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# A study of Interior Walls Decorations in the Twentieth Century

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# Abstract

This study investigated the characteristics and features of interior walls in the twentieth century. The most famous wall coverings, paints and designs developed in association to the establishment of or inspired by an artistic movement founded in the twentieth century were studied. These styles were the arts and crafts, Art nouveau, Modernism, Futurism, Art Deco, Bauhaus, Surrealism, Space age, Minimalism, Memphis and ended by the deconstructivism movement. It was found that the interior wall color design reflects clearly the two-dimensional design features of the artistic style movements adopted and established at the era in which interior walls of residential, commercial or public spaces were made. Throughout the twentieth century, interior wall design features were transformed gradually from traditional classic features including groups of colors used to reach the significant freedom in the post modernism era.

Keywords: Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Futurism, Modernism, Contemporary, Pattern, Wallpaper, Murals.

## 1. Introduction

Interior design is the artistic process of decorating the inner spaces and surfaces of a building using pieces of furniture, accessories and/or paints. This process includes managing, planning and coordinating the walls, floors and ceilings and the included area of the targeted space to fulfill the users' requirements in terms of aesthetic and functional values.

The walls of an interior space hold unique significance so as they have instant and direct impacts on the visitors. The walls would deliver the color palette, textures, style used instantly. Interior walls design is the art of ornamenting and decorating a building's inner walls employing different techniques. Interior walls' decorations could be applied directly on the walls such as paints or could be made and produced indirectly by using readymade coverings such as wallpaper or some murals or wall arts.

This paper is focused on studying the artistic features of interior walls specifications. It is limited to the twentieth century as this century had witnessed more key alterations into peoples' lives including their design preferences, inclinations and impressions than other centuries. Studying history of design is essential for designers as it is one of the main resources of their inspirations. i.e. the history generally and art and design especially would be highly likely to repeat itself. However, this repetition should be in new alternative form and sense. Therefore, almost designers start their projects or careers with looking at the past to develop their current and future designs.

## 2. The Arts and Crafts interior walls 1850-1915

In the twentieth century, a series of art movements were developed having their roots in the Arts and crafts movement. This style or movement was based on reviving the gothic style, used clear lines and natural patterns. This period of time is significant for William Morris's developed designs for wallpapers unique for using the "Pimpernel" plant and based on blue and green tones. Figure 1 shows a sample of an example of his designs.

Figure 2 shows Louis Comfort Tiffany's(1883–4)view of employing the floral pattern in decorating the interior walls which is inspired by the Victorian style and his inspirations from the Japanese style. Dankmar Adler and Louis H. Sullivan (1856–1924) has designed the interior space of the Auditorium Building- Chicago, the

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arches and floral incisions looked like jewelry surrounding the space. Figure 3 and Figure 4 present samples of a room distinctive for the Japanese sense and subject embedded into the arts and crafts style.

Blue and gold wall paintings were inspired by natural subject i.e. peacock feathers. The materials used on the walls were porcelain, leather and wood.

Therefore, it is evident from the analysis of the wall coverings adopted by the Arts and Crafts style, these are characterized by the typical features of this style including floral patterns, abstracted animal figures with color palette involve dark greens, reds and oranges and the beige as background.



Figure 1 Sample of Wallpaper Design- William Morris-1876. (Pile, 2005)



Figure 2 Louis Comfort Tiffany, Tiffany Residence, New York, 1883–4 (Hawley, 1976)



Figure 3 Sample of Interior Walls -Peacock Room- Thomas Jeckyll and James McNeill Whistler-1876–7. (Pile, 2005)



Figure 4 Samples of Wall designs- Antoni Gaudí- 1878-85 (Pile, 2005)

### 3. Art Nouveau movement 1880-1910

The Art Nouveau style aimed to ending the discrimination between levels and kinds of art style, methods and products. Therefore, artists were able to extend their applications in new fields such as wall paintings and murals(Widewalls, 2016).Gustav Klimt is one of the famous artists in the Art Nouveau era who had significant beginnings for his interior murals and paintings on ceilings. Figure 5 shows one of the murals made by him above the grand staircase at the Kunsthistorisches museum. Figure 7 is another example of Gusatv Klimt murals representing human figures. This mural painting is significant for it extravagant design, presenting historical old classical places, Parisian palette and outlined brightly colored subjects (Klimt, Delphi Complete Works of Gustav Klimt (Illustrated), 2014).Figure 7 to Figure 10provide more examples and samples of murals and wall arts made by Art Nouveau artists indicating the importance of the figures and using gold paint and color on the inner walls. Figure 10 shows a mural painting developed by artist Frantisek Urban and his wife Marie Urbanova-Zahradnicka presents angels and floral motifs.

Art Nouveau's residential interior design is evident from the Tassel House in Brussels (1892) of stenciled wall and painted ceiling (Figure 11). Besides, Horta House is one of the Art Nouveau examples employed in the wall white tiles, woodwork with colored stained glass and paintings. The flowing curves were used on the staircase walls (Pile, 2005). Typical art Nouveau style is shown in Masson- House's dining room with the flowing curves of

the woodwork cabinet (Pile, 2005). The Art Nouveau's flowing curves made by metal material and cream background with blue-green paints is an example of this style pastel palette (Figure 12 and Figure 13)(Pile, 2005).

Figure 14 depicts Otto Wagner's (1841–1918) interior design of the Karlsplatz station in Vienna (1898) used golden decorative detail reflects the Art Nouveau- white, green, and gold ornamented the lobby. Hoffmann designed the dining room's interior including the walls of warm thin sheets of colored marble edged with fine strips of metal ornaments plated with gold (Figure 15). Gustav Klimt designed the mosaic murals were used on the side walls. Some other rooms were executed using various colors of marble geometrical designs (Pile, 2005).



Figure 5 Mural painting- Gustav Klimt- 1891 (Sandi, 2018)



Figure 7 Art Nouveau Mural-Rue des Capucins 58-Brussels(Art Nouveau World, 2009 (taken))



Figure 9 Art Nouveau -Rue des Capucins 58Brussels(Wikimedia, 2020)



Figure 6 Art Nouveau . Gustav Klimt. Theatre in Taormina. 1886. (Klimt, The Theatre Of Taormina, 1886)



Figure 8 Art Nouveau Mural - House in Brussels(Panoramio, 2020)



Figure 10 Mural painting- Czech artist Frantisek Urban and his wife Marie Urbanova-Zahradnicka-Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul at Vysehrad in Prague, Czech Republic. (alamy, 2020)



Figure 11 Art Nouveau- Victor Horta, Tassel House, Brussels, 1892 (Pile, 2005)



Figure 12 Eugène Vallin, Masson- House, Nancy, France, 1903 (Pile, 2005)



Figure 13 Hector Guimard, Castel Béranger, Paris, 1894–9. (Pile, 2005)



Figure 14 Art Nouveau- Otto Wagner Karlsplatz station in Vienna (1898)(VisistVienna, 2020)



a)Dining room. B)Bathroom Figure 15 Josef Hoffmann, Stoclet House, Brussels, 1905–11(Stoclet, 2016)(katariMag, 2020)

Therefore, it is evident from this analysis that the visual characteristics of the wall coverings adopted the two dimensional Art Nouveau style. There would be uniqueness for both public and residential spaces. Figures of contrasting colors were used in public interior walls. For the residential interior walls, the flowing curves were extensively employed with natural colors employed. A common visual feature was noticed from examples of public and residential interiors that bright green and white background was used in both of them (Figure 14 and Figure 15).

# 4. Modernism 1880-1940

The modernism is a movement aimed at reflecting the societies hopes and actual status in their new materials, designs and technologies. The modernist style was seeking the development of new forms and shapes. Van Doesburg used the De Stijl abstract diagonally positioned geometrical shapes in making modern style interior (Figure 16) (Pile, 2005). The colors used were restricted to black white and primary colors. Another approach using abstracted shapes on the walls in the modernism styles is represented in Figure 17 showing the American Modernism of the interior walls' gold-plated materials used and tiles inspired by birds' forms. Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Hill House- Helensburgh 1904 (Figure 19) is one of the modernism styles blending and mixing conventional and international styles (McCorquodale, 1983) (Stirling, 2020). This building's interior walls are characterized by the eastern themes in addition to both art-nouveau and art-deco details. Ivory white and light purple colors were used in the decorative abstracted floral motifs.

A building named "House for an Art Lover" was built and constructed in 1996 and based on a design made by Charles Rennie Mackintosh in 1901. Dark and light color pallets for men and women respectively were used. This wallpaper designed by Bader and Dufour in 1826 has develop a relaxing atmosphere and look desired during 1950s and 1960s. It is obvious from the presented design and their consideration that the modernism style was focused on abstract designs either geometrical or organic lacking the repetition used in the arts and crafts and the extensive flowing curves of the art nouveau.



Figure 16 Theo van Doesburg, Café l'Aubette, Strasbourg, France, 1926-8. (Fiederer, 2016)



Figure 17 Bathroom in the Executive Suite, The Chanin Building, New York, 1929 Designed by Jacques Delamarre(McCorquodale, 1983)



Figure 18 House in Grotan, Massachusetts, by Maurice Smith, c. 1966(McCorquodale, 1983)

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Figure 19 Charles Rennie Mackintosh's - Hill House 1904(Griffiths, 2018)



Figure 20 HOUSE OF AN ART LOVER-Bellahouston Park in Glasgow(Stirling, 2020) (Griffiths, 2018)

# 5. Futurism 1909-1930

Designers were able to develop patterned walls using the available stencil technique which affected the design style of the walls. The colors were contrasting, and sometimes metallic paints were used. Dividing the walls was possible to make contrasting areas as well. The natural colors used at this era were the beige, cream and gray but not the white(Antique, 2015). Figure 21 presents the house of futurist designer Giacomo Balla in Rome depicting the freedom would be adopted in making the interior walls in the futurism. The color in the futurism is the main design element in this example bright colors are used in such a way giving dynamic impression. The patterns covering the whole walls using painting sand or wallpapers. Figure 22 shows rediscovered murals painted by Giacomo Balla in a building under renovation in Rome depicting bold colors (Phelan, 2018).



Figure 21 Casa Balla, in Rome, The home of the Futurist painter, sculptor and set designer Giacomo Balla(Phelan, 2018)(lablog, 2014)



Figure 22 Giacomo Balla's mural, recently rediscovered in a building under renovation. Photo: Banca d'Italia/YouTube (Phelan, 2018)

# 6. Art Deco 1910-1940

The Art Deco style is featured by detailed and clearly defined geometric shapes and solid colors.

Figure 23represents Salon of The Pavilion of a Collector, by Jacques Kuhlmann, International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industrialists, Paris, 1925 in which the walls are covered with a repeat pattern in silk showing stylized flower vases, flowers and birds beneath a large frieze apparently executed in plaster (McCorquodale, 1983). Figure 23to Figure 26depict several designed walls and papers indicating the pattern based designs clearly depict the art deco style features.



Figure 23 Salon of The Pavilion of a Collector, by Jacques Kuhlmann, International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and (Fabienne, 2009)



Figure 25Art Deco Wallpaper for a Doll's House (Decolish.com, 2020)



Figure 24 Bedroom suite of rooms created by Armand Albert Rateau for the famous couturier Jeanne Lanvin (Decolish.com, 2020)



Figure 26Florence Broadhurst Wallpaper - Framed (Decolish.com, 2020)

# 7. Bauhaus 1920-1934

The Bauhaus movement has mixed both arts and crafts feature and modernism features serving the function of the product. Therefore, simple geometrical designs were used in this style. Geometrical walls employing cladding wood ornaments were obviously used in Sommerfeld House, Berlin, by Walter Gropius, Adolf Meyer and Joost, Schmidt, 1921-2 (Figure 27). Another design feature used in the 1950s is the see-through interior wall spaces and partitions employing divisions such as low heights of book cases and/or cupboards giving a possible view to what is behind (see Figure 28 and Figure 29).(McCorquodale, 1983) (Heinz, 2002)



Figure 27Sommerfeld House, Berlin, by Walter Gropius, Adolf Meyer and Joost, Schmidt, 1921-2. (Jones, 2016) (Harrington, 1920)



Figure 28 No. 64 Old -Church Street, Chelsea, London, by Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff, 1936 (Pile, 2005)



Figure 29 German Pavilion at the International Exhibition, Barcelona, by Mies van der Robe, 1929 (Pile, 2005)

# 8. Surrealism 1925-1950

Surrealism is a cultural movement in modern art and literature that aims to expressing the subconscious mind in a way that lacks order and logic. It was developed in Europe during the first world war. This style has been applied in the field of interior design including wall coverings (see Figure 30). Vincent Darré is a well-known interior designer for adopting Surreal interior design creations mixed with other style i.e. baroque, cubism, futurism and art deco styles ."(bocadolobo.com, 2017)



Figure 30 For an artist's bedroom that Darré nicknamed "the graffiti suite," the designer was inspired by "a shut-away poet who draws baroque." PHOTO: COURTESY OF RIZZOLI(SIERACKI, 2019)

## 9. Space age 1960-1969

The 1960s have witnessed the development of new aesthetic concepts and values. The space age is a period that includes activities related to space race, exploration, technology and cultural developments affected by these events. The Space race was one of the areas irritating different countries and associated to new inventions and discoveries attracted the attention of people around the globe. This subject was reflected in different fields of applied arts including interior design as using motifs inspired by this subject would extend the feeling of power reflected from it. The commercial architecture exploited the public's infatuation with futuristic designs, rocket ships and nuclear motifs, and started incorporating their elements into buildings. Diagonals, boomerangs, fluid shapes, atomic burst (see Figure 31).

The designers found that they have a new role in this new-age designs. They employed fluid shapes and sleek forms, geometrical values. Imaginative forms and bright colors came to suggest the spirit of the moment.

Space Age designs used motifs such as atomic bursts, UFOs, satellites, capsule and pod-shapes (Vinterior, 2019).In1961, architects William Pereira and Charles Luckman designed the LAX Theme Building. Its design is based on a large glass dome and a unique design of 135 foot parabolic arches and transparent walls and metallic organic designs giving impression to the imagined space materials (Figure 32)(Young, 2020).



Figure 31 Stunning Space Age Guzzini Alba Floor Light Sergio Brazzoli & Ermano Lampa(Vinterior, 2019) (Young, 2020)



Figure 32 Inside the LAX Airport Theme Building: A Modernist Icon(Young, 2020) (Vinterior, 2019)

#### 10. Minimalism 1967-1978

The simplification or minimalism style has appeared in the sixties of the last century based on the abstraction concept and distinguished by its use of the least elements and colors. It is mainly revolving around simplifying thing to minimum. Benjamin Moor's white dove is a popular white paint used in this style. Earth, natural and monochrome colors are the main colors used in this style excluding bright and the dark colors are used in a limited. The wall art adopted in this style could be based on contrasting tones i.e. black and white photography art or abstract painting or line drawing representing familiar subjects and objects(Savoie, 2020).Kelly Wearstler is an American leading interior designers have applied the minimalism approach and concept in her designs natural and earth colors are used in the minimalists' designs and murals or painting could be used on plain white or beige (light tones) of backgrounds (Figure 33).



Figure 33 Samples and examples of Kelly Wearstler wallpaper designs (Wearstler, 2020)

#### 11. Post-modernism

It is a new stage in the history of western civilization characterized by a sense of frustration with modernity and an attempt to criticize this stage and search for new options, the postmodern movement with architecture.

#### 11.1. Memphis 1981-1988

Memphis designers have contributed to designing postmodern furniture, light, fabrics, carpets, ceramics, glass metal objects. It included contribution from many architects and designers. Memphis art style had been founded in the United States. It would be considered as an inspired style from several design styles i.e., Art Deco of significant geometric figures and thick lines, Pop Art of bold and vibrant colors, Tastelessness and freedom, and the minimalism's simplicity (Busche, 2016).

Ettore Sottsass worked on developing the Memphis movement to rebel against the minimalism style specifications. He applied his concepts in the interior. of Esprit's European expansion (fashion chain) aimed to developing a modern, dynamic and relaxed image – in tune with the times, and in keeping with the brand (PHAIDON, 2020). In Milano Malpensa Airport Interior Design by Ettore Sottsass, the columns look like Olivetti Synthesis series details of randomness, chaos, and mutability (Busche, 2016) (Anset2000, 2012)(Weinberg, Remembering Ettore Sottsass on His Centennial, 2017).(Figure 34 to Figure 38 depict samples of Sottsass interior designs).



Figure 34 Esprit showroom, Cologne, 1986, by Ettore Sottsass(PHAIDON, 2020)



Figure 36 Early work of Memphis Group founder Ettore Sottsass(HALLIE, 2017).



Figure 35 Milano Malpensa Airport. Designed by Ettore Sottsass. MXP(Anset2000, 2012)



Figure 37 Ettore Sottsass and Aldo Cibic, Munari Apartment, 1983.(Sottsass, Ettore Sottsass and Aldo Cibic, Munari Apartment, 1983, 1983)



Figure 38 Sottsass's Milan apartment in 1958. Photography courtesy of the Archivio Ettore Sottsass. (Sottsass, 1959) (Weinberg, Remembering Ettore Sottsass on His Centennial, 2017)

## 12. Deconstructivism 1988-Presesnt

It is a major cultural phenomenon, one of the most important recent developments in art and architecture in the current era. This style could be named fractured design. It is a critical and philosophical style distinguished by the shattering concept of two- and three-dimensional design elements. In the 1980s, the design style called Deconstructivism has appeared based on destruction impression of the interior and / or exterior design architecture. Its main features are asymmetrical, dissonance and discontinuity. Figure 39 and Figure 40 show examples of this style employed in a public building. Rectilinear shapes and sheets of aluminum are lined on the walls to create deconstruction and construction-based designs which were used to decorate the walls using contrasting colors including white, purple, grey and black colors to create a relaxing and focusing ambiance (Myers, 2018).

Guggenheim museum Bilbao – Spain (Figure 41) and the Danish Jewish Museum (Figure 42) are examples of public buildings applied the deconstructivism concept and style in their interior design and walls. The visitors experience a dynamic and exciting structure giving an adventurous impression.



Figure 39 oft interiors' UA cinemas design celebrates deconstructivism in shanghai (Myers, 2018)



Figure 41 Guggenheim Museum Bilbao-Spain (Bitter, 2003)



Figure 40 oft interiors' UA cinemas design celebrates deconstructivism in shanghai (Myers, 2018)



Figure 42 DANISH JEWISH MUSEUM Copenhagen, Denmark(WRIGHT, 2018)

## 13. Conclusion

In this study, the visual characteristics of interior walls including color groups and design element were found developed according to the design styles. The arts and crafts style adopted pattern floral designs and kinds of animals showing inspirations from the Japanese style. Human figures and flowing curves were extensively used on public and residential interior walls of the art nouveau style. Significant transformation took place in the modernism style walls; geometrical and abstracted plants' shapes were employed presenting its features. The designs were based almost on the contrast using light colored background. The futurists took the primary colors started by the modernists to an alternative approach of design making showing the freedom of using bright colors. The Art Deco interior wall designs used pattern schemes of floral or geometrical motifs. In the Bauhaus, the interior walls had unique wooden panels of geometrical rectilinear shapes. The open plans and transparent walls were used by the Bauhaus designers. Imaginative, unbelievable, representative images, paintings and artworks were used on the walls of the surrealists. However, realistic materials and shapes giving the space impressions were used by the space age designers to express their impressions and knowledge about space and to conform to the exterior construction of the space age buildings. Simple colors of natural colors were used by the minimalists. The Memphis designs adopted the postmodernism vivid colors and geometrical shapes. The Deconstructivists have used the irregular geometrical shapes.

It is evident from the analysis carried out to the art and design movements and their applications on the interior wall design in the twentieth century is moving towards freedom of using shapes and colors. Moreover, the interior walls clearly reflect and represent the design style adopted at certain era or period of time.

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