Sideboard

Place of origin: London (made)

Date: 1867-1870 (made)

Artist/Maker: Godwin, Edward William, born 1833 - died 1886 (designer)

William Watt & Co. (maker)

Materials and Techniques: Mahogany, ebonised, with silver-plated handles and inset panels of embossed leather paper

Museum number: CIRC.38:1 to 5-1953

Gallery location: British Galleries, Room 125, Edwin and Susan Davies Gallery, case 2

Public access description

Object Type
This sideboard is stylish and dramatic, but it is also quite appropriate for use in a dining room. It is functional with drawers, adjustable shelves, and a rack fitted to take a large dish between the cupboards. The construction and finish are practical and hygienic, with hard surfaces and simple decoration, and the raised bottom shelf gives access for cleaning the floor.

Materials & Making
E.W. Godwin designed the first version of this sideboard in ebonised deal, a cheap wood, in 1867. He subsequently changed to ebonised mahogany as he found deal to be unstable. At least ten versions of the original were made between 1867 and 1888, with differences in design, decoration or in the number of legs. There are several surviving examples of this sideboard, made of ebonised deal, mahogany, or oak and pine.

Ownership & Use
The original sideboard was designed by Godwin for the dining room of his London home in 1867. Another example was made for the Red House, Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire, the home that Godwin shared with the actress, Ellen Terry from 1868 to 1875. She subsequently used the sideboard in the dining room of her own house in London. Original owners of other sideboards in the same style also included the dramatist and art critic, Joseph Comyns Carr, the writers, Wilfred and Alice Meynell, and the architect, Frederick Jameson, whose daughter, Mrs. Hartree, sold this example to the Museum.

Descriptive line

Physical description
Sideboard, mahogany, ebonised with silver plated handles and inset panels of embossed leather paper.

Dimensions
Height: 181 cm, Width: 256 cm maximum, Width: 162 cm with flaps down, Depth: 56 cm

Museum number
CIRC.38:1 to 5-1953

Object history note
The sideboard originally belonged to Frederick Jameson, translator of Wagner and friend of Meredith (with whom he shared a house), Whistler and many other artists and architects. The museum acquired it from his daughter Evelyn Hartree.

Designed by Edward William Godwin (born in Bristol, 1833, died in London, 1886); made by William Watt & Co., London

Historical significance: This sideboard is today one of the most famous pieces of nineteenth century furniture. Its stark geometric form and plain ebonised surfaces have appealed greatly to Modernists throughout the twentieth century. The original version was designed by the architect E.W. Godwin in 1867 for himself. It epitomises the influence of Japanese art and design on British decorative art in the 1860s and 1870s.

A version of the sideboard was made in ebonised deal for Godwin's dining room. He wrote of it, 'Such effect as I wanted I endeavoured to gain, as in an economical building, by the mere grouping of solid and void and by a more or less broken outline.' [My chambers, and what I did to them. Chapter 1. A.D. 1867, The Architect, Vol.XVI, 1 July 1876, pp.4-5]

The success of Godwin's buffet is demonstrated by the number of examples which survive, all slightly different with varying numbers of legs. There are seven ebonised sideboards and one ebonised example without top cupboards, and one sideboard in oak and pine. The ebonised sideboard, from Ellen Terry's collection and now in Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, may be the example he designed about 1867 for their home in Hertfordshire.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8380/sideboard-godwin-edward-william/