FURNITURE BASED UPON GOOD CRAFTSMANSHIP: BY GUSTAV STICKLEY

The difference between period furniture and furniture based entirely upon good craftsmanship is the difference between the need of the people and the whim of the aristocracy. A man like Buhl who made furniture for the women of the French court, made it to suit their desire for decoration. They flattered him in the court life, and his desire was to give them the most elaborate, the most ornamented furniture that could be conceived. They cared little for good construction, and Buhl thought little of it. The whole matter was elaboration of detail, novelty, eccentricity, and the spirit which inspired him was the decadent spirit that wished to be petted and flattered and pleased.

The making of a really excellent piece of furniture is a totally different matter. It is made to meet some need, it is made out of the love of a man’s heart for beauty, and the longer it lasts the more sure it is of appreciation and understanding. Good craftsmanship must express the soul of the common people, the people who want a thing excellently made and need it excellently made; although real period furniture occasionally has good craftsmanship, it is not essential to it; it is usually because some good craftsman expressed himself in something excellent in the shop of the famous man; often it is merely accidental, and these strokes of artistic workmanship that we should preserve in our record of period furniture today.

Every cabinet-maker is entitled to gain the utmost from what every other cabinet-maker has accomplished. It is not enough to imitate the mere expression of eccentricities. It is true of cabinet making as of architecture that good construction has prevailed in every period and has thus affected subsequent periods. But the final ornamentation, the lavish superstructure which gives a period its name, is not the thing that is worth imitating. When people know that I am making a new kind of furniture now they say to me, “What period will this be?” It perplexes them when I answer, “No period.” I have never sought any period in my work. I am satisfied if it expresses what I believe to be progress in furniture making in America. I believe that there are many people living in this country who desire in their homes a certain sturdy elegance, good construction, good craftsmanship, beautiful lines, rich and durable furniture. This is what I am seeking in my new work.

The department store has sounded the death knell of so-called period furniture. The original interest of an artificial civilization in elaborate cabinet work was delight in ornamentation and richness of detail; this is of necessity done poorly when done in mass, when done...
to meet the department store need. If it is done poorly, then it fails in its purpose of richness; eventually, thus, people will realize that what is called “period furniture” is only a poorly constructed, badly ornamented bit of cabinet work, and inevitably the sincere mind will turn toward what is really rich and good and appropriate to American lives.

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MERICAN furniture should embody the same principles that made the slender French, painted Russian and carved English work such perfect creations of their kind, namely, fitness and an expression of the needs and ideals of the people who made it. The furniture made by the early Americans who had no thought of evolving a style of their own, but of constructing it from the memory of articles valued in the home land endeared to them from association, is revered by us now because it was so frank an expression of home love. This same home influence is felt in our early architecture. We see today all over New England the ideals of Holland, England and France expressed in the roof lines and doorways of our homes.

The furniture I am now making embodies the universal principles of cabinet making irrespective of countries or periods. There can be no design or construction without the employment of the basic elements of the square, the circle and the line. It is the manner of their combining that stamps the result as belonging to this or that period.

The first picture is a good illustration of what I mean. The chest of American oak finished by a process entirely my own cannot be said to imitate any period or that it is a copy of any style. The size and proportion were determined upon from the needs made by the size and division of the rooms of our home. It is not cumbersome like the English chests that were intended to be used in vast halls, nor delicate and fine like the gilded French furniture made more to ornament royal halls than for actual use. It is an article built to last for many generations, one intended to be kept in constant use; not a piece of ornamental furniture, but an indispensable article of everyday necessity. The panelings give it chaste and beautiful lines. The long drawer, the three smaller ones and the two cupboards on the side have been so disposed as to space that table linen, decanters, glassware, silver, etc., can be arranged within to the best advantage. By raising it from the floor it conforms to our modern demand for airiness and cleanliness. The drawers and cupboards are to be fitted in either wooden or metal knobs as desired to complete the plan of the room. Such an article is as useful in the hall as the dining room; even in a library with books upon the top it would be most suitable and useful.
OAK CHEST designed especially for modern American homes combining the qualities of usefulness and beauty, is shown at the right. It is finished by the new method that brings out the characteristic swirl of the grain and the natural color of the wood.

In proportion it shows a fine balance, being neither too cumbersome for our rooms nor so small as to appear insignificant. Door and drawer pulls of oak or metal are provided to conform to the requirement of the room in which it is to be placed.

A ROUND OAK TABLE with octagonal base and handturned legs such as shown above, one of the latest designs of the Craftsman shops, is attractive grouped with good furniture of many other types: Candelabra upon it are of oak.
CHAIRS, WIDE, deep and luxurious, upholstered in rich velours, velvets or tapestries bring color and sense of home comfort. They can be introduced with advantage in rooms of any type. The chair at the left is ideal for reading, while the one at the right shows exceptionally slender, aristocratic lines for an upholstered chair.

OCTAGONAL LIBRARY TABLE OF OAK showing new design in hand-turned legs: The oak chairs beside it, though simple in the extreme, are beautiful of line.
S M A L L
DROP-LEAF
TABLE of oak
that can be
moved from
room to room
serving the
purpose of
card-, tea-table
or even con-
sole against
the wall, with
light weight
oak chair be-
side it, forms a
cozy, hospitable
home
group.

Oak used in
library table,
lamp base,
flower stand-
ard, footstool
and chair
brings to the
room a rich
sense of color
and substantial
beauty: A note
of grace has
been given the
chair in the
curve of the
back and light-
ness by the in-
troduction of
cane.

The table is
intended for a
library in an
average American
home and
is dis-
tinguished by un-
usually fine
proportions.
LONG BENCH-STOOL of oak is often placed before a writing desk or dressing table of oak instead of the usual small chair. It brings pleasant variety to the room and is easily moved about: All the furniture shown on this page is from Gustav Stickley’s Craftsman shops.

All the new models have been designed in accordance with the present demand for lightness, stability, richness of finish and simplicity in home furniture.

DAVENPORT OF OAK which could serve as a day-bed, for it is both wide and long enough for comfortable sleeping.
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All the wood of the furniture that I am now making has been finished so that the natural beauty of grain and color of the wood is brought out rather than concealed. The bare, open honesty of this gives distinction, gives it a quality purely American, because honesty and fearlessness are ever identified with American character. Oak candlesticks, even bud vases of oak, are made to be used or not as taste dictates. They add a gracious note and furnish us an opportunity for pleasing color. The chair beside it is relieved from too great a severity by the turning of the stretcher rails and legs. There is a gentle curve to the arms, the back and seat are upholstered in soft leather.

Below this picture is shown a round table with octagon base, a novel and beautiful combination. The form of the lower shelf gives it a certain distinction. The hand-turned legs give great strength. Such a table could be used with the style of furniture that I have been making for the last few years. It is enough like it to be harmonious and enough different to add a pleasant variety. It could be made in the old or the new finish. Such a table also would be perfectly at home in a room of almost any type of furniture because it is individual and cosmopolitan. It does not quarrel, but makes friends with any other furniture made with equal sincerity of purpose. The settee against the wall gives chance for effective upholstery, the long, high back makes of it an extremely suitable piece for a hall. Upon the table may be seen the oak candelabra which take the place of the more commonplace brass. The plant stand shown in this same photograph can be brought out and placed before windows, moved into the hall or in fact is easily adapted to a variety of uses in almost any room in the house. It would hold a lamp or work basket with equal charm.

UPON the next page two types of upholstered chair are used, the one deep and cozy, the other more delicate of form. A softly upholstered chair introduced in sitting rooms or library brings to the room a sense of luxurious comfort. Another of the newest designs of The Craftsman Shop is shown in the octagon table on the second page. The design of the hand turning is decidedly an innovation. The octagon top makes a pleasant change in the ordinary room furnishings. The whole design is rich, unusual and striking. Nothing simpler than the chairs beside it could be seen and yet in their very simplicity is attractive beauty. Light, serviceable, ready for many uses, such a chair is an indispensable article in the modern home. The cane back gives them lightness, the stretcher rails, both pleasant design and strength of construction.
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The drop-leaf table which takes the place of our grandmother’s console is another distinctly American form of this useful household article. With one leaf dropped it can be pushed against the wall; with both leaves dropped it forms a useful article for small halls. It does not take up much room and can be carried from its position and used as card table or tea table in any room. It is light, strong and firm. The chair below, somewhat like the ones we have just been speaking of, with the exception that the back has been given an arch, the low stool in front of the deep reading chair and the unusual form of the rich and elegant library table, suggest home beauty and comfort.

Instead of the ordinary chair placed before the writing table or even a dressing table, a low bench has come to be considered a grateful change. The one shown has been made with the idea of interchangeable use, that is, an article that can be welcomed in almost any room because it is small, universal and light enough for both beauty and constant use. No article of furniture has made greater strides into popularity than the daybed. In all small homes where an extra bed is necessary it is welcome indeed for it adds to the beauty of the room by day and is as comfortable to sleep upon at night as any bed. This one has somewhat the air of the old Colonial furniture so endeared to us through historic association. The curve of the back and of the arm breaks any thought of severity. This would be beautiful in summer houses upholstered in gay chintzes or sun-proof fabrics. In design it is rich enough to carry with dignity upholstery of the richest silk or velours.

La Farge says that in every great artist there is a humble workman who knows his trade and likes it. This is incontrovertible, for how would it be possible for a man to produce great things without the love that brings wisdom and a technical skill that is gained only by years of devotion to that which he loves? It takes the whole nature of a man to create anything above mediocrity. Love of the work leaps swiftly forward into fresh fields of imagination, while the mind and hands labor steadily after to make permanent that which love has discovered. In every home-maker is the artist’s power to visualize a perfectly appointed home and the humble workman’s willingness to patiently work out the details that would be troublesome enough without love of the work. To select the proper furniture, draperies, rugs and all the manifold little things that go to make up a livable, lovable home involves knowledge of materials gained only by study and experience, a sense of fitness and an inner feeling for beauty. If women approached home-making as an artist does his work we would have more suitable, lovely homes to leave as a valued legacy.