



**BOLLING & CO.**  
the art of antique wallpaper

## "Fiery Fountains" Sidewall

M.H. Birge & Sons, Buffalo, New York

Birge Pattern No. 2964

*introduced in late 1924 for the 1925 season*

M.H. Birge & Sons was one of the most highly respected wallpaper manufacturers in the U.S. Established in 1834, the company printed its first papers in 1878, and remained an industry leader until its closure in 1982.

The 1920s saw Birge transition from the design direction of Charles Booze and Edward B. Sides – who had been the firm's lead designers since the 1880s – into a new era. In 1921, Sides hired a little-known watercolor artist named Charles Ephraim Burchfield to assist him in the design department, and Burchfield would work for Birge from 1921 until 1929.



Before becoming one of the United States' most esteemed watercolor painters, Charles Burchfield designed wallpapers for Birge, ascending to the role of design director upon the retirement of Sides in 1927. During his tenure Burchfield would produce a range of work for the company, from traditional to startlingly modern, eventually earning the right to mark his papers with his name in the selvage.

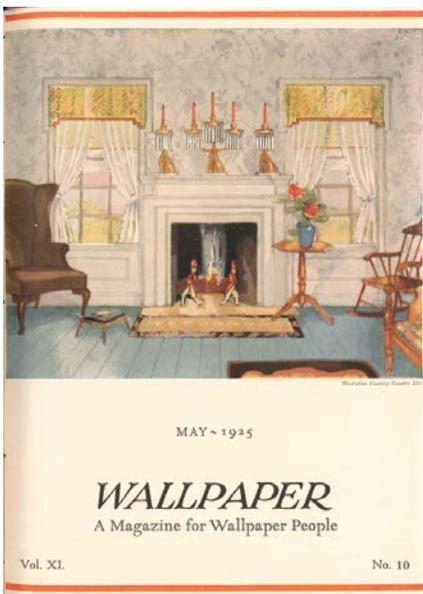
While it is not known who the designer of "Fiery Fountains" (our name) was, it was introduced in the collection of new patterns released in late 1924 for the coming 1925 season – smack in the middle in Burchfield's tenure. One can't help but speculate whether Burchfield had a hand in its utterly distinctive style, which would have been considered very avant-garde with its abstract rendering style and eye-catching palette – an entire room of this paper must have been a sight to behold.

M.H. Birge & Sons was best known internationally for its exceptional hand-produced "leather" papers, which were used by the most sophisticated and affluent home owners and designers of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century (true tooled leather, which Birge also produced, was only accessible to the richest of the rich).

Examples of Birge leather papers, as well as other designs from the 1880s into the postwar era, are held in the collections of the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, Historic New England in Boston, and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. Bolling & Company offers the only authenticated selection of original antique examples of these rare papers in the world.

***Bolling & Company Pattern ID: 10403***

*For more on the Birge "Fiery Fountains" paper, see next page.*



## Wallpaper Brings Sunlight to the Priscilla Proving Plant

Wallpaper Magazine, May 1925

The Birge paper we've called "Fiery Fountains" enjoyed a unique moment in the spotlight with a May 1925 article published in Wallpaper Magazine under the byline "As told by an Editor of Modern Priscilla Magazine."

[Modern Priscilla Magazine](#) was an influential periodical aimed at "highly intelligent, home-abiding women" and Birge's last-minute triumph in the Proving Plant redecorating endeavor was a marketing coup for the company.

For a brief history of Modern Priscilla see:

[http://uwf.edu/dearle/enevstand/enevstand\\_files/Page859.htm](http://uwf.edu/dearle/enevstand/enevstand_files/Page859.htm)



## WALLPAPER BRINGS SUNLIGHT TO THE PRISCILLA PROVING PLANT

*As told by an Editor of Modern Priscilla Magazine*

THE living room at the Modern Priscilla Proving Plant is a north room set on the bias. Windows at one end face the northwest, at the other end the southwest. A sun porch on the north gives light but no sun.

The room was dull, colorless, without life. A high walnut wainscoting and walnut beams gave an air of sombre weight to the room, unrelieved by the putty-colored paper on the wall. Cottage curtains of glaring white were tied back from the windows with draperies of mulberry at the side. A cold taupe rug was on the floor. There was harmony in the room, but a cold harmony, chaste and sombre.

We studied the room for several months before attempting a transformation. Then we made our decision. The walls must give to the room what nature could not.

We went to a wallpaper store under the management of Mr. E. J. Hickey, to whom we told our problem.

"Show us something with *life* in it", we said, "something colorful, something warm and golden. Something that will bring sunlight and stimulation into our room."

Mr. Hickey was most understanding, sparing no pains to help us in our problem. For more than an hour we studied wallpapers, always with the pic-

ture of our room before us as it is, and again with the vision of what it might become. Finally, we settled upon four different patterns and we brought samples of these home. One was a scenic paper—tan and brown. Two were of deep old ivory and gold, and one was a gorgeous thing like a forest through which shot flames of fire.

We pinned up the different samples on the wall and we called in many people to give a verdict. And finally the vote stood thus:

The scenic paper was too pale. Unanimous.

The gorgeous paper was too gorgeous. Beautiful in itself, yes, but too revolutionary. The draperies would not harmonize. The cushions on the davenport would be out of tune. And so on. The pattern in gold—so the majority said—would be much safer.

But, there was one reactionary in the jury, the *Housekeeping* Editor, whose home the Priscilla Proving Plant is, could see the flaming forest on her walls and they warmed her heart as well as the room. And she had one supporter, fortunately, in the person of the man whose word was law.

"Go ahead", he said in a stage aside. "You've got to live with it. If you don't like it you can always cover it up."

Everybody was disappointed, but the order was

given just the same, on Saturday, and the next Thursday was Thanksgiving. On the Friday after Thanksgiving a big reception was to be held at the Priscilla Proving Plant, and the room had to be ready. Mr. Hickey agreed to hustle the matter through, and on Monday sent two men to remove the old paper and get ready for the new. They also brought the paper for an upstairs library—a heavenly Chinese paper in tan and blue to match a Chinese rug (which is another story), but—they did not bring the flame-in-the-forest, which had to be ordered from Buffalo.

A little chill ran down our backbone when we felt that only three days lay between us and disaster, but the order was wired, the paper was to come by special delivery, and we were assured.

The paper was removed from the walls (so was the furniture from the room) and then we waited. At two o'clock on Wednesday the paper had not come. So, desperately and with a heart sick with disappointment, we called the store and had the paperhanger bring out the gold paper and put it on. He finished at eight o'clock that night, and, as he went out the door, *a special-delivery package of wallpaper was thrown in.*

The paperhanger turned back. He was as disappointed as we. He had longed to see that lovely paper on the walls.

"Wait a minute", we said, and rushed to the telephone.

The *man* whose word was *law* said, at the other end, "Will he work tomorrow?"

"Yes", we told him breathlessly, "he will".

"Then, go to it", he said, and we went.

On Thanksgiving morning the paperhanger hung the gorgeous paper right over the gold (which really looked very dignified and handsome). The *Housekeeping* Editor snatched up the golden draperies and took them to the laundry along with a piece of the flaming paper. She added a little scarlet dye to a good deal of orange dye and dipped the draperies until they matched to perfection.

At two o'clock the paper was on and the draperies were up. Cross-bar net curtains with a little golden figure had been hung at the window, and the mulberry draperies made into cushions. Parchment shades of orange tones, on which little black ships were painted, covered the wall candles and the davenport lamps. And the room was transfigured beyond belief.

Then, next day, the jury came in. And added to the jury were all the guests. Fifty or more. And one and all they said, "Oh, how *lovely* your room is." And one and all their eyes traveled the instant they came into the room, to the beautiful paper on the wall.

A forest it is, of slim, brown trunks and dull green foliage with every little ways this glorious splash of orange, a fountain it really is of flaming waters, spurting high; and, scattered through the trees, glimpses of the most heavenly blue you ever saw.

It is a revelation in wallpaper. It is a revelation of what wallpaper can do to a room. So is the blue and tan that makes a perfect background for the Chinese rug.

Hundreds of people have been through these rooms since that day and not one in all that number has failed to make the exclamation that we have learned to expect.

"Oh, what *lovely* paper! I didn't know that paper could *make* a room so lovely!"



COMBINATION LIBRARY-BEDROOM AT THE MODERN PRISCILLA PROVING PLANT IN BOSTON

## A Special Booklet for Your Real Estate Prospects

HAVE you had any experience in selling real estate men and speculative builders on decorating the walls of their houses with wallpaper? If you have, you probably know how difficult it is in many cases to make the prospect look upon decorated walls as a sound investment from his own

standpoint rather than as an additional, unnecessary outlay. Perhaps you may have felt that your job would be made a great deal easier if you could place in the hands of your real estate prospect a carefully prepared booklet summarizing in an interesting way just why attractively papered walls in his house would more than justify their cost to him, whether he wishes to rent or to sell.

Wallpaper Guild Headquarters has prepared just such a booklet and on the two following pages you will find the complete contents, submitted for your approval. This book has not yet been printed and it will not be printed unless readers of this magazine show sufficient interest to justify the expense. We await your further pleasure.

*Eleven*