“Making a Business of Good Taste”: Minerva Elliot and the
Professionalization of Interior Decoration in Toronto, 1925 – 1939

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the interior decorating profession in Toronto by following the career trajectory of interior decorator Minerva Elliot (1887-1964). Elliot's biography allows entry into spaces of inquiry beginning with the T. Eaton Company in Toronto as a site of education for both its clientele and the emerging professional.

Additionally, the upscale decorating magazine *Canadian Homes and Gardens* serves as an important tool for providing evidence of Elliot's independent practice, featuring her decorating advice and illustrations of her work. This thesis explores how the department store and magazine helped to professionalize the field of interior decoration, which dealt with various modern tastes in Toronto's rapidly evolving metropolis. I argue that interior decoration – and Minerva Elliot's voice alike – occupies an important and overlooked part of Canadian design and women's history, and draw attention to the significance of interior decorating as a means of expressing identity in interwar Toronto.

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Introduction

“Are we really saying to the world, through the medium of our house, what we wish the world to know?”¹

“Her influence in the community is a valuable one; from her[,] hundreds of Canadians are learning that the business of living is immeasurably brightened and enriched by surroundings of true beauty. And this influence is due to the simple fact that ‘she knows her job,’ knows it as does any other great craftsman, whether the medium in which they work be canvas, marble or the ‘concourse of sweet sounds.’ We need more Minerva Elliots among us.”²

In the first half of the twentieth century, Minerva Elliot (1887-1964) was recognized as a prominent Canadian interior decorator (Figure Intro 1). She gained experience as a decorator working at the T. Eaton Company in Toronto and John Wanamaker Department Store in Philadelphia before launching her own decorating business in 1925. In addition to decorating homes for Toronto’s elite, Elliot travelled extensively to acquire the furnishings and antiques she used in her decorating schemes (Figure Intro 2). Her travels were reported in newspapers across the world. She gave lectures to women’s associations and contributed essays to the popular decorating magazine *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (1925-1960).³ The magazine served as a public forum for discussing and advertising the role of the decorator, the importance of the home, and the challenges in expressing various modern identities within the space(s) of the modern interior. In their quest for professionalism, interior decorators, such as Elliot, utilized *Canadian Homes and Gardens* to demonstrate their knowledge, showcase taste, and establish themselves as

¹ J. Herbert Hodgins, “Editor’s Note,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1930, 15.

² Gertrude Pringle, “Making A Business of Good Taste,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, October 1, 1926, 71.

³ There is some confusion regarding the last year of *CHG*’s run. According to Library and Archives Canada, *CHG*’s run ends in 1960. From 1960-62, the magazine became *Canadian Homes* but was still published by Maclean-Hunter Publishing Co.

experts by publishing advice. Elliot therefore contributed to Canadian design history by being amongst a small group of Toronto decorators who campaigned for the professionalization of interior decoration.

Despite her successful and influential career, Minerva Elliot is relatively unknown today.⁴ In Canada in general, scholarly attention focused on the interior, and on interior decoration more specifically, has been severely neglected. The ephemerality of interior decoration and its association with women situates it as inferior to the sturdy permanence of architecture. As craft historian Sandra Alföldy explains, “[u]nlike architecture, which was comfortably professional and masculine, the field of interior design was fraught with the baggage of gender and materials.”⁵ It is true that the role of gender plays an important part in the history of interior decoration. After the First World War, interior decoration emerged as a new profession that was deemed acceptable for middle-class women. Conventional codes of femininity at the time, including women’s domestic experience, made them fittingly capable, it was reasoned, to work in home decoration.⁶ However, many men also worked as interior decorators in Toronto, and contributed to it being recognized as a reputable profession. The field therefore is not actually one dominated by women, although it was one of the few careers allowing women access to professional status. Women were, however, made responsible for the home, and this was largely

⁴ Elliot is briefly mentioned in a few recent Canadian design books, such as *Seeing, Selling and Situating Radio in Canada* (2017), *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture: Canadian Periodicals in English and French, 1925-1960* (2015), *Making Toronto Modern: Architecture and Design 1895-1975* (2014), and *‘Designing Women’: Gender and the Architectural Profession* (2000).

⁵ Sandra Alföldy, *Allied Arts: Architecture and Craft in Postwar Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012): 16.

⁶ Lynne Walker, “Women Architects,” in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women, and Design*, eds. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: Women’s Press Limited, 1989).

reflected in advertisements and editorials featured in the popular press such as *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, *MacLean's Magazine*, and *Canadian Home Journal*.

While current scholarship has uncovered the professional contributions of American and British interior decorators, the same cannot be said about Canadian decorators.⁷ The purpose of this thesis, then, is to provide a long overdue intervention into Canadian design history. This research examines how interior decoration attained professional status in the period between the wars by following Minerva Elliot's career. Tracing Elliot's trajectory provides a means of telling the story of interior decoration. She is a person to follow not because she revolutionized the profession. Rather, Elliot captured the path one took to make "interior decorating" into a viable career, which also required establishing the desire and *need* for a beautifully-decorated home. My aim is to reveal that interior decoration did not simply "happen" because one person decided to pursue it. Interior decoration emerged from a network of agents acting in response to a market for home decoration. The distinctive arena of the department store, decorating magazine, and later, independent decorating practice, all worked together to educate the public on the importance of the home. But where is the foundation for building up a private interior decorating practice? How and why did the *idea* of the independent interior decorator emerge in this period?

Design historian Grace Lees-Maffei defines "professionalization" as a "process of developing an activity into a generally recognized profession, through the setting up of professional organizations, the articulation and monitoring of standards and codes of conduct, the institution of clear educational routes and means of assessment, networking

⁷ There are some exceptions. See Rosalind Pepall, "Jeannette Meunier Biéler: Modern Interior Decorator," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 25 (2004).

and gate keeping.”⁸ Lees-Maffei’s description of professionalization serves to chart the interior decorator from amateur to professional. In order to professionalize, interior decorators needed to shift the emphasis away from taste to skill and to assert themselves as authorities and experts.⁹ Minerva Elliot herself advocated for proper training for the role of decorator and encouraged women to study home decoration in order to display their “originality and skill.”¹⁰

By following Minerva Elliot’s career, my project will employ a biographical approach to tell the story of interior decoration in Toronto. Elliot’s trajectory first brings us to Eaton’s House Furnishings department. Secondly, drawing from Elliot’s work featured in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, my investigation will inquire as to how, as an internationally-renowned decorator and magazine contributor, Elliot’s voice is not only important for providing notions of taste and aesthetics from this period, but for contributing to changing ideas about how to cope with the challenges of modern life. In addition, using *Canadian Homes and Gardens* as a vehicle to express her ideas about the interior allowed Elliot to showcase her own authority in one of the few professions that allowed women access to professional status. These spaces all mutually reinforced each other – Eaton’s, Minerva Elliot’s independent practice, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* – creating a market for interior decoration and a discourse on interiors.

Through the culture of consumption created first by the environment of the department store and within the pages of popular magazines, interior decoration

⁸ Grace Lees-Maffei, “Introduction: Professionalization as a Focus in Interior Design History,” *Journal of Design History* 21 no. 1 (2008): 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Minerva Elliot, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1928.

negotiates the spaces of the public and private. Publishing the interior allows entry into a private setting that is mediated by the interior decorator. The home is an important site for the representation of self, as curating one's home or the home of others communicates important notions of taste and identity. By revealing the authority Elliot was able to maintain in a profession seen as feminine and frivolous, I argue that Minerva Elliot's work and writings illuminate the emergence of professional interior decoration in Ontario.

Literature Review

There is no academic literature on Elliot nor an in-depth exploration of the professionalization of interior decoration in Canada, so this thesis relies heavily on primary archival sources to tell the story. The following scholarly sources were used to set the stage, and employed as a template to guide my research.

In Britain, design historian Penny Sparke continues to lay the foundation for implementing a biographical approach to the study of interiors. She is Director of the Modern Interiors Research Centre at Kingston University in London, UK (formed in 2005) in addition to editing published compilations that explore the complex histories of interior design, such as *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior* (2013), *Interior Design and Identity* (2004) and *Women's Places: Architecture and Design 1860-1960* (2003). The development of a research centre devoted to modern interiors speaks to the growing interest in interiors occurring in the last decade. In addition, Penny Sparke's thorough research into the life of popular early-twentieth century American decorator, Elsie de Wolfe, provides a model of meticulous research on female decorators. Sparke's

Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration (2005) investigates the role of the modern interior decorator by using Elsie de Wolfe as a case study.

Additionally, interior design scholar Bridget May explores the professionalization of interior decoration using American decorator Nancy Vincent McClelland as her central figure. In the article, “Nancy Vincent McClelland (1877-1959): Professionalizing Interior Decoration in the Early Twentieth Century,” May brings McClelland to the forefront by exploring her involvement in department stores, magazines, and in the establishment of professional decoration societies. May’s approach to narrate the path towards professionalization in an American context is extremely useful, as McClelland’s trajectory is nearly identical to Minerva Elliot’s. Both Penny Sparke and Bridget May demonstrate that biographies of female decorators provide an important contribution to design history. Sparke is also an important contributor of ideas about modern identities as represented in the home. In *The Modern Interior* (2008), she considers the home decorated in period furniture and antiques as one such modern identity, which is a theme I explore with Elliot.

In Canada, former decorative arts curator Rosalind Pepall contributes to the scholarship of interior decoration history in Canada with her research on Montreal decorator Jeannette Meunier Biéler. In the article “Jeannette Meunier Biéler: Modern Interior Decorator” (2004), Pepall highlights the paucity in scholarship on designers in Canada. Her article uses an investigative approach to uncover Biéler’s life and career by interviewing family members. Pepall’s work is the only piece that directly speaks about interwar interior decoration within a Canadian context, albeit centered in Montreal. Biéler worked at Eaton’s in Montreal before starting her own practice, decorating in French Art

Deco design. She designed furniture, although there is no record of the furniture ever being manufactured. Pepall states, “It would seem that, in Canada, women were a rarity in the field of interior decoration and design.”¹¹ Pepall does not focus on *Canadian Homes and Gardens* as a source for tracking the rich evidence of women such as Elliot working in Canada. Her article, however, begins the conversation about biographical approaches to interior decoration projects in Canada.

In the book *Modern Furniture in Canada, 1920 to 1970* (1997), design historian Virginia Wright explores modern furniture production and consumption in Canada by highlighting the growth of Canada’s furniture industry, and the emerging design professionals who responded to new modes of expression. Wright draws heavily from articles and advertisements published in *Canadian Home and Gardens* as evidence of this consumption. Although Wright explains that the term “Modern” is not one defined style but an “explosion of styles,” her study concentrates on furniture manufactured with modern industrial materials such as steel tube and plywood.¹² In my research, I am nuancing these ideas by exploring the modern interior decorated in period styles. Decorators did not have to employ modernist aesthetics to be modern. Wright provides an important first step in recognizing the professional associations formed as a result of the growth of the furniture, craft, and interior design industries. She also touches upon the

¹¹ Rosalind Pepall, “Jeannette Meunier Biéler: Modern Interior Decorator,” *Journal of Canadian Art History* 25 (2004): 142.

¹² Virginia Wright, “Introduction,” in *Modern Furniture in Canada, 1920 to 1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

implementation of interior design courses introduced in colleges and universities as a reaction to the increased demand for decorating and design training.¹³

Architectural historian Annemarie Adams and Petra Tancred's *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession* (2000) interrogates the inclusion of women in the profession of architecture. While their study focuses on architecture and not specifically on interior decoration, it is impossible to separate these two facets of the built environment. In their study, Adams and Tancred discuss interior decoration as an occupation women often fell into as a result of being excluded from the architectural field. They pursue this study by revising the history of architecture to include the contribution of the women who did strive for an architectural career. Their model is useful for the development of my thesis as their pursuit reflects what I am doing with Minerva Elliot: to revise the field of design to resurrect those women who have not had their stories told.

Finally, research into women's magazines as conveyors of taste and meaning is evident in Valerie J. Korinek's *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (2000). With a thorough reading of the Canadian magazine *Chatelaine*, Korinek investigates how it was used to voice feminist views under the guise of being a "simple" magazine for women with articles about style, lifestyle, and food recipes. Korinek's work is important for studying how monthly magazines serve to send textual and visual messages. Since my research critically examines *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, Korinek's work provides a framework for research into the role

¹³ In her unpublished essay, "The View from Winnipeg: Thoughts on the Evolution of Canadian Interior Design Education," which won the Martin Eli Weil award in 2011, interior designer Dorothy Stern investigates the Department of Interior Decoration at the University of Manitoba, where the first undergraduate program in interior decoration was implemented in 1938.

women's magazines played in shaping the Canadian interior. Cynthia Imogen Hammond's article "'I Weep for Us Women': Modernism, Feminism, and Suburbia in the Canadian Home Journal's Home '53 Design Competition," in *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970* (2012) uses the combination of text and image to dissect a cover of *Canadian Home Journal* with a feminist reading. While both of these works are set in the postwar period, the themes are similar to those still underway in the 1920s and 30s, and provide useful models for exploring the role of women using print media to spread important messages and gain visibility.

Methodology and Sources

As my thesis is a biographical case study on the contributions of Minerva Elliot, most of my research on Elliot and her profession draws from primary sources. Using a biographical approach is useful for this purpose as it sets a place and time, establishes a convincing protagonist to follow, and relates to the intimacy of the field. Interior decorating is centred on human interactions and connections with individuals' sense of taste. By looking at Minerva Elliot, I am able to understand the conversation occurring about interior design at this time. In addition, my thesis is revising the history of design in Canada, by drawing attention to the practice of interior decoration and to individuals who have been forgotten.

Penny Sparke's *Elsie De Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* (2005) is one example of an endeavour aimed to redress the profession of interior decoration and specifically the women who worked in this domain. Described as a "crucial mirror of popular culture," Sparke explains that interior decoration is "a touchstone of society's

public aspirations and private desires, a portrait of who we were at a particular moment.”¹⁴ Describing the difficulty of finding preserved documentation, Sparke comments: “Unless a museum or an archive makes a request for preservation, the items that provide insight into many decorators’ careers and lives – invoices, letters, journals, even cancelled checks – have been dispersed or discarded.”¹⁵ On a positive note, she notes that documentation does still get uncovered, which “[enables] scholars of design to correct past errors and misinterpretations – in short, to begin rewriting the history of interior decoration as we know it.”¹⁶ Using Sparke’s model, the biographical approach I am taking aims not only to revise the profession of interior decoration in Canada through the protagonist of Elliot, but to showcase how she utilized her professional status for independence. The association women had with the home made them excellent candidates for a career that kept them within the sphere of domesticity. However, in controlling their own environment, women were able to express their individuality.

In terms of practical methodology, this thesis draws mainly from primary sources accessed in the T. Eaton Company fonds at the Archives of Ontario (Toronto), and Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa) and the McGill University Archives (Montreal) for issues of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (between 1925 – 1939). These issues were used to demonstrate evidence of Elliot’s life and work at this time. Because archival holdings of Elliot’s life were never preserved, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* is an important record for capturing her existence.

¹⁴ Penny Sparke, *Elsie de Wolfe: The Birth of Modern Interior Decoration* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2005): 9.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 10.

While *Canadian Homes and Gardens* served to illustrate Elliot's career, her biographical information was uncovered using magazine and newspaper articles sourced from *McLean's Magazine*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Globe and Mail*. I also used the Genealogy Services at Library and Archives Canada to find census reports, and immigration, marriage, divorce, and death records. For instance, in Canadian census reports from 1901 and 1911, I found that Elliot (née Helps) was born in England to Canadian parents in 1887.¹⁷ She moved to Canada with her family in the first few years of her life. Known as "Minnie," she grew up in Toronto and worked in millinery. Marriage records indicate that she married in 1911.¹⁸ Her husband, Sidney Leonard Elliot, from Westmount, Montreal, worked as an inspector for the Canadian Pacific Railway.¹⁹ When asked how she became interested in a career in decoration, Elliot told *MacLean's Magazine*: "I think, perhaps, it was the experience of furnishing my own home after my marriage that gave me the idea that I might have some special ability."²⁰ As a young housewife, she decided to study the history of European architecture as well as furniture making in Montreal, because she had an "abundance of leisure and a tremendous store of unexpended energy and looked around for something interesting" with which to occupy her time.²¹

To capture a better picture of her collaborations, I conducted an interview with the granddaughter of one of Elliot's wealthy clients. I found Hallie Watson, an artist in Nova

¹⁷ *Census of Canada, 1911*, Series RG31-C-1, Statistics Canada Fonds, Microfilm reels T-20326 to T-20460, Library and Archives Canada.

¹⁸ *Registrations of Marriages, 1869-1928*; Series: MS932; Reel: 190, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Pringle, "Making A Business of Good Taste," 71.

²¹ Ibid.

Scotia, through her website. In a series entitled, “Objects and Meaning” (2006), Mrs. Watson painted items found in the home such as furniture and decorations. One such item, a gold lamp, was accompanied by a description that revealed it was inspired by her grandmother’s home, and of the woman who decorated it, Minerva Elliot.²² Hallie Watson used to visit her grandmother’s home in Toronto as a child, and had vivid memories of its layout and decoration. An oral history contributed to the intimacy of the subject of interior decoration. I could not talk to Elliot, but I was able to locate someone who walked in her spaces. This interview served to illustrate a component of interior decoration that *Canadian Homes and Gardens* could not.

Chapter Summaries

The structure of this thesis follows Minerva Elliot’s career through various spaces where interior decoration was negotiated, and where the foundation for the profession was rehearsed. My first chapter visits the department store and focuses on the T. Eaton Company in Toronto. I first explore Eaton’s House Furnishings Building on Queen Street and the opening of its College Street location as a point of departure for the increased fashionability of the interior. The College Street location operated an Interior Decorating Bureau that had to compete with independent decorators working outside of Eaton’s. The department store gave burgeoning professionals the opportunity to gain experience in the field of interior decoration. It also functioned as a site of edification and education, as Eaton’s gave lectures, published information pamphlets on different furniture styles, and continued its fashionable market for antiques and period furniture.

²² “Objects and Meaning,” 2006, *Hallie Watson*, <https://www.halliewatson.com/ObjectsandMeaning.aspx>.

My second and third chapters continue the conversation surrounding spaces of education by observing nodes of knowledge shared first in domestic advice manuals and later in the upscale decorating magazine, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. In Chapter Two, I observe Elliot's decorating advice published in the magazine. Chapter Three expands on Elliot's advice by analyzing the spaces she decorated and observing how she put her advice into practice. I also use my interview with Hallie Watson as a case study to investigate the collaboration between architect, decorator, and homeowner in creating a final unified project.

Collectively, these chapters consider those who contributed to the professionalization of interior decoration, and explore the home as a medium where identity is exhibited. Like the artistic media of painting, photography, and sculpture, the home, too, functions as an artistic arena where materials, skill, training, and creativity are combined to create a finished piece of art.

Chapter One

Selling and Consuming the Home: Eaton's House Furnishings Department and the Independent Decorator

In November 1924, Minerva Elliot submitted a letter to her manager in the House Furnishings department at the T. Eaton Company, Mr. Mathius: "Will you please accept my resignation from the house furnishing staff, to take place immediately. I have carefully looked after my old customers' interests and I feel sure you will find I have left everything in satisfactory order." Elliot seems to have abruptly cut her ties to Eaton's, where she had been working for the past two years. Her reasons for leaving included waiting "patiently for a decorating dep't [sic] of high standards to develop," one with which she would be "proud to be connected with." She added: "At present it is only a contract dep't [sic] selling merchandise...My ambition, my knowledge of my work compels me to find some way of belonging to a more dignified dep't [sic]. Much would result in raising the standards of all work in connection with it."²³

Elliot's resignation letter to Eaton's marked a significant shift in her career. From department store employee to, a year later, founder of her own decorating business, her departure also demonstrated an early desire for a set of standards to distinguish interior decorating as a reputable profession. But what was it about Eaton's decorating department that Elliot felt lacked the high standards she wanted to be associated with? And what skills did she develop over her three-year career working in department stores that led her to feel confident enough to leave?

²³ Minerva Elliot to Mr. Mathius, November 1, 1924, Eaton's Application Forms, File F229-167-0-158, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Using the department store as the first point of contact in tracking the professionalization of interior decoration, this chapter will focus on the way in which interior decoration was communicated and commodified at Eaton's retail emporium.²⁴ Eaton's early House Furnishings department utilized modern merchandising techniques to sell furniture and advice in home decoration. With their new upscale College Street location opening in 1930, Eaton's immense influence on Toronto society communicated the importance of a well-decorated home as a vehicle of identity expression. With College Street, Eaton's expanded its luxury market, which included introducing more period furnishings and antiques, the style *moderne*, and everything in between. In addition, Eaton's staff of "Company decorators" – interior decorators working in its Interior Decorating Bureau – had to compete with a growing number of independent decorating firms, such as Minerva Elliot Ltd. Eaton's tried to create a working relationship with "outside decorators" as a retailing tactic to increase sales of their furnishings. This further reveals not only the power that Eaton's wielded as an arbiter of taste, but the growing strength of independent decorators competing with Eaton's own decorating department. Elliot's reasons for leaving point to the belief that her skillset had surpassed that of an Eaton decorator.

The importance of the department store gave those interested in working in home decoration an opportunity to learn the fundamentals before launching their own independent practices. As this chapter will reveal, the modern department store became a site of education not only for the consumer but also for the professional, proving why

²⁴ Although this research focuses exclusively on the T. Eaton Company in Toronto, Eaton's rival Toronto department store, the Robert Simpson Company Ltd., would be an interesting study for future research.

department stores are so significant to the story of interior design in Canada. Eaton's sold furniture and antiques – everything, in fact, to be able to fashionably decorate and re-decorate any room in the house. And in addition, it sold knowledge by offering the services of an Eaton decorator.

Early Department Store House Furnishings and the Beginning of Taste Influence

Like many interior decorators of her time, Minerva Elliot began her career in the decorating department of large North American department stores.²⁵ In October 1920, she began her working relationship with the T. Eaton Company. She was engaged to the House Furnishings department and made \$30 a week.²⁶ According to Eaton's employment records, Elliot was laid off due to "staffing reductions" only a few months later, in January 1921. She was re-engaged in August 1922 after a short stint working as a "hostess" at John Wanamaker & Company in Philadelphia.²⁷ Elliot recounts that as a hostess at Wanamaker's, she was responsible for looking after a special collection, belonging to John Wanamaker himself, of fine porcelains, tapestries, old furniture and lacquers, worth between \$75,000 and \$250,000. Her duty was to explain this "assemblage of articles of [curio] to anyone interested."²⁸ Upon her return to Eaton's in 1922, she was promoted to a new salary of \$50 a week and given the task of doing all the American and

²⁵ For instance, American decorator Nancy Vincent McClelland began her career working at Wanamaker's in Philadelphia before opening her own business, Nancy McClelland, Inc. in New York City. In Toronto, before decorating independently, Freda James worked at Ridpath's, Emily Palmer at Eaton's, and Herbert Irvine began at Simpson's before moving to Eaton's.

²⁶ "Eaton Application Forms: Minerva Elliot," File: F229-167-0-158, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

²⁷ Elliot worked at Wanamaker's from June 27, 1921 until August 12, 1921. She was discharged because of a "reduction of force." See File: F229-167-0-158, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

²⁸ Elliot made \$25 a week at Wanamaker's. See Gertrude Pringle, "Making a Business of Good Taste," *McLean's Magazine*, 1926.

European buying for the department.²⁹ Elliot's journey from Toronto to Philadelphia and back – not to mention her frequent trips to Europe to acquire valuable collections for Eaton's, and later for her own firm – speaks not only to Elliot's venturesome spirit, but to the transnational sharing of design concepts. Historian Susan Haight explains that Eaton's, like other retail palaces such as Macy's in New York, Marshall Field's in Chicago and Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, "was committed to an enlarged definition of the functions of the department store that included the entertainment and education of the customer, as well as the centralized distribution of a diversity of products."³⁰

Eaton's engaged in the creation and commodification of fantasy. In her recent work, design historian Patricia Lara-Betancourt equates the model interior curated by British department stores as "displaying dreams." For instance, the fantasy of a better life "was a dream of abundance and beauty housed in buildings resembling palaces and populated with modern goods displayed in irresistible ways through the clever arrangement of glass, mirrors, light, color and interior design."³¹ The display of goods was deliberate in order to rouse a desire for a "beautiful and even luxurious way of life that shoppers could contemplate and vicariously inhabit in shop windows, galleries and model interiors."³² Better yet, historian William Leach suggests that the modern department store cut across class distinctions by selling goods at different price points.

²⁹ Pringle, "Making a Business of Good Taste," 71.

³⁰ Susan Haight, "Machines in Suburban Gardens: The 1936 T. Eaton Company Architectural Competition For House Designs," *Material History Review* 44 (Fall 1996): 24.

³¹ Patricia Lara-Betancourt, "Displaying Dreams: Model Interiors in British Department Stores, 1890-1914, in *Architectures of Display: Department Stores and Modern Retail*, edited by Anca I. Lasc, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Margaret Maile Petty (London & New York: Routledge, 2018): 31.

³² *Ibid*, 31.

This contributes to what Leach describes as the “democratization of desire”³³ and in Lara-Betancourt’s words, the “effort to democratize the dream of a better life, one originally inspired by the taste and wealth of the landed gentry.”³⁴

As far as Eaton’s is concerned, Susan Haight iterates that “services such as elegant restaurants and auditoriums helped blur the distinction between the store and other cultural attractions.”³⁵ The Eaton’s store on Queen Street had everything to satiate growing consumer culture, such as “clothes, shoes, hardware, furniture, toys, dishes, groceries – plus excellent service.”³⁶ There was also a “wig-cleaning and shaping service, wheelchairs for customers who needed them, guides for the blind and a shopping service that provided advice on purchasing clothes, gifts, party supplies – or anything else.”³⁷ The comparison between shopping and travelling is made by architectural historian Louisa Iarocci: “As the department store was constructed as a utopia, shopping was presented as its defining mode of travel, the means to fully participate in the economic and social co-operative of a modern world.”³⁸ Elliot frequently travelled abroad to bring home to Canada rare collectibles and antiques from the collections of French and British nobility, which she used to decorate her client’s homes. While visitors to Eaton’s could fantasize about living a cosmopolitan life (and could purchase a piece of that imagined

³³ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 3.

³⁴ Ibid, 38.

³⁵ Haight, “Machines in Suburban Gardens,” 24.

³⁶ Charis Cotter, *Toronto Between the Wars: Life in the City 1919-1939* (Richmond Hill: Firefly Books, 2004), 91.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Louisa Iarocci, *The Urban Department Store in America* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 7.

life), Elliot's travels generated souvenirs from specific collections, thereby adding to the aura of both Elliot as a person and to the antiques she imported.³⁹

In terms of retailing for the home, Eaton's had been in the business of selling furniture since the 1890s and house furnishings such as bedding, draperies, and carpets, since the 1870s.⁴⁰ In response to Eaton's success and economic growth, a new, eight-storey commercial building was built on the corner of Yonge and Albert Streets after founder Timothy Eaton's death in 1907, and was completed two years later.⁴¹ The store featured, among its many highlights, writing and rest rooms, which included a lavatory for women and a nursery, a telephone switchboard and telegraph department, and cold storage vaults for furs. Featured on the third floor was a furnished home decorated by Eaton's own workmen in an effort to show the "many ideas that can be put into use in any home."⁴² The inclusion of a furnished home demonstrated that Eaton's was interested and invested in selling home decorations and furniture, not merely selling the individual pieces but selling the ideas for decorating schemes to be adapted into a customer's own home. Indeed, integrating a furnished room or, more exceptionally, a fully furnished home, into the department store was hardly a new merchandising technique. Model showrooms had been used by American merchants as early as the 1880s.⁴³ For example, John Wanamaker's in New York opened the "House Palatial" in 1908, a twenty-four-

³⁹ I explore Elliot's travels further in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Cynthia Wright, "'The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto': Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920-1950" (Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1993), 151.

⁴¹ Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton's: The Trans-Canada Store* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 91.

⁴² "Facts Concerning A Great Store," T. Eaton Company, September 1909, File: F2299-162-0-1535, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁴³ Leach, *Land of Desire*, 80. Although Leach writes of American department stores and uses American examples, I believe these are still relevant in a Canadian context.

room “real” home covering two stories “right in the heart” of Wanamaker’s store.⁴⁴

Leach describes that “Complete assemblings of furniture, drapery, and art taken from departments throughout the store were set up in every room to give the public the most up-to-date standards of decorative ‘taste and beauty’.”⁴⁵

Demonstrating its devoted interest in home furnishings, in 1913, a ten-storey building was added to the annex block on the corner of James and Albert Streets, known as the Eaton’s House Furnishings Annex.⁴⁶ The retailer announced in the *Eaton’s Daily Store News* in January 1913 that the new building would contain a basement and five floors of furniture “for any room in the house.”⁴⁷ Eaton’s House Furnishings Building is advertised in a 1920 brochure:

Though you may not be one of the fortunates who can renew all their furnishings at once, though you may concentrate on the living room one year, on the bedroom the next – though your ambitions may not even rise to the refurnishing of a whole room, at any one time, and hesitate between the advisability of getting new curtains or a new carpet, you’ll find a journey through the House Furnishings Building a most fascinating progress.⁴⁸

The building’s six levels were dominated by the display of merchandise for the home: “carpets, draperies, wallpapers, paints, pictures, furniture and electric fixtures, brought from the four corners of the earth...”⁴⁹ An emphasis on the allure of “new” goods was promoted: “just a casual walk around will show you much that is new and interesting – new designs in furniture, new materials for draperies, new weaves and patterns in floor

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 81. For more on the inclusion of furnished homes into the department store, see Susan Haight’s recent work in *Architectures of Display: Department Stores and Modern Retail* (2018).

⁴⁶ Kopytek, *Eaton’s: The Trans-Canada Store*, 91.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “The Store and Some of its Manifold Interests,” T. Eaton Company, August 1920, File: F2299-162-0-1535, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

coverings and wallpapers, in lamp shades and fixtures, and new methods of using them.”⁵⁰ However, to appeal to varying tastes, and arguably the dominating taste in interwar Toronto, the department advised that “if you prefer to be conservative, you may choose reproductions of the olden time at prices that in view of the universally increased cost are strikingly moderate.”⁵¹

This last point is especially useful for the purposes of interior decoration. To equate conservatism to a preference for antiques is particularly telling. Patricia Lara-Betancourt explains that although “inspired by the past, period rooms and their furnishings were promoted and sold as modern.” Furnishing the modern home using historical styles became popular in the 1880s through to the 1920s.⁵² “Not everybody had the means to collect antiques, but department stores shaped and nurtured a much wider audience and market for modern reproductions.”⁵³

In 1923, Eaton’s opened their “Fifth Floor Galleries,” a retail space specializing in “antiques and reproductions of period furniture styles, as well as all kinds of outside contract work, covering all branches of this business, such as draperies, floor coverings, etc” (Figure 1.1). R.M. Slimon, who later became an independent interior decorator, was appointed superintendent of the department.⁵⁴ As a response to the success of the Fifth Floor Galleries, Eaton’s made a bold statement by opening their College Street location

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Patricia Lara-Betancourt, “Displaying Dreams: Model Interiors in British Department Stores, 1890-1914, in *Architectures of Display: Department Stores and Modern Retail*, edited by Anca I. Lasc, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Margaret Maile Petty (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), 40.

⁵³ Ibid. Modern rooms furnished in period styles were also used to educate the public at national and international exhibitions. In Toronto, Eaton’s exhibited furnished period rooms at the Canadian National Exhibition.

⁵⁴ *Canadian Furniture Maker and the Undertaker*, June 1923.

in November 1930. With its new, upscale College Street store, Eaton's declared the importance of house furnishings, and responded to the increasing fashionability of the interior. Eaton's College Street provided a new, well-decorated space for the continuation of its retail empire, and the growth of its House Furnishings department. In addition, Eaton's moving their House Furnishings building from its Annex location to College Street was staking something on the furniture trade. The selling of antiques and tasteful environments were all part of the edification and education of the customer. Having an expert in the field of antiques and period furniture reinforced and expanded the company's cultural capital, whereas building Eaton's College Street indicated great economic capital. And in her role as department store employee and later as an independent decorator, Minerva Elliot represented the mutually reinforcing stratas of both economic and cultural capital.

Eaton's College Street: The House Furnishings Department

The construction of Eaton College Street was originally meant as a multi-stage process, but only the first phase, that is, the first seven stories of the north-east corner of the block that was meant to house a massive skyscraper were ever developed (Figure 1.2).⁵⁵

Minerva Elliot was already developing her own interior decorating business at the time that Eaton's opened its prestigious College Street store, which was largely devoted to home furnishings. The new store targeted an upper-middle class clientele, whereas the old Furniture Building turned into the "Eaton Annex" and sold more economical items

⁵⁵ Many factors contributed to this, among them were the effects of the Great Depression. See Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto," 119.

targeting working-class consumers.⁵⁶ The College Street store represented a bold statement in the commodification of the interior, reinforcing the link between fashion and furniture. Like clothing, furniture was framed as a vehicle for expressing identity – an identity that could evolve and change over time. With College Street’s House Furnishings department, Eaton’s was trying to compete with its rival, Simpson’s, as *the* place for advice and furniture for the home. Historian Cynthia Wright reveals, “Of the two main Toronto department stores, Eaton’s and Simpson’s, it was Eaton’s College Street which was the leader in setting taste in interiors,” due in large part to its economic power.⁵⁷

The opening of College Street was covered with enthusiasm by Toronto magazine *House Furnishings*, a publication aimed at furniture retailers concerned with effective merchandising techniques for successfully selling furnishings for the home. After describing the various features of the new store and its departments, the writer notes:

But the piece de resistance of the whole store to the woman who aims at the unusual in furnishing her home, will be the fifth floor, where she will find a number of period rooms furnished according to their time and ideals...the Eaton Company have reproduced such rooms as the library of King Charles in St. John’s College at Oxford, an English oak room from the Albert and Victoria Museum, a room from Clifford Inn of the William and Mary period, Mary Antoinette’s boudoir, a Louis XVI Room, a French Canadian Room, a French Provincial Room, etc.⁵⁸

A month later, the same magazine wrote an article praising the display fixtures Eaton’s featured in its House Furnishings departments. The furniture department on the main floor (Figure 1.3) and the drapery department (Figure 1.4) showcase the sheer size of the

⁵⁶ Susan Haight, “Home economies: The T. Eaton Company’s Thrift House, 1926-1950,” in *Architectures of Display: Department Stores and Modern Retail*, edited by Anca I. Lasc, Patricia Lara-Betancourt, and Margaret Maile Petty (London & New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁵⁷ Wright, “The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto,” 152.

⁵⁸ “Eaton’s New House Furnishings Store,” *House Furnishings*, November 1930, 15, File: F229-162-0-334, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

store devoted to furnishings. The items were displayed in a manner similar to a window display:

Eaton's have not neglected in any particular the showing of merchandise. They appear to believe that goods well displayed are half sold because, to the casual visitor, it is apparent that a great deal more effort has been put into the displaying of goods than into the actual selling of them. One can walk through any department in this gigantic store and examine carefully any of the merchandise displayed without hearing that old familiar question, 'Can I help you?' Salesmen are in evidence in every department ready to take care of one's requirements, but customers must first appear to be interested from a buying standpoint before they are approached.⁵⁹

Returning to what Lara-Betancourt described as "displaying dreams," Eaton's successfully demonstrated this exhibition of "dreams" – yet only a dream for those without the means to purchase. Evidently, College Street was targeting the bourgeoisie of Toronto, yet allowed others to desire its imagined interiors.

Indeed, as a taste influencer, Eaton's encouraged its salespeople not only to sell, but to be knowledgeable about the most fashionable items. For example, in a 1933 edition of *Contacts*, a monthly publication by the T. Eaton Co. of Winnipeg, a feature entitled "Selling Up!" recounts an occasion when a salesperson in its House Furnishings department successfully upsold a customer:

Customer was inquiring for a bridge lamp with wooden standard and fringed shade priced about \$10.00. Realizing that this type of lamp is now *passe*, Salesman Ed. Adey tactfully explained the fact to his customer, who thanked him, and under Mr. Adey's guidance purchased a handsome, modern metal standard with tailored silk shade to match. Sale value \$21.84. Result – a real service to the customer and increased business for the Store.⁶⁰

This anecdote also illustrates the parallel between two distinctive styles of decoration: embracing modern or *moderne* – well-described as the lamp with "modern metal

⁵⁹ "Display Fixtures Invade Furnishing Departments at Eaton's College Street," *House Furnishings*, December 1930, 10. File: F229-162-0-334, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁶⁰ *Contacts* 2 no. 7 (1933): 8, File: F229-162-0-655, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

standard” – and the traditional, historic, or what some call the “Antique movement.”⁶¹ It is important to note that both furniture styles are “modern.” As Lara-Betancourt elucidates, “The strong grip of history on modern furnishing and decoration is partly explained by the anxiety many people experienced around change and modernization, prompting them to look to the past for reassurance. It seemed that the stronger the wave of modernity and transformation, the bigger the appeal of history and tradition.”⁶²

Eaton’s “Galleries of Antiques and Reproductions” at College Street (previously referred to as the “Fifth Floor Galleries” at the Queen Street store) responded to this desire for past styles.⁶³ There’s “an intangible charm about old furniture,” describes an advertising brochure for the department. “You may like Sheraton better than Queen Anne. You may adore old oak and despise mahogany. You may prefer walnut to either. But you’ll recognize that each has its special fascination – the quaint design, the inimitable, mellow tints of old and much polished wood.”⁶⁴ To help its customers become acquainted with the various periods and styles from which its antiques derive, Eaton’s published small brochures along with its promotional material. For example, in one, there contains a timeline of the different styles of chairs from years 1545 to 1795 (Figure 1.5). This contributed to Eaton’s motive to educate its clients. If consumers understand the history of design, the logic went, they could come to appreciate the value of antiques. In another advertisement illustrating the “romance” that imbues antiques, the company

⁶¹ Lara-Betancourt, “Displaying Dreams,” 41.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ It’s important to note that Eaton’s was among the first retailers to incorporate *moderne*, though it was not as well-received in Toronto at this time. Cynthia Wright discusses this matter further in Chapter 5 of “The Most Prominent Rendezvous for the Feminine Toronto.”

⁶⁴ Undated pamphlet for “Antiques and Reproductions,” T. Eaton Company, File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

wrote, “No wonder there is an allure in the quest of antiques – of old furniture, old silver, old treasures – that bring the romance of past centuries into our practical modern homes.”⁶⁵

In the years after College Street’s opening, efforts for Eaton’s Interior Decorators to become more specialized in the field of antiques and period furniture became an important issue for J. J. Vaughan, a senior manager in the Executive Office. In January 1933, he sent a memo to O.D. Vaughan of the House Furnishing Merchandise Office with the suggestion that they have their interior decorators “specialize” in the sale of pieces from the furniture and period furniture departments that they want to “dispose of”: “A special commission might be given as an inducement.”⁶⁶ In response to Vaughan’s suggestion decorators received 4% for selling period furniture instead of 1% on all other furniture. In the same correspondence, Vaughan also indicated that this commission percentage could be increased to 10% if the period furniture were sold at full price.⁶⁷ A few months later, J. J. Vaughan anxiously asked O. D. Vaughan if their Interior Decorators were “doing everything possible” to sell period furniture, with a suggestion that Mr. E. Ashby, the Manager of the Antiques and Reproductions department, assist.

The recent rise in the stock market may put people who are interested in this class of merchandise in a better frame for buying. Should Mr. Ashby keep in touch with work in progress and go to some of the houses with the Interior Decorators with a view to placing some antique pieces where they will fit in with the general scheme of decorating or furnishing? A description of the furniture from Mr.

⁶⁵ “Antiques from the 16th to the 18th century,” undated, File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁶⁶ J.J. Vaughan to O.D. Vaughan, January, 1933, File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁶⁷ O.D. Vaughan to J.J. Vaughan, January, 1933, File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Ashby should make a greater impression on the customer than merely a suggestion from a Decorator, who would not have the same selling story.⁶⁸

This point was brought up again in 1936 when O. D. Vaughan wrote a memo to H. G. Baggs, the Manager of Special Furniture, revealing that the reason their salesmen do not sell more furniture out of the Antique department “where there is a premium commission,” is because they “feel they know too little about the merchandise.”⁶⁹ This is an important revelation as many independent decorators working on their own, such as Minerva Elliot, dealt in the expertise of retailing antiques and imported furniture. The strength of an independent decorator versus an Eaton’s decorator – as evidenced above – lay in their specialized knowledge of furniture periods. Is this what Elliot was referring to in her resignation letter when she wrote, “My ambition, my knowledge of my work compels me to find some way of belonging to a more dignified dep’t [sic]”? Later that year, and in an effort to bolster the Antiques and Fine Art Galleries, which had been suffering “by reason of the people interested in lines of this kind having suffered through losses in the stock market,” the department decided to mail a small pamphlet to prospective customers. 6,000 pamphlets were issued to those “people likely to be interested” in the furniture from the Gallery of Antiques and Reproductions.⁷⁰ The pamphlet highlighted the features of their Fine Art Galleries and their Interior Decorating Bureau (Figure 1.6). In advertising their Bureau, they write, “Our Interior Decorating

⁶⁸ JJ Vaughan to OD Vaughan, May 5, 1933, File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁶⁹ OD Vaughan to HG Baggs, May 27, 1936, File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁷⁰ It is unknown who the recipients were or how Eaton’s selected them. Perhaps they had previously purchased items or used the services of the Interior Decoration Bureau; or, they were distributed throughout upscale Toronto neighborhoods such as Forest Hill, Moore Park, and Rosedale.

Bureau is clever at interpreting the eighteenth century vogue in modern terms and in designing rooms that are pleasant, distinguished, supremely comfortable to live in, whether you choose the modern or a period style.”⁷¹

“Outside Decorators”: Eaton’s Deposit Accounts for Professional Decorators

Beginning in 1932, Eaton’s proposed to pay independent decorators a 10% commission when they purchased Eaton’s House Furnishings items for their clients. The argument in favour was to compete with other Toronto stores, such as the Robert Simpson Company and furniture retailers like the Barker Brothers and Adams Furniture Co., which were pursuing similar commission programs with outside decorators. In the past, when decorators and architects were denied a discount on certain purchases, Eaton’s lost their cooperation.⁷² In a letter to J.G. McKee in the Merchandise Office, W.J. Kernohan from House Furnishings wrote, “We feel that we have as fine a selection of merchandise as can be found anywhere and by allowing these people 10% we would get a fair percentage of their business and at the same time make contacts for the Company as a whole.”⁷³ Kernohan believed that by paying the commission directly to the outside decorator, Eaton’s would be adding these decorators to its “staff in an indirect way.”⁷⁴

After a meeting on September 14th, 1932, where this matter was discussed, executives in the Merchandise Office proposed to open Deposit Accounts (known as “D.A.”) for each outside decorator. D.A. accounts were an important element of the

⁷¹ Pamphlet sent to Eaton’s customers, December 1936. File: H27 - Imported & Period Furniture, 1927-1939, B294455, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁷² W. J. Kernohan to J.G. McKee, September 13, 1932, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

company's economic strategy for the autonomy and convenience it allowed. Customers would leave a deposit with Eaton's and receive an account number.⁷⁵ When shopping, they did not have to handle money but simply charged their purchases to their Deposit Account.⁷⁶ For outside decorators, it meant that when they purchased for their clients, it would be charged to their D.A. account. The Department Head would then put through a merchandise voucher, for the amount of the allowance, crediting the D.A. and charging the department's merchandise at cost.⁷⁷ J.J. Vaughan suggested to allow 10% for draperies, curtains, window shades, wallpaper, pictures, electrical, chinaware, and antiques. 5% would be given on furniture, rugs, and carpets.⁷⁸

At this time, a list of seven Interior Decorators working in Toronto were suggested as being "likely to avail themselves of this privilege." Included on this prestigious list were R.M. Slimon, Ann Harris, Jane Moffatt, Augusta Fleming, Burns Studio, Stanley Sowden, and Minerva Elliot. The Manager of the Draperies department, G.M. Roberts, visited each decorator to inquire about their feelings regarding the commission program. Some decorators, such as Jane Moffatt, Anne Harris, and Augusta Fleming, were friendly towards the idea and considered the commission an incentive to purchase more at Eaton's. Others were not so well-inclined. For example, the husband and wife team at Burns Studio were reported to be "distinctly anti-Eaton in their attitude," and regarded the T. Eaton Co. as their "strongest competitors, and it would be

⁷⁵ Deposit Accounts and other types of payment programs has been examined by Cynthia Wright in Chapter 3 of "A Prominent Rendezvous for the Feminine Toronto."

⁷⁶ "Facts Concerning A Great Store" published by the T. Eaton Company in September 1909, File: F2299-162-0-1535, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁷⁷ JJ Vaughan to W. J. Kernohan, September 14, 1932, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

unwise for them to make purchases from [Eaton's], or bring clients to the store.”⁷⁹

Another, Mr. Stanley Sowden, regarded his business as “the most exclusive one in Toronto, and he would not care to let his clients know that any merchandise was, or could be, procured from the T. Eaton Company.” Those who did not respond well to the idea of the commission program were quickly eliminated from the list.⁸⁰ In the case of architects receiving a similar allowance, it would be addressed on a case-by-case basis handled by the Interior Decorating Bureau.⁸¹

As indicated above, those allowed to receive the special commission were heavily vetted. For example, after one man applied to receive the discount, further inquiries revealed that he was a builder and “in no way connected with the Interior Decorating profession.”⁸² He was, of course, denied the commission. Those considered for inclusion were more highly regarded if they had decorating experience and workrooms to show. In a 1935 memo from the House Furnishing Merchandise Office to James Browne, Manager of the Wallpaper department, O.D. Vaughan suggested the inclusion of a Mrs. Palmer to the list, as she previously worked in Eaton's Decorating Bureau and was now operating her own Interior Decorating practice in Toronto.⁸³ R. M. Slimon was previously superintendent of the “Fifth Floor Galleries” at Eaton's Queen Street location, and

⁷⁹ G. M. Roberts to W. J. Kernohan, September 27, 1932, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁸⁰ Unfortunately, there is no written record of what G.M. Roberts found on his visit to Minerva Elliot's. He did make a visit to see her, but none of his notes on this visit were found in this file.

⁸¹ JJ Vaughan to W. J. Kernohan, September 14, 1932, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁸² G.M. Roberts to W. J. Kernohan, November 10, 1934, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁸³ Similarly, when a Mr. Leonard B. Briard applied for the commission, it was reported that “This gentleman, before starting in business for himself, was, apparently, in charge of the Studios at The Robert Simpson Company.” In OD Vaughan to James Browne, February 20, 1935, RE: Interior Decorators Outside our Firm, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Minerva Elliot, as we know, had previous decorating experience from Eaton's and Wanamaker's.

The program did not attain the success desired, and it was short-lived. From November 1933 to May 1935 inclusive, Minerva Elliot made \$50.57 in commission, next to R.M. Slimon's \$503.94, Ann Harris' \$144.95, and Ridpath's Ltd's \$123.04.⁸⁴ From October 1932 to September 1936, the decorators had collectively spent \$61,363.21 (\$1,074,265.26 in 2017) on Eaton's House Furnishings items.⁸⁵ Many of the decorators who had been accepted to the program were cut because they were not spending enough money in order to qualify for a commission. There was also the issue of Eaton's own decorating staff feeling like their business was being taken away by the outside decorators. In one case, outside decorator Rose Swartz was informing her clients that they could receive her discount if they purchased items at Eaton's on their own. In response, W. J. Kernohan wrote to her:

The T. Eaton Company maintain a staff of skilled Interior Decorators who have built up a wide clientele. When an Eaton decorator selects furniture or housefurnishings that prove suitable to a client it is understood the client will place her order with the Eaton decorator. On the other hand, if the client should decide to place her order with a decorator not engaged by the Company no commission will be paid to this decorator on the transaction. In the event that the Eaton Decorator is unable to satisfy the client and she seeks assistance from another decorator not employed by the Company, who selects furniture or housefurnishings suitable to the client's taste, a commission will be paid to this decorator providing it may be proved that the merchandise selected by the Eaton Decorator was unsuitable while that selected by the other decorator was entirely satisfactory. This will explain the attitude taken by the T. Eaton Company toward its own decorators and those not connected with the organization.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ "Report of the Sub-Committee of the House Furnishings Committee," May 3, 1935, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

⁸⁵ "Outside Interior Decorators' Sales," File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto. The amount of \$61,363.21 equals \$1,074,265.26 in 2017. *Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator*, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>.

⁸⁶ W. J. Kernohan to Miss Rose Swartz, 1933, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Both pressure from the Interior Decorating Bureau and concerns about the outside decorator commission program not making enough of a financial contribution prompted the creation of the Sub-Committee of the House Furnishings Committee in May 1935. The Sub-Committee released a report recommending an end to the commission program for outside decorators: “This Company’s own staff of interior decorators feel that they are up against unfair competition in that the independents can operate in Eaton’s on the same basis as themselves and in addition can sell the client from any other store or factory as well. If there has been a conflict between an independent and an Eaton Interior Decorator the latter is invariably the one forced to withdraw.”⁸⁷

At this time, Eaton’s employed thirteen decorators in their Interior Decorating Bureau, compared to the approximately twenty outside decorators. The Sub-Committee’s report highlighted the desire to focus more on their own Decorators rather than giving privileges to decorators working in competition to Eaton’s. “It is not wise for the firm to encourage competition against itself by allowing independent interior decorators to sell at our prices, from our varieties, and at our qualities, on an equal basis with our departments and our salesmen.” And, “In some instances the customers must feel, when approached by the independent interior decorator, that Eaton’s should have their own interior decorators in whom they place the fullest confidence and the subsidizing of independents acknowledges that these independents are their equal.” The Report recommended retaining only six independent decorators because “they have been in business for some time and are recognized as the better ones in the profession along with the Robert

⁸⁷ “Report of the Sub-Committee of the House Furnishings Committee appointed to enquire into the workings of the Commission System for the Independent Interior Decorators,” May 3, 1935, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Simpson Company and Thornton-Smith Company. Offices are maintained.”⁸⁸ Those included Minerva Elliot, R.M. Slimon, Ann Harris, Augusta Fleming, Jane Moffatt, and Ridpaths Ltd.

The question of discontinuing the commission program was still being discussed into May 1936. In a letter to O.D. Vaughan, J. Browne explains that he and Mr. Simpson called on the various interior decorators to explain that “unless there is more business obtained from the 10% allowance the Company feels it is not worth while carrying on with the allowance.”

In most cases it would appear, from our conversation with these people, that they do not care whether or not they receive the 10% allowance, since they purchase from us only the things they cannot get elsewhere and we are merely a convenience for any small thing they require. As far as the large business is concerned, the general feeling is that they are as big as Eaton’s and can buy wholesale as well as can Eaton’s.⁸⁹

Though the DA program was ultimately deemed unsuccessful, it illustrates how professional interior decoration developed and grew independently from the strength of the department store. In the 1930s, Eaton’s evidently tried to negotiate this relationship by firstly supporting decorators working on their own, then by trying to exclusively support its own, employed decorators.

Despite Elliot’s pointed resignation letter, she did not leave with a bad taste regarding Eaton’s. Upon leaving, she wrote, “I wish it clearly understood I leave with the most pleasant feelings regarding the T. Eaton Co. and the high officials I have known and met. I feel the greatest admiration and warm regard as I have always found them

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ J. Browne to O.D. Vaughan, May 1936, File: Outside Interior Decorators, 1931-1943, B294478, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

courteous and most considerate in every way.”⁹⁰ Though Elliot launched her own decorating practice in 1925, she felt comfort in Eaton’s reputation and saw the importance of the department store for the profession of interior decoration. The relationship she maintained with Eaton’s allowed it to secure her patronage, and gave Elliot an opportunity to procure Eaton furnishings at a discount. Eaton’s desire to associate itself with the established decorators and decorating firms in Toronto demonstrates not only its initiative to produce more sales in its House Furnishing department, but acknowledges the growing number of independent interior decorators who were able to maintain their businesses working outside of the department store.

For the history of interior decoration, the department store provides a key space where the interior was communicated and commodified. The interior, in its entirety – from furnishings and trimmings to paint and wallpaper – could be purchased. The influence of the department store also enabled individuals to become proficient in the business of selling interiors, allowing many former department store employees to launch their own decorating businesses afterwards. Eaton’s utilized its selling and non-selling spaces, such as public lectures, to educate its visitors about the many modern identities – whether conservative or *moderne* – that could be incorporated into the home. Eaton’s maintained its dominance not only with its built space, but with its printed brochures and advertisements, making it more than just a store with an address but a complete entity emanating authority. As the site of education, commerce, fantasy projection, and dreams, Eaton’s provided a launchpad for interior decorators to create their own networks. In my

⁹⁰ Minerva Elliot to Mr. Mathius, November 1, 1924, Eaton’s Application Forms, File F229-167-0-158, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

next chapter, I will look at another site of education to further the story of interior decoration: the decorating magazine.

Chapter Two

Creating the Expert: Advice and Advertising in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*

“A home of the past centuries in Europe was built with the intention of keeping it a permanent home for [a] family for generations,” writes Minerva Elliot in the February 1928 issue of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. “The home was a place of joy and sorrow, birth and death, insignificant routine and great moments. The whole pageant of life was encompassed.” Her article, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” observes the tension between adhering to traditional decoration – that of period furnishings and antiques – and infusing the home with *art moderne*. In addition, Elliot perceived a crisis in the home which could be solved with interior decoration: “No longer is the home the focal-point for the family’s activities. Movies, theatres, concerts, clubs, cabarets, even the churches, offer amusement or interest with which the home has been compelled to compete. Motor cars have annihilated distance so efficiently, that now it is almost less bother to go out than it is to spend the evening *chez nous*. With such insistent competition from outside, the home has to take thought and make itself doubly attractive if it would be more than a mere roof.”⁹¹

As her writing indicates, Elliot was protective of the home. Products of modernity, such as the development of public spaces for entertainment and rapid modes of transportation, challenged the function of the home. The home journal, however, helped to narrate the complexities of modernity by offering a space for discussion. Elliot contributed to the popular upscale decorating magazine, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*

⁹¹ Minerva Elliot, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1928, 32.

(hereafter *CHG*), in multiple ways. She wrote columns on the subject of interior decoration, regularly had the expensive homes she decorated photographed for the magazine – including her own – and used the magazine venue to publish advertisements for her decorating business.

As a modern tool for communicating ideas and images, magazines such as *CHG* helped to introduce and familiarize its readers with *moderne* design. The modern magazine – itself a product of modernity – offers a view into how concepts of modern life were defined and discussed. *CHG* was a prime vehicle for interior decoration advice, and an important forum for furthering the role of the interior decorator, as it reinforced the expertise of architects, horticulturalists, and decorators.⁹² Design historians Jeremy Aynsley and Francesca Berry explain, “Out of a new genre of publication, modern professional roles for men and, increasingly, for women emerged— those of the interior designer and the design journalist.”⁹³ The developing profession of interior decoration was able to gain traction through the mobility of the magazine medium, a foundation first laid by the domestic advice manuals published by British and American home economists.

This chapter will explore the space(s) of *CHG* for the advancement of a decorator’s agenda by focusing on Elliot’s columns from 1925 to 1939. *CHG*, like most popular magazines, depended on the broad participation of experts and authorities in

⁹² As the name suggests, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* featured the best of Canadian homes and gardens, which the magazine paid equal attention to. The subject of professional gardening in this time period is a rich topic that deserves its own thesis. Because of the space limitations of this research, only the subject of interior decoration will be explored; however, research into the history and culture of domestic horticulture in Canada is one that still needs to be done.

⁹³ Jeremy Aynsley and Francesca Berry, “Publishing the Modern Home: Magazines and the Domestic Interior 1870–1965,” *Journal of Design History* vol 18 no. 1 (2005): 5.

order to be a legitimate forum of discourse. One example of this was *CHG*'s implementation of a "Would You Like to Know?" section to answer readers' queries, suggesting a kind of public entry into the intimacy of the private interior. Magazines provided a space of discourse in which all parties involved relied on each other to create and perpetuate certain values. *CHG* offered space for department stores and independent decorating firms to advertise their expertise. Like Eaton's, *CHG* projected a "fantasy" for readers who did not live in upper-middle-class homes nor could hire a professional decorator. The pages of the magazine allowed for messages to be disseminated across the country, such as contradictory views on the implementation of *moderne* in the home or the function of an interior decorator. Within the pages of *CHG*, the combination of photographs, text, and advertisements created a forum where ideas and trends could be shared, observed, emulated, and debated.

Canadian Homes and Gardens

In October 1925, the MacLean Publishing Company purchased *Canadian Homes and Gardens* from W. Rupert Davies, a Canadian businessman and editor. Davies, after publishing two issues of his version of the magazine, changed course by purchasing a daily newspaper entitled *The British Whig* from Kingston, Ontario, and disposing of his "original enterprise."⁹⁴ The new Managing Editor of the MacLean enterprise, J. Herbert Hodgins, wrote in its inaugural issue:

Frankly, it is a joy to take up the work of Canadian Homes and Gardens where Mr. Davies left off; to help mould and to participate in the month-to-month programme of home and garden planning which the MacLean organization has in mind. It is a pleasure to be surrounded by a corps of technicians in architecture, interior decoration, landscape and horticulture – experts who will bring to our

⁹⁴ J. Herbert Hodgins, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1925, 9.

reader-family the inspiration and counsel so invariably helpful in artistic home creation and development.⁹⁵

Following the MacLean Publishing Company's successful general interest publication, *Maclean's* (1911-), and preceding *Mayfair* (1927-1959) and *Chatelaine* (1928-), *CHG* responded to a growing interest in horticulture, home planning, building, and decoration, and was marketed to white upper-middle class women. *Canadian Home Journal* (1905-1958) and the short-lived *Everywoman's World* (1914-22) were the only other English-language Canadian women's magazines outside of the MacLean empire.⁹⁶

"Go where you will in the Dominion," writes Hodgins, "you will find increasing evidence that Canada is a nation of home lovers." Hodgins highlights the "exclusive residential areas of every important urban centre" – which demonstrates the type of residence the magazine both aimed to represent as a model, and the type of readership the magazine aimed to reach: "Vancouver has its Shaughnessy Heights; Winnipeg its Fort Rouge and River Heights; Toronto its Rosedale, Moore Park, Forest Hill and Lawrence Park; Montreal, its Westmount and Senneville; Quebec its Grand Allee; St John its Mount Pleasant; Halifax its North Arm."⁹⁷ Indeed, throughout the interwar period, the homes from these regions dominated the pages of *CHG*. The mission of the magazine, as reported by Hodgins, was to represent the beautiful Canadian home. "It should be part of our national pride and ambition to develop a distinctive Canadian home," comments Hodgins in the inaugural issue. "A nation progresses proportionately as it develops culturally. Canada has developed its literature, its music, its art in measurable degree. It

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Valerie J. Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 33.

⁹⁷ J. Herbert Hodgins, "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1925, 9.

follows that we should feel impelled to develop the art of the home, the architecture, the setting, the appointing.”⁹⁸

The desire for a distinctly “Canadian” home magazine emerged in an effort to compete with American periodicals. As historian Valerie Korinek explains, “Canadian readers of women’s magazines had to content themselves with the American and, less frequently, the British products until 1905” – the year *The Canadian Home Journal* was founded.⁹⁹ After *CHG*’s issue, enthusiastic response, including from its original editor, Rupert Davies, made its way back to Hodgins. A Toronto reader wrote in to express that with their October issue, *CHG* have “put the magazine into a class by itself among Canadian publications, where comparisons with similar periodicals in the United States can be made without the slightest fear of an unfavorable verdict.”¹⁰⁰ A reader from Montreal wrote, “I do not recall ever having had the pleasure of looking over a magazine produced in Canada and of Canada that impressed me so much, both in mechanical perfection and in editorial content.”¹⁰¹ Hodgins even wrote of a Toronto financier who, when walking down Hastings Street in Vancouver, saw a copy of the October issue displayed in a bookshop. He purchased it because its attractiveness made him think it was an imported magazine. When he discovered it was a Canadian publication with Canadian

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Valerie J. Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ J. Herbert Hodgins, “Editor’s Note,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, November 1925, np.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

content, he was surprisingly pleased.¹⁰² Hodgins termed the positive feedback received by Canadians a “patriotic reaction.”¹⁰³

Domestic Advice for the Home

Women’s magazines are part of a field of published advice literature that also encompasses the writings of nineteenth-century home economists and reformers. With the foundation already laid by women such as Catharine Beecher, Eustella White Beecher, Christine Frederick, and Edith Wharton, for example, a figure such as Minerva Elliot could offer advice on home decoration to an eager audience already prepared for receiving guidance. Household science, also known as domestic science or home economics, created a discipline that communicated the importance of the home and its beautification. As architectural historian Annmarie Adams explains, “[t]he invention of the new field of domestic science was part of a broader program to employ women in the late nineteenth century.” Furthermore, household science “was not threatening: women studying it did not put men out of work...its subject matter seemed restricted to women’s traditional work within the home: cooking, cleaning, and caring for the sick. Even the new field of hygiene...was considered a woman’s version of science.”¹⁰⁴ In relation to interior decoration, Adams explains: “As women gained more and more recognition and confidence in design through their management of the home by ‘scientific’ principles,

¹⁰² J. Herbert Hodgins, “Editor’s Note,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1925, 9.

¹⁰³ It is important to note that this evidence of “patriotic” success is coming from the journal itself. Hodgins’ writing clearly favors positive reactions while instances of negative reactions – if any – are not documented. J. Herbert Hodgins, “Editor’s Note,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1925, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Annmarie Adams, “Female Regulation of the Healthy Home,” in *Home, Work, and Play: Situating Canadian Social History, 1840-1980*, eds. James Opp and John C. Walsh (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12.

they, like the physicians, were seen by an anxious public as alternative ‘designers’ of domestic environments.”¹⁰⁵

“There is a RIGHT way of doing everything – however simple – which, if conscientiously followed, will insure satisfactory results,” writes American home economist Eustella Beecher, in *Motherly Talks – The Home: How to Make and Keep It* (1883). “There is a WRONG way, which, if persisted in, will insure failure. And the right way is always the easier.”¹⁰⁶ The commanding language employed by Beecher exemplifies her position as a household “expert,” and is one that is shared by her contemporaries. She suggests practical advice for the proper upkeep of the home, focusing on the housework and household management steeped in Christian moralistic values – fragments of the Victorian era characterized by behaviour adhering to values of decency, domesticity, and cleanliness.

The influx of domestic science manuals for household management in the nineteenth century allowed for the idea of “home management” to become a profession, and therefore a subject to be trained in. Those championing the cause “made the point that a woman’s virtue and worth can be found in the way she furnishes her home,” explains historian Sarah A. Leavitt. “Advisors saw instructions on the arrangement of the furniture and the types of wood used in the parlor not only as aesthetic concerns, but as symbols of honesty, faith, and good judgment.”¹⁰⁷ With this, the relationship between

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Eustella White Beecher (Bullard), *Motherly Talks – The Home: How to Make and Keep It* (Minneapolis: Buckeye Publishing Co., 1883), np.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catherine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 9.

home economics and interior decoration is evident.¹⁰⁸ For instance, in *The American Woman's Home* (1869), American home economists Beecher and Stowe describe the necessity of incorporating beauty into the home:

For while the aesthetic element must be subordinate to the requirements of physical existence, and, as a matter of expense, should be held of inferior consequence to means of higher moral growth; it yet holds a place of great significance among the influences which make home happy and attractive, which give it a constant and wholesome power over the young, and contributes much to the education of the entire household in refinement, intellectual development, and moral sensibility.¹⁰⁹

Their chapter on home decoration argues that even a homemaker of lesser financial means has the opportunity to incorporate “beauty” into the home, and calls upon the “educating influence” of a home filled with art and culture.

Educating women on the importance of the home, in all manners, took the form of public lectures (often held by prominent department stores such as Eaton's), the development of household science programs and courses at colleges and universities (such as the Lillian Massey School of Household Science and Art at the University of Toronto in 1906), books published by home reformers, and, finally, in the pages of the modern women's magazine. Expert advice from prominent names in the industry, and from the magazine itself, became a source of education. As Aynsley and Berry describe, “magazines made the home visible in text and in image on a national and international scale previously not possible and as such, the home was made to function as an object of

¹⁰⁸ Isabella Beeton's *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861), Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The American Woman's Home* (1869) and Eustella Beecher's *Motherly Talks – The Home: How to Make and Keep It* (1883) preceded Edith Wharton and Odgen Codman Jr.'s *The Decoration of Houses* (1898) and later, Elsie de Wolfe's *House in Good Taste* (1913).

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (New York: J.B. Ford & Co., 1869), 84.

mass distraction and mass consumption.”¹¹⁰ The role of a homemaker also meant being a careful consumer, or, as public historian Carolyn M. Goldstein describes, a “rational consumer citizen.”¹¹¹ “Once prized as the source of a family’s independence,” she explains, “the home – especially the middle-class home – was now more intertwined than ever before in an expanding national market, a growing network of new technological goods and systems, and an emerging culture of consumption.”¹¹²

In February 1930, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* published a question from a reader in Winnipeg: “I am studying home economics and find myself greatly interested in the interior decorating studies in our course. Would you kindly inform me as to the names and locations of any good interior decorating schools in Canada, and any of the best in the United States?” *CHG* responded:

We do not know of any thoroughly organized school of interior decoration in Canada. There is a man in Toronto who has small studio classes, and we are sending along his name and address so that you may enquire from him concerning course and rates. Most of the prominent decorators in Canada have gone through the more difficult mill of practical experience in shops and department stores, although several are graduates of school in New York and Paris.¹¹³

This interaction perfectly captures the life and evolving profession of interior decoration. Interior decoration was introduced in home economics studies, yet pursuing a career as a decorator proved difficult in Canada. As my first chapter explained, decorators in Canada

¹¹⁰ Jeremy Aynsley and Francesca Berry, “Publishing the Modern Home,” 5.

¹¹¹ Carolyn M. Goldstein, *Creating Consumers*, 24.

¹¹² Ibid. See also Janice Williams Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick & the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003) and Kerrie Johan Kennedy, “Womanly Work: The Introduction of Household Science at the University of Toronto” (M.A. Thesis, Graduate Department of Education, University of Toronto, 1995).

¹¹³ “Would You Like to Know?” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1930, 96.

Unfortunately, the man in Toronto offering studio classes in interior decoration is not named. *CHG* often sent their responses back to the reader privately, and would publish in the magazine a line saying so.

usually acquired practical experience in shops and department stores. Elliot herself followed this trajectory, as did most of the professional decorators working in Toronto. The exchange between this reader and *CHG* exposes the foundation for building up a private interior decorating practice.

Canadian Homes and Gardens as a Site of Education and Advice

Elliot was first introduced as a contributor to *CHG* in its December 1925 issue, although advertisements for her business were featured from its inception in October of the same year. “Minerva Elliot,” the magazine introduces, “is one of our foremost interior decorators. Mrs. Elliot approaches her work with a fine application of the best in her art from a knowledge gained by two years’ practical experience in Philadelphia and New York under two internationally famous decorators. Mrs. Elliot, too, studied architecture for two years in England and for a definite knowledge of the applied arts she visited England, France and Italy extensively.”¹¹⁴ Presenting Elliot’s education and experience in the field of decoration functioned to reassure readers of her expertise. By bringing an expert into the home (in reality or via a magazine), Elliot could broadcast her professionalism, thus giving herself more visibility.

In her first piece for *CHG*, “Walls In Their Perfection,” Elliot advocates for “quiet elegance and restraint,” firstly by the proper incorporation of oak-panelled walls, and secondly with the use of wallpaper. Her authority and strict codes of decorating rules are already apparent, as is her admiration for the work of seventeenth and eighteenth century architects from Britain. “I overheard a woman talking in a convincing manner about

¹¹⁴ “This Month’s Who’s Who,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1925, 7.

‘every one following like sheep and having panelled walls.’ My answer to that is: Go back to the days when really good decorators and architects such as Inigo Jones, the Brothers Adam, Sir William Chambers, Angelica Kauffman and many others; also the decorators and architects of European fame of our present day, all used and are using panelled walls, for the simple reason that they have lived through all the past generations and have always been restful and beautiful, with a quiet dignity, and also may be carried out in varied ways.”¹¹⁵ Her personal maxim can perhaps best be represented in her following statement:

Personally I love all things that have tradition behind them and have been thoroughly tested and tried and found things of beauty. After all a ‘gentleman’s home’ should not have fads and daring things carried out in bad taste bordering on vulgarity. A home that is built around old traditions and harmonious blendings creates an atmosphere of quiet elegance. We must turn back to the old masters who spent a lifetime studying interiors and decorations for inspiration. Our modern times are too commercialized, too swift to create great masters in this field. This is an age of wonderful things, no doubt, such as great engineering feats, aeronautics and science, but unfortunately our generation has consequently suffered in not producing great masters who can create an original perfect art for the interior of homes.¹¹⁶

These sentiments remain with Elliot throughout her presence in *CHG*. Her preference for the decorative movements that have withstood the “test of time” and for the “old masters” being the authority on taste, captures the tension of broadly accepting *moderne*, or, in her words, “vulgar” furnishings. Elliot ends her article with a preview of her next contribution. “I shall continue the subject of different styles of walls,” which informs the reader that her contribution to *CHG* is a serial column, inviting readers look forward to

¹¹⁵ Minerva Elliot, “Walls in Their Perfection,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1925, 48.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the next month's issue – and for non-subscribers this perhaps works as a buying-incentive.

In her next article, Elliot recounts her experience witnessing “one of the world-famous decorators,” with whom she worked and studied, decorate a room with Spanish influence by using gold leaf on the walls. “The effect was of a beautifully colored old metallic lace, hanging on a wall of dull gold. With its lovely, polished marble floor and concealed lighting, my readers will readily sense the numberless beauties of this splendid and unique room.” Referring to her “readers” once again demonstrates that her articles in *CHG* had an intended audience and following. Interestingly, Elliot's writing flows between sharing her own decorative treatments, sharing her personal thoughts, and describing well-decorated rooms by other decorators. Alluding to her own education, and admiration for European models, she explains: “The European school teaches the fitness of things by first blindfolding the eyes of the student. We thus learn by touch and feeling, and in this subtle way we come to sense that the grain and weight, for example, requires the texture and heavy velvets, wools, brocatelles.”

In February 1926, Elliot devotes her column to the subject of colour. “I have been questioned many times about my fondness for greens, in fact have been ridiculed by many and told it was a weakness, as I love to introduce either small or large quantities of it in every room because it is a never failing reminder of soft green foliage on trees, and of velvety lawns.”¹¹⁷ This same sentiment was previously expressed in a lecture Elliot gave in the Three Arts Room in the Women's Building at the Canadian National Exhibition on September 5, 1925. “Work from out-of-doors, and use something in nature,

¹¹⁷ Minerva Elliot, “The Importance of Color,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1926.

from a garden, the woods, or a flower, in planning a color scheme or a plan for the decoration of your house,” she advised. “Green is much used by the great masters, and leaf greens and pale greens, full of yellow sunlight, are always good. Some people think they must have rooms all of one color to have them in good taste but that is not so, and it makes a dull, monotonous room.”¹¹⁸ I bring in this example to demonstrate a few things. Firstly, that Elliot and her suggestions on interior decoration were important enough for a mainstream newspaper, *The Globe*, to be reporting on. Secondly, that her advice was consistent across two different – though similar – realms. The public lecture in the Woman’s Building at the C.N.E. works to educate an interested public in the same way a woman’s magazine like *CHG* functions as a site of education.

As a visual and textual product, *CHG* was able to use its platform as a source of education and edification for their readers. What is important about Elliot’s advice columns is that she was in a position to be giving advice. Her personal opinions point to an admiration for how interior decoration is being treated in Europe versus Canada, and she clearly wished to bring the teachings and *objects d’art* from Europe to Canadian homes. Furthermore, observing Elliot’s writing gives attention to her voice, her beliefs, her experiences, and provides evidence of her knowledge, and, ultimately, her life. In addition to editorials written by professionals – like Elliot – working in the fields it represented such as architecture, interior decoration, and horticulture, *CHG* featured a “Department of Information,” an editorial space allowing its subscribers to mail in questions about decoration, gardening, housekeeping, and home building. This demonstrates the authority of the magazine and an anxious public needing reassurance for

¹¹⁸ “Home Decoration Needs Good Taste: Mauve and Purple Not Favored by Mrs. Minerva Elliot,” *The Globe*, Sep 7, 1925, 15.

their home decoration choices. Launched in their second issue, November 1925, the “Would You Like to Know” Q&A section of the magazine grew from a single page to a four-page spread by 1930. As scholars Fay Hammill and Michelle Smith explain, “pages devoted to letters from readers give further insight into the editorial construction of an intended audience, as well as the reception of a magazine.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, it captures the residence of readers, thus indicating the national reach of the magazine.

“The Wise are Observant,” reads the headline of a *CHG*’s Department of Information advertisement in the magazine:

And so the wise householder will watch Canadian Homes & Gardens to be familiar with the latest conveniences, to become acquainted with successful adaptations of period furniture, to read about and see illustrated the homes of others where beauty, comfort and utility combine. Perusal of Canadian Homes & Gardens settles many mooted matters in the home. Where further or other information is required, the reader has merely to write the magazine’s ‘Would You Like to Know’ department.¹²⁰

Questions from readers ranged anywhere from how to properly stain wood floors to what type of flowers to plant in a garden with southern exposure. The department was an enticing reason to subscribe to the magazine as it responded to queries from subscribers only. For example, from a reader in Toronto, “Being a subscriber and a very sincere admirer of your magazine, I am writing to ask your help in selecting curtains for a living room.”¹²¹ Another reader sought advice for coverings and draperies. “We are doing our living room over, and I am in doubt as to color. The carpet is a dark Burgundy. I thought of doing the walls with an old ivory wall paper. What would you suggest for covering

¹¹⁹ Fay Hammill and Michelle Smith, *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture: Canadian Periodicals in English and French, 1925-1960* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015), 38.

¹²⁰ Advertisement for “The Department of Information,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, August 1930.

¹²¹ “Would You Like to Know?” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, April 1926.

chesterfield and for drapes?”¹²² *CHG* responded, “Your suggestion about ivory walls seems happy. For the chesterfield, have it slip-covered with a printed linen, showing Burgundy, green and ivory. For the hangings you might use the same linen, or you might have a different material, say brocade or velvet or taffeta in Burgundy or old gold.”¹²³ *CHG*’s suggestions exemplify the Q&A department as a type of forum and platform for sharing knowledge and expertise.

With this in mind, *CHG* editor J. Herbert Hodgins makes an interesting – and illuminating – declaration in the January 1926 issue: “A magazine such as this may be likened to a great college. Here, by observation of what others have accomplished and by study of what architects and decorators, landscape artists and gardeners have done, Canadians may broaden their knowledge of those subjects which make for the larger domestic life. Taking out a subscription to *Canadian Homes and Gardens* is like entering upon a university course with, however, the difference that our classes are ‘elective’ – but the graduation results in many ways are equally worth while.”¹²⁴ In the same issue, *CHG* promoted this statement with an advertisement for a new series on period furniture contributed throughout 1926 by C.T. Currelly, director of the Royal Ontario Museum. A sketch of a period room asks, “Could You Identify the Period of These Pieces at a Glance?”¹²⁵ (Figure 2.1) These “fascinating articles,” writes *CHG*, will “cover just that popular aspect of a wide subject which the woman who faces the selection and purchasing of furniture in keeping is so anxious to find.”¹²⁶

¹²² “Would You Like to Know?” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, April 1931, 54.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ J. Herbert Hodgins, “Editor’s Note,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1926, 11.

¹²⁵ Advertisement for *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, “February is Furniture Number,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1926, 6.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Series such as that offered by Professor Currelly remained prevalent in *CHG*. In 1930, for instance, a similar new series lasted throughout the year. *CHG* contributor and lecturer at the Royal Ontario Museum, Ruth M. Home, wrote articles “designed to assist the house-owner in the important matter of selecting and following the various period styles.” Home’s articles featured titles such as “The Elizabethan Style in the Modern Home,” “Let Us Be Jacobites,” “William and Mary and Anne,” “Should You Prefer Mahogany,” “Late Georgian Styles,” “Our Colonial Heritage,” and “Duncan Phyfe.” Being able to identify period styles was foundational for attaining expertise in interior decoration. *CHG* made sure to inform their readership of the importance both of respecting period furnishings while also being open to contemporary furnishings:

What to buy and what not to buy – what to eliminate from her present household collection; these problems are continually haunting the average woman. Yet these very questions may be successfully solved by careful study. This is where we come in – this is where it will be our privilege and our opportunity, progressively, to acquaint the home-builder with the present day offerings in home furnishings. In some respects, perhaps, our homes today fall short of the homes of a century ago – in beauty, that is, if not in convenience and comfort. The woman who hopes to create beauty in her home environment must know something about the beautiful homes of the past and their contents. But to be wholly successful in her modern home-making and home beautification, she must continually study what is evolving, day by day, for the further enhancement of the home.¹²⁷

Minerva Elliot staunchly supported tradition in decoration, as we have seen, and was unapologetically vocal about her views on the subject. After a trip to England in the summer of 1926, where she was invited to address the Guild of Decorative Art in London,¹²⁸ Elliot provided an article with her impressions on the trend of interior

¹²⁷ “Next Month With Canadian Homes and Gardens,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1926, 9.

¹²⁸ Elliot was in fact the first Canadian interior decorator to address the Guild of Decorative Art. See “Next Month With Canadian Homes and Gardens,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1926, 9.

decoration in the “old country.” In “A House Where Centuries Meet,” she writes: “How I wish that all my readers might have followed me during my recent visit to England and to France. Then they might have seen what a serious profession Interior Decorating is in the Old World. They would understand the pride of the creator in his work; the pride which is taken in the making of rare and beautiful things; the pride which is taken in having magnificent pieces of rare and lovely old furniture placed in their proper setting.”¹²⁹

Elliot recounts her tour to a tapestry workshop, meeting with Her Majesty Queen Mary while visiting with a London decorator, and seeing the home of Mrs. Derwent-Wood, wife of the late Francis Derwent-Wood, an English sculptor. Elliot’s love of England, its “distinction and charm,” professional associations, and the pride craftsmen take in their work, are features she would continue to champion throughout her career.

Perhaps most expressive of her personal sentiments, her article “New Fads Versus Old Traditions” captures her disillusionment with the “modern school of decoration.” For instance, “Only after an article has stood up against detached criticism, been approved by sound judgement, and has stood the test of centuries of service, can we be absolutely sure that it is really beautiful... We must wait for years to know whether the art of our own generation is truly great,” she explains. However,

I am frequently diverted by some of the interesting things being accomplished in the modern school of decoration. Naturally, the use of modern appliances, such as electric light and equipment, elaborate plumbing, and the accessories of rapid communication, such as motor cars, telephones and radios, have exercised new influences in the handling of a home, and changed, as well, people’s lives and habits. There is a scarcity of domestic help; therefore, houses are planned, decorated and equipped with the view to keeping labor to the minimum.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Minerva Elliot, “A House Where Centuries Meet,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1927.

¹³⁰ Minerva Elliot, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1928.

Elliot's view captures the anxiety many were feeling in the period after the First World War. On this subject, she explains, "Naturally, after the holocaust of the Great War, when France lost her finest men, a period of stress and confusion was to be expected. Then, too, the people of France were forced by economic pressure to turn out marketable products, and as they could not compete in world markets with utilitarian goods, they gave their whole-hearted attention to shocking the civilized world with bizarre art."¹³¹ Her focus on France at the centre of the modernist movement is due to the recent *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* held in Paris in 1925.¹³² In her own words, she describes France as in "the throes of modern savagery." However, it is important to note that "modern" is not a furniture style but rather what design historian Virginia Wright explains as "an explosion of styles ignited by the accelerating pace of industrial production and design experimentation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."¹³³ Interior decorating is the product of this "explosion," by reconciling the challenges of modern life through the elevation – and protection – of the home. The modern interior is a complex mix of old and new. While Elliot's views may seem conservative, she was unarguably a modern woman decorating modern interiors – even if that meant they were decorated in period furnishings and antiques.

Interestingly, after Elliot's editorial on the perils of modern design, J. Herbert Hodgins gave his editorial space in the March 1928 issue to the voice of another

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² As architectural historian Michael Windover explains, "The exhibition was an inherently political event in which France was attempting to re-establish its pre-eminence on the global stage of industrial and decorative arts." See M. Windover, *Art Deco: A Mode of Mobility* (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2012), 20.

¹³³ Virginia Wright, *Modern Furniture in Canada, 1920 to 1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997): xv.

decorator who did not agree with Elliot's words. Jeannine McLay, who had contributed to *CHG* two years prior, wrote: "As a Frenchwoman I cannot remain passive and silent after reading the statement in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* for February that in the matter of decoration France is 'now in the throes of modern savagery'... People have different tastes, but, if we say that we like good modern furniture, we do not mean that we like only that."¹³⁴ When it comes to representing and incorporating the "modern," *CHG* – like department stores – towed the line between trying to be avant-garde while also appealing to the conservative tastes of readers preferring period arrangements. Exemplifying this position, and perhaps explaining why *CHG* could publish both a scathing review of *art moderne* by Elliot and then give space for a rebuttal, Hodgins explains: "It is not our intention to set up any one school of interior decoration; as a matter of fact, we shall invariably avoid asserting our prejudices. Rather, we consider it our mission to 'report' on the subject of the home appointments, to present from month to month – as we are privileged to witness the trend of domestic events – those important developments in architecture and building of homes, decoration and furnishing of rooms, and the making and up-keep of gardens."¹³⁵ This allowed *CHG* to satisfy the varying tastes of their modern readers. In the form of editorials and advertisements, *CHG* communicated the idea of modernity, or at least, created a medium for discussions – and debates – about it.

¹³⁴ "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, March 1928, 15.

¹³⁵ J. Herbert Hodgins, "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1926, 11.

Advertising the Idea of Home Decoration

CHG advertised the professional services of Toronto's emerging interior decorators, as well as the decorating offices of large department stores and furniture retailers.¹³⁶

Examples include Toronto stores Eaton's College Street, Simpson's, Thornton-Smith, and Ridpath's Fine Furniture. As we have seen, Elliot illustrated her ideas in the form of her columns. Yet she also incorporated advertisements for her decorating business in the ad pages at the back of the magazine (Figure 2.2). These ads remained the same, in terms of graphic design, throughout the period in question (1925-39). Exceptions to this include a May 1930 advertisement featuring a photograph of gilt wooden doors from Buckingham Palace which had been imported by Minerva Elliot (Figure 2.3). A September 1931 full-page advertisement – the only full-page ad of Elliot's published in *CHG* – features a photograph of her storefront (Figure 2.4). Through the window we can see a room arranged according to Elliot's decorative principles: "The simple beauty and elegance of this window speaks of the excellent taste and quality of the scheme of decoration peculiar to the establishment of Minerva Elliot, Limited." Elliot's full-page advertisement puts her on a level next to Eaton's, Simpson's, and Thornton Smith, thus establishing herself with these big-name producers.

Full-page advertisements dominated the pages of *CHG*, promoting the products and services of businesses relating to construction, decoration, and gardening. Ads preyed upon the anxieties of *CHG*'s readership by sending the message that without a home of

¹³⁶ *CHG*'s advertisements largely focused on retailers from Toronto and Montreal. Although Montreal would provide an interesting lens, the focus of this research centers on Toronto's retail environment.

taste and elegance, one lacked grace and “good breeding.”¹³⁷ Advertisements for the Eaton’s House Furnishings Building, and later, Eaton’s College Street, responded to changes in modern interior decoration while reinforcing the idea that expert knowledge was required for the proper decoration of one’s home, thus evolving the professional status of interior decoration. For example, in *CHG*’s first issue, the T. Eaton Company advertisement for its House Furnishings Building first introduces the myriad furniture styles that conjure “period furnishings,” then explains, “But were you to assemble all their wonderful works in your home, the result would not necessarily be pleasing. It takes more than the possession of beautiful objects to produce beauty in the home. Arrangement is a necessity.”¹³⁸ In another advertisement for Eaton’s, the message is twofold (Figure 2.5): “The Right Thing in the Right Place Is the Whole Secret of Successful Furnishing.” It suggests that without knowledge of good taste, consulting an expert is required – and also explains that procuring the “right thing” in terms of furniture can be attained at Eaton’s.¹³⁹ The store, then, functions as a site for purchasing both knowledge and furniture. Clients could purchase both the decorating services of an Eaton decorator who had the expertise, and the Eaton commodities needed to decorate their home. To purchase “knowledge” is at the heart of professional interior decoration. Decorators had knowledge of taste, and their service were consumable. Yet to have a home professionally decorated also alludes to the attainment of knowledge. To further

¹³⁷ For example, in 1932 *CHG* published a book entitled *Canadian Homes and Gardens’ Book of Exteriors and Interiors*. In an advertisement for the book, they write, “It’s not enough nowadays that a house should have plenty of tables and chairs; to be an attractive home it must bear that unmistakable air of good breeding.” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1933, 2.

¹³⁸ Advertisement for Eaton’s House Furnishings Building, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1925, 8.

¹³⁹ Advertisement for Eaton’s, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, August 1926.

exemplify this notion, a 1934 advertisement for the Interior Decoration Bureau at Eaton's College Street uses a photograph of a room decorated by an Eaton decorator with text that reads: "The Atmosphere that Soothes and Charms Is the Result of Knowledge Not Accident"¹⁴⁰ (Figure 2.6). The photograph demonstrates a decorative arrangement combining the owner's furniture with new furnishings procured from Eaton's. And of course, the "result of knowledge" the ad describes is the knowledge obtained from "a life time [of] study" acquired by professional decorators.

Targeting female consumers was – and remains – an advertising strategy especially prevalent in women's magazines. As historian Valerie Korinek elucidates, *CHG*, like *Chatelaine*, used advertising models pioneered by American publications. The American women's magazine *Ladies' Home Journal* was the first to combine "editorial material of interest to women such as food, fashions, fiction, and advice columns, with national advertising for household products such as foodstuffs, cleaning supplies, and toiletries."¹⁴¹ By offering a very inexpensive subscription and single copy price, magazines were able to reach out to a huge "audience of women readers." The substantial quantity of ads featured allowed magazines to recoup "their costs and [make] healthy profits."¹⁴² Therefore, the line between editorial content and advertisement is blurred. This is further explored by Canadian design historian Margaret Hodges, who explains: "In keeping with an advertising trend that developed in North America in the 1920s and 1930s, [...] ads were peppered with the advice of psychologists and home economists, as

¹⁴⁰ Advertisement for Eaton's College Street, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June-July 1934, 8.

¹⁴¹ Valerie J. Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000): 32.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 33.

well as home decorators and architects.”¹⁴³ In addition, invoking the guidance of experts was “integral to the advertisers’ strategy of playing on the fears and insecurities of the public by reinforcing consumers’ ‘suspicions of their own inadequacies.’”¹⁴⁴ Home improvement ads often “exploited women’s anxieties about their appearance, about their home-making talents and about the state of their homes.”¹⁴⁵

As an authority on the subject of interior decoration, Elliot was featured in advertisements for the Canadian Marconi Company. In a 1930 ad campaign featured in *CHG*, the Marconi Company published two-page advertisements trying to demonstrate how the modern Marconi Radio could be incorporated into a home of taste.¹⁴⁶ Elliot had a prominent role as the voice of interior decoration. “Distinguished Canadians choose the Marconi...Canada’s Outstanding NEW Radio Receiving Set,” proclaims their September 1930 ad in *CHG* (Figure 2.7). Of the other six “distinguished Canadians” part of the ad is J. Herbert Hodgins, the Managing Editor of *CHG* and *Mayfair*. Using the approval of experts in music and design as well as the consent of society leaders, Marconi employed the “authority” of famous Canadians to aid the public into accepting the new Marconi radio for their homes. In another Marconi advertisement, published in *The Globe*, Minerva Elliot is given full attention with the suggestion that if she decorates her own home with the “distinctive modern beauty of the New Marconi radio,” it is given the seal

¹⁴³ Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson, “‘A kitchen that wastes no steps...’: Gender, Class and the Home Improvement Plan, 1936-40,” *Histoire sociale – Social History* 21 no. 41 (1988): 25.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ For more on how radio constructed “space” in modern Canada, see Michael Windover and Anne F. MacLennan, *Seeing, Selling, and Situation Radio in Canada, 1922-1956* (Halifax: Dalhousie Architectural Press, 2017).

of approval from an expert in interior decoration (Figure 2.8).¹⁴⁷ Elliot's incorporation into Marconi's ad campaign exemplifies her influence as a powerful voice for interior decoration. Elliot's decorative work was also incorporated into a Marconi ad featured in *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune* in 1930 (Figure 2.9) which captures the Marconi radio inside the Elliot-decorated home of Lady Kemp, a Toronto socialite.¹⁴⁸

The Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario: Establishing the Profession

The establishment of the Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario (*SIDO*) in 1934 coincided with the formation of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and Town Planners.¹⁴⁹ *CHG* supported both establishments by giving them space to advertise and showcase their work in the magazine. In the March 1934 issue, *CHG* announced, "With each of these groups the need of such organization has long been felt, and the feeling is that, working together and with the impetus of membership in a group of fellow craftsmen, both the public and the profession will enjoy greater benefits and opportunities."¹⁵⁰

Members of *SIDO* were featured in the magazine as decorating experts both before and after the society was established. Nearly all *SIDO* members worked and operated in Toronto, and had either started their careers or were currently employed at department and furniture stores such as Eaton's, Simpson's, Thornton-Smith's and

¹⁴⁷ Advertisement for the Canadian Marconi Company, *The Globe*, October 31, 1930, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Advertisement for the Canadian Marconi Company, *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, October 31, 1930, 10.

¹⁴⁹ The name "Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario" was patented on November 20th, 1933 but emerged publicly in 1934. "The Association Of Registered Interior Designers Of Ontario, By-Law No. 1, Operating By-Law," <http://www.arido.ca/download.php?id=501>.

¹⁵⁰ "The Bulletin Board," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, March 1934.

Ridpath's. R. Malcolm Slimon was elected president, Anne Harris as vice-president, and Guy V. Mitchell (Robert Simpson Co.) as secretary-treasurer. Most of the members were also part of Eaton's exclusive "outside decorator" D.A. program, demonstrating their authority within the profession of interior decoration. Other charter members included: Lawrence Barraud, Archibald Chisolm (T. Eaton Co.), Augusta Fleming, John D. Gerald (Thornton-Smith Co. Ltd.), Freda James (Ridpath's Ltd.) John I. Ridpath (Ridpath's Ltd.), and of course, Minerva Elliot. The Society's aim was to

develop, foster and promote the arts, crafts and science of interior decoration; to promote and protect the interests and welfare of those who have adopted or who contemplate the adoption of interior decoration as a profession or calling; to conduct such measures as may be calculated to enhance the knowledge, skill and proficiency of the members of the Society in all matters and things pertaining to interior decoration and kindred subjects...¹⁵¹

SIDO felt that the art of interior decoration should be regulated and standardized, and that those calling themselves "decorators" should have the education (i.e. knowledge) and training (i.e. experience) to warrant acceptance into the profession.

Canadian Homes and Gardens offered space for *SIDO* to communicate the importance of interior decoration by publishing examples of their members' work. For instance, in the January-February 1935 issue, *CHG* featured photographs of ten miniature rooms representing the "careful work in design and execution" of *SIDO*'s ten charter members. The model rooms were created for inclusion in an Architectural Exhibition held in the Art Gallery of Toronto in January 1935. They captured the application of various decorating trends while advertising individual decorators' skill and taste. For instance, the miniature room by Freda James was designed in Swedish modern (Figure

¹⁵¹ Advertisement for the Society for Interior Decorators of Ontario, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, April 1934, 66.

2.10) while R. Malcolm Slimon designed an eighteenth century period room (Figure 2.11). In another example of *CHG*'s role to promote the services and expertise of professional decorators, a new series was introduced in 1937: the series, entitled "Your Decorating Problems" had *CHG* interview *SIDO* members to solve various decorating quandaries. Examples of problems include "When windows from a view," "When rooms adjoin," "Return of the drawing-room," and "Bedrooms unstandardized."¹⁵² Minerva Elliot rarely contributed to *SIDO*-sponsored articles, though her name was featured as a charter member in the ads published in *CHG*.

In "New Fads Versus Old Traditions," Elliot observes how the function of the home has changed over time. At one point, she pauses to insert a comment about the responsibility of home decoration:

It is exactly at this point that [I] would like to stop and make an urgent plea to the women of Canada to strive to meet this situation. It is deplorable that in thousands of families [the] lack of interest in the home is directly traceable to the woman – the wife and mother. Women have unusual opportunities in their homes; they may enjoy the thrill of creating their own backgrounds, of displaying originality and skill, and yet it is seldom one finds a woman who is making any pretence at studying the art of decoration. However, that is a subject for another and sterner sermon.¹⁵³

Upper-middle class women – like those reading *CHG* – had the responsibility of being educated in home economics, which included interior decoration. Being a "rational consumer citizen" as Carolyn M. Goldstein described, meant being able to consume, and in this case, consume products used to curate a tasteful home.

CHG functioned as an advertising vehicle not only for Eaton's, Simpson's, and other furniture retailers, but for the professional associations forming in the early 1930s.

¹⁵² "Your Decorating Problems," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937, 30.

¹⁵³ Minerva Elliot, "New Fads Versus Old Traditions," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1928, 32.

CHG operated to promote and sell the *idea* of the interior decorator, thereby working as an agent in the pursuit for professional status sought by those in the field. And through the medium of the magazine, Elliot was able to market her expertise to a readership that was interested and invested in the beautification of the home. *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, like Eaton's, invested in the marketability of the interior; therefore, the magazine functioned as an important part of the professionalization of interior decoration in Toronto. Elliot and other prominent decorators were able to share advertising space – putting them on the same level – with major retailers. With the foundation laid by nineteenth-century home management advice manuals, published advice given through the medium of the women's magazine flourished. Both Minerva Elliot and *Canadian Homes and Gardens* used their position as “experts” to elevate the importance of interior decoration.

Chapter Three

Protecting the Home: Elliot's Advice in Practice

In an article written for *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, architect John M. Lyle puts forth the idea of the architect taking responsibility for decorating the domestic interior. "I am strongly of the opinion that the man to co-ordinate the different phases of interior decoration is the architect responsible for their design, and that he should be retained by the owner to advise him in the development of the color schemes and the selection of his furniture," he writes in the October-November 1934 issue. "If the house is to be considered as a complete unit, the lay public in Canada should realize that an architect, after working in concrete form, with his rooms designed in no matter what style, but with certain definite details worked out carefully, should not be asked to step out of the picture and leave to the untrained amateur the completion of his work."¹⁵⁴ He does not mention the role of the interior decorator, but rather reduces the position to an "untrained amateur." In retaliation, interior decorator R.N. Irvine, President of the Thornton-Smith Company, published his response to Lyle's article in the following December issue: "The interior of a building alone is the concern of the interior decorator. It is the decorator's business to treat in color, fabrics or paper, the walls and ceilings of the house, and to equip the various rooms for comfortable living in an atmosphere of beauty and good taste."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ John M. Lyle, "Domestic Interiors," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October-November 1934, 18.

¹⁵⁵ R.N. Irvine, "The Function of the Interior Decorator," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1934, 52.

The debate between an architect and interior decorator over who should take responsibility for the interior demonstrates the negotiations still under way over whose domain the interior belongs. One year later, Minerva Elliot gave a lecture entitled “The Modern Trend in Interior Decoration” at a luncheon for the Ottawa Woman’s Club’s annual meeting held at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa. “Every profession had its fakers, but the speaker believed interior decoration suffered more than any other,” reported *The Ottawa Journal*. “Women who expressed good taste in the treatment of their own homes would secure a few lamps and a few yards of materials and set themselves up as decorators, forgetting there were certain fundamentals that could not be ignored, and which required a great deal of study.”¹⁵⁶ Decorators had long been advocating for proper recognition, as evidenced by Elliot’s writings in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*.¹⁵⁷

In many ways, Elliot worked to reconcile the challenges of the modern interior. The home in this period was in peril from changes in modern decoration, from architects and others wanting to infiltrate the profession, and from the introduction of modern features to the home, such as telephones and electric appliances. Thus, the creation of interior decoration emerged in this period to mitigate these threats. It was Elliot’s function, then, to make these changes compatible, for, in her words, “the home has to take thought and make itself doubly attractive if it would be more than a mere roof.”¹⁵⁸ How then, did she put the advice she gave in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* and at lectures into practice? This chapter will analyse how she utilized her own decorating

¹⁵⁶ “Again President Woman’s Club,” *The Ottawa Journal*, November 1, 1935, 14.

¹⁵⁷ See Minerva Elliot, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1928; “A House Where Centuries Meet,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1927.

¹⁵⁸ Minerva Elliot, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, February 1928, 32.

principles to decorate her own home and one of her Toronto clients, Mrs. Hallie Shaver, published in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. The professional status of an interior decorator meant a great deal to Elliot. Part of the attainment of professionalism of the interior decorator was making a reputable name for herself. Elliot's invitation to *CHG* readers into her own home and those of her clients served to advertise her expertise, and to demonstrate that her name carried class, knowledge, and taste.

Minerva Elliot Ltd.

After her resignation from Eaton's in 1924, Elliot launched her own business, Minerva Elliot Limited, in a house at 228 Bloor St. West, a residential section of the street (Figure 3.1).¹⁵⁹ The location of her business in Yorkville, across the street from the Royal Ontario Museum, alludes to the emerging commercial hub of the neighborhood. Situating her business in a residential building also connects the practice with the intimacy of the home: what better way to show how to decorate a residential room than in an actual house?

Elliot's decorating business had a small staff of assistants and apprentices. One such apprentice, Herbert Irvine (1908-1992), worked with Elliot for three years before entering the department store circuit and becoming "the premier name in the [decorating] business."¹⁶⁰ In an interview with Irvine, *Maclean's* writer Joy Carroll explains that in the

¹⁵⁹ In the April 1931 issue of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, the ad for Elliot's business documented her move to 196 Bloor St. West, where she remained until the beginning of the 1940s.

¹⁶⁰ In Irvine's obituary written by John Barber at the *Globe and Mail*, he is described as "the man who virtually invented the profession of interior design in Canada." See John Barber, "Obituary: Herbert Irvine Design Pioneer 'Born With Style'," *Globe and Mail*, July 31, 1992, C8.

late 1920s, “there was only one decorator of any taste and distinction in Toronto, Mrs. Minerva Elliot.”¹⁶¹ Irvine secured employment with her “through sheer persistence.”¹⁶²

I had been working in the Bank of Montreal, but I always admired Mrs. Elliott's [sic] work and kept after her...On the last Saturday of my vacation I went again to ask Mrs. Elliott [sic] for a job. She had just fired her assistant so she hired me in order to get rid of me. She thought that if she hired me, then fired me right away, I'd get discouraged and stop bothering her.¹⁶³

Hired at the beginning of 1929, Irvine explained that “Minerva was a slavedriver...I was fired four times a week and quit three.”¹⁶⁴ Of his time with Elliot, Irvine remembered, “I worked eighteen hours a day for fifteen dollars a week and my mother mailed me lunch money...But the experience with Minerva was priceless.”¹⁶⁵ Irvine’s account of his time apprenticing with Elliot demonstrates the type of business owner she was. Her business was comprised of a display room, work rooms, and workshops “where everything [was] turned out under her personal supervision.”¹⁶⁶ Evidently, she held high standards and ran a tight ship.

The mention of “Minerva Elliot’s Little House of Interior Decoration,” also known as “Silverlocks,” emerged in September 1933 issue of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. For instance, in a photographic spread of the country house of Miss Florence Kemp near Kingston, Ontario, credit for its decoration was given to Silverlocks, with the magazine writing that the “effective decorative treatments throughout the house were

¹⁶¹ Joy Carroll, “Herbert Irvine: Benevolent despot of décor,” *Maclean’s*, February 19, 1966, 31.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ross Skoggard, “Never Copy Someone Else’s Room Says Louis St. Laurent’s Decorator,” *Toronto Star*, May 22, 1988, E5.

¹⁶⁴ Adele Freedman, “A Master of Tradition: Life for Herbert Irvine is a Matter of Taste,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 8, 1986, C5.

¹⁶⁵ Joy Carroll, “Herbert Irvine: Benevolent despot of décor,” *Maclean’s*, February 19, 1966, 31.

¹⁶⁶ “Minerva Elliot: A Pen Picture of the Career of this Outstanding Woman Decorator,” *Gossip!*, February 10, 1941, 4.

supervised by Silverlocks, Minerva Elliot's auxiliary establishment in 'The Village'."¹⁶⁷

A short article highlighting Elliot's career, published in the magazine *Gossip!* in 1941, reveals that Elliot opened her establishment "with a small nominal capital, a province-wide reputation and a five-fold revolutionary business policy, entirely new and unheard of up to that time in the decorating profession."¹⁶⁸ Her five-fold business policy was:

1. A thorough knowledge of all the phases of the decorative arts and contacts with all the American, English and Continental sources of supply.
2. One-price shop – one-price policy rigidly adhered to, with respect to all purchasers, large or small.
3. Visitors to the establishment cordially welcomed, not subjected to persuasion or importuning, and with no obligation to buy.
4. Relatively small percentage "mark-up" or profit over cost, and therefore fair prices to the public on all purchases.
5. Iron-clad guarantee of satisfaction on all services and purchases.¹⁶⁹

Elliot's appropriation of Eaton's policy suggests something learned from Eaton's, which was well-known for its promise of satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded.

From 1925 to 1940, Elliot operated "Minerva Elliot Limited" while contributing to decorating magazines, giving lectures, and travelling to Europe for four months of the year.¹⁷⁰ She imported pieces from the European collections of nobility such as Earl of

¹⁶⁷ *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October 1933. Efforts to find more about "Silverlocks" were unsuccessful. It remains to be found whether this was a workshop, or school, run by Elliot. It is very likely that this establishment was located at her 196 Bloor St. West location in Yorkville.

¹⁶⁸ "Minerva Elliot: A Pen Picture of the Career of this Outstanding Woman Decorator," *Gossip!*, February 10, 1941, 3.

¹⁶⁹ "Minerva Elliot: A Pen Picture of the Career of this Outstanding Woman Decorator," *Gossip!*, February 10, 1941, 4. Calling the policy "entirely new and unheard of up to that time in the decorating profession" might not be entirely true. Thanks to Susan Haight for pointing this out.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 3. The article specifically says that she spent "an average of four (4) months every year for sixteen (16) years on trips to Europe: Visiting important museums; viewing private collections; studying with leading painters, sculptors, architects, art collectors and art dealers of international reputation; purchasing the choicest and rarest specimens from notable collections."

Carnarvon, Lady de Bathe, Baron de la Rochefoucauld, and Lord Kitchener.¹⁷¹ In 1929, a newspaper in New Zealand reported that Elliot had been to Paris, “where she has been acquiring the late Empress Eugenie’s valuable collection of objets d’art.”¹⁷² Elliot also visited Hampton Court in London. The newspaper announced:

Among the beautiful things which she will carry away with her are tapestries and curtains of exquisite beauty and workmanship, which were woven specially for the late Empress Eugenie, pictures, many by Winterhalter, busts of the Imperial family, and priceless books and furniture. There is an illuminated book of hours, bound in crimson velvet, and covered in chased gold strapwork, which will beautify some home in the Far West. Priceless jewels sparkle from its bindings, and on the cover are the ciphers of Napoleon III, and his tragic Empress.¹⁷³

And for an article on the subject of three-pile velvets published in *CHG* (not written by Elliot), a photograph represented a piece of woven fibre done in the “three-pile velvet” process (Figure 3.2). Underneath the photograph, *CHG* wrote that the process “was invented and perfected by the late Sir Frank Warner. The first yard produced is in the Victoria and Albert Museum; this piece, the second yard, was given by Sir Frank Warner to Mrs. Minerva Elliot, of Toronto.”¹⁷⁴ These examples of her travelling and collecting – ultimately creating the networks that allowed her entry into the elite spaces of workshops and special collections – demonstrates the foundation of her business in creating an aura around objects: to have special pieces excavated from palaces and royal collections added to the allure of her practice as an exclusive buyer of unique antiques.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² “A Woman Decorator,” *The Evening Post*, March 8, 1929, Volume CVII, Issue 55.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ “Three-Pile Velvets,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June 1930, 100.

Inside Minerva Elliot's Home

Canadian Homes and Gardens functions quite well as evidence of both Elliot's advice and practice. Most importantly – and interestingly – Elliot allowed *CHG* to photograph the interior of her own home in Rosedale in 1931, and later her new home in Forest Hill in 1937. Elliot had been married for seventeen years, but she dissolved her marriage in 1929. Therefore, she presumably lived alone (with a servant).¹⁷⁵ By this point, the name “Minerva Elliot” was well-known, especially for long-time readers of *CHG*. Being able to see into her home must have fulfilled the curiosity of readers while also advertising her decorative prowess. In her work on American decorator Elsie de Wolfe, design historian Penny Sparke speaks of the ‘signature-decorator.’ Like de Wolfe, decorators “presented themselves as fashionable beings first and foremost. By extension, their work was perceived as fashionable and their clients as fashion-conscious, modern and discerning.”¹⁷⁶ The presence of mass media publications allowed for such fashionable spaces, created by interior decorators for individual clients, to be widely attainable.¹⁷⁷

In the article “Where a Decorator is Hostess,” *CHG* featured the interior of Elliot's Rosedale home, a two-story early Edwardian city house with a finished attic. The first floor was composed of a drawing room, dining room, entrance hall, and kitchen; the second floor had three bedrooms and two bathrooms. A guest room, servant's room and bathroom were relegated to the attic. *Canadian Homes and Gardens* wrote that “Mrs. Elliot's house is not large, and is a very excellent example of her own maxim, as an

¹⁷⁵ “An Act for the Relief of Minerva Elliot,” *Acts of the Parliament of Canada* (16th Parliament, 3rd Session, Chapter 65-336), June 14, 1929; Minerva Elliot petitioned for the dissolution of her marriage due to her husband, Sidney Leonard Elliot's, adultery, which was “proven with evidence.”

¹⁷⁶ Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 84.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

interior decorator, that the smaller the gem the more perfect its cutting should be.”¹⁷⁸ The article, like most of the photographic spreads featured in *CHG*, described the items in her home along with the decorative treatments applied. There is no interview with Elliot nor quotes from her that explain why, for example, she chose one type of furniture in her dining room over another. Elliot’s decorative language, however, is quite evident in the English and French antiques she included in her decorating schemes. In her dining room, for instance, she incorporated several pieces of Georgian furniture (Figure 3.3). “The chairs are old Hepplewhite, finely carved, with seats of damask in blue, ruby, gold and green. Decorative accessories are used sparingly, yet to the greatest effect – a table grouping of old Wedgwood pieces; Louis XIV candlesticks on the sideboard; old French and English porcelains gleaming from the corner cupboard; and, reflected in the large mirror, a Bernard Adams portrait of Mrs. Elliot”¹⁷⁹ The walls were painted in “duck-egg blue” and the silk curtains were dyed to match.

The entrance hall (Figure 3.4) and drawing-room (Figure 3.5-3.7) were painted in “dove-grey” for “quiet elegance” and a “restrained background,” with window hangings matching in dove-grey damask. In the drawing-room, Elliot combined objects of art she procured on her trips abroad: Chinese porcelains from the collection of the Comte de Noailles, a Queen Anne table from Glyn Garth Palace in Wales, a Chippendale mirror and several Chippendale sofas and chairs, and a Kirman rug. In Elliot’s “feminine” bedroom, walls were painted a “diluted gold-green” to match a French rug. On both sides of her dressing table are two original Adam chairs displaying painted medallions by

¹⁷⁸ “Where a Decorator is Hostess,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931, 23.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

Angelica Kauffman in the carved backs¹⁸⁰ (Figure 3.8). Nearly every room in her home had panelled walls, true to her belief that panelled walls “have always been restful and beautiful, with a quiet dignity...”¹⁸¹ Elliot treated her antiques and period pieces like works of art, making herself a kind of curator. She was drawn to antiques collected from exclusive locations in Europe because they were pieces of an elite culture, souvenirs of her travels, and perhaps made her feel regal and important. These objects were also material reminders of her expertise. She told *MacLean's Magazine* in 1926 that she had always been interested in decoration: “When I was sixteen I used to spend all my money on pretty things for my room.”¹⁸² Her love of “pretty things” clearly evolved, especially when she had an entire home to herself to fill with “things.”

The decorating scheme of her home calls to mind the English home of Mrs. Derwent-Wood, which she visited in the summer of 1926 and wrote about in her column, “A House Where Centuries Meet.” Elliot was immensely impressed by the interior decoration of Derwent-Wood's home,¹⁸³ where “rare Queen Anne, Tudor, Chippendale and William and Mary pieces – a rich background of art and architecture...creates a peculiar flavor and charm all its own.”¹⁸⁴ (Figure 3.9-3.10). In her own home, Elliot employed a similar decorative language by combining furniture and art from various styles featured in eighteenth-century England and France. Penny Sparke argues that

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 24.

¹⁸¹ Minerva Elliot, “Walls in Their Perfection,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1925, 48.

¹⁸² Gertrude Pringle, “Making a Business of Good Taste,” *MacLean's Magazine*, October 1, 1926, 71.

¹⁸³ “I could never fully express the utter joy and delight I experiences in visiting this home,” professed Elliot in “A House Where Centuries Meet,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1927, 55.

¹⁸⁴ Minerva Elliot, “A House Where Centuries Meet,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1927, 54.

female decorators used period styles to reflect “a new age in which women embraced modernity.”¹⁸⁵ Elliot’s use of soft, light colours on wood panelling and in window treatments, and a preference for the furniture of Thomas Chippendale and Queen Anne, like other female decorators operating in the United States and Britain, “was no less ‘modern’ a strategy than that of the Modernists, who turned to the ‘rationality’ of the machine for their inspiration.”¹⁸⁶ Elliot herself was critical of the effect of mass-production. For example, in her article “Floor Coverings at their Best,” she writes, “The Oriental rug is becoming more commercialized every day...In fact the conditions today are such that there is constant danger that the really fine and beautiful things that have been made in rugs, furniture and other divisions of industrial art are seriously jeopardized by cheap and inferior imitations. It is only by arousing the general public to a real appreciation, sufficiently widely distributed, that we may help the conscientious, creative manufacturer. He can succeed in this only to the extent that these things are sought and appreciated.”¹⁸⁷ Elliot’s decorating style is premised on the aura of unique objects. Her personal collections narrate her tastes and where she has travelled to. As I have previously alluded, choosing antiques and furnishings from elite collections expressed Elliot’s cosmopolitan identity, and exhibited her instinctive taste and learned knowledge, which spoke to her desire for an independent, professional life.

¹⁸⁵ Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 107.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Sparke argues that there is a gendered separation between the ‘rationality’ and ‘machine aesthetic’ of the Modernists, which “offered a ‘masculine’ solution to the modern interior,” whereas “the return to the styles of eighteenth-century France arguably represented its ‘feminine’” equivalent.

¹⁸⁷ Minerva Elliot, “Floor Coverings at their Best,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, March 1926, 26.

In “A Decorator’s Home,” *CHG* once again entered Elliot’s home to showcase a new house in Forest Hill she recently remodelled (Figure 3.11). “Mrs. Minerva Elliot, well known for her interesting decorative schemes which she designs for her clients, has remodelled and furnished a sparkling little house for herself, using many fine period pieces against the simple background of fresh yet elusive colors, and highlighting the effects with rare porcelains, crystal and rich fabrics.”¹⁸⁸ It is interesting to see the slow evolution of her decorating strategy, while remaining consistent with her maxims. The incorporation of panelled walls, for example, a feature she praised so highly and integrated in her Rosedale home, has disappeared. In her drawing room, the walls were painted a mother-of-pearl colour. An Adam mantel and silver-framed Adam mirror (Figure 3.12) replaced the Chippendale mirror above her mantel in Rosedale. A painting by the modern French painter Jean-Gabriel Domergue hung above the commode to the right. In a different view of the drawing room (Figure 3.13), Elliot concealed electric lighting within the curtain box sheds to illuminate her silk curtains. The effect of the light box surrounding the piano in a warm glow is quite a modern look compared to her previous home. The effect of the light on the curtains, when illuminated at night, could have been visible from the exterior; so, while remaining private with the curtains closed, Elliot was still able to display her skill in design to those on the outside.

Elliot also saved certain period pieces with obvious value, which were featured in her home in Rosedale in 1931 and again in Forest Hill in 1937. For example, Elliot’s Adam chairs with Angelica Kauffman inlay remained in the bedroom (although it looks like the fabric of the seat cushions was updated with red satin) (Figure 3.14). Elliot

¹⁸⁸ “A Decorator’s Home,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937, 18.

continued to embrace the fashionable furniture of the eighteenth century. Her bedroom combined the Adam chairs with a Russian Kelim rug and Louis XV bed. In another bedroom (Figure 3.15), the portrait of Elliot by Bernard Adams hung next to a Chippendale dressing table. Elliot emphasized – in her own home and those of her clients – charm, simplicity, lightness, elegance, and taste. Her changing tastes and evolving palate, though not drastic, symbolized the ephemerality of interior decoration. The interior of Elliot’s home is a kind of self-portrait, whereas in magazine images of the interiors she decorated for her clients were a portrait of her business.

There are also some instances that capture the tension with modern additions to a home decorated in period style. Her dining room purposefully omitted the addition of electric lighting so that candlelight could take center stage. The “central feature of the room,” was a crystal chandelier from France (“where it had hung for more than a century in the private chapel on an old estate”) (Figure 3.16). In fact, at a luncheon for the Toronto Heliconian Club just two years prior, Elliot proclaimed, “In a room with modern lighting, a jewel never sparkles. There has never been a light as beautiful as that of candles glowing among crystal.”¹⁸⁹ Similarly, before the Ottawa Woman’s Club, Elliot stated that “the most beautiful of the modern homes...[is] the Georgian House, modernized. The best of these [are] simple and plain, designed for comfort, and with modern indirect lighting.”¹⁹⁰ She used modern indirect lighting in her drawing room with the curtain box, and in her Rosedale home, sconces adorned the walls of the dining and drawing room.

¹⁸⁹ “Dear Neighbors,” *The Globe*, March 14, 1935, 13. The Toronto Heliconian Club was founded in 1909 “to give women in the arts and letters an opportunity to meet socially and intellectually.” See “About,” *Heliconian Club*, <http://www.heliconianclub.org/about.html>.

¹⁹⁰ “Again President Woman’s Club,” *The Ottawa Journal*, November 1, 1935, 14.

To demonstrate that Elliot's style only represents one facet of interior decoration in this period, the home of Freda James, a Toronto decorator who worked for Ridpath's Fine Furniture and was a member of the Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario, showcased a drastically different approach to decoration. "What the interior decorator does within her own four walls is a matter of interest, for it is there that she may work out her own cherished schemes and color experiments without having to consult another's taste or temperament," writes *CHG* in the September 1932 issue. Her home, a small studio-apartment in the Moore Park neighbourhood of Toronto, exemplified how modern furniture and design could be incorporated into an apartment. *CHG* explains, "Brains rather than money have gone into the decoration of this top-floor flat; even the apparent disadvantage of sloping ceilings has been turned into dramatic account...The whole effect is vivacious and refreshing, yet achieved with admirable restraint."¹⁹¹ Her sitting-room was painted a coral pink and combined Japanese woodcuts, lamps made of Bavarian glass, a French Provincial table and Norwegian peasant chair for a different decorative harmony than that of Minerva Elliot's (Figure 3.17) The inclusion of a day-bed, for example, in a black-and-white zigzagging herringbone pattern, flanked by two black lacquer tables (Figure 3.18) exemplifies a different kind of modern interior and identity.

¹⁹¹ "Smartness in Small Proportions in a Modern Studio-Apartment," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1932, 14.

91 Old Forest Hill Drive

As we have seen, only the very best and impressionable homes, large or small, were featured in photographic spreads for *Canadian Homes and Gardens*.¹⁹² Missing from *CHG*, however, is how these homes were experienced by their inhabitants. In January 1930, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* published the interior of 91 Old Forest Hill Drive in the upscale neighborhood of Forest Hill, Toronto – the home of Gordon and Hallie Shaver. The Shaver home exemplifies the collaboration between Minerva Elliot as interior decorator, Hallie Shaver as homeowner, and Jocelyn Davidson as architect. Gordon and Hallie Shaver’s home serves to showcase how Elliot collaborated with her client, and demonstrates the type of clientele who hired a decorator such as Elliot.

Mrs. Shaver was born Hallie Ellen Ramsay in Appleton, Wisconsin on October 14, 1884.¹⁹³ In 1907, she married Rolla Barnum Watson, a mining engineer. A year after marrying, he and Hallie moved to Cobalt, Ontario, where he managed a successful silver mine. His success in the mining industry made the family extremely wealthy.¹⁹⁴ They had two children, a daughter, Patricia (b. 1910), and son, Thomas (b. 1916). On January 30, 1924, Rolla died of rheumatism, leaving his effects to his wife.¹⁹⁵ Hallie and her children then moved to Toronto where she began the process of building a massive house in the

¹⁹² An important element in the history of interiors, and one often overlooked, is how the designed space was actually used by its inhabitants. Hallie Shaver’s story is made possible thanks to her granddaughter, Hallie Watson, who generously shared her memories of her grandmother’s home with me.

¹⁹³ “Application for Registration – Native Citizen,” Ancestry.com, Library and Archives, Ottawa.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Hallie Watson, February 2, 2018.

¹⁹⁵ “Report of the Death of an American Citizen,” *American Consular Service*, Ancestry.com, Library and Archives, Ottawa.

Toronto neighbourhood known as Forest Hill, which at the time was still a rural area.¹⁹⁶

The home was built in a “Spanish Colonial” style, most likely influenced by a trip Hallie and Rolla had taken to Panama to see the Panama Canal. During her time in Panama, Hallie took photographs of the Panamanian houses. The house she built in Forest Hill resembled the palatial houses she saw and photographed there.¹⁹⁷

In 1929, Hallie married Gordon Shaver, a lawyer appointed to King’s Council, who moved into the mansion and became a stepfather to Patricia and Tom. When Hallie died in November 1947, Gordon remained living in the house alone, “except he probably had servants,” recounted Tom’s daughter, Hallie Watson.¹⁹⁸ Mrs. Watson, named after her grandmother, remembered visiting the house for dinners as a child with her parents. “We didn’t visit him that often, that I remember...I remember this house vividly because it was enormous. I don’t know if it really was enormous but I suspect it was.”¹⁹⁹

While the exterior of the home was inspired by Spanish architecture, the interior expressed an influence from Italy. Italian antique furniture pieces from Balmain, the Scottish estate of Hallie Shaver’s grandfather, Sir Alexander Ramsay, were positioned in various rooms of the home. In the entrance hall, for example, was a “Savonarola chair” (Figure 3.19), named after the fifteenth-century Florentine friar Girolamo Savonarola, which was once at Balmain. The staircase was equipped with a wrought-iron balustrade

¹⁹⁶ While the house was being constructed the family rented a home at 58 Bernard Ave in the Annex, which at the time was an elite Toronto neighborhood. “Report of the Death of an American Citizen,” *American Consular Service*, Ancestry.com, Library and Archives, Ottawa; interview with Hallie Watson, February 2, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ The home was likely built between 1925-1929. Interview with Hallie Watson, February 2, 2018;

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

that continued upwards to surround the gallery on the first floor.²⁰⁰ When she was around seven years old, Mrs. Watson remembered standing on the stairs of the landing to peek through the three little windows with wrought-iron grills into the living room: “You could stand on the stairs and look through the little windows...you could look down into the living room and spy on the people that were in there.”²⁰¹ The living room (Figure 3.20) was accessed by descending three steps and featured Italian chairs with red velvet coverings, also from Balmain. An Italian valance of ruby-colored velvet was a copy from the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. It could also be seen above the fireplace (Figure 3.21), to the right of the balustrade. Other decorative features included a Persian rug, Chinese porcelain, and ruby damask drapes.²⁰²

A different decorative language was employed in the bedroom (Figure 3.22). *CHG* writes, “Not only is there serenity in the arrangement of the furniture which of itself is restraining in line, but the color theme is based upon that most restful of all colors – green! Not the intense tone of emerald nor the stimulating shade of crème de menthe, but a tender green that soothes repose. Carpet and brocade curtains stress this.”²⁰³ A boudoir, visible through the open door, was furnished in “French style.” The two twin Queen Anne beds were covered in rose-pink bedspreads (Figure 3.23). “On the whole,” reports *CHG*, “there is a pleasing personal touch – as evidence of Mrs. Shaver’s good taste in conjunction with that of the interior decorator, Minerva Elliot.”²⁰⁴ When I mentioned this to Hallie, she described her grandmother as “a very strong personality. I don’t think she

²⁰⁰ “Savoring of the Italian,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1930, 24.

²⁰¹ Interview with Hallie Watson, February 2, 2018.

²⁰² “Savoring of the Italian,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1930, 24.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

would let somebody tell her what to do, to be quite honest. So, maybe there's some people who would say, 'just do it and I'll live with it,' or my grandmother who would say 'I have this, this, and this, and what about this and, oh no I won't have that.' I can't see her being pushed around AT ALL. She was forceful, and a strong personality."²⁰⁵

The Shaver home, decorated using period furniture belonging to the homeowner, fused with Elliot's subtle decorative touches – the green bedroom, for example – exemplifies the decorative cohesion between professional and homeowner. Not all of Elliot's decorative choices were appreciated by the family, however. For instance, during the furnishing of the newly-built home, Mrs. Watson remembered that a mirror, most likely Italian, was purchased (though not by Elliot) which was framed with carved wooden *putti* playing musical instruments. "One of the things that my father was very unhappy about – I think it was Minerva Elliot, [or] *some* interior decorator – when the mirror was bought, originally, it was wooden, [with] wooden putti. They were wooden-looking, they were not painted, and the interior decorator had them painted sort of beige, and he thought that was too bad."²⁰⁶ When I told Mrs. Watson of my quest to save Minerva Elliot from oblivion, she said, "It's too bad she's so unknown [today], because at the time she was *famous*!"²⁰⁷ The house was sold after Gordon Shaver passed away, and today can barely be seen from the street because it is surrounded by tall trees. Subsequent homeowners have also made additions and renovations to the exterior, removing any evidence of its once Spanish Colonial architecture. The collaboration between Jocelyn Davidson, Minerva Elliot and Hallie Shaver points to a team effort. For

²⁰⁵ Interview with Hallie Watson, February 2, 2018.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

instance, Davidson evidently worked alongside Mrs. Shaver to design a Spanish Revival home like those she admired in Panama. Elliot demonstrably collaborated with Mrs. Shaver (and possibly even Davidson), to bring indoors some elements of the exterior style to create a Mediterranean feel resonant with the Spanish Revival exterior, in the social spaces on the first floor. Together, the three worked together to create a unified design.

The Function of an Interior Decorator

“The function of the interior decorator is just as important as that of the architect,” wrote R.N. Irvine. “The trained decorator has an intimate knowledge of the requirements of furnishing the house, and by reason of his special study and experience in the field he can offer a better ensemble than most architects.”²⁰⁸ John Lyle’s desire to seize control of the interior exemplified the crusade for a new “brand” of designer. Lyle wrote, “It is not necessary to have a big house or a big bank account to have a beautiful interior, but it is essential that whoever is handling the design and decoration of the interior be endowed with taste and equipped with knowledge.”²⁰⁹ Yet having taste and knowledge is exactly what Minerva Elliot and her contemporaries believed was the key to good decoration.

Design historian Peter McNeil explains

By the 1940s design was professionalized and colonized by architects and the emerging brand of industrial designer. A new model emerged which was opposed to both the taste of the 1920s and early 1930s and the feminized amateur practice which dominated interior decoration in the inter-war period. **‘Decoration’ became the disparaged term which was expunged from the discourse of post-World War II modern architecture and design, and the cultural production of a**

²⁰⁸ R.N. Irvine, “The Function of the Interior Decorator,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1934, 56.

²⁰⁹ John M. Lyle, “Domestic Interiors,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, October-November 1934, 19.

generation of women artists and designers demoted accordingly (emphasis mine).²¹⁰

This statement is perhaps best captured by the Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario, which continued as the Society of Interior Designers of Ontario before officially changing its name to Interior Designers of Ontario in 1968.²¹¹ The name was changed again in 1984 to the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario. In a 1926 profile of Elliot published in *McLean's Magazine*, writer Gertrude Pringle noted that “On a foundation of instinctive, sensitive taste and a quick and lively appreciation of things fine and beautiful, [Elliot] has added that all important superstructure of special, specific knowledge which distinguishes the authority from the pretentious amateur.”²¹²

Elliot's professional status was captured with her homes featured in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, and in the many decorative schemes she had photographed for the magazine, including that of Gordon and Hallie Shaver. Her desire to elevate the interior and give it proper attention – through means of decoration – was carried out by reconciling the challenges brought on by modern adaptations and infiltrators. John Lyle was worried about an “untrained amateur” completing the work of an architect. Yet, what a case study of the Shaver home exemplifies is the exact opposite. Hallie Shaver, the “untrained amateur” in Lyle's view, became the knowledgeable patron and Elliot was the hired expert. For those without Mrs. Shaver's resources, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* was the source for advice, prompting their education. Why then, did Hallie Shaver hire

²¹⁰ In Peter McNeil, “Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator, ca. 1890-1940,” *Art History* 17 no. 4 (1994): 652.

²¹¹ See Operating By-Law of the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario, March 19, 2014, <http://www.arido.ca/download.php?id=501>.

²¹² Gertrude Pringle, “Making A Business of Good Taste,” *MacLean's Magazine*, October 1, 1926, 71.

Elliot? Perhaps she wanted Elliot's stamp of approval, or needed assistance in creating atmosphere. Maybe they were even friends.²¹³ Elliot's fashionability and recognition made her an eminent choice to hire for collaboration. Who better to include in the decoration of your home than the authority of interior decoration herself?

²¹³ Hallie and Gordon Shaver were among 100 guests who attended a farewell party for Minerva Elliot before she sailed to the south of France and Ireland in 1937. See "Guests Bid Bon Voyage To Mrs. Minerva Elliot," *The Globe and Mail*, January 16, 1937, 14.

Conclusion

*“And so to-day, Minerva Elliot occupies a very definite and authoritative place in the art life of Canada. Her achievement ought to be at once an inspiration and a warning to women of artistic tastes who expect to earn a living in work congenial to them.”*²¹⁴

Minerva Elliot’s career after 1940 is difficult to trace.²¹⁵ Amongst the dearth of information, however, we can deduce a few things. *Gossip!* magazine wrote that after 1941, Elliot decided to “bring the results of her twenty years of experience in the decorative arts within reach of all Canadians who understand the importance of a background of good taste for living, whether their homes are large or small.”²¹⁶ She opened a new space, possibly a showroom, called the “New Ivory Room,” and showed the public her design innovation by creating the “New Minerva Dressing Table and Minerva Lamp to prove, to her own and her clients’ satisfaction, the following: Quality is cheapest in the end; Quality is not too good for any one; Quality is within reach of the purse of every home-owner with a natural pride in the home.”²¹⁷

There are many things to take away from this report. Elliot’s professional life, as we have seen published in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, catered to the upper classes. Her love of antiques and period furniture was captured in her columns and advertisements. By 1941, however, her “departure” alludes to a major change in her

²¹⁴ Gertrude Pringle, “Making A Business of Good Taste,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, October 1, 1926, 71.

²¹⁵ *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, a crucial vehicle for tracking Elliot’s career from 1925 to 1939, was difficult to access after 1940. The two main archival repositories I utilized, Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa) and McGill University Archives (Montreal), had limited copies of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* post-1940. It would be useful in future research on interior decoration to view copies of *CHG* after 1940.

²¹⁶ “Minerva Elliot: A Pen Picture of the Career of this Outstanding Woman Decorator,” *Gossip!*, February 10th, 1941, 4.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

decorating style and clientele. Now she appears to emphasize the democratization of quality. Perhaps the larger audience she addressed in *CHG* was now considered her clients, rather than only the socially elite. Instances of Elliot's "New Ivory Room" seem to have evaporated, as have any mentions of her "New Minerva Dressing Table" and "Minerva Lamp." I know that she designed lamp fixtures (one design was featured in *CHG* in 1933) (Figure 4.1), which could explain her foray into designing furniture. The modern identity she chose in the interwar period embodied the styles of eighteenth-century England and France, accommodating the expensive tastes of plutocratic clients. By the Second World War, however, Elliot seems to have embraced that interior decoration, and "quality," can be attained by any homeowner, regardless of income, as long as they have a "natural pride in the home."²¹⁸

In September 1943, Elliot left Toronto and moved to New York City.²¹⁹ She remained in Manhattan until 1950 and most likely continued working as an interior decorator.²²⁰ It would appear that Elliot then permanently moved to England, residing in Surrey until her death in June 1964.²²¹ There is no discernible evidence of her life in England. It does, however, make sense for Elliot to be drawn to the country of her birth, and one from which she found so much inspiration in her interior designs.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ *Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Buffalo, Lewiston, Niagara Falls, and Rochester, New York, 1902-1954*, Ancestry.com, Library and Archives, Ottawa.

²²⁰ City directories in 1945, 1946, and 1948 report two addresses for Elliot in Midtown Manhattan, one for her personal residence and one under "decorator." *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995*, Ancestry.com, Library and Archives, Ottawa.

²²¹ I cannot confirm that this death record belongs to Elliot, but I have strong reason to believe it does. For starters, the death record simply records the deceased's name and birth year. By all accounts, these match with the Minerva Elliot in question. It also makes sense that Elliot would return to England to live out her life. *England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007*, Ancestry.com, Library and Archives, Ottawa.

Interrogating the beginning of interior decoration in Toronto is important not only because it has not been done before. It is significant because it provides an account of the actors involved in the designed environment, such as department stores, magazines, independent decorators, and homeowners, and demonstrates how they mutually reinforced each other. Studying interior decoration is also important because it emphasizes the role of the interior as a vehicle for identity expression, which was expressed in the homes of Minerva Elliot and Hallie Shaver. Finally, this research draws attention to women, especially, who have been left out of the story of architecture and design.

The professionalization of interior decoration was achieved with the founding of the Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario in 1934. The founding members of *SIDO* learned the fundamentals of professional interior decoration by gaining experience in Toronto furniture and department stores. Their inclusion on Eaton's special "D.A." list for outside decorators demonstrated their recognition as decorators of importance in Toronto. The emergence of the Canadian decorating magazine, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, provided a new tool for educating the public about the importance of giving the home attention, and for elevating the profession of interior decoration. Minerva Elliot used both Eaton's and *Canadian Homes and Gardens* to impart advice about the beautification of the interior. By using Elliot as a protagonist, I have been able to use her biography to illuminate the spaces that contributed to the professionalization of interior decoration.

Utilizing *Canadian Homes and Gardens* as evidence of Elliot's life could not capture everything about her. Because there are no archival holdings of her business,

finding supplementary information about Elliot's existence was done through genealogy searches and by adding an oral history component to this project. Interviewing Hallie Watson gave life to a space Minerva Elliot decorated, yet also reminded me of the limitations of the project. The Shaver home is only one example of more than fifty homes Elliot decorated in Toronto. There remains a large amount of research to be conducted on the subject of interior decoration in Canada. While I was only able to skim the surface of what *Canadian Homes and Gardens* was doing in the interwar years, much could be done by analyzing this journal exclusively. There are many other journals published in Canada during this time, and like Valerie Korinek's work on *Chatelaine*, the same analysis could be conducted on *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, *Canadian Home Journal*, and *Canadian Homes and Gardens*' successor, *Canadian Homes*. Furthermore, if we were able to uncover the unknown Canadian decorators across this country, the first steps of revising the history of Canadian architecture and design can begin. There are many men and women who had illustrious careers in the interior design of domestic Canadian homes and are still in need of recognition. Hopefully more voices can emerge from the vaults and fill the scholarly silence of interior decoration histories. Directions to take if pursuing this research further include a more comprehensive look at the other Toronto decorators at play, such as *SIDO* founding members, Augusta Fleming, R. Malcolm Slimon, Anne Harris, and Freda James, just to start. It would also be interesting to look at the specialty furniture stores competing with Eaton's and which had prominence in Toronto at the time but have since faltered, such as Ridpath's in Rosedale. Finally, research into Elliot's apprentice, Herbert Irvine, would add a generational chapter to the story begun with Elliot.

Today, the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO) has a total membership of over 3,300.²²² It continues to regulate and set the standards for the interior design profession in Ontario, and has grown to “become the largest professional group of Interior Designers provincially.”²²³ As a founding member of what was once *SIDO*, Minerva Elliot advocated for the high standards that distinguish interior design today. By revealing the authority Elliot was able to maintain in a profession seen as fleeting and frivolous, and by circulating a small piece of her life within the confines of this research, I hope to have returned some power to Elliot by amplifying her voice as an early proponent of professional interior decoration in Canada.

²²² “About ARIDO,” 2017, *Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario*, <http://www.arido.ca/english/about/about-arido.html>.

²²³ Ibid.

Illustrations

Figure Intro 1. Mrs. Minerva Elliot, April 28, 1927. City of Toronto Archives, *Globe and Mail* fonds, Fonds 1266, Item 11252. Digital image.

Figure Intro 2. Mrs. Minerva Elliot, April 28, 1927. City of Toronto Archives, *Globe and Mail* fonds, Fonds 1266, Item 11251. Digital image.

Figure 1.1 Fifth Floor Galleries of the T. Eaton Company, *Canadian Furniture World and the Undertaker*, June 1923.

Figure 1.2 Postcard for Eaton's College Street, T. Eaton Company fonds, Archives of Ontario, F229-69.

Figure 1.3 *House Furnishings*, December 1930, T. Eaton Company fonds, Archives of Ontario, F229-69.

Figure 1.4 *House Furnishings*, December 1930, T. Eaton Company fonds, Archives of Ontario, F229-69.

Figure 1.5 "Antiques and Reproductions," T. Eaton Company fonds, Archives of Ontario, F229-69.

ABOUT 1545.
A—The scissors chair of the Renaissance. Its shape, carved twisted serpents and masks are borrowed directly from the classic fore-runner, but it shows the 16th century influence in the arched back, the carved centre panel with praying monk, and the amorini. Price, \$200.00.

ABOUT 1600.
B—In the days of good Queen Bess came this solid looking chair of carved oak, with a wide seat for farthingaled skirts, the back with a romanesque arch, carved and inlaid. Price, \$130.00.

ABOUT 1655.
C—Sturdy and uncompromising as Cromwell's Ironsides, an oak chair of the Commonwealth, with barley sugar twists, leather seat and back, nail studded, and the added fringe of a later date. One of a pair. Price, \$135.00.

ABOUT 1688.
D—A late Stuart chair, showing the Flemish influence, refined to the high pitch of elegance that prevailed in James II.'s time. C and S scrolls, cane panelling and arched back are typical. Price \$70.00.

ABOUT 1710.
E—The age of walnut and domestic comfort comes in with the hooped skirts of Queen Anne—comfort typified by the vase panelled, cushion seated chairs. Notice the spoon back, the cabriole leg adapted from the Flemish. Price, \$78.50.

ABOUT 1780.
F—Chippendale, the great experimenter in cabinet making, and in mahogany, produced beautiful chairs. This sketch shows some of his favorite effects—splat pierced with Gothic tracery, bow-shaped top, straight Chinese legs. Set of 4. Price, \$400.00.

ABOUT 1800.
G—The ruins of Pompeii supplied the Adam Brothers with suggestions for the tapering pilasters and legs and slender arches of this graceful chair. Painted in the Angelica Kaufman style. Price, \$60.00.

ABOUT 1795.
H—Sheraton has been described as the designer who adapted to our wants, the fancies of Marie Antoinette. In this chair—late Sheraton, we see the French taste modified by classic grace. Note the comfortable shaping of the back. Set of 7. Price, \$495.00.

THE T. EATON CO. LIMITED
TORONTO CANADA

Figure 1.6 Pamphlet for Eaton's College Street, T. Eaton Company fonds, Archives of Ontario, F229-69.

THE FINE ART GALLERIES
 In addition to a constant succession of exhibitions of contemporary art, present a distinguished collection of "Old Masters" representing many schools and including the famous Rembrandt — "Lady with a Handkerchief in her Left Hand", as well as notable paintings by English, French and Dutch painters. The English Portrait School is represented by paintings by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Hoppner, Lely, Cotes, Harlow. Photographed above, portrait of Master Robinson by George Harlow.
 —Fifth Floor.

THE AGE OF ELEGANCE
 has returned with the vogue for eighteenth century furniture — classic in design and singularly well adapted to our style of living. Good reproductions in these styles may be seen in great variety on the Fifth Floor at EATON'S College Street, including the mantelpiece, Hopplewhite chair, coffee tables and sofa of our sketch. The Chippendale secretary is an English antique, and can be reproduced.
 — Fifth Floor.

ORIENTAL RUGS
 of the finer sort bring colour and brilliance to austere interiors. So we commend to your notice a delightful group of "Semi-Antiques" (pre-War weaves), vivacious in colouring and exquisite in design, surprisingly moderately priced from \$35.00 to \$450.00.
 —Third Floor.

Figure 2.1 Advertisement for *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1926.

6

Canadian Homes and Gardens for January, 1926

The open cabinets or "cupboards" as they were called, are examples of early Colonial workmanship dating from the eighteenth century. The shell-like fixed interior area is mentioned in "The Corner Cupboard" Reclaimed" in this issue.

At centre is a piece of furniture of early American workmanship illustrative of the period tendency of the first craftsmen on this continent. There is a feeling of the Queen Anne piece about it, indicated by the "cabriole" carving of the legs.

Could You Identify the Period of These Pieces at a Glance?

February is Furniture Number

That promised series on period furniture will begin with this number—to run for the balance of the year. Professor Currelly of the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's leading authority on the subject, will contribute these fascinating articles calculated to cover just that popular aspect of a wide subject which the woman who faces the selection and purchasing of furniture in keeping is so anxious to find. Do not miss the beginning of this important series.

The smart dog and horse features which have attracted such wide interest and attention will continue while rich photographic presentations

of notable Canadian homes—in especial relation to their furnishing—will be shown.

We do not recommend *Canadian Homes and Gardens* to everyone, but if you are interested in those things which represent the gracious side of living—a beautiful and artistic home, continually improved and refreshed by the inspiration of new ideas and authoritative suggestion—you will not only appreciate but require the magazine. And if you are a garden lover as well, there is no other medium in this country in a position to supply you with the expert information and inspiration to be found in these pages.

We shall highly value your subscription and your opinion

SIGN—SNIP—AND SEND—THE COUPON

CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS,
153 University Avenue, Toronto, Ont.

Gentlemen: Enclosed please find \$5.00 for TWO YEARS' subscription to *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (or)

Enclosed please find \$3.00 for ONE YEAR'S subscription to *Canadian Homes and Gardens*.

Name _____ City _____

Street _____ Province _____

From settings like this the tradition of modern furniture descends.

Figure 2.2 Advertisement for “Minerva Elliot” (bottom, centre), *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1928.

Canadian Homes and Gardens for January, 1928

(53)

ANTIQUES, DECORATIONS & FINE ARTS

Jane Moffatt

CURTAINS
PORTIERES
SLIP COVERS
CUSHIONS
LAMP
SHADES
FURNITURE
COVERINGS,
ETC.
WALL
PAPERS

Rendolph 7255

8 Bloor St East, Toronto

**NEW Photographs
for OLD**

It's a pity to let
your ancestors'
pictures fade
away. They will
be of even greater
interest to your
children than they
are to you.

Have them copied by a perma-
nent photographic process and
scratches and stain removed.

If you wish we
will frame them
suitably-hanging or
send them to us
and we will quote
you a price.

Moore &
Nixon-James
12 Park Road
Evan. 7057 Toronto

**J.W. KNOTT & SON
DECORATORS**
ESTABLISHED 1899

We are now showing the
latest wallpaper importations
for 1927, including many
exclusive reproductions.
And will gladly send
samples of our suggestions
to any provincial address.
Just state your color
scheme and
requirements.

STUDIO & OFFICE
45 CHARLES ST. W. TORONTO

WHEN mahogany was first used in the creation of beautiful furniture, no expense in time, money or fine craftsmanship was spared. To find an inferior piece belonging to the early mahogany period is an exception. Drawer fronts and cabinet doors and panels were made out of the solid and were not veneered. Drawer linings and the backs of cabinets and book-cases and the underframes of tables in this early school were made from high quality oak; in fact, it is unusual to find such parts of a mahogany piece made from a soft wood. The drawer bottoms were made of single broad pieces of oak, and not of narrow strips joined up. The oak does not exhibit any splits, and is often figured, denoting that it was quarter cut. The dovetails of the drawers were beautifully executed and display the highest quality of craftsmanship. William Kent, the well-known architect of this period, greatly favored mahogany furniture for those houses in which he carried out the interior decoration. This type of furniture of classical design, which has come to be known to-day as "William Kent furniture," is typical of the furniture of the early mahogany period. The quality of the material and the craftsmanship is above criticism; it represents the high-water mark of excellence. The design, however, is inclined to be ponderous, although accurate in its classical proportions and detail. A distinguishing feature of the craftsmanship is displayed in the meticulous working of the classical mouldings, and, above all, in the execution of the carving. This is particularly noticeable, because the carved ornament was carried out in high relief. Moulding and carved ornament to-day have the appearance of being wrought in bronze, owing to the close-grained dense Spanish mahogany, darkened by age and use, acquiring a metallic lustre.

Hand Wrought Iron
Moderately Priced

Iron lighting fixtures forged by hand lend charm and distinction to your home.

We invite you to our showroom.

Write for Complete Catalogue

METALSMITHS CO., LIMITED
393 Yonge St., Toronto
Rand. 7997, 4 blocks North of Bloor

IRONWORKERS

Exclusive Fabrics

Unusual Lamps

Minerva Elliot
228 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ont.

Important Antique Furniture
Fine Reproductions

Interiors
Rare Porcelains

The
W. J. Bolus Co.
Limited

318 Yonge Street
TORONTO

DECORATORS

Both Interiors and Exteriors
Work requires unusual ability is
simplified in execution by our
trained organization.

Importers of
High-Grade Wallpapers

Telephones
ADELAIDE 4640
and
ADELAIDE 7750

AUGUSTA FLEMING

Consulting Decorator
Interiors and Antiques

Graduate of
New York School of
Fine and Applied Art
New York, Paris, Italy, England

96 BLOOR STREET W.
KINGSDALE 2929
TORONTO

**Curatins and
Draperies**

**STEVENSON
& MADDEN**

R. S. Stevenson Miss Madden
(formerly with the Murray Kay Co. Ltd.)

Color Schemes Estimates
Arranged Given

15 King St. E. Adelaide 5101
(4th floor, John Kay Building)
TORONTO

Figure 2.3 Advertisement for “Minerva Elliot,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, May 1930.

140

Canadian Homes and Gardens for May, 1930

Old carved and gilt wooden doors from Buckingham Palace. These doors were removed during alterations to the Palace at the commencement of the reign of King Edward VII. Imported by

MINERVA ELLIOT
228 Bloor Street West, Toronto

QUEEN

Figure 2.4 Advertisement for “Minerva Elliot, Limited,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Canadian Homes and Gardens for September, 1931 7

THE SIMPLE BEAUTY AND
ELEGANCE OF THIS
WINDOW SPEAKS OF THE
EXCELLENT TASTE AND
QUALITY OF THE SCHEME
OF DECORATION PECULIAR
TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

Minerva Elliot, Limited
196 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario

Figure 2.5 Advertisement for the T. Eaton Co., *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, August 1926.

14
Canadian Homes and Gardens for August, 1926

1. Chippendale mirror—walnut frame, \$35.00.

2. China cabinet of mahogany (reproduction) with finish grained centre panel, \$250.00.

3. Late Sheraton chair, with wheel, ear, pilasters and shaped back. One of a set of 4, \$400.00.

4. Beautiful lustre chandelier, English, early nineteenth century. Price \$100.00. Wall sconces with crystal drops, \$40.00, a pair.

5. Sheraton drop leaf table of light mahogany, inlaid with holly wood, \$175.00.

6. Eighteenth century stuffed over arm chair of mahogany. Solid and substantial, covered with glazed cloth, \$175.00.

The Right Thing in the Right Place

Is the Whole Secret of Successful Furnishing.

OF course this pre-supposes good taste, good judgment and the possibility of securing the "right thing." But how if you are not sure of your own taste, your own judgment? Then, of course, it is advisable to consult an expert. In which connection we would remind you of the existence of our large staff of Interior Decorators. (There is no charge for their services.) As for the "right thing," you can often find the exact piece of furniture that is needed in the Gallery of Antiques and Reproductions. For here is some of the very finest of modern furniture as well as a collection of carefully selected and guaranteed antiques. And if they have not just the thing, they will make it for you, copy any of your own furniture, or submit original designs. All the pieces shown in the sketch—except the china cabinet—are antiques.

THE T. EATON CO. LIMITED
CANADA

Figure 2.6 Advertisement for Eaton's College Street, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June-July 1934.

14
CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS
June-July, 1934

Above: Photograph of a room designed by Mr. F. C. Prout of our Interior Decorating Bureau—a charming setting arranged for the owner's treasured furniture combined with new furnishings.

The Atmosphere that Soothes and Charms Is the Result of Knowledge Not Accident--

It is primarily a matter of artistic sense—a sure eye for proportion and for color harmonies, combined with the technical knowledge which is a life time study.

This is all a matter of course for the members of our Interior Decoration Bureau—a knowledge which enables them to remodel a fireplace, devise new mouldings for a window, improvise a bookcase, suggest new finishes for walls, as well as to deal competently with such details as hangings and upholstery, floor coverings and arrangement.

Behind this technical knowledge lies the great tradition of period designers, and architects. So that, with equal facility, our interior decorators can create a room, classically eighteenth century, solidly Jacobean, or entertainingly modern. Telephone Adelaide 5471.

EATON'S - COLLEGE STREET

Figure 2.7 Advertisement for The New Marconi Radio, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1930.

Distinguished Canadians

... Canada's Outstanding

Dr. A. D. W. Ross, President of the Faculty of Arts, McGill University, Quebec, and member of the Senate.

Dr. J. H. Ross, President of the Faculty of Arts, McGill University, Quebec, and member of the Senate.

Dr. J. H. Ross, President of the Faculty of Arts, McGill University, Quebec, and member of the Senate.

Famous Canadian Musicians, Composers, Interior Decorators, Engineers and Social Leaders Join Marconi's Engineers in Choosing Canadian Marconi New Radio Receiving Sets.

IN the social and personal columns of the *Montreal Gazette* of March 25, the following paragraph appeared:

"Mr. Milton Halsey, Vice-President and Director of the Canadian Marconi Company, Limited, and Mr. R. M. Murphy, general sales-manager of the company, entertained at tea in the vice-regal parlour of the Rideau-Carleton yesterday afternoon. Among their guests were Miss Martha Allen, Mr. Milton Halsey, Mr. J. Herbert Hodgson, Mr. Auguste Ridgway, Mr. Alfons Howard, Dr. J. H. Whitehead, and Mr. Emiliano Renard."

Chosen for their outstanding reputations in the arts and sciences... invited by the officers and directors of the Canadian Marconi Company, Limited... those seven famous Canadians... to help Marconi Engineers select from a full range of new cabinet designs, the *for* consistent... to modern Canadian tastes

choose the MARCONI

NEW Radio Receiving Set

JUDGES SELECT NEW MARCONI CABINET MODELS

From above judges assembled in the Vice-regal parlour of the Rideau-Carleton, Ottawa, where Marconi's latest radio receiving sets were selected. Among them, as before, the Auguste Ridgway, general director of the Canadian Marconi Company, and Mr. J. H. Whitehead, editor of the *La Presse*. Miss Martha Allen, daughter of the late Senator, is also present.

Prominent Canadians judge and approve the New Marconi Radio

Amid colorful historical surroundings they recorded their respective choices by ballot. They had upon them requirements: (1) distinction of design, (2) simplicity of line, (3) symmetry of form, (4) harmony of composition, and (5) craftsmanship. On the back page you see photographs of the radio of their choice.

As radio receiving sets, these marvelous new Marconi Radios are built upon a sound, scientific basis. They are commending the attention not only of the scientific world, but of those who make an art of studying trends in modern development and modern interior decoration. For the same men who have helped to

achieve past aerial triumphs in wireless and make the name "Marconi" famous in radio research, are now applying their knowledge and experience to the manufacture of the new Marconi radio receiving sets.

To science now Marconi has added artistic skill. And the result is the new Marconi Radio in the approved new Marconi cabinet—a revolutionary advance in design, appearance and radio reproduction! Go to your nearest Marconi dealer. See these marvelous new radios. Examine them. Hear them. Picture them in your own home atmosphere. Then, and only then, decide for yourself which one of these masterpieces would best suit you.

The new Marconi Radio is a reliable foremost of today. Distinguished Canadians approve it!

Figure 2.8 Advertisement for The New Marconi Radio, *The Globe*, October 31, 1930.

"The New MARCONI is a decorative asset to any room," says

MRS. MINERVA ELLIOT

noted authority on home decoration

This famous radio cabinet which has helped to give name of Canada's most beautiful homes, is the only home with the distinctive "Tutti" Combination design model.

Delighted with the distinctive modern beauty of the New Marconi, many such noted authorities as Mrs. Minerva Elliot of Toronto, who has been selected to represent the New Marconi Radio in the "Tutti" Combination design model, have been selected to represent the New Marconi Radio in the "Tutti" Combination design model.

Styled in harmony with the most modern of home decoration, New Marconi cabinets are compact and aesthetically correct. Their presence in any room adds dignity and lasting beauty to the home scheme.

As a radio the New Marconi is a masterpiece of skill and beauty—lasting, pleasing, modern, useful! See and hear the new model of the New Marconi, which Mrs. Minerva Elliot has in her home, at your dealer's store. You will never be satisfied with any other set after you have compared the compact modern New Marconi with the old set in your home.

The New MARCONI Radio

Canadian MARCONI Company, Montreal Branches: Vancouver, Toronto, Halifax, and St. John's, Nfld.

Figure 2.9 Advertisement for The New Marconi Radio, *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, October 31, 1930.

●

In "Castle Frank," the home of Lady Kemp,
the distinctive design of the new MARCONI
adds a subtle touch of beauty . . .

●

●

Many of Canada's finest homes, placed with exquisite taste, the elegant, distinctive beauty of the New Marconi has been chosen as a part of nobly superior schemes of decoration.

MARCONI "SENIOR" COMBINATION
This ultra-modern musical instrument combines the finest in Radio and Phonograph entertainment. The Radio, a triumph of Marconi engineering, embodies the most perfect development. *Featured: Automatic Volume Control, Super-High Tuning, Super-Low-impedance Loud Circuit, Screen Grid Amplifier, and Power Output. General Audition Dynamic Speaker.* The Phonograph provides the volume in recorded music, reproducing every tone shading with utmost fidelity. *Extra Marconi Pick-up of advanced design. Full Automatic Stop.* The Cabinet, a masterpiece of modern craftsmanship, will add new beauty to even the finest home. *Height from floor 47" - \$385 with tubes.*

● The New Marconi radio has been chosen for so many prominent homes of society because its rich tone beauty is housed in a dignified, distinctive cabinet in perfect keeping with home-beautiful interiors.

Lady Kemp, of Toronto, for example, has chosen a New Marconi radio for her beautiful home "Castle Frank."

These New Marconi cabinets are small, compact and absolutely correct. They are designed in the modern manner in style harmony with modern furniture and interior. In your own home a New Marconi will add a touch of elegant beauty. It will generously reflect your good taste and modern decorative understanding. Indeed, but it will also lastingly confirm your good judgment in having it here.

Take models of the New Marconi set that now grace the home of Lady Kemp are on display at your dealer's store.—Come in and see the superior new radio.

●

The New
MARCONI Radio

Canadian MARCONI Company, Montreal Dealers: Vancouver, Toronto, Halifax, St. John's, Nfld.

●

Figure 2.10 Model room designed by Freda James, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January-February 1935.

Figure 2.11 Model room designed by R. Malcolm Slimon, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January-February 1935.

Figure 3.1 228 Bloor Street West, April 25, 1924. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 372, Subseries 9.

Figure 3.2 Yard of woven fibre given to Minerva Elliot from Sir Frank Warner, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, June 1930.

Figure 3.3 Dining room in Minerva Elliot's home in Rosedale, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Figure 3.4 Entrance of Minerva Elliot's home in Rosedale, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Figure 3.5 Drawing room of Minerva Elliot's home in Rosedale, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Figure 3.6 Drawing room of Minerva Elliot's home in Rosedale, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Figure 3.7 Drawing room of Minerva Elliot's home in Rosedale, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Figure 3.8 Bedroom of Minerva Elliot's home in Rosedale, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1931.

Figure 3.9 London home of Mrs. Derwent-Wood, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1927.

Figure 3.10 London home of Mrs. Derwent-Wood, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1927.

Figure 3.11 Exterior view of Minerva Elliot's home in Forest Hill, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937.

Figure 3.12 Drawing room in Minerva Elliot's home in Forest Hill, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937.

Figure 3.13 Drawing room in Minerva Elliot's home in Forest Hill, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937.

Figure 3.14 Bedroom in Minerva Elliot's home in Forest Hill, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937.

Figure 3.15 Bedroom in Minerva Elliot's home in Forest Hill, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937.

Figure 3.16 Dining room in Minerva Elliot's home in Forest Hill, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, December 1937.

Figure 3.17 Home of Freda James, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1932.

Figure 3.18 Living room in Freda James' apartment, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1932.

Figure 3.19 Entrance in the home of Gordon and Hallie Shaver, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1930.

Figure 3.20 Living room in the home of Gordon and Hallie Shaver, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1930.

Figure 3.21 Living room in the home of Gordon and Hallie Shaver, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1930.

Figure 3.22 Bedroom in the home of Gordon and Hallie Shaver, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, January 1930.

Figure 4.1 Light fixtures designed by Minerva Elliot, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, September 1933.

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