

Architecture and Books

A Review by Frank Alvah Parsons

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FRENCH PROVINCIAL ARCHITECTURE. By Philip Lippincott Goodwin and Henry Ooboct Milliken. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$20.00.

AMERICAN HOMES OF TODAY. By Augusta Owen Patterson. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$15.00.

THE OLD WORLD HOUSE. ITS FURNITURE AND DECORATION. By Herbert Cescinsky. New York: The Macmillan Co. 2 volumes. \$17.50.

IN spite of the radio and our national commitment to standardization and speed, we still need good books, and intelligent people want and read them. America, most cosmopolitan of all nations, a new country with new conditions and new problems, must create the answer to its needs by selecting and adapting the best from all sources from which its elements come. We are now awake, not only to this fact, but to the value of the art quality as an economic asset, as well as to its educational value in our environment; hence, the country-wide interest in the home, not alone in terms of comfort, but of beauty and of common sense.

"French Provincial Architecture" is a fascinating work containing new and genuinely practical material for the architect, the decorative designer, and the layman looking for ideas to be adapted. It opens practically a new field.

By hereditary instinct our colonial ancestors formed their conception of suitability and beauty from the English house. This tendency we have revived in the last quarter century in the Georgian styles. By successive steps, young America had for a century a spell of being original, of slavishly copying certain styles and of following fashion as she had dictated the monumental French of Louis Quatorze, then came a bedizened edition of Louis Quinze, followed by the ponderous elegance of the Italian Renaissance and the clumsy eccentricities of the Spanish bungalow, thereby filling the land with irrelevant and unsightly heaps called homes. The simpler French types, as a source of inspiration, have been practically ignored. But a new era is beginning, with order and plan in design and with qualities of simplicity, sincerity, and consistency as a conscious part of the nation's expression; hence, the immediate value of this book which convincingly presents simple, sensible, usable French material, standing squarely, also, for design based on orderly plan and law.

The book combines in an interesting and profitable way carefully measured drawings, plans, elevations, exterior and interior details with photographs of houses from the romantic Fifteenth and Sixteenth, the pompous Seventeenth, and the intriguing Eighteenth Centuries. Romance, picturesqueness, and sentiment are graphically pictured. If the reviewer may express a wish, it is for a larger number of Eighteenth Century and early Nineteenth Century examples. There are thousands in France. Our need is for more and even more of this type from which the nation may learn the necessity for order and law in design, an appreciation of what "good proportion" is, and a better understanding of the necessity for appropriateness and taste through knowledge as well as feeling.

This book will make its own appeal to any intelligent architect, designer, or layman seeking fresh material for adaptation, whose taste has reached such a degree of cultivation that simplicity and charm supplant elaboration and the bizarre — a state of mind in which one is capable of accepting a comparatively new field for thought.

AMONG other characteristics of the Twentieth Century is our childish surrender to the "picture craze." Diversion, pleasure, information, and some knowledge is more easily obtained from this form of expression than from the spoken or written word. To meet the situation one must learn to reverse the mental processes of other days when writers said something, then illustrated it in pictorial form. Now they illustrate something and often say little about it, leaving us to find or miss it, according to our intelligence. The mass results are obvious.

"American Homes of Today" presents its message in two distinct forms; the first its text, the second its illustration, each of which should be treated separately. The text is singularly free from sentimental buncombe as well as from technical idioms so often used to awe the public and cover a dearth of knowledge. It presents facts, gives reasons, and establishes unity in a manner that not only interests its reader, but inspires confidence through a simple, direct, and thorough treatment. It reflects throughout common sense as well as scholarship, and has a gracious and captivating manner.

The chapters given to the colonial and the English manner are particularly rich in information and show a grasp of interrelationships that is refreshing and informing. Particularly delightful is the

naïve suggestion, through comparisons, that ostentatious display may not be supremely æsthetic. Another satisfying section is that given to a discussion of "The French Style" from the point of view of our relations with the French Renaissance and its relations with our other so-called American styles.

READING this, one feels an intense desire to have the author discuss further, particularly as they relate to the interior of our homes, the exhaustless possibilities of other phases of the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century French styles. We should know of something besides those we have expressed so frequently in terms of gilded, exaggerated Louis Quinze, or the bizarre *cocotte* type of Louis Seize, the kitchen furniture of the Directoire and the oversized, badly proportioned Empire. The best in these styles is strikingly adaptable to our modern social urban life as well as to country homes in various sections of the country.

The illustrations in this book should be studied from a different angle than the text for the point of view differs materially, requiring other mental powers and processes. In the first place, the illustrations are selected to show what is, not always what should be, nor what the author would probably have. Since the book is one on æsthetics, one must remember how difficult it is for the layman and most other people to agree as to relative æsthetic values, particularly when questions of sentiment, cost, and practical usage are inseparable from them; hence, our wide difference of opinion as to the beauty in other people's homes. Many of the illustrations are beautiful, some are good examples of what is or has been, and some are clearly examples of what not to do, except with rare skill and seasoned taste. This is more or less true of any book with many illustrations and is not a criticism of the book, but it is of importance in estimating its effect on the point of view of the next generation.

A specially happy feature of the book is the part given to the discussion of gardens. There is a well-defined national movement now under way looking to a realization that a house belongs to its grounds, that there is a relationship between the exterior and the interior, and that it is more agreeable to find all these expressing in a unified way the culture and taste of their owner than to feel that the occupant merely owns a series of unrelated creations of other minds. By suggestion and (Continued on page 364)

Each of the three works discussed here has its own place. The reviewer makes no pretense to doing any of them justice in this limited space. He would only suggest briefly leading lines of thought for those who read, lest in taking one's own point of view for the only one, one should miss the graciousness and charm of it all in looking for brass tacks, fail to see the truth while searching for chic, or perchance lose much of the value of scholarly research in judging æsthetic values only.

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direct statement, Mrs. Patterson has made a strong contribution to our growing belief that the house is after all a unit and that it should be a unit expressing the intelligence and good taste of its owner supplemented by expert advice or assistance, but not annihilated by it.

SOUNDNESS and safety by conservatism and good judgment are rare in these days of modernists, iconoclasts, and New Thought. It is fashionable to be anti and glorifying to be original. The general attitude of "doing a thing to death" may bring rapid changes, but all change is not progress. For this reason, "The Old World House" is refreshing and reassuring, for both its text and its illustrations belong to the realm of reality and practicality rather than to imagination and æsthetics. The author's name insures its genuineness, its completeness, its scholarship and good sense, besides supplementing other contributions made before by the same man, whose name already spells authority to students of the English styles.

First of all, the book is English in its origin, English in its point of view, and English in its material. The author has not assumed the impossible by attempting to present the crystalized ideals of twenty centuries in as many countries in two short volumes. Second, he has shown admirably how the finest types of the English house have grown from generation to generation, through period after period, each added element settling comfortably, if not æsthetically, into its allotted place.

THIS work of Mr. Cescinsky cannot be reviewed adequately in so limited a space. It is not a book of impressions readily sensed. It is rather a selection, argument, and discussion of ideals from inception, and must be read and re-read to be judged fairly.

This work will find its way to the short shelf of essential information concerning English furniture and decoration of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries and will, if studied, we predict, do much to reinforce our faltering faith in clean-cut, honest, durable craftsmanship.