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My Box Living Room - and What It Cost Me.

A Bachelor Girl Tells How She Furnished Artistically the Principal Room of Her Long Island Bungalow for Nine Dollars and Forty-five Cents

By Marie Morgan

WHEN the builder handed me the keys of my bungalow on Long Island an unexpected emergency confronted me. I owned the land on which I had built the house. The house itself had been paid for, hence those keys. But the house was empty and I was without the wherewith to pay for its furnishing.

Decorators had called on me and I had, with smiling firmness, declined their services. Though I sent them away empty handed I was in a worse plight, for my purse was empty. My bungalow, precious but treacherous, as are some of my sex, had cost me twice as much as I had originally planned.

The neat little sum I had planned to outlay in birdseye maple for my sleeping chambers and oak for my dining room had melted into the sum paid out for cement walks and a sun-parlor. As I sat on the veranda of my new home looking ruefully at the yard, not yet cleared of its clutter of debris, my eyes fell upon a soap box on which one of the workmen, thoughtful of his "rheumatiz," had sat while eating his dinner-pail repast.

I picked my way through the building refuse and examined the box. It was clean and strong and fresh. The lid lay near it. Imagination waved its wand and I conjured the soap box into a window seat. Fortunately, I am an American and have determination. Still fortunately, I am a New England woman, and so possess "faculty." My hands were always deft at fashioning things, and I am not one of those who scream at a mouse or shy at a hammer. In a moment I had dragged the box into the house and fitted it into the bay window. It looked as though it had been built there. The next day I brought with me from town a package of brass tacks, a roll of dark green denim, four yards of rose colored cretonne. It required less than an hour for me to place the cotton about the inside of the box, to tack the cretonne securely within it and the green denim outside; to screw into it the glittering pair of handles I had bought at a ten-cent store, and there my living room was in part furnished. The window seat was neat. Furthermore it had cost me 94 cents. The tacks cost 10 cents. The denim and cretonne I had gotten at a remnant counter for 60 cents, and the cotton wadding cost 14 cents.

With this triumph of economy over need, I became imbued with a gentle insanity on the subject of furnishing my living room with boxes, and my friends aided me in the pleasant hallucination.

A friend who had a country home in the neighborhood, where he dabbled in his carpenter shop for play, sent his work bench over, and my living room became my work room. Every hour or two that I could spare from town I came out to and worked at my housefurnishing. I bribed the vegetable man to bring me his empty onion boxes for fifteen cents a box. The alternate slats of these I loosened, interlaced the slats in the form of an "X" or sawback, and nailed the ends together, covering the top and bottom with more slats, and had a firm, ornamental set of backless dining chairs. These chairs now awaited a dining table.

That required more than the feminine handiness with which I had lined and covered the soap box and the turns of the hand with which I had relaced the slats of the onion boxes and twisted them into wooden stools. To make a dining room table demanded workbench training as well as talent. Fortunately I had this, for I had been "father's best boy" and he had taught me the expert use of saw and mitre and brace and bit.

My knowledge of and skill with these were called into play in making my table, which I designed for my meal service, and between meals for a work and reading table. Also I wished it to serve if I wished for a settle, for I anticipated evenings when in the big living room of my bungalow I would give artist dances. For these dances the tables would, of course, be in the way and settles would be needed.

I ordered from my grocer's the largest packing box I could get. Having held bulky cereals, it was as large as a St. Bernard's kennel, approximately five feet square. My grocer sold me this for sixty cents. The two firmest sides I used for sides of the table, steadying them by extra pieces, "flat feet," I called them, like snowshoes, at the bottom. The lid of the box I used for a top of the table. The strongest parts of the remaining sides I placed between the two ends, to steady and secure them. On either side of this lower shelf, so to speak, of the table, I nailed a board sawed from the side. To my delight the table stood firm and steady as a rock. Let me tell you of the device by which I gave the table its settle possibilities. Instead of nailing the top to the legs of the table, I attached it by pegs. I bored holes in the edge of the doubly secured corners of what had been the packing box. When I wished the table to masquerade as a settle, I had merely to loosen the pegs, whisk the top of the table off, fasten the back of the supports, and behold a settle, chaste of outline as any that ever stood beside grandmother's fireplace. I had carefully planned the edges to prevent intruding splinters, and I covered it with a linen scarf cloth, with drawn work edges, set my dishes, brought from town, upon it, and placed a serving cloth on the lower shelf, placed the bread tray on it, sat on one of my onion stools, and drew up to my own table beneath my own roof, much happier than any troubled queen of a mere European kingdom.

My living room would not have deserved its name had it not had midway of its side and opposite the door a large fireplace. At either end of this I placed a settle, duplicate of the table and costing merely the sixty cents apiece, plus labor. The pegs I made. In front of the fireplace I stretched a bench, to be used as a work table if I chose to paint or write or sew there. This was made of a ten cent box.

With four onion box chairs, two cereal box settles, a cereal box settle table, and the window seat made of a soap box, my living room began to look habitable. The essentials were there, but my woman soul began to feel its craving for "places to put things." True, I kept my shoes and my household brushes in the window seat, but I needed a place to keep my shirtwaists. There was no wardrobe in my bedroom, nor did I wish to spend the money for one, for the best of reasons. I didn't have it. Besides, my living room, charming in all other respects, seemed a bit dark in the corner farthest from the large window at the other end of the room. An idea struck me as to how to introduce a bit of color and brightness into that dark spot and at the same time provide for myself something I greatly needed.

I went to a furniture store for a large packing box. They sold me for a dollar and seventy-five cents a box in which an old-fashioned cottage organ had that day arrived. I saved out its sides, leaving four cross strips at either side and ends. Across these I fitted shelves of the strips from the box sides. Carefully measuring these spaces, I bought on my next trip to the town four large boxes to fill them.



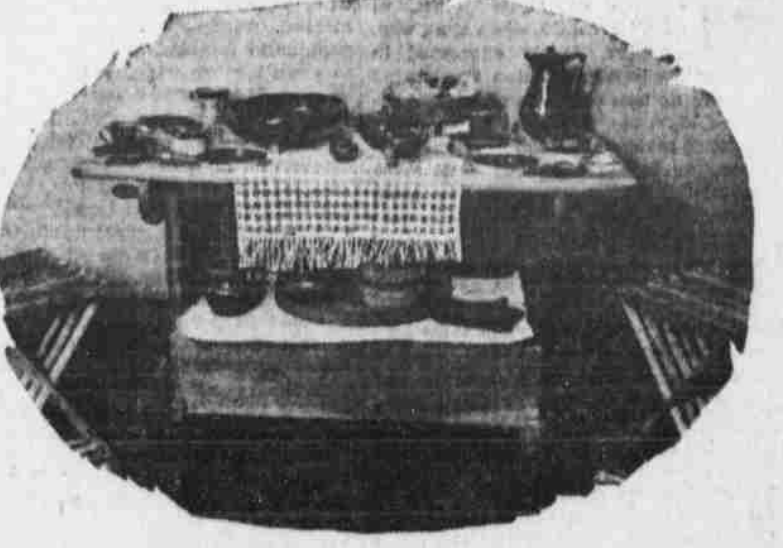
"I bribed the vegetable man to bring me empty onion boxes at fifteen cents apiece. The slats of these I loosened and interlaced. I covered the top and bottom with more slats, and had four ornamental backless dining chairs."

The boxes, paper though they were, were the largest single item of expense in my new home. But they were necessary and they furnished the color relief I needed, especially on cloudy days. They were heavy paste-board boxes, with pink roses seemingly tumbling over a wall of creamy tinted stone. The effect was charming. Besides, while the bit of color pleased my eye of an artist, the ingeniously contrived piece of furniture comforted my soul of a woman. For had I not here a light, graceful substitute for the cumbersome but now going out bureau? In these boxes I placed my shirtwaists, my linen skirts, my flat hats, my lingerie. In these boxes I kept most of my wearing apparel. Since it stood at the foot of the staircase, it was no hardship for me to run down of a morning, clad in my dressing gown, to take from one of the rose covered boxes my garments for the day's wear. The boxes were worth the dollar apiece I paid for them at a wholesale house, and later, when at less expense I replace them by wooden frames covered with cretonne, they will be no more satisfactory, I am sure.

One of my neighbor's acts in tossing away a large cigar box set me thinking. I thought so actively that in a few minutes I had appropriated the rejected box, removed some of its partitions and was refitting it with new partitions, to form six compartments. Along the long edge of one I partitioned off a space for gloves. The others, raying out from the side as from a fan, I dedicated in my mind to collars, ribbons and laces. I disodorized it by airing and scenting it, after which I covered it with rose cretonne and placed it on top of my cretonne bureau.

Small stools made of odds and ends of boards left from my fashioning of the other articles, I placed at cosy intervals about the room. Three of them added to foot comfort and could occasionally be pressed into service as seats.

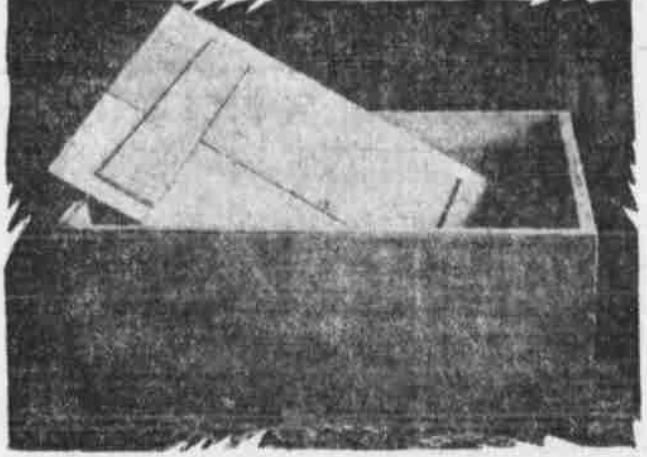
A plant stand I made of a box in which a friend had shipped to me some apples from Canada. This cost me nothing. The nails cost me twenty-six cents. The paint with which I gave my home-made furniture two coats of olive green, with the brush, cost one dollar and seventy-five cents. My living room is sufficiently, comfortably and tastefully furnished at a cost of \$9.45.



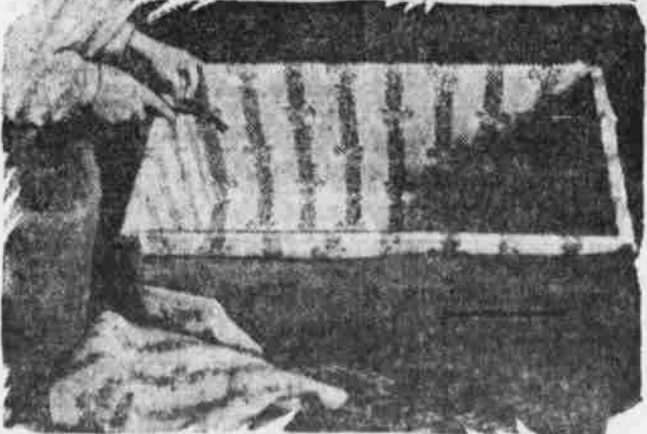
"This settle table I made from a cereal box I got at the grocer's. By using pegs instead of nails, to fasten the top, I could place the top at the back, and form a settle."



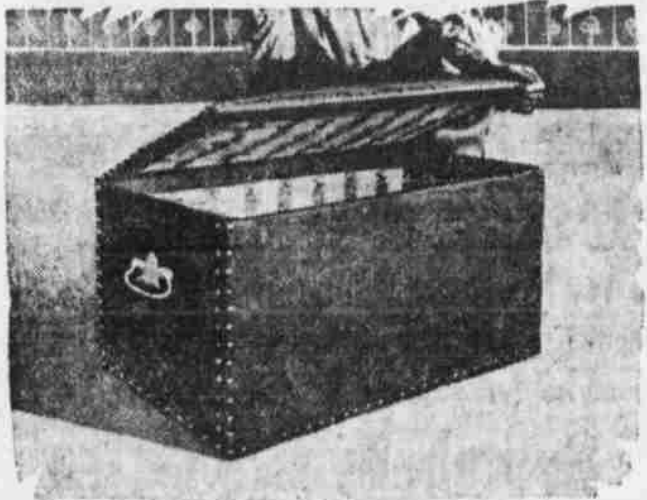
"I bought at a furniture store a box in which a cottage organ had that day arrived. I saved out its sides leaving four cross strips on either side. This was the skeleton of my box bureau."



"Imagination waved its wand and I conjured the soap box into a window seat."



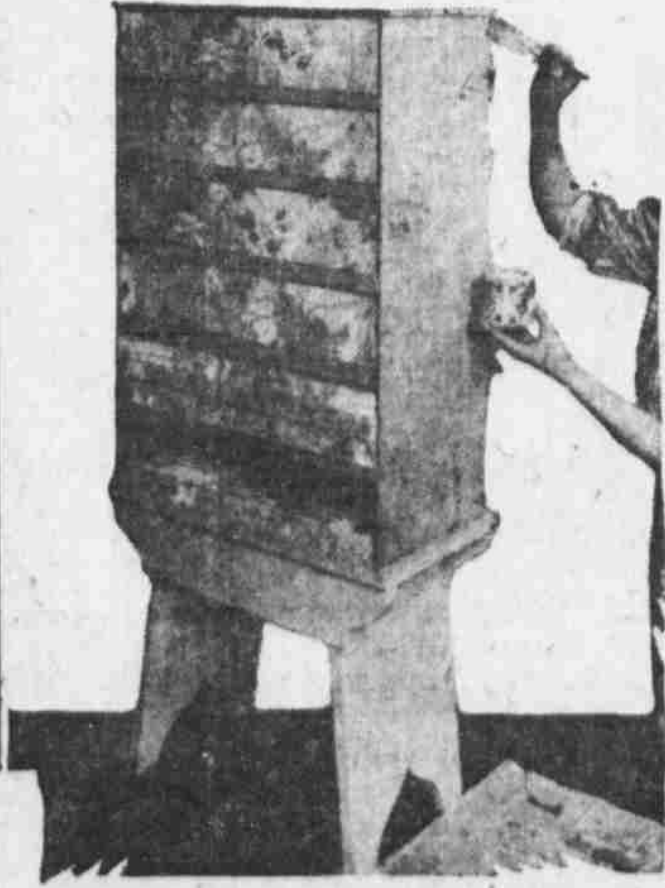
"Having tacked the cotton to the sides and bottom of the box I lined it with cretonne."



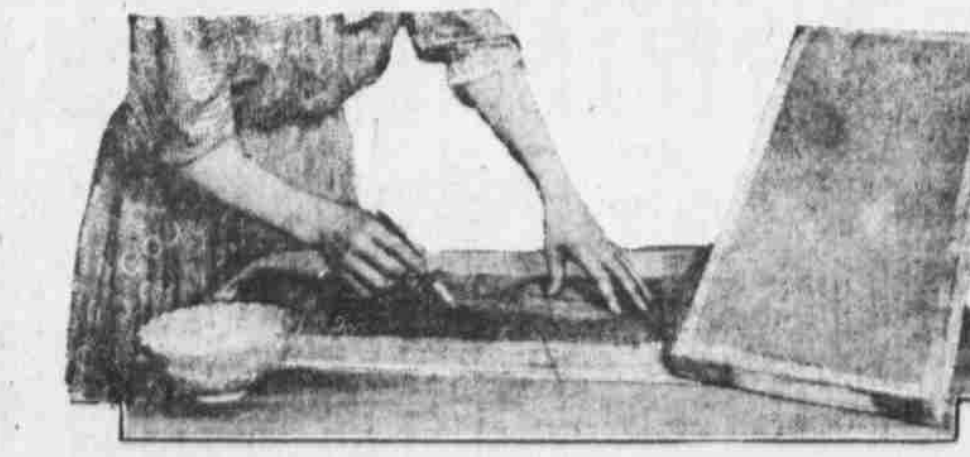
"This completed window box seat cost me 94 cents."



"The spaces in the frame I filled with strong paper boxes daintily covered with a design of pink roses that seemed to be tumbling over a creamy stone wall."



"The paint with which I gave my furniture two coats of green cost one dollar and seventy-five cents."



"To replace these with box frames over which cretonne has been stretched would be an easy task."