

OUR ESTEROS

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FOR years, I have talked and written about our *esteros*, in the hope that the City authorities would do something about them. But I might as well have talked to the pictures in my room for all the results that I have gotten.

Our leaders, like the general run of our people, seem to think of our *esteros* as a liability rather than an asset. The larger of them have, of course, a practical usefulness: they provide a cheap means of transporting goods to the different parts of the city. But the narrower and the shallower of them are used only for waste disposal. And, when they can no longer serve this purpose, they are filled up or covered.

The sad truth is that we do not realize the aesthetic possibilities of *esteros* as the aesthetic possibilities of similar bodies of water have been realized, appreciated, and exploited in other countries like Sweden, Holland, and Japan. In these countries, artificial ponds as well as estuaries and canals are usually made the central features of landscape architecture.

And now that the Japanese are here, perhaps they could teach us how to utilize our *esteros* to advantage. For the Japanese have been masters of landscape architecture for hundreds of years. Knowing the principle of scale to perfection, they are able to make even their smallest gardens look large. Because they know restraint and discrimination in the use of plant material, their gardens look spacious and uncluttered. Having studied nature with meticulous care, their gardens are as beautiful and as gracious and as refreshing as nature herself—if not, indeed, more so.

Following the example of Japan, we could make our *esteros* the nucleus of a wonderful park system that would be a source of health and joy and pride to all of us. They would serve as oases in this flat and tawdry and monotonous city.

The first step in this project should be the dredging of the *esteros*, in order to get rid of the sluggish water and the attendant odors. And the banks should

be held in place with rocks of interesting shapes and colors.

The wider and deeper *esteros*, which are navigable, could be given a formal treatment. They could be flanked by boulevards, with wide sidewalks for promenading, and lined with trees, palms, and flowering shrubs. The trees mirrored in the water should have pendulous branches. In order to preserve the pristine beauty of the boulevards, there should be a strip of parkway at least fifteen meters wide between the traffic lanes and the building lines.

The narrower and shallower *esteros* could be given an informal treatment in the Japanese manner. And this is where the services of a trained landscape architect is absolutely necessary. The general layout of the parkways, the selection of plant materials, the disposition of the trees and the shrubs and the annuals, and the relation between the planting the water—all these considerations should receive the closest attention and study.

With the *esteros* thus given importance, the houses should face them instead of turning their ugly backs towards them. And the people living along the *esteros* should be made to feel that the parks and the waterways in front of their houses are their personal responsibility. The branches of the trees should not be cut, flowers should not be picked, rubbish should not be thrown around. If the people of New York and the inhabitants of Japanese cities could be made amenable to such social discipline, certainly the citizens of this Pearl of the Orient could as well.

In the evenings, people can sit under the trees to keep themselves cool, to meditate, and to drink in the beauty of the scene. They can even go canoeing as people do in Central Park, New York City; in the parks of Stockholm; and in some parks in Japan. Thus the *esteros* could be made to add to the health, well-being, and happiness of the people. And whatever money is spent on them would be an investment whose dividends would increase year by year.