By the mid twentieth century, a wide range of engineers, planners, authors, and educators shared responsibility with landscape architects for shaping America’s outdoor spaces. The number of people involved in designing the landscape grew considerably over the previous decades. Pioneers chronicles many who were hired by public agencies and private developers to lay out streets and highways, grounds around public and institutional buildings, military installations, international expositions, shopping centers, and residential suburbs. And while there is little critical analysis in these largely laudatory biographies, one can sense the onset of concerns about urban sprawl in a number of them.

Pioneers is itself an outgrowth of several pioneering efforts begun in the last decade to preserve and study designed landscapes. The major impulse came from preservationists who asserted that designed landscapes merited protection on equal terms with architectural and historical landmarks. The CATALOG of Landscape Records in the United States, the National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative, and the American Library of Landscape History started collecting information on historic landscapes and their creators. The book developed out of these worthy endeavors, and in fact was anticipated by several earlier NPS publications. Given the fact that these important data bases exist, it is lamentable that no Web site addresses are given anywhere in this volume.

Still, there is very little to be critical of in this fine book. Its usefulness as a reference tool and guide might have been improved by an index rather than the listing of sites open to the public that appears at the end. The small color photographs, which repeat black-and-white views found elsewhere in the text, add little but expense. But these are minor complaints. The editors, Birnbaum of the Historic Landscape Initiative and Karson of the American Library of Landscape History, and the small battalion of authors they have assembled have done an admirable job of balancing breadth with depth. Their book marks a new level of scholarship in a field that has long been a stepchild of architectural history. We await a full narrative history of landscape architecture in America. But Pioneers of American Landscape Design will be for many years the authoritative source we will turn to for essential information on the men and women who molded so much of America’s outdoor space.

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John Pile
A History of Interior Design

An author who undertakes to craft a one-volume textbook on the history of interior design in the Western world from ancient Egypt to 2000 confronts a daunting task. The book must cover vast quantities of information, be written in an interesting style capable of holding the attention of undergraduates, and remain simple enough to be comprehended by readers who may lack background knowledge. With a visual topic, all of this is doubly difficult. Wielding a magic wand of words and a limited number of photographs, the writer must conjure images comprehensible to people who probably have not seen the buildings under discussion. John Pile’s A History of Interior Design is a commendable effort that largely succeeds in this complicated task.

Organized chronologically, the survey proceeds from prehistory through the successive eras of Western architecture. Half of the chapters focus on nineteenth- or twentieth-century design “to reflect the greater interest felt in the developments of recent times” (9). In general, Pile’s well-illustrated chapters focus on an overview of each period, but he does discuss some individual architects and designers including Gianlorenzo Bernini, Francesco Borromini, Christopher Wren, Charles Bulfinch, John Soane, Raymond Loewy, Norman Foster, James Stirling, and Michael Graves. The illustrations appropriately include floor plans, sections, drawings, and historic photographs, as well as current images. For example, the section on the Middle Ages includes an illustration from Les Trés Riches Heures du Duc de Berry; for the eighteenth-century, there is a period cross-section drawing for the Château de Petit-Bourg; an engraving from Thomas Hope’s Household Furniture and Interior Decoration (1807) appears in the discussion of Regency design; a 1904 photograph of the Larkin Building populated by workers is in the modern period. Pile’s writing style rises above the often pedantic syntax of many textbooks. He provides analysis of stylistic changes and not merely descriptions.

Insets (“Insight Boxes”) containing quotations from primary sources are a particularly welcome feature. These enable students to reach beyond the usual textbook synthesis of secondary sources and hear the words of the past as their authors wrote them. Pile chose a varied selection, sometimes from architects and designers and sometimes from observers, including Le Corbusier (in Vers une architecture), James Stirling, Charles Percier, Giorgio Vasari, and Dante Alighieri (on the Ravenna mosaics).

Pile, professor emeritus at the Pratt Institute and author of several books on interior design, perceives interiors as inseparable from the enclosing architecture. Hence, his book discusses interiors in the context of the buildings in which they are contained, with the focus on interior architecture and space planning. His approach is broad and includes industrial design as well as public and domestic interiors. He also examines the technological, social, and economic forces that help to determine design directions. Unlike most interior design textbooks, Pile does not focus much on furniture. This makes the book very different from Robbie Blakemore’s History of Interior Design and Furniture (New York, 1997), the other widely used textbook for interior design courses. Blake-
Pile's text also ended at 1900. By contrast, Pile chose to pursue a more holistic examination of spaces, rather than analysis of details. For many classes in the history of interiors, this would mean that supplementary sources on furniture styles would be necessary, but Pile's approach provides a valuable reminder that spaces should be viewed as a whole and not as a series of parts.

Pile includes both high style and vernacular interiors, which is laudable. Few books on interior design, particularly textbooks, grant even passing mention to vernacular spaces, leaving readers with the mistaken impression that the majority of the population eagerly pursued fashion. (In seeking to cover successive stylistic trends, many books skip over the influence of companies such as Sears and Roebuck that sold immense quantities of furniture [indeed, entire houses] and were arguably more influential than the well-known designers.) Pile's inclusion of these spaces provides a more realistic view of what people actually built and lived in. Inevitably, in a book of this scope, the discussion of vernacular issues is profoundly limited. Those seeking in-depth information should look elsewhere. The real value is in making the point that high-style interiors have never comprised more than a fraction of the total building inventory.

Particularly beneficial is Pile's effort to include a wide range of building types with a balance between residential and contract design. Bridges, train stations, tenements, theaters, market halls, stores, and ocean liners all appear in both illustrations and text. Such a broad context for understanding design development avoids the misconceptions that can arise when students see only a limited array of building types.

A pronunciation guide in the glossary is a helpful feature for students unfamiliar with the many arcane terms of architectural history. However, the bibliography would have benefited from the inclusion of more recent sources. This is primarily true for the earlier periods. For example, no references for Egypt, Greece, or Rome are later than 1973. No Gothic citations are later than 1962. Under American Colonial and Revival, the most recent source is 1965. This is unfortunate since more current studies refute some of Pile's statements. To suggest that plantations owned by the younger sons of titled families characterized Virginia and the Carolinas is to repeat a Colonial Revival myth (159). Outbuildings were not necessarily arranged in formal plans (159). Pile's sources for the twentieth century are more recent, however.

Pile acknowledges only one person as having read and commented on the manuscript. Perhaps a wider review would have caught some mistakes and/or omissions. For example, it is not wholly correct that the Shakers "established no central control of design practice" (202). The Aesthetic Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement are not synonymous (210).

Another troubling aspect is that Pile seems to lose his objective and dispassionate stance when he comes to modern design. Here he engages in general condemnation of those who criticize modern architecture. "Negative criticism most often comes from commentators who have not visited—let alone lived in—the projects in question" (289). Sweeping indictment of Modernism's critics is questionable in a textbook where objectivity is expected.

In-depth coverage of every topic is impossible within the confines of a textbook, of course, and most of the limitations in coverage are due to the book's vast temporal range and resultant space limitations. There are some gaps, however. Treatment of Minoan architecture is cursory; Tudor architecture is dispensed with in a single paragraph. In discussing the evolution of skyscrapers, elevators are not cited as enablers of height. In discussing a Victorian whatnot, the author describes it as "intended to hold a display of generally useless ornamental objects" (198). A more precise analysis would address the symbolic nature of such Victorian design. Still, no general textbook can cover every point, and instructors know they have to fill in the gaps.

Unfortunately, one of the book's weaker points lies in its relatively brief discussion of the evolution of the interior design profession. Pile fails to address clearly the issue of how the profession metamorphosed from "decoration" to "design." He indicates that "eclectic architecture created a need for interior design specialists who had the knowledge and skill to produce rooms in styles appropriate to the building that housed them. The profession of interior decoration developed to fill this need" (255). The situation was far more complicated than that. The changes in social factors that created a middle-class demand for design are not covered, nor is the interest of some key figures in functional design, especially of work spaces. As Pile's other books make clear, he is well aware of the issues surrounding the development of the interior design profession and its sometimes uneasy relation to architecture. One wishes he had seen fit to include discussion of these factors in this survey.

A faculty member using this textbook might wish to offer some commentary on Pile's opinions with regard to modern architecture and its critics and to provide supplemental material in some areas, but the book is one of the most comprehensive of its type. Unlike the architectural history field, there are few textbooks on the history of interiors. Pile's is an advance in the literature, inasmuch as it concentrates on the development of interior space, rather than furniture, and since it offers such a broad approach. The breadth of his discussion, combined with wide-ranging examples and illustrations, provides a text in which students can consider interior design as a vital component of the wider architectural field.

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376 JSAH / 60:3, SEPTEMBER 2001