

THE HOUSE OF VANISHING ROOMS

ECONOMY IN SPACE and cost, together with convenient equipment and perfect arrangement, are without question the considerations of greatest importance to the architect of the apartment and small city dwelling designed for a small lot. The latest example of the extremes to which architects and builders in their endeavors to produce cheap dwellings that possess all the conveniences and comfort afforded by a more expensive type of structure, was recently illustrated in "Country Life in America." The "freak" house, as it is termed, has been erected at Evanston, a suburb of Chicago. It is built of stucco and costs about \$1,500. It measures 25 ft. by 26 ft. in plan, and contains, by an ingenious arrangement, five rooms and a bath. The ground floor has a living room 19½ ft. by 12 ft.; bedroom, 13 ft. by 10½ ft.; bathroom, 8½ ft. by 5½ ft.; kitchen, 3 ft. by 9 ft.; closet, just outside the bathroom, 5 ft. by 3 ft.; and guest room, 7½ ft. x 5½ ft. Even the most careful figuring will not succeed in compressing all those measurements within the space of 25 ft. by 26 ft. That is because of certain arrangements which led it to be called "The House of Vanishing Rooms."

Exactly in the middle of the ground floor is a base-burner stove, which, upon a supply of four tons of coal, warms the entire house all winter. Over the main floor is a large attic, now used for storage; but two rooms can be finished off there if the downstairs supply proves inadequate. There is a curious closet between the bathroom and the sitting-room. One-half is a clothes closet, the other a stairway leading to the attic. When shut up these stairs are a tier of boxes serving as clothes hamper, hat boxes, and so on. Pull the lower ones forward and they form a first-rate flight of steps. Under this closet a door leads to a fair-sized compartment built below the floor—there is no cellar—and giving additional storage room. The roomy bookcase, if approached from the rear—that is, via the clothes closet—is a linen chest. There is an automatic gas heater in the attic which supplies hot water to kitchen and bathroom.

The visitor staying to dinner wonders where the dining-room is, and whether he is expected to eat in the kitchen. His youthful hostess has disappeared some time since, and he hears sounds in the kitchen that tell him that a meal is in process of preparation. The kitchen is attractive enough for anyone to mistake it for a dining-room, but when the critical moment arrives the host presses a button in the hospitable mantel-piece of the living room, the burlapped wall beneath the mantel slowly rises and disappears, and the dining table, in all its splendor of china and glass and snowy napery, appears through the opening, and when well on the living-room side the partition silently resumes its wonted place again; then chairs are drawn up, and you sit down to enjoy the repast. At the end of the meal the table is gently pushed back into the other room, the way it came, awaiting the pleasure and leisure of the mistress of the house to clear up.

Perhaps the greatest marvel is when the guest room appears out of an empty wall. A large, roomy couch is rolled over to the windows, and the panel behind it adjoining the bookcase, by the touch of a button, again swings out into the room. It may be swung out at right angles to make a larger room, but is usually left at a three-quarter angle, turning in slightly, and there you behold the guest chamber. It is a pretty room, with its fresh muslin curtains at the window, snowy counterpane on the bed, low, comfortable chair, and high, built-in dresser, which is in weathered oak to match the rest of the furnishings. When this panel is closed, the space is only large enough to hold the bed, chair, and dresser (which is built into the panel), but when opened out it gives a guest room of very fair dimensions, and a screen placed across the 3 ft. opening made by the folding out of the wall allows plenty of privacy. In the morning the wall is pushed back into place and the living-room resumes its normal size again.

INADEQUATE SPECIFICATIONS

THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE is copied from a set of specifications covering many different classes of work, the job for which they were used having a large amount of concrete construction:

"Concrete shall be mixed in the manner prescribed by the engineer, and of such proportions as the engineer may direct."

It is needless to say that nothing could be more indefinite than this clause, yet even by following it injustices can be inflicted. It would seem that when specifications are so indefinite, that it would be better not to have any specifications to govern the work. But few would agree with this statement owing to the fact that although some classes of work might be poorly covered, yet others may be described in great detail. In considering this clause we must first look into its origin.

No doubt such a clause was inserted in the specifications when concrete was but little used, and the amount of that class of work was always insignificant. In those days there were few, if any, mechanical mixers on the market, so that nearly all concrete was mixed by hand. Thus the contractor was to consult the engineer as to the method of mixing, that is, was sand and cement to be first mixed then water added, or was the concrete to be mixed dry, and then made wet, and how much water was to be used.

But with the introduction of many makes of mixers such questions were forgotten and the interpretation of the clause changed. The question to be decided was whether or not the concrete was to be mixed by hand or by machine, and if by the latter, what style of machine would be permitted. Here is where an injustice can be done the contractor. Under the specifications the engineer could prevent a mixer being used, compelling the contractor to mix all the concrete by hand, or if a mixer is allowed, the engineer could refuse to have on the job certain makes and styles of machines. These are not suppositions, but the editors of this journal have known of actual