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**The readi-cut dream: The mail-order house catalogs of the  
Aladdin Company, 1906-1920**

**Erbes, Scott Steven, M.A.**

**University of Delaware, 1990**

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**THE READI-CUT DREAM:  
THE MAIL-ORDER HOUSE CATALOGS  
OF THE ALADDIN COMPANY, 1906-1920**

by  
**Scott Steven Erbes**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

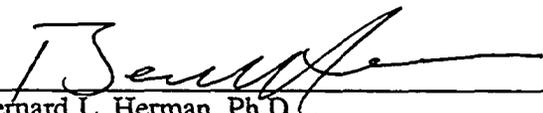
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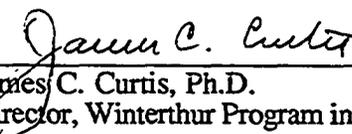
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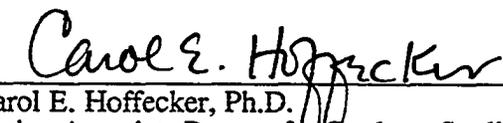
THE READI-CUT DREAM:  
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by

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For making this thesis possible at the outset, I thank William F. Sovereign who provided me with free access to his collection of Aladdin Company catalogs. Thanks are also due to Neville Thompson for her interest in this project and for always knowing where to find the right book. I must also acknowledge the patience and assistance of the staff of the Winterthur Library.

For their friendship, fun, and humor, thanks go to my Winterthur classmates. I also wish to thank my parents for their constant support and interest in my various pursuits. And finally, I thank Stephanie. Without her patience, understanding, humor, support, and strength, the last six years would not have been possible. I dedicate this to her as only the smallest of payments.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the 1906 to 1920 mail-order house catalogs of the Aladdin Company to examine the the reality and rhetoric of architecture associated with the early twentieth century's middle class. In terms of architecture, the catalogs illustrate 153 models and their plans. Analysis of the plans reveals the impact of standardized design and the process of spatial change on early twentieth-century houses. Opposed to architectural reality is architectural rhetoric. The rhetoric of architecture encoded in the catalogs may be broken down into three categories: aesthetics, practicality, and comfort. Each category reflects a tension between late nineteenth-century attitudes and the ideals promoted by early twentieth-century reformers like Gustav Stickley. Often, women are associated with both the Victorian cult of domesticity and the early twentieth-century domestic science movement. The rhetoric of Aladdin's 1906 to 1920 catalogs thus presents the home in idealistic, rather than realistic terms.

## INTRODUCTION

The Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan, in its 1918 catalog of pre-cut houses, presented fifty-six single-family models available for purchase by mail.<sup>1</sup> The *Michigan* was one of these (see Figure 1). The sales pitch used in 1918 described a conservative design marked by a practical plan. As the copywriter put it,

...it is a conservative design of a type that has always found a number of admirers among home builders. Among the great number of people building new homes each year, a large percentage are not attracted to types decorated with embellishments and novelties that, to use their words, 'come and go every year.'<sup>2</sup>

The same year, Aladdin also offered the *Marsden* (see Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> In considering the *Marsden*, the reader was asked to

study the line of this bungalow and note how artistically appointed is every part--the straight line dormer with exposed eaves in exact keeping with the eave of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Known as the North American Construction Company until 1917, the Aladdin Company also offered multiple family houses, summer cottages, additions, garages, and barns at various times during the 1906 to 1920 period studied in this thesis (for the sake of simplicity and consistency, "Aladdin Company" or "Aladdin" will be used throughout this thesis). In 1920 Aladdin also produced a catalog titled *Industrial Housing* which offered many of the same houses shown in its popular-market catalogs to industrial firms. In 1915 and 1918 the company published separate catalogs of furniture, plumbing fixtures, and other merchandise sold under the Aladdin name. Given this range of potential evidence and the various issues raised by each, a short book might be written. It was decided to limit this paper to the study of single-family houses, the major component of Aladdin's business. In addition, this paper will not undertake an analysis of the houses based on relationships between income levels and the prices of various models. The sales records of Aladdin have survived, making it theoretically possible to reconstruct the income levels and model choices made by Aladdin's customers. Practically speaking such an undertaking would be extremely difficult. In general, Aladdin aimed at the middle-class market with its house prices in 1916 ranging from \$313.00 to \$3,600.00.

<sup>2</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1918), 34. The *Michigan* was introduced in 1914. Its sales pitch was substantially revised in 1918.

<sup>3</sup>Introduced in 1913, the 1916 text used to promote the *Marsden* was a rewrite. This revised text continued in use in the 1917, 1918, and 1919 catalogs.

front porch--the extended bay window with roof and brackets, breaking the gable end--the windows of different sizes and styles and location--these and many other points make the exterior of the Marsden truly artistic.<sup>4</sup>

The customer thus had a choice of aesthetic orientations, ranging from the visual "artistry" of the *Marsden* to the staid and pragmatic *Michigan*.

The pitches for the *Michigan* and the *Marsden* were also sensitive to the customer's interest in a house's interior features. The *Michigan* offered the appeal of "comfortable rooms" and the assurance that "the conservative is always the practical."<sup>5</sup> The *Marsden's* interior was said to represent "the last word in designing," containing a "well arranged kitchen." It further provided the practical and comfortable virtues of "an abundance of light" in the living room and dining room.<sup>6</sup> Where the exteriors of the two houses were portrayed as opposites, both interiors appealed to the customer's desire for a comfortable and practical house. A perceptive customer might also notice the close similarity between the *Michigan's* and the *Marsden's* plans. By replacing the *Michigan's* inset corner porch with living room space and repositioning its front door, the *Marsden* and *Michigan* share the same plan regardless of exterior appearance. Turning to other models in the 1918 catalog--perhaps the grand and costly *Villa* or the small and simple *Erie*--the Aladdin customer would experience déjà vu: each model's rhetoric could be broken down into the conceptual categories of the aesthetic, the practical, and the comfortable--the same categories used in the *Marsden* and *Michigan*. The observant reader might also recognize that differences in the rhetoric of aesthetics and variations in physical scale served to define different house styles. The exceptionally inquisitive customer, by looking past the

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<sup>4</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 79.

<sup>5</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 34.

<sup>6</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 80.

advertising rhetoric to the physical realities of the floor plans, would see a limited range of plan types--the product of standardized production.

Aladdin's observant catalog reader of 1918 (or any other year) did not depend solely on Aladdin catalogs for information on the planning, appearance, and ideals behind a "proper" house. Neither were Aladdin's officers and advertising staff ignorant of the world around them. Rather, all were part of a society in flux. As the United States emerged from the nineteenth century, the excesses of the Gilded Age, the immense power of industrial capitalists, and other factors led to calls for the reform of many social, economic, and governmental institutions. Because many reformers, or "progressives," believed that the influence of one's environment decided one's fate, the household became a focal point for reform.<sup>7</sup> Authors like Gustav Stickley, Charles Keeler, and Christine Frederick, taking aim on the middle-class household, advocated the adoption of more efficient and rational household operations, the simplification of interior and exterior

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<sup>7</sup>Throughout this thesis, the terms "reformers" and "progressives" will be used interchangeably in reference to those who pushed for change in the early twentieth-century domestic environment. Historians rightfully associate many who advocated domestic change with the Arts and Crafts movement. For the purposes of simplicity and clarity, such persons will also be referred to as "progressives" or "reformers." The term "progressives" should also not be confused with "Progressives." The latter term refers to those involved with the Progressive political party of the early twentieth century. Obviously the grouping of numerous persons under the blanket term "reformers" or "progressives" denies the real complexity of the efforts to reform the house and home. Nevertheless, certain continuities exist among domestic reformers, especially among their major spokespeople. Only these major figures are considered in this thesis. See, for example, Gustav Stickley, Craftsman Homes (New York: Craftsman Publishing Co., 1909; reprint, New York: Dover, 1979), Charles Keeler, The Simple Home (San Francisco: P. Elder, 1904; reprint, Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1979), and Christine Frederick, The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1913). This paper is not intended as an extensive exploration of such prescriptive materials. For such studies, see Clifford E. Clark, Jr., The American Family Home, 1800-1960 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), Alan Gowans, The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture 1890-1930 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), David Handlin, The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), and Gwendolyn Wright, Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Instead, this thesis will use some of the major prescriptive works of the period as a general basis of comparison with the rhetoric used by Aladdin. For a contemporary discussion of the home as a focal point of reform, see Wright, Moralism, 234. For a discussion of the same topic written during the period, see Stickley, Craftsman Homes, 194.

aesthetics, and a reduction in the formality of social relations and interior planning as the keys to an improved home life.<sup>8</sup> This, then, was the social and cultural milieu in which Aladdin and its customers existed: a world where a reformed, progressive home was held forth as an ideal.

Through the rhetoric of the aesthetic, the practical, and the comfortable as well as the physical realities of various house plans, the Aladdin catalogs published between 1906 and 1920 reflect the impact of the progressive home ideal on the mass middle-class market. In particular, the period saw the Aladdin bungalow become the rhetorical embodiment of a simple yet artistic aesthetic and an efficient yet comfortable interior. At the same time, ornamentally simple houses like the *Michigan* were transformed into "conservative" aesthetic alternatives to the bungalow. Other house styles--like the "artistic" semi-bungalow--were subsequently defined on the basis of their aesthetic proximity to the bungalow, or conversely, ornamentally simple houses.<sup>9</sup> To some extent, the distinctions between house styles extended beyond aesthetics to the rhetoric of the practical and the comfortable; as the 1906 to 1920 period passed, bungalows and related styles were increasingly portrayed as aesthetic and material expressions of progressive ideals. More frequently virtues like cozy comfort and convenient plans were shared among the styles.

The ideology of reform, however, was not the only factor affecting middle-class Americans' attitudes towards the house and home. Many carried the baggage of late

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<sup>8</sup>It is important to distinguish between house and home. House, as used here, will refer to the architectural shell created by a designer or designers. Home will encompass the house as well as the abstract, culturally defined values, attitudes, and behaviors (for example, what makes for a "comfortable" environment) acted out within its walls.

<sup>9</sup>"Semi-bungalow" was a term used by Aladdin to describe two-story houses with ornamental details like those associated with bungalows. For a more extensive definition, see Chapter 2.

nineteenth-century values, an influence reflected in Aladdin's rhetoric. From attitudes towards women to the spatial organization of the house, the rhetoric of the aesthetic, the practical, and the comfortable is riddled with ideology reminiscent of the nineteenth century. The Aladdin catalogs of the 1906 to 1920 period, then, reflect a period in flux between old and new. Simultaneously urged to abandon Victorian values in favor of reform and faced with the revolutionary introduction of mass-produced, standardized houses, Aladdin and its customers sought to reach an accord between the established ideals of their past and the rapid changes of the early twentieth century.

Before starting the analysis of any body of evidence, one must first consider its potential for providing accurate conclusions. At the outset, one must recognize that advertising, as historical evidence, is not without its pitfalls. The potential problems posed by advertisements are tied to three of its inherent characteristics. First is the issue of fraudulence: no matter what claims a company makes about serving its customers' welfare, self-interest lies behind its every action.<sup>10</sup> Second is the relationship between product differentiation and profit-making: Aladdin benefitted by creating clear differences among its models so as to appeal to the widest possible audience. Third, advertising aestheticizes the product by giving it as many positive sensory and ideological attributes as possible.<sup>11</sup>

Another set of problems is specific to the catalogs. In 1906, Aladdin was a struggling firm with an eight page catalog. During the 1906 to 1920 period, however, the company's sales, advertising budget, and advertising acumen increased substantially. A

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<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of fraudulence, see Michael Schudson, Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 10.

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of aestheticization, see Torben Vestergaard and Kim Schrøder, The Language of Advertising (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1985), 8; 154-155.

significant number of new models were introduced in 1911, 1913, and 1916 while revisions in the advertising copy were made annually with a major rewrite occurring in 1916. As a result, later catalogs are much more substantial (both literally and figuratively) than earlier examples; by 1920, the Aladdin Homes catalog contained 116 pages.

If one is sensitive to the inherent biases of advertising and the nature of Aladdin's history, the company's catalogs provide the means for connecting the world of mass-produced goods and culture.<sup>12</sup> Several authors have previously recognized this potential. Most prominent are Clifford E. Clark and Alan Gowans.<sup>13</sup> Clark and Gowans (the former most especially) also rely on the prescriptive literature of the period to provide information about the house and home. But mail-order house catalogs and prescriptive literature on the home represent two discrete bodies of evidence. While similarities exist, the motivation of profit and the motivation of ideology are very different. Nevertheless, Clark lumps the two together, stating, "The promotional literature...provides the crucial insight into the expectations about family relationships and the symbolic functions of the family home."<sup>14</sup> Using the term "promotional literature" to cover both mail-order house catalogs and prescriptive literature implies that the two carry equal value as evidence of their readers' values and actions. The profit motive guiding Aladdin, however, probably led to a level of rhetoric closer to popular thought than that found in prescriptive

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<sup>12</sup>Though she sees it as a negative point, Judith Williamson notes, "Advertisements...provide a structure which is capable of transforming the language of objects to that of people, and vice versa" (Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising [London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd., 1978], 12).

<sup>13</sup>See Gowans and Clark, American.

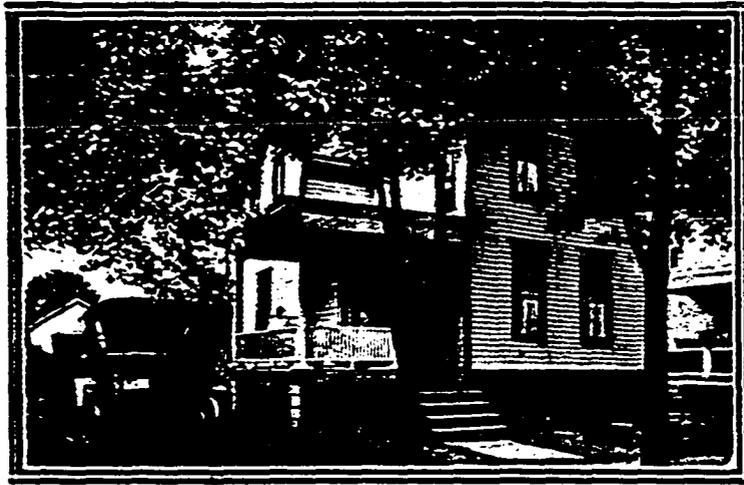
<sup>14</sup>Clark, American, xv. Gwendolyn Wright, who also uses both prescriptive and catalog materials as evidence, echoes Clark. Through these materials, believes Wright, one can discover the "common ideology of home and family, the most pervasive aesthetic ideas about architecture and furnishings, and the probable ways families might have used the spaces in and around their homes" (Wright, Moralism, 14).

literature.<sup>15</sup> Since Aladdin's aim was to appeal to the popular market and not compete with prescriptive ideologues, Aladdin's rhetoric represents a "filtered" or popularized version of prescriptive ideals. For this reason, the Aladdin catalogs contain a more accurate representation of popular ideas about the home; Aladdin was not pressing an ideological agenda, but reacting to popular taste. The catalogs further provide floor plans for each model, illustrating the types of spatial configurations the public preferred. The hundreds of plans shown in the catalogs also provide evidence as to the nature of the new mass-produced, pre-cut, standardized house. Such houses represent a major transformation in the process of design and construction. By treating rhetoric as evidence of architectural reality and by viewing prescriptive literature and advertising materials as interchangeable, Clark and others have overlooked the true potential of mail-order catalogs like those of the Aladdin Company. The pages that follow attempt to correct these problems by considering the 1906 to 1920 Aladdin catalogs as a source of new insight into the rhetoric and realities of early twentieth-century domestic architecture.

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<sup>15</sup>Kenneth Ames has succinctly summarized the risks of using prescriptive literature as evidence of actual behavior in "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings and Victorian America," in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 243.

Figure 1. *The Michigan*. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 23.



## The Michigan \$832.20

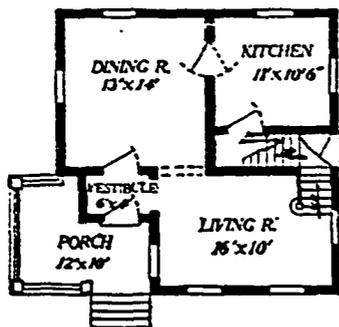
Price, \$876.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$832.20

**H**ERE is a model six-room dwelling which offers unusual value for the price. The interior rooms are arranged for convenience, ventilation and plenty of light. The vestibule opens direct into either the living room or dining room. The upstairs bed rooms are well lighted. A good-sized porch with attractive turned pillars affords plenty of room for sitting out and enjoying pleasant weather. The Michigan is easily and economically heated, as it is practically square in proportions. Semi-open stairway in the living room with circle tread, and paneled newel post and grade cellar entrance give a most modern interior. All doors are of our beautifully grained natural fir and can be finished in any way desired by the tastes of the owner.

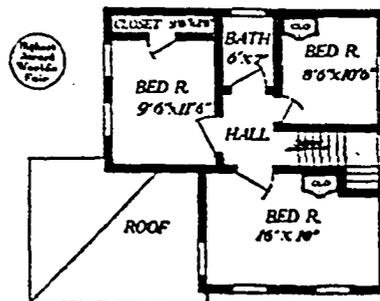
We have our "Michigan" completed, are living in it and are very much satisfied with everything. I know I saved between \$800 and \$900 and shall always be glad to recommend Aladdin houses.

—Samuel G. Long.

See Terms on page 2 and General Specifications on pages 12 and 13.



First Floor Plan—The Michigan



Second Floor Plan—The Michigan

Figure 2. The *Martin* (name used in 1915 for the *Marsden*). From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1915), 36.



### THE MARTIN



THIS pretty bungalow, of six rooms, is designed in excellent style and the plan commends itself for its compactness and to give all the room possible for its cost. The living room is 26 x 16 ft. This room is separated from the dining room by an attractive arch. The dining room has a large deep bay window, arranged to allow a buffet underneath. There are three good-sized chambers with bath room between and directly connecting them to inside hall. Generous closet room has been provided. The grade cellar entrance is another convenient feature.

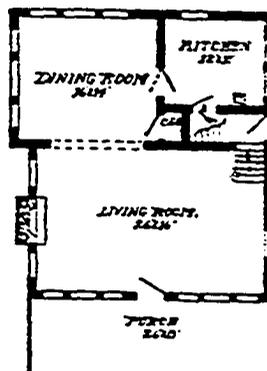
The Martin is without question the most complete, convenient, and attractive design that we are showing.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

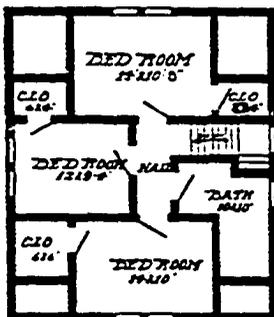
Size, 26 x 38 ft. Price, \$1,290. Cash Discount, 5%. Net Price, \$1,225.50. See Terms on Page 2.

This floor plan can be reversed without extra charge.

All lumber selected Yellow Pine, Red Cedar, and Huron Pine. Height of ceiling, 9 ft.; second floor, 8 ft. Sill, 6 x 8 in. Joists, 2 x 8 in. first floor, 2 x 8 in. second floor. Studing, rafters, and ceiling joist, 2 x 4 in. Joists, ceiling joists and studding placed every 16 in. Side walls, sheathing lumber 1 in., shingles or bevel siding. Flooring, clear and knotless. Sub-floor. Building paper. Roof, 1-in. lumber, overlaid with shingles. Lath and plaster or patent plaster board. Base board, stairs, and all interior trim and finish clear and knotless Oregon Fir. Windows, two sliding sash, glass double strength. Doors, outside, 2 ft. 8 in. x 6 ft. 8 in., inside, 2 ft. 8 in. x 6 ft. 8 in.; double-action door between dining room and kitchen; front door, special design. Porch columns, square, with railing. Grade cellar entrance. Front steps. Hardware, locks, hinges, knobs, nails, stain, or paint for two coats outside; oil, sand, and varnishes for inside.



First Floor Plan, The Martin



Second Floor Plan, The Martin



## Chapter 1

### THE ALADDIN COMPANY AND ITS HISTORY

"Otto, you remember several years ago when Cliff Brooks started a little business on a shoe string, selling knocked down boats by mail?"

"Yes, I know about it. How's he doing?"

"His business is growing so fast that he has two competitors right now. One the Pioneer Boat Works and the other the Defoe Boat Company. They are all selling knocked down boats by mail and for cash, shipping their completely machined boat parts to all sections of the country. Buyers assemble the parts themselves and save a lot of money."

"What's that got to do with your 'Idea'?"

"Just this. If all the parts and pieces of a boat can be machined ready to be shipped and successfully nailed together by an amateur, why not houses?"<sup>1</sup>

So began the North American Construction Company in 1906 according to Otto E. Sovereign's anecdotal account. The figures involved were Otto E. and William J. Sovereign, brothers, natives of Bay City, Michigan, and founders of the nation's first major mail-order, pre-cut housing company. Prior to the company's founding, Otto had completed a correspondence course in advertising and worked for advertising firms in Cincinnati and Detroit as well as working as a reporter for the Detroit Free Press. William also completed a correspondence course, though his was in the area of law; he was a member of the Michigan Bar, but never practiced.

Though neither brother had any experience in the construction business, they together invested \$200 and sold a half-interest in the company to the Detroit advertising firm of Brownell and Humphrey for \$500 worth of credit for advertising. According to Otto, the business was first run out of their parents' kitchen. From this location came

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<sup>1</sup>Otto E. Sovereign, Fifty Million Dollars on a Shoestring: A Tale of Fifty Years in Business (and Fifty Years of Fun) ([Bay City, MI]: By the author, 1951), 15.

their first catalog, an eight page booklet entitled "ALADDIN" Knocked-Down Automobile Garages and Boat Houses (1906) which was soon followed by a three page catalog of summer cottages. Advertising was also initiated with various popular magazines including The Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, McClure's Magazine, and The Farm Journal. During the early years, the company's houses were produced at a Bay City lumber mill with whom the brothers contracted; as Otto put it, "During the first eight years we didn't own a foot of lumber, or a saw or a woodworking machine..."<sup>2</sup> Throughout their years with the company, William served as president, handling the administration of the company, while Otto's title was Treasurer and General Manager. Otto assumed charge of advertising, making the catalogs in part an expression of his ideas as to what consumers wanted in a home.

By 1911, rising nation-wide demand led to contracts with mills in other parts of the country. In 1914, the brothers invested in a factory in Bay City, sold a "solid trainload of houses" to the Du Pont Company for their Hopewell, Virginia, facility, and tripled the Aladdin factory's size.<sup>3</sup> Soon after the Du Pont project, Aladdin supplied England's Austin Motor Company with 250 houses for their industrial community in Birmingham.<sup>4</sup> The United States' military build-up prior to World War I also contributed to Aladdin's growth. Among other projects, the company was contracted to build an 8,000-man officer training facility at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. During the war, Aladdin dealt with 100 or more manufacturing concerns in the U. S. and England, supplying the Allies' war

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<sup>2</sup>Sovereign, 18.

<sup>3</sup>Sovereign, 23.

<sup>4</sup>Sovereign, 25.

machine from 1914 to 1917.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of Aladdin's advertising budget from a fragment of William and Otto's \$200 investment to \$250,000 in 1920 is another index of the company's success.<sup>6</sup> Such a dramatic increase in advertising expenditures explains the growth in size and elaboration of the catalogs studied.<sup>7</sup> Table 1, however, provides the most telling story of Aladdin's growth between its founding in 1906 and 1920:

TABLE 1. Aladdin Company's Gross Sales, 1906-1920

YEAR	GROSS SALES
1906	\$1,300.00
1910	\$87,000.00
1913	\$565,000.00
1915	\$1,100,000.00
1917	\$2,200,000.00
1920	\$5,100,000.00

Source: Otto E. Sovereign, Fifty Million Dollars on a Shoestring: A Tale of Fifty Years in Business (and Fifty Years of Fun) (Bay City, MI: By the author, 1951), 109.

<sup>5</sup>Sovereign, 24.

<sup>6</sup>Sovereign, 47 and 33.

<sup>7</sup>Aladdin did not cease operations in 1920 when this study ends, but continued to function until 1982. During this long period, a notable project associated with the company was Aladdin City, started in 1925. Aladdin essentially lent its name to a group of investors who wanted to build an entire town of Aladdin houses forty miles south of Miami. Rampant speculation, however, caused the project to collapse, forcing William and Otto to take over the role of developers in order to keep Aladdin's image from being tarnished; the cost to the company was over \$100,000. See Sovereign, 40 for a discussion. The company also suffered losses during the Depression, but managed to stay afloat and prosperous for the next several decades. The 1970s, however, saw sales fall to 100 to 200 units per year and the recession of the early 1980s brought Aladdin's long life to an end. See Robert Schweitzer and Michael Davis, "Aladdin's Magic Catalog," Michigan History 68.1 (January 1984): 32 for a discussion of Aladdin's demise.

Along with the principle of pre-cut (or as it became known in 1913, Readi-Cut) construction, Aladdin provided other materials and services to its customers. Together this package was referred to as the Aladdin System of Construction or the Aladdin Plan. Through advertising rhetoric assuring economy, quality, and modernity, the Aladdin Plan was personalized to help the company sell its products. Before analyzing this rhetorical personality, a brief explanation of Aladdin's pre-cut construction technique is in order. An Aladdin house began with lumber from a local source. Having long served as a major marketplace for Michigan's lumber industry, Bay City was a logical location for Aladdin. As Aladdin began to subcontract with mills in other regions of the country, these locations used local wood, whether fir in Oregon or yellow pine in Louisiana. When the lumber arrived at an Aladdin plant, it was cut to the lengths required for the various house models, hence the title pre-cut construction: the buyer received framing lumber already cut to size and labelled as to its position within the house frame. To ensure efficiency, standardization was integral to Aladdin's production method. In particular, standard sets of room dimensions allowed for interchangeable parts among numerous house models.<sup>8</sup>

Once the lumber had been cut to the required specifications, it was shipped by rail to the station most convenient to the buyer's building site. Along with the framing timbers, the house "kit" included windows, doors, roofing, interior woodwork, plaster board, paint, and hardware. The owner (or hired labor) then assembled the new house like a model airplane, matching the numbered parts according to the instruction sheets. The proud owner was responsible for procuring some of the materials to construct the house, most notably masonry. As numerous Aladdin catalogs stated, "No money would be saved by including stone or brick or concrete, for every section of the country produces

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<sup>8</sup>The impact of standardization on the plans of Aladdin's various models is discussed in Chapter 2.

this material and prices vary but little."<sup>9</sup> Neither did one receive electrical, plumbing, or heating equipment and fixtures. On the whole, however, an Aladdin house was quite complete.

Aladdin, however, could not simply rely on the technical qualities of its houses to ensure sales; advertising was necessary for establishing and building the credibility of the Aladdin System of Construction. Thus, extrinsic qualities were attached to the System through the rhetoric of advertising. These positive qualities assured the customer that no matter what model he or she might purchase, all shared the benefits of Aladdin's production system.<sup>10</sup> The elements structuring this rhetorical personality were archetypal advertising appeals emphasizing savings, quality, and modernity. The first appeal offered the customer a savings of time and money. In terms of time, Aladdin stressed that its factory production methods, multiple mills, and easy-to-build houses guaranteed a savings of time. Emphasis on saving money, however, formed the bulk of the appeal. One way the Aladdin System of Construction saved the consumer money was through the elimination of bad debt.<sup>11</sup> As the 1914 catalog stated, "We sell for cash only -we have no bad accounts, and are, therefore, not obliged to take from the man who pays to make up for the man who doesn't pay."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (1918), 9. While Aladdin did not include masonry, houses illustrated in their catalogs are frequently shown with chimneys and often with masonry-work integrated into the porch foundation and roof supports.

<sup>10</sup>The universal quality of the Aladdin Plan rhetoric came not only from its content, but its presentation at the beginning of each catalog rather than with specific models. Over time, the pages devoted to the introduction of Aladdin and its product increased substantially. Pages devoted to promoting the Aladdin System of Construction were also added midway through the catalogs and often near the end as a conclusion.

<sup>11</sup>When you ordered an Aladdin home, you had the choice of paying 25% down and the balance on delivery or paying the entire amount with your order receiving a 5% discount.

<sup>12</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1914), 4.

Aladdin's supposed elimination of waste also offered savings to the customer. By waste, Aladdin meant wasted materials, claiming that by "buying lumber in the usual way you pay for about 18% more material than is used--18% simply wasted...This waste is eliminated by the Aladdin designers and the Aladdin system."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the technology of the factory eliminated the waste of traditional design and construction methods. Aladdin could even get twenty feet of lumber from a sixteen foot board, a visual gimmick introduced in 1914 (see Figure 3).

Reduced labor costs also offered the consumer a way to save. By buying an Aladdin house, claimed the company, the bulk of the skilled labor associated with house construction was completed at the factory. In early catalogs, labor savings came because you built the house yourself or hired "an ordinary man" (unskilled labor) to assemble your new house.<sup>14</sup> As time went on and the models Aladdin offered became more complex, this element of the rhetorical personality underwent change. By 1913, the "ordinary man" had become the "ordinary carpenter," implying that a more skilled person was required to assemble an Aladdin house if you did not build it yourself.<sup>15</sup> The 1914 catalog went one step further, noting that "Skilled labor is practically unnecessary in the erection and completion of any but the largest Aladdin houses..."<sup>16</sup> In other words, skilled labor was, more likely than not, necessary, especially if you purchased a large

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<sup>13</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (1914), 5. Aladdin explicitly blamed architects for wasted materials.

<sup>14</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Knocked-Down Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, [1908]), inside front cover.

<sup>15</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1913), 6.

<sup>16</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (1914), 7.

house. Finally, by 1915, the do-it-yourself claim was removed.<sup>17</sup> Therefore savings came not because you could build an Aladdin house yourself, but because construction of a pre-cut Aladdin house required less labor than a house built by a contractor.

A final savings offered by an Aladdin house was the elimination of the middle man, a claim still used by mail-order firms. Summarized by the catchy phrase "Direct from the Forest to the Home," the Aladdin System claimed that one was "*not* paying a profit to the big *jobber*, a profit to the big *wholesaler*, and a profit to the local *lumber dealer* at your home..."<sup>18</sup> Savings, whether in time or money, was one of the extrinsic attributes given to the Aladdin System of Construction. By creating such attributes, Aladdin tried to differentiate its product and the pre-cut method of construction from more traditional building processes incorporating an architect or builder's design and skilled tradespeople.

Not surprisingly, a second component of the Aladdin Plan's rhetoric focused on its quality. Perhaps the most frequent claims of quality were made about the lumber Aladdin used. Since the Aladdin Plan required its customers to purchase materials on a "sight unseen" basis, this was a logical appeal: if buyers were convinced that the materials used were of first quality, then they might be more accepting of a house that arrived in a railroad car. Though the emphasis on quality lumber began as early as 1908, it was most succinctly summarized with the "Dollar-A-Knot" guarantee introduced in 1916. According to this guarantee, Otto promised to pay "\$1.00 for every knot any customer can find in our Red Cedar Siding...I stand ready to prove to you in this way that the lumber in Aladdin Read-Cut Houses is Higher [sic] in grade throughout than is regularly

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<sup>17</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1915), 9.

<sup>18</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 9. Italics theirs.

carried by any seller of lumber in America."<sup>19</sup> Through guarantees like "Dollar-A-Knot," lumber was given human appeal. Another material that received a substantial amount of copy in regards to its quality was Aladdin's plasterboard, touted in 1909 as "the greatest single achievement in the builders' craft in the last generation."<sup>20</sup> Though exaggerated, the claim still demonstrates the way in which building materials were given positive qualities through the use of rhetoric.

Building materials were not the only component of the Aladdin Plan imbued with connotations of quality. During the 1906 to 1920 period, Aladdin increasingly stressed the quality of its customer service. The Department of Service, introduced in 1913, was a first step towards emphasizing customer service. This department provided free advice on interior and exterior color schemes and landscaping, all of which helped "to make your Aladdin house home, in every sense possible."<sup>21</sup> Additional claims of quality service also filtered into the catalogs. In 1914, under the heading "INTEGRITY OF THE ALADDIN PLAN," an entire paragraph emphasized Aladdin's honesty: "Integrity means *moral soundness*; it means *honesty*; it means *freedom from corrupting influence or practice*; it means *strictness in the fulfillment of contracts, uprightness, square dealing*."<sup>22</sup> By 1915, the slogan "Sold by the Golden Rule" was being used to symbolize Aladdin's dedication to its customers. Since it was not a traditional face-to-face business, statements and

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<sup>19</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (1916), 10.

<sup>20</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1909), 2.

<sup>21</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (1913), 91.

<sup>22</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (1914), 3. Italics theirs.

slogans stressing honesty and customer service were essential to Aladdin; the catalogs--not a handshake--had to initiate a sense of trust in the consumer.

The third and final element of the Aladdin Plan's rhetorical personality was its supposed modernity. Before Aladdin began to connect its system with modernity, however, the company first had to convince potential buyers that pre-cut construction was equal to more traditional methods of building. The company's earliest catalogs contain the clearest statements of this sentiment. For example, a passage in the 1908 catalog notes that

This house, when erected, is exactly the same as any house of same size and style erected by a contractor. The difference between our method of construction and the old method of construction employed in building and erecting a house is that we do all the work by automatic machinery, instead of by the slow and costly process of hand labor, by which method houses are usually built. The result in the finished house is in both cases the same...<sup>23</sup>

Clearly the company recognized the non-traditional nature of its construction system, constantly noting the similarities between Aladdin's methods and those associated with more traditional building processes.

Over time, increasing sales gave Aladdin the confidence to promote the Aladdin System on its own merits. The result was the portrayal of the Aladdin System of Construction as a modern, scientifically-advanced method of house building. The first step in this new promotional effort came in 1913 with the attachment of the adjective "scientific" to long-used claims and slogans. For example, the claim of eliminating the middleman became "Scientific salesmanship, to eliminate unnecessary profits--to useless middlemen."<sup>24</sup> Though heavy-handed, the first attempt to imbue the Aladdin System with

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<sup>23</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Knocked-Down Houses ([1908]), 9.

<sup>24</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (1913), 96.

a sense of scientific modernity indicated a shift in the rhetoric used by the company to sell its houses.

Since Aladdin had become scientific, it needed scientists, or at least "experts," in charge of design and production. To fill the void, the Board of Seven was created in 1914 as a symbol of Aladdin's modern methods. Comprised of a "Master Designer," a "Master Builder," and "Factory Experts," not a single detail escaped their "keen and searching analysis..."<sup>25</sup> Aladdin also boosted its modern image in 1914 by drawing a parallel between steel construction techniques and the Readi-Cut system (see Figure 4). Because both steel structural members and those of an Aladdin house were factory prefabricated, Aladdin claimed the two systems represented the same application of technology to building.<sup>26</sup> The benefits of such a comparison were twofold. First, steel frame construction had been used successfully for several years prior to Aladdin's founding. By association, this helped prove the viability of Aladdin's construction method. The second, and more important benefit was the explicit association of pre-cut construction methods with steel and new steel-framed skyscrapers; Aladdin's System of Construction was not a variation on traditional wooden frame construction, but something "high-tech" just like a steel-framed skyscraper.<sup>27</sup>

Aladdin soon exploited the modern skyscraper/Aladdin house comparison by claiming in 1916 that the Woolworth Building represented an example of Readi-Cut

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<sup>25</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 9. The "experts" pictured in the catalogs were, in fact, simply members of Aladdin's office staff. For a discussion of the cult of the expert, see Wright, *Moralism*, 272.

<sup>26</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 8.

<sup>27</sup>By presenting the Aladdin System as technological, Aladdin was appealing to the growing interest in science and household technology. For a discussion on the growing emphasis on and use of household technologies, see Wright, *Moralism*, Chapter 8.

construction (see Figure 5).<sup>28</sup> By making such a comparison, the rhetorical personality of the Aladdin Plan became consummately modern. What consumer could question the efficiency and effectiveness of the Aladdin System? To calm reactionary customers, Aladdin also tied itself to the past. In the same sentence that compares the Read-Cut system to the Woolworth Building, the former is compared to the methods that built the Great Pyramids, Solomon's Temple, and the Washington Monument. Such a manipulation of history gave Aladdin houses cultural authority by associating them with great architectural monuments of the past.<sup>29</sup> Modernity intertwined with a sense of historical destiny made the Aladdin house a step forward in America's inevitable progress.<sup>30</sup> The rhetorical personality of the Aladdin system, then, served to give the technology and process of pre-cut construction a set of extrinsic qualities far more appealing than bland technical descriptions. By promoting the Aladdin System's potential for savings and its high degree of quality, Aladdin created a direct appeal to consumer wants. The rhetoric of Aladdin's modernity also appealed to consumers seeking to be a part of the early twentieth century's fascination with science.<sup>31</sup> Aladdin, confident that the Read-Cut system no longer had to be justified as an equal to traditional construction methods, simply tapped the positive connotations of science to give itself credibility.

In terms of its production and advertising, Aladdin was clearly a major enterprise. But where did the company fit in the larger context of both mail-order and prefabricated

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<sup>28</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 7.

<sup>29</sup>Vestergaard, 162.

<sup>30</sup>Gowans, 6.

<sup>31</sup>As Gowans notes, "Whatever the post-Victorian age's outward professions, its real religion was Science. However varied understanding of 'Science' might be from class to class and according to education, its power to move minds was awesome" (Gowans, 27).

housing? If mail-order housing and prefabricated housing are considered together, Aladdin was the first company to produce and sell by mail prefabricated, wood-framed houses on a large scale. A distinction, however, must be made between mail-order and prefabricated houses, since the marketing of houses by mail pre-dated the Readi-Cut System by several decades. The origins of mail-order housing date from the mid-nineteenth century with Andrew Jackson Downing's Cottage Residences (1842) which provided plans and elevations for several house models. Building on Downing, books like Samuel Sloan's The Model Architect: A Series of Designs for Cottages, Villas, and Suburban Residences (1852) and periodicals like Godey's Lady's Book provided their readers with an expanded range of models from which to choose.<sup>32</sup> Such publications continued into the twentieth century.

The short step from providing plans in books and periodicals to selling detailed plans by mail was first taken in the late 1850s. Alan Gowans cites the firm of Cleaveland and Backus Brothers of New York City and their Village and Farm Cottages: The Requirements of American Village Homes, with Designs for Such Houses (1856) as the first attempt to sell "working drawings" by mail.<sup>33</sup> The flowering of mail-order houses, however, came in the early 1880s with George and Charles Palliser. Palliser, Palliser, and Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut published Palliser's Model Homes for the People (1876) and Palliser's Useful Details (1881). Both books illustrated houses for which the reader could purchase detailed working drawings. Unlike earlier mail-order schemes, the Pallisers sold their publications as cheap catalogs rather than as more expensive books. The brothers also encouraged readers to supply the company with

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<sup>32</sup>Gowans, 41-42.

<sup>33</sup>Gowans, 42. The term "working drawings" is that of the company.

detailed information regarding the siting and desired cost of a reader's future home. The company then contracted with various architects to produce drawings for submission to the customer. The customer could revise these drawings prior to receiving the final plans.<sup>34</sup> In 1881, Robert Shoppell took the ideas of the Pallisers one step further with his Artistic Modern Homes of Low Cost. Shoppell offered an "architect-by-mail" service similar to the Pallisers, though Shoppell had his own staff of architects. Shoppell also provided estimated building costs as well as a standardized set of drawings (plans, elevations, framing plan, materials list, and others) for every house.<sup>35</sup> The selling of plans by mail continued into the twentieth century with periodicals like The Ladies Homes Journal (most remembered for including three plans by Frank Lloyd Wright) and companies like the Radford Architectural Company of Chicago. Aladdin, then, continued in a more than fifty year tradition of marketing houses by mail.

Though others predated Aladdin in selling houses by mail, Aladdin's revolution was in the area of prefabrication. Aladdin was the first company in the United States to bring standardized, pre-cut wood frame houses into large-scale production and sell them as complete units including all the materials needed for construction and finish. As Alan Gowans notes, prefabrication of building materials had deep historical roots: eighteenth-century buildings were often prefabricated away from the building site while in the nineteenth century, mass-produced millwork became widely available.<sup>36</sup> Balloon framing, introduced in the 1840s, also represented a prefabricated technology in the sense

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<sup>34</sup>Gowans, 43. A similar discussion of the Pallisers may be found in Patricia Poore, "Pattern Book Architecture: Is Yours a Mail-Order House?" Old House Journal 8.12 (December 1980): 183-191.

<sup>35</sup>James L. Garvin, "Mail-Order House Plans and American Victorian Architecture," Winterthur Portfolio 16.4 (Winter 1981): 314.

<sup>36</sup>Gowans, 46.

that lumber dimensions were standardized. Aladdin was also predated by others in the sale of pre-cut houses. As early as 1888, George F. Barber of Knoxville, Tennessee was selling pre-cut houses by mail and shipping them by rail on a small scale.<sup>37</sup> E. F. Hodgson Company of Dover, Massachusetts, founded in 1892, sold prefabricated sectional housing of wood while regional companies like the St. John's Portable Building Company of St. John's, Michigan sold pre-cut outbuildings and summer cottages. It was Aladdin, however, that combined for the first time factory production, standardization, and pre-cut building technology to produce complete houses sold by mail and shipped by rail.<sup>38</sup> Just as Henry Ford had standardized the production of automobiles to make the best use of industrial technology, Aladdin standardized the wood-frame house.

Given the company's rocketing sales, it did not take long for other firms to imitate the Aladdin. In Bay City, Liberty Ready-Cut Homes began production in 1915. Smaller firms like Harris Brothers of Chicago and Minter Homes of Huntington, West Virginia also emerged to compete with Aladdin.<sup>39</sup> But the most obvious competitor was Sears, Roebuck and Company, the Goliath of the mail-order business. Sears's first house catalog, Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans, was published in 1908, two years after Aladdin's first publication.<sup>40</sup> Like Aladdin, Sears met with great success. Between

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<sup>37</sup>For a discussion of George F. Barber, see Gowans, 48 and Poore, 190-91.

<sup>38</sup>Gowans, 48. It should be noted that in England, other building technologies were being used for the mass production of prefabricated houses beginning in the late nineteenth century. For example, Boulton and Paul of Norwich produced prefabricated houses assembled with corrugated iron placed over a wood frame. For a succinct discussion of mass prefabrication in England, see Anthony King, The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), Chapter 3. The subject is given more extensive treatment in Gilbert Herbert, Pioneers of Prefabrication: The British Contribution in the Nineteenth Century (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>39</sup>Gowans, 52.

<sup>40</sup>Information on Sears's role in the mail-order house industry comes primarily from Katharine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, Houses By Mail: A Field Guide to Mail Order Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1986).

1909 and 1912, the company bought several mills, production plants, and lumber yards in different parts of the country. Nearly 100 models were being offered by 1928.<sup>41</sup> Sears did not copy Aladdin completely for the former offered financing, the option of modifying plans, and three different model lines. Honor Bilt houses constituted the top of the line. Using cedar shingles, cypress siding, and knotless interior lumber, these houses were the most comparable to Aladdin's. Sears's Standard Built houses and Simplex Sectional cottages were less expensive due to cheaper materials and only partially pre-cut lumber. Sears also charged extra with all models for plaster board, a material Aladdin included with all but its summer cottages. As with any firm possessing a revolutionary product and production technique, Aladdin had to compete with other enterprises. To "get the edge" on their competition, Aladdin relied not only on the merits of its product, but on effective advertising.

Though less revolutionary than the Read-Cut system, Aladdin's catalogs changed the way mail-order housing was sold. From the outset the catalogs stressed promotion of the product through extensive illustrations, carefully written copy, and a well-organized, appealing layout; Otto Sovereign's training and experience in advertising were not wasted. For example, even in Aladdin's early catalogs, a page or two was devoted to emphasizing the quality, efficiency, and ease of construction found in Aladdin buildings. With each catalog, the advertising techniques grew more sophisticated as Aladdin expanded and began to face increasing competition. A chronological comparison with a few of Sears's advertising techniques demonstrates Aladdin's innovative approach. In 1911, Sears introduced the use of customer testimonials to its catalogs. Aladdin began

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<sup>41</sup>Gowans, 50.

exploiting this technique in 1909.<sup>42</sup> Between 1911 and 1912, Sears began including interior illustrations whereas Aladdin had begun in 1909. To help personalize their products, Aladdin started naming its house models in 1909. Sears did not name its houses until 1918.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Aladdin made extensive use of photographs of actual Aladdin houses (often taken by their owners) and in 1917 introduced cut-away interior drawings for each model to show possible furnishing arrangements (see Figure 6). The consistent use of catchy slogans like "Sold by the Golden Rule" and a stress on Aladdin's scientific, "high-tech" approach further contributed to the catalogs' appeal. In both its product and advertising, Aladdin was a major player in the early twentieth-century housing industry. It built on a tradition of marketing houses by mail, but introduced a revolution by mass producing complete, pre-cut houses and selling them through ever more attractive catalogs. But apart from its role in the housing industry, Aladdin and its catalogs also disseminated and reinforced ideas about architectural style, spatial organization, and the ideal home to a broad, middle-class audience. Thus, the catalogs provide evidence of both the rhetoric associated with the home as well as its actual physical features.

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<sup>42</sup>The following information on Sears comes from Stevenson and Jandl, 25.

<sup>43</sup>David M. Schwartz, "When Home Sweet Home Was Just a Mailbox Away," *Smithsonian* 16.8 (November 1985): 94.

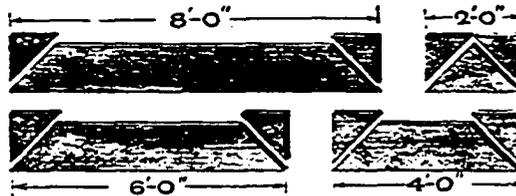
Figure 3. Getting twenty feet of lumber from a sixteen foot board. From The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1917), 5.

## Twenty feet of lumber from a sixteen foot board How it's done



To cut the sheathing for this gable:

The carpenter usually takes an eight-foot board, a six-foot board, a four-foot board and a two-foot board and cuts them this way:



The carpenter requires twenty feet of lumber for the job. Aladdin takes a sixteen-foot board, cuts it this way:



and gets twenty feet of lumber at the cost of sixteen feet—and YOU get the saving.

**T**HE wonderful money saving results of the Aladdin Read-Cut System will be understood after reading this page. Nowhere in the history of manufacturing or building since history began can be found an example equal to that which is a part of every day's work in the Aladdin designing rooms and in the Aladdin mills.



Machinery of the Most Modern types are used to manufacture Aladdin Homes. This machine houses and fits a staircase in less than five minutes.

*Think of taking a six-inch board sixteen feet long and getting twenty feet of six-inch board out of it!*

*Think of applying this system of saving throughout all the lumber used in building your home!*

*Think of your own good money it saves!*

To eliminate waste by scientific planning, designing, and cutting of lumber is to save your money from the waste pile.

W. J. Sovereign, president of The Aladdin Company, conceived this tremendous thought, originated, perfected, and established the system. Imitators have been many the past three or four years, but not one has yet even approached Aladdin efficiency, nor has one yet established a success. It took six years of Aladdin success before any one had the courage to even attempt to manufacture houses in the footsteps of this company.

Figure 4. Comparing steel construction to the Read-Cut System. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1915), 10.



Readi-Cut System of Construction

Figure 5. The Read-Cut System compared to the world's architectural monuments.  
From The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin  
Company, 1917), 7.



**T**O him who says the Read-Cut System is not possible or practicable, point to the Pyramids of Egypt, refer to Solomon's Temple as described in the Bible, or inspect Washington Monument, or the 57-story Woolworth Building in New York City. You will find that each was prepared, erected and completed by the Read-Cut System. But it remained for W. J. Sovereign to first apply the system to *your* benefit in the building of a home. And thousands of American families scattered over this broad land will testify to its economy and practical success.

The pyramids aren't portable, the Woolworth Building is not portable, *nor are Aladdin houses portable.*

If you attempted to tear apart, or dissect an Aladdin house, the most expert contractor could not tell it from any other first class frame dwelling be-

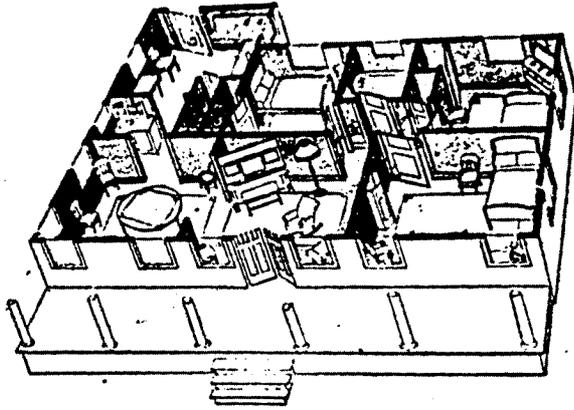
*cause there is no difference.*



Read-Cut System of Construction.

At the bottom of this page is a striking illustration of the Read-Cut System of construction successfully used for twenty-five years in steel-building construction. Note the "studding" for the two side walls, all in position with the "joist hanger" placed. These studs are about thirty feet high. In the foreground are shown some of the rafters, with the marks and numbers indicating their respective positions—"6201-16-Col-22." There is no fitting or cutting on the ground. The sawing, measuring, and fitting were done in the steel mills in Pittsburgh. How can they do this work? Why, the structural engineers know how. It's their particular business. It's their life-work. So it is with Aladdin Read-Cut houses. The same principles govern each job. *It's the same system.*

Figure 6. Cut-away drawing of the *Kentucky*. From The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1917), 25.



## Chapter 2

### PLAN AND STYLE IN THE ALADDIN HOUSE

The most obvious manifestation of physical, rather than rhetorical expression is found in the plans accompanying each Aladdin model. These plans provide significant insight into the spatial organization of early twentieth-century, middle-class houses. Several authors, most notably Henry Glassie, have shown the value of studying the spatial organization of architecture.<sup>1</sup> Unlike style, the product of shifting popular taste, patterns of spatial organization are often tenacious, the product of culturally defined parameters that endure over time and space. The spatial systems underlying Aladdin's houses were identified by sorting the various models according to their first-floor plans.<sup>2</sup> From the more than 150 models represented, seven distinct plan groups emerged (see Figures 7-13).<sup>3</sup> These seven spatial systems, however, were more than the product of

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Henry Glassie, "The Variation of Concepts Within Tradition: Barn Building in Otsego County, New York," in *Man and Cultural Heritage: Papers in Honor of Fred B. Kniffen*, eds. H. J. Walker and W. G. Haag, 177-235, Geoscience and Man series, ed. Bob F. Perkins, vol. 5 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974) and Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975). More recently, Dell Upton has successfully used architectural space as evidence. See Dell Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth Century Virginia," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, 315-35 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986) and Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>In two-story models, the second story plans were more or less identical. Thus only first floor plans were used for purposes of classification.

<sup>3</sup>Plan *types* represent individual plans or smaller groupings of plans that serve as subsets of larger plan *groups*. Plan groups are the largest unit in this organizational scheme. For example, if House A represents a plan related to House B, their plans are two *types* within the same *group*. Similarly, if House A and House B's plans are transformations of the same Aladdin prototype, they are types within a group where all members of the group are different transformations of the same prototype.

cultural attitudes. For the purposes of industrial production such standardization was necessary. The increasing use of one-story houses also contributed to the limited number of groupings; in such houses, the tolerance for spatial variation is limited if accepted preferences for the arrangement of interior spaces are to remain intact. Standardization of houses was also touted by reformers as a desirable quality, serving the ends of both efficiency and democratization of architecture.<sup>4</sup> But within the overarching theme of standardization, variety was possible: certain plan groups are characterized by a range of plan types created through transformations of a prototype or base concept. Henry Glassie developed the model of base concepts with rules for their manipulation as a way of explaining variation within folk architecture. In "The Variation of Concepts Within Tradition: Barn Building in Otsego County, New York," Glassie writes,

...it would appear that there are base concepts in material culture that are complex models consisting of a specific relationship--structure--of numerous components. The base concept is accompanied by rules for its alteration...These rules allow for the modification of the base concept in accordance with the conditions surrounding its employment.<sup>5</sup>

The Aladdin materials suggest, however, that a relationship exists between traditional modes of building and the industrial production of houses; in both cases variation exists, but within certain limits.

Of the seven plan groups, only one is composed of a single plan type. Characterized by a narrow center hallway running back from the front rooms, this group may be labelled *Central Core Hallway Houses* (see Figure 7). Only two models utilize this plan type.

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<sup>4</sup>Wright, *Moralism*, 134-41.

<sup>5</sup>Glassie, *Variation*, 229.

Four of the seven groups, unlike *Central Core Hallway Houses*, contain multiple plan types. In all four groups, a general base concept—and not a specific Aladdin model—provides the basis for variation. The first group, *Inset Corner Entrance Houses*, use an inset corner porch which opens into the living room (see Figure 8). Variation occurs primarily in the form of differing scale with both one and two-story versions represented. The *Central Vestibule Houses* represent another plan group containing multiple plan types. In a *Central Vestibule House* (all of which are one story), one enters a shallow, center vestibule which opens on three sides into the other rooms of the house (see Figure 9). Variation occurs in the types of rooms arranged around the vestibule. *Georgian Plan Houses* represent the third plan group to incorporate variation based on a general prototype. Plan types within this group recall the central-hall plans characteristic of eighteenth-century Georgian architecture.<sup>6</sup> Aladdin carried on the Georgian tradition with houses like the appropriately named *Colonial* of 1909. Two-story versions like the *Colonial* use a central hall while one floor variations utilize an oblong central living room (see Figure 10). The fourth group, *Corner Stairhall Entrance Houses*, also incorporate variation based on a general base concept. In the majority of *Corner Stairhall Entrance Houses*, one enters into a corner hall which also contains the staircase (see Figure 11). The living room lies to the side of the hall while the kitchen sits behind it. By pulling the

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<sup>6</sup>According to James Deetz, America's first Georgian house was supposedly the Foster-Hutchinson house, built in 1688 in Boston. See James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977), 111. As the eighteenth century progressed, the Georgian house spread in influence beyond the urban elite to outlying regions. To a certain degree, it also spread down the economic scale. The central-hall plan with rooms opening to either side did not disappear with the advent of the nineteenth century. The middle and upper-middle class Victorian house with its ubiquitous central entrance hall represented a continuation of the Georgian spatial arrangement. On the vernacular level, extensive use was made of the Georgian central-hall plan in many regions throughout the nineteenth century.

porch inward and shortening the stairhall, different plan types within the group are created.

The final two plan groups are similar to the four just discussed in that a base concept is transformed into multiple plan types. Unlike the previous four plan groups, however, the final two use an identifiable Aladdin model as the starting point for developing other plans. Thus, a lineage of houses may be traced across the 1906 to 1920 period. As Figure 12 shows, *Style D* (1906) was transformed over time into several related plan types through an additive process. To produce *Style J*, *Style D* was modified in 1908 by increasing the size of the dining room/living room complex and placing the two secondary rooms (bath and pantry) across the rear of the new plan.<sup>7</sup> The living room/dining room complex was further emphasized in the *Ormond* (1913) by placing a hallway alongside the dining room so as to isolate the private rooms of the house (the bedrooms and bath) from the public rooms (living room and dining room). Other transformations of *Style D* included *Style R* which rotated *Style D*'s length-by-width orientation. A two-story transformation of *Style D* was also created.

Transformations of *Style B* represent the second of the two plan groups containing multiple plan types based on the variation of a specific Aladdin prototype (see Figure 13). By adding two *Style Bs* side-by-side, *Style C* started one branch of the *Style B* genealogy. Adding another *Style B*-sized unit to the side of *Style C* created the plan type used for the *Oakland*. The *Style C* plan was also made into a two-story version. The other subset of plan types related to *Style B* involved adding two *Style Bs* side-by-side and then adding two eight-by-ten foot units across the back. This plan type (characterized

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<sup>7</sup>Primary rooms are spaces that support activities considered integral to the function of the house like sleeping, preparing food, eating, and socializing. Secondary rooms are transitory spaces used only for brief periods of time relative to primary rooms. Secondary rooms include halls, bathrooms, pantries, and closets.

by *Style F*) was subsequently modified by subdividing the two room spatial unit across the rear to accommodate new secondary rooms (hall and bath) along with the original primary rooms (kitchen and bedroom). This plan type is represented by the *Winthrop*.

As these plan groups show, standardization was integral to Aladdin's design process and production system. But standardization was also part of progressive rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> Standardizing domestic architecture, reformers believed, would further their goal of a more democratic society; not only would standardized architecture symbolize equality, it was a practical necessity if the dream of extensive middle-class homeownership was to be realized.<sup>9</sup> Standardized architecture would further ensure that aesthetic reforms (primarily demands for aesthetic simplification) and their accompanying social reforms (the reduction in formality within the home) became reality.<sup>10</sup> Finally, standardized houses were considered more efficient and "scientific."<sup>11</sup> Aladdin was not alone in promoting standardized architecture. In fact, progressive praise for standardization facilitated Aladdin's promotional emphasis on the "scientific" efficiency and modern qualities of the Read-Cut system.

If standardization of domestic architecture was a requirement of both industrial production and progressive ideology, then the limited number of plan groups used by Aladdin is not so surprising; the company could justify standardized houses in terms of

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<sup>8</sup>As Gwendolyn Wright shows, the progressives sought a "simplified, standardized architecture" to replace "the earlier focus on privatized, perfect dwellings, each one the haven of a separate family, each one a world unto itself" (Wright, *Moralism*, 106-7).

<sup>9</sup>On standardization see Wright, *Moralism*, 106-7 and 141-44.

<sup>10</sup>Wright, *Moralism*, 144.

<sup>11</sup>As Orison Swett Marden put it, "The ideal of modern efficiency demands a reorganized and standardized home. Just as in the scientific reorganization of business, [where] incompetence, unscientific methods, [and] slovenly management had to go, they are doomed also in the kitchen" (Orison Swett Marden, *Woman and Home* [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1915], 305-6).

ideology rather than profit-taking. More surprising, however, are the similarities that exist between the plans used by Aladdin and those of other mass-market house designers and producers. Compare, for example, *Plan 185* (see Figure 14) from The Wilson Bungalow with Aladdin's *Oakland* of 1911 (see Figure 15).<sup>12</sup> An exact relationship exists between the plans of both houses. While not all relationships between the two companies' plans are so explicit, connections can be made between the base concepts underlying both Wilson's designs and those of Aladdin.

Similar relationships exist between the plan types used by Aladdin and the plans found in many Sears, Roebuck and Company houses.<sup>13</sup> Like Sears's *Magnolia*, Aladdin's *Brentwood* used a central stair hall flanked by the dining room and kitchen on one side and a living room and porch on the other (see Figures 16-17). The *Magnolia* simply reduced the size of the living room to accommodate a den and added a series of secondary rooms behind the stairhall. Sears' *Ashmore* and Aladdin's *Pomona* also shared plans governed by the same base concept (see Figures 18-19). Both used a living room placed across the front of the house and connected to the dining room. A bedroom sat next to the dining room in both plans while a hall off of the dining room provided access to two bedrooms and the bathroom. Clearly, the two houses were ruled by the same conceptualizations of architectural space.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Henry L. Wilson, the self-proclaimed "Bungalow Man," was a major producer of plans and specifications that could be ordered by mail. See Henry L. Wilson, The Wilson Bungalow, 5th ed. (Chicago: Henry L. Wilson, 1910).

<sup>13</sup>The Sears examples come from Stevenson and Jandl, 285 and 88 respectively.

<sup>14</sup>Along similar lines, Thomas Harvey has shown that the Architects' Small House Service Bureau of the 1920s developed stock plans in their attempt to "elevate" small house architecture. Each regional office produced plans which varied according to the number, type, and organization of rooms. See Thomas Harvey, "Mail-Order Architecture in the Twenties," Landscape 25.3 (1981): 1-9.

Just as Aladdin's plans were related to other producers' and designers' houses, Frances Downing and Ulric Flemming, in their analysis of seven bungalows in Buffalo, New York, found that the spatial arrangements of the seven were closely related. As they put it, the plans of the seven bungalows revealed "a limited set of rather rigid conventions" in which differences could be explained "as *different geometric realizations of the same set of conventions*."<sup>15</sup> The successful comparison of Aladdin's plan groups with those of other producers supports Downing and Flemming's contention. Its verity, however, extends beyond the Buffalo city limits since certain shared sets of spatial conventions govern Aladdin's plans as well as those of many other designers and producers. These shared spatial conventions concurrently allowed for standardized production along with a certain degree of variety.

Henry Glassie has shown that a similar method of organizing space characterizes folk architecture. Aside from developing the theoretical notion of base concepts, Glassie's "The Variation of Concepts Within Tradition: Barn Building in Otsego County, New York" further demonstrates how two base concepts guided the building of 149 barns in Otsego County, New York even though many of the barns appeared to represent disparate types. Glassie expanded on the notion of architectural base concepts in Folk Housing in Middle Virginia. There, he used the methods of structural linguistics to derive the single spatial unit that served as a base concept for a series of eighteenth-century Virginia houses. Glassie states that base concepts tend to change little over time and as such serve to "separate things that can be qualified with the adjective 'folk' from those that cannot be."<sup>16</sup> The Aladdin materials suggest, however, that popular architecture is

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<sup>15</sup>Frances Downing and Ulric Flemming, "The Bungalows of Buffalo," Environment and Planning B 8.3 (1981): 269. Italics theirs.

<sup>16</sup>Glassie, Variation, 228.

also guided by base concepts and rules for their variation. In some cases the base concept was codified in an actual house model (like *Style D*) which was subsequently transformed into other plan types within the group. In others, the base concept could be readily identified within a plan group even if a prototype and its "lineage" of variants was not present. Whatever the case, a direct relationship exists between the mental processes that shape both folk and popular architecture.

Admittedly, Aladdin's base concepts were partially the product of standardization due to industrialization. The relationship between the Aladdin materials and Glassie's work on folk architecture nevertheless demonstrates the validity of the metaphor linking the structure of language and the structure of architectural space. With both folk and popular architecture, the architectural design process functions like language where stable rules guide the structure of speech (or in this case, buildings). One of the critical differences between folk and popular architecture then becomes the way in which forms are dispersed. Folk architectural forms tend to disperse in a recognizable geographic pattern, often within distinct boundaries. By contrast, an architectural form in mass culture becomes widely dispersed through mass production, communication, and transportation systems. Aladdin's seven plan groups, then, show much more than the impact of industrial standardization on architecture. When compared with the designs of others, Aladdin's house plans demonstrate how similar ideas guided house design on a mass level, uniting geographically distant regions through a shared architectural vocabulary. They also show how the processes shaping architecture, whether labeled "folk" or "popular," may operate in strikingly similar ways.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>As Bernard Herman pointed out to the author, Aladdin's method of plan design--namely producing variations within certain parameters--bears a close resemblance to the "semi-custom" houses offered by today's real estate developers. Further investigation might show this to be the case.

The Aladdin catalogs' numerous plans also provide valuable insight into the types of spatial change that affected houses during the early twentieth century. Not only were prototypes altered and transformed to create new plan types, but the kinds of rooms and their arrangement within the house also changed over time.<sup>18</sup> This process of change began in the public rooms of the house, driven by reformers' demands for less formal social relations and social spaces. One of the first spaces to feel the impact of reform was the parlor: between 1909 and 1914, several Aladdin houses possessed parlors, but after 1914, these parlors were gone. The parlor in Aladdin's houses recalled those found in most middle-class Victorian houses. In the late Victorian era, the parlor was a room of great formality—a genteel stage for social and family rituals.<sup>19</sup> Closed-off from the other rooms in the house, it contained artifacts symbolic of refined culture like books, exotic curios, and other materials.

As early as the 1850s, progressive farm journals advocated a transformation of the parlor into a less formal sitting room.<sup>20</sup> It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, that the urban parlor fell into disfavor.<sup>21</sup> Charles Keeler summarized the perspective held by many early twentieth-century reformers: "In the conventional [late

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<sup>18</sup>This is not to say that there is a significant chronological pattern to the appearance and disappearance of certain plan types. Most of the plan types and the groups they formed were introduced early in the 1906 to 1920 time span. Once introduced, plan types tended to remain in use for much of the period. The categories of change discussed here occurred across the various plan groups as new types of rooms were introduced and others fell from use.

<sup>19</sup>Sally McMurray, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 141-42. See also Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in American, 1840-1870," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 543 for a similar viewpoint.

<sup>20</sup>McMurray, 152.

<sup>21</sup>McMurray, 167-68.

Victorian] home, both the richness of family intercourse and the freedom of hospitality is restrained. A life hedged in with formality is like a plant stifled by surrounding weeds..."<sup>22</sup> Changes in Aladdin's product line reflected the reformers' influence. Of the six Aladdin houses containing parlors, five were dropped from the model line by 1912. The *Hamilton*, for example, possessed a parlor until 1914 when it was replaced by a bedroom.

The parlor was typically replaced in function by a living room. Ostensibly a different kind of space, the living room continued to serve as a focal point for family gathering. As Stickley wrote, "It [the living room] is the executive chamber of the household where the family life centers and from which radiates that indefinable home influence that shapes at last the character of the nation and the age."<sup>23</sup> Thus, by replacing the parlor as the center of family life, the living room maintained the symbolic connection between the family, the house, and moral character (albeit in a less formal way than the parlor).<sup>24</sup> The emergence of the living room as the primary social space within the house is reflected in the Aladdin catalogs. As Figure 12 shows, the 1908 transformation that created the *Style J* plan from the *Style D* plan included an enlargement of the living room. Similarly, when the plan of *Style B* was modified to create *Style C*, the living room was doubled in size (see Figure 13).

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<sup>22</sup>Keeler, 3. Despite the efforts of Keeler and others, voices in support of the parlor could still be heard in 1903. An anonymous contributor to *The Atlantic Monthly* wrote, "...I mourn for the parlor, that darkened and dustless room where we may be sure that all is tidy, and that no secret of soil or wear will be betrayed to eyes we do not quite trust" ("The Passing of the Parlor," *The Atlantic Monthly* 91 [May 1903]: 714).

<sup>23</sup>Stickley, *Craftsman Homes*, 129.

<sup>24</sup>Alan Gowans believes that the decline of the parlor spelled the end of "houses as visual metaphors of the family" and "the whole concept of architectural symbolism" (Gowans, 28). The evidence suggests, however, that the living room became an important metaphor of happy family relations.

Calls for more informal social relations extended into the dining room as well. Stickley believed that an open span between the living and dining rooms was "a constant expression of the fine spirit of hospitality."<sup>25</sup> Aladdin responded to such views in two ways. First, the living room and dining room were spatially emphasized by enlarging their size relative to other rooms. Figure 12 reflects this process, a process that occurred most frequently in one-story houses where the "shotgun" arrangement of the living room and dining room became the dominant form of spatial organization.

Replacing the traditional doorway with an open archway was the second method by which the living room and dining room were made spatially contiguous. By 1916, the arched opening was used in all Aladdin houses where the living room abutted the dining room. In most cases, this arch was a simple framed and plastered device that ran up the walls and across the ceiling. It measured five to six inches in width and projected about six inches into the room. Aladdin's A-1 arch was included with more expensive houses. It consisted of bookcases running three quarters of the arch's height. On top of each bookcase was a square, wooden column "supporting" the crosspiece that ran along the ceiling. The introduction of arches between the living room and dining room did make for a more informal plan as the two rooms became a single, interpenetrating space. The arch, however, also set the two spaces apart, serving as a kind of proscenium arch that separated the rituals of visiting or family activities and the ritual of eating.

For those who purchased more expensive houses, French doors maintained a genteel specialization of architectural space along with the benefits of the connected living room and dining room. The *Lamberton* is a typical case (see Figure 20). There, paired French doors, constructed of bevel-edged glass in a wooden frame, were placed between

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<sup>25</sup>Stickley, *Craftsman Homes*, 196.

the living and dining rooms. On the one hand, the glass doors created a visual continuity between the two rooms reminiscent of an open living room/dining room plan. On the other hand, the doors maintained each room's discrete nature much like the formal, specialized rooms of a middle-class Victorian house. Associated with Aladdin's more expensive models, the use of French doors indicates the limits of progressive ideology in breaking-down the spatial segmentation long favored by the upper-middle class.

The final category of change seen in the Aladdin plans occurs in the private spaces of the house. Over time, an increasing effort was made to separate social spaces from private spaces in one-story houses. This effort was essentially conservative, seeking to accommodate old ideas about the separation of public from private rooms within the new spatial configuration of the one-story bungalow. In discussing the middle-class Victorian house, Clifford Clark has noted the emphasis placed on separating private spaces like bedrooms (and later in the nineteenth century, the bathroom) from public spaces like the parlor, sitting room, dining room, and kitchen.<sup>26</sup> Since the typical middle-class Victorian house was usually two stories in height, this division was easily codified; by placing public spaces on the first floor and private spaces on the second, segmentation was achieved. But in the early twentieth century, the one-story bungalow became increasingly popular among a middle class raised with the values of the late Victorian home.<sup>27</sup> Maintaining the public/private segmentation of space within the one-story bungalow, therefore, became an important design consideration. Many of Aladdin's earlier bungalows made little attempt to separate the two types of spaces. In the *Plaza* (first

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<sup>26</sup>Clark, *American*, 42.

<sup>27</sup>The definition of a bungalow will be more carefully developed later in this chapter. For the purposes of the present discussion, the bungalow's one-story height is the critical point.

introduced in 1913), two bedrooms opened directly off the living room while the other bedroom was connected to the kitchen (see Figure 21). Even the bathroom, joined to the dining room, was not separated from the house's public spaces. Over time, however, short hallways began to be incorporated into Aladdin's one-story models in an attempt to better separate public and private spaces. In 1916, a hallway was added to the *Plaza* so that only one bedroom opened directly into a public room (see Figure 22). The hallway also served to privatize the bathroom. Many smaller, less expensive models, however, did not undergo such modifications. More often, changes occurred in bungalows like the *Plaza*, located in the middle to upper-middle range of Aladdin's price structure. Middle-class propriety was therefore partially defined by income. By emphasizing the architectural division between public and private space, Aladdin reflects the continuities between late nineteenth and early twentieth-century middle-class attitudes towards the spatial arrangement of the house.

Whether illustrating the relationship between mass-produced houses and folk architecture or reflecting new attitudes towards social space and domestic formality, the plans illustrated by Aladdin are a rich source of evidence. But the company did not use plans as its basis of house categorization. Instead ornament and scale (together defined here as "style") were used to distinguish between models. The style-based typology that emerges from the catalogs consists of five house styles: the bungalow, the semi-bungalow, the square type house, the conservative house, and the period revival house. Because of the dominance of style, the five house styles will serve as the divisions used in much of the later discussion of the rhetoric of aesthetics, practicality, and comfort.

The largest category defined by Aladdin are bungalows which comprise sixty-five of the 153 models examined. Of the sixty-five, fifty-one were explicitly referred to as

bungalows in the catalogs. The categorization of the remaining fourteen was done on the basis of similarities with explicitly named bungalows. Based on the Bengali *bangla*, or low house surrounded by porches, the early twentieth-century bungalow could trace its roots to English structures built in India as early as the seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> The mass popularity of bungalows in the United States first came in turn-of-the-century California where the term often indicated a small, impermanent dwelling. As the bungalow spread across the country, its associations with California were not lost; Aladdin's first bungalow intended for year around occupancy (introduced in 1909) was named the *California*.<sup>29</sup> In 1911, Aladdin offered its first extensive selection of bungalows, establishing the stylistic features that were to characterize the style. One story in height with a low hipped, gabled, or later, jerkinhead roof, the typical Aladdin bungalow featured exposed construction members like rafter ends and gable brackets (see Figure 23). Shingled siding and grouped windows were other common features. The roof line usually swept out over the porch and was supported by wood or masonry pillars. Square footage had nothing to do with a house's designation as a bungalow; even the smallest house could be a bungalow as long as it possessed the aesthetic features just noted. Most bungalows, however, possessed one of the plan types based on transformations of *Style D* or *Style B* (see Figures 12-13).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Clay Lancaster, *The American Bungalow* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 19. Lancaster offers the most extensive history of the American bungalow and its architectural roots. For a less art historical and more sociological perspective on the bungalow and its history both in America and elsewhere, see King. American bungalows began to appear in the late 1870s, often as vacation houses. In the Aladdin catalogs, the earliest use of the term "bungalow" came between 1907 and 1908 in reference to an ornamentally plain house intended for use as a summer cottage.

<sup>29</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1909), 20.

<sup>30</sup>Aladdin's definition of a bungalow closely matches that developed by Alan Gowans. He characterizes bungalows as being one to one-and-one-half stories tall and having no basement, a roof that extends out over the porch, and plans characterized by "interpenetration of inner and outer space" (Gowans, 77). Gowans, however, rejects houses that do not meet his requirements even if their

Houses that share many of the aesthetic features of bungalows but incorporated an additional half or full story presented a problem for Aladdin: how should this style be named? The *Georgia* reflects Aladdin's various solutions. From 1912 through 1915, the *Georgia* was referred to as "a pretty half-shingled type of two-story bungalow."<sup>31</sup> By 1916, however, it was called "a most unusual combination of true bungalow and two-story house."<sup>32</sup> Sometime between 1915 and 1916, Aladdin realized that a "proper" bungalow could not be two stories in height. Despite the revelation, a connection was still drawn between bungalows and two-story houses that used the same ornamental features. A similar naming process went on with the *Detroit*. It was first introduced in 1911 as "a two-story design...yet carrying genuine bungalow lines throughout."<sup>33</sup> By 1916, its bungalow heritage had been reduced to the label "semi-bungalow."<sup>34</sup> Clearly, houses like the *Georgia* and *Detroit*--offering bungalow ornament and the more traditional scale of the two-story house--represented a distinct group to Aladdin and its customers (see Figure 24). These houses were modified to resemble the bungalow and then renamed to give them cachet.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, Aladdin rarely gave explicit names to this

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producers called them bungalows. In order to sell houses, companies like Aladdin did call some models bungalows that architects and critics might not view as such. Nevertheless, Gowans's approach seems to project contemporary aesthetic ideas backwards in a typical art historical manner. For this reason, any house Aladdin calls a bungalow will be treated as such and used as the basis for categorizing similar houses that may not be explicitly referred to as bungalows.

<sup>31</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1913), 78.

<sup>32</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 75.

<sup>33</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1911), 38.

<sup>34</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 19. Alan Gowans traces the roots of the semi-bungalow to nineteenth-century worker's houses built on the urban fringe, houses Andrew Jackson Downing called "cottage homes." See Gowans, 78.

<sup>35</sup>Gowans, 82.

house style; only twelve of the twenty-nine houses that fall within this stylistic group are explicitly named by style. Among those that are explicitly named, "semi-bungalow" seems the most appropriate label. It indicates both the aesthetic relationship with the bungalow while at the same time acknowledging the differences between the two styles. For these reasons, the term "semi-bungalow" will be used here.

The third of the five house styles recognized by Aladdin is the "square type house."<sup>36</sup> The sixteen houses in this category are two floors in height and capped by a hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves (see Figure 25). A single front facing dormer is also always used. Typical ornament includes exposed rafter ends and half shingled siding though some examples are quite plain. Today, this type of house is commonly referred to as a foursquare. Since Aladdin never used this term, "square type house" will be used here.<sup>37</sup>

Period revival houses form the fourth group of houses distinguished by Aladdin. Ranging from Colonial Revival to "Old English"<sup>38</sup> revivals, Aladdin's eleven period revival houses incorporate a range of aesthetic attributes; no single, shared aesthetic characteristic can be identified (see Figures 26-27). This relative aesthetic uniqueness, however, is itself a defining feature. Since the largest and most expensive models offered by Aladdin are period revivals, their size and cost are also distinguishing features.

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<sup>36</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 68.

<sup>37</sup>In discussing the square type house, Alan Gowans sees its roots in the nineteenth-century cube house and the "classical self-containment" of Georgian design. He also believes that their relative lack of ornament emerges from the general trend toward simplification of the 1890 to 1930 period. See Gowans, 84-87. Gowans also identifies a one-story version of the square type house he calls the "small (workingman's) foursquare" (Gowans, 90).

<sup>38</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 24.

The final stylistic group, that of the conservative house, is used only implicitly in the catalogs. Consisting of thirty-two examples, the conservative house may be either one or two stories in height (see Figures 28-29). In these houses, ornament is usually limited to the columns that support the porch roof. As such, Aladdin could not name them on the basis of ornament or scale. Thus, they exist as an implicit group, set apart by their aesthetic simplicity rather than by a shared set of easily named stylistic features. Where the rhetoric associated with other styles invariably mentions their distinctive aesthetic qualities, that used with conservative houses typically emphasizes their interior features.<sup>39</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, conservative houses were eventually presented as a conservative alternative to bungalows and the other stylistic groups, hence the name used here.

Aladdin used this five member stylistic typology to differentiate its various models. In creating the typology, the company ignored the spatial relationships between the models' various plans. Aladdin's customers presumably accepted and understood the emphasis on exterior aesthetics over interior spatial configuration; Aladdin's success depended on its using the same language of style recognized by its customers. Despite Aladdin's emphasis on style, the house plans remain a significant source of evidence. A plan-based typology reveals the extensive degree of standardization used in the mass-production of early twentieth-century housing. The plans also indicate the process by which stable base concepts could be varied to create multiple plan types within the limits of industrial standardization. Despite the wealth of information carried by Aladdin's house plans, it is time to "shift gears" and begin the exploration of the rhetoric associated with the aesthetics, practicality, and comfort supposedly found in Aladdin houses.

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<sup>39</sup>The rhetoric associated with aesthetics is discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 7. The first-floor plan of the *Willard* as an example of a *Central Core Hallway House*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1918), 24.

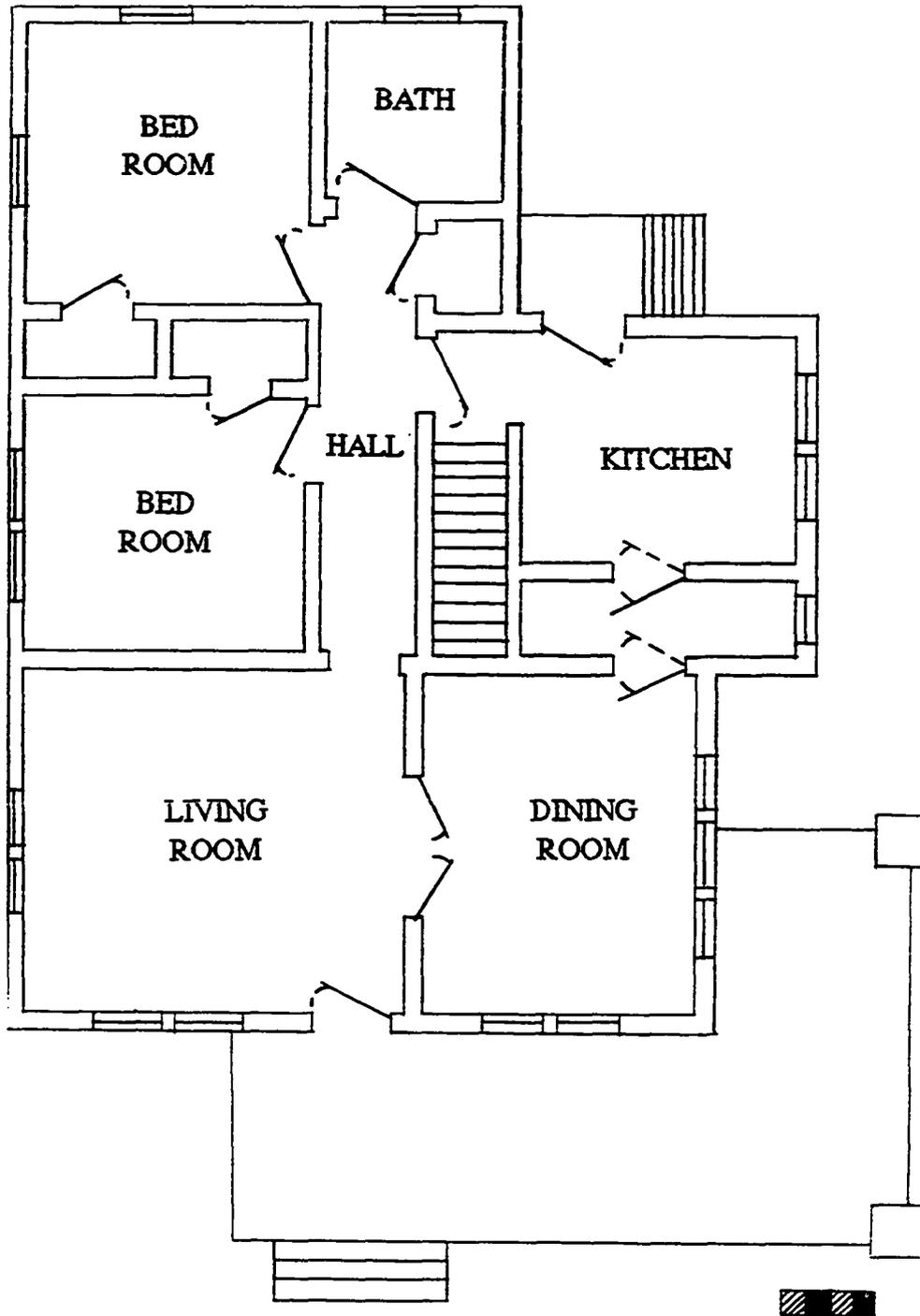


Figure 8. The first-floor plan of the *Selfridge* as an example of an *Inset Corner Entrance House*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1913), 66.

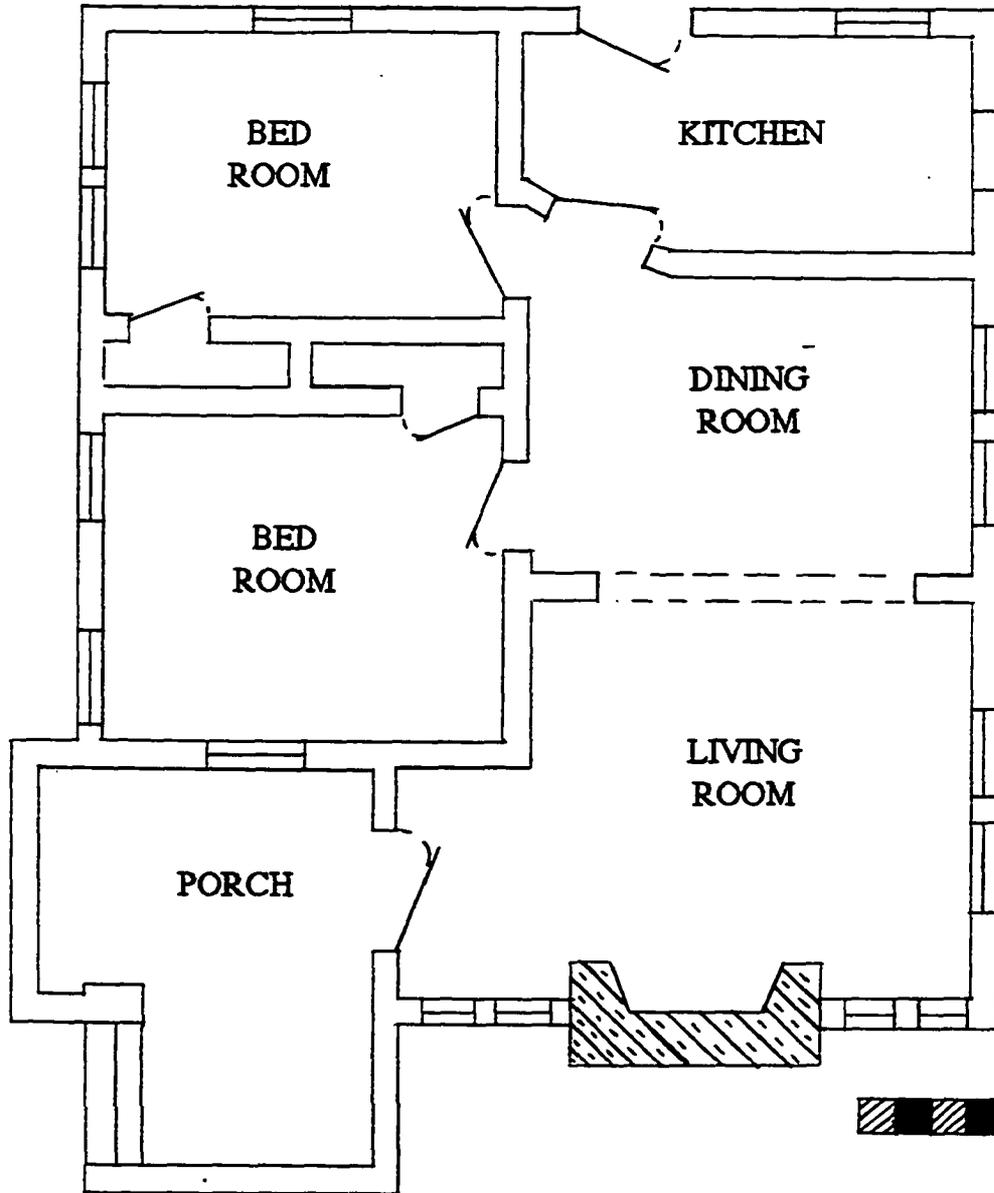


Figure 9. The first-floor plan of the *Forsyth* as an example of a *Central Vestibule House*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1914), 17.

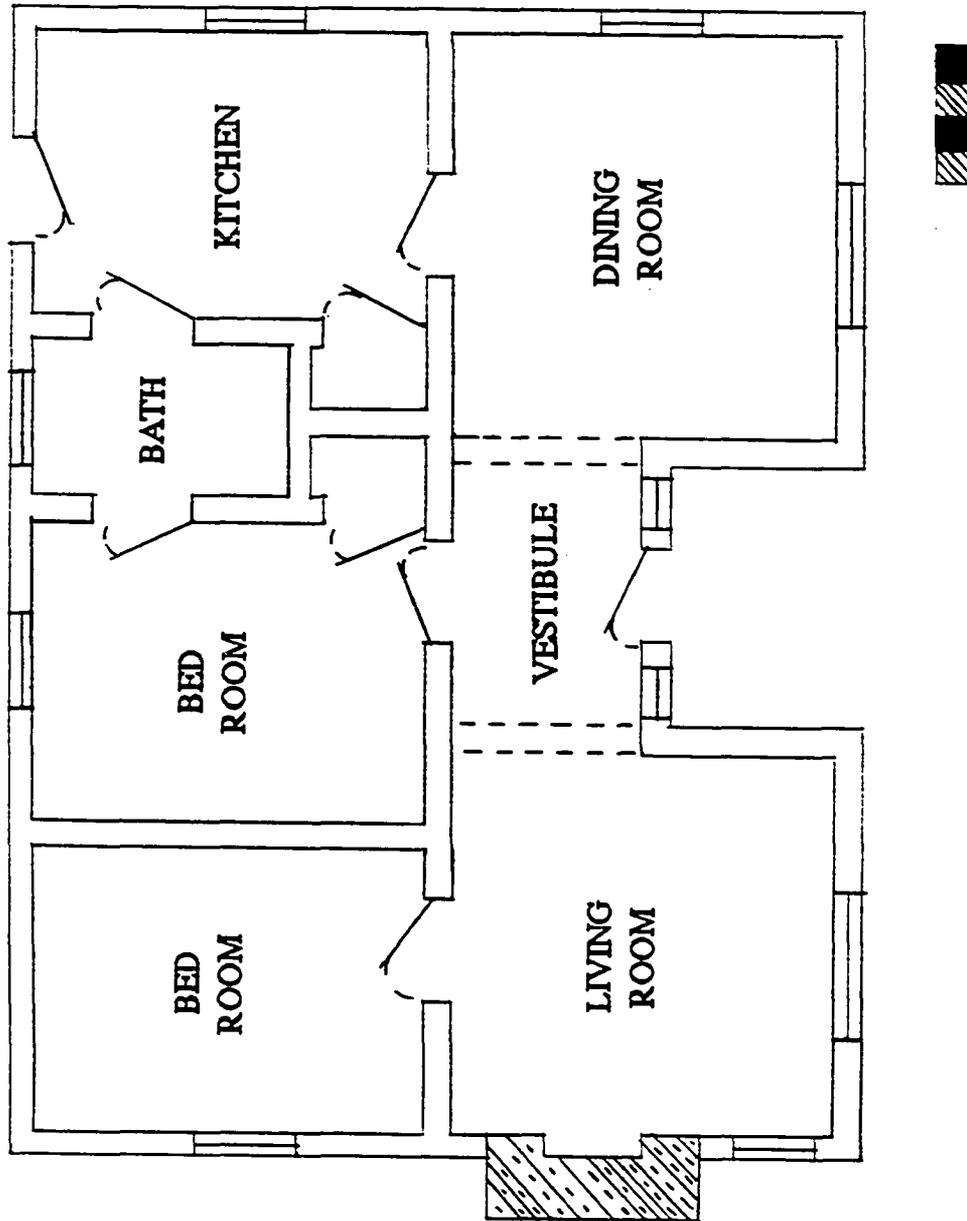


Figure 10. The first-floor plan of the *Colonial* as an example of a *Georgian Plan House*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 31.

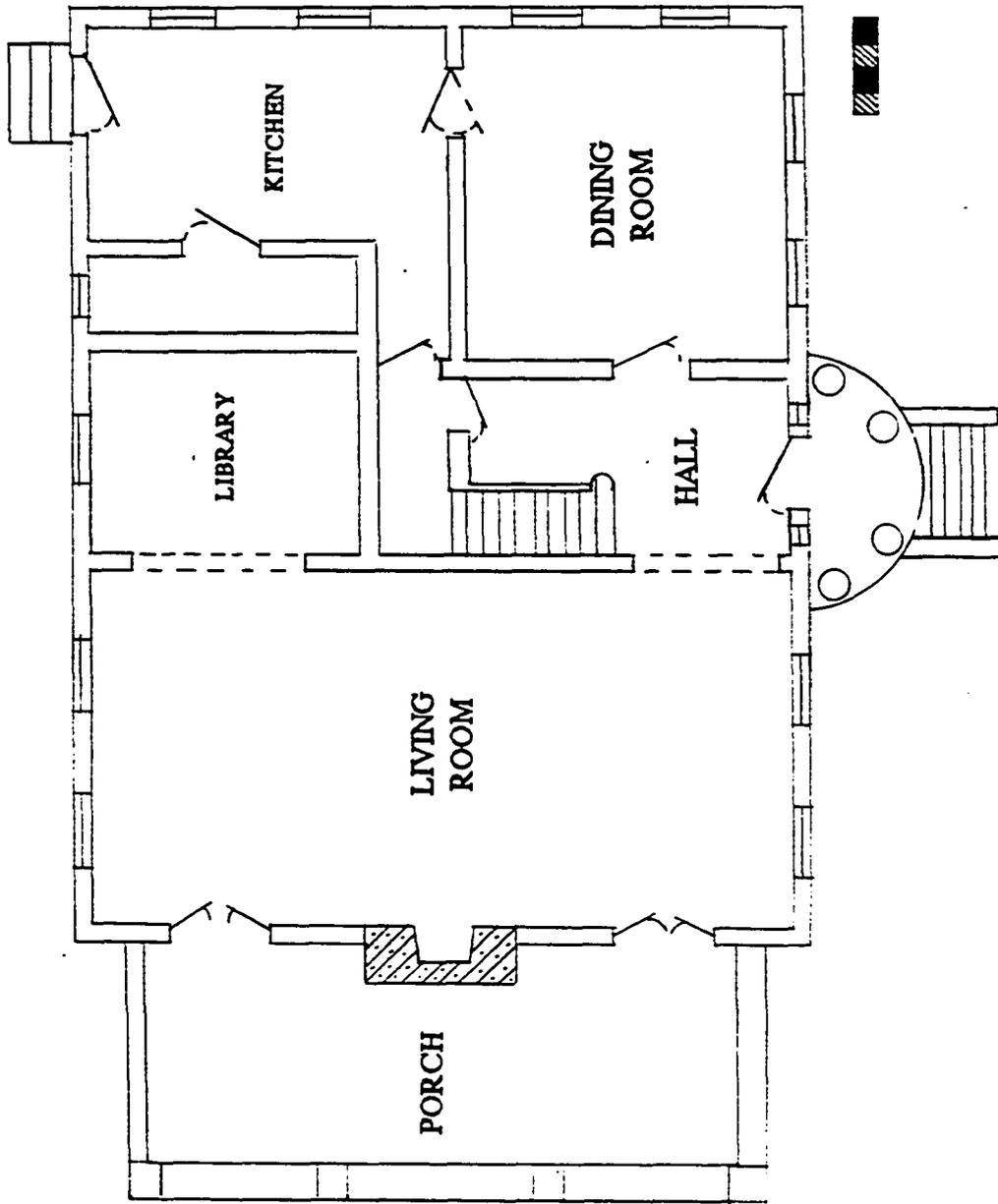


Figure 11. The first-floor plan of the *Suburban* as an example of a *Corner Stairhall Entrance House*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1911), 25.

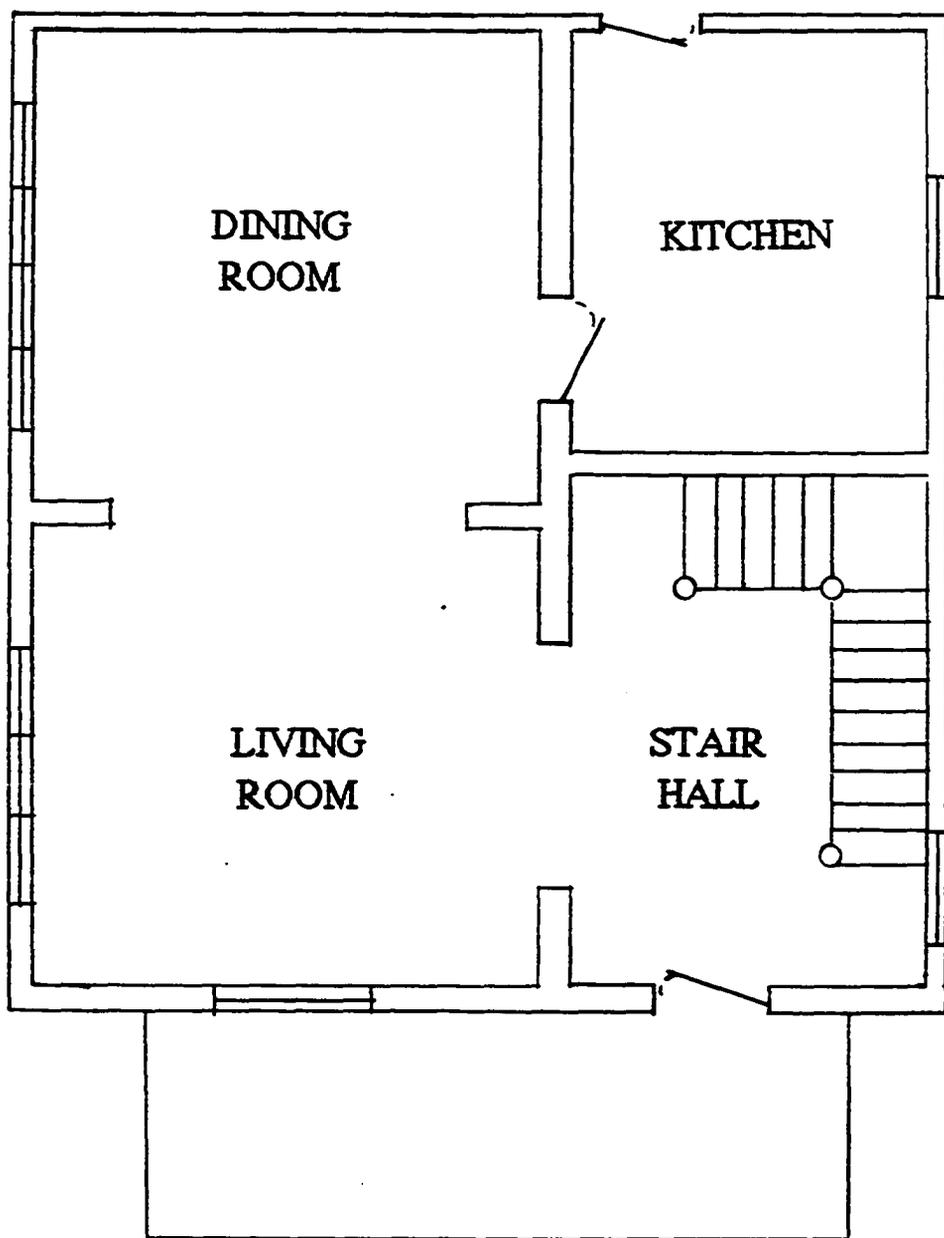


Figure 12. *Style D* and its lineage. Dates in parentheses indicate the year each model was introduced. Legend: LR = Living Room; DR = Dining Room; K = Kitchen; BR = Bedroom; B = Bath; H = Hall. Drawing by the author.

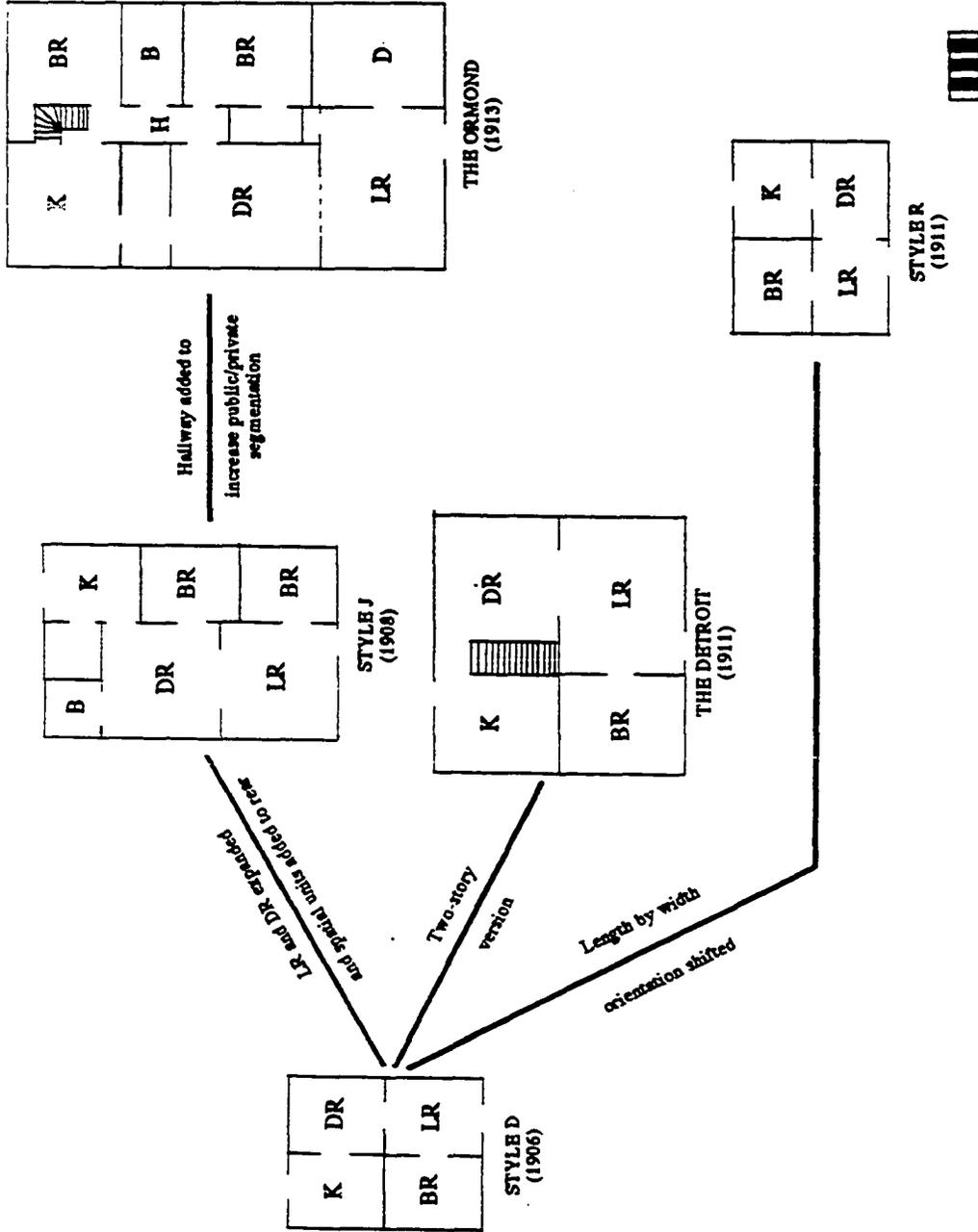


Figure 13. *Style B* and its lineage. Dates in parentheses indicate the year each model was introduced. Legend: LR = Living Room; DR = Dining Room; K = Kitchen; BR = Bedroom; D = Den; B = Bath; H = Hall. Drawing by the author.

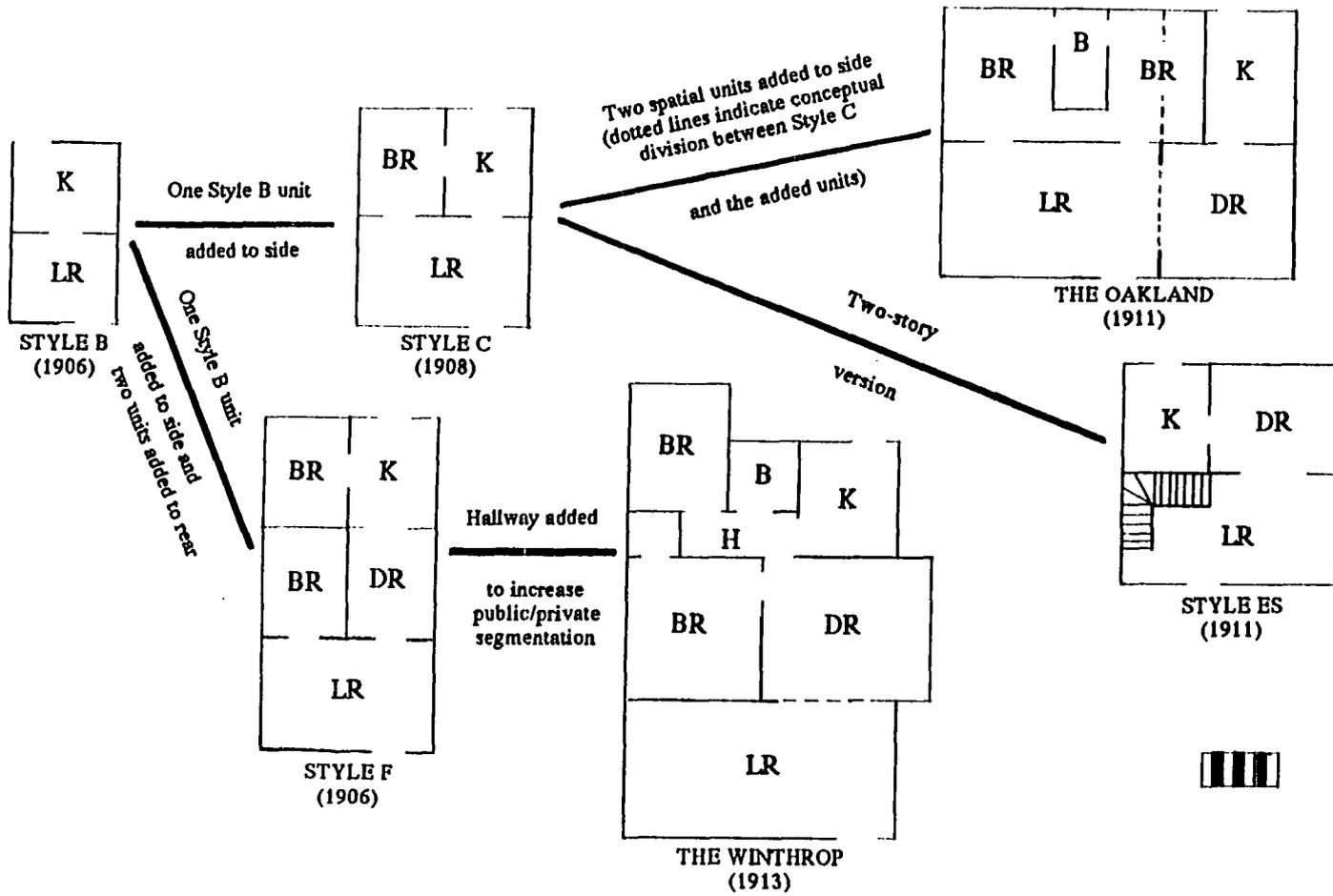


Figure 14. *Plan 185* by Henry Wilson. Drawing by the author after an illustration in Henry L. Wilson, The Bungalow Book, 5th ed. (Chicago: By the author, 1910), 12.

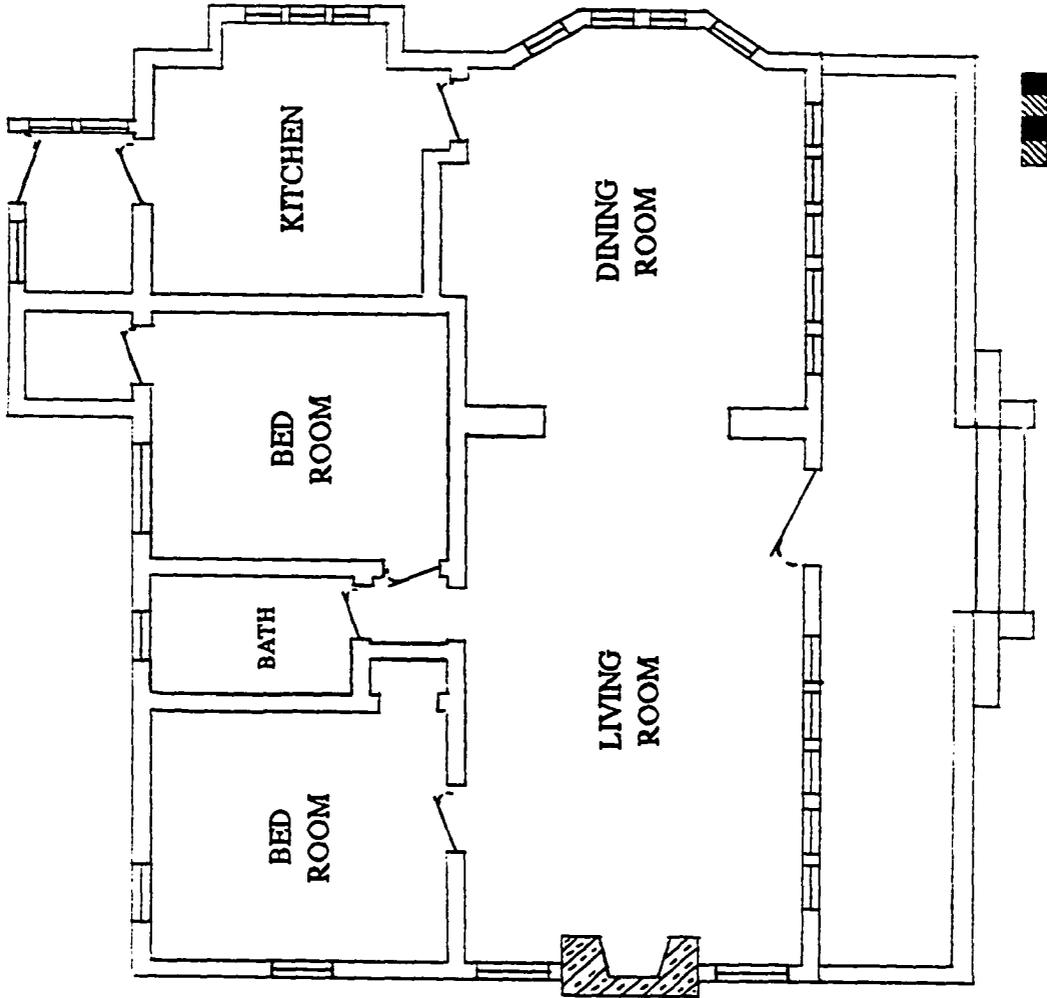


Figure 15. The first-floor plan of the *Oakland*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1911), 39.

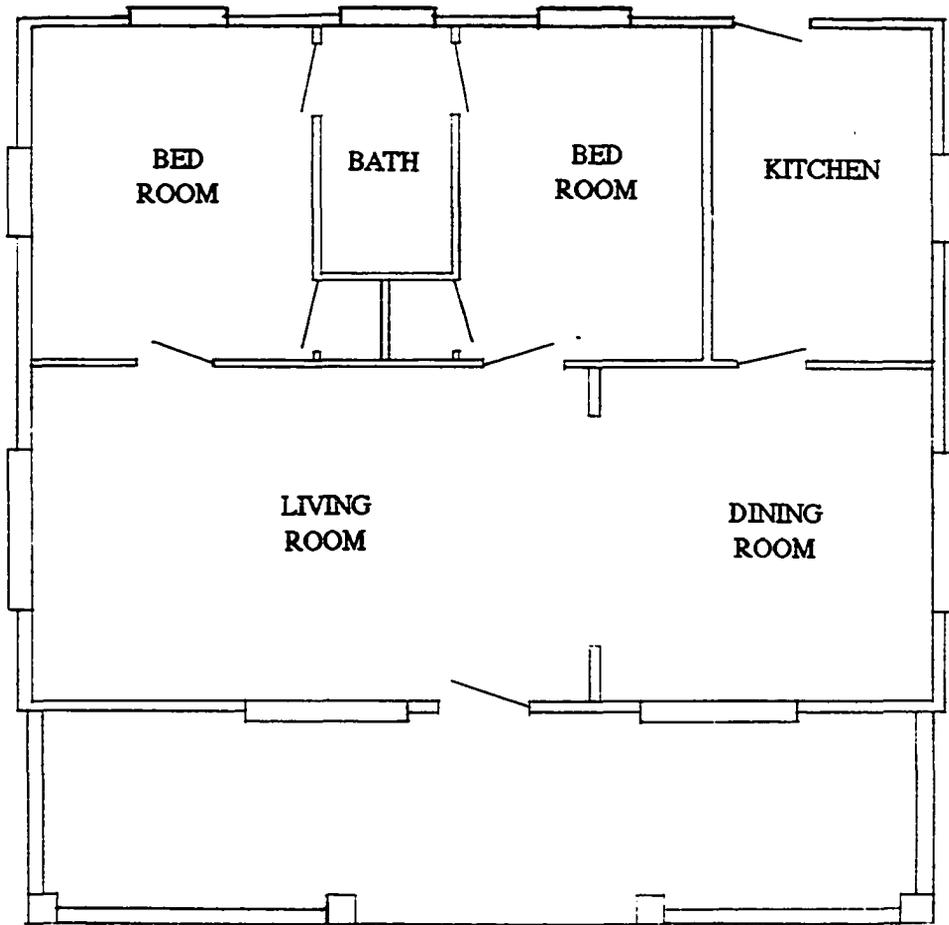


Figure 16. The first-floor plan of the *Brentwood*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1917), 52.

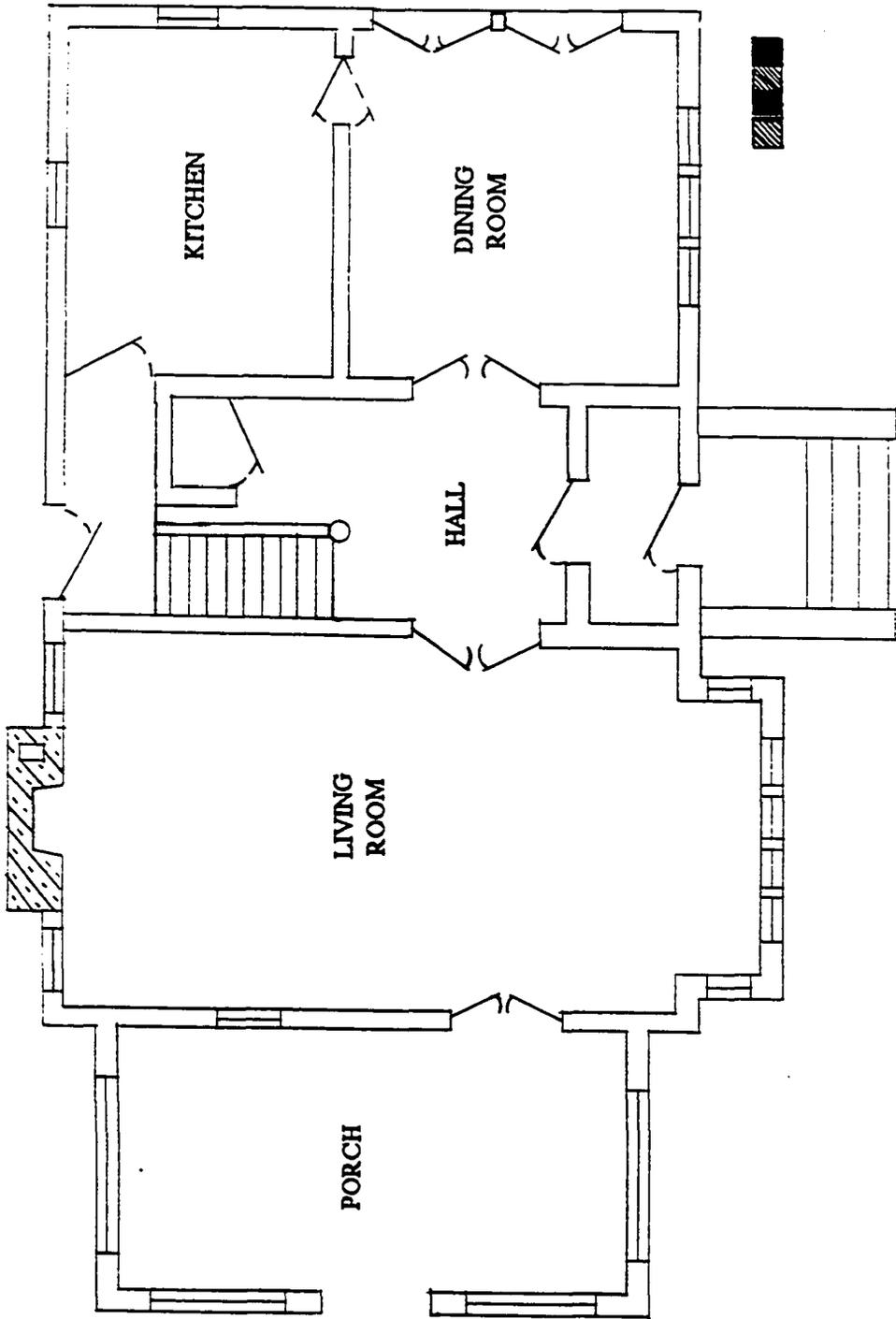


Figure 17. The first-floor plan of the *Magnolia*, introduced by Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1918. Drawing by the author after an illustration in Katharine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, Houses by Mail: A Field Guide to Mail Order Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1986), 285.

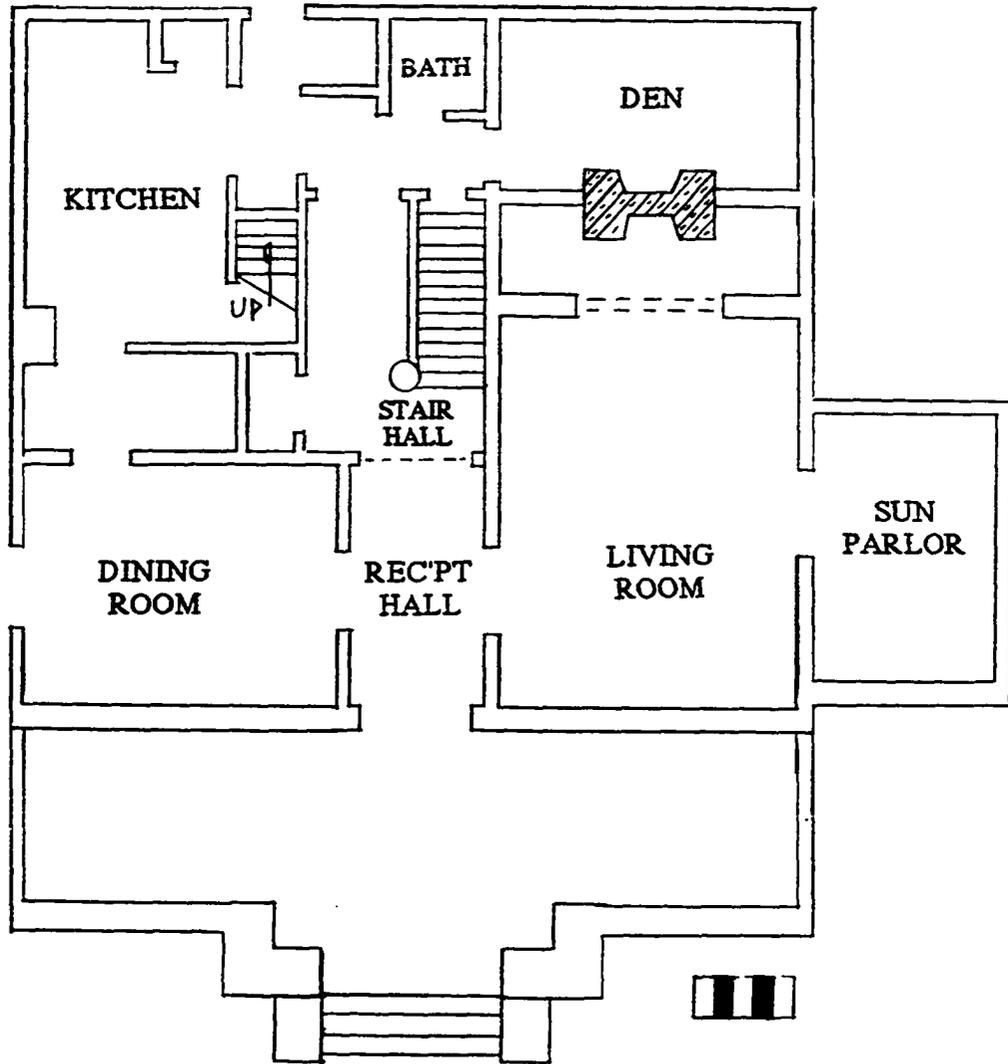


Figure 18. The first-floor plan of the *Ashmore*, introduced by Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1916. Drawing by the author after an illustration in Katharine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, Houses by Mail: A Field Guide to Mail Order Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1986), 88.

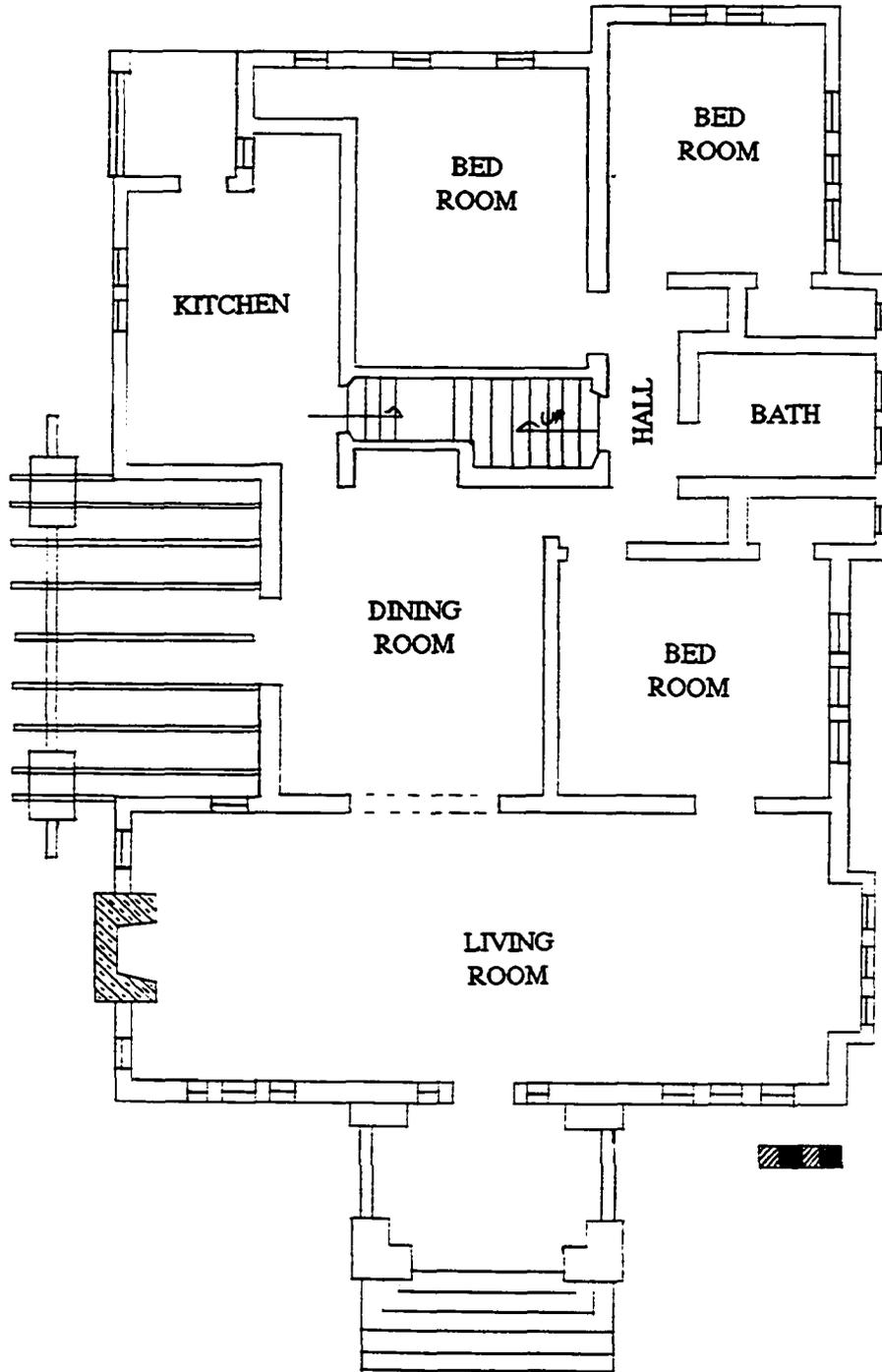


Figure 19. The first-floor plan of the *Pomona*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 50.

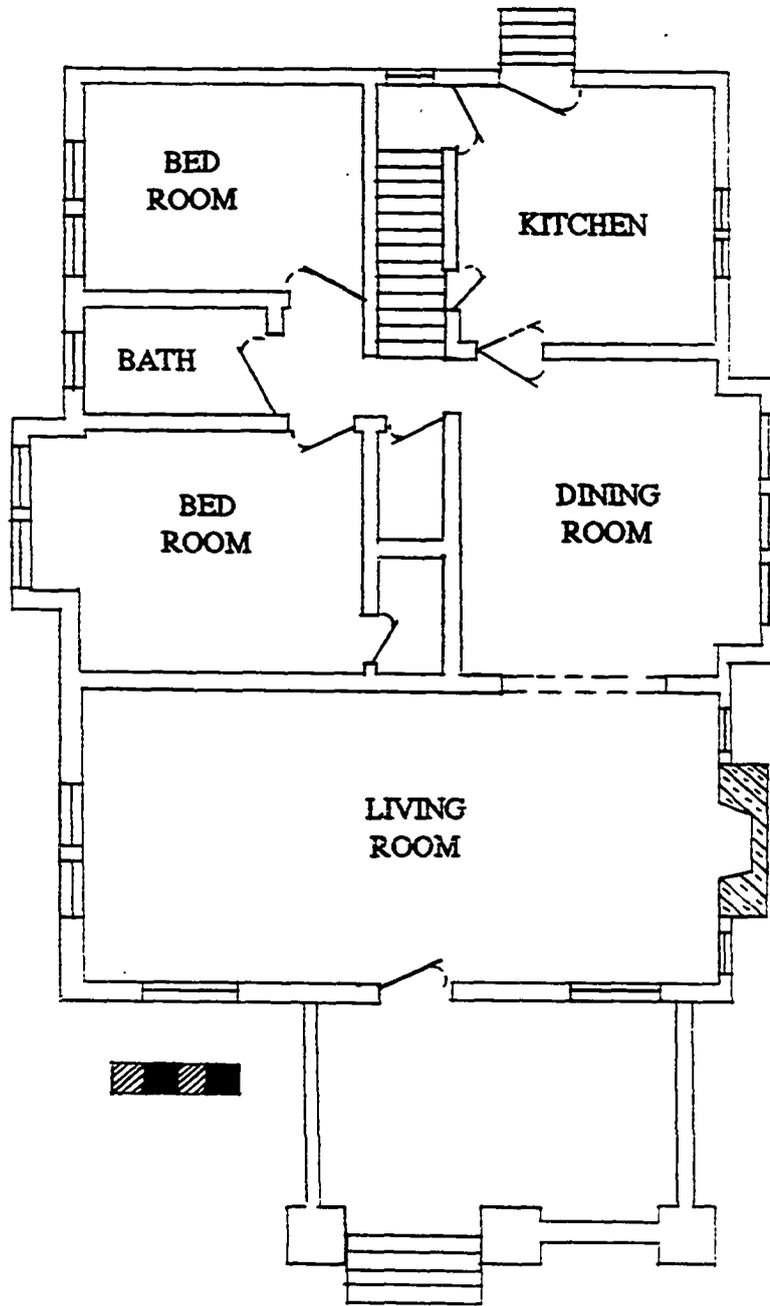


Figure 20. The first-floor plan of the *Lamberton*. Drawing by the author after an illustration in The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1917), 22.

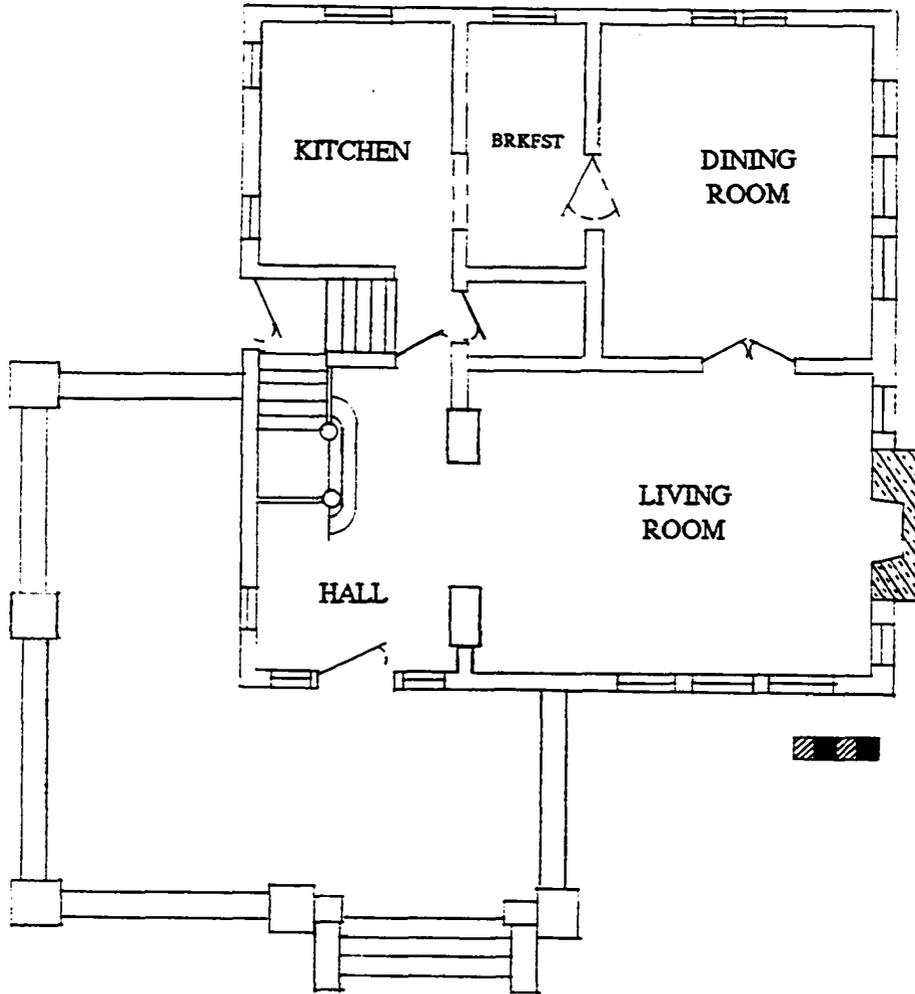


Figure 21. The *Plaza's* 1913 plan. Here public and private space are not segmented. Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1913), 76.

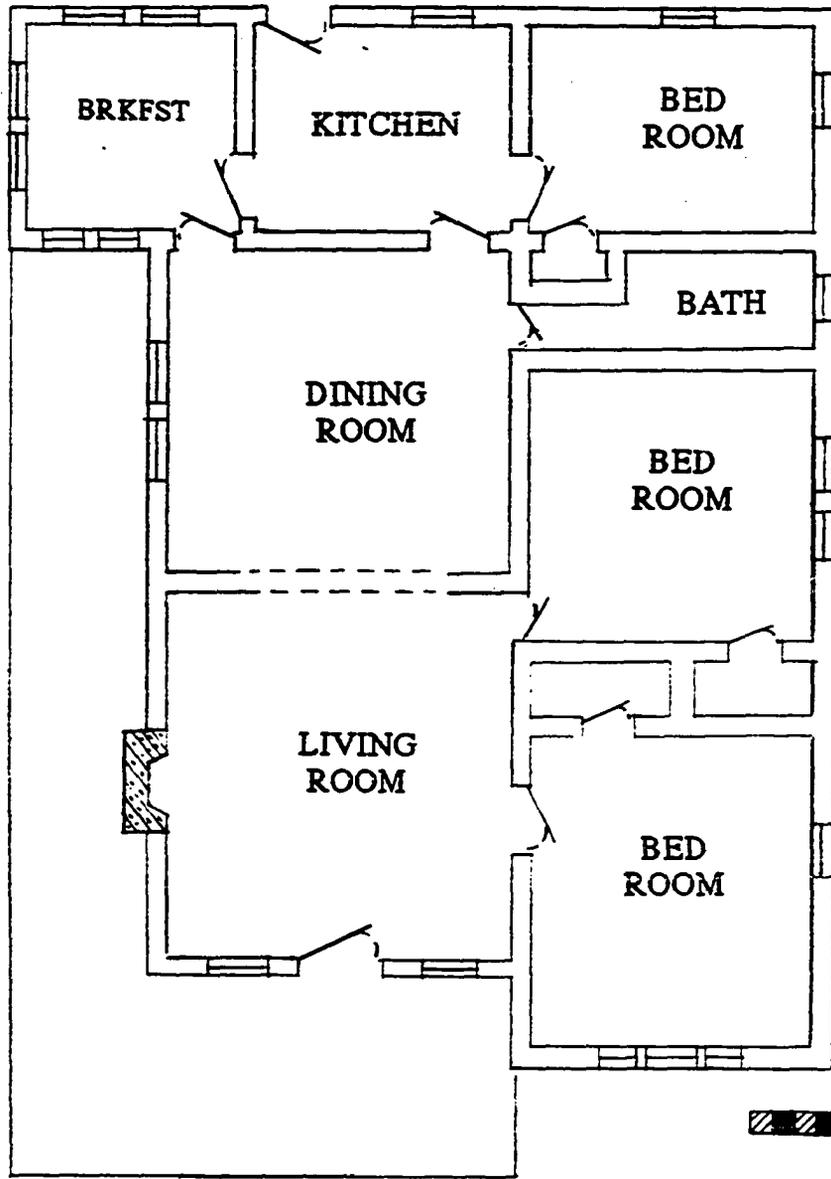


Figure 22. The *Plaza's* 1916 plan. Here public and private space are segmented.  
Drawing by the author after an illustration in North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 86.

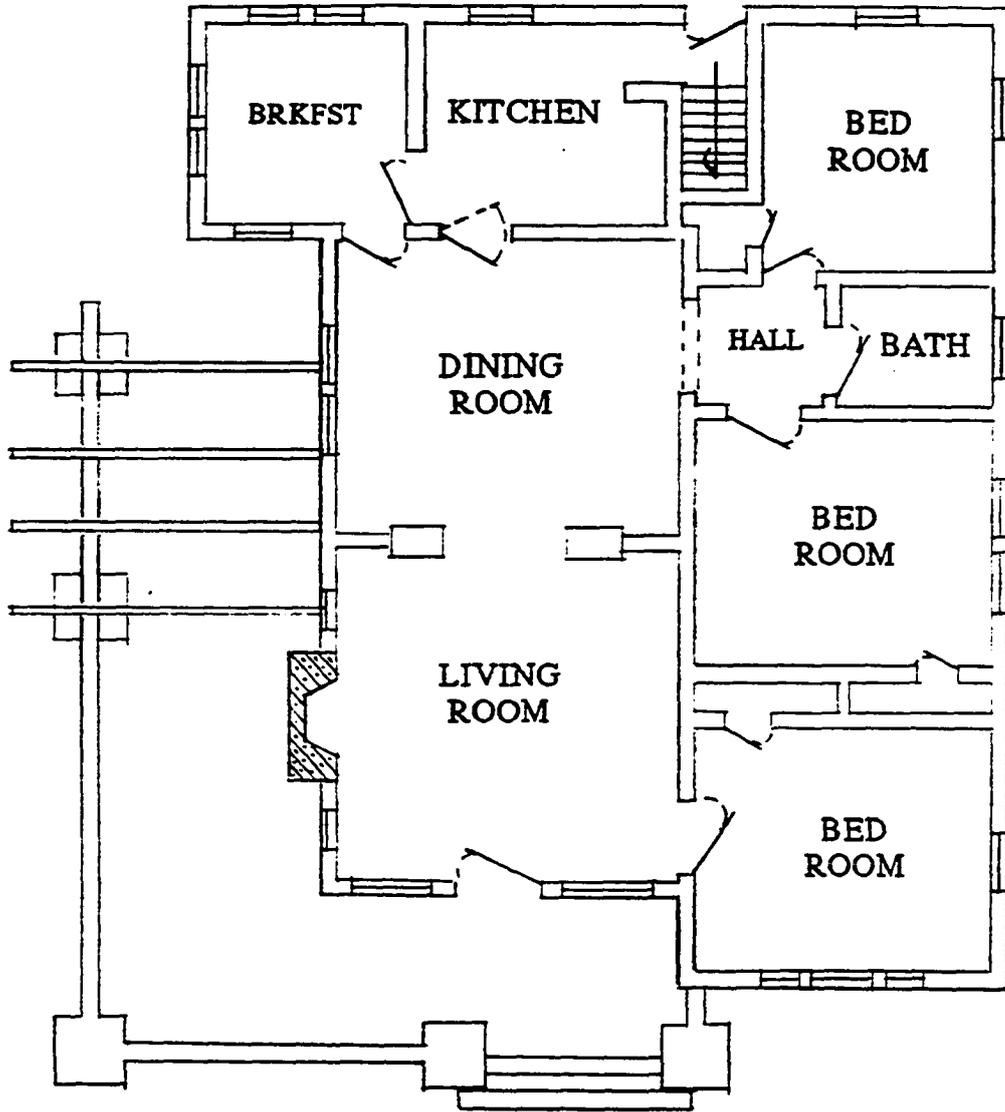


Figure 23. The *Winthrop* as an example of an Aladdin bungalow. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 87.



**The Winthrop \$996.55**

Price, \$1,049.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$996.55

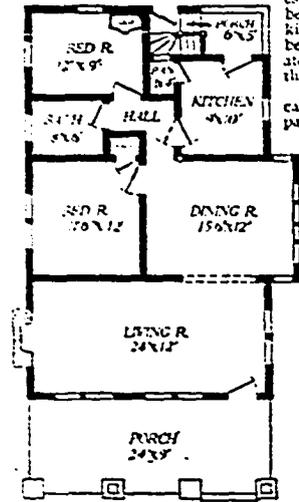
**C**AN you imagine this bungalow nestling among trees and shrubbery on your own lot? A few cobblestones are gathered from nearby fields and when blended with brown stained shingles, natural shrubbery and a setting of velvety green the observer is fascinated.

A bungalow should always be set close to the ground. When local conditions seem to make this impossible, the same result can be secured by terracing close to the building.

The Winthrop is of the pure bungalow type—low, a touch of rough stones, bracketed eave supports, heavy timber work, shingles, and broken outlines.

And as the real bungalow is always compactly and conveniently arranged inside—you will agree that the Winthrop is typical. The large living room is lighted by three group windows and the fireplace at the end forms an inviting nook. Extra length is secured to the dining room by the interesting bay window. Lots of wall space is available in the front bed room. The centralized hall, and entrance from dining room, kitchen, bath and bed room is a good feature. Could a bath room be better located than this? Rear porch with space for refrigerator, and grade cellar entrance. Can you help falling in love with this interesting bungalow?

See General Specifications on pages 12 and 13. Detail specifications for the Winthrop will be sent on request. See Terms on page 2. Masonry not included.



Floor Plan—The Winthrop



Figure 24. *The Georgia* as an example of an Aladdin semi-bungalow. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 55.



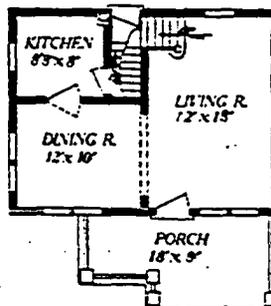
**The Georgia No. 1 \$797.05** Price, \$839.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$797.05

**A**RE you interested in a six-room home with bath and all modern conveniences? If so, we would ask you to study carefully the architectural lines and interior arrangements of the Georgia No. 1. After you have done this we believe you will agree that in this modern bungalow our architect has combined in a remarkable degree the elements essential for beauty and convenience. The exposed rafters, heavy cornice brackets, casement windows, hooded brackets over upper windows, and bungalow front door all lend a charm which at once makes this house a favorite with home builders. Notice also how pleasantly the porch lines blend with the general exterior lines of construction. Often you see a porch added to a house so that one almost wonders if it were not an afterthought in designing. The porch lines of the Georgia certainly are far removed from any such criticism.

On entering the front door the large living room separated from the dining room by the cased archway gives a sense of appearance to be had only by such an arrangement of floor plan. The conveniently located kitchen with inside door to grade entrance completes the first floor. From the rear of the large living room the open stairs lead to a central hall on the second floor. Three well lighted bed rooms with bath and clothes closets are conveniently accessible from this hall.

This house is regularly furnished with knotless red cedar siding for the walls of the first story and cedar shingles for the second story. Either siding or shingles for the entire walls can be had if preferred. Also two oak check rail windows will be substituted for casement windows where desired. No additional cost for either change. Examine Georgia No. 2 in colors on another page.

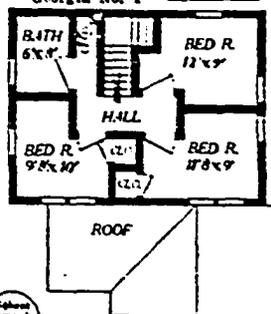
See Terms on page 2 and General Specifications on pages 12 and 13.



First Floor Plan—Georgia No. 1



The Georgia living room is especially interesting by reason of the unusual window arrangement.



Second Floor Plan—Georgia No. 1

Figure 25. The *Rochester* as an example of an Aladdin square type house. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 35.

# The Rochester \$1,366.10

Price, \$1,422.08  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$1,351.18

**T**HE Rochester is of the strong, substantial American type. Square lines give the advantage of utilizing every inch of space to good advantage. While this particular house incorporates some features distinctive to itself. Note the vestibule, large living room with cosy bed room having projecting bay window; group window in dining room; large pantry attached to kitchen and rear exit grade cellar entrance. Three bed rooms, sewing room, bath and closets complete the second story. Most of the windows are grouped in pairs. Scrolled under ends embellish the eaves. Taken altogether, the Rochester is a most satisfying home. On a one-thousand-dollar lot the Rochester would normally sell for at least \$2,500. You can easily comprehend the profit available to the owner should conditions arise that he would want to sell it. Owners of Aladdin houses find that the high quality of finish, material, both inside and outside helps make quick sales when a sale is desired.

The Rochester was first built up in Northern Minnesota and the owner is high in his praise of the warmth of Aladdin construction.

See Terms on page 2 and General Specifications on pages 12 and 13.

Be sure to send for details specifications on the house you want. These are gladly sent to you without charge and will give you much information that cannot be gotten into a catalog page.

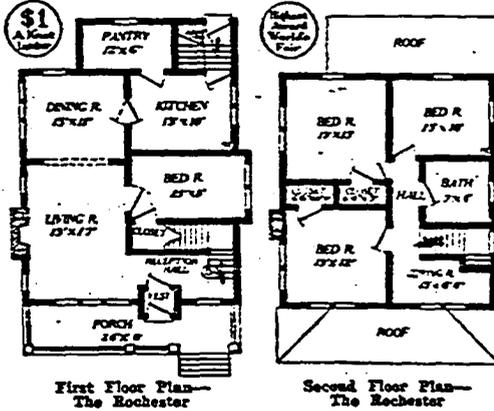
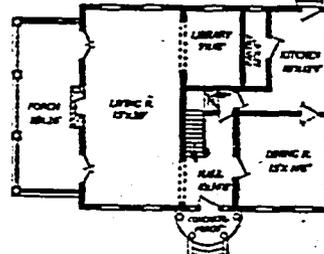


Figure 26. The *Colonial* as an example of an Aladdin period revival house. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 31.

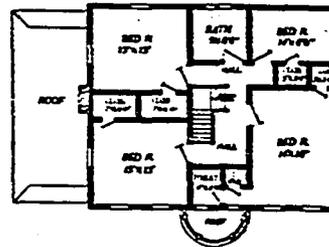
**T**HIS modern home with its distinctive features has a large number of admirers. The general appearance, both design and arrangement of detail, place it in a class of its own. The general lines are taken from New England and Southern colonial architecture, while many original ideas are added. The windows with divided lights and simple dormers breaking the front roof, are purely of New England origin, often referred to as "severe, simple, and quiet."

Credit is due to Southern designers for the semi-circle porch and front entrance detail; also the broad and heavy side porch. The interior expresses modern ideas.

The large size porch is an excellent summer season auxiliary to living room, as both run parallel, with entrance doors on either side of the fireplace. Library directly adjoins living room. Dining room and kitchen arranged on opposite side of house are separated by entrance hall and staircase. Four corner bed rooms on second floor are well ventilated and easily accessible to hallway and bathroom. This home is fascinating in appearance and has much of the sought-for distinction. Of course you will want to know a great many things about the Colonial, if this handsome home appeals to you, things that there is not enough space to tell about here. Upon request we will send complete detail specifications and go into all the interesting facts. Write us about your ideas. See General Specifications on pages 12 and 13. See Terms on page 2.



First Floor Plan—The Colonial



Second Floor Plan—The Colonial

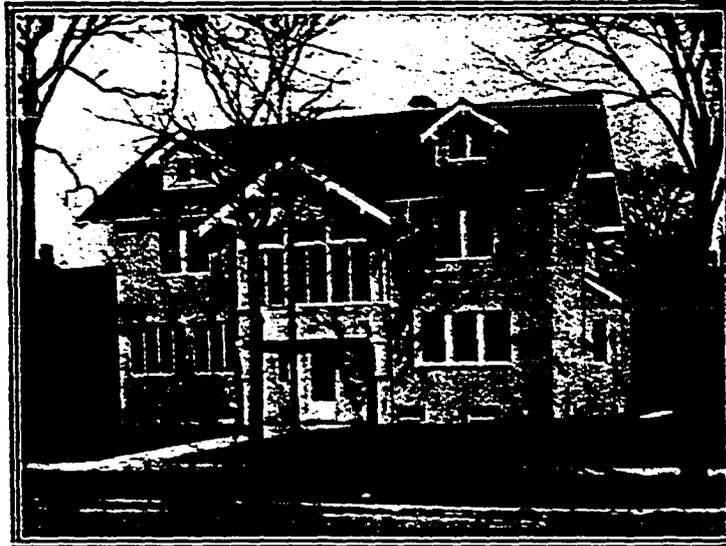
## The Colonial

**\$1,843.00**

Price, \$1,940.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$1,843.00



Figure 27. The *Rossley* as an example of an Aladdin period revival house. From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 24.



**The Rossley \$3,040.00**

Price, \$3,200.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$3,040.00

**A**RE you interested in the Old English style of architecture? If so, we are certain that you will be delighted with the Rossley. Every detail reveals the careful attention that has been given to make this home artistic, modern and convenient.

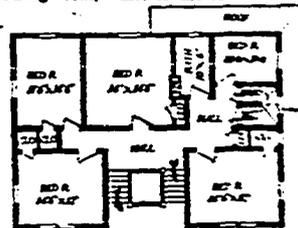
Notice how the front entrance from grade is protected by the heavy overhang forming the balcony to second floor landing. Passing through this beautifully designed front entrance one enters a large vestibule, and double French doors. Ascending by wide steps to the first floor, one is charmed with the view and pleased with the arrangement. Directly in front are the double glass doors affording an excellent view of the den; to the right a large door leading to the attractive and well lighted dining room, while to the left and rear are the doors leading to kitchen, breakfast room and side grade entrance.

On entering the large living room, one is delighted with the plan, which includes large French doors leading to the sun parlor. The sun parlor has the center pair of each set of windows swinging open, thus affording in pleasant weather a delightfully protected and secluded open porch. Opening off from the den at the rear is a glass door leading to another semi-open porch. On returning to the front hall, the visitor at once is attracted by the massive yet artistic stairway leading to balcony and second floor. We wish you could stand there to see for yourself. The massive square column, the wide, easily ascending stairs, the large, brilliantly lighted balcony combine to make this one of the most attractive and unique plans. It is so far removed from the ordinary, so massive and yet so artistic, that it becomes a distinctive feature in the architecture of the Rossley.

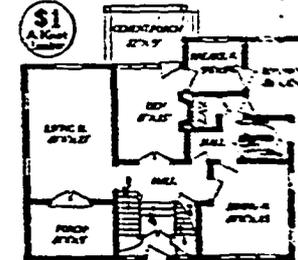
Each of the four well lighted bed rooms on the second floor has a large clothes closet in connection. Convenient stairs lead to a well lighted third floor.

The home from which this picture was taken was built by us in Bay City and is finished in stucco or pebble dash, and the roof has every fifth row of shingles laid double to give the ridged appearance so easily seen. If desired shingles or siding can be furnished for side walls.

See Terms on page 2 and General Specifications on pages 12 and 13.



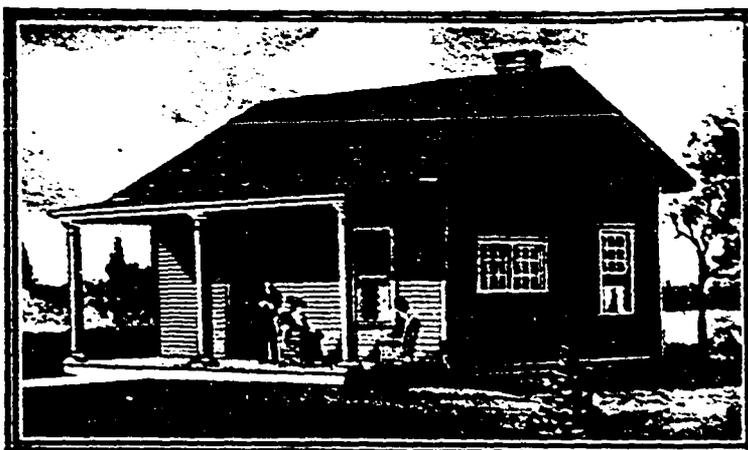
Second Floor Plan—The Rossley



First Floor Plan—The Rossley

\$1 A Week

Figure 28. The *Rodney* as an example of an Aladdin one-story conservative house.  
From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City,  
MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 48.



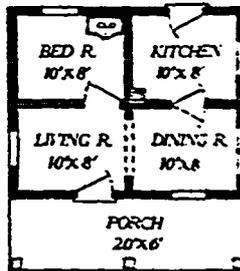
**The Rodney—A Comfortable Little Home**

**\$1  
A Week**

**\$327.75**

Price, No. 1, \$345.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$327.75

**M**ANY good American families are living happily and comfortably in Rodneys. Its four cosy rooms are all well arranged and its generous porch serves in a delightful way the outdoor pleasures of summer. A handsome front door with glass in upper part and embellished with mouldings would suitably fit a more costly home. The double casement window in the dining room, with English sash made to swing in appeals strongly to the housewife. All upper sash are divided into small lights.



Floor Plan—The Rodney

You have your choice of two sizes in the Rodney. No. 1 is 20x22 feet over all and has four 10x8 foot rooms. Price given above. No. 2 is 24x26 feet and has four 10x12 foot rooms. Price, \$390.00, cash discount 5%. Net price, \$370.50. In both designs a wide arch separates the living room from the dining room. You will be delighted should you decide to own this cottage.

Of course, you receive our famous Dollar-A-Knot siding and all the materials entering the construction are positively the highest grades found anywhere. Fine brass oak leaf design lock sets set off the beautifully grained doors and woodwork. In fact, you will have as finely finished a home as anyone. Two men can erect this house in four days. Most owners of the Rodney did all the work themselves easily.



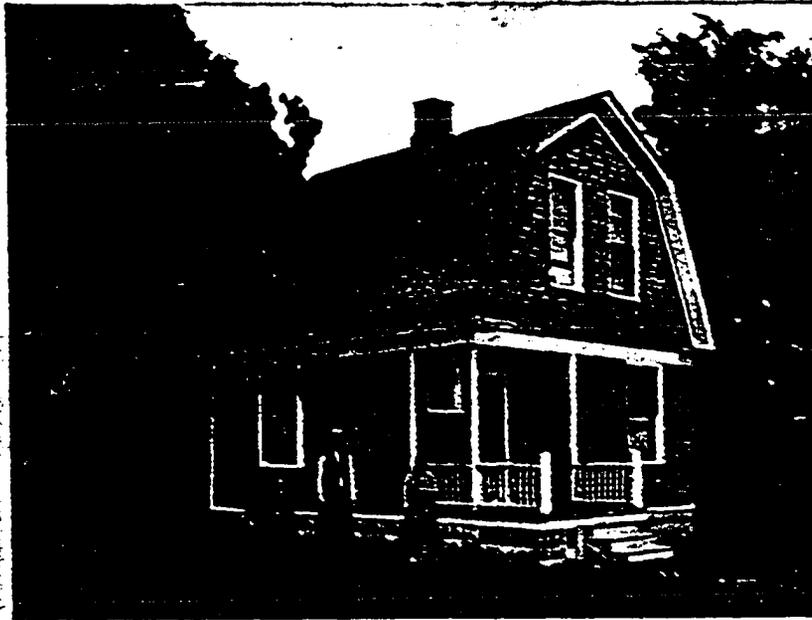
Rodney Dining Room

See Terms on page 2 and General Specifications on pages 12 and 13.

I am very proud of my bungalow and want to say that I received much better material than I could have bought here. It is admired by all. You may be sure when I build again you will get the order. For I saved nearly \$600 on this deal.

—S. R. Bartlett

Figure 29. The *New Eden* as an example of an Aladdin two-story conservative house.  
From North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (Bay City,  
MI: North American Construction Company, 1916), 32.

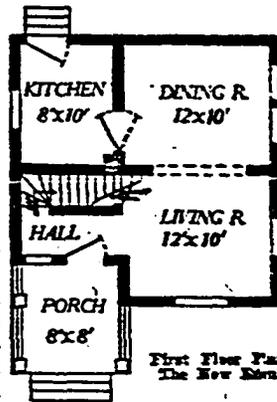


**The New Eden \$596.60**

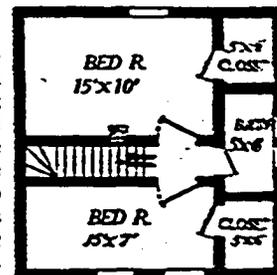
Price, \$622.00  
Cash discount, 5%  
Net price, \$596.60

**T**HIS home, the New Eden, shows the result of careful planning before building—and it is surely gratifying to its many owners among Aladdin customers. On a ground space of 20x20 feet, this home gives more room, more comfort, more convenience than has ever before been obtained. Two stories, having two bed rooms upstairs, a hall, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, an open stairway, a porch, and above all, an attractive looking house. It is so well liked by its many happy owners, that it is common for them to call it the "Wonder Home" on account of its low price, abundance of space, and its convenience.

Notice the features on the exterior. A broad belt across the front of the house divides first and second stories, giving a pleasing and harmonious effect. The half-sheltered porch is a pleasant feature and is well built for strength, attractiveness and harmony. The full length column, fronted by pedestals, makes a comfortable porch. The diamond paned window to the left of the front door gives plenty of light to the stairway and adds attractiveness to the front of the house and porch. Living room and dining room are divided by a wide arch, making them practically one room. Both rooms are well lighted and of good size. Notice the double window in the dining room. Two men can erect and complete this house in exactly six days. It can be done by any two men who are willing to work, assisted by our complete instructions and illustrations. See General Specifications on pages 12 and 13. Detail specifications will be sent you on request. See Terms on page 2.



First Floor Plan  
The New Eden



Second Floor—The New Eden

## Chapter 3

### THE RHETORIC OF AESTHETICS

The aesthetic, the practical, and the comfortable. Of the three categories of rhetoric, the aesthetic presents the characteristics which defined and differentiated bungalows, semi-bungalows, square type houses, period revivals, and conservative houses. Through the rhetoric of aesthetics, the physical features of ornament and scale are given abstract qualities like "simplicity" and "massiveness." Each house style possesses a different set of these aesthetic abstractions which serve to distinguish one style from another. Some abstractions are shared across several styles, namely semi-bungalows, square type houses, and certain period revivals. By contrast, bungalows and conservative houses are aesthetic opposites, having few aesthetic abstractions in common. They thus represent two opposite aesthetic poles. Semi-bungalows, square type houses, and the period revivals that together share rhetorical abstractions are positioned between the two poles. The degree to which these houses share aesthetic abstractions with bungalows or conversely, with conservative houses, determines their relative aesthetic position between the poles.

The adjectives or descriptors used to describe Aladdin's various houses were critical to its aesthetic typology of house styles. Through these descriptors, the houses could be portrayed in terms of subjective abstraction rather than objective description. Objectively speaking, a two-story house is not "massive." Subjectively speaking, however, its scale may be portrayed as "massive." Such a description invokes a set of positive associations like "strength" and "power." Thus, a symbolic construction is formed where the house's

exterior shell, defined by scale and ornament, assumes the role of signifier, or objective expression. The abstractions created by the use of descriptors become the exterior shell's signifieds, or subjective content. Together a sign or symbol is created.<sup>1</sup> This process of symbol generation may be thought of in terms of aestheticization, the process by which advertising attaches positive, subjective qualities to a product.<sup>2</sup>

The aesthetic qualities Aladdin attached to its various house styles were not plucked randomly from the air. Instead, they increasingly emerged from progressive ideas about the "reform" of the home and its aesthetic qualities. The process by which reformist ideas were incorporated into Aladdin's aesthetic rhetoric may be thought of in terms of literacy: the rhetoric of the aesthetic grew more literate in its understanding of progressive ideology as the 1906 to 1920 period passed. As the company (and presumably many of its customers) grew more aware of reformers' definitions of proper aesthetics, these ideas were manipulated by Aladdin to help sell houses.<sup>3</sup> The impact of the increasing awareness and use of progressive aesthetics was the increasing separation of bungalows and conservative houses. Over time, bungalows came to possess the most extensive and explicit expression of progressive aesthetics. Conservative houses, on the other hand, came to represent an aesthetic alternative to the bungalow; not all of Aladdin's customers

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<sup>1</sup>A signifier exists in the plane of expression as a objective entity, whether an object, sound, image or other conscious act. Its signified (or in this case, series of signifieds) exists in the plane of content as the abstract, subjective, mental representation of the conscious act. Together the signifier/signified pair forms a sign or symbol. For a complete discussion of symbolic systems, see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>For an earlier discussion of aestheticization, see page 5.

<sup>3</sup>Manipulation of progressive ideas does not necessarily mean deceit. Instead, Aladdin recognized the popularity of such ideas and used them as an advertising tool. If Aladdin's version of the progressive home and that developed by progressive authors did not always correspond, deceit was probably not the intention. Aladdin's copy simply reflects the company's interpretation of progressive ideas. This interpretation was probably quite close to the popular middle-class perception of "reform" and its relationship to the concept of "home."

were interested in the aesthetics of reform. This process of change runs throughout the discussion that follows.

As a style, the bungalow was characterized by three aesthetic abstractions, those of simplicity, individuality, and artistry. All three qualities traced their roots to progressive ideas about the home. But where the reformers envisioned simplicity, individuality, and artistry as part of a new way of living, Aladdin modified their views to serve only as positive aesthetic properties. In fact, Aladdin's rhetoric of aesthetics is often reminiscent of late Victorian attitudes rather than "progressive" living. Support for a new mode of living based on the ideals of simplicity, individuality, and artistry thus had a limited impact on the mass middle class to whom Aladdin catered.

Simplicity was one of the fundamental requirements necessary for "improved" living according to many reformers. Only later in the 1906 to 1920 period, however, did Aladdin associate simplicity with the progressive prescriptive literature. As this awareness grew, bungalows in particular came to be described in terms of the aesthetics of simplicity. Once in place, the rhetoric of simplicity grew increasingly more elaborate as Aladdin exploited its popular appeal. The *Maples*, for example, was described in 1912 as having "simple outlines."<sup>4</sup> Similarly the *Forsyth* in 1914 possessed "simple, square lines."<sup>5</sup> With the 1916 rewrite of Aladdin's catalogs, however, aesthetic simplicity became more elaborate and idealized. Introduced in 1913, the *Brighton's* 1916 text noted that the house possessed an "extreme simplicity and purity of form."<sup>6</sup> The virtues of

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<sup>4</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1912), 41.

<sup>5</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 17.

<sup>6</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 22.

simplicity were made even more elaborate with the *Sunshine*: "Extreme simplicity is the motif behind the planning of this home. Simplicity implies character, quality and taste."<sup>7</sup>

The aesthetics of simplicity increasingly represented idealized, positive values in the Aladdin bungalow. Aladdin, seeking to appeal to a popular market familiar with the literature of reform, drew on progressive ideologues like Gustav Stickley and Charles Keeler. But to the progressives who viewed the Victorian taste for elaboration as the root of larger social ills, simplicity formed the basis for a new way of living.<sup>8</sup> Aladdin's version of simplicity, by contrast, was much more conservative. Charles Keeler, for example, believed that one's entire lifestyle must be made more simple. Of the home he said, "Let the work be simple and genuine...let it be an individual expression of the life which it is to environ...Eliminate in so far as possible all factory-made accessories in order that your dwelling may not be typical of American commercial supremacy."<sup>9</sup> Keeler viewed simplicity as part of a new way of life that asserted its independence from industrial production. Even in the *Sunshine*, Aladdin did not attach simplicity to reform. Instead, it presented simplicity as primarily an aesthetic quality symbolic of positive properties like "character, quality and taste."

Aladdin's and the reformer's differing conceptualizations of simplicity have several implications. First, the gap indicates that progressive ideals had a limited popular appeal. The text from the *Sunshine* suggests that people were uninterested in embracing

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<sup>7</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1917), 54.

<sup>8</sup>Stickley, for example, wrote, "One need only turn to the pages of history to find abundant proof of the unerring action of Nature's law, for without exception the people whose lives are lived simply and wholesomely, in the open, and who have in a high degree the sense of the sacredness of the home, are the people who have made the greatest strides in the development of the race" (Stickley, *Craftsman Homes*, 194).

<sup>9</sup>Keeler, 36-37.

simplicity as a new lifestyle. Instead, Aladdin's version of simplicity offered bungalow owners a certain sense of fashionability by allowing them to flaunt its up-to-date "simplicity."<sup>10</sup> By increasingly incorporating simplicity into the aesthetic rhetoric of bungalows, Aladdin could expand the style's appeal; progressive literacy gave simplicity a positive "spin." The disparity between Aladdin's sense of simplicity and that of reformers was also rife with irony. Aladdin was part of the industrial complex criticized by Keeler and others for destroying the tie between worker and product. But for the reformers' ideal of simple houses for simple living to become reality, wide-scale availability of "simple" houses (itself a subjective and ambiguous concept) was required. Wide-scale availability meant affordable, mass-produced houses from companies like Aladdin. Such companies, however, were part of the same industrial complex that had supposedly contributed to both the ornamental excesses and the exploitation of the worker criticized by many reformers.

Individuality is the second of the aesthetic abstractions associated with bungalows. Like simplicity, many reformers promoted individuality in house design. Aladdin's notion of individuality, however, was geared towards making mass-produced houses seem different and unique. And unlike the aesthetics of simplicity where greater elaboration and idealism came with progressive literacy, the content of Aladdin's rhetoric

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<sup>10</sup>The concept of simplicity as a form of status was first suggested by Thorstein Veblen. In his discussion of handcrafted goods, Veblen implies that capacity to select the crude and simple becomes a form of ostentatious display. See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912), 155-66. Cheryl Robertson also discusses the fashionable attributes of simplicity in the handmade object, noting her debt to Veblen. See Cheryl Robertson, "House and Home in the Arts and Crafts Era: Reforms for Simpler Living," in *The Art that is Life: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920*, ed. Wendy Kaplan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), 336-40. Robert Winter has used the term "ostentatious simplicity" to describe the fashionable connotations of simplicity expressed in publications on bungalow design and decoration. See Robert Winter, *The California Bungalow*, California Architecture and Architects, ed. David Gebhard, no. 1 (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1980), 48. Anthony King draws a similar conclusion in pointing out that the choice of "simple living" implied that one could instead choose not to live simply. See King, 155.

of individuality was stable over time. The *Jamesburg*, for example, was described in 1913 as being "quaint and distinctive."<sup>11</sup> In 1916, the *Burbank* was similarly described as having "individuality and distinction."<sup>12</sup> Apart from indicating the rhetoric of individuality's stability, the themes of individuality and independence found in the *Jamesburg* and *Burbank* also connect such rhetoric to the late Victorian home ideal. The prescriptive literature of the later nineteenth century portrayed the single family house as an individualized symbol of its occupants, indicative of achievement or failure; proper scale, decoration, and furnishing assured the former.<sup>13</sup> Aladdin reflected the continued appeal of such ideas as late as 1916: "Home! Who loves their home more than the American family? Every day, father is looking forward to the time when he can provide a home for his loved ones..."<sup>14</sup> Possession of one's own house was still an important achievement in 1916. To own an aesthetically "distinctive" or "different" house held even greater significance as an affirmation of success; a unique house more explicitly set its owner apart from his or her peers.<sup>15</sup> Aladdin recognized the appeal of the single family home as well as the desire to possess and display something unique and unusual. But how could a standardized, mass-produced house possibly reflect individuality? It could not, but Aladdin nevertheless tried to make its models sound aesthetically unique. In

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<sup>11</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1913), 18.

<sup>12</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 73-74.

<sup>13</sup>Wright, *Moralism*, 45 and Clark, *American*, 114.

<sup>14</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 15.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of the significance attached to the single family house and its ownership, see Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xv-xix.

doing so, it was trying to mediate between an older vision of the single family home as a tool for conspicuous display and the new reality of mass-production.

But why were bungalows disproportionately emphasized as being aesthetically unique and individualistic in relation to other house styles? One must look to the reformers for an answer. Like Aladdin, the progressives also regarded individuality in a positive light, but as more than an issue of aesthetics. They saw individuality not in terms of materialistic display, but in terms of creating an "honest" house that exactly met one's needs without elaboration; the individual, cognizant of his or her needs, would create an individualized house to serve those needs.<sup>16</sup> Like simplicity, then, individuality was a concept with popular currency in the early twentieth century. Bandied about in the progressive prescriptive literature, it became a "buzz word" for describing the house and home. Aladdin, despite its differing conception of individuality, exploited the term's popularity. And since bungalows were widely viewed as the archtypical progressive house style, Aladdin attached the rhetoric of individuality to this style.<sup>17</sup> Once again the progressive vision was tempered by popular realities. From Aladdin's perspective, individuality was an outward, aesthetic quality that helped differentiate its many bungalow models and minimize any stigma attached to mass-produced houses. From the customer's perspective, the rhetoric of individuality created the illusion that he or she was

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<sup>16</sup>In exhorting his audience to assert their independence from architects and builders, Gustav Stickley reflects the reformers' ideal of individuality: "individuality and independence seem to vanish, and we are brow beaten alike by architect, builder, contractor, interior decorator, picture dealer and furniture man...How many of us would dare to rise up and assert sufficient individuality to plan a build a house that exactly suited our personal ideal of comfort and beauty, and represented our station in life?" (Stickley, Craftsman Homes, 6).

<sup>17</sup>As Clark points out, the bungalow was popularly viewed as the ideal type for the progressive home; as a new form, it served as the antithesis of the Victorian house. See Clark, American, 171.

receiving a unique design. In short, Aladdin and its customers continued to view individuality in terms of its display value.

Related to simplicity and individuality was the artistic, first associated with bungalows in 1916.<sup>18</sup> In looking at the *Vassar*, the reader was asked to "Notice how all sides of this house are relieved of every monotonous appearance by the broken roof lines and the artistic selection and location of the different styles of windows."<sup>19</sup> The "artistic" is thus presented as a self-conscious process intended to create a contrived aesthetic composition; the manipulation of ornament, fenestration, and other elements made the house into an art object. This viewpoint is quite similar to that in vogue during the 1870s and 1880s when "the artistic" denoted a self-conscious expression symbolic of personal taste and achievement.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the interior of the house was to be a continual "artistic" display of "female elegancies" like drawings and piano playing.<sup>21</sup>

Reformers associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, however, did not view the artistic as a contrived manipulation of materials for purposes of display. They viewed art and the artistic as naturally emerging from one's life--an organic extension of one's needs. In reference to the designing of houses, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin wrote: "At present he [the architect] but too readily accepts the popular idea of art as a

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<sup>18</sup>Aladdin first incorporated the artistic into its aesthetic rhetoric in 1914 when the *Georgia*, a semi-bungalow, was described as having "reached the highest point of artistic development" (North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* [1914], 79).

<sup>19</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 54.

<sup>20</sup>Clark, *American*, 104.

<sup>21</sup>Clark, *American*, 106.

thing quite apart from life, a sort of trimming to be added if funds allow."<sup>22</sup> Art and the artistic were holistically viewed as part of the larger experience of life. One did not simply tack trimming to one's house or try to create an artistic composition from various pieces of ornament. Instead, the artistic house emerged naturally when one sought to build "honestly" and without aesthetic conceit. By defining the artistic in terms of contrived architectural compositions, Aladdin split from Parker, Unwin, and others.

Other producers for the popular market echoed Aladdin's sense of the artistic. Henry Wilson noted that

Nothing is more offensive to good taste in architecture than too much 'gingerbread' trimming, but the artistic introduction of heavy roof brackets, flower boxes and overhanging shed-roofs greatly enhance the attractiveness of this [a bungalow] beautiful and very popular home.<sup>23</sup>

Wilson says, in effect, that the ornament applied to the Victorian house made it offensive. The same technique, however, is artistic when done with a bungalow using the latest ornamental devices. Aladdin and Wilson, then, adopted the artistic as a progressive "buzz word" to accompany the newly popular bungalow. Their actual definition of the artistic placed them in the late nineteenth century when artistic architecture implied a self-conscious "composing" of facades. Such "artistic" structures became material symbols of personal and cultural success rather than the useful and virtuous art advocated by reformers.

The artistic, like simplicity and individuality, was part of the rhetoric used by a range of aesthetic/social reformers. Over time, Aladdin increasingly adopted these terms

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<sup>22</sup>Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, "The Art of Building a Home," in Gustav Stickley, Craftsman Homes: Architecture and Furnishings of the American Arts and Crafts Movement (New York: Craftsman Publishing Co., 1909; reprint, New York: Dover, 1979), 8.

<sup>23</sup>Wilson, 16.

for their positive connotations. But Aladdin's versions of simplicity, individuality, and artistry, having more in common with the nineteenth than the twentieth century, reflected the continued influence of nineteenth-century aesthetic ideas in the popular market. Whatever the source, simplicity, individuality, and artistry came to be defining characteristics of the Aladdin bungalow. They doubly established the bungalow as both a distinct house style and as an important source for developing stylistic definitions for other houses.

Exploiting the popular recognition of simplicity, individuality, and artistry, Aladdin increasingly used various combinations of the three to define other house styles. Since many of Aladdin's non-bungalows were one and one half or two stories, the variations of simplicity, individuality, and artistry used with these houses often incorporated references to scale as well. By assembling one, two, or all three of the aesthetic abstractions associated with bungalows along with references to scale, semi-bungalows, non-Colonial period revivals, and square type houses became discrete house styles defined by their aesthetic rhetoric; from the bungalow's rhetorical attributes, new styles were subsequently spun-off.

The house type bearing the closest relationship to the bungalow was the semi-bungalow, utilizing all three of the bungalow's aesthetic abstractions. The close relationship between the two styles is not surprising since semi-bungalows were sometimes described as two-story bungalows.<sup>24</sup> In the realm of simplicity, the rhetoric associated with semi-bungalows tended to be less idealistic in tone than that used with bungalows. The *Romeo*, for example, was described in 1916 as having "clean lines."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>For a discussion of the bungalow/semi-bungalow physical relationship, see pages 38-39.

<sup>25</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 71.

Such straightforward expressions of simplicity are typical throughout the 1906 to 1920 period.

Used throughout the 1906 to 1920 era, individuality in semi-bungalows was very similar to that found with bungalows. Like Aladdin's mass-produced bungalows, individuality in semi-bungalows was used to imply aesthetic uniqueness. The *Wilmont*, for one, possessed "several individualities peculiar to it alone" like the appearance of its porch and other features.<sup>26</sup> In the context of standardized design, Aladdin rhetorically maintained the aesthetic ideal that one's house was to be a unique visual expression of its occupants; in reality, one *Wilmont* was no different than any other.

Like bungalows, artistry in the semi-bungalow connoted a contrived composition of ornamental elements. Also like the bungalow, artistry and semi-bungalows were more frequently combined after 1916. The *Venus* of 1917 is a good example of the artistic as used with semi-bungalows. It was described as having "many artistic touches" like casement windows and exposed rafter ends.<sup>27</sup>

If simplicity, individuality, and artistry could all be found in the aesthetics of the semi-bungalow, the style was explicitly set apart from bungalows on the basis of scale. The 1916 description of the *Georgia* as an "unusual combination" of a bungalow and a two-story house clearly defines the difference between the two styles.<sup>28</sup> To help reiterate the semi-bungalow's larger, two-story scale, the ornament of semi-bungalows was often described with adjectives connoting strength and weight. The *Sheffield*, for example, had

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<sup>26</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 71.

<sup>27</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 44.

<sup>28</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1916), 75.

a "heavy overhang" to its roof as well as "heavy porch columns."<sup>29</sup> Taking the abstraction further, the *Brunswick* offered a "broad substantial structure."<sup>30</sup> While the semi-bungalow's ornament could be read as symbolic of simplicity, individuality, and artistry, its scale--characterized by its sturdy strength--became its differentiating characteristic.

Aladdin's non-Colonial period revival houses further shared aesthetic rhetoric with bungalows and semi-bungalows. The aesthetics of artistry and individuality often appear in association with these period revival houses: the *Villa* was said to challenge "the lover of the artistic" while the *Brentwood's* balcony represented an "unusual and distinctive [read individual] idea."<sup>31</sup> Again a relationship was drawn between bungalow aesthetics and those of a different style. Simplicity, however, was not part of the aesthetic rhetoric of these period revival models. By eliminating simplicity, expensive period revival models like the *Villa* were living up to their purchasers' expectations. The buyers of these houses did not want to be told that their new dwellings were aesthetically simple or plain. The positive connotations of simplicity thus had limits among the more wealthy members of Aladdin's audience; Aladdin apparently associated this market segment with aesthetic complexity.

In square type houses, a more radical variation on the bungalow's simplicity-individuality-artistry aesthetic was used to differentiate the style. Simplicity and individuality remained part of the aesthetic equation through phrases like "trim, clean

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<sup>29</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 64.

<sup>30</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (Bay City, MI: The Aladdin Company, 1920), 81.

<sup>31</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 27; 41-42.

architectural lines" (simplicity) and "several different" aesthetic features (individuality).<sup>32</sup> Square type houses shared with semi-bungalows the additional abstractions of massiveness and strength. With square type houses, though, it was their square shape that served as the basis of their supposed strength. The *Rochester's* square shape, for example, was said to always express "massiveness and strength."<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the bungalow and semi-bungalow, the square type house was not presented as artistic. Instead, it was described as conservative. Beginning in 1916--the same time the aesthetic rhetoric of the bungalow became more elaborated and idealistic--square type houses began to be described in terms of conservatism. The design of the *Virginia*, for one, was "founded on conservative lines."<sup>34</sup> Even in the only square type house described as artistic, there were limits: its exposed rafter ends, dormers, and other features added "an artistic touch without giving it an overburdening of trimmings."<sup>35</sup> Artistry, suggests the rhetoric, was not to be taken to extremes. The connotations of the artistic, then, were not always positive. Even though Aladdin's concept of the artistic had more in common with the Victorian era, the connotations of the artistic could be too bold--too tied to transitory fashions. Perhaps the connotation of art as avant-garde or as part of the progressive agenda created negative associations for some house buyers. Whatever the case, the square type house became an aesthetic alternative to the new bungalows,

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<sup>32</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 62 and North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1912), 25. The models respectively described are the *Cumberland* and the *Addison*.

<sup>33</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 86.

<sup>34</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 46.

<sup>35</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 86. The model was the *Rochester*.

semi-bungalows, and non-Colonial period revivals; they provided both the bungalow's simplicity and individuality as well as the stable aesthetics of conservatism.<sup>36</sup>

As the square type house indicated, aesthetic conservatism became a positive value as time passed. The square type house, however, mixed conservatism with the bungalow-based aesthetics of simplicity and individuality. By contrast, the ornamentally simple conservative house eventually rejected the bungalow aesthetic. In Aladdin's early catalogs, subjective aesthetic qualities were rarely attached to the ornamentally sparse conservative house. If aesthetic abstractions were used, they were pragmatic in tone. The *M-2* was described in 1911 as "a great big, square, honest dwelling house...There is nothing fancy about this house."<sup>37</sup> Here, "fancy" refers to the ornamental elaboration typical of late nineteenth-century houses. Over time, though, conservative houses began to be portrayed not as a reaction against nineteenth-century design, but as the aesthetic opposite of the "faddish" bungalow. This process occurred at the same time that Aladdin was becoming more sensitive to progressive rhetoric, a trend evidenced by its incorporation of progressive "buzz words" into the aesthetic rhetoric of bungalows and related house styles.

The *Michigan* represents the clearest example of the rhetorical change in conservative houses. In 1914, only interior features defined the *Michigan*.<sup>38</sup> By 1918, the *Michigan* had been transformed:

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<sup>36</sup>The square type house's "conservative" aesthetic may, in part, emerge from the history of the form itself. Alan Gowans contends that the square type house (he uses "foursquare") had its roots in eighteenth-century Georgian design. In the nineteenth century, "the old square or cubic shape became only a core for houses in High-Victorian Picturesque styles..." By the 1880s the reaction against the Picturesque led to simplification and "Slowly the square form began to resurface, and the American foursquare of the post-Victorian suburbs emerged from its Picturesque chrysalis" (Gowans, 87).

<sup>37</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1911), 22.

<sup>38</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 29.

...it is a conservative design of a type that has always found a number of admirers among home builders. Among the great number of people building new homes each year, a large percentage are not attracted to types decorated with embellishments and novelties that, to use their words, 'come and go every year.' Their preference runs to simplicity, service and durability.<sup>39</sup>

The absence of ornament thus aesthetically defined the *Michigan*. The new bungalow aesthetic of brackets and exposed rafter ends, simplicity and artistry, was rejected as little more than a passing novelty; unlike the idealized simplicity associated with the bungalow, houses like the *Michigan* were literally simple--and therefore conservative. To reiterate their conservative pedigree, two conservative houses underwent name changes in 1916: the *Jersey* became the *Princeton* and the *Portland* became the *Yale*. The new Ivy League names carried connotations of conservatism and tradition. Certainly the creation of the conservative house style was partially an advertising ploy intended to increase product differentiation. At the same time, however, the tension between the bungalow and the conservative house reflected the diversity of attitudes during the early twentieth century. Even if reformers bombarded the public with prescriptive literature, other attitudes towards the home also had adherents. The rhetoric of the aesthetic encoded these diverse values into a single symbolic system; bungalow owners were not the only ones who could participate in the language of symbols based on house styles.

Conservatism was also part of Aladdin's Colonial Revival houses. By combining conservatism with an emphasis on historical accuracy and an explicit aesthetic elitism, Aladdin's Colonial Revival houses became a discrete type. In terms of conservatism, the *Colonial* of 1909 was "wholesome in design" while the *Colonial* of 1916 possessed

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<sup>39</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 34.

"severe, simple, and quiet" windows.<sup>40</sup> Unlike conservative houses, the conservatism of Colonial Revival houses functioned in terms of limited ornament, imposing appearance, and a general air of purity; apparently other houses were not as aesthetically wholesome. Accuracy of detail was also stressed. As early as 1909 the *Virginia* was described as having "all necessary features of the true Southern type."<sup>41</sup> The same emphasis on accuracy appeared in 1917 with the *La Salle*: "The architectural detail is purely Colonial...Entrance detail shows no deviation from Colonial custom...Sidelights on each side of the door, heavy brass door knocker and half glass door are purely Colonial."<sup>42</sup> The emphasis on accuracy indicates an "Academic" approach to architecture which stressed carefully studied revivalism.<sup>43</sup> A sense of exclusivity was also part of Aladdin's Colonial Revival aesthetic. "The general appearance, both design and arrangement of details, place it in a class of its own" described the *Colonial* while the *Worthington* boasted "Exclusiveness of design--that's what the *Worthington* bespeaks...this house is bound to equal in beauty and design, any of the better class homes in any city or town."<sup>44</sup>

The aesthetics of conservatism, accuracy, and exclusivity associated with Aladdin's Colonial Revival houses made them an expression of mode. Dell Upton defines mode as those visual elements of goods that serve to intentionally set their owners apart from

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<sup>40</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1909), 12 and North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 31. The *Colonial* of 1909 was only offered in that year. The name was revived in 1916 for another Colonial Revival model.

<sup>41</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1909), 14.

<sup>42</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 95.

<sup>43</sup>Gowans, 104. Gowans associates Academicism with architects and their emphasis on historically accurate design.

<sup>44</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 32 and The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1920), 56. The model name *Colonial* refers to the model introduced in 1916 rather than the 1909 model of the same name.

others.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Aladdin's Colonial Revival houses--often the company's most expensive models--the purpose of mode was to set wealthy house owners apart from others through references to a Colonial elite. As Alan Gowans has pointed out, America's Colonial Revival was based on eighteenth-century Georgian houses which originally served "to compose authority symbols for a class-structured state."<sup>46</sup> When revived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Colonial Revival continued to be associated with the wealth of a predominantly WASP, upper-middle class.<sup>47</sup> Aladdin, by imbuing its Colonial Revival houses with the aesthetics of mode, was part of a larger context in which Colonial Revival houses served as symbols of exclusivity.<sup>48</sup> Like Aladdin's other house styles, its Colonial Revival houses were defined by their aesthetic qualities. Aladdin's rhetoric of the aesthetic thus played the crucial role in defining the various house styles the company offered, ranging from the simple and artistic bungalow to the staid and stable conservative house. By not using plans as the basis of categorization, Aladdin emphasized the function of houses as visual symbols of their purchasers; in the popular housing market of the early twentieth century, self-conscious display overwhelmed the reformers' calls for conscientious consumption with an eye towards use and beauty.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Upton, *Holy*, 102.

<sup>46</sup>Gowans, 144.

<sup>47</sup>Gowans, 146.

<sup>48</sup>For a discussion of the various symbolic components of the Colonial Revival, see William Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival," vol. 1 (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1974), 376-544.

<sup>49</sup>For a discussion of the reform movement and consumer consumption, see David E. Shi, ed., *In Search of the Simple Life* (Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, 1986), 177-78.

Clearly Aladdin and, more likely than not, its customers emphasized the role of the exterior in creating differences between various houses. To that end, Aladdin attached subjective qualities to various physical features, transforming objective, physical reality into subjective, abstract symbols. Each house style possessed its own set of abstract aesthetic qualities which defined it as a distinct type. Building on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas and sociologist Michael Schudson, it is possible to consider the aesthetic categorization of houses as a process by which goods become visible signs of culture and social relationships. Mary Douglas argues that goods are necessary to clearly define and maintain the categories of social relationships that structure culture.<sup>50</sup> Douglas also observes that "consumption is a ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events." Goods therefore serve as part of ritual where ritual is a stabilizing force. Together, goods and their consumption help the consumer construct a stable, "intelligible universe" in a complex world.<sup>51</sup> Goods connect this individual universe to the broader culture by functioning as messengers: "In being offered, accepted, or refused, [goods] either reinforce or undermine existing boundaries."<sup>52</sup> Goods can therefore be used to create similarities or disparities among people. This process is mostly clearly acted out through the process of naming goods and subsequently sharing those names with others.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979), 59-60.

<sup>51</sup>Douglas, 65.

<sup>52</sup>Douglas, 72.

<sup>53</sup>Douglas, 75-76.

In trying to explain the development of America's consumer culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Michael Schudson expands on Douglas' work. Schudson believes that the high social and geographic mobility of the late nineteenth century led to an increasing range of choices for individuals in all aspects of life.<sup>54</sup> The growing mass media played an integral role in individual decision making by expanding the individual's knowledge of the world. The mass media also led "people to constantly compare themselves to others or to images of others."<sup>55</sup> Goods, argues Schudson, played a critical role in structuring new symbolic systems that helped people establish their place in this changing cultural context.<sup>56</sup> Promoted by the new advertising industry, the huge quantities of standardized goods flooding the market provided the means by which new symbols could be developed, sold, and consumed. More specifically, consumption offered the opportunity to share names and thereby participate in culture; by consuming different types of goods as well as specific brand names, one could create an identity that was related to a broader cultural context.<sup>57</sup> Others recognized this goods-grounded identity since the names to be shared were provided by producers and dispersed through expanded channels of distribution and advertising.<sup>58</sup>

Dependent on improved distribution and mass marketing, Aladdin participated in the consumer culture identified by Schudson. The various house styles the company rhetorically created were the equivalent of brand name goods given distinct connotations

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<sup>54</sup>Schudson, 151-52.

<sup>55</sup>Schudson, 153.

<sup>56</sup>Schudson, 156.

<sup>57</sup>Schudson, 158-61.

<sup>58</sup>Schudson, 161-68.

through advertising. By extension, the house styles together functioned as a symbolic system. Consumers used this system to create for themselves an "intelligible universe" where different house styles suggested different associations. A bungalow, for example, might symbolize its owner's "progressive" view or his or her preference for the latest stylistic fashions. By contrast, a conservative house might symbolize its owner's anxiety towards, or rejection of, current fashion.<sup>59</sup> Just as the consumption of a particular brand of canned soup or a particular brand of ready-made clothing created relationships and disparities among consumers, so did the consumption of mass-produced houses. Through the process of naming and sharing names, a bungalow "brand name" and a conservative house "brand name" signified different attitudes and values.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the symbolic system defined by Aladdin's rhetoric of the aesthetic allowed mass-produced goods (in this case, houses) to function as visual guideposts. These guideposts not only defined the individual house owner's "intelligible universe," but also a broader universe where the possession of goods and subsequent recognition of ownership played an important role in defining relationships and divisions among people.

The rhetoric of the aesthetic was clearly a critical part of Aladdin's promotional effort. By using such rhetoric, the physical features of ornament and scale were converted into abstract qualities like simplicity and conservatism. These abstract qualities, in turn, defined and differentiated the various house styles used by Aladdin. Together, the different house styles formed a symbolic system, each style having its own symbolic

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<sup>59</sup>The danger for generalization is clear when assuming that consumers completely accepted Aladdin's rhetoric. But even if an Aladdin customer did not accept the rhetoric which defined a given house style, its visual qualities still set it apart from other styles. The essential integrity of the symbolic system was thus maintained.

<sup>60</sup>The various "brand names" associated with Aladdin's house styles may also express different socioeconomic and regional preferences. An analysis of Aladdin's business records might provide answers to such questions.

content. Over time, the bungalow and the conservative house emerged as the two primary styles around which other house styles revolved: the bungalow symbolic of progressive values and current fashion and the conservative house symbolic of a pragmatic, conservative attitude. Ironically, the two types were not as far apart as Aladdin's rhetoric made them out to be. The "progressive" values of simplicity, individuality, and artistry that Aladdin increasingly attached to bungalows and related styles were not so new and progressive. In many ways, Aladdin simply attached new labels to older ideas about the home--ideas many reformers might label as conservative. Whether Aladdin's customers accepted the company's aesthetic rhetoric is not known. It is likely, however, that much of the rhetoric touched upon ideas, attitudes, and values current in the mass, middle-class market. As we will see, the connection with middle-class values extended into Aladdin's rhetoric of practicality.

## Chapter 4

### THE RHETORIC OF PRACTICALITY

The Aladdin house was more than just exterior aesthetics. The company recognized that its customers also considered interior features before buying a house. Accordingly, the Aladdin house was practical as well as aesthetically pleasing. Practicality, the second of the three major categories of rhetoric used in the Aladdin catalogs, developed into an ubiquitous component of Aladdin's sales pitch after 1916. Characterized by lines like "The arrangement of the several rooms is very convenient and handy," the rhetoric of practicality described and promoted interior features that supposedly made the Aladdin house a convenient and efficient place.<sup>1</sup> Practicality was also a frequent topic in the prescriptive literature on the house and home produced during the early twentieth century. Practicality's currency made it a salient topic for companies like Aladdin that had to appeal to the same mass, middle-class audience at which the prescriptive literature was aimed; that the practical is constantly emphasized in the catalogs indicates Aladdin's recognition of its popular appeal.

Expressions of the practical range from the general to the specific. In the former case, vague rhetoric attaches subjective qualities to a house's interior in the same way that the rhetoric of the aesthetic made houses "simple" or "artistic." But where the aesthetic served to divide houses into stylistic groups, much of the rhetoric of practicality is shared across house styles; standardization extended beyond plans into definitions of practicality.

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<sup>1</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1912), 49.

The general convenience of plan arrangement was one such standardized, practical feature. In 1916, the *Gretna* offered a "convenient and desirable interior arrangement."<sup>2</sup> The same year, the plan of the *Winthrop* was said to be "conveniently arranged."<sup>3</sup> Both houses derived convenience from their plans, even though they were stylistic opposites: the *Gretna* was a conservative house and the *Winthrop*, a bungalow. The same sharing of rhetoric across house styles characterized other expressions of practicality. The adjective "roomy," for example was used to promote nearly every type of house.<sup>4</sup> While Aladdin divided houses on the basis of their exterior appearances, their interiors had generic, practical features in common according to the rhetoric of practicality.

The shared rhetoric of practicality provided more than just references to "conveniently arranged" and "roomy" houses. Much of it was room-specific, usually referring to secondary spaces like vestibules, bathrooms, and closets. The *Augusta* (a conservative house) and the *Marsden* (a semi-bungalow) respectively offered "good-sized" and "generous" closets in 1913.<sup>5</sup> In the case of closets and bathrooms, these spaces still held a certain novelty in the middle-class house of the early twentieth century; they were amenities previously unavailable to much of the mass, middle-class market.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 49.

<sup>3</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 87.

<sup>4</sup>The *Charleston*, for example, was described in 1913 as "A good, substantial, roomy house with four good bed rooms on the second floor..." (North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* [1913], 35).

<sup>5</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1913), 24; 64.

<sup>6</sup>Plumbing codes and systems expanded greatly in major United States cities in the 1880s. The private houses of the urban middle and upper classes were the first to benefit from the expanded use of plumbing. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, bathrooms became more common in middle class houses outside of the city. Rural areas were usually the last to receive improved plumbing. Thus, the bathroom, especially one fitted with new industrial porcelain fixtures, still carried a certain novelty in the early twentieth century. For a discussion of late nineteenth-century plumbing, see May N. Stone, "The Plumbing Paradox: American Attitudes Toward Late Nineteenth-Century Domestic Sanitary Arrangements," *Winterthur Portfolio* 14.3 (Autumn 1979): 283-309 and Handlin, 466-71.

For this reason, they made good selling points. But as new spaces, they also confronted existing attitudes towards spatial organization. As Henry Glassie suggests, spatial change represents deep change--change in the fundamental cultural rules that govern one's perception of architecture's spatial function.<sup>7</sup> By presenting the convenient benefits of closets and bathrooms, *Aladdin* helped its readers assimilate the new spaces in terms of practicality, a popular concept governing the house and home.

The rhetoric of practicality was also style-specific, especially in reference to bungalows and period revivals. With these two styles, the issues of spatial change and the corresponding reorientation of attitudes played an important role in shaping the rhetoric. For bungalows, the rhetoric of practicality served to mediate a conflict. On one hand, the new, one-story, spatially open plan of the bungalow offered greater efficiency of movement and function, or so said the prescriptive literature. *Good Housekeeping*, for example, described the bungalow plan as "a miracle of simplicity and efficiency."<sup>8</sup> *Aladdin*, playing on such sentiments, promoted bungalows in similar terms: in the *Forsyth*, "...the arrangement of rooms, convenience and access, one room with another is excellent."<sup>9</sup>

But the bungalow's compact, single floor plan also represented a radical departure from the large scale and numerous specialized rooms found in the typical two-story, middle-class Victorian house. Beginning in 1916, *Aladdin* tried to mediate between these differing conceptions of spatial organization through the rhetoric of practicality. In some

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<sup>7</sup>Henry Glassie, "Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, eds. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 407.

<sup>8</sup>"Under Your Own Vine," *Good Housekeeping* 66 (April 1920): 25; quoted in Clark, *American*, 173.

<sup>9</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 17.

cases, the company resorted to paradox to accommodate both the old and the new. Describing the living room and dining room of the *Edison*, the 1916 catalog notes, "The living room and dining room, divided by an archway are really one big room but they still retain the convenience of two."<sup>10</sup> The first part of the sentence--that the living room and dining room represent a singular space--emerged from the ideas of Stickley and other reformers.<sup>11</sup> The last section of the sentence, however, divides the living room and dining room into discrete spaces just as they had been in the Victorian house.<sup>12</sup>

The *Carmen* also reflects the tension between old and new: "Notice how easily accessible are the bath and sleeping quarters, yet how secluded they are from the living apartments."<sup>13</sup> The one-story *Carmen* offers convenient access to private spaces like the bathroom and bedrooms. Yet at the same time, the rhetoric emphasizes their separation from public spaces; private space should not be too convenient to public space. From the perspective of the nineteenth century, the careful segmentation of public and private space was a widely accepted norm.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the bungalow created a conflict by virtue of its single floor plan. With all of the rooms grouped on one floor instead of segmented between two, established notions of architectural propriety were threatened. The spatial changes carried by the bungalow required that an accord be reached with existing

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<sup>10</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 52.

<sup>11</sup>Stickley, for example, required that one must "do away...with the idea that a house must be a series of cells, room upon room, shut away from all others" (Gustav Stickley, *More Craftsman Homes* [New York: The Craftsman Publishing Co., 1912], 2).

<sup>12</sup>For a discussion of spatial segmentation in the Victorian house see Clark, *American*, 40-47 and Ames, 244.

<sup>13</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 70.

<sup>14</sup>Clark, *American*, 42.

attitudes. By emphasizing the convenient access and careful separation found in its houses, Aladdin used the rhetoric of practicality to mediate this conflict.

Components of the practical were also unique to period revival houses. Like the bungalow, these rhetorical components referred to the spatial arrangement of the house. Unlike the bungalow, however, the rhetoric was not about coping with change, but with maintaining continuity. Period revival houses, characterized by traditional center hall plans, were also characterized by traditional, Victorian attitudes towards spatial organization. Rather than describing the entire spatial arrangement of the house as practical, the majority of period revival houses refer only to specific, discrete spaces as being practical. In the *Brentwood*, for example, practicality was found in its sleeping room which gave "all the advantages of the sleeping porch with none of its inconveniences." Other spaces in the *Brentwood* were also portrayed as practical. The first and second floor halls were "commodious," while the dining room buffet afforded "room for dishes, linen, and silver."<sup>15</sup> With period revivals, the rhetoric of practicality does not emphasize the convenient arrangement of rooms. Instead, the many amenities associated with period revivals (Aladdin's most expensive houses) are individually emphasized as practical. In part, this was simple advertising--a way of highlighting the features to be found in expensive houses like the *Brentwood*. But the emphasis on the practicality of individual spaces reflects a genteel attitude. In the tradition of the Victorian era, Aladdin presented the costly period revival house as a sequence of distinct, specialized spaces, each supporting different behaviors and rituals; a convenient linen closet or sleeping room facilitated the ritualized lifestyle its genteel owner was to practice. Where the bungalow and other house styles were practical in the broad sense of plan

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<sup>15</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 41-42.

efficiency, period revivals offered practicality on multiple, discrete levels. The rhetoric of practicality was thus manipulated by Aladdin for multiple purposes. In some ways it was a unifying force, describing qualities shared among several house styles. In other ways it was unique, helping to define the spatial properties associated with a particular house style.

The rhetoric of practicality was also a vehicle for expressing attitudes towards women and their role in the house and home. Much of the prescriptive literature of the period discussed practicality in terms of gender. Frequently, the housewife was portrayed as an "expert" who ran the household like an efficient factory. The Aladdin catalogs reflect this attitude, most often using gender-specific references in relation to the practical aspects of the household. But the catalogs also reflect the ambiguities of a society in transition. Sometimes paralleling early twentieth-century home economics literature and sometimes recalling Victorian values, the rhetoric of practicality required the ideal housewife to assume the twentieth-century role of scientific expert and the sentimental nineteenth-century role of nurturer.

Appearing after 1915, catalog references to the housewife portrayed her as the head of a domestic factory, constantly concerned with saving time and energy. The heart of her factory was the kitchen; from conservative houses to bungalows, the kitchen was emphasized by Aladdin as making the housewife's life easier. In the *Castle*, a conservative house, the living room and dining room were "separated from the kitchen," promising "no inconvenience to the housewife."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the kitchen of the *Standard* (a square type house) offered the following: "The kitchen in the Standard home invites efficiency methods. First, the size is ample for working to advantage. Second, no

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<sup>16</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 61.

wasted steps are necessary."<sup>17</sup> The same type of rhetoric infused the bungalow. The *Carmen* offered a dining room that was "reached with the least possible steps from the housewife's laboratory--the kitchen."<sup>18</sup> The semi-bungalow *Sheffield*, though, best summarizes Aladdin's attitude toward the housewife and her ideal relationship with the kitchen. The 1920 catalog noted, "This [the kitchen] is the one room of the whole house in which the housewife is particularly interested and in the kitchen...she will find much room for admiration."<sup>19</sup> The rhetoric of practicality presented the kitchen as the focal point of women's lives. As such, the efficient Aladdin kitchen beckoned to the housewife with the offer of a life less consumed by household demands.

Practicality, expressed in terms of household efficiency and the housewife, was not limited to the kitchen. Often, the general plan of the house was emphasized as an aid to the housewife, reiterating her prescribed role. The *Raymond*, for example, offered the "'step-saving arrangements'" that "help to make 'doing ones' own work' a real pleasure." The *Raymond's* plan thus offered women a better life, turning housework into "a real pleasure."<sup>20</sup> The emphasis on efficiency was the key to the new image of women and housework. Efficiency--as in the *Raymond* and the *Standard*--reduced the effort required to complete household duties. At the same time, efficiency--as in the *Carmen*--transformed housework into a scientific pursuit complete with laboratories; if women's

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<sup>17</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 105.

<sup>18</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 70.

<sup>19</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1920), 85.

<sup>20</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 46. In the context of the period, "doing one's own work" indicated that no maid was living in the house. For a discussion of domestic labor in the early twentieth century, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), 156-60. Cowan indicates that even when the housewife was said to be "doing her own work," she might still employ help for laundry and heavy cleaning. Another person might also be used for light cleaning. Such domestic laborers were increasingly seen as specialists.

prescribed role as housewives had not changed, the rhetoric characterizing housework made the old seem distinctly new and modern.

The ideal of the efficient home and homemaker was not invented by Aladdin. Rather, it emerged from the prescriptive literature associated with the early twentieth-century home economics movement.<sup>21</sup> While the home economists largely upheld the norm of woman-as-housewife, many did try to give greater prestige to housework. They tried to achieve this goal by rhetorically transforming housework into a profession.<sup>22</sup> The key to the process was "science." As Gwendolyn Wright puts it, "...the home economists were attempting to modernize the Victorian ideal of women uplifting society by giving women a new weapon: science."<sup>23</sup> The connotations of rational thought and efficient management attached to "science" made housework seem more modern and professional.<sup>24</sup> The literature argued that through "expert" advice and an efficient, scientific approach, the housewife would enjoy a better life.

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<sup>21</sup>The ideal of the efficient house existed as early as the 1860s, when Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe advocated the use of labor-saving devices, an efficiently arranged kitchen, and other measures. See Catherine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science: Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes (New York: J. B. Ford and Co., 1869). Apparently their efforts were unsuccessful, for as late as 1889 "the natural and affected requirements of housekeeping make the life of many a woman one of the extremest drudgery and hardship" (Louis H. Gibson, Convenient Houses with Fifty Plans for the Housekeeper [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1889], 17).

<sup>22</sup>Several authors have viewed the early twentieth-century emphasis on household efficiency as a way of increasing the status of housework; the rhetoric of scientific management made housework in to a profession. See Bettina Berch, "Scientific Management in the Home: The Empress's New Clothes," Journal of American Culture 3.3 (Fall, 1980): 440-45, Carroll Pursell, "According to a Fixed Law and not Arbitrary; The Home Efficiency Movement in America, 1900-1930," Polihelm 3.1 (1985): 1-16, and Cheryl Robertson, "The Professionalization of Domesticity," paper presented at the conference The Material Culture of Gender/The Gender of Material Culture, 9-11 November 1989, at the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

<sup>23</sup>Wright, Moralism, 156.

<sup>24</sup>By "modernizing" housekeeping, the home economists were in keeping with the tone of many progressives who believed that scientific study and the use of trained experts were critical to social reform.

Christine Frederick's Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home stands as a classic prescriptive text aimed at rationalizing and professionalizing the household. Though often wildly impractical, Frederick provides ample advice on creating the efficient, scientific home.<sup>25</sup> As she told her readers, "you are going to be one of a great band of women investigators working toward the splendid aim of putting housework on a standardized, professional basis."<sup>26</sup> To accompany the systematization and standardization of housework, Frederick emphasized the need for a new kind of house: one that simplified and streamlined production. She also encouraged the use of new "labor-saving" devices like gas ranges and kitchen cabinets.

It is not surprising that the bulk of the labor-saving devices promoted by Frederick were intended for the kitchen; at the center of the efficient home was an efficient kitchen. As Frederick put it, "...any plan for a reorganization of the work of the home on a more efficient basis must begin with a careful study of present kitchen conditions and methods of work."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Aladdin's emphasis on the kitchen drew directly from sources like Frederick. Frederick also emphasized the role women could play in planning the new house, a concept echoed by Aladdin's *Rochester*: "In planning a home, the housewife, besides giving deep thought to the exterior appearance, takes a greater interest still in the interior arrangement."<sup>28</sup> The housewife in the Aladdin house, like the ideal promoted by

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<sup>25</sup>Frederick's less realistic suggestions include time/motion studies for household chores and elaborate record keeping systems for household expenditures. See Christine Frederick, Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home, 5th ed. (Chicago: American School of Home Economics, 1923), 77-78; 81-83.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick, 17. The emphasis on standardization reflects the application of industrial techniques to the operation of the household. Recall that Aladdin also praised the benefits of standardization. But as Bettina Berch points out, the techniques of industrial production ultimately failed in the domestic setting; a house cannot function as a factory. See Berch, 442-43.

<sup>27</sup>Frederick, 19.

<sup>28</sup>The Aladdin Company, Aladdin Homes (1918), 87.

Frederick, was to show an active interest in the plan arrangement and other features of the house.<sup>29</sup>

The similarity between Frederick's prescriptive writings and Aladdin's rhetoric suggests the close relationship between the home economics literature and popular attitudes towards women, their role as housewives, and the "improvement" of their lives through household science. In the end, the "reform" of the household was not much of a reform. Instead, "reform" was largely the construction of rhetoric. Aladdin's kitchens and plans were efficient only because the rhetoric said they were. In fact, an Aladdin house filled with the latest "labor-saving" devices may not have reduced the housewife's labors. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan persuasively argues, new, "labor-saving" equipment and the demands being made by the home economists likely created "more work for mother:" with laundry becoming easier to do, it was done more often; with a greater emphasis on sanitation, the house had to be cleaned more frequently. Efficiency, instead of supplying freedom, was necessary if the housewife was to meet the new prescriptive standards by which the "proper" home was judged.<sup>30</sup>

That the woman's "proper place" remained the home is not terribly surprising; the majority of the prescriptive literature was anything but radical. But the lack of change reveals a deeper paradox within the lives of many early twentieth-century, middle-class women. Even though writers like Christine Frederick emphasized the "new" science of

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<sup>29</sup>Frederick was not the only author whose rhetoric matched that of Aladdin. Orison Swett Marsden also touted the positive benefits of home efficiency, though not he did not suggest measures as extreme as Frederick. He wrote, "The tendency everywhere, in the home as well as in business, is to lessen drudgery by the use of machinery and the practice of scientific methods...It will lift cooking and what is generally called housework into a profession..." (Marden, 296-98).

<sup>30</sup>Cowan, 271-73. An examination of the physical aspects of Aladdin houses emphasizes the rhetorical, rather than actual, nature of efficiency in the Aladdin house. At the same time the company was increasingly associating women with household efficiency, corresponding physical changes in the houses were notably absent. For example, the ratios of kitchen square footage to total square footage changed little over time, regardless of house style.

housekeeping, Victorian attitudes towards women and their role in the house and home remained intact.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, the Victorian notion of the domestic "sphere," the cult of domesticity, and the role of women as household artists continued to influence much of the rhetoric directed towards the middle class.<sup>32</sup> As a producer of such rhetoric, Aladdin reflects the tenacity of Victorian values. Even though the housewife might be a scientist, the rhetoric of practicality also implied that she was to continue in her role as the bearer of culture within the home. By combining old and new, the rhetorical burden placed on the housewife grew heavier.

As for the concept of the sphere, the *Thelma* of 1916 explicitly expresses the acceptable range of women's ambitions:

Home! Who loves their home more than the American family? Every day, father is looking forward to the time when he can provide a home for his loved ones...Mother has it all planned, has everything arranged. Her highest ambition is a home and its comforts...To this type of American family is dedicated the Aladdin home.<sup>33</sup>

While Father toiled, Mother remained in the Aladdin home, dedicated to improving its environment. The clear sense of division between the male and female world is distinctly reminiscent of the Victorian division of the world into male and female spheres, an idea

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<sup>31</sup>For a discussion of the household science/efficiency movement's essential conservatism, see Pursell, 13-14.

<sup>32</sup>Other authors have discussed the continuity between some Victorian attitudes towards the home and the supposedly new ideals of the progressives. Gwendolyn Wright argues that the home economists of the 1890s continued to support the traditional activities associated with the home even though they emphasized changes in household operations. See Wright, *Moralism*, 158-60. David Handlin and Cheryl Robertson both discuss the backward looking emphasis on "old-time" housekeeping that pervaded much of the prescriptive literature; somehow grandmother's advice and symbols of colonial domesticity still carried wisdom alongside the new science of housekeeping. See Handlin, 412-13 and Robertson, "House and Home," 341. In Stickley's view, "the old New England kitchen" was "the special realm of the housewife and the living room of the whole family"--both positive features despite their age (Stickley, *Craftsman Homes*, 142).

<sup>33</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 15.

popular during much of the Victorian era. Where the male sphere encompassed the outside world, the female sphere was that of domesticity. As one author put it in 1874,

Birds often plunge into the watery deep, and fishes sometimes rise into the air, but one is nevertheless formed for swimming and the other for flight. So women may make transient diversions from the sphere of activity for which they are constituted, but they are nevertheless formed and designed for maternity, the care of children, and the affairs of domestic life. They are the mothers of human kind, the natural educators of childhood, the guardians of the household, and by the deepest ordinance of things, they are this, in a sense, and to a degree, that man is not.<sup>34</sup>

Because women were viewed as models of morality, the domestic sphere, in turn, was society's font of virtue. The woman's responsibility became the cultivation and maintenance of the home's positive qualities. Together the division of the world into gender-defined spheres along with the ideal of the home as the container of civilization formed what historians have called the "cult of domesticity."<sup>35</sup> The Aladdin house, according to the rhetoric of practicality, helped make this ideal a reality.

The rhetoric of practicality also promoted the ease of domestic artistry possible in an Aladdin house. By recalling the concept of woman-as-domestic-artist, Aladdin again evoked the Victorian era. The prescriptive burden placed on the early twentieth-century, middle-class housewife was thus increased; not only were women to run their sphere with industrial efficiency, they were to make it an artistic temple to genteel culture. One of the practical benefits of an Aladdin house was its potential for interior artistry; the Aladdin house was increasingly presented over time as an architectural space conducive to the "artistic" display of furniture and other goods. The artist responsible for creating this

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<sup>34</sup>George Youmans, "The Higher Education of Women" *Popular Science Monthly* 4 (April 1874): 748; quoted in Clark, *American*, 104. Clark rightfully views such expressions in terms of biological determinism, a concept introduced by Charles Darwin.

<sup>35</sup>For a discussion of the roots of gender-defined spheres and the cult of domesticity, see Clark, *American*, 29-36 and Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930* (Rochester, NY: The Strong Museum, 1988), 4-5.

setting was the housewife. The *Boulevard's* 1917 text incorporated both the gender associations of domestic artistry as well as the artistic possibilities inherent in an Aladdin house: "The interior will appeal to every housewife who has a desire to make the home beautiful and comfortable. The arrangement of rooms and size of each permit excellent decoration..."<sup>36</sup> In 1920, the *Sheffield* made the point even more explicitly:

Surely there is plenty of room therein to give the housewife a place to find expression for her ideas as to the proper furnishing and arrangement of the living room. This is one of the most important rooms of the house...and therefore should be arranged as attractively as possible.<sup>37</sup>

The housewife, according to Aladdin's copywriters, was a domestic artist. It was her duty to help transform house into home through the artistic arrangement of goods. The ever-practical Aladdin house helped her perform this artistic magic.<sup>38</sup>

The woman-as-domestic-artist ideal was not new to the early twentieth century. It had its roots in the Victorian era, especially the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>39</sup> During that period, the prescriptive literature told women they should be competent in domestic arts like knitting and drawing. These arts were to be moral and didactic in their subject matter and their arrangement within the house; groupings of handmade and purchased objects, for example, might teach virtue or other "civilizing" qualities to family members.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 55.

<sup>37</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1920), 84-85.

<sup>38</sup>In presenting the woman in terms of a domestic artist, Aladdin was in line with much of the advertising industry. As one writer of instructional materials on advertising stated, "It is generally believed that women are more esthetic [sic] than men, that they have a greater appreciation of the beautiful..." (James Davis Woolf, *Writing Advertising* [New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1926], 227). The reform literature also portrayed women in terms of interior artistry. Orison Swett Marden wrote, "The husband...builds the shell of the home, but the wife furnishes the interior decorations, makes the house homelike and, above all, contributes the spirit that makes it sacred, the atmosphere which makes it home" (Marden, 309).

<sup>39</sup>Clark, *American*, 106-7.

<sup>40</sup>For a discussion of the role of goods as symbols of morality, see Wright, *Moralism*, 19 and Grier, 6-7.

parallels between the early twentieth-century rhetoric of Aladdin and that of the Victorian prescriptive literature is quite similar. The woman, by creating an artistic home, was reinforcing the role of the home as a temple to genteel culture. At the same time, this ideal created more demands on middle-class housewives. Not only were they to be pragmatic scientists, they were also told to be artistic nurturers for their families. Ever practical, the Aladdin house offered to help achieve this arduous ideal.

Aladdin was not alone in maintaining the clear gender division of the world that sought to segment and isolate the domestic sphere and the woman from the outside world. Even reformers noted that though women might pursue outside activities (a rarity in the middle-class Victorian home), they could never aspire to anything better than maintaining their proper sphere--the home. Orison Swett Marden commented, "However broad her field may become, or however far the adventurous spirit of the new woman may carry her, she can never find anything higher, nobler, or more inspiring than the queenship of her ancient sphere--the home."<sup>41</sup> Charles Keeler went further. He believed that the "supreme reward" of the housewife (or "high priestess of the home") was so great that "The idea of woman's rights becomes insignificant in the face of this great privilege of service."<sup>42</sup> Aladdin and others believed that even if the woman might be a modern domestic scientist, "modernity" in household operation did not change the gender-based ideal of the domestic sphere. The status quo--cloaked in the grand rhetoric of appropriate spheres--remained intact; the Victorian exaltation of women and their ethereal influence on the home existed alongside the professionalization of housework.<sup>43</sup> Aladdin, engaged

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<sup>41</sup>Marden, 309.

<sup>42</sup>Keeler, 53.

<sup>43</sup>As Gwendolyn Wright puts it, "In reality...the scientific imagery did not disrupt either the nuclear family or the housewife's role; it only made them seem more modern" (Wright, *Moralism*, 255). See Robertson, "House and Home," 336 for a similar analysis.

with the popular market, offered houses that rhetorically facilitated the domestic isolation of the middle-class woman.<sup>44</sup> The same conservative approach also infiltrated the prescriptive literature produced by many so-called progressives like Charles Keeler.

Paradox ultimately characterized the role of the woman in the early twentieth-century house, at least in terms of the ideal built by the prescriptive literature and Aladdin's rhetoric of practicality. On the one hand, women were offered the *potentially* liberating ideal of efficiency. Through better household management skills and more efficient houses, they could enjoy more time for themselves. Christine Frederick implied as much when she wrote, "Several years ago I faced the problem which confronts many young mothers--how to do my housework and care for two small children, and yet have any time for myself or outside interests."<sup>45</sup> She apparently acquired more free time by applying the methods of household efficiency. Early twentieth-century authors like Marden and Keeler (both male), however, emphasized the continuing role and responsibility of woman in the home even if she might have outside interests. The paradox between the new and the old--between the potential for more personal freedom and the expectation that the home would be her highest aspiration--characterized the feminine ideal during the early twentieth century. Frederick reflected the impact of the paradox between old and new when she wrote, "I cannot express how much poise and determination came from this efficiency attitude,--the attitude of being superior to conditions, of having faith in myself and in my work, to feel that it was drudgery or

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<sup>44</sup>In discussing the development and consumption of household technology, Ruth Schwartz Cowan notes that "inventors and entrepreneurs and advertising copywriters and consumers themselves simply assumed that the separation of spheres was a normal arrangement, and they continued to build, to refine, and to accept the technological systems of housework accordingly" (Cowan, 69). Hence the acceptance of the concept of spheres extended beyond the rhetoric of prescriptive literature into the marketplace.

<sup>45</sup>Frederick, 7.

degrading only if I allowed myself to think so."<sup>46</sup> To cope with potentially degrading housework, implies Frederick, required the construction of a coping mechanism--the "efficiency attitude." By adopting this new attitude, the old demands and limits of the domestic sphere could be made tolerable. Aladdin's emphasis on its efficient houses presumably provided a setting in which this attitude could be developed and used to help cope with the demands of domesticity.

At the same time she was to strive towards efficiency and artistry, the middle-class housewife of the early twentieth century was also being stripped of her symbolic power over the house and home. For one, the decline of the parlor and its replacement with the living room signified a shift from a feminine space to a more neutral or even male space. The woman was of prime importance in the urban, middle-class Victorian parlor. Not only was she responsible for the room's dense arrangement of goods, the room itself was seen as a female space.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the parlor was an important ritual space, physically segmented from other rooms and usually reserved for formal gatherings of the family and/or guests. Further, it typically contained the family's "best" goods, thereby emphasizing its ritual function. The Victorian woman, then, controlled the most formal and highly ritualized space within the house. The living room found in Aladdin houses was a very different space. Its informality, rather than its ritual quality, was emphasized; the shrine-like associations of the Victorian parlor were suppressed. Even though the housewife retained control of the living room, it was not as culturally charged as the old parlor. Its feminine associations were also not as explicit as those of the parlor.

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<sup>46</sup>Frederick, 15.

<sup>47</sup>McMurray, 143.

The style of the furniture used in the living room might further negate any feminine qualities the room possessed.<sup>48</sup> Where the Victorian parlor usually contained thickly upholstered furniture, the early twentieth-century Arts and Crafts movement emphasized a sparse aesthetic and solid craftsmanship. The masculine qualities of new Arts and Crafts furnishings were particularly emphasized during the period. An Aladdin furniture catalog described one of its "Mission" style davenports as having "straight lines and heavy, massive construction."<sup>49</sup> The emphasis on weight and simplicity as opposed to delicacy and complexity signified a male-oriented aesthetic. If the woman used such furnishings to decorate the living room, her symbolic power over architectural space was doubly diminished. Not only had the living room supplanted the parlor, but the furnishings used in it often served as symbols of masculinity. Even if the practical Aladdin house helped achieve the ideal of female artistry, the housewife's creation was still dominated by the masculine world.

Did the introduction of this male-oriented aesthetic have a broader impact on women's lives? While a completely objective measure does not exist, analyzing the relationship between male and female aesthetic expressions in terms of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs does provide some tentative answers.<sup>50</sup> As Figure 30 shows, Maslow's hierarchy may be thought of as a triangle with the human needs arranged in progression from the basic physiological needs at its base to the higher order needs at its peak. Maslow believes that when fulfilled, higher order needs like the

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<sup>48</sup>Cheryl Robertson has developed the idea that the masculine association of Arts and Crafts furnishings can be interpreted as a step backwards for women in terms of their autonomy within the home. See Robertson, "House and Home," 344.

<sup>49</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homecraft Marketplace* (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1915), 7.

<sup>50</sup>The information on Maslow's hierarchy comes from Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), Chapters 4 and 7.

aesthetic needs have a more deeply satisfying effect. Accordingly, the satisfaction of higher order needs places one closer to self-actualization and self-fulfillment.<sup>51</sup>

With Maslow's hierarchy in mind, consider the following passage from one of Aladdin's catalogs: "It has been said that the outside of the house shows the man's character, and the inside the wife's."<sup>52</sup> Since the exterior of Aladdin's houses were treated almost entirely in terms of the rhetoric of aesthetics, the aesthetic qualities must be associated with maleness; the "man's character" was expressed through ornament and scale. By implication, men were the creators and appreciators of aesthetic qualities, thereby fulfilling their aesthetic needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy, the aesthetic needs are one step removed from self-actualization.

If the woman's role as interior artist paralleled the man's role as exterior artist, both were allowed to fulfill their aesthetic needs. But if a woman was using Arts and Crafts-style furniture, the male world still forced its influence upon her; her opportunity for aesthetic fulfillment was repressed. Even if she did not use "masculine" furniture, the housewife's aesthetic expression paled in comparison to that associated with men. Aladdin considered the "male" exterior aesthetic so significant that the company used it as the basis for defining house styles. The male's aesthetic needs were further validated by the prominent display function of the house's exterior. The women's aesthetic expression, by contrast, was contained within the male shell, on view only for family members and the occasional guest. Her aesthetic needs were thereby overshadowed by the male world. Given the hierarchical arrangement of needs defined by Maslow, the limits placed on women's aesthetic sensibilities in relation to those of men theoretically

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<sup>51</sup>Maslow, 98-100.

<sup>52</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Homes (1916), 71.

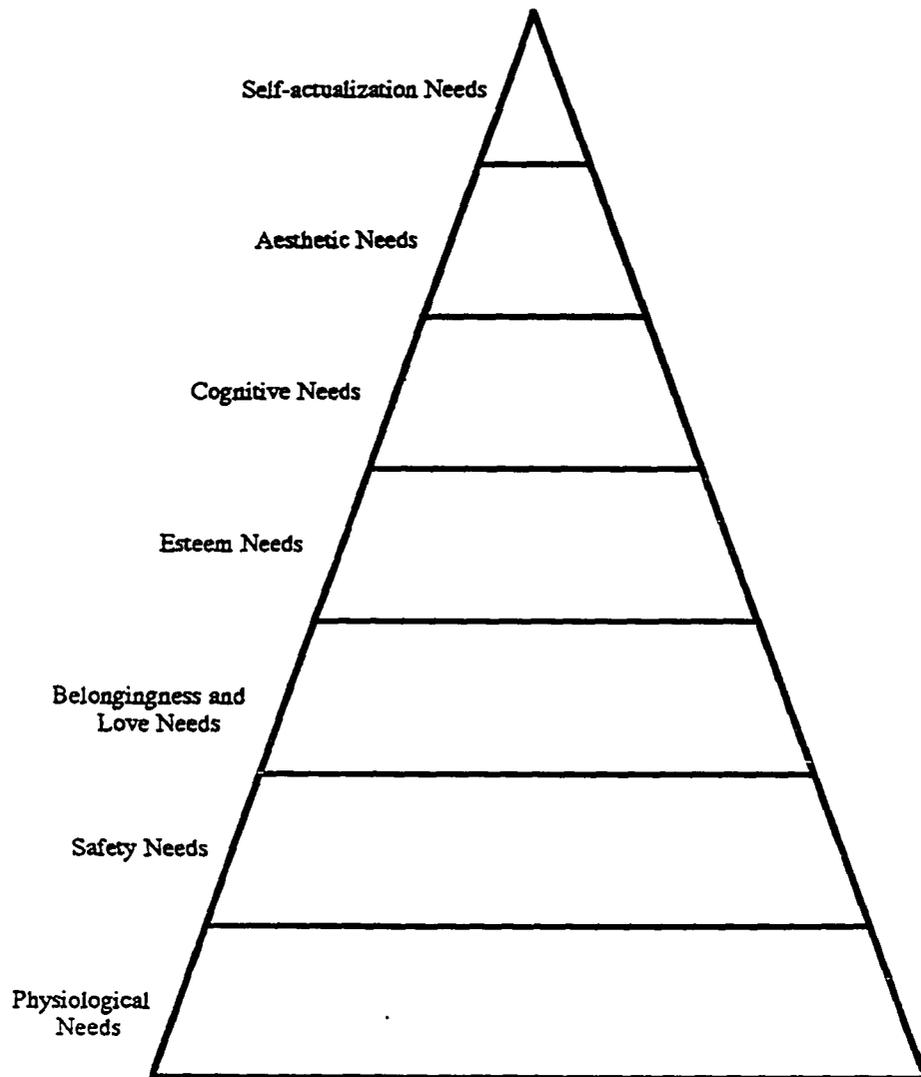
made it more difficult for women to attain self-actualization. By studying the relationship between gender, the aesthetic needs, and Maslow's hierarchy, it becomes clear that the rhetoric of practicality promoted the repression of women.

Though often inflated, Aladdin's rhetoric of practicality offers a valuable source of evidence on the relationship between gender and the early twentieth-century house and home. Like much of the prescriptive literature of the period, Aladdin's rhetoric of practicality frequently used the image of the efficient, scientific home. But if the rhetoric reflected ideas about women and the home new to the 1906 to 1920 period, it also drew on the late nineteenth-century concepts of the domestic sphere and the role of women as household artists. According to Aladdin and many "reformers," a woman's highest ambition remained the home, its labors, and an artistic interior. Though she might ideally reign over her sphere, the symbolic power wielded by the middle-class, married woman was on the decline. The disappearance of the highly ritualized, feminine parlor along with the advent of the masculine Arts and Crafts aesthetic spelled a reduction in explicitly feminine spaces and the feminine goods used to fill those spaces. Though women were responsible for the household and its operations, the repressive restrictions of a male dominated society surrounded and enclosed their lives.

Apart from promoting houses in terms of gender, the rhetoric of practicality served other purposes as well. For one, it was a unifying force among the various house styles Aladdin offered. In a sense, a standardized set of practical features existed just as a standardized set of rules governed Aladdin's many house plans. The rhetoric of practicality also helped assimilate spatial changes and mediate between older ideas about the house--like the segmentation of public and private space--and the new, one-story bungalow. Like the rhetoric of aesthetics, the rhetoric of practicality was a critical part of the promotion of Aladdin houses. Expressions of the rhetoric of practicality, however,

often also evoke notions of comfort--a convenient and efficient house suggests both practicality and comfort. Along with the rhetoric of aesthetics and practicality, Aladdin also utilized the rhetoric of comfort.

Figure 30. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Drawing by the author after an illustration in Andrew B. Crider et al., Psychology (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1983), 139.



## Chapter 5

### THE RHETORIC OF COMFORT

The third component of Aladdin's rhetoric is the rhetoric of comfort. While it is associated with all five of Aladdin's house styles (bungalows, semi-bungalows, square type houses, period revivals, and conservative houses), bungalows and semi-bungalows possess both the earliest and most highly elaborated expressions of the rhetoric of comfort. Comfort, however, was not just a rhetorical creation. Its rhetoric is often explicitly linked to certain types of architectural features, suggesting that abstract notions of comfort could be architecturally codified; if the Victorians found comfort in overstuffed furniture, the bungalow emphasized the porch, built-in furniture, and the manipulation of space as comfort-giving features. The Aladdin catalogs also reflect the tie between the comfortable and the practical. The practical and comfortable benefits of good ventilation, ample lighting, and the ease with which women could create comfort all reflect this intersection. Like the rhetoric of aesthetics and practicality, the rhetoric of comfort illuminates popular attitudes towards the house and home. Often these attitudes could only be verbally expressed. In some cases, however, the physical realities of architecture could express abstract notions of comfort.

More so than the aesthetic or the practical, the rhetoric of comfort was considerably abstract. What does comfort mean? How is it defined? Who defines it? While an object may be said to provide comfort, the determination that it is actually comfortable depends on one's definition. Comfort, then, is a product of individual attitudes that vary from person to person. But there are also wider definitions of comfort shared by groups within

a culture or even held by all members of a culture. In his analysis of comfort, Witold Rybczynski defines it as a product of culture, durable over time:

If comfort were subjective, one would expect a greater variety of attitudes toward it; instead, at any particular historical period there has always been a demonstrable consensus about what is comfortable and what is not. Although comfort is experienced personally, the individual judges comfort according to broader norms, indicating that comfort may be an objective experience.<sup>1</sup>

Often stable over time, broader definitions of comfort are based on cultural norms regarding "appropriate" posture, social rituals, and other factors.<sup>2</sup> Katherine Grier's study of Victorian upholstered furniture and the parlor provides time and space-specific evidence to support the comfort-as-cultural definition. By studying the types of furniture used during the second half of the nineteenth century, their upholstery, and their placement in the house, Grier shows how the Victorian definition of comfort related to the period's rigid sense of propriety. She contends that comfort to the Victorians was composed of "a group of ideas and beliefs not simply associated with a pleasurable physical state" but also "family-centered, even religious values associated with 'home,' values emphasizing perfect sincerity and moderation in all things."<sup>3</sup> In short, the connection between Victorian comfort and Victorian culture was inextricable. The set of abstract qualities called "comfort" is both individual and collective; it is defined not only by personal values, but also by cultural values. Because Aladdin's target audience was primarily middle class, the cultural values expressed by the rhetoric of comfort are the general values associated with the early twentieth-century middle class.

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<sup>1</sup>Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking, 1986), 225.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Rudofsky, *Now I Lay Me Down to Eat* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1980), 57.

<sup>3</sup>Grier, 1.

The rhetoric of comfort is frequently expressed in the catalogs in terms of the physical associations of comfort. Through appealing words like "cozy" and "snug," a sense of security is evoked; enclosed architectural space becomes a comfort giver. The ideal of the house as a secure sanctuary from the outside world came, in part, from Victorian ideology. Security also represents one of the fundamental human needs defined by psychologist Abraham Maslow. In his well-known hierarchy of needs, Maslow identifies the need for security and protection ("the safety needs") as needs secondary only to the physiological need for sustenance.<sup>4</sup> Maslow's analysis suggests that the home-as-haven ideal has roots deeper than Victorian ideology. Thus, its extension into the early twentieth century was not solely the product of conservatism.

The catalog's rhetoric often tied the physical associations of comfort (comfort-as-security) to the physical features of the Aladdin house. The rhetoric was thus materially codified through architecture. The relationship between physical features and the rhetoric of comfort, however, was not shared equally among all house styles. In conservative houses, expressions of security were limited in their degree of elaboration: "A cozy little four-room house" is a typical example.<sup>5</sup> More frequently, bungalows, semi-bungalows, and square type houses were associated with the rhetoric of comfort-as-security. In these house styles, specific architectural elements were often promoted as security-giving features. Despite such differences, the rhetoric of comfort was shared among all house styles, varying not so much in meaning, but in extent of use and degree of rhetorical elaboration. Like the rhetoric of practicality, that of the comfortable was a unifying force;

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<sup>4</sup>Maslow, 35-43.

<sup>5</sup>North American Construction Company, Aladdin Houses (1909), 5.

while exterior appearances separated house styles, a shared conceptualization of interior space based on comfort and practicality formed linkages among Aladdin's many models.

The dominant relationship between the rhetorical and physical expression of comfort-as-security was one of spatial manipulation. In bungalows, semi-bungalows, and square type houses, small, enclosed spaces like corners and nooks became "cozy" and "snug" retreats within the larger space of the house.<sup>6</sup> Their explicit segmentation from larger architectural spaces combined with their connotations of informality made corners, nooks, and the like architectural versions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Turkish corner. As early as 1911 the bay window in the *Huron* offered a "cozy nook for a window seat."<sup>7</sup> After 1915, square type houses supplied the same feature. The bay window in the *Virginia* could be "converted into a cozy corner and fitted with window seat [sic], sofa cushions, etc. making it the most popular part of the home."<sup>8</sup> The *Charleston* also provided "cozy corners for the placing of easy chairs, cushions, and pillows...popular with home-loving folks everywhere."<sup>9</sup> Even the porch offered a secure place to rest: "The porch forms almost an outdoor cozy corner, it being inset sufficiently to form a nook..."<sup>10</sup> Architectural space was thus being manipulated to provide spaces that would fulfill the rhetoric of comfort. Specifically, these spaces

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<sup>6</sup>In some cases, even an entire room was presented as a space offering secure comfort. The semi-bungalow *Richmond* offered a "cozy little den, or children's room...recessed back of the stairway" (The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* [1917], 71). Apparently, even small rooms (a "cozy little den") isolated from the main rooms of the house ("recessed back of the stairway") were not viewed as wasted space. Instead, they were valued as places to escape from the social and familial demands found elsewhere within the house.

<sup>7</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1911), 34.

<sup>8</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 47.

<sup>9</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 69.

<sup>10</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 21.

offered the security and isolation suggested by the words "cozy" and "snug." Gustav Stickley also advocated the use of nooks as comfort-giving features. He believed that "coziness" came not so much from small rooms, but from large public rooms fitted with various recesses.<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis on small architectural niches in which to find security is distinctly reminiscent of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Turkish corner; another popular name for the Turkish corner was, in fact, "cozy corner."<sup>12</sup> Turkish corners, usually located in the parlor or living room, were popular primarily during the 1890 to 1920 period.<sup>13</sup> They typically consisted of loose pillows placed on an armless couch or other low cushion. A curtain or other hanging isolated the corner from the larger room in which it sat. "Turkish" referred to the materials used to create the corner which usually included Turkish carpets (imported or domestic), overstuffed upholstery, and other material reminiscent of the exotic Turkish bazaar. Turkish materials also suggested informal posture and relaxation.<sup>14</sup> As such, the Turkish corner represented a shift from the stiff posture of the Victorian parlor to a more relaxed form of comfort.<sup>15</sup> That Turkish corners could be closed-off symbolized their possibility for escape from one's surroundings; they offered an enclosed space characterized by relaxation and informality.

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<sup>11</sup>Stickley, Craftsman Homes, 135-36.

<sup>12</sup>Grier, 194.

<sup>13</sup>Material on the Turkish corner comes from Grier, 183-98.

<sup>14</sup>Grier, 185.

<sup>15</sup>Grier's insightful analysis of the Turkish corner shows that its exotic associations symbolized a cosmopolitan, cultured user. The emphasis on displaying one's civility typified the middle-class outlook of the Victorian era. Thus, older attitudes remained intact even though the Turkish corner was promoted as a new, less formal approach to comfort. For a summary of this argument, see Grier, 193.

To early twentieth-century reformers, the emphasis on informality suggested by the Turkish corner matched their calls for less formal architectural spaces and social relations.<sup>16</sup> The thick upholstery and heavy curtains of the late nineteenth-century Turkish corner, however, were problematical. Such materials were viewed as excessively ornamental, ostentatious, and unsanitary.<sup>17</sup> Window seats and nooks fitted with only a few cushions offered a solution by keeping the positive, comfort-giving qualities of the Turkish corner while dispensing with its rich upholstery; they provided seclusion and informal comfort but did not depend on heavy curtains for spatial segmentation or an over-stuffed sofa for sitting. These new architectural niches also accommodated the reformers' demands for open architectural spaces. Nooks and window seats, free from curtains, gave a sense of spatial continuity while at the same time offering the opportunity for seclusion.<sup>18</sup> Aladdin's rhetoric of comfort-as-security presented comfort in terms of secluded and informal spaces—a definition shared with reformers like Gustav Stickley and no doubt much of the company's middle-class audience. Unlike so much of the rhetoric Aladdin used, its emphasis on comfort-as-security was actually associated with physical

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<sup>16</sup>The use of nooks and window seats as part of a less formal notion of comfort began in the late nineteenth century with Queen Anne style houses. Houses in this style were precursors to the bungalow in that the former was viewed as being reformist: it supposedly represented the virtuous design and craftsmanship of early eighteenth-century English houses. For a discussion of the Queen Anne house in relation to aesthetic and domestic reforms, see Rybczynski, 178.

<sup>17</sup>Edward Carpenter, for example, believed that thick upholstery, especially curtains created "dust and stiffness, and...entail trouble and recurring expense, and they all tempt the housekeeper to keep out the air and sunlight..." (Edward Carpenter, "'The Simplification of Life:' A Chapter from Edward Carpenter's Book Called 'England's Ideal,'" in Gustav Stickley, Craftsman Homes: Architecture and Furnishings of the American Arts and Crafts Movement [New York: Craftsman Publishing Co., 1909; reprint, New York: Dover, 1979], 4).

<sup>18</sup>Since nooks and window seats were unenclosed, the seclusion they provided was largely symbolic. By using these spaces, the sitter indicated his or her detachment from the activities occurring in the primary rooms of the house.

reality; through nooks and cozy corners, the Aladdin house offered an architectural codification of comfort.

The association between comfort and security reinforced the ideal that the home was to be a haven from the outside world. Since the early Victorian period, the home had represented an escape from the evils of an increasingly industrialized world.<sup>19</sup> The protective comforts offered by the home continued to be viewed as a "retreat from the toils and troubles of the outer world" into the early twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Aladdin played on the home-as-haven ideal, transforming its houses into secure bastions against the outside world. "Sturdy and staunch is the Jordan and safe and secure is its owner" read the opening line accompanying the *Jordan* in 1920.<sup>21</sup> Nooks, window seats, and other architectural devices offered a haven within a haven by serving as isolated, informal spaces; one could escape even the world of the home in the cozy corner. Comfort, defined as security from the surrounding world, was thus an integral part of Aladdin's rhetoric. Such a definition catered to middle-class customers seeking refuge from the factory, office, and store.

As the home-as-haven ideal suggests, comfort could function in mental as well as physical terms. Features like the cozy corner gave physical comfort to the body. An idea, on the other hand, could supply mental comfort. If one believed that the home was a haven from the outside world, one might more easily cope with that world; the security given by the idea of haven could provide mental comfort. Apart from the home-as-haven ideal, the rhetoric of comfort tried to create other mental comforts. For one, a repeated

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<sup>19</sup>For a discussion of the home-as-refuge ideal, see Clark, *American*, 29-32.

<sup>20</sup>Marden, 174.

<sup>21</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1920), 95.

association was drawn between natural interior light and positive emotional qualities. More simply put, a sunny room created "cheer." Closely related to ideals current during the early twentieth century, examples of the sunlight/cheerful pairing occur throughout the 1906 to 1920 period. In all but one case, the pairing is associated with bungalows and semi-bungalows. Examples include the *Winthrop* whose bay window made the dining room a "cheerful, sunny room."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the three windows in the *Thelma's* dining room assured "plenty of light and cheerfulness."<sup>23</sup> Other models possessed similar expressions. The sunlight/cheer association implied that by embracing nature (in the form of sunlight) and providing for it within the home, happiness was the result. The positive qualities of nature were emphasized by many reformers who viewed city dwelling as unnatural and unhealthy. Humans, they believed, were instinctively drawn to nature.<sup>24</sup> To alleviate the problems associated with urban life, the city dweller was supposed to actively seek nature in parks, through trips into the country, and ideally, by living in the suburbs. In the latter setting, grass, trees, and sunlight graced each individual house.

Sunlight was thus more than just a light source. It represented the positive attributes of nature necessary for a healthy life. As Stickley put it, the "healthiest and happiest life" was one that was close to nature.<sup>25</sup> This idealized version of nature was thus invited into the home through windows and porches. By doing so, assurances of health and

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<sup>22</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1913), 63.

<sup>23</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 55.

<sup>24</sup>Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 18. Schmitt offers a thorough discussion of the idealized appeal of nature in the early twentieth century.

<sup>25</sup>Stickley, *Craftsman Homes*, 196. The full sentence reads, "Because we believe that the healthiest and happiest life is that which maintains the closest relationship with out-of-doors, we have planned our houses with outdoor living rooms, dining rooms and sleeping rooms, and many windows to let in plenty of air and sunlight."

happiness--both mental comforts--were secured. A sunny room therefore gave physiological and psychological comfort; if one believed in the positive attributes of nature, a sunny room was a happy room. Since reformers repeatedly stressed the positive role of nature in the home and since the bungalow was popularly viewed as the new, progressive house style, bungalows and semi-bungalows were the logical types to possess "sunny cheer." Accordingly, the rhetoric of sun and cheer was repeatedly associated with models like the *Winthrop* and *Thelma*.

Related to the appeal of sunny rooms was the porch's appeal as a comfort-giving feature. The porch was increasingly emphasized during the 1906 to 1920 period as Aladdin and its customers became sensitized to the rhetoric emphasizing the purported benefits of nature. Standing as a transitional space between nature (euphemistically symbolized by the front lawn) and the home, the porch potentially offered a communion with nature along with protection from the elements. Aladdin's rhetoric of comfort tended toward the latter view. The pragmatic physical comfort of the porch was emphasized over the idealized mental comforts it might offer; the comfort of security dominated a comfort based on an idealized view of nature.<sup>26</sup>

The often explicit relationship drawn between the porch and interior architectural space is a manifestation of Aladdin's pragmatic bent. The *Countryside's* porches, for

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<sup>26</sup>Aladdin did not completely abandon the function of the porch as an extension into nature. As early as 1914, the porch of the *Michigan* provided "plenty of room for sitting out and enjoying the pleasant weather" (North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* [1914], 29). As time passed, the rhetoric grew more idealistic in its presentation of nature. The *Rodney's* porch was said to serve "in a remarkable way the outdoor pleasures of summer" (North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* [1916], 48). The most explicitly idealistic association between nature and the porch occurred with a semi-bungalow. "What a fine place to spend an evening watching the sun slowly sink into the west and darkness creepingly spread its mantilla over the land," enthused Aladdin's copywriter as he described the benefits of the *Sheffield's* porch (The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* [1920], 84). Over time, Aladdin recognized the popular appeal of an idealized vision of nature. Extending out into the lawn, the porch could provide the mental comforts associated with the natural world; who wouldn't find peace and serenity "watching the sun slowly sink into the west?"

example, were arranged so that "no matter from what quarter the sun may shine, one can always find a shady nook in which to lounge."<sup>27</sup> The secure nook associated with the living room was moved to the porch. Similarly, the *Carnation's* porch was described as being "an outdoor cozy corner...being inset sufficiently to form a nook against inclement weather."<sup>28</sup> The porch thus functioned in terms of an interior space, offering the same secure comforts; the porch allowed interior comforts to be carried outside.

By defining the comfort of the porch in terms of interior architectural space, Aladdin drew on a more traditional, genteel perspective. Nature had long been viewed as chaos--as an entity to be controlled.<sup>29</sup> The Victorians embraced this assumption, transforming natural forms into elaborately carved furniture and ornate, flowered wall papers; nature was subjected to the elaborate rituals of Victorian life. Aladdin's presentation of the porch as a controlled, secure place represented a continuation of these ideas. Apparently, Aladdin believed its customers were more interested in the porch's physical similarity with enclosed architectural space than with its potential to provide a communion with nature. When nature threatened, the porch of an Aladdin house remained genteel. It protected its users while at the same time selectively incorporating the positive benefits of nature. Just as interior spaces offered a controlled environment, the porch was an outdoor room that always held the upper hand over nature's forces.

The most explicit statement of control over nature through the porch was found in the sun porch. Found in Aladdin's most expensive models, the sun porch or parlor was a

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<sup>27</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 16.

<sup>28</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 21.

<sup>29</sup>For a discussion of the traditional Western view of nature as chaotic, see John Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 7-29.

specialized, interior room surrounded by windows. The *Rossley's* sun parlor was described as follows: "The sun parlor has the center pair of each set of windows swinging open, thus affording in pleasant weather a delightfully protected and secluded open porch."<sup>30</sup> The genteel implications are clear. First, "parlor" evokes images of the highly ritualized social room associated with the Victorian house. Second, the sun parlor provided complete control over nature. By opening or closing the sun parlor's grouped windows, one manipulated nature, embracing it only when convenient. The sun parlor, when not convenient, became another interior room, secure from nature's threats.

While the porches of houses like the *Carnation* or *Countryside* did not offer the degree of gentility associated with expensive models like the *Rossley*, a similar attitude united them. Through the rhetoric of comfort, the porch was more frequently emphasized as a protected outdoor room than as a temple to nature. Even in bungalows--supposedly the manifestation of progressive ideology--this was the case. By explicitly referring to the protective function of the porch as well as using terms like "cozy corner" and "parlor," Aladdin affirmed the relationship between the porch and interior architectural spaces. Progressive ideology, however, emphasized nature as an ideal, one that offered healing power to the individual battered by modern life. The porch, in turn, was to provide a place to embrace nature's positive force. Aladdin departed from such rhetoric, instead promoting the porch in terms of its pragmatic physical comforts.

The discussion of the porch and its comfort-giving features shows the relationship between the rhetoric of comfort and that of practicality: the porch of the *Dresden* supposedly offered "shelter and relief...from the rays of the hot summer sun."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 24.

<sup>31</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1920), 70.

Certainly such rhetoric treats comfort. But it also contains elements of practicality since an exposed porch is uncomfortable, and therefore impractical. Several more explicit intersections between comfort and practicality mark the Aladdin catalogs. By intertwining the two, Aladdin followed the conventions of the period's prescriptive literature. Comfort and practicality, believed reformers, were to be the dominant features of the house's interior.<sup>32</sup>

One point of intersection in the Aladdin house related to ventilation and lighting. No one questioned that a well ventilated and lighted house was a good thing; the two accommodated popular attitudes towards both comfort and practicality. On the one hand, a breezy, cheerfully lit house provided physical and mental comfort. In the context of the period, adequate ventilation and lighting were also seen as critical to one's health. The *Dresden* provides a good example of the duality of comfort and practicality associated with ventilation and lighting: "It is possible to practically open up the home on four sides giving the utmost in ventilation, making all rooms light and airy, cool and pleasant."<sup>33</sup> The "utmost in ventilation" seems to connote practicality while the sensual nature of "light and airy, cool and pleasant" suggests comfort.

The comfort-giving features of adequate ventilation and lighting are no doubt nearly universal in their appeal. In the context of the Aladdin catalogs, however, the practical value of the two was tied to popular beliefs. Building on a nineteenth-century tradition, proper lighting and adequate ventilation were repeatedly emphasized by reformers. Charles Keeler proclaimed, "Blessed is he...who is hospitable not only to friends, but to

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<sup>32</sup>Gustav Stickley, for one, proclaimed, "how close is the relation between a practical arrangement of rooms and a comfortable and beautiful home" (Stickley, *More Craftsman Homes*, 11).

<sup>33</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1916), 30.

the sweet ministrations of the elements, who holds abundant intercourse with sun and air..."<sup>34</sup> The reformers' stress on light and air was not new. The emphasis on proper ventilation had begun in the United States in the 1820s and 1830s and gained momentum as the century progressed.<sup>35</sup> A well-ventilated house, believed many writers, ensured health. Too little ventilation led to the build-up of noxious gases and other elements harmful to family members. Since illness was viewed as a sign of immorality in the Victorian era, proper ventilation was doubly critical.<sup>36</sup> Early twentieth-century reformers carried on a rhetorical tradition that stressed the practical, healthful benefits of light and air. The incorporation of light and air into the house through numerous windows and porches was part of "the architecture of visible health" that progressives associated with the ideal home.<sup>37</sup>

Aladdin's rhetoric, taking its cues from reformers, also came to view light and air in terms of health. In 1920 the *Winston* was described in the following terms: "Every room is well lighted...Wherever there is plenty of sunshine there can be no ills and the builder of the *Winston* can feel that he is throwing as many safeguards about himself and family as possible."<sup>38</sup> The *Winston* offered the practical value of adequate light and air which in turn guaranteed health. This guarantee--achieved through the "safeguards" of light and air--provided mental comfort. If one believed in the connection between health and

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<sup>34</sup>Keeler, 5.

<sup>35</sup>For discussions of the ventilation/health relationship, see Rybczynski, 132-37 and Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 77-85; 113-15; and 123-25.

<sup>36</sup>Clark, *American*, 101.

<sup>37</sup>Wright, *Moralism*, 119.

<sup>38</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1920), 97.

ventilation, the purchase of the *Winston* was doubly advantageous: one received the practical benefits of good ventilation and the mental comfort of knowing that one's health was secure.

That the *Winston* was a semi-bungalow is also significant. As with much of Aladdin's rhetoric, that associated with the comfortable and practical benefits of light and air developed over time with an increasing awareness of progressive ideology. Accordingly, the first houses to incorporate the rhetoric of light and air in 1913 were bungalows--the new house style widely believed to embody the ideals of progressivism. Over time, Aladdin spread the gospel of light and air to related house styles, primarily the semi-bungalow. The conceptual linkage between practicality and comfort as well as the influence of progressive reform is clearly illustrated by the issue of lighting and ventilation.

Apart from ventilation and lighting, the intersecting rhetoric of comfort and practicality also shaped the prescribed gender roles and responsibilities presented by Aladdin. Most explicitly associated with bungalows, Aladdin's rhetoric of gender roles was closely tied to progressive ideology. As noted in Chapter 4, the practical capacity of Aladdin houses in assisting the housewife in her role as household artist hinted at her role as comfort giver; the artistic arrangement of materials contributed to household comfort. The *Boulevard* was quite explicit in connecting the housewife to comfort, proclaiming "The interior will appeal to every housewife who has a desire to make the home beautiful and comfortable."<sup>39</sup> By providing an efficient, easily decorated house, Aladdin helped the housewife in her prescribed role as comfort giver. Such rhetoric was, in part, rooted in

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<sup>39</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 55.

the Victorian cult of domesticity.<sup>40</sup> But Aladdin was not drawing on hopelessly outdated Victorian views. The rhetorical link between practicality, comfort, and women used by Aladdin was provided by the early twentieth-century reformers who continued to promote the role of woman as comfort provider. Marden, Stickley, and others promoted the idea that the woman's highest responsibility was to the home environment and its comforts.<sup>41</sup> By describing women in terms of their role as creators, providers, and maintainers of comfort, Aladdin was responding to firmly established prescriptive norms. Potential buyers of bungalows, semi-bungalows, and square type houses were assured by Aladdin's rhetoric: these house styles maintained the prescribed role of women as comfort givers.

If women were the creators of comfort, they were not necessarily allowed to enjoy the products of their work. The gender rhetoric accompanying several Aladdin houses implies that women were primarily the makers and maintainers of comfort rather than its users. For the housewife the practical benefit of a "modern" home was not the comfort it provided her. Instead, the emphasis was on the ease with which she could fulfill her prescribed role; her comfort came through the practicality of an efficient household. The *Boulevard's* 1917 text is a revealing example: "The interior will appeal to every housewife who has a desire to make the home beautiful and comfortable."<sup>42</sup> While the

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<sup>40</sup>The role of women as providers of comfort was not new to the early twentieth century. Women in the European and North American context had played an important part in defining domestic comfort since the seventeenth century. See Rybczynski, 223. More specifically, the association with women and household comfort was developed in the prescriptive literature of the nineteenth century. According to the cult of domesticity, women were able to create comfort as well as morality through the arrangement of furniture and other goods.

<sup>41</sup>Recall Marden's words, "However broad her field may become, or however far the adventurous spirit of the new woman may carry her, she can never find anything higher, nobler, or more inspiring than the queenship of her ancient sphere—the home." He also believed that it was the woman's responsibility to make the home "the happiest place on earth" (Marden, 309; 324).

<sup>42</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1917), 55.

woman was to "make" comfort--just as she was expected to "make" dinner--no mention was made of her use of that comfort. The product of her labor existed for the use of others.<sup>43</sup>

Bungalows like the *Boulevard* were not alone in portraying women as household laborers. The *Rochester*, a square type house, also implied that women were creators, but not necessarily users, of comfort. Its text notes, "Housewives in general have placed their stamp of approval on the interior of the Rochester. The arrangement is ideal--convenient and comfortable, minimizing housework."<sup>44</sup> Through its practical "arrangement" (plan), the *Rochester* made it possible for women to provide comfort with less work. Comfort for the woman thus existed in relation to household efficiency and her prescribed role as comfort provider. Her comfort came not with relaxation in the living room she had artistically arranged, but with less work. Witold Rybczynski appropriately labels the early twentieth-century's tie between women, efficiency and comfort as the "comfort-as-efficiency" ideal.<sup>45</sup> Stickley also reflects the comfort-as-efficiency attitude. In discussing the proper kitchen, he proposes that "...it should be large enough for comfort, well ventilated and full of sunshine, and that the equipment for the work that is to be done should be ample, of good quality and, above all, intelligently

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<sup>43</sup>Such exploitation can be viewed in Marxist terms: the product of the woman's labor was being appropriated for use by others. Marilyn Power suggests that role of housewives as maintainers of the home rather than as producers of domestic goods developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the household became more dependent on the capitalist system for the supply of household goods. The shift in women's household work from production to maintenance made them less able to support themselves and their families. As a result they became a latent reserve army of labor, ripe for wage labor exploitation. See Marilyn Power, "Women: From Home Production to Wage Labor," in *The Capitalist System*, 3rd ed., eds. Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich, and Thomas E. Weisskopf, 265-78 (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986).

<sup>44</sup>The Aladdin Company, *Aladdin Homes* (1918), 87.

<sup>45</sup>Rybczynski, 167-70.

selected."<sup>46</sup> The kitchen, according to Stickley, was to offer comforts similar to other parts of the house, particularly ventilation and sunshine. But in the kitchen, real comfort came through easier work for the housewife.

While it is impossible to know if actual households functioned like the *Boulevard* or the *Rochester*, the attitude towards women and comfort must have had some popular appeal; Aladdin would have been inept to promote unpopular ideas. The woman's prescribed world, then, was being defined in terms of labor, not the freedom to relax. She was to constantly provide, whether it be comfort, cooking, or cleaning. To that end, the intersection of comfort and practicality (supposedly) offered her less labor to fulfill her prescribed role as comfort giver. The "progressive's" emphasis on social and domestic change clearly had limits when it came to gender roles. Middle-class women were supposed to remain responsible not only for higher standards of cleanliness, but also for the demands of the cult of domesticity. In the context of the early twentieth century, the Aladdin materials show that the lives of middle-class, married women were not unlike those of their Victorian predecessors. According to Aladdin's prescriptive rhetoric, women were to remain in the house, responsible for its physical upkeep and the maintenance of its idealized domesticity.

While the issues of gender roles and ventilation and lighting were, in part, grounded in progressive prescriptive literature, the final intersection between comfort and practicality was not. In trying to mediate between old attitudes favoring large rooms and the new, one-story bungalow, Aladdin often resorted to paradox: a bungalow could be both small and spacious at the same time. The *Brighton* and the *Selfridge* clearly express the paradox. In 1914 the *Brighton* was described as a "compact bungalow, and at the

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<sup>46</sup>Stickley, *Craftsman Homes*, 142.

same time...roomy and comfortable."<sup>47</sup> The previous year, however, the *Selfridge* was called "snug and comfy," yet "still having all ample rooms."<sup>48</sup> With the *Brighton*, its "compact" size implies efficiency and practicality. Comfort, on the other hand, is equated with large rooms. The *Selfridge* reverses the equation. "Snug and comfy" suggests the comfort of a small, secluded space. Practicality, though, comes with rooms large ("ample") enough to support the house's day-to-day functions. The paradox is partially explained by Aladdin's need to appeal to a range of tastes. But it also reflects the tensions inherent in the bungalow. The single-floor bungalow, as noted previously, represented a major reorganization of space within the house. Until Aladdin and its customers assimilated the new spatial orientation into their architectural vocabularies, a certain tension was bound to exist between past and present. The differing perceptions of spatial scale were, in turn, tied to attitudes towards comfort and practicality. The progressives emphasized the efficiency and coziness that accompanied a small, compact plan. The ideal middle-class, Victorian house, however, provided comfort and practicality through many large rooms, each serving specialized functions. As the twentieth century began, the relationship between comfort, practicality, and room size was uncertain. Until new relationships were worked out, the ideas of reformers collided with established, stable attitudes towards architectural space and its relationship with comfort and practicality. Aladdin reflects this period of uncertainty by trying to appeal to both the old and new perspectives through the rhetoric of comfort and practicality.

Like the aesthetic and the practical, the rhetoric of comfort is exactly that--rhetoric. It provides evidence less about the actual form of architecture, than about the ideals that

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<sup>47</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1914), 71.

<sup>48</sup>North American Construction Company, *Aladdin Houses* (1913), 66.

influenced Aladdin's customers. To a certain extent, the ideals of the comfortable house cut across the five house styles used by Aladdin. Words like "cozy" and "snug" had a universal appeal, being associated with all types of houses. Aladdin and its customers believed that comfort, like practicality, was an essential concept in transforming house into "home."

The rhetoric of comfort, however, also consisted of rhetorical expressions specific to certain house styles. Taking its cues from progressive ideology, Aladdin increasingly gave the bungalow a more elaborated, idealized sense of comfort as the 1906 to 1920 period passed. This idealized comfort, emphasizing physical security and informality, eventually spread to semi-bungalows and square type houses. Houses of these three styles often offered nooks and window seats as "cozy" and "snug" refuges within the larger spaces of the house. Related to the late Victorian Turkish corner, nooks and the like represented an architectural codification of the rhetoric of comfort. The idealized vision of nature promoted by reformers also influenced the rhetoric of comfort. Thought to be necessary for both physical and mental health, nature was welcomed into bungalows and semi-bungalows through windows and porches. But nature, contrary to progressive sensibilities, was also a nuisance. The porches of Aladdin bungalows, in particular, were usually portrayed not as places to worship nature, but places where nature was controlled by human design.

Given the role of comfort and practicality in defining interiors, it is not surprising that the two sometimes intersected. Light and air, for one, offered both comfort and practicality. The prescribed role of women--ever busy around the home--represented another intersection between the two types of rhetoric. A final intersection between the comfortable and the practical was one of paradox. Aladdin attempted to use rhetoric to

mediate between the reformers new conceptualizations of comfort, practicality, and spatial scale and the attitudes carried over from the late nineteenth century. By illustrating such conflicts, the catalogs portray a culture in transition; America's middle class was trying to synthesize old and new ideas about the house and home. To that end, definitions of comfort were only part of the adjustment process.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

Plan and style, aesthetics, practicality, comfort. The plans, styles, and rhetoric found in Aladdin's 1906 to 1920 catalogs reflect the ideals and realities that shaped the middle-class house and home in the early twentieth century. Many of the home ideals and house designs the company used were developed from the ideas of "progressive" reformers like Gustav Stickley and Christine Frederick. The attitudes of the late Victorian period, however, were not simply cast off with the advent of a new prescriptive ideology. Instead, they lingered into the twentieth century. The Aladdin catalogs, required to appeal to the popular market rather than a particular prescriptive ideology, reflect the tension between old and new. On one hand, they mirror the growing influence of the reformers' ideas; Aladdin increasingly emphasized the bungalow as the embodiment of new attitudes towards the house and home. Aesthetically, the bungalow's supposed simplicity, artistry, and individuality became prominent selling points. Symbolizing continuity, ornamentally simple houses came to represent a conservative aesthetic alternative to the new bungalows. It was between these two aesthetic poles that other house styles were defined based on their scale and ornament. By choosing a certain house style, the customer could physically express his or her place in the spectrum between old and new.

In the household interior, the contrast between bungalows and conservative houses was not always so explicitly drawn. The qualities of efficient practicality and cozy comfort were shared among the various house styles. But the influence of progressive ideology also found its way inside house. Over time, bungalows and semi-bungalows

were given practical and comfortable qualities not associated with conservative houses. Thus, Aladdin used the rhetoric of practicality and comfort to extend associations with progressivism into the interior of certain house styles. The customers who purchased these houses could rest secure in the knowledge that they were in step with both the latest fashion and the latest prescriptive ideology.

The tension between old and new, however, also affected other elements within the house. Opposed to the two-story Victorian house, the one-story bungalow represented a radical reorganization of architectural space. To help assimilate these spatial changes, the bungalow was described and promoted in terms of older attitudes towards the house and home. By using the rhetoric of comfort and practicality, Aladdin tried to assure its customers that bungalows offered the same degree of segmentation between public and private spaces associated with the Victorian house.

As portrayed by Aladdin, the role of women in the "progressive" house also reflected the ongoing influence of the nineteenth century. In the realm of practicality, the "efficient" Aladdin bungalow (and later, the semi-bungalow and square type house) offered the housewife the hope of less housework. The scientific home, however, also urged the housewife to ascend to a higher plane of household management. Instead of acknowledging the paradox, the company used the appeal of an efficient house as a promotional tool. This cult of efficiency only made housework seem more modern. Women remained symbolically bound to the same household sphere that had contained their mothers during the Victorian era. As part of their duties, women were also responsible for providing an artistic and comfortable setting for the family; the Victorian cult of domesticity remained substantially intact even after the end of the nineteenth century. Despite their emphasis on reform, both the progressives and Aladdin's

interpretation of the progressives maintained the status quo when it came to the prescribed role of women in domestic life.

Transition, then, influenced much of the rhetoric used by Aladdin in its catalogs from the 1906 to 1920 era: architectural aesthetics, the prescribed role of women, the influence of nature, and other attitudes surrounding the house and home were all thrown into flux between the old and the new. By their very existence, the catalogs themselves are a testimony to change. As the first company to mass market and mass produce pre-cut houses, Aladdin transformed traditional methods of house design and construction into the methods of standardized industrial production. The catalogs are evidence of this new approach to building. But does the rhetoric employed in the catalogs accurately tell us anything about the people who bought, assembled, and lived in Aladdin houses during the 1906 to 1920 period? Since advertising is a reflection of its audience's aspirations and ideals, the catalogs accurately reflect purchasers' attitudes towards the home current during the period.

At the same time, Aladdin's rhetoric distances the houses portrayed in the catalogs from reality. In some cases, the rhetoric and the physical realities of architecture intersected. More often, Aladdin's rhetoric transformed the objective, physical realities of architecture into subjective symbols. Just as we are aware of the manipulation of reality in today's advertising, Aladdin's customers no doubt recognized the image the catalogs presented as idealistic. But rhetoric, especially that describing the cultural entity called "home," has a powerful attraction. Ideals about the perfect home are not inherent in the architecture of the house. Instead the ideals must be created through words and associations like those found in Aladdin's rhetoric. To customers seeking a new house, these ideals must have had a certain appeal; who would not want to buy a house that was

also the perfect home? For Aladdin, the use of idealistic rhetoric was doubly effective. It not only transformed its houses into ideal homes, it also created a sense of differentiation and uniqueness amidst the standardized products of industrial production.

Aladdin's rhetoric, then, remains a double-edged sword. It provides an accurate record of the general, middle-class attitudes towards the house and home in vogue during the early twentieth century. The rhetoric, however, does not allow us to understand why individuals chose certain models or how they used architectural spaces. Rhetoric, whether that of Aladdin or Gustav Stickley, does not allow us to be that specific. Whether the *Marsden* was actually artistic or the *Michigan* truly conservative was an individual decision. From Long Lake, Minnesota to Ortega, Florida, the owners of Aladdin houses ultimately decided how to turn rhetoric into reality and house into home.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The geographic locations come from testimonials by D. M Jorgensen (Long Lake, Minnesota) and Charles H. Pringle (Ortega, Florida) contained in *Aladdin Interiors* (Bay City, MI: North American Construction Company, 1911), n.p.

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