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EC1179 The Livable Home

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The Livable Home



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The Livable Home

RIZPAH ANNA DOUGLASS

THE KIND of home one lives in influences one's whole life. A cheerful, happy home promotes fine relationships; an orderly home contributes to the peace and tranquillity of the family. A home of good taste fosters an appreciation of beauty and gives much satisfaction. Almost every home has one room where the family life centers. In most homes this is the living room or dining room. One should plan the furnishings in this room to meet the needs of the family, keeping in mind their ages, interests, and activities.

Providing a living room the family will enjoy does not mean that it is necessary to spend a large sum of money. It is a satisfaction to realize that the proper grouping of the furniture will help to obtain an attractive, restful room no matter how old or out of date the furniture may be or how little money one may have to spend.

Every family has different requirements; each member has individual likes and dislikes, interests, habits, and hobbies. This makes it impossible to set down rules on how things should be done. There are rules, but they are only guides suggesting ways and ideas. To make a room the whole family will enjoy is mainly a matter of fitting furnishings together in order to create a cheerful, orderly, stimulating, restful room that expresses the lives, thoughts, and activities of the entire family.

Group Furniture in Accordance with Function

Let us first consider the function of the room. If it is the living room, the family will be reading or listening to the radio; the mother may be doing her sewing or mending. The children may study, perhaps play the piano, or work on a hobby such as a stamp collection. Here is where guests are received and entertained, where conversation is carried on, perhaps at the same time that someone is reading or writing. All these activities need to be considered and provision made for them.

The family center may be the dining room. When this is the case, in addition to providing a place to eat, it must be planned to provide for other activities. The problem is perhaps slightly more difficult but no less interesting and challenging.

A reading group requires a comfortable chair, a table, magazines, and books. When these pieces are placed close together, when the light is placed on the table in the proper position for reading, and the magazines are within easy reach, then they are handy and such a group invites one to read. If one is required to pull a chair across to be near the source of light, one is not so eager to sit down to read. The room seems to lack an inviting, cozy atmosphere. If a grouping of furniture can be created for each member of the family, the room seems to be providing some of the requirements for the activities of the family.

When guests arrive or when the family are visiting together, several chairs grouped together so that conversation may be carried on comfortably will invite confidence and express hospitality. This group may in-

clude the couch or davenport and a couple of chairs. The reading group may be a part of this conversational group. To add convenience and comfort, place a lamp on a table, and perhaps a footstool close enough to be used by anyone sitting on the davenport; thus these groups serve two or more functions.

A desk or table and a chair placed so as to obtain light from the left side constitute a good writing center. If it can be removed somewhat from the conversational group, the person writing will be better able to concentrate. The music group also is best located away from the conversational groups.

Let us study the traffic lanes through the room and then try to avoid placing furniture in these lanes. Do not place furniture in the center of the room nor near the doorways, so that it is necessary to walk around it. If one can enter the living room and read, write, visit, study, or rest without moving furniture about, it is well arranged for use.

The children are our most precious possessions and must be considered in the arrangement of the furniture. Provide a place for little sister to play; perhaps shelves or a part of the bookcase may be given over for her dolls. Brother will want a place to work on his stamp collection or some other hobby.

How can one determine if the room is arranged conveniently? Perhaps the best way to determine this is to ask the following questions:

What is meant by grouping furniture for convenience?



FIG. 1.—These children have a place to play and keep their toys.

Is the room difficult to keep orderly?

Is the furniture moved about when friends come to visit and is the room disarranged when guests leave?

Does the furniture need to be moved about when the family spends an evening at home?

Do chairs need to be moved closer to the light or is it necessary to spend a part of each morning rearranging and putting back the furniture to its original place?

If the answer to these questions is "yes" then let us study the room to see if the furniture can be combined into groups so that it is conveniently and comfortably arranged.

One good way to begin rearrangement is to watch the family to see how they move the pieces about the room. See if they do not naturally form a group or groups about the room. This may be the nucleus around which an interesting and comfortable arrangement may be made.

The plan on the right side of Figure 2 shows a reading center that accommodates three people and one study or writing center. By placing the table in this manner the lamp on the table is made to serve three people instead of one or two as it would if the table were placed with the long side against the wall.

Figure 3 shows a floor plan of a room arranged to provide two conversational groups and a writing and a music center. This includes the stove for a winter arrangement.

Figure 4 shows a dining room that provides a rest center, and Figure 5 shows a reading center by the radio.

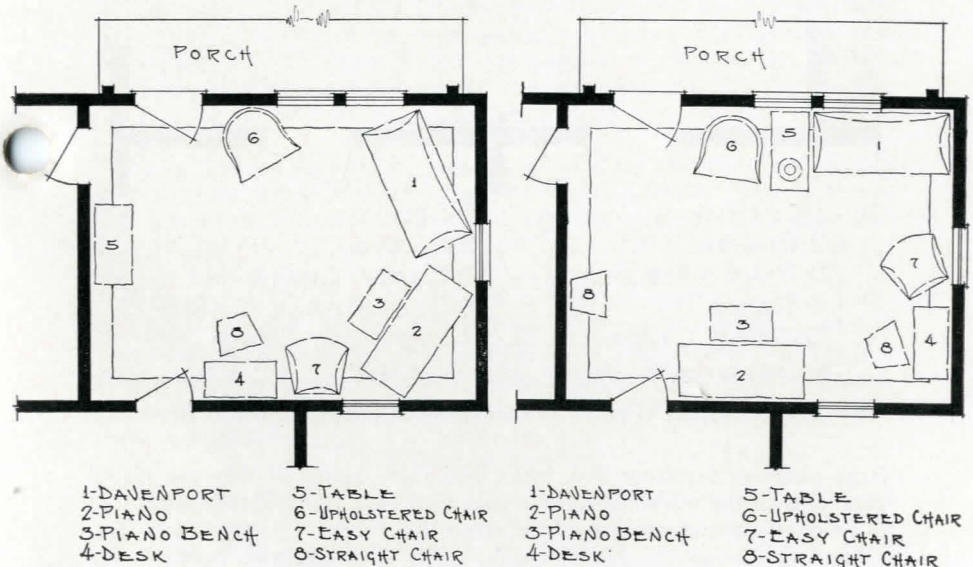


FIG. 2.—Showing rearrangement of reading center.

Follow Structural Lines

Arranging the furniture for convenience and comfort is especially important. Yet there are a few other points that also ought to be considered. Because a room is usually rectangular in shape, and the doors, windows, fireplace, and other built-in features are usually placed architecturally square with the room, it is reasonable to say that the rugs and

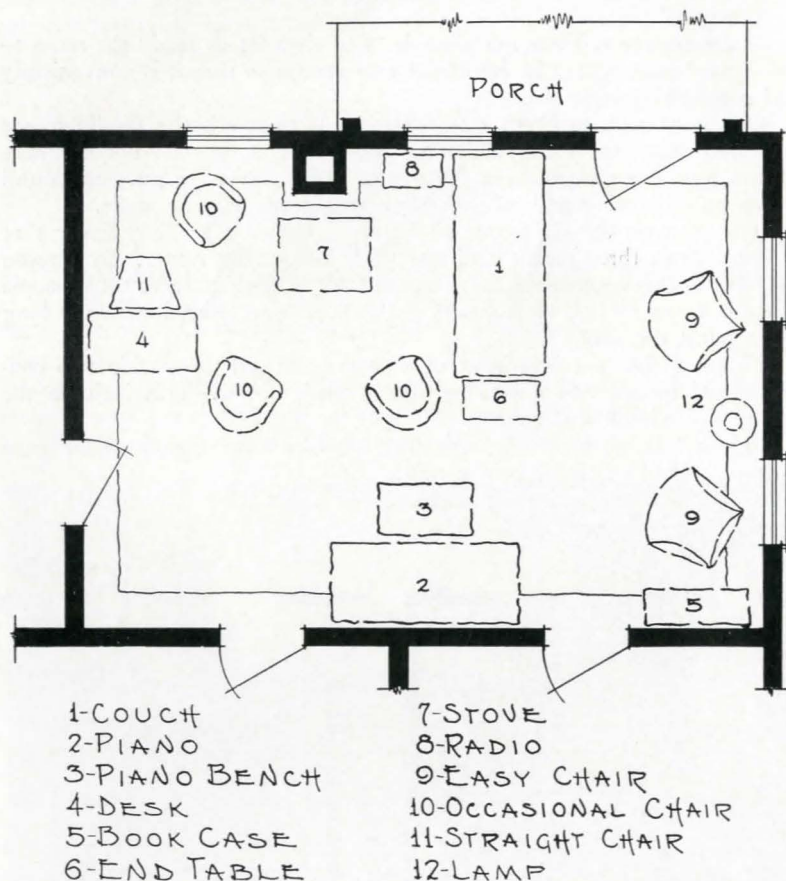


FIG. 3.—Arrangement to permit two conversational groups and centers for music and writing.

large pieces of furniture look better and more at rest if they are placed parallel with the walls. In other words, they look better if they are placed to follow the structural lines of the room.

Such pieces as the piano, couch, table, secretary, and bookcase are more restful if they are not placed across a corner. When furniture is



FIG. 4.—This dining room also provides a rest center and a reading center.

placed across corners the room appears smaller and the relationship between the lines of the room and the lines of the furniture destroys the impression of unity. Rugs, even small ones, generally look best if they are placed to conform with this rule. When a rug is placed in a doorway or archway it is less confusing and gives a more orderly feeling if it is placed parallel to the edge of the large rug or straight through the doorway, not at an angle.

Since chairs are light and easily moved they are exceptions to this rule. They may be placed at angles which help to make more intimate groups and relieve the formality of having everything straight. If a small end table is used with a chair as a group it is usually placed parallel to the sides or arms of the chair, not parallel to the wall or rug.

Figures 7 and 8 show the effect of placing furniture across the corners of a room. None of the furniture in Figure 7 is placed where it is needed. The room seems cramped and crowded. The room shown in Figure 8 with practically the same furniture seems larger, the light is better located, and the room has a comfortable appearance. Also compare the two floor plans in Figure 2.

Balance is Essential

After arranging the furniture in groups according to their function and noting whether the large pieces are placed parallel to the wall, let us see if the room seems balanced. Is the furniture arranged so that when you stand in the middle of the room there is a feeling of rest and equili-



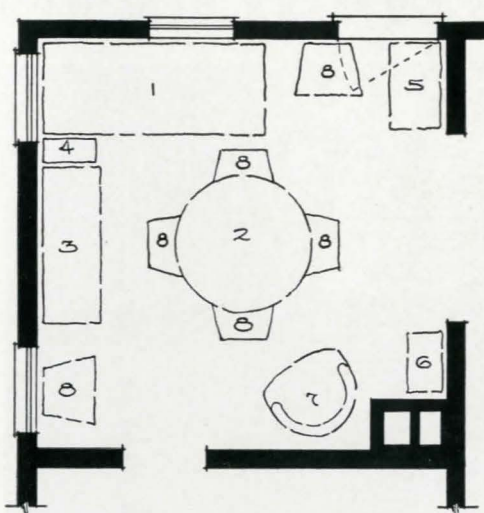
FIG. 5.—A reading center in the dining room by the radio is enjoyed by every member of the family.

brum? See if the large, heavy pieces are placed on different sides of the room. A couch or davenport will balance a piano nicely, or either one would balance a fireplace or doorway on the other side of the room. A group of furniture will also balance either of these pieces. Size alone does not make for balance. A small but bright object may balance a larger, dull article.

Intermingle upholstered and wooden pieces, as well as tall and short pieces of furniture. When all of a kind are placed at one end of the room a lop-sided effect is produced. High and low, heavy and light pieces should be used together for balance and pleasing variation. Furniture groups which are placed against the walls look best if they harmonize with the spaces they occupy; that is, use tall, narrow pieces of furniture against high, narrow wall spaces and broad, low pieces against spaces of similar kind.

It is best, generally, to avoid placing large pieces of furniture too close to corners because they appear to weight down the corner. If the wall

space is about the size of the furniture to be placed against it, in most instances it would be best to place the furniture in the center of the space rather than closer to the corner. In Figures 2, 3, and 11, the bookcase, desk, and piano are placed in the center of the wall space. This gives a better feeling of balance than if they were placed closer to the corner.



- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1-COUCH | 5-SEWING MACHINE |
| 2-DINING TABLE | 6-RADIO |
| 3-BUFFER | 7-UPHOLSTERED CHAIR |
| 4-TABLE | 8-STRAIGHT CHAIR |

FIG. 6.—Floor plan of room shown in Figure 4.

of it. This would be formal balance. A desk or bookcase is often placed in the center of the wall space which with two chairs would make a formal arrangement also. Figure 9 shows a formal arrangement.

If all the furniture is placed symmetrically, the room will be too stiff and uninviting. When unlike objects are used, they may be placed at different distances from the center in such a way that a feeling of balance results. An informal balance is secured by placing the objects attracting the most attention nearer the center and by placing the smaller, darker objects, attracting less attention, a greater distance from the center. A doorway or window that is located on one side of the wall space may be balanced by arranging a group of furnishings on the other side of the center of the wall space. This would be an informal arrangement.

Create a Center of Interest

Create in each room a center of interest. It will give the keynote of the purpose of the room and help to make it seem more comfortable.

Balance may be obtained in two ways, through formal or through informal arrangement. Balance means rest or repose. The word implies an equal distribution of weight on either side of a center line and suggests a feeling of rest and stability because of the arrangement of the objects. When the largest or most attractive article is placed at the center of a wall space and similar objects are placed on either side it is called formal balance. Usually a buffet is placed in the center of a wall space. It may have a dining chair placed on either side

For instance, in a living room, a group that is the center of interest could express restfulness and sociability. The group chosen for the center of interest will naturally be the most interesting or largest group in the room. A table with a good lamp, a picture above it, and a couple of easy chairs, may be the group that looks the most inviting. A fireplace with two easy chairs placed on either side may be the group that looks the most inviting.



FIG. 7.—Placing furniture across the corners makes a room seem small and cluttered.

The sofa group can easily be made to look just as inviting. Place the sofa in the most important location in the room along the longest unbroken wall space or between windows or before a group of windows. Place a table with a lamp at one end and an odd chair at right angles to one end; this group easily becomes the most inviting spot. Figure 8 shows the davenport as the center of interest. The end table with the lamp and chair placed near it make an attractive and inviting conversational or reading group.

A small group such as a comfortable chair beside a table or radio, with a lamp and magazine near may also be the most-sought-for spot in a small room. Provide as many of these smaller groups as is possible.

Hints for Changing Apparent Proportions

Small rooms may be made to appear larger by placing all the heavy pieces of furniture flat against the wall. When selecting new furniture choose pieces which are small in scale. Large, heavy chairs seem to fill a room unnecessarily. The aim is to provide the maximum amount of comfort with the minimum amount of furniture.

A large room really needs a few large pieces of furniture. Couches or davenports may be placed out from the wall. A large room will accommo-

date more centers or groups of furniture. By using two or three rugs to break up the floor space, you will make the room seem smaller and cozier.

A square room or one that is almost square may be made to look more oblong by using an oblong rug and by arranging the furniture to accentuate the long lines of the rug. Put the long pieces of furniture on opposite walls. The room shown in Figure 10 is square but the proportions seem changed somewhat by the positions of the davenport and piano on opposite walls, thus accentuating long lines in one direction.



FIG. 8.—The room shown in Figure 7, rearranged with furniture following the structural lines and grouped ready for use.

Long rooms that are narrow will appear wider if two rugs are used, one larger than the other. Also place the long pieces of furniture at the ends of the room rather than at the sides. Figure 11 shows a long, narrow room. Placing the davenport out into the room and the use of three rugs instead of one make the room appear shorter. This first arrangement in Figure 12 emphasizes the length of the room, while the rearranged room emphasizes the width. This makes the room seem better proportioned.

The arrangement of the decorative objects contributes much in making a room attractive and comfortable. After the furniture is arranged our attention is then turned to the smaller objects which add notes of color making a room personal and appearing to belong to families that have individual tastes and ideas. For suggestions on the arrangement of decorative objects see Extension Circular 1177, "Adding Beauty in Homes through Decorative Objects."



FIG. 9.—This end of the room has a formal-balance arrangement.

Using One's Possessions to the Best Advantage

The person who can have just the kind of house that he likes is most fortunate. Few are so blessed, for most of us are obliged to make the best of what we have.

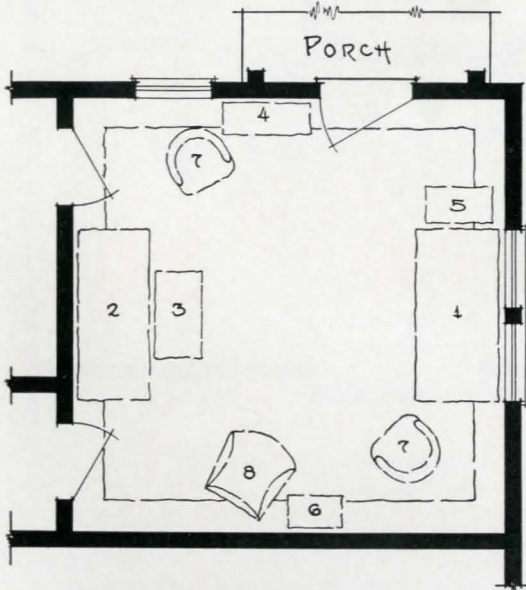
Simplify the arrangement of the rooms as much as possible. Provide for the activities of the family, then look about to see what other needed furnishings one may provide at little expense.

A bookcase may be made with stained boards and pressed brick. (See cover page.) The bricks are piled at the ends of the boards to support the shelves. Between the bricks in both columns of the bookcase, small pieces of composition board, cut the size of the bricks, may be placed. This resembles mortar and makes the shelves seem more permanent. To give the bookcase a more finished appearance select a larger, thicker board for the bottom and bevel the edge.

Perhaps a couch is needed in a dining room or living room. One homemaker made an old sanitary couch serve the purpose and be attractive by making a pad from an old mattress and then making a cover of dyed feed sacks. To give it a boxed-in appearance the edges were piped with a contrasting material. To the lower edge of the mattress cover she attached a pleated ruffle that hung to the floor.

Another family had a couch built in. This could be done by the boy of the family. To make room for the rest center a door which was

seldom used was shut off and shelves put up for books. A couch was then built in the corner under the book shelves. What an attractive, convenient corner this made!



- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 1-DAVENPORT | 5-END TABLE |
| 2-PIANO | 6-RADIO |
| 3-PIANO BENCH | 7-OCCASIONAL CHAIR |
| 4-BOOK CASE | 8-EASY CHAIR |

FIG. 10.—Arrangement of furniture in a square room.

doors, partially close them, making an ordinary-sized doorway. Hang portieres over the sliding doors to conceal them. This will allow furniture to be placed close to the door and thus extend the wall space for the arrangement of furniture. It would be best if the portieres were about the same color as the wall. This would make them less conspicuous and seem more like the wall.

Test for the Arrangement of Rooms

After arranging the room, test by applying the following questions:

Have you kept the purpose of the room in mind?

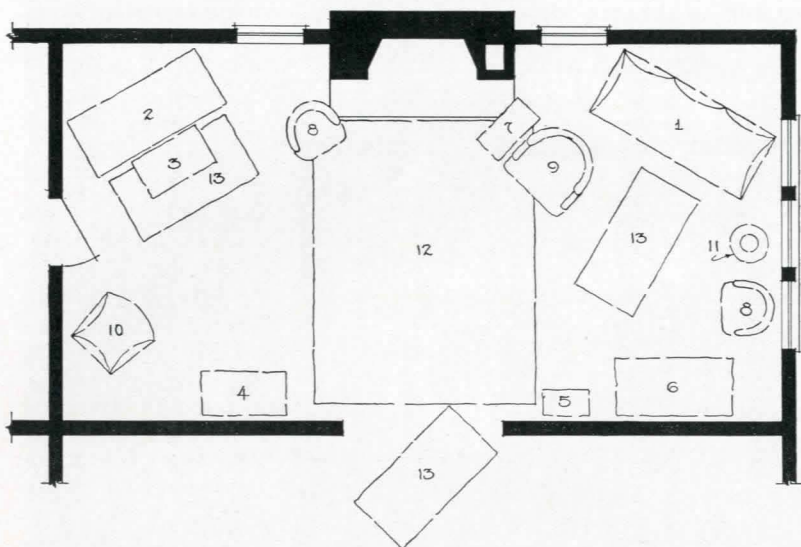
Does the room provide for the normal activities which will take place there?

Is it necessary for a member of the family to move a chair for better light or for any other reason when sitting down to read?

Are there definite traffic lanes from room to room or are the groupings in the way?

Besides closing off doorways as is described above one may hang a heavy curtain or portiere over the door and then place a piece of furniture such as a table, a sewing machine, or a chair in front of the door. The portiere gives an excellent background for a piece of furniture and makes the door a wall space convenient for arranging furniture.

A large open doorway or archway between a living room and a bedroom may give more privacy if the opening is shut off. This may be done by placing a screen in the doorway when needed. If the opening is provided with sliding



1-DAVENPORT
2-PIANO
3-PIANO BENCH
4-DESK
5-RADIO

6-LIBRARY TABLE
7-END TABLE
8-OCCASIONAL CHAIR
9-LARGE UPHOLSTERED CHAIR
10-EASY CHAIR

11-LAMP
12-LARGE RUG
13-SMALL RUG
14-STRAIGHT CHAIR



FIG. 11.—This long room appears better in proportion because the furniture has been placed out into the room.

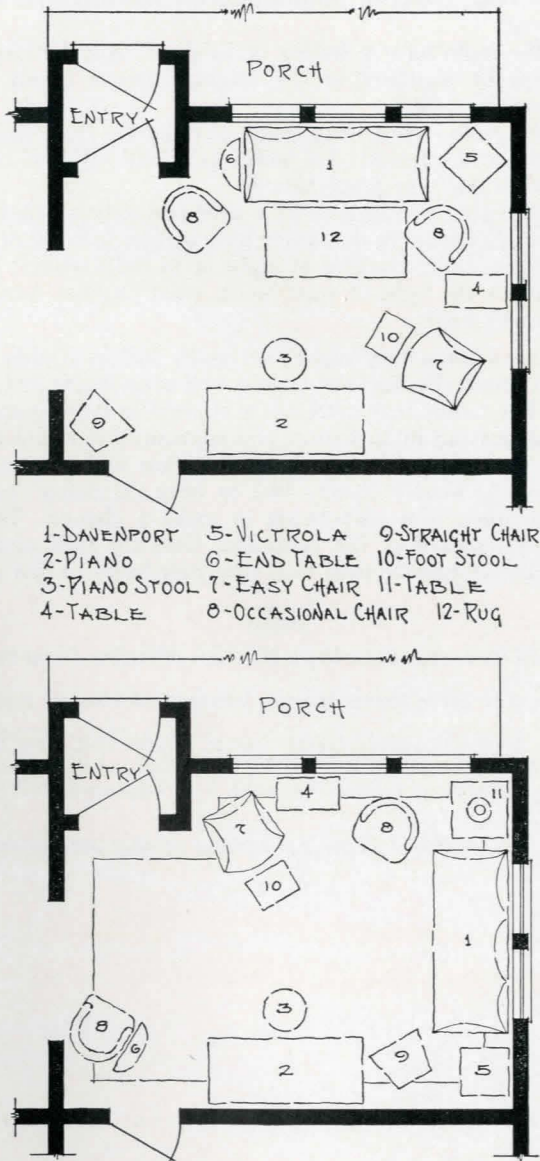


FIG. 12.—Arrangement upper figure emphasizes length. Lower figure is same room re-arranged to emphasize width.

Do the large pieces of furniture follow the structural lines of the room?

Does the room have a feeling of balance? Are the larger, heavier pieces of furniture or the brighter objects evenly distributed about the room?

Does the room have a main center of interest? Does each wall have a center of interest? Are both formal and informal balance used or does one type predominate?

Does each piece of furniture fill a need and serve a definite purpose?

Does each member of the family have a place to work or study with adequate light available at night or in the daytime? If you can improve the light of your home, what changes would you like to make first?

Rearranging a room may make the family feel as if they are in another person's home. Perhaps the change will seem queer and uncomfortable at first. The family may not entirely approve in the beginning. Sometimes the change is an improvement and sometimes it would be better to have it back in its original arrangement. Habits and customs are often firmly established. People usually like to keep on doing things in the same way but often it is stimulating to make a change. This may be true of the arrangement of the furniture. Give the new arrangement a trial. As the family become used to it they may begin to like it better.

Books

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"I live not in myself, but I become a portion of that around me."—Byron