Shedding Light on the Craftsman Interior

In a recent *Architectural Digest* interview, contemporary lighting designer Leni Schwendinger said, "I have always found that light is the quintessential spark to connect people to the nighttime environment."[i] Since the discovery of fire as an artificial lighting source, home illumination has continued to evolve to this day. This essay looks at home lighting through the eyes of Gustav Stickley (1858-1942) and contributors to his magazine *The Craftsman* published from 1901 to 1916. Through the magazine's many articles on the subject, we are better able to understand the theory behind lighting the Craftsman home.

Illuminating America 1901-1910

When looking at lighting fixtures of the early part of the 20th century, we need to consider what energy sources were available to fuel them. By the later part of the 19th century, the open flame as an artificial light source was beginning to fade, but was still the only source of light available to the majority of Americans. Early issues of *The Craftsman* contained advertisements for oil and candle lighting fixtures by William Grueby, Robert Jarvie ("The Candlestickmaker"), and Teco Pottery. Thomas Edison's (1847-1931) patent in 1879 for the first practical carbon filament light bulb led to further developments in steam and water powered dynamos to supply electricity to larger population centers. A major portion of that generated electricity, however, was being used for municipal lighting, commercial endeavors, and trolley lines. In the late 1800's, bright industrial and municipal lighting emanated from electric Arc lamps — invented by Humphry Davy (1778-1829) and further developed for broader use by inventors such as Charles Brush (1849-1929) — or Walther Nernst's (1864-1941) "Nernst lamps" emitting an incandescence at the brightness of daylight. At the same time, the battle between two power distribution systems, Edison's Direct Current (DC) and George Westinghouse (1846-1914) and Nikola Tesla's (1856-1943) Alternating Current (AC) raged on. This competitive spirit led to rapid developments in electrical power generation, distribution, and artificial lighting.

The great expositions of the time such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois served as platforms for electrical pioneers, and exposed patrons to electric lighting on a large scale. Lighting at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition held in Buffalo, New York was due to George Westinghouse's harnessing of the Niagara River to generate power in 1896. Irene Sargent would write in the May 1903 issue of *The Craftsman*:

"The Pan-American followed in the first year of the new century, showing the great possibilities of electricity as an illuminant, and leaving in the minds of all who visited it memories of color-effects which seemed as if due to a super-excited imagination, and which had previously never shone upon sea or land."[ii]

The Pan-American's "Electric Tower," designed by architect John Galen Howard, was illuminated by 44,000 8-watt light bulbs and served as the exposition's centerpiece. Although electricity abounded at the Pan-American, Gustav Stickley's exhibit at the Pan-American displayed only oil lamps created by the Grueby Company of Boston, which shared space with Stickley. In the years directly following the exposition, home electrification was still a long way off for the majority of the population.

This October 1904 image from The Craftsman illustrates Gustav Stickley's use of wood, textiles, and metal work to create the unified Craftsman interior. Ambient light emanating from hanging lanterns, wall sconces, and candlesticks were combined with task lighting—such as desk lamps—to achieve a hygienic and restful nighttime environment.

Electrification: the Physical and Psychological Attitudes

Even as electricity became available to more customers, the idea of electricity in the home brought with it some trepidation and fears. The possibility of burns, fires, vapors, and physiological maladies — real or imagined — from exposure to electric current persisted. An interesting study of this reluctance to embrace electricity in the home can be found in Linda Simon's book *Dark Light*. In it, Ms. Simon observes:

"…[o]ne would suppose that the public hardly could wait for electrical power in their homes; instead, more than thirty years after Thomas Edison invented the incandescent bulb in 1879 and soon afterward installed a lighting system in a business section of lower Manhattan, barely 10 percent of American homes were wired."[iii]

— Mark E. Weaver

Reluctance to break from the more traditional fuel sources continued to create a market for oil, candle, and gas lighting fixtures. In *The Craftsman*, the most frequently discussed electrical danger was the prolonged exposure of the eyes to electric lighting. C. Sanford Freeman's June 1903 article entitled *Decorative Lighting* was one of the first in the magazine to address this issue and offer the solution of diffused lighting:

"The exposure to the naked eye of the concentrated light from an Electric Lamp produces, by the involuntary contraction of the pupil, a sensation of pain which renders reading difficult, and which, by continuance, is liable to result in serious damage to the sight. In order to obtain a soft and comfortable effect, the rays from an incandescent lamp must be projected on to a large area, such as the ceiling or walls of a room, which act as a reflector and diffuse the light in such a way that the pupil may expand and reading may be done with ease."[iv]

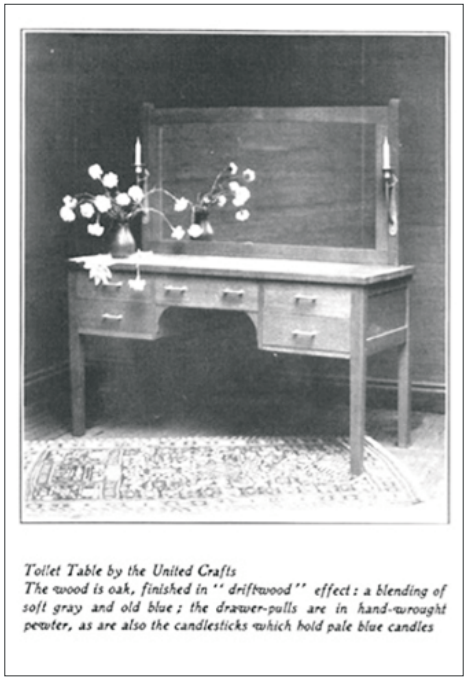
Diffused Light from the Craftsman

Although Stickley's shop had yet to fabricate a single lighting fixture, a declaration in the 1901 December issue of *The Craftsman* was clear regarding the future design of accessories for the Craftsman home, including lighting. Good design would not be subordinate to the energy source that was being used:

"Household art must parallel that economy which employs the subtle and hitherto largely idle force, electricity, against the waste of natural supplies and of vital energy…Forms and materials once deliberately and well chosen, must not be made subject to the vagaries of fashion. They are to be modified only so far as to maintain a constant progress in utility, simplicity and beauty."[v]

In the June 1902 issue of *The Craftsman,* a pair of No. 75 bracket sconces — possibly one of the metal shop's first lighting forms — are shown mounted on an oak "Toilet Table." This image beautifully illustrated the idea of utility, simplicity and beauty with this caption:

"The wood is oak, finished in 'driftwood' effect: a blending of soft gray and old blue; the drawer-pulls are in hand-wrought pewter, as are also the candlesticks which hold pale blue candles."[vi]



Toilet Table by the United Crafts
The wood is oak, finished in "driftwood" effect: a blending of soft gray and old blue; the drawer-pulls are in hand-wrought pewter, as are also the candlesticks which hold pale blue candles

This illustration from the June 1902 issue of "The Craftsman" may be the only reference to pewter being used in the Craftsman metal shop.

Since the Craftsman home interior strove to be a harmonious nurturing experience at all times, diffused lighting was an important ingredient in the transition from day to night. In his monograph Gustav Stickley, author David Cathers points out that in the summer and fall of 1902, Stickley began to pursue the production of other items than just furniture to create a "unified" Craftsman interior. Stickley's lighting would have to meet all of the requirements of the Craftsman idea of Simple Structural Style[vii] in order to fit in the unified Craftsman interior. An article entitled *The Craftsman House* in the May 1903 issue of *The Craftsman* was written shortly after Stickley's inspiring overseas trip to the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, and articulated how this might be accomplished:

"…[l]ight fittings should harmonize with the general scheme of the woodwork and furnishings. They should be, preferably, in hammered copper, with wrought iron trimmings, and have straw-colored glass globes."[viii]

This quotation perfectly describes the lantern forms by the Faulkner Bronze Company that Stickley brought back with him from England. The Faulkner forms greatly informed Stickley's earliest hanging lighting fixtures. Stickley's versions of the lamps were adapted with great success to wall sconces, electroliers and shower lights, becoming arguably some of the metal shop's most recognizable lighting designs.

At the conclusion of his June 1903 *Craftsman* essay *Decorative lighting*, C. Sanford Freeman expressed his appreciation of the trend to simplify designs and accentuate craftsmanship:

"It is gratifying to observe the efforts which are being made to supersede the gaudy and massive machine-made productions of wholesale factories by designs, which, in their execution, bear the hammer marks of the craftsman."[ix]

Achieving the diffused lighting that the Craftsman interior required meant that a variety of designs would need to be created. Each fixture was intended for a specific use in an interior room or outside the building. The designers took into consideration the materials and color of glass in the fixtures to achieve the best diffusion and concealment of the incandescent light source whether it was

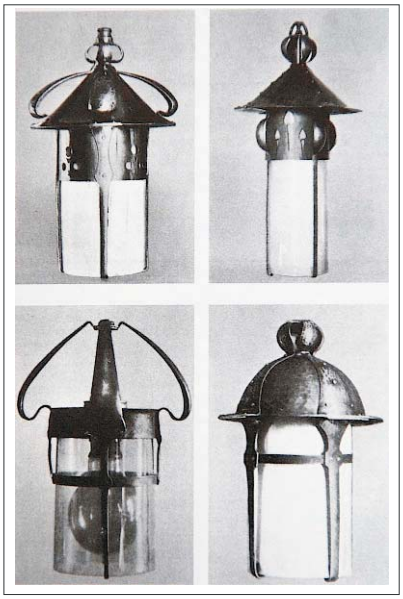
electric or flame. In the June 1907 issue of *The Craftsman*, an article entitled *The charm of diffused light* explained how to lighting should be adapted to a space:

"No room can be really made winning and enticing of an evening without a diffused light which is essentially the product of lighting fixtures scattered about the sides of the wall. No one concentrated light is essential, but a glow of light wherever it can contribute to the comfort of work or play — by the bookcase, at the side of the window seat, near the piano, just back of the sewing table, by the hatrack in the hall, over the buffet in the dining room…In studying into the lighting problem, we have made a special effort to develop the diffused lighting of rooms. Where center lights are used in Craftsman rooms they are so hidden by soft globes that one is conscious only of a mellow glow; but these showers of lights are for large spaces. For living rooms and cozy dining rooms, the lights are on the walls in a series of sconces, adjusted to each room to bring out its utmost possibility of restfulness and cheer. In fact, in a room perfectly illuminated with side lights, the sense of effort to achieve light is wholly lost. One is conscious of rest, glow, peace, and contentment, and a desire to stay, which is wholly absent from the chandelier room.[x]

One of the most important elements in achieving diffused lighting was the shade. A November 1906 *Craftsman* advertisement observed:

"A lamp-shade is so prominent a feature in a room that it may greatly help or mar the whole effect…The frame is of a rich dark brown wicker work, combining lightness and great strength, while the sheer silk lining is just enough to both reveal and conceal the light."[xi]

This is best expressed in the Japanese wicker shades made of either split bamboo or willow, and the Sweet-Grass shades that were made by the St. Regis Indians of Franklin County, New York that are most commonly seen on Stickley lamps beginning in 1905. Both types of shades were lined with heavy Habutai silk in soft rich shades of red, green, dull yellow, or orange, through which a mellow light is diffused. For reading, these shades were also offered with an additional lining material called White Holland, a fabric similar to canvas, but not as thick. In addition to its rich color and organic quality, one description of the sweet-grass shade mentioned that the shade would give out, "a delicate pungent odor."[xii]" No stone was left unturned when it came to marketing a product.



Lantern forms by the Faulkner Bronze Company, Birmingham, England, as they appeared in the April 1903 issue of "The Craftsman."

Metal shades sometimes included small chain fringes around the circumference of their rims, or glass panels to refract the light source for a more pleasant effect. Materials such as mica and brass wire gauze (screen) were also used to add more diffusion.

The different fuel sources of the time also contributed to the brilliance and color of the incandescent light sources. For a brief period another lighting fuel — in addition to oil, candles, and electricity — was re-introduced and adapted as an option into Stickley lighting. Denatured alcohol (ethanol) made a return in 1906 after a long absence. The repeal of a tax levy that had been imposed on the fuel during the Civil War made it far too expensive for common use. By 1908, Stickley lamps such as the No. 508 used denatured alcohol. One article in *The Craftsman* went so far as to call alcohol "The Fuel and Luminant of the Future."[xiii]" An October 1908 advertisement for Stickley's alcohol lamps Nos. 508 and 507 stated that:

"The light it gives is a soft pure white glow, more nearly like the daylight than any artificial light that has yet been discovered. It lacks the harshness of electric light and the yellowness of gas, and can be used in a country house where it is inconvenient to install either one."[xiv]

Note that the advertisement mentions once again here the harshness of electric light. Unfortunately, ethanol as lighting fuel was once again to be thwarted by the adoption of Prohibition in 1920.

If there was one major impediment that stood in the way of people achieving the Craftsman lighting experience in their homes, it was the cost. Some of the more artistic forms were far out of reach for the common man. The average working American in 1905 made between $200-400 a year. For them, the thought of purchasing a No. 755 table lamp at $155 was unimaginable, but that person might splurge for a No. 505 table lamp with wicker shade for $7.80. Either way, Craftsman lighting was not cheap!

The 1907 October, November, and December issues of *The Craftsman* encouraged readers to make their own lamps based on Stickley designs. *The Craftsman* supplied directions and instructional commentary including measurements, technical data (gauge of copper, and type of wood), and illustrations of Stickley pieces to copy. However Americans chose to light their homes, the pages of *The Craftsman* were there to give them guidance on creating the Craftsman interior that many of us continue to strive for today. In today's

world of electrical bombardment, we can take a chapter out of the January 1912 *Craftsman* article entitled *The Japanese Art of Diffused Lighting*:

"We are apparently helpless as far as the lighting of streets, theaters and public places is concerned, but there is nothing to prevent our creating a haven of quiet and peace in our homes where we can rest, regain poise and recover our strength."[xv]

Lighting at Craftsman Farms

In his essay from the 2011 Grove Park Inn exhibition *Mr. Stickley's Home: 1911*, author Peter K. Mars stated:

"…Craftsman Farms hovers in the balance between the pre and post electric world. Due in part to profusion of wealthy estate owners and the near-ness of Bell Laboratories, electricity came to Morris Plains in 1909, concurrent with the construction of the Farms. Buildings at the Farms were wired for municipal electricity, placing it decades ahead of the 90% of rural American farms that didn't have municipal electricity until after the Rural Electrification Act of 1936."[xvi]

When the Stickley family moved to Craftsman Farms in 1910, all of the buildings were wired for electricity, but alternative fuel sources also illuminated the Log House. 1911 images of the Log House Living Room show candlesticks sharing space with a Grueby pottery based oil lamp, and the iconic #291 oil lantern located above the piano. Electrically powered #673 Craftsman lanterns run the length of the front Porch, Living, and Dining Rooms; fixtures that have become symbols of the Log House interior as much as its furniture.

A walk through the Log House at Craftsman Farms permits you to see everything that *The Craftsman* preached in its pages, particularly the use of lighting fixtures. Each occupies a special place in the interior, creating the quintessential Craftsman lighting environment.

Endnotes

[i] Special Advertisement, "Designers Take Flight," *Architectural Digest*, (December 2011), pp. 59-62

[ii] Irene Sargent, "A recent arts and crafts exhibition," *The Craftsman*, (May 1903) pp. 69-83

[iii] Linda Simon, *Dark Light: Electricity and Anxiety from the Telegraph to the X-ray*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, (April 11, 2005), Introduction, p. 4, paragraph 2

[iv] C. Sanford Freeman, "Decorative Lighting," *The Craftsman*, (June 1903), pp. 173-177

[v] Contributors, "Stages in the development of household art," *The Craftsman*, (December 1901), pp. [vi]-[viii]

[vi] H. Fairchild Steven, "The small country house," *The Craftsman*, (June 1902), pp. 152-154, illustration caption for "Toilet Table" by United Crafts.

[vii] Contributors, "The American Style," *The Craftsman*, (July 1903), pp. 278-270 p. 270

[viii] C. Sandford Freeman,?"Decorative lighting," *The Craftsman*, (June 1903), pp. 173-177

[ix] "Ibid," page 177

[x] Contributors, "The Charm of Diffused Light," *The Craftsman*, (June 1907), p. 372

[xi] Advertisement, "Two Lamp-Shades," *The Craftsman*, (November 1906), p. xxx

[xii] Advertisement, "Two Lamp Shades," *The Craftsman*, (November 1906), p.xxx, The Sweet Grass Shade

[xiii] Contributors, "Denatured Alcohol: the fuel and luminant of the future," *The Craftsman*,(October 1908), pp. 94-96

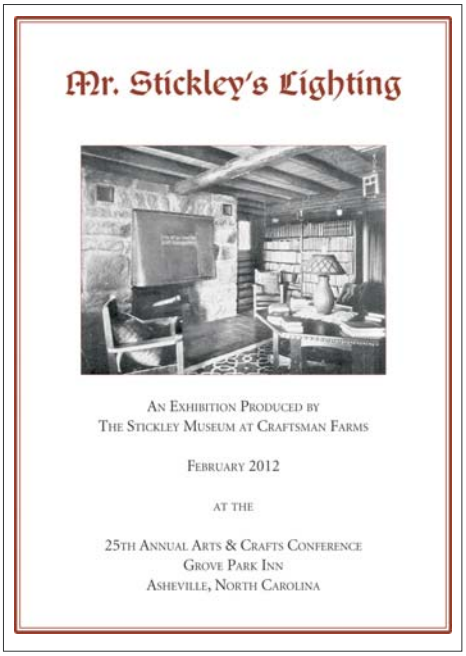
[xiv] Advertisement, "Craftsman Alcohol Lamps," The Craftsman, (October 1908), p. xxxvi

[xv] Contributors, "The Japanese art of diffused lighting," The Craftsman, (January 1912), pp. 449-451, p. 449, paragraph 5

[xvi] Peter K. Mars, "On The Dear Old Farm: gathering ideas from an ideal," *Mr. Stickley's Home: 1911*, (February 2011), pp. 28-38

About the Author:

Mark E. Weaver serves as Trustee and Chair of the Collections Committee for the SMCF. He has written and collaborated on articles on the Arts and Crafts movement for both *Style 1900* magazine and *Antiques Roadshow Insider*. He had a leading role in organizing the *Mr. Stickley's Lighting* exhibtion and catalogue.



The "Mr. Stickley's Lighting" catalogue.

Do You Want to Know More?

The *Mr. Stickley's Lighting* full-color exhibtion catalogue, which includes the essay by Mark Weaver featured in this issue of *Notes From the Farms*, includes the following additional essays:

A Revolution in Lighting by Edward Wirth, Archivist at the Thomas Edison National Historic Park.

A New Light on Labor: The Structure of Production at Stickley's Metal Shop by Dr. Jonathan Clancy, Director of American Fine and Decorative Arts Program at Sotheby's Institute of Art.

Metal Working Techniques Used at the Craftsman Workshop by Dawn Hopkins and Michael Adams, master artisans.

Lighting Details: Evolutions in Design by Tim Gleason, subject matter expert.

The catalogue also contains the complete exhibtion checklist and numerous period and contemporary illustrations. It is available in the Museum Shop or at StickleyMuseum.org.

$20 ($18 for members).