

Creating an Arts & Crafts Home

Along BUNGALOW Lines

PAUL DUCHSCHERER
& LINDA SVENDSEN



Figure 4.

NICOLAI-CAKE-OLSEN
HOUSE, PORTLAND,
OREGON (1905–1906).

In the historic Irvington district, this home was designed by prominent local architect Emil Schacht. Built as speculative housing for Harry T. Nicolai, it is named for its successive owners through the late 1960s. An early local version of the Craftsman style, its design was adapted from one that Gustav Stickley published in the June 1904 issue of *The Craftsman* magazine. Not apparent in this view, the roof is defined by two side-facing gables, one of which faces the street on the left side of this corner home. One of the curving brackets (knee braces) lining the side gables' eaves is seen at upper left. Elsewhere, deep eaves are supported by decoratively shaped rafter tails. A nod to the Colonial Revival influence, a pair of classical columns supports the shed-roofed front porch, and above, a pair of shallow bay windows adds further interest. The home's original shingled walls (subsequently stuccoed) will be restored by the current owners.

among these was important architect and designer A. W. N. Pugin (1812–1852), and influential philosopher, art critic, and teacher John Ruskin (1819–1900). Although the personal philosophies of these men differed considerably, both shared a true reverence for the medieval period and its Gothic style, and for the various hand-crafted skills embodied in its surviving artifacts and buildings. Each in his way idealized that distant past as a period when the purveyors of traditional craft skills were elevated into professions of high art. They were convinced that a revival of the craft traditions and ideals of the Middle Ages could become working models for much-needed reforms in the workplace, opening up many new possibilities of more fulfilling and artistic careers for frustrated factory workers with dead-end jobs.

William Morris and His Influence

Among those of England's next generation to pick up the idealistic torch of design reform, the most widely known was William Morris (1834–1896), an avid student of Ruskin. Deeply instilled with a reverence for the lost world of the Middle Ages and its craft traditions, Morris was a visionary and poet, as well as a brilliant pattern designer. His influence colored much of the Gothic-inspired character of design during the first phase of the English Arts and Crafts movement. In 1861, assisted by his charismatic personality and privileged background, Morris galvanized the ener-

gies of some like-minded friends into collaborating on a business venture to produce and sell a range of simple, well designed, handmade goods for the home furnishings market. Distinctly different in appearance from others then available, they offered textiles, wallpaper, ceramic tile, metalwork, art glass, and furniture. Eventually known as Morris and Company, the firm also offered interior design services for clientele who admired their wares.

A primary dilemma that faced Morris and others who later entered into similar handcraft-driven ventures was that the time and cost of design and materials inherent in their products also made them unaffordable for most of the middle class, who were the people who Morris most wanted to reach. Instead, his goods became most fashionable among the affluent intelligentsia. The lofty goal of educating the greater public about the added value of good design, honest construction, and quality materials ultimately had a rather limited effect in England.

As a voice of concern for the dubious fate of factory workers, some factions of the movement found another fervent cause. Morris was among other English Arts and Crafts proponents who also chose to veer into the territory of social reform. They truly believed that by training otherwise disadvantaged factory workers with marketable craft skills, there could be a potential way out for these workers, through their own efforts.

Despite its long evolution and important contributions to both social and design reform, the Arts and Crafts movement was never a truly mainstream influence in either England or America. However, its aesthetic legacy has long since proven to have been an important influence on the subsequent evolution of progressive architecture and decorative arts. In these disciplines, the quest toward ideals of greater simplicity and order helped pave the way for the emerging Modern movement yet to come.

Arts & Crafts in America: Stickley and Hubbard

In America, the Arts and Crafts movement was able to take a faster and stronger foothold than it otherwise might have, largely due to the proselytizing efforts of its early proponents. The most significant and influential of these were Gustav Stickley (1858–1942) and Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915), who each visited England in the 1890s, and came home impressed by what they had observed of the movement's progress and influence. Although each man would develop his own highly personal vision of the movement and the potential for its applications in America, both were also shrewd businessmen. Hubbard and Stickley became concurrently intrigued with the prospects of aligning their commercial business ventures with an idealistic movement imported from England, and promoted their personal ideas with remarkable zeal. These men helped to achieve in America what Morris and his followers were unable to do in England—bring the progressive, reformed aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts movement to the middle class, through relatively affordable handcrafted products of uncommon design integrity—though not quite in the way Morris had envisioned it.

Gustav Stickley came from a large family in Wisconsin and received early training as a stonemason, furniture maker, and metalworker. This background in craft skills added a useful perspective to his particular business success. Several of Stickley's siblings also pursued furniture-making careers, but none

achieved the high profile of Gustav in his prime. In the wake of his 1898 visit to England, Stickley's sense of direction in the furniture business was indelibly altered. While there, he met with prominent Arts and Crafts architects/designers C. F. A. Voysey (1857–1941) and C. R. Ashbee (1863–1942). He also fell under the spell of the work and philosophy of William Morris. Upon returning, he established a furniture workshop in Eastwood, New York, called United Crafts, which he enlarged in 1900 and renamed the Craftsman Workshops. His business soon took off.

Stickley also undertook the publication of his own magazine, *The Craftsman* (1901–1916), which promoted his expanding ventures and became a popular vehicle for spreading the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement nationwide. He began to market a variety of other home furnishings products that complemented his sturdy slatted furniture, and also produced and published sets of house plans (see Figures 16–17). His magazine's informal mix of editorial coverage effectively showcased his ideas about architecture, decorating, and landscaping, and his personal vision of a complete Craftsman lifestyle. Notably, he was an early proponent of the bungalow as the ideal, simple American home. While Stickley exerted considerable impact on public taste, his success also encouraged other furniture manufacturers to copy (to his financial detriment) the look of his signature Craftsman furniture. By World War I, the popularity of the Craftsman style was already waning. This factor, combined with some ill-advised business decisions, led to his bankruptcy. Once out of the limelight, Stickley retreated to Syracuse, New York, and lived out his life in relative obscurity. An important Arts and Crafts site is Stickley's former home, "Craftsman Farms," in Parsippany, New Jersey. Today it is open to the public as a house museum (see Resources, page 190).

Elbert Hubbard founded the Roycroft community in East Aurora, New York, in 1895, after his 1894 sojourn to England. He had just retired from a successful career as a sales executive with the Larkin Soap Company in nearby Buffalo, and was initially interested in printing and publishing handmade books.

Figure 5.

INTERIOR VIEW OF THE NICOLAI-GAKE-OLSEN HOUSE.

Viewed from the entry vestibule, the living room extends across the front of the house. With most of the other first-floor rooms visible, the compact footprint of the house is apparent. At the bottom of the stairs to the second floor, the landing at center is enclosed by a solid paneled railing wall. The stairs also connect to the kitchen (partially seen beyond). The living room's fireplace is in the corner behind the landing. At left, a nearly room-wide opening fitted with folding french doors leads to the dining room, which is encircled by a bright stenciled frieze that adapts a period design. Off the dining room, a door leads to a small breakfast room that overlooks the rear garden. The warm, vivid hues seen in the Italian Majolica pottery on display throughout this floor inspired the color schemes of the stenciling and the walls. High wainscoting and plate rails of equal height unite both public rooms; in the dining room the inset panels are stained, while the living room's inset panels are painted.