



The Decoration of Houses

Edith Wharton (1862 - 1937) and Ogden Codman, Jr. (1863 - 1951)

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Before she was an acclaimed novelist, Edith Wharton achieved recognition for her *The Decoration of Houses*, a manual on interior decoration produced in collaboration with architect Ogden Codman, Jr. Prior to its publication, interior decoration had been a discipline much like dressmaking, which was reflected in the use of heavy drapey-overstuffed furniture and prominence of Victorian lace and bric-a-brac. Codman and Wharton argued that interior decoration should instead be approached much like architecture, and thus room design should be approached with a classical sense of simple lines, proportion, symmetry, and balance. In doing so they helped guide interior decoration away from the Victorian penchant for elaborate details,

busy wallpaper and fabric designs, and clutter and stuffiness in general.

The book is organized in sixteen chapters, with the first chapters outlining general principles and the following chapters detailing the suggested arrangement of specific rooms for maximum comfort and usefulness. *The Decoration of Houses* is considered a seminal work in the creation of the discipline of interior design.

Edith Wharton (January 24, 1862 – August 11, 1937) was an American writer and designer best known for her stories featuring an insider’s view of America’s wealthy and privileged class. She was born Edith Newbold Jones into an upper crust family (the Joneses of the phrase “keeping up with Joneses”) and was raised in the thick of New York society. In 1885 she married well-bred Bostonian Edward Wharton. They traveled widely and eventually settled in 1902 at the Mount, her estate in Lenox, Massachusetts. Edward suffered from an increasingly acute depression, deemed incurable in 1908, and they divorced in 1913, subjecting her to the opprobrium of her peers. She moved to France shortly thereafter, dividing her time between Paris and a villa in Provence, returning to America only once in 1923, to accept an honorary degree from Yale University. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 for *The Age of Innocence*, the first woman to do so, and was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1927, 1928, and 1930.

Ogden Codman, Jr. (January 19, 1863 - January 8, 1951) was a noted American architect and interior decorator in the Beaux-Arts styles, and co-author with Edith Wharton of *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), which became a standard in American interior design.