

HOME FURNISHINGS.

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II. Historical.

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  - c. Financial standing.
  - d. Character and area of owner.
- 2. Material and decorative elements.
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  - a. Climate.
  - b. City or Country, also size of City.
  - c. Financial standing.
  - d. Character and tastes of owner.
- 2. Useful underlie ornamental.
- 3. Harmony.
  - a. Color )
  - ) Simplicity.
  - b. Form )
- 4. Ornament-- Bric-a-brac.
- 5. Taste - the aesthetic sense.

In treating of furnishings we must begin by defining the word as it is to be used and so considered in this production.

In its natural and general meaning, furniture (French "mobilier") represents everything that is movable, transportable and easy to place in security. We intend to consider the house neither constructively nor architecturally, but as a dwelling-place, in that it relates to all internal adornment and arrangement. As, however, the decoration and fitting up of the rooms are often essentially dependent upon the construction of the house and upon its divisions, and were more especially so in the antique dwelling, these latter points must not remain altogether unconsidered.

Furnishings or adornment of a house or dwelling are regarded in too many cases as of secondary importance, even by those who are intellectually strong and appreciate modern culture and training. It also happens that for want of individual knowledge even those who mean well, commit the arrangement and adornment of their home to tradesmen, with the feeling that he will best understand what ought to be done, but he does not and can not but follow the dictates of fashion.

We regret this state of things when we consider the important part that home plays in our lives and how much its beauty can add to our pleasures of existence and how much the mere helping to produce such beauty is in itself a source of positive delight for even when we are called upon to exercise judgment in selecting materials or arranging furniture we are doing artist's work, a responsible womanly work which brings with it real enjoyment.

Much can be learned by studying the art of furnishing, and much more can be learned by studying the history of the art of

furnishing and its relation to civilization. "Show me thy furniture, and I will tell thee what thou art" is an assertion and quotation which has in it much more than words as seen by the eye, for if we look into the matter we can see that there is not a single piece of furniture of the slightest description that is not emblazoned or characterized with the customs of a people, the manners of a time and the great factor of individuality. Mr Dresser informs us, "That the customs of two different races of people may be read in the mere shape of their water jars; the long Egyptian jar for instance with its rounded larger lower end and its single metal handle, telling that it was let down by a cord into deep water, where its form allowed it to turn and fill itself and keep the center of gravity right as it was drawn up, tells the presence of plains, of artificial irrigation and the resulting life, while the wide mouthed, high shouldered Greek jar, with flat bottom and two handles, declares that it was set to catch falling water, was carried on the Greek head without splashing, and hints at the gossip round the spring while the jar was being filled and other incidents of daily life in a land of mountain streams." If so much can be learned from suggestions of two pieces of commonest pottery, how much more can be learned from the study of furniture upon which a larger share of art and thought has been expended, for the designer of furniture sought to surround daily life with comfort and beauty and with charm for body and mind.

We have shown why the study of furnishings is very important, why we should substitute a clear and critical comprehension for a timid and hesitating choice, why there is a need of an aesthetic element in the home daily, and why we should have a thorough knowledge and an ever increasing interest in the subject of home furnishings. Now to this end there are two roads or there are two parts to the

subject. We will acquaint ourselves with the subject by following up its history and thus ascertain how present conditions were induced, and we will examine the existing conditions of today and apply to them those methods of criticism which will tell us what is right and what is wrong and what may be allowed and what rejected. We will combine these two phases first taking up the historical then the critical.

Omitting any consideration of those beginnings and attempts at artistic arrangement and decoration of the house which have no immediate bearing upon the present time, we shall glance rapidly over a historic survey dividing it into ancient, medeavial or the dark ages, and the modern, that we may see what a choice set of furniture was composed of in each one. We will say nothing of the Indian and other Oriental races, but will take up the Ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. Art had already received some development when the Egyptian began to lead the world, but comfort was a thing of price. His beds were of cedar, supported on feet carved, painted and covered with the richest draperies. His chairs were of wood with the red lotus showing on the back-ground. His princes and priests used tables of wood, marble and of precious metal, the vases and mirrors were of polished metal. There is an air of firmness imparted to all of the furniture, the legs often end in a serpent's head or sometimes the whole body of an animal is represented in a piece of furniture. All furniture was usually inlaid with ivory and if any upholstery was used it was bright colored. The mural decorations added much to the interior and exterior, indeed there were but few if any colorless things in the home. The element of ornament were found in flowers, the palm branch, the feathers of birds, and a number of geometrical

patterns. The walls were painted with brilliant colors and the floors were covered with woven mats and the skins of wild animals, upon which the inmates often slept. The distinguishing feature of all furniture was the wise use of material. This alone would entitle it to special consideration in an age like ours, when mechanical appliances enables us to bend wood to our will without regarding the all important point, as to whether that will is not directly in opposition to nature. It is indeed hard to say what form of decoration can not be traced back to Egypt, that cradle of all human inventions.

The Greeks took their civilization from the Egyptians and therefore took all their arts and with them the art of furniture. The Greeks however lived largely in public in temples, theatres, groves and porticoes, caring little if at all for a home. They expended their time and money on their public sculpture, paintings and architecture and cared but slightly for the decoration of their home houses and the art and comforts there. They had but few pieces of domestic furniture and these were of the old Egyptian style. We account for the inartistic home largely by considering the degree in which women were held, which was very low. They were kept down and therefore could not do justice to their home.

The Romans inherited some from the Greek and the Egyptian but they paid much more attention to the home and domestic art, and they valued women higher though they were still low in rank. The Roman valued his home and made it a part of his business to render it delightful. The atrium was the most important part of the Roman house. It was the place where the family assembled, where the master of the house resided, where the mistress ruled and worked with her servants. Here were the penates and the family hearth, near which all

all the meals were taken. In short, it was the seat and center of all household and family life. Such being its uses, the atrium was rather a room than an open court, a hall which received all its light from an opening in the roof just large enough for this purpose and for the smoke to escape. But gradually the Roman manners of living became more grand, instead of a few friends they had troops of visitors daily; they then modified and enlarged their dwelling to fulfil the requirements. The hearth was removed to another part of the house, the back which was used as a kitchen. The different inmates were consigned to a room of their own and the atrium was moved to the front part and served as a court room. This style of arrangement was more favorable to rich ornamentation but still it was unfavorable for artistic decoration, and harmony of effect. The rooms as said before were dark, yet the artist thought little about brightness and gloom, and often made the ground tint of the whole wall black, merely enlivening it by brilliantly colored, and often exceedingly graceful, ornaments. It was then intended to catch the eye by the use of an inexhaustible variety of ornaments. Where the walls were so profusely adorned, the floors and ceiling had to be decorated with equal richness, either of geometrical patterns or pounded and polished bits of different colored stone, which were very deceptive to the eye and foot, The ceilings were fixed practically the same way only that the stones were set in panels etc. If now we look at these apartments with reference to the way in which they were furnished we shall find them, if judged from a modern standpoint, extremely bare and empty. Neither mirrors nor framed pictures found place upon the walls, but their want was in a measure made up for by the extremely rich and artistic character of each single piece of furniture if indeed the

complete decoration of walls, floors and ceilings ever allowed it to be felt.

The ordinary dining room had but one table in the center with a cushioned seat or rather couch running around three sides. The Romans never sat at meals, but ate in a reclining position. Great stress was laid on the costliness of the table, both as regarded material and artistic finish, the feet, as all their furniture, were conspicuous and very richly ornamented. The table top was vaneered.

An ornamental couch was the most important piece of furniture not only in the dining room but also in the other apartments. The bed room was divided into three parts, usually divided by curtains, the first for an attendant, the second for a dressing room, and the third for a sleeping place. The bed, richly adorned, carved and inlaid, was almost the only article of furniture. The chairs and sofas, of course, were made quite as elegant as tables, couches and beds. Their framework was wood inlaid with shells or ivory. The chairs were also of manifold shapes.

Another article of furniture that was of great importance in the antique house was the lighting apparatus. It is amazing on the one hand to see how simple and inadequate it was and on the other how much art was lavished upon it, for upon these great chandeliers were tubes of smoking oil with a number of wicks.

Finally we can<sup>say</sup> that their decorations of all sorts were in general deceptive and false in principle, for they are over-rich in detail, so fantastic and variegated that they disturb and weary the eye with their richness.

When in following the historical course of our subject we pass from ancient times to those of the Middle Ages we rather retro-



grade than advance. The antique house made us acquainted with a peculiar but very perfect kind of dwelling, but when the barbarians went through the country they destroyed nearly everything and decorative art went with them. At this time every lord of a territory was a sovereign surrounded by foes liable to attack. If he dwelt at home his halls were only a military depot; if he went abroad, uncertain of his ability ever to return, he took his valuables with him therefore they were not many nor too unmanageable. His furniture then consisted of but chests in which he could carry his belongings and which in the castle served for seat, table, bed and treasury. But as times became more gentle and he was no longer in perpetual danger, he did not need that everything should be either easily portable or else fixed to the castle in stone. The chest grew into the armory and cabinet and was enriched with carving; the bench into the chair, the bed took its great corner, the hearth received decoration. The furniture was adapted to the conditions of life. There was one great hall which served for every use, it was the dining room, sleeping room and hall of justice, it was all a grand sort of encampment. Around the room were benches made of mere plank and supported by uprights, or long narrow chests, the valuables packed inside, certain of them were very simple, others entirely covered with rich ornamentation of hammered iron work or gilded leather, but at a later period they carried armorial carvings and other emblems cut in the wood of which they were made, and as taste and love of ease developed backs and finally arms were added, but the seat was still a lid that lifted and these were the chief, and for a long time, almost the only pieces of furniture of the Middle Ages. But toward the end of the Middle Ages cushions were laid upon them, stuffs were thrown loosely over them,

footstools before them and then it was lifted on feet; the lids changed to doors and the chest became a cabinet. They lined the whole extent of the wall of the room with heavy curtains, made of gilt leather or heavy cloth, mats of woven reeds were put upon the floor, the table appeared, the ceiling was carved and the chimney was heavily decorated, the windows were widened, and panes of glass were substituted for waxed linen or parchment.

Then at last as the Middle Ages passed away life opened into an easier and more enjoyable thing with all the pleasures of peace about it, then the dwelling was ready for a different furnishing, for one that should not please the eye, but should also please the body, a place for the family to indulge in comfort and relaxation. Art entered upon the most flourishing period which it had known and this was our modern period. We not only see here a great advance in all that relates to furnishing but we also have a transition from one style to another, for the centre of attraction now was the home and family rather than in public, and there is dissemination of money among many, where it was formerly among few. This has put within the power of many to make the home attractive by the art of furnishing.

We have entered upon a period in which the purchaser makes the market, whatever there is that may be wanted, there is some one that tries to produce it. The purchaser can get the thing that pleases him whether he wants beauty, strength or cheapness. In this modern period all the woods found in nature have come into use, the principle ones being the harder woods as walnut, mahogany, oak, cherry, ash, and ebony. The woods are finished into all sorts, shapes and designs, for machinery has made structure of almost anything

possible. These woods may be stained, painted, gilded, enameled or several varieties may be combined. As to other material used in furnishing in this modern period they are almost innumerable, for we have iron, cotton, wool, silk, leather, marble, slate, glass, straw and combinations of almost all things found in nature. This style of furnishing has grown up out of the habits of the people which we know are modern and progressive. There is certainly in modern furniture a great variety to choose from as we know today; one might be so well satisfied with what there is as to demand no more, as this desire is apt to meet the popular desire for cheapness.

Having followed up the history of furnishings until we have come and even named a few (for a full description of this period is unnecessary) of the articles used by the home artist in this period of the modern, in which we find everything that is necessary to make a home, we will now examine the same subject from a critical and aesthetic point of view and show how with all these styles and varieties of combinations we can make home not only a house to sleep and eat in, but, "A place amidst a busy and weary world for friendship, love and repose."

The first points to consider are the universal conditions, the surroundings and circumstances. If we consider the dwelling with reference to the influences of climate, we find the widest possible differences which are aesthetically important. The Northerner must make his home appear warm; this is done with well closed and not too large rooms, carpeted floors, wainscoted walls covered with hangings and by the use of warm colors. The Southerner must furnish with special reference to the summer's heat i.e. with large, airy rooms, hard cold walls and colors used that have a cooling effect.

Another point is that of the city and country home, also the size of the city. In town the aesthetic condition of the dwelling like the life of the family relates to the interior and material comfort, internal elegance and luxury appears to us necessary or desirable, while in the country we count upon the beautiful scenery of nature to provide us with enjoyment therefore the mode of adornment is more simple and economical. As to the small city the houses are usually small, inhabited all the year around, there is therefore more durability in the decoration and a tendency to neglect the ornamental. While in large cities the houses are vacated often and social life is great without making the interior of the home simple. The next point is that there should be a distinction between wealth and moderate means. They may of course buy what they wish but their desires should be governed by rules, for rooms expensively furnished will have something in them which not only detracts from the beauty of real elegant surroundings but produce as well a sense of irritability to the critical eye. The person of moderate means should keep within his bounds for the truth is that the chief beauty of decoration does not consist so much in the costliness of the materials which compose it as the taste displayed in design and appropriateness of its position.

Another point is that the house should express the character and tastes of its owner, show individuality and special appropriateness of the various rooms. It is as an outer garment which should bear the impress of the owner's peculiarities and express her character whether grave or gay, simple or showy, warm or cold. Other conditions must be observed and other things allowed or forbidden according as to the use of the room and whether for lady, gentleman, children, and whether for the laborer or lawyer.

Such being the case the task of furnishing seems hard but however varied the conditions the object of our investigation is the same and bears its conditions within itself. This object is an enclosed room with its four walls, its floor, ceiling and movable furniture, which is composed of a given material and has a definite end and upon these common conditions we deduce general principles. The first principle that we would lay down is that the useful should underlie the ornamental. A beautiful thing which has grown out of a definite need is more beautiful than that which has only its own beauty to recommend it. So in home decoration, that which should first strike the mind is the appropriateness or fitness of an ornament to the needs of the home, and we at once perceive that what we may call the main features are more important than many knickknacks and fancy adornment, for a large part in the art of decorating is to know what not to have in a room. Elaboration in a small dwelling and without means to support elegance is not a mark of good taste. This holds good as regards highly decorative furniture ~~furniture~~, and confusion of color for these offend the eye of correct taste.

The next principle that we would lay down is that of harmony, for "The eye is made quiet by the power of harmony." Artistic harmony depends upon two things, color and form. In both there must be a union and blending of many dissimilar things. One may say that color is of more importance in decoration than form for color makes the first and strongest impression, it gives the general tone, it may be used to conceal fault in form. Color gives character to a house and by its help we may produce any desirable effect. A room may be made to look higher or lower, narrower or broader, grave or cheerful, light or dark, warm or cool, irritable or restful. Care should be

taken at the outset so that there may be a prevailing color and never a medley or a variety of tones, for certain colors destroy each other, these should never be in the same room. Other colors are complementary and aid in the color scheme. Color should be adapted to the room e.g. red is the most exciting therefore we can easily see that we would not want this in a bed room. Red is also warm therefore we would not desire this in a hot south room, and so it is with all the other colors. But although we depend mainly upon colors for effect, form is very important though generally unobserved. To be harmony of form they need not all belong to some historic style but be of a particular design and shape so that they harmonize well together and are of a form that fits the purpose, e.g. parlor furniture may be light and delicate if so desired, but the living room furniture should be strong and fit for every day use. Furniture that is used but seldom may be greatly carved and have a complex design, but for every day use that kind of furniture would be too hard to clean. Then again the form of the furniture should suit the form of the dwelling, elegant and lofty apartments display large massive pieces of furniture while the humble should have a small simple form or design. As with color so with form, we find that simplicity is a very true guide in the use of either.

Ornament or bric-a-brac - if the chief artistic aim of inhabited rooms is harmony in color and form and a use before beauty then everything which contributes to their adornment must be subservient to this harmony and enter into it. Ornament should therefore be subject to law, it ought never to make us forget the room it was intended to adorn. It must never appear as if the walls were made for ornament but that ornament existed for the room and was subordin-

ated to it, for the presence of a multitude of small affairs that have no special value show the eager love of acquisition and less taste rather than full purse. The mere shape of a lamp shows whether people buy what their neighbors buy or have individual taste of their own or ever gave any thought to the matter of educating what may be called the aesthetic sense. This aesthetic sense is what helps us in disposing of the masses in a room which we will now take up.

In disposing of the masses, i.e. giving effect to a whole we use that sense, taste, which <sup>if</sup> we wish to make some object prominent tells us to put dark furniture, books or paintings on either side of it, that tells us that we should counteract the influence of too heavy an article by another at a distance; that we should darken a place where there is too strong a glare, not merely by curtains but with a sofa which stands near a table, the table it may be corners on a piano not far away, the piano carrying the darkness to the dark place on picture or wall above it. There we have a picture, piano, table and sofa, neither can be moved or the effect would be destroyed. Attention to the massing of objects prevents the speckled appearance which we see in many rooms where everything seems spotty and disconnected. One does not feel at home there and to do this the pieces should have a friendly relation, there should be a union of the whole even in the details of the odd corners. This broad effect is not injured by a quantity of furniture providing it is not crowded, neither does a quality rob it of its size providing each piece is in its corner and that corner unites with the rest to make a perfect whole.

Much can be said on the art of furnishing but we still see that furnishing is an affair of genius and tact i.e. of thorough taste; nor is this all, for the house is not furnished whose kitchen has not

received equal attention with that of the parlor, nor is the house yet furnished where a regard for others is not shown, i.e. a stout chair for the heavy person and an easy chair for the invalid, a low chair for a child (if the house is so blessed), it is unfinished without such evidence of unselfish care. It is only true taste that can tell exactly where to drop and ~~where~~ to introduce an article which has a peculiar color and form. Taste after all ~~is~~ the result of genius and tact is the great secret of the art of furnishing and this is a thing to be cultivated.