

A HOUSE IN TOWN

Most wealthy Roman families had a comfortable house in town. Although these houses varied in size, each house - or *domus* - followed the same basic design, and was sturdily built from stone, cement and wood. Houses were peaceful, private places, designed to keep cool in the hot Roman summers, but they were also designed to welcome visitors. Important people spent lots of money and made their homes look very grand to impress their guests.



"DO COME IN..."

A typical *domus* was arranged around a hall - called the *atrium* - where guests were received. The central part of the ceiling was open to the sky, and beneath the opening was an ornamental pool, known as the *impluvium*. The *atrium* usually had a shrine to the household gods as well.

A 19th century painting showing a Roman family welcoming guests in their atrium

Around the *atrium* were the dining room, kitchen and study, and the wealthiest homes also had a bathroom. (People who had no bathroom at home used the public bath-house.) The rooms next to the street were often rented out as shops.

INVITING INTERIORS

Although town houses looked quite plain from the outside, they could be lavishly decorated inside. The walls were smoothly finished with plaster and were often adorned with beautiful paintings known as frescoes. The floors were laid with stunning mosaics made from baked clay, glass or stone tiles. Lifesize statues in marble or bronze helped make the rooms look even more dramatic.

FURNITURE

Grand houses were extravagantly furnished with intricately carved marble tables, couches decorated with ivory and gold, and gleaming bronze lamp stands. Sometimes, the floors were covered with leopard skins or fine Egyptian rugs. However, most Roman houses had just a few simple pieces of wooden furniture.

Part of this Roman house has been cut away, so you can see inside.



The rooms at the front were rented by shopkeepers.