

Surface Designing
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It has now been several centuries since the first industrial schools were founded.

Since that time the advance in industrial skill has been surprising. In some lines special progress has been made.

Formerly France had undisputed sway. Now art is so distributed that each country has its excellence in certain lines; so it would be unjust to decide the productions of one nation, on the whole, more perfect than those of another.

It might be called a "standing joke" in England that what, in art, is ruined for their market will find a demand here. But art, especially designing, is of recent introduction in the Western countries in comparison with the countries of the East where it has been known from time immemorial.

Our progress is very gratifying. We are pushing ahead in all directions. Our schools for industrial training, for example are fast improving and multiplying. All over our land young men and women have opportunities for industrial training.

At present in the United States attention is being more generally and seriously given to the addition of music and the art of designing in our industrial schools than has formerly been given.

Fifty years ago in the United States there were no designers. Young America had no time for art then. Whatever of art productions were found here then were imported. But in 1876, the year of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, a stimulus came. It was then that the people began to appreciate the beautiful as well as the useful. At this exhibition our fathers showed their inventive genius and originality in their display of machinery; but the art productions were few and showed undeveloped talent.

England had a liberal display of art; including rich designs in tapestry, carpets and wall paper. France at that time was foremost. But out of her abundance she sent a meagre display. She had a most elegant

display in designs, but it was a source of disappointment and annoyance to know what a grand showing she might have made had she chosen to do so.

Of the examples our nation took careful notice. Our people realized how far behind they were falling in art, and a reform began almost immediately. No great desire or need had previously been felt by our forefathers for wall papers or carpets.

They had other and greater needs. Their houses were as a rule log huts or rude frame buildings. Such dwellings demanded no papers for the walls. They did not care for carpets for their floors were rough and unadapted to the use of them. Some who were wealthy enough having houses that required carpets and wall papers sent to England or France for them. Now most of the wall paper used here is produced here. We get some from England and France, yet. Odd varieties are sometimes imported from Japan or China.

Prof. Smith's method of teaching art and designing was the first deserving praise in this country. His work has been interest

in Massachusetts where our best art schools are located. Since about 1870, Prof. Walter Smith, an English artist, thoroughly learned in art and the mode of teaching it, has done much for us in promoting our taste and chiefly in giving us a highly satisfactory mode of instruction. Prof. Smith has made the influence of his teaching felt all over the United States.

Many of our schools are now compelled to furnish material and instruction for drawing. But still we labor under difficulties. In the old world every thing is made favorable to art development.

We can easily see their advantage over us by contrasting the grand opportunities their art students enjoy, with the meagre ones furnished our artists. Tools and materials here are dear. We have few permanently established art galleries. Teachers of art are few and to a great extent incapable of teaching.

There they have plenty of excellent teachers. Tools and materials are very cheap.

There are numerous art galleries, exhibiting productions of the highest rank.

There they have libraries full of information for the would be artist.

England at the time of her Internat.

ional Exhibition in 1851 ranked about where we ranked at the time of the Centennial Exhibition. Here designers then were none ahead of our designers of 1876. Our designers are becoming numerous and skilled, but they have not as yet reached the excellence of our neighbors across the waters.

Women rank quite high in the art of designing. Their tastes and their sense of appropriateness of patterns for wall and floor often far surpass that of men. Still most of the best patterns that have as yet been produced have been designed by men.

We do not find our designers huddled together in little groups in certain localities. Nor are there only a few who do all our designing. It does not matter where an individual lives, whether in some crowded city or in some little out-of-the-way village; if he can produce a tasteful design he has equal advantages in either place. For wherever he lives or whoever he be, if he wishes to make himself known as a designer he sends his production to some large manufactory where the judgment of some of our best authorities is given. If they decide a design really

tasteful its author obtains some pay, probably less, certainly no more than the relative merit of the design calls for. The designer must then obtain a patent on his design before it is printed and put on sale. So we learn that none of our designs are really poor but they are not all in the best of taste.

So It is to please the eyes of a nation that we find the best designs on sale with those which cannot be classed anywhere but with the relatively poor. The fact that these latter find ready sale shows how neglectful we are still to art culture which should extend to all classes - high or low. There would without doubt be more or less demand for the most vulgar designs in wall papers and carpets among a certain class of the unlearned. But such designs are not put upon the market. It is hoped that by putting only tasteful patterns out for sale the people may in this way be led up to a higher standard of excellence in art. For it is very desirable that humanity have a high standard of excellence. This art element develops in man with the development of civilization.

and marks the advancement of a race. It has been imagination which has done such wonders for man. Designing develops his originality and helps him to depend on himself for ideas and plans — teaching him to rely on the resources within himself. For these reasons it is that parents are now becoming so desirous of having their children taught this art — which requires them to produce original designs.

In very ancient times we find plain walls — no designs, for they said, "Thou shalt not make any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above."

The crudest type of surface ornamentation is a coat of paint of but one color. What a leap has been made from this to the rich designs in wall paper and carpets! After, however, the most elaborate designs are not in so good taste as the plain coat of paint.

In later times we find the people using metal plates in which a design is

perforated. On painting over this plate the design was left on the wall. The plate could be preserved and the design produced whenever and wherever desirable.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries artists were under the patronage of wealthy nobles. They directed their attention towards that which would please their patrons for they were dependent upon them. But this condition was done away with. In the Middle Ages we find our artist master of his own actions. He now has released himself from the cords that bound him and is working out his own quaint or original ideas.

It is found very interesting to study old designs in wall-papers. They often tell of the tastes and dispositions of the people; which information would be otherwise unattainable. In pulling off old wall papers in rooms on whose walls it has been allowed to accumulate a greatly varied assortment is obtainable. Often bits of landscape are exposed; then perhaps, patterns in which the objects are in impossible perspective; underlying this, possibly, is a

paper on which are represented groups of strange foreign birds. Deeper down may be found a design of huge flowers and foliage interlaced with vines. These designs represent the tastes of our forefathers and they were generally far from conforming to our ideas of taste. From some fine examples of surface designs preserved from the Middle Ages it is acknowledged that we have not yet in some points excelled ~~them~~ work done at that time.

But in the present advanced state we can boast that there is better judgment shown in the fitness of designs for the uses to which they are put. It has been said that a man may be known by the company he keeps. Another says he can just as truly be known by the furnishings of his home. He tells us of a man who was noted for his good taste.

A caller once remarked how bare his walls were. The man replied that he could not afford the best wall paper and the law could not force him to use the poorer grades; he was unable to buy the masterpieces in art and he had done

nothing to deserve the infliction of poor pictures. We find few of like ideas.

About twenty years ago the conventional designs were considered the best. In these designs the figures employed were geometrically ~~balanced~~ so that one half the figure was the exact reverse of the other half.

But all things change in this world and designing has proved no exception. In this as in all works of art there has been a fascination for novelty. The Japanese patterns in which natural forms were copied now became influential in a change of style. From this developed a taste for the most elaborate designs. Simplicity and modesty in designs for wall-papers and carpets were utterly ignored.

Some fifteen years ago a fashion for a time prevailed, of arranging wall-papers in panels round the room. This was indeed novel and so found many ardent admirers. But critics find fault with it for its falseness of principle. They therefore rejoice at its disappearance.

The English in spite of the great advancement in art made in the United States since the Centennial Exhibition still scorn and deride us for our poor taste. They do this not with-

out some grounds. An Englishman told as a fact that at one time we used patterns that now would be astonishing. He said that in our wall papers the figures were sometimes so large that an important door or window was omitted so the design would not be interfered with.

We are now however becoming quite generally acquainted with many of the principles observed in worthy designs. It might be well to notice a few of these underlying principles. Too little importance is laid on the selections of carpets and wall-papers. But it should require careful attention and serious study.

There are many different uses for surface designs, as in lace, tapestry, carpets, and wall-papers. The latter two seem the most important and require more attention.

The carpet serves as a background for the furniture and should be chosen with this in view. If in harmony with the furnishings of a room it will give untiring pleasure. But if glaring or inharmonious it makes a room decidedly disagreeable and unpleasant. The colors should be subdued and carefully blended. The carpet should not be made an object to attract attention. But if the attention is

accidentally called to it the effect should be one of pleased surprise at its modesty and quiet beauty. If a contrast is desired the carpet chosen should be of contrasting shade with that of the furniture and wall paper. The most pleasing effect, however, is generally that gained by the carpet which is of a somewhat darker shade than the articles placed on it. From the floor up the room should become gradually lighter in shade.

Only for exceptionally large rooms should large figures be chosen. A large pattern makes the room appear less than its real size; while, conversely, a small pattern tends to enlarge the appearance of a room. For many of our cultured taste nothing is more attractive than the design in which the light and shade bring out the object as true to reality. In designs for rugs we often see a dog lying contentedly just where there is no possibility of stepping over or around him. We must step on him. There are thousands of similar examples and though they may be attractive, they are weak.

Whatever object is taken, it should be represented flatly as is the surface for which it is intended. For instance a vine intertwined

among leaves is taken as a design there should be the appearance of flatness such as they would have in an herbarium. The roundness of nature should be missing.

"The conventional figure is the activating principle of Persian and Indian carpets." The textile fabrics of Persia, Turkey and India have long been famous for the harmonious beauty with which their colors are blended. Beyond a certain uniformity in the carrying out of the design their ornamentations are not in the least formal. The border at one side may be only half the width of that on the other side. At one end there are not so many figures as at the other. And so it is throughout. The English and French have tried to imitate these but their success has not been great. In their scorn of the carelessness in regard to symmetry in these old carpets, they have lost the untiring eye-pleasure which the Eastern carpets possess. To a certain extent symmetry and conventionality are essential but they may be carried to the extreme.

"It is the secret of using colors of a negative character which makes Turkey carpets the most satisfactory to the refined taste; and,

again, it is the conventionality of ^{ornamentation in} Indian goods that makes them deservedly popular - without the reason for this liking always being recognized." It is not great variety which produces most lasting pleasure.

Much that has been said of carpets may be said of wall-paper. But there are some points of difference to notice. One writer has spoken of the wall-paper as ~~the~~ atmosphere of the room. A dark room may be made diurnal by a deep shade of paper. A light paper livenes up the room.

In wall-papers as in carpets there should be quietness yet beauty. If the wall is to ~~be~~ furnish its own ornamentation the paper may be chosen for its own attractiveness. But as a background for pictures its object should be to furnish the most suitable background for them.

Natural foliage intermingled with vines is the most popular subject of design for wall-papers. These must of course be ~~presented~~ conventionally, leaving the flatness of the wall undisturbed. The pattern should be close and

small unless the room be very large when a larger pattern is a decided improvement.

But even when a large figure is used the

outlines should be so interlaced and the colors so blended that it would be hard to tell where one figure ends and another begins. The attractiveness of a paper to a great extent depends on the mingling of contrasting colors. "A wall surface cannot be beautiful unless the forms upon it be of good design and the colors harmoniously applied."

One of the leading English designers, Dr. Dresser, has observed that since the wall is perpendicular, the general direction of the figure should be upward; but this would not apply to the floor or ceiling, of course. Eastlake, another noted designer, in his patterns is characterized by simplicity. His designs are perhaps too simple for richness. They are however inexpensive and are in accordance with certain important principles often overlooked. Though lacking richness they are always sure to be most tastefully designed and inexpensive.

The spotty effect produced by a series of detached bunches of flowers is to be avoided. Distasteful patterns are often a great source of annoyance and in quite a marked degree they are responsible for the state of one's mind.

Sensitive persons often are injured by glaring wall papers. Sick persons are often the first to notice defects in wall-papers. An example may be given of a man sick with a fever. He had the best of care but his fever still raged and became worse instead of better.

In his delirium the red spots on the wall-paper seemed balls of fire glaring at him on every side. He could not get away from them and the torture became unbearable. His life was in danger. Then someone guessed what it was that had caused him so much suffering and curtains were hung around him.

He soon rallied and after a time the curtains were removed. The spots again became extremely annoying. His mind was kept active counting them up then down the wall, adding, subtracting, and dividing till he could bear it no longer. He again became alarmingly ill. And again rallied when he begged to be taken to a room where there was no paper on the walls. Here he rapidly recovered. There are many such cases that might be sighted. These should be instructive in themselves, teaching us to reject poor papers in preference to none. There are

plenty of designs that cannot but produce pleasing effects. It should not be considered a matter of little importance what paper is chosen since happiness and comfort ~~and~~ in no small degree depend upon it.

It is often remarked that the general reproduction of works of art makes them commonplace and their influence injurious instead of elevating. But we can hardly accept this statement as true. For, "Repetition of works of art which are animated by artistic motives even though they are articles of commerce can not become too general. They place the most beautiful thoughts of the best men within the reach of many people and help purify and enlighten the social atmosphere."