TRAINING FOR INTERIOR DECORATORS: NUMBER 1: BY MARY LINTON BOOKWALTER

WOULD you employ as your family physician a man who had received no training for his calling? Would you entrust your legal difficulties to one who wanted to be a lawyer and became so because of that desire? Would you employ an architect who had a "taste" for building and based his right to bungle your contract because of "taste untrained"? Is there any reason why, in the profession of interior-decorator or decorator-architect, a "love of pretty things" should be sufficient cause to start in the profession?

The majority of students who plan to enter the professions of medicine, law or architecture, see before them a number of years planned with a definite course of work leading to a definite result. Those who wish to succeed professionally and to become authorities in their respective lines, plan work here and abroad, but with one point always in view—that of enlarging their knowledge of their chosen work.

What is the attitude of the average student who expects to become a decorator? He has a short course in design and painting. It is not his fault that he gets no more from his institution in that particular course. Thus far nothing better is offered. But if the student wishes to do work which is worth while, he will soon see that he must think out a plan for himself that will lead to a knowledge of his subject that makes him valuable as an adviser to his future clients.

First: Suppose you have a house given you to do. Do you know what style of architecture it is? Could you make working drawings

of any of the details? Is your knowledge of proportion such that you know whether it is good or bad, and why? Have you any idea of how it is constructed?

Second: Suppose the house is only an average example,—the work of an architect not very well equipped for his profession. Do you know enough about the effect of horizontal and vertical lines in room treatment to take this house, and by means of subdued color and restraint in line, produce something better in effect than the architect could do?

Third: If the house is a fine example, do you know how to make your work the right setting for what this architect has done? Would what you do make a unit of the house and not ruin the architect's thought?

Fourth: When looking for wall coverings, if the market has nothing to offer which is right, could you make a design for paper or fabric that would meet the mechanical requirements as well as the artistic?

Fifth: When ordering the curtains could you give specifications for making them? Have you ever made curtains?

Sixth: Do you know anything of weaving rugs or the making of carpets? Would your opinion be safe for your client to follow in purchases for the new house?

Seventh: Could you tell by looking at a piece of furniture whether it is well constructed or right in type for the place intended? If the color of the wood were not satisfactory, could you give directions as to stain and finish?

Eighth: When you finished the house, was it adapted to the needs of your client? Did you try to give him the personal satisfaction of owning something which he wanted, but which was better than he could have obtained because of your knowledge and skill?

Ninth: Were you able to make estimates and quote prices on your work? As some one said, "Two of the essential points in a decorator's equipment are arithmetic and common sense."

A serious profession, you say, an exaggerated demand upon one. Not at all; but a work worthy of the best possible equipment. I have not dwelt upon the art side of this. Your work is not worth considering if it does not conform to the best principles of art, and your art, if not constructively sound, is wanting. It would be safe to estimate that the work of a decorator-architect is ten per cent. art and ninety per cent. construction; that ten per cent. makes the individual expression, but the ninety per cent. of construction is what makes it reasonable.

How would it be possible for the student to gain knowledge in this line which would give him a professional standing—equal to that of the other artistic professions?

If you go into the work and expect to take the commercial output as your basis for work you will at once lower your standard artistically. Have as part of your training a thorough course in painting until you can look at color from the painter's viewpoint. Be willing to work faithfully over this color problem. Then go into the market and here and there assemble your stuffs with the trained color sense back of your work.

The most beautiful color is to be had from the wealth of material which we have in our wholesale houses—but combinations in color and texture can rarely be had from one stock.

While you are painting and draw-

ing take up your design, but when you make a design immediately find out how it could be applied. If for a wall paper do not be satisfied until you know the mechanical process which produces that paper and what *your* limitations as a designer will be. Take each problem as it comes and get down to the fundamental principles underlying it. If you do this you will soon see that the ability to combine a few attractive colors and make interesting sketches is only the primary course in your chosen work. If you have been earnest to this point in your study you will begin to feel the need of the knowledge of mechanical drawing. If you design furniture you are not satisfied with your designs in the solid and you realize that work on paper will not give adequate results in wood. You must work in the material itself before you can make the simple direct drawing that your mechanic can execute. Be broad enough to look at his labor with the constructive limitations in your mind. You can't do this thoroughly until you have worked at the bench. Then will come to you a breadth and quality in your design that you have never realized when you worked only from the studio.

This will mean work in manual training—either such a course as our good institutions now have, or you can apprentice yourself to some excellent cabinet maker. Pay him for the use of tools and shop. The latter course will give you an idea of commercial values that no training in a school will ever offer. He will have direct methods in gaining results which will give you valuable lessons in saving time.

You must learn as soon as possible where you stand as a commercial asset. The average craftsman has an inflated idea of his value in dollars and cents. You must *have* value and *give* value before you can *ask* for it. Can your output at the bench equal or excel what hundreds of others are doing?

After you have these basic principles in your grasp—then what? Make a commercial connection that you may know how work is executed. No school has a course in interior decoration that is taught by the man in the field, who can give the direct practical help in the use of materials. For example—how are wall coverings applied, paper, canvas and tapestry? What conditions might exist in the plaster that would ruin your material and how could you overcome them? This kind of information comes only from the workman and not from the theorist.

You will probably be worth less than nothing to your firm for the first three months. If any one will take you for that period and you can get in exchange the experience you need, grasp the opportunity. If you have the right material in you, you will be glad to gain this practical experience after the theoretical work which did not fit you to meet business conditions. In the quiet of your studio you have been inclined to dream over your work, when many a time good clear thinking would have produced better results. It is this contact of people with systematic methods that will help you eventually to apply your ability in the right way. If you do this earnestly for a year, at the end of that time you will know your weak points, and one of the first necessities will be the knowledge of architecture.

No problem in interior treatment can be carried out successfully without an appreciation of the architectural side. The decorator's work on

THE BASIS OF TRUE HOME DECORATION

THE true method of making a room beautiful is to make all the necessary and useful things in it beautiful; so much is this true that it becomes almost impossible to design a really beautiful room that is to have no useful work done in it or natural life lived in it. An architect called upon to design a room in which nothing more earnest is to be done than to gossip over afternoon teas has a sad job.

For a room must always derive its dignity or meanness from, and reflect somewhat, the character and kind of occupation which is carried on in it. For instance, the studio of an artist, the study of a man of letters, the workshop of a carpenter, or the kitchen of a farmhouse, each in its position and degree, derives a dignity and interest from the work done in it. And the things in the room bear some relation to that work, and will be the furniture and surroundings natural to it; as the bench and tools in the carpenter's shop; the easels and canvases in the studio; the books and papers in the study; and the bright pans and crockery in the kitchen. All these lend a sense of active, useful, human life to the room, which redeems it from vulgarity, though it be the simplest possible; and no amount of decoration or ornamentation can give dignity or homeliness to a room which is used as a show room, or in which no regular useful life is lived. For in the work room all things *have a place*, by reason of their usefulness, which gives a sense of fitness and repose entirely wanting in a room where a place has obviously *had to be found* for everything, as in a drawing room. (From "The Smaller Middle Class House," by Barry Parker.)