
Capricious Fancy examines the use of textile drapery in household interiors throughout the period of industrial revolution in Europe and the United States. It provides an historical overview of draping and curtaining from 1655 to 1930 followed by a close study of primary sources organized in four chapters, focusing on three or four decades at a time. To get the reader in the mood, a foreword by Roger W. Moss reveals a personal portrait of Samuel J. Dornsife, looking at his life and work as a pioneer in authentic restoration and re-creation of nineteenth-century interiors for museums and historic houses.

Displaying 325 quality colorful reproductions, this book captivates the reader with a significant amount of diverse visual material, ranging from schematic illustrations of curtain dimensions, charts depicting varied uses of textiles over different varieties of beds, to the types of fabrics used to adorn living interiors. Resources from which these illustrations are borrowed are varied, ranging from rare pattern books, workroom manuals, trade catalogues, and samples of design literature borrowed from the collections of The Athenæum of Philadelphia, including the Samuel J. Dornsife Collection of The Victorian Society in America.

Gail Caskey Winkler's writing is aimed at serious scholars and is densely packed with useful historical data and a plethora of primary references, observing the change in interior fashion trends from high style in Paris to a more democratic mail order sensibility. Given the technical language of nineteenth century textile history, a handy three-page glossary of terms helps the reader to understand terminology like “casement cloth” or “cretonne.” This glossary is closely followed by a four-page bibliography, noting that many useful resources listed are from the 1970s and 1980s and would likely be lacking the quality image reproductions found in this volume. The ten-page extensive index at the very end of this publication highlights the multitude of invaluable references found in this volume.

The only strike against this in-depth study is its glossy finish, which provides a barrier to producing quality scans of illustrations. The paper quality is fairly high, making this volume a hefty two pounds.

This volume is an excellent reference resource and is intended for scholars in textile history, museum curators and historic preservation practitioners. It would also be of use to set and interior designers, as well as lovers of period décor.

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