MODERN WINDOWS AND THEIR DECORATION: BY B. RUSSELL HERTS

Windows, even more than doorways, represent the great architectural links between the inner life of the home and the activity of the outer world. We enter life through the doorway, but we view it from the window, and, after all, it is the contemplation of things that renders them important to us. The time that the average mortal spends in a comfortable window-seat at the base of an attractively glazed and curtained window, through which an inspiring view is to be seen, can be a thousand times as fruitful as the time spent at the average entrance to a house.

Hence the significance of windows, spiritually as well as artistically; the two elements closely interwoven. Unless windows are structurally and decoratively beautiful, their effect on the spirit will not be half as beneficent as it might be, even though the landscape they frame is exquisite in the extreme.

Of course, when this latter is the case, it may seem necessary to build the window of large-paneled casements so that the picture may not be cut into fragments. As a general rule, however, the casement cut up into small panes or the now popular French window yields the better decorative effect. But the size and arrangement of the panes constitutes only one of the architectural problems connected with windows. Equally important is the determination of the size and shape of the window openings in relation to the rooms which they are to light and ventilate, and no less in relation to the wall surface of the exterior. For windows can make or mar the outside as well as the inside of a house: poor proportions, badly designed woodwork casings, ugly or over-elaborate curtains are all destructive possibilities that the housebuilder learns to avoid only after careful study.

This last suggestion leads us to the inside of the house and to the important question of sash and other curtains, shades and the like, and incidentally to a consideration of the dozen groups of fabrics and styles that can be employed.

At the outset, in taking up the question of curtaining, we recognize that what is called a “period” room requires a “period” window treatment. That is to say that any room in which all of the furniture, the lighting fixtures, wall decoration, etc., belong to one of the great dec-
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ornate periods of history must have its win-
dows treated in a conventional manner that has come down to us from the time which is represented by the other articles of furniture in the room. Thus a Georgian room should have one of the varieties of Georgian window treatment; a Georgian fabric and the cut of the curtains made to harmonize with the feeling of the period. A Louis XV room can have very much more elaborate curtains draped and redraped to conform to the lavish and *rococo* character of the time.

But most of us today are not furnishing under these restrictions. Most of us have homes of moderate size in which we have used furniture of various styles, sometimes all in the same room. Under these conditions our sole problem is to create a harmonious whole, the word being used in its deepest sense. We must create a spiritual harmony of color and efficiency; and appropriateness must be the keynote of this as well as of all our furnishing. We must not put a silk damask curtain into a Crafts-

A WINDOW IN WHICH THE UPPER SASH IS LEFT BLANK, MAY HAVE SILK CURTAINS TO DRAW ON THE LOWER SASH AND OVER-CURTAINS OF COLORED TAP-PETA OR VELOUR.

A VERY PLEASING EFFECT FOR A RATHER FORMAL ROOM IS MADE BY THE USE OF A CUT OR SHAPED VALANCE EDGED WITH GALLOON, AND CURTAINS TO MATCH, FALLING TO THE FLOOR: INSIDE, AGAINST THE PANES, NET OR SCRIM IS USED.

man library any more than we would use a rag carpet in a French ballroom.

This question of appropriateness or suitability in the home cannot be emphasized too strongly; for unless everything has its decorative or practical use, it is perfectly impossible for the home to be a beautiful one. Naturally everything useful is not a thing of beauty, but we can rest assured that everything useless will turn out to be ugly.

Now with regard to windows, there is a very useful element, an element that has always been thought of as essential, but which today is being less used than at any time since its invention. I refer to the roller shade. The shade is unquestionably a very suitable piece of window equipment; but it is not a beautiful feature; and by the simple and very practical use of curtains that draw, a way has been found to shade or exclude light, and at the same time to achieve the most aesthetic results. This is the reason that so many of our contemporary windows are fitted with sash curtains and heavier over-curtains that draw across the window on rods and pulleys, or else
FRENCH DOORS ARE VERY POPULAR TODAY, AND MAY BE DRAPE WITH CURTAINS WHICH, IF LEFT TO THEMSELVES, WOULD FALL QUITE OVER THE WINDOWS, BUT WHICH DRAPE BACK A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE TOP GIVE LIGHT AND GRACE.

perhaps only on their metal rings; at any rate with curtains that have a distinct service to perform outside of their principal function a generation ago, of covering up poorly designed woodwork. As a matter of fact now that our houses are built by better trained and more cultivated architects than was formerly the case in America, and now that our trim work and window casings are better looking than they were, we tend to hang even our heavier window curtains inside rather than over the casings. Hanging our fabrics in this manner gives a more suitable feeling to the window and properly emphasizes the architectural feature as a frame for the fabric decoration. Moreover, it is economical to hang curtains inside the casements, for when the curtains are drawn, less material is required to span the width of the window. If this treatment is accepted, the valance or lambrequin will be only occasionally employed, as a low window will appear sufficiently draped when it is furnished with side curtains alone. When the window opening is high, and it is desired to create a more comfortable atmosphere in the room, a simple French plaited valance or one cut and shaped on stiff buckram will give the desired effect without any expensive and unnecessary draping.

The simple side curtains without the valance give a feeling of increased height; the valance across the top reduces considerably the impression of height.

When a very handsome fabric is used for these over-curtains, or when it is proposed to keep the window treatment extremely simple, we may complete the work without the use of any edging or gallon. Nearly all valances, however, require the finishing touch which a cut edging or ball edging or a little dull gold gallon gives, and plain fabrics such as velours are generally better edged unless they have been stenciled in contrasting colors or embroidered or decorated in some other way. Heavy curtains of velours or damask should always be lined with Parma satin or satin and interlined unless there is some special purpose in not doing so. Thin silk curtains are almost always better without lining; although they cannot be used as substitutes for shades, as when drawn they will not keep out the light entirely but only prevent it from coming too strongly into the room.

In addition to the over-curtains, whether lined or unlined, edged or unedged, completed by valances or hung simply on either side, there is always the necessity for definite sash curtains. These can hang either over both sashes from inside the top of the window frame or consist of a small pair of curtains for each sash. The customary fabric for this use is perfectly simple net. This is suitable for every conceivable kind of room; it is procurable in greatly varying prices and can be used with or without a lace edge. Then there are the various figured nets, filet nets in both white and ecru; and the scrimms, grenadines, muslins and similar fabrics that are particularly excellent for bedrooms and the rooms of upper stories. A very pleasing fabric that is now well on its way to popularity is the English casement cloth; plain China silk also makes an excellent casement curtain.

Sometimes this latter fabric is used for a third pair of curtains on the same window that is treated with net or lace on the sashes and which has heavier curtains of damask or chintz on the woodwork. Under these circumstances the silk curtains are hung between the two and are invariably provided with pulleys and cords. This is a very charming treatment for bedrooms particularly, and is not as expensive as it seems, for the plain thin silk and the net
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taken together are not nearly so costly as a pair of heavy, real lace curtains, and although much simpler give a far more satisfactory result. The old desire for elaborate and expensive laces to hang against glass has passed quite out of vogue along with the taste for showy ornaments of every description. Today it is regarded as rather bad form to interrupt the light by a lace of irregular design.

A point that should receive consideration is that the colors of many kinds of fabrics are affected by the chemical action of sunlight, and fade after a time. Care should be taken, therefore, in selecting the materials for window curtains, to choose those that are sun-fast.

On the sashes themselves it seems to me invariably better taste to have the curtains hang straight down, although the over-curtains may be held back with heavy loops and tassels made in the colors contained in the fabric. These will generally have to be made to order, as will also the edging for any colored fabric it is desired to match in tone and design. Loops are generally most effective on curtains that reach to the floor; those that extend only to the sill should hang straight. In deciding whether one’s curtains should hang all the way down or not, one must again bear in mind the architectural features of the window. If the casing is built straight from the top to the floor it would seem to encourage the curtains to be hung in the same manner, especially when the casements are recessed several inches. Under other circumstances the architecture of the window may make it absolutely impossible to hang curtains to the floor. In any case, this should always be the determining factor. Then again, the height of the room may be a fairly important consideration, for it must be borne in mind that the longer the straight side curtains are, if they have no valance, the higher the room will look; and the shorter they are, and the deeper the valance when there is one, the lower the ceiling of the room will appear.

There is one last matter of theory in connection with curtains of prime significance in the finishing of a room: it is that, decoratively speaking, the curtains stand between the furniture and the backgrounds, consisting of floor, walls and ceiling. The furniture of the room is its most important decorative feature; it should be the most prominent element in color and in every other way. The backgrounds against which the furniture stands should be restrained and very simple: the ceiling very light, the walls a little more colorful and the floors perhaps still more so, but between them the window curtains must act as a harmonizing arbiter. They are neither as essential as the furniture nor as reticent as the walls, and so they must take the middle course, bringing the final touch of beauty and grace and cheerfulness after all the other elements have been provided.

Note: The author will be glad to reply to any questions in regard to this or any related subject.

ART PLANS FOR THE PANAMA CANAL

NOW that the digging and fortifying of the Panama Canal are nearing completion, many and varied suggestions are being made as to the possibilities of adding to this huge engineering achievement the finishing touch of art. An official plan is the building of a single great monument at the continental divide; others favor the erection of a lighthouse at either side of the canal at the Atlantic entrance; statues of the great explorers are also advocated. According to the New York Times, the suggestion from France is “that the early work of Ferdinand De Lesseps, the French engineer, be commemorated by a statue to him at some conspicuous point on the canal. . . . One proposal is for colossal pillars at the outermost points of the Atlantic and Pacific entrances, surmounted by statues of heroic proportions of Columbus and Balboa. Another suggestion is for a statue to Senator John Morgan of Alabama, one of the pioneer advocates of Isthmian canal construction.”

The Government Commission of Fine Arts, made up of many of the leading sculptors and architects of this country, has studied the problem of beautifying the canal, but its report, which is awaiting action by Congress, has only one specific proposal for a commemorative monument: namely, an impressive inscription in Roman lettering on a monument about 100 feet in height and somewhat more in width, the material to be concrete.

Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape gardener, suggests that any further ornamentation of the waterway should be undertaken only after serious consideration, bearing in mind that the outstanding feature of the canal is utility rather than ornament.