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Robert M. Kelly

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Robert M. Kelly : The Backstory of Wallpaper: Paper-Hangings 1650-1750 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Backstory of Wallpaper: Paper-Hangings 1650-1750:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A History of Hanging Paper By Rob Hardy Add this one to the list of books whose subjects I never thought I would read about. Who reads about the history of wallpaper? Who writes about it? In this case, readers are in good hands; Robert M. Kelly hangs wallpaper, but he does so in locales like the White

House, and he has shared his expertise on the history of wallpaper in various articles for historic preservation journals, and for the Wallpaper History Society (again, who knew?). He has now written *The Backstory of Wallpaper: Paper-Hangings 1650 - 1750* (WallpaperScholar.com), and it is fun to see how far his researches have carried him. He has mined advertisements for the trade, and looked at bills from wallpaper sellers, and manuals from the time. The result is a book full of oddities, since it is a close look at such a small slice of human endeavor; at least Kelly didn't call it *The Wall Covering That Changed History*. He admits that the account is fragmentary because the subject is fragmentary. He reminds us that wallpaper, unlike windows or tiles, are useless except for visual delight, and although well-produced and well-installed wallpaper can hold its own against more costly coverings like silk or leather, it isn't meant to last, and fashions change. The study of the changes brings in history, economics, art, and literature, so even if you have no particular care for wallpaper, there will probably be something of interest here. One of the surprising aspects of wallpaper history is that wallpaper did not start as a luxury for the rich, as many have believed. It was a folk art, because people liked sprucing up their places with a bit of printed paper. Discarded paper from the printer would be block printed with patterns or flowers and hung (not initially pasted) just for the sake of having something to look at. When, around 1650, there was a steady supply of strong and inexpensive paper (characteristics wallpaper has always had), wallpapering took off. It is a mark of the economic importance of wallpaper that England created a wallpaper tax in 1712 for paper Printed, Painted, or Stained. It isn't surprising that the craft of making or hanging ephemeral paper should be hard to research. Wallpaper manufacturers were the ones who did the work, but they were subcontracted to stationers and warehouses, so they became invisible to the historical record. The work was done in down-and-dirty workshops, while retail shops would try for glamor as the goods were sold. The rural paperstainers were folk artists, but their realms were grimy workplaces which were often small, reeked of hide glue, and had messy coloring materials strewn about. They would have been happy to have their wares in a pristine local stationery shop, and further into linen drapers and dry-goods sellers who dealt with the upper class. While wallpaper started as a rural craft, eventually sold in the city, there was a reversal of the path, as the fashionable depended on city tastes in selecting papers for their country homes. A magazine in 1752 reflected how successful wallpapering had become: Our painted Paper is scarce distinguishable from the finest Silk; and there is scarce a modern House, which hath not one or more Rooms lined with this Furniture. Wallpaper had to compete with other wall covers like silk, velvet, and leather; of them all, we still use wallpaper. Even though our homes have fewer doors, Kelly writes, and our rooms are unlikely to be wrapped up like pretty packages with borders running round, we still have walls. And where there is wall, there is need to decorate that wall. I don't know enough about the other writings about the history of wallpaper to compare, but this is an entertaining account focusing on a colorful craft. Before reading it, I would not have thought wallpaper could have much of a history, but Kelly has it covered.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I never imagined wallpaper could be so interesting. By Tracy Rowan You know the old saying about watching paint dry? I suspect that most people think of wallpaper with the same oh-yawn attitude; I know I did. But then I read Robert Kelly's "The Backstory of Wallpaper" and was stunned to find that this was a fascinating look at something which was essentially a folk art to begin with, but which became so popular that eventually the British crown was able to levy taxes on wallpaper. Kelly covers the physical creation of wallpaper which was originally lined with materials such as bamboo or canvas rather than applied directly to the wall. He covers the printing of wallpaper (which cost one printer his head!) the styles, the countries in which it became popular, influences and a good many other wallpaper-related topics, and he does so with fascinating asides that make the story much more than a dry recounting of a decorative process. There is a substantial bibliography and a lot of end notes for anyone who wants to take their reading further. This is a remarkable piece of work and is reminiscent of Bill Bryson's writing. It might, in fact, be an excellent companion to Bryson's "At Home." Kelly's prose is crisp and clever, always engaging, scholarly, but never dry.. It's an attractive book, too, filled with black and white illustrations. I'm genuinely pleased to have been offered this book for review, and I hope that Mr. Kelly chooses to do another volume that follows the evolution of wallpaper into the modern world. Highly recommended.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Early Wallpaper History By C. Wong The Backstory of Wallpaper: Paper Hangings 1650-1750 by Robert M. Kelly is an excellent reference book. I love reading history books and I have a personal memory of the wallpaper in my family's guest room. I was a child but I can never forget the effect of the green background and lovely yellow flowers on it. So I know for a fact the wallpaper can affect your mood. I wasn't the only one, everyone coming in that room said Oh and immediately relaxed. So this book stood out to me. Robert M. Kelly does very well with the lack of early history of wallpaper. He details the roots of wallpaper and this book is richly illustrated. So this book answers several questions: 1. In what countries did the beginnings of wallpaper start? 2. Why was there a tax on wallpaper in England? 3. What are the many ways that wallpaper was applied to walls in the past? 4. What was the purpose of wallpaper borders? My favorite part of the book is the history of wallpaper in the colonies. My father's ancestors lived at the Plymouth Plantation where I know they did not have wallpaper but I am wondering about the descendants later on. Also, I was fascinated by the many illustrations of the installation of wallpaper. That brought memories back of my father and mother getting the paste ready and the wooden horses with plywood on top to lay it out. This book is for anyone who has enjoyed hanging wallpaper or those interested in its early history. I think it would be a useful reference for someone making a historical movie set in that

time period. I hope that Mr. Kelly writes a sequel to this book with further history of paper hangings. I received this book from the author after I had expressed an interest in his book for a review. That in no way influenced my thoughts or feelings in this review.

Wallpaper design has captivated Western consumers for 300 years, but few writers have looked at the material culture of wallpaper use. This book tells how single-sheet wallpaper developed in Europe, found wide acceptance in England and France, and was successfully transplanted to the North American colonies. By 1750, wallpaper was well-established and poised for growth. "Backstory" has been nominated for the annual book prize of Historic New England and recommended by CHOICE (Current Reviews For Academic Libraries) and the Art Libraries Society of North America.

From Booklist Most books about wallpaper and other wall hangings cover design elements. This may well be the first book to look at the history of wallpaper. Kelly goes back to the roots of paperhanging, starting with the precursors to wallpaper in the seventeenth century and moving forward to the decorating styles found in the American colonies. Along the way, readers learn about various printing techniques; styles, such as flock damasks and Asian art influences; and various techniques and practical matters. There is a bibliography, a glossary, and an index. A specialized book, to be sure, but suitable for academic and larger public libraries where there is interest in interior decoration. --Rebecca Vnuk From Midwest Book :