

INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE DESIGNING OF FLATS- DE-LUXE OR MANSION FLATS

By FRANK T. VERITY, F.R.I.B.A.



THE selection of a site for this type of building is of the utmost importance at the present time. It should preferably not be in a main thoroughfare, because of the noise which arises from ever-increasing traffic.

In the planning of flats an architect should bear in mind the social conditions governing the life of those for whom the building is intended.

As a flat is the substitute for a house, it should supply what a house gives—namely, proper facilities for entertaining, and quietude for the principal tenants, whose rooms, accordingly, when possible, should be isolated from the secondary rooms and from the servants' quarters.

The disposition and grouping of the various parts of a suite should be well studied, even the smallest domestic details receiving careful consideration.

Linen cupboards should be warmed from the hot-water system or from the heating system, both being independent of the kitchens in the suites, and supplied from boilers in duplicate placed in the basement.

A plate safe, and ample cupboards and storage, should be put in the subsidiary part of a flat over pantries, lavatories, etc., in which rooms less height is required than in others.

Introductory Notes

It should be our aim to design a plan having few corridors ; only those should be retained which are necessary for service purposes. Costing as much to build as if the same space were allotted to rooms, corridors are of no use except as a means of communication. When the nature of the site renders their employment necessary, they should be planned in such a way that they do not form a vista from the entrance portion of a suite ; and if they must be designed in one long length, intersect them by a lobby or a pleasing ante-room.

The main entrance and staircase should form a central architectural feature, the importance of which does not appear to have been sufficiently appreciated. There are some who think that the staircase may be neglected by architects because lifts are in general use. But tenants when they leave their flats seldom ring for the lift ; they walk down the stairs ; and for this reason, among others, the staircase should be of ample dimensions and designed to create a good first impression. Let it have plenty of daylight, or the effect aimed at will be lost.

The passenger lift, which is mainly used to ascend to the upper floors, should not be placed in the well-hole of the staircase, for the regulations of the London County Council require lifts to be protected by an arrangement of ironwork which is unsightly, and appears to diminish the size of the staircase.

When there are two flats on one floor, the windows of important rooms in one suite should not overlook those of the other.

The level of the suites on the ground floor should be sufficiently raised above the pavement to keep tenants from being overlooked by passers-by ; and this enables us to give proper light to the windows below, in the basement or sub-ground floor.

An entrance vestibule, similar to those in private

The Designing of Flats-de-Luxe

houses, should be provided in every flat—a vestibule, that is to say, into which visitors enter before approaching the lounge of a suite. The lounge itself should be so placed that the reception-rooms may be grouped around it or approached directly from it through a pleasant ante-room. It is advisable that the drawing-room or morning-room should be entered from the vestibule, without it being necessary for us to cross the lounge.

A recess for hats and coats, properly designed and fitted with mirror doors, ought to be planned in the vestibule.

From the inner hall (*i.e.*, the lounge) we should pass into a smaller hall or ante, leading to the spare bedrooms, the maids' rooms, and the kitchen quarters. By this means corridors are reduced to a minimum, the ante forming a useful adjunct to the hall.

The position of the dining-room is open to argument, but as this room in a Flat-de-Luxe is used principally for meals, it may be placed in a position on the site occupying the least important outlook. The service thereto must not disturb the privacy of the other reception-rooms.

The Châtelaine of the Flat should have her bedroom, bed dressing-room, boudoir and drawing-room with the best aspect; they should be *en suite* and separated from the remainder of the flat, and have their own bathroom and cabinet de toilette. If possible, let the suite adjoin the morning-room, which can be used as a breakfast-room.

The suites being planned with a view to architectural effect, the decorative scheme will be easy of development, but this work should not be far advanced in the reception-rooms until the flats are let, because tenants have their own views on this subject.

The foregoing principles necessitate a thorough grasp of architectural grouping, and a recognition of all possibilities in

Introductory Notes

the design. It may be said with truth that the best results are attained by a method of planning which is axial and symmetrical.

It is, of course, difficult to obtain all desirable features ; but, if there is space on the site for all the necessary rooms, it is possible to arrange them as an architectural whole, whether the building is intended for low rents or for high. In the kitchen quarters the accommodation required is approximately the same in both classes of flats, the difference between these two classes being in the number of the rooms, their arrangement and the approaches thereto.

The windows of the principal reception-rooms should have the sill two feet from the floor line, so that tenants may look into the street when sitting some distance from a window. When these low sills are employed, the additional height required for safety may be made up by means of iron balconettes outside, if balconies are not provided for the sake of architectural effect.

The position of windows and doors, in bedrooms particularly, is most important ; and an architect in his drawings should scheme also for the various pieces of furniture, so that they may fit into the places assigned to them and form part of the general design.

Partitions of fire-resisting material, as distinguished from constructive walls, are advisable between certain rooms, because they are easily removed for the purpose of transforming two rooms into one large apartment.

Bathrooms, at least two in a suite, should be of good size and efficiently lighted. Toilet accommodation is out of place when connected with the bathrooms. Servants' bathrooms may conveniently be placed on the top floor, with the service spare-rooms or additional guest-rooms. Bedrooms for the men servants, with bath and lavatory accommodation, are provided in the basement.

The Designing of Flats-de-Luxe

Fixtures, in the nature of fitted furniture for the bedrooms, are possibly an advantage in flats for moderate incomes, but experience proves that they are unnecessary in high-priced flats, where they are not so decorative as good pieces of furniture.

The kitchen quarters should be large, with ample window area, and it is advisable for them to have wood-block floors, which are easy to clean, and keep free from vermin.

Service staircases and their lifts, if space permits, should serve only one flat on a floor, as much annoyance may be caused when the servants of two suites on the same floor are able to converse.

The position of electric light points ought to be carefully considered in the first instance, or plaster will have to be cut away hereafter.

Internal courtyards, large enough to ensure proper lighting and ventilation, should be independent of the areas of an adjoining property, so that their light and ventilation may not suffer in the future from building operations.

Every effort should be made to combine all the space available for internal lighting and ventilation, instead of using several small courts for that purpose.

As regards the exterior treatment, perhaps it is most effective when it is designed on classic lines, broadly and simply, its general characteristics being the same as those of a large town mansion. The windows, their grouping and gradation, kept subordinate to the whole mass, may be enriched with suitable balconies.

Finally, all dwellers in flats will admit that the expense of service and maintenance, with the annual expenditure necessary for repairs, are much less than in a house having similar facilities

Introductory Notes

for entertaining. There are also no staircases, so that the cost of furnishing and upkeep is considerably reduced. The Flat-de-Luxe has long been a great success on the Continent, and here in London, no doubt, more buildings of this description will be erected year by year. Not only do they possess all the comforts to which the wealthy are accustomed; in addition to that, they need fewer servants than are necessary in large houses; and it is easy to lock up a flat and leave it in the care of the manager.

When considered also from an architect's point of view, the designing of Mansion Flats offers great opportunities both for planning and for artistic treatment—opportunities perhaps even greater than those which present themselves in the building of a town mansion.

FRANK T. VERITY.

A FLAT-DWELLER'S POINT OF VIEW

By W. SHAW SPARROW



AS far back as the sixteenth century, in the Inns of Court, a bencher had his separate chambers, his bedroom and a room for business, while a passage, dark and uncomfortable, appears to have been used as the clerk's office. It was thus that a germinal idea of flats came by its beginning here in London, some considerable time after a similar idea had shown itself in Edinburgh. At a much earlier date, in England and Scotland, the flat system had another origin, this time in palaces and castles, where courtiers and retainers lived in separate suites or apartments; but when we think of this, when we compare in thought these early flats with those of our own days, we are struck by the wonderful progress which has been achieved.

At a first glance, indeed, there seems to be no connection at all between the first English flats and the designs, let us say, of Mr. E. T. Hall (p. 35), of Mr. Collcutt and Mr. Hamp (pp. 28, 29), of Professor Beresford Pite (p. 41), of Mr. Verity (pp. 30, 31), or of Mr. Norman Shaw (pp. 25, 26), whose art is a great romance in logical construction, a kind of music frozen into architecture, orchestrated into English Homes. These are just a few examples; and if we forget at times their line of descent from the past, if we think of them as entirely new, it is because there is great novelty in the adaptation of an old idea to the needs and conditions of the present day.

When changes of importance have taken place in domestic architecture, it has happened frequently that the first appeals have been made to the rich and to the poor. The palace and the castle (or big country house), the cottage and the farmer's