The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption and Interior Design in American Men's Magazines, 1930–65

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**Abstract**

Si Non Oscillas, Noli Tintinnare
Si Non Oscillas, Noli Tintinnare
(Trans: ‘If You Don't Swing, Don't Ring’).

Inscription on a brass plaque at the entrance to the Playboy Mansion, 1960

Focusing on the representation of domestic interiors in American men's magazines during the mid-twentieth century, this article explores the history and significance of the ‘bachelor pad’ as an icon of high-living modernity. Beginning with a consideration of *Esquire* magazine in the 1930s, attention is given to representations of the sleek, stylish bachelor apartment and its role as a totem of forward-looking and ‘liberated’ masculine consumerism. Depicted as a place where men could luxuriate in a milieu of sybaritic indulgence, the ‘bachelor pad’ was configured as the spatial manifestation of a consuming masculine subject who later became pervasive amid the consumer boom of the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, the fantasy of the chic, gadget-laden ‘bachelor's lair’ was a recurring icon of hedonistic, masculine consumption in men's magazines such as *Playboy, Escapade* and *Rogue*. Cosmopolitan and brimming with *à la mode* luxuries, the ‘bachelor pad’ was a leitmotif in these magazines' wider celebration of masculine consumer pleasure and desire. Analysis of these representations, it is argued, suggests that in American culture during the mid-twentieth century the ‘masculine’ arena of production and the ‘feminine’ domain of consumption were not neatly and clearly divided. Instead, the iconography of the ‘bachelor pad’ in American men's magazines points to a significant masculine presence within mid-twentieth century commodity culture.

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