

The ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

Vol. LII
No. 5

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NOVEMBER, 1922

Serial
No. 290

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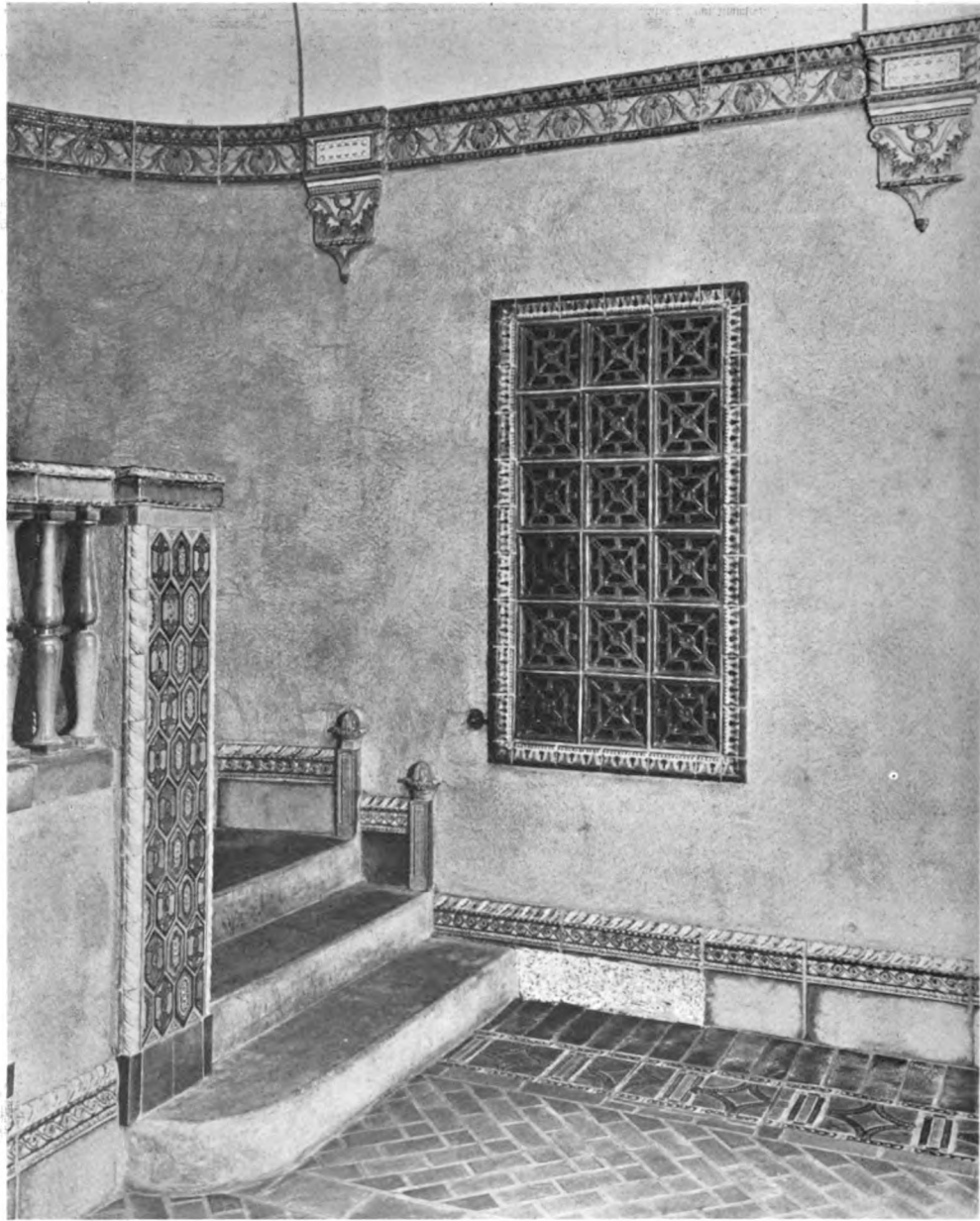
PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY
THE ARCHITECTURAL RECORD COMPANY

115-119 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK

T. S. MORGAN, Pres.
E. S. DODGE, Vice-Pres.

M. A. MIKKELSEN, Vice-Pres.
J. W. FRANK, Sec'y-Treas.

Yearly Subscription: United States, \$3.00; Foreign, \$4.00; Single Copies,
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DETAIL OF STAIRWAY, WITH RADIATOR GRILLES OF FAÏENCE. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

three hundred sixty-two



AN ITALIAN MAJOLICA FOUNTAIN IN THE MAIN DISPLAY ROOM. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

The DISPLAY ROOMS of a TILE MANUFACTORY



By Leon V. Solon

ONE of the most intricate problems of modern salesmanship concerns the manner of presentation of decorative products: the complication increases when the product is one that is just emerging from the fulfilment of purely utilitarian needs, to enter the artistic field—and this is the case with tile today. Though the least informed of the public is acquainted in a general way with the brilliant past of the potter in every land throughout the ages, there appears to be little mental connection between the achievement of former days and current possibilities. In the tile industry a very limited few are striving to express the artistic aspirations of America, hoping that in the course of

three hundred sixty-three

time the influence of pure ideals may be as fruitful of result in that industry as they have proved to be in American architecture. In the making of artistic tile, a condition exists which is paralleled in several other decorative art industries; we find that the process of evolution which has prevailed throughout the development of the applied arts in former time is now being reversed. In past ages we find that technical proficiency is in most cases a natural result of accumulated artistic experience; in fact, the necessity for improving the media for artistic expression often compelled the perfecting of technical methods. Today we find great technical achievement awaiting utilization in artistic practice.

The fallacy so loudly proclaimed by William Morris and his proselytes, that primitive methods stimulate artistry in craftsmanship, has died for lack of root and leaf: and though the many masterpieces of the potters' art were in most cases the outcome of rule of thumb methods, or shop tradition in production, there is no more reason that the modern potter should suffer artistic limitation through the scientific control of uncertain factors in material or process, than that the painter today should be considered handicapped because he buys his colors ready-made in tubes, instead of making them himself like Cimabue or Giotto.

The tile industry in this country sold its soul at birth to the devil of commercialism; with adolescence, it begins to show signs of regeneration: in a few instances a healthy desire is noticeable to formulate ideals and standards of craftsmanship on a par with those which actuated the potters of ancient times. Technical achievement is at a higher point of attainment than at any other period in the history of ceramics. In this respect, the greatest contribution to progress of recent years has been made by H. D. Lillibridge, who considers no effort too great if it is productive of some process which serves artistic expression; his technical knowledge and artistic sympathy have successfully revived lost processes and devised new methods of the greatest value to the designer, in such profusion that a generation of artists could hardly exhaust them.

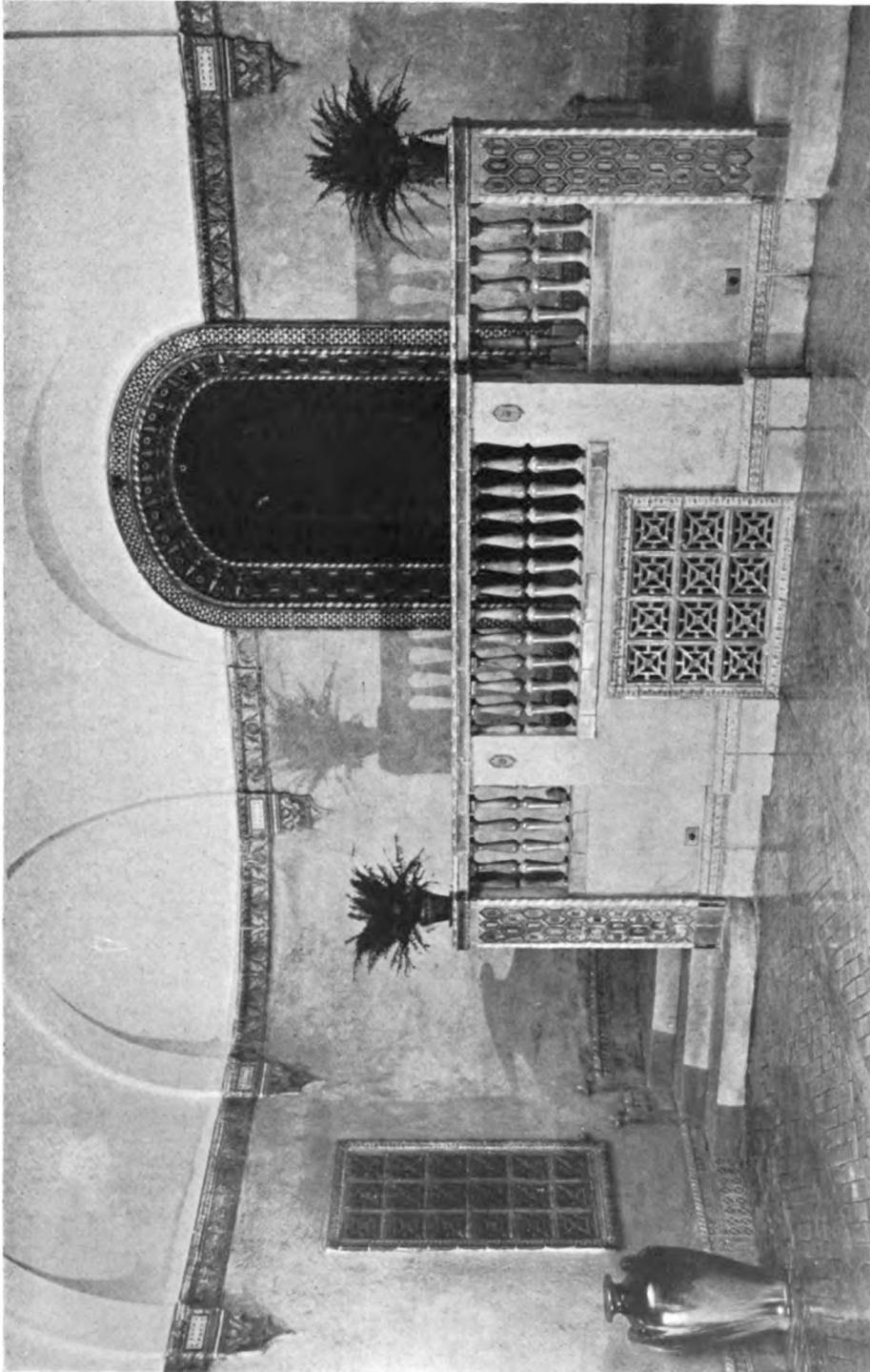
There is an urgent necessity to demonstrate the decorative capacity of tile through the installation of ornamental schemes: the decorative development of tile is in its infancy in this country, and great difficulty is experienced by many architects, and the majority of laymen, in visualizing the ultimate effect from an assortment of samples grouped together; it was with this circumstance in view that the schemes here illustrated were contrived. Comparatively little has been produced to which reference can be made as an aid to gauging indeterminate qualities of effect; the demonstration of certain types of effect through tile installation is, therefore, essential in premises in which

questions of treatment will be discussed.

With the prevalence of commercial standards from the initial stages of industrial development to the present time, a set idea has been impressed upon the public mind as to the most appropriate uses for tile. This is, in a great measure, the aftermath of a manufacturing sales campaign which featured tile solely as a "sanitary" product. It must be conceded that when that propaganda was launched, artistic achievement was a minus quantity. When the interior and exterior treatments of the Aetco Building were being worked out by the company's art department, the necessity was realized for neutralizing certain preconceived ideas which were detrimental to the artistic expansion of the industry: also, that an opportunity presented itself for demonstrating the value of tile or faience as a medium for color effect in architecture and interior decoration. In the façade, an effort was made to show that architectural detail could be given color interest without any of the garishness which the uninitiated imagine is a predominant attribute of glazed clay products. Faience is used which has all the structural advantages of terra-cotta; its restrained harmony of russet, black, Tuscan red, rich low-toned blue, cream and gold, show at a glance that structural clay need not necessarily be crude in color or aggressively commercial in character. The Greek principles for color location governed the general planning of color on the detail; the coloring of the modelling over the door-way presented many debatable points for treatment, all of which were satisfactorily solved by the application of Greek polychrome methods. Particular attention was paid to the modelling, that the plastic quality of clay should reveal itself in treatment. The mellowness of color which characterizes this faience is produced by using the Tuscan glazes created by H. D. Lillibridge, which have an unusual texture, a rich color variation, and the unusual recommendation that they are not injuriously affected by the most rigorous extremes of climate.

The entrance corridor is treated with studied simplicity; a dark Delft blue

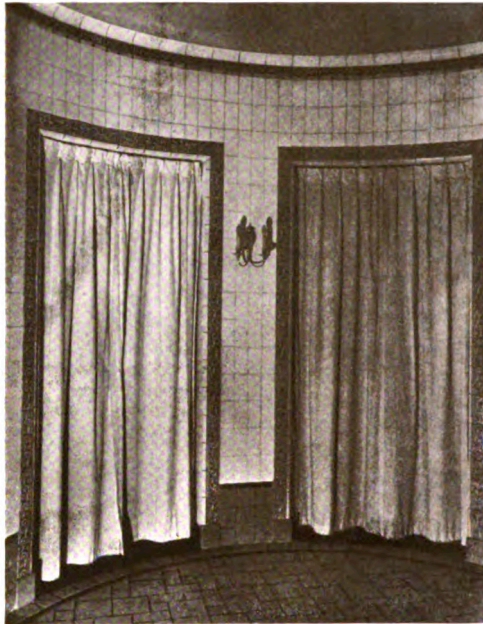
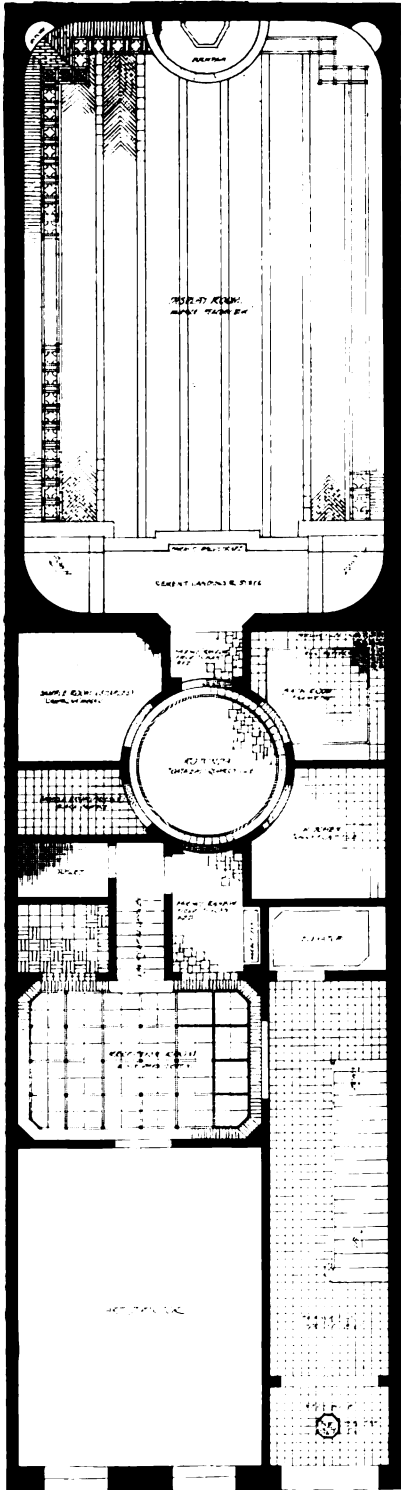
three hundred sixty-four



STAIRWAY TO MAIN DISPLAY ROOM. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

The decorative features are treated in polychrome after the manner of the Italian majolica coloring.

three hundred sixty-five



DOOR TREATMENT IN ROTUNDA, AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.



BATHROOM. BASE OF PERSIAN TILE, WALLS OF UNGLAZED BISCUIT TILE. AETCO BUILDING THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

three hundred sixty-six

covers the floor, extending a short distance up the walls as a low wainscot, terminated with a rope molding. Two highly decorative panels by Arthur Crisp are hung on rough stucco walls. The subdued quality of the façade, and the great simplicity of the entrance vestibule, were conceived for the following reason: when an architect or client comes to this building to decide some tile effect, the mental concentration necessary for the undertaking does not usually operate in the street, or in the vestibule; the state of mind is preparatory to the effort, and should be aided by means of treatments that are unobtrusive but helpful towards severing thought from previous and extraneous impressions, and preparatory to those about to be received. As the visitor enters the reception-room the first reaction is stimulated, and a preconceived impression neutralized which exists in

the mind of many, to the effect that tile is a purely commercial product, capable only of cold color effect. The color quality of this little room is one of great sumptuousness; its walls are covered with 3x3 inch tiles embossed with a simple Greek fret, the field and detail being colored alternately with red, black, and gold; this variously colored tile is set at random, producing a rich and interesting color vibration, quite low in tone value. The floor is of large blue-green tiles, panelled with a narrow strip ornamented with a simple repeating detail, with embossed gilt spots at the intersections. One of the Parthenon metopes, reproduced in faience, is inserted in the wall over the telephone operator's desk; it is treated with a special type of glaze which develops a brownish tint on those projections which cause the glaze to lie thinly on the surface; this produces an effect



RECEPTION ROOM. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

three hundred sixty-seven



STREET ENTRANCE IN POLYCHROME FAÏENCE. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

of ageing, which is singularly appropriate to the fractured condition of the original. The grilles are of faïence treated with a vermilion glaze. The color effect is carried up the stairway leading to the general office, which is visible from the door-way on entering, by using the wall tile as a base to the steps.

The visitor leaves the reception room through a little vaulted corridor, paved with Tuscan red faïence tiles laid at random; a marble seat fits in a recess, which

is decorated with American-Persian tiles arranged partly at random, after the fashion in which they decorate some of the mosque towers in northern Africa. This corridor leads to a small rotunda, on to which open display and sample-rooms. As white wall-tile is a very important feature in the output of this company, it was necessary to originate some form of decoration that would emphasize the technical excellence of the product, and endow it with a measure of attractiveness which it lacks when seen alone. White wall-tile has the unfortunate peculiarity of being the least adaptable of all the clay products to decorative assimilation. The problem of making this important item of manufacture decoratively interesting seemed almost beyond solution, when the idea germinated that the late eighteenth century French faïence might be fruitful in suggestion. After a thorough examination of historic examples, the solution was found in the dinner-plates of that period. The procedure followed was to create the same proportional relation between the ornamental panel border and the field that was established between the plate border and the center of the plate; it was then necessary to translate those ceramic decorations into an architectural scale.

The very general desire for colored bath-rooms had to be provided for, as the white tile treatment is practically obsolete for residences of any pretension to modernity, distinctive color schemes and treatments being the order of the day. Special color effects in variously combined ceramic materials for the kitchen had also to be devised; partly in the hope that the elusive cooks of this age may become attached to their surroundings, and partly with the realization that the mistress of the house may periodically have to spend many hours there herself, when domestics are unprocurable.

Progressing onwards we enter the main display room, in which the appropriateness of faïence is demonstrated for the polychrome treatment of various architectural features. The stylistic treatment is that of the Italian Renaissance; as the decorative color methods of the Della Robbias have usually prevailed in such

three hundred sixty-eight



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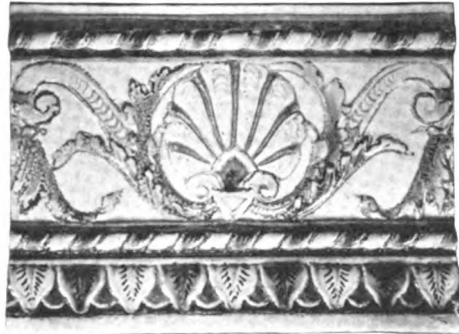
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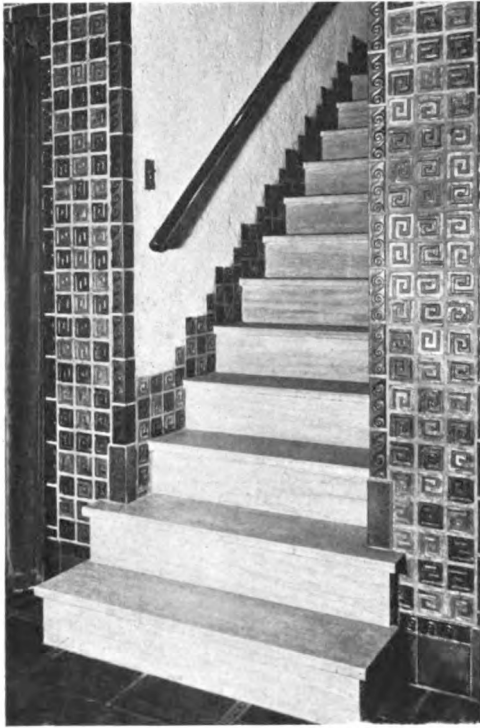
DETAIL, AETCO BUILDING--THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

(1) Polychrome faïence details of façade.

(2) Polychrome majolica detail.

(3) Original Greek detail, colored and used as door trim in hallway.

three hundred sixty-nine

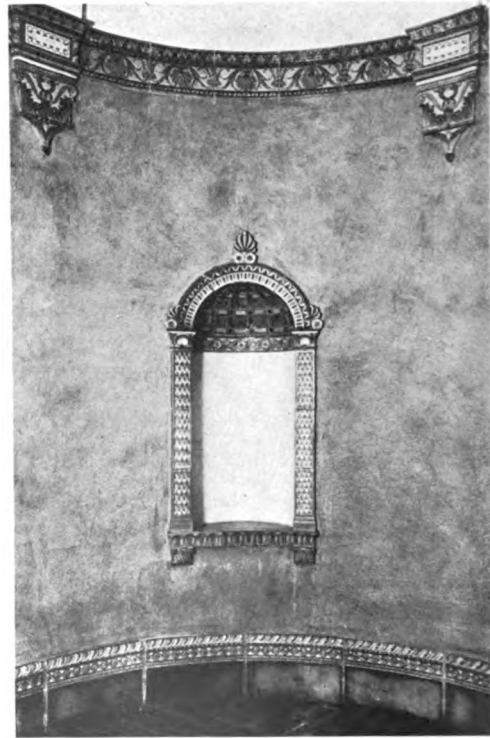


DETAIL OF RECEPTION ROOM. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

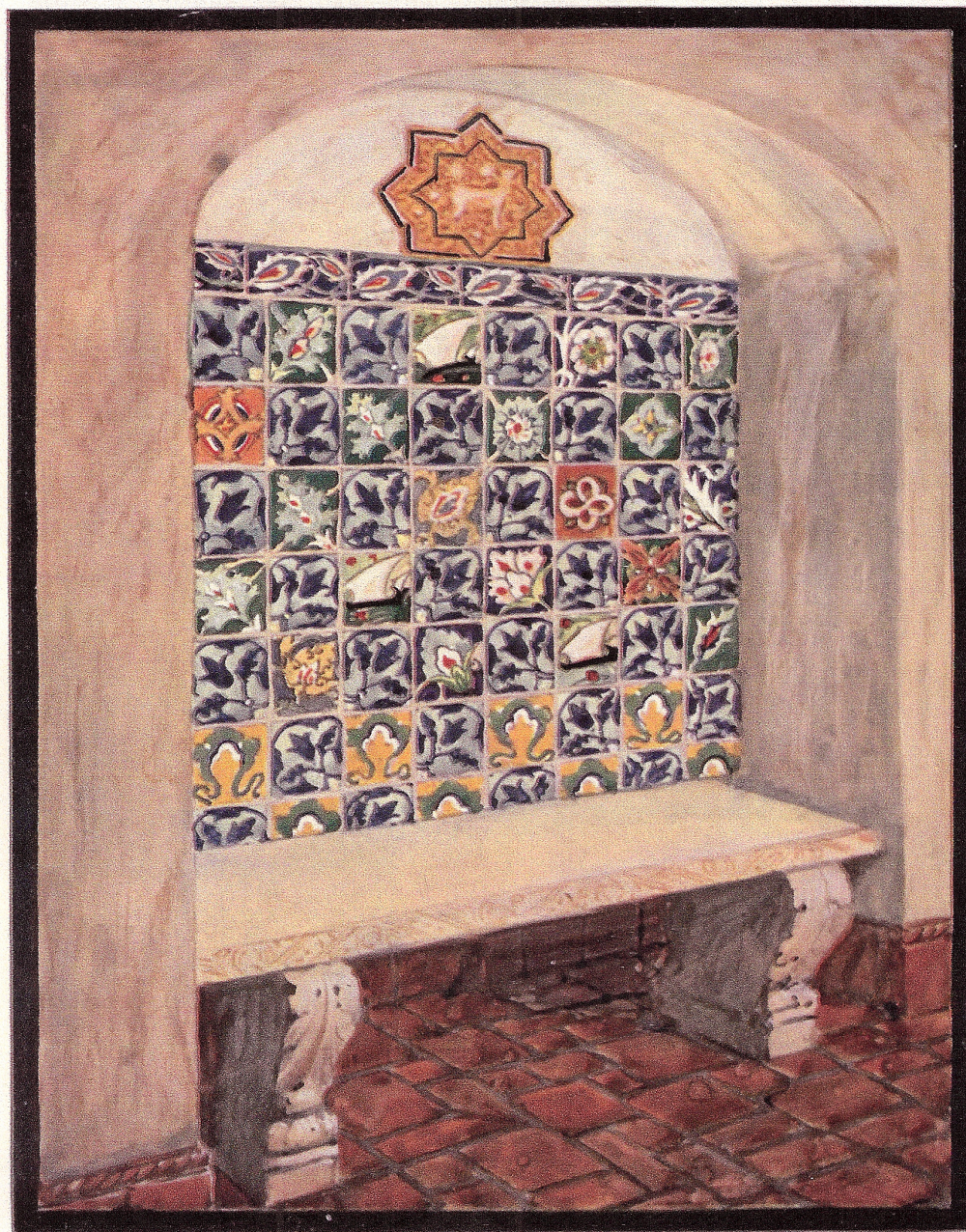
cases, a variation was attempted. As the result of a general investigation into the color methods of the ceramists of the 16th century, it was found that much Italian majolica was decorated with detail essentially architectural in character, treated in a distinctly ceramic fashion. Data were carefully gathered, and a system of treatment developed for the doorway, frieze, fountain, balustrade, etc. It was interesting to find that several of the Greek methods of color arrangement upon detail prevailed at that period. The principle of color and ornamental alternation, which was as much practiced by the Italians as by the Greeks, was featured in the color treatment of the doorway. The general effect of the entrance,

with its deeply splayed jambs, recalls the very early Renaissance buildings of Italy; intensely brilliant blues, vermillion, and gold, illumine the shadows, and suggest the heraldic quality of coloring which characterizes work of that period.

The sales value of this building depended upon the reflection in treatment of the trend of decorative taste; as this could only be gauged through a daily contact with the varying problems, the designing of the exterior and interior faience or tiling was done by the company's art department in New York. The building was an old residence which was made over; the architects for the reconstruction were Messrs. Rich and Mathesius.



NICHE AT ANGLE OF MAIN DISPLAY ROOM. AETCO BUILDING—THE NEW YORK OFFICES OF THE AMERICAN ENCAUSTIC TILING CO.

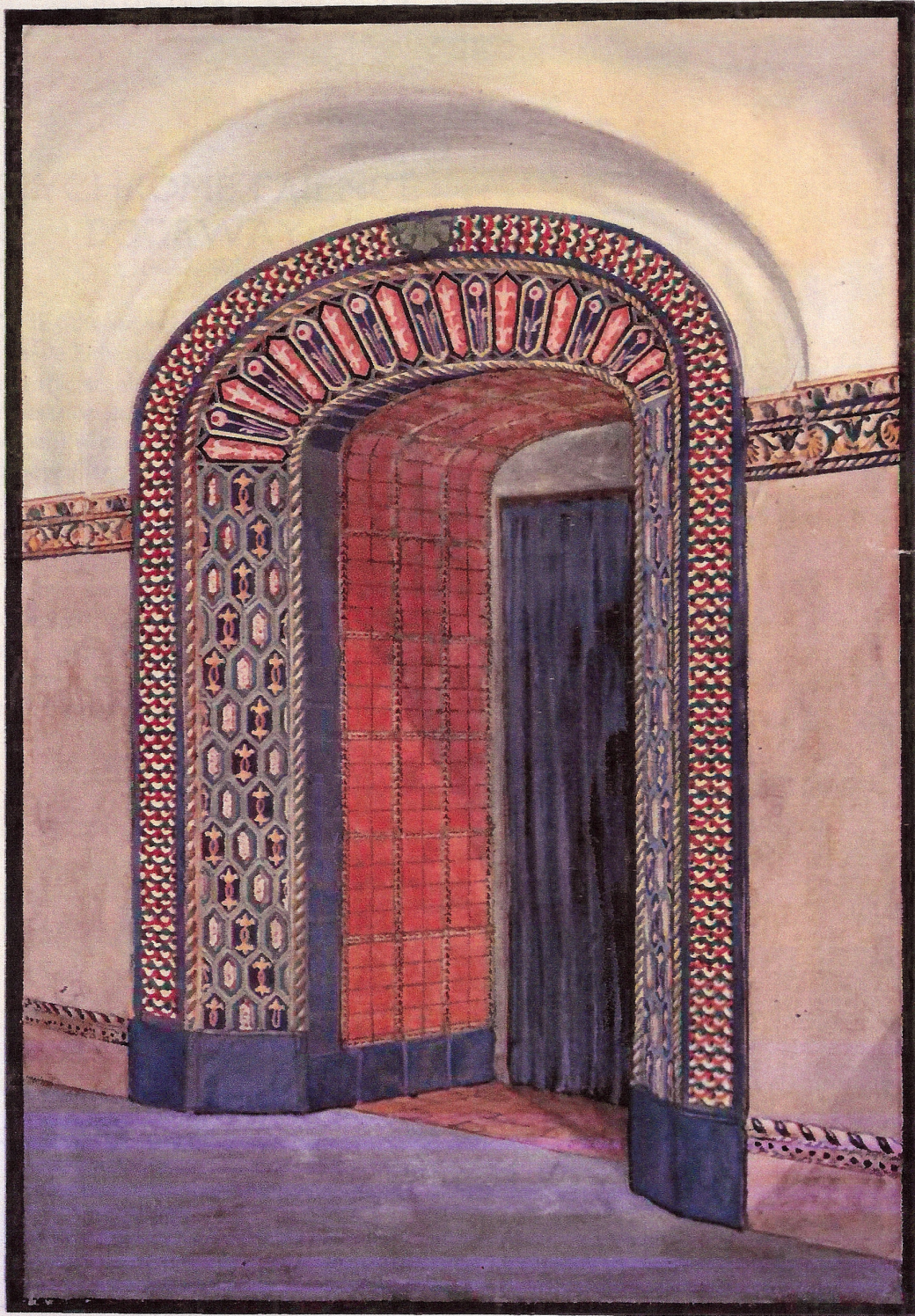


Seat alcove decorated with Aetco-Persian faïence tiles. Aetco Building
—the New York Offices of the American Encaustic Tiling Co.

SEAT ALCOVE

(See Reverse)

THE manner in which these strongly contrasting "Aetco-Persian" faïence tiles are arranged follows the pattern-plan found on certain mosque towers of northern Africa; in those examples we find harmony established in an assembly of brilliantly colored patterns, by means of a method of pattern grouping. It is a species of alternation, or checker, in which one pattern is constant; the other alternating unit in the checker has the maximum degree of variation. An iridescent lusted tile is introduced to fill the tympanum; this is a contrasting texture to the balance of the decoration, and possesses the advantage that it illuminates the shadow projected from the arch, as lustre reflects light at a great variety of angles.



Polychrome doorway, demonstrating the application of Italian majolica decorations to architectural detail. Aetco Building—the New York Offices of the American Encaustic Tiling Co.

B

POLYCHROME FAÏENCE DOORWAY

(See reverse)

THE traditions of the Della Robbias have hitherto been the accepted model when the architectural detail of the Italian Renaissance has been colored. As this treatment is somewhat limited in effect and hackneyed by overuse, another contemporary influence was sought, and the majolica decorations made the subject of study, with the purpose of adapting the ceramists' decorative methods to architectonic ends: this proved quite feasible, as the detail chiefly used by the Renaissance potter was similar to that found upon the buildings of his day.