



THE BUSINESS OF HOME-MAKING

A Consideration of the Most Important Construction in the World

"—For the sake of a rug a paper is sought
For the sake of paper a picture is bought . . ."

By PAUL FITZPATRICK

WHEN the editor of the HOME JOURNAL asked me to write an article for the Home-Furnishing Number my first impulse was to endeavor (in ever so humble a way) to shed a little light on some technical point of decorating—to light a paragraphic paraffine in the alleged dark of present-day taste. Or, literary scalpel and forceps in hand, to open a clinic for decorative dissection, and expose "The Effect of Blue on Morbid Cosmogonies"—or "Red, and Its Influence on Neurasthenics."

Instead of either of which (sparing you the boredom and denying myself the amusement) I am going to talk to you women of the HOME JOURNAL circle like the proverbial Dutch uncle.

I am going to talk to you about the Business of Decorating—not from my standpoint as a manufacturer of wall paper, nor from that of the practical man who cuts and pastes and hangs—and sometimes, alas, who smears his paste in unwonted places and suggests the enormity of a horrible pun on his undeniable "right to hang."

But from your standpoint.

The business of decoration, like all house furnishing and business in general, is usually treated as having only one side, that of production; or at most two, giving distribution equal and separate dignity. As a matter of economic fact, the forgotten side, consumption, is the most important and by far the most interesting.

Leaving aside the rhetorical incongruity in talking of the "Consumption of Decoration," let us see how this business of consumption is at present carried on.

II.

THE most generous of critics could but brand the present management as incompetent. A just critic might well say that there was no management. In homes where the income runs from say \$1,500 up to the \$2,000 or \$3,000 mark, the decoration and furnishing are haphazard, unplanned and often baldly inartistic. In the homes of the well-to-do and wealthy they are usually delegated to self-styled "specialists," who prate of periods, and purvey plastic pulchritude at preposterous prices. (Yes, almost that bad.)

Management, in the sense of getting results in the first instance, or value for your money in the second, is woefully lacking. To pick an emerald from the jewels of speech, "True, straightforward, honest decoration is a rarity never found."

III.

THE reign of the gilded frying pan as a mural ornament may be over, but we still yield fealty to useless knick-knacks and monstrous discordances in the name of decoration.

And I think the underlying cause of all this is the Devil of Hurry—the horned gentleman who prods so many businesses into the Pit of Failure.

Homes are built around couples—or at least they should be. But to-day, with instalment house temptations on the one side and misgoverned ambition on the other, the average young couple feel that their home must be complete before they make the divine start together.

Like all hurried or cheap things, the result is but a thin veneer of a home, covering basic faults which time exposes all too clearly. It seems to me that a real home is never complete until, after years and years of beautiful service to several generations, it starts to decay. And the difference between the false and the real home is just that difference between veneer, which time cracks and peels to bare the meanness of its reality—and fine old quarter-cut which time but colors into added charm.

IV.

MY plea is not for this or that color in the drawing room, Mission or Jacobean in the dining room, nor for any "ism" of period style or nouveau art. It is for business management in decorating and furnishing the home. Successful businesses are not built in a day, nor are successful homes.

You who are starting, start right!

Exercise choice—there's really the whole crux of the problem—choice. Because an August furniture sale beguiles, don't burden your home with some awful "bargain," needless from a utilitarian standpoint, distressing from an artistic. Because a wall paper is marked down from thirty-seven cents to twenty-nine cents, don't spoil an otherwise attractive room with an incongruous pattern or discordant color scheme on the walls. And whatever you do, choose your rugs with all the discrimination there is in you.

Exigent buying will lead you nowhere but to failure and final disappointment in the appearance of your home.

Plan the home, as business executives plan their future commercial moves. Take any passing advantage, of course, provided it is worth while and fits in with your broad scheme of furnishing.

But plan, and stick to the plan when once you are sure you have the right one.

V.

I THINK one of the best plans is to start the home with only the immediate necessities—and even these can, if circumstances insist, be far more modest than one plans to possess ultimately.

One couple I know, with an ideal home to-day, started with wicker furniture throughout, the simplest of wall treatments, and artistic but inexpensive grass rugs. Then gradually they have picked up, piece by piece, a houseful of the most charming furniture you can imagine. And just as carefully and with just as fine a discrimination they have decorated their walls in harmony, found the pictures they can cherish and prize, and replaced their grass rugs with fine examples of modern and Oriental weaves. Incidentally, there are fewer gew-gaws and gim-crack knick-knacks in that home than in any other I visit. Each room irradiates a spirit of real "homeyness," of harmony and taste that professional decorators accomplishing everything at one fell sweep fail utterly to catch.

They decreed at the start that a certain portion of their income was to go to the home. They put the proposition of making their home on a sound business basis. And they have succeeded. Their living room was to be a real living room in the old-fashioned meaning of the word. It is. There are only two pieces of furniture that are of exactly the same style—twin easy chairs that beckon and hold one like a loving mother's arms. And yet every stick in that charming apartment seems to be possessed with a living brotherly feeling for its neighbors, to blend into and form a part of one harmonious and comfortable family.

And this couple (who by the way have not remained a couple unblest otherwise) have a most refreshing pleasure in "new arrivals"—of either kind—for they go right on, year after year, picking up additions to the furnishings, changing the wall papers and hangings, rearranging pictures—giving their home a chance to grow along with themselves and their charming family.

Their great artistic success with their home has come to them directly in reward for their economic intelligence, their money sense in buying, and their exercise of choice.

Contrast with theirs the experience of so many people who start out with a misconception of what furnishing and decorating a home really is—a life work of love—and wish to have everything ready made and waiting for them. If they are well-to-do, their house will likely be turned over to "Drapem and Stickem, Decorators in All the Periods"—and when they return from Florida, Europe, or wherever the honeymoon has led them, they settle down in the new house with about as much feeling of home as one can have in a hotel, or furnished apartment decorated with Louis Sixteenth furniture, art nouveau wall paper and Turkish rugs.

And if they are not well-to-do they will fill the house with credit bought furniture, decorate (?) the walls with cheap papers and the mantels with plaster of Paris cats and terra cotta dogs—utterly respectable, of course—but!—All of which will be selected very much in haste and repented just as much at leisure. For in three months they will

find they don't really need half of what they have burdened themselves with, and will hate everything they "half-own."

Put this business of furnishing and decorating on a sound basis and you will succeed. Appropriate a part of your income for the home, just as you do for dress, food and amusement.

Spend carefully, choose wisely, get one good thing rather than two commonplace expensive "bargains," keep everything simple and "in tone," and there will gradually grow up around you a home that is really a home—a monument to the most interesting business in the world.



About Silver and Antique

A WRITER on the subject of "Housecraft" makes the following remarks:

There is a depressing sameness and triviality about the designs which an uncultivated modern taste has made popular in silverware. Base imitations of the richly wrought or chased effects which the silversmiths of the eighteenth century, or earlier, produced by patient and loving labor, are instinctively rejected by sincere lovers of the beautiful as unworthy of a place beside truly artistic productions. The beauty of the metal is exhibited to far greater advantage in objects made on simple, graceful lines, and very sparingly decorated, than on the glittering surfaces that have been entirely covered with meaningless ornament in relief, or drawn with the point. It is a regrettable fact that one searches almost vainly for quiet, tasteful effects in the silver of to-day. One must go to the antique shops to find the lovely shapes and chaste ideas of decoration that our forefathers loved.

It may indeed be true that all the alleged "antiques" are far from being as venerable as they seem, but they have at least the merit of imitating good models, and they are thus more desirable possessions than the characterless, machine-made productions of the modern factory.

Over-decorated china also floods the markets of the world to-day and helps to vulgarize the dinner tables of the "nouveaux-riches." Dishes heavily splashed with gold and bright colors or made in fantastic shapes, are so fatiguing to the trained eye that to see them once is enough. No person of taste would willingly dine twice where such an infliction must be endured. In the same category are the gorgeous lace and embroidered effects, sensational lighting arrangements, and extravagant floral exhibitions which are out of all proportion to the really important features of the dinner table.

There is inevitably an impression of vulgarity where excess is committed in any direction. The merely rich are constantly surprised at the unostentatious manner in which the families of the higher aristocracy live. At ducal tables one does not find the latest thing in knives, forks, or spoons, for the excellent reason that the heirlooms in old silver and cutlery, handed down from generations of ancestors, are naturally preferred to the freakish inventions of the modern silversmith.

The finicky and fussy details of a suburban dinner table, indicating much thought and labor on the part of the mistress of the mansion, are entirely absent from the stately board of which a dignified and conservative butler and his assistants have exclusive charge. In these fine old houses, family traditions are held in greater respect than the fluctuations of fashion. Anything approaching a millinery or fancy fair effect in the dining room would be rejected with horror. The ancestral portraits on the walls seem to frown upon the least suggestion of innovation or triviality.

It is not easy in an ordinary household, dependant upon a narrow income, to emulate the severe grandeur of the dining room with a venerable history, but it is at least quite possible to shun the other extreme, to avoid the acquisition of articles which too plainly announce themselves as being of to-day or yesterday.

An occasional visit to an antique shop, along with the study of the older periods of artistic production in silverware, china and glass will suffice to correct any tendency to be carried away by the showy but usually false standards that prevail in the commercial world to-day.