

Pear, Tony ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6367-1387> (2016) The furniture designs of C.F.A. Voysey, part 1: 1883–1898. The Orchard, 5 . pp. 5-15.

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The furniture designs of C F A Voysey, Part 1: 1883-1898

Tony Peart

The best of Voysey's furniture is as well known as his architecture and is highly regarded in design circles, with many major museums of decorative art holding representative examples. Above all else, his pieces are praised and valued for their simplicity of design, exquisite proportions and exemplary craftsmanship. In today's secular society it is all too easy to impose our own values and perceptions – primarily aesthetic – on these, the products of a relatively recent past. In the case of C F A Voysey this would be a mistake. Voysey's own extensive writings on architecture and design make clear that he viewed his creations as having two, interdependent but equally important aspects: the moral and the aesthetic. Counselling against judgement based purely on aesthetic grounds Voysey wrote:

“Some would have us silence our reason and drink in the sensuous beauty as we often do our food, for the mere pleasure of being pleased; so feeding, not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. Rather should we approach the works of men in all time, intelligently seeking the higher motive of their action.”[1]

The higher motive in Voysey's case was his unswerving and deeply held belief in: “a beneficent and omnipotent controlling power, that is perfectly good and perfectly loving; and that our existence here, is for the purpose of growing individual characters.”[2]

In breaking from the Church of England in the 1870s and ultimately establishing his own Theistic Church – Voysey's father, the Rev. Charles (1828-1912), undertook a determined, protracted and very public, head-to-head battle with the religious authority and orthodoxy of his day. It could also be argued that he relished his central role in this long-running cause célèbre. C F A Voysey not only inherited his father's religious beliefs but also his combative nature, stating: “what my father was has taught me more than what my father knew.”[3] He saw himself as an individual, an outsider – one could even argue as a prophet without honour – someone who would speak forthrightly when he felt the need to and, above all else, pursue his own path, never following the crowd. Writing of himself in the third person in 1931, Voysey said: “When Providence wants to affect the movement of men's mind collectively He sends a few pioneers to work individually.” Individuality not egotism was a passion with this man, who in consequence disliked all forms of collectivism.”[4] Speaking of Voysey's book *Individuality* (1915) John Betjeman astutely observed: “it expounds the religion of the architect and the consequent reverence with which he made his buildings.”[5] Voysey extended that same reverence to the contents of those buildings.

1
C F A Voysey, *Reason as a Basis of Art*. London: Elkin Mathews, 1906, p13-14

2
Voysey, C. F.A. *Individuality*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1915, p7

3
Ibid, p57

4
C F A Voysey, *The Value of Hidden Influences as Disclosed in the Life of One Ordinary Man*. Unpublished typescript, 1931, RIBA VOC/4/6

5
J Betjeman, *Charles Francis Annesley Voysey: the Architect of Individualism*. *Architectural Review*, vol. 70, October 1931, p93



Figure 1 – A third, more ornate and later variation of the “Swan” chair, commissioned c.1905 by James Bellamy Higham, Unitarian Minister for Wolverhampton, and neighbouring minister to Voysey’s brother, Ellison Annesley

The primary motivating factor for Voysey to start designing furniture was the precedent set by a slightly older generation of architects as he explained: “William Burgess [*sic*], E.W. Godwin, A.H. Mackmurdo, Bodley and others regarded nothing in or outside a home as too small to deserve their careful consideration. So we find Burges designing water-taps and hair brushes; Godwin and Mackmurdo furniture; Bodley, like Pugin, fabrics and wallpapers.”[6] Writing late in life he also stated:

“It was fully realised that as there was nothing too small for the creator’s care, there should be nothing thought unworthy of man’s devotion and labour.” He considered it his duty to make everything as beautiful and pleasing to the eye and mind as possible, And for that end to wage eternal war against all forms of ugliness. Simplicity was also loved because it demanded the best materials and first class workmanship; and needed perfect proportion.”[7]

For any young, progressive architect/designer, yet to find an individual voice but embarking upon independent practice in the early 1880s – as Voysey did – there were two approaches to design competing for attention: the long established Gothic (as practised by Burges, Bodley, Pugin and Seddon); and the more recent stylistic developments which were then known as Queen Anne or, as we would call it now, the Aesthetic Movement (as practised by Godwin and Norman Shaw). Voysey was well aware of both idioms, although his adoption of the Gothic can largely be attributed to the huge influence of his first master, Seddon, in combination with his admiration for the writings of Ruskin and the works of Pugin. His deep-seated abhorrence of the central tenets of the Aesthetic Movement: “art for art’s sake” and the influence of foreign styles – principally from Japan – should also be noted. In 1918 Voysey would write: “We find that traditional ideas and feelings may be quite insincerely repeated...for instance, we may fitly imitate in an object of our own, the finish we find in Japanese workmanship, but the imitation of its traditional thought and feeling is absurd, Chippendale exhibited this kind of absurdity when he produced his Chinese furniture.”[8]

The earliest surviving Voysey design for furniture is for “an oak chair for reading room, writing room or hall”; the so-called “Swan” chair (figure 1) with a working drawing dating to c1883-85. This somewhat technically naive design (as evidenced by repairs to structurally weak points on a surviving example)[9] although visually striking, is barely fit for purpose, being extremely uncomfortable. The chair could well have been constructed for Voysey’s own use around 1885 (the year of his marriage). It was certainly illustrated alongside other items from his own collection in a photograph appearing in *Dekorative Kunst* in 1898[10] and should not be confused with a second version[11] commissioned around that date by William and Haydee Ward-Higgs. There are echoes in the design of both Pugin – especially his designs for a range of simple, “knock-down” furniture which also featured similar “tusked” tenons, and the well-known Glastonbury chair,[12] a design that was reproduced by Pugin. For all its many shortcomings, this earliest design does exhibit the pared-down, almost naked quality of all that was to follow, a characteristic Voysey would himself refer to as his “severe simplicity.”[13]

7

C F A Voysey, *The Value of Hidden Influences as Disclosed in the Life of One Ordinary Man*. Unpublished typescript, 1931, RIBA VOC/4/6

8

C F A Voysey, *Tradition in Relation to Modern Art*. In *Problems of Reconstruction: Lectures and Addresses Delivered at the Summer Meeting at the Hampstead Garden Suburb*, August, 1917. London: T Fisher Unwin, 1918, pp225-232

9

In the collection of The Wilson - Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, 1981.312

10

A.L.P.C.F.A.Voysey. *Dekorative Kunst*, vol 11, no 6, March 1898, pp241-56

During the early 1880s, the architect A H Mackmurdo (1851-1942) offered great assistance and practical advice to Voysey as he sought to develop a parallel career as a commercial pattern designer, using the regular income generated to support himself through the financially uncertain early years of his independent architectural practice. In establishing The Century Guild of Artists c1884, Mackmurdo was to provide the single greatest influence on Voysey's (and, it could be argued, a generation of architect/designer's) approach to the design of furniture. Voysey himself was unequivocal:

"Mackmurdo's furniture, first exhibited in the Inventions Exhibition, showed how the machine should be recognized by the designer, and led many in his day to revolt from over-decoration and strive for the straight, simple and plain. And soon there were signs that the rising generation were rebelling against accepted methods and styles as such, and were asking: Can we not do without cornices, mouldings and other furbelows?"[14]

The Guild's stated aims to "render all branches of art the sphere no longer of the tradesman but of the artist" and to "emphasise the Unity of Art"[15] in the fields of architecture, furniture and decoration would also become the founding tenets of both The Art Workers Guild (1884) and The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (1887), both organisations with which Voysey would become inextricably linked. The importance of Mackmurdo and The Century Guild cannot be overstated; they were pathfinders, creating a new, progressive approach to the design of furniture, objects and pattern that offered a distinctive alternative to both the Gothic and the Aesthetic. Virtually all furniture that we now know as Arts and Crafts owes its genesis to them. Century Guild furniture typically exhibits a delicacy and gracefulness of design rarely found in the Gothic canon; it also lacks the fussiness of Aesthetic furniture, dispensing with the latter's all-pervasive use of ebonising, a finish that hides the grain of the wood. Although not as austere as Voysey's furniture, it shares the same delight in proportion, exquisite craftsmanship and utilising the "figure" of quality, machine-worked timber. Voysey took much from Mackmurdo's Century Guild furniture, but a seminal piece must be the small, atypically spartan, oak reading desk of 1886 (figure 2). Here is so much that came to characterise Voysey's later furniture: the plain, rectangular form; the overhanging cornices; the use of simple mouldings; extended vertical elements surmounted by caps; legs that taper gracefully and, of course; the use of beautifully figured, quarter-sawn oak.

As with his progress as both an architect and pattern designer, it would also take years of trial and error for Voysey to evolve into a consummate furniture designer. It is also clear that during the 1880s and early 1890s pattern and architectural design took precedence, as evidenced by the small number of furniture designs dating to these years.

In June 1889 a design for a simple towel horse[16] was made, presumably for Voysey's own use. More significantly, in the same year, an entry made in Voysey's *Black Book*, records the following: "Essex & Co. designs and working drawings for furniture for showrooms".



Figure 2 – Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, small oak writing desk, c1886

11

Illustrated in: K Livingstone, MDonnelly, and L Parry, *C.F.A.Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p165

12

A chair of c1504 preserved in the Bishop's Palace, Wells

13

C F A Voysey, *The Value of Hidden Influences as Disclosed in the Life of One Ordinary Man*. Unpublished typescript, 1931, RIBA VOC/4/6

14

C F A Voysey, 1874 & After, *Architectural Review*, vol 70, October 1931, p92

15

The Century Guild Hobby Horse. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co vol1, April 1884

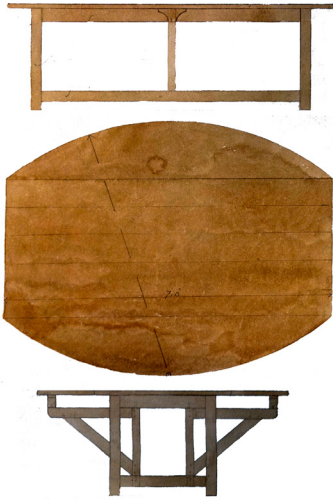


Figure 3 – Design for an oak table for M H Lakin Esquire, 1889. RIBA Collections

Luckily a photograph[17] survives. From this it seems clear that Voysey designed the fitted furniture (fire surround, panelled booths) and also a few pieces of movable furniture (the rectangular chair and central table). Walter Essex, the company's owner, would have been well aware of Voysey's growing reputation as a wallpaper designer and would later sign him to an exclusive wallpaper contract, as well as also commissioning a home[18] and further pieces of domestic furniture. The showroom furniture appears awkward and unresolved – in particular the box-like chair with clashing body and front legs. The pieces also feature many design elements that are clearly “borrowed” from Century Guild designs.

The first recorded furniture design for a Voysey house is a table (figure 3) of 1899 for M H Lakin; presumably for The Cottage at Bishop's Itchington, which was commissioned the previous year. Across the course of his career, the vast majority of Voysey's furniture designs were to be executed in oak and invariably contain instructions to the effect that the item is to be “left clean from stain or polish” or that it is to be “lightly oiled”. This was not always the case in the early years; although not to be polished, this item is unusual in that it was “to be fumigated”, that is artificially darkened by exposure to strong ammonia fumes. The table appears to have been made (an estimate of £9.10 is inscribed on the drawing) but it is yet another, awkward, heavy design. Although free from the influence of Mackmurdo, the over-engineered supports for the drop-leaves are virtually identical to those found on the iconic, ebonised sideboard[19] designed by E W Godwin and made by William Watt in the late 1860s.

Figure 4 – Design ...for treatment of domestic window, 1890. RIBA Collections

In reference to influence, Voysey would later state: “What you can remember is your own, what you sketch you steal”[20]. However, his contradictory nature also permitted the following outspoken pronouncement made in 1918, at a time when he was employing many Tudor elements in his own architectural and furniture designs:



“The looking back for precedent and reliance on tradition are the natural outcomes of weakness. The lazy and timid are greatly helped by a visit to the museum to see how someone else has mastered the problem or escaped the difficulties of the work in hand. It is idleness that leads us to let others think for us. Idleness and timidity make us take shelter behind tradition.”[21]

Early in his career the use of contemporary or historical precedent was not such an issue, as a design for an interior dating to 1890 will demonstrate. The drawing, entitled “Suggestion for Treatment of a Domestic Window” (figure 4), contains much of interest. This “Tudoresque” design features what would become Voysey’s favoured wall treatment – oak panelling – although here it is stained green and is heavily moulded and carved, even containing some areas of linenfold carving, an element the older Voysey would strongly disapprove of! The treatment also features early designs for metal cabinet furniture (presumably of brass or bronze) in the Gothic-styled strap hinges and drop handles of the cupboard doors and the delicate, floriated hinges and handles of the two smaller drop-down doors. This smaller hinge design would actually be made up shortly thereafter and used on two similar, canopied cabinets. The green staining of oak would also become a favoured finish of Voysey’s during the early 1890s, and was also popular with many of his contemporaries and some of the more “progressive” commercial furniture manufacturers. The wide adoption of this finish cannot be attributed to Voysey and was probably due in no small measure to the favourable reviews garnered by a very simple, green-stained oak chest of drawers, designed by Ford Madox Brown and later exhibited by Morris & Co. at the third Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1890.

One of the earliest pieces of furniture to be widely reproduced in contemporary journals was a “Sideboard in American Walnut made for the Lady Lovelace”. [22] Although it first appeared in 1894 as the single illustration accompanying Voysey’s article *Domestic Furniture* in the *RIBA Journal* [23], it was probably made a few years earlier. Hardly a satisfactory design to most contemporary observers, it does however exhibit many elements that would go on to characterise Voysey’s later work. The use of walnut seems to be unique (probably used at the request of the client) but here can be seen design features that would appear again and again: the generous, projecting mouldings both above and below the carcass; the use of flush panels to simplify the appearance of doors; the decorative architraves running above door openings – in this rare instance functional, as opposed to simply decorative, supporting as they do the two drop-down cupboard doors above –; and finally the rectangular legs which taper gracefully to an octagonal section as they approach the floor.

The Lovelace sideboard can also be used to illustrate the approach Voysey took to the development and refinement of his furniture. Elements considered successful would often be re-used from earlier designs or, if less successful, would be subject to subtle further refinement in later pieces. In this case the drop-down doors and floriated hinges of the earlier “Treatment of a Domestic Window” are used once more, whereas

16

Illustrated in: W Hitchmough,
C.F.A. Voysey. London: Phaidon, 1995, p223

17

Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly,
and L Parry, C.F.A. Voysey *Arts & Crafts
Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert
Museum, 2016, p166

18

Dixcot, 1897 – completed and altered by
Walter Cave

19

V&A, CIRC.38:1 to 5, 1953

20

C F A Voysey, *Individuality*. London:
Chapman and Hall, 1915, p88

21

C F A Voysey, *Tradition in Relation to
Modern Art*. London: T Fisher Unwin,
1918, pp225-232

22

Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly,
and L Parry, C.F.A. Voysey *Arts & Crafts
Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert
Museum, 2016, p167

23

C F A Voysey, *Domestic Furniture*. *Journal of
the Royal Institute of British Architects*, vol. 1,
1894, pp415-18

24

Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly,
and L Parry, C.F.A. Voysey *Arts & Crafts
Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert
Museum, 2016, p165

25

The Journal of Decorative Art. London,
vol 13, no 11, November 1893, p271



Figure 7 – German manufactured version of the lady's work cabinet, bearing a metal label for A Vordermeyer, Kuppenheim

when a second, slightly later version of the sideboard was made in oak (figure 5), the awkward, swelling silhouette of the original was radically simplified. The pillared upper canopy would also reappear in a fire surround exhibited at the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition; a virtually identical example being purchased in 1898 by William and Haydee Ward-Higgs for their Queensborough Terrace home (figure 6).

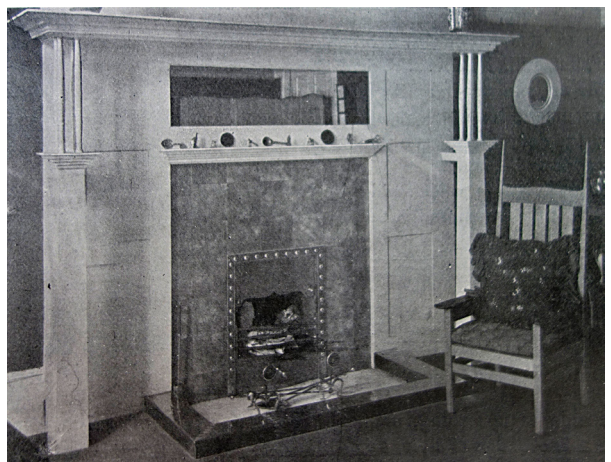
Voysey's continual refinement of his furniture designs was probably the result of limitations imposed by his working method. Anyone spending time looking through the extensive RIBA Voysey drawings archive will be struck by the lack of any development sketches using perspective, ie drawn "in the round". His preferred working method seems to have consisted of designing a piece whilst making its final construction drawing. This approach illustrates the clarity of his vision and has resulted in drawings of great precision, economy and beauty. However, although the drawings contain all the necessary information for a craftsman to manufacture the piece, this information is entirely two-dimensional, with Voysey using the orthographic system of projection; a combination of side and plan views together with various explanatory cross-sections. In effect Voysey only ever saw his furniture properly "in the round" after it was manufactured and, in many cases, it would appear he considered the design could be further improved.

A second widely reproduced and reviewed early design is the green-stained "Lady's Work Cabinet"[24] shown at the 1893 Arts and Crafts exhibition. This is an important piece, showing as it does Voysey rapidly finding his own voice as a furniture designer; it was also surprisingly well received by contemporary reviewers. *The Journal of Decorative Art* referred to the "quality of refined expression asserting itself in an unmistakeable manner" and the almost "Puritan sternness in the severity of the lines chastened by a perception of the beautiful, which all must admire." [25] Horace Townsend, writing in *The Studio* said:

Figure 5 – Modified, oak version of the sideboard for the Lady Lovelace, c1893 (left)

Figure 6 – Fireplace and chair at 23 Queensborough Terrace, 1899 (right)

"To a differing and more original fancy does Mr. Voysey's Work Cabinet owe its being. Nor to Chippendale nor to any bygone stylistic suggestion is this simple, well-proportioned piece of furniture due, and



yet there is happily absent from it any disturbing note of eccentricity. It is designed to meet its needs; of useless ornament there is none, and yet it is sufficiently ornamental.”[26]

The “cabinet on stand” was a popular form with architect designers at this time; but Voysey’s approach was a radical departure from the norm and demonstrates a new, clear understanding of space and form that he would later express as: “The essence of good proportion is brotherly love, making one line, surface, or space helpful to the full expression of another, in harmonious contrast, not angry rivalry.”[27] It also clearly fulfils the design ethos that Voysey explained as: “The thought and feeling in any object is the life and soul of it. It must be alive; it must be sincere; it must be frank and utterly truthful.”[28] This piece provided a valuable foundation for much of his following cabinet work and interestingly, as his reputation on the continent grew, it would also be reproduced by a German manufacturer (figure 7), faithful in all respects apart from the applied metalwork.[29]

Voysey began to master the design of cabinet pieces much more quickly than he did other types of furniture. In 1894, in a paper read before members of The Royal Institute of British Architects[30] he honestly admitted that he was: “groping in the dark, struggling to find out the true laws which govern fitness and beauty.” However he was sure what he was striving to achieve: simplicity; repose; harmony; dignity; and breadth. He encouraged his audience to “have a logical basis for our design in furniture; as in all else, laws must be discovered and obeyed. Then the best work will result from well-understood requirements, provided always our motives are noble and not degraded by exhibitions.”

Chairs of differing design stand as some of the most iconic pieces in the Voysey cannon; however the majority date to the years straddling the turn of the 20th century. In the early to mid-1890s progress was slow, and prior to 1898 only five different chair designs are known: four through photographs and surviving examples[31] and one through a drawing held in the RIBA collection.[32] It is uncertain if the latter was ever executed but it is of considerable interest. Although undated: “Design for a bedroom chair for Messers D’Oyly & Co.” can be assigned a likely date of c1893 by cross referencing the style of lettering employed to other, dated drawings. D’Oyly seems to have been a firm of furnisheers or decorators as Voysey also supplied them with a design for a carpet at a similar date. At first sight, the projected elevations and details of the original drawing seem to have little in common with the later chairs however, once viewed in perspective (figure 8) a simple, tall, lath-back, rush-seated chair with a gently arched top-rail and curved apron is revealed. The major elements of what would become the “Voysey chair” are all here present and correct.

During the 1890s there was a superficial similarity between the furniture of Voysey and Walter Cave (1863–1939). Cave’s well known cottage piano design for Bechstein, with extended, capped uprights, was first exhibited in 1893[33] whereas Voysey’s similar design for Collard & Collard[34] did not appear until c1903. However, the matter is not as clear cut as it would at first seem, as Voysey did exhibit a drawing[35]



Figure 8 – Author’s perspective sketch from the design for a bedroom chair for Messers D’Oyly & Co., c1893

26

H Townsend, *The Studio*. London, vol 2, no 7, October 1893, p18

27

C F A Voysey, *Ideas in Things* in T. Raffles Davison (ed), *The Arts Connected with Building*. London: Batsford, 1909, p114

28

C F A Voysey, *Tradition in Relation to Modern Art*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918, pp225-232

29

It is unclear whether this was a licensed or pirated design

30

C F A Voysey, *Domestic Furniture*. *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, vol 1, 1894, pp415-18

31

The “Swan” Chair; the Essex showroom chair; the green-stained hall chair and a canopied bedroom chair of 1896 illustrated in *The Studio*, vol 9, December 1896, p194

32
RIBA SBI14VOY[208] – the sheet also contains a design for a pedestal cupboard

33
The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society at the New Gallery, London, 1893

34
Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly and L Parry, *C.F.A.Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p212

35
RIBA SBI15VOY[318]

36
Anon. An Interview with Mr Charles F. Annesley Voysey, Architect and Designer. London: *The Studio*, vol 1, April 1893, pp231-7

37
Sotheby's. Applied Arts from 1880. 4 June 1987, lot 138

38
C F A Voysey, *Domestic Furniture*. *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, vol 1, 1894, pp415-18

39
Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly and L Parry, *C.F.A.Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p258

40
Ibid, p171

41
A Vallance, *Home Arts and Industries at the Albert Hall*. London: *The Studio*, vol 3, August 1894, p151

42
Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly and L Parry, *C.F.A.Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p165

43
A.L.P.C.F.A.Voysey. *Dekorative Kunst*, vol 11, no 6, March 1898, pp241–56

for a piano very similar to Cave's at the same 1893 exhibition. Always keen to assert his "individuality", Voysey was concerned enough to clarify the matter in his *Studio* interview[36] conducted shortly after the exhibition, pointing out that: "he (Voysey) worked out the same problem on not dissimilar lines, but the coincidence is purely fortuitous, neither artist having known the scheme of the other." However, much confusion over attribution remains to this day. One example is the case of Voysey's own, green-stained hall chair (figure 9), designed c1893 and later photographed in the hall at The Orchard which was tentatively attributed to Cave when it came to auction in 1987.[37] To some extent this is understandable, as Cave's designs are seldom as elegant as Voysey's and this is certainly not a comfortable design either visually or physically. The single stretcher, low seat, armrests and solid plank back all conspire to give it a massively heavy appearance. When applying Voysey's own criteria for judging furniture: "Is it proportioned, coloured, and disposed as the natural beauties in creation? Are its lines and masses graceful and pleasing? Do any of its parts quarrel? Does it express sobriety, restraint and purity?"[38] one could only answer yes to the criterion of "sobriety". It was a design that would not be repeated but, resourceful as ever, the dished, circular caps would soon appear again, (much more successfully) on Voysey's own double-bed[39] and the leg profiles would find their way into the iconic painted clock design of 1895.[40]

Voysey's passion for the Gothic, or to be more precise the Tudor, defined his earliest work, and its influence would reappear from time to time throughout his career as a furniture designer. This is clearly seen in the small, hanging cabinet (figure 10) designed c1893 (exhibited by the Epsom Class at the 1894 *Home Arts and Industries Exhibition* at the Albert Hall)[41] and also in the unusually ornate "Tudoresque" child's highchair, which was illustrated[42] in the March 1898 edition of *Dekorative Kunst*. [43] Voysey's popularity in Germany and Austria was such that the whole of this issue was devoted to all aspects of his work, resulting in a useful photographic record of his furniture designs to this date. The illustrated examples mostly comprise "family" pieces, photographed in one of the principal rooms at 6 Carlton Hill, St John's Wood. They include the previously discussed "Swan" chair, "Lady's Work Cabinet" and hall chair, together with a wash stand (decorated by Walter Cave's wife Jessica) and a small table cabinet with canted sides.[44] Also shown is an elegant writing cabinet on stand (figure 11), designed in December 1896 in a form that would provide the basis for the well-known Kelmscott "Chaucer" cabinet that would follow a few years later. Two significant commissions for Walter Essex also feature: a writing desk (figure 12), designed in 1896 and clearly based on the earlier "Lady's Work Cabinet", together with a very elegant sideboard (figure 13) designed in 1893. The sideboard's superstructure shows Voysey further exploring elements previously used in the panelled booths designed for Essex's wallpaper showrooms. Both pieces also demonstrate a move away from the use of green stain and show the light, fresh tone produced by rubbing linseed oil (to seal the surface from dirt) into unstained oak.



Figure 9 – Green-stained hall chair designed c1893 for 11 Melina Place and later used in the living hall of The Orchard, Chorleywood



Figure 10 – Carved hanging cabinet, designed to be executed by members of the Home Arts & Industries Association, c1893



Figure 11 – Oak writing cabinet on stand, designed December 1896



Figure 12 – Writing cabinet for Walter Richard Essex, designed October 1896

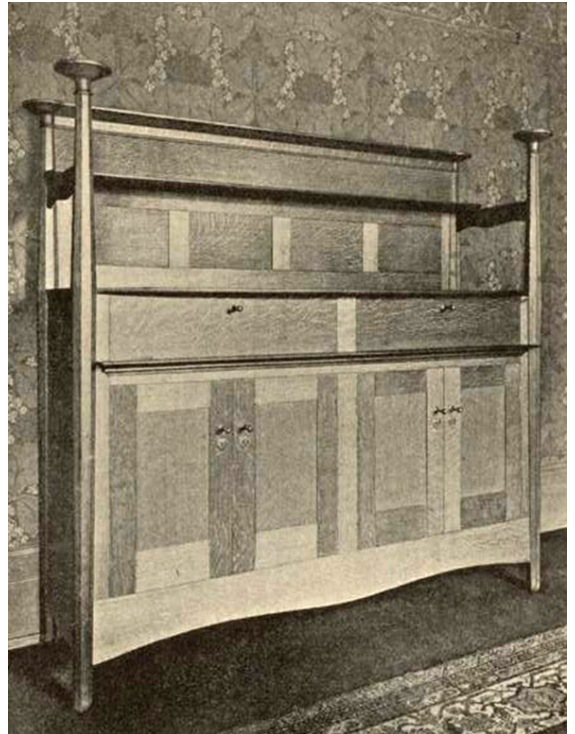


Figure 13 – Sideboard for Walter Richard Essex, designed May 1893

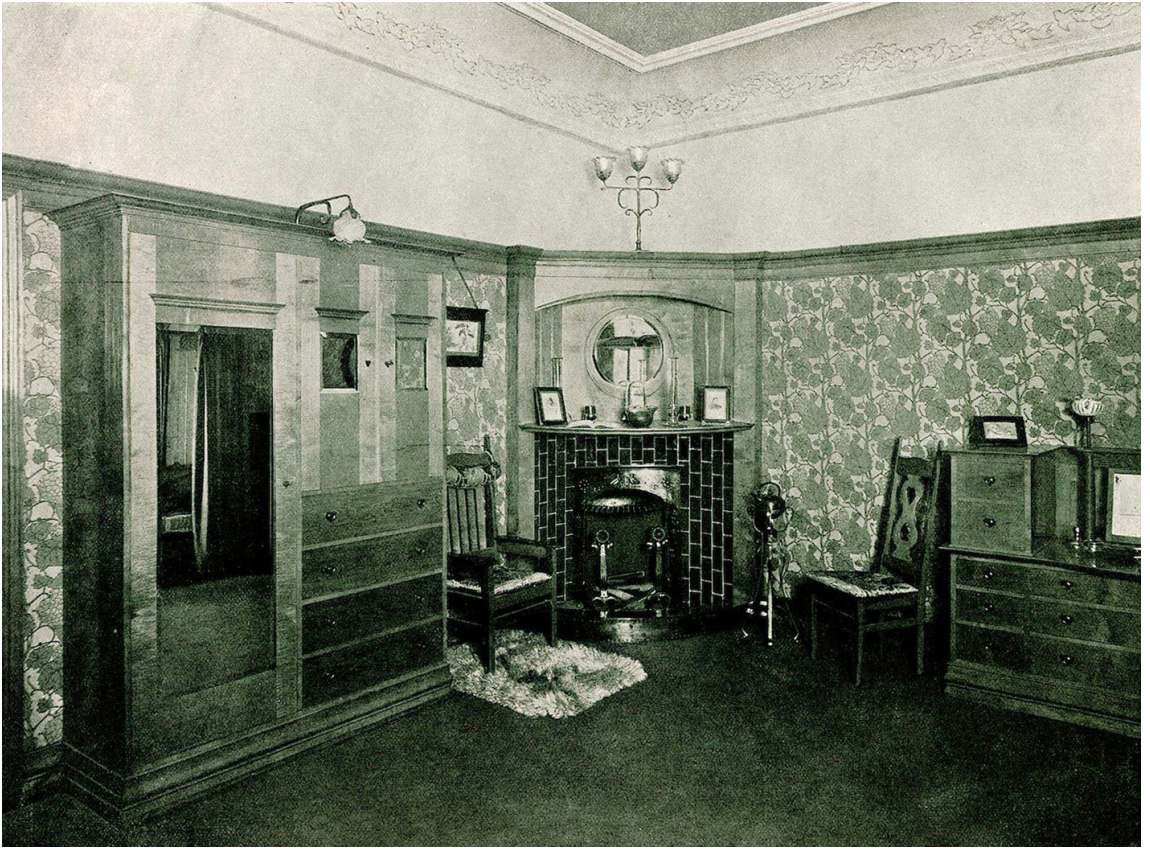


Figure 14 – Living and bedroom for a young lady, executed by F Schönthaler & Söhne, Wien, 1898 (above)

Figure 15 – Sideboard for Hurtmore, Surrey, 1897. LACMA (right)



An entry made in 1898 in Voysey's Black Book records: "Hofler Rama & Co. Furniture and decoration for Room at Wien Austria." Although no record can be found of Hofler Rama & Co a recently discovered photograph in the German journal *Kunstgewerbeblatt*[45] clearly shows a complete Voysey interior (figure 14), described as: a "living and bedroom for a young lady executed by F Schönthaler & Söhne, Wien", exhibited at the 1898 Winter exhibition at the Museum of Art and Industry, Vienna although no credit is given to Voysey. Franz Schönthaler (1821-1904) was a successful Viennese interior decorator and furniture manufacturer. The scheme includes a unique fitted wardrobe, a dressing table, two chairs and a corner fire surround all in "brightly coloured" maple. Also to be seen are a Voysey kettle on stand, elegant electric light fittings and a flock of Voysey style birds – similar to those on his painted clock – incised into the plaster coving above. Apart from the interiors in his own home, which at this time still contained an eclectic mix of shop bought and self-designed pieces; this was his first complete interior design scheme.

Although Voysey's architectural practice was rapidly developing and nearly 20 houses had been built, even as late as 1898 no clients had yet commissioned both a home and a fully furnished interior or, for that matter, even a single room. A small number of clients had commissioned one or two pieces of furniture for their homes, one example being the well-conceived, small sideboard (figure 15) of 1897 designed for A M M Steadman's house Hurtmore (later to be renamed New Place). The problem Voysey faced was raised by a perceptive reviewer in *The Studio*:

"But one thing is sure, that Mr. Voysey's furniture does not take kindly to its commercially produced relatives. To introduce one of these refined and individual objects – whether a dainty piece of colour like the painted clock, a simple and useful article like the writing-cabinet, the most refined and charming buffet, or a larger piece like the sideboard or the cottage piano – among modern cabinet work and upholstery is to introduce a discordant element.

"Even the most sanguine believer in the advance of taste must recognise that the classic restraint which marks Mr. Voysey's furniture could not hope at present to find a fit environment in every house awaiting its reception. But with its plain surfaces of wood, often enough stained green – with oil colour rubbed well in – its simple mouldings, and its decoration (if any) confined to certain structural features – these show elements of a new style..."[46]

What Voysey needed were clients with not only the money, but also the vision, to commission a full interior scheme. In early 1898 Voysey would commence work for two such far-sighted people: William and Haydee Ward-Higgs.

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Illustrated in: K Livingstone, M Donnelly and L Parry, *C.F.A. Voysey Arts & Crafts Designer*. London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016, p167

45

Anon. Die Winterausstellung im K. K. Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Wien. Leipzig: *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, Volume 10, 1899, p93

46

E. B. S. *Some Recent Designs by Mr. Voysey*. London: *The Studio*, vol. 7, May 1896, p209