

THE ART OF DESIGNING SMALL HOUSES AND COTTAGES.*

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In no house can every advantage be obtained; each must be somewhat of a compromise; in each there must be a sacrificing of what we deem the less important to secure what we esteem of greater value. It follows that the variety of our attitude must produce individuality in the results.

Suppose we have received a commission for a dwelling house. The first thing is to visit the site and devote some time to thinking out the problem on the spot. The site is the most important factor to be considered, for it usually suggests both the internal arrangement and the external treatment. If the site is a large one the position of the house upon it must first be determined.

A primary consideration must be to place the house as to afford its occupants the greatest possible enjoyment of such beauty of adjacent country or grandeur of distant view as the site can command. While doing this, however, we must so place and design the house that it shall not stand out as a disturbing excrescence, but shall look at home in its place, in harmony with its surroundings.

This consideration of the house as a detail in a larger picture will bring us to a determination of its general form, its treatment and its colouring. Some positions demand a lofty building to crown or complete a spur of rising ground, for example, while others seem to suggest that it be kept as low as possible, as when it nestles under some protecting hill-side. And in the country at any rate the low house is usually more successful. Some natural terrace may suggest a long house with all its rooms facing one way, or a ridge may indicate a double-faced house commanding the outlook over each slope, or perhaps a steep hillside will require a house following its lines and clinging to it storey by storey, while a gentle slope will demand a general grouping of the roofs to give a sense of stability by contradicting it.

In the choice of materials and colouring, harmony rather than strong contrast should be sought. There is only one sure way of obtaining this at all generally, which is of course to keep to local materials and local ways of using them. In some places a low-toned colour-scheme, such as stone walls and grey stone or slate roof, seems most fitting, in others the warmth and brightness of bricks and tiles; some invite the homeliness of whitewash, while others suggest the deep colouring of green or purple slate. Whatever it is, some definite colour-scheme should be adopted and colours of paint and any enrichments made to contribute to it.

Greatly as must the site influence the external treatment of the house, its internal arrangement will be even more definitely dictated by it. The position of each room in relation to the points of the compass and the outlook should be determined on the spot. It is now pretty generally realised that no sacrifice is too great which is necessary to enable us to bring plenty of sunshine into all the main living-rooms. The general rule would seem to be, to so contrive as to get the sunshine into a room at the time when it is likely to be most occupied. Let a study or breakfast-room be east or south-east, a general living-room or drawing-room south and south-west. A good western window in the room we most occupy in the latter part of the day gives us

many an extra hour of daylight; while the opportunity it affords us of habitually seeing the bright colour of sunset is a privilege which is worth some effort to obtain. A kitchen is best north-east or east, for the first coming down into the fireless house may well have its cheerlessness reduced by what sunshine is to be had at an early hour; later in the day, when the kitchen is hot with cooking, the heat of the sun should not be added. A bathroom and bedrooms too are pleasant with an eastern aspect, though some cannot sleep in a room into which early sunshine can penetrate.

Next only in importance to such considerations of aspect, and certainly important enough to modify them somewhat, is the question of prospect. For a pleasant outlook is a boon second only to a sunny aspect.

Before leaving the site one should be able to carry away not only detailed notes of drainage, water-supply levels, fine trees, views and aspects, but also a general idea as to the arrangement of the rooms of the new house, an ideal plan to be aimed at, and a sort of mental sketch in block of the general form the new creation should take externally.

It would be only tedious to you if I were to go through all the details of a house, trying to deal with them in a general way. I will therefore take one or two definite examples and explain how and why we worked them out as we did, trusting that the interest which attaches to any active problem solved may come to my aid and redeem the details from tediousness.

We have chosen for the first example a country-house designed for a house in North Saffordshire, partly because the site was not one to very obviously suggest or very imperatively demand a special treatment. The plot of land consists of a small field, long and rather narrow; it is much the shape of a suburban building plot, though situated right in the country (see illustration pages).

The client required the house to have a good comfortable living-room for the general family life; another good room for entering guests and callers; a small den for his own use, with desk, safe, sample cupboards and gun-rack; four bedrooms, one to be a bed-sitting room for an only son; a kitchen with the usual offices; outside there were to be wash-house, stables, coach-house, &c. The house was to be arranged to give as much open-air as possible.

As the site is exposed to the prevailing winds, and the best prospect is in the direction whence they blow, some form of court on to which the rooms might open suggests itself as a means of obtaining the needful shelter. The stable yard not being very suitable for the purpose, the house is grouped round a very small central court, round which a corridor is planned fitted with sliding windows, so that it can be converted at will into a sort of small open-air cloister by sliding the sashes down below the sill. This is roofed over at as low a level as possible to avoid anything of the feeling of a well, which a court as small as this needs must be might soon produce. The main roof also is made to slope away from the court in all directions, so that a good deal of sunlight may find its way in. On to this corridor the main rooms open with wide double doors, and the court being protected against wind on all sides it is possible in any weather, except when extremely cold, to have the living-rooms open to the fresh air to a quite unusual extent. The kitchen, butler's pantry, front and side entrances, and stairs all communicate

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