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Apartment Therapy: How Does “Good Taste” Become Second Nature for Consumers?

Design blogs such as Apartment Therapy or lifestyle brands such as Martha Stewart help consumers exercise taste in their everyday life as they learn how to generate meaning through objects, according to a new study in the Journal of Consumer Research.

“Participating in a taste regime allows consumers to assemble coherent sets of objects, associate meanings with those objects, and then create routines that serve to maintain the physical order of objects and their associated meanings,” write authors Zeynep Arsel (Concordia University) and Jonathan Bean (Parsons The New School for Design).

How do we find the best couch or the perfect paint color? How do we decide on the “right” way to place objects in our homes? How do consumers learn what constitutes “good taste” and incorporate it into their homes?

The authors studied the popular design blog Apartment Therapy to see how consumers navigate through infinite options in the marketplace and develop their sense of taste. Consumers begin by acknowledging that the design of their home could be better. For example, any kind of clutter is consistently described as problematic. The solution is to address the problem by changing habits through new arrangements of possessions in the pursuit of a clutter-free and aesthetically pleasing home. Taste eventually becomes so ingrained that home decorating in a certain style becomes second nature.

“Reading Real Simple magazine; immersing oneself in the Martha Stewart brand empire; watching DIY television and makeover shows. These are not simply passive leisure activities, but rather elements of practice that influence how people relate to objects and what they do with them,” write the authors.

“Engagement with the Apartment Therapy regime transforms home and self. Creating long-term rituals and routines shapes consciousness and guides ordinary, normalized, and effortless action,” the authors conclude.

Zeynep Arsel and Jonathan Bean. “Taste Regimes and Market-Mediated Practice.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2013. For more information, contact Zeynep Arsel (zarsel@jmsb.concordia.ca) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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