

The Contemporary Office

Design

Contemporary art seems to be here to stay. On the cover of the SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER this week is shown a business executive's office in the contemporary manner—part of an exhibit of contemporary design held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. How scientific developments have made this new design possible in this particular instance is best explained in the words of Raymond M. Hood, the architect, in a catalogue which will soon be issued.

"The task of the contemporary designer," he says, "is first to search for the practical solution of his problem, and then to avail himself of every material, every invention, every method that will aid him in its development. He does not forget that it is his business to fashion the materials that he uses into a beautiful form, but he realizes that only by this road can he hope to find the real beauty which will be the harmonious expression of modern life. Especially must there be acknowledgment of the fact that the machine, a tool of the designer, has replaced the craftsman in contemporary production, and has, therefore, tremendously influenced modern design.

"Perhaps I can best express my conception of the new movement by an illustration. If I were asked if I could build a more beautiful business office than Michelangelo, I should say, 'No, but I can build a better business office.' My office would be better lighted, better heated, have furniture better suited to its needs, and so on, all for the simple reason that I have new materials, new processes, and new inventions at my command, of which Michelangelo did not dream. The office might not be so beautiful, but it would certainly be more convenient, more comfortable, and better suited to its purpose. But it would not be as good, and would undoubtedly be less beautiful than Michelangelo's, were I to limit myself to the materials, the craftsmanship and the relatively simple contrivances of his period.

"This introduction will explain my point of view in the development of the business office. . . . The layout and design of the different elements were controlled by present-day requirements. In general, each material has been chosen because of its fitness for the work it is to do, and with regard to economical upkeep and

sanitary qualities. Its decorative treatment, then, has been dictated by the capabilities of the machine or process by which it is made.

"The executive sits with his back to the light as people enter. His desk is arranged to receive the proper working light, and at the same time to give him the restful distraction of an outdoor view. Facing him is his secretary's chair, while his visitors may group themselves about the conference table contiguous to his desk at right angles without disturbing his work. The walls and ceilings are covered with fabrikoid, a machine product which far excels in durability, cheapness, quality of surface, sureness of effect, and variety of expression the old methods of plaster and paint and wood paneling. The furniture is made of aluminum, a material as strong, light and adaptable for the purpose as wood, but one that is not subject to shrinking, swell-

ing, warping, and the necessity of repeated refinishing. The large window, made possible by modern heating, lights the room with a great area of subdued light, rather than by a small area of intense light. The curtain permits a complete regulation of light and air."

Science News-Letter, March 16, 1929

Government tests show that boxes made of green lumber and allowed to dry have only about one-quarter to one-half the resistance to rough handling compared with boxes made of dry lumber and stored in a reasonably dry place.

A wild flower garden, with more than a million plants representing 1,000 species, will be a new feature of a hotel in the Yosemite National Park.

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