THE MODERN HOUSE BEAUTIFUL. AN EXHORTATION BY ANTOINETTE REHMANN

The material essence of the home is a subject which really requires the best talent and thought, for we all agree that the home should contribute a large share to that fulness of life which comes with our work, our play, our friendships, and our search for things spiritual, intellectual and beautiful. The modern house beautiful should be daily a joy, daily a center of affectionate interest, and daily an inspiration. It should be a house that neither poverty nor wealth can keep from us. It should be a house that we all can have, if it be our heart’s desire.

What are the essentials of a beautiful house? Look at the Swiss chalet, the Dutch peasant cottage, our own old American farmhouses; the street architecture of Nürnberg, the Flemish squares of Brussels and of Bruges; Elizabethan manor houses, French châteaux, and Florentine palaces. Look at the Villa Farnese or Versailles. What is it that makes us look upon each and every one of these with an eye of pleasure? What is it that unites the home of the upright, sturdy mountaineer with that of a Louis Quatorze? The first characteristic which all these houses possess is that they efficiently served the needs of their inhabitants and the requirements of their location, their day and generation. The second characteristic is that they were all built, consciously or unconsciously, according to the underlying laws of architectural design.

We have, in this country, some good village streets and some good city squares, some fine suburban houses and some magnificent country estates; but, as a nation, we have too much the taste of the nouveaux- riches and our houses fail largely in the two essentials I have mentioned. The nineteenth century was an undisguised triumph of mechanics over aesthetics; and it is one of the most urgent of present tasks to again make civilization lovely. We all feel this. Then let us have the courage to struggle against the false ideals of materialism and commercialism, and let us bring to our homes all the possible elements of culture!

There is a new spirit in the air which we are all beginning to feel. Men and women are demanding greater utility, greater comfort, and greater beauty in their homes. Call this spirit a new note in household furnishing and decoration, call it the new school of domestic
architecture, or call it the new art. Call it what you will, but study and love it, for it is the art of our age, vigorous and original, and it has the energy and strength, the devotion and enthusiasm of some of the best talent of our day. Architects and artists, decorators and craftsmen in Vienna, in Munich and Karlsruhe, in Düsseldorf and Darmstadt, in Glasgow, in Burlington and Manchester, in London and in Paris, are embracing its principles and devoting their lives to the solution of its problems. In all its aspects it seems an art that is eminently suited to our own country.

The principles of this new school are largely those that were championed by William Morris and that were incorporated in the building of his famous Red House. We are more and more realizing that William Morris was one of the prophets of the nineteenth century. The newer men are expressing themselves differently but, at heart, they have fundamentally the same principles. These principles may be named as unity of conception, harmony of color, simplicity of form, excellence of workmanship, utility, comfort, and refinement of thought.

Unity of conception means clarity of aim and singleness of purpose. It is as necessary to a house as to a sonnet. It combines all the manifold carvings of a Cologne cathedral into a harmonious whole. It does not forget, in the designing of a front façade, that a house is built of four walls. It does not forget, in the decorating of a drawing room, that the kitchen and servants’ hall deserve special care. It considers you and me, our individual needs and likings, and it builds a house that will express this individuality. In the house every part will not only be a lovely entity in itself, but a subordinate and harmonious part of the whole. Unity of conception is as fundamental a law in architecture as in every other creative art.

Harmony of color, of course, precludes all loudness, all garishness, all jumbling, but yet it does not mean monotony. The new school is very fond of single tone burlaps and buckrams and of soft wood stains, but it has many original combinations and many brilliant effects. It knows that we are more liable to show good taste in simplicity than when we try to be ornate; for the papal apartments of a Raphael, the mural magnificence of a Veronese and a Tintoretto, and the ceilings of a Correggio, belong to an age that is past. Even in our
prosperous time we have not all the purses of gold to command a Puvis de Chavannes, a Sargent, an Abbey, or a Blashfield.

Simplicity of form is also one of the democratic requirements of our day, and to many of us it is an economic requirement, if we wish good taste, good material, and good workmanship. We belong to an age of wonderful material prosperity, an age of organization, of specialization, and of machinery. It is a surprising fact that with all the enormous output of our factories, and all the enormous display of our stores, it is sometimes an impossibility to buy a few well designed things in household furnishings. We know that the mediaeval workman, who was at the same time an artist and a craftsman, and who gave to his work a trained skill and a rich imagination, is no more; and that the conditions that made him have passed away. Still that is no reason why we should not have good things. The real craftsmen of Europe and America are demonstrating the fact that this age can deal in a masterly way with good forms, simple lines, simple ornamentation, and with all manner of material. Is it not better to have original simplicity than incongruous adaptations from all ages and all countries whose requirements are not our own?

As for excellence of workmanship, the women who are homemakers either largely demand it or suppress it, for women are the buyers of household goods and their word is the ultimatum for all household designing and planning. It is therefore the duty of every homemaker to study the essential differences between good taste and poor taste in household furnishings. We, who are interested in all manner of economic questions, should realize that this is not only a duty to ourselves and our families and to the community in which we live, but that it is also a duty to the workman. For to the workman the difference between the making of a good thing and a poor thing means all the difference between the free, wholesome life of the man who loves his work, and the hopeless grind of labor in which the best impulses must be suppressed.

The modern English house, designed by such men as Voysey, Baillie Scott, George Walton, Lutyens, and Brierley is a very good solution of the problems of modern life. In its exterior appearance this house belongs to its environment. It is usually built of material quarried in the neighborhood. Its general proportions are good. Its roof lines, chimneys, and window spacing are pleasing. It is ad-
vantageously placed, and about it is a real garden. This garden may
be a simple plot of grass with trees and shrubs; it may be as full of
flowers as the gardens of Hampton Court, or as stately as the Villa
Lanti, but in all cases there is a garden with a real feeling for garden
effects.

In the interior of the house we note a keen professional insight, a
good knowledge of the refinements of life, and an enthusiasm for de-
tail. This enthusiasm for detail we note in every thing about the
house: in the woodwork and wall fabrics, in the draperies and rugs,
in the furniture, in the lighting fixtures and hardware, in the pottery,
porcelains, silverware, and metal goods, in the linens and laces, in the
books, in the pictures and their frames, in the children’s playthings
and the kitchen utensils. Everything in the house is either specially
designed or carefully chosen so that everything, without being in the
least singular or eccentric, seems to belong to that house and the
family for which it was built.

The larger comforts are solved. The servants’ quarters are good.
The nurseries are full of the spirit of childlife and of recollec-
tions from fairyland. The private rooms give scope for individual
tastes. The study is cosy, with low bookcases, writing desks, and read-
ing lamps. The social hall or living room is imbued with a spirit of
companionship and hospitality. There are deep ingle-nooks, bright
log fires, musical instruments, tea-tables, and windows full of soft sun-
shine and bright flowers. These comforts of English home life are
the real comforts of American home life.

In Paris, if you don’t like your apartments, you can dine on the
boulevard and watch the passers by. In Munich, you have coffee
parties in the Schloss garten and spend evenings in the Hofbrauhaus.
In Venice, you can literally live in front of Florian’s on the Piazza
and have, for your company, St. Mark’s and the doves. Even in old
Corinth you can take your midday meal under the spreading tree in
the village square. But what are we Americans to do here if we
can’t spend our leisure in our homes? Where else can we go for our
daily wholesome recreation hours?

In a word, let us all, whether we be poor or rich, have a little
center of domestic beauty. Let it be all our own, and yet in its larger
significance let it embody one of the dearest ideals of the Anglo-Saxon
race: the building up of a nation of true, happy, and beautiful homes!