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# THE MATERIAL WORLD

The Marble of Antiquity  
The Concrete of Brutalism  
The Everything of Now



**THE SINCEREST FORM**  
 Right: a plaster doorway of exaggerated proportions designed by the author as an homage to Dorothy Draper, a decorator known for her whimsical interpretations of the Baroque style. Below: an 18th-century bouquet of Sèvres porcelain flowers.



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the human need and desire to build. But new materials, substances and surfaces develop taste; it seems quixotic to willfully disregard their aptness and usefulness and charm, determining instead of an austerity, which, once achieved, is blandly static.

The Golden Age magnates, ordering all their furniture from Paris, along with walls full of Old Masters from Duveen, had zero intrinsic taste, but a lingering memory of, and yearning for, European culture. It remained so until the early 20th century. American decorator Elsie de Wolfe came along to inject a bit of decorative frivolity into those gloomy 1890s mansions. Her style caught the public imagination like wildfire, and her innovative lightheartedness set the style for the first half of the coming century. Among the things de Wolfe insisted on was an acceptance of new materials. Just as in previous centuries, royalty had been thrilled to own the latest-discovered woods or Chinese lacquer to incorporate into their newest furniture, so De Wolfe introduced the most up-to-date materials: plastic, Bakelite, spun glass, acrylic, nylon. Her ideas were influential not only interior design (Dorothy Draper, Billy Haines, etc.), but artists (Dali), fashion (Schiaparelli), magazines and, most of all, film. Fake became a valid art form. As the millions spent acquiring a Warhol — the grand old man of the art — prove, there's nothing so authentic as a fake. ■

no material should *ex post facto* be considered superior to any other, age and rarity notwithstanding.

In the country, I live in a "sham" Jacobean house of extreme whimsical delicacy, but even the grimmest of minimalists fall for its "fake" facade. A diamond Cartier feather is, *au fond*, a fake feather, but I doubt that any severely pro-authenticity proprietress of one of those earnest, soulless spaces would throw one in the trash. It is said Madame de Pompadour had the flower beds at Château de Bellevue planted with thousands of "fake" porcelain flowers, thereby not only ensuring constant work for the Sèvres manufacturers, but also the creation of ravishingly beautiful artworks that fooled no one and delighted all — and, of course, whose rarity and value today are incalculable.

When the few seams of the world's more exotic marbles were exhausted, 18th-century architects had craftsmen all over Europe paint the equivalent. But if one suggests a unique marbleized wall finish over the real thing, most shudder and beetle back to boring calacatta. Fake is surely only contemptible when it's trying to pass as original, when quite simply forgery, or counterfeit. But a witty take on the real thing is a different matter. Fake fur springs to mind.

I suspect that dedication to the "authentic" is really taste for people with no taste. One can't really criticize that exposed brick wall, the steel supports, the rough stone. There's nothing wrong with them. They were, are, the essential linchpins of



**IMITATION GAME**  
 Clockwise from bottom: Cody Hoyt's ceramic vessels, Maurizio Galante and Tal Lenceman's upholstered daybed and Bethan Laura Wood's laminate cabinet loosely mimic the speckles and veining of natural stone, while Martino Gamper uses recycled Gio Ponti furniture to create new work.

