



A bedroom at the Hotel Astor



A sitting-room in the Hotel Astor

Architectural Impressions

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The Hotel and the Home

THIS is not going to be a scathing indictment of the people who are too lazy to run a house and live at hotels, to the great detriment of the health and morals of themselves and their families, if we can believe the literature of the time. There are plenty of others who have taken in hand that inconsiderable fraction of Americans that live at hotels, and have used up a very considerable amount of time and paper and ink, and made a good deal of money in abusing them. There was "Harvey" for example, in Kipling's "Captains Courageous," who was regenerated by the simple, hearty fare and honest toil on a Banks' fishing schooner. We have even had plays about such people, quite popular plays, in which the hotel was the villain of the piece.

No, quite the contrary is my intention; the Hotel is the hero of my story; not perhaps the homely, hard living hero of old-fashioned fiction, but rather the cultivated and sophisticated man of the world that Robert W. Chambers loves to write about; and the heroine is the poor, plain, unlettered girl from the back woods of Ohio or New York, who learns her first lessons as to what the great world considers taste and elegance, from some hotel, and very often gets lessons that are far more sound and practical than she can get from the "literature of the home" or from books about interior decoration. Further, the lesson she receives is visual and unconscious; therefore the more effective and since all architecture, and especially architecture of interiors, will depend very greatly upon color for its effect, no book or picture can teach a lesson so well as the real object.

It is surprising how many of my clients will quote to me some hotel room as suggesting an effect that they desire for their own homes, and equally surprising how often I find myself suggest-

ing to a client that some particular treatment of walls or ceilings or doors can be studied at one or another of our newer hotels, just as, I suppose, the Waldorf in its time, and the Fifth Avenue years ago influenced the architecture of many of the houses of the people who frequented them. Of course for a long time to say that a room "looked just like a hotel" was to damn it utterly, and for this the hotels themselves were responsible, because for many years in New York the thing the hotel proprietor sought most for was magnificence or the effect of magnificence, at no matter what detriment to comfort or beauty. This tendency still persists to a large extent in New York, and about universally elsewhere, and is, I believe, one of the greatest factors in setting up and crystallizing new standards of bad taste in places where people formerly were unsure of what was good; and had no standard by which to judge.

The hotel, even in its enormous modern development, should approximate the home; and the wisest of our hotel proprietors are coming

more and more to realize this fact. Our earliest hotels were nothing more than big houses of exactly the same type as the private houses of their time; they were furnished with chairs and tables and beds like those of the homes of the period; a little more durable perhaps, but in all respects similar. In searching for Colonial motives to use in our private houses of today we very often find the thing we want in some old "public house," Fraunce's Tavern, for example, or that lovely old tavern in Ridgefield, Connecticut, that is now the home of one of our foremost architects. The influence of such hotels upon the private architecture of our country has been tremendous, and continues to be. The same thing is true of the small old hotels of France and England: the "Peacock Inn" has furnished inspiration for innumerable country houses, both English and American, and the little "Hotel de France et d'Angleterre" at Fontainebleau, with its delightfully furnished rooms, has indubitably opened the eyes of hundreds of people to the possibilities which lie hid in simple materials tastefully combined.

The principal quality which differentiates the small English and French Inns from the great modern hotel (here and abroad) is their "hominess." The food is often as good or better than can be found in the big hotels, the service as good, and the beds as soft; but they linger in mind because to the traveler they convey a sense of mental comfort, the feeling of "belonging" which is not present in our great hotels, however impressive they may be: we may admire a mausoleum without particularly wishing to live there. Fortunately the best, and (perhaps in consequence) the most popular of our hotels in New York do approximate the personal quality of the small old-time inn, especially in their smaller rooms, the bedrooms, the private dining and sit-



Dining-room of the state suite at the Hotel Pennsylvania