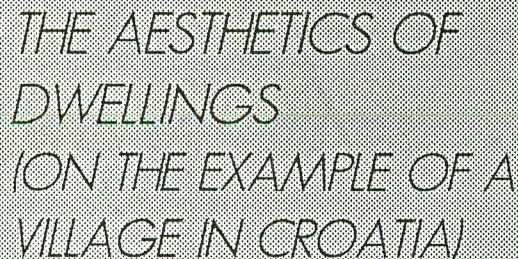


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THE AESTHETICS OF
DWELLINGS
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF A
VILLAGE IN CROATIA)

The article presents the author's research into dwelling decoration as practiced in the village of Sošice. The theoretical assumptions for the aesthetics of dwellings are formulated in the first part of the article as a subject of ethnological research. The second part consists of concise information on the period and form of research; on the natural features and historical processes that have taken place in Sošice, a small town in an economically poorly developed part of Croatia; on the basic features of the architectural environment and the most significant dwelling processes that have occurred within it over the last eighty years. The decoration of dwellings observable in the given period, from 1981 to 1985, in houses that are still occupied, is described in the third part. Research has registered several decoration styles, which correspond to the general social and cultural conditions and village residential standards characteristic for the early 20th century, the period between the two world wars, and the post-war period.

The permanent habitation, the dwelling, has manifold meanings for the human race. If we see it as an entity we might say that it is a place that man has isolated and separated from the outside world in order to secure conditions within it for his existence: to seek shelter from inclement weather and protection from the dangers of the outside world, in order to meet his biological need for nutrition, rest, and reproduction. If we consider it a sociocultural phenomenon, this is a place where family life goes on and social communication takes place.

It is also a part of the work place, where jobs are done that supplement either primary or secondary economic activity.

It is obviously unnecessary to make a special point of the fact that these facets of the dwelling are universal since they have emerged in response to needs immanent to the entire human race. However, there are differences in the way in which each of these needs is met, the procedures that are applied in the process, the space allotted for these purposes and designed especially to correspond to them, not only in different climates and different cultures but within social strata of the same climate and culture type. These specific features are deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of individual societies, whose individuals know and respect the traditions, while in practice, according to their own possibilities, they hold to them to a greater or lesser degree.

The aesthetics of dwellings is one aspect, one of the articulations, of the culture of habitation. The latter is, again, a broad concept that does not contain the social aspect alone - behavior and activity in the dwelling, and the material aspect - design of space through selection of objects and devices, but also includes the spiritual aspect - the residents' feelings about it. The behavior and activity are evidenced in the established procedures that residents use during the events of everyday life. These are residential habits, and they seem so ordinary to the residents that they are not aware that their expression is inherited through tradition. The devices and objects equipping a dwelling may only seem uniform at first glance. If you look more closely at the amount these devices are used, and at the habits related to using objects and furnishings, here you find the culture of habitation for an individual. After all, in habitational aspirations and attitudes towards the dwelling one can discern habitational values.

If we consider the objects that fill and decorate a dwelling in terms of their function and the meaning they have for the inhabitants, a distinction comes forth immediately. On the one hand, we find a group of those general, common objects necessary to everyone. On the other, we find those which are not used in common by all people, but are special. They are not indispensable, yet are found in all dwellings.

The first group of objects are symbolized by the three points in a dwelling: the hearth, table and bed. Three life circles are drawn around this inevitable triangle. The circle of the hearth is the primary existential center of the house. We should recall, after all: man did not merely build a house to protect himself, but to protect his fire as well! The table is the circle of family gathering. The bed is the beginning and end of man's daily circle, and usually his life's journey as well.

These three points are a sort of *conditio sine qua non* of man's habitation. So, although they can take on different formal articulations in different geographical, historical and sociocultural environments, they are substantially the same everywhere, and can be considered the universal features of habitational space.

Next to objects of utilitarian function in the dwelling, we also find items belonging to another level. These are things that man uses to either embellish his residential space, or that provide substance for his spiritual needs; feeling about the dwelling and feeling in the dwelling.

Some theorists consider the line between the utilitarian ("useful") and the decorative ("beautiful") a demarcation for determining the concept of civilization and culture. Thus György Lukács, for example, considers the solidity of a house, its heating system and other elements of this kind to belong to the notion of civilization, while the internal and external

beauty of the house belongs to the notion of culture (see Tränkle, 1972, 13).

Decorative objects in a dwelling do not primarily interest us as items in their own right. Their formal and aesthetic properties are the subject of other disciplines. The primary ethnological interest is aimed at the subject - man in the dwelling. When seeking an answer to the question - why he chooses, for decoration, certain objects and not others, and what they mean to him - one can discern the path to recognizing his culture. One may traverse this path by starting from an assumption formulated as follows: unlike with utilitarian objects in a dwelling which everyone has in common, the resident expresses his individuality through selection of decorative objects. Through them he is integrated, in a certain way, into his social group and establishes his status, identifies with the heroes or idols of his time, expresses his relationship to family, to the immediate surroundings or homeland, to religion (Scharfe, 1970, 110 and elsewhere). Therefore in the selection of decorative objects in the dwelling we do not merely note the resident's individual sense of beauty, but rather recognize his outlook on world and life. Considered in this light, decorative objects can be indicators of cultural values (with one note! The notion of the decorative object is grasped here in significantly broader terms than in its customary definition that a priori includes aesthetic evaluation. The term "decorative object" includes all those objects whose basic property is not - or rather is no longer, though it may originally have been - strictly utilitarian. These are objects that are not indispensable but make the home more comfortable, cosy, individual).

It is important to interject, however, that the theoretical assumption of dwelling decoration as an individual expression of the resident is not entirely confirmed in practice. One must not make the mistake of judging the current inhabitants of a house on the basis of the inventory of decorative objects found in their dwelling. Often enough some of the decorative objects in a house have been inherited. They are not the result of the choice of the present generation, rather of previous ones. In some cases the current inhabitants keep them in the house out of mere inertia, guided by the principle: they have always been here, and everyone is so accustomed to them that it seems as if they can not be done without. At first it seems as if between these objects on the one hand and the resident as subject on the other there is no longer communicative process going on. But nonetheless, with their uninterrupted presence, these objects become signs for the resident of the recognizability of his home, and as such symbols of the security of his private sphere. In another case one finds a certain nostalgia surfacing, especially among older or aging residents, for whom these objects are reminiscent of their childhood. Although a series of utilitarian objects have come and gone, old things have been thrown out and more modern ones introduced, by retaining decorative objects there is an attempt at preserving something of the atmosphere of past times. And finally, a more profound emotional involvement happens with inherited objects that were the personal property of some dearly beloved ancestor who has since deceased. By saving ornaments which are reminiscent of this person, a relationship is materialized between two beings, from this world and the beyond.

Furthermore, one must keep the fact in mind that there are a greater number of gifts among decorative objects than among utilitarian objects. This again means that these objects are not the selection of the current resident but of someone else from his circle of family or friends. So while inherited objects belong to past periods in terms of origin and even certain meaning, these objects which were received as gifts usually belong to the present, both in terms of origin and meaning. If certain forms appear more frequently among them, they can be grasped as specific symbols of the social group.

II

On the basis of assumptions formulated as above, I studied the aesthetics of dwellings as a part of the greater culture of habitation in the village of Sošice, located in the western part of central Croatia (Muraj, 1987). The field work went on from 1981 to 1985 and covered about thirty houses in that small village. The corpus of field material consists both of my own observations during stays in the village homes, and authentic (tape recorded) statements made by residents of the village that I collected by interviewing them with a prepared questionnaire. People from various age groups took part in these conversations, and various social and economic standing. Since the memory of the oldest living witnesses went back to the first years of the 20th century, this is the chronological extent of the period within which I considered the above theme. The situation of the researched subject within a time period of eight decades made it possible to survey a phenomenon that seems, at first glance, to be static, in a dynamic sequence. And when the process, observed as such, is related to the general social and cultural conditions of that time and space, the phenomenon can be better understood.

Sošice was, until recently, the central village of Žumberak, an area situated among the Žumberak hills that stretch about forty miles along the Croatian and Slovenian border, and cover the territory between the Kupa and Sava rivers. It is a hilly area with limited natural resources, an underdeveloped infrastructure, and a lack of any major economic installations or plants; therefore, it is one of the most backward parts of Croatia, even today.

We find confirmation of settlement in Sošice in 13th century documents. Decisive events, however, took place here, as everywhere in the Žumberak area, in the early 16th century. After the great devastation wreaked by the Turks, new population was moved into the area - at the urging of the Military Frontier Zone administration. This new population was originally from the inland Balkans area, and brought with it cultural traditions that differed to a certain extent from those of the native traditions, and the way of life was different. This population lived with a constant military obligation, but they also enjoyed certain privileges, including the status of free man unlike the serfs who had inhabited the area before them. The treatment of this border town, even something of a regional center, meant more favorable development for Sošice, especially from the 18th century, on. In this period the elementary school first opened, and the town became the seat of the Greek Catholic parish (because the newly settled population, originally Orthodox, had embraced the Greek Catholic faith), and the weekly livestock fairs were of special economic importance for the benefit of the population. Trade in livestock and traffic in other goods led to the opening of taverns, wayside inns, stores, and contributed to the general dynamics of living. This relatively suitable course of development for the town kept going after the Military Frontier Zone ceased to exist, when Sošice became part of civilian Croatia in the late 19th century, and became a communal seat. Although this positive trend continued until World War Two, a process of economic emigration commenced in Sošice as elsewhere in Žumberak, in the last centuries of the 19th century, which was focused, for the most part, on countries overseas.

The beginning of the regression of life in the village dates to 1944, when most of Sošice was burnt to the ground in the course of military operations. Although the inhabitants managed to rebuild most of the housing after the war, Sošice gradually lost its significance as a regional center. Not only did it cease to be the seat of the commune after an administrative

reorganization, with the loss of all accompanying functions, but the livestock fairs also stopped. They had breathed life into the town over the last one hundred and fifty years, providing lasting positive impulses. Aside from emigration to nearby cities, part of the active population left, starting with the 1960s, for temporary employment in the countries of Western Europe. Most of them went to West Germany. The consequence was a drastic change in the population structure: the settlement was increasingly dominated by households of aging, single people, and there are fewer and fewer children. Now one comes across young people in the village only on the weekends (when those working in neighboring cities come home) or during the summer (as far as the "guest workers" are concerned, who spend their vacations here).

Almost a majority of the sixty or so households functioning in Sošice during the period covered by this study live off of agriculture, although some of the population receive pensions (most of them earned abroad, some of them from Yugoslavia), and some receive financial aid that they earned as participants in the National Liberation Struggle. The agricultural profession dominates over all others. It is the most essential component of the current population, as it has been the economic constant of a whole series of past generations of Sošice inhabitants. Since this activity is unquestionably the existential crux in Sošice, the structure of everyday behavior, interrelations, the system of values, attitudes and views on the world within this small social group is formed along with it and around it.

The former way of life in extended farming families (the *zadruga*) can be recognized in the architectural fabric of the village. Sošice is the scattered type village, formed out of formerly separate holdings of several *zadruga* families (which is still reflected in their patronymic toponyms). It consists of six, mutually more or less distant sections. Four of them (the hamlets of Maršiči, Tarači, Boiči and Gornje selo) consist only of residential and farming buildings, while two of the hamlets, both lying along the main road, contain residential buildings and buildings of public importance. In the hamlet of Kovači, by the building of the elementary school stand two churches, one next to the other (Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic), the house of the parish office, and the Convent of the Basilians whose building also houses the local museum collection. In the central hamlet, by the residential and farming buildings of today's descendants of the venerable Hranilović and Radić families is a building with a store, inn, post office and local borough office, a meeting hall. Here you have the noticeable area where the livestock fair used to be held, and the bus station. These two hamlets are, within the village, the places where more intense gatherings of local villagers go on, areas intended for public life, while the other four hamlets are purely residential. Because of the scattered hamlets, the entire settled area covered by Sošice does not represent a coherent architectural whole. Adapted to the hilly karst relief it is structured such that not only the gardens and orchards, but also the pastures and fields are located in the immediate vicinity of the houses, most of them built without following a particular design, some between the various parts of the village. The town consists equally of built-up and natural areas, merging one with the other in gentle transitions.

The processes that have been going on in habitation over the last eighty years can be seen from a survey of the architectural features of residential buildings, if one looks at them in a chronological order according to the year each was built. I will present them here in the most concise possible form.

In spite of the devastation of World War Two, there are still a few houses to be found among the village buildings that represent the residential architecture typical in the late 19th century. Adapted to the lay of the land, these houses are partly ground floor, partly two-storey. The lower level consists of two rooms designed for farming needs, while the upper floor is intended for dwelling in the narrower sense. A covered porch runs along the front face and side entrance to the house, and the residential part of the house consists of two rooms only (Figure 1). In the entranceway is a kitchen with a hearth, and adjacent to it, a room with

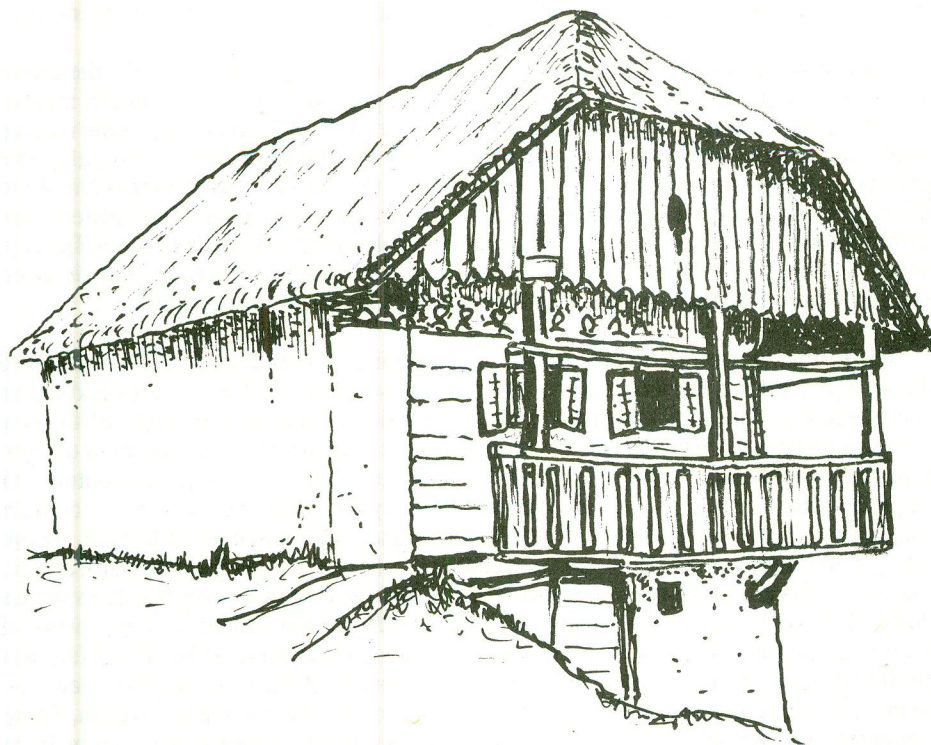
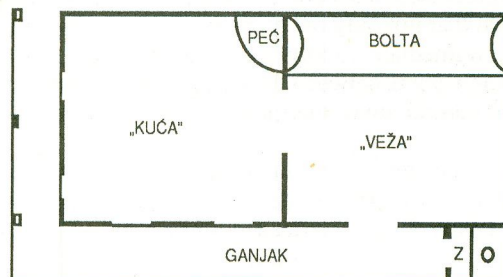


Figure 1 - A house built in 1895; the façade facing the street, and the floor plan of the upper floor.

kuća = soba	<i>the "house" room</i>
veža = kuhinja	<i>the "hallway" Kitchen</i>
ganjak = trijem	<i>the "corridor" porch</i>
z = zahod	<i>toilet</i>
bolta = svod od pruća	<i>woven reed ceiling</i>



a wood stove, connected to the hearth and stoked from the kitchen. While the room is outfitted with a wooden ceiling and floor, and four windows providing adequate light, the kitchen has no ceiling, open all the way to the roof. Only the section by the hearth is covered by an overhang woven of twigs; the floor is earthen, there are no windows. Since there is no opening to let out smoke, the overhang over the hearth is covered by a thick layer of soot, and the entire room is dark. Food was prepared and cooked in that black kitchen, while all other aspects of daily life went on in the room. There the family ate its meals and slept, took care of certain household and farming tasks, met with relatives and neighbors, held festivities, weddings. It was the place of births and deaths.

An improvement in the dwelling standard was related to a change in the form of residential architecture that was seen in Sošice in the first decades of the 20th century. Then full two-storey houses appeared that were somewhat larger than the previously described building. In this case as well, both ground floor rooms are intended for the farming function, and the section on the upper floor is intended for residence. This part of the building now consists of three rooms, of which the middle one (by the entrance), the kitchen, and the two side rooms (of which one, depending on the size of the family, is used as a bedroom, or as storage for certain foods, clothing, household equipment and tools, and so forth). Now all three rooms have ceilings, and the attic can be used throughout its length for storage. This form of dwelling also retains the earlier type of access to the residential floor through an outside staircase and a porch running along two sides of the house, most of which end in a toilet (non-flushing, of course) (Figures 2,3). The earlier open hearth is replaced by a stove,



Figure 2 - A house built in the period between the two world wars.

which is a major improvement. Smoke no longer fills the room but is funneled out through a chimney, the entrance door has a glass panel, factors contributing to a cleaner, lighter and

more comfortable kitchen. Some of the living functions then shift to this room, and the kitchen becomes a place for more than just preparing food. Meals are taken here and the household members spend their day here, while the room is reduced to the function of sleeping, and possibly as a receiving parlor.

In the post-war re-building of burnt houses, this basic type of dwelling survived, but supplemented by additional rooms, it was partially modernized and adapted to modern living

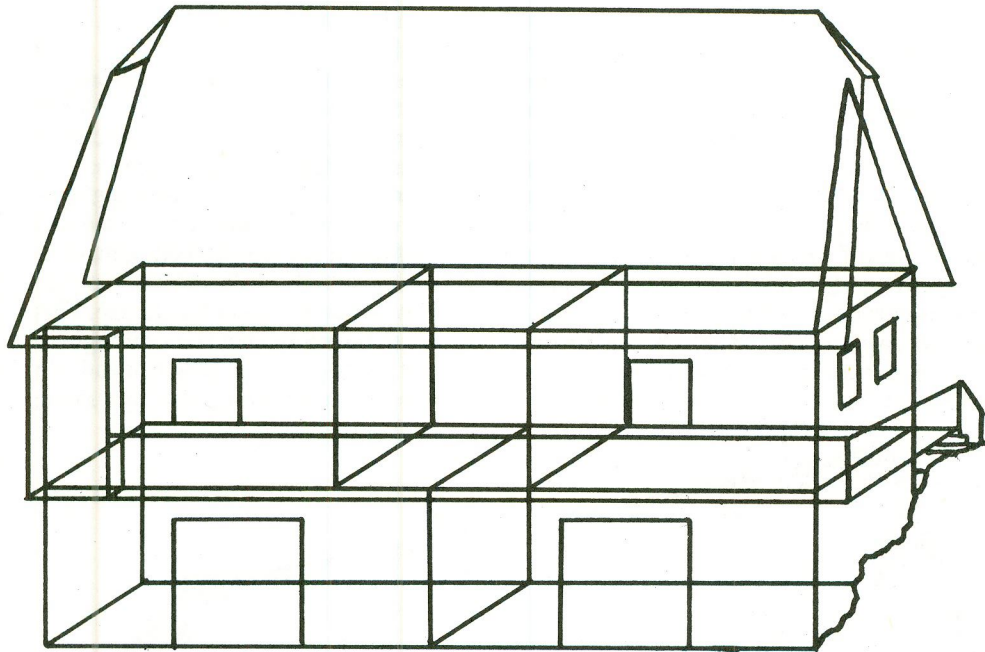


Figure 3 - Spatial projection of the most common form of dwelling in Sošice.

standards. It is most frequent practice to build annexes onto the house from the farmyard side. Additional rooms on the ground floor level are also intended for farming needs, and so now a whole series of farming tasks that used to be done in the room (for example, jobs related to butchering pigs and preparing the meat, husking corn, shelling beans, etc.) have been transferred to the ground floor level and are more strictly separated from the residential part on the upper floor. The annex usually houses a bathroom and toilet with running water, a pantry, a closed staircase, and in some cases another room (Figure 4). The kitchen, even in these annexed and modernized houses, equipped with more modern furnishings, still retains its residential polyvalence, and continues to serve as the day room for the members of the household, along with its primary function, as well as the place where neighbors and relatives are received.

The fact that the population is on the decrease, particularly of those at an active age, the impossibility of getting a job outside of agriculture, and the other previously mentioned unfavorable circumstances have meant that there has been very little new building done

among the dwellings in Sošice. The few to be found no longer follow the traditional architectural tradition, in building material or in external design and internal room layout, rather they are built completely differently (Figure 5). Their owners are inevitably people who are working temporarily abroad in West Germany, and in their aspirations they tend to

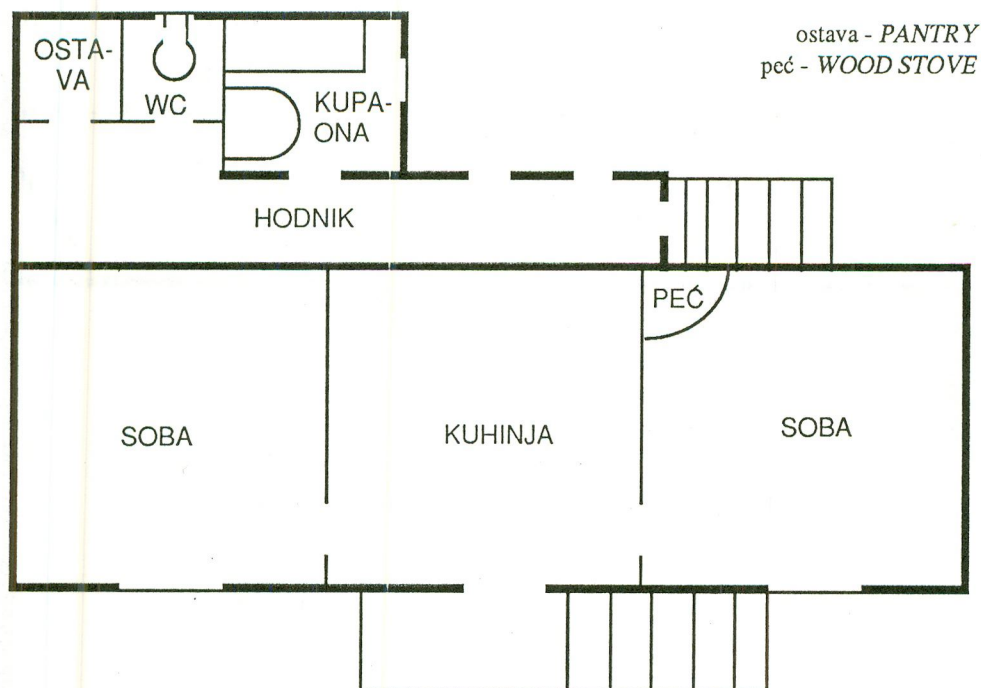
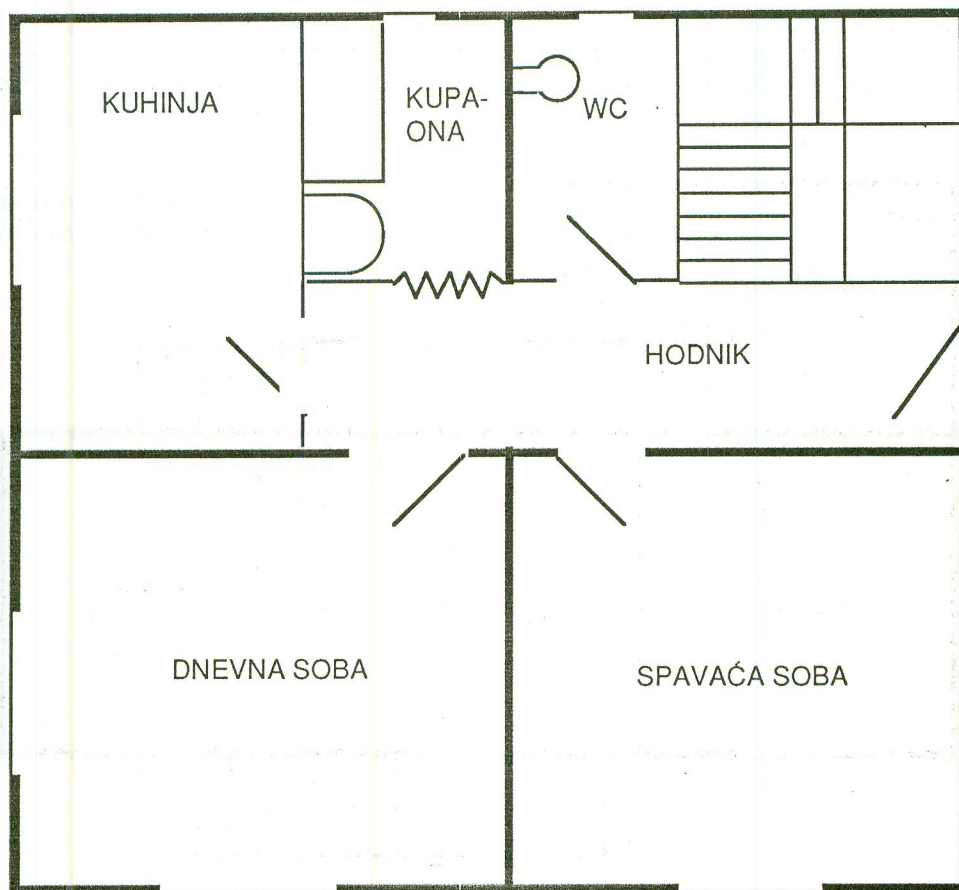


Figure 4 - Floorplan of the upper floor of a house built after World War Two.

look to the urban family home in their own, village way. There are certain discrepancies, however, between their tendencies and imitation of others on the one hand, and the deeply rooted dwelling habits and Sošice way of life on the other. These houses are intended only for residence, so the farming buildings are separate. Furnished with modern fittings, kitchen equipment and machines, they now have a living room along with the kitchen and bedrooms, which is supposed to reduce the kitchen to a room exclusively for preparing food. The building is also furnished with central heating, varnished parquet floors, and so forth. The household members, however, spend most of their day in the annexed room called a "summer kitchen", a separate building that is much more modest and traditionally designed than the new house.

This is not the only case when I ran into two parallel processes, while studying the culture of habitation among Sošice residents, going on at equal speed. I noticed that the surfacing of a need for owning modern furniture and kitchen equipment and the decisions made to purchase it happen faster than its total adoption into daily life among some of the



Kuhinja - *KITCHEN*
Kupaonica - *BATHROOM*
Hodnik - *HALLWAY*
WC - *TOILET*
dnevna soba - *LIVING ROOM*
spavaća soba - *BEDROOM*

Figure 5 - Floorplan of the ground floor of a house built in the 1970s.

consumers. It has become clear that mere possession of certain technological advantages of civilization does not necessarily result (for everyone) in a simultaneous cultural change.

III

When registering the objects with which the people of Sošice decorate their dwelling space one might note at once that - on the level of the village - there are several expressions in the style of decoration, of which each reflects a separate period in time.

The expression that dominated in most dwellings at the turn of the century has survived in a few of the Sošice houses that have not been subject to change in either outside design or inside layout. In the former black kitchen there were no decorative objects, no coverings on the floor, and no curtains on the windows. The table was covered in the past and is covered today with a linen tablecloth only for festive occasions, while otherwise, for everyday usage today it is covered with waxed cloth.

The dominant point is the ornamentation of the corner of the room where the table is located. Pictures of the saints hang in this corner on the wall. These reproductions on paper, inserted into a wooden frame under glass, used to be available at fairs. Three or five of them usually hang in a row. The central position in the corner, at the conjunction of the two wall surfaces, is held in Greek Catholic homes by the saint whose day is celebrated by the family. In the Roman Catholic homes one most frequently finds a picture here of the Madonna, and next to her usually hangs a crucifix. On the same walls, somewhat below the saints, is a row of photographs of members of the family. They are arranged overlapping one another in a larger frame. Photographs from weddings and obligatory military service tend to predominate. A wall mirror is also used as an ornament, located on the street wall between two windows. Family photographs are also inserted into the mirror frame.

It is typical, therefore, of the oldest existing style to be seen in the village, that the place for decoration was focused on that corner of the room, across from the door and diagonal to the heating stove, where a number of everyday and festive activities take place. A further typical characteristic is the priority by which decorative objects are selected, of religious (or "protecting") and family importance. Calendars appear, but only secondarily as a wall decoration, and on walls by the beds hang *zidnjaks*, modern factory-made tapestries or - in the poorest of homes - colored paper.

The evident restraint in decorating interiors seems to have been balanced by decoration of the exteriors. One of the houses, dating to the late 19th century, was decorated with colored ornamental decoration all along the wooden front face in the zone above the window (Figure 6). In spite of his advanced age, its owner touched up the color decoration every year himself, and his statement proves that this was to meet his aesthetic needs.

The second example is a house built in the first years of the 20th century. At the ground floor level of the street front is a plaster sculpture of the Madonna in a semicircular niche. The current owner, although an atheist when it comes to faith, takes care of the wall ornament, primarily in honor of the memory of his grandfather, in whose lifetime the house was built.

Traces of the arrangement of the "holy" corner can be still followed in the houses where many changes have been introduced and where a different style prevails. A concrete illustration of this is a room in a two-room house, now furnished with the furniture for a married couple's bedroom. Where the table used to stand in the corner, now there is a combination of wardrobe and cupboard with glass dishes and ornaments of a modern origin, purchased in Munich department stores. (The father of the household is temporarily working

in this German city.) Although this corner of the room is no longer a place where the members of the household gather, there are still five pictures of saints (Figure 7) on the wall above the cupboard.

In another house a low bureau with mirror and a television set upon it stood in the corner in place of the earlier table, while a radio was on a shelf up on the wall. But the entire upper belt of both walls was covered, to the ceiling, with pictures on religious subjects, ending with a photograph of Marshal Tito. The current resident of the house continues to live with objects that reflect the world of ideas of the older generation, without feeling any discrepancy at the fact that he has added the hero of his own time, the symbol of the world of ideas that he, as participant in the National Liberation War, took part in himself.

The third example is from a modernized room from which everything that used to stand in the "holy" corner has been removed, except the decoration that held the central spot on the conjunction of the two wall surfaces. This is also a painting with a religious motif, that the grandmother of today's sixty-year old owner brought with her as dowry. In the time of his childhood this picture included a music box mechanism that was wound up to play for special occasions - for Christmas, Easter, the family patron saint's day. This evidently left its traces on today's resident. He said: "That is a painting. I may not be religious, but I left it up. There were a lot of pictures here. The saints weren't important to me. So I took them down. But I left this. I'm interested in it because it is a cultural value, how should I put it, a heritage that is worth something. To have a memory regardless of how anyone sees it" (mgf-9/83, 27).

Parallel to modernization of Sošice houses and a different organization of space, decoration of the beginning of the century was suppressed by a somewhat different way, in which the spirit of the mid-century found expression. This style consists of several novelties that gave a certain warmth and greater sense of comfort to the interior decor. Windows were hung with curtains in these homes, the floors covered with rugs. Transparent curtains of inexpensive synthetics predominate, and in the houses where someone has lived in Germany, you also find thicker cotton curtains of colorful decorative fabric. The floors were first covered in the rooms; the earlier rag rugs, hand woven floor runners of strips of cloth, later replaced in the more affluent houses by wall-to-wall carpeting. The kitchen floors are covered by linoleum or some other type of plastic floor covering.

Another novelty is the increased space for wall decoration. Wall surfaces are planned for this in all the rooms, and the earlier sparsity has now been replaced by more abundance in wall decoration. In terms of frequency, the most common are modern photographs of members of the family, arranged in a collage, hanging framed in rooms. Aside from surrounding themselves with their living generation of relatives, some of the residents felt a stronger need for the pictorial presence of ancestors. It is therefore customary to take old, separate photographs of one's mother and father, and by re-photographing them together and touching them up, a joint photograph of the parental couple is made that is usually hung up on the wall over the bed (Figure 8).

Cheap reproductions of paintings with religious motifs, framed certificates of first communion and crucifixes are second in frequency among wall decorations. They are found with equal regularity in the rooms and the kitchen.

They are followed, in frequency, by the *zidnjak*, industrially produced tapestries of various sizes, many of them purchased abroad. They are hung by the bed and on other empty places on the wall, both in the rooms and the kitchen. Since most of these are due to recent

purchase by the current residents, *zidnjak* wall tapestries can serve as an indication of the aesthetic level of this community, especially when their pictorial content is considered. It is noted that exotic scenes tend to predominate as motifs: Arabs on horses in the desert at night, leopards in the jungle ready to spring, a scene from the life of people in China, etc. Fairy tale scenes appear: a couple of white deer, horses in a magical forest and so forth. There are also scenes of recent, usually tragic figures, such as the *zidnjak* in one of the houses in Sošice showing the figure of late U.S. President John Kennedy. A leaning, in the selection of the abovelisted motifs, can be recognized within this social community for what we call trivial art.

Further in terms of frequency, we find wall calendars. Judging by the fact that there are three or four of them in each room of the house, residents treat them first as a decoration, and only secondarily as they were originally intended to be used. Calendars are regularly given as gifts. From the selection of calendars we learn more, for example, about the companies and businesses that the relatives or friends of the people of Sošice work in that we do about their aesthetic leanings or other values. In those occasional families with children or young people, or in those houses where the grandchildren of people living in Sošice visit with some regularity, calendars can be noted with photographs of idols of the current generation. Most of these are Yugoslav show business or sports stars.

Unlike the frequency of calendars, one does not often come across landscapes among the wall decorations found in Sošice households. Only here and there one finds the occasional framed postcard, among the family photographs, and rarely there are reproductions of local landscapes. They are usually located in less prominent places, for example in the hallway.

Another item lacking from the inventory of wall decorations is original artistic paintings. The exception that I happened upon proved to be quite indicative. This was a large painting, oil on canvas, without an artist's signature. A woman's portrait done in realistic manner. It turned out that the owner of the painting was the Sošice registrar, and it remained in the residence after his death. When the dwelling was damaged by bombing during the war, the registrar's niece - a village woman from Sošice - took the painting to her own house, and regardless of the obvious damage from shrapnel, hung it up by her bed.

This was a chance for me to try and establish this woman's attitude towards the artwork. When asked directly whether she thought the painting beautiful or not, she answered: "It is dear to me and beautiful because it was his (her uncle's, author's note). They were good to me". (mgf-9/82, 10). It seems that the emotive relationship in this case towards the symbol of a beloved or respected person is much more powerful in the awareness of this village woman than her understanding of the artwork. The emotional satisfaction seems to considerably overpower her need to own a decoration of this kind in her dwelling because of a need to enjoy the decoration itself.

One more item can be found among the wall decorations in Sošice houses. When it happens that a household item loses its utilitarian function due to technological modernization, it becomes decorative. After running water was installed in dwellings, the entire apparatus used for water, previously essential to every kitchen, became superfluous. In current kitchen decor such a set up has completely vanished, and all that is left is the *podvijač*. The former base for carrying a water vessel on the head is now a popular kitchen ornament. Of the current wall decorations, this is the only that has "folklore" origins, a product of domestic handcrafting.

Unlike the earlier sparse decoration, due, in part, to the extreme crowding, and the many purposes of the room, the current decor of Sošice households shows a tendency towards those varied decorative objects that do not hang on the wall but are placed in the room. One gets the impression that decoration of a dwelling with such objects is more common in those houses where a woman is working abroad. Although these objects are quite varied, they can be included in a single category in terms of artistic properties.

As an illustration I will mention a few of these decorations that I noticed in two Sošice households: in the middle of the room table, covered with a textile tablecloth, was a dish with artificial fruit, and a vase was on the sideboard holding artificial flowers. On a night table in the bedroom was a statuette of a naked black woman made of plastic mass, and on the other a velvet tiger; on a shelf of the dressing table stood a Venetian gondola, and next to it was a box made of seashells and snail shells; a hanging mobile object hung from the ceiling, consisting of several small, stuffed birds that wobbled at every breath of air. Aside from these decorations there were also decorative utilitarian objects such as a wall clock with a cuckoo, a barometer in an especially ornamental setting, and so forth. An unusual set of drinking glasses where the pitcher and six glasses are arranged on a spiral-shaped stand of forged iron was also in both houses.

The example of the set of glasses with a rare, non-functional shape is one of the confirmations of the earlier observation that neighbors often look to one another when choosing what decorative objects to acquire. It seems that when choosing decorations one does not tend towards originality or does not even rely on one's own taste. And the result of this is a standardization of dwelling decoration.

The choice of such decorative objects from the wide selection of available goods in West German and Yugoslav stores coincides with the choice of the wall tapestries mentioned earlier. Since these are no longer objects with protective and religious or familial connotations, but objects exclusively intended for decoration, both groups of objects can be treated as indicators of the artistic tastes of most current inhabitants of Sošice. It seems that they decided on such "artworks" out of the available assortment primarily because they are understandable. Such work does not confuse or perplex them. It is something they clearly like.¹ And moreover, hardly last in priority is the fact that such tapestries do not have an economic value above which they would be prepared to spend. And just as their ancestors satisfied their need of luxury with the goods sold at fairs, so most of this generation of people in Sošice choose their luxury in massive goods production with a form we refer to as trivial. The frequency with which this category of decorative object is found in most Sošice homes indicates a rather uniform aesthetic level and a symbolic coherence of its owners. The fact that a part, the greater part, of the villagers chose to use approximately the same sort of decoration when arranging their dwellings is evidence of a successful integration of these people in their social group and the possibility of an equal participation in its subculture.

The most recent style in decoration is noted in the few Sošice houses that were built over the last ten years. The rooms of these newly raised homes have been furnished with newly acquired furniture, which, it seems, has resulted in an occasional deviation from the

¹ In his analysis of kitsch, Abraham Moles came to the amusing conclusion that kitsch is "acceptable art, which does not insult our spirit with elevation that is outside everyday life" (Mol, 1973, 59).

previously common style of decoration. Wall surfaces receive special emphasis as a whole, because all are covered with wallpaper, usually in several colors, showing dominating floral or other motifs. The colorful atmosphere of the room is aided by curtains, the printed design, color and pattern of which usually differs from the wallpaper in both pattern and color, and the motifs and various hues of the rug also make their contribution to the chromatic and motivic lack of uniformity (Figure 9).

One can find a range from old to new on the wall decorations within these same houses. For example, in the most modernly furnished Sošice house, the central spot on the wall in the grandmother's bedroom, over the bed is taken up by a reproduction with a biblical motif, while the same spot in the grandchild's room is decorated with wallpaper that is a large photograph (with a landscape motif from the tropical seas). Certain decorations, formerly typical for the room, are now located in the kitchen. In the corner of the kitchen, in this most modern house, where the family gathers around the table, at the conjunction of the two walls, now hangs a photograph of Josip Broz Tito (Figure 10). In another house with a modernly furnished kitchen, the ceramic plate is a new type of wall jewelry.

The living room is dominated by a long cupboard which serves as the repository for decorative objects, and not only on the shelves, but also along the top. Here, aside from decorative and utilitarian glasses or cups, a new object is decorative candles, the packaging with bottles of costly liquor, and an utterly new note, a few books. The television table is another place planned for placing decorative objects in the living room, which usually stands in the corner, diagonally across from the door. A new form of ornamentation appears - house plants (Figure 11).

Plants that are raised in flower pots can be considered a decoration that has begun to appear, though only rarely, in exteriors as well as interiors, on balconies or an outside staircase. This is noted for those houses with a fenced-in yard,² and whose residents are among the more affluent in Sošice. It seems in all respects that a metal fence and potted flowers along the balconies and stairways or planted along the house, do not only serve the purpose of decoration; they are also a prominently visible status symbol.

Despite the observed recent formal differences and innovations in the most recent style of decoration, in the quality of the decoration in terms of its aesthetic, artistic properties there have been no shifts whatsoever. When considering the space that is decorated in Sošice houses as well as the types of decorated objects, we have so far established three styles of decoration that have corresponded to certain time periods. These are only chronological modalities of the same style, however, which has held on quite tenaciously over the last several generations of Sošice residents. The features of this style can be summarized in several points. As far as the inventory of decorative objects, there is more interest in realistic scenes than symbolic ones. As to production there is virtually no hand made work; the objects are purchased, inherited or acquired as a gift. The cheapness of the decorative object is of priority importance for acquisition, the further consequence of which is that the production belongs to the trivial category³. Most of the people of Sošice lack affinity for an original

² In Sošice there did not used to be fences around houses and yards. This is a practice that has only recently appeared.

³ The previously quoted analyst of kitsch, Moles, considers the basic idea of "kitsch civilization" - as he calls it - in opposition to the axiom: "there are better things, but they are more expensive" rather, to the contrary, contained in the axiom: "there are things that are cheaper, but a little uglier" (Mol, 1973, 112).

artwork. They do not try to own one-of-a-kind objects, rather they prefer reproductions. When arranging the decor of a room there is no noticeable tendency to coordinate the tones, designs or stylistic features, rather there is a predominance of color and lack of uniformity. No desire for a particular arrangement of one's dwelling could be noted. On the contrary, there is evidence of imitating others within the village environment, a tendency towards uniformity.

I must add a little something in closing. When I planned to research this segment of the culture of habitation in Sošice, I considered it likely that I would need to establish the relationship of Sošice residents towards the tradition of art in general. I also wanted to establish their attitude towards modern artistic expression in general, in hope that I would arrive at a fuller insight into their total relationship towards the beautiful. As is evidenced by the material I came up with, I did not succeed in doing this because my original assumptions about their dwelling (and general) aesthetics were unrealistic.

But, it is not mine to judge. The style with which dwellings are decorated in Sošice and the modest aesthetic level of their owners are as they are. It is a fact that they are a constituent part of the way of life of the current generation, but also an expression of a continuous legacy from past generations as well. They are projections of the people's views of the world and life and the extent of their culture.

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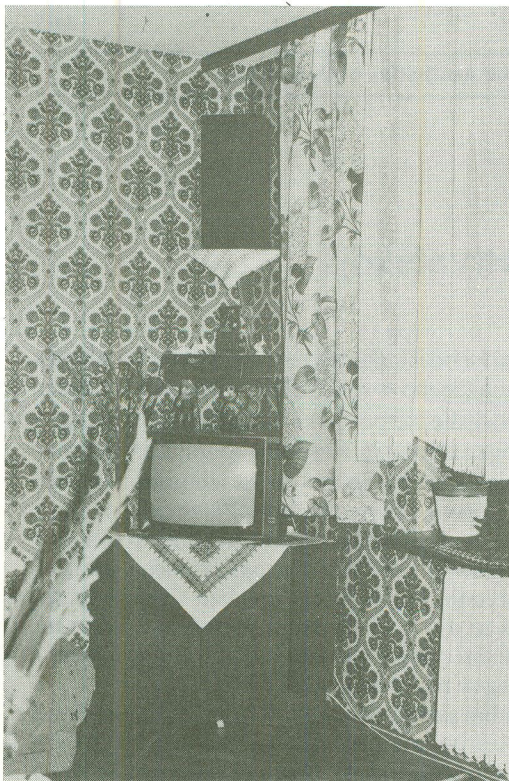


Figure 9 - A living room in a newly built house.

Figure 6 - Decorations on the façade of house no.52.

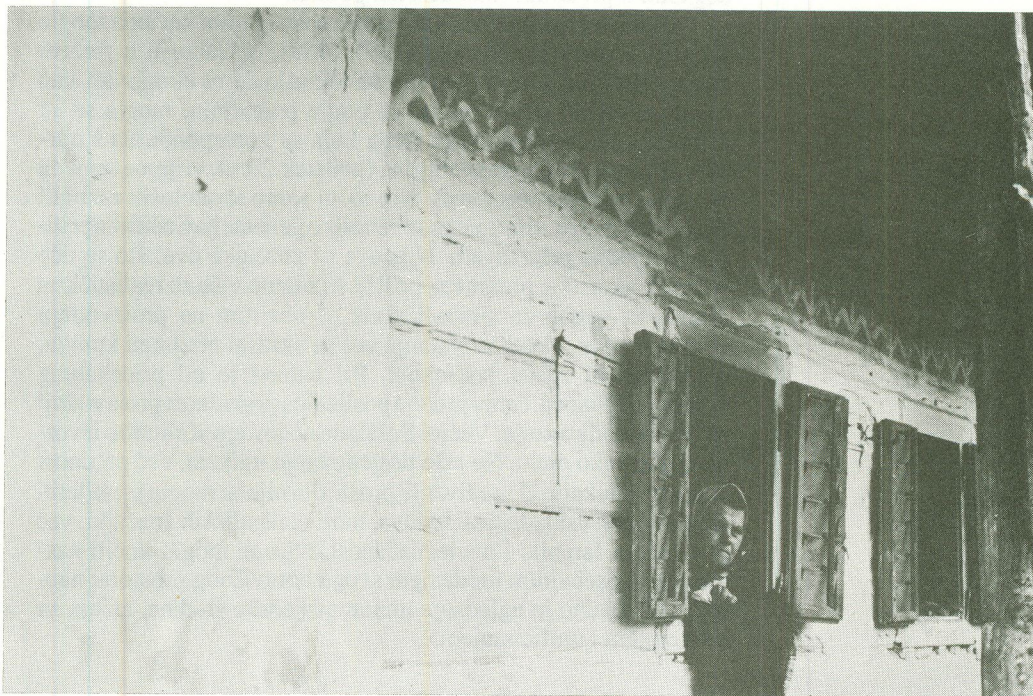




Figure 7 - The former "holy corner" in a room.

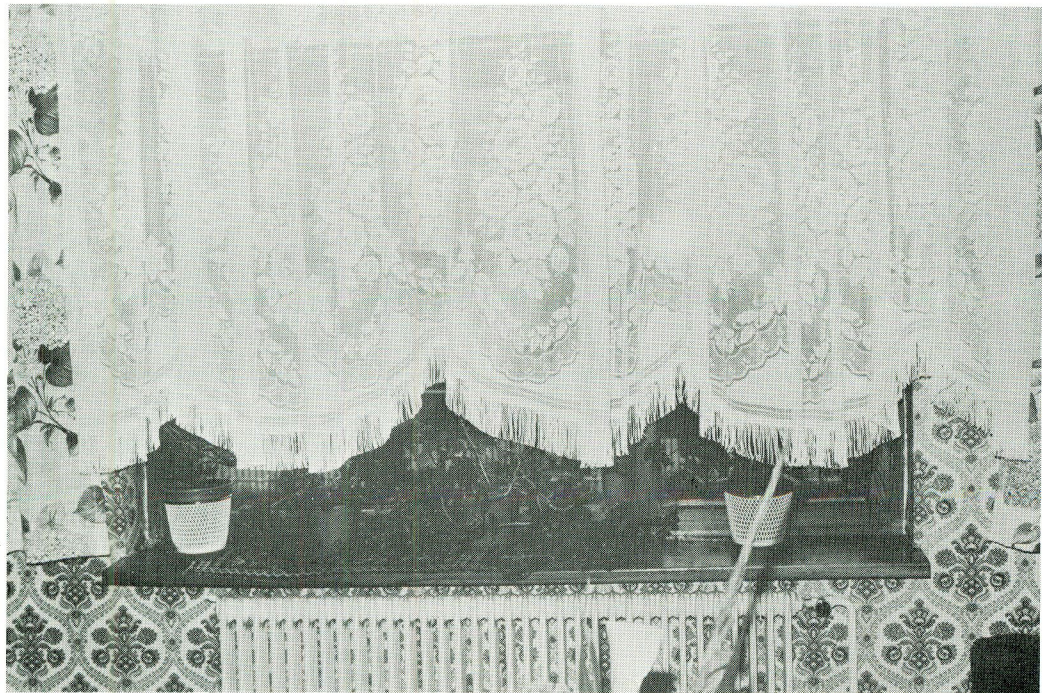


Figure 11 - A detail of a room.

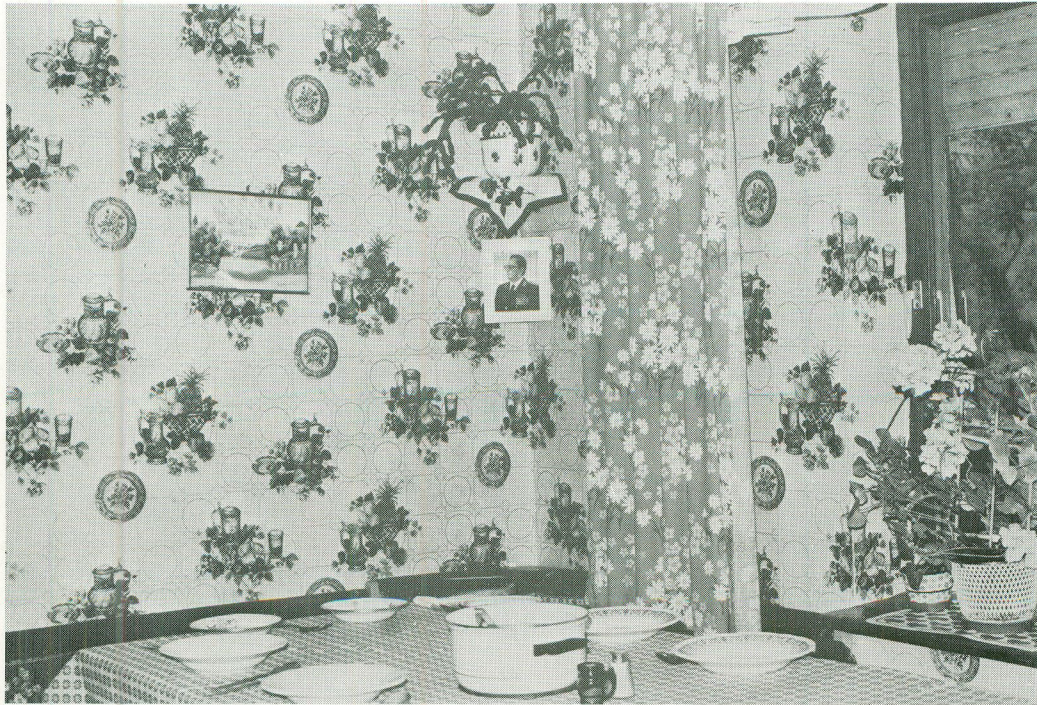


Figure 10 - A kitchen in a newly built house.



Figure 8 - Decorations in a bedroom.