NEW HOPI ARCHITECTURE ON THE OLD MESA LAND: FROM NOTES BY ETHEL ROSE

“Far in the West, far below, there a house was made;
Delightful house.”

In the far-away days of the old” the Navaho Indians made and dedicated their desert home with a neighborly friendliness and with a picturesque ceremony which we of this unpoetical generation would do well to follow, in spirit at least. From our standpoint the Indian home could not be called beautiful, for it was a rude affair made without the slightest architectural attempt at symmetry or effective ornamentation; but to the Indian it was beautiful because it had been made in conformance to his religion, myths and the established custom of his people.

In shape it was like the first homes built by the gods when they lived on earth; the chief timbers, five in number, were full of strength, the floors smooth, the bark covering over which the earth was piled was good and strong. There was an unobstructed view to the East, so the beneficial influence of the god of sunrise was assured; there was fresh water close by and no red ant hills near; friends had helped in the building of it. For these reasons it was beautiful. After the man’s work upon the house was finished, the wife made the floors smooth with a grass broom, she and her husband together lighted a fire, then he sprinkled meal that she had ground, about the house, chanting this wonderful salutation to the home:

“May it be delightful, my house;
From my head may it be delightful;
To my feet may it be delightful;
Where I lie may it be delightful;
All above me may it be delightful;
All around me may it be delightful.”

The Hopi houses were made with as touching an allegiance to myths and customs, but with far more architectural success, at least as we regard such things, than those of the Navahos; for the Hopi houses were built of the earth into such perfect imitations of the strange square forms of the surrounding buttes that it was almost impossible for even the keen eye of an Indian to tell houses from tur- reted hills. The Hopis, through the same instinct of protective security that mottles the breast of the thrush, that streaks the tawny tiger
HOUSE AT LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA, built along the lines of the old Hopi structures that once stood upon the painted deserts of Arizona:
The old Hopi builders, by modeling their houses after the square forms of the surrounding buttes, achieved one of the most perfect examples of architectural fitness known to the world.
HOPI HOUSE in shades of tan stucco to match the sand, built for Wheeler Bailey, Esq., with the assistance of Hopi Indians:

The steps of this great lodge lead up to the observation roof: A ladder of unequal uprights leans against the walls as in the old Hopi houses and an olla hangs at the door.
FIREPLACE IN THIS MODERN HOPI HOUSE, showing use of Indian design: Indian baskets adorn the mantel and inverted Hopi bowls of dull red clay form the electric light shades.
THE DOORWAY OF THIS MODERN HOPI HOUSE is painted blue to bring it into harmony with the surrounding Pacific waters: Cactus and sagebrush growing abundantly on the bluffs increase its likeness to the Indian structures that once stood upon the Arizona deserts.
NEW HOPI ARCHITECTURE

with stripes like the shadows of jungle reeds, have achieved one of the most perfect examples of architectural fitness known to the world.

OUT on the Pacific Coast is a man who has long been interested in Indians, in the romantic history of California and in modern architecture. He has recently built a house on the opal bluffs of La Jolla fashioned after the Hopi ruins that still hang upon the painted cliffs of the Arizona desert. He has designed and built this house to honor and to perpetuate some of the fine Hopi traditions, for the Indians of today are influenced by modern methods to such an extent that the old-time house is no longer seen in the land. Of course, since this house on the La Jolla bluffs is to be lived in and enjoyed by modern people with up-to-date ideas of physical comfort and luxuries it is not altogether like its historic ancestors, yet it has so many points in common and has been built so cleverly and with so fine a sense of harmony that it deserves to be brought to the attention of every one interested in architecture, in our Indian history and in original and fearless expression of personal taste.

The house is the joint result of Mr. Wheeler Bailey’s and his architects, Messrs. Mead and Requa’s enthusiasm and labor, with the able assistance of Hopi Indians whose suggestions and craftsmanship were of the greatest importance. These Hopis (by the way, the name means good or peaceful people) have not lost their cunning, entered with zest into the making of a “great lodge” on the bright cliffs by the turquoise blue sea. Green cactus, orange poppies, yellow mustard, purple beach asters, sage brush and chapparal are all growing there as should be, with wrens resting among the cactus and hawks wheeling far above.

This house is built of stucco in the shades of tan that exactly match the sand, so that it carries out the scheme of protective coloring sought for by the Hopi builders and that cannot be improved upon for artistic effect by any modern scheme of decoration. A distinctly original note, however, is introduced here by painting the doors and window casings a deep vivid blue. This was to give the house relation to the blue of the ocean, and no doubt the first Hopi houses, had they been built on the bluffs of a southern California coast, might have shown some such endeavor to harmonize them with the blue of the water, in the blankets hung at the door or the great water jar standing beside it.

Modern ingenuity is apparent in the huge beams projecting so conspicuously through the outer walls and which form the exposed beams of the inner rooms. They are in reality discarded telegraph poles, hand hewn into house requirements. A diminutive courtyard
NEW HOPI ARCHITECTURE

is entered through a crude wooden gate bound together with rawhide thongs with the hair left on. For romantic interest and picturesque effect, strings of dried Chili peppers and speckled corn hang beside the courtyard door and a great olla or water jar swings, as in days of yore, conveniently near at hand.

"IN the days of the old" the Indians entered their houses by way of ladders which for safety's sake they pulled up after them, much as in Mediaeval days the drawbridge over the moat was raised out of the enemy's reach after the owners had crossed to the security of their castle. The Hopi ladders were irregularly made, with one of the upper ends much taller than the other. Whether this was because the two slender saplings chosen to hold the rungs were just naturally of different heights and they did not see any reason for taking the trouble to make them of even lengths or whether they preferred them that way for some unknown reason is not clear, but certainly the result was extremely effective. Those ladders with unequal uprights outlined against the sky were certainly most strikingly decorative. Naturally Mr. Bailey must have so distinctive a Hopi feature to give color and atmosphere. As a matter of fact, this ladder is not an absolute necessity, for the majority of guests prefer to reach the roof, where they assemble for the full enjoyment of the sunset play of colors, by way of the steps along the wall—those wide, safe steps that go up on one side and down the wall on the other, as may be seen by a glance at the accompanying photographs. These steps are quite an ornamental as well as useful part of this house. In the center of the roof is a great square chimney that even on the windiest of days offers a leeward side to the guest who wishes to watch the gulls skimming over the blue sea or to look off over the beautiful flower colored hills.

Another interesting feature of the outside of this house is the narrow irregular flight of stairs and stepping-stone path cut in between the cactus, creepers and shrubs, disturbing them as little as possible and keeping to the uneven, impromptu appearance that comes from taking advantage of existing unevenness of ground. The Indians would naturally, in ascending the cliffs to their house, leave as inconspicuous a trail as possible against the cliff, a trail concealed here and there by a stone, a clump of opuntias or a venturesome shrub.

The sea-blue door opens into a little hall with a dressing room on one side. Winding stairs lead from this hall down to the bedrooms. As may be seen, this house is almost entered from the roof because it is built upon a very steep bluff and the approach is more practical
from the upper side. From the end of this hall two steps lead down to the large living room which crosses the entire sea front of the house. When all the glass doors are opened the wide terrace seems an actual part of the room. On pleasant days the room is a delight, on stormy days the glass doors shield from wind and dampness, but permit a full view of the beauty of the outside world.

The interior finish is of plaster in the same soft, lovely, warm shaded tans as the outside. Indian rugs, of wonderful blue ground, with symbolic designs worked out in black, cover the floor. Facing the terrace is the fireplace shown in one of the photographs. The decoration of it is adapted from a Hopi pattern. Indian bowls and baskets are on the mantel. The shades of the electric lights are inverted Hopi bowls of dull red clay. The red bands of the patterns upon these bowls have been copied upon the blue window curtains. The dining table and chairs have been carried out as much as possible along these same lines, to emphasize Hopi decoration. The few ornaments are of genuine Indian workmanship, fine examples of basket, or rug weaving and pottery making.

From one side of the living room a door opens into the most un-Hopilike kitchen imaginable, fitted with a gas range. A little scrubbing board is set in the side of the laundry tub, all fittings are white; and off this droll little kitchen with its growing parsley plants is a tiny room with a folding bunk and corner cupboard—the sanctum of the Chinese cook. There are two fine bedrooms on the lower floor, each with big closets and specially built redwood furniture. There is also a large bathroom between the two. Here also is a terrace, one end of which is screened off to form what is almost regarded as a California necessity—a sleeping porch.

The old Navahos Indian felt that the roof of his home was the blue sky, the earth carpeted with flowers was the floor of his home, the trees, hills, streams were the ornaments of it. His home was a beautiful place and he loved it. What we call his home was to his mind but a place he stored a few things in, a place where he sought shelter occasionally for but a brief time. This shelter that we call a hut he was not especially attached to, for though he made it with fitting ceremony he was ready to leave it at a moment’s notice. We moderns have just reversed this idea. Our home is not the great beautiful world, but a small house that we build. We no longer wander from one valley room to another, happy and free, but have chained ourselves to the narrow confines of a house. However, we must have beauty in our life else we perish, so we make the house called home as lovely as we can to compensate.
NEW HOPI ARCHITECTURE

for the great, wide mansion of the world we have renounced. We prefer porcelain baths to clear brooks, painted frescos to living trees for the decoration of our rooms. We have exchanged pine needles for soft mattresses and are afraid of the winds that once brought us health and strength. Still we have found no substitute for beauty. We cannot live without its inspiration, so have learned to surround ourselves with it of another sort. The Indian sings:

“In the house of long life, there I wander.
   In the house of happiness, there I wander.
   Beauty before me, with it I wander.
   Beauty behind me, with it I wander.
   Beauty below me, with it I wander.

“Beauty above me, with it I wander.
   Beauty all around me, with it I wander.
   In old age traveling, with it I wander.
   On the beautiful trail I am, with it I wander.”

We also sing that same song, though with different words. On the trail of beauty we also wander and of our houses as with our lives we should be able to say with them, “It is finished with beauty.” The trail of beauty for the Indian and for ourselves may lead in widely opposite directions, but we follow it with the same eager, springing step. Our eyes see through different glasses, but nevertheless as we walk through the valleys and over the mountains of life we are surrounded, nourished, inspired and comforted by the same spirit of beauty. Love of home and joy in its adorning is inherent in humanity. One looks at an especial corner of the world as his home and calls it beautiful, though to another it may seem but a barren desert; one looks around upon the four walls of his house hung with pictures, made comfortable with soft rugs, chairs and tables and is satisfied, though to another it might seem but a cheerless prison. “In the house of happiness” may we all wander.