



The Philosophy of Furniture

Edgar Allen Poe

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"The Philosophy of Furniture" is an essay written by American author Edgar Allan Poe published in 1840. An unusual work by Poe, whose more typical works include horror tales like "The Tell-Tale Heart," the essay is essentially Poe's theories on interior decorating. Poe begins by suggesting that the English are the "supreme" examples of interior decoration, above the Italians, French, Chinese, Scotch, Dutch, Spanish and Russians. "Yankees," he says, "are preposterous." He blames this American failing on a lack of aristocracy by blood, having instead "an aristocracy of dollars." Because of that, decoration in America has become a "mere parade of costly appurtenances" to create an "impression of the beautiful." He contrasts this with England, where wealth is not the loftiest ambition to constitute "nobility." As a result, Poe says, "there could be nothing more directly offensive to the eye of an artist than the interior of what is termed the United States... a well-furnished apartment." Because decorating rooms is a form of art, it should be judged similarly to any other work of art. The elements of a room should work well together, just as in a painting. Poe begins giving his advice, starting with curtains. Excessive drapery, he says, is "irreconcilable with good taste." Curtains should be chosen based on the general character of the room. He puts strong emphasis on carpets, which he calls "the soul of the apartment." From the carpet, the colors and forms of the rest of the room can be determined. He recommends patterns "of no meaning," as "the abomination of flowers or representations of well-known objects of any kind should not be endured." Carpets, curtains, tapestry, or even ottoman coverings and upholstery of any kind should be "rigidly Arabesque." Gaudy patterns "glorious with all hues" are a cloth version of a kaleidoscope and only serve worshipers of Mammon. Gas lighting is "inadmissible," Poe says, because it is harsh and unsteady. "No one having both brains and eyes will use it," he says. He also dismisses large chandeliers as "the quintessence of all that is false in taste or preposterous in folly." Edgar Allan Poe (born Edgar Poe; January 19, 1809 – October 7, 1849) was an American author, poet, editor, and literary critic, considered part of the American Romantic Movement. Best known for his tales of mystery and the macabre, Poe was one of the earliest American practitioners of the short story, and is generally considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. He is further credited with contributing to the emerging genre of science fiction. He was the first well-known American writer to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career. Born in Boston, he was the second child of two actors. His father abandoned the family in 1810, and his mother died the following year. Thus orphaned, the child was taken in by John and Frances Allan, of Richmond, Virginia. Although they never formally adopted him, Poe was with them well into young adulthood. Tension developed later as John Allan and Edgar repeatedly clashed over debts, including those incurred by gambling, and the cost of secondary education for the young man. Poe attended the University of Virginia for one semester but left due to lack of money. Poe quarreled with Allan over the funds for his education and enlisted in the Army in 1827 under an assumed name. It was at this time his publishing career began, albeit humbly, with an anonymous collection of poems, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), credited only to "a Bostonian". With the death of Frances Allan in 1829, Poe and Allan reached a temporary rapprochement. Later failing as an officer's cadet at West Point and declaring a firm wish to be a poet and writer, Poe parted ways with John Allan.

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