

Understated Luxury: The Arts and Crafts Textiles of CFA Voysey

Description



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CFA Voysey design for a printed velveteen showing poppies with stems intertwi

The English late 19th and early 20th century designer Charles Francis Annesley (CFA) Voysey made a remarkable contribution to British design, through architecture, furniture design, wallpaper, textiles, and more. During his lifetime, he earned a widespread reputation as a leading light in the Arts and Crafts movement. Much like his contemporary William Morris, Voysey believed above all in the transformative and healing potential of living with beautiful design, which he celebrated in his own language of quiet, understated elegance. He once said, â??Never look at an ugly thing twice. It is fairly easy to get accustomed to corrupting influences.â?•



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CFA Voyseyâ??s â??In My Orchardâ??, Textile or Wallpaper Design/ 1929 (ma

Born in Hessle, near Hull in 1857, Voysey initially trained as an architect with J.P. Seddon in 1874, before becoming an assistant to Henry Saxon Snell, followed by George Devey â?? from these leading Victorian architects Voysey learned a deep and profound appreciation for natural light, fresh air, and modest functionality as a means of improving living conditions. Building on his early success, Voysey established his own architectural office in 1881. It was during these early, formative years, that Voysey first developed an interest in domestic interiors, and he expanded into flat pattern design for wallpaper, textiles, and other elements of design for the home. In keeping with the Arts and Crafts sensibility, Voysey believed homes should be unified with a â??totalâ?? design scheme, in which all elements of its design, from the buildingâ??s structure to its furniture and furnishing, should work sinuously alongside one another.



CFA Voyseyâ??s â??Alice in Wonderlandâ?? textile design from 1920 Â© Victo

During the 1880s, Voyseyâ??s designs leaned towards historical, traditional motifs that were typical of the Victorian era. However, by the 1890s he was leaning into what would become his signature style, featuring simplified and stylized naturalistic forms, particularly birds, flowers, and plants. Voysey also looked to nature for his appealingly down-to-earth colour schemes, working with pale sky blues, soft, naturalistic greens, and small, contrasting accents of burnt orange or russet. Stylistically Voyseyâ??s designs were in keeping with the Arts and Crafts traditions of loose, flowing shapes that seem to mime the organic and continuous energy of nature, and often incorporated elements of linear outline to differentiate objects from their backgrounds.



CFA Voyseyâ??s Furnishing Fabric, 1898

Voysey designed his patterns for textiles on standard graph paper, a process which allowed his preliminary drawings to be easily transferred to punched cards for the technician, who worked meticulously with different coloured threads to realise his designs. As with all his work, Voysey was a perfectionist who insisted on specific instructions when handing his designs over to fabric manufacturers, and this allowed the integrity of his distinctive aesthetic to remain an integral aspect of each and every fabric he put his name to.



C.F.A. Voysey. Textile design with roses, shamrocks and thistles. British, 1915

Voysey produced his designs as both wallpapers and for wool double cloths, and both proved to be hugely successful, leading Voysey to become one of the most important pattern designers of his generation. Some of his most popular lines, which were realised in multiple different colourways, included The Saladin (1897), The Owls, (1898), and particularly his Alice in Wonderland Fabric (1920), which, with its charming, characterful details and soft, pastel colour scheme, was designed to be made for childrenâ??s bedrooms or nurseries. Voyseyâ??s popular floral patterns that featured closely cropped plant details, such as The Iolanthe (1897), with their large curling, floral forms, are now recognised as forerunners to the Art Nouveau movement. Moreover, Voyseyâ??s emphasis on clean simplicity was deeply radical for a time when ostentatious and fussy Victorian chintz was the norm, and as such, he is now recognised as one of the primary forerunners who paved the way for the entire Modernist movement that followed.

CATEGORY

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