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**“Good Taste for Living”**  
**Establishing the Profession of Interior Decoration in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* Magazine, 1925-1937**

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## “GOOD TASTE FOR LIVING” Establishing the Profession of Interior Decoration in *Canadian Homes and Gardens Magazine*, 1925-1937<sup>1</sup>

> NICOLA KRANTZ

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// A home of the past centuries in Europe was built with the intention of keeping it a permanent home for [a] family for generations,” writes interior decorator Minerva Elliot [1887-1964] in the February 1928 issue of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* magazine. “The home was a place of joy and sorrow, birth and death, insignificant routine and great moments. The whole pageant of life was encompassed.” The changes affecting the tradition and security of the home during the interwar years had an impact on Elliot, who perceived a crisis that only interior decoration could solve:

No longer is the home the focal-point for the family's activities. Movies, theatres, concerts, clubs, cabarets, even the churches, offer amusement or interest with which the home has been compelled to compete. Motor cars have annihilated distance so efficiently, that now it is almost less bother to go out than it is to spend the evening *chez nous*. With such insistent competition from outside, the home has to take thought and make itself doubly attractive if it would be more than a mere roof.<sup>2</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, Elliot was recognized as a prominent Canadian interior decorator (fig. 1). She first gained practical experience working at the T. Eaton Company in Toronto and John Wanamaker Department Store in Philadelphia before launching her own decorating business in 1925. She decorated homes in Toronto's upscale neighbourhoods and catered to clients who were affluent and had social status. Her business satisfied the desire for antiques and period furniture, a modern



FIG. 1. MINERVA ELLIOT POSED WITH A CERAMIC FIGURE, APRIL 28, 1927. | CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES, GLOBE AND MAIL FONDS, FONDS 1266, ITEM 11252.

decorating trend in interwar Toronto. She travelled often to Europe to bring home textiles and antiques from French and English collections. In addition, she advocated for proper attention to be paid to the decoration of the home, and used the popular decorating magazine *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (hereafter *CHG*) as a forum to advertise her business and ideas on modern decorating.

Despite her successful and influential career, Elliot is relatively unknown today.<sup>3</sup> In Canada in general, architectural history seldom explores the development and role of interior decoration. The ephemerality of interior decoration and its association with women has historically positioned it as an inferior subject compared to the sturdy permanence of architecture. As craft historian Sandra Alföldy explains, “[u]nlike architecture, which was comfortably professional and masculine, the field of interior design was fraught with the baggage of gender and materials.”<sup>4</sup> While current scholarship has uncovered the professional contributions of American and British interior decorators, the same cannot be said about Canadian decorators.<sup>5</sup>

As a modern tool for communicating ideas and images, magazines such as *CHG* helped to introduce and familiarize its readers with diverse styles of design, including *moderne* and Elliot’s own personal brand of design. The mass-circulating, illustrated magazine—itsself a product of modernity—offers a view to how concepts of modern life were defined and discussed.<sup>6</sup> *CHG* was a prime vehicle for interior decoration advice, and an important tool for furthering the role of the interior decorator as it reinforced the expertise of architects, horticulturalists, and decorators.<sup>7</sup> Design historians Jeremy Aynsley and Francesca Berry explain: “Out of a new genre of

publication, modern professional roles for men and, increasingly, for women emerged—those of the interior designer and the design journalist.”<sup>8</sup> The developing profession of interior decoration was able to gain traction through the mobility of the magazine medium. Historian Valerie J. Korinek<sup>9</sup> explores the role of women’s magazines as conveyors of taste and meaning in *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (2000). With a thorough reading of the Canadian magazine *Chatelaine*, Korinek investigates how it was used to voice feminist views under the guise of being a “simple” magazine for women with articles about style, lifestyle, and food recipes. In addition, Cynthia Hammond’s 2012 article “‘I Weep for Us Women’: Modernism, Feminism, and Suburbia in the Canadian Home Journal’s Home ‘53 Design Competition”<sup>10</sup> provides an inspiring, feminist reading of the text and images from an issue of the *Canadian Home Journal*. While both of these works are set in the postwar period, the themes are similar to those that were underway in the 1920s and 1930s, and provide useful models for exploring the role of women using print media to spread important messages while gaining visibility.<sup>11</sup>

As her writing indicates, Elliot was protective of the home. Products of modernity—such as the development of public spaces for entertainment and rapid modes of transportation—challenged the function of the home. The home journal, however, helped to narrate the complexities of modernity by offering a space for discussion. Elliot contributed to *CHG* in multiple ways. She wrote columns on the subject of interior decoration, regularly had the expensive homes she decorated photographed for the magazine, and used the magazine venue to publish advertisements for her decorating business.

This paper will explore the space(s) of *CHG* for the advancement of a decorator’s agenda by focusing on Elliot’s columns from 1925 to 1937. *CHG*, like most popular magazines, depended on the broad participation of experts and authorities in order to be a legitimate forum of discourse. One example of this was *CHG*’s implementation of a “Would You Like to Know?” section to answer readers’ queries, suggesting a kind of public entry into the intimacy of the private interior. Magazines provided a space of discourse in which all parties involved relied on each other to create and perpetuate certain values. *CHG* offered space for department stores and independent decorating firms to advertise their expertise. The pages of the magazine allowed for messages to be disseminated across the country, such as contradictory views on the implementation of *moderne* styling in the home or the function of an interior decorator. Within the pages, the combination of photographs, texts, and advertisements created a forum where ideas and trends could be shared, observed, emulated, and debated.

## CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS

In October 1925, the MacLean Publishing Company purchased *Canadian Homes and Gardens* from W. Rupert Davies, a Canadian businessman and editor. Davies had published two issues before purchasing a daily newspaper entitled *The British Whig* from Kingston, Ontario, and disposing of his “original enterprise.”<sup>12</sup> The new managing editor of the MacLean enterprise, J. Herbert Hodgins, wrote in its inaugural issue:

Frankly, it is a joy to take up the work of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* where Mr. Davies left off; to help mould and to

participate in the month-to-month programme of home and garden planning which the MacLean organization has in mind. It is a pleasure to be surrounded by a corps of technicians in architecture, interior decoration, landscape and horticulture—experts who will bring to our reader-family the inspiration and counsel so invariably helpful in artistic home creation and development.<sup>13</sup>

Following the MacLean Publishing Company's successful general interest publication, *Maclean's* [1911--], and preceding *Mayfair* [1927-1959] and *Chatelaine* [1928--], *CHG* responded to a growing interest in horticulture, home planning, building, and decoration, and was marketed to white upper-middle class women.<sup>14</sup> The *Canadian Home Journal* [1905-1958] and the short-lived *Everywoman's World* [1914-1922] were the only other English-language Canadian women's magazines outside of the MacLean empire.<sup>15</sup>

"Go where you will in the Dominion," wrote Hodgins, "you will find increasing evidence that Canada is a nation of home lovers." Hodgins thus highlights the "exclusive residential areas of every important urban centre"—which demonstrates both the type of residence the magazine aimed to represent as a model, and the type of readership it intended to reach: "Vancouver has its Shaughnessy Heights; Winnipeg its Fort Rouge and River Heights; Toronto its Rosedale, Moore Park, Forest Hill and Lawrence Park; Montreal, its Westmount and Senneville; Quebec its Grand Allee; St John its Mount Pleasant; Halifax its North Arm."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, throughout the interwar period, the homes from these regions dominated the pages of *CHG*. The mission of the magazine, as reported by Hodgins, was to represent the beautiful Canadian home. "It should be part

of our national pride and ambition to develop a distinctive Canadian home," commented Hodgins in the inaugural issue. "A nation progresses proportionately as it develops culturally. Canada has developed its literature, its music, its art in measurable degree. It follows that we should feel impelled to develop the art of the home, the architecture, the setting, the appointing."<sup>17</sup>

The desire for a distinctly "Canadian" home magazine emerged in an effort to compete with American periodicals. Korinek explains: "Canadian readers of women's magazines had to content themselves with the American and, less frequently, the British products until 1905"—the year the *Canadian Home Journal* was founded.<sup>18</sup> After *CHG*'s inaugural issue, enthusiastic response, including from its original editor Rupert Davies, made its way back to Hodgins. A Toronto reader wrote in to express that with their October issue, *CHG* "put the magazine into a class by itself among Canadian publications, where comparisons with similar periodicals in the United States can be made without the slightest fear of an unfavorable verdict."<sup>19</sup> A reader from Montreal wrote: "I do not recall ever having had the pleasure of looking over a magazine produced in Canada and of Canada that impressed me so much, both in mechanical perfection and in editorial content."<sup>20</sup> Hodgins even wrote of a Toronto financier who, when walking down Hastings Street in Vancouver, saw a copy of the October issue displayed in a bookshop. He purchased it because its attractiveness made him think it was an imported magazine. When he discovered it was a Canadian publication with Canadian content, he was surprisingly pleased.<sup>21</sup> Hodgins termed the positive feedback received by Canadians a "patriotic reaction."<sup>22</sup>

## CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS AS A SITE OF EDUCATION AND ADVICE

Elliot was first introduced as a contributor to *CHG* in its December 1925 issue, although advertisements for her business were featured from its inception in October of the same year. "Minerva Elliot," the magazine introduced,

is one of our foremost interior decorators. Mrs. Elliot approaches her work with a fine application of the best in her art from a knowledge gained by two years' practical experience in Philadelphia and New York under two internationally famous decorators. Mrs. Elliot, too, studied architecture for two years in England and for a definite knowledge of the applied arts she visited England, France and Italy extensively.<sup>23</sup>

Presenting Elliot's education and experience in the field of decoration functioned to reassure readers of her expertise. By bringing an expert into the home (in reality or via a magazine), Elliot could broadcast her professionalism, thus giving herself more visibility.

In her first piece for *CHG*, "Walls in Their Perfection," Elliot advocated for "quiet elegance and restraint," firstly by the proper incorporation of oak-panelled walls, and secondly with the use of wallpaper. Her authority and strict codes of decorating rules were already apparent, as was her admiration for the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architects from the United Kingdom:

I overheard a woman talking in a convincing manner about "every one following like sheep and having panelled walls." My answer to that is: Go back to the days when really good decorators and architects such as Inigo Jones, the Brothers Adam, Sir William Chambers, Angelica Kauffman

and many others; also the decorators and architects of European fame of our present day, all used and are using panelled walls, for the simple reason that they have lived through all the past generations and have always been restful and beautiful, with a quiet dignity, and also may be carried out in varied ways.<sup>24</sup>

Her personal maxim can perhaps best be represented in her following statement:

Personally I love all things that have tradition behind them and have been thoroughly tested and tried and found things of beauty. After all a "gentleman's home" should not have fads and daring things carried out in bad taste bordering on vulgarity. A home that is built around old traditions and harmonious blendings creates an atmosphere of quiet elegance. We must turn back to the old masters who spent a lifetime studying interiors and decorations for inspiration. Our modern times are too commercialized, too swift to create great masters in this field. This is an age of wonderful things, no doubt, such as great engineering feats, aeronautics and science, but unfortunately our generation has consequently suffered in not producing great masters who can create an original perfect art for the interior of homes.<sup>25</sup>

These sentiments remained with Elliot throughout her presence in *CHG*. Her preference for the decorative movements that have withstood the "test of time," and for the "old masters" being the authority on taste, captured the tension of broadly accepting *moderne*, or, in her words, "vulgar" furnishings. Elliot ended her article with a preview of her next contribution. "I shall continue the subject of different styles of walls," therefore informing the reader that her contribution to *CHG* was a serial column, inviting them to look forward to the next month's issue—as for non-subscribers, this perhaps worked as a buying incentive.

As a visual and textual product, *CHG* was able to use its platform like a source of education and edification for its readers. What is important about Elliot's advice columns is that she was in a position to be giving advice. Her personal opinions pointed to an admiration for how interior decoration was being treated in Europe versus Canada, and she clearly wished to bring the teachings and *objets d'art* from Europe to Canadian homes. Furthermore, observing Elliot's writing gives attention to her voice, her beliefs, her experiences, and provides evidence of her knowledge, experience(s), and, ultimately, her life. In addition to editorials written by professionals—like Elliot—working in the fields it represented such as architecture, interior decoration, and horticulture, *CHG* featured a "Department of Information," an editorial space allowing its subscribers to mail in questions about decoration, gardening, housekeeping, and home building. This demonstrates the authority of the magazine and an anxious public needing reassurance for their home decoration choices. Launched in their second issue, November 1925, the "Would You Like to Know" Q&A section of the magazine grew from a single page to a four-page spread by 1930. Faye Hammill and Michelle Smith explain that "pages devoted to letters from readers give further insight into the editorial construction of an intended audience, as well as the reception of a magazine."<sup>26</sup> This applies to *CHG*'s "Would You Like to Know" section, because the letters it published featured the cities and towns from which the writers originated, thus indicating the national reach of the magazine.

Questions from readers ranged anywhere from how to properly stain wood floors to what type of flowers to plant in a garden with southern exposure. The department was an enticing

reason to subscribe to the magazine as it responded to queries from subscribers only. For example, to a reader seeking advice for coverings and draperies: "We are doing our living room over, and I am in doubt as to color. The carpet is a dark Burgundy. I thought of doing the walls with an old ivory wall paper. What would you suggest for covering chesterfield and for drapes?" *CHG* responded: "Your suggestion about ivory walls seems happy. For the chesterfield, have it slip-covered with a printed linen, showing Burgundy, green and ivory. For the hangings you might use the same linen, or you might have a different material, say brocade or velvet or taffeta in Burgundy or old gold."<sup>27</sup> *CHG*'s suggestions exemplify the Q&A department as a type of forum and platform for sharing knowledge and expertise.

With that in mind, *CHG* editor J. Herbert Hodgins made an interesting—and illuminating—declaration in the January 1926 issue:

A magazine such as this may be likened to a great college. Here, by observation of what others have accomplished and by study of what architects and decorators, landscape artists and gardeners have done, Canadians may broaden their knowledge of those subjects which make for the larger domestic life. Taking out a subscription to *Canadian Homes and Gardens* is like entering upon a university course with, however, the difference that our classes are "elective"—but the graduation results in many ways are equally worth while.<sup>28</sup>

In the same issue, *CHG* promoted this statement with an advertisement for a new series on period furniture contributed throughout 1926 by Charles T. Currelly, director of the Royal Ontario Museum. A sketch of a period room asked: "Could You Identify the Period of These Pieces

at a Glance?"<sup>29</sup> (fig. 2). These "fascination articles," wrote *CHG*, will "cover just that popular aspect of a wide subject which the woman who faces the selection and purchasing of furniture in keeping is so anxious to find."<sup>30</sup>


Minerva Elliot staunchly supported tradition in decoration, as we have seen, and was unapologetically vocal about her views on the subject. After a trip to England in the summer of 1926, where she was invited to address the Guild of Decorative Art in London,<sup>31</sup> Elliot provided an article with her impressions on the trend of interior decoration in the "old country." In "A House Where Centuries Meet," she wrote:

How I wish that all my readers might have followed me during my recent visit to England and to France. Then they might have seen what a serious profession Interior Decorating is in the Old World. They would understand the pride of the creator in his work; the pride which is taken in the making of rare and beautiful things; the pride which is taken in having magnificent pieces of rare and lovely old furniture placed in their proper setting.<sup>32</sup>

Elliot recounted her tour to a tapestry workshop, meeting with Her Majesty Queen Mary while visiting with a London decorator, and seeing the home of Mrs. Derwent-Wood, wife of the late Francis Derwent-Wood, an English sculptor. Elliot's love of England, its "distinction and charm," professional associations, and the pride craftsmen take in their work, are features she would continue to champion throughout her career.

Perhaps most expressive of her personal sentiments, her article "New Fads Versus Old Traditions" captured her disillusionment with the "modern school of decoration." In it, Elliot observed the tension

6 Canadian Homes and Gardens for January, 1926



*The open cabinets or "buffets" as they were called, are examples of early Colonial workmanship dating from the eighteenth century. The shell-like fluted interior arcs are mentioned in "The Corner Cupboard Reclaimed" in this issue.*

*At centre is a piece of furniture of early American workmanship illustrative of the period tendency of the first craftsmen on this continent. There is a feeling of the Queen Anne piece about it, indicated by the "cabriole" curving of the legs.*

**Could You Identify the Period of These Pieces at a Glance?**

## February is Furniture Number

That promised series on period furniture will begin with this number—to run for the balance of the year. Professor Currelly of the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada's leading authority on the subject, will contribute these fascinating articles calculated to cover just that popular aspect of a wide subject which the woman who faces the selection and purchasing of furniture in keeping is so anxious to find. Do not miss the beginning of this important series.

The smart dog and horse features which have attracted such wide interest and attention will continue while rich photographic presentations of notable Canadian homes—in especial relation to their furnishing—will be shown.

We do not recommend *Canadian Homes and Gardens* to everyone, but if you are interested in those things which represent the gracious side of living—a beautiful and artistic home, continually improved and refreshed by the inspiration of new ideas and authoritative suggestion—you will not only appreciate but require the magazine. And if you are a garden lover as well, there is no other medium in this country in a position to supply you with the expert information and inspiration to be found in these pages.

*We shall highly value your subscription and your opinion.*

SIGN—SNIP—AND SEND—THE COUPON


CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS,  
153 University Avenue, Toronto, Ont.

Gentlemen: Enclosed please find \$5.00 for 'TWO YEARS' subscription to *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (or)

Enclosed please find \$3.00 for ONE YEAR'S subscription to *Canadian Homes and Gardens*.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_



*From settings like this the tradition of modern furniture descends.*

FIG. 2. ADVERTISEMENT FOR SUBSCRIPTION TO *CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS* MAGAZINE. | *CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS*, JANUARY 1926, P. 6.

between adhering to traditional decoration—that of period furnishings and antiques—and infusing the home with *art moderne*. For instance, "Only after an article has stood up against detached criticism, been approved by sound judgment, and has stood the test of centuries of service, can we be absolutely sure that

it is really beautiful . . . We must wait for years to know whether the art of our own generation is truly great." However,

I am frequently diverted by some of the interesting things being accomplished in the modern school of decoration. Naturally, the use of modern appliances, such as electric



FIG. 3. ADVERTISEMENT FOR MINERVA ELLIOT'S BUSINESS IN THE "ANTIQUES, DECORATIONS & FINE ARTS" CLASSIFIEDS SECTION (BOTTOM, CENTRE). | CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS, JANUARY 1928, P. 69.



FIG. 4. ADVERTISEMENT FEATURING A PHOTOGRAPH OF GILT WOODEN DOORS FROM BUCKINGHAM PALACE. | CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS, MAY 1930, P. 140.

light and equipment, elaborate plumbing, and the accessories of rapid communication, such as motor cars, telephones and radios, have exercised new influences in the handling of a home, and changed, as well, people's lives and habits. There is a scarcity of domestic help; therefore, houses are planned, decorated and equipped with the view to keeping labor to the minimum.<sup>33</sup>

Elliot's view captured the anxiety many were feeling in the period after the First World War. On that subject, she elaborated:

Naturally, after the holocaust of the Great War, when France lost her finest men, a period of stress and confusion was to be expected. Then, too, the people of France were forced by economic pressure to turn out marketable products, and as they could not compete in world markets with utilitarian goods, they gave their whole-hearted attention to shocking the civilized world with bizarre art.<sup>34</sup>

Her focus on France at the centre of the modernist movement was due to the recent *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* held in Paris in 1925.<sup>35</sup> In her own words, she described France as being in "the throes of modern savagery." However, it is important to note that "modern" is not a furniture style but rather what design historian Virginia Wright explained as "an explosion of styles ignited by the accelerating pace of industrial production and design experimentation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>36</sup> Interior decorating is the product of this "explosion," by reconciling the challenges of modern life through the elevation—and protection—of the home. The modern interior is a complex mix of old and new. While Elliot's views may seem conservative, she was unarguably a modern woman decorating modern interiors—even if that meant they were decorated in period furnishings and antiques.

Interestingly, after Elliot's editorial on the perils of modern design, Hodgins gave his editorial space in the March 1928 issue to the voice of another decorator who did not agree with Elliot's words. Jeannine McLay, who had contributed to *CHG* two years prior, then wrote:

As a Frenchwoman I cannot remain passive and silent after reading the statement in *Canadian Homes and Gardens* for February that in the matter of decoration France is "now in the throes of modern savagery" . . . People have different tastes, but, if we say that we like good modern furniture, we do not mean that we like only that.<sup>37</sup>

When it comes to representing and incorporating the "modern," *CHG*—like department stores—towed the line between trying to be avant-garde while also appeasing the conservative tastes of readers preferring period



FIG. 5. ADVERTISEMENT FEATURING MINERVA ELLIOT'S STOREFRONT ON BLOOR ST. WEST. | *CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS*, SEPTEMBER 1931, P. 7.

arrangements. Exemplifying this position, and perhaps explaining why *CHG* could both publish a scathing review of *art moderne* by Elliot and then give space for a rebuttal, Hodgins explained:

It is not our intention to set up any one school of interior decoration; as a matter of fact, we shall invariably avoid asserting our prejudices. Rather, we consider it our mission to "report" on the subject of the home appointments, to present from month to month—as we are privileged to witness the trend of domestic events—those important developments in architecture and building of homes, decoration and furnishing of rooms, and the making and up-keep of gardens.<sup>38</sup>

This allowed *CHG* to appease the varying tastes of their modern readers. In the form of editorials and advertisements, *CHG* communicated the idea of modernity, or at least created a medium for discussions—and debates—about it.



FIG. 6. ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE T. EATON COMPANY'S GALLERY OF ANTIQUES AND REPRODUCTIONS AND STAFF OF INTERIOR DECORATORS. | *CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS*, AUGUST 1926, P. 14.

## ADVERTISING THE IDEA OF HOME DECORATION

*CHG* advertised the professional services of Toronto's emerging interior decorators, as well as the decorating offices of large department stores and furniture retailers.<sup>39</sup> Examples include Toronto stores Eaton's College Street, Simpson's, Thornton-Smith, and Ridpath's Fine Furniture. As we have seen, Elliot illustrated her ideas in the form of her columns. Yet she also incorporated advertisements for her decorating business in the advertisement pages at the back of the magazine (fig. 3). These advertisements remained the same, in terms of graphic design, throughout the period in question (1925-1939). Exceptions to this include a May 1930 advertisement featuring a photograph of gilt wooden doors from Buckingham Palace which had been imported by Minerva Elliot (fig. 4). A September 1931 full-page advertisement—the only full-page advertisement

of Elliot's published in *CHG*—featured a photograph of her storefront (fig. 5). Through the window we can see a room arranged according to Elliot's decorative principles: "The simple beauty and elegance of this window speaks of the excellent taste and quality of the scheme of decoration peculiar to the establishment of Minerva Elliot, Limited." Elliot's full-page advertisement put her on a level next to Eaton's, Simpson's, and Thornton-Smith's, thus establishing herself with these big-name producers.

Full-page advertisements dominated the pages of *CHG*, promoting the products and services of businesses relating to construction, decoration, and gardening. Advertisements preyed upon the anxieties of *CHG*'s readership by sending the message that without a home of taste and elegance, one lacked grace and "good breeding."<sup>40</sup> Advertisements for the Eaton's Housefurnishings Building and, later, Eaton's College Street, responded to changes in modern interior decoration while reinforcing the idea that expert knowledge was required for the proper decoration of one's home, thus developing the professional status of interior decoration. For example, in *CHG*'s first issue, the T. Eaton Company advertisement for its Housefurnishings Building first introduced the myriad furniture styles that conjured "period furnishings," then explained: "But were you to assemble all their wonderful works in your home, the result would not necessarily be pleasing. It takes more than the possession of beautiful objects to produce beauty in the home. Arrangement is a necessity."<sup>41</sup> In another advertisement for Eaton's, the message was twofold (fig. 6): "The Right Thing in the Right Place Is the Whole Secret of Successful Furnishing." It suggested that without knowledge of good taste, consulting an expert was required—and also explained





FIG. 7. ADVERTISEMENT FOR EATON'S COLLEGE STREET INTERIOR DECORATING BUREAU, FEATURING A PHOTOGRAPH OF A ROOM DESIGNED BY MR. F.C. PROMOLI, A STAFF DECORATOR. | *CANADIAN HOMES AND GARDENS*, JUNE-JULY 1934, P. 14.

that procuring the “right thing” in terms of furniture could be attained at Eaton’s.<sup>42</sup> The store, then, functioned as a site for purchasing knowledge and furniture. Clients could purchase both the decorating services of an Eaton decorator who had the expertise and the Eaton commodities needed to decorate their home. To purchase “knowledge” is at the heart of professional interior decoration. Decorators have knowledge of taste, and their services are consumable. Yet to have a home professionally decorated also alludes to the attainment of knowledge.

To further exemplify that notion, a 1934 advertisement for the Interior Decoration Bureau at Eaton’s College Street used a photograph of a room designed by an Eaton decorator with text that read: “The Atmosphere that Soothes and Charms Is the Result of Knowledge Not Accident”<sup>43</sup>



FIG. 8. ADVERTISEMENT FOR THE CANADIAN MARCONI COMPANY FEATURING MINERVA ELLIOT AS THE “NOTED AUTHORITY ON HOME DECORATION.” | *THE GLOBE*, OCTOBER 31, 1930, P. 5.

(fig. 7). The photograph demonstrated a decorative arrangement combining the owner’s furniture with new furnishings procured from Eaton’s. And of course, the “result of knowledge” the advertisement described is that obtained from “a life time [of] study” acquired by professional decorators.

Speaking of the guidance of experts, Elliot was featured in advertisements for the Canadian Marconi Company as an authority on the subject of interior decoration. In a 1930 publicity campaign featured in *CHG*, the Company published two-page advertisements trying to demonstrate how the modern Marconi Radio could be incorporated into a home of taste.<sup>44</sup> Elliot had a prominent role as the voice of interior decoration. “Distinguished Canadians choose the Marconi . . . Canada’s Outstanding NEW

Radio Receiving Set,” proclaimed their September 1930 advertisement in *CHG*. Of the other six “distinguished Canadians” part of the advertisement was J. Herbert Hodgins, the managing editor of *CHG* and *Mayfair*. Using the approval of experts in music and design as well as the consent of society leaders, Marconi employed the “authority” of famous Canadians to prompt the public to accept the new Marconi radio for their homes. In another Marconi advertisement, published in *The Globe*, Minerva Elliot was given full attention with the suggestion that if she decorated her own home with the “distinctive modern beauty of the New Marconi radio,” it gave that radio set the seal of approval from an expert in interior decoration (fig. 8).<sup>45</sup> Elliot’s incorporation into Marconi’s publicity campaign exemplified her influence as a powerful voice for interior decoration.

## THE SOCIETY OF INTERIOR DECORATORS OF ONTARIO: ESTABLISHING THE PROFESSION

The establishment of the Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario (SIDO) in 1934 coincided with the formation of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and Town Planners.<sup>46</sup> *CHG* supported both societies by giving them space to advertise and showcase their work in the magazine. In the March 1934 issue, *CHG* announced: “With each of these groups the need of such organization has long been felt, and the feeling is that, working together and with the impetus of membership in a group of fellow craftsmen, both the public and the profession will enjoy greater benefits and opportunities.”<sup>47</sup>

Members of SIDO were featured in the magazine as decorating experts both before and after the society was established. Nearly all the members worked and operated in Toronto and had either started their careers or were currently employed at department and furniture stores such as Eaton’s, Simpson’s, Thornton-Smith’s, and Ridpath’s. R. Malcolm Slimon was elected president, Anne Harris vice-president, and Guy V. Mitchell (Robert Simpson Co.) secretary-treasurer. Other charter members included: Lawrence Barraud, Archibald Chisolm (T. Eaton Co.), Augusta Fleming, John D. Gerald (Thornton-Smith Co. Ltd.), Freda James (Ridpath’s Ltd.), John I. Ridpath (Ridpath’s Ltd.), and, of course, Minerva Elliot. The Society’s aim was to

develop, foster and promote the arts, crafts and science of interior decoration; to promote and protect the interests and welfare of those who have adopted or who contemplate the adoption of interior decoration as a profession or calling; to conduct such measures as may be calculated to enhance the knowledge, skill and proficiency of the

members of the Society in all matters and things pertaining to interior decoration and kindred subjects . . .<sup>48</sup>

SIDO felt that the art of interior decoration should be regulated and standardized, and that those calling themselves “decorators” should have the education (knowledge) and training (experience) to warrant acceptance into the profession.

*Canadian Homes and Gardens* offered space for SIDO to communicate the importance of interior decoration by publishing examples of their members’ work. For instance, in the January-February 1935 issue, the magazine featured photographs of ten miniature rooms representing the “careful work in design and execution” of SIDO’s ten charter members. The model rooms were created for inclusion in an architectural exhibition held in the Art Gallery of Toronto in January 1935. They captured the application of various decorating trends while advertising individual decorators’ skills and tastes. For instance, the miniature room by Freda James was designed in Swedish modern, while R. Malcolm Slimon designed an eighteenth-century period room. In another example of *CHG*’s role to promote the services and expertise of professional decorators, a new series was introduced in 1937. Entitled “Your Decorating Problems,” that series had *CHG* interview SIDO members to solve various decorating quandaries. Examples of problems include “When windows frame a view,” “When rooms adjoin,” “Return of the drawing-room,” and “Bedrooms unstandardized.”<sup>49</sup> Elliot rarely contributed to SIDO-sponsored articles, though her name was featured as a charter member in the advertisements published in *CHG*.

As a founding member of SIDO, Elliot advocated for the high standards that distinguish interior design today. In her

article “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” she observed how the function of the home has changed over time. At one point, she paused to insert a comment about the responsibility of home decoration:

It is exactly at this point that [I] would like to stop and make an urgent plea to the women of Canada to strive to meet this situation. It is deplorable that in thousands of families [the] lack of interest in the home is directly traceable to the woman—the wife and mother. Women have unusual opportunities in their homes; they may enjoy the thrill of creating their own backgrounds, of displaying originality and skill, and yet it is seldom one finds a woman who is making any pretence at studying the art of decoration. However, that is a subject for another and sterner sermon.<sup>50</sup>

Upper-middle-class women—like those reading *CHG*—had the responsibility of being educated in home decoration in order to consume products used to curate a tasteful home.

*CHG* functioned as an advertising vehicle not only for Eaton’s, Simpson’s, and other furniture retailers, but for the professional associations forming in the early 1930s. *CHG* operated to promote and sell the *idea* of the interior decorator, thereby working as an agent in the pursuit for professional status sought by those in the field. And through the medium of the magazine, Elliot was able to market her expertise to a readership that was interested and invested in the beautification of the home. *Canadian Homes and Gardens* invested in the marketability of the interior; therefore, the magazine functioned as an important part of the professionalization of interior decoration in Toronto. Elliot and other prominent decorators were able to share advertising space—putting them on the same level—with

major retailers. Both Elliot and *CHG* used their position as “experts” to elevate the importance of interior decoration.

Interrogating the beginning of interior decoration in Toronto is important not only because it has not been done before; it is significant because it provides an account of the actors involved in the designed environment, such as magazines, independent decorators, and homeowners; and it demonstrates how they mutually reinforced one another. Studying interior decoration is also important because it emphasizes the role of the interior as a vehicle for identity expression, which was expressed in the homes decorated by Elliot. Finally, this research draws attention to women, especially, who have been left out of the story of architecture and design. The emergence of the decorating magazine *Canadian Homes and Gardens* provided a new tool for educating the public about the importance of giving the home attention, and for elevating the profession of interior decoration. There remains a large amount of research to be conducted on the subject of interior decoration in Canada. While I was only able to skim the surface of what *CHG* was doing in the interwar years, much could be done by analyzing this journal exclusively. Other journals published in Canada, such as the *Canadian Home Journal* and *Canadian Homes and Gardens*' successor, *Canadian Homes*, ought to receive the same kind of in-depth analysis Valerie Korinek has given to *Chatelaine*. Furthermore, if we were able to uncover the unknown Canadian decorators across this country, important steps in the revision of Canadian architecture and design history could begin. Many men and women had illustrious careers in the interior design of Canadian homes and are still in need of recognition. By revealing the authority Minerva Elliot was able to maintain in a

profession seen as fleeting and frivolous, and by circulating a small piece of her life within the confines of this research, I hope to have returned some power to Elliot by amplifying her voice as an early proponent of professional interior decoration in Canada.

## NOTES

1. This paper was first published as part of my master's thesis entitled *Making a Business of Good Taste: Minerva Elliot and the Professionalization of Interior Decoration in Toronto, 1925-1939* (Carleton University, 2018). I would like to thank Michael Windover for his support and guidance while supervising my research and for introducing me to this subject.
2. Elliot, Minerva, 1928, “New Fads Versus Old Traditions,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 32.
3. Elliot is briefly mentioned in a few recent Canadian design books: Windover, Michael and Anne F. MacLennan, 2017, *Seeing, Selling, and Situation Radio in Canada, 1922-1956*, Halifax, Dalhousie Architectural Press; Hammill, Faye and Michelle Smith, 2015, *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture: Canadian Periodicals in English and French, 1925-1960*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press; Armstrong, Christopher, 2014, *Making Toronto Modern: Architecture and Design, 1895-1975*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press; and Adams, Annemarie and Petra Tancred, 2000, *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
4. Alföldy, Sandra, 2012, *Allied Arts: Architecture and Craft in Postwar Canada*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 16.
5. There are some exceptions. See: Pepall, Rosalind, 2004, “Jeannette Meunier Biéler: Modern Interior Decorator,” *Journal of Canadian Art History*, vol. 25, p. 126-149; and Adams and Tancred, *Designing Women*, *op. cit.*
6. The inclusion of popular magazines like *CHG* in the discourse of Canadian architectural history has helped to enrich understandings of architectural modernity. See: Liscombe, Rhodri Windsor and Michelangelo Sabatino, 2016, *Canada: Modern Architectures in History*,

London, Reaktion Books; and Kapelos, George Thomas, 2009, “The Small House in Print: Promoting the Modern Home to Post-war Canadians through Pattern Books, Journals, and Magazines,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, vol. 34, no. 1, p. 3360.

7. As the name suggests, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* featured the best of Canadian homes and gardens, which the magazine paid equal attention to. The subject of professional gardening in that time period is a rich topic that deserves its own paper. Because of the space limitations of this research, only the subject of interior decoration is explored here; however, research into the history and culture of domestic horticulture in Canada is one that needs to be done.
8. Aynsley, Jeremy and Francesca Berry, 2005, “Publishing the Modern Home: Magazines and the Domestic Interior 1870-1965,” *Journal of Design History*, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 1-5, at p. 5.
9. Korinek, Valerie J., 2000, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
10. Hammond, Cynthia Imogen, 2012, “‘I Weep for Us Women’: Modernism, Feminism, and Suburbia in the Canadian Home Journal’s Home ‘53 Design Competition,” in Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson (dir.), *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970*, Montreal and Kingston, London, Ithaca, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 194224.
11. Another important example of the published interior in Canada is Liscombe, Rhodri Windsor, 2001, “The Fe-Male Spaces of Modernism: A Western Canadian Perspective,” *Prospects*, vol. 26, p. 677700.
12. Hodgins, J. Herbert, 1925, “Editor’s Note,” *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 10, p. 9.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Canadian Homes and Gardens* has often been referred to as a “woman’s magazine.” See Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs*, *op. cit.* It certainly reinforced—through its editorials and advertisements—the idea of women as household managers; however, men also read the magazine, as is evident from the reader response in *CHG*'s Q&A department. While many questions were sent in from women readers, men also contributed by inquiring about home care and decoration.

15. Korinek, *id.*, p. 33; Hammill and Smith, *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture*, *op cit.*
16. Hodgins, "Editor's Note," vol. 2, no. 10, p. 9.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs*, p. 33.
19. Hodgins, J. Herbert, 1925, "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 11, p. 9.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Hodgins, J. Herbert, 1925, "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 12, p. 9.
22. *Ibid.* It is important to note that this evidence of "patriotic" success is coming from the journal itself. Hodgins's writing clearly favours positive reactions while instances of negative reactions—if any—are not documented.
23. No author, 1925, "This Month's Who's Who," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 12, p. 7.
24. Elliot, Minerva, 1925, "Walls in Their Perfection," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 12, p. 28-30, and 48, at p. 48.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Hammill and Smith, *Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture*, p. 38.
27. No author, 1931, "Would You Like to Know?," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 54.
28. Hodgins, J. Herbert, 1926, "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 11.
29. Advertisement, 1926, "February is Furniture Number," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 6.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Elliot was in fact the first Canadian interior decorator to address the Guild of Decorative Art. Efforts to find information about this Guild were unsuccessful.
32. Elliot, Minerva, 1927, "A House Where Centuries Meet," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 32-33 and 54-55, at p. 32
33. Elliot, "New Fads Versus Old Traditions," *op. cit.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. As architectural historian Michael Windover (2012, *Art Deco: A Mode of Mobility*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, p. 20) explains, "The exhibition was an inherently political event in which France was attempting to re-establish its pre-eminence on the global stage of industrial and decorative arts."
36. Wright, Virginia, 1997, *Modern Furniture in Canada, 1920 to 1970*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. XV.
37. Hodgins, J. Herbert, 1928, "Editor's Note," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 15.
38. Hodgins, "Editor's Note," vol. 3, no. 1, p. 11.
39. CHG's advertisements largely focused on retailers from Toronto and Montreal. Although Montreal would provide an interesting lens, the focus of this research centres on Toronto's retail environment.
40. For example, in 1932, CHG published a book entitled *Canadian Homes and Gardens' Book of Exteriors and Interiors*. In an advertisement for the book, they write: "It's not enough nowadays that a house should have plenty of tables and chairs; to be an attractive home it must bear that unmistakable air of good breeding." *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, 1933, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 2.
41. Advertisement for Eaton's Housefurnishings Building, 1925, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 2, no. 10, p. 8.
42. Advertisement for the T. Eaton Company's Gallery of Antiques and Reproductions and staff of Interior Decorators, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, August 1926, vol. 3, no. 8, p. 14.
43. Advertisement for Eaton's College Street, 1934, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 11, no. 6, p. 8.
44. For more on how radio constructed "space" in modern Canada, see Windover and MacLennan, *Seeing, Selling, and Situation Radio in Canada*, *op. cit.*
45. Advertisement for Canadian Marconi Company, 1930, *The Globe*, October 31, p. 5.
46. The name "Society of Interior Decorators of Ontario" was patented on November 20, 1933, but emerged publicly in 1934. The name was changed in 1984 to the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO), which is still in use today. See: Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario, By-Law no. 1, Operating By-Law," 2014, [<http://www.arido.ca/download.php?id=501>], accessed September 30, 2016.
47. No author, 1934, "The Bulletin Board," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 11, no. 3, p. 11.
48. Advertisement for The Society for Interior Decorators of Ontario, 1934, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 11, no. 4, p. 66.
49. No author, 1937, "Your Decorating Problems," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, vol. 14, no. 12, p. 30.
50. Elliot, "New Fads Versus Old Traditions," p. 32.