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course title: The American Home
institution: University of Delaware

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The American Home

ARTH 245-010

Tuesday and Thursday: 9:30-10:45

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:30; Wednesday 2:30-4:00

Statement of purpose:

The American Home explores themes in the history and design of the most intimate and most public of objects--the house. Residences, from tract house mansions to apartment buildings, are powerful statements about how we see our society and how circumstance and choice lead us to house ourselves. From the outset be aware that there is a sharp distinction between house and home. A house is a particular kind of object generally designed and used as a place where people reside. A home, however, represents a highly variable category of experience. Using the evidence of houses, this course investigates the nature of some of those experiences. But, given the vast array of living conditions, we cannot cover them all. Our goal is to investigate a few of these experiences and from those examples consider how we might better comprehend the larger range of living situations.

Our course is organized more or less chronologically, working from the present back through time. The intent is to undertake an "archaeology" of the American home. Beginning in the present, we also begin with what is most familiar to us. The example of the Television Home is particularly important in this light. Television, as the medium of a national culture, tends to set a "normal" standard in subtle ways. Looking at sitcom episodes from the *Honeymooners* to *Friends*, we discern the importance of place in terms of setting the action and the relationships between actors. Each succeeding class in our course carries back one more layer in the archaeological strata of how Americans have historically imagined and shaped their living experiences. At the close of the course, we encounter two themes: first, the rise of regional cultures centered on the house; second, the historic house museum--a topic which carries us all the way back to the present.

Our purpose is simple: we are learning to look, to think, to comprehend the world around us.

Readings

The majority of the readings come from the two required texts:

Gwendolyn Wright

Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America

Witold Rybczynski

Home: A Short History of An Idea

Additional readings are on reserve under ARTH 245-010.

The readings parallel the lectures and provide additional approaches to looking at the themes covered in class. Because the books are written chronologically from old to new, we will read the chapters out of sequence. To keep a clear sense of what the authors intend, read their introductions as soon as possible.

Course Requirements

The course requirements consist of four components: three 1 1/2 hour exams and class participation. The exams are progressively weighted at 25%, 30%, and 35%. The remaining 10% is based on involvement in the class. This includes attendance, discussion, and two class projects. The exam policy for the course is straightforward. An unexcused absence from an exam can be made up--but the highest possible grade is a C. An exam can be taken for full credit for an excused absence (in writing), but only one make-up exam will be scheduled.

Class Schedule

• Week 1:

29 August: Introduction and Orientation

31 August: House and Home

Read: Wright xv-xix; Rybczynski 216-231.

• Week 2:

5 September: Television Home

Read: Rybczynski, 1-13, 195-215.

7 September: The Model Home

Read: Wright, 240-261; Clifford Clark, The American Family Home, 217-236, *reserve*.

● **Week 3:**

12 September: Ranch Houses and other Post-War Housing

Read: Wright, 193-214; National Homes of Moderate Cost 1949) advertising brochure, *reserve*.

14 September: Bungalows, Four-Squares, and the Early 20th-Century

Read: Wright, 158-176; Charles E. White, The Bungalow Book, 1-23, *reserve*; Alan Gowans, The Comfortable House 74-89, *reserve*.

● **Week 4:**

19 September: Apartments

Read: Wright, 135-151;

21 September: Housing Reform and the Birth of the "Projects"--guest Jeff Klee

Read: Wright, 114-134; 220-239

● **Week 5:**

26 September: Review and Discussion

28 September: First exam

● **Week 6:**

3 October: Pattern Book Houses

Read: Wright, 73-89; Cleveland, Bachus, and Bachus, Village and Farm Cottages (1856), 1-16, *reserve*.

5 October: Pattern Book Homes and "Separate Spheres"

Read: Wright, 96-113.

Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, excerpt from The American Woman's Home (1869), in Leland M. Roth, America Builds, 57-66.

● **Week 7:**

10 October: The "Big" and the "Little" House: Plantations in the American

South

Read: Wright, 41-57.

12 October: The Worker's World: Houses for Millworkers

Read: Wright, 58-72, 177-192.

• Week 8:

17 October: Pueblos

Read: Peter Nabokov, Native American Architecture, 348-408, *reserve*.

19 October: Hispanic Traditions in the American Southwest

Read: Chris Wilson, La Tierra Amarilla, 15-40, *reserve*.

• Week 9:

24 October: In the Heartland

Read: Peterson, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III, 176-184; Bernstein and Torma, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV, 64-72; Tishler and Witmer, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II, 102-110, *reserve*.

26 October: City Dwellers

Read: Wright, 24-40;

R.G. Hatfield, The American House-Carpenter (1850), 89-96, *reserve*.

• Week 10:

31 October: Discussion and Review

2 November: Second Exam

• Week 11:

7 November: NO CLASS–ELECTION DAY

9 November: Gentility and the Georgian House

Read: Rybczynski, 77-121;

Mark Wenger, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II, 137-149; and Mark Wenger, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, III, 149-159, *reserve*.

• Week 12:

14 November: Colonial Traditions: The Delaware Valley "English"

Read: Rybczynski, 51-75.

16 November: Colonial Traditions: The Pennsylvania Germans

Read: Scott T. Swank, Arts of the Pennsylvania Germans, 35-60.

● **Week 13:**

21 November: Colonial Traditions: New England

Read: Wright, 3-17;

Kevin Sweeney, "Mansion People," from Winterthur Portfolio (1984) 231-255, *reserve*.

23 November: No Class--THANKSGIVING

● **Week 14:**

28 November: Colonial Traditions: The Chesapeake

Read: Bernard L. Herman, The Stolen House, 166-222, *reserve*.

30 November: Historic Houses

Read: Wright, 262-281; Rybczynski, 15-49.

● **Week 15:**

5 December: Discussion and Review

Third Exam