WHERE THE GARDEN IS THE CENTER OF
THE HOUSE: DEVELOPMENT OF A PIC-
TURESQUE ARCHITECTURE IN SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA: BY GODDARD M. WHITE

and home have until recently been regarded
in this country, at least, as having distinct identities,
and even where they have been brought into close
harmony with each other and linked by porches and
pergolas, vines and shrubs, the feeling of a separate
existence has been more or less retained. Within
the last few years, however, this point of view has
undergone considerable revision. People are coming not only to
plan their home and grounds together, as a unified whole, but to
arrange the building and planting in such intimate relationship that
one actually does not know where the garden leaves off and the

house begins. They are finding that it is possible to provide, in
addition to, or in place of, the familiar veranda, terrace or balcony,
the less usual but equally delightful plant-filled patio, the sheltered
courtyard with vine-clad cloisters, the roof garden with its airy
height and refreshing view. In other words, they are beginning to
take full advantage of the opportunities for open-air living that
our warm summers offer, infusing into American dwellings something
of the architectural and garden beauty of the Orient.
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PATIO IN THE THEOSOPHICAL SCHOOL; THE WATER AND LILY PADS, BRICK WALK, COLUMNED VERANDA, PALMS AND FLOWERS SUGGEST THE BEAUTY OF A MOORISH GARDEN.

It is largely, of course, in our southern and southwestern States that such picturesque developments are possible. The traveler who knows southern Italy, Sicily or indeed southern Spain or Morocco, who knows the coasts of these regions, the clear sapphire blue of the water, the jaggedness of the mountains with peaks piercing the pink or purple haze, cannot fail to recognize in southern California the same sort of scenery and the same sort of atmospheric beauty.

Such traveler also will admit that the artistic aspect of these old countries is enhanced greatly by the plaster houses which dot the hillsides with their gaily colored roofs and awnings, reflecting the bright sunlight as they form villages and towns along the shore. If this is true of the older countries to which the scenery of the new is akin, it is more than likely that one day in the future the new southern California will fairly revel in the same type of architecture. For the climatic conditions are very similar, and climate more often than not dominates architectural development.

The spirit of the Mediterranean has of late been felt by certain San Diego architects who have evolved a style peculiarly suited to our own southwestern land and at the same time closely akin to certain Old World types. Motives have been drawn from Italy as far north as Venice, from Sicily and from Morocco, while unconsciously the influence of Spain and Mexico has been perpetuated. The work shows an extraordinary gift of resource and of ability
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to assemble forms of architecture having manifest incongruities.

By way of example two buildings have been chosen for illustration here—the Robert Windsor house in San Diego County, California, and the Theosophical School in Hollywood, Los Angeles. The most distinctive and charming points about these buildings are the patio or court, the roof-loggia and the pergola; and, indeed, what three units could be more appropriate in the architecture of a warm, sun-beaten land—the patio in which to enjoy seclusion and fresh air, the roof-loggia whereon to find the coolest breeze, and the pergola giving shelter from the sun.

The Robert Windsor house stands on a terrace at the edge of the mesa or high-tableland overlooking the Sweetwater Valley. Its walls are of cream-colored plaster, while its door and window sashes are painted a bluish-green. The eaves, casting exactly the right depth of shadow, a valuable asset to the design, are stained Venetian red, harmonizing with the tiled roof.

In examining the façade there lurks considerable pleasure; it is so admirably proportioned, especially its central porch with seats and pergola. Yet to something more than these does it owe its success. The writer remembers examining in England a certain façade, the south front of Haddon Hall, and wondering why it possessed so much poise. This was due, he at length decided, to the large windows in the second story, occupying more than half the
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wall space, and to the small ones above set in a comparatively enormous wall space. To break the upper part of a wall gives it invariably an appearance of lightness, making the supporting portion below seem sturdier in comparison. In the façade of the Windsor house this principle is illustrated. The loggias here appear as large breaks in the walls and produce an effect of lightness, likewise one of subtle grace. The principal entrance which leads to the patio is from the rear, and forms one of the most interesting features of the house, the arch being of just the right height and width to emphasize the opening and to suggest a spirit of hospitality. Boston ivy, begonias, ferns and a pair of towering eucalyptus trees soften the whole design. On entering the patio one is enchanted by the deep window and vis-à-vis balcony. Three glass doors lead into the living room, while at the right are doors into the bedrooms. At the left there is a service door. The floor is paved with brick, and in the center is a pool for fish and aquatics. The treatment of the pool as well as other details connected with this house gives rein naturally to individual taste, and the photographs will no doubt suggest to other home-builders many interesting variations. For instance, if desired a patio pool of this sort could be lined with some of the new and artistic tiles that have much the same value as those which have made the bathing pools in the Mohammedan courtyards and gardens places of abiding interest.

This house suggests the architecture of Mexico, where the homes are in a sense defensive, being built with few outside apertures and with all the apartments opening into a central court to insure safety from outside attack. One finds, too, the influence of Venice in the patio of the Windsor house, its iron grille, balcony and window, its pool and sound of running water. The same can be said of the bolster blocks supporting the lintels of the living-room doors. Similar types of these are found throughout the Orient, but those of exactly the same outline are seen only in Venice.

The house is planned with a large combined living and dining
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room and a small, cozy den, the former having a generous fireplace and a timbered ceiling. A door in the living room opens onto a small flight of stairs leading to the loggia—the one at the left of the central porch. The view here is fine, but the visitor will discover one even more inspiring if he walks around the roof to the farther loggia from which are to be seen, around the green valley, the mountains veiled by opalescent hazes of purple, pink and blue. The central porch, its pergola and seat, which have already been mentioned, present possibly the loveliest feature of the house, for the arched door frames a vista through the living room, the patio and its entrance archway out toward the undulating mesa beyond.

The house has an admirable setting, designed by Miss Kate Sessions of San Diego, landscape gardener. Brick and gravel walks are interestingly combined with patches of lawn, a rose garden and a variety of shrubs. The brick walk at the side of the bedroom windows is edged with bulbous plants, jonquils and the like, reminding one of a Persian carpet. Portions of the ground are covered with English ivy, which forms, in a dry climate, an excellent substitute for grass. Orange bignonia climbs one of the terrace walls, while the hill below is banked with Cherokee roses and lumbago. Himalayan cedars flank the driveway, and pepper trees, eucalyptus and Italian cypresses appear to grow in just the right places.

Those who have spent enough time in Morocco or other parts of the Orient to acquire the habit of retiring to the roof of a house for
the afternoon (the observation must apply to women, for they only are allowed this privilege) would wish on seeing the Theosophical School in Hollywood to recline lazily on its roof and to be made comfortable with rugs and pillows in some sheltered corner. For the varying levels of this roof, the dome and horseshoe arch are all deeply suggestive of the East.

In the design for the Theosophical School the architects combined several buildings into one—a large assembly hall, chapel, schoolrooms, cafeteria and sleeping apartments. The scheme was to use the patio as the common means of access to each, and since it was to be the center of the home, to make it the loveliest feature of all. The façade, however, was not overlooked; and all the apertures were well designed, including the entrance arch with the pergola of eucalyptus logs and the window above with its grille or much-rah-beiah which screens a dressing room.

Although it cannot be denied that the much-rah-beiah suggests the Orient, where the openings are so screened for the protection of the women, there is also something about this façade that is reminiscent of Italy. Perhaps it is the protecting eaves with their deep shadows and the corner loggias.

The exterior color scheme is the same as that of the Windsor house, except that the walls are a somewhat deeper cream color. The entrance arch leads into the lovely patio, where the water and lily pads, brick walk, palms and flowers remind one of some hidden Moorish garden. The encircling veranda with its repetition of columns serves to further the illusion. If some dark-skinned Oriental, his white turban and loose gown accentuated by sunlight, could be seen looking gravely into the pool, the spell of the place would be complete. The columns, however, are unlike any that
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one might see in Morocco or elsewhere. Above the entrance is a loggia screened by a much-rah-beiah in which a horseshoe arch is admirably drawn. The whole appearance of this side of the patio, the eaves and corner loggias, is unique, and the same may be said of the view through the arch, across the patio and onto the dome, below which the horseshoe arch is repeated.

The dome roofs the chapel, which is one story in height, and below is the assembly hall with a platform at one end and on either side a large French window, through which one can look toward the hills beyond. The remaining three sides of the building are occupied by schoolrooms and sleeping apartments. The cafeteria and kitchen are in the basement, which, since the land falls away in the rear, is entirely open to light and air.

As a completion of this picture, so well set in a semitropical country, brightly colored flowers are everywhere, and these, with the shrubs and eucalyptus trees, complete the harmony between the building and the landscape.

The buildings and their gardens shown in this article are, of course, only two of the many successful experiments that have been tried recently in this particular field. The visitor to southern California is always pleasantly surprised by the way in which the planting is brought into close intimacy with the exterior and interior of the house. And what has been accomplished in this sunny State may likewise be achieved to a greater or less degree in any part of our wide country where the warm summer months make possible a fair amount of comfortable outdoor life. There is no reason why the veranda and the pergola porch cannot add beauty and open-air pleasure to our eastern and southern as well as our southwestern homes; why our roof spaces cannot be more widely utilized for airy living-rooms, and the house so built as to enclose, or partially enclose, a central courtyard where flowers, shrubs, vines and possibly a fountain may gladden the eye of all who enter.

Naturally, the inclusion of such features in the home will add considerably to its interest, and may even prove an element of real picturesqueness. At the same time, it need not add much to the expense of building, if a little ingenuity is used. Besides, the more livable and attractive we make our home and garden spaces, both in architecture and planting, the more likely we are to spend as much time as possible in the fresh air.

It is through such means as this—by building for individual and climatic needs, creating homes that express the spirit of both the people and their land—that America may achieve the distinction of a national architectural type.