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AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS



THE CRAFTSMAN

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Visit to the House of Stickley



Dining Room - Mr. Stickley's House

I Purpose this month to extend somewhat farther the series of considerations with which, in the October number of this magazine, I opened my plea for a rehearing of the imminent and now all important question of securing appropriate and simple decorative elements for the modern house. In the former article I dealt mainly with the making of furniture in the workshops of The United Crafts at Eastwood, giving a glimpse of the daily life among the workers, briefly outlining the frank handling of well-prepared material, and in a general way citing those conditions of industry which have given such flavor to one of the most vital subjects of the present day. Now I write of the house itself, and I have selected the house of Mr. Stickley as an illustration, because it is so singularly free from pretension. It contains evidence of serious thought and honest intent, with abundant freshness and wholesomeness, which are innovations in these days of machine carving and jelly mold enrichments. Unlike modern literature, in which, if we are wise, we say all we can, the matter of house building needs some of the outward barriers of repression against the false enthusiasm that promotes tinsel at the cost of sterling gold, and modern shams in place of sound principles. And a curious fact remains, that in spite of all our modern ease of communication, men still remain individual. Interchange is powerless to subdue it and man can still, by giving thought, stamp his individuality on his house, so that when you look at the house, you view the man. Ideals are as portable as bonds, and individuality alone, despite the value of cooperation, frequently shapes the destiny of man and house. This is brought home to us in viewing the house of Mr. Stickley. I purpose to confine my remarks to the interior of the house, remembering certain limitations which had to be accepted because they were imposed by the general plan. When I enter I note a rich grandeur in the passion for size, scale and sense of bigness. How soothing—wistful—simple, is this house. The quiet sense of humanity pervades it. The soul of the workman is manifest in his work. We hear his rugged laugh, half defiant of criticism. There is daring, and I might say almost arrogance, in some of the detail. It has been said that the reign of the fireside is over and that with it, the sense of home has perished from among us. Surely a glance at these liberal hearths shows that this statement is not yet true. The square impost which marks the entrance to dining room and library, denotes a very much plainer, franker use of structural features than is usual. It looks really able to support the house. The scale is big—it thrills. It has neither base nor cap, even that would be a mistake. The composition is stronger as it is. Let us look at the casement windows for a moment. They are well

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proportioned, long and low, with mullions of severely simple outline, cutting the window into four equal openings. As we pass from one window to another, we note how well adapted they are for plants; how happy they would look then, with the sun streaming in, and what great secrets can the children tell as they hide behind the cushions in the long deep seat beside them. This hall is large for a comparatively small house and impresses one with a sense of grandness by its well-considered contrast. When it is said that the most clearly and typically expressive of modern homes do not hold us in awe with their linear dimensions, but rather cheer by the welcome they extend to us, surely, this house should be included in the category. We do not often get vaulted interiors in these days. The Anglo-Saxon has always been a lover of beamed ceilings. Here beams, row after row, mark and intensify the perspective, leaving long panels of plaster between them. Tastes differ as to the color the surfaces should show. White or shades of ivory is the tone generally in favor with the professional mind. In this instance the surfaces are white. This gives a variation of texture, a play of light and shade, which reminds us of the monastic buildings and cloistered courts of Spain and Italy. One point of unlikeness to the conventional house is in the floors, which instead of being laid with narrow boards, have broad chestnut of varying widths and lengths, frankly showing nails; the wood being darkened by aqua-ammonia and rubbed and polished with a mixture of beeswax and turpentine. The fireplaces are of common red brick, built solidly into the house, not added on as a mere lining to conceal a poorly constructed frame. When we look at the drawings of interiors here presented, we must remember how difficult it is for sketches to retain their freshness when added to the frigid zone of a page of type. They are intended to be "strong," not "pretty," and to illustrate facts rather than enthusiasm. It is like hoisting a danger signal to speak out loud to Mr. Stickley of ornament, yet all people do not know this. "It is very grand, said one visitor, "but have you no ornament, carving or draperies in your house, Mr. Stickley?" "No draperies, thank you, and as for ornament, -have we not our friends?" a courtier, I declare! In a measure you are right. The truest ornament to a house is the family-the wife and children, then, as you say, the friends." No fiercer architectural battle has been fought than that in which the question of ornament supplies the field. Some ornament resents leadership. It affects to govern and not with a small voice, but with a shout. Not content to be seen, it must be heard. It eschews moderation. Assuming that collective ignorance represents dominant wisdom, it justifies its intolerance by its popularity. The lovers of accessive and aggressive beauty clamor for more ornament, which grows as it goes, a snowball on a muddy road. Not alone is this house remarkable because of its conspicuous absence of carving, molding, and inlay by way of ornament, but because of the singularly frank manner in which they have been omitted. No false construction is allowed to take the place of these popular idols by presenting rudely wrought, primitive forms as an architectural expedient. So I salute the man who, refusing the many dangers which confront him in the search for an acceptable solution of the house-building problem, rescues from the dust of ages enough of the fundamental characteristics of the past to present so valuable an illustration of the true understanding of the problem. This severe treatment is truly a welcome understanding, disciplined, chastened, yet always wholesome, modest and noble. I like Mr. Stickley's house because it is strong, robust, wholesome, free from affectation, vagaries; yet it might be, and I trust it will be, softened with the addition of furnishing details. Nature would help with her flowers, plants and potted shrubs, never more welcome than when they show against a background of polished oak.

Mr. Stickleys House Floor Plan.

