



## Simple Rules: what the oldtime builders knew

*Shannon Taylor Scarlett*

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Simple Rules is a new kind of builder handbook / design guide.

Inspired by long forgotten sources, the design content included here--timeless composition principles, elegant proportional systems, building techniques and formulas for making buildings more beautiful--is intended as a guide for the modern builder who cares about aesthetics and meaning as much or more than the bottom line.

In this small guide a few select concepts and techniques, salvaged mostly from 18th, 19th and early 20th century builder pocket references and architectural guides, have been resurrected and abridged--or interpreted where possible--for practical use by the 21st century architect and homebuilder. Simple building principles and conventions included here were used in the past to make places that were at once familiar and meaningful, sensible and beautiful.

The design concepts are equally applicable to modern design. In fact, they are intended to serve as archetypes for a new modern architecture, to free builders from the need to simply replicate old styles.

Sample Rules:

## **simple RULE 1 STRENGTH, UTILITY, AND BEAUTY**

"All architecture should possess strength, utility, and beauty." ~Marcus Vitruvius Pollio Strength arises from carrying down the foundations to a good solid bottom, and from making a proper choice of materials without parsimony. † Utility arises from a judicious distribution of the parts, so that their purposes be duly answered, and that each have its proper situation. Beauty is produced by the pleasing appearance and good taste of the whole, and by the dimensions of all the parts being duly proportioned to each other.

†parsimony: economy of means, cost-cutting

~Marcus Vitruvius Pollio De Architectura, Book

STRENGTH, UTILITY, AND BEAUTY "As one principal figure should always stand out as the foremost, ...to which all subordinate purposes should contribute and lend their aid. "

## **simple RULE 5 THREE DIMENSIONALITY**

"Always keep in mind the perspective appearance when designing the exterior of a detached building, and not merely the front elevation." ~ Richard Brown, Architect

THREE DIMENSIONALITY "From every possible view a really good building must have balance..." ~ Talbot Hamlin (image) equal distribution of detail and composition front and side, same roof form repeated, smaller side porch compliments front porch

THREE DIMENSIONALITY "...imagine the building as it appears to a person walking all around it... From every possible view a really good building must have balance, and this accounts for the comparative failure of some of our informal American country houses. They seem manifestly to be designed with one view point, or two, in mind; from these points they are good, perfect in balance and composition, but from other points the same buildings are a mere hodge-podge, and they lack that little accent on the centre of balance

given by a chimney or flower box, or some little point of interest, that would have made the whole seem balanced and in repose."

~ Talbot Hamlin The Enjoyment of Architecture

### **simple RULE 10 LAW OF LEVERAGE**

"Masses on one side of an interesting pivotal feature must have counterbalancing masses on the other side; shapes and positions of the masses themselves affect the balance." ~ Talbot Hamlin

LAW OF LEVERAGE "First, a heavy member close to that interesting feature which expresses the centre of balance--the pivot, as it were--will counterbalance and be balanced by a long, low, lighter member further from that point.

Secondly, the shapes and positions of the masses themselves affect the balance. A member that projects forward always seems heavier than a receding member. (image)

The best place on an "L" type building for the centre of interest is on the long side, near the angle, (the projecting wing, nearer the eye, seems heavier than the rest, requires a longer portion to balance it.)"

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