

Cabinet-making, Home & Pro

AMERICAN FURNITURE, 1650-1850.
By Charles Nagel. New York:
Chanticleer Press. 110 pp. \$2.95.

THE STANDARD BOOK OF AMERICAN ANTIQUE FURNITURE. By Edgar G. Miller, Jr. New York: Greystone Press. 856 pp. \$7.95.

CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN FURNITURE TREASURES. By Lester Margon. New York: The Home Craftsman Publishing Corp. 167 pp. \$4.95.

AMERICAN GLASS AND GLASS-MAKING. By Lura Woodside Watkins. New York: Chanticleer Press. 104 pp. \$2.95.

By RLENE L. HOWELL

AS A small, general guide to styles and changes in styles in America Charles Nagel has produced a genuinely helpful handbook for the beginner. This manual does not deal with individual "masterpieces" of American furniture nor with specialized and "unique" pieces but discusses standard forms (tables, chairs, beds, etc.) in terms of their construction and the prevailing fashion.

Dispensing with the one-room, log-cabin theory and abolishing the *Mayflower* myth (bulging with "priceless heirlooms"), Mr. Nagel indicates the development of forms in architecture and furniture. The colonials imported, borrowed, and stole from England, the Continent, and the Orient yet developed an art in a manner distinctively American and sometimes peculiarly regional. Such native innovations as the highboy, lowboy, and chest-on-chest are noted. The influence of men like Inigo Jones, Palladio, the brothers Adam, Chippendale, Hepplewhite, and Sheraton is chronicled, showing the designs they developed as well as the American adaptations.

By and large, Mr. Nagel gives the reader a clear picture of the whole room of both the wealthy and poor colonial as well as a fairly complete description of the "makings" of the furniture, even to the woods used and décor applied. Unfortunately, the individual craftsmen and master cabinetmakers are only mentioned in passing.

It is to be remarked with regret that from Duncan Phyfe to the present there has been no taste in style or any cabinetmaker (except Belter) worthy of the name. Mechanization seems to have robbed us of the art of the craftsman. Perhaps, as Mr. Nagel hopes, the machine can be used

to "encourage" design of merit and lasting worth.

Edgar G. Miller's "American Antique Furniture" has been reissued in one stout volume. Although the illustrations have been cut down, and Volume II in the original edition (1937) has been visibly shortened in this reissue, the bulk of illustrations and textual material from the first edition is all there.

Mr. Miller's book is primarily for the beginning student of American furniture and for the amateur collector. The text has been set up to serve as a simple guide post. Chapters dealing with particular types of furniture are divided into styles, sources, and makers. There is an explicit section dealing with details, in which Mr. Miller discusses such important matters as the cyma curve "ball-and-claw" foot, veneers, finishes, carvings, etc., all the fine points in identifying and appreciating American furniture. The book closes with some sound advice for the amateur collector.

One very great virtue of Mr. Miller's work is that a majority of his illustrations are chosen from private collections rather than public institutions. This is a real reward for a student of American furniture who seldom has an opportunity to see the treasures hidden away from the public's eye.

Although the book is primarily for the novice in the field, it still supplements such standard works as Wallace Nutting's three-volume "Furniture Treasury" and Luke Vincent Lockwood's two-volume "Colonial Furniture in America."

Lester Margon's "Furniture Treasures" is probably the best book in print on the construction of American furniture. The drawings range from Colonial cupboards and paneling, Pennsylvania chests and benches to Queen Anne highboys and Duncan Phyfe tables and chairs, all chosen for their excellent construction and beauty of design. Even such items as a cradle, a clock, cellarette, spinning wheel, and fire screen are included.

Anyone looking for the recognized "masterpieces" in American furniture will be somewhat disappointed, for there is not one Philadelphia highboy, Salem chest-on-chest, or New York State pier table. However, the thirty-eight measured drawings should be of interest to the home craftsman for they show Mr. Margon's regard for exact measurement and detail. In a chest owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art the inlays of maple, mahogany, and oak are given careful attention and the dovetailing of the drawers is handled with



skill. The veneer on a Sheraton-period sewing table is treated with great delicacy. Each piece shows the maker's art from the actual selection of the stock, the molding, and carving to the assembly of the whole. The drawings are complete and should be fairly easy for the home cabinetmaker to follow.

As a book on the history of American glass, Mrs. Watkins's "American Glass and Glassmaking" has many gaps but as a preliminary essay on the art of glassmaking in America the book has much to commend it. Although such giants in the glass industry as Casper Wistar, "Baron" Stiegel, and John Frederick Amelung are touched on sketchily, most important for the reader are the sections on the passage of ideas in methods from Europe to Eastern America and then to the Midwest and the development, techniques, and improvements in the art of pressing glass. Mrs. Watkins is obviously on familiar ground here. Unfortunately, too little space is devoted to the beautiful blown glass made in the colonies.

Rlene L. Howell is assistant in the department of decorative arts of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Art Notes

FRANS HALS: *The Civic Portrait Groups*, by H. P. Baard. Elsevier-Macmillan. \$6.50. Probably it was because the people of the Low Countries had a predilection not only for portrait painting but for portrait sitting, too, that they excelled at this art. During his long career sitters kept Hals so busy that he hardly had time for other work. This volume deals only with his group portraits, six of them, but

they are treated in great detail as the fifty-four full-page reproductions will attest. Twenty of these are in color. From these banqueting, drinking, or just posing groups not only single figures and heads are isolated but such fascinating details as a bit of lace, a sword hilt, or a hand with a wine glass are enlarged, showing the master's amazing *alla prima* brush work. For each of the six group pictures Mr. Baard, who is keeper of the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem, Holland, offers a sketch identifying the sitters. A good part of the accompanying text is devoted to local history and genealogy of the sitters.

BOTTICELLI, by Lionello Venturi. Phaidon-Oxford. \$5. Do not let the fact that the text of this large album of reproductions is in French frighten you away from it. The style of Lionello Venturi, one of the outstanding living historians of Renaissance painting, is so simple and direct that you need no great command of the French language to appreciate his twelve-page essay. For that matter, Professor Venturi observes that persons who wish to feel and dream with Botticelli in the more than 100 pages of reproductions that follow will have no real need for his comments. The reproductions were the publisher's choice but Venturi praises them highly, and with good cause. Most of the 104 large plates are of paintings but some drawings are also included. There are fourteen color plates, two of them double-page fold-ins.

GHIBERTI, by Ludwig Goldscheider. Phaidon-Oxford. \$5. Rare indeed is the visitor to Florence who has not looked at the bronze doors of the Baptistery. Whether he stares at them, Baedeker in hand, amazed that Ghiberti worked on them for over half a century, or whether his interest is more scholarly or esthetic, this volume will provide pleasure and instruction. For the casual, there are many handsome reproductions and a highly readable text; for the serious a valuable collection of information buttressed by copious notes and references.

There are 141 large plates and forty-four *en-texte* illustrations, covering all the authenticated extant works of Ghiberti. The pictures, which are inserted throughout the text, cover a myriad of items, such as work attributed to him, those of contemporaries, and products of his workshop.

The text material includes Ghiberti's autobiography (published for the first time in English), Vasari's life of the artist, and an introduction and catalogue with notes on the plates by Ludwig Goldscheider. There is no other work in the United States to compare with this. —L. R. SANDER.

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