THE ENVIRONMENT OF A COUNTRY HOME: 
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The quality of beauty is increasing rapidly from being the luxury of the few to being the necessity of the many. We find the need manifesting itself in all the large and small things of life; in the apparel we wear; the books we read; the utensils of our common use; in the laboratory of the scientist; in the office of the busy broker; in the carefully kept flower beds that skirt the bare walls of a factory and the luxuriant vines that are striving to hide its bareness; in the decoration which has become an essential part of public buildings and grounds. It is not the desire for mere display which has been a long time with us, but that yearning sense of the harmonious, reaching out for satisfaction; and nowhere is the unceasing endeavor to attain artistic appeal so evident as in the evolution of the home.

So strong is the subconscious, aesthetic sentiment within us, that the words "country home" at once suggest a picture of all-pervading sylvan charm, and this innate expectation is the fruitful source of many disappointments when actual visits dispel the ideal. To say that one has a town house in the country would be, too often, a more truthful expression and leave less room for disenchantment.

Considering the frequency of its occurrence, it seems almost a fatality that the things we wish to escape cling to us, follow us and insist upon being reproduced in our surroundings. Is it because we do not accord to our inclinations the courtesy of being understood, or does their satisfaction seem to involve the impossible? In most instances, the latter reason is doubtless responsible, but so much has been accomplished with most unpromising materials, that there is little reason for discouragement. And, when the advantage of selection is ours, we have only to concern ourselves with the choice of a location which possesses the accessories most difficult of acquirement. A house will grow steadily day by day under the hand of a solitary builder, but a beautiful tree requires a lifetime for the building, adding each year a ring to its girth and a little more strength, length and grace to its branches.

If you love the country for the trees, the grass, the shrubs and vines and the numberless little wild things that spring up everywhere and lift their blooms to you for recognition, you would not, of your own volition, become possessed of a well-cleared farm on which stood a house covered with siding and painted white like those
"You approach the house by a flight of winding steps, cut in a steep declivity, and a rustic rail at the side is draped with luxuriant vines."
“NESTLING IN A SMALL GROVE OF MAPLES, NEAR A RUNNING STREAM, STANDS THE OLD HOUSE.”
"THE LITTLE SCREENED SUMMER HOUSE IS PERCHED ABOVE A BEND IN THE CREEK. *** A STEP FARTHER IS THE LATTICE BRIDGE."
“WOODBINE CREEPT UP AND HUNG FROM THE GABLES OF THE WOOD HOUSE.”

“LATTICE SHUTTERS WERE ADDED TO THE OLD WINDOWS.”
you have known in town, with perhaps a red barn and other equally hideous outbuildings. Such a property is not hopeless if you are young and very patient, but to most of us the period of waiting involved would be an obstacle. And you would not acquire it, for, having seen it, you would have no desire to see it again. A prosperous farm is sometimes a most unpromising home.

Here, now, is a neglected door-yard, a small cottage some distance from the road, in a tangle of leafage which the farmer has been too busy to disturb. Once, some one planted a climbing rose, for it is all over the porch now, and a woodbine has laid hold of the roof. There are great trees too, permitted to add vigor and beauty each year, because in cutting his winter’s wood, the farmer preferred to add fresh territory to the potato patch. Long may the potato crop flourish, and may its planting, cultivating, harvesting and marketing so fully occupy the good man’s time that he will find no leisure to clear his door-yard! Perhaps, some day, his spiritual self will recognize among his best friends these great trees that have faithfully shielded his roof from the vertical sun rays and rendered the long, warm days of summer endurable to wife and little ones. So often a man makes preparation for home-building by cutting away every tree and shrub, destroying for one generation at least the atmosphere of home; for what the faces of loved ones are to the inner sanctuary, the trees are to the outer walls, the softening of hard lines, the mystery of tenderness, the appeal of silent service.

Without doubt, the most pleasing element in the surroundings of a country house is restfulness, and its attainment lies along the line of harmonious merging of form and color rather than in striking innovations however attractive in themselves. The contact with city life fills us with weariness of sharp contrasts. We would have the spiritual sight and sense carried forward on the gently varying tones of grass and shrub and gray tree trunks, with an entrancing variation of delicate willows finding their images in a little patch of brook, or the quiet emerging of a building so truly a habitant of the region that the consciousness of harmony almost anticipates its presence. Could we build the home while this recognition of our needs is dominant and our minds open to Nature’s infinite suggestions of form and color, no structure of alien ambitions would, years hence, obtrude itself upon our remorseful sight. Let us then carefully garner all these impressions and use them as the motive and the restraining power in our work of construction and development of environment.
ONCE, a man found, near a running stream, nestling in a small grove of maple trees, an old house, the beauty of whose outline and weathered gray coloring so filled him with delight that all his nature clamored for it. Time passed and he became its possessor. He believed that, with much remodeling, its attractions could be greatly enhanced. However, as he waited, reflecting upon the changes necessary, he found his desire for radical alteration lessening, until finally his early enthusiasm crystallized into an abiding approval of its simplicity, and the extensive remodeling dwindled to the addition of such accessories as, without departing from the general tone and style, accentuated the best features. Porches of strong constructive lines grew out where utility demanded, but in such proportion as symmetry warranted. The old windows evolved lattice shutters, not intended to close over them, but merely for emphasis and as a support for the vines which have taken possession of them. The walls of upright boards and battens were beautiful in natural grays and browns, and all new work was brought into harmony. The householder, meekly taking his lesson from Nature and working with her hand in hand, achieved realization instead of the disillusionment which often follows the changing of a thing we love.

As the months and years slipped by, the immediate surroundings began to feel the sureness of the touch acquired from experience with the old house. The woodbine, many of whose family adorned the gray walls with deep, glossy green, crept up to and hung from the gable of the woodhouse, and a luxuriant elder found its weathered wall an admirable background for drifts of bloom. A screen of old boards conceals the unattractive woodpile now and becomes the foil of the various flowering plants that live close to this sunny south end, while the dog-fennel, made bold by encouragement, riots through the grass. Just beyond, half hidden by shrubbery, is a small granary, with projecting eaves and lattice paneled door. Does someone say, "Unnecessary?" But, with the vine-covered arbor and the old apple trees, it makes a picture of what are usually the unsightly necessities of a country house.

Beyond the apple trees is the poultry house, with indescribable roof, whose quaint gable, quite surrounded by leafage, is visible from a distant approach. Let no amount of good-natured raillery deter you from building a picturesque house for your hens. This man's table is as abundantly supplied as though his hens had been housed in the ugliest shelter possible to the merely practical builder. Some even assert that the fruit from this poultry-house excels in flavor. Be
that as it may, to the owner of the building, the joy of its fitness is better than food.

Again amid the greenery we find this touch of wood tones in a wind break, flanking on the west a flower bed where poppies are allowed to grow at will. It is a simple fence of upright boards with square openings below the caprail, but when the afternoon sun falls over it and through the openings and the poppies float in the amber light, the charm of its unstudied effect is a delight to the beholder.

The out-of-doors never belongs wholly to the owner of the land. It is the possession of all who pass by and find something in its expression that appeals to the inner sense. In greater degree is this true of scenes along country roads, meeting the view of the traveler in possibly his only leisure, whether he be dweller on a city lot or a tiller of the land. Here, as we leave the wind break and pass through a vine-arched opening in a hedge of wild shrubs, we find ourselves upon the traveled road. But we must cross the road in order to sit in the little, screened summer-house, perched above a bend of the creek and commanding the sunset stretch of light and shade. Built principally of old greenhouse sash from which the glass had been removed, it is, nevertheless, another inviting gable in the midst of the varying green of sumac and willows. A step farther is the lattice bridge, resting upon high stone butments, and sending ragged reflections far below the bed of the shallow stream. Wonderfully charming is this touch of weathered gray, dappled with silver where the sunlight, eluding the outstretched arms of the trees, plays caressingly over it. It scarcely parts the willows, so skilfully has it found its way between them, and it leads to a pasture where a spring brook winds between willow-clad banks and great elms, buttonwoods and pines loom above it and the undulating green of the meadow. More than one cottage turns its pleasure-seeking eyes toward this pasture, and here and there well-worn paths lead from the natural terraces above down to the flower-clothed banks of the stream, and no more enchanting approach is found than the winding flight of steps cut into a steep declivity, of whose rustic rail wild vines have taken a loving possession. It is the work of an amateur craftsman in stair building, but so adapted to its setting that it seems to have just grown that way. And the country people say, as they ride slowly by this pasture behind their work teams, “It is like a park.” But it is better than a park, as much better as the real thing is better than the imitation.
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Wherever Nature is allowed her will, she gives us the keynote of the composition. We may mar, with aggressive additions, with the introduction of alien elements, what she has made beautiful, but, left to herself, in time she will again harmonize the whole. She will soften our crude colorings and cover unpleasing shapes with lovely growths, but we may not be there to see it. To be her contemporary we must be satisfied to assist, to take the suggestion and follow through faith to understanding. So, with much love and some labor, the country home comes to mean, not merely a place where we breathe the fresh air and are served with sweet cream and fresh vegetables, but a refuge for the sensitive mind, from which the unsightly and disturbing is banished; where the lover of life in its simple and universal manifestations grows acquainted with its varied moods, and the lover of art finds, framed by his casement, a landscape whose charm only the greatest artist can suggest. Here, the inborn craving for freedom is lost in its realization and the growth of the intellectual man becomes as spontaneous as the growth of the tree.

THE IDEALIST

THINK you that I am blind because I see
Beauty and truth in souls where your keen eyes
Discover only blemishes and lies?
Nay, dear, not blind am I, but verily
Aflame with the true vision. What to me
Is the dark thunder-cloud that terrifies
The hearts of children, when the open skies
The other side are lighted gloriously?

Today a friend betrayed me, O refined
Last gift of pain! You know the words she said,
You cannot know the mystery behind.
You do not see her poor soul, passion-led,—
Blindfolded by the dark veil of her mind,—
That weeps and never may be comforted.

—Elsa Barker.