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Interior Decorating in the Age of Historicism: Popular Advice Manuals and the Pattern Books of Édouard Bajot

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Abstract

This article calls for a re-definition of eclectic décor as applied to the private interiors of nineteenth-century France. Previously, scholars of the

nineteenth century have separated two forms of advice literature, one dedicated to women as house decorators and the other dedicated to men as collectors. By bringing them together, this essay argues that these private interiors, rather than being eclectic, as they might appear to an untrained eye, were, in fact, carefully orchestrated decorative ensembles guided by the rules of historic revivalism and themed décor, which attempted to create a collection of different times and places through interior decoration. The first part of this essay outlines the changes in the art market and the perception of the past in France in the first half of the nineteenth century, while the second part introduces collecting and interior decorating manuals from the second half of the century, written by both men and women alike. The essay concludes with an examination of the work of the furniture designer (*architecte d'ameublement*) Édouard Bajot (1853–1900s), in order to understand how the theoretical tenets put forth in writing by collecting and decorating advisors were given visual form.

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