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**What is interiors? An essay on lining, concealing, and making  
one's mark  
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## **Taylor & Francis**

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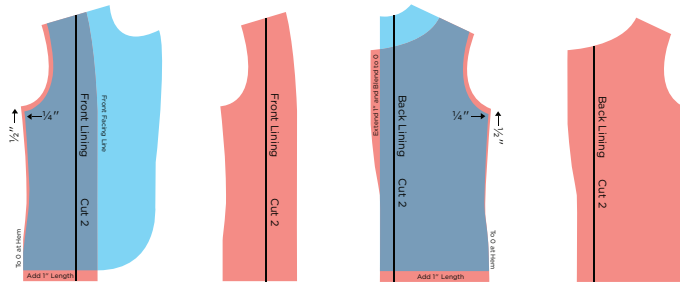
## **What is interiors? An essay on lining, concealing, and making one's mark**

Keywords: to line, to seal, to conceal, to carve, to represent.

At first we ignored the damp patch in the hall, the paint beginning to bubble, there was always something more pressing to do. But over a period of months as the patch grew, so did the unavoidable truth that something in the cloakroom was leaking. A modest room that had originally contained a toilet and hand basin, the previous owner of the house had converted the adjoining coat cupboard into a shower to create a tiny second bathroom used by guests, muddy children and for watering plants.

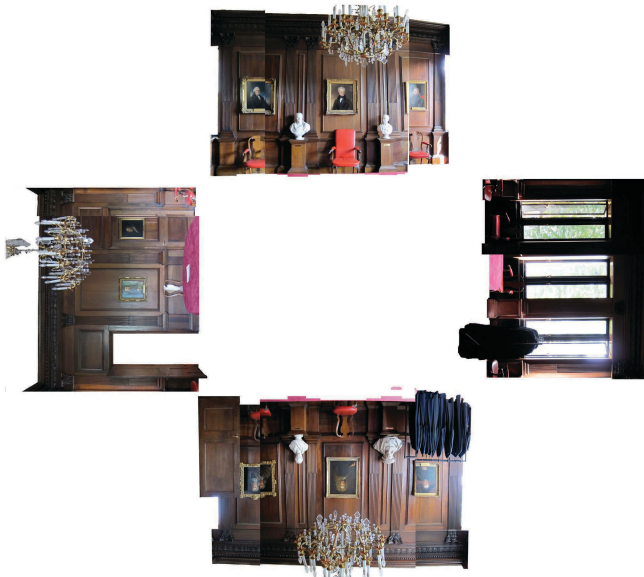
The first job was to strip back the tiles around the shower to see where the water might be coming from and sure enough a leak was found in the dusty pipe work hidden behind the shiny ceramic surface. We decided to completely refurbish the space and bit by bit ripped everything out, carrying the waste material out to where the car normally sits. As the broken tiles, shower tray, toilet bowl, hand basin, rotten timber studwork and twisted pipework slowly piled up in front of the house it created a tangled volume not dissimilar to that of my Fiat Panda. Is this an interior I thought; a lining to the structure that can be removed without the house falling down?

Of course the question asked is 'what is interiors?' not 'what is an interior?' but the analogy of lining seems a useful one to interrogate the subject or discipline of interiors.



**Figure 1: Pattern Tutorial – Adding Lining to an Unlined Blazer by Jen Beeman of Grainline Studio. See [www.grainlinestudio.com/2012/07/06/pattern-tutorial-adding-lining-to-an-unlined-blazer/](http://www.grainlinestudio.com/2012/07/06/pattern-tutorial-adding-lining-to-an-unlined-blazer/)**

So first; what is meant by a lining? A lining is more commonly understood as the stuff with which garments are lined – the dictionary telling us it is the inner or under surface of material stitched into a coat, robe, hat, etc. for protection or warmth. This surface will usually be made from a different but complementary material to the outer garment, in the sense a fleece lining can make a waterproof jacket warmer or a smooth silk lining allows a linen dress to hug the body without creasing. Thus a lining complements the garments appearance and also its function, it is often bespoke and because of this denotes quality.



**Figure 2: Oak wainscoting lining the Censors' Room at the Royal College of Physicians, London. Photographs by author arranged as a developed surface interior. See [http://idea-edu.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/IDEA-journal-2012\\_Full.pdf#page=41](http://idea-edu.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/IDEA-journal-2012_Full.pdf#page=41)**

In a similar manner in previous centuries wooden panels or linings known as wainscoting, or boiserie were added to rooms for protection from the rough masonry and for warmth. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the word ‘seelinge’ was used to describe both the covering of the walls or ceiling of a room to make them draught-proof, and for the material used to provide such a covering, which included wood, plaster or even fabrics such as a hanging tapestry or silk drapery. Today the word seelinge remains with us in the modern word ceiling but is limited to the lining that covers the roof rafters or floor joists of the room above. At the same time buildings have become infinitely more complex, multi serviced machines so the function of modern interior linings is no longer just for protection and warmth but to provide a user-friendly housing for a web of mechanical and electrical engineering, to say nothing of plumbing. And with the function the materials have changed and a sealing is as likely to be stainless steel, or ceramic such as the tiles in my cloakroom, keeping the water in, rather than the draught out.

The word ceiling stems from three possible Latin sources: *cēlāre* meaning to hide, conceal, or cover up, *caelāre* to carve, engrave in relief, and *caelum* meaning sky or vault of heaven. Although seemingly very different, collectively the three sources give a useful structure for an interrogation into the role of a lining.

I’ll start with *cēlāre* meaning to hide, conceal, or cover up. In tailoring linings are carefully slip stitched into the outer fabric to hide construction details such as seams, interfacing or hems. In a similar manner interior linings are used conceal construction joints, a skirting concealing the awkward junction between the floor and the wall, an architrave allowing a door to sit snugly in a less than perfect opening, or a dry lining

used to cover pipework and wiring behind. Although today not many rooms have timber panelling, a lining is so part of our built culture one could suggest an unlined building is either unfinished or one not used for human habitation such as a warehouse or an agricultural building.

There are other senses that interior linings hide and conceal. In garments linings conceal secrets only known to the wearer. Labels reveal the manufacturers brand, the size, the fabric and origin and the washing instructions and it is not only school children who write their names in their blazers, many adults choosing to personalise a garment in some way. Inner pockets are less vulnerable to prying eyes or pickpockets and will contain more interesting items than the more visible outer ones. Valuable items such as wallets or phones, or perhaps if a character in a nineteenth century novel, their life savings stitched into the lining of coat as they make a desperate escape. My pockets contain sentimental items like pebble found on a walk, the stub of a cinema ticket, or some other memory laden souvenir, while those with something to hide might conceal a guilty cigarette, a knife or even a dead rabbit hidden deep in the infamous poachers pocket sewn in the back of a hunters coat. Interior linings can conceal equally intriguing details. The secret door concealed in the panelling, a safe hidden behind a picture, the entrance to a cellar tucked away under the stairs or even a giggling child concealed behind a curtain. This quality of a surface that doesn't give its secrets away is why interiors are so intimate and personal, providing a sort of architectural subconscious and the ideal backdrop to many a 'who-done-it?' crime mystery.

There's the outside of the outside form, the inside of the outside form, and then a space in perpetual tension. Then there's the outside of the inside form and finally, the inside of the inside form....Inside and outside are both coincidental and discontinuous.

Fit and misfit.

Eric Owen Moss 1999. *Gnostic Architect*. New York: The Monacelli Press

The second meaning, *caelāre* meaning to carve, engrave in relief, is perhaps less obvious. Yet if one considers how a shoulder pad hidden in the lining of a jacket or a corset worn under a dress shapes the wearers body, the sculptural nature of linings is clearer. In buildings even more so, interior linings being used to carve out recesses and openings, a surface to decorate and fix mouldings and reliefs. If one considers the practice of lining as creating false walls to cover up pipework or unwanted features, one can understand a lining both fits to the exterior and it doesn't, giving shape to an interior volume that may be quite different to that suggested by the exterior. The two surfaces operate with different logics, and in doing so create an accidental and curious space in between; an 'inside of the outside' and the 'outside of the inside' that Eric Owen Moss describes as 'coincidental and discontinuous'. It is this unseen space that creates the relief.

The final source *caelum* meaning 'sky or vault of heaven' (think of the Italian *cielo* or French *ciel*,) seems to have the most simple fit to the word ceiling particularly when one reads it later acquired the sense of a 'canopy, vault, roof, tester of a bed, etc.' But *caelum* also alludes to perhaps the most important function of a lining which is its role as a representation, literally, as in painted vaults of heaven found in Renaissance churches but more commonly as a representation of its owner. Just as a scarlet lining to a sombre suit suggests something of the inner life of the wearer, an interior lining reveals much about the inhabitant.

And strangely, more than the desire for protection and warmth or the need to hide construction details or dark secrets, I propose that it is the desire to represent ourselves that is why we line our buildings. Lining, 'sealing', decorating, one's space is a way of representing or externalizing one's beliefs, culture, and one's inner self. Beginning, arguably, with the marks made on the walls of the caves of prehistory, the interior as expression of self, is tied up with issues of identity, story telling, and rituals of the everyday, the desire to express oneself satisfying different needs to the more functional and pragmatic requirements of structure and shelter. This is why a new occupant will rip out a perfectly functional lining and replace it with their own because in doing so they make the space their own.

So as I sit at the kitchen table flicking through sanitary ware catalogues, I conclude the task is not simply the act of re-lining the space and choosing fittings. It is a form of representation. The choices I make will say as much about me, my taste and the culture I belong to as the clothes I wear. My choices will be influenced by function; the need for the new lining to be water tight, for aesthetic reasons; to cover up the pipework and bare masonry, for economic reasons because this new shower room will have a huge impact on the family budget, but most of all because finally the cloakroom belongs to me and not the previous owner.



**Illustrations:**

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