THE MAKING OF DECORATIVE LAMP SHADES: BY KATHARINE LORD

"How shall we shade our lights?" is one of the first and most important questions that is asked by the craftsman who is furnishing a house, be it simple or rich. And the search for lamp shades often reveals the fact that satisfactory shades are few, and the simplest in design are often out of reach of the moderate purse. Then why not make your own shades? But, you may object, I am not a worker in glass or metal. You can, however, handle a brush and lay a flat wash of water color—or at the very least you are a master of scissors and paste. Then why not a shade of paper?

A visit to the studio of a great mural painter who is an enthusiastic craftsman as well, reveals unthought-of possibilities in the paper shade. The shades in this studio were first of all designed to be an integral part of the general scheme of the room, to be points of decoration when lighted, since the light inevitably attracts the eye, and to melt unobtrusively into the color scheme in the daytime. In other words, the light itself brings out the pattern, and this by a very simple device. They are made on the principle of the once popular transparency, but with more consideration for the general tone and decorative value when unlighted. The shade may be any shape, as is shown by the illustrations, which range from small shades of simplest form for candles to larger ones, both round and octagonal, for lamps, and the original cylindrical shades which carry out so well the general constructive principle of the great antique candelabra which light the studio in question.

The making of the shades is a simple matter, so long as ordinary care and accuracy are used. The materials needed are a set of water colors, Whatman's paper of rather a heavy grade, some thin Chinese silk, some silver or gilt braid for edging and a frame such as can be bought at any lamp store. In case the water color is not available, the colored mounting papers may be used. The first step is, of course, the choice of the design, and this will depend entirely upon the character of the room in which the shades are to be used. As part of the design is to be cut out it must be made on the principle of a stencil, with well-considered proportion between the cut-out parts, with adequate "bridges," and without overlapping edges, though by the use of painted-in forms, as described later on, it may be made to combine the stencil form and a freer form of decoration. Festoons of fruit and flowers, arrangements of conventionalized flowers and leaves may be used.
The shape of the shade determined on, it should be drawn accurately on the paper before the design is made. If a frame is to be used, the paper must be fitted exactly to it by the following method. Measure the diameter of the upper opening of the frame and draw a circle on the paper, with a diameter one-quarter to one-third as long again. Now measure the depth of the frame—that is, the distance from the outer to the inner edge—and draw a diagonal through the circle and extending beyond it and measure off this distance upon it. Upon the same center draw another circle touching this point. Cut the paper along this diagonal and fit it onto the frame by lapping the upper circle and adjusting the paper to the frame and marking the lower edge from the wire frame. This fitting and making of the pattern should be done with a piece of ordinary paper and when complete transferred with great exactness to the Whatman's paper.

When the design has been made or traced it should be carefully drawn or transferred onto the paper. Then if the white paper has been used, the color must be mixed and an even wash applied. If one can handle a brush, charming effects may be gained by sketching in lightly a few extra forms which furnish a medial value between the cut-out portions of the design and the background. It is best to choose a neutral tone of blue-gray, gray-green or tawny brown. Warm vibratory tones may be secured by successive washes of different colors, each being allowed to dry before the next is applied. Only experiment can determine exactly the tone to be used, but in general warm colors should be put on first and cool ones over them. Successive washes of Indian red, yellow ochre or blue produce a delightful vibrant gray that is glowing and jewel-like when alight.

When the tone of the paper has been allowed to dry thoroughly, the design may be cut out. For this purpose a very sharp pointed knife should be used, held very erect in the hand, so that a clean cut will be made. Then the leaves or any added decoration may be painted in, these portions of the design having been left white when the wash was applied. When the whole decoration is finished and thoroughly dry, the shade may be cut around the lower edge before pasting onto the silk.

This operation requires great care and precision, that there be no wrinkles and that no atom of paste touches the exposed parts of the silk. The shade, now cut to its exact final shape, should be laid face downward on a clean piece of blotting paper,
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and an even coat of thin paste applied. Have the silk fastened with thumb tacks to a board, also covered with blotting paper, place the shade carefully upon it, leaving ample margin of silk to be cut off afterward, and with the fingers carefully smooth until the two are adhering at every point. If too much paste has been put on, it will ooze out upon the exposed parts of the silk. It is important therefore to wipe away any superfluous paste before putting the two together.

The shade must now be put under a heavy weight and left until absolutely dry and firm, which will take a good many hours. It is safest to leave all further work until the next day.

Ordinary library paste may be used, but does not withstand the heat as well as a stronger and better paste which is made as follows: Soak a teaspoonful of ordinary laundry starch in a very small quantity of cold water until dissolved. Then pour actively boiling water over it and stir until clear. Do not use until it is cool. A few drops of formaldehyde will keep the paste sweet indefinitely.

A word about the silk to be used. It must be thin and yet firm, the best grade of Chinese or Japanese silks being very satisfactory. It should be chosen for its color value when lighted, which should be carefully tested before it is used, as the yellow light of gas or the whitish light of electricity often plays surprising pranks with colors. On the whole, the entire range of yellows and yellow-greens are perhaps the most satisfactory colors to use. The yellows when lighted have the soft glow of sunlight and when unlighted relieve the quiet greens and grays generally used in the paper part of the shade. The exposed parts of the silk may be touched up with spots of high light or shadow, the water color for this purpose being mixed with Chinese white to give it body.

When the shade is completely dry it is ready to be fitted to the frame. Just here something may be said about the choice of a frame, though of course this frame has been chosen before the design was made. Upon the shape of the shade depends the diffusion or concentration of the light, the more spreading the shade the larger will be the circle of light.

Candle shades for dining-table use should be planned to throw the light down. The openings should be rather small and evenly distributed, so that the design shall not be too obtrusive, as these shades are on a level with the eye and rather near to it. Candle shades, being small, do not need to be attached to the wire frame, and the edge may be simply cut or finished with a light-weight silk fringe.

In the case of the larger shades, where they must be sewn to the wire frames, it is necessary to use a galloon or braid to cover the edges. This may be of a corresponding color or, better still, of dull gold or silver. The gold, silver or copper lace makes charming edges. A narrow and simple lace may be chosen, or a wider one that by its weight and richness gives an added elaboration, when that is desirable.

The accompanying illustrations show a series of shades of comparative simplicity, but of great decorative value and artistic effect. The lamp and candle screens shown are admirably adapted to the treatment described and their form can be varied almost indefinitely.

The Craftsman is indebted to Mr. Albert Herter for permission to have his lamp shades photographed and for furnishing in detail his method of making them.

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"I f our plants exceed in food and drink, they will grow fat and not fine; that is, they will run to stem and leaf, and their blossoms will be few, or atrophied. In his hunger for the soil, that develops when a man—or his wife—acquires a bit of yard, there is a tendency to demand more of it than it can give; to be overgood to it, expecting impossible returns; to spoil it, as we do some children. It is a real delight to play the hose over our garden at sunset and see it brighten under the mimic rain. How fresh and fair it looks, when we have done! Yet it can be harmed with too much drink. Plants that are too much coddled grow dim and weak when the coddling is foregone for awhile. One other item: Go over the ground with a rake, or a hoe, if it shows a tendency to harden and pack down, so that the water may reach the roots; even a spading or troweling may be necessary in resistant soils; but be careful not to cut the rootlets and not to jar the plant heavily, for that may shake off its flowers, or displace it, or at least break some of its stems or branches."

Chas. M. Skinner.