

Three iconic women in interior design from the twentieth century



International Women's Day has passed us by, and there is no reason to write about women in particular. However, there is always an exception that demonstrates the opposite. To help define interior design in the twentieth century as more feminine, we'll look at some significant historical figures.

Candace Wheeler, the mother of interior design and one of the first American women to work in interior and textile design. She co-founded the Society of Decorative Art in New York in 1877 with Louis Comfort Tiffany, John LaFarge, and Elizabeth Custer, and the Women's Exchange in 1878. In 1883, she established Associated Artists, an all-female company. She was adamant about demonstrating that women can earn a living if fully educated. Throughout her lengthy career, she created numerous magnificent artefacts and endorsed a distinctively American elegance of textile and wallpaper design, with colour combinations inspired by American flowers and replying to the characteristics of American light. But without hesitation, Candace Wheeler's crowning achievement was serving as a role template for women at the turn of the twentieth century, encouraging them to request equality in the workplace. In a century when powerful women were not always valued, Wheeler boldly elevated art and design as viable career paths for women rather than passions.

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Syrie Maugham was a well-known 1920s and 1930s British female interior designer. Known as the "Princess of Pale," she promoted glamorous interiors that were predominantly white in colour. The most notable of these was the all-white music room she revealed at a party in 1927 at her residence on London's King's Road. This was an area offered to host the editor of *Vogue*, the Prince of Wales and Cecil Beaton at various points in time. Noel Coward, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, and poet Stephen Tennant were also among her clients. In 1922, she decided to borrow £400 (~ £23,000 today) and managed to open her first interior design showroom at 85 Baker Street – an ideal location for London's residences and some of the richest families. Not far from the famous Sherlock Holme's 221b Baker St., the shop is now occupied by a men's outfitters. Her interiors, which were light and remarkably thin, functioned as a remedy to the overcrowded decor that persisted during the late Victorian times in which she grew up.

Eileen Gray was an acclaimed Irish architect and furniture designer who achieved fame at the age of 94. Although she received little recognition during her lifetime, she is now regarded as the founder of the Modernist movement, best remembered for her astonishingly bold furniture designs and architectural style. Gray established an extravagant and luscious interpretation of the geometric shapes, and industrially processed materials popularised by International Style designers such as Le Corbusier, and Charlotte Perriand. In 1922, she opened her gallery, showcasing opulent and theatrical furniture pieces. Even if the gallery was never financially successful, it was preserved by selling her famous carpets. After attaining greatness as a furniture designer, she transitioned to architecture and, despite having no professional education, formed an iconic structure that introduced cosiness and comfort as fundamental principles of Modernist design. Examples of her previous work are housed in the V&A and the Museum of Modern Art in New York; these collections serve as a touching tribute to her input on modern design.

