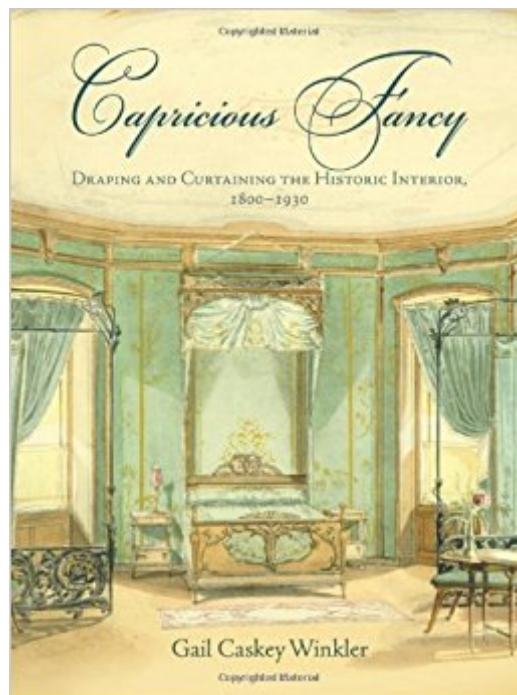




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Capricious Fancy: Draping And Curtaining The Historic Interior, 1800-1930



Synopsis

The materials that decorate our homes and protect us from cold, light, and prying eyes reveal as well as conceal. Drapery and curtain designs tell the story of great shifts in home and work life that accompanied innovations in textile manufacturing technology and the fashion industry over the course of the nineteenth century. *Capricious Fancy* chronicles the changes in fashionable curtain and drapery styles in the United States and Europe during the Industrial Revolution. This unique compilation contains hundreds of illustrations, most in full color, reproduced from more than one hundred rare pattern books, workroom manuals, trade catalogues, and examples of design literature selected from the collections of The Athenæum of Philadelphia, including the Samuel J. Dornsife Collection of The Victorian Society in America. Each design is annotated with a description of its source and significance. Gail Caskey Winkler's research confirms the mastery of French upholsterers in the art of draping windows, bedsteads, and doorways. The book follows the transmission of high styles from Paris to London to North America before the middle of the nineteenth century and the development of the retail home fashion business, including the mail-order trade. Even as wealth spread, disparity continued between the upper and middle classes in adopting the newest fashions. Meanwhile, the audience for interior fashion publications switched from male building professionals and artisans to female homemakers. With 325 images and historical commentary from a leading educator and historic preservation practitioner, *Capricious Fancy* is a source of authentic inspiration for preservation professionals, interior designers, set designers, museum curators, and anyone with a passion for period décor.

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Customer Reviews

Gail Caskey Winkler is Lecturer at the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design and Senior Partner of LCA Associates, a design firm specializing in historic interiors. Her books include *Victorian Interior Decoration*, *Floor Coverings for Historic Buildings*, and *An Analysis of Drapery*. Roger W. Moss is Emeritus Executive Director of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia and retired Adjunct Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of a dozen books, including *Historic Houses of Philadelphia*, *Historic Sacred Places of Philadelphia*, and *Historic Landmarks of Philadelphia*, all three of which are available from the University of Pennsylvania Press.

Foreword
Samuel J. Dornsife and His Collection
Roger Moss
The AthenÃfÂµm of Philadelphia is a special collections library founded in 1814 to collect materials "connected with the history and antiquities of America." Since the 1960s, the library has refined this historic mandate to concentrate its research collections on American architecture and decoration spanning the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. This publication calls attention to the library's rich resources on the draping and curtaining of historic interiors, and because it is drawn so heavily from the Samuel J. Dornsife Collection of the Victorian Society in America, it is appropriate here to introduce the donor, his collection, and how it came to be at the AthenÃfÂµm. Samuel J. Dornsife (1916-1999) was a pioneer in the authentic restoration and re-creation of nineteenth-century interiors for museums and historic houses. Although entirely self-educated (his doctorate in fine arts was honorary), he had an extraordinary visual memory and a scholar's mastery of historic documentation. A second-generation interior decorator, he also brought to his projects a practical understanding of the steps necessary to translate estate inventories, photographs, or fragments of carpet or curtain textiles into authentic reproductions. His familiarity with carpet mills and drapery workrooms made him an essential consultant to curators and administrators at such institutions as the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and dozens of historic house museums across America. For half a century, Samuel J. Dornsife was also a voracious collector of books acquired principally to inform his profession as a designer and consultant. Given the ephemeral nature of even the most authentic recreation of historic carpets, wallpaper, decorative painting, and upholstery textiles, such as his work at Gallier House and San Francisco Plantation in Louisiana, and the White House of the Confederacy in Richmond,

Virginia, his research library now in the care of the Athenæum of Philadelphia may ultimately be his most enduring legacy. Sam and I first met in 1966 at the Attingham Summer School in Shropshire, England. Following the Attingham program, some of the Americans moved on to London for a Victorian Society meeting, where the architectural historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, suggested they should establish a Victorian Society in America. Sir Nikolaus envisioned a friends group in support of the British Victorian Society, but the Americans – regardless of their anglophilic leanings – decided to concentrate the efforts of their new society on the appreciation and preservation of American architecture and decorative arts of the nineteenth century. In 1968, after I became the executive director of The Athenæum of Philadelphia, I suggested to Sam that the fledgling Victorian Society establish its first formal office in the Athenæum's National Historic Landmark building (John Notman, 1847) near Independence Hall. Sam carried the offer to the next meeting of the board, and in no time I found myself serving as both VSA corporate secretary and landlord for a society composed mainly of New Yorkers. The president was the architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and the directors included New Yorker critic Brendan Gill, the pioneering preservationist and Attingham class of 1966 alumnus; James Marston Fitch, founder of the Columbia University historic preservation program; and philanthropist-collector Christopher Forbes, son of the publisher Malcolm Forbes. New directors were soon attracted from Washington, Boston, and Philadelphia, including William J. Murtagh, Keeper of the National Register; Richard H. Howland from the Smithsonian; and future White House historian and preservationist William Seale. Those were heady years. We were eager to encourage greater appreciation of American Victorian architectural heritage, so Sam and I organized for the Victorian Society a series of speaking tours titled (not very originally) "Upstairs and Downstairs in the Victorian House." For a decade we crossed North America like evangelists fervently preaching the glories of nineteenth-century architecture and interior decoration. Sam's topics were wallpaper, window treatments, and carpets; I spoke on lighting, architectural colors, and how to research nineteenth-century buildings. To round out the program, Joan Wells, then director of the Victorian Society, developed a stable of decorative arts historians, restoration architects, and landscape designers who could be drafted as speakers according to the needs of local sponsors and the geographic location. Eventually, Clem Labine, founder of the Old House Journal, and Gail Caskey Winkler, then teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, became regular members of the team. Today there is widespread appreciation of nineteenth-century architecture and decoration, but in the late 1960s and 1970s it was something new, and the enormous size and enthusiasm of our audiences, especially in the Middle West and South, now seems hardly credible. Young families

who were discovering the merits of solidly built and richly textured Victorian-era houses were the most receptive. Older members of the audience were less certain, a point driven home to me when confronted by an agitated elderly woman who remarked after attending one of our workshops, "I was born in the nineteenth century, and I can assure you it is not a subject fit for serious study! You are wasting your time." But I'm getting ahead of the story. That summer of 1966 when we first met, Samuel Jonathan Dornsife was fifty years old. He had been born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, the son of Henry Albert and Lizzie Spatz Dornsife. Williamsport is a small city of 30,000 located in Lycoming County, of approximately equal distance from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Elmira, New York. Sam attended local public schools and graduated in 1933. The prospect of joining his father's interior design business was initially unappealing to him; he hoped instead to study theater costume design in New York City. But in those financially difficult times his father could see little reason to support what he viewed as his younger son's fantasy—a decision Sam bitterly resented for the rest of his life. Instead, he found employment with a local antiques dealer, Charles Leroy Glosser, who also conducted appraisals and auctions in the region. Today Williamsport is neither as prosperous nor as fashionable as it once was. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, many fortunes were made in the region's lumber business, which translated into substantial houses furnished from the warerooms and cabinet shops of New York City and Philadelphia. In the depression years of the 1930s, the contents of these houses were coming on the market. No longer fashionable florid and richly carved Rococo and Renaissance Revival parlor suites by Meeks, Belter, Baudouine, and Pabst, exuberant still-life paintings by the local artist Severin Roesen, marble portrait busts commissioned in Florence or Rome, and grand tour bronzes purchased in Paris were disgorged into auctioneers' tents pitched on the lawns of Italianate and Queen Anne-style villas that the aging owners or their heirs were no longer able or willing to maintain. During this period Sam first evidenced a passion for out-of-favor Rococo Revival furniture—a fascination his employer attempted to discourage. At an estate sale in Rochester, New York, Sam admired a carved rosewood lady's writing desk lined with bird's-eye maple. Over Glosser's objection, he bid. After it had been knocked down to him for \$18.00, Sam recalled, "I noticed Glosser talking with the auctioneer who shortly asked me to stand. Looking across the crowd, he remarked, 'Mr. Glosser wants the audience to see the young man who is throwing his money away on that kind of furniture.'" The architecture and decorative arts he encountered in Williamsport had excited Samuel Dornsife's interest in the Victorian era, and his book-collecting instincts were initially stimulated in the 1930s by a well-worn fourth edition of Asher Benjamin's *American Builder's Companion* (1820), which he discovered at an upstate New York auction. He purchased the book

for three dollars. That modest acquisition launched what would become a lifelong search for period sources with which to document the design and decoration of nineteenth-century American buildings. He particularly sought books or trade catalogues that would later help him recreate ephemeral finishes: paint colors and other decorative treatments such as graining, marbling, and stenciling; carpets, upholstery, wallpaper, and—most particularly—the draping and curtaining of windows and beds. Inducted into the United States Army in 1942 and posted at the Edgewood Arsenal near Baltimore, Maryland, Sam had access to the well-stocked bookshops of a major city for the first time. While most young soldiers pursued other pleasures along Howard Street, Sam trolled for antiquarian books. He recalled, "I particularly remember one memorable Saturday afternoon when I discovered Samuel Sloan's *The Model Architect* (Philadelphia, 1860), a copy of Edmund Aikin's *Designs for Villas and Other Rural Buildings* (London, 1835), and Robert Lugar's *Villa Architecture* (London, 1828)—all three for a total of \$10.00." After the war, Sam and his brother, Chester F. Dornsife, returned to Williamsport. Their father was ill and they decided to live at home and support their parents by continuing the family decorating business as Henry A. Dornsife and Sons. Neither brother ever married. While design services for residential clients in the north-central region of Pennsylvania and southern New York State provided the core of the firm's practice, Sam increasingly specialized in the authentic re-creation of nineteenth-century interiors. Dismayed by the lack of reliable, published studies on the furniture and decoration of that period, he turned his book-collecting hobby into a professional reference library of original pattern books and trade catalogues for which he ultimately would scour the stock of booksellers throughout the United States, England, and France. By the early 1970s his practice as a designer was almost exclusively with museums and historic sites. One of his early museum consultations was Fountain Elms in Utica, New York, an Italianate house owned by the Munson-Williams-Proctor Art Institute designed in 1850 by William J. Woollett, Jr., and restored in the 1960s. Here, as in all his later historic house museum projects, he declared in a newspaper interview, "Documentation is an important part of my work." Another early project, which extended over many years and involved work on several buildings, was assisting John L. Wehle in assembling what became Genesee Country Village in Mumfords, New York. In Williamsport, Sam and his brother continued to occupy their parents' home, a solidly built Tudoresque house that Sam filled with Victorian-era fine and decorative arts. Despite the modern ceiling heights, the rooms were wallpapered in mid-century patterns, complete with deep swag friezes, and closely hung with oil paintings and mirrors in brightly gilded Rococo Revival frames and wall brackets holding porcelain figurines. The floors were covered with custom-woven Brussels carpets based on point papers dating from the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Over

these were laid needlepoint area carpets and hearth rugs that Sam had made. The windows were curtained and draped in the French style with cobalt blue glass tie-backs and pole ends. Virtually every room in the house was wall-to-wall, mid- to late nineteenth-century American furniture, all French polished and appropriately upholstered in silk, hair cloth, or mohair plush. Every flat surface held decorative objects of glass, porcelain, marble, bronze, and silver; every table supported an Argand-burner solar lamp with cut-glass shades and faceted crystals. Glass-fronted, marble-topped cabinets and vitrines held both objets de vertu and whimsy collected over many years, and in most corners of the principal rooms and on stair landings were large French bronzes on marble pedestals. It always seemed to me that everything was poised in readiness for transfer to a ten-thousand-square-foot Italianate villa by Samuel Sloan. But the moving vans never came. During the early 1970s when Sam Dornsife was working at Gallier House in New Orleans—unquestionably one of his most important museum projects—the curators, assuming he owned a Victorian house, asked if he would show slides of his own home. Sam obliged. Several drums of slides were projected in one evening and the audience, being unprepared for a suburban house so lavishly turned out, were stunned into silence. One said to me in recounting the experience, "the best we could say was: 'we've never seen anything like it.'" And yet Sam would have been the first to admit that he did not live in a museum. One newspaper reporter quoted him saying that he never expected the domestic decoration of privately owned historic houses to reflect more than the "flavor of the period." But when interpreting the interior of a historic house museum open to the public, he demanded the most rigorously documented standards of authenticity. As Sam's consulting practice expanded, he cast a wider collector's net. In the postwar years he had discovered the booksellers Jeremy North in Jamestown, Rhode Island; Paul A. Struck in New York City; and James J. Kane who maintained a shop on East 34th Street in New York. In the late 1940s, he bought copies of Peter and M. A. Nicholson's *Practical Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer, and Compete Decorator* (London, 1826) [entry 9], and George Smith's *Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Guide* (London, 1826) [entry 10], from Kane. After Kane's death, his successor, Viola Neiman, offered Dornsife many important books, including John Riddell's *Architectural Designs for Model Country Residences* (Philadelphia, 1861), which she described in 1958 as having "twenty-two full page plates in the most beautiful 'ice-cream' colors. We have never seen this work before. We never knew it existed." The price? \$67.50. Sam called it "probably the most beautiful American architectural pattern book published in the 19th century and certainly one of the rarest." By the 1960s he had discovered the architecture bookseller Timothy Trace in Peekskill, New York, who, in 1961, sold him a splendid copy of William Henry Pyne's three-volume *History of the Royal*

Residences (London, 1819), with one hundred hand-colored aquatint plates bound in red morocco for \$200. Even allowing for inflation, Samuel J. Dornsife benefited from a lack of competition for books that would be the envy of today's collectors. After World War II, Sam began traveling to London, where Batsford's antiquarian department had previously supplied him with runs of Rudolph Ackermann's Repository of Arts (London, 1809-1828) [entry 6]. He also ordered books from William Duck in Hastings, Sussex, and Blackwell's in Oxford. I once asked him when he began to buy from the legendary London bookseller Benjamin Weinrab. Sam replied, "Weinrab's reputation for high prices kept me away from his famous shop for a while, but after meeting him and learning that his reputation for expense was somewhat exaggerated—after all, he was offering the finest material—I acquired many choice items from him, such as the first five plates of La Maffre's Decoration for Windows and Beds (London, 1834) [entry 15]. Other London dealers, such as Sims, Reed & Fogg, supplied items, as did David Batterham, who made a specialty of architecture and early trade material on interior decoration. From London it was a short trip to the Paris booksellers. As is amply revealed in the pages that follow, Sam was well aware that French designers had been the major influence on European, British, and American interiors of the nineteenth century. "The Rue Bonaparte and Rue de Rennes dealers," he wrote me, "eventually supplied most of the early 19th-century French pattern books by Osmont, Hallavant, Muidebled, and plates from Pierre de La Maffre's Meubles et objets de gout (Paris, 1802-35)" [entries 7, 22, and 2]. One of his favorite French books was the multivolume portfolio Le Nouvel Opéra de Paris par Charles Garnier (Paris, 1880). Sam had first seen the Garnier Opera when he began traveling in Europe after World War II; he believed it to be one of the most significant buildings of the second half of the nineteenth century. Typical of the way Sam collected, he walked out of the opera after his first visit and began to canvass Paris bookshops, asking at each if they had anything about the great building. Finally, one antiquarian specialist produced a copy of the Garnier Opera portfolio. Although filled with stunning chromolithographs of that lush Second Empire interior that today would be broken apart and sold plate by plate as wall art, the price was modest. No one wanted such things in the 1950s, but Sam thought them cheap at twice the price—even though it probably cost more to pack and ship the large portfolios than it did to purchase them. His lack of fluency in French never kept him from demanding the best from the notorious Paris booksellers. He made the acquaintance of Jacqueline Viaux at the Bibliothèque Forney in the 1960s and purchased her bibliographies as they were published. Thus informed, he became a customer who could be counted on to purchase color-plate items of the highest quality—especially on the subjects of

curtains, drapery, and upholstery. During the 1960s and 1970s, Sam purchased many books from L'Œuvre de Laget on the Rue Bonaparte in Paris, where the staff would notify him by mail whenever something they thought he would want came into the shop. Even after his health failed in the late 1990s, Samuel J. Dornsife continued to read booksellers' catalogues. He would avidly annotate each one, marking items he thought should be acquired by the Athenaeum, then hand them to his nurses to mail to Philadelphia. A few months prior to his death, he called my attention to a collection of large-format photographs of the Paris Opera by the Parisian photographer Charles Marville dating from 1875, before the building was opened to the public. The catalogue was from the scholarly bookseller Charles B. Wood III in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who had attended the Attingham Summer School with us in 1966. Sam and I had both acquired numerous books from Charles, and here was an item that Sam would normally have purchased, but the price was now beyond his contemplation. So I found a generous donor who fondly remembered her first visit to the Garnier Opera and when the portfolio arrived I carried it to his bedside, where we spent an hour passing the large-format images back and forth and commenting on the various decorative details. It was not long after this visit that Sam died, and the Athenaeum learned he had bequeathed to us the bronze portrait bust of the Opera's architect, Charles Garnier (1825-1898), taken from life by his friend the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827-1875). The bust now presides over the Joseph N. DuBarry IV conference room at the Athenaeum. In 1976 Samuel J. Dornsife began transferring his book collection to the Victorian Society in America with the stipulation that it would remain permanently at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. There it would be catalogued and made available for scholarly use under appropriate conditions. By the time of his death more than 2,500 titles had been entrusted to the Athenaeum's care and catalogued into the WorldCat database as well as the Athenaeum's online public catalogue at www.philaathenaeum.org. Concurrently, the Athenaeum began acquiring books and trade catalogues that complemented the Dornsife Collection, and in 1996 Sam's friends, colleagues, and former clients created an endowed book fund at the Athenaeum in honor of his eightieth birthday. Income from that fund continues to make appropriate acquisitions for the Athenaeum in his memory. The Athenaeum gratefully acknowledges the financial support for this publication and the exhibition and symposium that preceded it from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency; the Ella West Freeman Foundation, New Orleans, Louisiana; the Barra Foundation, Inc., Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania; Mr. and Mrs. George M. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia; Scalamandre, New York, New York; and Mr. and Mrs. Wesley Wright, Jr., Richmond, Virginia. Thanks is also due to the Board of Directors of The

Victorian Society in America, and to Sandra L. Tatman, Executive Director, and the staff of the Athenaeum, particularly Bruce Laverty, Curator of Architecture, the late Keith Kamm, Bibliographer, Michael Seneca, Director of the Regional Digital Imaging Center, and Jim Carroll, Imaging Specialist, who scanned all the images from the Dornsife and Athenaeum collections for this book.

To quote a prior reviewer, this book is indeed a "lavishly illustrated catalog" and a "beautifully produced volume." And it should be for the price. The historical commentary is the weakest element of the book. Note how a prior reviewer uses the word "catalog." The depth and breadth of Ms Winkler's knowledge of contemporary sources is commendable. But there is simply too much emphasis on the source(s) themselves, such as the foibles of the publisher or the graduated subscription rate of a certain publication, than an analysis of the illustration itself. As I look about my own collection to better voice my misgivings, my eyes first fall upon Mario Praz's "An Illustrated history of Interior Design" with his engaging interpretation of how the individual inhabited a respective interior and shaped it to make it his own. But then Suddenly, my eyes rest upon "Victorian Interior Decoration" and I realize that it is written part by the same author! However, in that work, she captured what I find sadly missing in this book. A succinct and organized understanding of an age drawn not only from oft sterile catalog illustrations, but also from contemporary critical reaction to the new fads and fancies the progression of which themselves are engagingly described. I don't care if Mr. W of of so-and-so produced an "extraordinary" volume with X number of illustrations prefaced by advertisement "most notably" from Z's establishment. Tell me more about the construction of Y window treatment, what attracted the contemporary consumer and why, and how the consumer shaped these items to make them their own. I also need to know the broader context of these treatments so that each illustrations breaths life to reveal a place in time as remote as the moon. I initially harbored buyer's remorse with this purchase, though with time I increasingly appreciate it for what the dust jacket revealingly calls "a unique compilation" of illustrations and a "source of authentic inspiration for preservation professionals, interior designers, set designers" and etc. Perhaps tombs like these account for the sterility of many a work of the aforementioned, for how can you capture the spirit of the age if you do not understand its essence?

A comprehensive and enlightening survey of the most important design sources for 19th and early 20th-century room hangings, this lavishly illustrated catalogue will serve as the resource of record for historians, architects, interior designers, and homeowners alike for many years to come. Gail

Winkler's meticulous and engaging text interprets each illustration with a crucial analysis of the limitations and practicalities of translating the ideal into reality, based on her knowledge of surviving period examples as well as her own experience as a consultant for important restorations of historic interiors. This beautifully produced volume is a must-have resource for anyone who owns, wants to own, or works on an historic structure.

This is a book that I wish I would have had in my library 15 years ago before I embarked on designing and sewing my own period draperies. It was exactly what I was looking for in my present venture of designing and sewing 19th century portieres. Although pretty expensive, I was pleased that I had purchased it and it was very informative on the history of drapery design. It makes me wish I could start over, however finding suitable fabrics and trims to replicate the 19th century is challenging enough.

We found this book satisfying in its complete treatment of interior treatment. It is beautifully illustrated and annotated. Miss Caskey Winkler has obviously put in years of fine research for this gem of book. This tome might be necessary for anyone interested in Historic Preservation on a grand scale or bringing even the most modest of cottages back to some semblance of original decoration. And beside all this it is a pretty book for the coffee table!

this is the most amazing fabric book ever published. full stop.

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