

MAKING A HOUSE A HOME :
ENGLISH-CANADIAN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES AND THE RECONSTRUCTION
OF THE FAMILY HOME DURING THE POST-WAR YEARS, 1945-1960

by
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I. INTRODUCTION

Whenever the family is in crisis, conservative elements in society tend to look to the fifties with nostalgia, longing for a time when men and women had strictly-defined roles that confined them to a specific sphere of influence. Back then, everything seemed to be in order : according to the dominant model of the nuclear family, children were surrounded by loving parents who wished to give them all those things they could not have as kids. The father would come home from work to eat the dinner lovingly prepared by his stay-at-home wife. This was the post-war ideal of family life as prosperity followed an extended period of crisis marked by the Great Depression, the Second World War and the shift in gender roles it led to. It was believed that once the war was over, a return to more traditional values and roles would make up for the material hardship and the lack of emotional stability endured by Canadian families over the previous fifteen years.

These discourses abound in the popular press of the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, including the pages of women's magazines. Some features promoted a renewed way of life characterized through a post-war cult of domesticity, and home decorating experts offered more or less overt advice on how to attain this ideal through their articles. This research examines these discourses and discusses how they defined women's roles and responsibilities within family and society in post-war Canada.

Other than illustrated books presenting dominant decorating trends over time and studies dealing with the profession of interior decorator,¹ there are a limited number of published works dedicated to home decorating advice aimed at women. In line with the new interest shown for material and cultural history in the last twenty years, they enable us to place the post-war advice literature on this subject into a series of principles and

assumptions underlying interior decoration since its early stages in North America. In the 1980s, Jean Gordon and Jan McArthur analysed the content of American home decorating manuals and magazines published between 1870 and 1940 and they believed that the experts' advice should be interpreted as a manifestation of popular culture. These suggestions reflected values important to American society and were in turn perpetuated by the insistence that women incorporate them in their decorating strategies.² Through her examination of the transition from parlour to the living room in American interiors during the same period, Karen Halttunen touched, for her part, upon the interaction between the decor of a room and the physical appearance as well as the temperament of its occupants. More recently, Beverly Gordon further analysed this conceptual conflation of women's bodies and domestic interiors between 1875 and 1925, a period when home decorating trends closely followed styles in fashion. The experts' choice of words in manuals showed that like the female body, a house could be "dressed up" for special occasions or be given a "face-lift". Recently also, Jan Jennings has elaborated upon the effects of decoration on personality. Her study of the moral debate between the wallpaper manufacturers and American domestic reformers at the turn of the century shows the importance of this issue as it was believed that decorating should favour and reflect the family's morality. In this case, experts encouraged women not to trust salesmen but rather be advised consumers who would not compromise their family's respectability with extravagances.³ Finally, in her 1997 article on the domestication of desire, Janna Jones claims that advice found in interior design manuals published in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century indeed suggested how to make a house a home.⁴ More importantly, however, it

fostered desires in the female reader that could not be realised because the ideal home described by the experts belonged to another historical period, culture or social class. Still, the specialists maintained that it was possible to achieve an effect envied by the well-to-do, but it meant acquiring rare or expensive artifacts that the average reader could not afford, making the achievement of the ideal home an elusive goal.

Although these studies provide a conceptual and methodological framework to conduct similar work for the post-World War II period, they are based on American material and they cover earlier periods. Canadian studies on interior decoration are rare, and there is no extensive analysis of the advice given to Canadian women by means of publications.⁵ For example, Linda Dale's article on domestic arrangements in rural Newfoundland shows a link between women's role in this region's economy and the organization of their interiors.⁶ Louise Fradet's study about women, kitchens and mass consumption in post-war Quebec reveals that the acquisition of household appliances led to a reorganization of the kitchen as a predominantly female space.⁷ Finally, Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson's assessment of the gender and class implications of the Home Improvement Plan seems to demonstrate that the "modernization" movement (remodelling kitchens and bathrooms to make them more efficient) started before World War II. This plan was introduced by the Canadian government to reduce unemployment by creating jobs in the building sector. According to the authors, it reinforced gender divisions and traditional roles in the family. The advertising presented women as wives, mothers, homemakers and consumers, and it was clear that if they were to benefit from these home improvements (usually in the kitchen) it would be as their husbands' dependants.⁸

Although these three Canadian studies deal indirectly with home decorating, they introduce, along with the American studies reviewed so far, a concept at the heart of this project : gendered spaces. This concept implies, of course, a physical segregation of women and men between home (private sphere) and workplace (public sphere). But this principle can also be applied inside the home. For instance, the growing feminization of the home with the gradual disappearance of servants contributed to the creation of the kitchen, the “female” space par excellence, as middle- and upper-class housewives were left with the bulk of the housework.⁹ Dolores Hayden’s account of nineteenth-century American materialist feminists emphasizes the relationship between the idea of the kitchen as housewives’ workshop and their inferior status in society.¹⁰ Hayden contends that the massive introduction of household appliances in the kitchen after World War II deprived women of the little control they used to have in their sphere as capitalism took the more profitable activities out of the domestic context (laundry and cooking), adding more pressure on housewives who have to deal with higher standards. In this sense, the home became the spatial element of women’s economic oppression.¹¹

As for Anne Chapman, she insists on the formative nature of public and private spaces (workplace and home) and believes that the arrangement, dimension and appearance of rooms act as transmitters of gender norms. In this way, individuals internalize the traditional roles deemed acceptable for their sex, therefore maintaining women in a subordinate position because the two spheres are perpetuated. Coming to a similar conclusion, Daphne Spain asserts that the allocation of space according to sex is socially constructed and follows power relations between men and women. Once institutionalized,

this physical segregation reproduces the power relations between the sexes because it makes it practically impossible for women to acquire the valuable knowledge necessary to improve their situation.¹²

These studies do not deal with home decorating per se, but they lead to a more specific interrogation proposed by Veronica Strong-Boag. In the early 1990s, this historian briefly touched upon the subject of interior decoration and the notion of gendered spaces in two articles about the lives of suburban women in Canada after World War II.¹³ She compared these women's experiences (from information gathered through interviews and questionnaires) with the perceptions of feminist critics, social scientists and writers worried about the feminization of suburbia as a fast-growing residential area.¹⁴ The author briefly mentions women's efforts to turn identical houses into family homes. Through their choice of furniture and appliances, often influenced by home decorating advice found in women's magazines, these housewives had found a way to personalize suburbia.

Inspired by Strong-Boag's research on female suburbanites in post-war Canada, this study looks at the expected nature and extent of women's contribution to the reconstruction of the family home after the Second World War, as suggested in articles on interior decoration published in three English-Canadian women's magazines : *Chatelaine*, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, and *Canadian Home Journal*.¹⁵ It is our belief that during the post-war years, home decorating had the unstated function of re-establishing traditional relations between the sexes. After a period of crisis causing a shift in gender roles, interior decoration experts promoted a new ideal of the family home by their articles published in women's magazines.

The magazines chosen for this research were published monthly across Canada. However, they were all edited in Toronto, which may have contributed to a certain homogeneity in their perspectives and content. In addition, all three publications have been the property of Maclean-Hunter at some point of their existence, resulting in similar styles as well as in the rotation of staff members and contributors. Also, they could not escape the hard years suffered by their industry during the war. Publications focusing on family, home or women were the hardest hit compared to news magazines.¹⁶ Several of these periodicals did not survive and either merged or disappeared during the post-war period. Also, Mary-Etta Macpherson was at the helm of each of these three monthlies as editor between 1945 and 1960 (*Chatelaine* in 1945 replacing Byrne Hope Sanders away in Ottawa as director of the Consumers division of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* in 1946 after Sanders' return and *Canadian Home Journal* in 1948). Her editorship may have had repercussions on the contents of home planning features, since Macpherson was known to have campaigned for higher standards in house design and lower architect fees in Canada.¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that this research will not address the question of who were these home decorating experts and the possible influence of their identity on the content of their articles.

Most importantly in the context of this study, these magazines were targeting an audience mainly composed of middle-class women. First published in 1928 *Chatelaine* was originally geared toward middle-class women, judging by the features on the search for domestic help. However, this "trade magazine for homemakers" quickly became "the" Canadian women's magazine, its sales surpassing those of larger American publications

available in the country. In 1950, *Chatelaine* was one of Maclean-Hunter's four star magazines and with this status came a broader readership including rural and urban working-class women. According to writer Sylvia Fraser, *Chatelaine* may not have reflected accurately the experience of these women (compared with the lives of female suburbanites, for example), but through its seventy years it has been loyal to dominant values held by the Canadian population.¹⁸ As for Valerie Korinek, she sustains that during the 1950s and 1960s *Chatelaine* had a tendency to publish short stories and articles more representative of suburban women's daily lives but she insists that the magazine's readership was not homogeneous.¹⁹

Canadian Homes and Gardens was founded in 1924 by Senator Rupert Davies. It was bought a year later by Maclean. Not a typical women's magazine by focussing almost exclusively on interiors, it aimed at upper- and upper-middle-class female audiences, but tried to appeal to male readers as well.²⁰ Promoting gracious living, this magazine took advantage of the post-war housing boom in the early 1950s by offering relatively easy do-it-yourself projects to its readers. However, this move was not enough to sustain the magazine and by 1954, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* was struggling financially. After years of accumulated losses, the magazine was sold to Southam Press in 1962 and was converted into a newspaper insert, *Canadian Homes*.

Finally, the *Canadian Home Journal*, deemed "the first modern women's magazine,"²¹ was founded in 1905 by the Consolidated Press (also owner of *Saturday Night*). Popular with middle-class women, although it was not considered a first-rate women's magazine because it was more family-oriented with its forum for teenagers and other

features for children, it was in direct competition with *Chatelaine* and indeed had a very similar content. Its circulation was comparable to *Chatelaine*'s but financial problems forced it to merge with its closest rival in 1958.²² Once the new list of subscribers was compiled, the new owners discovered that there was a duplication rate of only 15%, showing that despite their rivalry the two publications did not have the same readers.²³

Thus, this research consists in a content analysis of articles published in these three women's magazines, a type of document that can be seen as a revelation of a society's culture and values at a given time.²⁴ Discourse analysis has been widely used by historians and is particularly suitable in women's history where records of their past seen through their own eyes are limited. Veronica Strong-Boag has applied this technique to various Canadian magazines in order to document the lives of women before and after the Second World War, completing and comparing this information with interviews, questionnaires, statistics and other accounts.²⁵ In her analysis of *Chatelaine* Valerie Korinek also used this method to uncover the overt and covert meanings of every feature appearing in this magazine. With a detailed record sheet, she measured frequencies and determined the types of images appearing on the cover, the location of readers through their letters, the issues discussed in editorials and the subjects touched upon in articles and fiction, among other aspects of the magazine. Korinek was then able to make a thorough qualitative analysis of the content. Comparing this data to surveys and market studies, she concluded that despite its suburban middle-class bias, *Chatelaine* had readers from all social classes and regions in Canada and acted as a women's forum on various issues from marriage and divorce laws to Christmas decorations and cake recipes.²⁶

More recently, Quebec historian Micheline Dumont and her colleague Stéphanie Lanthier used a similar approach to evaluate how feminism has been presented in *L'actualité* from 1960 to 1996. They confronted the magazine's treatment of feminism with the actual strategies, issues and demands of the women's movement during the last 35 years and concluded that despite some progress in its coverage, overall, *L'actualité* preferred to overshadow feminists' preoccupations, even making fun of their demands. Luc Côté and Jean-Guy Daigle's recent study of advertising and the Quebec market from 1920 to 1960 also offers some insight into the use of content analysis. With this method, the authors examined Quebec's social, cultural and economic integration to the "American way of life" through ads published in *La Presse*, *Le Soleil* and *The Montreal Daily Star*. They have determined that until the Quiet Revolution, there was no typical Quebec consumer as the province was part of a large North American market and businesses did not need to adapt their advertising.²⁷

Using a comparable method, this study looks at the values and ideas expressed by the experts in interior decoration and the strategies used to convey their message. Like all advice literature targeting a female population, whether it be in the matter of beauty, health, cooking or fashion, home decorating columns and articles constitute an original and valuable source to analyse the discourse and ideals that have shaped women's past. They provide additional information on the various expectations regarding women's roles after the Second World War. An analysis of this literature's ideological content offers insight on what was expected of women in their private lives, thus giving a more complete as well as a more complex perspective of their existence. However, one has to keep in mind that what

transpires of these advice columns must not be automatically interpreted as constituting the real life experiences of women to whom this advice was addressed. Unless they are confronted and compared with diaries, questionnaires or interviews, these sources give little indication of what really went on in post-war homes around Canada. But this involves another project altogether.

To conduct this research, every issue available for each magazine was consulted using the table of contents and limiting the analysis on pieces listed under the "Home Planning" section.²⁸ Then, as a way to reduce a corpus still too voluminous for the scope of this study, it was decided that the definition of interior decoration had to be narrowed down. As a result, articles on gardening and cottages, questions from readers, most house plans, tips on creating decorations for special occasions and advice on buying, building or selling a house were left out of this analysis. The rest of the articles were read carefully using a record sheet.

The record sheet served as a guide to the reading of more than 150 articles. It offered a analytical framework without being too restrictive (see Appendix). Taking the form of a checklist, it was used to analyse the sources by following the two parts of the thesis, interior decoration advice and gender relations. Questions were developed to cover the economic, emotional, practical and gendered dimensions of home decorating. All this information was then compared and combined to determine the basic principles underlying the advice as a vehicle for a revitalized domestic ideal. More questions were added to catch all references to masculine and feminine roles in a familial context or when decorating. When the number of children is mentioned, it will help to draw the image of the ideal post-

war family.

When analysed in the context of the 1950s, these articles are indicative of women's place and roles at a moment when new phenomena were modifying the social, economic and demographic landscape of the country. This research will thus contribute to a better understanding of the baby boom, the model of the nuclear family, rising living standards, consumerism, and suburbanisation and their interaction as well as their influence on women's roles during the post-war era. Furthermore, it will broaden the concept of reconstruction, which often has a strictly political and economic dimension, to include its private dimension as well. Finally, it will call into question the idea of a clear separation between the domestic sphere (relegated to women) and the public sphere (associated with men).

Other primary material was used for this study. The Canadian Youth Commission's report published in 1948, which assessed the problems facing the rising generation in post-war Canada, provided a better understanding of the concerns over the effects of war on youth, marriage and family. The report combines briefs by youth groups with the views of family experts and 170 young people (15-24 years old) and helps explain the national obsession for homes, privacy and stability.²⁹ The 1956 study of Crestwood Heights (fictional name given to the Toronto suburb of Forest Hill) conducted by sociologist John R. Seeley and his colleagues is also a valuable post-war document that adds to the comprehension of family life in the fifties, albeit in an exclusively suburban context and with a focus on children. The chapters on shelter and family proved to be useful in determining the role of the home as an indicator of the husband's social standing and as a place where the

housewife found her identity.³⁰

Our study is divided into four sections. Following the introduction, the second part explains the post-war context in relation with ideals of home and family as well as the housing crisis, government intervention and suburbanisation after a period of crisis causing emotional and material deprivation and a shift in gender roles. The third section examines the seven basic principles behind interior decoration as exposed by the experts. A fourth section looks at the gender roles depicted in these articles and explores the strategies used by the specialists to reassure the female reader of her competence in this field. Finally, the last part sums up the trends observed throughout the analysis, it also establishes the differences and the similarities between the articles examined for the duration of the period under study.

1. See for example : Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration from Pompeii to Art Nouveau* (London : Thames and Hudson, 1964) ; Harold Leslie Peterson, *Americans at Home : From the Colonists to the Late Victorians* (New York : Scribner, 1971) and Charles McCorquodale, *History of the Interior* (New York : Vendome Press, 1983). On the subject of professional decorators, Peter McNeil discusses how interior decoration became a socially acceptable profession for women. See "Designing Women : Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator, c 1890-1940," *Art History* 17.4 (December 1994) : 613-657.

2. Jean Gordon and Jan McArthur, "Interior Decorating Advice as Popular Culture : Women's Views Concerning Wall and Window Treatments, 1870-1920," *Journal of American Culture* 9.4 (Winter 1986) : 15-23 and "Popular Culture, Magazines and American Domestic Interiors, 1898-1940," *Journal of Popular Culture* 22.4 (Spring 1989) : 35-60.

3. Karen Halttunen, "From Parlor to Living Room : Domestic Space, Interior Decoration, and the Culture of Personality," *Consuming Visions : Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 1989) 157-189 ; Beverly Gordon, "Woman's Domestic Body : The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age," *Winterthur Portfolio : A Journal of American Material Culture* 31.4 (Winter 1996) : 281-301 and Jan Jennings, "Controlling Passion : The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma," *Winterthur Portfolio : A Journal of American Material Culture* 31.4 (Winter 1996) : 243-264.

4. Janna Jones, "The Distance from Home : The Domestication of Desire in Interior Design Manuals," *Journal of Social History* 31.2 (Winter 1997) : 307-326.

5. In her Ph.D. dissertation, Valerie Korinek analysed *Chatelaine* magazine as a whole, but only three pages are devoted to the home planning features of the 1950s. See "Roughing It In Suburbia : Reading *Chatelaine* Magazine 1950-1969," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996) 199-201.

6. Linda Dale, "A Woman's Touch : Domestic Arrangements in the Rural Newfoundland Home," *Material History Bulletin/Bulletin d'histoire de la culture matérielle* 15 (Summer 1982) : 19-22.

7. Louise Fradet, "Femmes, cuisines et consommation de masse au Québec, 1945-1960," *Bulletin du regroupement des chercheurs-chercheuses en histoire des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec* 17.2 (Summer 1991) : 23-35.

8. Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson, "'When Is a Kitchen Not a Kitchen?'," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 7.4 (Winter 1986) : 71-76 and "'A kitchen that wastes no steps...'" Gender, Class and the Home Improvement Plan, 1936-40," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 21.41 (May 1988) : 9-37.

9. Witold Rybczynski, *Home : A Short History of an Idea* (New York : Viking, 1986) 72-75.

10. Nineteenth-century material feminists in the United States were the first to identify the economic exploitation of women's domestic work by men as the fundamental cause of women's inequality. They suggested transformations in the design and the material culture of houses, neighbourhoods and cities. They are referred to as "material feminists" because of their focus on economic and spacial issues as the basis of existence.

11. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution : A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1981).

12. Anne Chapman, "Space and Place : Territorial Training for Traditional Gender Roles," *Women and Environments* 7.1 (Winter 1985) : 6-9 and Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

13. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams : Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72.4 (December 1991) : 471-504 and "'Their Side of the Story' : Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-60," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 46-74.

14. Psychologists and other health professionals believed that the absence of a male role model during the day and the overly feminine climate prevailing in the suburbs were at the root of numerous "social problems" such as homosexuality, juvenile delinquency and alcoholism.

15. Canadian women had access to American publications such as *Ladies Home Journal*, but one can reasonably assume that their content may not have been representative of the Canadian experience. Without getting into an endless debate about cultural differences between the two countries, some variations must be considered. For instance, suburbanisation in Canada occurred later and on a smaller scale compared to the same phenomenon South of the border. Also, although Canadians benefitted from the post-war prosperity with an increase in their living standards they enjoyed a less enviable lot than their American counterparts. This situation is reflected in Canadians' preference for the wringer washer well into the 1960s whereas Americans bought automatic washers as soon as they were available. Thus, it seemed preferable to limit this research to Canadian articles in order to have

a more accurate idea of the reconstruction of the home after World War II. See Paul-André Linteau, "Canadian Suburbanization in a North American Context : Does the Border Make a Difference?" *Journal of Urban History* 13.3 (May 1987) : 252-274 ; Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 37-38 and Joy Parr, "What Makes Washday Less Blue? Gender, Nation, and Technology Choice in Postwar Canada," *Technology and Culture* 38.1 (January 1997) : 153-186.

16. Fraser Sutherland, *The Monthly Epic : A History of Canadian Magazines 1789-1989* (Markham, ON : Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1989) 181 and 243.

17. "Introducing Mary-Etta Macpherson," *Canadian Home Journal* 45.1 (May 1948) : 2 and Noel Robert Barbour, *Those Amazing People : The Story of the Canadian Magazine Industry, 1778-1967* (Toronto : The Crucible Press, 1982) 116, 131 and 155.

18. Sylvia Fraser, ed., *A Woman's Place : Seventy Years in the Lives of Canadian Women* (Toronto : Key Porter Books, 1997) 12.

19. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 58 and 64.

20. Sutherland, *The Monthly Epic*, 157 and Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 5 and 54. *Canadian Homes and Gardens* had a monthly feature for the handyman.

21. Sutherland, *The Monthly Epic*, 156.

22. In its last issue published in June 1958, the *Canadian Home Journal* admitted to its readers that the Canadian market was too small to sustain two women's magazines and one would have to fold eventually.

23. Barbour, *Those Amazing People*, 172.

24. It should be noted that articles are used rather than home decorating manuals written by a small number of authorities, making it easier to find out if the expressed views were shared in the profession and society at large or if they corresponded to the opinions of a few authors in particular.

25. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams," 471-504 ; *The New Day Recalled : Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939*, rev. ed. (Toronto : Copp Clark Pitman, 1993) and "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 29.3 (Fall 1994) : 5-25.

26. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia".

27. Micheline Dumont and Stéphanie Lanthier, "Pas d'histoire, les femmes! Le féminisme dans un magazine québécois à grand tirage : *L'actualité* 1960-1996," *Recherches féministes* 11.2 (1998) : 101-124 and Luc Côté and Jean-Guy Daigle, *Publicité de masse et masse publicitaire : le marché québécois des années 1920 aux années 1960* (Ottawa : Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1999).

28. The title of these departments varied from one magazine to the other and also changed within publications between 1945 and 1960.

29. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family* (Toronto : The Ryerson Press, 1948).

30. John R. Seeley, R. Alexander Sim, and E.W. Loosley, *Crestwood Heights : A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1956).

II. A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES AND ROLES : THE POST-WAR IDEALS OF FAMILY AND HOME

The post-war period in Canada was marked by important demographic, economic and social transformations. It constitutes an era rich in anecdotes and contradictions as to women's proper roles in society. An attempt was made to return to the traditional values that prevailed before the war, but Canadian society could not ignore the effect of this major conflict on women's lives. Pushed by job opportunities, financial need or patriotism, women had integrated the labour market in greater numbers to participate in the war effort, government and employers growing more tolerant of working wives and mothers because their labour was needed. Due to these special circumstances, it was more acceptable for women to work for pay outside the home. This push into the public sphere partially liberated them from the sphere to which most of them had been confined. This broadening of women's roles only added to the sense of uncertainty felt by many Canadians at the end of the Second World War.

As during any period of crisis, gender roles were disrupted during the Depression and further more with World War II. Without necessarily causing a role reversal it nevertheless forced women to take on responsibilities normally judged inappropriate for them.¹ With their husbands, fathers, and brothers fighting overseas, a good number of women had to take over as heads of households. Even more disturbing in the eyes of social workers, psychologists and the Canadian Youth Commission, married women and mothers were brought into factories and bureaucracies in response to a pressing need for wartime labour, "(...) often to the neglect of their children," reported the Commission.² Women were also entering the armed forces, taking on mostly clerical work to relieve men for combat.

Recruiting agents tried to downplay these developments by insisting that this was a short-term necessity and these new responsibilities would not threaten existing gender roles.³ Added to the separation from loved ones and the emotional turmoil caused by the war, this form of women's emancipation was thought to further challenge the stability of the family unit and the traditional concept of home.

The Canadian Youth Commission was aware of women's newly gained independence and self-assurance through paid work or by managing a home by themselves. The Commission warned that it caused a shift in power relations that would certainly increase friction within couples because men's authority was being challenged. This "role reversal" would confuse children and could possibly lead to problems of adjustment for all members of the family. In order to avoid such consequences, the post-war wife was told to help her veteran husband recover his role in the family, by sharing the responsibilities in home management and the education of children, all the while letting him know she can assume a greater responsibility in the future.⁴ There was a general concern about the readjustment of returning servicemen to society and family life and it was believed "(...) this could be best accomplished within the clear-cut sex roles of the traditional family."⁵

In this scheme, it was women's responsibility to guarantee their husbands' masculinity through their own femininity. This would be achieved by they adhering to the cult of domesticity. In practice, it meant leaving the workforce to assume their role as stay-at-home mothers while their husbands would be the sole providers. Policy makers believed that a "back-to-the-kitchen" movement would ensure a smooth transition to a peace-time economy because men could then be easily reinstated in their jobs.⁶ After the war, new

income tax regulations, the closing of day-care centres, unequal opportunities and wages for female workers, the introduction of family allowance as an indirect salary for domestic work, and the double-day all contributed to discourage women from staying in the workforce.⁷ In some cases, post-war prosperity made it financially possible for wives to quit their jobs. The Canadian Youth Commission believed that this turn of events could only be beneficial for personal relationships at home because "It re-established the father's position as head of the family, a position always threatened and sometimes lost during the years in which he went without work ; the result was a reshifting of family relationships to a more normal footing."⁸

In the post-war era, what was considered "normal" was the nuclear family centred on domesticity and children.⁹ The parents of the baby-boom generation married in greater number, at a younger age, and were starting their families soon after marriage, thus increasing the chances of having more children. The ideal family (which was also presented as being the "average" family) had a male breadwinner at its head and a non-wage earning wife at home joined in a "partnership", and two to three children who were the centre of their parents' lives.¹⁰ This child-centredness can be seen in the profusion of advice in books and magazines on childrearing during the postwar years, most exemplified by Dr. Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense of Baby and Childcare* (1945).

These demographic trends were all signs of social and economic transformations. With prosperity, the three generational sharing of housing facilities (grand-parents, parents and children) became a rarity among the Canadian-born population.¹¹ The ideal became the self-sufficient nuclear family living alone in its own dwelling.¹² After years of overcrowding

and poor housing conditions in urban centres, privacy and comfort became a reality for many households with the help of government loans. At the beginning of the First World War, it was estimated that over one million Canadians had lived in residences where they had to share a room with other individuals. Furthermore, just three out of every five homes had piped running water while only half had inside flush toilets. Figures also showed that one dwelling in five had a refrigerator and in a large number of houses, the stove was the only source of heat.¹³ It was believed that such deplorable housing conditions could have a devastating impact on children's behaviour. An Ontario branch of the Children's Aid Society informed the Canadian Youth Commission that "The lack of privacy resulting in too close association of the sexes, of parents and children (...)" caused anxiety and could lead to juvenile delinquency.¹⁴ Since the welfare and strength of the nation were thought to rest upon the well-being and stability of the family unit, the Canadian government intervened in the ongoing housing crisis.¹⁵

In 1941, the federal government created a crown corporation, Wartime Housing Limited, to appease the housing crisis which had persisted since the Depression.¹⁶ The conflict in Europe only made things worse as Canadians were leaving rural communities to join the war effort in urban centres. In response to this pressing need, Victory Houses were built to put temporary roofs over the heads of wartime workers (they were built without basements and were heated with stoves).¹⁷ It set precedents in efficient home building because they made a maximum use of scarce material and followed the principle of an assembly line. However, these houses were more a makeshift than real homes.

As part of its post-war planning, the Canadian government introduced the *National*

Housing Act (NHA) in 1944. Its initial goal was to provide decent homes for servicemen and their families because their fixed income was considered insufficient by landlords who often believed that children with absent fathers were hard to control and could damage property.¹⁸ However, the demand for single dwellings increased dramatically after the war with the baby boom and the arrival of immigrants. The housing crisis thus lasted until the early 1950s.¹⁹ A good number of veterans resorted to upgrading Victory Houses by adding a basement and a furnace to make them permanent dwellings as construction of new houses could not keep up with the demand.²⁰

Trying to improve upon the situation, the Central (later Canadian) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) was created in 1945 to meet the housing needs of middle-class families and returning veterans. With the assistance of the private sector, the CMHC oversaw the construction of homes while easing unemployment in the building trades. It was involved in the financing part of the equation by making mortgage money available at incredibly low interest rates.²¹ It also defined building standards by lending money only to families who chose one of its own designs, "(...) all of which were variations on the same theme."²² Consequently, the CMHC indirectly assisted in the expansion of the suburbs by helping families settling in the outskirts of cities, the only realistic and affordable alternative to urban overcrowding and high housing costs.²³

More than just a series of cookie-cutter homes, suburbia was, as J.M. Bumsted explains, "(...) a rather complex constellation of expectations and values centred on the home, the family and economic affluence."²⁴ Most families moving to the suburbs did so to raise their children in a safe place away from urban chaos. This was where middle-class

parents could find an affordable family home, that protective zone where children could learn to express themselves and grow to autonomy to become mature and stable individuals able to deal with adult responsibilities.²⁵ After years of uncertainty, the parents of the baby boomers, who were entering adulthood just as the housing situation was more than critical, jumped on the occasion to provide their children with a decent home where they would be able to find, according to the Canadian Youth Commission, “(...) the personal ties, the happiness of belonging and being loved (...) [, and] the sense of security [they need] to face the world with confidence.”²⁶

For returning veterans and their families still feeling the effects of a housing crisis and years of separation, “home” meant material comfort, reunion with loved ones and peace ; in a word it meant stability. In this vision, home and family became inextricably linked and almost synonymous, but this ideal was not born with the post-war era. It rather surfaced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with industrialisation which provoked a separation of workplace and residence, but years of deprivation and turmoil followed by prosperity gave a new tinge to traditional values which were expressed differently through a revived domesticity. As noted by Stephanie Coontz “Beneath a superficial revival of Victorian domesticity and gender distinctions, a novel rearrangement of family ideals and male-female relations was accomplished.”²⁷ Nowhere was this new arrangement more visible than in the suburbs which promoted clearly defined gender roles giving women the expressive role of nurturer while men were assigned to a more instrumental role, that of the breadwinner.²⁸

Known for its rows upon rows of virtually identical houses, suburbia became the

symbol of home ownership and because of the strong demand for housing, prospective buyers were not too concerned with subtlety of design.²⁹ According to Mary-Etta Macpherson, *Chatelaine's* editor in 1945, women did not mind this uniformity because they knew they could individualize their homes with colours, furnishings and personal touches.³⁰ As we shall see, post-war women's magazines assisted them in this undertaking by giving home decorating advice promoting the revival of traditional family roles and values.

1. As noted by Ruth Roach Pierson, "(...) shifts in sex/gender lines of demarcation took place exclusively in the public sphere. The subject of reorganizing the household division of labour was broached only in jokes and cartoons about male/female role reversal." In *"They're Still Women After All" : The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1986) 220.

2. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family* (Toronto : The Ryerson Press, 1948) 35.

3. For more on society's concerns about the effect of war on women, see Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All"*, especially Chapter 4 : "Wartime Jitters over Femininity", p. 129-168.

4. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family*, 59-63. Warning readers that the debate over working mothers was far from over, *Chatelaine's* Mary-Etta Macpherson insisted that the new skills, the comradeship of other women, the self-respect and the economic independence gained during the war would not be easily forgotten, despite what seemed to be a smooth transition up to that point. See "Working Mothers," *Chatelaine* 18.8 (August 1945) : 68.

5. Brett Harvey, *The Fifties : A Women's Oral History* (New York : Harper Collins, 1993) 72. This idea is also expressed in Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time : A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1996) 28-29.

6. These disturbances provoked by the war raised enough concern for the federal government to start planning the nation's return to peace before victory. Conscious of the changes caused by women's paid participation in the war effort, it commissioned the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women in 1943. For more on the Subcommittee see Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "'Pigeon-Holed and Forgotten' : The Work of the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women, 1943," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 15.29 (May 1982) : 239-259.

7. Anne-Marie Séguin, "Madame Ford et l'espace : lecture féministe de la suburbanisation," *Recherches féministes* 2.1 (1989) : 57 ; Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams : Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72.4 (December 1991) : 480 and Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women : A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto : Harcourt Brace, 1996) 350.

8. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family*, 37.

9. For an examination of psychologists' definition of the family ideal in post-war Canada, see Mona Gleason, "Psychology and the Construction of the 'Normal' Family in Postwar Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 78.3 (September 1997) : 442-477.

10. The post-war family was not as idyllic as the one portrayed by the media. Furthermore, the nuclear family model, which rested on the male breadwinner and the female homemaker was not an invention of the 1950s and it was mostly a white middle-class phenomenon. For a discussion of this romantic myth in the United States, see Chapter 2 : "'Leave It to Beaver' and 'Ozzie and Harriet' : American Families in the 1950s" in Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were : American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York : Basic Books, 1992) 23-41.

11. Most immigrants with low-paying jobs could not afford a place of their own or it was still culturally acceptable for them to share a home with an extended family.

12. John Miron, *Housing in Postwar Canada : Demographic Change, Household Formation, and Housing Demand* (Montreal and Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988) 9.

13. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 11 and Marc Denhez, *The Canadian Home : From Cave to Electronic Cocoon* (Toronto : Dundurn Press, 1994) 82.

14. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family*, 42.

15. Annalee Gölz notes that family and nation have always been linked but this equation took a distinctive twist during the post-war era. See "Family Matters : The Canadian Family and the State in the Postwar Period," *Left History* 1.2 (Fall 1993) : 9-49. In fact, in the preface of its report, the Canadian Youth Commission insisted that "Upon the stability of the family more than anything else the welfare of the nation depends. For young people the experience of personal security in a good home is the prerequisite of normal development." *Youth, Marriage, and the Family*, iii.

16. During the Great Depression, few could afford to pay for supplies and labour, which explains why the construction of houses slowed down. With World War II, the supplies and the workforce were monopolized for the war effort, and resulted in the same lack of new houses.

17. Victory Houses were built out of an economic need for munition-plant workers and sustained by a political need for adequate shelter for returning war veterans. Albert Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies, 1935-1980* (Toronto : Butterworths, 1980) 28 and John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace : The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal and Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 181.

18. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family*, 41. However, the introduction of the NHA and later the creation of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation should also be interpreted as a strategy to create jobs in the building trades to avoid a return to a stagnant economy. Séguin, "Madame Ford et l'espace," 54-55.

19. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Housing in Canada : 1945 to 1986. An Overview and Lessons Learned* (Ottawa : CMHC, 1987) 7 and Denhez, *The Canadian Home*, 114. Until 1952, with the Korean War and the tensions of the Cold War, housing became a lower priority as scarce

- material were monopolized to sustain a new war effort. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 198.
20. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 133.
21. Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies*, 35.
22. Denhez, *The Canadian Home*, 94.
23. Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Their Side of the Story': Women's Voices for Ontario Suburbs, 1945-60," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 50-51.
24. J.M. Bumsted, "Home Sweet Suburb : The Great Post-War Migration," *The Beaver* 72.5 (October-November 1992) : 26.
25. Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family*, 15-23 and 53-57.
26. *Ibid.*, vii-viii.
27. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 27.
28. According to Margaret Marsh the suburban ideal and the ideology of domesticity have emerged at the same time but separately. They evolved independently until the turn of the century to finally lead to the 1950s suburban ideal centred on family togetherness and clearly defined gender roles. See "From Separation to Togetherness : The Social Construction of Domestic Space in American Suburbs, 1840-1915," *Journal of American History* 76.2 (September 1989) : 506-527.
29. Deryck W. Holdsworth and Joan Simon, "Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space," *House, Home, and Community : Progress in Housing Canadians, 1945-1986*, ed. John R. Miron (Montreal and Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 191.
30. Mary-Etta Macpherson, "Postwar Houses," *Chatelaine* 18.5 (May 1945) : 96.

III. THE EXPERTS SPEAK : THE SEVEN BASIC PRINCIPLES TO BUILD A REAL HOME

As we inducted in the previous chapter, the housing crisis, aggravated by a shortage of materials and labour during the war, persisted until the early fifties under the pressure of immigration and the baby boom, turning the search for a decent home into a national obsession. Looking for privacy, a good number of home-hungry families acquired new houses in the suburbs while others resorted to moving into older dwellings. They referred to interior decoration advice in magazines as they sought to individualize identical houses or to give a face-lift to an older home. However, it can be argued that these readers were offered much more than just ways to achieve a charming effect in their interiors. Home decorating experts were proposing a way of life and they warned their audience that in order to make a house a home, it would take more than a new sofa or a fresh coat of paint. Indeed, a real home was possible only if the amateur decorator followed a series of basic principles reflecting women's and particularly housewives' multiple roles.¹ These principles appeared throughout the articles and their combination was presented as the key to a successful arrangement. Post-war home decorating thus fulfilled aesthetic, practical, emotional, as well as economic functions.

A. "Transforming the identical into the distinguishable"² : Individuality, Personality and Livability

The construction of almost identical houses in the suburbs was especially favourable to the proliferation of home decorating advice during the post-war years. Experts prescribed ways to personalize these homes, but they made clear that their ideas were only suggestions and should be used as a source of inspiration and for guidance only. Like a family's favourite recipe, these recommendations were to be altered by the homemaker to

suit the tastes of all occupants because a house truly becomes a home when it reflects the personality of those who live in it and answers their needs and interests. Authors insisted that interiors should be as individual as a signature and that each room should reflect the occupant's "(...) inner personality just as a mirror reflects your outward person" and "(...) [bear] the stamp of your character."³ Like fashion, decoration was considered to be an unspoken language expressing individuality and an active personality.⁴

Home Decorating Consultant Catherine Fraser referred to the process of individualizing and personalizing a home as achieving "dignity". In one of the seven lessons she contributed to *Chatelaine* in 1952, she cautioned women that dignity could not be achieved by copying a neighbour or by trying to outdo her. It was rather present in a decor that served the interests and answered the needs of every family member in an efficient and pleasing manner.⁵ In fact, failure to comply to these individual requirements could result in serious health problems, as it was the case for "(...) the tall woman, who gave herself a serious back ailment because of a blind desire to have a kitchen exactly the same as that of her neighbour, completely overlooking the fact that her work level was five inches higher."⁶

Thus, the secret to any successful arrangement was to be found in the knowledge of one's self (psychologically and physically). But this was easier said than done according to John Caulfield Smith, *Chatelaine's* Home Planning Consultant. Smith suggested that readers ask friends about what they considered to be their chief characteristics and use this information as a basis for an interior matching the personality of the occupants.⁷ Such insistence on the importance of a distinct home accurately reflecting the people it sheltered made decoration "(...) a personal art, not a fashion or a formula."⁸ Thus, housewives were

encouraged to develop and nurture their decoration skills to make their surroundings an extension of themselves. Only then could a home become truly livable.

Indeed, experts explained it was not enough to have a beautiful decor. A family should also be able to “live” in this house or else it would feel like “(...) a series of department store windows, charmingly arranged, harmoniously matched in color, but rather cold and empty of life.”⁹ A livable home should exude a positive atmosphere and give everyone a lift when they came in. It should be pleasing to the eyes without demanding too much attention and “(...) furnished with thought of you and your family working, relaxing, entertaining and living there.”¹⁰ As illustrated with the case of the bedroom, livability was of the utmost importance because a home did not merely reflect the personality of its occupants, it also forged their temperaments. A *Canadian Home Journal* contributor insisted that “The last scene on which you close your eyes at night, the first sight that greets them in the morning cannot but have its influence upon your daily attitude toward taxes, rain and life in general.”¹¹

B. “Children Are People Too” : A Mother’s Guide to Child Psychology

From this perspective, livability was defined as catering to the needs of every family member. In the post-war era, it was also strongly believed that children deserved respect and sympathy just like any adult.¹² This attitude had a profound impact on trends in interior decoration as experts often highlighted the link between environment and children’s development. In effect, nowhere was the child-centredness of the post-war years more visible than in the attention given to children’s development in relations to their surroundings. In fact, claimed the *Canadian Home Journal*, “(...) never before [had] the

needs of children been studied with such care and enlightened understanding by home planners and decorators."¹³ From babies to teenagers, they were to be at the centre of any redecorating project as their presence meant the interior had to be practical, versatile and adjustable.

In home decorating articles, youngsters were often portrayed as dirty little creatures with too much energy, which justified the use of easy-to-clean materials and sturdy furniture. It was strongly recommended that children have a room of their own where they could work off that surplus of energy without wrecking the whole house.¹⁴ In this era of the recreation room, children had a "don't-say-no" area where they could play without disturbing adults or having to put their toys away when called for dinner or going to bed.¹⁵ According to architect Richard F. Fisher, it was about time children got the attention they deserved. In 1946, *Chatelaine* presented a house planned with kids in mind and Fisher explained his motives behind his choices :

(...) I think the typical kid gets a rather thin deal when it comes to housing. When he's young he's shot outdoors in all sorts of weather, presumably for health but just as much because he's under mother's feet. When he's a bit older he comes home and wants to listen to his favorite radio program. Instead he's hustled up to his bedroom because daddy's had a hard day at the office and wants peace and quiet.¹⁶

This lack of space also affected teenagers, who were more likely to hang out on the street and get into trouble if they did not have a place to entertain their friends without sending parents to the kitchen or their bedroom. With a private hang-out in the basement, teenagers would be more likely to stay home where their parents could keep an eye on them.

Aside from a rec-room, children also needed their own bedrooms to become better

adjusted and more responsible individuals.¹⁷ Experts agreed that having a room of their own, even as babies, would promote their psychological development and maturity. Besides giving everyone more sleep, providing Junior with his own bedroom would give him the “(...) feeling of being just as important as anyone else in the house because he has his own possessions in his own room.”¹⁸ The best example of this is three-year-old Christopher who became a “young man” when he got a space of his own, much to the delight of his parents. In a matter of days, the toddler’s behaviour had changed : he stopped wetting his bed and became less jealous of his 20-month-old sister.¹⁹ When “(...) encouraged to enjoy their own place in the scheme of things,” children developed good taste and acquired good habits.²⁰ Besides giving them a chance to express their personality, it incited them the keep their rooms tidy.

However, the homemaker was advised to restrain from imposing too much maternal orderliness as a “(...) wise mother (...) keeps in mind that a child’s room should be *practical*, without detracting from its beauty ; for children shouldn’t have to be inhibited too much in their own rooms.”²¹ It was women’s responsibility to create a charming effect without sacrificing practicality, especially in the case in the nursery. Experts warned the “sentimental mother” to stay away from the frills that would require hours of washing and scrubbing. She should rather make psychologists happy by rocking her new baby because it “(...) gives him a sense of security and of being loved that will stay with him all through life.”²²

The housewife was cautioned not to get carried away with her desire to beautify her home. To illustrate this point, a psychologist told *Canadian Homes and Gardens* readers the

story of a woman who made each room in her home so beautiful that her little girl was not allowed to be herself in them. She was the envy of other women in the neighbourhood but that did not keep her daughter from protesting by cutting a hole in the carpet. The child expert warned that :

The real tragedy was not the hole in the broadloom but the gulf between mother and daughter, created by the mother's blissful assumption that redecorating their home was just as important to everyone else as it was to her. In her determination to make every room a gem she forgot that houses are made for families, and not the other way around. In her eagerness to transform her house she had let it transform her. She wasn't a mother any more, just an interior decorator.²³

As even youngsters were encouraged to express their views on home decorating, their bedrooms should be their pride and joy and truly reflect their preferences. It often included plenty of storage space and shelves for their possessions such as their rock collection and other precious mementos. Mothers were advised to arrange their separate quarters in a way to give them good memories when they were older, preparing them for the day when they would establish their own home : "You're handing your children precious memories when you do over their *own* rooms in mood of happy imagination. Years later... miles away, perhaps... there'll be nostalgic moments when they'll remember those havens and hideaway spots. For a child's room is *his* castle, *her* pretend house (...)." ²⁴ In other words, through interior decoration, mothers were directly responsible for their children's immediate and future happiness.²⁵

For older children, the rule still applied as teenagers needed to express their individuality and their independence. However, at this age, it was harder for mothers to impose their decorating rationale. *Chatelaine's* Catherine Fraser foresaw possible

disagreements between mothers and grown children, especially when the latter wanted to use their own money to furnish their rooms. But she assured mothers that it was actually a wise move to let a wage-earning daughter decide, "(...) for she will learn a lot in the process and her first purchases may provide her with a start for her own house someday."²⁶

As for the rest of the house, its decor was also to teach children good habits. To encourage hand-washing before meals, a low step ladder in the bathroom would make it easier for youngsters to reach the wash basin. In families with young children, small kitchens had the advantage of discouraging them from eating there and rather use the dining room, more appropriate for learning dining etiquette. In fact, "(...) parents of young children have found that the atmosphere of formality and ceremony that attaches to regular family gatherings around 'the bid table' is a real help in child training."²⁷

Thus, if the appearance of a room had to reflect the personalities and the tastes of its young occupants, it also served to teach appropriate behaviour and promote their psychological development.

C. A Room of One's Own : Space, Privacy and Togetherness

Giving children their own rooms served parent's interests as well in a period when privacy was very much in demand despite the happiness of being reunited with loved ones. Interior decoration experts described the home as a haven where individuals, young and old, should find warmth, laughter, inspiration, peace, rest and a sense of belonging. As a place of refuge, its function was to prepare the husband and the children for the day and welcome them back after their venture in the outside world. In the eyes of *Chatelaine's* Catherine Fraser, the dining room best served this purpose. Insisting on the importance of mealtime

for harmonious family relations (she believed that eating together did more good than three books on the subject), she told readers to “Decorate the room so it will sent them out with calmness and receive them with kindness when they return.”²⁸ However, at a time when most households had to make do with small homes, space was a rare commodity and a separate dining room was often considered a luxury, aside from being unpractical for the homemaker who found it hard to keep one eye on her family at the table and another on the meal preparation in the kitchen.

With a serious lack of space in most post-war homes, single-function rooms soon gave way to multipurpose rooms as a compromise between high expectations and high housing costs. For example, what was once a guest room became an office for Dad as well as a sewing room for Mom. Architects also came up with the open-plan house with fewer walls and less waste of precious space. This type of design however came with its contradictions. As it promoted togetherness, it also challenged the desire for privacy. Decorators tried to reconcile these two principles in the post-war home. As announced in the *Canadian Home Journal* :

Memories of Dad being ousted to the front bedroom with his newspaper - far from the news and his easy chair, while the children entertained, were altogether too common a few years back. To-day, even the smallest house can be arranged so that the family social life isn't getting in anybody's hair.²⁹

On the one hand, after years of overcrowding people longed for a place of their own, not having to share a dwelling with another household or even to share a room with another family member.³⁰ On the other hand, the separation caused by the war was also fresh in the minds

of Canadians and the ideal of the close-knit nuclear family meant that parents and children were to spend more time together at home.³¹

However, this longing for privacy, that seems to prevail over the need to spend time in company of family members was not automatically synonymous with withdrawal. It was rather “(..) a process involving both seeking and restricting interaction with others at different times.”³² At the centre of a the privacy/togetherness dilemma was the living room. Some experts advised readers to have separate quarters for parents and children, suggesting that the living room should be an elegant retreat where youngsters were admitted only if they were on their best behaviour. But most insisted that it should be welcoming for all members of the family.³³ As the hub of the house and the key to good family relations when everyone gathered there at the end of the day, the living room should be easy to care for and radiate “nuclear warmth”.³⁴ If it were only decorated with objects that could not be touched, “(...) those now so-receptive youngsters - when grown - will have no memories of a place they loved as children. Rather, they will recall one where they were constantly restricted for one reason or another. Will *your* children have such recollections?” Inflicting mothers with the guilt treatment by insinuating that they were directly responsible for their children’s behaviour, Ruby Price Weeks reiterated that “There should be few restrictions as to the use of a *real living room*. It should fairly exude hospitality. The children, in such a home, from first-graders to teen-agers, won’t be wandering about the streets wondering where to go. They will be headed home. Are *yours*?”³⁵

If privacy could be found in the living room, it was considered as the main characteristic of the bedroom. This place was described as the personal domain of its

occupants ; it should, therefore, not be decorated in a way that had not received their consent. The bedroom was where everyone should find what they loved the most, objects that had a special meaning. In the master bedroom, one could expect to find "(...) the snapshots and portrait photos of the children, (...) the beloved hideosity that Junior made (...) in manual training, (...) [the] husband's favorite magazines and [the wife's] sweet girl graduate picture (...)." ³⁶ This kind of privacy was believed to be especially important for the returning veteran. The housewife was advised to spoil him by "(...) giv[ing] him the privacy of a room of his own, with space for his cherished boyhood belongings and war trophies. Be sure, too, to equip his room with a bed so big and so superlatively comfortable that it will banish for all time the memory of crowded bunks, swaying hammocks or army cots." ³⁷ Also, to help the ex-serviceman to live with his memories and remind him of his efforts and courage, souvenirs were to be integrated in the decor because he had fought for this home. ³⁸

Men and children generally came first when setting up a special room for them to pursue their interests and practice their hobbies. A husband needed a place of his own, a private haven for his trophies, guns collection and books, a study with a comfortable chair or perhaps a workshop where he could "(...) smoke and saw and file to [his] heart's content." ³⁹ This was especially important in an all-girl household where Father "(...) needs a haven where he can escape the tides of femininity (...)." ⁴⁰ If there was not enough space for a den, the man of the house should at least have a cupboard or drawer of his own, safe from his wife's urge to tidy up without his permission. As discussed above, children could also expect to get a room of their own. As for the housewife and mother, she had to make sure that the needs of other family members were met before her own. Consequently, "Only

after the husband got his den, the son a club room, and the daughter an attic bedroom, could the wife expect a space of her own, perhaps a sewing room." This made the home a workplace for women as opposed to a place of leisure for men.⁴¹

Indeed, experts seldom made reference to a specific space for women except when discussing their duties as homemakers. If one were to go by the experts' remarks, one would think that women's only interests were sewing and cooking. The best deal a lucky mother could expect was a cheerful corner in the kitchen for her sewing. Only on one occasion did a frustrated housewife (an occasional *Canadian Home Journal* contributor) make a plea for a women's study, emphasising the fact that men have had studies for a long time and that children and wives had learned to respect this space. She felt it was about time women got their own space, not just a tiny corner used as a sewing room, but a place where she "(...) can spread [her] things out in one glorious mess (...)" without everyone seeing it or the kids touching it. She can be herself, put all the feminine touches she wants, regardless of conventions.⁴² However, these public demands were rare perhaps because the kitchen, and to a certain extent the whole house, were considered to be a female space. In this case, most experts did not see the need for the lady of the house to have a special room as she already had her own domain in the kitchen.

Paradoxically what decorators and architects defined as a "female space" was in reality a room open to all. As noted by Anne Chapman, "(...) the kitchen, often defined as the woman's space in the home, is freely intruded upon by all members of the family ; the den, office, study or workroom, her husband's domain, are far less subject to others' use."⁴³ Thus, despite popular beliefs, the kitchen was not exclusively the housewife's territory, even

more so with the introduction of the open-plan house. This simplification of design thus reduced segregation by age and by sex and encouraged family togetherness. On the other hand, it will be vehemently denounced in 1963 by Betty Friedan in her then celebrated and best-selling feminist treatise on *The Feminist Mystique*. Friedan insisted that women could no longer have a private space in their own homes and that this could only contribute to their misery :

There are no true walls or doors ; the woman in the beautiful electronic kitchen is never separated from her children. She need never feel alone for a minute, need never be by herself. She can forget her own identity in those noisy open-plan houses. The open plan also helps expand the housework to fill the time available. In what is basically one free-flowing room, instead of many rooms separated by walls and stairs, continual messes continually need picking up.⁴⁴

However, as it became less private with an open plan, the post-war kitchen also foreshadowed, according to Stephanie Coontz, the blurring of male and female spheres within the home.⁴⁵

Separated from the rest of the house by a counter, the kitchen became a sort of family room where guests were also welcomed. As it became “(...) a legitimate area for the entertainment of friends, the areas of the house considered to be truly private decreased.”⁴⁶ Thus subject to visitors, the kitchen could no longer be decorated to suit only the housewife’s preferences and had to accommodate “outsiders” as well. In their columns, home decorating experts made it sound like it was women’s demands that prompted such changes. They maintained that busy mothers did not want to feel cut off from the rest of the house and wanted to keep an eye on everything without having to play the “jack-in-the-box” hostess. With only a counter separating the kitchen from the dining room, housewives could

also save time and steps when serving meals. With an open kitchen, "No longer is mother exiled to the back of the house. Instead, even when she takes over the command post, she still shares in the fun," while catering to her family's needs.⁴⁷ She can prepare dinner while supervising the children or have a chat with her husband who is relaxing in the dining area.⁴⁸

It was even suggested that a more inviting kitchen could sometimes incite other family members to help with the meal preparation.⁴⁹ Overall, however, the post-war homemaker could hardly expect any assistance from her husband and children.

D. "A Woman's home is her factory"⁵⁰ : Technology, Efficiency and Spatial Arrangements

Through technological innovation and a few tips on efficiency, post-war experts promised that housework would become more enjoyable for women. Before the end of the Second World War, *Canadian Home Journal's* Collier Stevenson already predicted that the scientific and technological developments that had been so destructive during the conflict would later be used towards more constructive ends to save time, labour and money.⁵¹ Nowhere was this promise of a better life more visible than in the woman's workshop, the kitchen. In May 1945, various appliance manufacturers announced the forthcoming fully equipped "Victory Kitchen", available as soon as war requirements would be met.⁵² Unlike its predecessor, the ideal post-war kitchen would be a compromise between the sociable but inefficient kitchens of the 1920s and the efficient but tiny clinics of the past decade. Efficient and workable, but warm and friendly, it was to be a livable place for children, husbands, and guests who wished to join the hostess.⁵³ It also served various purposes such as cooking, eating, storage, laundry, sewing, play area for children and by the end of the

fifties, watching television.⁵⁴

Because of the high costs brought on by a strong demand, only a limited number of households had access to major appliances at war's end, but this did not keep the manufacturers from praising the merits of the latest innovations.⁵⁵ Dishwashers, refrigerators, automatic ovens and washers and other gadgets were presented as liberating women from the drudgery of housework. These "electric servants" were simple to use and could practically do the work for them : "There is nothing complicated about using an automatic washer. In fact it's so simple that you won't realize your washing is done."⁵⁶ With the arrival of the freezer, it was expected that women would learn to cook the new way, that is to set aside a couple of days every month to cook, freeze and then relax. This method meant no more panic at the arrival of unexpected guests or for last minute parties.

One author noted that the homemaker

(...) has been quick to take advantage of stoves that start cooking the roast automatically while she is out playing bridge (...) and housekeeping aids that permit her to enjoy at least some of the benefits of the forty-hour week - although she knows the gadget will probably never be invented that will make her a nine-to-five worker like her husband.⁵⁷

Indeed, if these technological innovations were hailed as the end of countless hours spent cooking and cleaning, they also increased expectations. Instead of liberating women and giving them more time to pursue other activities, including paid work, technological progress and the disappearance of domestic servants during the postwar had the effect of homogenizing housework and making it a reality for women of all classes. Historian Ruth Schwartz Cowan thus argues that appliances did not create free time that women decided to fill by entering the workforce. If they integrated the workforce after World War II, it was

in order to pay for those appliances and maintain the family's living standards. As for Susan Strasser, she notes that automatic washers restructured laundry time rather than reducing it.⁵⁸ Less physically demanding, laundry was done more often because of increased standards of cleanliness. With a machine that was so easy to use, most people stopped wearing the same clothes twice without washing them and with an increase in living standards, they just had more to wash.⁵⁹ Betty Friedan contends that because they had no other interests, women spent more time on housekeeping despite technological innovations, simply because this occupation forged their whole identity.⁶⁰

Despite their questionable time-saving promises, these new domestic appliances had an impact on the spacial organisation of the post-war home, particularly in the kitchen.⁶¹ The housewife's "factory" was now conceived with these appliances in mind ; according to a rational approach to domestic work also referred to as "scientific management".⁶² The modern kitchen was usually separated along three departments placed in an order which led to the dining table : preservation and storage, preparation and cleaning, and cooking and serving.⁶³ To save steps, the work should proceed in this logical sequence by placing the equipment in order of use, the path from fridge to sink to stove taking the shape of a triangle or looking like an assembly line.⁶⁴ The U-shaped kitchen was presented as the ideal because the housewife had access to every piece of equipment just by turning around, but L-shaped and H-shaped kitchens could also do the trick.⁶⁵

These changes usually involved more than redecorating ; but experts assured their readers that it was worth remodelling as a badly planned house was like a vacuum sucking up time and energy and eventually spirit.⁶⁶ Any sensible husband would be glad to invest

in such a project if it resulted in less fatigue and more leisure time for his wife. However, it seems women themselves were asking for better working conditions. According to *Chatelaine's* Consumer Councillors (a group of women from across Canada surveyed on various topics by the magazine), "It is clearly evident that women want to be happy in their kitchens. They know they're stuck with their kitchen jobs just as a man is with his office job (...)." It was about time efficiency experts took a good look at the kitchen and apply what they had learned in offices and factories.⁶⁷

Efficiency could thus be achieved through various changes, but all these were guaranteed to save the housewife time, labour, and steps. Home decorators also gave tips on how to maximize space as post-war houses were small because of the high cost of materials and housing. This reality was perceivable in the tiny kitchens, but designers converted this problem into an asset by telling readers that small scale was modern and step-saving. It was the lack of organisation, obsolete tools and equipment, and dust traps that added to the homemaker's fatigue, not the size of her house.

Built-in features, which were very popular in the post-war home, ensured that there was a place for everything and that everything was in its place. Authors suggested divided drawers to store silver or tin-lined compartments to put sugar and flour (it avoided knocking over pots when reaching for the top shelf), slots to hold trays and platters, a pull-out table, a knife rack behind a swing-down cutting board, a paper towel rack over the sink, a lazy Susan and fold-up burners as ways to give the lady of the house plenty of counter space and elbow room. These features could even help her become a better cook as it was hard for "(...) a housewife [to] display skill with a skillet if she's handicapped by lack of storage

space and working surfaces.”⁶⁸ To eliminate the needless search for her tools, the homemaker could hang utensils inside cabinet doors and paint a silhouette of each behind to put everything in the right place after use. It was also proposed that she hung her pots and pans over the stove in a way that would make them readily accessible. Finally, to save time and tempers, a cupboard could be allocated for breakfast essentials such as coffee, bread, cereals, and the toaster. This kind of arrangement would “[Make] things easy (...) in the early morning when a misplaced toaster cord can start the whole day wrong.”⁶⁹ More often referred to as a “workshop”, the kitchen sometimes took on the appearance of an “office” with its organization comparable to a filing system.

To avoid spending hours cleaning and scrubbing her home, authors advised readers to get rid of dust traps such as fancy baseboard mouldings “(...) which created a nice morning’s work for 18th Century servants but which can put a busy housewife into a dangerously savage mood.”⁷⁰ For floor covering it was recommended to use easy to maintain linoleum with splatter design to make the toast crumbs virtually disappear. Drawers with curved corners and a continuous surface at the junction of the counter top and the back splash also made for easier dusting. Since children seemed to leave traces everywhere with their sticky fingers, washable wallpaper and plastic materials were preferable for “heavy traffic” areas such as the bathroom and the kitchen. Easy to clean and durable, plastic surfaces such as Arborite and Formica promised efficiency and... good looks : “[The] wife can be beautiful - and efficient too with kitchen surfaces of Life-Lasting Arborite.”⁷¹

This was not the only instance where the housewife’s physical appearance was used

to convince her to adopt a product or an idea. A water softener was described as a must because it allowed to save on detergent, kitchen and bath cleaners and more importantly, it left the housewife with much softer skin.⁷² To be pretty in her workshop, the housewife should also have a mirror handy in the kitchen (on the wall or inside a cabinet door) to dab on some lipstick, set her stray locks and get rid of the shine on her nose before answering the door bell to welcome unexpected visitors.⁷³ Another home decorating specialist advised readers that it was not desirable to have a kitchen with a window facing South because porcelain fixtures and other polished surfaces reflect the sun's glare and can cause eyestrain, if not wrinkles :

Just try working at a shiny white kitchen sink with the morning sun beaming in through the windows above it, and, if you don't develop a nice squint, I'll miss my guess. Years of this sort of eye-strain will do things to your face, things out of which the wrinkle-cream manufacturers are making a lot of money.⁷⁴

By contrast, proper lighting speeded up work by saving sight and soothing nerves, and it made the "central-control room"⁷⁵ look good too. A place to sit, preferably a stool used at the kitchen counter, could also make work more pleasant and easier on the feet while ironing or washing the dishes. With the telephone in the kitchen, one could add a desk and a chair for kids to study, listen to the radio or have a private talk with mother, who can also write letters, plan meals, make grocery lists and file recipes.⁷⁶ With all these features, "(...) Mistress Cook found herself in proud possession of a real executive headquarters!"⁷⁷

Previously all work and no glamour, the kitchen thus slowly took on a more attractive appearance as decorators offered tips on how to illuminate the housewife's workplace without giving it a clinical look.⁷⁸ Making her kingdom more attractive and

efficient would not only make kitchen work pleasant, it would also increase productivity, giving mother some leisure time.⁷⁹ Since it was estimated that women spent on average one third of their waking hours in the kitchen, the equivalent of their husbands' eight-hour workday,⁸⁰ some experts felt that the "Recognition of the importance of woman's work in the kitchen is long overdue. And recognition can best be made by providing her with a home workshop worthy of her best efforts." After all, "A housewife is a human being as well as a cook. She should have leisure time to develop personal interests and share in family fun."⁸¹ Spending less time on maintenance would give her the opportunity to relax and contemplate her surroundings. By the mid-fifties, one author suggested that mother could put this free time to more constructive use by getting involved in her community or by taking a part-time job.⁸²

However, the prospect of working for pay outside the home was certainly not the main incentive to remodel the kitchen. The efficient home was rather presented as a way to give women better working conditions and free time to share with their husbands and children's leisure interests without being too tired to enjoy them.⁸³ Housework was considered a legitimate full-time occupation deserving modern equipment and attractive surroundings adapted to the gender of its principal practitioner.⁸⁴

E. Feminine Frills and Tailored Masculinity : Training for Proper Gender Roles

Interior decoration experts suggested that rooms in post-war homes should be adapted to their occupants on the basis of age and, more importantly, gender. Taking the example of the bedroom, Louise Price Bell asserted that this room

(...) should give an immediate clue to the personality and interests of its

occupants. You can tell, at the most cursory glance, whether a bedroom is that of a man, a teen-ager, a woman or man and wife. No teen-age girl would feel at ease surrounded by the masculine type of furnishings. But when a room is occupied by husband and wife it should be a happy mingling of masculinity and femininity.⁸⁵

Thus, not just any decor was appropriate for a girl, a young man or a couple. Carefully planned, the arrangements, the furnishings, the decorative themes, the colours and the accessories had to reflect the gender of the occupants. One could go as far as to say that decoration prepared children for womanhood or manhood and served to remind adults of the appropriate gender roles in post-war Canada.

It was mainly within the walls of their bedrooms that children were to learn their future roles as adults. A typical girl's room had plenty of frills and furbelows, ruffles and flounces to add a feminine touch. Collecting clothes and bibelots, a girl was thought to need more storage space (drawers and shelves) than her brother. Mother was advised to use lots of colours in her daughter's room, but she should keep them delicate. Alice in Wonderland, angels, kittens, ballet dancers and flowers were just a few of the suggested decorative themes. As for furniture, a wise mother would be careful to put a table and chairs for her daughter to play hostess with her friends and thus foster her homemaking instincts.⁸⁶ For the teen-ager, a draped dressing table would do much to establish her femininity as it was believed that girls had frivolous tastes and that the vain female always needed to look at herself in the mirror.⁸⁷

By contrast, the watch-words in a boy's room were simplicity and sturdiness as boys were known to be tough on carpet and furniture. Any young man would prefer an "eye-easy" and practical room over his sister's ribbons and bows. In fact, while it sounded like girls

were imposed a certain type of bedroom, boys seemed to know exactly what they wanted and parents submitted to their desires : “The masculine taste for simplicity and for items that will stand up to rugged use, emerges early. In furnishing a boy’s room, parents can’t go far wrong when they pick sturdy, unfussy pieces (...).”⁸⁸ As a member of the opposite sex, a mother had to restrain herself when decorating her son’s room to avoid feminine touches :

No matter how much *you* may like dainty effects, steer far from them when planning a room or rooms for your young sons. Boys like sturdy rooms in which they can do about as they please with no worry about being chastised for their acts. Keep the ruffles and frills... the dainty pink-and-white color-schemes for the daughters. And at all time remember that a boy’s room should be of the type that won’t show soil, will take a great deal of scuffing and hard wear... be *masculine* in color-effects.⁸⁹

A real “he-man” had plenty of storage for sporting gear, shelves for books and bunk beds for adventurous little boys who did not mind climbing a ladder to go to bed. As for decorative themes, specialists suggested soldiers, rockets, ships, trains, planes, race cars, sports, cow-boys, horses and dogs.⁹⁰ Aside from the motifs, the rest of the rules applied to the young adult as well :

Bedrooms planned for men should reflect that fact at a glance. No frills, no furbelows, sheer fabrics or dainty lamps. The room should flaunt strong colors, sturdy and practical materials, non-breakable accessories. (...) And a desk that isn’t straightened up except by the man himself is a must.⁹¹

Decorating the rest of the house following established gender rules was more complicated and not as clear-cut because men and women shared the space. Interior decorator Edith Wight told *Saturday Night* readers that the decoration should be a combination of the couple’s tastes, but she admitted that the wife’s preferences often dominated unless the husband insisted the home took on a more masculine look because he

was paying the bill.⁹² Following experts' prescriptions, women tried to give personality to a room while men wanted comfort and simplicity. A considerate wife sat down with her husband to know his preferences, stopped rationalizing with the feminine logic and agreed to compromise because "(...) beneath the roof that shelters the family, decoration and furnishings should have a masculine as well as a feminine gender."⁹³

This principle was especially true in the master bedroom which had to be adapted to the two occupants. Going easy on the feminine touches could even help avoid fights because the husband would feel more at ease in this room. Like modern marriages, decorating the master bedroom had become a fifty-fifty affair, meaning that "(...) women no longer reign supreme in this room. The frills and furbelows are on their way out and tailored washable spreads and tidy make-up tables are coming in so that the man in your life can feel comfortably at home here, too, without catching his foot in a ruffle or knocking over a powder box."⁹⁴ Without making her husband feel he was "(...) trapped in a ladie's lounge,"⁹⁵ a young bride should try to have a dainty dressing table in the bedroom because "Every man likes to see his wife being truly feminine [and] an attractive dressing table does much to establish that role."⁹⁶ However, that was as far as she could go. If she had an overwhelming love for flowers, she should put them where her husband rarely went, namely the kitchen.

Another room where the housewife was told to restrain her feminine touches was in the bathroom. As the whole family was using this room, it would be inappropriate to make "(...) it look like milady's dressing room."⁹⁷ Also, a well-lit mirror was a must for "Few ill-tempered men would appear at breakfast were the light for shaving all it should be."⁹⁸ Finally, to avoid fights over wet laundry hanging in the bathroom (described as a women's

habit that men found exasperating) the lady of the house should buy a large stand with bars and set it up at one end of the tub. The racks could be used "(...) for towels and face cloths but they [did] their best service for freshly washed stockings and lingerie," keeping both sides happy.⁹⁹

Compromise could also be found in the combination of colours and features. A male look was considered solid, tailored and practical because simple in design while feminine touches were usually associated with unstimulating, unpractical and expensive decoration. Fortunately, according to specialists, it was possible to achieve a balanced look. For example, a bathroom could be completely feminine and practical at the same time with "(...) walls, fixtures and plastic counter top all in pale pink." In a writing-room, "Rosy geraniums in white flower pots" added an unexpensive feminine touch. In a girl's room a mix of coral, pink, chocolate and white was considered stimulating and feminine.¹⁰⁰

F. "Don't be afraid of colours"¹⁰¹ : Giving a Lift to the Home and its Occupants

When interior decorators approached the subject of colour in their articles, it was more often associated with its influence on temperament rather than its gender-training potential. Contributing to gracious living, colour was said to have an effect comparable to vitamins on metabolism or a dash of cayenne on meat loaf.¹⁰² Not only could it revive a drab house, it also helped people cure their case of the blues. But one had to be careful when choosing a colour scheme. Colour consultant Ruth Hamilton gave the example of a wife with depressed spirits : "The blue-and-black environment had aggravated the woman's psychic illness, whereas the red surroundings were the first step toward helping her to normal behavior and happiness." Conversely, for the overly excitable woman, it was

discouraged to use such colours as orange and red because they were considered too stimulating. Hamilton prescribed blue to calm her down and bring back her rationality.¹⁰³ Colours should also be inviting and inspiring for the tired or frustrated man coming home after a hard day at the office. To start the day on the right foot, the bedroom should be painted in the favourite colour of the occupant, despite the fact that people spent most of the time there with their eyes closed, because "Uneasy is the head that wakes up facing a dingy ceiling."¹⁰⁴ Since "(...) color has such a profound effect upon the mood and the feeling of a room - and because this, in turn, has such a profound effect upon the state of mind of anyone who spends much time in that room," meticulous thought had to be given to the choice of a colour scheme.¹⁰⁵ However, throughout her seven home decoration lessons, Catherine Fraser insisted that when deciding on a colour combination, the housewife could not go wrong with nature's contrasts and patterns. She would find infallible colour harmonies by paying close attention to a sunset or a river running through a park.¹⁰⁶

Colours could also enhance the appearance of the occupants and this propriety was especially advantageous when someone came down with the flu and had to stay in bed. Fraser warned readers that "You'll look and feel your worst then - make sure the room helps you out on both counts."¹⁰⁷ It was even suggested that coloured sheets and pillow cases could actually make occupants look better and even younger.¹⁰⁸ The dining room was another place where colour was critical. Deep rose was said to be "(...) flattering to the ladies and the food" while chartreuse should be avoided at all costs since it was unflattering to food and faces.¹⁰⁹ Colour could even act as a cooking aid when the housewife picked one that had a pleasing effect and made food appetizing as "Every meal is a masterpiece when it's served

in harmonious surroundings,” otherwise “(...) a mistake in color can actually affect your appetite.”¹¹⁰

In the kitchen, colour was used to boost the morale of the homemaker. Like modern equipment and efficient organization, a splash of colour could make kitchen work more attractive as it gave the housewife a lift everytime she walked in. She could paint the inside of the cabinets a different colour from the exterior, perhaps green and coral, and make the handles of the utensils match. Appliance manufacturers also went to great lengths to help their female customers create a colourful kitchen. International Harvester introduced in the early fifties refrigerators with coloured handles (the company insisted they were “femineered”) and in 1953, it popularized the “Decorator Refrigerator”. In only seven minutes, the housewife could make the door match her curtains by covering it with the same fabric. This trend rapidly led to coloured kitchen appliances and bathrooms soon became as colourful as tubs, basins and toilets were available in shell pink, manchu yellow, regency blue, persian red and pale jade.¹¹¹

Such colour combination as aquamarine and brown, yellow and green, leads historian Doug Owrap to conclude that “By the time the interior was all put together, it could be quite overwhelming.”¹¹² However, since bright colours did not cost more than dull ones, why not give it a shot, especially with the positive effects on one’s mood and attitude. Besides, experts conscious of readers’ limited budget recommended colour as an unexpensive way to give a home a face-lift “(...) when you decorate on a shoestring.”¹¹³

G. The Pocketbook Challenge : The Art of Decorating on a Budget

Indeed, in this period of small houses and high housing costs, interior decoration

experts advised readers on how to make the most of what they had, where it be in reference to their limited savings or to the furniture and accessories previously acquired.¹¹⁴ In fact, many families went beyond their pocketbook to buy that suburban home, which meant that women, generally responsible for administering the household's finances, used every means they could to stretch their decorating dollars.¹¹⁵ According to Valerie Korinek, home decorating courses in *Chatelaine* "(...) were clearly written for younger women, who would be decorating their first homes, since they stressed planned buying, economizing on a budget, and dealt with issues for which new homeowners needed assistance."¹¹⁶ This conclusion also applies to the *Canadian Home Journal* and the *Canadian Homes and Gardens* as they too tried to teach the the art of "(...) achiev[ing] wonderful effect with the greatest respect to your bank account."¹¹⁷

Most specialists, using examples of real couples and families to be more convincing, maintained that clever ideas, enthusiasm, and determination made up for lack of cash. When money was scarce, painting was cheap and fun but it required a lot of elbow-grease, "(...) but that is something every homemaker has plenty of when she wants to get an 'effect' in her home!"¹¹⁸ With organization and hard work, a housewife on a slender budget could undertake any decorating project because there was no limit to her imagination and inventiveness. Do-it-yourself projects were deemed preferable for households short on cash as professional services were too expensive. A woman could make her own draperies and curtains or refinish second-hand furniture and invest the money she saved somewhere else. Wallpaper and potted plants were also suggested as inexpensive ways to change a room. One author promised that readers could fool visitors with coloured cushions that cost little

“But the resulting charm and comfort will lead all comers to believe that you are living beyond your means!”¹¹⁹ As noted by Janna Jones who has studied interior design manuals, by giving advice on how to achieve the look of the wealthier class with little financial resources, experts reminded the general female readership that they just were not part of that social class, but that they could satisfy themselves with imitations.¹²⁰

However, most interior decorators were realistic and admitted that redecorating a room came with a price. They told their readers to take a long-term view and plan for gradual changes that would avoid straining budget and morale. This way, the room could still be functional while the household was trying to find money to finish the job. When furnishing a nursery, parents were advised to buy second-hand furniture because baby would soon outgrow it and in children’s room, they should buy pieces that will grow with the kids and paint the walls ivory to match any pastel or bright colour they may prefer later on.

Furniture seemed to be the biggest blow to a tight budget, so experts suggested buying it in stages (over months) and investing more initially on basic pieces that were cheap to maintain.¹²¹ Barbara Reynolds cautioned readers about buying without a plan and insisted on the importance of shopping wisely :

Furnishing a home is a long-term investment, and an expensive one. (...) Too many homemakers buy things on the spur of the moment and spend the next three months trying to make them look right in their homes. With a little organization, you will know exactly what you want to buy and will not be tempted by so-called and usually costly ‘bargains’. Buy with the future in mind, and remember : good design never goes out of style.¹²²

The housewife should stick with her plan and not let well-meaning friends tempt her with their suggestions. When in doubt she could turn to the different home bureaus established

by women's magazines and stop being a guinea pig believing every ad and trying all the new gadgets.¹²³ Home decorating experts were promoting "enlightened consumerism" ,¹²⁴ assisting women in one of the multiple roles they were expected to assume in post-war Canada.

Using her creativity and artistic talent, the Canadian housewife was to personalize her home, making it livable and individual in this era of small and nearly identical houses. Looking after her family's needs before her own, she consulted her husband and children before undertaking any redecorating project. She provided them with a space of their own, while she had to satisfy herself with her "workshop", but she made sure that everyone could meet in a pleasant atmosphere to share their joys and disappointments. The kitchen benefitted from technological innovations, making it more efficient and practical, but the introduction of electric appliances reinforced the idea of home as a place of work for women. Through her choice of fabrics, colours and accessories, the homemaker taught her children proper gender roles and preserved her husband's masculinity, all the while keeping a close eye on the budget. Wife, mother, tension manager, cook, housekeeper, and consumer, the modern woman had to combine these roles in order to become the amateur decorator experts described in their articles.

1. This question will be addressed in more detail in the next section, which discusses gender roles as presented in home decorating articles.

2. Borrowed from Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams : Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72.4 (December 1994) : 492.

3. Ruth Jeffrey, "Your Home Should Be a Mirror," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.9 (January 1948) : 53 and John Freeling Hunt, "Common Mistakes in Decoration," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 24.12 (December 1947) : 71.

4. Karen Halttunen, "From Parlor to Living Room : Domestic Space, Interior Decoration, and the Culture of Personality," *Consuming Visions : Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 1989) 172 ; "Change for the Better," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 22.8 (August 1945) : 19 and "Portfolio of Canadian Decoration," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.2 (February 1948) : 13.
5. Catherine Fraser, "Make Your Living Room Come Alive," *Chatelaine* 25.10 (October 1952) : 24.
6. Hunt, "Common Mistakes in Decoration," 34.
7. John Caulfield Smith, "Young Modern's Room," *Chatelaine* 22.11 (November 1949) : 92.
8. Margit Bennett, "Decorating is a Highly Personal Art," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 35.1 (January 1958) : 13.
9. John R. Seeley, R. Alexander Sim, and E.W. Loosley, *Crestwood Heights : A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1956) 51.
10. "Change for the Better," 19.
11. "Variations on a Restful Theme," *Canadian Home Journal* 48.9 (January 1952) : 44.
12. Joyce Bainard, "Wake Up Your Home," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.5 (May 1949) : 25 and Canadian Youth Commission, *Youth, Marriage, and the Family* (Toronto : The Ryerson Press, 1948) ix.
13. "At Home... in Canada," *Canadian Home Journal* 52.9 (January 1956) : 23.
14. "Go to it, Kids," *Canadian Home Journal* 48.9 (January 1952) : 58 ; "Decorating for the Whole Family," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 27.9 (September 1950) : 21. In their study of Crestwood Heights, Seeley and his colleagues found that these parents adhered to the principle of the home serving every member of the family. However, they were very protective of their possessions and preferred to have a separate room for the children because of their boisterous behaviour. In this light, the authors deplored the fact that rumpus and children's rooms were in reality designed and decorated to suit adults' comfort, ambitions and purpose rather than children's tastes. Seeley *et al.*, *Crestwood Heights*, 53.
15. Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 215.
16. John Caulfield Smith, "House with Young Ideas," *Chatelaine* 19.6 (June 1946) : 12.
17. It was advised that children's room should be bigger than a cubicle, but if parents could not afford two separate bedrooms, they should at least arrange to have a sliding wall for nighttime and provide both kids with separate bookshelves, closets and toyboxes as a way to promote their individuality and independence.
18. Joan Chalmers, "Make Way for Baby," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.7 (July 1949) : 22. The male gender is used here in line with the examples given in the article. In fact, when children were

mentioned, experts named the average youngster Junior.

19. "Christopher Gets a New Room and Overnight Becomes a Real Young Man," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 31.2 (February 1954) : 18.

20. "They're Never Too Young for a Nice Room," *Canadian Home Journal* 52.9 (January 1956) : 46.

21. Emphasis in the text. Louise Price Bell, "A Child's Room Should Be Attractive and Practical," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.10 (February 1948) : 53.

22. Chalmers, "Make Way for Baby," 19 ; Charlene Champness, "Washable Nursery," *Chatelaine* 23.3 (March 1950) : 54.

23. D.C. Williams, "Are You Henpecked by a House," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 33.1 (January 1956) : 9.

24. Emphasis in the text. "Do Their Rooms in a Gay Mood," *Chatelaine* 20.11 (November 1947) : 86 and Seeley *et al.*, *Crestwood Heights*, 55.

25. Margit Bennett, "Inspired Ideas for Children's Rooms," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 36.10 (October 1959) : 25.

26. Catherine Fraser, "Make Your Whole Home Harmonize," *Chatelaine* 25.11 (November 1952) : 39.

27. "A Good Place to Eat...," *Canadian Home Journal* 49.4 (August 1952) : 58 ; Collier Stevenson, "A Place for Meals," *Canadian Home Journal* 42.6 (October 1945) : 69 and "Here's to Pleasant Dining," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.1 (January 1948) : 24. There is another interpretation as to the preference for smaller kitchens. According to Marion Roberts, "This intention was presumably based on a desire to cultivate the appearance of a middle-class life style where the housewife would play the part of an unseen servant, so that meals would 'appear' in front of husband and children." *Living in a Man-Made World : Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design* (London : Routledge, 1990) 83.

28. Catherine Fraser, "A Place to Eat," *Chatelaine* 25.9 (September 1952) : 19 and 63. See also "Invitation to Dinner," *Canadian Home Journal* 48.9 (January 1952) : 27.

29. Dottie Walter, "Homes for Tomorrow," *Canadian Home Journal* 42.2 (June 1945) : 30.

30. A home of one's own was thought to be essential to avoid friction between generations as living with in-laws could put quite a strain on family ties. It was also described as a "deep personal need" when satisfied "(...) [reduced] many of today's much-talked-of tensions." See "Everyone Needs Breathing Space," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 29.8 (August 1952) : 9. On the subject of returning veterans and frictions that were bound to arise when a wife has to share a roof with her mother-in-law, see "A Home of their Own," *Canadian Home Journal* 42.7 (November 1945) : 96.

31. J.M. Bumsted, "Home Sweet Suburb : The Great Post-War Migration," *The Beaver* 72.5 (October-November 1992) : 31. It should be noted however that the desire to combine privacy and

togetherness in house design is not new and could be found in the mid-19th century in the United States. See Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History : The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7.1 (Summer 1976) : 33-56.

32. Cynthia Rock, Susana Torre, and Gwendolyn Wright, "The Appropriation of the House : Changes in House Design and Concepts of Domesticity," *New Space for Women*, ed. Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson, and David Morley (Boulder, CO : Westview Press, 1980) 95.

33. Three authors note that with oil replacing coal as the source of heat in most post-war homes, the basement could be used as a rec-room for children or a family room, making the living room an adult-only space for parents. Deryck W. Holdsworth, and Joan Simon, "Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space," *House, Home, and Community : Progress in Housing Canadians, 1945-1986*, ed. John R. Miron (Montreal and Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 194 and Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time : A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1996) 66.

34. Isabel Schwartz, "How to Make the Most of Your Living Room," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 28.6 (June 1951) : 30 and "How the Morrisons Manage to Budget, Build and Furnish," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.4 (April 1948) : 25.

35. Emphasis in the text. Ruby Price Weeks, "Your Living Room, Do You Live in It," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.12 (April 1948) : 57 and 59.

36. Catherine Fraser, "The Problems of the Small Bedroom," *Chatelaine* 25.6 (June 1952) : 40.

37. Barbara Calvert, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," *Canadian Home Journal* 42.2 (June 1945) : 54.

38. Louise Price Bell, "Trophies from Afar," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.11 (March 1947) : 31.

39. G.E. Valentine, "We Solved Our Housing Problem," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.5 (September 1947) : 70.

40. James A. Knight, "Ideas Are Built In All Over This House," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 36.11 (November 1959) : 20.

41. Margaret Hobbs, and Ruth Roach Pierson, "When Is a Kitchen Not a Kitchen?," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 7.4 (Winter 1986) : 74.

42. Priscilla McKnight, "Do You Ride a Hobby Horse," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.1 (May 1947) : 30, 31 and 33.

43. Anne Chapman, "Space and Place : Territorial Training for Traditional Gender Roles," *Women and Environments* 7.1 (Winter 1985) : 8.

44. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 20th Anniversary Ed. (New York : Dell Publishing, 1984) 246.

45. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were : American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York : Basic Books, 1992) 28.

46. Clark, *The American Family Home*, 242.

47. "Now the Kitchen Joins the Party," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 31.1 (January 1954) : 20.

48. Pat Woodward, "Today's Busy Mothers Need a New Kind of Kitchen," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 30.2 (February 1953) : 13 ; "Two Good Kitchens You Can Plan From," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 32.6 (June 1955) : 26 ; "24 Hours of Good Living," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 32.8 (August 1955) : 29 and James A. Knight, "R for Family Sanity - A Good Floor Plan," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 35.4 (April 1958) : 99.

49. It was suggested that in a more open kitchen, men would try their hand at cooking but only as a hobby or to impress guests. Margaret Ecker Francis, "'There's a Man in the House,' Interior Decorators Say," *Saturday Night* 67.29 (April 29, 1952) : 40.

50. Borrowed from Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World*, 78.

51. Collier Stevenson, "New Year - New Era," *Canadian Home Journal* 41.9 (January 1945) : 42.

52. General Steel Wares Advertisement, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 22.5 (May 1945) : 90 and General Electric Advertisement, *Canadian Home Journal* 42.1 (May 1945) : 94.

53. Moyra Tooke, "Kitchen Special", *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 34.3 (March 1957) : 13 and Stanley Fillmore, "How to Plan a Kitchen that's Friendly and Efficient Too," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 34.3 (March 1957) : 27.

54. Clark, *The American Family Home*, 204. In line with the problems of the small house, experts proposed a combination kitchen-laundry room that would save space and steps as the housewife spent most of her time in those two rooms.

55. However, by the end of the fifties, appliances were widely available. In 1958 it was estimated that 71% of Canadian households had an electric or gas range, 86.6% owned a washer (wringer or automatic) and 86.3% had a mechanical refrigerator. Joy Parr, "Trading Up and Building Load : Appliances Designed for Saturated Markets," unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Economic History Conference, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON, 1997, 1.

56. Laura Harris, "Look What's Happening to Living : How to Have a Friendly Kitchen," *Chatelaine* 27.4 (April 1954) : 102.

57. Kay Darcy, "Look What's Happening to Living," *Chatelaine* 26.10 (October 1953) : 11.

58. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother : The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York : Basic Books, 1983) 209 and Susan Strasser, *Never Done : A History of American Housework* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1982) 268.

59. Roberts, *Living In a Man-Made World*, 90. According to John Miron, this progress in home-making technology may also have reinforced the demand for smaller dwellings during the post-war

period. This author contends that "By making home-making easier, they (these innovations) contributed to the number of individuals who found it feasible to live alone or in a small household and stimulated the demand for smaller dwellings." John Miron, *Housing in Postwar Canada : Demographic Change, Household Formation, and Housing Demand* (Montreal and Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988) 10.

60. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 239.

61. Television has been another technological innovation demanding changes in room arrangement, furniture, and even eating habits (TV dinners). Replacing the fireplace as the focus of the living room, it also disturbed dinnertime. Some households chose to move meals to the living room in order not to miss any moment of entertainment. Nancy Chisholm, "When You Arrange for TV," *Canadian Home Journal* 49.7 (November 1952) : 61 ; "TV Is Changing Our Living," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 32.10 (October 1955) : 57 ; "TV Where You Like It," *Canadian Home Journal* 52.9 (January 1956) : 32 and 34 and Margit Bennett, "How to Make Your TV Set Fit in the Picture," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 36.8 (August 1959) : 28.

62. Louise Fradet, "Femmes, cuisines et consommation de masse au Québec, 1945-1960," *Bulletin du regroupement des chercheurs-chercheuses en histoire des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec* 17.2 (Summer 1991) : 32.

63. "Work is Easier in the Right Kind of Kitchen," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.3 (March 1948) : 32 and John Caulfield Smith, "Efficiency Can Be Built In," *Chatelaine* 20.11 (November 1947) : 100.

64. However, scientific management as applied to kitchen work came with its contradictions. Dolores Hayden observes that "(...) this was a logical impossibility, since scientific management required the specialization and division of labor, and the essence of private housework was its isolated, unspecialized character (...)." As for Joy Parr, she suggests that scientific management came about at a time when "(...) a generation of consumers [were] seeking the signs of science with which to validate their unpaid work within the home." Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution : A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1981) 285 and Joy Parr, "Shopping for a Good Stove : A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 91.

65. Doris Thistlewood, "Buy Your Kitchen Ready-Made," *Chatelaine* 29.8 (August 1957) : 16-17 and Harris, "Look What's Happening to Living : How to Have a Friendly Kitchen," 94.

66. Jonathan Hill, "Why not Start with Your Kitchen," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.9 (September 1949) : 21.

67. John Caulfield Smith, Consumer Councillors and *Chatelaine* Institute, "Are Canadian Kitchens Obsolete," *Chatelaine* 20.11 (November 1947) : 28.

68. John Caulfield Smith, "You Asked for More Cupboards and Counters," *Chatelaine* 21.3 (March 1948) : 88.

69. "Save Time... and Steps," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.10 (October 1948) : 64.

70. Mary-Etta Macpherson, "Postwar Houses," *Chatelaine* 18.5 (May 1945) : 96.
71. Arborite Company Limited Advertisement, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 36.5 (May 1959) : 66.
72. Harris, "Look What's Happening to Living : How to Have a Friendly Kitchen," 100.
73. Margaret Hobbs, and Ruth Roach Pierson, "'A kitchen that wastes no steps...' Gender, Class and the Home Improvement Plan, 1936-40," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 21.41 (May 1988) : 25 ; "Kitchen Work Can Be Child's Play... What About Yours," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.9 (September 1949) : 25 and Ruby Price Weeks, "Mirrors Are a 'Must' in Every Room," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.6 (October 1947) : 58.
74. Priscilla McKnight, "I'm All for Bungalows," *Canadian Home Journal* 43.3 (July 1946) : 30.
75. "How the Morrisons Manage to Budget, Build and Furnish," 28.
76. Versatility and multipurpose features were also present in the bathroom. A sliding bathboard to dry the baby could also be used as a seat for sponge baths, a book rest for father, or a beauty tray for mother when she took a bath. Catherine Fraser, "Bathrooms & Kitchens," *Chatelaine* 25.7 (July 1952) : 50.
77. "Kitchens Are Versatile," *Canadian Home Journal* 49.4 (August 1952) : 63.
78. Clark, *The American Family Home*, 215. This matter is discussed in greater detail below.
79. "Modern Living Means Time-Savers," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.9 (September 1949) : 28 ; "Work is Easier in the Right Kind of Kitchen," 33 ; idea also expressed in John Caulfield Smith, "Chatelaine Presents a House Designed for Better Living," *Chatelaine* 18.1 (January 1946) : 70.
80. Smith *et al.*, "Are Canadian Kitchens Obsolete," 28 ; "Everything but the Kitchen Sink," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.11 (November 1948) : 24 ; John Caulfield Smith, "Color in Your Kitchen," *Chatelaine* 23.3 (March 1950) : 56 and Doris Thistlewood, "Look What's Happening to Living : Put Some Personality into Your Kitchen," *Chatelaine* 28.7 (July 1955) : 24.
81. Smith, "Efficiency Can Be Built In," 99.
82. Kay Darcy, "Look What's Happening to Living : Grandmother's Linen Closet Was Never Like This," *Chatelaine* 27.1 (January 1954) : 40.
83. Beulah Fawcett, "My Husband Remodelled our Kitchen," *Chatelaine* 24.4 (April 1951) : 69.
84. This could also be interpreted as a way to justify women's position and make an undervalued task such as housework more interesting and scientific. Historian Joy Parr believes that "In the postwar years, the laboratory kitchen signalled the worth of domestic work to women leaving the paid labour force and the feasibility of combining waged and non-waged work for those who were not." Parr, "Shopping for a Good Stove," 90.
85. Louise Price Bell, "Bedrooms Have Personality," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.10 (October 1948) : 33.

86. Hobbs and Pierson, "When Is a Kitchen Not a Kitchen?," 74.
87. Weeks, "Mirrors Are a 'Must' in Every Room," 58
88. "Make Mine Practical," *Canadian Home Journal* 49.4 (August 1952) : 50.
89. Emphasis in the text. Louise Price Bell, "Sturdy is the Word for Boys' Rooms," *Canadian Home Journal* 43.12 (April 1947) : 30.
90. Joan Kron has observed a similar pattern in the 1980s : "Parents decorated children's rooms differently and gave them different toys, depending on their sex. A content analysis of the rooms of children under six years old showed that parents gave daughters more dolls, doll houses, and furnishings with lace, fringe, ruffles, and floral motifs ; they gave boys more vehicles, machines, military toys, sports equipment, and furnishings with animal motifs." Joan Kron, *Home-Psych : The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration* (New York : Clarkson N. Potter, 1983) 120.
91. "For the Young Man in Your Family," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 28.2 (February 1951) : 49.
92. Francis, "'There's a Man in the House,' Interior Decorators Say," 41.
93. *Ibid.*, 15.
94. Margaret Newcombe, "Look What's Happening to Living : The Modern Bedtime Story," *Chatelaine* 27.8 (August 1954) : 34.
95. Zena Cherry, "What Men Think About Their Home," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 30.1 (January 1953) : 15.
96. "When a Girl Marries," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 22.5 (May 1945) : 58.
97. Fraser, "Bathrooms & Kitchens," 51.
98. Weeks, "Mirrors Are a 'Must' in Every Room," 58 and "Reflect on This," *Canadian Home Journal* 49.4 (August 1952) : 35.
99. "Bathrooms Need Storage Space Too," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 27.5 (May 1950) : 50.
100. Doris Thistlewood, "Have a Bathroom to Sing About," *Chatelaine* 31.3 (March 1958) : 25 and "Sophisticated Writing-Room," *Canadian Home Journal* 53.9 (January 1957) : 33.
101. Inspired by an article intitled : "Don't be afraid of reds," *Chatelaine* 20.10 (October 1947) : 94.
102. John Caulfield Smith, "Color : The Vitamin for Tired Rooms," *Chatelaine* 21.3 (March 1948) : 56 ; Gertrude Paul, "Color Brings New Beauty to any Home Background," *Canadian Home Journal* 46.12 (April 1950) : 29 and Gertrude Paul, "Now We're Cooking with Color," *Canadian Home Journal* 48.7 (November 1951) : 21.
103. Ruth Hamilton, "Make Your Colors Count," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.5 (May 1949) : 78.

104. Doris McCubbin, "Give Your Home a Splash of Color," *Chatelaine* 25.3 (March 1952) : 7.
105. "Color and How to Proceed Successfully from a Starting Point," *Canadian Home Journal* 48.9 (January 1952) : 34.
106. Catherine Fraser, "Course in Home Decorating," *Chatelaine* 25.5 (May 1952) : 53.
107. Fraser, "The Problems of the Small Bedroom," 40.
108. Darcy, "Look What's Happening to Living : Grandmother's Linen Closet Was Never Like This," 41 and 42.
109. "It's Home... Inside and Out," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 29.1 (January 1952) : 18.
110. "Here's to Pleasant Dining," 24 and Hamilton, "Make Your Colors Count," 79.
111. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 78 ; Parr, "Trading Up and Building Load," 8-9 and International Harvester Advertisement, *Chatelaine* 24.7 (July 1951). For coloured bathroom fixtures see Crane Advertisement, *Canadian Home Journal* 50.4 (August 1953) : 62 and American Standard Advertisement, *Canadian Home Journal* 55.1 (May 1958) : 37.
112. Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, 78-79.
113. "How Would Your Home Rate," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 27.10 (October 1950) : 23. Idea also expressed in Smith, "Color : The Vitamin for Tired Rooms," 56.
114. The "patching business" is still a prevalent theme in women's magazines. Jean Gordon, and Jan McArthur, "Interior Decorating Advice as Popular Culture : Women's Views Concerning Wall and Window Treatments, 1870-1920," *Journal of American Culture* 9.4 (Winter 1986) : 16. For more on how to save, the origins of these tips and their evolution in the 1980s, see Chapter 6 : "Service and Home : The Seven Sisters Adapt to the 1980s" in Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines : From Mademoiselle to Ms* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1993) 173-195.
115. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams," 491 and "'Their Side of the Story' : Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-60," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 62.
116. Valerie J. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia : Reading *Chatelaine* Magazine 1950-1969," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996) 201.
117. "Ready to 'Receive'," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 22.5 (May 1945) : 32.
118. Louise Price Bell, "A Bright New Room - At Little Cost," *Canadian Home Journal* 42.6 (October 1945) : 72.
119. "Budget Decorating with Colorful Cushions," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 27.9 (September 1950) : 9.

120. Janna Jones, "The Distance from Home : The Domestication of Desire in Interior Design Manuals," *Journal of Social History* 31.2 (Winter 1997) : 310, 311 and 321.

121. "Furnishing on a 3-year Plan," *Canadian Home Journal* 54.9 (January 1958) : 23 ; "How to Buy Good Furniture in Easy Stages," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 36.2 (February 1959) : 26-27, 46.

122. Barbara Reynolds, "Your Guide to Good Decorating," *Canadian Home Journal* 54.9 (January 1958) : 19.

123. Dottie Walter, "Homes for Tomorrow," *Canadian Home Journal* 42.2 (June 1945) : 8.

124. Jean Gordon, and Jan McArthur, "Popular Culture, Magazines and American Domestic Interiors, 1898-1940," *Journal of Popular Culture* 22.4 (Spring 1989) : 37.

IV. "WHEN WOMEN WERE WOMEN, MEN WERE MEN, AND THE RULES WERE CLEAR"¹ : GENDER ROLES IN POST-WAR HOME DECORATING LITERATURE

The fifties were a period of fixed gender roles. They were firmly defined and categorized by American sociologists Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales in their celebrated *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process* (1955). Parsons and Bales attempted to explain how male and female (biological) differences contributed to the perpetuation of the social system. Reflecting the behaviours and aspirations of white middle-class families,² their analysis determined that adults had specialized roles within the family, men taking on the instrumental role of providing for their dependants and acting as a link between family and wider society, while women were assigned the expressive role of nurturing and managing relationships among family members. This division of labour did exist, but it was more visible in the suburbs where family roles were clearly defined. Husbands would leave early in the morning to earn a living in town, while their wives were actually responsible for the daily functioning of the home.³

If this model did not apply to society as a whole, home decorating columns published in English-Canadian women's magazines nevertheless mirrored these traditional roles, leaving little room for alternatives. Women were more often portrayed as dedicated wives and mothers waiting for their breadwinner husbands to come home after work. Experts also promoted this sexual division of labour by suggesting that men and women use their distinct "natural" abilities when decorating, thus making some tasks more appropriate for one sex. Paradoxically, if women "naturally" inherited the responsibility of making a house a home, the skills required to undertake such a project were acquired and fostered through advice literature. The modern woman was not born an interior decorator, but she could use her

common sense and knowledge of her family's preferences to achieve a charming effect adapted to every member's needs. Specialists made a point to reassure the amateur decorator in various ways all the while reminding her of the proper gender roles assigned to adults.

A. "Weekend husbands"⁴ : Male Breadwinners Waiting for Dinner to Be Served

In home decorating articles, men were usually referred to as the husbands (and sometimes as sons) of female readers to whom these suggestions were addressed. As a general rule, they were in the picture when money matters were being discussed and experts emphasized their role as providers by underlining their occupation. Most men featured in these articles were professionals with a high level of responsibilities. In fact, if one were to go only by the occupations mentioned, every man in post-war Canada was either an architect, a photographer, an engineer, a university professor, a doctor or a businessman. A good portion of them were also former servicemen now working from nine to five in an office, wearing suits and ties.⁵ These demanding professions justified a man's need for a quiet place to relax while waiting for dinner to be served, making home "(...) the one place he may be himself, relieved of pressing responsibilities, free of competition, sure of warmth and companionship."⁶

Their role of breadwinners often made these men "weekend husbands" and fathers, but their prolonged absence during the week did not seem to undermine their authority over the household as their wives consulted them before redecorating or making major purchases. The housewife was strongly advised to refrain from adding too many feminine touches that would make her husband feel out of place or else she could not blame him for

coming home late at night. It could also be argued that women in “matriarchal suburbs” sought their husbands’ opinion as a way to make them think they were still in charge. However, regardless of what really happened in Canadian homes after the Second World War, specialists painted these men as being in control of the finances. Even if mother did the actual buying, Mr. Home-Owner was the one who “(...) [wrote] the monthly (...) cheques.”⁷

First presented as sole providers and then as husbands and fathers, men had a small place in home decorating advice except as life partners of female readers or when money and sometimes physical strength were needed to redecorate a room. However, since the experts’ suggestions were chiefly aimed at homemakers, interior decoration columns contain details more appropriate to delineate women’s multiple roles and responsibilities within the household.

B. “Jacks of all trades” : Women’s Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

The post-war media popularized the image of the happy homemaker and dedicated mother eager to please her husband and children by preparing culinary masterpieces, surrounded by gadgets in her modern kitchen.⁸ This resurgence of the domestic ideal was accompanied by a back-to-the-pedestal movement that glorified women’s role as wives, mothers, and homemakers, making them queens of their castle “(...) for, as Betty Friedan observed, the less a real function that role has, the more it is decorated with meaningless details to conceal its emptiness.”⁹ It should be noted that this renewed cult of domesticity “(...) offered women the opportunity to cultivate outside interests but not to play the same roles in society as men.” Home decorating articles conveyed this message through the

ideological discourse underlying the experts' advice.¹⁰

Interior decoration columns generally hinted that marriage and family were a woman's most desirable fate. Most women featured in these articles were either married (a newlywed or part of an older couple) or were preparing for marriage. They sometimes had a college education, but the rare times this dimension was raised, it seemed secondary and must not interfere with a woman's marriageability. Aside from the pieces specifically aimed at the young bride decorating her first home, numerous authors just took for granted that their readers were married and frequently made reference to their husbands. Children were also present in a good number of articles and recently married women mentioned their plans to start a family in the near future. Thus it would be reasonable to say that all three magazines believed their readership was composed primarily of brides, wives, mothers and homemakers.

Nonetheless, these publications also portrayed women as artists, designers, fashion commentators, models, businesswomen and even as female lawyers and architects. But these women were the exception to the rule. The few career women who made it in the pages of *Chatelaine*, *Canadian Home Journal* and *Canadian Homes and Gardens* can not be said to have followed the typical path of marriage and motherhood. They were usually older women who never married or career girls who would eventually retire to full-time housekeeping and childrearing after their marriage to become "kitchen executives".¹¹ There were only a few cases of young brides keeping their office job to supply their husbands' wages in the hope of someday buying or building their dream house.

However, despite a return to conservative values after the war, before becoming a

wife and mother the career girl could enjoy a certain degree of independence. Indeed, the young executive or college girl could have her own place or share an apartment with other women of her age. As observed by historian Alison Prentice and her colleagues, by the end of the fifties, it was more common and more acceptable for the working young woman or the college girl to live on her own or with people of her own age.¹² This new reality could be seen in some interior decoration articles offering advice on how to decorate an apartment. Still, most experts approached the subject of women's social roles by linking them with women's responsibilities upon entering marriage.

These responsibilities covered a wide spectrum of activities. Indeed, advice literature made mothers jacks of all trades : child psychologists, mediators, babysitters, homemakers, cooks, cleaners, consumers and interior decorators.¹³ Aside from nurturing husband, children and the sick, being a post-war housewife involved more than keeping the house clean and cooking healthy meals. She was also expected to act as a hostess, entertaining friends and making an impression upon her husband's boss and colleagues. In this sense, she was supposed to assist him in his career, helping him expand his professional network to get a promotion. Looking for ideas in magazines, the wife tried to make her home beautiful, efficient, livable and reputable in order to properly reflect her husband's changing status.¹⁴ By adhering to this cult of domesticity, she assured her femininity as well as her husband's masculinity.¹⁵ For her part, Betty Friedan will argue in *The Feminist Mystique* that women redecorated their homes regularly because there was nothing left to do after the laundry and the housework were done, the meals had been prepared and the kids were gone to school. Housewives then redecorated their living-room as a way to fill this

emptiness.¹⁶ Often pictured in magazines as wearing make-up and high heels to vacuum the carpet, women were encouraged to consider housework as an exciting, glamorous and fulfilling occupation.¹⁷

However, no matter how busy she was at handling the house, the modern woman found time for outside interests, which were generally extensions of her daily chores and responsibilities. She was part of a sewing club or a missionary group, was present at PTA meetings, gave her time to needy causes, tried new recipes, did some gardening (not without some reaction from a disgruntled suburban husband who wanted to stop the women's intrusion into "men's realm"¹⁸). She sometimes held a part-time job which provided extra money for consumption.¹⁹ In these days of well-equipped kitchens, it was possible for a wife and mother to keep her job at the office, but it was far from the norm in home decorating articles.²⁰ Also, while appliances and gadgets may have reduced the time spent on housekeeping, these technological innovations were introduced assuming that the primary role of a woman was still to serve her husband and children.²¹

In this perspective, *Chatelaine's* editor Mary-Etta Macpherson explained that it was "(...) her particular woman's job to create the home within the house, to operate and manage the machinery of it, and jointly with her husband to make the project economically sound."²²

The modern housewife was supposed to provide her loved ones with an environment where they could find security and understanding.²³ Aside from being present for her children by staying at home, she could best accomplish this by redecorating the house with her husband's assistance.

C. Who Did What ? Home Decorating as a Gendered Activity

Women have been associated with home decorating since the mid-nineteenth century after industrialisation further increased the separation between the private and the public spheres. Deemed an appropriate activity for women, it appealed to their sense of taste and creativity in order to make livable a world created by men.²⁴ According to a Victorian theory explaining sexual differences, the smaller size of women's brains made them more apt at arranging and completing work started by men than to come up with something new.²⁵ Despite its discriminatory nature, this division of labour was later transposed to housing, making men responsible for planning and building while women were left with decorating as a way to beautify the house. The vestiges of this assumption could help explain the predominance of female interior decorators and the under-representation of women in architecture, an imbalance observable in advice literature on home decorating.²⁶

Such beliefs about women's abilities and limits were still very much alive in post-war Canada. Some architects thus complained that wives often interfered with their job by making suggestions that were rarely feasible. Architect Suilio Venchiarutti even told *Chatelaine* readers that homemakers were unrealistic, unpractical, inconsistent, and conservative which made it impossible to come up with logical plans that would actually help them save time and labour as well as satisfy their husbands and children's needs. He suspected that women were "(...) too busy living in houses ever to stand back and look at the whole subject of houses objectively, as an architect does. And anyway, men are by nature more objective than women."²⁷ However, most experts avoided this kind of comments ; some even encouraged women to discuss particular requirements with architects to integrate

a solution into the final plan. Without overtly admitting it, they were starting to recognize that housing was a central issue for women because it determined their working conditions.²⁸

Conversely, men did not seem as concerned about the appearance of the interior as long as the house was comfortable and practical. Spending less time at home than their wives, men maintained an impersonal relationship with their house and unlike women, they got their identity from their profession, their social standing and their community, not from the harmony of the living room.²⁹ However, this does not mean they were uninterested in colour combinations and furniture arrangements. Announcing the beginning of a revolution in interior decoration, *Canadian Home Journal* encouraged men to express their views and warned their female readers that :

Furnishing and decorating are by no means the exclusive territory of the distaff side of the household. (...) Plenty of men have pronounced views about color and line, and there's a constantly growing community of sons and husbands who enjoy taking a specific carpentering or painting problem down to their basement workshops and finding a solution.³⁰

In the opinion of a *Canadian Homes and Gardens* contributor, this new-found interest in home decorating was triggered by women and decorators' "shimmering schemes", making it sound as though they were deliberately engaged in a conspiracy to overlook men's needs and preferences.³¹ The same magazine even devoted an entire issue to men and their particular housing necessities. The editors believed that it was time to give them a break :

Our superhome of today has gadgets for mother, playrooms for the kids and even a basket for Rover. But for father? A built-in pipe rack, maybe or a bigger snow shovel. So, this month, we're glorifying the Canadian man with stories galore on all the subjects that men like.³²

Other authors invited women to ask their husbands and sons for suggestions because if given

half a chance, men would certainly have good ideas for their rooms. However, before actually contributing ideas or lending a hand, husbands made decorating possible by providing Mrs. Consumer with money.

In line with their role of providers, men were mostly referred to as financial backers with the right to approve or veto purchases for the household.³³ A 1945 Durolave Paint ad illustrates men's usual involvement in rejuvenating the home. Dad made the money available while Mom and Mary did the painting. Choosing the colour scheme herself and using washable paint, Mom was proud of her home and the daughter could not wait to show her lovely room to her friends, but more importantly Dad was satisfied with the investment as it cost him half what he expected and he estimated that a professional painter could not have done better.³⁴

Still men were not always bystanders and they got involved especially when a redecorating project turned into a remodelling job, which was often the case in the kitchen. Taking into account his wife's suggestions and ideas (because she knew best what was needed in her workshop), the husband drew the plans (it seemed most men had some experience in design from their training in college...) and installed new cabinets and electrical outlets. If he seriously lacked talent with a hammer, he could call a professional and supervise the work himself, but he needed not to be an expert in carpentry as the average handyman had enough skill to build shelves and frames or fix tables and chairs. His physical strength was also required to move furniture and in this case, the wife was strongly advised to plan on paper first with cut-out silhouettes to save her husband's back and temper : "This helps you get a good room plan without shoving furniture around and driving your husband

crazy.”³⁵

The man of the house having the final say, a woman might even have to trick her husband into approving the changes, especially if he considered them a luxury. Making a plea for a woman’s study, Priscilla McKnight recommended a strategy that would almost assure her of getting that elusive room of her own :

(...) I suggest you sit down and do a bit of scheming. Plan up your own beloved’s very favorite dinner, select a day when he seems particularly amicable, and then, after feeding him well, blitz him with all the subtlety and tact you can muster, and, first thing you know, he’ll be *helping* you plan your own hobby room.³⁶

Using her cooking skills and her charm, a wife could convince the bill-footer to invest the money needed to undertake a redecorating project, but this kind of advice suggested that women’s demands were not always justified and that it was men who really held the purse strings, thus accentuating their state of economic dependence. That was what retailers believed as they assumed that women buying appliances reported to their husbands because they would end up paying for these purchases, making the housewife a “purchasing agent” accountable to the male breadwinner.³⁷ Since these women were spending someone else’s money, it was thought necessary “(...) to educate [them] in consumption, style and taste,” the openly admitted objective of home decorating advice.³⁸

As discussed in the previous section on the basic principles of interior decoration, do-it-yourself projects were one way to reduce expenses. Carefully planning her purchases, the homemaker proceeded to upholster the chairs, cover the couch and cushions, and make draperies and slipcovers. Using her skills with needles and scissors, she was encouraged to make her own curtains, but it seemed she did not need much incentive to engage in this kind

of activity. When women moved into a new house, it was actually the first thing they thought about, sometimes to the detriment of more important or essential details :

Set a woman down in the middle of a desert island, provide her with a shelter, and what is the first thing she'll do? Make curtains out of palm fronds, of course! From the earliest pioneer days when precious bits of flour sacking were saved for this purpose right up to now when our first act on moving is to 'get the curtains up,' we women have found some of our greatest satisfaction in this ritual.³⁹

To save money, the lady of the house was also taught how to lay tiles in her kitchen or bathroom. *Canadian Homes and Gardens* had a homemaker illustrate the seven steps and as she measured, applied cement, cut and laid the tiles, the reader could see her accomplish this task and manage to stay feminine with her varnished nails and delicate apron.⁴⁰

If it was never too early to teach children good taste, it was also important for them to acquire the skills to decorate their own rooms or at least assist their mother. Mom was advised to let her teenage daughter get acquainted with a sewing machine, initiating her to the "curtain ritual" and inexpensive decorating. A young gal could then count on Mother's advisory and Father's financial help to give a pleasing effect to her bedroom.⁴¹ Mothers were also invited to make their youngsters participate in the decoration of their rooms by letting them help with cut-outs or paint the furniture. According to a *Chatelaine* contributor, "(...) they can never learn younger, they'll get into the paint anyway, and it's easier to concentrate all the activity and accidents in one spot."⁴²

In fact, despite a division of labour, decorating could also be a family affair when rearranging a children's room as parents stripped the wallpaper and patched the walls while father took care of the electrical work and the carpentry. Mom made the curtains and

bedspreads and with the help of her boys, she scrapped the wood, pasted figures on the walls and painted the furniture.⁴³ However even when an activity was considered appropriate for both sexes, husband and wife were involved in different stages of the process. When painting for example, he climbed and stood on the scaffolding to paint the top of the wall and the ceiling while she remained on the ground to paint the bottom.

D. "No one can decorate your house as well as you can"⁴⁴ : Reassuring the Female Amateur Decorator

Yet, when the rest of the family pitched in, the housewife was still in charge of decorating her home and with so many things to remember and so many opportunities to make a mistake, she also needed some reassurance to put this advice into practice. Post-war women were bombarded with advice on how to make their house a home and even courses were designed to put their fears to rest and give them the confidence they need to start redecorating.⁴⁵ Thought to be subject to panic and dismay, Canadian housewives had to be informed about the basic clues of home decorating and reassured about their abilities as amateur decorators. This is what experts were set out to do through their articles. But it is quite possible that these numerous suggestions had the opposite effect since women who read this kind of magazines were often treated as if they had no idea on how to use and vary their homes.⁴⁶ Whether this advice did create anxiety and a feeling of ineptitude among women is beyond the scope of this study. But we can argue, along with historian Doug Owram, that this kind of literature "(...) [struck] just the right tone for a generation that believed in experts but needed reassurance."⁴⁷

Specialists warned readers that it was impossible for a homemaker to possess the

skills and knowledge of the professional decorator without specialized training, but she could compensate for this situation by carefully noting every detail and studying hard.⁴⁸ In this sense, the amateur decorator should not be ashamed to ask for assistance as few people “(...) should undertake extensive decoration changes without the help of experts. They guide your spending where it will do the most ; yet keep the result directly an expression of your taste.”⁴⁹ For readers who could not afford the services of a professional decorator coming directly into their homes, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* and *Canadian Home Journal* offered a room decorating service. Experts Kathleen Scott and Elizabeth Kent helped housewives solve their decoration dilemmas by offering personalized advice based on plans and questionnaires filled out by readers. For two dollars, they received suggestions on how to rearrange their furniture and choose colours, and even got samples of fabric, carpet and wallpaper.⁵⁰

Other experts were even more encouraging and assured the housewife that she already possessed the instinct to tastefully decorate a room : “(...) decorating is really in every woman’s bag of tricks. Try, test, use your imagination, then go ahead. First thing you know, your plans and homes will be realities.”⁵¹ With originality, ingenuity and imagination, any true homemaker could master the art of decorating and give a room a charming effect even if her home was small and had odd corners.⁵² Every woman was said to have a reservoir of creative ability and to make her dream a reality, she just needed to plan ahead and the results would be beyond expectations. It would certainly take a lot of work, but with experts’ advice the homemaker could accomplish miracles, “For, properly equipped and prepared, you are your own best home decorator.”⁵³ Specialists were enthusiastic about

sharing their home planning, colour scheming and decoration knowledge with readers and it was up to the homemaker to combine it her own ideas “(...) to make [her] home a friendly ‘family’ setting for everyone from Baby Daughter to Dad.”⁵⁴

Some authors told readers that decorating was so easy that any intelligent housewife could do it because it called on knowledge she had previously acquired. Women were urged to have more faith in their good taste and to doubtful readers, *Chatelaine*’s Kay Darcy offered this word of encouragement : “(...) [good taste is] the privilege of any woman who can read, observe and judge her own needs. Every housewife has, in effect, become an interior decorator.”⁵⁵ By using what they already knew, women were told they could do as good of a job as any professional decorator. In fact, they were steps ahead of him because they knew their family’s tastes, likes and dislikes better than anyone else, and were very much aware of their budget.⁵⁶ Home Decorating Consultant Catherine Fraser gave readers a confidence boost when she wrote : “(...) all these things *you* know so well you don’t even have to think about them. Right there you have a head start toward a better job of decorating your own home than any ‘expert’.”⁵⁷ Even colour combinations that seemed so complicated lost their mystery when housewives were told that knowledge of their family’s preferences was what mattered the most.⁵⁸

Another strategy used by experts to reassure their readers was to compare various aspects of decorating with activities familiar to women. John Caulfield Smith thought painting a wall was comparable to applying nail polish and he explained that “(...) two thin coats [were] better than one thick one.”⁵⁹ Like cooking, interior decoration required some basic ingredients and the housewife should follow experts’ advice by adapting it to her

family's needs just like she changed a favorite recipe to suit their tastes.⁶⁰ When it came to preparing this meal, she was the expert and "(...) for the same reason we believe that with an equivalent amount of knowledge about home decorating you can make your house more charming for your way of life than can anyone else."⁶¹ Finally, home decorating was also similar to fashion in two ways. Mrs. Disney of Toronto believed that : "(..) if a woman dresses well, she probably decorates her home equally well," as her taste in clothes would be reflected in the appearance of her interior.⁶² Furthermore, women were advised to add simple touches of white to illuminate a room, just like they could turn a tired costume into a creation.⁶³

Despite all these efforts to reassure readers of their abilities and skills, interior decoration was also a challenge, which made it a fascinating hobby according to Fraser. She contended that with her seven lessons, "You will (...) find that you have merely started down a path that will lead you to constant delight, provide your family with benefit and give you an avocation that will entertain you for a lifetime."⁶⁴ The real homemaker could create a home anywhere and her reward was the pleasure other family members would have in this place. However, one should not automatically interpret home decorating advice as an effective means for post-war women to satisfy themselves entirely with their role as housewives. This was prescriptive literature ; the message that women really recieved and the way they applied this information in their homes are complex processes which cannot be understood by examining only the official discourse.⁶⁵

1. Brett Harvey, *The Fifties : A Women's Oral History* (New York : Harper Collins, 1993) xii.

2. A methodological choice that generated much criticism on the part of other sociologists and social theorists as Parsons and Bales extended their conclusions to the rest of society, not taking into account

class and race differences.

3.J.M. Bumsted, "Home Sweet Suburb : The Great Post-War Migration," *The Beaver* 72.5 (October-November 1992) : 31. Suburbia may have been known for promoting the model of the male breadwinner and female homemaker, but the fact that mother ran the household all day while her husband was off to work in urban centres caused some concerns. Despite a more complex reality, suburbia was often referred to as a matriarchy where women fixed drains and thus took on male roles, which could only confuse children. For a discussion about the gap between the symbolic dichotomy of women/suburban and men/urban and reality, see Susan Saegert, "Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs : Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities," *Women and the American City*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson, Elsa Dixler, Martha J. Nelson, and Kathryn B. Yatrakis (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1981) 93-108.

4.Quoted in Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Their Side of the Story' : Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-60," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 56.

5.John Caulfield Smith, "Be Clever with Closets," *Chatelaine* 22.8 (August 1949) : 53.

6.John R. Seeley, R. Alexander Sim, and E.W. Loosley, *Crestwood Heights : A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1956) 59.

7.Patricia Lamont, "Two Rooms for the Price of One," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 33.10 (October 1956) : 24.

8.Margaret Marsh, "From Separation to Togetherness : The Social Construction of Domestic Space in American Suburbs, 1840-1915," *Journal of American History* 76.2 (September 1989) : 514.

9.Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 20th Anniversary ed. (New York : Dell Publishing, 1984) 239.

10.Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women : A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto : Harcourt Brace, 1996) 383.

11.Arborite Advertisement, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 35.1 (January 1958) : 35.

12.Prentice *et al.*, *Canadian Women : A History*, 379.

13.Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 215 and "24 Hours of Good Living," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 32.8 (August 1955) : 29.

14.Seeley *et al.*, *Crestwood Heights*, 190.

15.Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams : Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72.4 (December 1991) : 483.

16.Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 243. *Chatelaine's* Home Planning Editor, Doris Thistlewood, once pointed out that when the holidays were over, the kids were back to school and she had the house

to herself, the homemaker could no longer ignore the problems. "Face Up that Problem Window," *Chatelaine* 28.9 (September 1955) : 42.

17. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 65.

18. According to H. Fred Dale, women spent too much time gardening while children were fed cold meals and wore unpressed clothing. He stayed out of the kitchen, women should stay clear of the garden. See Dale's manifesto "Suburban Husbands, Arise," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 37.5 (May 1960) : 21. Dale was probably reacting to a blurring of men and women's spheres. Ten years earlier, the same magazine presented the Edwards family in which Midge was the family decorator while her husband George reigned over the garden. Jean McKinley, "Our Cover House : 'We Want It White and Low, As If It Grew There'," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 27.7 (July 1950) : 25.

19. Experts rarely recognized the need for some women to work in order to make ends meet. For the real life story of a 1950s housewife faced with the dilemma of paid work and her husband's reaction, see Edna Staebler, ed., *Haven't Any News : Ruby's Letters from the Fifties* (Waterloo, ON : Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995).

20. "Grandmother Had Nothing on You," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.9 (September 1949) : 76.

21. Marion Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World : Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design* (London : Routledge, 1990) 83.

22. Mary-Etta Macpherson, "Postwar Houses," *Chatelaine* 18.5 (May 1945) : 96.

23. Seeley *et al.*, *Crestwood Heights*, 59.

24. Aaron Betsky, *Building Sex : Men, Women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York : William Morrow & Company, 1995) xiii.

25. Annmarie Adams, "Building Barriers : Images of Women in Canada's Architectural Press, 1924-73 Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada," *Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche féministe* 23.3 (Fall 1994) : 12.

26. Beverly Gordon, "Woman's Domestic Body : The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age," *Winterthur Portfolio : A Journal of American Material Culture* 31.4 (Winter 1996) : 281. One of our authors blamed this division of labour for the lack of cupboards and storage space in most homes planned and built by men. She suggested that there should be more women architects or they should at least act as consultants. Jessie Allan Brown, "Mother Hubbard Had a Cupboard," *Canadian Home Journal* 43.4 (August 1946) : 34.

27. Doris McCubbin, "Look What's Happening to Living : How Women Drive Architects Crazy," *Chatelaine* 27.5 (May 1954) : 32-33.

28. Anne-Marie Séguin, "Madame Ford et l'espace : lecture féministe de la suburbanisation," *Recherches féministes* 2.1 (1989) : 58.

29. Joan Kron, *Home-Psych : The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration* (New York : Clarkson N. Potter, 1983) 120.
30. "Men Have Ideas Too," *Canadian Home Journal* 50.9 (January 1954) : 34.
31. Frank Moritsugu, "The Best Chair of the House Is... Father's Chair," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 37.2 (February 1960) : 35.
32. "Men, Men, Men," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 30.1 (January 1953) : 9.
33. Kron, *Home-Psych*, 127.
34. Durolave Paint Advertisement, *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 22.4 (April 1945) : 39.
35. Eleanor Brown, "How to Arrange Your Rooms," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.8 (August 1949) : 41 ; Doris Thistlewood, "Decorate the Smart Way - On Paper First," *Chatelaine* 28.3 (March 1956) : 72 and Margit Bennett, "Furniture Arranging Made Easy," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 34.11 (November 1957) : 29.
36. Emphasis in the text. Priscilla McKnight, "Do You Ride a Hobby Horse," *Canadian Home Journal* 44.1 (May 1947) : 33.
37. Joy Parr, "Shopping for a Good Stove : A Parable about Gender, Design, and the Market," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 76 and Margaret Hobbs, and Ruth Roach Pierson, "'When Is a Kitchen Not a Kitchen?'," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 7.4 (Winter 1986) : 73.
38. Kron, *Home-Psych*, 127.
39. Margaret Newcombe, "Look What's Happening to Living : Give that Room a Lift with Fabrics," *Chatelaine* 27.3 (March 1954) : 74.
40. "Seven Steps to Modernization," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.5 (May 1949) : 53-54.
41. "Dream Room for a Daughter," *Chatelaine* 20.4 (April 1947) : 73.
42. "Do Their Rooms in a Gay Mood," *Chatelaine* 20.11 (November 1947) : 86.
43. Edna McMillan, "A Boy's Room Comes to Life," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 29.1 (January 1952) : 33.
44. Catherine Fraser, "Course in Home Decorating," *Chatelaine* 25.5 (May 1952) : 21.
45. See Catherine Fraser's seven home decorating lessons in *Chatelaine*, published from May to November 1952.
46. Cynthia Rock, Susana Torre, and Gwendolyn Wright, "The Appropriation of the House : Changes in House Design and Concepts of Domesticity," *New Space for Women*, ed. Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson and David Morley (Boulder, CO : Westview Press, 1980) 84.

47. Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time : A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1956) 48.
48. Joyce Bainard, "Honestly, What Does the Decorator Do," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 27.9 (September 1950) : 79 and Eleanor Shepherd Thompson, "The Background Is the Backbone," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 24.11 (November 1947) : 35.
49. "Portfolio of Canadian Decoration," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.2 (February 1948) : 13.
50. "Are You Smitten With the Urge to Redecorate," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 25.5 (May 1948) : 60 ; "Announcing *Canadian Home Journal's* Room Decorating Service and introducing Elizabeth Kent, Director," *Canadian Home Journal* 48.12 (April 1952) : 4 and "How to Transform a House into Your Own Home," *Canadian Home Journal* 50.3 (July 1953) : 73. In less than five years, the Room Decorating Service assisted in the decoration of 3,000 homes. Barbara Reynolds, "An Invitation to Interiors 1957," *Canadian Home Journal* 53.9 (January 1957) : 23.
51. "The Bakers' Facelift Their Farmhouse," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 30.3 (March 1953) : 9.
52. Louise Price Bell, "Are You Window-Wise," *Canadian Home Journal* 43.1 (May 1946) : 34 and "Good Taste Is Yours if You'll Use It," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 29.10 (October 1952) : 10.
53. Fraser, "Course in Home Decorating," 22.
54. "Basic Guide for the Home Decorator," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 26.10 (October 1949) : 26.
55. Kay Darcy, "Look What's Happening to Living," *Chatelaine* 26.10 (October 1953) : 95.
56. Catherine Fraser, "The Problems with the Small Bedroom," *Chatelaine* 25.6 (June 1952) : 21. It should be noted that despite the feminization of the profession, when experts referred to their fellow decorators they often presented them as men.
57. Emphasis in the text. Fraser, "Course in Home Decorating," 21.
58. Gertrude Paul, "Color Brings New Beauty to any Home Background," *Canadian Home Journal* 46.12 (April 1950) : 29.
59. John Caulfield Smith, "Face-Lifting Your Home," *Chatelaine* 21.5 (May 1948) : 86.
60. Joan Chalmers, "Charm Recipes For a Tired Living Room," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 28.9 (September 1951) : 28-29.
61. Fraser, "Course in Home Decorating," 21.
62. "Color and Sharp Contrasts," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 30.3 (March 1953) : 22.
63. "A Touch of White," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* 28.4 (April 1951) : 23.

64. Catherine Fraser, "Make Your Whole Home Harmonize," *Chatelaine* 25.11 (November 1952) : 48.

65. Valerie J. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia : Reading *Chatelaine* Magazine 1950-1969," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996) 164.

V. THE BIG PICTURE : DEFINING TRENDS AND EVALUATING THE MESSAGE

After analysing the basic principles of interior decoration to uncover the values, norms and gender roles they promoted, it is appropriate to identify some common trends and evaluate the overall message our experts were transmitting to female readers in post-war Canada. Because of their similar audiences and interests, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Home Journal* presented converging ideals of home (single-family dwelling in the suburbs), family (nuclear family) and womanhood (wife-mother-homemaker).¹

The three magazines' home planning departments assured readers that their suggestions could be applied to various settings, from the large suburban home to the tiny city apartment. However, when they talked about types of dwellings other than the single family home, their articles generally featured individuals living alone in an apartment or young couples sharing housing with another household (often the in-laws), waiting to save enough money to afford a home of their own. These specialists, by addressing most of their suggestions to young suburbanites with a middle-class lifestyle, covertly suggested that marriage and the self-sufficient nuclear family were the norm and the most desirable situation for Canadians.²

The ideal suburban home proposed by magazines was the bungalow featuring a picture window and a modern kitchen equipped with electric refrigerator and stove. Its open-plan design gave an illusion of living room, dining room, and kitchen flowing into one another. It also included three bedrooms and a large basement that could be converted into a rec-room. Keeping in mind the need for a safe place where children could play, it often

had a built-in play area in the backyard, "(...) conveniently located so that mother can watch from the kitchen."³ With a growing family, a partition could be installed to separate bath and toilet from the basin, a second sink could be added or another bathroom could be built to avoid traffic jams in the morning.⁴ In fact, it seemed like almost every household at this time had two to three kids and the typical family was formed of four members : a married heterosexual couple in their late twenties or early thirties with a boy and a girl between the ages of three and twelve.⁵ By focusing on this type of dwelling and choosing the "average" family as examples, magazines were not only suggesting plans satisfying basic housing needs, they were also promoting a new image of family life.⁶

Turning to the appearance of this ideal home, two rooms particularly attracted the attention of specialists : the kitchen and the bedroom. As shown in Table I, over two-thirds (68.6%) of the articles surveyed focused on either kitchens (35.7%) or bedrooms (32.9%), in line with the post-war interest in technology and desire for privacy. When looking at the three magazines individually, only the *Canadian Home Journal* presented more articles on the decoration of bedrooms. More family-oriented than its rivals, this publication dealt regularly with the dilemma of privacy versus togetherness, and compared to *Canadian Homes and Gardens* and *Chatelaine*, it also had more suggestions for dining rooms and living rooms, two places where adults and children gathered.

Yet, this overall focus on the kitchen is not surprising considering the post-war revival of domesticity that glamourized women's role in the home. This was the space where most technological developments were introduced in an effort to bring charm and efficiency to women's "workshops". *Canadian Homes and Gardens* readers got the bulk

TABLE I
Proportion of Articles Devoted to Kitchens and Bedrooms by Magazine, 1945-1960

Magazine	Articles on Kitchens	Articles on Bedrooms	Total	Number of Articles Surveyed
<i>CH&G</i>	29 (44.6%)	19 (29.2%)	48 (73.8%)	65
<i>Chatelaine</i>	11 (35.5%)	9 (29.9%)	20 (64.5%)	31
<i>CHJ</i>	10 (22.7%)	18 (40.9%)	28 (63.6%)	44
Total	50 (35.7%)	46 (32.9%)	96 (68.6%)	140

Sources : *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, 1945-1960 ; *Chatelaine*, 1945-1960 and *Canadian Home Journal*, 1945-1958.

of suggestions to remodel the kitchen because coming mostly from the upper and upper-middle class, they were the ones who could really afford these expensive modifications without threatening the post-war ideal of the stay-at-home mother. In fact, this publication became even more elitist in 1960 when it changed its name and focus : *Canadian Homes* ("The New Magazine of Canadian Living") promised to set trends and warned readers that the average homemaker could find it too avant-gardist.⁷

One should remember that what was projected in these magazines did not correspond to the lives of all Canadian women. By focusing almost exclusively on one image, that of the female suburbanite, they overlooked the existence of the majority. As noted by Ellen McCracken, "Each [women's magazines] functions as an idealized mirror image of the woman who gazes at them in which everyday and the extraordinary are conjoined," making difficult to distinguish the conventional from the exception.⁸

In this perspective, one has to wonder if the articles discussed in our study were read exclusively by English-speaking middle-class stay-at-home mothers living in the suburbs,

as portrayed in the three magazines.⁹ Valerie Korinek's extensive analysis of *Chatelaine* offers the beginning of an answer. The readership was certainly not as homogeneous as reflected by the experts' choice of examples ; however, despite the fact that rural women as well as working mothers read *Chatelaine*, it seems the magazine appealed to a certain type of reader. In 1955, a Canadian Consumer Publications Report stated that 82% of *Chatelaine*'s female readers listed their occupation as retired, housewife or unemployed. When asked about their living arrangements, 69% of the households surveyed owned their homes, while 82% lived in a single family dwelling.¹⁰ During the 1950s subscriptions to *Chatelaine* soared, this coincided with massive suburbanisation and a time when domesticity was at its peak and home became the centre of the female universe.¹¹ This trend certainly applies to the other magazines examined here. *Chatelaine*'s emphasis on a middle-class lifestyle overshadowed the fact that its readers' income varied considerably. This unevenly distributed affluence was reflected to a certain point in home decorating articles that were filled with budget-conscious tips.¹² However, experts rarely suggested that the housewife could get a job to pay for these expenses.

In reality, the middle-class suburban families represented in this kind of literature constituted a small segment of Canadian society. Interior decoration specialists were thus caught in the same "classlessness" (and "racelessness") as other writers who got their manuscripts published in magazines.¹³ Historian Veronica Strong-Boag notes that "The hard reality of a substantial cash shortfall was ignored by most popular commentators in Canada's popular press. They embraced and perpetuated the North American myth of a middle class which was almost co-extensive with society itself."¹⁴ This denial of diversity by the media

thus created a distorted image of the fifties family with a male breadwinner at its head and a full-time homemaker who had gone back to her kitchen after World War II.¹⁵ Every household “(...) seemed content to bask in unprecedented national prosperity, and to pursue single-mindedly the good life : a home of one’s own, a car in the driveway, a fridge in the kitchen, and 2.5 kids in the ‘rec room’ watching ‘Les Plouffes’ or ‘Father Knows Best’.”¹⁶

In the meantime, more and more wives and mothers defied the new ideal of domesticity and integrated the workforce in increasing numbers during the 1950s, often to counter high housing costs and the changing definition of need in this era of consumerism.¹⁷ In Ontario alone, at the beginning of the Second World War, one in twenty married women worked for pay. By 1951 it was one in ten and in 1961, the figure amounted to one in five. These figures are impressive and coincide with the switch to a service economy with jobs as women-defined. They are probably incomplete as they do not include women who worked at some point during the year, but not at the time of the census.¹⁸ Thus, for many women, the middle-class ideal of the male breadwinner and stay-at-home mother was impossible to attain or to maintain. The popular press started to pay attention to working wives and mothers when more middle-class women worked for pay, this created a heated debate because it was interpreted by many Canadians as an attack upon the nuclear family.

For their part, Prentice *et al.* suggest that “The very vigour with which the ‘happy homemaker’ image was promoted by the media may well have been a reaction to women’s growing involvement in activities outside the home and, in some cases, their resistance to conventional heterosexual roles.”¹⁹ Korinek has drawn a similar conclusion after comparing features and editorials with letters from readers. Their reactions thus indicate that they “(...)

did not passively digest this prescriptive literature.”²⁰

To know what really went on during those years often characterized as a period of retreat for women, one would then have to collect the evidence directly from the principal actors. However, since husbands usually owned the house, the act of decorating could be seen as a way for women to feel at home ; more importantly, it may have given them a certain degree of control, a sense of being able to decide. But this was as far as home decorating could contribute to their “emancipation”, since this activity did not constitute a real alternative to homemaking.²¹ As noted by Korinek, “(...) empowerment always happened after the lunch dishes were washed.”²² Indeed, home decorating constituted an effective way to construct and perpetuate gender differences, as ideas about what spaces are male and what spaces are female are passed down through custom.²³ The home reflected “(...) ideals and realities about relationships between women and men within the family and in society.”²⁴ Therefore, it can be argued that the nuclear family home of the fifties existed as a cultural symbol because of its direct link with society’s traditional definition of proper gender roles.²⁵

In the end, what clearly transpires from this analysis of interior decoration advice as a means to promote distinct gender roles and ease the turmoil caused by the Depression and the Second World War, is the different meaning of housing for men and women. The ideal suburban house was the symbol of the man’s economic and social status while its interior was to be representative of the woman who decorated it. Thus, a single physical structure was at once the man’s house and the woman’s home, giving the term “homemaker” all its meaning.²⁶

1. In the context of this research, Canada as a geographic area needs to be defined. By paying close attention to the location of the real homes featured in these publications, one will notice that Canada often meant Ontario and sometimes British Columbia, making it difficult to grasp regional and provincial variations across the country.

2. This focus on suburban issues could be attributed to the location of the magazines' offices. The three of them were based in Toronto and in case of *Chatelaine*, freelancers were often from that area as well. Valerie J. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia : Reading *Chatelaine* Magazine 1950-1969," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996) 118 and 200.

3. Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time : A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1996) 54-55.

4. Doris Thistlewood, "How to Beat that Bathroom Line-up," *Chatelaine* 29.4 (April 1957) : 22-23.

5. John Caulfield Smith, "House With Young Ideas," *Chatelaine* 19.6 (June 1946) : 12. According to a more recent estimate, post-war families in Canada counted on average two to five children. "Overall, the size of the Canadian family was becoming more uniform. Between 1941 and 1966, the percentages of small families (0-1 child) and of large families (6 or more children) decreased." Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women : A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto : Harcourt Brace, 1996) 380.

6. Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home, 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 216.

7. However, even before changing its "vocation", *Canadian Homes and Gardens* rarely featured typical couples. For example there were television personalities and artists, as well as a successful importer married to a Spanish ballet dancer.

8. Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines : From Mademoiselle to Ms* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1993) 13.

9. *Canadian Home Journal*, *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Homes and Gardens* may not have promoted a single vision of Canadian women, but they made clear that every "normal" woman should aspire to the status of stay-at-home mother with children and "healthy" newlyweds did not wait too long before starting their families.

10. *1955 Canadian Consumer Publications Report* (Montreal, Toronto and New York : Gruneau Research Ltd., 1955) inset in Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 12 and 61.

11. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 2.

12. *Ibid.*, 140.

13. Terms borrowed from John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic : An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1967) 4 and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 29.3 (Fall 1994) : 21. Indeed, of all the articles surveyed for this study, only a few of them featured "non-white" individuals, people who had immigrated and were

able to make it big in Canada.

14. Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives....," 8.

15. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were : American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York : Basic Books, 1992) 31 ; idea also expressed in Mona Gleason, "Psychology and the Construction of the 'Normal' Family in Postwar Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 78.3 (September 1997) : 444.

16. Prentice *et al.*, *Canadian Women : A History*, 336. Historian Clifford Clark has observed the same phenomenon in U.S. magazines, noting that "Happiness came from raising healthy, independent kids, decorating the home to ones own tastes, and sitting back in the evening with other family members and relaxing in front of the new television set." Clark, *The American Family Home*, 209.

17. Joan Sangster, "Doing Two Jobs : The Wage-Earning Mother, 1945-70," *A Diversity of Women : Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 98-101 and 125 and Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives....," 7-8 and 21 (n. 14).

18. Sangster, "Doing Two Jobs," 99-100.

19. Prentice *et al.*, *Canadian Women : A History*, 384.

20. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 215.

21. Joan Kron, *Home-Psych : The Social Psychology of Home and Decoration* (New York : Clarkson N. Potter, 1983) 39.

22. Korinek, "Roughing It In Suburbia," 19.

23. Kron, *Home-Psych*, 115.

24. Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 7.

25. Susan Saegert, "Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs : Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities," *Women and the American City*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson, Elsa Dixler, Martha J. Nelson, and Kathryn B. Yatrakis (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1981) 95.

26. Kron, *Home-Psych*, 117.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of the discourse linked to the home decorating advice published in English-Canadian women's magazine from 1945 to 1960 constitutes one way to delineate the conservative ideology that dominated in post-war North America. Indeed, a similar study could have been conducted with soap operas or with ads for domestic products and appliances. These sources could certainly be informative as to which roles were assigned to women during a particular period of time. In the context of this research, discourse analysis was used to uncover the covert and overt meanings of experts' suggestions in *Canadian Home Journal*, *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. It was shown that interior decoration articles were offering more than suggestions on how to rearrange a particular room : readers were flooded with hints about the ideal family and home in reaction to the shift in gender roles caused by a prolonged period of crisis. This discourse found in home decorating columns after World War II should then be understood as fitting into a larger movement to set the family back on its feet again after years of separation and hardship.

The Great Depression and the Second World War brought uncertainty and instability at the economic and social levels. With a good portion of Canadian men fighting overseas and an urgent need for more labour to sustain the war effort, women took on new responsibilities that were considered a threat to conventional gender relations. Such a "role reversal" was thought to contribute to the disintegration of the traditional social order that had already been badly shaken by a depression and a war. To ensure a smooth transition upon the return of veterans, it was believed that a restoration of the middle-class model of male breadwinner/female homemaker would do much to achieve a sense of stability. The

nuclear family and the suburban home associated with this model were soon presented as the ideal lifestyle to which every Canadian should aspire. However, despite the federal government's post-war planning, numerous families had to postpone their plan of buying a house in the suburbs. The post-war demand for single family dwellings was so strong that the building sector could not keep up. This housing shortage, which had started before the war, only heightened the desire for a decent home ; it also certainly contributed to the popularity of interior decoration advice to transform a simple house into a real home.

Throughout the post-war period, home decorating specialists grouped their suggestions around seven basic principles. First, women had to individualize and personalize their homes as well as make them livable. To accomplish this feat, the homemaker had to be attentive to the needs of every family members and this often meant giving priority to their preferences and interests. This was the case when decorating in the presence of children and women were advised to pay attention to every detail because the appearance of a room could have a serious impact on their development. More or less overtly, experts told readers how to decorate their homes to ensure the transmission of proper gender roles and good manners. During this era of child-centredness, they suggested that children have a room of their own to favour their transformation into well-adjusted and responsible adults.

However, not all members of the family were lucky enough to have this private space. When it came to delimiting the territory within the home it was "men and children first". The most comfortable chair in front of the television, the study or the den were reserved for Dad, while children had their own bedroom and a rec-room. Mom, for her part,

was assigned to the kitchen, her workshop, which was often intruded upon by youngsters doing their homework or having a private talk with her. But since she was spending so much time in this room, and in order to make her work more pleasant and less back-breaking, technological innovations and principles of efficiency made their way into the post-war kitchen. Automatic washers and electric refrigerators and ranges were supposed to revolutionize housework and give the housekeeper more leisure, but they did not keep their promise as it contributed to raising the standards of cleanliness and efficiency.

More important in the context of this analysis, the experts' advice made clear that certain accessories and motifs were appropriate for men or boys, while others were preferable when decorating a room for a woman or a girl. The wise homemaker made sure to decorate her home in a way to foster the right "instincts" in her children and make her husband feel at home surrounded by a mix of simplicity and frills. Plenty of colours were said to give a lift to the house and its occupants and a woman could not go wrong if she followed combinations found in nature. Finally, these charming effects could be achieved even when a housewife was decorating on a budget. Specialists assured readers that elbow-grease, enthusiasm and imagination could replace cash. But furnishing a room also required a large initial investment, thus the importance of planning ahead and of shopping wisely to avoid costly mistakes.

Underlying these practical tips from interior decoration experts was an ideal of what gender roles should be in post-war Canada. Through their examples and step by step instructions, it is possible to depict a distinct sexual division of labour within the household. Men were first and foremost breadwinners who had the final say on major purchases and

redecorating projects. In addition to his role as financial backer, the husband was also needed to move furniture and his skills as a handyman could be used to build shelves and install new kitchen cabinets. As for women, they were mostly portrayed as stay-at-home mothers doing the actual purchasing with their husbands' money. They cleaned, sewed, cooked, nurtured, supervised and assisted the man of the house with his career. As an amateur decorator, the true homemaker used her pool of creative ability to turn her husband's house into a home by making her own curtains and getting the whole family involved. Often overwhelmed by this task, women could find encouragement in home decorating columns as specialists reassured them of their abilities and "instincts".

The images presented in those articles may not have corresponded with the daily lives of all Canadian women. Rather, they projected an ideal by overlooking the diversity of their roles in society. Hence, all three magazines contributed to the reinforcement of the dominant discourse which assigned to women roles and functions considered appropriate for their sex. In this context, interior decoration promoted an ideal of womanhood through women's responsibilities as well as an ideal of the family home through the look they were expected to achieve. Thus, the post-war home was more than just walls and a roof : it was a place where "appropriate" gender roles were constructed and perpetuated.

After the Second World War, Canadian women were thus asked to participated actively to the process of "reconstruction", which went far beyond a transition to a peacetime economy and the reinstatement of veterans. Indeed, we have shown how reconstruction also had a familial dimension. In effect, interior decoration experts were asking women in every home around the country to be the keepers of family values as a way

to return to a “normal” life after years of turmoil and dislocation. Through home decorating, women could create an atmosphere favourable to harmonious relations among family members and, more specifically, to the reproduction of established gender roles. Our study has thus demonstrated the vital link between the private world of home and the outside world and the contribution of the “domestic sphere” to the continuation of the social order.

APPENDIX : RECORD SHEET

1. Identification

Magazine : *Chatelaine* Month : _____ Year : _____
 Canadian Home Journal
 Canadian Homes and Gardens

Author : _____ Volume : _____ Number : _____

Title : _____

Page(s) : _____ Total number of pages in the magazine : _____

Type of article : account imaginary example
 true example other : _____

Subject : house (plan) bedroom dining room
 kitchen bathroom living room
 recreation room general advice other : _____

2. Interior decoration

a) In the article, is there any mention of the expenses necessary to redecorate ?

yes no

➡ from which angle ?

- careful planning of the procedure
- long-term evaluation of the results
- redecorating or remodelling gradually
- "keep it simple"
- avoid professionals / do-it-yourself
- dip into savings
- look for sales
- invest in durability
- other : _____

b) Is interior decoration presented as having an emotional function contributing to the well-being of the family ? yes no

➡ how ? through the colours : _____

- by insisting on a private space for every member of the family, in which case the segregation is by :
 - sex age
- by presenting the home as a refuge or haven
- by presenting the home as favouring togetherness and communication (suburban sociability?)
- other : _____

c) Does this redecorating project have any practical goals ?

yes no

➡ what are these objectives and what is suggested to achieve them ?

save time : easy-to-wash surfaces "a place for everything"

other : _____

maximize space : built-ins storage space hooks

other : _____

save labour and energy : triangle in kitchen keep everything handy

kitchen window located to help mother watch children

other : _____

make work more pleasant : ventilation lighting
 bright colours plants and flowers

Technology : _____

Basic principles underlying these changes : simplicity comfort

harmony space free mother from housework to pursue other activities (Paid or unpaid work, part-time job, community involvement, leisure...)

d) Is the new decor presented as being more appropriate for one sex in particular ?

yes no

➡ it is more appropriate for a : man woman boy
 girl

Which elements show this distinction and how are they different for each sex ?

colours : _____

furniture : _____

theme or design : _____

accessories : _____

other : _____

Are both sexes involved differently in redecorating ?

yes no, a man or a woman can do it no, they do it together N/A

➡ which part of redecorating is the responsibility of the :

- man : _____

- woman : _____

If children are involved, they assist their : father mother

e) Which strategies are used to reassure the reader about her abilities as interior decorator ?

- no obvious strategy is used
 interior decoration is compared to cooking
 emphasis on knowledge reader has as homemaker
 other : _____

Is the reader encouraged to improve her decorating skills ? yes no

f) Is the advice applicable to a particular type of dwelling ?

- yes no

➔ it is more suitable for : a house an apartment other : _____

3. Traditional gender relations

a) Does the article make any reference to women's roles and functions ?

- yes no

➔ what are these roles and how can they be recognized ?

- wife reference to husband hostess
 volunteer/charity work other : _____
 mother reference to children self-sacrifice
 listens to family's needs tension manager
 other : _____
 housewife cooking sewing housekeeping
 managing the budget other : _____
 wage-earner : _____
 other roles or functions : _____

If there is a reference to children, what is their number ? _____

Age group : baby infant teenager young adult N/A

b) Does the article make any reference to men's roles and functions ?

- yes no

➔ what are these roles and how can they be recognized ?

- head of household : he is consulted before undertaking any changes
 (authority) feminine touches are limited
 other : _____
 breadwinner : paid work (type of employment : _____)
 forced absence due to work
 space of his own to relax after work
 other : _____
 husband/father : reference to wife/children
 other roles or functions : _____

4. Comments / further information

5. Quotations

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