

PRACTICAL HINTS ON DESIGNING.

PART II.



LL design is either symbolic or aesthetic in principle, and if we decide to follow the former, we are governed in our selection of elements by the meanings which religion, tradition or sentiment has assigned to

various natural objects; but if we arrange our ornament according only to aesthetic ideals, we have all nature to choose from, and with such wide liberty, are perhaps all the more likely to make mistakes.

The simplest method of decoration is merely sprinkling a given space with dots, and quite sufficient variety may result from their arrangement on different geometrical bases, or from the contrasting fulness or scarcity of their distribution. But this sort of work only answers on a small scale; on a larger, the dots must develop into isolated circular or floral forms.

Simple straight lines also are effective when used with taste, and by varying their length, placing them at different angles with each other, and combining them with dots, many pretty patterns can be invented, particularly suitable for monochrome embroidery, pyrography, leather work, pottery-painting, and chip carving; although, in the last-named, the lines thicken and the dots become circles.

As beginners should aim at simplicity before anything, they cannot do better than work at first only with the easiest geometrical details; and, when the due value of lines and spaces is thoroughly grasped, experiments should be tried with interlacing circles and polygons, whence may be evolved an almost endless variety of designs. The circle is especially susceptible to such treatment, as will be seen by drawing one of a fair size, dividing its circumference into any equal number of parts, and taking each of the points thus obtained as the centre of a smaller radius. This will form a wreath of interlacing circles, or arcs, if portions of each be erased according to taste; and these can be enriched by describing larger or smaller arcs round about them, taking any points for centres, and joining parts to one another by straight or curved lines.

Overlapping circles, with the lower part of each omitted to give the effect of being hidden by the next, make a very pleasant framework for an "up and down" design; and when several of different sizes are drawn from the same centre, they should be worked out ultimately in graduating thicknesses of line, or tones of colour, the heaviest near the centre. Concentric whole circles treated in this way make a very good repeat for a diaper pattern.

Before attempting to compose any elaborate design, the artist should practice for some time with exercises of this kind taking the circle and all the polygons by turn, and noticing at every opportunity good pieces of ancient and modern art, in which such purely geometric designs occur. In London, of course, visits to the British and South Kensington Museums will teach much to an observant eye.

Very beautiful designs for every kind of work are founded on contrasting curves,

elaborated by others springing from the main lines, turning back on themselves, or interlacing, as fancy may dictate, and enriched by appropriate vegetable forms. These details may continually cross and occasionally cover portions of the principal lines, but not often enough to obscure the original plan, and all the subsidiary curves must grow from the main stem and each other in one direction only, as do the parts of a plant. Whether simple or elaborate, such ornament depends for its beauty on the care with which the arcs are drawn, and the grace with which the lines spring apart. There must be no ugly angles or abrupt joinings, but each subsequent curve should appear the natural, unbroken continuation of the earlier portion common to all; even though the actual point of attachment may be concealed or emphasised by a bracket-like device. There are few better examples of this than the cover of the *Magazine of Art*, designed by Lewis F. Day; the field consisting of very beautiful curves, scantily foliated, and the border built up on stiffer and more ornate lines.

When the art of making simple patterns, by means of pleasant curves and contrasting spaces, is fairly understood, these can be elaborated by clothing them with more or less floral forms; care being always taken that the new lines do not disguise the old, or the result will be as ugly as of an abnormal fleshy protuberance destroying the natural proportion of the human frame.

As flowers supply us with the most popular and beautiful details of ornament, a knowledge of botany is obviously helpful; but its scientific study is less useful for our purpose than a close acquaintance with individual plants, and careful observation of their external features.

As, however, naturalistic copies of plants, with all their accidental light and shade, position and colour can seldom be used decoratively, it is well to make preliminary exercises in conventionalising them. To this end careful pencil studies of a plant should be made in various positions, all unnecessary shading being omitted, but each change in outline marked with precision, and particular note taken of every peculiarity of growth: such as the way in which leaves spring from stalk, the arrangement of veins, the exact angle of one part of the flower with another, and the number of petals, sepals and stamina. Then separate parts, such as the flower, leaf, bud and seed, should be drawn and shaded slightly, and afterwards a water-colour sketch may be made, giving broadly the chief features of light and colour.

Such exercises having been carried out with several different flowers, one should be selected which best suits the style of decoration desired, and whose details compose best into their destined space. A primary plan of the repeat having been prepared, as directed in the former paper, and thoughtfully divided with charcoal into agreeable masses of light and shade, the most prominent of these should be translated, by means of a bread stump and H. B. pencil, into a copy of a conspicuous feature of the plant, preferably its flower; the leaves, buds or seed-vessels representing the other masses, and the whole brought together by the stem, whose curve must not contradict nature, and from which the parts must spring with some show of probability, although it need not be an exact copy of any actual stalk. Some flat designs need no stalk; or a repeat may be arranged by surrounding a full face drawing of the flower by a wreath composed of the stalk and other details.

In this kind of work it is chiefly necessary to convey, as simply as possible, an idea of the main outlines rather than the less distinctive features of the flower, presenting, in fact, a type rather than an individual.

The flowers which most easily work up into decorative schemes belong for the most part to single species, and hardy English plants, experience showing that the more distinct the form, the more likely is an amateur pencil to convey a clear idea of it. For this reason the dog-rose, daisy, daffodil, sunflower, cornflower, iris, tulip, bryony and woodbine, are naturally decorative when rendered with intelligent reserve.

On the other hand, a much greater variety and opulence can be gained by the use in skilful hands of some double flowers, such as the garden rose, chrysanthemum, peony, double poppy and carnation.

Suitability is a primary consideration in the use of flowers, as in everything else, and no amount of skill can make them look happy in unnatural positions. What can look more undignified than daffodils bent and prone along a horizontal border, or bunches of grapes sticking out at right angles to a vertical stem? Yet both of these absurdities are sometimes seen.

In simpler diaper repeats flattish single blooms, drawn full face, or clusters of small florets, like fruit-blossoms, go best. For "up and down," sprays of almost any plant can be safely used.

To any pattern founded on curves, climbers are most congenial, especially to borders; although some other flowers, such as the carnation, whose stalk has a natural droop when left to itself, can, with a little care, be pleasantly adapted to such lines; but in this case alternation is impossible, as the flowers must always appear to spring upwards out of the main stem.

Generally both edges of a border may be equally covered, but where it is to hang down, as in a table-cloth, the lower edge should, I think, be in greatest contrast to the centre field; that is, lighter if the cloth itself be thickly worked, and *vice versa*. Where the border is vertical, as down the edge of a curtain, a good effect is obtained by letting some details hang downwards, instead of pointing from edge to edge, or on the contrary, the eye may be led upwards by most of the ornament pointing thither.

When using whole sprays a great matter for consideration is the relative size of flowers and leaves. Should the latter be less distinctly shaped, and yet much larger than the flowers, the whole may prove uninteresting; but very good contrasts can be formed either by clusters of small flowers having bigger leaves, or large heavy blossoms surrounded by light and delicate foliage. The masses of each should never quite balance, either in size or shape.

For all practical purposes seeds, berries and fruit may be regarded as flowers, either taking their place or accessory to them.

It is seldom advisable to represent natural flowers as larger than their real size, although they can always be used smaller. It is not at all unusual, especially in wall-papers and cretonnes, to see repeats of gigantic poppies or roses, but the effect is generally startling rather than beautiful, and with an amateur tends to become grotesque. For handsome patterns in proper proportion to large objects, it is better to use big flowers, like peonies and hemlock, or even small blossoms in heavy masses. But with flowers so conventionalised as to be mere symbols of the real, this rule may be relaxed if the arrangement be correspondingly formal.

A charming contrast can often be made by using two plants in the same design, one decidedly prominent, the other secondary, or even fulfilling the functions of a background; but the two must never spring from one stem, as I remember them doing in a particularly