The simplicity of the house inspires the visitor with a feeling of restfulness, and, if I may venture to say so, of simplicity of heart, exceedingly pleasant and profitable. The perfection of art is to escape notice. A room which does not smack of the upholsterer, which is redolent of life, exhales a peculiar charm. We feel grateful to it for its partial response to our secret needs, our constant yearning towards an unattainable ideal, our longing for a real grasp of the blessed life. No hard and fast rule obtains here, except that, while a woman may impress us by the magnificence of her dwelling, she can only touch our spirits by the discreet art of making us partakers of her own spiritual life.

Nothing is so distressing as furniture with pretentious and labored outlines, draperies with ill-matched colors, diffuse hangings that are poor substitutes for the shade of tree or cloud. It behooves us to give the whole a convincing character of simple, natural development, and by an artistic sense of arrangement to secure that what is meant to attract the visitor shall attract him instantly.

The whole atmosphere should be one of "noble pleasure," as John Stuart Mill said, of serenity and permanence, all things suggesting the presence of a strong and fervent soul, which imparts something of its glow to surrounding objects, and invites other kindred souls to itself.

The general scheme of color has vital importance in a room. What is color? We do not know. Has it a real existence? We can not tell. But these questions are of no importance; color exists for us, and that is enough. Sensations of color are produced, it appears, by light waves of various rapidity; they affect and influence us in the same manner as sensations of sound, and almost as imperceptibly as our food.

It has been proven that the mere proximity of a vivid color is sufficient to produce a certain muscular excitement, analogous to

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the irritation resulting from a piercing sound. The fancy, so popular during the Renascence, that the several colors favored the development of particular feelings has become, through the labors of Féré, Wundt, and others, a scientific fact.

Thus the choice of colors for our rooms demands the greatest care. Red, without affecting men as it affects certain animals, stimulates them to energetic action, or at least to movement, to such an extent that in Germany red has been employed in certain factories as a spur to activity.

If you wish to create an idealistic atmosphere in your home, make your ceilings a principal feature. Dispense with whitewash or cloudy tints, and construct your ceiling of stout beams, heavily molded, inscribed with maxims of high inspiration and solace, and colored in strong tints of red, or blue, or green. Sacrifice the walls; make them bright with mirrors, so that their disappearance may add to the size and the cheerfulness of the room. Window-frames stained in dark tones will form a substantial setting for the landscape, and bring you into direct communication with it. But if misfortune has placed you in a street where you have a disagreeable outlook, to which attention is better not attracted, have the windows lightly frosted, so that they too may cease to be.

There is a certain lack of distinction in filling one’s rooms with furniture solely for ease and comfort—sofas, long chairs, ottomans, settees. The big arm-chair of a bygone age, standing firm and capacious, was a thing of quite different stamp, dignified, even in the graceful Louis Quinze style. And as to certain articles neither useful nor ornamental, incapable of responding even to the modest desire for something to sit upon—they, happily, have had their day.

The whole effect should be one of dignity combined with homeliness.

Rich or poor, do not crowd your walls; set on them merely a living and friendly note, something that is a final revelation of yourself, an element of life—a delicate water-color, a fine engraving. Is not this a thousand times better than a vulgar glitter, or even than tapestries? It is you, your thought, that you stamp on these walls!
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Thereby you extend and strengthen your personal influence. What matters it whether I find this or that object in your drawing room? Am I entering a photographer's studio or a museum?
It is you that I want to see. And, to tell the truth, I do not think it very delightful to see above your head your own portrait, the portraits of your husband and children. The end of portraiture is to replace the absent; beside, the painter or engraver strikes me too forcibly as interposing between you and me, and, as indicating, almost brutally, how I am to understand you. What would happen, I wonder, if I should admire the imitation more than the original?
I would rather divine you, come to know you, in my own fashion, as the secret unity among your belongings grows upon me. If the visitor on entering perceives no discordant element; if his eye, wandering presently toward the chimney-piece or some other salient point, rests on a beautiful head enhaloed, as it were, with Christian sentiment and ideals, or on a beautiful Greek statue, calm, dignified, in no wise labored or strained, natural in pose and expression; at once he is at his ease, his confidence is already gained. Presently his glance will range afield; he will perceive some fine early Italian master, admirable in its artlessness, crowded with ardent ideas, and fragrant with noble aspirations; or, if you are touched with the unrest of life, if needs you must plumb the mysterious and the unknown, you will have found room for some Vincian vision; or perhaps for the clever and superficial gaieties of the French school, or the admirable warmth and spirit of our landscape painters.
Many people indulge a taste for small canvases, because these will hang anywhere, go with anything, form part of the furniture, and suggest no manner of problem—cowsheeds scoured miraculously clean, interiors all spick and span, kettles athrob, alive; or watery meadow-lands, with grey trees and grey water, and clouds fretted, or far stretched out, or close-packed, or flocculent. These do not tire the brain; they offend no one, except that from the house-decorator's point of view they are often of too superior workmanship. Rembrandt is the divinity of shade, the antipodes of the Italian
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sunny expansiveness. In an impenetrable cloud he dints a spot of gold, which proves to be a drunkard, a beggar, a melancholy wight, a rotund Boniface, a needy soul, a Jew from Amsterdam or Bagnolles, or possibly himself. There are also the Gargantuesque old Flemish masters, with their phenomenal processions, their carousals, free to all, reeking with jollity and life.

It seems to me that in matters of art one should say raca to nothing; every aesthetic impression has some use. And I really do not see the utility of a discussion, like that which has been wrangled over for ages about the relative importance of form and substance. Certainly there are features that are accidental, and others that are essential; you will choose according to your taste. The arts of design have no title to govern your soul; it is your part to govern and make use of them. Do you wish to surround yourself with the brutalities of so-called Truth, or with suggestions, forms which efface themselves in the interests of impressions or ideas? Do you love beauty of form, exact outlines, well-defined contours, or a broad effect, a surface whose lines are lost in the ambient shade? These are questions for yourself to answer. Good tools are those which suit you best. It is not the mission of painter or sculptor to reproduce a scene with mathematical precision; a photographer would do this better; the artist’s part is to be of service to you, to furnish you with the elements of the art of life. Indeed, it is the distinguishing mark of the artist that he singles out and segregates, in a crowd, in a landscape, the one choice object; upon this he fastens, he is alive to all its manifold romance, and the charm is so great that around this object he sees naught but gloom.

The aesthetic object does you the delightful service of supplementing your own visions, and of compassing you about with ideas. You do not ask what it is; but what it expresses: the cleverest of Italian houses would give you but a very superficial pleasure. You need support, not illusions; this marble, as no one knows better than yourself, is marble, but it speaks to you. Only, the message of art needs to be properly directed. To catch its accents or to make them heard, one must impart to it something
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of one's own. How wonderfully the meaning of things, even their most precise intellectual meaning, varies for us, day by day, through distraction or a change of mood. If our mind wanders as we read a book, the loveliest thoughts slip past as if of marble. A lady who had been stirred to enthusiasm by a somewhat mediocre book, wrote me, asking to recommend another which would produce the same effect. I told her first of all to fill herself with the same enthusiasm, and then to take down from her shelves any book she pleased. One day, subdued to our mechanism, we pass on like blind men; the next, if our hearts are touched and our spirits satisfied, we put suggestions to the full, or go so far as to see, in a phrase or a picture, ideas which the author never dreamed of putting there.

Let us not, then, be anxious to crowd our rooms with beautiful things; far better display things few in number but high in worth, adapted to their surroundings and performing in some sort the office of the conductor of the orchestra.

In a room of great simplicity, a single work adapted to its surroundings, and excellently interpreting a woman's tastes, renders us a wholly different service. This is no corpse to anatomise. You contemplate an object of love, and all things glow with a new lustre. You forget, if only for a moment, the offences of life. And I maintain that the poorest woman in the world, if she has faith in beauty, will always be able thus to fill her home with light; she can always place there some flowers or a photograph.