Eileen Gray's *Jean Désert* showroom 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris ; marketing design in the 1920s

*La galerie d'exposition Jean Désert d'Eileen Gray, 217 rue du Faubourg Saint-
Honoré, Paris : marketing du design dans les années 1920*

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La galerie d'exposition Jean Désert d'Eileen Gray, 217 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris : marketing du design dans les années 1920

Tim Benton

- 1 What can a simple cash ledger tell the historian? In the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are several documents concerning the Jean Désert showroom, at 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, that the Irish designer Eileen Gray opened in 1922 and closed in 1930. The *Journal de Caisse* is a ledger containing 183 numbered pages from which 29 pages have been ripped out to constitute a separate document entitled *Ventes Jean Désert*.¹ Although these sources have been studied by dealers and scholars before, this is the first attempt to mine the records for detailed information on the workings of the design market.² Although there are many material and economic studies of architectural and design practices, I know of no other such detailed analysis of the sale and marketing of furniture and rugs.³
- 2 What can these documents tell us? Several questions arise. What was the financial viability of the showroom? What kinds of items sold best? What does the showroom tell us about Gray's approach to design? How does her practice differ from that of other designers of the day? What clues do the documents give to understanding Gray's clients and their social milieu? Before analysing the documents and tackling these questions, a little context is required.
- 3 The career of the enormously talented Irish artist Eileen Gray (1878-1976) is usually seen as a kind of progression, from designing *objets d'art* and furniture in Japanese lacquer, through interior design to architecture⁴. In 1907, she settled permanently in Paris in her apartment at 21 Rue Bonaparte in the sixth arrondissement where she

began to design and make objects and furniture in lacquer. By 1922, when her lacquer work was written up in glowing terms by Élisabeth de Gramont, Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre, Gray had established a reputation among a discreet circle of wealthy clients in Paris.⁵ Following a discussion with Philippe Garner, I have not used the style label “Art Déco” to describe her early work because it is so unlike the productions of the well-known Art Déco designers. In 1919 Juliette Mathieu-Lévy, who had taken over the management of the millinery label “Suzanne Talbot”, commissioned Gray to redesign her apartment at 9 Rue de Lota in the sixteenth arrondissement, a project which kept her busy for four years.⁶ This was Gray’s only complete interior design commission.

- 4 In 1923 Gray exhibited a complete room, which she dubbed ‘bedroom boudoir for Monte Carlo’ at the Salon des artistes décorateurs.⁷ Partly under the influence of the Romanian architect and journalist Jean Badovici and partly through the stimulation offered by several de Stijl artists and architects in Rotterdam, she moved away from lacquer towards abstract compositions and, from 1925 or 1926, tubular steel furniture.⁸ I will show that her approach to design and business practices differed substantially from that of her contemporaries.

Jean Désert, 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris

- 5 Gray opened her showroom Jean Désert at 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré on 16 May 1922 and closed it in 1930.⁹ I will argue that the showroom effectively finished trading in late 1927, when Gray’s interest had been transferred to architecture and, in particular, the design and construction of the *Villa en bord de mer* E-1027 at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, not far from Monaco.¹⁰ The name of the showroom seems to have derived from the 127-page novelette written by Jean de La Ville de Mirmont, *Les dimanches de Jean Désert*, 1914.¹¹ The Jean Désert showroom was recorded in the *Bottin du Commerce* in 1923 and 1924.¹² In the *Didot-Bottin* of 1925, Gray lists herself as an *ébéniste* under her home address of 21 Rue Bonaparte, Paris.¹³

Figure 1. Map of part of the left bank, Paris, showing Eileen Gray's apartment (A), the Rue Visconti rugs workshop (B) and the Rue Guénégau lacquer workshop (C)

- 6 The name of the showroom gave the bisexual Gray a male business persona. Tradesmen would usually address their letters and bills to “monsieur Désert”, and Gray encouraged this with the masthead of her headed paper for the Guénégau workshop: “Désert et Gray”.¹⁴ In 1922 it was almost unheard-of to name a furniture business or salesroom explicitly after a woman.¹⁵ On the other hand, by 1928, many of the fashion houses had feminized names: Lucile, Jeanne Lanvin, Germaine, Berthe, Suzanne Talbot, Agnès, to name but a few. Of 76 fashion shows listed in a New York store buyer’s guide in 1926, more than half had women’s names.¹⁶ However, the feminization of the public face of the fashion industry was beginning to permeate the world of interior design. Madame J. B. Klotz, Renée Kinsbourg and, later, Charlotte Perriand and Charlotte Alix created reputations as furniture designers and *ensemblières* in the 1920s.

Figure 2. Eileen Gray, Jean Désert shop front, 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris ca. 1927

NMIEG 2009_Arch_Port 2, p. 289

- 7 In this showroom, with its austere frontage (Fig. 2), Gray tried to sell her own furniture, rugs produced by her partnership with Evelyn Wyld, works produced by the Japanese lacquer artist Seizo Sougawara and the sculptor and woodworker Kichizo Inagaki.¹⁷ In 1910 Gray had set up a workshop for Sougawara at 11 Rue Guénégaud, not far from Gray's apartment at 21 Rue Bonaparte in the sixth arrondissement, and also adapted a space adjoining her house at Samois-sur-Seine for him to work (Fig. 1).¹⁸ With Evelyn Wyld she established a rug weaving workshop on three floors at 17-19 Rue Visconti in 1910 where, apparently, eight women worked between 1924-1925 on the first floor.¹⁹ This workshop was less than 100 metres from Gray's apartment. Although this workshop had been active since at least 1912, a contract was only signed by Gray and Wyld on 1 February 1924 initiating a "Société en nom collectif pour la fabrication et vente d'étoffes tissées, de tapis et autres travaux de même nature, exécutés sur métiers à main ou mécaniques".²⁰ The contract specified that Gray's share of the company, valued at 50,000 francs, consisted of the originating idea, the machinery, materials and clients, while Wyld's share, valued at 10,000 francs, consisted of her technical expertise. The duration of the contract was specified as between two and five years. This seems to reflect tensions beginning to develop between Gray and Wyld, who had been very close friends since childhood, as Wyld began to develop her own career.
- 8 Although, as we shall see, the Rue Guénégaud and Rue Visconti workshops were partially integrated into the business plan of the Jean Désert showroom, the relationship between the Rue Visconti workshop and Jean Désert was not an exclusive one. Wyld designed, exhibited and presumably sold some of the rugs herself.²¹ In fact, it seems that Wyld was much more proactive than Gray in promoting her work, exhibiting regularly in the Salon des arts décoratifs, the Salon d'automne and the

annual exhibitions at the Musée Galliera, often in collaboration with Jean Dunand and Eugène Printz. By contrast, Gray exhibited only intermittently, not even submitting work to the Exposition des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, in Paris in 1925.²² Wyld did exhibit her rugs at this exhibition. The designer Eugène Printz also featured Wyld's work in his gallery in the Rue de Miromesnil, in the eighth arrondissement, which opened in June 1928.²³ Around 1926 Wyld met the American artist, journalist and designer Elizabeth Eyre de Lanux and soon afterwards set up a partnership with her in the Rue Visconti workshops.

- 9 According to Gray's biographer Peter Adam, confirmed by the design historian Susan Day, Gray transferred half the looms from Rue Visconti to the basement of the Jean Désert showroom in 1926.²⁴ This is confirmed by the payment of 1,728,90 francs to a certain Davies for "transporting looms" on 26 October 1925.²⁵ It is perhaps no coincidence that in November 1925 Gray began paying the salaries of between two and three women working on rugs, presumably in the Jean Désert showroom.²⁶ It is also at this time that the accounts begin to record payments for significant quantities of weaving materials. The separation of activities between Evelyn Wyld's workshop and Eileen Gray's showroom began therefore in 1925 and not in 1926 and must have transformed the use of space in the Jean Désert showroom.

Figure 3. E-1027 adjustable tea-table, c. 1926-7, black lacquered block screen and "circles" rug in the Jean Désert showroom

NMIEG 2009_Arch_Port_1-132

- 10 The only existing original photograph of the exterior of the showroom (Fig. 2) shows the entrance as a double door roughly 1.60 m wide on the right-hand side.²⁷ The historian Cécile Tajan dates the photograph of the exterior to 1927, no doubt based on the rugs illustrated in the window.²⁸ One of these rugs is shown in the guest bedroom of

E-1027 in *Architecture Vivante* in 1929 and features in a photograph, taken in the Jean Désert showroom, along with the “E-1027 table” designed in 1926 or 1927 (Fig. 3).²⁹ The other rug is “Wendingen”, named for the Amsterdam journal that ran a feature on Gray’s work in 1924. I know of no images associating either of these rugs with furniture designed before 1926.³⁰ We can therefore date the photograph of the exterior to the period 1926 to 1929.

“Ventes Jean Désert” List of sales 1923-October 1927

- 11 In the next section I will analyse the accounts of the Jean Désert showroom. I will then use the account books to trace Gray’s most influential clients and comment on her approach to business and to the development of her career.
- 12 An intriguing document that throws light on the financial viability of Jean Désert is a detailed ledger entitled “*Journal de Caisse*”, covering the years 1925 to 1926 and part of 1927.³¹ A further document entitled “*Ventes Jean Désert*” covers the period 1923 to October 1927.³² Here are listed sales of items, the dates and the clients who bought them.³³ The pages of the Cash Ledger are numbered and there is a gap between pages 151 and 180. This indicates that the 28 pages of “*Ventes Jean Désert*” were originally part of the Cash Ledger, which raises the interesting question about the disparity of dates between the two accounts. Why does the Cash Ledger begin in 1925 and not in 1923, like the “*Ventes Jean Désert*”?

Figure 4. Sale of furniture, rugs and other items from January 1923 to October 1927, not counting the commission for the Rue de Lota apartment

AAD 1980_9-19

- 13 How successful was Jean Désert as a business venture? The account of sales of items in the manuscript “*Ventes Jean Désert*” suggests a steady rise in sales to 1926 followed by a decline in 1927 (Fig. 4). Business was seasonal, usually peaking from December to February with spikes in June and July. This pattern reflects the nature of Gray’s wealthy clientele, which moved between different properties in France and elsewhere. The almost total lack of advertising helps to explain the shortage of regular visitors. Total sales, over the 58 months of this record, amount to 303,895,11 francs at an average of 5,239.57 francs per month. The showroom was closed every year in August (except for 1923) but was apparently also closed in April, September and October 1923, May 1924, April and June 1926 and July 1927, when no sales are recorded. The 1923 closures may be accounted for by Gray’s work on her Bedroom Boudoir for Monte Carlo

exhibit for the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs. From June 1926 Gray was progressively involved in selecting the site and supervising construction of the villa E-1027 at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

- ¹⁴ A large number of items remained unsold in 1930. There is a typed sheet headed “*Ventes depuis le 1^{er} Février*” (the month is capitalised in the English manner).³⁴ In pencil “[1930]” was added to the title, and the sheet is paginated “5”. This sheet lists 14 sales of 27 items and is annotated “à recevoir” or “reçu” according to whether the client had paid up. This must be the fifth sheet of a longer typed inventory of sales during the winding up of Jean Désert in 1930. There is also a handwritten sheet of 29 items with discounted prices in blue ink entitled ‘*Liste de meubles (à la boutique)*’.³⁵ From the contents of this list, it must also belong to the period of selling off the stock in 1930. It can be cross-checked with three manuscript pages headed “*Derniers prix des meubles*”.³⁶ These pages list items of furniture with a price and a discounted price (almost all of the order of 12 % reduction). That these sheets constitute part of an inventory of stock is indicated by a running total listed at the top of each page. This inventory is also missing at least one page. The process of selling off the stock of the showroom around 1930 is also documented in a number of receipts, both for the manufacture of items and for their sale, and a typewritten note detailing sales of furniture to seven clients.³⁷ It is notable that the majority of these items were designed before 1925,

Estimating profit and loss

- ¹⁵ In 1973, Gray told Éveline Schlumberger, “*J’avais tant de mal avec ma galerie, les gens n’entraient pas. Ils trouvaient ce que je faisais inquiétant.*”³⁸ Some difficulties have to be acknowledged straight away before estimating the profitability of Jean Désert. We have very little indication of the costs of production of items. For example, by far the biggest income recorded in the ‘*Ventes Jean Désert*’ is the sum of 80,000 francs received on January 19, 1924 and marked “*Reçu solde pr antichambre Lota decoration*”³⁹. This refers to the redecoration of the apartment of Juliette Mathieu-Lévy at 9 Rue de Lota between 1919 and 1923.⁴⁰ A final account for the decoration of Mathieu-Lévy’s apartment is listed for October 1924 at 12,254 francs and 90 centimes⁴¹. We must assume that these sums should be offset against unknown production costs and expenses. This sum of 92,254.90 francs can be compared to 211,640.20 francs, the total value of Jean Désert sales recorded in the list of “*Vente des meubles*” for 1923-1927 (minus Rue de Lota), or 42 %. We do not seem to have a record of any other fees for interior design work. We have no evidence of sales in 1922 although they must have existed.

Cash Ledger 1925-1927 (AAD 1980-9-1)

- ¹⁶ It is necessary here to delve a little into the mechanics of accounting, if we are to understand the economic history of Jean Désert. The cash ledger, marketed by H. Beauvais, 14 Rue du Bac, is inscribed on its inside front cover “*Eileen Gray; maison Jean Désert; 217 Faubourg Saint-Honoré; Journal de Caisse 1925*” (Fig. 5). The pages are numbered from 1 to 183. On page 102 begins a series of incomplete analytical pages summarising certain topics of expenditure, but the accounts of daily expenses and income for 1927 overlap with these pages. On page 116 the accounts peter out, halfway through

April 1927, with 91.90 francs in the till but without a final reconciling of the accounts. The main income recorded in 1927 consists of 3,000 francs paid in by Gray.⁴²

Figure 5. Cash ledger Jean Désert, pp. 2-3

AAD 1980_9-1

- 17 The *Journal de Caisse* was stamped and initialled on each page by the clerk of the “*juge suppléant du Tribunal de Commerce de la Seine*” and submitted as account 3837 under the ordonnance 1673 titre III article 4. This attestation was dated 24 January 1925 and covers 100 pages which suggests that it was a blank document intended to be completed and submitted for scrutiny at a later date. This ordonnance under the law 1804-03-06 is about the sale of property. Since Gray rented 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the only property she had to sell was the business and its stock. Was Gray already thinking of a possible sale of the business in 1925, which might require keeping official accounts for tax purposes? Given what we now know about the date of the break-up with Evelyn Wyld, it seems likely that Gray was already thinking of selling the business in 1925. Do the accounts come to an end, incomplete, because Gray decided not to sell the business but just to close it?
- 18 In fact, was the showroom effectively closed after April 1927? From 1927, according to Gray’s biographer Peter Adam, Gray’s servant Louise Dany “helped in the Jean Désert showroom and handled all the dealings with suppliers and workmen”.⁴³ This may also explain why the formal accounts of Jean Désert come to a halt in April 1927. We know that some tradesmen continued to send bills to 217 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré in 1928, but these may have been handled personally by Gray.⁴⁴ Several factors might support this hypothesis. First, the analytical pages are incomplete. Secondly, Gray was beginning to accumulate expenses on the Côte d’Azur. In June 1926 she began to buy the six plots of land near Castellar, a village in the hills above Menton on the Côte

d'Azur, on which she would build her villa Tempe a Pailla.⁴⁵ In one of the deeds of sale dated 24 April 1926, for three plots bought from Jean-Baptiste Viale, the price is given as 68,000 francs; in another transaction she seems to have paid 40,000 francs for two other plots.⁴⁶ If it is true that Gray reimbursed Jean Badovici for the 35,000 francs he paid for the site of E-1027, that would represent a sizeable dent in her account at Morgan bank which would increase with the costs of construction of the villa, which may have begun in 1927. Furthermore, the continuing devaluation of the franc compared to the Pound sterling was eating away at her fixed income (Fig. 6 and 7).⁴⁷ An aggravating factor is that the newly formed Irish Free state passed currency legislation in 1926 that would have frozen any assets that she may have had in Ireland.⁴⁸ Without knowing how Gray invested her money, it is impossible to know how serious this was. On the other hand, the family home Brownswood was sold on 4 March 1929, and it must be assumed that Gray received a share of the proceeds.⁴⁹

Figure 6. Cost of living in France

Statistique Générale de la France

Figure 7. Inflation of the French franc against the British pound and the US dollar, 1919-1926

Statistique journalière, Archives de la Banque de France, données retravaillées

- 19 Many of the cash deposits into the till are described as payments to “*Larroussilhe caisse*”.⁵⁰ Apparently, Larroussilhe, who was paid a monthly salary, was the clerk of Jean Désert.⁵¹ The *caisse* frequently passes into deficit, and we must assume that Larroussilhe managed the cashflow in some way. There is no evidence that Gabrielle (Gaby) Bloch ran the showroom, as is asserted by the biographers. The ledger presents certain difficulties of comprehension. Although it is intended as a cash register, other figures in red ink are added, representing cheques paid in and cheques paid out by Gray (complete with the cheque numbers) (Fig. 5). It is in the nature of a cash register to balance income and expenditure as much as possible. If expenses exceed receipts, additional funds have to be found to keep the till afloat.

Figure 8. Chart of cheque transactions in the Ledger January 1925-April 1927

AAD 1908-9-1. Chart by the author, 2021.

- 20 Key to the viability of the showroom were the cheques paid directly to Eileen Gray and the cheques she paid out (Fig. 8). The cheque payments included frequent sums paid in to the *Caisse* by Eileen Gray for the rents of the lacquer workshop in the Rue Guénégaud and the Jean Désert showroom and to cover cash deficits (counted as income in the cash flow chart). For example, on January 10, 1925, two such deposits of 2,000 francs (both identified as “*chèque pr caisse*” with Gray’s cheque numbers) are recorded in black ink as cash income (Fig. 5). This means that Gray paid 4,000 francs in cash into the till. On the other hand, on 12 January, we see the figure of 3,305 francs in cash deposited in the bank, the sum of a number of receipts on page 3.⁵²
- 21 Gray was paying more into the *caisse* than she was receiving in cheques from the sale of furniture, to the tune of a net imbalance of 21,55.12 francs (January 1925-April 1927). In fact, Gray paid 158,500 francs into the *caisse* between January 1925 and April 1927 to keep the till afloat (Fig. 9).

Figure 9. Monthly payments into the *caisse* by Gray

AAD 1980_9-1. Chart by the author, 2021

- 22 But this too is not the end of the story. What really matters is the profit and loss in Gray’s bank account. In addition to the cheques paid to Gray, there were occasional deposits of cash from the till into her bank account. We have no access to the full story of Gray’s finances including her income from investments and major and minor expenses. Fortunately, the accountant summarised the bank transactions for 1925-1926 in the Ledger, including the numbers of the cheques used by Gray.⁵³ This summary can be completed and extended to March 1927 by consulting the cash ledger (Fig. 10). This presents uncomfortable reading.

Figure 10. Bank transactions summarised in the Ledger (January 1925 to May 1926, extended to March 1927).

Chart by the author, 2021.

- 23 Losses on the bank transactions for 1925 were 31,186.97 francs and for 1926 45,618 francs. In only four months (February and July 1925 and January and February 1926) are the bank transactions positive, and from March 1926, they are consistently in deficit. To put these numbers into perspective, Jean Badovici paid 35,000 francs on March 27 1926 for the 768 square meters of the Massolin site at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin on which E-1027 was built.⁵⁴
- 24 Four sequences of cheque numbers paid out by Gray are recorded: 48472-48500, 317351-317400 and 528351-528366. Of the 111 cheques included in these sequences, we have records for 90 and some at least were voided.⁵⁵ Although Gray was obviously using these chequebooks to pay for some other things, whether personal or connected with the business, this is a fairly complete record of banking transactions connected with Jean Désert.

Fixed costs

- 25 How sound was the business plan for Jean Désert? We have no complete record of production costs, but we can estimate fixed costs fairly accurately. The biggest fixed costs was the salary paid to Sougawara (usually 250 francs per week, or 1,000 francs per month), plus additional payments made to him, and the monthly salary payments to Larroussilhe (700 francs). Taken together, these salaries averaged out to 1,967 francs per month from January to June 1925.⁵⁶ The salaries rise steadily between 1925 and 1927, which is not surprising consisting that the cost of living rose significantly in this period.⁵⁷ In 1926 the weekly sum paid to Sougawara was raised to 300 francs when it was first described as “*salaire*”.⁵⁸ By comparison, skilled metal workers in Paris earned 233 francs per week, in 1930.⁵⁹
- 26 In the first half of 1926 we find the names of various women receiving salaries: a certain Renée and Antoinette Lamour working at 11 Rue Guénégaud and Mme Bodin,

Mlle Bouvel and Mlle Brunaud, working on the rugs in the showroom. The first payment to Antoinette (120 francs per week) was on 17 October 1925. I cannot explain why Gray should have begun subsidising Sougawara's staff at a time when he had begun to branch out on his own, working with other designers and when she had given up designing in lacquer. The first payment (90 francs per week) to Mme Bodin was on 20 November 1925, immediately after the transfer of the looms to the basement of Jean Désert. We know the day rate because calculations are sometimes made based on specific days. For example, on 3 October Antoinette Lamour is paid 60 francs for "3 jours à 20 francs" and on 19 February 1926 Renée is paid 82,50 francs for "½ journée en moins".⁶⁰ Based on an eight hour day, these figures correspond to hourly wages of 2,50 francs and 1,87 franc respectively, which is very low, but they may have worked fewer than eight hours per day. They worked between 5, 5 ½ or 6 days a week.

- 27 Next in importance were the quarterly payments of rent for the Jean Désert showroom and the Rue Guénégaud workshop as well as occasional payments of Gray's rent in Rue Bonaparte and contributions to her house in Samois-sur-Seine. Overall, this gives us monthly fixed costs of around 5,000 francs for the first six months of 1925.⁶¹ Mapping these data in the period January to June 1925 indicates that overall sales outstripped fixed costs overall by 4,618 francs. but that in most months costs outstripped sales.⁶²
- 28 Some of the fixed costs – the salaries paid to Sougawara and to his assistants and to the weavers after 1926 – contributed to production but it is impossible to evaluate their relative importance, particularly since many of the items sold were made before 1923. There is correspondence with Kichizo Inazaki detailing costs of certain items, but these are all before 1923.⁶³ From this it is clear that some items were sold at little more than twice the cost. A sheet of expenses entitled "*Achats de toutes choses nécessaires à la profession*" gives some clues.⁶⁴ Here we find payments to "Louvre" for some goat skins, to "Ménétrier" for cabinet making, "Tassin" for upholstery, "Wickstöm" for repairs, and so forth. Unfortunately, this sheet only covers the months of January to May 1925. Partial evidence of the costs of production of Gray's furniture also exists in the form of bills for items manufactured in 1931 from the firm Aixa, which specialised in tubular steel furniture.⁶⁵ There are some accounts for the cabinet maker Ménétrier, who submitted a number of sizeable bills, totalling 9,947.90 francs between January 1925 and January 1927.⁶⁶ In an interview with Gray recorded by the English designer Andrew Hodgkinson in 1974 she recalled:

Well, there was a very good man who worked by himself and was a help in all those things, but he was just a [...] I think he started as a *plombier*, you know [...] and then he started working, but [...] so we used to get him to do these things. I did the drawings and he carried them out.⁶⁷

- 29 This must refer to work on her tubular steel furniture. Most of the payments were unspecified, on account or completing earlier payments.

Table 1. Payments to the cabinet maker Ménétrier, as reported in the *Journal de Caisse*.

Date	page	Payments to Ménétrier	Bill	cheque no
10 January 1925	p.3	Ménétrier acompte de 1,000 francs en décembre 1924 à rendre à Mlle Gray; Complément Bureau 1700; dossier lit persan 50	2,750.00	48477

16 February 1925	p.7	supp[lement] Bureau	400.00	48479
30 April 1925	p.15	maquette meuble (à ajouter 100 francs d'acompte)	284.00	cash
30 April 1925	p.15	Reste dû facture de 27 mars	88.00	cash
12 October 1925	p.31	Acompte à Ménétrier	350.00	cash
11 January 1926	p. 49	Ménétrier	1,955.00	317376
30 April 1926	p.65	Ménétrier (métier)	2,400.00	317390
28 July 1926	p.77	Cheque Ménétrier (ébénisterie)	1,216.00	528354
04 November 1926	p.88	Acompte Ménétrier	500.00	cash
27 January 1927	p. 100	Taxi de chez Ménétrier à Bonaparte	4.90	cash
		Total	9,947.90 francs	

- 30 The payment to Ménétrier on 30 April 1926 is annotated “*métier*” which may mean that he was making one or more looms for the basement of the Jean Désert showroom.
- 31 Most of these payments are on account and it is impossible to associate them with particular items of furniture. During this time, seven pieces of furniture were sold in the showroom, to a total value of 18,880 francs.

Table 2. List of items of furniture sold between 1923 and October 1927.

Page	Date	Description	Price	Client
3-4	11 January 1923	1 fauteuil “Sirène”	1,000.00	Mlle Damia, 3 Rue Saint-Senoch, Paris
3-4	26 July 1923	1 bureau laqué	1,200.00	Mlle Damia, 3 Rue Saint-Senoch, Paris
5-6	12 November 1923	1 coiffeuse	1,600.00	Comte Charles de Noailles, 3 Rue de la Baume, Paris
7-8	17 March 1924	1 lit de repos (dit Persan)	6,500.00	Marthe Régnier, 18 Av Mozart, Paris
11-12	27 December 1924	1 table à thé laquée	2,000.00	Mlle Damia, 3 Rue Saint-Senoch, Paris

13-14	27 February 1925	1 bureau chêne rempli	3,600.00	Jérôme Levy, 69 Rue d'Erlanger, Paris
15-16	01 April 1925	1 banquette laquée rouge	2,000.00	Mme Léveillé, 19 bis Rue Legendre, Paris
17-18	24 October 1925	1 divan bois brûlé	2,000.00	Mlle Lucy Vauthrin
19-20	05 January 1926	1 table laquée en ébène	2,200.00	Léveillé, 19 bis Rue Legendre
21-22	22 May 1926	1 table laquée avec tiroirs, poignée ivoire	1,350.00	Donohue, Hôtel Crillon [144 Grande Allée, Québec, Canada]
21-22	21 July 1926	1 socle ébène	350.00	Comtesse de Behague, 123 Rue Saint-Dominique, Paris
25-26	02 January 1927	1 table à thé laquée	2,500.00	Mlle Labourdette
25-26	12 February 1927	1 paravent laqué blanc et avec lézards	7,080.00	Miss Fifi (export) Amérique
27	15 October 1927	1 table chêne et sycomore	2,800.00	De Mohise (?), 114 Grande Allée, Quebec Canada
			36,180 frs	

- 32 These figures might suggest a markup of 364 %, but they do not take account of upholstery and ivory fittings on some of the items, supplied by the artisans Tassin and Sougawara, luxury tax or delivery costs (sometimes abroad). Nor can we make any firm connection between payments to craftsmen after 1925 and items sold between 1925 and 1927, since most of these items must have been made much earlier.⁶⁸ A rule of thumb is to estimate production costs at 25 % sales (400 % markup). Using this rough measure, fixed and production costs would have outstripped sales by 70,000 francs (Fig. 11).⁶⁹ These calculations do not, however, take into account the items sold at discount in 1930, for which only partial accounts exist.

Figure 11. Sales minus fixed costs and minus production costs estimated at 25 % sales

Image 1000E8E00000409A000019E0A2EF8820C36972E8.emf

AAD 1980-9-19. Chart by the author, 2021

- 33 Most successful designers engage in contracted work, making furniture and fittings for an interior, where they are guaranteed a return. They may make some pieces speculatively for exhibition, hoping to attract sales in that way. Gray seems to have designed and had made many items without a specific client in view and without putting them on show in a national exhibition.⁷⁰ This was especially true from 1925, when she was designing in tubular steel, mostly for her own use or that of Jean Badovici. This accounts for the very large number of pieces remaining unsold in 1930.

What was sold at Jean Désert?

- 34 By far the biggest sellers were the rugs (Fig. 12). These figures do not include some sales on account, where the items are unspecified. For example, the cash ledger includes a total of 23,000 francs of settlements of account by Labourdette.⁷¹ It is impossible to allocate any of these group sales to specific items.

Figure 12. Break-down of sales at Jean Désert, 1923-1927

AAD 1980-9-19. Chart by the author, 2021

The clients

- 35 Jennifer Goff, curator of the Eileen Gray archive at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin and the most thorough of the biographers, lists many of the influential clients who frequented Jean Désert.⁷² She includes Raymond Poincaré, previously President of France (1913-1918). A certain Madame Poincaré purchased a *Footit* rug on 27 January 1923; her address is given as 20 Rue [Pierre] Demours in the seventeenth arrondissement and I have not been able to establish whether she was indeed related to Raymond Poincaré who was Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1923. The banker Marcel Martin du Gard (1884-1963) was the brother of the Nobel prize winning author Roger Martin du Gard (1881-1958).⁷³ Marcel is listed in the *Liste des Ventes* as purchasing a *Poissons* rug for 1,400 francs on 27 February 1925 and a *tenture Cluny* and *Fidèle* rug on 23 June 1925 for 1,100 francs and on 27 July a “M. Martin du Gard”, presumably the same, is listed as purchasing a Zebra skin for 4,350 francs (but with 1,100 francs on account).⁷⁴
- 36 The singer Lucy Vauthrin (1885-1945) is listed in the address book at 18 Quai de la Mégisserie and bought *Penelope* and *Cluny* rugs on 24 October 1925 (3,300 francs), a discounted *Karnac* rug on 11 February 1930 for 1,400 francs as well as a *Bolivar* rug (550 francs), a “*paravent, laque véritable de Japon, solde*” (2,000 francs) and a lacquered mirror (700 francs).⁷⁵ She was a singer in the Opéra Comique and may have been a friend of Gray’s one-time lover Marie-Louise (Marise) Damien, known as “Damia”. A problem here is that Vauthrin’s name is sometimes written “Vautrin” in the press. A “Lucy Vautrin” and Damia both appeared in a “*Gala des Chansonniers*” on 11 December 1924.⁷⁶ Damia remained a faithful client, buying 3,300 francs of goods between 1923 and 1926. On 11 January 1923 she paid 1,300 francs for the famous *Sirène* armchair.⁷⁷

Figure 13. Maurice Hamel, interview of Marise Damia in her apartment

Les modes de la femme, 1 March 1925, p. 19

- 37 The interconnectedness of fashion and the arts is revealed by an interview of “Marise Damia” by Maurice Hamel on 1 March 1925 (Fig. 13). This was in a fashion magazine *Les modes de la femme de France* and the interview was held in Damia’s own apartment in the Rue Saint-Senoch not far from the Étoile.⁷⁸ The interviewer commented on the singer’s furniture and fittings. It is frustrating that Gray’s hand cannot be precisely identified in any of the “gentils meubles, adorables petites tables, des secrétaires aux bois ouvragés, aux fourrures précieuses, des fauteuils, des poufs, intimes et profonds” that the interviewer describes. Design, fashion and the troubling mystique of a famous singer are all entwined in this piece. Hamel signs off: “Jolie, jolie Damia, silhouette bizarre de romanichelle pathétique, nous vous avons quittée, enchantés et rêveurs.”
- 38 Several of Gray’s clients were foreigners. A certain Mr Kramer gave his address as Stockholm; Mr Goldsmid came from Brill Buck Farm, England, de Gravemoet from Bergen, Holland and Isabelle Errera from Brussels. One purchase is credited simply to “Anglaise de passage”. One client is identified only by an address – Loudon Street – without specifying the country. Several English or American clients gave hotels as their address. For example, Mr Donohue, from 144 Grande Allée, Quebec, Canada, purchased a lacquered table with ivory handles and four rugs on 22 May 1926 for 2,750 francs and gave his address as Hôtel Crillon.⁷⁹ Rex Ingram who bought a *tenture Mistral bleu* for 600 francs on 22 November 1924, gave his address as Hôtel Carlton.⁸⁰ This is presumably the Irish-American film director of *The Four Horses of the Apocalypse* with Rudolph Valentino and *The prisoner of Zenda*. Rex Ingram left Hollywood in 1924, after being refused the direction of *Ben Hur* and bought a house on the Côte d’Azur.⁸¹ A purchase of 6,400 francs is credited to “Sprickels 1080 Washington Street San Francisco”, but this must be a misspelling. Alma de Bretteville Spreckels, wife of the owner of the Spreckels

Sugar company, was in Paris in the 1920s buying works of art for the Museum she opened in 1924 in San Francisco. Gray may have met her already before the War when Spreckels was in Paris, meeting with Gray's friend the dancer and choreographer Loie Fuller. Another wealthy American client who bought goods worth 9,934 francs is listed simply as "Dunn, San Francisco".⁸² Philippe Garner explains: "William F. Dunn and his wife Edna, from San Francisco, visited Europe, North Africa and the Middle East from October 1923 until April 1924. Edna's diary for November 1923 confirms her shopping in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, where the Galerie Jean Désert was located at number 217."⁸³ A mysterious "Miss Fifi" exported to America a circular lacquer sample (70 francs) and a screen "avec lézards" (with craquelure) (7,080 francs) on 12 February 1927.⁸⁴ It would be pleasant to associate this lady with "Fifi D'Orsay" – Miss Fifi – a Canadian actress and singer who made a career in New York and Hollywood playing saucy French women.⁸⁵ Apparently, she never visited Paris despite starring in Frank Borzage's film *They had to come to Paris* in 1929 so it is not clear how this order was placed.

Figure 14. Jean Laporte, "Romaine Brooks, interprète de la sensibilité internationale", *Vogue*, 1 June 1925.

Brooks's portrait of the Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre is upper left, self-portrait below.

Vogue, 1 June 1925

- 39 Several of those listed in the address books were personal friends in the art world and many of them knew each other well. Natalie Clifford Barney was an American author who established a weekly Salon at 20 Rue Jacob frequented by many free-thinking writers and artists. The complex sexual and social relations linking the women who frequented Natalie Clifford Barney's salons at 20 Rue Jacob, a mere 100 yards from Gray's apartment (Fig. 1), have been well described.⁸⁶ Gray herself does not seem to have been a regular attender at these soirées, but many of her clients were. Gabrielle

(Gaby) Bloch, who had a relationship with Gray in the early years in Paris, was also a customer (390 francs for a lacquer dish and a cache-col).⁸⁷ Elisabeth de Gramont, Duchess of Clermont-Tonnerre, who had written a very positive review of Gray's lacquer work in 1922, was also a significant client, paying 1,800 francs for a *Safari* rug on 13 March 1923. She was a long-standing lover of Natalie Barney and had her portrait done by Romaine Brooks who painted most of Natalie Barney's lesbian circle (Fig. 14). Brooks, Clermont-Tonnerre and Eyre de Lanux all had sexual relationships with Barney. Renée Raoul Duval, who married Gray's friend Jessie Gavin, also bought a couple of items (*Footit* and *Hannibal* rugs and a copy of *Wendingen*, all for 790 francs). Gray's clients painted each other, but they also clothed each other. Georgette Henri-Labourdette, one of the best clients of Jean Désert, was photographed in an outfit designed by Juliette Mathieu-Lévy of Suzanne Talbot (Fig. 15).

Figure 15. Baron Adolphe de Meyer, Georgette Labourdette in a silk evening dress by Suzanne Talbot, 1927

Musée Galliera GAL 1977.37.3C

- 40 Gray loved motor cars and appreciated the latest models. Mme Georgette Henri-Labourdette was the main client of Jean Désert in the last years recorded by the *Journal de Caisse*, spending 38,051 francs between October 1925 and the end of the accounts.⁸⁸ Her husband Jean Henri-Labourdette inherited his father's coachwork factory in Courbevoie in 1910. He immediately began to innovate, designing lightweight streamlined wooden "torpedo-skiff" bodies for prestigious clients. In 1924, his "Silensouple" system of damped suspension ensured a more comfortable ride. The couple had a collection of African furniture and sculptures in their home at 143 Rue de la Pompe in the sixteenth arrondissement.

- 41 There is an amusing interview of “Mme Juliette-Suzanne Talbot” (Juliette Mathieu-Lévy) intercepted out jogging on the Allée des Acacias in the Bois de Boulogne (Fig. 16). The author, an automobile journalist, was prompted to write the piece by Duolé, the fitness trainer at the Automobile Club, who was also the personal trainer of Juliette Mathieu-Lévy. Mathieu-Lévy's message was that, “*C'est par la culture physique qu'une femme conserve sa grâce et sa ligne*”. She jogged every day, performed her exercises with her trainer every morning as well as practicing golf and skiing in the winter. This tribute to a star of the world of fashion in a car magazine was repaid by the fashion magazines that regularly posed mannequins in front of the latest cars.

Figure 16. Interview of “Suzanne Talbot” in *Auto*, vol. 26, n° 8,824, 11 February 1925, p. 1

Auto, vol. 26, no 8,824, 11 February 1925, p. 1

- 42 It is difficult to underestimate the importance of the close association between fashion and luxury design. This was not a casual relationship; modern design helped give couturiers a charismatic image. The two apartments that Jacques Doucet filled with Chinese antiques, modern art and furniture added to his mystique as a man of taste and distinction.⁸⁹ There is a set of famous photographs, taken by Baron de Meyer, of Juliette Mathieu-Lévy posing on Eileen Gray's pirogue daybed and holding up a flask of her perfume, or standing in front of one of Gray's lacquer screens in the Rue de Lota apartment.⁹⁰ Berenice Abbott, who also photographed Eileen Gray, took a picture of Mathieu-Lévy in front of the Eileen Gray screen and the bookcase previously illustrated in the article by Clermont-Tonnerre. Images like these, with their very expensive accoutrements, were an investment in fashion distinction and hence the value of products.
- 43 Jeanne Tachard, wife of the industrialist and engineer André Tachard, was a key member of the circle of Jean Désert clients and a regular client of Gray's. Committed to

modern design, she patronised Pierre Legrain, who had previously worked for Jacques Doucet. Legrain designed the interiors of the Tachard villa in the leafy suburb of La Celle-Saint-Cloud and even designed a modern garden.⁹¹

- 44 Elsa Schiaparelli, whose illustrious career as founder of one of the leading fashion houses in Paris was just beginning, bought a number of discounted pieces in February 1930: an armchair, a sycamore desk and rugs worth 3,720 francs.⁹² Madame Agnès (Agnès Rittener), like Mathieu-Lévy, was a successful milliner whose showroom was on 7 Rue Auber.⁹³ Her personal address is given in the *Liste des Ventes* as 5 Avenue Victor Hugo. She commissioned a *Biribi* rug and paid 1,040 francs for it on 21 June 1927.⁹⁴ She placed great store by style, commissioning the designer Jean Dunand to design the spectacular interior of her showroom with its gold lacquered walls and black lacquered furniture, illuminated by concealed cove lighting (Fig. 17). Dunand learned much of his skills in lacquer from Seizo Sougawara and probably benefitted from the reputation for high quality work in lacquer set by Eileen Gray.

Figure 17. Jean Dunand, interior of Madame Agnès showroom, 1927

"Jean Dunand, le studio de Madame Agnès", *La Renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe*, April 1927, p. 175.

- 45 Someone whose career spanned the theatrical and fashion worlds was Marthe Régnier. She spent 9,750 francs on two purchases in 1924: the "*lit de repos dit person*" (6,500 francs) on 17 March and three rugs for 3,250 francs on 30 September.⁹⁵ She was a successful actress who was the star in plays such as *L'homme enchaîné* at the Théâtre Femina in December 1923, *Si je voulais* at the Théâtre du Gymnase in May 1924 or *Dans sa candeur naïve* at the Comédie Caumartin in February 1926. These lightweight comedies were little more than fashion shows. An article in *Excelsior* of 27 May 1924 illustrates the various dresses worn by Régnier and her co-star Mlle Denise Gray in the

play *Si je voulais* (Fig. 18). She was also a mannequin, appearing in the fashion magazines, sometimes wearing the dresses in which she performed. Régnier made the significant step of transferring from a passive to an active role in the fashion business. She set up her own fashion house, at first as a milliner (Fig. 19) and then as a couturier. Régnier was sufficiently successful to have the architect Charles Siclis design a villa for her.⁹⁶ On the same day that Régnier bought the *lit persan*, Henri de Rothschild bought a *Bol laqué marron* for 500 francs. This was not a coincidence: Régnier was Rothschild's mistress at the time and eventually became his wife⁹⁷.

Figure 18. "Le théâtre et la mode", article about the dresses worn by Marthe Régnier and Mlle Denise Grey in each act of the play *Si je voulais* at the Gymnase theatre

Excelsior, 27 May 1924, p. 5

Figure 19. Marthe Régnier, spring capelines straw hats and cloches

Les Modes, XX, 250, March 1925 p. 12

- 46 A male equivalent of these fashionable theatrical stars was Pierre Meyer. Adopted son of a wealthy businessman who gave his son an annual allowance of 800,000 francs, Pierre Meyer's first marriage was to the writer Louise Hirtz, for whom Le Corbusier tried in vain to design a villa in Neuilly between 1925 and 1926.⁹⁸ In 1926 Meyer inherited a fortune of millions of francs from his father. Soon, Pierre Meyer was spending heavily having his apartment on 33 Avenue Montaigne in the eighth arrondissement transformed by Pierre Legrain. Meyer bought two *Footit* rugs on 19 May 1923.⁹⁹

Locating Gray's clients

Figure 20. Plan of Paris (1900) showing location of the principal French clients of Jean Désert (red).

In blue, Gray's properties.

- 47 Mapping the Jean Désert clients shows that most of them lived in the affluent sixteenth, seventeenth and eighth arrondissements of Paris on the West side of Paris (Fig. 20). Nine of them clustered around the Avenue Victor Hugo to the South West of the Arc de Triomphe and another group of four around the Rue de Passy further South in the sixteenth arrondissement. Almost all of them lived in elegant apartment blocks built in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

Figure 21. The clients of Jean Désert (the numbers are keyed to Table 3)

Google Maps

Table 3. Major clients of Jean Désert referred to in the *Journal de Caisse*

1	Mme Juliette Mathieu-Levy, 9 Rue de Lota, Paris, 16 ^e	92,729.90 francs
2	Mme Jean-Henri-Labourdette, 143 Rue de La Pompe, Paris, 16 ^e	38,051.00 francs
3	M. André Léveillé, 19 bis Rue Legendre, Paris, 17 ^e	13,835.00 francs
4	Dunn, San Francisco, USA	9,934.20 francs
5	Marthe Régnier, 18 Avenue Mozart, Paris, 16 ^e	9,750.00 francs
6	Miss Fifi 'exporte Amérique'	7,150.00 francs
7	Mme Jacques Errera, 86 Rue de la Faisanderie, Paris, 16 ^e	6,600.00 francs
8	Alma de Bretteville Spreckels, 1080 Washington Street, San Francisco, USA.	6,400.00 francs
9	Comtesse de Béhague, 123 Rue Saint-Dominique, Paris, 7 ^e	5,950.00 francs
10	Marcel Martin du Gard, 102 Avenue de Villiers, Paris, 17 ^e	5,750.00 francs
11	Charles et Marie-Laure de Noailles, 11 Place des États-Unis, Paris, 16 ^e	4,710.00 francs
12	Jérôme Levy, 69 Rue d'Erlanger, Paris, 16 ^e	4,575.00 francs

13	Mme Bovet , 20 Rue Chaligny, Paris, 16 ^e	3,900.00 francs
14	Perugia, 11 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris, 8 ^e	3,310.00 francs
15	Mlle Damia, 3 Rue Saint-Senoche, Paris, 17 ^e	3,300.00 francs
16	Lucie Vauthrin, 18 quai de la Mégisserie, Paris, 1 ^{er}	3,300.00 francs
17	Larivière, 148 Rue Longchamp, Paris, 16 ^e	3,200.00 francs
18	Heuzy,[or Henri?], 14bis Avenue du Bois [renamed Avenue Foch,16 ^e]	3,120.00 francs
19	Madame Jeanne Tachard, 41 Rue Emile-Ménier, Paris, 16 ^e	3,105.00 francs
20	Donohue, Hôtel Crillon, Place de la Concorde, Paris, 8 ^e	3,100.00 francs
21	Henri Pacon, 11 Rue d'Alger,Paris, 1 ^{er} / 9 Rue Falguière, Paris, 15 ^e	2,460.00 francs
22	de Parseval, 33 Avenue Duquesne, Paris, 7 ^e	2,215.00 francs
24	M. Andre Rénaud, 16 Avenue de l'Observatoire, Paris, 6 ^e	2,035.00 francs
25	Dammier, 3 Rue Chernoviz, Paris, 16 ^e	1,951.00 francs
26	Pierre Meyer, 4 Rue de Chanaleilles,Paris,7 ^e	1,940.00 francs
27	Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre, 67 Rue Ranelagh, Paris, 16 ^e	1,800.00 francs
28	Reynouard et Fils, 35a Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, Paris, 9 ^e	1,800.00 francs
29	Robinson, Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris, 8 ^e	1,790.00 francs
30	Lucy Vautrin, 42 Boulevard Haussmann, Paris, 9 ^e	1,700.00 francs
31	Lantulo, 117 Boulevard Jourdan [demolished?] [145 Boulevard Raspail, 6 ^{ème}]	1,600.00 francs
34	Raymond Dior, 9 Rue Louis David, Paris, 16 ^e	1,554.00 francs
36	Demachy, 27 Rue de Londres, Paris, 9 ^e	1,300.00 francs
38	Fukushima, 4 Rue Peronnet, Neuilly	1,250.00 francs
39	Kate Weatherby, 33 Rue de Verneuil, Paris, 7 ^e	1,200.00 francs

- 48 Not all of them shared the avant-garde taste of Eileen Gray's friends. The most splendid of the houses, a real palace, was that of Martine-Marie-Pol, Comtesse de Béhague and Comtesse de Béarn at 123 Rue de Saint-Dominique near the Invalides Palace in the seventh arrondissement. The Countess held frequent charity balls and performances where Parisian high society presented itself. Hers was an older and more traditional social group, less easily associated with the other Gray clients. It is difficult to imagine where the zebra pelt (3,800 francs) or the knotted rug (2,150 francs) that the countess bought at Jean Désert could fit into the neo-Louis XIV furniture and fittings of the

Palais Béhague (Fig. 22). Perhaps the countess took Gray's rug with her to the villa La Polynésie that she had built for her by the architect René Darde near Hyères on the Côte d'Azur in 1924.

Figure 22. Salon in the Hôtel de Béhague, 123 Rue Saint-Dominique, Paris, 7^e

L. Murat, "L'appel des chimères: les collections de la comtesse de Béhague", *L'Objet d'Art*, March 1988

- 49 The comtesse de Béhague was a friend of Charles de Noailles, another client of Jean Désert, whose villa at Hyères designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens included a range of modern furniture. For example, the bedroom of Marie-Laure de Noailles included a rug by Eileen Gray. Noailles bought a *Tarabos* rug on 10 November 1924 for 2,200 francs and this may be the same one (Fig. 23). Their town house on the Place des États-Unis was redecorated by Jean-Michel Franck in 1926, with bedroom furniture faced in snakeskin by Pierre Legrain, and was the stage for soirées of modern artists, musicians and film-makers.

Figure 23. Eileen Gray, *Tarabos* rug in the bedroom of Marie-Laure de Noailles in the villa Noailles at Hyères by Robert Mallet-Stevens

Art et Décoration, July 1928, p. 21

Conclusion

- 50 Gray's showroom Jean Désert attracted the cream of the rich and fashion-conscious as well as the designers and modistes who serviced them. Her luxurious and sensuous designs perfectly matched the aspirations of the new generation of "beautiful people", for whom the imagery of personal beauty and ravishing interiors were part of their business. Despite selling some outstanding pieces, Gray seems to have missed out on the success that greeted most of her colleagues in the design world. All the designers suffered a loss in sales after the impact of the Wall Street crash reached France around 1930. But Jean Désert seems to have run aground well before that, in the high period of Art Déco. It is sobering that the value of items remaining unsold in 1930 was roughly the same as the total sales from 1923 to 1927.
- 51 It is interesting how so many of Gray's clients turned to other architects and designers to carry out the transformation of their apartments and villas. The architects Paul Ruaud, Charles Siclis, Robert Mallet-Stevens and the designers Jean Dunand, Pierre Legrain, Jean-Michel Franck and Djo-Bourgeois carried out work for Gray's clients, for which Gray might well have competed. But she seems to have shown no interest in capturing stable and lucrative patrons. Perhaps her experience with Juliette Mathieu-Lévy, which was apparently a stormy one, and the adverse criticism of the *Chambre Boudoir pour Monte Carlo* put her off. Not only that, she seemed content to allow those whose careers she had formed, such as Seizo Sougawara and Evelyn Wyld, to make their own way with her blessing and even financial support. In most ways, Gray behaved less like a professional designer and more like a patron, encouraging other designers. As

she moved away from design towards architecture, in 1926 and 1927, the business of making and selling design must have appeared less and less attractive.

NOTES

1. *Journal de Caisse* (Victoria and Albert Museum archives, London (AAD) AAD-1980-9-1) and *Ventes Jean Désert* (AAD-1980-19). There is a gap in the numbered pages between 150 and 181 that shows where these pages came from.
2. For example, Philippe Garner has made good use of these archives in his case study entries to the recent Eileen Gray catalogue: Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine (eds), *Eileen Gray*, New York, Bard Graduate Center, 2020, pp. 248-365 passim.
3. For a detailed study of the Heal's department store in London in the years 1929-1933, see Tim Benton, "Up and Down at Heal's: 1929-35", *Architectural Review*, 1978 Feb, pp. 109-116. I have also studied the production costs of several of Le Corbusier's houses (Tim Benton, *Les villas de Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret : 1920-1930*, Paris, P. Sers, 1984, and Paris, Éditions de la Villette, 2007).
4. Gray's life and work have been well told: Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: architect designer: a biography*, Thames & Hudson, 1987; Jennifer Goff, *Eileen Gray: her work and her world*, Sallins, Co. Kildare (Ireland), Irish Academic Press, 2015. Excellent accounts of her architectural work include: Eileen Gray, Caroline Constant, Wilfried Wang *et al.*, *Eileen Gray: an architecture for all senses*, Tübingen; Frankfurt am Main; Cambridge, MA, Ernst J. Wasmuth; Deutsches Architektur-Museum; Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 1996. The best book on Gray's architecture is Caroline Constant, *Eileen Gray*, [Londres] Paris, Phaidon, 2007.
5. Élisabeth de Clermont-Tonnerre, "The laquer work of Miss Eileen Gray", *The Living Arts*, (3), pp. 147-148 and in French: Élisabeth de Clermont-Tonnerre, "Les Laques d'Eileen Gray", *Les Feuilles d'Art*, Feb-March 1922, 2(3), pp. 147-148, pp. 144-146.
6. Juliette Mathieu-Lévy was installed as manager of the Suzanne Talbot showroom by the founder of the company, Jeanne Tachard, a close friend of Gray's first consequential client, the doyen of Parisian fashion Jacques Doucet. Tachard, who became one of Gray's clients, may have recommended her to Lévy.
7. Captioned as "slaapkamer-boudoir voor Monte-Carlo" in the *Wendingen* issue of 1924, it was referred to by Badovici as "Hall" (*Architecture Vivante* (winter 1924) and *Intérieurs Français* (1925)).
8. The Dutch architect Jan Wils wrote an enthusiastic piece in the special issue of *Wendingen* dedicated to Eileen Gray in 1924, and she corresponded with him, J.J.P. Oud and Sybold Van Ravesteyn.
9. Cécile Tajan, "Jean Désert : une aventure", in Cloé Pitiot, *Eileen Gray*, Paris, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2013, pp. 65-71. Valerie Guillaume illustrates the registration of the showroom, on 17 May 1922: Valérie Guillaume, "Eileen Gray à Paris : luxe et arts" in Cloé Pitiot, *ibid*, p. 60.
10. Gray and her employees invariably referred to Jean Désert as "boutique" (shop). Gray retrospectively referred to it as her "gallery" (see note 34). I will use the English word "showroom" as it best describes Gray's principal purpose, which was to display her work.
11. Renaud Barrès first made this connection.

12. *Bottin du Commerce*, 1923, p.3003 and 1924, p.3265 classified under “*meubles d’art moderne*” (cited in Valérie Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p. 59. It does not feature in later editions of the *Bottin*.
13. *Annuaire du commerce Didot-Bottin*, 1925, p. 1770.
14. National Museum of Ireland Eileen Gray Archive (NMIEG) NMIEG_2000-160
15. The 1922 *Didot-Bottin* includes only one explicitly female name under “Ameublements”: Mme C. Bertin. Characteristically, she specialised in curtains and draperies.
16. For a nuanced view of the fashion industry in Paris and New York, Caroline Evans, *The Mechanical Smile: modernism and the first fashion shows in France and America 1900-1929*. 2013, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016.
17. Sougawara’s name is normally rendered today as “Sugawara”, but his business cards include the letter “o” and he is referred to in the ledger either as “Souga” or “Suga”.
18. In the 1922 edition of the *Didot-Bottin*, 11 Rue Guénégaud was also occupied by a bookbinder, M. Lortie (*Didot-Bottin* 1922 p. 3547). In the *Didot-Bottin* for 1922 and 1925 there is no listing of the Wyld or Sougawara workshops, nor of the Jean Désert boutique.
19. In 1922, the *Didot-Bottin* lists four other businesses at 17-19 Rue Visconti, including a chemical laboratory, a shop selling moleskin book covers, a painter called Frédéric Léon and a J. Canape, listed as being in “*Réhabilitations*”.
20. Fichier alphabétique de déclaration de commerce D34U3-3861 and D31U3-2272, cited in Anne-Marie Zucchelli, “Ateliers de tissage Evelyn Wyld : collaborations et amitiés”, in Cloé Pitiot, *Eileen Gray*, Paris, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2013, pp. 84-87, p.85.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
22. After 1923, Gray made no major contribution to the Parisian exhibitions until 1930, when she and Badovici showed plans and photographs of E-1027 at the first exhibition of the Union des Artistes Modernes. She occasionally contributed rugs or other items to the exhibits of her friends.
23. Eugène Printz had a showroom at the less fashionable address of 12 Rue Saint Bernard in the eleventh arrondissement, where he presented “*ensembles modernes*” (*Didot-Bottin* 1926, p. 3351). B. Coleat, “Les expositions”, in *La Renaissance politique, littéraire, artistique*, 30 June 1928, VI, (26), pp. 7-8. Coleat calls Printz’s showroom a “*temple de l’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*” and mentions Wyld’s carpets, glassware by Jean Sala and lacquered goods by Jean Dunand.
24. Susan Day, *Tapis modernes et art déco*, Paris, Norma, 2002, p. 129. Peter Adam also states this, probably based on something Gray told him (Peter Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 182).
25. AAD 1980-9-1, p. 33.
26. Payments to Madame Bodin began on 20 November 1925. An analysis of these salaries follows later.
27. The photograph is pasted into one of the two portfolios that Gray assembled in the 1950s (NMIEG, Portfolio 2, p. 289).
28. Cécile Tajan, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
29. A drawing in gouache for this rug is in the V&A, where an approximate date of 1925 is suggested (CIRC.241-1973). An 18 x 24 cm glass negative of this rug by Gray exists (AAD 1980-9-32).
30. The date of the design and manufacture of the adjustable table (“table E-1027”) has never been fixed.
31. V&A AAD 1980-9-1. I will refer to this either as *Journal de Caisse* or “*Cash ledger*”.
32. V&A AAD 1980-9-19. Goff discusses the clients in this document (Jennifer Goff, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153).
33. These names and addresses can be cross-checked with 9 pages of addresses, not in alphabetical order (V&A AAD 1980-9-17).
34. AAD 1980-9-20. Under this reference are 58 unnumbered documents.

35. AAD 1980-9-20 TBT5951.
36. AAD 1980-9-20 TBT5880-5882.
37. AAD 1980-9-20 passim and 1980-9-20 TBT5896. The value of the items listed in these documents is over 211,000 francs. This is roughly the same as the total recorded sales in Jean Désert from 1923-1927.
38. Évelyne Schlumberger, "Eileen Gray", *Connaissance des arts*, n° 258, 1973, pp. 71-81.
39. AAD 1980-9-19, p. 6. In order to maintain the correct recto/verso relationship, I have numbered the pages from the title page.
40. Jennifer Goff, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-150.
41. AAD 1980-9-19, p. 10.
42. 3,000 francs in 1927 is worth around \$1,350 or £720 in the currency of 2000 (see [on line] <http://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>).
43. Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray: architect/designer: a biography*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
44. For example, a bill was submitted for 107.85 francs on 6 April 1928 for various materials and containers apparently connected with glass enamelling (AAD 1980_9-11)
45. Rachel Stella, "Where the paper trail leads", in Wildried Wang and Peter Adam, *E.1027 Eileen Gray in collaboration with Jean Badovici*, Tübingen, Wasmuth, 2017, pp. 92-99, p. 92.
46. NMIEG The date of the sale of Jean Baptiste Viale's plot is given as 30 March 1926 and the notary's document dated 24 April 1926 (folio 93 case 442). A draft of a deed of sale written in Badovici's hand records the sale of two plots to Gray belonging to M. Blancard for 40,000 francs (July 1928?) (GRI 880412 Box 6). This document confirms that Gray had opened an Account with the Banque Commerciale in Menton.
47. Source : Statistique journalière, Archives de la Banque de France, données retravaillées (Jean-Charles Asselain *et al.*, "L'inflation française de 1922-1926, hasards et coïncidences d'un policy-mix : les enseignements de la FTP", in *Du Franc à l'euro changements et continuité de la monnaie*, Poitiers, 2001. Based on an index of 25 francs to the Pound in 1919, it had reached 116 francs in November 1925 and a peak of 180 in July 1926 before subsiding to around 120 later in the year.
48. Rachel Stella, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
49. Jennifer Goff, *op. cit.*, p. 194
50. I have been unable to identify this person.
51. Caroline Constant (among others) mentions Gabrielle Bloch as managing the boutique, but no trace can be found of her in this documentation (Caroline Constant, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46).
52. AAD 1980-9-1, p. 4.
53. The summary runs from January 1925 to May 1926 (AAD 1980-9-1, pp. 180-184).
54. 35,000 francs in 1926 was the equivalent of between £ 7,000 (\$ 10,372) and £ 10,000 (\$ 15,415) in 2000 (see [on line] <http://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>)
55. For example, cheques 317362 and 317363 are described as "annulé" (AAD 1980-9-1, p. 182).
56. Sougawara is often referred to in the Cash ledger as "monsieur Souga". The additional payments to Sougawara are usually expressed in round figures (e.g. 600 francs on 17 March 1925) rather than particular sums for specific jobs.
57. Larroussilhe's salary was raised to 800 francs in October 1925, to 900 francs in April 1926 and 1,000 francs in July 1926). Between January 1925 and June 1926 the index of cost of living rose from 400 to 600 (Statistique générale de France).
58. On 21 February there is an exceptional payment by cheque to Sougawara of 2,000 francs but this was labelled "personal" and in May 1926 a payment of 4,000 francs to "ami de Sougawara" for lacquer work. Other payments are labelled "contribution Guénégaud". None of these are expressed as specific expenses.
59. US Department of Labor (1927), *Monthly Labor Review*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, [on line] <http://clioweb.free.fr/dossiers/salaires/salprix.htm>
60. AAD 1980-9-1, p. 31.

61. Fixed costs include gas, electricity and telephone charges, a luxury tax on certain goods sold and a commission to a salesgirl.
62. To avoid reflecting the uneven distribution of costs, due to the quarterly rent payments, I have applied the average of the six months' costs – 4,575 francs – in each month.
63. AAD 1980-9-10.
64. V&A AAD 1980-9-1, pp. 102-103.
65. NMIEG 2003-045 and -046, the latter for removing the nickel and chroming the parts for the Transat armchair for the Maharajah of Indore. Tubular steel furniture was usually finished in nickel until 1929, when the use of a second surface in chrome became normal. NMIEG 2003-045 includes a bill for 1,900 francs for the large double curved divan which was photographed in E-1027.
66. There is a “*Ménétrier ébéniste*” listed in the *Didot-Bottin* at 7 Avenue du Maine and again at 113 Rue de Sèvres in the seventh arrondissement (*Didot-Bottin*, 1925, p. 1771)
67. Cited in Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
68. AAD 1980-9_20 and 20_1
69. Markup is a percentage calculated as Sales price divided by costs. These costs should include production and fixed costs but I have used the simpler figure, dividing sales price by production costs.
70. For a list of Gray's submissions to exhibitions, see Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.
71. For examples of payments to Labourdette on account: a cheque for 6,000 francs (27 November 1926) and monthly cash payments in 1927: 5,000 francs (3 January 1927), 5,000 francs (3 February 1927), 2,000 francs (3 March 1927), 5,000 francs (19 March 1927): total 23,000 francs. The accounts do not specify what these payments on account were for.
72. Jennifer Goff, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.
73. <https://gw.geneanet.org/garric?n=martin+du+gard&oc=0&p=marcel>
74. On 23 June 1925 he is listed as “Marcel Martin Du Gard” (AAD 1980-9_19, pp. 13-14 and 15-16).
75. AAD 1980_9-2 and individual bill (AAD 1980_9-20 TBT5897).
76. *L'Intransigeant*, 11 December 1924, p. 2.
77. Private collection, illustrated in Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 291.
78. Maurice Hamel, “Notre enquête sur la mode et la beauté chez Marise Damia”, *Les modes de la femme de France*, 1 March 1925, p. 19.
79. AAD 1980_9-19, pp. 21-22. On 26 November 1926, he is listed at 62 Rue Monceau, purchasing a “cache col” for 350 francs. A Mr Stephens gave the same address on 5 January 1924 and a Mr Quinley 14 March 1924.
80. The Hotel Carlton in Paris was built in 1928-1929. Perhaps Rex Ingram was referring to the hotel in Cannes.
81. The black actor Rex (Clifford) Ingram may also have visited Paris at this time.
82. See Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 495.
83. Philippe Garner, “rue de Lota divan catalogue entry”, in Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *ibid*, p. 316.
84. AAD 1980-9-19, p. 25. This screen, which had a craquelure effect (“*lézards*”), may be one of the white painted block screens.
85. Born Yvonne Lussier in Montreal in 1904 and established herself as singer and entertainer in New York using the stage name “Miss Fifi”. She adopted the name Fifi D'Orsay when she moved to Hollywood.
86. Jasmine Rault, *Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic Modernity staying in*, Farnham, Surrey Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2011. The architect Le Corbusier lived in an attic apartment in the same building but never mentions the Barney group in his letters.

87. "Mlle Bloch" paid 190 francs for "1 cachecol (tenture)" on 12 September 1926 (AAD 1980-9-19, p. 22) and 200 francs for "1 assiette laquée rouge" on 8 January 1927 (*ibid.*, p. 24).
88. Jean-Henri Labourdette petitioned to change his name to Henri-Labourdette in 1921. The entries in the *Journal de Caisse* do not always make it possible to identify the purchaser as Georgette or another member of her family.
89. The first apartment to reflect Doucet's turn from Baroque to modern taste was on the Avenue du Bois. In August 1928, Doucet started remodelling a new apartment at 33 Rue Saint-James in Neuilly in a building owned by his wife (Chantal Georgel, *Jacques Doucet collectionneur et mécène*, Paris, Arts décoratifs/Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA), 2016).
90. Illustrated in Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 124 and p. 55.
91. Yvanhoé Rambosson, "Un jardin de Pierre Legrain", *Jardins et cottages*, 18 January 1929.
92. Individual receipt (AAD 1980_9-20).
93. On a printed list of fashion shows in Spring 1928, Agnès's address is given as 7 Rue Auber (Caroline Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 169).
94. AAD 1980-9-19, pp. 25-26.
95. AAD 1980_9-19, pp. 7-8 and 9-10.
96. *Jardins et Cottages*, I, 1926, p. 136.
97. See Philippe Garner, in Cloé Pitiot and Nina Stritzler-Levine, *op. cit.*, p. 306.
98. Tim Benton, *Les Villas parisiennes de Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret, 1920-1930*, Paris, Éditions de La Villette, 2007, pp. 139-147.
99. AAD 1980-9_19, pp. 3-4 and AAD 1980-9_2.

ABSTRACTS

The Irish designer Eileen Gray (1878-1976) is recognized as one of the foremost artists of the 1920s. Detailed analysis of the accounts of the Jean Désert showroom in Paris, opened by Gray in 1922, adds to our understanding of her approach to design and marketing. The showroom did not only fail due to low turnover but also due to the high fixed costs involved in subsidising the lacquer workshop run by Seizo Sougawara and the rug workshop managed by Evelyn Wyld. The article addresses the following questions: What was the financial viability of the showroom? Who were Gray's clients? What kinds of items sold best? What does the showroom tell us about Gray's approach to design? How does her practice differ from that of other designers of the day? What clues do the documents give to understanding Gray's clients and their social milieu?

La designer irlandaise Eileen Gray (1878-1976) est reconnue comme l'une des plus grandes artistes des années 1920. L'analyse détaillée des comptes de la galerie Jean Désert à Paris, ouverte par Gray en 1922, nous permet de mieux comprendre son approche du design et du marketing. L'échec de la galerie n'est pas seulement dû à un faible chiffre d'affaires, mais aussi aux frais fixes élevés liés à la subvention de l'atelier de laque dirigé par Seizo Sougawara et de l'atelier de tapisserie géré par Evelyn Wyld. L'article aborde les questions suivantes : quelle était la viabilité financière de la galerie ? Qui étaient les clients de Gray ? Quels types d'articles se vendaient le mieux ? Qu'est-ce que la galerie nous apprend sur l'approche de Gray en matière de design ? En quoi sa pratique diffère-t-elle de celle des autres designers de l'époque ? Quels indices les documents nous donnent-ils pour comprendre les clients de Gray et leur milieu social ?

INDEX

Keywords: Eileen Gray, Seizo Sougawara, Evelyn Wyld, Art Déco, Furniture, Clientele, Fashion, Sapphic Modernism

Mots-clés: Eileen Gray, Seizo Sougawara, Evelyn Wyld, Mobilier, Clientèle, Mode, Modernisme sapphique

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