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Journal For The Home

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Journal For The Home

HELPING TREES

In a recent issue the Canadian Weekly Bulletin of the Information Division Department of External Affairs, reports on Ottawa's "1970 look."

It mentions the lush green of Canada's capital, which is the first thing to strike Ottawa's summer visitors and comments that the city stretches east, west and south under what appears to be a dense forest, while to the north the Gatineau Hills form a thickly wooded domain.

We learn that the city of Ottawa has long done what it can to safeguard the trees within its boundaries. "Tree watchers" are employed, who roam the streets looking for trees in need of help, while task forces are also employed to plant "instant woodlands" along its scenic driveways.

To millions in Pakistan this would seem to be a wonderful dream world in which living conditions of human beings have progressed to the stage where they can even care for trees!

One's instant reaction would be to wonder how much work load there would be in our cities and villages for even "children watchers", let alone "adult watchers", to roam the streets and see who is in need of care!

It is interesting to reflect as to how many years it will be before Pakistan progresses to that wonderful era when she can begin to care on a national scale for her trees.

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HOUSE ON A BUDGET

From a discussion with Yasmin Lari

by Kamila Ali

HOW often have we conjured up visions of a dream-house, flicking through issues of "Ideal Home" or "House Beautiful", and drinking in all that perfection? But these images soon vanish into thin air when one actually gets down to house-building and is faced with innumerable problems, the chief one usually being financial considerations.

Pakistan's leading woman architect gives an insight into the problems involved

Speaking on behalf of the middle class majority the essential factor is that the house should be a home—compact, comfortable, economical to run and above all its cost must be congruous with the financial position of the builder. This requires the expert knowledge of a fully trained architect, who in Pakistan is more or less a rarity. There are barely a handful of what may be termed qualified architects, the rest being mere engineers or draftsmen who have acquired a meagre knowledge of architecture through imperfect practice and have been licensed as architects by the K. D. A. Unwary builders-to-be fall prey to such would-be architects and end up branding the entire profession as a bunch of inefficient ignoramuses. Consequently one must check on an architect's qualifications before employing him. To a certain extent here the fault also lies with the architects themselves, who as members of the Institute of Architects have failed to give this organisation, the sole purpose of which is to provide security to those in the profession, sufficient publicity. Architects cannot in accordance with their code of professional ethics give publicity to themselves or approach a client. But there is nothing to bar them from channellising their Institute to serve them, and the community, in a proper manner.

When drawing up plans for a house, especially one on a tight budget, unless there is a clear understanding of what the total cost of the design under consideration will be, a great deal of time and study can be wasted. It is important to give this factor early and due consideration. A generally accepted principal is that the total cost of the house should not exceed much more than twice the annual income of the family.

One of the most common complaints against architects is that they underquote in the initial stages thus causing their clients financial inconvenience later. This results from a vicious circle. Clients are not willing to employ the services of an expensive architect—and why should they if their aim is to build within the limits of a restricted budget. The only way an exact statement or quotation can be given is if the architect works out, to within an inch, the quantity and cost of materials which are going to be consumed, from the foundation laying to the last finishing touch on the completed house. Architects who under-bid just to get the contract find that it is not worth their while to go through this lengthy, time consuming procedure. Moreover in the process of construction clients want to fit in all possible little 'extras'—a window here or shelves there—and these add up to quite an amount in the final account. So one is at a loss to pin-point the actual responsibility for inaccurate estimates.

Low Cost Housing for the middle class—clients' difficulties and architects' problems

In Pakistan architects find it more profitable to go in for either large scale government projects or private housing for the elite. Undertaking the designing of a small low cost middle class house is not worth their while, because their fee (normally eight to ten percent of the cost of the house) does not compensate for the expense incurred and the time consumed. The only solution therefore is to evolve a system of Type Designs. In the world of today how many people can afford to build and maintain large sprawling houses? So more and more of them are going in for neat little economical houses. For their convenience, and that of the architect, a few low cost house plans should be drawn up, and these Type Designs pooled together. This can only be done through a central organisation where people can come, pick out a Type Design which suits them best, and pay a certain Royalty Fee to the architect. This way if there are enough clients for these low cost Type Designs the architects will not suffer a loss and people will find it convenient to obtain a house plan which, although not exclusive, is economical, as it cuts down the architect's fee to a minimum. This is an essential step which only the Institute of Architects can take and should, for housing of the future will be based on such Type Designs which, once introduced, are bound to be readily accepted by the majority.

Creation of suitable conditions for the future of Low Cost Housing

A client on approaching an architect must give him a detailed account of his requirements, not attempting to impose his own preconceived plans (for then he requires the services not of an architect but of a draftsman). It may seem a trifle ridiculous if an architect puts questions regarding the intended family size of the client, how many servants are to be employed, and what is the social pattern of the inhabitants-to-be, but a programme must be drawn up stating the particular requirements and taste of the family who are to occupy the house, for the design must be compatible with their income, family size and way of life. Unless the designer is well acquainted with these he cannot possibly hope to satisfy his client. To start with the space needed and funds available must be made clear. More often than not these two factors conflict and the architect is hard put to to resolve them, but with

compensations here and there the problem can be solved. The future plans of the family must be stated, for children grow up and parents develop new interests but it is difficult to mould and alter brick and stone accordingly. Which family does not have certain ideals when planning a house? These should not be altogether thrust aside, but given consideration, for some are bound to come through in the final results.

Once the architect is thoroughly acquainted with, and comprehends the requirements of the occupants of the house he is designing, he can then produce an exclusive plan which satisfies every need of the family and is the ideal home for them.

After the design stage is approved by the client, with maybe a few minor alterations here and there, the next step is that of the working drawings. For this the soil conditions of the particular piece of land to be built on must be thoroughly examined, because the presence of sub-soil water or rock can cause additional expense and render the building operation more difficult. If there is a water problem then the most economical method of drainage must be sought. It is also necessary to carry out an accurate survey of the property, for if the surface is irregular, with differences in level then the house must be designed accordingly. It is far easier and more economical to work with the natural contour of the land rather than to try and alter it. Moreover, irregularities in the hands of an able architect can make for an interesting and distinctive design.

The working drawings must be detailed with all quantities and cost of materials worked out so as to keep a check on them throughout the process of construction. When drawing up plans it is best to start with the floor plan before proceeding to more involved details such as doorways and porches. Although satisfactory appearance is important, efficient use is also essential. It is senseless trying to pick out bits and pieces from magazines, for they can never provide the perfect plan for the individual, and only lead to further involvement and consequent expenditure.

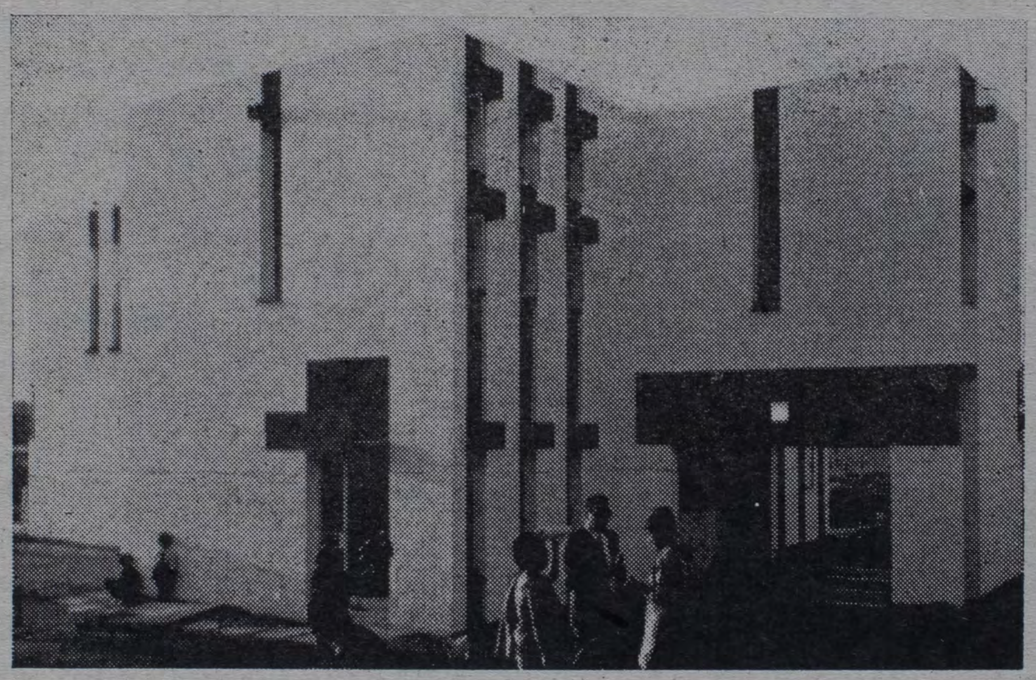
Taking into consideration that servants are a fast dying luxury it is most suitable to combine the living and dining rooms into a single space, with the kitchen being related to the dining area, or else to make the kitchen large enough to be also utilised as a convenient family dining room.

Rooms in a small compact house may tend to be cramped, but then a well designed one should take furniture and allow for movement as well. Built-in furniture furthers the appearance of spaciousness. Colour too has an effect on apparent size—whereas light, cool colours enhance space, warm, dark ones reduce it.

For the building purpose a contractor is employed and the plans handed over to him, with the architect merely supervising. But it is unfortunate that with the inefficient standard of existing contractors, architects normally need to be on the job full time, keeping a close watch at each stage, for mistakes are so easily and so often made.

Because of prevailing conditions, and the rigours of this profession, not many women have chosen architecture as a career. YASMIN LARI was among the first few, and by no means found it easy going. But now a great many girls have taken up architecture and are thus opening up the field to more women.

Haque's House in Karachi



A brilliant achievement—this modern low cost house is built within a total budget of Rs. 55,000. YASMIN LARI writes about her successful design.

This double-storeyed house had been designed for an officer in the Pakistan Navy, his wife and five children, all under 9 years of age.

On initial enquiry I had found that the family employed no servants, the wife did all the housework, an unusual phenomenon for a middle class family in Pakistan, they mostly entertained close friends in small numbers, their life revolved around the children and—most important, — that for a four bedroom house needed to house the family, the budget was very tight——about Rs. 55,000 only. This meant planning the house very compactly with no waste circulation areas.

Since there was no problem of separate servants' circulation area I could plan it with the living room as the central focal point, being the room that would be used most of the time by the family and all other rooms, except the master bedroom, overlooking the central living room. The kitchen is only partially screened from the living room by a dining counter and high level storage fitment, so that the wife could keep an eye on the three toddlers, two of whom are twins. The kitchen opens on to an outside dining terrace with a vegetable garden.

There are no internal walls around the 3 first floor children's bedrooms. They overlook the living room and they can be screened off by curtains if needed. It was decided on consultation with the client and his children that no walls were needed for the time being as they are all very young and later on, if needed they could put up 7' high storage partitions to screen off the bedrooms.

The only rooms which have internal walls are the master bedroom and the bathrooms.

Two of the bedrooms have low and high bunks and the windows of the east wall have been especially designed to allow for breeze circulation at those levels.

An unusual feature is that all the furniture—from beds to study table and dressing tables, kitchen fitments, dining counter to living room seating, etc., are all built-in which had not yet been experimented with in Pakistan.

She is a talented young architect who feels that designing houses on these lines is not profitable. Consequently she undertakes larger projects such as the naval scheme for Dilawar, which she is presently working on.

The result of all this planning and built-in furniture is that although the bedrooms are small from the usual standard here, the feeling is that of a very spacious house.

All precautions have been taken to avoid heat entry into the house. Windows and other openings have been kept small and well protected—the roof has been insulated with foam concrete insulation to cut down heat transmission from the roof.

The ventilation problem was studied to give maximum breeze in all the rooms, a very important consideration for Karachi's humid climate.

The materials chosen are very simple to keep the cost down—fairfaced concrete block masonry, load bearing walls and R.C.C. floor and roof slabs. The spans have been kept small to have the minimum of reinforcing steel, which is expensive in Pakistan.

Special concrete blocks were hand made as no machine made blocks were available. Plastering was avoided internally as well.

The statement is of stark simplicity which contrasts strongly—accentuated blue against the white painted block masonry. There is no attempt at camouflage.

The total cost was approximately Rs. 51,500, the cost per foot being Rs. 23.50 as compared to Rs. 33.00 of a house of comparable finishes:

This is the first time that a decent house has been built for such a small sum - a first step towards low cost housing for middle class. Normally four bedroom houses are built for twice this sum.