

The Town House in Georgian London



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This book takes a fresh look at a familiar building type - the town house in eighteenth-century London - and investigates the circumstances in which individuals

made decisions about living in London, and particularly about their West End house. It uncovers what occupants of town houses thought about their property, why and how they chose or built it, paid for it, used it, decorated it and sold or bequeathed it, and what uses it had for them beyond simply accommodation. For the first time, this book takes as a starting point the houseowner, occupant or architect's client, and through extensive and original use of anecdotal evidence, opens up a wealth of unforeseen values, uses and connections attaching to the house. It offers a serious analysis of clients' wants and needs, and describes the house's function within and impact upon people's lives, concerns and aspirations. Stewart shows how the use of the house comprised much more than how life was lived in it on a day-to-day basis, or even how it served special occasions, and included how it functioned in the context of family relations, financial, legal and property transactions, and the market, as well as in the construction of personal identity. At the same time as exploring private perceptions and expectations, Stewart reveals the negative press attention the town house received in its own time. The house unsettled many eighteenth-century observers, and Stewart analyses an unprecedented range of evidence, to demonstrate how the house was associated with notions of transience, changeability, imperfection, luxury, and selfishness, which resulted in its characterization as inconsequential, inconstant, insubstantial, intemperate and ultimately emasculate. By stepping away from conventional tales of economics, materials, or style, and into the previously unexplored world of the houseowner, the book offers an entirely original reading of a familiar building.

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