Extensive Reading Material 1:

**Take Your Home into Your Own Hands**

I do not know who started the idea of “good taste”. I strongly suspect that DORA had a younger brother who went to art classes at an evening polytechnic, and that it all began with him.

Certainly no one worried much about it in the eighteenth century, when people who were rich enough put cupids all over their ceilings, and built fireplaces in a style happily based on a combination of Greek, Chinese and French Gothic. Nor, I think, did it much concern our grandparents who went on accumulating the grossest kinds of bric-a-brac in superb disregard of all that Mr. Ruskin was saying in his clever books. But quite lately, with the advent of all the other worries which gave that hunted look to Mr. Strube’s “Little Man”, came the plague of “good taste”.

One has only to look around today at the bleak little parlors of the suburbs and the still bleaker great drawing-rooms of Belgrave Square to see the havoc it has caused. Some terrific voice from behind the bar seems to have said ‘Time, gentlemen, please,’ and forthwith everyone began carrying away her dearest possessions to the lumber-room or sending them down to a very chilly reception in the servants’ hall.

In some mysterious way, for which I strongly suspect my fellow journalists in the Home Pages are largely responsible, everybody seems to have been bullied into an inferiority complex about their own homes.

In Victorian times people were terrified of being thought poor, and starved themselves in order to clothe a second footman. Nowadays we are all desperately poor and quite boastful it, but I have yet to find anyone but myself who still says with absolute complacency, “I don’t know much about art, but I do know what I like.” I say that about three times a day and it always has the profoundly shocking effect that I hoped for.

Look around your own drawing-room. Where is the firescreen with the family coat-of-arms worked in colored wools by your Aunt Agatha? And why is that horrible earthenware pot, which someone else’s Aunt Agatha made in suburb of Brighton, sitting so coldly on the mantelpiece? And do you really find it comfortable to read by that triangular lamp shade which throws all the light on the ceiling? And where is the stuffed parrot?

Have you made all these changes because you really like the or because someone has been at you about “good taste”?

It may be that you really do like them, but it seems odd that Colonel Brown’s wife who disagrees with you about politics and religion and how to bring up her daughters should see eye to eye with you on this point. And the vicar’s drawing-room is exactly like yours, although you could never bear the vicar; and so it the doctor’s wife’s, who, they say, drinks far more than is good for her, and wears such extraordinary hats.

If by some odd coincidence you really do heartily agree with your neighbor’s taste in house decoration, well and good; but if she likes to fill her window with arts-and-crafts pottery bowls of crocuses, and you like aspidistras better, just fill your house with aspidistras till it looks like a conservatory, and if you like Benares brass pots, put them in those, and if you like bamboo stands, put them on them. By all means hide the tiger’s head which your Uncle George shot in India, if it keeps you awake at night, but if you like it, don’t be bullied into putting it away by Mrs. Brown who lives next door. March round with your umbrella and tell her that her hunting prints and Staffordshire pottery are “middle class”or “bad taste”.

And if you see sarcastic glances being cast on the family photograph album or the cup you won at the cycling gymkhana or at the tinted photograph of the Acropolis or the Landseer engravings, just you say very decisively, “I don’t know much about art, but I do know what I like”. then they will see that they are beaten, and Mrs. Brown will say to the vicar’s wife that it is so sad that you have no taste, and the vicar’s wife will say to the doctor’s wife that it really only shows what sort of people you are, but all three will envy you at heart and even perhaps, one by one, bring out from the attics a few of the things they really like.