An Urban House

IN submitting the site of this house to The Craftsman, the owner believed that the only building-plan possible involved a sloping terrace with a flight of steep steps and the ungainly wooden rail, or life-line, for safety in winter.

The site is by no means unusual. It is presented in almost every city in the country: namely, a lot of fifty feet frontage and one hundred feet deep; elevated eight feet above the street level, and with practically no variation in height from front to rear.

In the locality of this special house, there is no provision in deeds or leases which definitely fixes the position of the houses upon the lots. But yet, by tacit agreement, the fronts of the larger number of the residences upon the given side of the street have been kept back approximately twenty-five feet from the lot lines. At the same time, there is a decided lack of uniformity in the matter of porches, bays and other projections; so that any building feature desired may be introduced, without encroaching upon public rights, and without disturbing the good will of the neighborhood.

In obedience therefore to the foregoing easily fulfilled conditions, but with an absolute rejection of the local methods of treatment, the accompanying plans were evolved: the owner simply stating the requirements of his family; the Craftsman architects providing for the same by those means which, in their judgment, seemed best. It may be added that a sufficient and generous, although not extravagant, sum was provided for the thorough execution of the plans herewith presented.

By examination of the ground-floor plan, it will be seen that with the exception of the space taken by the steps leading from the street and by the motor-way, the entire lot has been reserved for use: no sacrifice having been made to wasteful terraces, which, used without tact and artistic sense, stand too often as a confession of defeat in schemes like the one at present treated.
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From the very nature of our site, built up to the line, as it is, on the one side, and separated from the adjoining house, on the other, by a narrow way, three feet six inches wide, it is plain that side light is impossible; unless that, to insure this questionable good, the house is built long and narrow: which is a plan unworthy of consideration. But with the lot covered, as in our scheme, the height above the street becomes an advantage; since it gives direct access to the basement; thus doing away with that objectionable feature, the tradesmen’s entrance.

Our drawings show that, the main front of the structure having been set back the usual distance of twenty-five feet, the entire front is occupied by the living room and its dependencies: such as the vestibule, ante-room, main staircase and lavatory; while the dining room, serving room, kitchen and pantries form an “L” at the right of the house; further, that at right angles with this “L” lies the servants’ stairway, which connects by a wall with the tool house; the latter in turn, connecting with the main body of the house, forms the boundary of a formal garden sufficiently large to admit of flowers, turf, gravel paths and a sun dial, as well as of a modest exedra; yet not large enough to require a high-priced gardener and assistant: a garden, in short, which gives much pleasure in return for the degree of attention which would be required by the lawns usually accompanying houses of the value here involved. The pleasure garden having been thus set aside, ample space still remained at the rear of the lot for the kitchen garden and the laundry yard, each being of ample size to meet all requirements.

The general block plan completed, the considerations next following were those of building materials. These were, to a degree, forced upon the owner, as the excavation necessary for the basement was made through a fair quality of blue limestone, such as is ordinarily used in cellar-walls: a variety which permits no dressing, save the rudimentary hammer work similar to that done by the stone-mason in shaping his material for a rubble wall.

In accordance with this plain suggestion, it was determined to build the house of “cellar-wall”; but that it might be of excellent workmanship and of pleasing appearance, it was liberally
Formal Garden
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“pointed up” with cement mortar, in the manner shown by the accompanying photograph. The same method was observed in the retaining walls, steps, etc., in order that the building might present a harmonious whole.

The roof was made sufficiently heavy to carry a thick bed of cement mortar, into which were set black slates of extra thickness, with enough cement in the joints to afford variety in level, color, and texture: features which are not without character and distinction. These provisions, together with copper flashings and down spouts, completed the exterior of the house, whose otherwise too sombre appearance was relieved by visible casings, sash, and doors

in cream white; the whole producing a dignified and harmonious effect.

The porches at front and rear were provided with beamed ceilings stained dark brown; light cement mortar filling the spaces between the beams. The floors of these porches were laid in square tiles of gray cement, fourteen by fourteen inches, set in black mortar, with joints one and a half inches wide; a border being formed by two rows of red clay tiles, eight by eight inches square, laid with close joints, and separated from the lining by a black cement joint one and one-half inches wide.

The garden has walks made of white gravel rolled into asphalt; the ground having a slight inclination toward the sides. The exedra has a floor like that of the porches, and the steps lead-
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ing thence are similar to those leading from the street to the front entrance. A large square in the middle of the garden is sunken, like the impluvium in the court of a Pompeian house, while the entire space is sodded, with the exception of the walks and of small places left for plants against the boundary wall. The area providing light for the furnace room in the basement is concealed by a hedge of privet, which, as shown in the view of the garden, has its corners left untrimmed save as to diameter: a device lending interest to the composition, and, from one point of view, making a fine background for the sun dial. The instrument itself, standing in the middle of the depressed space, is of light cream colored cement, simple, almost severe in its lines, and suggesting by its form as well as by its setting and surroundings the altar of the household gods in an antique dwelling. This decorative feature, together with the black, wrought-iron gates and the concrete roadway for the “auto,” completes the exterior work.

We may now pass to the consideration of the interior. We find the vestibule, which serves as an airlock for the entire house, floored with black cement, upon which is traced all about a white cement line, one and a half inches wide and eight inches from the base board. At the right of the vestibule are a spacious lavatory and cloak room, fitted with all necessary appointments; at the left, is an ante-room intended for the reception of the formal visitor and for the transaction of all business other than that pertaining to household supplies.

The ante-room was designed to be unobtrusive in finish and decoration: a passage to the house proper. Therefore, its color scheme was set in a low key and the furnishings were chosen for their simplicity. The room is finished in white quartered oak, stained moss-green; the walls are covered with olive green linen stenciled in a delicate powdered pattern of dull purple and white; the ceiling is pale green, and the floor a dark golden brown; the few pieces of furniture, which include a writing-desk, being of the same color as the floor.

The exit through the portières shown in the scale drawings, leads into the living-room, which is the focal point of the house. This room is of fine proportions: being forty-three feet long by
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twenty-four feet wide in its superior dimensions. It is divided by suggestion rather than in reality into four parts: the first is occupied by the books and the approach to the main staircase; the sec-

ond is intended for a general sitting room; the third is devoted to music and the piano; the fourth to the fireplace and ingle. As will be noted in the drawings, there are three different levels in the

floor, which were arranged with regard to both requirements and aesthetic considerations. The first descent of three steps was made in answer to the demands of the large proportions of the room,
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which otherwise, with a height of nine feet, would have appeared too low; also, because it was necessary to pass on a level from the front vestibule to the dining room. Incidentally, this necessity provided the means of obtaining the two seats on either side of the steps, and facing the bookcase. The reason for the second descent of three steps—this time into the ingle—is not so apparent at first thought; but it is based upon the intention of the architect to draw together those seated at the fireside through a subtile sense of companionship and intimacy. This device, which to the inexperienced might appear purposeless, has been tested with frequent use by this special architect, and always with the happiest effects. In this case, the deviation of level is easily obtained, for the reason that the portion of the basement lying under the room is not excavated, and therefore permits different heights of different parts of the room.

The floor of the ingle, owing to its proximity to the open fire-place, is of the same material as that of the vestibules: the only difference being that, in the present instance, the eight-inch red tile border is omitted.

The chimney-breast, shown in the perspective view of the fire-place, is finished with cement left under the trowel and coated with yellow shellac brought to a golden green by the introduction of Prussian blue pigment. The cement showing through the transparent coating, and the crevices taking more color than the smoother portions, produce an effect not unlike the glazes which are seen in certain kinds of potter's products, notably in faïence.

The ceiling of the ingle, forming the segment of a circle, is colored yellow: full, rich, and strong, like that found in the pumpkin.

The leather seats are so arranged that only infrequent glimpses of them can be obtained from the main body of the room. Consequently, they have been treated in color, with sole reference to the chord used in the ingle, and, for this reason, they have a cold blue-green shade.

The fireplace facing the wooden shelf is in hammered iron finished in the Russian manner. And this feature, enhanced with a few pieces of copper and pewter, together with some old ivory carving, forms an admirable focus for one end of the room.
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Ascending from the ingle to the main level, we find the floor, as well as the floor of the succeeding level, in cherry, finished in imitation of ebony, and having double lines of white wood, added for emphasis, all about the room and its annexes; each line being one-half inch in width, and the two lines lying one inch apart; the whole being placed at twenty-four inches from the baseboard. The remainder of the woodwork in this room is of white quartered oak, “fumed” rich golden brown, and the side walls up to the molding are covered with linen applied as indicated in the drawing.

The above mentioned fabric is in plum-color, of a grayish tinge, with a band at top of the same material in dark slate-color.

Above the linen, the plastered wall is finished like the chimney-breast in the ingle, except that the blue pigment has been omitted from the shellac, with a resultant fine rich yellow in the plaster frieze. The mortar of the ceiling between the beams, when wet, was stained with French ochre, thus producing a pale cream tint; this modulation completing a cheerful, dignified and harmonious color-scheme and producing an effect that is a perpetual source of gratification to the eye.

The glazing in this room is of the simplest kind, with the exception of the leaded work in the ingle, which is sufficiently explained by the drawings. The same simplicity prevails in the few draperies: the portières between the library end of the room and the front vestibule being in olive green, with appliqué work in tones of indigo and ivory, and with outlining in dark brown and yellow.

At the head of the first landing of the stairway of three steps there is a hanging of a linen fabric like that of the portières. It is seen from the entire body of the room and has a highly conventionalized figure-picture, showing two young girls in a mediaeval garden, and worked in the same style as the portières. The rugs in this room, four or five in number, are of the Donegal variety, and run the scale of greens from blue to yellow. The sash curtains are in pale ivory-color, with a design in tones of faded plum, indigo and lemon-yellow. As a last word, it may be said that the colors of these various fabrics are broken and refined to the degree that, when seen in combination, they have a unity and a delicate har-
monious beauty hardly to be appreciated when they are simply described.

The passage from the living to the dining room, of course, brings a change, although it is in no sense a radical one; since the two rooms are intimately related to each other, structurally and also from the decorative point of view.

In the dining room the dominant factor of finish and decoration is the leather, which was specially prepared in the Craftsman workshops. It is so dressed as to afford a constant play of color-value and it retains its natural veinings and markings, only accentuated and made more beautiful. It is colored a deep rich burnt orange, and is fastened to the wall with round, black-headed brads, placed not more than one and a half diameters apart.

Above the wainscot, the plastered wall is treated like the similar wall spaces in the living room: the color here being a pale apple green inclining to yellow, with the ceiling left in the original color of the plaster.

The wood of the casings, sash and sideboard is in rich, dark brown, while the floor is black, like that of the living room. Upon this, the large Donegal rug, in tawny yellows and olive-greens, makes an agreeable, cheerful note of not too strong color. The facing of the fireplace is of dark blue-green tiling, while the metal work is of copper, and the hearth in French blue tiles. With these details the window hangings of pale canary-colored silk harmonize admirably.

As may be seen from the plan, the general scheme of decoration used in the living room follows up the main staircase and continues through the upper hall and the sewing room. The plans also give with precision the arrangement of the second floor, thus precluding long verbal descriptions, and leaving untold merely the colors and the woods which have been employed.

The entire second story, save the front hall, the sewing room and the servants' rooms, is finished in ash, stained olive-green inclining to yellow, and the two connecting bedrooms above the ingle have their walls and ceilings in shades of tan-color accented by touches of milky white.

The remaining room in the second story has walls of old rose,
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touched with the same soft white; while the room above the dining room is finished in blue-green and lemon-yellow.

Finally, the servants' room in the second story, the kitchen and the serving room of the first story have their woodwork stained a Prussian blue, which, over the ash and with the subsequent finish, produces a rich moss green. With this the side walls of yellow olive and the cream-white ceilings give a pleasing and restful effect.

The basement, which, owing to reasons of space, is not shown, is arranged for an auto-room, and a man's room beneath the front porch and the main staircase. Proceeding through the auto-room to the rear, thence through a hall-way, and passing apartments for cold storage and heating apparatus, we come to the laundry and rear staircase; thence to the kitchen garden: the whole scheme forming an arrangement simple, complete and practical.

In leaving the house after our careful examination, we can sum up its characteristics which have forced themselves upon our attention. It is built of the simplest materials, put together in the simplest ways. Its success is the result of skilful labor. The natural beauty of its component materials has been respected: the grains of its woods have been preserved, and all carvings and moldings excluded. Its ornament resides in color, since color is the most imperative demand and want in the art of the present day.

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"WHO CREATES A HOME, CREATES A POTENT SPIRIT WHICH IN TURN DOETH FASHION HIM THAT FASHIONED"