AMERICAN COUNTRY HOMES OF TODAY:
AN ACHIEVEMENT IN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE: BY WILSON EYRE

The architecture of a nation, like every other vital form of practical and artistic expression, is the result of gradual evolution. It may be based largely on the experience and achievements of other days and other lands, but if it be developed along natural, logical lines it will in the end become a distinct national type, the outcome of local and individual needs. It will reflect the ideals and the customs of the people for whose wants it was created, and in this way it will achieve the only genuine sort of originality—that which has for its incentive the fulfillment of a new and definite need.

This is true of our American architecture today. Much of its inspiration is drawn from Old World sources, and the influence of past and foreign styles is still found in many of our modern homes; but taken as a whole, they are essentially the product of our own country and our own people, and every year they are becoming more and more distinctively American and more closely in harmony with our environment and life.

And after all this path of evolution is the only one which will lead us to success. Mere imitation of a foreign style, however cleverly it may be accomplished and however beautiful the result may be, can never be wholly satisfying or expressive; and on the other hand the "invention" of a new type merely for the sake of producing something "original" is apt to be unrelated to the real needs of the people, and more often than not arrives only at eccentricity.

Here, as in so many other things, the solution of the problem lies in compromise, in the adaptation of old ideals to new conditions. And it is by working along these lines that our architects have attained the most successful results.

The source from which American builders have borrowed most extensively has of course been England. They have turned to the mother-country for her sturdy principles of construction as well as for her beauty of design. And this was perfectly natural, for in the majority of our States the climate is not so very different from that of the British Isles, and the same general type of structure and arrangement is applicable here as there. Then, too, in many of our suburban and rural districts, especially in the East, the nature of the landscape, the formation of the soil, the building materials available and—above all—the mode of living, are very similar to English conditions.
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At the same time, however, there are certain radical points of departure which have helped to differentiate our country homes from those abroad. England has no porches, as we know them in America—only small loggias and arcades and sheltered entrances. And so, to meet the wishes of our people for the utmost outdoor life, and to take advantage of our warmer summers, we have built porches and verandas, pergolas and balconies, which have come to be one of the most distinctive characteristics of the New World home.

Another point wherein our houses differ from the English is in our simpler arrangement of pantries, halls and corridors. Our kitchens and service arrangements are also more compact and usually nearer the dining room. Our roofs are somewhat different in construction, to withstand the greater snowfall, and we use double-hung windows more frequently than casements, as they afford better protection against heavy storms. In these and various other ways we have developed, out of more or less English styles and traditions, a definite local type.

PROBABLY one of the most significant factors in the evolution of American domestic architecture is the personal interest which the people themselves are evincing. They are no longer content to live in uncomfortable and monotonous-looking dwellings, or to abide by the preferences of their architect. They want their houses to be as convenient and homelike as purse, taste and skill will permit, and to possess as much beauty and individuality as possible. And in most cases the tendency is toward simplicity rather than elaboration, both in the exterior construction and in the interior furnishings.

There are many reasons for this alert, enthusiastic attitude on the part of our home-makers. Many of them have acquired taste and knowledge of art and architecture through travel abroad, through glimpses of the historic beauties of older civilizations. Others have developed a sympathetic understanding of architecture through wide study and reading in school, college and home. Libraries, exhibitions, lectures, current periodicals—all these have guided them to intelligent appreciation of past and present achievements, and given them at least a general knowledge of the many problems of home- and garden-planning, as well as furnishing and decoration.

They have followed the work of the foremost architects of the day, studied the various styles of construction and design, weighed the advantages and disadvantages of different building materials and gradually formulated their own ideal of what a comfortable democratic American home should be. At all events, when the time
TWO VIEWS OF AN INTERESTING MODERN COUNTRY HOUSE BUILT AT LITCHFIELD, CONN.: WILSON EYRE, ARCHITECT.
MODERN HOUSE AT LAKE FOREST, ILL.: ALBRO AND LINDEBERG, ARCHITECTS.
DETAIL VIEW OF LAKE FOREST HOUSE SHOWING BEAUTY OF WINDOW, DOOR ARRANGEMENT AND "SHINGLE-THATCH" ROOF.
TWO VIEWS OF A DELIGHTFUL MODERN HOUSE:
DONN BARBER, ARCHITECT: THE RESIDENCE OF
DR. W. M. STONE, FLUSHING, L. I.
A MODERN STONE AND CEMENT HOUSE: BUILT IN MERION, PA.
DAVID KNICKERBACKER BOYD, ARCHITECT.
THE FOUNTAIN GARDEN IN THE SCARSDALE ESTATES, DESIGNED BY CHAS. W. LEAVITT, JR.
comes for them to build, they have a pretty clear idea of the sort of house they want, and are prepared to devote considerable time and interest to its planning to ensure the carrying out of their ideas.

As a rule, they prefer to let the nature of the site and the local materials suggest the most suitable construction, for they realize that this will not only prove more practical and economical, but it will result in closer harmony between building and environment.

In Pennsylvania, for instance, where stone is plentiful and comparatively cheap, the builders have taken advantage of this fact and used stone so widely that it has become one of the chief characteristics of the local architecture. And incidentally, by combining good construction with good taste, they have attained delightfully picturesque effects.

In New York State brick is comparatively cheap, and is widely used with very beautiful results, while concrete is of course available practically everywhere and is proving a remarkably adaptable and satisfactory material.

But whatever the materials selected, they are being used more and more with a view to building the best possible house for the particular site and requirements, and the qualities most sought are durability, comfort, beauty and homelike charm rather than an adherence to some classic architectural tradition.

Not only has the progress of the last few years brought about closer cooperation between architect and owner and among the architects themselves in designing individual homes for the people, but a marked improvement is also noticeable in the quality of houses that are being erected for renting purposes.

This fact, together with the increased facilities of transit, is making it easier for people to live in or near the country, and to enjoy its wholesomeness and freedom without the isolation and discomfort with which rural life was formerly synonymous.

The architect is also taking a keener interest in the furnishing and decorating of the interior of the house and the laying out of the grounds, with a view to making the place as satisfying as possible from every point of view. And so we have closer cooperation between architect, interior decorator and landscape gardener, with the result that our country homes are growing still more harmonious with their surroundings and more expressive of the owner’s taste, guided of course by the architect’s technical knowledge and skill.

The accompanying illustrations, which came to our notice through the recent exhibition of the Architectural League, show a few typical country residences, and give some idea of the kind of homes America is building today for those of her people who believe in a practical, democratic and at the same time beautiful form of architecture.