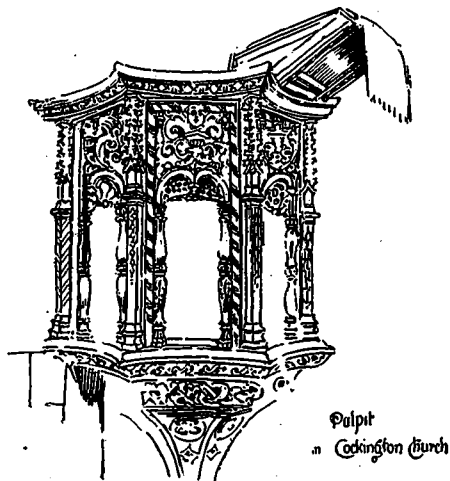


DECORATION IN INTERIORS



Pulpit
in Cockington Church

DECORATION.*

And now, to come to my special subject, I will give some hints as to the best manner of treating a middle-class dwelling, and will begin at the entrance hall. Of course there are many ways of dealing with this, as with every other part of the house, so I must give several modes of treatment. It has long been the custom to treat the hall and staircase as unimportant parts of the house, to give them little or no attention, and so they have presented a naked, cold, and uninviting aspect—places to be hurried through as quickly as possible. The ceilings have been left white, and the walls painted one plain unbroken tint of dumb or stone color. The visitor obtains his first impression of the house on entering the hall, and it is desirable he should be well impressed. We may first consider the ceiling. It should not be pure white, as garnish whiteness is out of accord with all other coloring—that is, in connection with house decoration; the whiter your shirt-fronts are the better. Well, the ceiling may be painted some shade, such as light vellum or fawn color, or some shade of blue, neutral in tone, such as the shade presented in the duck-egg shell. The ceiling tint will be regulated by the coloring of the walls. This toning of the ceiling is good as far as it goes, but there is no limit to the various ways it may be decorated. Stencilled ornament is one of the less expensive modes. And here, in speaking of stencilled ornament, it must not be thought that this is necessarily a "cheap and nasty" mode of ornamentation because we are all familiar with wretchedly designed and executed work of this kind. A stencil is a design cut in firm paper, cardboard, or tinfol, and the color is stamped through the openings in the manner of printing. Now all printing is not artistic, yet the capital letters in old Italian and German books are full of artistic design—yet they are printed, too. So with the stencil plate. It first of all has to be designed, and the highest powers of draftsmanship may be brought to bear in the production of high-class stencil work. The same design may be traced directly by hand, but the stencil plate is used as a quicker method of obtaining like results. The reason why so much work of this kind is inferior is simply because it is difficult to do it well. Preston Town Hall, in England, decorated by Heaton, Butler and Bayne, the eminent glass-stainers and decorators, is nearly all stencilled work, but yet it is one of the best decorated halls in England. I do not recommend stencilled in place of hand-painted work; where money is forthcoming, I prefer to do the latter. But to return to the hall ceiling. It is a simple and inexpensive way of getting a pleasing effect to put a band of well-designed ornament round the ceiling, its breadth being regulated by the size of the vestibule or hall, and there is no reason why the centre of the ceiling should not be covered with a simple geometrical design in quiet colors, and treated flatly, without light or shade. A little gilding introduced in small spots and thin lines defining the leading forms of the diaper or panelling has a very good effect, but there is no limit to the richness and quality of design that may quite fitly be expended here. Besides that, there are many alternative modes of treatment besides painting. There are beautiful paper hangings specially designed for ceilings, besides several embossed or raised materials such as Tynecastle tapestry, Anaglypta, and Japanese leather papers, which when harmoniously colored produce most pleasing effects. The cornice should be colored to connect the ceiling and walls, care being taken to use light shades where the mouldings and enrichments are delicate. The treatment as to the division of the walls will depend on the height of the ceiling, but generally speaking it is good to put a frieze under the cornice, and it is

useful to have a dado here, and in the staircase following the rake of the handrail. The dado and wall space should be separated by a wooden moulded rail. The dado should be highly varnished, so as to allow of washing and dusting without the risk of soiling. The color of the walls should be pleasantly warm, such as terra-cotta, or even Pompeian red, the dado in deeper shades of the wall color; soft olive green is also good for staircase walls. Blue, unless it is of the peacock shade, or approaching a grey green, had better be avoided here. The steps of stairs if of wood, should be stained a deep walnut color, or if they be of stone they may be painted a deep shade of the dado color, and varnished to allow of cleaning frequently. The hall and staircase walls may be papered—there are special designs made for the purpose that look very well indeed, having friezes and dados specially colored to match. The hall is a good place to hang etchings, autotypes, and engravings, in quiet oak or black moulded frames; and when they form a special feature of the decoration, the walls should be painted a quiet shade, as a florid patterned paper detracts from the value of the pictures. The carpets and portières should be in strict harmony with the decorator's work, and should be chosen by him or the architect. I have often seen the whole harmony of coloring in a house destroyed by the unskillful selection of the carpets and hangings. The woodwork should be painted in one or more shades of maroon or other rich brown colors and varnished, all graining should be avoided. I must confine myself to broad principles as I proceed, as I could multiply varieties of treatment without end. The dining-room should be sombre in tone, the ceiling a vellum color in depth to suit the walls. It may be divided by wood mouldings into geometrical panelling, and these panels filled with Tynecastle tapestry or Anaglypta, the effect of this is as if it were executed in low-relief plaster work. The designs manufactured now are very beautiful. If the ceiling is treated in this manner, the walls may also be decorated with the same materials, for there are friezes and wall hangings made of the same stuffs. The painting and gilding on those surfaces can be as simple or as grand as may be demanded, they are capable of many and varied beautiful treatments. Immediately under the frieze should be fixed a moulded picture rail; this is much better than a metal rod, as it goes round the entire room as the cornice does; its distance from the cornice will depend upon the height of the walls. The advantages of lowering the picture rail is that it affords greater ease in hanging the pictures, and prevents the unsightly cords being seen to the same extent as when going to the cornice; by shortening the cords, too, pictures hang steeper and the chances of breakage are lessened. This moulding can be colored to be in harmony with the walls and rendered almost invisible, or it may be gilt solid so as to form a marked boundary to the frieze. The coloring of the walls should have reference to the pictures, and should not be too light in tone; experience has discovered that dark reds or old gold color, not unlike rich brown paper or dull tones of green, either cool and grey, or warm and brown, are the best for showing pictures to advantage. I painted the dining rooms of two of the Royal Academicians in London, J. Pettie's and McWhirter's, and in both cases the color selected was a dark grey-green; both artists found the full value of the coloring of their pictures brought out to the fullest extent on this dark background. The Royal Academy walls are colored a dark Indian red, and so also are the walls of the British National Gallery. As chairs are placed round the walls of the dining room, it is good to put a chair-rail at the height of the chair-backs; this prevents the chairs from breaking the plaster. The dado should be colored in relation to the walls above, and a good many shades darker; the dark dado takes from the bareness of a large room, and gives a coziness and furnished appearance which does not exist when you can see each piece of furniture clearly defined against the walls. The woodwork should be painted good solid colors of Indian red or walnut shades, or black and resembling ebony. I do not recommend decorating the panels with any kind of natural flower designs; this flat hand-painted ornament in ivory color, or smilbing, but not imitating, inlaid work, is chaste and beautiful. If the wood is of good quality the panels may be decorated with various stints in full and rich designs as shown in samples here. I have decorated the saloons of many of the great ocean steamships in this manner. It is best to French polish surfaces decorated in this way.

As yet I have dealt with the ceilings and walls as covered with embossed materials, either in low or high relief. The ceilings, where dust cannot settle, may safely have the designs in high relief, but those in low relief are more suited to the walls. The walls themselves may be formed into wall proportioned panels, not so small as to interfere with the placing of the furniture or the hanging of the pictures. The panels should be divided by wood mouldings and there should be a style round each treated in flat tints of such a kind as to show the panel colouring to the greatest advantage. The French are partial to the mode of treatment, and I think it a very good one; it gives a rich finished appearance to the walls. Both ceilings and walls may again be oil-painted and decorated in a hundred ways; I have painted many of the finest houses in Scotland in this way, the ceilings being entirely decorated by hand with figures, wreaths, and ornamental compositions, the walls also being decorated with the like specially designed and hand-painted ornament. This is the most artistic manner, and no two houses are ever painted in the same way. Of course, ordinary wall papers may be applied here as everywhere else in the house, and if chosen by an expert, very fine effects may be obtained in this manner. I don't think there is a wiser way of spending money than in making the home beautiful. Our wives and families spend most of their lives at home, and the enjoyment derived from beautiful surroundings is beyond estimate, besides the refining influence it has on our children. There is no pleasure so constant, so soothing, so lifting and elevating as that afforded by a lovely home; it

*Abstract from a paper read before the Sydney, N. S. W., Architectural Association, by Mr. Andrew Wells.