

Lucy Drage

Interior Decorator
1876-1965

by Daniel Coleman

In a fitting tribute to a woman who exemplified sophistication for many Kansas Citians, no less an arbiter of taste than Algonquin Round Table wit Alexander Woollcott once commented that his era's two fairest Broadway beauties seemed merely a "frump" and an "eyesore" in comparison to Lucy Christie Drage. Apparent from the earliest days of her youth, when she and Woollcott played as children in Kansas City's fashionable Quality Hill neighborhood, Drage's innate sense of style, in combination with a talent for business, made her the area's premier interior designer.

Lucy Christie was born September 18, 1876, the daughter of prominent grain broker C. C. Christie. Drapes of Chinese silk filled the windows of her childhood, and in the brick homes of Kansas City's oldest and wealthiest families she experienced such luxuries as the city's earliest electric lighting and steam heat. Among Lucy's childhood friends were Woollcott and his sister Julie, as well as literary brothers Eugene and Roswell "Rose" Field. She attended Miss Barstow's School, studied painting at the nascent Kansas City Art Institute, and presided over an evening known to history for its elegance when she was declared Belle of the Century Ball in the city's new Convention Hall on December 31, 1900.

Lucy soon married an individual who also seemed to have emerged from the pages of a storybook. Her English bridegroom, Colonel Francis B. Drage, was a veteran of the Boer War and an officer in the official cavalry escort of the British monarchy, the Royal Horse Guards. The couple spent 10 years living in Colonel Drage's native Northampton before establishing a second home in Kansas City—a 25-room stone and frame mansion they called Stony Glen, located on 13 acres near 75th and Indiana.

Lucy Drage's return to the U.S. coincided with her taking over the management of her family's extensive land holdings just south of Kansas City. Running the Christie Farm provided her an opportunity to further develop her already keen business skills. Drage eventually sought a new venture in which she could pursue



personal interests in the commercial sphere. Her love of fine homes, and a life spent within them, led her to interior decorating. Although she was not formally trained in the field, clients found in her a faultless eye and knack for bringing into their rooms the brightness and life of an English garden.

Drage built up her business over a number of years, expanding from consultations on specific decorating problems to the creation of extensive interior designs for large building projects. Her signature remained the flowery chintz patterns she had come to appreciate in England, and the shop she shared with longtime partner Ethel Guy at 320 Ward Parkway earned praise for its work inside the old Kansas City Club at 1228 Baltimore, sorority houses at the Universities of Kansas and Missouri, and the Kansas City Country Club. In 1962, Drage was named a fellow of the American Institute of Interior Decorators.

In semi-retirement toward the end of her life, Drage returned to her first love of painting and shared a studio near 45th and State Line with several other artists. For the Kansas City Art Institute she was an active fundraiser, as she had been for an earlier cause, when she spearheaded the Kansas City activities of the national "Bundles-for-Britain" foreign aid drive. And though she seemed to have enjoyed a charmed life, it was not without great sorrow. Finding solace in the beauty of her work, Drage endured the losses of her husband, who died in 1935; a daughter who perished in a plane crash the following year; and two sons before her own death at age 88 on September 11, 1965.

Sources

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