



Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000

By Claudia Kinmonth. Cork: Cork University Press, 2020. 576 pp. Illus. €39.00 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-78205-405-4

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Book Review

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Claudia Kinmonth's *Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000*, an illustrated study of Irish farmhouse and country furniture, is meticulously researched and grounded in historical evidence. This book provides the reader with a fully updated and revised text of Kinmonth's earlier publication *Irish Country Furniture 1700–1950* (1993). This new book expands the timeframe of Kinmonth's previous investigation to include fieldwork conducted by the author in the 1980s. An additional new chapter, 'Small Furnishings and Utensils', provides insight into the production and use of everyday domestic functional objects, while exemplifying how necessity and functionality were key drivers in the addition of furniture to the rural Irish home.

Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000 is presented in a typological format organized by specific furniture type, each chapter critically engaging with the materials, uses, and making processes of a particular series of objects. Kinmonth's detailed analysis of each furniture object's method of construction and form reveals how the structure and materials used in Irish country furniture's construction reflect its makers, and the resources and materials that were available to them (357). Through this analysis, Kinmonth highlights both differences and similarities in the material and form of furniture objects from across the island of Ireland to construct a vernacular of Irish country furniture. This well-developed vernacular is enhanced by Kinmonth's vivid descriptions, which situate rural furniture as part of Ireland's material folk culture.

Kinmonth's text highlights the individual nature of makers and craftspeople while simultaneously constructing a shared narrative throughout the book of lived experience, inherited knowledge, and tradition. The book is peppered with references that illustrate how material memory is transferred through furniture-making, and in the case of Irish rural furniture, re-making (59–60, 87 and 116). *Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000* engages fully with the life cycle of Irish country furniture beyond its production and making processes, highlighting a cultural practice of reuse, adaptation, and recycling (61 and 63). The book exemplifies how tradition is carried through the material memory of Irish vernacular furniture.

Ireland's socio-cultural history is deeply engrained throughout the text of *Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000*. Through the book's inclusion of vivid descriptions of everyday lives, traditional customs, rituals, and behaviours, the reader gains an understanding of the resourcefulness of the people who owned the rural furniture Kinmonth describes (40 and 250). This interwoven element is underpinned by Kinmonth's original research, which is grounded in an applied methodology that incorporates oral histories (256). Through the inclusion of oral histories, the book succeeds in documenting a transient and disappearing aspect of Irish material memory, preserving the recollections and perspectives of Irish furniture makers and craftspeople. *Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000* offers a deeply researched and factual written record of approaches to and experiences of rural Irish traditions.

Kinmonth's original research makes a major contribution to the knowledge of folk museums and formal records, as it engages with previously undocumented Irish country furniture and furnishings in situ. Kinmonth successfully preserves a vanishing aspect of rural Irish culture through the fieldwork she conducted in the 1980s. In undertaking this research, Kinmonth has produced a captivating visual record of the ephemeral Irish country

interior and its furnishings. The welcome inclusion of coloured images in this publication, which did not feature in *Irish Country Furniture 1700–1950* (1993), aids the reader in visually understanding the individualistic nature of rural Irish furniture. Coupled with Kinmonth’s fluid writing, which is both descriptive and engaging, *Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000* provides an expert text that is simultaneously accessible to a wide audience. It will undoubtedly be a constant reference point for writers and researchers of folklore, anthropology, and design history.

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