

The Phenomenon of
the Showhouse,
The Role and Function of
Showhouse Interior Design
in Ireland

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**The Phenomenon of
the Showhouse,
The Role and Function of
Showhouse Interior Design
in Ireland**

by
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Submitted to the
Faculty of History of Art and Design
and Complementary Studies

in candidacy for

The Degree of
B. Des. (Textiles - Embroidery)
1995

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people and institutions who assisted in the compilation of this thesis.

Deirdre Campion, Thesis Tutor.

The National College of Art and Design Library.

Padraic O'Hara, S.D.L. Exhibitions.

David Averill,

June Cosgrove.

Ross Mc Pharland, Estate Agents.

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INTRODUCTION

Show homes are increasingly encouraged as important factors in clinching house sales, according to developers in the United Kingdom and France. (Interiors, 1995 pg. 104). This is one of the roles a showhouse can perform, the very practical one of boosting the sales of a development of houses.

This thesis will aim to establish the role and function of the phenomenon of the showhouse, in relation to its interior; and how this affects the consumer, and the ultimate dissemination of its design ideas. The show house is a house that is shown to the public fully furnished. The entire interior is decorated, and also includes accessories. This showhouse is not just viewed by the prospective buyer of the house, but also by buyers of other houses in the development, and by many people who just want to have a look at how the interior of a house can look.

I will be discussing the role of the showhouse in relation to how it portrays interior design in relation to a mass audience. Showhouses are viewed as a Sunday pastime by certain people who like the idea of viewing someone else's home, to either criticize, or gain new insight into how their own homes could look in relation to colour scheme, wallpapers and other ways of furnishing their homes. This viewer is unwittingly being subjected to somebody else's view of an interior, often which has been put together in a very short space of time, by someone who has very narrow ideas on what the role of the interior is. The 'designer' of the house, sadly, in Ireland, is not always a qualified

interior designer who is willing to experiment with colour and texture, but quite often the sister or wife of the architect or developer.

The design of these houses is very often amazingly similar, with wallpapered walls (which are the builders choice as they mask imperfections in the walls better than paint does) usually separated by a paper dado-rail level border. The colour schemes are quite unexciting and mostly these houses deal with the general feel for over the top historicist interiors.

I will be asking how the showhouse could play a role in the education of a vast amount of the public to, ^{show} not only good design, but also new ideas, and help them to question their ideas on the function of the interior. Since so many people visit showhouses, it is the ideal way to educate them to move away from the typically repro-interior and get a view of contemporary design. It would allow people to see interiors in a different light, and play a role in the education of taste.

While everyone has their own taste, many people gain it from sources that are unreliable. Whereas it used to be thought that taste was a gift, "scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education" (**Bourdieu, 1983, pg. 11**)

If taste is therefore not a gift of nature, but can be taught, in most cases unwittingly, it can be brought about that peoples taste with regard to good design can also be changed. Taste is one of the processes we use to make judgements about design, and if showhouses were to be used to their full advantage they are an ideal way to reach a mass audience of ordinary people.

I will be looking at two showhouses in this thesis. Both of these are in the higher end of the price market. These homes have been selected because of the vast amount of people that went to view them, because of the advertising involved, and because both of them shared a common goal of showing the public a quality interior.

The first of these was a showhouse built at the Ideal Homes Exhibition 1994, at the Royal Dublin Society, Simmonscourt, Dublin. This was a full size, two storey detached house, built inside the exhibition area (see fig. 1.) The second house was in fact a group of four showhouses in an upmarket development in Blackrock, Dublin, 1994.

This thesis will assess if the public has been shown a quality interior, or whether good design was used in these houses.

INTERIOR DESIGN



The Interior Design of the
PMPA 'HOUSE OF CHARACTER' SHOWHOUSE
at the 1994 Shell Ideal Homes Exhibition,
including the sourcing of all furniture, decor and fabrics,
was undertaken by June Cosgrove Interior Design.
For a professional service tailored to your requirements
contact

JUNE
INTERIOR DESIGN
COSGROVE

14 Whitton Road, Terenure, Dublin 6. Tel: 01 490 1858.

Fig. 1 ,The Ideal Homes Showhouse,1994.

Chapter 1

A showhouse is a house in a development of houses or apartments which is fully furnished and decorated, and is used as a tool in the selling of the other houses. They provide the prospective buyers of the houses in that development a view to how their own house can look when they move in. If there were no showhouses, people would have to view empty rooms, bare floors etc. and often do not realise the scope a room could offer when it is furnished, and rooms without this are very bare, often look quite small, and are cold and noisy.

"Many purchasers are not capable of visualising an interior. It's important to educate buyers on how to use space to best advantage, especially in the lower price ranges" (**Interior 1995 pg. 104**).

Without seeing a pre-decorated house, many buyers are not able to see past the bare walls of a house, and by seeing a house with the same properties of their own fully decorated, they are given the chance to almost look into the future, and idealise what their house will ultimately look like.

So as a way of selling a product, i.e., the houses in that particular development, showhouses have a very important role to play. A leading building company's sales manager in the United Kingdom, "believes the showhome role to be 'critical' and the best way of demonstrating the product". (**Allen, Interior, 1995 pg. 104**). Companies are not afraid of spending a lot of money on decorating

these houses, some of them have in-house designers and others just hire interior decorators.

In France, developers Kaufman and Broad, have realised the importance of the showhouse as a tool for selling their houses;

Showhouses and flats are so important to us that there is no question of price for the decoration, according to the vice-president of the company; It is always worthwhile to produce a showhouse Since we began using show homes in the country, sales have been so good we can't keep up.

(Herve de la Debutne, *Interior* 1995, pg. 104).

The average time it takes to decorate a showhouse is 6-8 weeks, (*Interior*, pg. 104) and the resulting house is a fully co-ordinating piece. This house, having been viewed by a huge amount of people, is then sold to a client as a complete package, a ready to live in home. According to *Interior* magazine, "there is never a shortage of buyers for showhouses, particularly among first time buyers, who are less likely to have much furniture of their own". (*Interior*, 1995 p. 104).

The designers of these houses have no prior knowledge of who their clients will be, and so the interior is decorated without considering the personality of the prospective owner of the home. The decorator must make many assumptions about the role of the people who will live in that house, what their particular life style is, in relation to the different areas of the house, and also the gender breakdown of the client. Bedrooms have to be furnished, and are quite often very stereotyped, with a girls room, a boys room and a main room which is usually decorated in quite a feminine fashion. Elements like this are unavoidable, with the designer being left no choice other than to make assumptions about the client who will eventually live here.

It is the person who buys a showhouse that is sacrificing their individuality for the convenience of moving into a ready decorated house. Unlike someone employing an interior designer to come in and offer advice which suits their clients personality and lifestyle, this pre-packaged interior has often been designed, not only without the future client in mind, but with the view to satisfying the designers own personal opinions on interiors, and also with the aspect of advertising for various manufacturers.

When we consider that the owners of a showhouse will probably be living here for quite some time before they change any elements of the decor, it is, in a sense, quite a stifling way of living. There is little room left for a choice of ornaments of their own choice, or for the owners personality to come through, in the way of decorating.

Peoples homes are very often reflective of their personality and lifestyle, and it is possible, by walking into someone's home to gain a certain insight into their life.

Colour schemes and furniture will all say something because the choice was made by that person, even if things were chosen purely for financial reasons. Decorating is a very personal thing, and just as we create an environment in dressing our bodies, we make a statement of our personality in an outward way, which everyone can see and make judgements about, so to in 'dressing' our homes are we making a statement about our personality. Although in clothing one only has to think about ones self, that is the wearer, in decorating an interior, very often there are compromises, because the interior will be lived in by more than one person. There may be more than one personality which

comes through in the decor of a house, but it is an outward statement of the personality of the dwellers.

Those who purchase a showhouse are not allowing themselves the expression of their creativity and personality that would be evident in their interior. Although the house decorated in this fashion is to their taste or else they would not have purchased it, the small subtle things associated with their lives will not be present, or at least will have been subsumed into a developed interior.

The convenience of not having to go to the bother of decorating is a very influencing factor when people buy these houses. Just knowing that the house is ready to move into and nothing else has to be thought about is very appealing to some people.

There is a certain market out there who doesn't want the hassle of having to do it themselves and doesn't really care to go to the trouble, so they just buy a package they've got an instant product which is very presentable.

(Averill, 18-11-94)

There is an idea that the showhouse is something far better than anything that they could possibly achieve themselves, and they lack the confidence in their own taste, and ability to decorate the interior in which they will live.

Inferiority with regard to decorating ones home has been brought about by the influence of the media on peoples ideas, such as television and magazines. People have become more aware of the fact that the home is an extension of ourselves, and, as such need careful planning. However not everyone has the confidence in their own ability

to adorn the space they live in. This level of inferiority in aesthetic living may be due to a number of factors, the main one being that the Irish in general have not used their homes as showcases of their personalities due to economic reasons.

But other factors mitigate against the Irish development of the aesthetic which can be used in the creation of an interior. The lack of design education in Irish schools is a contributing factor.

The buyer of a showhouse is willing to accept the interior of this house as appropriate to their taste. The interior designer very often has done no market research into who the potential buyer of this house will be, although the amount of money which is given to the designer for the decoration of the interior will often influence them in their ideas of who their future client will be but these houses are often decorated in order to please the designer, and is a project in which there are no clients to dictate their views on what they want, only the construction company is there to say what they expect of this interior, and they usually give the designer a free hand in producing whatever interior they see fit.

The house provides the purchaser with a showpiece, an interior which is co-ordinating from the very moment they move in. This is in contrast to what usually happens with a house where the interior gradually evolves as the owners add furniture and accessories, this interior has been evolved in a very speedy manner, usually about 6 weeks. The owner now has an interior which is very presentable, and with everything chosen to compliment the interior in some way or another, they are provided with a 'beautiful' setting which remains a

showhouse, it is a showpiece in itself, which will be admired by friends and neighbours.

Along with the obvious and accepted roles of both selling other houses and of being an entire product in itself, the showhouse also has a number of other roles which are equally important. Not only does the future owner of this house have a chance to view this pre-designed interior, a ready packaged home, but other potential purchasers and decorators of houses, both in the area, and from further afield, come to view this house and see what their own house could potentially look like. This mass audience view the house as a real-life magazine, from which they can gain useful hints and ideas on how they could decorate their own house. They are provided with a service where they can see the house from an all round view, and how different pieces of furniture work together, in the amount of space available.

Elements such as carpeting and flooring are all noted, and, in contrast with showrooms offered by shops, they get to see how the entire house works, how the interior of each room leads into the next. They can see the interior in natural lighting, and can also examine every item in it. Fabrics can be examined and small details noted.

Items that the viewer might not have thought of previously in decorating, their own interior are taken into account, details such as pelmets above windows, and tie backs for the curtains all the choice of these people when it comes to decorating their own homes. Areas which particularly influence the prospective interior of these viewers are colour scheme, and wallpapers. According to David Averill, who decorated one of the showhouses which will be dealt with in chapter 2,

after this showhouse had been opened, he received quite an amount of phone calls from people enquiring as to the colour that was used in certain rooms, so that they could use it in their own homes.

The people most influenced by showhouses are the people who buy a house or apartment in the same development as a particular showhouse. This is the house that makes the decision for them as to whether they will buy a house here or not. They will probably view the house on numerous occasions to make sure that they are making the right decision on purchasing a similar property. Placement of furniture and colours used in the house can all serve to give the feel of a large space or a cosy home, and in this way will subconsciously influence the person as to whether this house is right for them or not.

Quite often the interior they see does not, in any way stray from the very conventional idea of a house. The people who see it are given no other indications as to what the function of each room could be. If there is a dining room, for example, it is strictly a room with a table and chairs in the centre of the room, and that is all it can be used for. Similarly with the front 'lounge'. Generally these have a sofa and arm chairs placed around a fireplace. These rooms are given the sole purpose of just sitting in. In any age where generally both partners living in a house are working the idea of incorporating work studies into these rooms would give their function added dimension, especially in smaller houses in which there is no spare room to perform this task. Especially the dining room, which is so often lying dormant, not being used unless there is a special occasion. During the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis, one area which remained a constant was the fact that in not one had an attic been converted to provide maximum

living area and storage space. This could easily provide the extra room that could be a selling point of the house, but is neglected. Although some developments have used the 'roof' idea in an interesting way, such as the Avoca development, where a skylight was used from the top point of the roof to bring light down into the landing and hall, the rest of the attic was not used, and this was not a feature in all the houses in this development.

The showhouse provides future home decorators with a house which has been decorated from scratch, and is very often the same build as their own house, but these potential home buyers are not the only people who come to see the showhouse.

'Showhousing' is viewed as a pass time by many people, who, on a Sunday, go to visit new houses which have been built either in their neighbourhood, or in a different area. This pass time is different from the way in which new homebuyer would look at a showhouse in order to gain insight into an interior, ^{who would} possibly not have had any previous experience in decorating a home before.

Its a thing people do at weekends - they go to showhouses and they look at things and they look at things and quite like saying 'I can do that better ... they enjoy feeling superior ... also they are looking for ideas. (Averill 18-11-1994).

These people like the idea of seeing into a richer mans domain, and being able to criticize the choice of furnishing. They not only get ideas for their own homes, but also reject certain ideas that they see. But, for the main part, these people are passive viewers, they are there to pass comment, as much as to just get an overall view of the house; this

is the walk-through magazine. They are given this view of a coordinating interior and see it as something to aspire to. They also feel quite pleased when they have a similar element in their own homes and congratulate themselves on having chosen something which was also chosen by an interior designer.

By visiting these showhouses, peoples taste changes. Constantly seeing one kind of interior design being portrayed as 'good design' affects these peoples own attitude towards good design. They associate the items they see and the products used with a good interior, and are given no reason to doubt this assumption.

What we usually get in these houses are products which are used to advertise a company. Quite often leaflets or brochures of the various companies are distributed to the people who come to see the house. Elements for the interior of the house are sometimes chosen, not because they will best compliment the room in that particular house, but because of an agreement with a company to purchase the product at a cheaper price in return for the advertising. Although this has the benefit of reducing the overall cost of decorating the interior, and thus offering the buyer a better deal, it also has the effect of producing an interior with a bias toward certain manufacturers and shops. The viewers of the house would be mistaken in presuming that this is an interior designed purely to have that function - it is also a tool in the world of advertising.

With the amount of people that view showhouses it is a very good platform for showing products to a mass audience. Their products are viewed by the people most likely to be buying them, that is, the home

buyers, and also by people who are thinking of redecorating their homes. Depending on the showhouse, it may receive a write up in the newspapers, as did the showhomes in Avoca, where photographs were also shown. These houses capture a market for these manufacturers who they would otherwise fail to reach. The advertising aspect of showhouses was very much used in both the Avoca Showhomes and the Ideal Homes Exhibition Showhome. Both of these houses produced brochures to advertise the products they were using, and enable people to purchase the same products that they had seen in these houses. Outside the Ideal home showhouse, almost all of the companies who had been involved in providing products for their Interior had their own company leaflet or brochure which was given to both the viewers of that house, and those who did not have the time to join the long queue to see inside the home. This showhouse was actually different to most in this particular area because the companies had to pay a certain revenue to have their products displayed in the house. This led to a restriction in what could and could not be used in the decorating of the interior. All the fabrics, for instance, had to be chosen from one shop, Hickeys, so the range of items the interior designer was able to choose was very much narrowed down, and with the speed the house was put up and decorated, it was difficult to shop around.

I only got contracts 3 weeks before the show opened.

I was restricted because I could only use people who had given revenue, ... It would have been better if I could have had more of a selection.

(Cosgrove, 5-12-1994).

The majority of showhouses in Ireland are decorated with a historicist look to the interior. This is especially evident in the fabrics and wallpapers, both in their design and the way in which they are used. Certain elements repeat themselves again and again in different showhouses. Victorian fireplaces are, without fail, the choice of

showhouse interior designers, as are pelmets and fringed curtain of interior design, their own taste is influenced. By viewing an interior such as this, where the bathroom suite is, inevitably white Victorian with brass taps, they are unlikely to have any cause to question this in their own choice of bathroom suite or other, furniture for their house.

The showhouse, as a phenomenon, has so much to offer in terms of its viewer~~ship~~ it has a role in society which has up to now been ignored. Not only does it sell houses, it also offers itself as an open magazine and sells taste.

The people who are influenced by showhouse interiors are not just new home buyers or people wishing to redecorate. People come to look at showhouses to see a well designed interior and compare it with their own. They do not question what they see in terms of design, but usually in terms of practicality.

If something is unpopular with the people viewing it is because they are thinking about the consequences of the realities of life. Where carpets are displayed in a pale colour, the reaction of people is not in relation to likes and dislikes, but to its practicality.

They are influenced by the colour schemes, the furniture, and the overall feeling of the house. This is a more powerful way of forming taste than a magazine, it stays in peoples memories longer and result in a general taste for bland historicist interiors.

Chapter 2.

This chapter will discuss the interiors of two separate showhouses. 'The Avoca Showhouse', situated in Blackrock, Co. Dublin, actually consists of four different showhouses in the same development, each interior designed by a different designer. These are compared to the Showhouse which was on view at the Ideal Homes Exhibition in Dublin 1994. This showhouse was designed by June Cosgrove, an interior design consultant, who also runs an interior design course. The designers chosen to design the Avoca Interiors are all very well known Irish Designers and/or Architects.

Both of these showhouses have been highly publicised, in newspapers articles and through advertisement and therefore, were viewed by a huge audience. What they were both offering in terms of interior design were quality furnished interiors. There was also an emphasis on using Irish goods where-ever possible. In fact, the briefing for the 'Avoca' Showhomes was open, apart from the specification that, wherever possible, Irish made goods and services be used. This group of showhouses was entitled 'Irish by Design' after this concept, and set out to encourage people into thinking Irish for their own homes. (***Irish by Design Brochure, Dublin, 94***).

The Ideal Homes Showhouses are not a new phenomenon. In England, the first Ideal Homes Exhibition took place in London in 1922. This Exhibition featured a Lancashire miners cottage, which was transferred "in its entirety to the exhibition to expose 'the worst kind of human habitation' "(***Harrod, 1993, pg. 6***)

This kind of social concern is not evident in the exhibitions of recent times, "Nowhere does the current Ideal Homes Exhibition suggest that homelessness and unemployment are at their highest levels since the thirties " (**Harrod, 1993 pg. 6**).

The Ideal Homes exhibitions in recent years have acquired a large amount of unfavourable reviews from newspapers and magazines. The main problem with the recent Ideal Homes Exhibitions are that, unlike the earlier exhibitions, where there were new ideas, and interiors shown from the 'house of the future'; the exhibitions have recently gained a reputation for over-sentimentalising the past. With articles bearing such titles as

Commercial Cocktail is Designs last Gasp (**Allen 1989 pg.13**).
Mock Domestic Bliss of the Ideal Homes .. a schizophrenic display of hi-tech and nostalgic repro, (**Pawley, 1987 pg. 12**).
Looking forward to a past that never was (**Harrod, 1993 pg. 6**).

The showhouse is always the main attraction, and is responsible both for drawing the crowds to the exhibition, and for setting the theme of the exhibition. But in trying to attract a quality clientele, and producing a quality home for them to see, the Ideal home has taken a step in to historicist interiors. The designers are presenting the idea that in producing a repro interior, they are somehow grasping at an old world mansion, that these interiors are somehow reflective of a richer mans home. This continuing trend has led some people to become disillusioned with the showhouses of the ideal homes exhibition, and of showhouses in general;

Today all showhouses are beamed and have quasi-rural pitched roofs. All interiors are exaggeratedly historicist - dado rails, Doric columns on kitchen units, reproduction furniture in the dining room, inchoate piles of leather-bound volumes, wholefields of dried flowers

(Harrod 1993 pg. 6)

The 1994 Ideal Home Showhouse in Dublin was decorated with quality in mind - both in producing a quality interior for its showhouse which would "upgrade the show, and ... get quality people in".

(O'Hara, Jan. 1995). ?

In trying to attract quality exhibitors to the show, O'Hara was sure that other potential exhibitors would be more willing to take part in the show in the future.

In trying to achieve a quality interior, Cosgrove, the designer, produced a house with a very traditional, historicist feel, full of reproduction antiques, and very expensive furniture. This was the first showhouse Cosgrove had ever designed, and, apart from being asked to produce a quality home, she was given no other brief. There were limitations however

The people who came into the showhouse all paid to come in, this was revenue for the showhouse, so I was limited to people who were actually paying to come into the showhouse. (Cosgrove, 5-12, 1994).

With only three weeks to decorate the interior it was obviously difficult to shop around, and there was not a lot of time to change things once they had been completed.

The house itself was a real house built indoors, for the purpose of the exhibition. The 2 storey, 2,500 square foot home was designed to demonstrate

"What the Ideal Irish Home would look like if money was no object to the task of creating a dream home".

(Irish Independent Supplement, Dublin Oct. '94 pg. 2).

The overall cost of the interior of this house was £100,000 approx. Although not everything in the house was very costly, with fabrics being obtained from Hickeys, a large fabric retailer and wallpapers from Budget Decor, the overall interior was full of very expensive objects, which led to a chaining off of the rooms. This idea of chaining off the rooms not only helped to ensure the safety of the objects, but also the swift movement of parties from room to room. Unlike most showhouses, where people are allowed time to browse around, this was not possible here, with 20,000 people visiting the showhouse, an estimated 40% of the overall exhibition attendance, in just 5 days.

(Exit Survey, Oct. '94).

According to Cosgrove, the challenge of this house was to present a house with something for everyone,

Its not an individual project and I'm trying to reflect what's current in interior design, and encourage people not to be too rigid with styles. The influences here are traditional, rustic, modern and individual. Modern living has to be practical, and I think the house is very practical overall.

(Irish Independent Supplement, Dublin, Oct. '94).

For Cosgrove it was different from decorating for a client, in that it was "highly political". **(Cosgrove, Dub. 94).** This was a result of dealing with so many different companies, and the other factors are encounters when building and decorating a house in just 6 weeks.



Fig.2 ,The Study.



Fig. 3 ,The Hall.

I had a huge workforce of 40 men at one stage. It was extremely time consuming, highly responsible, almost 24 hours around the clock. It was very exciting but yet very, very tiring ... we were dealing with hundreds of people. **(Cosgrove 5th Dec.'94).**

So unlike decorating for a client, where one has time to understand their way of thinking, and where one only has the owners of the house, and maybe an electrician to deal with, this house was very much more to do with public relations.

Rather than being able to choose all the items that went into the showhouse, a lot of the suppliers approached Cosgrove, and then paid commission to have their products displayed in the showhouse.

Every item in the interior of a showhome has been arrived at by a furious process of bargaining, as P.R. companies have struggled to obtain a sly piece of below the line exposure for their clients.
(Allen, 89, pg. 13).

This explains the presence of the Panther Radiator Covers - in almost every room, **(see fig. 2)**. It also explains the fresco panelling in the hall, chosen instead of a dado rail, which was supplied by Lasarge Plaster board, which supplied plaster board for the whole house, including the ceiling rose in the hall, and the moulding found in most of the rooms in the house **(see fig. 3, hall)**. There are companies which have supplied everything you see of one particular item, the lighting is all from one supplier Hicken lighting, and all the accessories throughout the house were also from one supplier, Clerys. The organisers wanted the house to have a personal feel to it, "a lived in feel, in that it wouldn't look like a department store showhouse". **(O'Hara, Jan. 95)**. They did not want the house to have the feel of just one major



Fig.4 a, The Dining Room.

(Detail, the cabinet)



Fig.4b, The Dining Room.



Fig.5a, The Kitchen,
Detail.



Fig.5b, The Kitchen.

store, and that is why they did not go to just one supplier for all of the elements within the interior.

What Cosgrove achieved in decorating this house was an eclectic style of repro antique furniture, a country home style, without the elegance of the faded grandeur one sees in these old mansions. Although she tried to give the house influences such as "traditional, rustic, modern", (**Cosgrave, Dec. 5, 1994**), what she does not succeed in doing is inter-linking these elements. These influences are not contrasted with each other, where the modern meets traditional, and produces an interesting format, something new and unexpected. Rather, as in fig. 2, the study, what we find is each room having a separate identity. The study typifies Edwardian elegance, with dark mahogany furniture. The darkness of the room is added to by a green wallpaper. Decorative elements to be found in the room are not only paintings, (most of which have been painted by Cosgrove) but austere looking busts, both on the bookshelf/cabinet, and on the early 18th Century style table in the corner of the room, which features three gold legs, in the form of a lions head, on a one legged body. The fireplace in the room is Victorian style cast iron, and the expected radiator cover and moulding are evident. This room, however, is not totally alone. It is very similar to the dining room, both by the era chosen to represent, and in the sombre atmosphere each has to offer. (**see fig. 4a,4b**). Also a very dark room, it is crowded with accessories, on the table, on the sideboard, and also in the cabinet. Here we see plates which depict country scenes such as a cathedral, and other 'Constable' like images. This country feel is also sought after in the use of hunting scene table mats. These elements are chosen to give the illusion of the house being owned by typical country gentry. Items like these place mats can be



Fig.6a, The main Bedroom.



Fig,6b.The Bedroom.

(Dressing table)



Fig.6c ,The Bedroom,



Fig.7 a, The Sitting Room.



Fig.7b, The Sitting Room
(The fireplace)



Fig.7c ,The Sitting Room)
(Compact Disk Player)



Fig.8a ,The Bathroom.


Fig.8c ,The Curtain
Fabric.



Fig.8b ,The Bathroom,
Curtain detain.

found in many houses in Ireland, it is not unusual to find them in the heart of the suburbs, where the hunt has very little to do with daily life whatsoever. These are often chosen for the sole purpose of protecting the table from the heat of plates, and are not usually bought to compliment an interior. In this case, the house is also typically suburban, and everything in the house has been specifically chosen to give a certain feel to each room. These mats will never be used and add to the overall feel of established wealth.

While the study and dining room mimic each other, two rooms that also have quite similar qualities are the kitchen and the bedroom. The kitchen (see fig. 5) is fully fitted out in pine units, and also a large pine table one end of the room. Almost everything in this room has the traditional feel of a country kitchen, with the use of items such as a Belfast sink, and a creel above a stall, marble topped table. The realities of these items and their use in the past are now forgotten and are used for decoration, with copper pot and dried flowers hanging from a rack that was used originally to put breads and other foods on, in order that mice could not eat them. Colour is added to an otherwise beige kitchen with an ethnic style print found on the curtains above the sink. The country feel is added to with a traditional cast iron cooker, and a church





Fig,9a .The Guest Bedroom.



Fig,9b.The Guest Bedroom.
(Wardrobe detail)



Fig.10a, Childrens
Bedroom.



fig.10c,
Fabric detail.



Fig,10b.Childrens Bedroom.



Fig.11a, The En-Suite Bathroom.



Fig.11b, The En-Suite
Bathroom.

(Washstand)

pew to be found in one corner. There is an abundance of vases and jugs which are placed on every available surface in the kitchen.

The main bedroom is also predominantly decorated with pine fittings, the bed, bedside tables, wardrobe drawers, dressing table and cot, all in a country style pine (see fig. 6). The colour scheme of this room is also very like that of the kitchen. Other traditional elements such as pelmets on both window, above curtains that are held back with tassled tiebacks. Co-ordinating fabrics are used on the curtains and bedspread. There is definitely a rustic feel to both of these rooms, but this is not inter-mixed with any other elements.

The sitting room (see fig. 7) achieves more of a balance between the elements Cosgrove was trying to achieve in this house. The use of a dark green fabric on the sofa (see fig. 7a) contrasts with the cream walls, the room is still very traditional in its overall view, but plain walls give a more contemporary feel. The curtains are however, treated very much in a traditional manner, with a ruched pelmet draping over the tied back curtains. The centre of the floor is taken up by a coffee table, in front of a Victorian style fireplace (see fig. 7b). The traditional features of this room are blended awkwardly with the modern elements the technology of the black plastic C.D. player (see fig. 7c) against the pseudo Victorian furniture is quite disturbing in its combination. It is the newness of these objects, that are feigning authenticity that gives the interior an unsettling, unreal quality.

The house is much more spacious than most houses that are built today, and this allows for a large amount of space to be given to the main bathroom (see fig. 8).

But the use of space in such a large room leaves an empty feeling. The suite used in the room is a white (see fig. 8a) Victorian style suite, with brass mahogany fittings. This room is tiled from ceiling to floor, with a two tone scheme being separated in the middle with a tiled border. The gold fittings of the bathroom suite are echoed in the gold accessories found in the ornate pelmet and curtain at the window. A printed muslin is overshadowed by a ruched gathered piece of heavy green fabric. The choice of fabric (see fig. 8b) which has a classical feel to it with swirling scrolls over printed in a mottled gold, add to an overall traditional feel, which is unbroken, even with the use of a more modern floor covering that is grey 'marmoleum' (a company name for a brand of linoleum).

Another room which tries to juxtapose the modern with traditional is the guest bedroom (see fig. 9). The use of the fitted wardrobes, the 'Sliderobes' (a company name for a sliding door wardrobe) are mirrored (see fig. 9a) and are wallpapered to a dado rail level.

The room also offers contemporary framed cottages on the walls. The bed is a Victorian style iron bed (see fig. 9b) and there is also an iron shelf. Apart from these, the rest of the furniture is mahogany, we see the Victorian clothes rack beside the sliderobes, this is where modern meets traditional. The accessories do not seem to fit in here, a purple quilted washbag hung on the bedpost makes for a curious combination. The wallpaper one finds in this room is very similar in pattern to the wallpaper used in the main bedroom, study and dining room, all of which have a repeating diamond shaped motif.

The childrens bedroom is an exercise in nostalgia, which is full of colourfully painted furniture, as in fig. 10. Traditional characters from books are found on these, and all of the 'accessories' are toys which reflect the past. The choice of fabric is a bright red and white check on the bed, and a red/white stripe on the curtains, which are tied back, and pelmetted. (See fig. 10b). The treatment of the curtains in the house is very similar throughout, with only one room having roman blinds that is the downstairs bathroom. All of the other rooms have the curtains held back on some manner with tie backs, fringes and tassels, which are usually coupled with a pelmet. This treatment is very much in keeping with the traditional feel of the house, but does not aid in the balance of old and new styles. This showhouse was built, not as in most cases to be sold, but rather, to be viewed, by over 20,000 people. This was to give them an insight into an interior decorated by an interior designer, and boasted that it gave people "the chance to see all the latest in Irish interior design under one roof". (Irish Independent Supplement, Dub. Oct. '94, pg. 10). While this is not to say that people should not decorate their houses in a traditional style, however, within this showhouse, which claimed to have so much to offer in the line of a 'dream home', it only gave the option of the historicist style interior. It failed to give any indication of modern trends in interior design, and, while promoting Irish business and shops, it was not put together with the idea of promoting Irish design. Irish made was not a stressed guide line, and rather than achieving a lived in look the interior is quite impersonal.

The showhouses in Blackrock, Avoca were a new step in the Irish Showhouse industry. Instead of creating a bland interior that would suit most people, the creators of this particular development chose

leading Irish designers to decorate the interiors of these houses. The development was a range of expensive detached and semi-detached houses, and also had 3 storey regency style houses, with outside steps leading up to the front door.

The developers were determined, from the beginning, that the decoration of these houses would be in keeping with the quality of the site "an uncompromising testament of the quality of Irish Construction and architectural design" (**Irish Design, Brochure, Dublin, '94 pg. 1**). The project when finished was viewed as more of an exhibition of Irish Design, rather than merely another group of showhouses. The development was advertised both in newspapers, and on billboards, which invited people to see these exceptionally designed homes. Having viewed the showhouse, purchasers of other houses in the development, these buyers were then offered the opportunity of consulting the interior designer of their choice, who would advise them on their own interior as appropriate,

Simply visit the showhouses. Each is quite different - and quite wonderful. All you have to do is choose the one you feel best suits your tastes and you'll have the opportunity to work with its designer on your dream home.

(Irish Times Property, Nov. 3, '94 pg.12, Advert).

The designers, David Averill, Greg Tisdale and Arthur Duff, Peter Johnson and Gerry Brouder, were not given any brief, other than that, where possible, they would use Irish Design, and that the interiors would eventually allow for someone to live there;

The only constraints placed on the designers was an insistence that their solutions be practical - that they create interiors in which people would want to live, not artificial showcases - and that they should specify, wherever possible, Irish made goods and services.

(Irish By Design, Brochure, pg. 1).



Fig.13a,
The Conservatory.
(Averill)



Fig.12 ,The Drawingroom, (Parlour)
(Averill)



Fig.13b, The Bedroom,
(Averill)



Fig.14 ,The Dining Room,(Gerry Brouder)

The designers used 97% Irish goods in their houses, and also produced a second catalogue, along with the full colour brochure, in the form of a directory of the designers of the products available in the showhouses. This was to provide people who visited the showhouses with a guide to Irish design, not just the furniture, but also textiles and the paintings, and other accessories which were displayed around the houses.

The approach of the designers did not boast the latest in Irish Interior design, Irish design was very important, but the houses were decorated with the view that the interior would eventually have to be lived in. Of the house which he decorated, Averill said:

It might have been easier for us to simply reflect the classic architectural design of the house by using traditional interior design and furnishings. Alternatively, we could have simply taken an avant garde approach which ignored the sensitive work of the architect ... this is a modern home which will be lived in by real modern people.

(Averill, Brochure, Dub. 94, pg. 3).

These houses mix elements of contemporary style with traditional elements in a way that was not seen in the Ideal Homes Showhouse. The houses are spacious, but no attempt is made to fill up every available space with furniture. The homes have more of a personal feeling to them.

The most obvious difference between these houses and the Ideal Homes Showhouse, is that these are, in fact real, and will be viewed, not only by people who are seeking new ideas for their own homes, but by people who are actually interested in buying them. These houses will be lived in, and remain here, not being dismantled after 5 days as is the case



Fig.15a, The Bahtroom.
(Duff and Tisdale)



Fig.15b, (above) The Study.
(Duff and Tisdale)



Fig.15c, Childrens Bedroom.
(Duff and Tisdale)

of the Ideal Home. They are also unlike average showhouses in the quality of their design. These do not follow the run-of-the-mill showhouse format which is so widely available in Dublin at the moment where you will find, separated by a paper border, and the same carpet found right the way through the house. The interiors are surprisingly interesting and lively, with colour and texture playing an important part in their overall atmosphere.

There was no market research into possible clients undertaken in these houses, in fact, according to Averill, had any market research been undertaken they might not have decorated certain rooms as they did, such as the drawing room (**in fig. 12**) of the house which he decorated;

I dare say if we had done any market research we wouldn't have used some of the things we did use - I think possibly the rear drawing room is a little too austere for some peoples taste
(Averill, 18.11.1994).

In the insistence of Irish design, some interesting ways of using typically Irish items were found. The beds, in at least two of the houses, were covered with blankets, and also with woven tweeds. Traditionally blankets have been covered with bedspreads, but, as in fig. 13b, the blanket is allowed to stand on its own.

In being conscientious about using Irish products, none of the designers have wallpaper in the houses, because there is no Irish manufacturer of wallpaper. Instead all the rooms are painted, with most of the designers choosing plain colours, and some as in Brouders case, opted for paint effects (**see fig. 14**). According to Averill,



Fig.16 ,The Sitting Room,(Peter Johnson)

"It actually suited our approach quite well, because we don't really use a lot of wallpapers in domestic type work" (**Averill 18.11.94**).

The budget for these interiors was between £30,000 and £40,000, approximately half the cost of the ideal homes showhouse.

Although these houses are quite modern in their approach, there is still a strong format in the function of each room. Each room has a title, and that is what it is decorated to achieve. If the room is called the study, it is purely that. Only in one case did the designer stray from the notion that there is more than one function for a room;

I wanted to show people with big living rooms they didn't have to have one living room devoted to a dining table it is much better to actually have a table that they could put out and set up for a dinner party, instead of wasting the room all the time.

(**Averill interview, Dublin Nov. 94**)

This room (**see fig. 12**) is a large room, airy but with traditional overtones. The wooden floor is covered by a specially designed rug in the centre of the room, this is one of the strongest elements in a room that hosts a Victorian cast iron fire place, and regency style chairs. There is a choice of contemporary accessories, such as the coffee tables, and the walls are painted in a pale blue.

This room leads into the conservatory, (**see fig. 13a**) a room painted to give warmth, with a table in the centre. The room is sparsely decorated, and opens into the kitchen. The simple muslin drapes on the windows ensure a feeling of simplicity.

This combining of past and present is found in all of the houses, such as in the study of the Duff and Tisdale house (see fig. 15b). Here old elements such as the fireplace and dado rail are used to new and old pieces of furniture, on a cherrywood floor. The lighting used both on the ceiling and on the fireplace is of contemporary design, and adds interest to the room.

The bathroom (see fig. 15a) in this house is a quirky, colourful room, with both mosaic and painted on 'coup d'oeil' brick work. On either side of the bath is a red column, and the floor is tiled in terracotta tiles. The suite, however is the same suite that appears in every other bathroom in the development. These white porcelain suites, with brass taps did not allow for the creativity of the designers to come through. The insistence that these bathroom suites be used could have led to a uniformity in the bathrooms. It did not however, and people played with colour and accessories to create interesting bathroom interiors. The insistence that Irish design be used in these developments did not limit the designers in creating interesting interiors. In fact, most of them were surprised to find so many quality Irish goods on the market. Finding lighting, for example proved no problem, there is a vast array to choose from in these houses alone, in the Duff Tisdale house, for example if we look at the lighting in the study and the bedroom, there are four different lights to choose from (see fig. 15b and 16).

Curtain fittings did not just remain in one format, although one does find pelmets and tassels, which provoked the designer Alfred Cochrane in his reviews of the exhibition to saying, of his visit to Averill's house; "I thought I had run my afternoons design marathon without an attack of the dreaded pelmet, but alas, it appeared here,

compressing an already squat window." (Cochrane, Irish Times, April '94 pg. 6). But in other cases, timber blinds (see fig. 16) roman blinds and other window dressing made up for the odd braided tie back.

These houses, although not the latest trend in interior design, set out to prove that Irish design can be used in contemporary interiors, without comprising the design. In providing people with a quality interior to view, and without resorting to too many of the stereotypical ideals that are to be found in showhouses, Irish by Design provided people with something more than the average showhouse, and showed that they could be used, not only to benefit the developer, in providing a wider audience, but also to sell Irish Design, in a passive manner, where each item is seen as part of a whole interior. This gave people a new insight into showhouse interiors and turn peoples preconceptions around;

When I went to review four new showhouses I was bracing myself for a display of ruched blinds, swags, tails, paper dados and meringue cornices squeezed in under eight foot high ceilings. This is - I thought - what turns on the newly affluent Suburban classes - the English country dowager look.

(Cochrane, Irish Times, April '94 pg. 6)

Proved wrong on having seen the houses, Cochrane then calls these houses a tremendous step forward in showhouse design.

(Cochrane, Irish Times, April '94, pg. 6).

Chapter 3

In this chapter I shall deal with taste and education in relation to showhouses. I will ask how the current taste for historicist interiors came about, and what relevance it has to taste in general. I will question the role of the showhouse in the feeding on this trend for repro-interiors. I will also be discussing the other influences people encounter in the forming of their ideas on taste.

The role of the showhouse in the education of the public toward good design is also a topic I shall discuss, and how important a tool it is in the elevation of a design standard.

What is taste ? Taste is one of the processes we use to make judgements about design (**Bayley, 1983 pg. 2**). There are many opinions on the subject of taste, and this chapter is not attempting to define the meaning of the word taste, taste in terms of the showhouse is discussed here.

Taste and education are two subjects which cannot be separated in the arguments of this thesis. Although some people argue that taste is either something you have or have not, that some people are lucky in their ability to discuss good from bad. But contrary to this belief, it has been shown that it is through our cultural upbringing we learn most about our likes and dislikes, our taste. Although education plays a role in the development and formation of our ideas, the most important influences on us are those we receive at home;

Even in the classroom, the dominant definition of the legitimate way of appropriating culture and works of art favours those who have had early access to legitimate culture in a cultural household, outside of scholastic disciplines.

(Bourdieu, 1984 pg. 11)

Taste is not a gift one is born with, but through environmental influences, taste is a process which is developed. The terms good taste and bad taste are often used by people as a way of voicing their opinion on the value of an object. In this way certain things are classed, not because of what they are, but because of the perception of an individual as to the purpose or meaning of this thing.

Most often the value is not inherent in the object itself, but in the intention of its consumer. Taste is both a myth and a reality, it is not a style.

(Bayley, 1991, pg.71).

Taste is a tool in our discern, it is what we form our likes and dislikes from. Design, however is easier to class, there can be good design and bad design, just as there can be good interior design. A good design is something that performs the task it was meant for. It must adhere to the purpose of its existence, whether that be practical or decorative. Design is not taught in schools the way Maths or English is. People are not taught from a young age how to discern good design from bad design. The decisions they make with regard to this are based on their perceptions of what their taste is. But where do people get their ideas on taste. What influences people in their opinions of taste.

In the past taste filtered down from the aristocracy to the landed gentry and in turn to butchers and grocers. Now the butcher is influenced by the Ideal homes exhibition because the elite of moneyed class have no taste.

(Hicks, 1969, pg. 69)

Although it is true to say that people get their ideas of taste from the Ideal homes exhibitions, there are also a great many other influences that form peoples taste, with regard to interiors.

This is an age of mass media, television, magazines, and many other elements influence us daily. Travel is now easier than ever and we are forever being bombarded with ideas on what our taste should conform to.

With the current taste among a large portion of the population for repro-style interiors, it would be interesting to look into how this trend came to be. "Most people learn the fundamentals of interior design from their experience of Restaurants." (Bayley, 1991, pg. 40).

This could also be true of the Pub, especially in Ireland, where there is a certain Pub Culture. The fact is most pubs in Dublin are decorated in a very retro-style, pub designers, with few exceptions, have decided that there are only two marketable styles of pub - the coaching inn for the country, and the Victorian snug in the city, (Pearman, Sunday Times, London 1995 pg.25).

Another large influence on peoples formation of taste is the magazines they read, not only interior magazines, but social magazines such as Hello , which offers a view into richer peoples homes - people the readers aspire to - and very often these people show off their wealth through their interiors, which show a strong liking for historicism. Along with other magazines - House and Gardens, Ideal Home and Country Homes and Interiors - peoples taste for retro is fuelled. On the cover of one particular 'Country Homes and Interiors' magazine, it boasts "Extra pages of antiques, simple country style, a decorative

Buckinghamshire Cottage, Master class - chair covers and glorious floral fabrics" (Country Homes, May 1994).

The World of Interiors - voted the best glossy magazine in the world, also offers toile de Jouy wallpapers, with matching fabrics, and has a complete section devoted to Art and Antiques and restoration is a big feature of this magazine.

Television has also played a part in this nostalgia for the past, with new period programmes constantly being made, such as the Bucaneers, and the Antiques Roadshow being very popular.

In the housing market today everything that is being built has a retro facade, even newly built apartment blocks have a neo-georgian facade to them,

'speculative house building have now settled on a limited range of styles, ranging from vaguely Tudor to the vaguely Edwardian, but missing out on virtually everything that has happened since the first world war'

(Pearman, The Sunday Times, Style, London 1995 pg. 25).

The home buyers have a desire to live in a Period look house, which brings a rural element into their suburban lives.

They then proceed to decorate their homes in accordance with these influences, wallpaper with a border, reproduction furniture, fringed, tassled curtains. This is in total contrast to the 50's and 60's where there was more of a taste for modern interiors, with all the new household wonders, and the mass production of plastic furniture and fittings.

Taste is disseminated through all these influences - the public usually produces a watered down version of what they have seen, however a more practical approach is undertaken. If people are getting their ideas from these influences would it not be better to expose them to the influences of good design, and contemporary design, and allow for them to produce their own version of these in their homes?

With the vast amount of people who visit showhouses for ideas on how to decorate their homes, it offers designers an ideal platform to display good, innovative interiors, which would not only elevate peoples ideas in relation to the decoration of their homes, but also in their concept of the function of the home. The people who visit showhouses do so because it is an easy way to view an interior. People do not always question the designers taste, unless it is in relation to the practicalities of items such as light coloured carpets. They pick out areas that appeal to them, and find a way they can produce that effect, either a cheaper way or an easier way. With so many influences bombarding people with ideas that lead them into choosing badly designed products, the showhouse could have a major part to play, as a wheel in the whole area of taste and consumerism. Taste is dictated by the media, manufacturers and designers. Instead of looking backward all the time, looking forward will produce new ideas and designs, and encourage the media to portray new rather than old. If showhouses were utilised for their full potential they could play a part in the education of the masses.

20,000 people visited the Ideal Homes Showhouse, and what was shown to them was nothing new, the traditional middle class interior, with nothing other than 'safe' elements. This house portrayed the idea



Fig.17 ,The Living and Dining area.

(Wall 2 Wall 2000)

that a house is a very bland, sombre place, and did not allow for people to either experiment with decoration, or even enjoy it. There is a strict format to be adhered to - a certain code that equals quality, and it has to include antique furniture, pelmets and fringes on heavy curtains, new, contemporary, exciting, experimental, these were not part of this code. In producing a house that merely advertised products that weren't of any value in the overall decoration, the Ideal Home Showhouse failed its viewers. Neither the facade of the house nor, the interior offered anything more than any D.I.Y furniture store.

In showing Irish design, the Avoca showhouse made an attempt at upgrading a very much ignored aspect of Irish interiors, but, although they achieved in breaking new ground for Irish showhouses, it was not enough. The houses did not offer anything outside of a quality furnished interior. With a showhouse people could be exposed to new and innovative interiors. They offer a gallery form with as yet no commission, where work can be exhibited to a typically non gallery going section of the public. This is the way in which good design can reach the ordinary person. One has to allow for peoples current home tastes to be taken into account.

This thesis does not suggest that we should tell these people that their current home ideas are now 'unfashionable', or not in line with current tastes. But that if these people could be educated both to a better design philosophy, that they would in turn be more confident in their own ability to make decisions about the interior they live in, and not always rely on the opinions of others, magazines and interior designers. If people become more aware of their own taste, they will be better able to

express their personality in their interior, and not see their house as merely empty rooms which have to be filled.

Although there are magazines that do offer more of a range of contemporary ideas, such as Elle Decoration, going out and buying one of these is not the same as actually experiencing the reality of walking around an actual interior.



Fig. 18, The Bathroom, (Crafts Council Gallery)

CONCLUSION

Showhouses today are part of the huge building industry. Their importance has, up until quite recently been overlooked. While they had been seen as just a house in which someone would paper the walls and carpet the rooms and then call it a showhouse, these days showhouse designers have realised to some extent the role a showhouse can play in the selling of a house. When there is so little difference between the exterior of the houses that are being built at this time, the interior has become a large selling point.

The showhouses role in consumerism has an important role to play. Each offers a separate exhibition space that will be viewed by large amounts of people, who are looking for ideas on how an interior should be decorated. These viewers are giving themselves the opportunity to expand their ideas of interior design, and what way of decorating best suits their personality.

Unlike the buyer of the showhouse, who is suppressing their own personal style and allowing someone else to choose the interior of their home, there are people who want to give themselves the choice of how their interior should look, and find a showhouse a good way of gaining insight into the decorative trends.

What the viewers of showhouses are being offered in terms of Interior design is usually a blank house with a historicist feel. The interiors of most showhouses follows the one format. They are not offering contemporary interiors, for modern people, but feel that interior design is about colour matching the wallpaper and carpets.

There is in fact a company in Dublin specialising in the decoration of interiors for apartments and showhouses. This company, Wall to Wall 2000, offer a total furnishing package for showhouses and apartments. This company offers not only fabrics and carpets but also furniture, and every accessory needed to create an interior. The selling point this company offers is totally co-ordinating interiors. The actual choice of products is quite limited, living and dining room furniture is available in natural ash, and also antique pine, there is no other choice. The bedroom can be fitted out in Antique pine or Valley Oak. (see fig. 17)

Every detail has been included in this pre-package interior. Wall to Wall 2000 goes way beyond carpets and curtains. It provides a total turnkey package which also includes upholstery, furniture, bedding and kitchenware - right down to the last teaspoon. A fully equipped kitchen, in which crockery and cutlery all contrive to match is one of life's great luxuries. (Wall to Wall 2000, Brochure, 94/95).

This company, while offering an entire packages interior, with everything co-ordinating is producing interiors which all look the same, and provide people with an interior lacking in personality. They suggest that a luxurious interior is one in which everything is matching, and do not deal with the interior as an extension of ones personality. They offer people who can afford it an easy way out of decorating for themselves, so many people visit these houses that they offer a very tempting platform both for displaying good interior design, and new, innovative ideals.

People will soon tire of seeing the same interiors, and by using some imagination showhouses could be come more of a phenomenon than they actually already are.

Showhouses geared toward the less affluent people in society could show that, in decorating an interior, the lack of finance does not mean that an interior has to lack imagination. Less costly ways of producing well designed interiors could be a feature of these houses that could not only have a role to play in the education of people toward a better design understanding, but also a social role in reaching out to the vast amount of the population who cannot afford to buy antique furniture and showing them that interiors do not have a historicist feel, as they are being told by the media.

Although the Ideal homes showhouse was attempting to show the 'dream home', the majority of the population will never be able to afford anything close to it. Instead of showing people something they cannot have, showhouses could prove that interiors of the average person need not be drab or run-of-the-mill. There is a chance that this might actually take place at a future Ideal homes exhibition, in Dublin. During discussions with Padraic O'Hara, one of the exhibition organisers, he was very open to the possibility of displaying an 'Alternative' interior, along with the Ideal Homes Showhouse. This interior could show that an interior could be decorated in an individual, exciting manner, on a lesser budget than the actual showhouse. With the focus of this alternative interior being on originality and personal creativity, it would reach a different market than that Ideal home currently attracts. By offering people good design ideas, this alternative interior could show people that an interior does not have to be filled with expensive, repro-antique furniture to be a well designed interior.

By acknowledging that there is a market for original ideas in interior^s, a market which values creativity, the exhibition organisers

are prepared to take the Ideal Homes Exhibition to a new level. In showing that they do not have to be rich to have a well designed interior, and by educating their taste toward good design, the showhouses role has up until now been underestimated. The majority of people who visit showhouses are not designers, but ordinary people, passing time on a Sunday. It is the ordinary person that showhouses can reach. In reaching these people, they can become more confident about their own taste, and therefore not be afraid of creating an interior that suits them.

What is really important is that people educate or elevate their taste so that they can judge not only their own problems but general problems of taste and design. It is amazing how few people cultivate their taste and how very many people there are with no taste either good or bad, or any feelings about it and all that it affects.

(Hicks, London pg.69)

In elevating the taste of people to good design, designers will be forced into producing practical well designed pieces for people, which will be available on a large scale. If peoples taste change toward a better designed interior, retailers will produce products in line with these tastes, and well designed goods will not be associated with an elite class. In 1993, the Crafts Council of Ireland, under the guide of Anya Von Gosseln, had an exhibition of interiors. This is a very important step as interior design was taken away from its decorating image and given a new exhibition status. The exhibition showed that interior designing did not have to be the domain of interior designers, "Five 'decorators' were chosen, and none of them is an interior decorator" (**Irish Times, 11-9-93, pg.8**). It also showed people that interiors did not have to be a serious sombre things.

There were five 'rooms' in all at this exhibition, a bedsit, a bedroom, a home office, a bathroom and a hotel lobby. Each interior shows originality and the personality of the designer is evident in the choice of decoration. In the bathroom (fig. 18), one finds a chaise longue, and the shower is, not tiled, but has red brick walls. The bedsit offered unusual items of furniture, used to maximise the space allotted. The bed, which is on four high legs has a table underneath it for eating, and must be reached by a ladder,

its tall girder-like legs supporting a nest like structure that is lined with a feather mattress. Climb the ladder and you are high above the room, sunk into the platform, with space around you for television, books and coffee cups.

(Irish Times, 11-9-93, pg. 93)

This exhibition proved to be the most attended exhibition the Crafts Council of Ireland had ever hosted, which proves that, not only are people interested in interiors, they are also interested in good design. Interior design is all too often perceived as not having anything more to offer than the images shown in glossy magazines, this exhibition offered something different,

The relief of it. No chi chi plaids, no flowering chinzes, no ruched blinds, — no kilims, and best of all, not a dried flower in sight.

(Mulcahy, Irish Times, 11-9-93, pg.8).

As a platform for design, it showed entire interiors, not just pieces out of context. With design, especially craft, pieces are so often displayed in a manner that removes them from the reality of their purpose. In this exhibition they are given the benefit of the context they were produced for.

Showhouses also offer a relevant platform for design, an actual house. The audience could be shown well designed pieces, 'exhibited' in

their relevant context, not just seeing well designed pieces as something which remains in a gallery.

The showhouse, as a phenomenon has until recently been overlooked, its importance has not been realised, both in terms of mass consumerism, and in the teaching of good design and taste. People would view interiors as extensions of their personalities. They need not just be a badly put together interior, used just for the selling of houses, but with well informed, well created interiors could be used both in the education of the public, and as a platform for Irish design.

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