

Harper's Bazar

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SEARCHING PARIS THROUGH

Lady Duff Gordon



ONCE upon a time, when I was a child, long, long, *long* ago, I was on a holiday at the seaside with my staid—and even then I thought—*very* boring English governess. One day she caught me playing on the sands, with some delightfully wild, dirty looking children. She got me home in no time and set me to write out this old catch phrase, "Show me your friends, and I'll tell you what you are," one hundred times. I wrote it; so believe me, it registered on my childish mind.

Most people, and very likely you are one of them, thoroughly believe that this old-fashioned proverb is all right; and I also—until yesterday. But since then I most truly realize that, henceforth, the up-to-date proverb is:

"Show me your *bathroom*, and I'll tell you *who* and *what* you are."

Such an interesting, amusing experience I have had . . .

A dear little American New England friend of mine wants to rent an apartment here, so she went to Frank Arthur and got a long list, all supposed to have *confort modern*, i.e.—at least one bathroom, if not two. (Do you know that there are thousands and thousands of apartments here, in this beautiful city of cities, where a bathroom is an unheard of and *unwanted* luxury, especially on the *Rive Gauche*—where the *gradin* live?) She requested me to go around on this voyage of discovery with her. I accepted with joy, as it is one of my pet amusements.

Well—off we started, she full of hope, and I very interested at seeing unknown people's apartments: it is to me like getting a peep into their innermost thoughts. But I never before realized just how absolutely you can get the character—the mental, spiritual and social status of a woman or man—from just what sort of a bathroom they have materialized.

Most of the apartments belonged to (judging from the bathroom) ordinary, dull, honest, clean, unimaginative people, easily con-

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tented; just an enameled iron bath and a *chauffe-bain* of gas—some were of porcelain, heated from a main furnace below—and all tiled in white, and pure, and clean, and *hygienic*. My little New England friend decided on one of these honest, simple bathrooms, showing her nice, honest, domestic, sweet, clean nature. But among the thirty on the list were many so interesting that my little New England friend was thoroughly upset that any one could need such luxury in a bathroom—but I did not agree.

The loveliest one possible was of white marble with pink onyx *entre-deux* trimming, and pale jade, and tops of real (Concluded on page 82) silver gilt, and old Waterford glass carafes, and bowls galore, all filled with scent and powder and bath salts, and towels all with real lace and a luxurious day-bed for massage and rest.

We happened to come across the owner as we left, a lovely bit of fluff—all golden hair, and cream and roses, and small and exquisite—and we discovered she was a popular movie star.

Another apartment on the list, which I was most anxious to see, belonged to one whom the world of America and Europe considers a very fine modern actress of great subtlety and imagination. Since seeing her bathroom I know she is neither subtle nor imaginative: fancy, just a miserable tin affair in a dark closet, worked by a *chauffe-bain* of gas; and, hanging on the door, a drabby looking Turkish toweling bath-robe.

But *the* bathroom of bathrooms, the one that is really the *raison d'etre* of this letter, made me realize the great truth that your bathroom is far more potent as a "give away" of your true character than any of your so-called "friends." This apartment was the most expensive one on the list (ten thousand francs a month) and so we imagined it might be something very special and thrilling, and kept our visit there for the last.

IT certainly was thrilling, and so extraordinary that I must try and tell you all about it—at least, all we saw of it. The entrance to the apartment house was quite an ordinary one, but just as soon as the double doors were opened to admit us by a dirty looking, ugly *concierge* (who added greatly to the effect by contrast), we were in another world. As the doors closed behind us, they sank so into the scheme of decoration that we lost all sense of there having been an entrance at all, and Mrs. "New England" got almost hysterical, fearing a trap—not so me. It was all so strange

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and exotic and beautiful. We were in a long vestibule of black and white marble, with gold and small pieces of looking-glass let in, in a pattern on the walls, and black pillars and looking-glasses so arranged that the hall looked vast and endless. It was lit by concealed dim blue lights from somewhere above. In the center was a large sunken pool and a fountain. The pool was lined with blue mosaic and looked of great depth; lotus lilies made of *nacre* floated in the water, and the fountain seemed scented.

Out of this hall, through the black pillars, you went down four low wide steps into a large square room. The side opposite was entirely made up of windows, all veiled in golden gauze and purple and gold brocade curtains embroidered with scarlet, looking on to the garden.

On the other three sides were four steps, running the whole length of the walls, and at the top, arches leading to the different rooms. On these steps were cushions of every shape and size, cushions of purple and scarlet and orange and crimson and yellow, and here and there jade-green—and lots and lots of gold and silver—but all harmonizing, owing to the softening light effect of the gold gauze on the windows.

On the floor of marble and gold and black were priceless Persian and Chinese rugs; the only furniture was of strangely carved sandalwood. There were stools and divans and small tables and a huge Chinese screen, and a more than life-size Buddha of bronze seemed smiling down on us, and especially on the "out of the picture" *concierge*, who informed us that this dream was the "Grand Salon."

The dining-room was a rather bringing-to-earth note, too. It was a completely equipped affair in very modern Chippendale!

On the other side up the four long low steps, through the archway hung with royal blue and gold brocade curtains, the *concierge* told us was the bedroom—and bathroom.

Now, my interest truly began.

WE entered. It was all dim. Such a weird and yet beautiful idea: up three more steps on a dais or platform were two low mattresses, about nine feet square; quite six people could easily have slept there. This dais was supported on the reposing figures of carved ebony and gold Africans, full size. On the bed was a huge cover of white fox skins, and again cushions and cushions, of every shade of purple and blue. A great red and gold lac cabinet, and several little low tables, and more cushions on the floor were the only furniture in the room.

What looked like lapis-lazuli pillars framed the windows, looking on to the garden (the garden was disappointing), and blue and gold curtains and the same gold gauze were on the windows. At the end, beyond the bed, were more blue pillars and a flight of steps of turquoise blue mosaic. (The surprising effects got in this apartment by the different heights of the numerous flights of steps, up and down,

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are greatly to be recommended in decorative schemes.) This was so very beautiful I almost feared to put my foot upon it, so fragile it looked, but urged on by the *concierge*, we ventured up, and behold—"The Bathroom." It is the loveliest, most whimsical thing you have ever seen. My sense for getting the personality of the owner was pretty sharp by then, and I said to the *concierge*: "Why, this bathroom can belong to only one person—Mlle. X," ... and, do you know, I was right. All the little lady's extraordinary personality, and great musical and acting talent, and beauty of form, and her love of displaying it in public, spoke right out from that bath.

When you had climbed up the stairs you were in a room completely lined with mosaic in different shades of turquoise blue. And again, two more steps up, and along the whole length of the wall, as if for spectators was a low divan of golden stuff, and against cushions everywhere of scarlet and *per-venche* blue. On the ceiling and all around the bath, reflecting the bather, were looking-glasses set in the mosaic.

The actual bath was again down four steps and was sunken below the floor and was square—and large enough for at least six people to bathe at the same time. The water ran in from golden swans' heads—and great flacons and urns of Persian blue glass held the secret perfumes, et cetera. . . Towels? Not any were visible; I suppose they were hidden away as uglies, for I saw none. My little friend was by now in a state of collapse and horror and implored me to get out as fast as we could. When the *concierge* had pocketed her ample tin, she let us out, through a concealed door, and we found ourselves again in the first entrance hall, but with no visible means of exit. The ugly old *concierge* had knowledge, however, and touched an invisible button in the carving, and lo and behold, the great doors swung open and our dream was over. We were again in the ordinary, ugly apartment entrance hall, which we hurried through, and out to the waiting motor—and so, home— And I say again, "Show me your bathroom, and I'll tell you what you are."