JAPAN'S BEAUTY AN INSPIRATION TO
AMERICAN HOME-BUILDERS: BY KATHRYN
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FRESH air is pouring through every phase of American
life today. Our traditions and customs, civic, artistic
and social are rent asunder. As a nation we are reform-
ing and being reformed. Whatever is classic and formal
in our lives is at the present moment open to suspicion.
The only thing we are not open-minded to today is
habit. It is almost impossible to have an idea so fresh
and unusual and overwhelming that it can really create a sensation,
because every day is bringing forth new ideas, and as a nation we
are tolerant of everything that is fresh and stimulating and of nothing
that smacks of the established.

Of course a certain restlessness must be the result of this perpetual
interest in change. On the other hand, out of this stirring up of the
moribund we shall surely gather a more interesting, exalted, worth-
while social existence.

For instance, just at present we are as a people eagerly looking
out into the country with a view to more wholesome, peaceful and
sane living, we are tired of our city houses in the midst of noise and
confusion, of our overheated rooms, of the need of dashing away
from our homes a couple of times a year in order to remember what
trees and birds and flowers are like. We want country homes and
we want simpler homes and of course we are looking about for fresh
ideas for the building and fitting of these homes.

It is but natural that this search should at least lead us sooner
or later back to Japan, where the greatest beauty and simplicity are
to be found in all the old established homes and where the prime
impulse seems to be to bring nature within doors as much as possible,
not by clipping flowers and ferns and tree branches and bringing
them in to wilt and die, but by building houses that can be made
open to outdoor life whenever the season and the weather will permit.

Perhaps there is no land which holds out to us better examples
of simplicity and beauty in house and garden than Japan; because
its people, while cunning to a degree in commerce, have never departed
very far from the most primitive home-life. To picture homes more
unlike those of America in conception and arrangement than the
Japanese would be somewhat difficult. It is equally true that the
people who live in them are different from those of the United States
and that in each case there are certain geographical limitations.
Nevertheless the homes of Japan illustrate certain admirable features
conducive to health and happiness that might well be emulated in
America.
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In comparing our houses with those of the land of the Rising Sun the most marked contrast is found between elaborateness and simplicity. The beauty of the latter is sometimes severe, even though projecting an air peculiarly pleasing, friendly and inviting. The Occidental conception of the term “homey” is entirely lacking. Instead, the charm of the Japanese house is found in its close relationship to the garden of which it appears a part; its freedom and naturalness and its unobtrusive beauty.

Of course climatic conditions and the requirements and inclinations of the people have had much to do with the development of Japanese houses as they now exist. Mild winters and hot summers have made it desirable that they should above all else be open and airy. Usually one entire side of a room is formed of sliding and removable doors allowing it to be thrown open onto a garden. There are in fact to such rooms two sets of doors with a little porch-way between called the engawa. The outer doors or amado are of thin boards, their purpose being protection from storms and intruders. The inner doors along the engawa, and the windows, shoji, have wooden frames covered with thin white paper. In winter they are usually kept closed, while in summer they are often entirely removed, making the house quite pavilion-like. Hung with decorative lanterns and wind bells, the matted floors supplied with cushions, zabaton, and a rack of bright colored fans conveniently at hand, this open arrangement is very effective, restful and satisfying.

In the Japanese house there are no dust catching draperies, or over-crowded furniture. Chairs and beds are without place. Perhaps the absence of these frequently distracting and disturbing elements, considered necessary in American homes, save our Nipponese friends from many cases of nerves.

The singleness of purpose of these artistic but very simple people is observable in all details of their homes. There is a certain place reserved for pictures, of which one only, two at most, can be exposed at a time. Another place is held for a vase of flowers, and seldom more than one treasure of pottery, porcelain or bronze is to be seen. The place set aside for the exhibit of these decorations is called the tokonoma and the pillar of its construction is usually of beautiful, natural wood, frequently nanten or red sandalwood. It is always in the reception or company room, kyakuma, the seat before it being the high place of honor. The inner sliding doors, or fusuma of decorated paper and an occasional screen offer the only other ornamental features in the house except perhaps the rare use of a carved over-door panel.
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The fact that most Japanese houses have but one story eliminates the fatigue of stair climbing. Very thin walls and sliding paper doors without any means of fastening, make of necessity the home life extremely intimate. No strain after exclusiveness is felt; every one is so natural and unashamed that there seems to be neither desire nor need for privacy. Yet there is no boldness or show of immodesty.

The rooms are large or small according to the means of the family, the ordinary house usually consisting of vestibule, parlor, wife's room, tea room, two servants' rooms and a kitchen. Any apartment however is readily converted into a sleeping chamber, it only being necessary to spread the bedding on the floor, kept exquisitely clean and free from dust since all footgear is left at the entrance.

In the kitchen, also, there is great simplicity, meals being prepared with few utensils and over a small wood or charcoal stove, very primitive in style. The gas range and electrical cooking apparatus are not demanded as modern conveniences. Steam and furnace heat are practically unknown. Living rooms invariably face the south, that their exposed sides may receive all possible benefit from the warm sunshine in winter and the breezes in summer. Of every natural advantage some use is made and these seem to be appreciated in the fullest.

One thing seems most remarkable and inexplicable about these outdoor-loving people. With all the openness of their houses flooding them by day with air and sunlight, not an air-hole is left open at night and to the uninitiated it remains a mystery why the non-ventilated sleeping rooms are not more deadly in their effect.

In Japan one does not always inquire for the house of a friend: one asks to be directed to his garden, knowing that there he will find him whom he seeks. For the Japanese would infinitely rather be known as the owner of a bit of earth that has been subject to his treatment, showing also his artistic conception of nature, than as possessor merely of the boards, the shutters and strips of paper that compose his dwelling. In truth the home instinct of the Japanese lies in his garden. This may be because he there scents his power as a ruler of nature; as he remakes and transforms the space at his command into a miniature landscape. In no wise does he aim, like many humble gardeners, to be the faithful servant of Nature: he desires to be, as in reality he is with his wonderful skill and ability, her master. He ignores the wishes of plants, harries and distorts them into fantastic shapes which enable him nevertheless to attain the effects that he loves. He touches in his garden the highest point of artificiality, yet gains results so alluringly simple, so sweetly childlike that it seems
SECLUSION AND QUIET PEACE ARE ALWAYS PRESERVED IN THE JAPANESE GARDEN; FROM A BUSY CITY STREET YOU MAY STEP INTO SUCH A SPOT AS THIS AND FEEL IN THE HEART OF A WILDERNESS, SO MUCH OF NATURE IS CONCENTRATED IN IT
Even in the hotels and tea houses, the charm of the simplicity of the home is felt. Though the building is expanded by one or two additional stories, its atmosphere is not that of a public place. This *ociya* or tea house with its exquisite garden is quite typical.
THE COVERED GATEWAY AND HEDGE ARE PICTURESQUE FEATURES OF THE GARDEN OF ALMOST EVERY JAPANESE HOME. NEAR THE PORCHWAY, OR ENGAWA, A LARGE URN OR VESSEL OF WATER IS PLACED FOR CONVENIENCE IN WASHING THE HANDS: AND HOW BEAUTIFUL IS THE SCENE!
Houses along the river bank in Tokio: the water is much loved and verandas overhang the edge of nearly all Japanese streams.

The intimacy between this charming house and garden makes one feel that the two must form a friendly and ever attractive home.
THIS ATTRACTIVE KITCHEN SCENE SHOWS HOW VERY SIMPLE IS THE DAILY COOKING IN A JAPANESE HOUSE; THE RICE BOILER, WITH A WOOD OR CHARCOAL FIRE, COMPRERE THE OUTFIT IN MOST HOMES.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD WELL, WHERE MUCH VISITING AND GOSSIP IS INDULGED IN BY HOUSEWIVES AND MAIDS; RUNNING WATER IS NOT TO BE HAD IN ALL CITY DISTRICTS, AND THIS PRIMITIVE WORK IS MADE A SOURCE OF JOY.
FIRST COURSE OF A SIMPLE DINNER FOR THREE PERSONS: THE SOUP IS ALWAYS SERVED COVERED AND THERE IS NOTHING SUPERFLUOUS OR UNBEAUTIFUL.

THE JAPANESE BED CONSISTS OF BEDDING ONLY, AND THIS IS PUT AWAY IN A CLOSET DURING THE DAY: NO SPECIAL APPOINTMENTS ARE NECESSARY FOR THE SLEEPING ROOMS.
as if he must have thrown dust into the very eyes of Mother Nature.

The Japanese asks his visitor: "You like my garden? See, a place to walk; a little water; pretty view; a place to think!"

This garden at no point may be more than twenty feet long, yet the visitor bows his head, saying with conviction: "It is a little paradise."

The ambition of a Japanese garden is entirely without limit. It is, in fact, to form a mimic landscape. The rock garden therefore is one pure and simple, not merely ground set aside for ill-tempered Alpine plants, as is frequently the case in America. In such a garden the rocks would be of perfect shape, size and disposition and they would be relieved by round, clipped bushes absolute in proportion and offsetting in arrangement the prescribed order of the rocks. The finished result would be so apparently free from ostentation that the stranger might easily think it a conception of Nature in one of her chastest moods.

IT is a mistake to think however that all Japanese gardens are miniature in proportion and beside which the dwelling occurs merely as a place of refuge. Some of the famous ones of Tokio cover much ground and are as wonderful and highly perfected art works as are the smaller ones. From a vista in one of the large Tokio gardens the visitor looks over water to a series of green dunes topped with dwarf pines above which rises the ever changing cone of Fujiyama; in another section of the same garden an archipelago of pine clad islets mimic the famous ones of Matsushima, off the coast of Sendai. The water in this garden has besides innumerable bays and inlets bordered by reeds and defined by rocks or pebbles. In some sections irises occur in profusion, also azaleas; although it cannot be denied that blooming plants have not entered to any extent into the great scheme of development. For the Japanese garden is never a display ground for flowers: it is in every case a reproduction of landscape. Its tone may in places be gloomy, a trifle sad; but it is always without the attribute of excitement and unrest, given to many American gardens by irrelevant blooms, inharmonious colors and flowers mad with the determination to go to seed.

The Japanese looks upon the American garden as he does upon the arrangement of its cut flowers thinking to himself that they are equally barbaric in profusion. In his garden he seeks peace, solace and the inspiration that comes from regarding the works of nature. Too often the American garden gives only excitement and the wild notes of high color.