harper’s Bazaar* includes an illustration of a dark blue satin portière with a band border of appliquéd motifs worked on a satin ground (Figure 20). The use of satin, similar to silk in reflecting light and catching the eye, is similar to many other articles that stressed the artistic quality of the textile. Also similar to other designs is the use of a rod for hanging the portière, as well as cord tiebacks and tassels.89

An illustration of the finished work is shown in an artistic interior. Aesthetic furniture, similar to Bruce James Talbert designs, is incorporated in the interior view. Window hangings of a lighter color are also shown, in contrasting to the portière—an artistic design element. Exoticism is also included in drapery swags, similar to the Moorish designed interior by John Bradstreet from the previous chapter. The illustration is similar to an artist’s studio model in such use of artistic drapery and combination of Aesthetic furniture.

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Additionally, identical or similar articles were published in journals and newspapers that embodied ‘exotic’ influences. An article by Laura B. Starr in *The Decorator and Furnisher*, from August, 1889, was published a month later in a Michigan newspaper, *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, without the accompanying illustration (Figure 21). The instructions for the quickly worked and inexpensive burlap portière, which was

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90 This occurred in the other periods of this study as well, illustrating the wide dissemination of successful portière designs and the popularization of artistic influences.
described as being seen in an artist’s studio, utilized ‘exotic’ inspiration in design, such as the inclusion of Chinese brass coins to be looped in bands. These coins could be purchased at specialty shops, referenced by the author and other tastemakers who advised ‘exotic’ touches within interiors. Burlap was an inexpensive fabric that could be artistic in ‘exotic’ representation as well. Fringe, rope, and tassels also make up the design, creating a more complicated hanging that differs from more simplistic designs. There is also a lack of embroidery, in contrast to many hangings studied as well as counter to taste advice by designers such as Candace Wheeler.  

However, this portière can be compared to artistic hangings such as those of Tiffany’s designed interiors in referencing the ‘exotic,’ following professional examples of high-style artistic taste. Designers such as Tiffany incorporated nonwestern ornamentation into interiors, resulting in the creation of an artistic aesthetic detached from cultural and historical associations and meanings. Middle-class homemakers could recreate such high-style aesthetic by incorporating ‘exotic’ objects, including Chinese coins, into portières, following the guidance of newspaper and journal articles.

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In further use of ‘exotic’ elements in imitation of high-style hangings, another design published both in newspapers and journals utilized woven silk pieces in creation of a portière. This was a cost efficient method of reusing fabric scraps as well as in displaying the ‘exotic’ in silk materials. An article by Evelyn Baker Harvier from 1887 in *The Washington Post* was published in at least one other publication, *The Christian Advocate*, in 1894. Baker states that pieces of silk should be haphazardly gathered and sewn together in strips, and taken to a weaver. She comments that the end result
resembles “some East Indian fabric.” 92 This is interesting in the ingenuity of the homemaker to create portières out of scraps, somewhat similar to the crazy quilt craze around the same period, in order to display an artistic and ‘exotic’ influenced hanging. The crazy aesthetic was a reflection of artistic trends, and the incorporation of similar elements into a portière further reiterates the popularization of artistic concepts. Furthermore, it is also interesting in how this process was still advised seven years later, implicating the lasting influence of artistic concepts in portière designs.

Also popular during this period were portières created from strands of textiles as well as beads, bamboos, and other materials. An article representative of this style and that is comparable to a portière in a photograph found in Mary Warner Blanchard’s publication is a strip cloth portière described in The Ladies’ Home Journal and Practical Housekeeper, from 1889 (Figure 22). Strips of cloth are braided and hung from a pole and can be parted at any point, which the author states is “like those of the Japanese made of bamboo and beads.”93 An illustration incorporates the description, including a table similar to E.W. Godwin and Japanese designs along with a teapot—markings of an artistic sensibility. Hints at wainscoting, referencing the artistic tripartite wall decoration, and architectural carving also add to the artistic representation of the interior.

This illustration is important because when examined in conjunction to the rope portière shown in Blanchard’s publication, the interiors can be compared, depicting artistic elements incorporated into popular artistic design. Blanchard’s photograph portrays the home of a fish hatchery worker, and she states that the rope portière reflects the interests of the homeowner in interpretation of netting. Compared to the braided rope portière, pictured in a more clearly defined aesthetic interior that follows typical artistic ornamentation in tripartite wall treatment and aesthetic furniture, the rope portière in the fish hatchery worker’s home combines such artistic influence with personal interests in imitation of netting. The result is a personalized style that follows popular artistic trends as illustrated in publications such as *The Ladies’ Home Journal and Practical Housekeeper*. 
Such artistic influence carried into portière designs found in journals and newspapers of the 1890s. An illustration by Clare L. Bunce in *The Atlanta Constitution*, from 1891, depicts a hanging influenced by artistic taste (Figure 23). It is a straight panel, similar to Constance Carry Harrison’s advise in portière hanging methods. Comparable to other portière designs, a band border is ornamented in natural motifs, with a central panel that is simplistic in decoration. The motif is embroidered with occasional lines in gold, reflecting light, similar to works by Candace Wheeler. The design is also similar to Wheeler’s works, such as the irises hanging, in comparable motifs of foliage. Bunce may have viewed Wheeler’s work on exhibit in 1883, and most likely was familiar with Wheeler’s designs. Bunce’s illustration reflects an interpretation of high-style artistic ornamentation in design and use of color.

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Bunce also wrote for at least one other publication, *Harper’s Monthly*, a publication focused more on art and design. As was previously mentioned, this is important because both journals and newspapers published artistic designs, disseminating taste advice to a wide readership, and popularizing artistic and historical designs. Middle-class women would have been exposed to artistic style in multiple publications, not just aimed at artistic homemakers but to a wider audience as well, creating a popularized artistic aesthetic inspired by high-style design.

An article in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* from 1892, by Margaret Sims, further shows the influence of artistic taste as well as historical styles. Sims includes five illustrations and multiple descriptions of interior hangings, including for portières, which she states are on their own works of art. Asian, French, medieval, and artistic influences
are all found in her descriptions and designs, which this combination of styles was also seen in many articles during the period.

Two of Sims’ portière illustrations are important in examining artistic influences. The first illustration, “AN ARTISTIC SERGE PORTIERE”, depicts a stylized natural vine border with a central panel of an orange tree branch extending from the left side of the portière (Figure 24). Appliqué is used for the larger elements in the design such as the oranges, and embroidery is used for the details such as twig outlines. The design is asymmetric, similar to Japanese designs made popular because of the Centennial and Aestheticism. The panel also is meant to hang straight, similar to Harrison’s advice. Emphasis is placed on the light-catching ability of materials used such as plush, similar to works by Wheeler, illustrating the influence of high-style professional design on popular taste literature.⁹⁵

In contrast, “AN EMBROIDERED PORTIERE” differs from this work, with emphasis on medieval embroidery motifs executed in similar design to tripartite wall treatments, comparable to Samuel Colman’s design for a hanging (Figure 25). There is an outside band border in trailing foliage as well as a lower panel with a larger swirling vine depiction. The design is similar to English Arts and Crafts works by artists such as May Morris, drawing upon medieval decoration. This article is useful in that multiple illustrations are given that embody many artistic influences including historicism, showing the variety of designs incorporated into popular artistic trends.


Historical ornamentation was also reference in May Morris’ article for *The Decorator and Furnisher*, “SIMPLE DOOR DRAPERY,” from 1893, as described in the second chapter. The design is influenced by medieval ornamentation and is most likely meant to be embroidered as well as appliquéd, coinciding with the surface decoration methods preferred by tastemakers. In contrast to Sims’ illustration, Morris’ shows all-over ornamentation rather than a tripartite representation, influenced by natural motifs. Her design also shows a portière hung along with a door, a design aspect that was occasionally mentioned by authors throughout the late nineteenth century.\(^{96}\) Morris’ illustration represents high-style design aimed at middle-class homemakers, and is an important example of English influence on American aesthetic.

In addition, a design also from *The Decorator and Furnisher* in the same year shows a hanging along with a door (Figure 26). The illustration is labeled “THE KHIRASSAN—PARISIAN CURTAINS WITH RICH BORDER.” It depicts a hanging of stylized natural band borders, also with one panel tied back, like Morris’ design. Elaborate tiebacks are also depicted, similar to portières from antiquity. This design may be referring to purchased textiles, as the text describes figural fabrics available for purchase.\(^{97}\) However, the portière is similar to handmade works in embroidered and appliquéd bands. There is a combination of styles, including Persian influence in ‘exotic’ ornamentation as well as European influence in French design in the display of a two-panel hanging. This mixture of influences was important in artistic design in creating art

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objects and interiors unbounded by history and place in order to create a theatrical space removed from reality.

![Figure 26 “THE KHORASSAN-PARISIAN CURTAINS WITH RICH BORDER,” From “Fashionable Portieres,” The Decorator and Furnisher, Vol. 21, No. 6 (March 1893), page 217. Image courtesy of JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25582373.]

Theatricality was a vital concept in many of the portière designs of the late nineteenth century, along with other artistic influences. Whether in rods shaped like weapons or shepherd’s crooks used to create French hangings for “lovers of Dresden china, Wat-teau girls and their jaunty French flower baskets,” Victorian tastemakers were conscious in describing hangings meant for interiors set as stages in which to display the
world.\textsuperscript{98} Portières, similar to stage curtains, created barriers between diversely decorated rooms as well as acted as art objects on their own, a concept that would lose favor after 1900. This theatricality and heavy influence of Aestheticism reflect portière designs from 1875 to 1900, coinciding with the height of Aestheticism in the United States.

**Portière Designs, c. 1900-1910**

The period from around 1900 to 1910 is not examined by Uber, but is useful in examining the lasting influence of the Aesthetic Movement after its height in the United States. The period also illustrates the transition from Aestheticism to an American colonial aesthetic. Portières were not quite out of favor during the period of 1901 to 1910, but were found more frequently in newspapers than in journals in this sampling. The articles continue to stress the importance of inexpensive materials and simplicity in design, which seemed to be more profound in this period due to the interest in colonial design. Popular colors include muted shades as well as the peacock color scheme of blue-green, and inexpensive fabrics, such as burlap, and textiles that manipulated light in pleasing ways continued to be referenced in this period. Such fabrics continued to be appliquéd and embroidered. However, portières were now sometimes described as matching walls and window treatments, a change in design from the earlier periods that stressed harmony but not overall matching in design and in color.

In continuation of the early period, after the height of Aestheticism, hangings were described as being “artistic.” In a small excerpt from *The Washington Post* in 1901,

taken from *Harper’s Bazar*, the revival of “the old-fashioned green and black calico” was “revived as a cotton print, and is especially artistic as the backing of a portiere.”

The article is referencing a revival of a print from an earlier period, stating that the print was artistic when displayed in a portière. This is a continuation of historical styles for use in artistic designs, differing slightly in use of a specific material used instead of handworked surface decoration. However, it is interesting in examining the transition from popular artistic aesthetic to mainly historicism in interior decoration.

In addition, naturalistic representation continued to be important in portière designs during this period. An article from 1909 in the *New York Times* dictated appliqué work for “a large dashing spray of coarse mountain ferns” used in a portière for a mountain summer cottage in the mountains. This is similar to the designs by C. L. Bunce and Wheeler in stylized foliage. The *Albuquerque Journal* also described an embroidered hanging of “simple trees.” Such naturalistic representation is similar to surviving works designed by Wheeler as well as the stylized representations of nature adherent to American Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts Movements. Portière designs of this period, while evolving into a style heavily influenced by the American landscape and colonial past, still referenced artistic popular taste in natural motifs and materials.


Nonetheless, portières were becoming aspects of architecture within the interior rather than works of art, differing from artistic interiors.

An interesting combination of hangings and colonial influence is found in an article from 1905 in *The Washington Post* (Figure 27 and Figure 28). The colonial interior is described as modern, signaling the transition to an American historical style. Window and door treatments, including multiple illustrations of different designs, are used to describe how interior treatments complimented interior architecture. Folds in the drapery are used to decrease as well as to accentuate doorway height, as well as to soften the straight lines of the architecture. Portières of the late nineteenth century were often described as useful in hiding architectural defects, which is similar to this period in that certain elements needed to be softened by textiles, a Victorian concept. However, as these designs indicate, a major change that occurred in this period was that the design of the portière was not the focus, but rather how the fabric could manipulate space.

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In coinciding with the change in interior design that referenced an American past rather than the world’s history, portière descriptions from around 1900 to 1910 continued popularized artistic taste in naturalized ornamentation. However, the portière began to recede into the architecture of the room. It no longer was an art object to be admired in adoration of the maker’s taste or was central to an artistic domestic space, but rather it was a side note to a doorway. This change in portière design is indicative of the receding popularity of artistic influence in American interior decoration.
CONCLUSION

As established by the findings of this study, high-style works influenced the creation of a popular artistic style visible in portière trends aimed at middle-class domestic women. Instructions and illustrations found in newspaper and journal articles referenced high-style artistic ornamentation, influencing domestic women in creation of portières for display within the home. Portières were integral to an artistic interior, and such publications by English and American professional tastemakers served as models of design.

Middle-class homemakers could easily create artistic hangings by using inexpensive textiles advised by tastemakers, which was vital to quickly changing styles. This made artistic style accessible to a large American population. Furthermore, natural and ‘exotic’ elements, influenced by the Centennial and tastemakers such as Louis Comfort Tiffany, were adopted into a domestic aesthetic that incorporated the world within the interior. Aestheticism, spread by taste literature, permeated popular tastes.

To further study the lasting influence of Aestheticism on popular American design, an examination of the period after 1900 in which colonial aesthetic was prevalent could be expanded upon. It is interesting to examine this continuation of artistic elements, such as in surface ornamentation, in comparison to a historical American design. These depictions could also be compared to manufactured hangings advertised in
catalogs, a fascinating topic in relation to Arts and Crafts ideals of handwork as well as the acceptance of mass-produced objects during the Aesthetic Movement. Furthermore, a study of portière trends would be interesting in comparison to similar quilting patterns, such as the silk scrap portière trend associated to crazy quilts.

In summation, portières were more than just fabric barriers between rooms. They were on par with other domestic needlework, having been made to reflect the tastes of their female makers. Domestic homemakers created them from designs found in popular literature, incorporating a wide variety of high-style influences from European and nonwestern cultures. Such American decoration, ‘exotic’ in appropriation of foreign design, and borrowing from English aesthetic, embraced portières in the creation of a theatrical interior design in which door hangings were props for the domestic stage.
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Kristin Skinner graduated from Lakeview Community High School, Lakeview, Michigan, in 2008. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Studio Art Minor from Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan, in 2012.