

A NEW ROAD TO MODERNITY¹: THOMAS JECKYLL'S DESIGN
INNOVATIONS OR THE REFORMATION OF THE MID-VICTORIAN
DECORATIVE ARTS THROUGH THE JAPANESE CULTURE

UN NUEVO CAMINO HACIA LA MODERNIDAD: EL DISEÑO Y LA INNOVACIÓN DE
THOMAS JECKYLL O LA REFORMA DE LAS ARTES DECORATIVAS VICTORIANAS A
TRAVÉS DE LA CULTURA JAPONESA

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Resumen

A través de las numerosas turbulencias en el transcurso del diseño y las artes decorativas en Inglaterra en la segunda mitad del siglo diecinueve, destacó la emergencia de un nuevo estilo basado en la filosofía y estética de la cultura japonesa combinada con la tradición británica. El llamado estilo “Anglo-japonés” dentro de un amplio Movimiento Estético, aunque asociado con la decoración más que con la estructura de los objetos, introdujo aspectos innovadores para la abstracción y la geometría en el diseño definiendo de este modo la Modernidad en sí misma. Aunque existieron muchos representantes de este nuevo estilo, Thomas Jeckyll, arquitecto y diseñador menos conocido, a través de su trabajo constituyó la culminación de ese nuevo orden mundial, contribuyendo de una manera silenciosa pero significativa a un nuevo diseño de la realidad estética emergente. Este artículo tiene la intención de investigar a través de los importantes acontecimientos históricos a mitad de época victoriana y las nuevas tecnologías del momento y el efecto de la cultura japonesa impulsada por Jeckyll en la evolución de las artes decorativas británicas hacia la Modernidad.

Palabras clave: Modernidad, Estilo Anglo-japonés, Thomas Jeckyll, artes decorativas, metalistería, mobiliario.

Abstract

Through the numerous upheavals of the course of design and decorative arts in England in the second half of the nineteenth century, the emergence of a new style which was based on the philosophy and aesthetics of the Japanese culture combined with the British tradition, stood out. The so-called Anglo-Japanese Style within the Aesthetic Movement broad framework, although

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mainly associated with the decoration rather than with the structure of objects, ushered innovative approaches to abstraction and geometry in design, thereby defining, in a way, Modernity itself. Although there were many representatives of this new style, the less known architect and designer Thomas Jeckyll, constituted through his work, the culmination of that new world order by contributing in a silent but meaningful way to an emerging new design aesthetic reality. This article intends to research through important mid-Victorian period historic events and new ideologies of the time the effect of Jeckyll's Japanese culture driven innovations on the evolution of the British decorative arts towards the era of Modernity.

Keywords: Modernity, Anglo-Japanese Style, Thomas Jeckyll, decorative arts, metalwork, furniture.

1. Introduction

“The labor all have to undergo is now really severe, but it is done with a will and with an earnest purpose to do the best for the 1862 Exhibition. The show of foreign goods from remote countries will on this occasion, be something really wonderful. China and Japan will both be splendidly represented in all their varied branches of arts and art-manufactures... from their rare lacquer ware, straw basket, and bamboo work down to the massive quadrangular coins of the realm, almost as curious as the money of Siam. Their wonderful egg-shell porcelain-the astonishment and envy of all European manufacturers-will be amply represented, as we might expect [...]”².

With the above comment, inter alia, the famous newspaper *The Times* in a long article on the medley of cultural, aesthetic, technological and even traditional achievements in the fields of art, craft and design through the objects exhibited at the International London Exhibition in 1862, seemed to ‘launch’ the spectacular rise of the Aesthetic Movement, a decorative, but also ideological trend bowing in the artistic superiority of the Far East while adopting many of its aesthetic values. This Movement also constituted a strong reaction to the sweeping Gothic Revival onslaught which starting from England in the mid-19th century, seemed to be the stable aesthetic and ideological basis of the Arts and Crafts Movement, ‘condemning’ somehow the return of British design to an arid, utopian historicist regression³. More specifically, this second major Exhibition in London, after the dazzling success of the first Great Exhibition in 1851, Hyde Park⁴ gave rise to the greatest, in terms of attendance and diversity, exhibition of Japanese objects, both utilitarian and aesthetic, to a wide audience. Among them the vast private collection of traditional Japanese objects of the then British Minister to Japan, Rutherford Alcock was also included and it revealed in an obvious way the Japanese culture through the taste of the British, rather than

that of the Japanese, as they were attracted to these new goods not only for their fine, austere appealing forms and their high functional values, but also their social/theosophical symbolisms⁵. If we examine this as an isolated incident, it helps us to interpret the subsequent spectacularly positive reaction of not only the British public over the Japanese objects but also of the critics and the designers themselves who took part in the exhibition and highlighted in a momentous tone the need for a 'turn' to British decorative arts towards simplicity, according to the unparalleled austere beauty of the Japanese goods⁶. Among these designers there were names who later became the 'ambassadors' of this new aesthetic and later ideological line in decorative arts in Britain such as Christopher Dresser⁷ (1834-1904), Edward William Godwin (1833-1886), James Lamb (1816-1903) but also Owen Jones (1809-1874) and Philip Webb (1831-1915)⁸. With both their original, innovative design ideas, and with their broader perception on aesthetics, these designers managed to convince the strict English consumer society and thus many more quirky western markets which had been significantly 'eroded' in terms of taste and consumption by the voracious multi-productive instincts of the Industrial Revolution for the refreshing breeze that started blowing in art and design from the country of the Rising Sun.

But, how did these designers' interest on Japanese art become so sudden and vivid? Was it just the emergence of Japanese culture via this important exhibition, or there were former reasons for their mass enchantment? The matter of fact is that most of them had already been aware of the Japanese art thrill, though in a rather theoretical way, as it had already flowed into France as a result of the reopening of trade relations between Europe and Japan. The Japanese art, in the primary form of the *ukiyo-e* prints, was to have a special appeal to the French artists circle of the mid-nineteenth century and at the same time to some of the British designers who were closely watching the evolution of the French art of the time⁹. The speed with which Japanese style was accepted in England as a result of a well-established decorative oriental tradition in France was impressive and it soon rendered Japanese taste as an expression synonymous to the then British design flourishing.

However, not only designers, but also the manufacturers and craftsmen themselves often seemed to be captivated by the high quality of Japanese objects, assisting thus in shaping the new world order in the western mass-produced products arena by undertaking initiatives for the production of 'hybrid' Anglo-Japanese objects, i.e. products that bore an aesthetic combination of culture of both people¹⁰. So the British public of the following years with no distrust on the concept of *orientalism* and with striking boldness accepted the strange and mysterious beauty of Japanese exoticism in a period in which art was regarded *distillation of all that was good or bad about a society*¹¹.

It is worth observing, however, that the Japanese themselves, although few in number, who happened either to attend the inauguration or to visit on another day this important Exhibition in Kensington postulated in a rather discouraging manner for the Japanese exhibits as they found that most of them were inauthentic and of a very low aesthetic value. This of course did not stop at

all the Japanese merchants and politicians, who had already realized the importance of these goods for Europeans, to make their formal presence in major trade fairs and International Exhibitions in Europe, flooding, in essence, the European market with unique Japanese items such as textiles, clothing, wallpaper, ceramics, cutlery, masks, bronzes and fans¹² thereby acting as catalysts, from their own part, in shaping the European taste. Furthermore, this fact is the reference point of the Modernist Movement that captivated, apart from fine arts, the decorative arts and design which however had already begun to 'be revamped' since the last three decades of the 19th century. Having been freed from the 'traditional' design norms of the past, the design of the twentieth century, took no long to find its own style and personality. Thomas Jeckyll (1827-1881) was not only the most famous, but also the most representative personality of the British competitive theatre in the fields of architecture and design that seemed to be attracted by, but also to exploit, this immeasurable wealth of ideas, shapes, colors, ideologies, styles and materials that invaded Europe and conquered it. The work to be considered below is now a legacy of values and ideologies that shaped the concept of the late 19th century decorative arts in Britain and of course the twentieth century design.

2. The birth of the Anglo-Japanese Style in Jekyll's metalwork.

Perhaps the most important achievement of this peculiar British architect and designer¹³ was not his works themselves, but his phenomenal, innovative ideology. The new, ground-breaking, radical and ultimately risky ideas in the fields of interior, furniture, but primarily metalwork design set new, untrodden, until then, paths not only in hitherto traditional British decorative arts, but also in the world design arena which, at the time, was looking for innovative ideas that would lead to Modernism. Less passionate with his personal view than the formidable ceramist and metalwork designer Dresser¹⁴ and the ambitious furniture designer Godwin, Jeckyll was a rather quiet, but keen observer of the particularly 'scrambled' and static situation in the British decorative arts and industrial design. Despite the best efforts of many individual leaders of the time to find ways for their redevelopment either through the famous Schools of Design, or through International Exhibitions, they had not yet found a way to their own self-luminous style, while Jeckyll had realized far ahead the need for a change beyond the typical British navel-gazing¹⁵. This is why his observations focused on the preciousness of Japanese art which, being representative of the Asian culture in general that had seduced the 19th century Europe, promised new aesthetic and functional directions for the decorative and applied arts. However, we should state that he was much affected by the way Dresser understood Japanese art and thus he possibly started to appreciate but mainly to 'adopt' its distinctive characteristics initially driven by Dresser's catalytic interpretations. But this was just the beginning as Jeckyll reinterpreted the Japanese designs and motifs in his own way and according to his own design perception with the only scope to produce a 'finer and more fashionable' British design.

By approaching the Japanese aesthetics realm he found out that it comprised a set of ancient ideals that included meanings such as *wabi-sabi* and *yūgen*¹⁶ that underpinned much of Japanese cultural and aesthetic norms on what was then considered as elegant, natural, simple and beautiful. He soon understood that while this was seen as a new *worldview* in Western societies, the concept of aesthetics in Japan was nothing but an integral part of daily life. So he tried not to simply copy the forms and colors but to transfer *the ideology* of the Japanese painting and curving two dimensional fineness into the then rigid plasticity of the British metalwork and furniture design, suggesting in this way an innovative mode of design thinking. This new British design would also be distinctive for its 'international style', which would definitely suit to the British Empire expansionism. This first ambitious, experimental but highly successful mix of cultures of East and West, led to the emergence of the famous Anglo-Japanese Style which was not just a short-lived and impressive trend, but rather the main source of ideas for many small or large western arts movements in both Europe and the U.S.A. This aided the smooth transition of the fin de siècle decorative arts to the grand era of minimalist style that characterized Modernism, which is the most important twentieth century design style¹⁷.

Although he was quite a successful architect, especially from the 1850s¹⁸ Jeckyll became well known in design mainly through his work in the field of metalwork. This of course was not independent of his architectural work, given that a big part of his projects did not concern only house areas, but also public places and it had both aesthetic and functional value. Besides, the specific design sector gave him the opportunity to understand better the aesthetic sense of the fine, geometric, abstract Japanese motifs as these should not be seen as 'foreign bodies', but rather be harmoniously combined with what had already been accepted as *tradition* by the aesthetic memory of the British. His relocation from Norwich to London in 1859 did not prevent the start of a polysemous professional relationship with Norwich iron founders Barnard, Bishop & Barnards which lasted for over nineteen years¹⁹. With the same partners he took part in 1862 in the International London Exhibition, presenting to the public for the first time his wrought ironwork design named 'Norwich Gates', i.e. a range of ceremonial pillars and rails full of impressive heraldic figures, foliage and scroll-work which won a medal for design and art work²⁰.

But the extensive range of cast iron gates, railings, fireplace surrounds, grates, benches, umbrella stands and scones for home use²¹ which often incorporated roundels of old Japanese motifs as well as a wide range of church candelabra and altar rails that followed, were those which helped him emerge as a modern 'magician' at the then dull British design landscape, which would mark the beginning of a new, post-traditional era. His above works, which were addressed to the then emerging middle class, seem to reflect in a more mature and stable way his admiration of Japanese art, which was incorporated in the most natural way into many types of utilitarian objects, which until then were considered unconquered strongholds of the British traditional decorative arts. Through a wide range of fireplace fronts, the most representative one was the fire front he designed in 1870, after a thorough study and experimentation in

metalworking. The invaluable assistance of his then permanent collaborators in Norwich, was a strong support to his desire and talent to produce some of the highest quality designs in fine casting. The experimental skill of Jeckyll to uniquely combine the simple elegance of Japanese symbols and patterns with asymmetric, geometrical floral motifs ideally enclaved in circles with the British design, soon became synonymous with good taste. This also occurred because his designs were distinguished not only for their fine forms, but also for their smooth application in cast iron, as the result looked more like having a hand-built character rather than a mass production one. They became soon very popular and therefore many architects –such as Norman Shaw –incorporated many of them into their newly-built houses or even public buildings, as well as Christopher Dresser for his architectural projects at Alangate, Halifax, and Bushloe House in Leicester. The fireplace and stove fronts that were exhibited at the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle were described by the Furniture Gazette as *a large and varied stock of stoves, hearths and mantelpiece of extremely artistic character*. (Fig.1).



Fig. 1. Elegant fireplace front in Anglo-Japanese style, manufactured by Barnard, Bishop & Barnards, c. 1870.

Another creative attempt of his relating to the design of a remarkably elegant range of bronze fountain panels manufactured by the same company in Norfolk, constituted an outstanding success of its kind. One of them, now in the Art Institute of Chicago, is considered the epitome of the elegance of the Anglo-Japanese design as it bears many characteristics of this style. The simple, strict geometric lines of the panel which make up a framework that seems to split the work into multiple parts, are nothing but an attempt of the artist to put the spectator of the work in place of an observer of an original aquarium. (Fig.2)



Fig. 2. Bronze fountain panel manufactured by Barnard, Bishop & Barnards, c. 1871.

The almost naturalistic vivid fish that rotate in a lifelike way in the supposedly seabed, the sea plants that are made with the delicacy of Japanese flowers, but also the playful, almost effeminate waves at the bottom part of the panel which remind us of the famous Japanese painter and printmaker Katsushika Hokushai's (1760-1849) paintings –especially the well-known *The Great Wave*–, are coordinated harmoniously with the geometric, flat framework, creating a sense of balance between shapes and textures.



Fig. 3. *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, Katsushika Hokusai, 1830-1833.

If we try to compare these two rather dissimilar pieces of work we will easily find out that Jeckyll has successfully transformed the two dimensional but lively and spontaneous wave of the print, into an 'uncolored' but lively relief pattern which seems to animate, at the same time, the silent and cold piece of metalwork. In this case we can see that Japan meant more than just *decorative motifs and designs* to Jeckyll as he creatively combined the love and the respect of Japanese people for nature with the inanimate, industrial surface of the British metalwork. This clearly indicates Jeckyll's main design reasoning as he primarily cared for a profound and well-documented' reform in the mid Victorian British decorative arts.



Fig. 4. Cast iron sunflower andirons inspired by the sunflower Asian designs for the Japanese Pavilion, Philadelphia, 1876.

Among his many creative initiatives one can single out the ambitious design and construction of the peculiar two-storey both wrought and cast iron Japanese Pavilion in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, U.S.A.²² which received very good reviews both for its interesting design, sound construction, but mainly its decorative perfection. From an architectural viewpoint, obviously influenced by Japanese culture without however being a replica of traditional architecture of Japan, the pagoda-like Pavilion was distinguished for its unique aesthetic balance and unity. The neat design of the building was overall enhanced with the use of several, cast iron pillars and brackets which were embellished with a series of bas reliefs depicting naturalistic forms and scenes²³. At the same time, it was singled out particularly for the discrete, repetitive incorporation of many Asian symbolist elements or merely ornamental motifs. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5. A rare cast iron garden bench decorated with abstract Japanese semi-circle and quasi-circle designs, c. 1878.

One of them was the famous sunflower motif that was used as a symbol in a series of railings that encircled the Pavilion. In Japanese culture sunflowers, or *Himawari* in Japanese, were associated with the happiness of life and represented the people who were full of energy, friendliness and optimism. Jeckyll was aware of this and this is why he tried to incorporate them into some of his most ambitious projects as he wanted not simply to decorate them, but mainly to inaugurate a new language of design that would promote through its decorative and functional character the sense of individuality. This motif was later employed by Barnard, Bishop & Barnards who were responsible for the

construction of the whole Pavilion, into designs for fire baskets and andirons. These household objects were most highly scored with great success in sales and became loved by consumers both of the middle and the bourgeoisie in England and the United States. Especially the andirons, two years later, were used as typical metalwork exhibits on Barnard, Bishop and Barnards' display under the Paris Exposition Universelle 1878 and were also installed in the dining room of the Prince of Wales Pavilion²⁴.

3. A modern vision of Interior and Furniture design.

Clearly influenced by his close relationship with the cold, but friendly metal material, he experimented with designing metal furniture such as cast iron hall chairs, but also a specific type of cast iron public and garden benches which enjoyed great commercial success, a fact that made them as the reference point of the metalwork design of its kind. Although metal was their main material, they were proudly combined with slats of wood, a warm material, friendly to the human body, which were placed at the base of the furniture seat, and also decorated with the recognizable half roundels of Japanese inspiration. He employed the idea of *pattern repetition*²⁵, a rather more intellectual concept than a simple decorative method in Japanese traditional art, by transferring it into a metal surface. Here again Jeckyll tried and succeeded to invade the predictable dullness of the British cast iron design, by suggesting a new way of approach which was fundamentally ideological. This was only the beginning of his occupation with furniture design, an area which was of great historical value in Great Britain and which, at the time, did not allow adventurous and unconventional experiments. (Fig.6)



Fig. 6. A simple but beautiful dressing table designed for Ionides house master bedroom, manufactured by the firm Holland & Sons, c.1876.

However his deep interest on Japanese furniture itself allowed him to go much further in furniture design than he could ever believe. As Godwin himself, so Jeckyll had early noticed that the Japanese exhibited great care in the design of their furniture types which were few and lean. But what was of real importance for Jeckyll, in stark contrast to Godwin²⁶, was mainly the way they decorated them, the numerous and interesting materials they used as well as the logic of the concepts of symmetry and / or asymmetry, harmony and contrast they developed, which, of course, derived from their ancient aesthetics philosophy. For example, with regard to techniques, that of lacquer work, inlaid with designs, in colored or simply white mother-of-pearl, decorated with fauna and flora designs is particularly characteristic of an otherwise structurally simple Japanese piece of furniture. But the differences between the old, ancient technique of lacquer and that of middle nineteenth-century was obvious, the latter being considered modern and much less rich in materials, textures and style. However, the 'modern' technique of lacquer, thanks to its simplicity, was perfectly combined, inter alia, with the technique of gilt, with the introduction of impressive iridescent inlays and with the technique of raised figures or other forms in gilding²⁷. It should be noted the most important wood furniture designed by Jeckyll has always been in line with the overall design of the private houses interiors he undertook, among which stood out the Alecos Ionides²⁸ (1810-1890), a private house in west London and the famous ship-owner Frederick Richards Leyland's²⁹ (1832 – 1892) house in 49 Prince's Gate, Kensington, London.

3. 1. Ionides House and its decoration

One of the most important commissions undertaken by Jeckyll throughout his career was the tempting invitation he received from Alexander Ionides to redecorate, according to his own idiosyncratically exotic taste which had already become widely known, his big house in N° 1 Holland Park, a rich and elegant area of the city of West London. His first reforming attempt included the layout and decoration of a new wing added in 1870: so he designed a billiard room of stunning beauty, a master bedroom, a sitting room, as well as a servant's hall in line with the fashionable Anglo-Japanese Style, while he also undertook the executive design of these rooms furniture. Perhaps the most impressive of all them was the billiard room, as it constituted the epitome of minimalist aesthetics in terms of both materials and style, with obvious influences from the Japanese furniture design. We mention it because many of its features such as the dado, the cornice and even the ceiling were covered with a type of lacquered wood, a technique commonly found in wooden trays but mainly in the traditional furniture of Japan as we have already stated³⁰. The dominant colors were shades of brown in curtains, the warm red of the lacquered oak mantel around the fireplace, the reddish-brown of enameled ceramic tiles of the fireplace as well as the brown ocher of the leather, austere sofas.

The master bedroom of the house had a certain type of furniture which was designed with the same care and devotion to the Japanese tradition and taste

including a wardrobe, a dressing table and also a commode. Notwithstanding that the wardrobe was a really impressive, grand piece of furniture as it was made of ebony and padauk³¹ decorated with traditional Japanese scenes in the upper panels of its doors, the piece of furniture with the strongest design physiognomy was, in our view, the dressing table which was designed to be specific to the personal writing table of Jeckyll himself. In a simple style that referred to a former British cabinet style, that dressing table of pedestal form consisted of a flat top, a series of four drawers in both sides, and a small but strong structure of different sizes cupboards and drawers with brass handles and ebony moldings at the back. The Japanese ornamental elements were very carefully adapted to the design of the dressing table and they were limited to the careful use of the polished walnut surfaces, but mainly the addition of the wavy and straight incised moldings in its sides. Originally it had definitely had a mirror, which constituted an indispensable feature of this type of furniture, which is now missing³².

In the matching commode or otherwise bedside table which is an example of Japanese elegance and unadorned harmony, Jeckyll managed to convey in a unique way the two-dimensional Japanese, geometric designs and patterns in three-dimensional form and to combine them with the subtle sheen of lacquered wood surfaces. Also evident is the use of materials such as bronze and leather which give a sense of solidity and at the same time the sense of luxury in the handle and the top part of the object respectively. The main body of this piece of furniture is distinguished, as in the case of the dressing table, for its successful combination of light and dark walnut wood, ebony moldings, lattice-work panels, and fine curved brackets bellow the stretchers which consist a popular type of decoration strongly influenced by the simplicity of the Japanese design philosophy³³. (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7. Smart commode or else bedside table for Alexander Ionides's master bedroom, c.1875.

Another type of furniture of Ionides's extraordinary house is a large, bulky but also elegant desk which although appears to maintain its historicist British value with regard to design and form, it is still considered one of the few Jeckyll's furniture designs that have survived and bear frills of Japanese origin which can be easily identified. As can be noticed in the design of this walnut desk, both its overall style and design details such as the 'Key Design'³⁴ found on the sides of the object, the lacquered door panels of exceptional construction quality which have been designed according to the traditional Japanese manner, the effective, playful drawer brass handles even the curvilinear design on the brass door brackets, all demonstrate an admirable work representative of the Anglo-Japanese Style. Regarding purely its structural logic, the desk, obviously reflects the close relationship of Jeckyll with architecture, as it stands out for its almost 'architectural' complexity, the inventiveness of storage spaces, but also its spacious working surfaces. (Fig. 8)



Fig. 8. Walnut Desk for Alexander Ionides's house, manufactured by Charles Hindley and Sons, c. 1875.

3. 2. The Peacock Dining Room and its decorative approach.

The renovation of Frederick Richards Leyland's house in 1876 was the last and perhaps the most interesting commission assigned to Jeckyll shortly before his withdrawal from his successful profession a few years later for health reasons. A room, among the numerous ones, was though the one that caught more his attention as he considered it as a great, difficult, but attractive interior design challenge: the grand dining room of the rich house which functioned, until then, as the respective room of the German Elector of Saxony Augustus II The Strong (1670-1733), the famous *Porsellanzimmer* (The room of porcelain), in which a remarkable collection of porcelain objects was carefully maintained. Respectively, Leyland in his own room, which was decorated in a traditional, dull British style and also lined with trays and simple shelves, kept his private collection of expensive and rare Chinese porcelain objects, most of which came from the period of the Qing Dynasty³⁵. (Fig. 9)

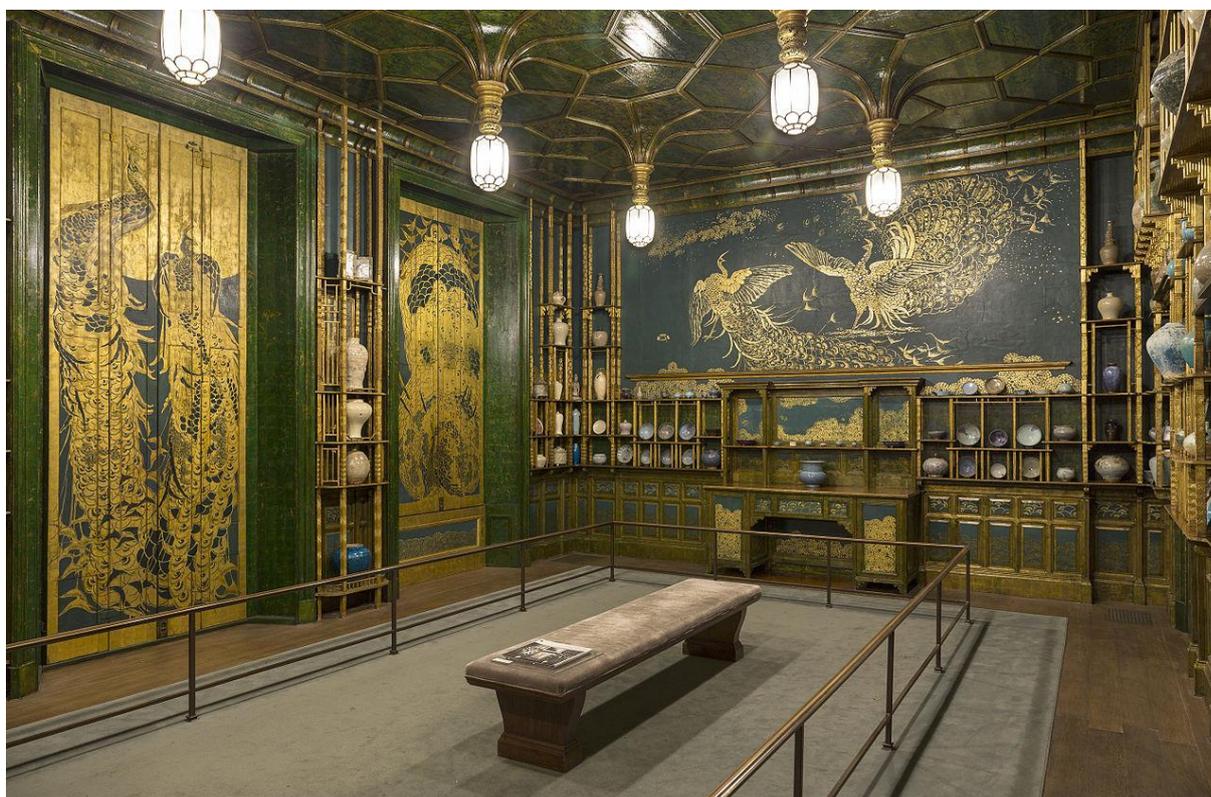


Fig. 9. The famous Peacock Room (1873-1876) designed for Frederick Richards Leyland's house. Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

The room changed dramatically after the major changes recommended by Jeckyll who turned it into a 'Temple of the Asian culture and elegance' by lending it his familiar Anglo-Japanese Style. The walls of the room were covered with expensive French and Dutch leather, while for the owner's china collection a complex structure of engraved walnut shelves was made at different levels the

design of which was directly inspired from the Japanese culture. This peculiar furniture synthesis covered a large part of the room, dominating the space. The large, bright windows of the room were covered with majestic fully-length walnut shutters, the ceiling was redesigned in a simple geometric pattern which reminded of the classic Tudor style and was decorated with a series of eight globed lamps, while the floor was covered with a simple, red edging carpet. (Fig. 9).

While he was executing the dining room project, he consulted James McNeill Whistler who was also working there at the time, about his ideas for the painted shutters and doors and he advised him to be “bolder in color”. However, soon Jeckyll became ill and was unable to finish the project which was finally reworked by Whistler³⁶. The American painter first finished painting the famous picture *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine* which was placed just above the fireplace and furthermore he totally redecorated the luxurious room by overpainting the leather wall cover, the shutters, and the Tudor ceiling in a blue-and-green color scheme with gold, impressive peacocks and roundels and he also gilded the incised Asian patterns on the walnut selves. The former Anglo-Japanese dining room was then renamed as *The Peacock Room*³⁷, and constituted a subject of severe dispute between Leyland himself and Whistler who had always thought that the transformation of Jeckyll's uneventful, leather-covered chamber was just an entirely spontaneous effort which however had to be treated in a more lavish way³⁸.

Jeckyll's built-in sideboard constituted another very important innovation in the famous dining room. In full association with the labyrinthine walnut shelving, the sideboard was considered as a magnificent type of furniture which fully reminded the viewer of the Japanese culture, as it was simple in structure with six open selves on the top, a plain walnut color, polished top, three austere drawers and two cupboards underneath. The carved patterns that seemed to appear both on the shelves and the sideboard were probably borrowed by Jeckyll himself from his earlier furniture and metalwork designs, and they are all connected with Japan and its aesthetics³⁹. The original sideboard style was not merely delicate and elegant: along with the superbly designed shelving, it constituted a totally new approach to furniture design, predisposing its undisputable connection with what people would understand as Modernity in a few decades afterwards. However, Jeckyll's Anglo-Japanese immaculate furniture did not manage to avoid Whistler's intervention who, excited by his royal peacock blue and golden vision, along with the gilded, carved walnut shelves⁴⁰, painted over in peacock blue the unique sideboard and then decorated it with several, playful golden roundels and peacock feather details. (Fig. 10)



Fig. 10. Jeckyll's impressive Peacock Room walnut sideboard and shelves with the exuberant Whistler's painted decoration.

4. Conclusion

'[...] Jeckyll is one of my favorite artists. I have six of his fireplaces around my home. He was strongly inspired by Japanese designs and adapted his metal products to suit British manufactured goods. I have always liked metalwork – it is sturdy and the moths can't eat it [...]'⁴¹

These are the words of the great collector John Scott⁴² who through his simple words for liking Jeckyll's works predisposes the modern reader of his collection books or the viewer of his collections themselves to understand in depth its truth and value. However, not only through the words of this particularly significant collector of the nineteenth century decorative arts, but also through other objective comments and with proven results, it is no wonder that Thomas Jeckyll has been one of the greatest architects and designers of Victorian Britain. His perspicacious spirit combined with his creative talent and high taste were the foundations on which his design genius, that was directly affiliated with the

Japanese culture, was based. Knowing the aesthetic potential of this new and unexplored art form and while acknowledging the dead end which the decorative arts in Britain had reached, he tried and managed to overcome the barriers of tradition and sterile historicism proposing an unconventional, but quickly accepted way of designing. His attempts were beyond the previously unnegotiable and undisturbed sense of taste in the broader field of the utilitarian objects design and defined new directions in the development of decorative arts. Many design historians have claimed that his art was limited to the purely decorative side of objects but we would not agree with this rather outdated and superficial view. We understand that Jeckyll might not have been as keen as Dresser was in the essence of Japanese culture, but he was *at least* aware of the traditional Japanese arts aesthetics symbolisms and their valuable impact on people's lives. This was the key for his success which led successfully the mid Victorian decorative arts to the threshold of the 20th century Modernism. More specifically by familiarizing British consumers, designers and manufacturers with his miraculous design innovations, Jeckyll affected directly not only the Arts and Crafts Movement, but also the European and mainly the British Art Nouveau which, itself, constituted the unifying bridge between the admirable fin de siècle decorative arts and the speedy twentieth century design that would conquer whole Europe. His notably innovative works, but also his notebooks, books and many other types of manuscripts constituted a precious source of information for many of his peers but also for other subsequent architects, furniture and metalwork designers who tried to find new solutions to the decoration problems that would arise from time to time.

NOTES

¹ Modernity, in the broadest sense of the word, is considered the contemporary thought and its practical application in the context of innovation marked by a questioning of tradition and a possible break with historicism and is strongly associated with the emergence and prevalence of individualism, but also with the prioritization of meanings such as equality and freedom. The term, however, describes a position grid of attitudes and movements which emerged in several social domains from the late 19th century, under the pressure of the unprecedented changes that were brought about in the West by innovative ideas in art, science, capitalism and the sweeping technological developments after the Enlightenment era.

² The Times, March 29, 1862, p. 19.

³ TSOUMAS, Johannis, *Η Ιστορία των Διακοσμητικών Τεχνών και της Αρχιτεκτονικής στην Ευρώπη και την Αμερική (1760-1914)* (*The History of the Decorative Arts and Architecture in Europe and America (1760-1914)*), Athens, ION Publications Ltd., 2005, pp. 296, 297.

⁴ Between this well-known Great International Exhibition housed in the famous Crystal Palace, London and its 1862 report many other exhibitions were organized in Europe. Two years later, a Great Industrial Exhibition held in Dublin, Ireland tried to dull the shine of the first, but without success while that of Paris in 1855, which was housed in a building that tried to imitate the glamour of Joseph Paxton's respective architectural project, the famous Palais de l' Industrie, constituted a very good effort but not so good as to compete with the 1851 Great Exhibition splendor.

⁵ DANIELS, Gordon and TSUZUKI, Chushichi, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000*, Volume V: Social and Cultural Perspectives, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 151.

⁶ <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-victorian-vision-of-china-and-japan/>. Assessed: 10/09/2015.

⁷ He was the only British designer who not only admired but also bought some objects from Alcock's display for his own collection and was one of the few Britons who visited Japan in 1876 as an official guest of Japan. His work was substantially affected by Japanese art which he also promoted throughout his long career.

⁸ Christopher Dresser was the first who bought items from this display and was one of the few designers in the world who visited Japan. This gave him the advantage to understand better and consequently promote Japanese art throughout his long career.

⁹ FLYNN, Patricia, *Visions of People: The Influences of Japanese Prints Ukiyo-e Upon Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century French Art*, <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1982/4/82.04.03.x.html>. Assessed 17/11/2015.

¹⁰ COOK, Clarence, *What Shall We Do With Our Walls?* New York, Warren, Fuller & Lange; 2nd edition 1880, p. 42.

¹¹ SIGUR, Hannah, *The Influence of Japanese Art on Design*, Utah, Gibbs Smith, 2008, pp. 8-10.

¹² Many of these objects were representative of the aesthetics of the old regime of Japan which was formulated under particularly strict social and religious conditions during the famous Edo Period (1603-1868). This period came to an end with the rise of Emperor Meiji on 3 May 1868, which ushered a new political era of Japan, named Meiji Restoration, and represented the rehabilitation of practical imperial rule to Japan after more than two centuries.

¹³ His family environment, personal life and his professionally risky, but several times, successful moves created an intense life scenario from which he escaped in a rather inglorious and tragic way. He died at the age of fifty-four of mental illness.

¹⁴ HALEN, Widar, *Christopher Dresser, a Pioneer of Modern Design*, London, Phaidon, 1990, p. 119.

¹⁵ TSOUMAS, Johannis, Η Ιστορία των Διακοσμητικών Τεχνών και της Αρχιτεκτονικής στην Ευρώπη και την Αμερική (1760-1914) (*The History of the Decorative Arts and Architecture in Europe and America (1760-1914)*), p. 101.

¹⁶ *Wabi-sabi* was an aesthetic term that represented a comprehensive Japanese ideology which was mainly centered not only on the beauty of an object but also on its imperfection and transience. It also represented meanings such as asymmetry or irregularity, geometry, economy and modesty of the natural objects and processes. *Yūgen* signified the grace and the delicacy of things.

¹⁷ *Old House Interiors (The Anglo-Japanese Style)*, Spring 1996, p. 52.

¹⁸ His career as an architect began in the area Norwich, East Anglia, where he mostly worked on the Gothic Revival Style, an architectural style that prevailed in England at the time, by designing a wide range of works which included churches, schools, private commercial buildings and residences. Among his most important church architecture creations we can find the well-known for its color eccentricity Free Methodist Congregation Chapel in Holt, Norfolk which was completed in 1863. Very soon he abandoned his "close relationship" with the Gothic tradition in order to proceed to an innovative approach to architecture which would be based on an experimental synthesis of many different styles. Thus, in the three decades that followed and shortly before his death his architectural work was distinguished for its bold experimentation with the Old English, Anglo-Japanese and Queen Anne Revival Style.

¹⁹ <https://www.bgc.bard.edu/gallery/gallery-at-bgc/past-exhibitions/past-exhibitions-jeckyll.html>, Assessed: 12/09/2015.

²⁰ SHAFFNER, Taliaferro, Preston & OWEN, Rev. W., *The Illustrated Record of the International Exhibition of All Nations*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 23.

²¹ CAMPBELL, Gordon, *The Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts* (Vol. 1), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 515.

²² The largest International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine, more simply known as 'the Centennial,' was held at the Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, U.S.A. within a framework of an incredible frenzy not only for the then massively imported Japanese products but also for whatever had to do with the Japanese culture, in general. The Exhibition lasted for six months (May-October 1876) and was the first in a series of many more U.S. international exhibitions that followed and which aimed at showing not only the

American national pride but also the advances in education and technology which consisted the base of the great industrial development of the country.

²³ DOBRASZCZYK, Paul, *Iron, Ornament and Architecture in Victorian Britain: Myth and Modernity, Excess and Enchantment*, Surrey, England, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014, p. 59.

²⁴ <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/LotDetailsPrintable.aspx?intObjectID=5521228>. Assessed: 14/09/2015.

²⁵ Repetition patterns in the Japanese traditional arts were not just plain decorative motifs as they represented the meanings of return and nostalgia. There seems to have been an intimate thematic connection between nostalgia and repetition which defined nostalgia as *a longing for repetition*.

²⁶ Godwin's work presents obvious differences from Jeckyll's equivalent: its design logic is mainly based on the structural value of the Japanese culture objects, while the Japanese culture elements borrowed by Jackyll are mostly used for rather decorative reasons on his furniture designs.

²⁷ GODWIN, Edward William, "Decorative Manufactures of Japan", *The Building News*, June 21, 1867.

²⁸ Alecos or Alexander Ionides was a London based shipowner of Greek origin and also a keen art patron and collector mainly of many ancient Hellenist terracotta grave figures called *Tanagra* and ancient Persian object including, textiles, earthenware tiles, pottery and metalwork. He lived in his rich parents' mansion many rooms of which were also decorated by William Morris. Unfortunately the house was destroyed in the Second World War.

²⁹ He was a well-known, rich shipowner but also a keen art collector. He bought the house in London at 49 Princes Gate in 1869 which after some years was decorated by Jeckyll and Whistler and founded the *Leyland Shipping Line* in 1873.

³⁰ HARVEY, Charles and PRESS, Jon, *Art, Enterprise and Ethics: The Life and Work of William Morris*, London, FRANK CASS & CO. LTD., 1996, P.155.

³¹ A certain type of wood which is obtained from several species of *Pterocarpus*, a tropical kind of tree which thrives in the African and the Asian Continents. Its colors vary in different shades of red and it is particularly popular for its durability, toughness and stability among woodworkers.

³² STANTON, Thomas, <http://hyper-stacks.com/objects>. Assessed:22/09/2015
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O61438/commode-jeckyll-thomas/>. Assessed: 23/09/2015.

³³ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O61438/commode-jeckyll-thomas/>. Assessed: 23/09/2015.

³⁴ It is a kind of design or ornamental pattern which consists of repeated horizontal and vertical lines, sometimes in relief or even in three dimensions. The 'Key' design on this desk does not constitute an innovation in Jeckyll's works as it has first appeared on many of Jeckyll's previous designs including many cast iron fireplace fronts and grates made by Barnard, Bishop & Barnards.

³⁵ SCHULZ, Max, F., *Paradise Preserved: Recreations of Eden in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 306.

³⁶ SOROS WEBER, Susan and ARBUTHNOTT, Catherine, *Thomas Jeckyll, Architect and Designer 1827-1881*, New Heaven, Bard Graduate Center and Yale University Press, 2003, p. 99.

³⁷ The famous painting of the room as well as the whole room itself was bought by the American tycoon and art collector Charles Freer from Leyland's heirs in 1904. Everything was then transferred and installed in his luxurious house in Detroit but after his death in 1919 was acquired by the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Museum, Washington D.C. where it still remains and constitutes one of its most precious exhibits.

³⁸ HOBBS, Suzan, *The Whistler Peacock Room*, Washington D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Insitution, 1980, p. 3.

³⁹ MERILL, Linda, *The Peacock Room*, Washington D.C., Freer Gallery of Art Publications, 1998, p. 205.

⁴⁰ FISCHER, Cynthia, *'Thomas Jeckyll, James McNeil Whistler and the Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room: A Re-Examination'*. Ph. D. Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013, p. 21.

⁴¹ WHITEWAY, Michael & Durant, Stuart, *The John Scott Collection: Modern English Design From the 1860s and 1870s* (Vol. 2), London, The Fine Art Society, 2004, p. 64.

⁴² A contemporary famous and eccentric English collector of decorative arts whose vast collection in central London (Notting Hill) is arguably one of the finest of British objects and design, spanning 1830-1930. Amongst the arts and crafts, and curiosities the viewer will be able to admire works of pottery, metalwork, furniture, stained glass conceived and many times executed by great modern such as Leon Arnoux, Christopher Dresser, A.W.N. Pugin, William Burges, Thomas Jeckyll, Owen Jones and many others.

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