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Summaries in English

Home and home furnishings

(see page 1433)

In the field of furniture design we gather at the present time an impression of uncertainty. Actually a "Eurodomus" ought to have been held in 1974 – an exhibition, sponsored by Italy four times and intended to be held every two years, for the purpose of inspiring new ideas in the field of home furnishings. What's more, the Triennale, formerly a marketplace for design ideas and projects, this year displayed less enthusiasm than ever for the designed object. And anyone who had a look around the Milan Furniture Fair became aware that doubt and hesitancy in the minds of designers are even apparent in the products coming on the market. What is the reason for all this? New developments in furnishings nowadays are taking place more in offices than in homes, and therefore new designs are more frequently encountered in office furniture than in home furnishings. After a hectic period of rapidly changing fashions, people are becoming interested in traditional values, as expressed in the antique and period furniture boom.

On the other hand, new trends are being registered in furniture selling. People are getting away from the idea of complete sets of furniture intended to last a lifetime, and the result is a much wider range of products on the market. At the present time, the intense productivity in the field of housing construction is eliciting sharp criticism from residents. Numerous theoretical studies are concerning themselves with livability. In housing itself the prestige of the designer is having to yield to more utilitarian standards in architecture, standards that are more in line with the needs of actual users.

If department stores are to offer good furnishings for the home, the consumer will have to think more seriously about housing problems.

In the field of housing construction too the specialists expect personal participation on the part of users. Thus consumer orientation and research are becoming more important in the housing sector. The consequence is a certain levelling of styles, which will probably have to be accepted as part of a trend toward mediocrity.

Domestic portraits

(see page 1434)

What is remarkable about the pictures of the photographer Christian Vogt is the way in which a domestic setting expresses personality. The home a person has made for himself, his privately created environment, is part of the portrait of that person. Photos of people in the privacy of their homes are rare; all the more astonishing is the difference between them and the usual "interiors" appearing in catalogues and furniture ads.

Can one learn how to live in a house?

A basis for courses in residence instruction in the public schools

Verena Huber

(see page 1438)

The following article is a summary of a paper entitled "Introduction to the proper selection and utilization of the residence", dealing with a project carried out by the author for the Federal Office for Housing Construction and at the instigation of the Federal Commission for building Research (Housing). This study sets forth for the first time the current endeavours both in Switzerland and abroad in the field of housing instruction.

Since the study is to be submitted first of all to interested institutions and specialists, the findings are to be regarded as the author's personal conclusions. The original report has not been published.

At the present time there is general agreement on the necessity of making the public at large aware of housing problems so that they can contribute to their solution. The integration of a course of housing or residence instruction in the public schools guarantees that the maximum number of people will be reached at an age before they have made any important decisions in relation to housing. Moreover, there exists a possibility of integrating housing, as a subject of study, within the larger framework of general education.

In Switzerland it is possible to integrate residence instruction in domestic science courses. Even now, homemaking in the wider sense is already being dealt with in detail in many domestic science programmes.

The public affected is limited. This subject is currently being taken in school by girls only. However, there is an increasing trend to make domestic science instruction also available to boys. To be sure, Switzerland is still a long way from making this subject compulsory for girls and boys, as has been the case for some time now in Sweden.

Since domestic science instruction is set up as consumer training, the sphere of housing can easily be made to supplement the foodstuffs and clothing sectors. The first prerequisite for the introduction of residence instruction is the proper training of teachers, who require a thorough grounding in the fundamentals of the subject.

The fundamentals have to be organized in line with a methodical conception, that is to say, the individual aspects must be coherently incorporated within a comprehensive framework, which constitutes the basis for the training of teachers. In integrating this kind of instruction in the school programmes, individual aspects can be dealt with, depending on the school grade. However, sight should not be lost of the whole.

Teaching materials. The stage now reached per-

mits a general survey of the teaching materials required. Some of them are already in planning stage, and others still have to be elaborated in detail. It is important for the basis to be clearly apparent.

The already prepared documentation is based on experience gathered in teachers' courses that have been carried out. It consists of instructions for setting up assignments and administering exercises, as well as suggestions for discussions.

16 x the same flat

Brochure and model flat for the orientation of residents of housing complexes
(see page 1445)

A group of architects and interior designers of the Zurich Section of the Swiss Werkbund has been given the assignment of demonstrating the utilization and installation potential of standard flats in the Benglen complex near Zurich.

The theme of the assignment from the firm of Ernst Göhner was the design of a furnished model flat. It was the desire of the Werkbund group involved to expand the assignment so that the furnishing of a model flat could become the occasion of a more far-reaching study on utilization and installation potentials in a standard flat. While the model flat gives a detailed idea of what is possible, a brochure has been prepared in addition to present different types of housing situation.

The brochure shows what happens to 4 different families in 4 different situations within an assumed period of time. The furnishing plans are illustrated with detailed suggestions. For the elaboration of the installation proposals, one team member looked after one family each; in this way full expression is given to a wide range of ideas.

The model flat illustrates a particular stage in the development of Family I. There was selected deliberately the situation that makes heavy demands on a housing unit. The growth and development of children of pre-school age is essentially influenced by their freedom of movement inside the flat. Moreover, restricted quarters often coincide with a financial squeeze, young parents not yet having reached full earning power.

Möbelfakta

The Swedish declaration system for furniture
(see page 1434)

The ordinary consumer and, in many respects, also the institutional buyer of furniture lack a clearly understandable and neutral system for making qualitative comparisons, for judging whether a piece of furniture is suitable for a specific use and can meet the given requirements. In Switzerland there are consumer services of this kind in many other lines of business. We need only recall the well conceived fabric care emblem or the labels of carpeting materials, which specify the areas of application, such as living tract, wheelchair traction, etc. by means of the internationally recognized emblem. Moreover, the results of tests carried out by the Swiss Institute of Home Economics on household appliances yield objective criteria.

The Swedes have always insisted on serious consumer consultation in the furniture sector. Well known for many years is the "VDN-Fakta", the state-regulated product emblem, a declaration employed by many manufacturers and dealers, which, however, no longer meets the requirements of many buyers. Nowadays "Furniture-Fakta" is a drastically revised system offering both the furniture buyer and the furniture manufacturer and dealer the

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required information and thus the possibility of judging products.

The function, durability and quality of furniture are complex features which are difficult to assess. The product declaration alone, therefore, possesses but a limited value. In the furniture sector, above all, the shopper, architect or public institutional representative needs considerably more precise criteria for making a decision. All too often the decision to buy is determined by purely formal aspects or thinking in terms of status, which can lead to faulty decision-making, which in turn can entail negative material consequences.

In the Furniture-Fakta System, the furniture is tested by means of scientific methods. In addition, the area of application is defined (e.g. chairs for diningrooms, restaurants, schools). Comprehensive schedules of specifications have been drawn up, with subdivisions in accordance with furniture types and areas of application. All tests and trials can be conducted on an absolutely serious and independent basis in line with these regulations. The test results are recorded in a detailed report which is made available to the furniture manufacturer or the merchandizing firm. A label has been designed for products, which is easily understood by the ordinary customer; it is affixed to the furniture in a clearly visible position and gives a summary of the test results. On request, any buyer can obtain the complete report.

New directions in the furniture market

*A comparative study of five sales organizations
(see page 1455)*

In the last few years, department stores and manufacturers have acquired sizeable shares of the total furniture market by means of their own sales organizations. The steady change observable in shopping habits in the consumer goods sector is also having its effect in the household appliance and furniture sector. A number of big distributors, by adjusting to this trend, have succeeded in establishing themselves in the public eye as household suppliers. An important feature of the new trend is that more and more people are getting away from treating their homes and furniture as status symbols. The consumer no longer adopts an emotional approach to his basic household requirements; he is becoming more rational.

We have submitted to five leading concerns a questionnaire, and the results, which we herewith present, constitute a differential picture of their conceptions of themselves and of what they are doing.

Trends in furniture design

(see page 1466)

The design boom is now over. New furniture designs are now rather modest in character, designers endeavouring to perfect technical potentialities and adapt them to a wide range of requirements.

We have selected for presentation a number of furniture programmes, in different materials, which

strike us as being typical of the latest trend. Combining elements make possible individualized designs, with special attention being devoted to the overall spatial aspect.

Wigarten

A small colony for active residents

by Lutz Kleinselbeck

Architect: Willi Walter, Zurich

*Management: H.U. Gfeller, Dübendorf
(see page 1473)*

The colony. "Wigarten" (according to a publicity leaflet put out by the management) "is situated some 400 meters east of Fällanden church in a sunny, quiet location. Part of the complex is situated in the natural conservation zone of the Greifensee. In the last 10 years Fällanden has developed into an attractive suburb of Zurich, also from the fiscal point of view." The colony is about a 15-to-20-minute drive from the centre of Zurich.

The "Wigarten" colony, just to the north of a slightly older complex, comprises 7 residence blocks (2 six-storey, 1 four-storey and 4 three-storey units) with a total of 106 individual housing units (2½-, 3½-, 4½- and 5½-room flats), a kindergarten plus the new Fällanden post office in front; shops and a café-restaurant will be included.

The client. Although in the concrete construction phase Bachofen's activity differed but little from that of other building clients, the colony as it developed compelled him to break with the conventional social role of the owner. Bachofen demonstrated great flexibility and willingness to learn. His land (he had been a farmer) continues to yield him an income – a reasonable, fair income in the opinion of "Wigarten" tenants. Bachofen lives in their midst, respected, an owner, who did not allow the question of ownership to come up and thus greatly contributed to making "Wigarten" the unusual place that it is.

The architect. In "Wigarten" an important precondition for the erection of economical but high-quality housing was the client's readiness not to plan on maximum yield. Nevertheless, this attitude on the part of the client does not reduce construction costs at all, which, even so, have to be kept as low as possible if the moderate rentals are to make sense. Since a high degree of livability presupposes a certain technical standard, there result certain costs that simply cannot be reduced. However, rationalization of building elements and procedures, as well as a responsible attitude on the part of the contractor help to keep costs down. Also helpful in this respect is the architect's consistent renunciation of everything that does not immediately serve the housing function, of needless accessories, "style". "individualism", "prestige".

The height of the trees in the neighbouring natural conservation zone was taken as a vertical scale for the disposition of the buildings, and in this way the complex was integrated in its natural surroundings.

A loose extensive grouping yields plenty of open space which can, in any case, be put to use (as playgrounds, etc.).

The blending of small, medium-size and large flats reflects the staggered requirements of the housing market and strengthens the competitive capacity of the owner. The dimensions and proportions were not computed in accordance with a scheme of an ideal type of family but were kept flexible, so that the flats can be altered to meet the requirements of families of varying size.

Flexibility also makes possible in "Wigarten" the installation of one separate room per floor which can be used by someone who wishes to reside alone

(a parent or parent-in-law, young person seeking privacy) or which can be let as an office or let to a student or other short-term resident.

The manager. Gfeller was the man who encouraged the farmer Bachofen to be the owner of the complex and so was the originator of the idea behind "Wigarten". Publicity set in early. Interested persons were on repeated occasions invited to meet on an informal basis, when they were oriented on the ideas of the owner, the architect and the manager and could air their own views.

The spokesman of the house over against the management is not the caretaker, but an independent house committee consisting of an elected male and female resident. Now then, is "Wigarten" – the question now seems apt – a colony of activists?

Gfeller says emphatically: "Whoever wants merely to live in 'Wigarten' and keep to himself can do so, and keep out of community affairs, without becoming a suspect person. Not taking part, of course, means having to accept what one has failed to influence.

There is no point in looking for anything sensational or spectacular in 'Wigarten', on the basis of discussions about it and what has been seen there. There is nothing 'unique' about this colony; it presents itself as something that can be repeated elsewhere, not as a limit that has been reached but as a step into further possibilities. If this colony is unusual, it is so in the most natural way. It is not based on fortunate circumstances that are missing elsewhere – its basis is, rather, the plain decision of an owner, an architect, a manager, to do what is possible."

Wall decorations as a reflection of popular wishes and values

(see page 1488)

Long before the present flood of newspaper articles on the current fad for old things set in, a survey made it clear that "nostalgia" in various forms is a dominant motive in private wall decorations in Zurich homes. The wall has revealed itself to be a highly differentiated and "willing" medium for the expression of personal wishes, attitudes, evaluations, relationships and recollections; taken as a whole, it reflects the manifold private cultural background of urban man.

This is not exactly identical with the rationalized, scientifically oriented and progressive civilization that surrounds us in our everyday working lives and that appears to determine almost exclusively our behaviour. Such decorations give emotional expression to our conviction that in the old days things were better or that for our jaded generation happiness is inaccessibly far away; this feeling goes hand in hand with a realization of the dubiousness of unlimited progress and of the perils of unrestricted growth; this feeling does not by any means exist only of primarily on the rational plane.

Considered as a whole, one's four walls reflect the manifold and complex life of the present. Wall decorations as present-day "folk art" stem from choice out of what is offered, in all its colourful variety, by the consumer goods industry. Totally ignoring aesthetic rules, a person selects what "suits" his given situation and seems worth hanging on the wall. The term "wall decoration" is far from doing justice to the phenomenon, for decorating is practically the least important motive revealed in a psychological analysis of a choice of such decorations. The medium of the wall as a reflection of life as a whole (embracing both wish and reality) has been very carefully studied for the last few years by students of culture as well. ■