

The Making of Home: The 500-Year Story of How Our Houses Became Our Homes

Shirley Wajda
Michigan State University

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The Making of Home: The 500-Year Story of How Our Houses Became Our Homes, by Judith Flanders. New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2015. xii, 346 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.99 hardcover, \$16.99 paperback.

Reviewer Shirley Wajda is curator of history at Michigan State University Museum. She is the coeditor, with Helen Sheumaker, of *Material Culture in America: Understanding Everyday Life* (2008).

Judith Flanders's 500-year history of the buildings we call both houses and homes is not—but is—about Iowa. Written in a familiar, lively voice and based on a wealth of transatlantic sources, *The Making of Home* makes one feel at home in the vast and varied history Flanders undertakes. After an introduction that explores through languages and paintings the differences between those European cultures that used *house* and those that used *home*, the book is divided into two parts. The first, consisting of five chapters, explores the history of *home* in north-west Europe and its spread to North America. The second, comprising two chapters, investigates technological innovation in the making of the modern home. The architectural modernism of the early twentieth century and its failure to remake entirely the house because of the enduring idea of home is the subject of a coda.

In chapter one, Flanders traces the modern house and meanings of home to the great changes wrought in northwestern Europe's industrial revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Netherlands and England proved to be the "seedbeds of change" (23), establishing new forms of trade as well as a rising demand for goods by the growing middle classes. To this well-known argument Flanders adds the insights of historian Mary Hartman, who notes that northwestern Europe's unique marriage system, in which people worked longer before marriage and thus could afford "going to housekeeping," established—through consumption—the still normative single-family household.

The remaining chapters of part one explore the material changes new attitudes about living brought about from the late eighteenth into the early twentieth century. The shift in domestic privacy according to function and formality, gender and generation, rather than social status, is the focus of the second chapter. The seventeenth-century innovation of the corridor in monasteries, separating each monk's room, replaced the practice of hierarchically connecting rooms (*enfilade*) and was quickly adapted to houses, ensuring discrete, specialized, and private spaces. Curtains and colored glass in sash windows, by the nineteenth century, further distinguished the private home from the public street. "Home and the World," the topic of chapter three, scrutinizes the gendered ideology of "separate spheres" in the nineteenth century as "never more

than an idea, and an idea for the prosperous" (100), and traces the evolution of women's unpaid labor of housework in what was perceived as the noncommercial sphere of the home. Household privacy was increased through technology (from the enclosed stove to the oscillating washing machine to central heating), rendering servants (and men) unnecessary but increasing women's labor and solitude. Chapter four, "Home Furnishings," inventories the world in the home through the concept of informality reflected in the use of storage, seating, dining, and display furniture. These mass-produced goods created a nostalgia for a preindustrial past in the nineteenth century. In turn, historic house museums and collections of domestic life were established to preserve the "authentic" and patriotic material past. Along with discussions of the American "log cabin" myth, spinning wheels, and quilts, chapter five ("Building Myths") explores the "dilemmas of authenticity" (183) the romanticization of the past created. As Flanders writes, "The only permanency has been our belief that there is one unchanging reality, perhaps the strongest and most comforting myth of all" (195).

The infrastructures girding the notion of home through physical buildings form the subject of part two. The technologies providing heat and light are the subject of the sixth chapter ("Hearth and Home"); the labor, construction, government, and financial sectors supporting the household's efficiency, cleanliness, and health, and subsequent suburbanization and home (note: not house) ownership is the subject of the last chapter, "The Home Network." The coda, "Not at Home," examines modernism's embrace of industrial production and standardization in creating in houses streamlined, open-plan "machines for living." Such a threat to privacy and the idea of home horrified Henry James, who despaired that everything was "'visible, visitable, penetrable'" (280). Little wonder, Flanders writes, that modern architecture could not undermine in several decades of its primacy the sense of home it had taken 500 years to achieve.

The Making of Home makes sense of our own homes, and does so in admirable ways. Its author teaches by example how we should be wary of evidence. Her exploration of the slippages between texts and images and material things, and between prescriptive literature and actual human behavior, provides many useful and engaging lessons. She reminds us that architectural history still hinges on innovation, not maintenance, renovation, and lived experience, and that a history of home is more (if not entirely) inclusive. One wonders how historic house museums might offer new interpretations based not on the families that once inhabited them but as examples of larger histories in the invention and stewardship of the idea of home.