PLASTER HOUSES IN THE SOUTHWEST: BY UNA NIXSON HOPKINS

The plaster house in America is a composite reflected of plaster houses in all countries, and, as a result, has many delightful features. Its popularity in the past few years has increased at a surprising ratio. The reasons are not far to seek: plaster houses are warmer in winter and cooler in summer than those of wood. Further, the high price of mill work no longer makes the frame house cheaper, so that the plaster house is not at a disadvantage from an economical standpoint. Then, too, people are learning how to build them. Every one who goes abroad, for instance, is more or less influenced, when he comes to make a home, by his observations. It may be the Elizabethan half-timbered houses of England have appealed to his particular fancy, or that the villas of Florence are the type which he wishes to reproduce for his own, or, possibly, the rambling houses of Spain, with their picturesque courtyards, have taken a special hold on his imagination. Those who have seen Southern California with its wealth of architectural specimens know that the plaster house shows all these influences as well as an occasional marked originality.

The Pompeian plaster house which one seldom, if ever, sees in the Eastern States, appears quite natural in the tropical setting of our Southwest. A number of these houses are situated in the midst of orchards, a good deal of space being necessary for their construction to satisfy their rambling propensities. Built around an interior court, or atrium, which serves as a distributing point for other rooms, they are picturesque in the extreme. A fountain plays according to tradition and tropical plants border this central room, luxuriously. The light comes entirely from above, and the ventilation is manipulated by small windows that form a sort of frieze. In some of the houses the atrium is floored with cement, places being left for plants. From the atrium you go up one step to a platform that bounds the atrium on four sides, and from this you enter the various rooms of the house. The front door, which commands a wonderful view of this novel interior, also opens on the court. In others the central space has been filled in with dirt, the plants growing as if out of doors. These houses might be adapted for summer homes in the East, and possibly for all the year round, but it is doubtful whether houses covering so much ground would be altogether practical when it came to the matter of heating, though it is possible. It would be difficult to find anything in domestic
HOUSE IN PASADENA SHOWING SARACENIC INFLUENCE.

THE TILE ROOF IS THE USUAL COMPLEMENT OF A PLASTER HOUSE.
PLASTER HOUSE SHOWING STRONG MOORISH INFLUENCE.

THE POMPEIAN PLASTER HOUSE IS ESPECIALLY ADAPTED TO THE TROPICAL SURROUNDINGS OF THE SOUTHWEST.
PLASTER HOUSE BUILT WITH OUTDOOR LIVING ROOM.

THE PLASTER COTTAGE WITH STONE FOUNDATION HAS BECOME A FAMILIAR SIGHT ON THE PACIFIC SLOPE.
PLASTER HOUSES IN THE SOUTHWEST

architecture more romantic than the Pompeian house, especially in the evening when the fountain is playing softly and lights everywhere are turned low. A tile roof is the usual complement to the plaster; though shingles are often used, they are not so suitable. The cement house conveys the impression of strength and calls for the same qualities in all its various attributes, including the roof. From the standpoint of color the red tile is perfection in connection with the natural color of the plaster, or when slightly tinted. The tin roof painted to simulate tile is a poor makeshift and not to be recommended—shingles are in much better taste.

The environment of these houses is always important; they need space about them and without it lose much of their charm. Several plaster houses close together or a plaster house intruded close between two of frame is apt to look hard and bare. To be successful they must be simple in line and almost entirely without ornament.

Where the foundation of these houses shows it is preferably of cut stone or of cobblestone, either of which combines better with plaster than does brick. But it is quite as well, when possible, to let the cement run to the ground, so that no other material is in evidence.

When it comes to details, it is interesting to have the trim,—door and window sashes, etc., rustic. As to color, there is nothing more satisfactory than a soft, warm brown; the contrasting color in such small quantities gives the desired character.

The house with the courtyard encompassed with repeated arches is trimmed with a pinkish-buff, very like the house paper, but a shade or two lighter. This house has plenty of space about it and since the picture was taken the vines have grown to such an extent about the arches as to afford a screen so that the family occupy it in summer as an outdoor sitting room without fear of intruding glances from passers-by. The living room runs through the center of the house and opens on the south into the court—where there is a fountain—and on the north onto a veranda by glass windows, thereby giving entrance or exit at either end of the main room as well as from the entrance hall in front.

The house among the illustrations showing Moorish detail is so restrained as to make it a suitable neighbor to plainer, simpler dwellings. Detail of the sort employed here is necessarily expensive, as the carving and coloring must be done by a master hand, or it becomes bizarre and vulgar. The foundation of cut stone is a good beginning, and the central tower is so located and the wings so distributed as to create lines pleasing to the eye, which combined with subtle coloring makes an architectural picture.

The home of Mr. Robert J. Burdette, situated on the famous Orange Grove Boulevard, Pasadena, suggests slight Saracenic influence. It stands on the crest of a hill and is appropriately called Sunnycrest. The plaster is the natural gray color, relieved by warm brown trimmings, with a tile roof of dark red.

The cottage pictured is a good illustration of what may be done in small plaster houses. Even with such heavy material there is a certain picturesque. On analysis it will be seen that much ingenuity was brought to bear in the designing of this house. It is a pity that the rear does not show in the picture, for a pergola adds materially to the western view. In fact, the designing of plaster houses taxes the ability of the architect more certainly than the designing of those of wood, but there is sufficient satisfaction in the successful accomplishment to justify the effort.