

# ***Mackintosh In Miniature***



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# The Gek Contemporary

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## Cover Photograph

**Willow Tearooms.** (2021)

219 Sauchiehall St.

Glasgow.

# ***Introduction***

## **Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928)**

The Modernist Style, also known as Art Nouveau, of architecture, art and design first emerged in the UK in the mid-1880's, just as Charles was enrolling for the first time as a student at the Glasgow School of Art. He subsequently became one of the most important people in the field of design in general and architecture. He created one of the iconic symbols of the movement, known as the Mackintosh or Glasgow Rose.

By the beginning of the First World War, the Modernist Style was already in decline, being subsequently replaced by the Art Deco of the 1920s. As a consequence of that war and the loss of interest in Charles's take on architecture, his style disappeared off the radar until he was 'rediscovered' by a revived interest in the Art Nouveau movement in the late '60s, early '70s. When a chair designed originally for House'hill sold at auction in 1975 for an unprecedented amount, his popularity began to 'sky-rocket'.

Charles's designs have now become a commodity, appearing on everything from mugs to jewel in any museum's gift shop with a Mackintosh piece in its collection. Indeed, two such items are on display in this exhibition, bought in the gift shop on a recent visit to Tintern Abbey, which as far as I know, has no connection with Charles.

This exhibition features mainly furniture pieces designed by Mackintosh for the Willows Tearooms in Glasgow plus a couple for his own home.

In conclusion, I have to say that none of these models could have been made without the detailed drawings found in Michael Crow's book.



### **Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margret Macdonald**

They met as students at the old Glasgow School of Art in 1883. Little did they know then that Charles would one day be the architect of the new Glasgow School of Art. The couple were married in 1900. Their home, which is now replicated at the Hunterian Gallery in Glasgow, was both beautiful and functional.

In one of his letters to Margret, Charles states: 'You must remember that in all of my architectural efforts you have been the half, if not three quarters of them.' He described Margret as his "spirit key" whose contribution to his creative output illustrates how talented she was in her own right as an artist, who defined the 'Glasgow Style' as much as Mackintosh did.

Indeed, Charles wrote "Margret has genius, I have only talent."



## **Willow Tearooms.**

Charles's and Margret's collaboration in the design of the famous Willow Tearooms, commissioned by a Miss Cranston, was a work of art in itself. Meticulous attention to detail was apparent, right down to the teaspoons, china and the attire of the staff.

The tea rooms are on Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street, which at the turn of the century was the city's finest street. 'Sauchiehall' is thought to be a corruption of the Scots language phrase meaning a 'meadow of willows'.

There was a ladies' tearoom to the front of the ground floor with a general lunch room to the back and a tea gallery above it. The first floor contains the "Room de Luxe", a more exclusive ladies' room overlooking Sauchiehall Street. The second floor had a timber-panelled billiards room and smoke rooms the men. The design concept foresaw a place for ladies to meet their friends, and for the men to use in their breaks from office work – an oasis in the city centre.

The rooms were first opened for business in October 1903 and after a major 4-year restoration reopened to the public again in June 2018 as the Mackintosh at the Willow.



Buchanan Street, 2020

### **Tea Gallery.**

***Willow Tearooms, Buchanan Street.***

To first, perhaps, clear up a little confusion. When the original Willows Tearooms building was acquired back in 2014 for the restoration, the incumbent Willows Tearooms moved to Buchanan Street. On completion of the project, the Sauchiehall Street premises then became the Mackintosh at the Willows.



### **High Chair.**

***Willow Tearooms, Buchanan Street.***

The idea behind such a high back to the chair was to give the group seated at the table a sense of isolation and intimacy. The chair was originally made for the Ingram Street Tearoom and were stained black as shown here, those for Charles's and Margret's own home were painted white.



**Baldacchino.**  
*Mackintosh at the Willow.*

A Baldacchino is a canopy of state typically placed over an altar or throne. It is not exactly clear if Charles meant it to be so named or if customers to the tea room came to call it so.

**Clock.**

***Mackintosh at the Willow.***

Although the clock's case is as tall as a grandfather's, this design does not require a pendulum. Instead, display shelves occupy the space. David Hislop (c1838-1919) was paid £7 to build the clock from Charles's design especially for the tearooms.



**Cafe Table.**

***Mackintosh at the Willow.***

There are no existing examples of this table designed for the Willows. The drawings for it in Michael Crow's book were derived from a 1905 photograph featured in a German Art Nouveau magazine, *Dekorative Kunst*. In the tea room it was paired with the arm chair featured below, the two making an "attractive match for intimate dining".





Original General Lunch Room



Photograph from 2014

### **Fire Place.**

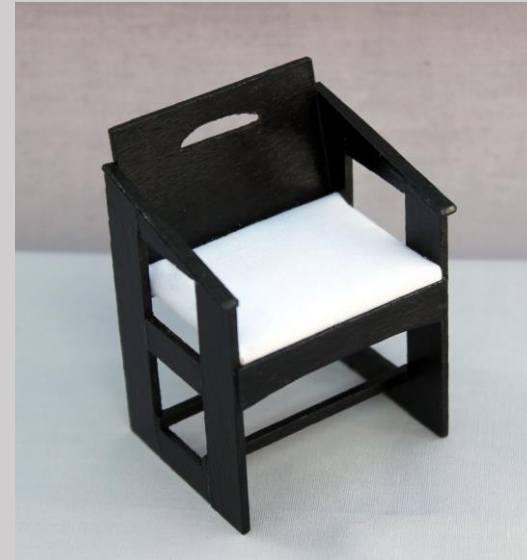
***Mackintosh at the Willow.***

In the general lunch room at the rear of the property. The fireplace was boarded up for 20 years prior to the tearooms restoration in 2014 when this photograph was taken. Subsequently the hearth was found to cover more tiles. Unfortunately, I had already made the model before discovering a more recent image.

**Café Arm Chair.**

***Mackintosh at the Willow.***

Fifty copies of the chair were made for the tearoom in ebonised oak. As with many of Mackintosh's other chair designs, the emphasis appears to be on form rather than function. Still, a pair of original chairs sold at auction for £40,000 in 2016.



**Café Table.**

***Mackintosh at the Willow.***

This is thought to be the first design where Mackintosh used the table legs set based on the diagonal to the top, a choice he returned to time and time again.



Hill House

### **Other Furniture.**

As well as working as an architect, an example of which is Hill House shown opposite, Charles was also designing bespoke furniture for his clients as well as for his on home.

### **Umbrella Stand.**

*Hill House Cloak Room.*

The umbrella stand was built for the Hill House cloak rooms. Rather modest in design for Mackintosh.



**Settle.**

*The Mackintosh's own Home.*

The settle provided a seat for putting on shoes in an entry way or mudroom. A hinged seat also opens to provide additional storage for foot wear.



**Dresser.**

*The Mackintosh's own Home.*

“Though modestly executed in black-stained pine, it shows care in its design, with the motif of the square on the upper shelves echoed in its overall shape.” Michael Crow

# ***Acknowledgements***

**Mackintosh Furniture: Techniques & Shop Drawings for 30 Designs** – Michael Crow, Popular Woodworking Books.

**Charles Rennie Mackintosh: A Legacy and a Love Story** - Barbara Butcher, Published in History Today

**Willow Tearooms** – Alyn Griffiths, [www.dezeen.com](http://www.dezeen.com)

**Wikipedia** – General information.

Thank you for visiting the Gek Contemporary.

Hope to see you again soon.