

IN DEFENCE OF CLUTTER

Redefining clutter as a pleasant word

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We live in a world where clarity, sterility and purpose are the defining features of interior design. Forensic suits and cotton booties have replaced the tradition of shoes off at the door. Clutter has become an ugly word, but when did an appreciation of things become an offence against principles of design?

Couches, bedrooms and kitchens hide beautiful Victorian facades with ornate castings. These are designed less to elicit comfort than to remind the recliner that relaxation is subject to the imperative of control. To lay back, to extend one's legs and sink back is blasphemy, apparently antithetical to modernity.

The passion of collection is a long-established phenomenon. Tutankhamun collected walking sticks, King George V enjoyed stamps, and Quentin Tarantino collects board games. It is the innate need to own, to possess, and to imbibe the beautiful. Ownership is not the key, it is the presence; to be surrounded, to feel a mesmeric draw as your eyes flit over each piece. It is not a plastering of kitsch or a hoarder's paradise. It is personality made manifest, loves and ideals curated and displayed, the projection of soul onto the walls of a dwelling.

Even if each piece on its own does not exude beauty in the traditional sense, then each piece has beauty in the eye of the beholder, the curator and the collector. There are stories that can be told, a reasoning behind each piece.

It is not the content that should be evaluated, it is the collection itself. The summary of the host, the vision of the collector. The flip side of the emphasis on sterility is the emphasis on value – that each piece should have a value worth its individual position. What can one painting, one clock or one table really do to tell the story of the purchaser. The value of an item is neither that dollar amount ascribed, nor the cultural recognition. It is surely in the passion of the decorator, the vision and the world created. What is easily deemed clutter should really be described as a full and enchanting museum, a body of work that reflects the mind and body of the home.

What does sterility have to offer? Maybe it's in the fact that it is not easy to clean in a world entirely divorced from the



undervalued dusters of years past. That seems a facile argument, for cleaning a selection of beloved items, each which inspire emotion, seems less comparable to the arduous chore of scrubbing the hearth, unless of course that hearth is a

bountiful font of nostalgic pleasure.

As part of our interest in post-modernism, individualism is a currency of its own value. If anything is personal, it is the willing display of a selection of items that reflect the soul. If we accept



the possibility that someone may love something that is not regarded by society as having monetary value, and accept that, that gives it its own value. Then there is another element in the cluttered home that should be considered: arrangement.

The arrangement of a collection is comparable to the seating plan of a wedding; each must confer with the other and conversation must exist between them. Even if there is an obvious distance, the character of one piece can delight the other. It is less about putting same with same than it is about conducting an orchestra of voices that intertwine. In the same way, clutter without collusion is a cacophony. The imperative is first to dismiss preconceptions of the importance

of blankness, and second to embrace both the pieces on their own and their harmonious impression.

Why make this point in a publication about period homes? The “character” of such a dwelling is much of the reason for purchase, and most of the passion for the enthusiast. It would then seem obvious that all who embrace such buildings would have a similar love for the character of their past decoration. However, in many of these homes, restored lovingly, there is a disconnect between their internal styling and the personality of the house. What is attempting to be preserved — the age, the personality and the craftsmanship — is not necessarily emphasised by stark sterility. Sometimes that can work, but often it feels

like the soul has been stripped out, leaving a hollow shell.

The character of the place, the spirituality of a “period home”, is not in the remnants of period features left dotted around. It lies in the spirit of the designer, and the spirit of the occupants of times past. Times past where collection and the embrace of the treasures of the world made the home a home. That is why clutter needs to be defended and needs to be redefined as a pleasant word.

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