

Your House May Be a Moron!

Home Economics



AN ELECTRIC PLUG waist-high that requires no gymnastics or stooping. Pulling the connection straight out is also found to be less of a strain on the wires, and lessens the chance of short-circuiting

By DONALD A. LAIRD

Many persons squirm in the presence of a psychologist because they feel that their thoughts are being read, and that they are probably being diagnosed as morons—or worse.

Not content with making every one generally uncomfortable, psychologists are now rating the houses we live in. Some houses which are tremendously expensive are morons. Some small cottages rate as geniuses on the psychological scale for measuring houses.

Everyone will be more comfortable when builders and architects plan houses in accordance with psychological principles. So perhaps psychologists may be forgiven for making people mentally uncomfortable by starting to show up the weak points of their homes.

To reduce fatigue to the lowest possible minimum is one aspect of psychological engineering in the home. This depends partly upon how the floor plans are arranged, partly upon how the furniture and working equipment is distributed throughout the house, and partly upon the planned thoughtfulness with which the housewife does her work.

Obviously a big house is more tiring on the housewife than a small house. A small kitchen with shelf-boards on the walls and a space

for the ice box is less fatiguing than a large kitchen with a pantry on one side and an enclosed porch on the other in which the refrigerator is kept. High shelves which require stretching, and low shelves which demand stooping add to the burden of fatigue.

Filigree trimmings on the woodwork and French doors help reduce a house to moron rank by adding to cleaning difficulties.

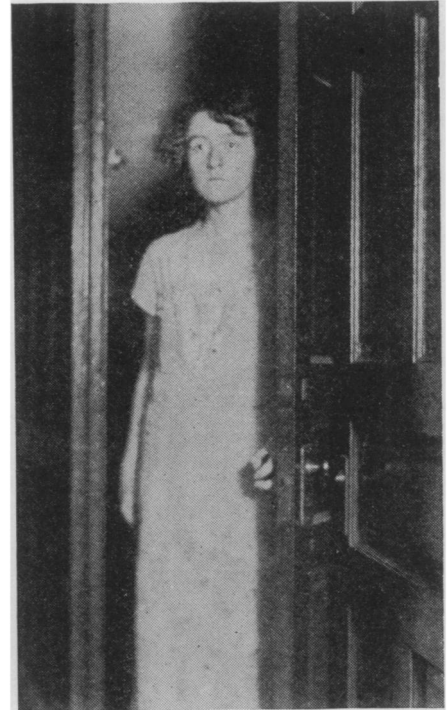
The telephone should be placed only after thoughtful consideration. The housewife can walk many unnecessary miles every year unless the phone has been placed equidistant from the places where she is usually at work. Ordinarily a convenience, the telephone can readily become a nuisance by thoughtless placing.

Even with a perfectly laid out house, from the psychologist's viewpoint, working habits of the housewife may still generate almost inconceivable amounts of fatigue. Some housewives are famous, almost notorious, as fussy busybodies who are always hard at work and yet accomplish very little. Duplicate dust cloths placed on the second floor will relieve the busybee type of housekeeper of some unnecessary trips up and down stairs.

Stew pans and kettles into which water is drawn in preparing a meal should be placed within easy reach of the water tap. With this arrangement, many steps each day will be saved, since the cook can grasp and fill the utensils with water without having to take a step. Vegetables such as potatoes should also be kept within easy reach of the sink so that they can be picked up, pared and washed without having to take a step or having to stoop.

The coffee canister and the empty pot also belong within easy reach of the sink without taking a step, to keep the kitchen from becoming a moron.

There are many insidious sources of fatigue in the house. Take the way beds are placed in the bedrooms, for instance. They should be set so that the sun or early daylight does not strike the sleeper's eyes; otherwise they make the last hour or two of sleep less refreshing, and the day may be started before one has fully recovered from the fatigue of the previous day.



WHEN DOOR meets door

Noises are also an insidious source of fatigue. This is especially true of noises which will disturb one's sleep without awakening him. A bedroom facing away from the street is oftentimes the best sleeping room since many disturbing and fatiguing street noises are thus avoided.

To avoid all possible embarrassment is another phase of psychological engineering applied to a home.

Before the days of short skirts, hot air registers used to cause considerable embarrassment to women who stepped within range of the breeze. A house with large archways between rooms may give an air of grandeur, but it does not allow adequate privacy to avoid all possible embarrassment. Noisy bath fixtures and poor wall construction which does not prevent the transmission of noise is a cause of embarrassment day in and day out.

The stairway to the second floor should be placed so that when the minister comes to call, the man of the house can go upstairs from the basement workshop to clean up without being seen from the living room.

We have already mentioned the telephone; it may also cause embarrassment if the conversation is overheard by (*Turn to next page*)

Is Your House a Moron—Continued

guests, or even other members of the family. It should be placed in a closet or nook so that conversation cannot be overheard. Even this is not adequate protection on party lines, when all the neighbors lift their receivers and listen in on the conversations every time the phone rings.

Bed room lights should be near the windows, so no revealing shadows can be projected on to the window shades when one is retiring.

A small hamper for soiled clothes should be in each bed room to lessen the temptation to hang discarded clothes up on the floor. This prevents embarrassment from soiled clothes scattered about the room in case company comes. There should be a decorative waste basket in all other rooms of the house to catch scraps and waste the minute they are formed and give the house a perpetual ship-shape appearance. The mad scramble to tidy up when the door bell buzzes is a sign of the moron house.

To avoid all possible annoyance is another phase of making the house psychologically right.

Poorly built houses with windows and doors that stick are the source of much mental irritation and annoyance. So are loose windows that rattle in the least gale. And water taps that drip, drip, drip all day and night.

Small water pipes that lessen the flow of hot water in the bath mixture when hot water is drawn in the kitchen sink come under the annoyance classification—although perhaps they might come under the class of accident hazards, as it has happened that small children have been seriously scalded by the temperature of their bath water changing when cold water was drawn to sprinkle the lawn.

To have to spend ten minutes hunting for a favorite paper or deck of cards is annoying and could readily be avoided if a definite place were allotted for these commonly used items. All members of the family should be thoroughly trained in replacing these in their exact niche.

Electric light switches are especially potent at causing annoyance. This is principally because they are usually hard to find at night. The worst offender is the pull chain switch fastened right at the fixture with a small button dangling in the middle of the room. Try to find it at night and still keep your temper!

There are numerous small items which are used daily which could be purchased in duplicate, or even quadruplicate, to save much irritation. There are ash trays, for instance. The bother of having to hunt all over the house for one, or the worse annoyance of letting ashes fall from a brimming tray to the floor, can be saved if they are generously sprinkled throughout the house. Pencils, too, should be given the same liberal treatment.

"Every home free from accident hazards" is the slogan of the fourth phase of psychology applied to homes.

Mark Twain suggested that going to bed was a very dangerous thing to do, since most people died there. There is no humor, however, in the fact that home accidents lead automobile and factory accidents.

This phase of accidents is subtly connected with the other three of fatigue, embarrassment and annoyance, but is important enough in its own right to be given independent emphasis. If fatigue has not been brought to the vanishing point, the accident hazard is increased because the tired housewife cannot be careful. Under adequate annoyance, also, the irritable husband may lose his temper and suffer an accident caused by blind fury.

Falls are prominent among serious home accidents. Did you ever slip on a rug? Not a large rug, or a heavy rug, for their weight and size gives enough friction traction to keep them from slipping on even the most hazardous floor. It is the small rugs that connect one room with another that are the principal offenders.

High shelving in closets and cupboards is to be avoided on two scores. It induces the strain fatigue due to stretching, and it precipitates many falls. Small rugs which lie loosely at the tops of stairways are to be severely condemned.

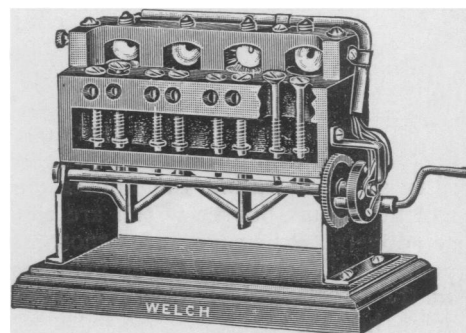
Talk with any man six feet tall about the basement of his house. Prepare yourself for strong language before you ask him, however, for it is probable in nine cases out of ten that he has battered his head against a water or heat pipe in the cellar on the average of once a week for years. The extravagance of digging a deeper excavation can be spared and yet not have a low bridge effect in the basement by a careful routing of the obstructing pipes along side walls

where they cannot batter out gray matter.

Cellar steps usually appear to be an after thought, or perhaps they are devised by the devil himself. Narrow, winding, and dark, they are the dimly illumined scene of much domestic disaster. To complicate matters further many housewives, driven to desperation over the lack of adequate closet space, drive over-size spikes into the walls of the basement stairway to catch on apron pockets, not to mention ears and eyes.

Frosty weather brings a treacherous slipperiness to the porch steps. There are special slip-proof treads which insure against the hazard of a rude reception to some visitor who may bump himself uncomfortably on several of the steps in one spectacular fall.

This new application of psychology demands a broadened conception of house building. The structural engineer comes into the picture in the specifications of materials to give most satisfactory wear under years of weather strain. (Turn to page 305)



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Your House—Continued

His job is largely to guide economical spending in the purchase of materials, oftentimes by recommending a slightly more expensive material which will stand up under years of service better and be less expensive in the long run.

The psychological engineer has the difficult task of correlating all the elements of the building so that they revolve around the dominant features—the human beings who will live in the house. The materials engineer's field is to relate the properties of the various materials to certain building stresses and strains. The psychological engineer's field is to relate materials and forms to human stresses and strains, as we have briefly illustrated.

A house becomes a home, it has been said, when it is designed to live in. This should be amended to specify effective living. And one cannot live effectively even in a palace if it is arranged and used to cause any avoidable fatigue, embarrassment, annoyance, or accident.

Designing and constructing a house to be a genius on a psychological test, however, does not assure in any sense that after people have moved into the house it will still retain its originally high rating. Thoughtless use and poor arrangement of kitchen tables and other details of equipment lower the I Q of many a house that started out with prospects of a brilliant career of efficient service.

Science News-Letter, November 17, 1928

Syphilis Increasing

Medicine

The American people are gradually becoming more and more "syphilized," reports Dr. Charles W. Burr, professor of mental diseases at the University of Pennsylvania, basing his opinion on his many years' experience with patients suffering from the end conditions of this disease.

Change in the type of immigration during the last few generations and the letting down of social standards, particularly those which placed a bar between adolescent boys and girls, are the causes to which Dr. Burr attributes the increase.

Immigrants from Eastern Europe, where the disease is more prevalent, have brought it into this country in large numbers. Modern promiscuity, which has developed since the war, is playing a large part in the work of "syphilizing" the country.

Science News-Letter, November 17, 1928

Fifty Questions to Ask Your House

(Each question answered "Yes" is favorable, a "No" is unfavorable. Rate your house by this questionnaire.)

1. Does the main entrance lead into a vestibule?
2. Is the stairway to the second floor accessible without passing through rooms on the first floor?
3. Are dining-room and living-room so situated that callers in the living-room cannot watch the progress of a meal?
4. Can one enter the bathroom without passing through other rooms or being seen by persons in other rooms?
5. Is the bathroom constructed to prevent the transmission of noises?
6. Are there opaque shades on all windows which prevent silhouettes of persons inside being seen when the room is lighted?
7. Can all doors be opened irrespective of the position of any other door?
8. Are all doors so arranged that when opened they do not cut down light from the windows?
9. Is the water heating system such that hot water can be obtained almost immediately when a faucet is opened?
10. Are all bells non-startling?
11. Are the house numerals in a place where they can be readily seen both day and night?
12. Is there a roomy clothes closet at the front entrance for storing coats and rubbers?
13. Is each bedroom provided with a roomy clothes closet?
14. Are electric switches placed so that it is not necessary to walk into a dark room in search of them?
15. Is the telephone so placed that one's conversation is private?
16. Are the kitchen shelves so arranged that the contents of the highest and the lowest shelf can be reached without stretching or low bending?
17. Can mail be left inside the house by use of a slot or small opening?
18. Can refuse and garbage be disposed of without the use of an unsanitary outside receptacle (by means of incinerator, etc.)?
19. Is the house planned and constructed so that noise transmission from one room to other points of the house is practically eliminated?
20. Are all rooms free from low, slanting ceilings?
21. Can all door locks be opened by a single master key?
22. Are there lights with conveniently located switches in all closets?
23. Is the house situated in a quiet place?
24. Is there toe room under all cupboards in the kitchen?
25. Is the house of fireproof construction?
26. Are the floors slip-proof?
27. Is there a safety handrail beside the bathtub?
28. Do all the rugs lie flat and stationary on the floor?
29. Are all steps seven and a half inches high and nine inches deep?
30. Are all staircases straight?
31. Are all staircases provided with hand rails at a convenient height?
32. Are the cellar ceiling and pipes high enough to make stooping unnecessary?

33. Are the door knobs set in far enough to prevent bruising knuckles on the door frame when closing?

34. Are radiators shielded so as to prevent burning one's self?

35. Is there freedom from the danger of ice and snow falling from the roof in the path of persons below?

36. Is there a safe and convenient means for disposing of safety razor blades, toothpaste tubes, etc.?

37. Is there a fire screen covering the entire front of the fireplace?

38. Are all walks even and level?

39. Does the kitchen adjoin the dining-room?

40. Are the kitchen furnishings so arranged in relation to each other (i. e., distance from stove to sink, etc.) that needless steps and waste motions are eliminated?

41. Is the telephone centrally located?

42. Is fuel stored conveniently near the heating plants (i. e., fireplace, furnace, etc.)?

43. Is the dish cupboard accessible from both dining-room and kitchen?

44. Is there a lavatory and toilet on the first floor?

45. Is there a bedroom on the first floor?

46. Is there a clothes chute from the second floor?

47. Can kitchen utensils be placed or stored where they are used, so that they can be grasped without unnecessary motions and effort?

48. Are the work tables, benches and sink in the kitchen at such a height that when standing erect with arms hanging loosely in front of him and with palms up, one's knuckles just touch the work surface?

49. Is there a stool which can be used while working in the kitchen?

50. Are outlets for electrical appliances which are used intermittently (such as electric iron, vacuum cleaner, etc.) waist high so that stooping is unnecessary in connecting up the appliances?

(—And these are only a handful of the questions that the psychologists might ask the average American home in their attempt to determine the fitness of these dwellings for comfortable living.)

Science News-Letter, November 17, 1928

Irishmen in Scotland

Anthropology

Within recent historic times, the north of Ireland was colonized from Scotland. In prehistoric times an exact reversal of this migration took place, and the north of Scotland was peopled from Ireland. So thinks Sir George MacDonald, noted Scottish archaeologist. The story has been pieced out largely from the burial mounds of this part of ancient Caledonia, which are like the burial mounds in Ireland and on the intervening small islands. As the Irish population increased, waves of emigration would surge out over the sea in little boats, finally breaking into the then unpopulated Scottish North.

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