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GOOD DESIGN IN NEEDLEWORK

by
Helen Rocke

Needlecraft is an old art and many museums house priceless pieces and examples of the many kinds which have been developed through the years. Many families have some few pieces which they cherish among their priceless possessions. Such pieces of needlework are truly works of art. They give satisfaction to the creative spirit, just as painting and sculpture do. A knowledge of art and design has been required to make both.

Not every one can be a truly great artist nor aspire to make museum pieces, but every good homemaker desires to surround herself and her family with good standards of beauty. Family taste is in a large measure trained by objects of her selection and making. Recognition and appreciation of beauty and a feeling for the beautiful come through association with the beautiful. There is real need, then for knowing and developing the fundamentals of good taste and good design in needlework. To be good design it need not be elaborate. Often the best design is very simple. We need to be able to recognize and enjoy good design. The thrift or economy that results from this ability is one which needs more emphasis. Articles of good design are lasting and one does not tire of them and soon desire to replace them.

Before investing material and time simply because we are interested in doing a piece of needlework, it is well to ask ourselves: (1) Do we really need the article? (2) Will it serve a definite purpose? (3) Does such an article need decoration? (4) Is the decoration we are planning appropriate? The true test of decorative design is that it should not appear to be added, but should be a part of the thing itself.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD DESIGN

Design is any arrangement of lines, shapes, and colors. It is the selecting and arranging of materials with two aims -- order and beauty. There are two kinds of design:

Structural--The design made by the size and shape of an object. Color and texture are also a part.

Decorative--The design used to enrich the beauty of an article.
There are definite standards or requirements for both kinds of design.

Good structural design. If an object is intended for use these requirements are:
(1) that it be suited to its purpose in addition to being beautiful, (2) that it be simple, (3) that it be well proportioned, and (4) that it be suited to the material from which it is made.

Good decorative design. Such design should fulfill all the following, no matter whether intended for a costume, table runner, or a chair:

The decoration should be used in moderation.

The placing of the decorative design should help to strengthen the shape of the object.

The decoration should be placed at structural points.

There should be enough background space to give an effect of simplicity and dignity to the design.

Surface patterns should cover the surface in an orderly and harmonious arrangement.

The decoration should be suitable for the material and for the service it must give.

The real artist adapts or conventionalizes natural forms such as flowers, fruit, and birds to suit his materials and the shapes he wishes to decorate. He does not attempt to copy or imitate nature.

These principles of good design may be applied in all forms of needlework and they will help in planning and applying decorative finishes for dresses, blouses, coats and suits.