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MODERN INTERIOR DECORATION BASIL IONIDES



Sitting-room in pencil cedar at Claridge's Hotel. By Basil Ionides. Mantelpiece of mirror in three shades—white, light grey and dark grey. The room follows classic lines but has modern simplicity and materials

IT is difficult to define what modern decoration is because many of the most noticeable of modern treatments become old-fashioned and boring after about six months. This should not be, and it is probably due to the tendency of modern work to try to be original and not follow tradition.

I think the more permanent of the modern work is the result of elimination of

unnecessary details and a practical use of new media and conditions.

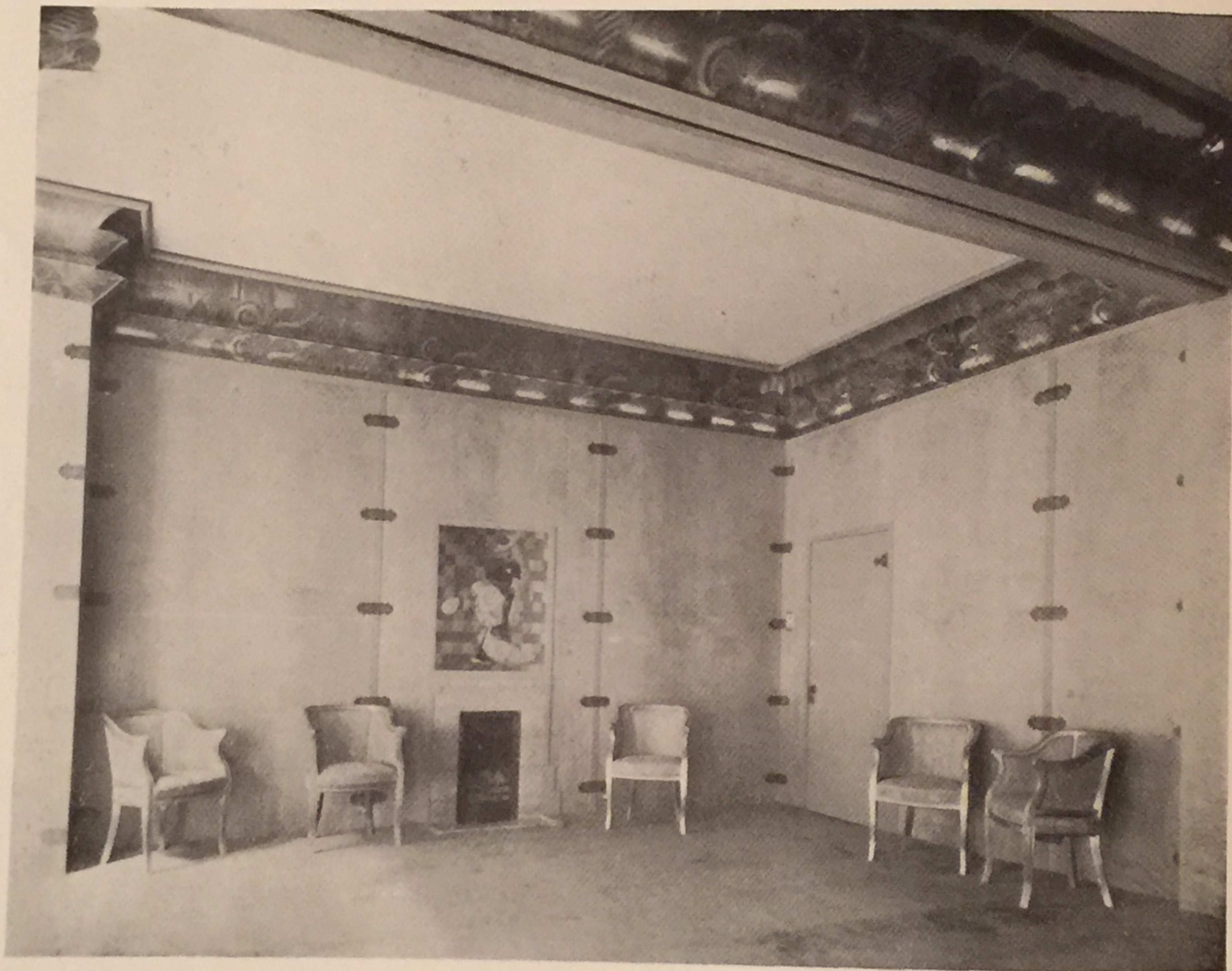
Possibly the foremost of these is electricity. Its flexibility in the designers' hands quite upsets the rules of other days, but this possibility has made the wilder designers put it everywhere and make it the main feature of their schemes, so that if the light is not on the scheme is half absent. There has been a show lately of

modern rooms, mostly from Paris, and these rooms are all displayed by electric light and look very well, but were one to see them by the cold light of a winter's day without the artificial light they would be horrid, and the large slabs of glass meant to be illuminated would be grey masses of gloom.

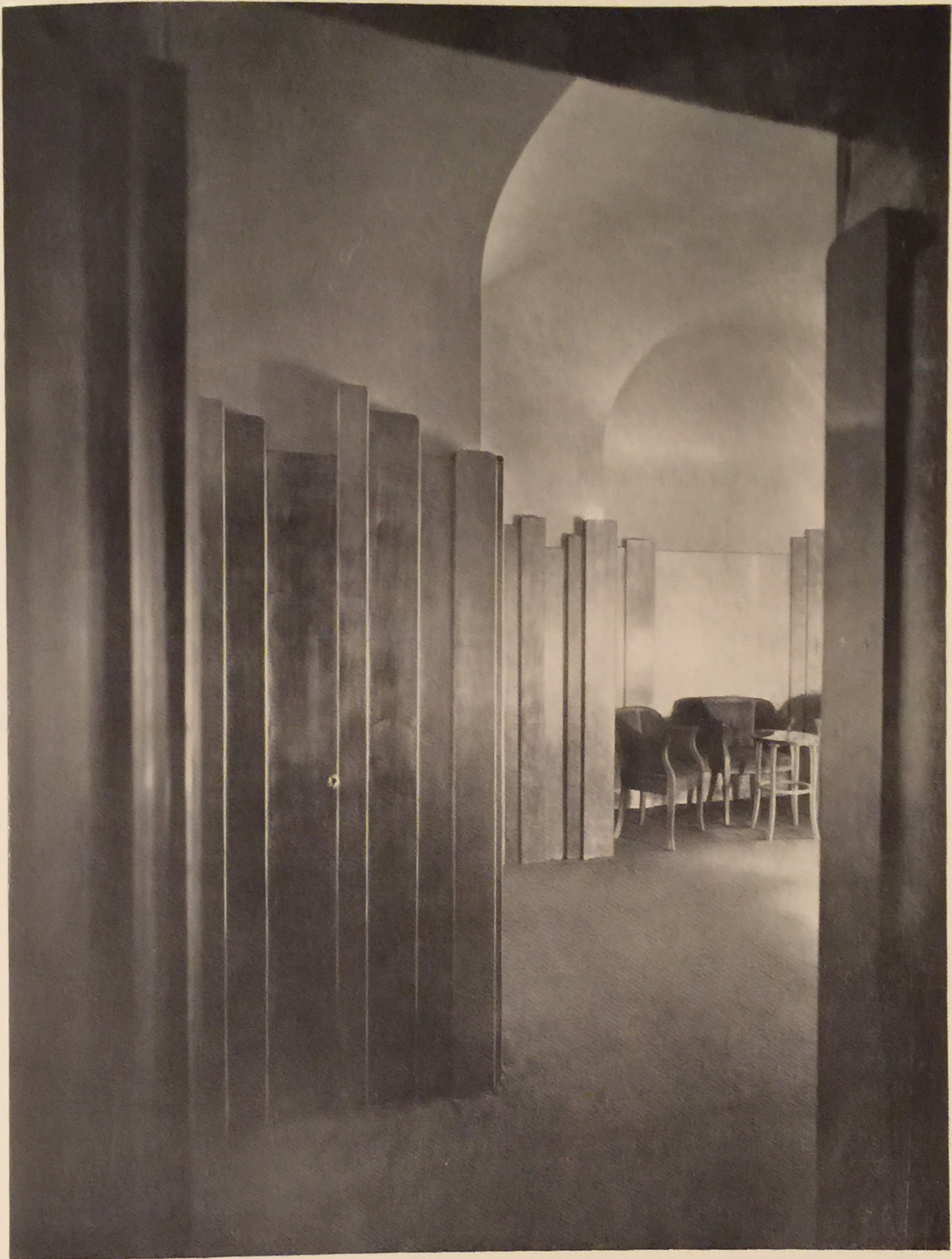
Simplicity is of course the note to be aimed at to-day, and also good colours. The day of the elaborate plaster ceiling is gone and its place is taken by simple stepping or coffering. Gone also are the carved mouldings beloved by the last generation and reproduced by the mile in fibrous plaster—particularly one excellent but unfortunately popular acanthus leaf of Wren's.

Straight clean mouldings are desired to modern woodwork, and decoration is nearly always concentrated into panels on pilasters.

Possibly the absence of decorators' carving is one of the most noticeable features of modern decoration, but its place is taken where carving is needed by sculptors' carving, which is different, as it is designed by the carver and therefore has artistic effort in it, whereas the decorator's carving is dictated from the drawing board, and carved without desire to create. In fact, the drawing board has very little to say about modern decoration because the designs on the flat look extremely uninteresting, depending as they do so much on texture and colour of materials. The tendency is to treat everything in flat surfaces made beautiful by colour or grain of wood, or curious workings of metal or paint, and these surfaces, drawn in an office, look nothing. This makes modern work very difficult to represent to the client before it is executed and impedes the execution. Everybody



Room at the Savoy Hotel in grey sycamore with green bronze clasps. By Basil Ionides. There is a folding partition to divide the room, which has hinges matching the clasps. These screen hinges necessitated the clasps to make the screen wall match the rest. The room is lighted from a glass cornice reflected in a chromium cove, and a glass panel is introduced over the fire



Savoy Hotel. Reception Room in gold with blue coving over. By Basil Ionides. The pilasters are each in a different tone of gold ; all corners are softened and the light is concealed behind the pilasters, being thrown up on to the ceiling

knows what a period room looks like, and a drawing of one conveys something, but the drawing of anything that depends on texture and quality conveys none of the essentials to the uninitiated.

Most people think that it is easy to do new work. I think they are mistaken, a simple thing that is pleasing—I mean really pleasing in its naïveté—is far more difficult to create than one loaded with decoration, a simple design must be pure and purity of design is at a premium. Another thing is that many simple things lack grace, and grace is essential to good work. One can have grace in the plainest of cubes if the proportion is right and this is the real secret—proportion. Most



Showroom for Messrs. Boots in Birmingham. By Basil Ionides. Pale pink coved walls. Engraved mirrors and bright green furniture specially made

modern designs lack good proportion and so fail and in failing bring discredit on other modern work.

The first essential to original design is a very sound knowledge of preceding periods. This applies to all things from dressmaking to houses. The next essential is a willingness to listen to the craftsman who is to do the work. The craftsman and the designer must "get together," as only by the combined knowledge can satisfactory results be got and new treatments suggested. So much original work is not practical owing to the materials being strained to achieve feats not intended by nature. Whole walls of plain wood are wonderful—but what about shrinkage? It can be got over, but needs care. It is this type of detail that lets the designer down. I have seen hundreds of drawings for rooms and decorations that are lovely, but could not be practically done or lived in. Untouched wood is often beautiful and one often sees at arty shows plain oak furniture, but fingers with their greasy touches are fatal to its purity. All sorts of delightful lighting effects are schemed, forgetting that the heat from the lamps will deposit destroying dirt, and so forth. These are the sorts of problems that face the designer of modern work, and which he usually shirks. Germany, a practical country, has done a great deal of new work well and carefully, but here little has been done. In Germany theatres, halls and houses are all modern now and yet in London not a single theatre has been done that shows any intelligent modernity. Lots of theatres have bought modern electric light fittings and put them up and thought themselves very new, but none has really tackled the problem with thought. One of the newest picture palaces is an artistic disaster in a forest of dead leaves, after the directors had considered endless schemes. Possibly it is the owners of theatres who dare not face being up to date.

No design is worth while unless you have to fight for it. Unless a designer is fond of his work he will never create, and that is the trouble with so much modern work. It is done by people who don't know much because they think it easy, and not because they are fond of it. **BASIL IONIDES**



Restaurant at Messrs. Swan and Edgar's. Decorative scheme by Basil Ionides.

