REMODELING AND DECORATING A SUBURBAN HOUSE: LESSON IV: BY MARY LINTON BOOKWALTER

A very interesting problem in interior decoration was presented to me in the doing over of an old house set in large and beautiful grounds from which it took its name, "Roselawn." It was interesting mainly because three entirely new thoughts in decorative work were suggested in the problem: First, I was asked to bring, so far as possible, the charm of the outside surroundings of the house indoors; second, it was suggested that in the remodeling I should give to the dining room the additional comfort and charm of a sunroom; third, the bedrooms were to be fitted and furnished with such close attention to sanitation that five minutes’ work would put any one of them into commission as a perfectly equipped sickroom.

Certainly such a combination of requirements had never come to me before in connection with any contract, and, as far as I know, they have never entered into any one plan for remodeling a house. Coöperating with me in this contract were Shepherd & Farrar, architects, and Mr. Kessler, a landscape architect. We all felt unusually interested in the problem because of the novel ideas which we were expected to work out.

To convey a clear understanding of what was accomplished in the remodeling of "Roselawn," it will be well, first of all, to give the original scheme of the old house. The ground floor was divided into the very small rooms of the period in which the building was erected. There were small doors between the rooms and elaborate grill-work in the arches where there were no doors. The hall was small and uninteresting, and the windows were planned to give a little light, but in no way to bring into the house any realization of the beauty of the surrounding garden and lawns.

The first step was to decide upon the changes that were essential in order to achieve the results desired, and also to what extent the old structure would permit the making of such changes. As one entered the front door of "Roselawn" there were two small rooms at the right, one a parlor and the other a sitting room, carefully partitioned off from one another and connected only by a small doorway. The partition between these two rooms was first of all taken out. The old closed-in chimney was taken away and a spacious fireplace built in on one side. The little hall was next extended in width to make room for a larger stairway, and at the end were introduced attractive seats and bookcases topped with high windows, which, as one entered the house, permitted a pleasant glimpse of tree tops. The dining room was originally twelve by twenty-six feet. In the remodeling, twelve feet were added to the width, making a room twenty-four by twenty-six feet.

As the house was built on ground which sloped to the rear, the dining room became a second-story room, and there was a row of rare old apple trees across the back of the lawn. It seemed a delightful plan to use in the walls of the dining room extension as much glass as would be consistent with the strength necessary to support the roof. This addition projected beyond the line of the second story in the rear, so that the ceiling also could be treated in glass, giving the room all the essential qualities of a sunroom. Briefly, these were the radical changes...
in construction which were necessary before we could begin any interesting interior decorations.

The first problem was the remodeling of the living room, which was made from the two small rooms. Naturally, the plastering in these rooms was old, so that first of all the ceiling was given careful treatment in pointing, sandpapering and sizing,—then lined with heavy ceiling muslin, which was in turn given four coats in oil, the final coat being a perfectly flat tone. Trimming lines, in a color to harmonize with the walls and fittings, were used on the ceiling. The walls, after most careful preparatory work, were lined with domestic ingrain in a color suitable for an undertone to the canvas. The best method of putting on such a canvas wall covering is to apply the paste to the wall and then lay on the canvas and smooth to place. By this process the material can be cut by a thread, starting perfectly straight at the ceiling line, and smoothed down to the baseboard. It is wise to leave at least two or three extra inches at the bottom of each length, for the looser the weave the greater the shrinkage on the length. After the canvas has been on over night and the wall thoroughly dried, these lower edges can be trimmed. When canvas is thus handled, as perfect a piece of "butted work" can be achieved as from two edges of wall paper. It is also more easily cleaned, as dust does not catch as readily as when the canvas is hung on stretchers. The color of the canvas used on these walls was dull green, and the woodwork was given a deep ivory finish. The woodwork, as in all the lower floor, was entirely new. Low toned Oriental rugs in dull greens, blues and rose furnished the floor covering, and the over curtains repeated these quiet colors.

The walls of the hall were done in a rich deep cadmium yellow Craftsman canvas, and the woodwork was stained brown with suggestions of yellow and red. The floor coverings were Oriental rugs of rich texture and color. The curtains were of soft English cloth dyed to match the walls and trimmed in deeper toned yellow and narrow lines of black. The yellow of the walls, contrasted with the glimpses of the green background of trees seen through the windows, furnished the keynote of a delightfully sunny color effect. Through the hall, also, one could look the whole length of the dining room, a vista which seemed to extend through and beyond the windows out into the orchard and gardens. And it was from this vantage ground one day that I caught a glimpse of the tracery of apple blossoms across the sash of a dining room window, which suggested a rare Japanese print, and then decided to make the interior of the dining room a softly toned frame for all the loveliness of the changing seasons as seen from these windows. The blossoming of spring suggested grays and gray-greens, with pink hued sprays and gray-brown branches; the full summer foliage would bring a touch of blue with the green; the snow on the branches a note of yellow to warm it all. All of these suggestions it seemed possible to me to combine in one harmonious color scheme for the interior of the room that should hold these window pictures. Thus the woodwork was made gray with green in it; the spaces between the skeleton wainscot were covered with cloth which carried in the different threads of the weave gray, blue-green and gray-green. The walls were hung with canvas and ornamented with a design in an all-over pattern of grapes with their large decorative leaves and graceful vines. This design was laid on first in strong color and then glazed down un-
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till the impression was that of an old print, which suggested the mingling of yellow, blue and green, and yet left you actually with an impression of gray and blue-green. This process of glazing the color on the walls is the same as that employed in old portrait work to get tone. Several thin coats of translucent color are used successively, one over the other upon the body of a brilliant color. A mellowness of tone can be obtained in this way not possible in the direct application of color. The ceiling of the extension in the dining room was of soft yellow glass with a design in blue and green, repeating the grape motif. The floor covering was a hand-tufted rug made to order to harmonize with the coloring of the room. It was kept to the cooler tones of the color scheme.

Craftsman furniture was selected for this room, as being especially adapted to its simple lines. Unstained frames of furniture were obtained, and these were colored and stained to harmonize with the woodwork. The leather used for all the furniture was a beautiful dull green, and the great Craftsman table was in perfect keeping with the ample dimensions and rather severe lines of the room. When the work was completed the room was found to have a distinctly individual charm,—and also we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had accomplished the task set us, that of making it a sunroom in every sense of the word. Very few pictures were used on the wall spaces of these rooms, and also few ornaments. This was not a question of economy, but of the achieving of a fine simplicity and dignity throughout.

In doing the bedrooms we had to study the perfection of sanitary conditions combined with the utmost beauty of effect. All the bedroom walls were first covered with ceiling muslin, to which four coats of oil paint were applied. The last coat was an egg-shell finish that might be thoroughly washed if necessary. Each room was treated in the color chosen by its occupant. Some good English prints made the curtains and bed sets in one of the large rooms, and the linens used for hangings were decorated with the same pattern that appeared in the ceiling and walls. No material in any bedroom was used which could not be washed or scrubbed, and could not stand the fullest exposure to sunlight, for each room was planned to secure all the sunlight possible through the day, that it should be the more wholesome sleeping place at night. When I first received the injunction to make these bedrooms sanitary, my instant query was, "Can I also make them attractive?" as the average ugly hospital room was the picture that came to me with the word "sanitary." But I found in working out the scheme that in the long run it was color that made a room beautiful and that interesting color came in the most hygienic materials and could be used in the most hygienic surroundings, for nowadays there is a wealth of beautiful wash fabrics, with infinite variety of color and pattern, to draw from.

At the front of the house, which was close to the road, we added a broad veranda, and a stone wall furnished the boundary line. This arrangement gave privacy to the garden and made it possible to use the attractive tea house, bowling alley, garage and conservatory with a freedom not enjoyed in many American homes. Then the outside of the house was given a fresh coat of paint of a lighter hue, which brought it in charming contrast to the wide lawns and sloping gardens.