

## ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING INTERIOR DESIGN STYLISTICS

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### Abstract

The design of contemporary pieces of furniture cannot be reduced to imitating the styles of the past, but the knowledge of their main characteristics and their critical analysis can represent a basis for the creations of the present, which innovatively capitalize the assimilated sources. Furniture styling is a broad subject matter required to train an interior designer or architect. Starting from the types of furniture, continuing with the ornamentation, with the analysis of the main architectural styles of interior, starting from the antiquity and up to the present, treating each new style appeared according to the historical context, geographical region, characteristic ornamentation, typologies of furniture pieces but and from the point of view of the technological innovation characteristic of that period.

The acquirement of knowledge in the field of interior styling is not only necessary to have the necessary basis to create modern furniture, adapted to the current requirements and technology, as well as to capitalize on furniture pieces of important styles prior to our period and their stylistic harmonization in a contemporary context or with other pieces of furniture of different styles.

The purpose of this article is to present the results obtained in the practical part of the "Interior Stylistics" course, which supported the didactic process representing an alternative method of assimilating the concepts taught in the course by taking several steps. This article present the main steps, results and conclusions obtained from this application part, which proves that using alternative methods of teaching improve the learning even in the theoretical courses with a significant amount of information and data.

**Keywords:** alternative methods, interior architecture, stylistics, furniture.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The pieces of furniture are a significant part of interior design, which are necessary from a functional point of view, to comfort, and also aesthetics considerations: the ambience which they create through shapes, colors and ornaments. Starting from Ancient History (Greece, Egypt, Rome), through Medieval Age, Renaissance, Baroque, etc till in the present, the main characteristic of the pieces of furniture and the principle of interior design have changed influenced by the historical period, the location, the general environment of the standard of living of that period, but also due to the level of technical development in the furniture production and materials which are used. (Cragoe, 2010; Simon & Dowling, 1995)

All these characteristics that followed one another through history have been materialized through different styles that provided information on the way of life from the times of the past, on some social hierarchies, also highlighting aesthetics and comfort preferences, expressing feelings, thoughts and standards of life. (Hudson, 2007)

Style furniture still occupies a significant place in furniture production. Knowing the main styles of interior design that have happened over time is necessary in the process of designing new pieces of furniture in order to take into account the evidence of the artistic imprint and the original factor introduced. The acquisition of knowledge in the field of Interior Stylistics is important also in the case of the accomplishment of interior arrangements that follow the stylistic harmonization of some original antiques pieces of furniture from different historical periods. (Bussagli, 2005; Florescu & Daicoviciu & Rosu, 1980)

### **1.1 Interior design stylistics**

When a piece of furniture it is more than a simple functional object, becoming a piece of work with different meanings, significations and symbols, we can talk about furniture design as art. It is important to understand what style furniture means and its evolution, in order to create a proper environment where we can integrate original antiques pieces in a stylistic harmonization with modern designs or in order to create original pieces of design. (Simon & Dowling, 1995; Bird, 1991)

By the term "style furniture" it can be understood either an original old furniture created during the period in which it is framed, but also a piece or an assembly of objects that respect the obvious typologies (shape, ornamentation, materials, execution technique) in one of the historical styles (Louis XV, Queen Ann, Regency, etc.) According to a generally accepted convention, the notion of style furniture includes also the reference to an old piece; including recent works, executed according to procedures and with contemporary techniques, often industrial, but which respect the general characteristics of a particular style or an historical era. (Dumitrescu & Povian & Milincu & Tudoran, 218; Ching & Binggeli, 2005)

### **1.2 The ornamentation and its applicability**

The association of fine arts, architecture and decorative arts has reached moments of perfect harmony in ancient Greece or in the Italian Renaissance; proposed fabulous experiments in the Spanish art nouveau or the German Rococo, thus being permanently framed in the great stylistic trends. Thus it can be considered as a reference element in the history of arts.

Ornaments are made of natural or abstract elements and are often stylized. There are inspired by geometric ornamental motifs, vegetal elements, animal kingdom, elements of architectural origin, human figure, human activities and tools, astral elements, calligraphic writing; and have a large field of applicability: starting with ancient crockery (pouring water pots, ancient bucket, amphora, etc.) metal objects (lighting, cult objects, weapons, household items, etc), different types of furniture (storage furniture, for stays, for sleeping) and also frames, jewelry, heraldry and ornamental writing. (Meyer, 1988)

The hypothesis of removing the ornament is not necessary, even though at certain moments of history it has surpassed its natural features, it has been added to the human environment as a superfluous element, abusing its functional form and characteristics, causing Adolf Loos to assert in 1900 that "the ornament" it is a crime and its removal is an act of culture." (Bucătaru, 1991)

The ornament has a decorative purpose, with symbolic connotations, which transforms objects into attractive, warmer and more pleasant forms. At the same time subject to the form it decorates, it offers significant clues in determining a style, the absence or the presence of certain decorative elements being specific to certain periods. An example is the style "Empire" from the French neoclassical period (1804-1815) characterized by the following ornamental elements: the swan, the letter "N", the bee, the imperial eagle, the abundance horn, the pleated dress, etc. (Popescu, 1979; Achiței, 1988)

### **1.3 Stylistic Harmonization**

The concept of stylistic harmonization was introduced especially in the post-modern period when the predilection to use simple forms was replaced by complex and contradictory forms. In the interior decorations the ornament and the classical furniture styles are reintroduced, although sometimes they are used in the form of copies turning the layout into "kitsch". The term "verkitschen" was used in 1860 at Munchen to describe an action of degradation, falsify, diminishing the value of an object. Nowadays the term "kitsch" it is used to describe the surrogate of an art element, an inauthentic piece which can be used in the absence of the original or because of the ignorance in identifying the original one. (Miller, 2000)

## 2 METHODOLOGY

Numerous books, articles and publications have analyzed and gathered information regarding the main characteristics, the functional factor, the aesthetic, the technology of making the main pieces of furniture, the characteristic ornamentation of each style, the way in which the historical period influenced the appearance of new pieces of furniture, as well as the connection between architecture - interior design - furniture - ornamentation. (Bucătaru, 1991; Hudson, 2007; Dumitrescu & Povian & Milincu & Tudoran, 2018)

All this amount of information concentrated to be taught to students, from the faculties of Architecture or Design, in one semester, in spite of its fascinated elements, does not appeal students to learn if it is being taught in a traditional way. The aim of this article is to present how the alternative methods of teaching, using the method of learning by drawing have improved the teaching process of this course.

### 2.1 Premises and assumptions

In the past years numerous studies were made in order to help students to learn more effectively than using the traditional method that rely on “teaching by telling”. Active learning approaches and this concept started to be used and promoted more than thirty years ago by Piaget and nowadays it is very often used with children in different educational workshops or activities. (Povian, 2019) It is also known under the definition: „Instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing”. (Bonwell, 1991).

In this case study presented in this article both methods are combine: the traditional method “teaching by telling”, as a starting point, and the alternative methods of teaching, in order to structure better the information in a logical way, where the students are challenged to draw in a workbook the results obtained from the documentation they have realized during the courses taught at the university, and through personal study.

The aim of this article is to analyze how alternative methods of teaching interior design stylistics can improve the attractiveness of the course, can increase the attendance at the course and at the seminar and the most important factor can improve the exam promotion rate.

### 2.2 Subjects and methods

The case study which is presented below represents the structure of the course and the seminar from the “Interior Stylistics” subject to the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Politehnica, Timișoara, and how it has been transformed in the last five years, by introducing alternative methods of learning, in order to improve the teaching process.

During these 5 years, during the second semester of the second year of study at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Specialization “Furniture and Interior Design”, each year about 30-40 students had to attend a 2 hours course and a 1 hour seminar for 14 weeks. At the end of the semester the evaluation was realized by an exam and a grade that evaluates the work realized during the seminar throughout the whole semester.

### 2.3 Case study on the Course and Seminar of “Comparative Stylistics”

**The course** is structured mainly on discussions on pictures representing pieces of furniture or examples of interior design representative for each period presented. Students are asked to enunciate opinions, to identify the main characteristics, the characteristic ornamentation, to think and comment on the information received from the teacher or following the individual documentation.

**The seminar** consists of seven sessions of two hours. In each session the students have to draw a worksheet on a certain topic. The purpose of the seminar is to create a connection between what they read or hear at course and the real applicability of the information.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The workbook of the seminar has 7 worksheets, each one having a subject to analyze. **The first worksheet- the application of ornamentation** represents an object, in six different styles throughout history. The students are encouraged to choose to draw objects in which they have a particular interest, starting from pieces of jewelry, clocks, weapons, household items, etc. (Fig. 1.a,b,c.)

**The second worksheet** represents drawings of a certain type of furniture throughout six different styles in history. (Fig.2.a.) Through this exercise they will be able to identify the evolution of the pieces of furniture from a functional, decorative, materiality and technological point of view. Also this type of exercise facilitates

the organization of information by comparative analysis between the styles studied.

The third and the fourth worksheets contain, each one of them, drawings representing six different pieces of furniture or decorations from two different styles. The first style they choose must be before the Renaissance period (Ancient Greece, Tudor style, German Gothic) and the second one after this period till the post-modernism (Louis XIII, William & Mary, Empire, Biedermeier, Arts and Crafts etc.). (Fig.2.b.c.)

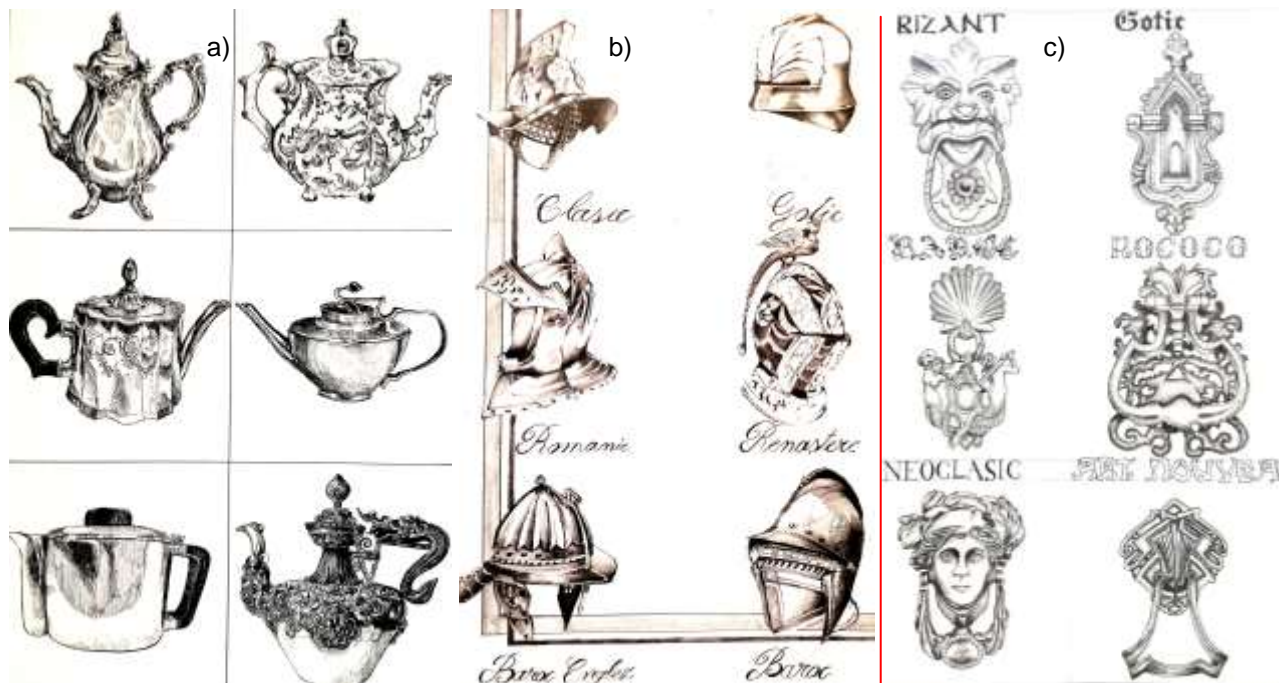


Fig. 1. The first worksheet representing the application of ornamentation, in six different styles throughout history; a) Teapots from six different historical styles; b) Armor helmets from six different styles; c) Door knob from six different styles.

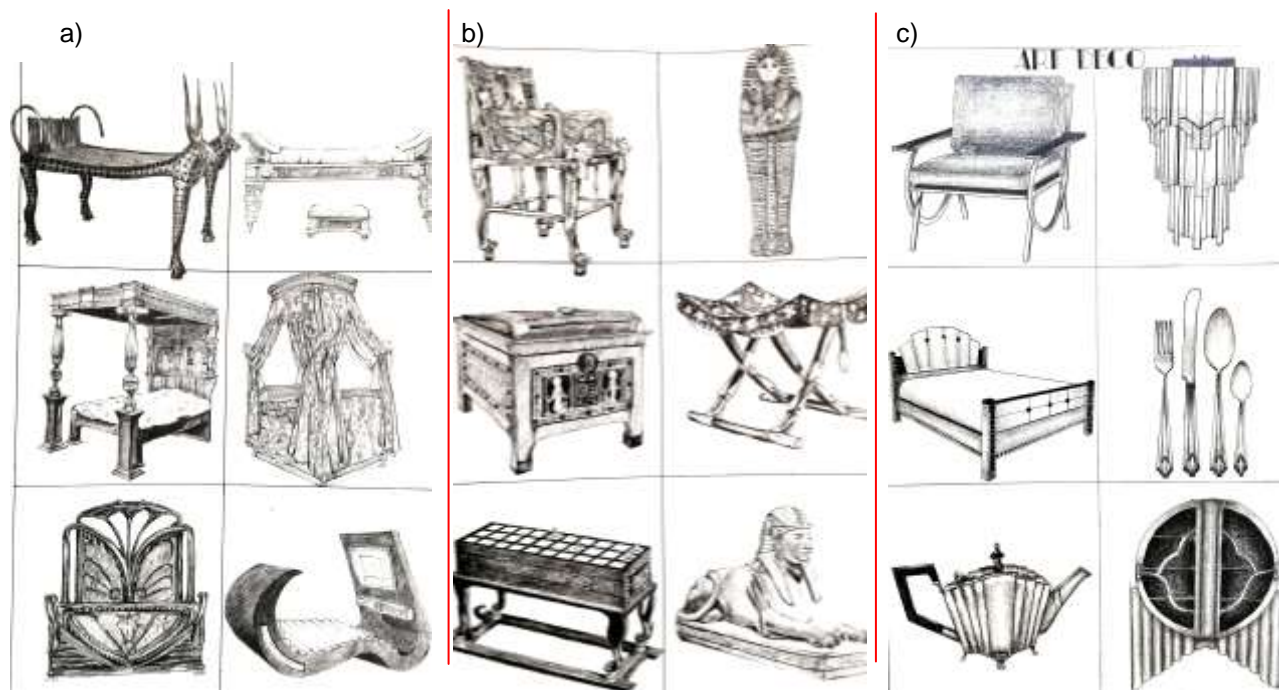


Fig. 2. a) The second worksheet- a piece of furniture throughout six different styles in history; b) The third worksheet- six pieces of furniture in a style before Renaissance c) The fourth worksheet- six pieces of furniture in a chosen style, after Renaissance.

The fifth worksheet contains an interior arrangement made in one of the styles presented in pages three and four. The students have to use the pieces of furniture drawn in the worksheets three or four and to create an interior design with them in order to recreate the atmosphere of the chosen style. They can eliminate one of the pieces of furniture from the previous worksheet and they can add as many other pieces of furniture or decorations in order to create a characteristic environment for the studied style.(Fig 3.a.b.c.)

As it can be seen below each worksheet contains: 1) the plan of the room which represents how the pieces of furniture from the previous worksheet were arranged in space and what connections were created between them; 2) a perspective in order to illustrate better the atmosphere and the stylistic harmonization created with the given pieces of furniture; 3) a paragraph of text in order to describe the main characteristics of the chosen stile.(Fig 3.a.b.c.)



Fig. 3.Worksheets representing the main pieces of furniture and the interior design realized with them; a)Late medieval Tudor Style; b) Louis XVI Style; c)Modern style in interior design.

The 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> worksheets contain each one of them drawings representing: the first one an example

of Romanian vernacular interior design; and the second worksheet an example of international vernacular interior design. The template of the worksheets 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> is the same with the template form the worksheet number 5 and contains: the plan, the perspective and short descriptions of the main characteristics of the style they have chosen.

In order to draw this worksheets they have to realize a scientific documentation, to create a reference list for each piece they have drawn with the source. Only antiques, or objects from museums, from books or scientifically papers are accepted as source for their drawings. In this way they are encouraged to learn to spot the differences between an original piece and a fake one and also to see the value of them in the antiques shops.

The Worksheets four and five stimulates the students not only to reproduce by copy a few pieces of furniture, but also helps them to understand better the shape and function of the furniture and raise the problem of their use in a different social context, with different symbolic values, and a representative purpose which answers to different needs than the current ones.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

By approaching the problem of teaching stylistics to students using alternative methods, we could notice that the number of students attending the course increased, the exam passing rate from the first presentation also increased significantly from 40% to 60%. The most important result of using this type of teaching was observed in increasing the retention period of the acquired information, these being logically assimilated through practical activities.

All this data proves that even if we are talking about theoretical courses with a significant amount of information and data, the practical part using drawings and other alternative methods should be taken into consideration in order to obtain better result in learning.

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The drawings were realized during the “Comparative Stylistics” Seminar by students from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Specialization Furniture and Interior Design, Politehnica University, Timișoara, Romania.