

FURNITURE AS ARCHITECTURE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF  
CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH (PART I)

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The current interest in Mackintosh dates from 1968, when Andrew McLaren Young put on the Centenary Exhibition for the Edinburgh Festival Society. That exhibition ignored Mackintosh's architecture (only photographs represented it) and showed mostly furniture, but, importantly, actual pieces of Mackintosh's white painted furniture made also with bits of colors were then shown for the first time. Nikolaus Pevsner's 1950 book, published in Italy, and Howarth's monumental book on Mackintosh, 1952 -- still the classical work -- had no color illustrations and the emphasis of both these historians was on the architecture, which, unfortunately, consists only of a few villas and the Glasgow Art School; in his own time the latter was not even known by the name of the designer but simply by the name of the architectural firm in which he was a draftsman.

The publication of Roger Billcliffe's book, Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Drawings and Interior Designs (New York: Taplinger, 1979, 252 pages, \$60.00), marks a climax to the mounting interest and auction sale prices of Mackintosh furniture. In July of 1979 Mackintosh's personal desk was sold for \$177,456. It is also interesting to note that Italy which first discovered Mackintosh in the Turin Exhibition of 1902 and had published Pevsner's study on Mackintosh is today responsible for reproducing facsimiles of nine of Mackintosh's chairs through the firm of Cassina. Among them are the Argyle chair, [the original of which is in the Museum of Modern Art] the Hill house ladder-back chair and the lattice-frame chair of the Willow tearoom which can also be found in the Memphis Holiday Inn executive offices, according to Rita Reif's article on Mackintosh in the New York Times Magazine "Home Design," part two, September 30, 1979.<sup>1</sup>

The chair for the main bedroom in the Hill House, 1904, Helensburgh, including a stool, cost then about fifteen dollars. A Cassina reproduction of the chair today costs \$1,050. Time makes money as it makes values, as art comes through finally with its passage. It is interesting along the same lines that the desk which Mackintosh made for himself, a replica of the one he designed for the Hill House in 1905, made of ebonized oak with mother-of-pearl, metal and glass cost twenty pounds with an additional bill of a pound for the glass. From one hundred dollars to one hundred and seventy-seven thousand dollars is quite a leap, even considering inflation, resurrection of a talent and the proliferation of furniture collectors in the world today.