

HOME FURNISHING

BY

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TO
NORMAN E. RUTT

PREFACE

This book has been written to serve as a textbook for classes in home furnishing, as a practical book for homemakers, and as a book of general information for interior decorators. As a textbook it can be used for long or short courses. The last chapter consists of two complete sets of class problems, of which the first supplies problems for each chapter in the book, and the second, definite projects, such as the decorating and furnishing of a small home.

Unlike other books on home decoration and furnishing, this one treats the traditional and the contemporary styles with equal completeness. It considers the furnishings of a home both room by room and subject by subject; for example, there are separate sections on living rooms and bedrooms, and separate sections on textiles and furniture.

I am indebted for ideas to the artists, decorators, and craftsmen with whom I have worked, to the students in my classes, to the authors of the many books on art that I have examined, and to the art teachers with whom I have studied in the United States and Europe. My special gratitude is due to the following persons who have read all or part of the manuscript of this book: Florence Spiehler Cook, Ruth R. Treganza, Marion Clark, Nellie W. Ullrick, William G. Whitford, Thomas E. Tallmadge, Virgil D. Westbrook, Arthur Carhart, and Norman E. Rutt. I wish to thank also those who have lent photographs with which to illustrate the book. This courtesy is acknowledged under the pictures.

Evanston, Illinois
February 21, 1935

ANNA HONG RUTT

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HOME FURNISHING

PART I

CHAPTER 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING IN HOME FURNISHING

*The common problem, yours, mine, everyone's,
Is—not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means: a very different thing!*

ROBERT BROWNING

The appearance of the home is the most critical art problem that a family has to solve. There is no more important agent in the development of visual good taste than everyday surroundings having art quality. Since the home is the place in which to foster and direct the spiritual, intellectual, and physical growth of all members of the family, the appearance of the home should be worthy of its high purpose.

The family that appreciates art quality in man-made things lives a richer life than one that is not aware of it. Each member of a family group that has good taste will have a higher understanding of the meaning of home, and may in turn be inspired to create a home that is fine. These members will also have within them a source of satisfaction and joy that will always be a comfort, for it will not disappear with loss of health or material means.

From the point of view of economy it is necessary for the home maker to be able to distinguish the ugly from the fine. The average person has to part with the belief that only costly things

are beautiful. Any type of environment may have beauty if it attains fitness and harmony, which are secured by good selection and arrangement.

The average home maker is not able to select and arrange her furnishings without certain training to give her standards of taste. Nearly everyone has some natural ability to recognize and create harmonies, and in most adults this power can be developed by study and experience in creative problems. The majority of women are eager to devote time and effort to the study of home furnishing.

No undertaking in life deserves more intelligent handling than the budgeting, selection, and arrangement necessary in establishing a home. The woman as spender of family income is faced with a problem as serious as that of the man in producing it. In the United States about two billion dollars are paid out annually for furniture, and it is safe to say that only a small fraction of it is expended by persons who are qualified for the task.

BENEFITS OBTAINABLE FROM THE STUDY OF HOME FURNISHING

The individual should gain:

1. The following personal benefits:

- a.* Power to recognize and appreciate beauty and the means by which it is attained.
- b.* Ability to create harmony in color and form.
- c.* Sufficient knowledge to express her own personality in her home.
- d.* Greater self-confidence.
- e.* A more active imagination.
- f.* A wider personality.
- g.* Joy in the use of art materials.
- h.* A new way to escape from worries.
- i.* A general interest in the space arts.

2. The following abilities of benefit to the family:

- a.* Ability to create a home of taste—a social asset.
- b.* Ability to recognize moral and spiritual values in surroundings of taste.
- c.* Ability to economize by the proper use of a furnishing budget, and by helping the family to do its own decorating and furniture making wherever advisable.

d. Ability to direct the leisure-time craftwork of the family so that hobbies are developed.

3. The following interests of importance to society:

a. Interest in having one's house, neighborhood, and city look well.

b. Interest in the interior decoration of schools, churches, clubs, and hospitals.

c. Interest in housing problems and projects.

d. Interest in raising the general level of taste.

e. Interest in consumers' organizations.

f. Interest in craftsmen and designers.

g. Interest in world citizenship through international art movements and contact with foreign products.

CHAPTER 2

THE ART OBJECTIVES OF HOME FURNISHING

BEAUTY

The supreme achievement for which we strive in home furnishing, just as in every other art pursuit, is beauty. Although difficult to define or explain, "beauty" might usually be considered to be "that combination of qualities that is pleasing to the eye or ear." Philosophers do not agree upon the meaning of the word, and neither do artists, especially those of different times and different lands. The Orientals say, "One man's beauty is another man's ugliness." A helpful discussion of the meaning of beauty is presented in Chapter 2 of a book entitled "Art for Amateurs and Students" written by George J. Cox.

The philosophy of beauty is known as aesthetics. Aestheticians have studied objects made by man, and by determining what qualities are common to all beautiful things, have established certain laws and principles that help us to recognize and appreciate beauty. These principles form a basis for judging the art quality of any object. An understanding of the components, principles, and aims of art helps to clarify vague ideas about beauty, partly by providing a standard terminology relating to it.

Use these art components	According to these art principles	To achieve these art objectives	
Line	Proportion	Expressiveness	} Beauty
Form	Balance	(Personality)	
Texture	Emphasis	Unity	
Pattern	Rhythm	Order	
Light	Repetition	Honesty	
Color	Variation	Functionalism	
	Opposition	Fine space relations	
	Transition	Color harmony	

EXPRESSIVENESS

One way to approach the subject of selecting, decorating, and furnishing a house or apartment is to seek to express some definite idea in it. The most interesting homes, large or small, are those which are consistent throughout. For this reason, the expressiveness of houses and their furnishings deserves careful study.

There are similar terms more commonly used than expressiveness, such as the character of a home, or the personality of a home. The word expressiveness is preferable, however, because it implies the power to excite emotional response that is lacking in the word character, and it avoids the suggestion of human attributes which is contained in the word personality. Talbot F. Hamlin uses the word expressiveness in regard to exteriors and interiors of houses in his book "The Enjoyment of Architecture." He says, "All good architecture should have this gift of expressiveness. Every building, every well-designed room, should carry in itself at least one message of cheer or rest or power. . . . In the buildings which seem alive with some message the architect has succeeded; they are true works of art."

The following are some of the ideas that are expressed in homes, consciously or unconsciously: repose, animation, naturalness, sophistication, intimacy, formality, warmth, coolness, delicacy, strength, freshness, antiquity. Since it is not possible to consider in detail all the ideas that may be expressed in homes, some of the typical ones are used here to illustrate expressiveness. Whether one lives in an apartment or in a house, the home may express formality, informality, modernism, or naturalness.

Formality. A home that expresses formality usually also expresses dignity, strength, reserve, and impressiveness. Features which contribute to this effect in a house are unbroken lines, large spaces, and a symmetrical facade, that is, a house front in which the two vertical halves are alike. In an interior, formality may result partly from conservative color of subtle or austere quality. The furniture is usually traditional in style though not necessarily so. The family that creates a home of this type usually lives a conventional, dignified, ordered life made possible by efficient service. A house which expresses dignity is not a mere

lifeless representation of that quality but an active thing influencing the emotions and behavior of all who enter it.

Informality. The informal home usually expresses friendly hospitality, intimate charm, and coziness. A house that has asymmetrical balance expresses the idea of informality through its varied design, its broken lines, and sometimes by its picturesque features. Its livable interior is often the result of using bright, warm colors, and simple, comfortable furniture. The family that selects a home of this type is usually unpretentious, somewhat unconventional, and often dependent on self-service.

Modernism. The modern home expresses the spirit of this machine age. Le Corbusier's famous definition of a house as "the machine in which we live" indicates the importance of functionalism in a modern house. Modernism expresses the directness and speed of the youth of today. This effect is achieved by stripping off all non-essentials in designs for furnishings and houses. For a complete discussion of the twentieth-century style see Chapter 10.

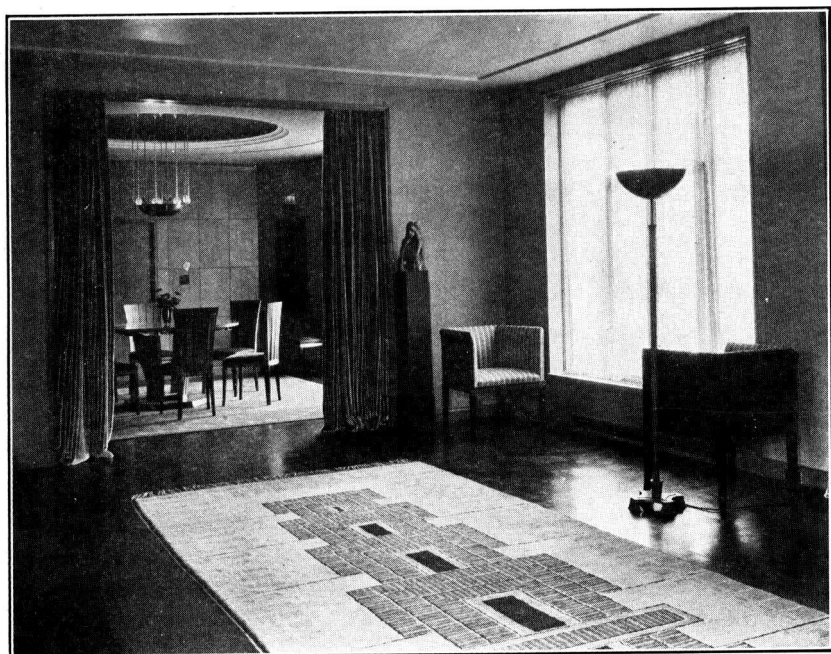
The families that choose modern furnishings are usually young, courageous, experimental, impersonal, and logical. They are interested in a style which is expressive of their own day.

Naturalness (Primitiveness). A natural or primitive type of home may express the following things: simplicity, handmade quality, sincerity, thrift, naïveté, playfulness, rugged force, unpretentiousness, originality, or protest against artificiality.

Among the things which contribute to the attainment of the natural effect are the use of native materials and native styles, handwork showing natural irregularities in structure, direct treatment, inexpensive materials, and peasant or primitive colors. Labored effects, fine finish, and imitations are avoided.

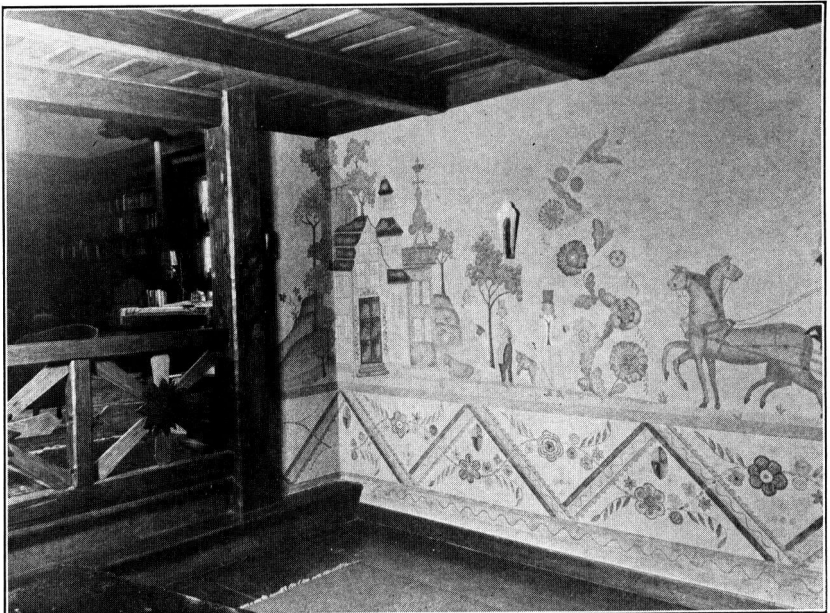
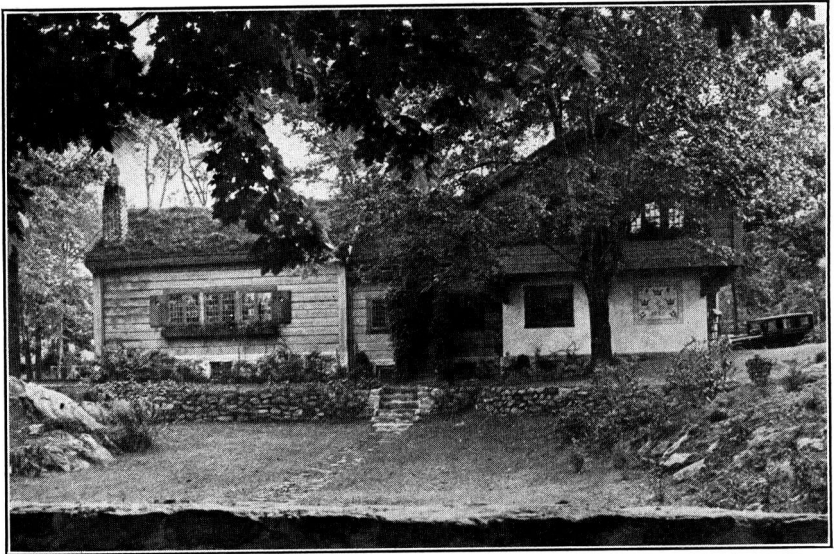
Houses of this type are not numerous but they are to be found in every part of the United States. Many families in the Southwest have shown their appreciation of the native art of that section by creating homes inspired by rather primitive American-Indian, Mexican, and Spanish forms of art. Along the Atlantic there is appreciation of the vigorous, natural quality in the primitive Pilgrim houses and furnishings that are reproduced today. Many farm homes in various parts of the United States are fittingly furnished with simple furniture some of which is handmade.

It seems wise to explain the meaning of the word primitive as



Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Eliel Saarinen

The Michigan home of the architect Eliel Saarinen expresses dignity and formality because of its balance and restraint. Order and harmony are important factors in the beauty of the interior. Note the repetition of circular lines in the luminaire, ceiling, and table. Mrs. Saarinen designed and made this handsome rug.



Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Lennart Palme

This picturesque house expresses informality and friendliness by its varied construction materials, including a sod roof. Although located in New York it suggests a Scandinavian farm home. In the lower picture a corner of the dining room reveals the honesty and directness of hand-hewn timbers and peasant wall-painting.

it is used in interior decorating today. In the words of a dictionary primitive may mean "simple or crude, old-fashioned, characterized by the style of early times." The word crude in this connection is not used in a derogatory way. It means merely "in a natural state, unrefined, unpolished, unfinished; showing lack of skill in workmanship." The words primitive and crude are used in describing the quality of sincerity that is today prized in many forms of art, from Negro sculpture to peasant wall painting.

Persons with highly trained taste often prefer articles of primitive and peasant construction because such products usually have satisfying realness, whereas the products of more highly organized society are too often artificial. It is amazing to see the contrast between the high art quality in the primitive textiles in museums and the lack of art quality in many of the textiles for sale in the shops of today. The unsophisticated artist knows better than to imitate nature exactly in his patterns. His feeling for suitable design is partially due to the fact that he alone is responsible for the entire object on which he works. Therefore he plans, makes, and decorates each article to suit its construction material. But his good taste is as unstudied and innate as his joy in his work.

The average home maker is not interested in a primitive or natural effect in her own home. Some artists and other creative persons, however, have found that the simplicity and realness of this type of furnishing are expressive of their own ideas. They believe that the creative spirit does not thrive in luxurious surroundings or among sophisticated reproductions of other periods. The artist Paul Gauguin who fled from Paris to Tahiti provides an extreme and famous example of this attitude. His feeling about "civilization" was so intense that he spat whenever he spoke that word.

The four different expressive ideas explained here are usually not used in their most extreme forms. These ideas and others are often combined and modified.

Unfortunately one often sees an effect that is the result of expressing an unworthy idea in home decoration and furnishing. Some owners seek to impress others with their wealth or importance, and so select highly ornamented and polished palatial

furniture, not realizing that this is mere ostentation. Very often families of small means make the mistake of trying to imitate the furnishings of people of wealth, and succeed only in being pretentious and insincere.

EXPRESSING THE OWNER'S PERSONALITY

It is the personality of the owner and his family that determines the idea to be expressed in a home. Qualities sincerely characteristic of the family that is to live with it should be the basis for the home furnishing. An interest which has permanent significance, and not merely a passing fad, should provide the inspiration for a plan of decorating and furnishing. It is true, of course, that the income, as well as the taste of the family, must help to determine the type of home to be created.

If a family likes to do things in a formal way with careful regard for the conventions, that attitude should affect its choice in architecture and in home furnishings. On the other hand, if a family has an informal, domestic, stay-at-home attitude, it should select a more picturesque, but simple, type of house and garden and furnishings. A modern artist might create a distinctive effect by making his own furniture at small cost, using a plain type of modern furnishing corresponding to his own simple way of living. The historian's family naturally inclines toward antiques. The carefree and casual family that spends summer out-of-doors and lives in a remodeled stable in the winter wants heavy, indestructible, and rough furniture. A traveled lady of sufficient means and love of elegance may have her apartment done in a sophisticated French fashion. An old-fashioned bride might like the quaintness and simplicity of the Early American style.

A certain writer of American Indian songs uses rather crude, simple furniture with Indian rugs, baskets, and pottery. One celebrated flower-lover has a vine-covered house that is close to the ground so that she can step right out among the flowers. Californians who love the romantic Spanish style use it to build charming homes. Many a recluse who does not wish to be disturbed has a high hedge, an uninviting house with few windows, and furnishings of a restrained sort and sober color. The indefinite or capricious type of person generally has a collection of things that expresses her confused state of mind.

The fact that a family may contain several conflicting personalities may often make it necessary to effect a compromise as to the idea expressed in a home. Therefore there would have to be modifications and combinations of ideas to suit particular cases. Common sense is a good guide in this as in all other applications of theories. Imagine the background that a dainty mother might create for her sons if she were lacking in taste.

It is not difficult for any family to decide whether it is more formal or informal in its tastes. Usually it is also easy to determine whether a family leans more towards natural, subtle, or modern effects. With these decisions made, the selection of a suitable house and appropriate furnishings is simplified.

UNITY

Another important objective in home furnishing is unity. Unity means an organized interrelation of parts producing singleness of effect in form, pattern, texture, color, and idea.

Unity of form results from likeness of shape. In any scheme enough of the surfaces should be similar in shape and size to result in the domination of one form. In a rectangular room, a rectangular dining table, and a rectangular rug, carry out the same form idea and help to produce unity.

Unity of pattern results from using patterns which are harmonious in type and size. Unity of texture results from the use of consistent textures. Unity of color is considered fully under color harmony (page 42).

It is possible to obtain such color, form, pattern, light, and texture that they affect the mind in the same way and produce unity in emotional effect. For example, if a cheerful, but reserved, masculine effect is desired, it could be achieved by using brown and red colors, large angular forms, abstract patterns, architectural light, and such textures as are found in oak, brass, iron, parchment, and leather. All these elements express the same decorative idea, and each one adds to the others, so that the effect is heightened and unity assured.

A room that has organic unity seems complete and gives the impression that nothing could be taken away or added without interfering with the wholeness of it.