

Some Reflections on Small Flats

In view of the cry throughout New Zealand for more and better houses, the suggestion contained in the article we print below for self-contained flats is worthy of close consideration. It is from "Architecture," the official organ of the Institutes of Australia.

When Sydney first caught the flat epidemic there was a general rush to turn all manner of places into residential suites and make money while the boom lasted. Most of the places were structurally unfit for any such transformation, and the result from the health point of view was deplorable. The city and North Shore became dotted over with collections of buildings in which two or three pokey dens, not large enough to be decent dog boxes, were offered to a gasping public at twice the rental of a five-roomed house with a garden.

However, flats became the vogue and large numbers of people continued to seek them. More establishments were converted, and quite a lot of money gambled away on the new idea. But it was a paying concern, and the people who had taken time by the scalp felt that they were going to get rich quickly.

Then one day someone put up something new in the way of flats. They were self-contained, each having its own bathroom and offices. They were larger, more airy, and being built for the purpose, superior in every way. The idea caught on, and more buildings of the sort were erected. Then, all in a day, as it were, the original flat became unprofitable, the residents thereof having started a general exodus to the new type. To-day, the original flats are not paying interest on the money invested in them, and have a distinct tendency to sink back into the cheap and nasty state from which they should never have emerged.

To-day it looks as though the second generation of flats is going to follow the first. Another revolution is impending. Look over any number of flat buildings in Sydney and you find that the idea that they are based upon is that of the old style of "Unfurnished Apartments." Truly, they are self-contained, and in one of them a couple can live a life of complete isolation. Too much so, in fact, for there have been cases in which sickness and accident have remained undiscovered for a couple of days. They are merely glorified lodging-houses where instead of having only one room and sharing in the use of a common kitchen each tenant has two or three apartments and a bathroom. Only in half a dozen flat buildings in Sydney is there a restaurant in the building for the use of tenants who do not wish to cook for themselves. Only in about three cases are there roof or any sort of gardens. And, in every case but one the writer knows of, the garbage has to be carted out through the dining-room, and the early guest is always liable to rub shoulders with the vegetable-vending Chinese.

That type of flat is doomed in the very near future. There is money in the construction of flats, but not of that sort. The isolation flat is going down before the community flat building, the big structure on the American plan, with its "dumb waiter" lift for the conveyance of goods direct to each suite, its proper refuse shoot, and its elimination of the milkman and Chinaman wandering up and down the corridors in the early morning and afternoons. The flat building of the future will be more on the lines of the old-time English private hotel. A restaurant is indispensable, and so is a billiard-room—perhaps several; also roof gardens, concert rooms, and so forth.



An American example of self-contained apartments: the Warren Apartments San Francisco. Architect, F. H. Meyers

Such structures will be put up not by individuals, but companies. They will represent big capital. They will give all the facilities and advantages of hotel life combined with the privacy of a private home. They will cater for the man who requires only a large airy living room in which he can read, smoke or write any hour of the day or night, and who will have his own private bathroom, with hot water laid on at all hours. They will provide adequate accommodation for the family that wishes to spend a holiday in the city and dine either table d'hôte or en suite, as the spirit moves them.

The other sort of flat building will suffer seriously by reason of the raising of the standard. No