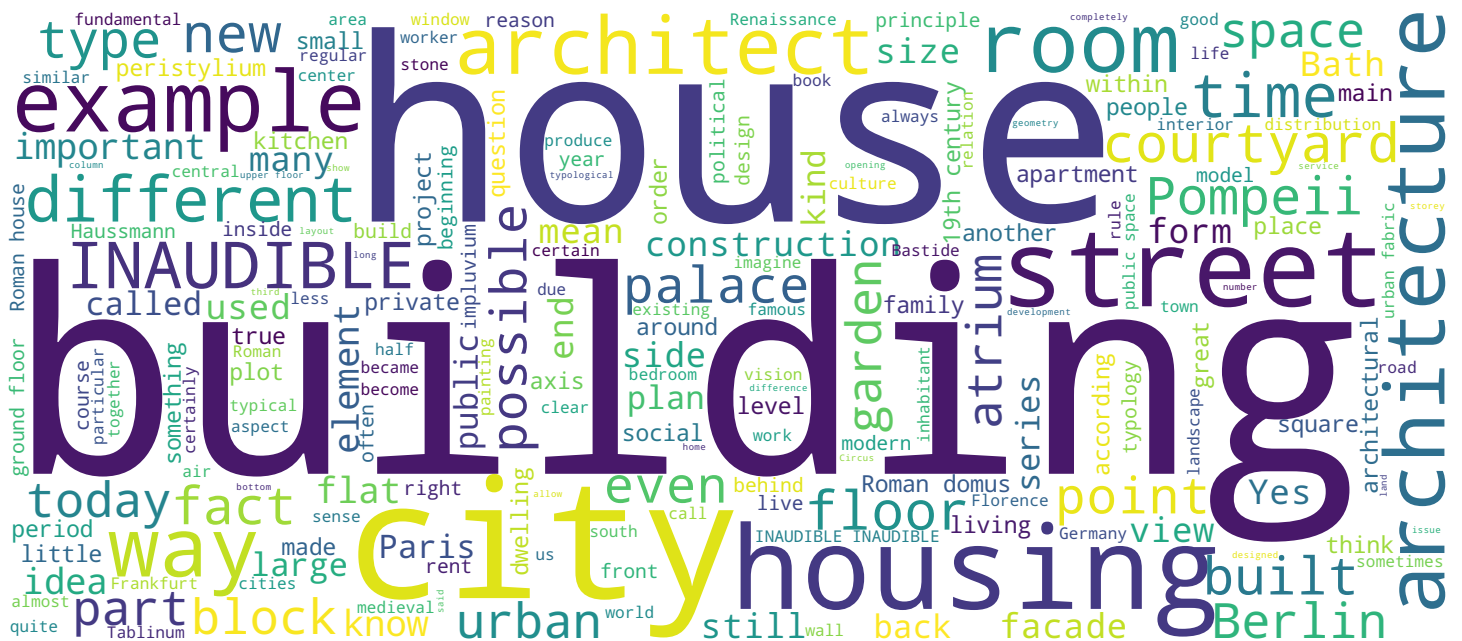


a Housing and Cities course video



EPFL





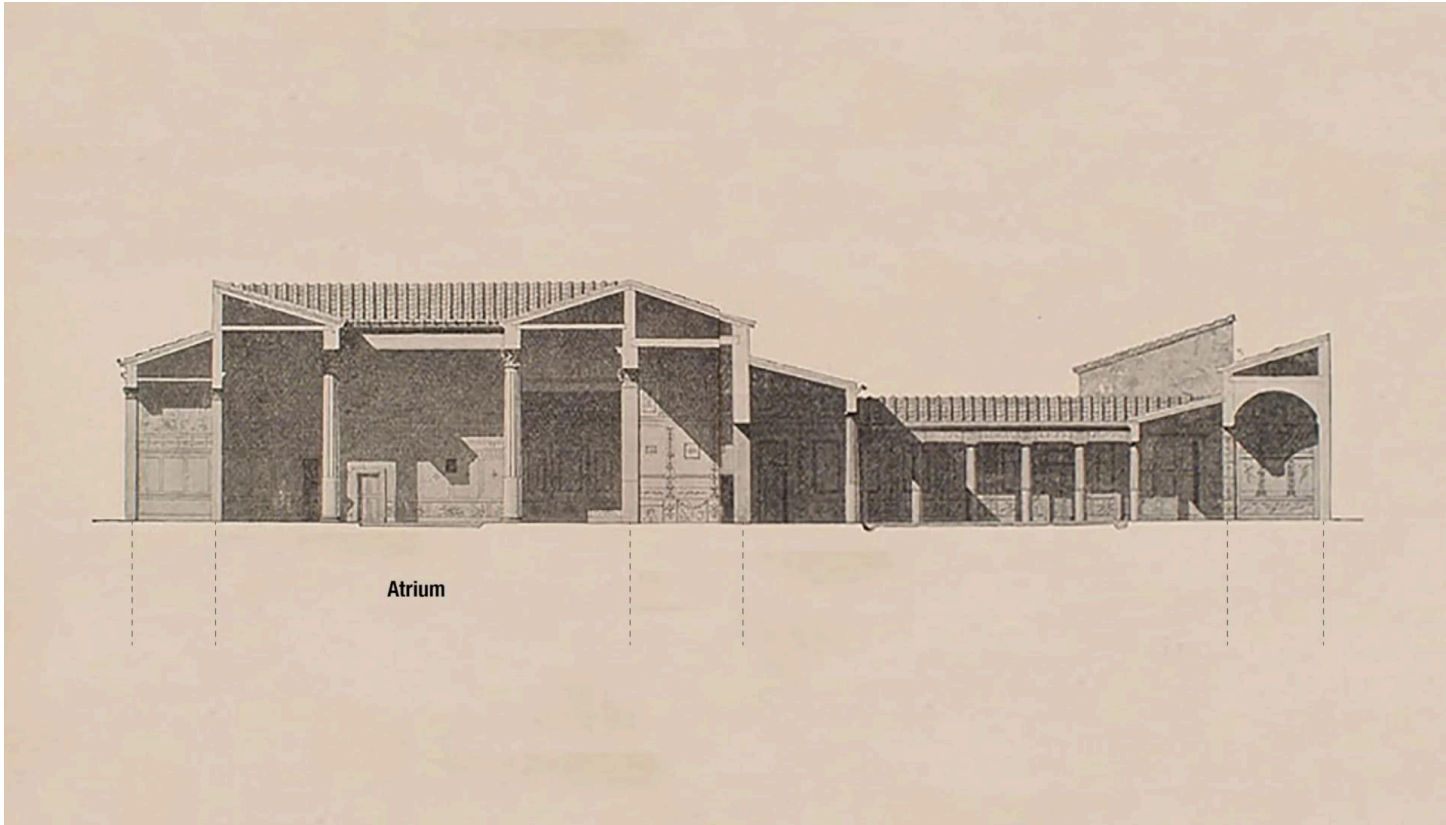
The most astonishing aspect of Pompeii is the dominating presence of domestic architecture. Surprisingly, most of the houses were composed according to the same principle, a spatial progression connecting the busy street to the inner domestic Rome. One particular topic concerning Pompeian house is the fact that it has practically no direct relationships with the road, with the street, with the exception of the entrance door. All the rest is an interior development. Here in Pompeii we have the most meaningful representation of the Roman domus, which is basically a single-story house. In reality, when Pompeii was destroyed, the city was living a period of transition between this kind of single-story dwelling and the construction of higher buildings. The hypodamian grid of Pompeii outlined blocks, the Insula, that were then built over their entire surface.

Notes

Summary

0m 34s





A series of houses, the domus, formed a continuous front to the street of one or two floors in height, with the only openings being the entranceway and one or two modest windows for each house. In this way, both the security and the intimacy of the interior spaces was maintained. The internal spatial sequences of the house were not visible from the street. Also, more modest and very elaborate houses can be found side by side. In the book entitled *The Roman House*, architect and archaeologist Jean Pierre Adam says, the almost exclusive presence of individual houses does not mean that all inhabitants are owners. Indeed, several large houses are in reality rented accommodation. The city is composed of a homogeneous tissue of housing. In several houses, the rooms located next to the street were shops, the taberna, small units that the owner could rent to anyone who wanted to conduct commercial activities. This is not so different to what happens today. The Roman domus were all built according to the same spatial principle. From the street to the heart of the house, a series of thresholds articulate the circulation spaces, both open and covered. The first threshold separating the house from the city is the Fauces, a long entrance hall, which is often separated from the street by one or two steps. It leads to the first courtyard, the atrium.

Notes

Summary

1m 57s





In the oldest form of the Roman house, this first central space was space for meals. It is a covered space with a central opening which provided light to the interior and allowed rainwater to enter collected in a shallow basin, the impluvium. The central space combined distributive functions, providing access to the different rooms around it, technical functions in the sense of collecting water, regulation of the temperature in summer, and also had representative functions, since it displayed the size of the house. This aspect of representation is reinforced by the placement of the cartibulum alongside the impluvium. The cartibulum is a small and richly ornamented table, recalling the original dining function of the atrium, but it is also used to display the household's valuable objects to visitors. A small domestic temple dedicated to the Roman guards, the lararium was often placed in one of the corners of the atrium. The second threshold, the tablinum was one of the main rooms of the house. It is this room that links the first courtyard, the atrium, with the second courtyard, the peristylum. This important room was the office or library for the master of the house.

Notes

Summary

3m 47s





It was furnished with a table and storage spaces for parchment scrolls, and could be separated from the atrium by a curtain or a wooden screen. Depending on the size of the plot, the last space in the series was the peristylum, a paved courtyard inherited from Greek architecture. In Pompeii, the peristylum became an interior garden representing the pinnacle of luxury for the time. It was surrounded by a colonnade, which sometimes gave access to other rooms. An interior perspective from the entrance allows this. The view of a porch within an Italian city of the south or a city like Florence is a more complex view because the porches are closed. However, from the south, we have an open view and we can see an alley, a dark gallery and further on, a very luminous courtyard. There is a second door at the bottom and just behind, we have stanchions and a garden. This standpoint that will certainly be exploited during the renaissance period in a prodigious way already existed during these Roman times. The Romans themselves imagined and pictured these by juxtaposing the peristylum to the atrium and realized that through this large room called the Tablinum - the reception work place of the house master, the Domus - there is a very large opening. This Tablinum is transparent; therefore, we can pass through and arrive to what's called the pits of entrance and the Vestibulum.

Notes

Summary

5m 18s





From here, further in front can either be the atrium, the basin, there can be 4 columns if it is tetrastyle and then at the bottom of the atrium, which already is the first perspective; light showering its rays on the basin, then the darkness on the right and left sides and at the back, a very clear opening. Through this opening, we have a colonnade, then the garden, then another colonnade; this is the back of the peristylum. This idea of standpoints, naturally intended was meticulously designed, maintained. It could be concealed since there were curtains to close the Tablinum. Conventionally however, the approval of this profound vision of the house was just pleasing. It is important to observe that the spatial sequence fauces, atrium, tablinum and peristylum can be identified even inside an irregular geometry. The geometry of the blocks of Pompeii was not always regular, but this type of house was capable of solving geometric contradictions in a brilliant way. On the other end, we can say that Pompeii shows an incredible amount of possible arrangements of the typical space.

Notes

Summary

6m 43s





That's the reason why it is possible to talk about a Pompeian typology, which means that it is always possible to recognise the fundamental elements even if their disposition and the relationship among them can be very, very different. In his book *Toward an Architecture*, Le Corbusier observes the way in which the axis is determined by a sequence of spaces, rather than by a rigid, abstract and purely geometrical line. Here, in the house of the tragic poet, the subtleties of a consummate art. Everything related to an axis, but you'd have a hard time drawing a straight line through it. The axis is in the intentions, and the splendour given by the axis extends to the humble things that the latter affects with a skillful gesture, the corridors, the main passageway, et cetera, through optical illusions. The axis here is not a dry theoretical thing, it links the crucial volumes, yet spells them out and differentiates them from one another. In observing the house plans, we can see how their layout was connected to their use. The size of the triclinium, the dining room, and the iconic room of the house was determined by the furniture, usually three couches arranged to form the Greek letter pie.

Notes

Summary





This arrangement made it possible to eat lying down, called *akubo*, according to the Greek tradition. A second example is the size of the bedroom, the *cubiculum*, which was only large enough to accommodate one bed. The rooms were rarely connected, but opened onto the atrium or the *peristylum*, from which they also received natural light. One of the most important aspects of the Roman *domus* is the consistent use of the courtyard as an element of distribution. Further to this, the courtyard is an element of spatial organisation used by most cultures because it is a way of bringing light and air into a dense urban fabric. Hence, the provision of living space is dependent on firstly providing such a void. Unfortunately, what we do not know, what we are ignorant about are the storeys. All the storeys at Pompeii have collapsed under the weight of the frame or structure. Even though, there would have certainly been as much if not more rooms on the higher storeys than on the ground level. So we can imagine or ask ourselves: what could be the purpose of the open lateral wings found on the ground floor? Could these parts possibly have just been used for keeping furniture? What could eventually be possible.

Notes

Summary

9m 32s





Could people live in there? Were these rooms really that comfortable?” It doesn't matter as far as we know that on the upper floor, floor there were 4 to 5 rooms of which we do not know anything and that obviously had the same type of natural scenery. There were equally floor latrines, In Pompeii, we could find latrine upstairs. This is also something prodigious to think... Roman houses offered a level of modern domestic comfort that would not be achieved again until the end of the 19th century. Today we would call such climatic regulation passive, since the arrangement around the courtyard without external windows meant that the houses stored heat in the masonry walls and were naturally ventilated by the flow of air between the atrium and the peristylum. Water stored in the impluvium further assisted in cooling the air in the system of indirect lighting and ventilation. The Roman domus's high comfort levels were also due to their sanitary installations. Water was available in each house, either collected in the impluvium, then stored in a system, or provided by the town's network of running water connected directly to the house in the same way as the public fountains.

Notes

Summary

10m 52s





Each house was equipped with a kitchen, the coolina and a toilet, the latrina, both connected to a drainage system. More luxurious houses also had a bathroom and even a swimming pool in the garden or in the peristylum. Although totally introverted with respect to the city's urban spaces, the Roman domus referred to landscape in another way. The walls became the canvas for a rich iconographic decoration that extended beyond the physical limits of the house. Upon entering a well-preserved house, fortunately, there are still in Pompeii with their ceilings, which we have rebuilt ceilings; we are amazed to see that there is no bare lining. When you enter in a Roman house, it is true in Pompeii as well as in most Roman cities of course including the provinces, the linings no longer exist, it faded away because it had a setting which commenced from the floor to the ceiling. This scenery might thus have no limits. It could be something visual that can be complemented by a very rich iconographic theme. Architect Gunnar Asplund visited Pompeii in 1914 focusing on the sequence of rooms, the introversion of the house, and on the spaces of shadow and light, he recognised something very domestic.

Notes

Summary

12m 12s





Asplund was strongly influenced by this trip. A few years later, he went to the point of conducting one of the bravest architectural adventures in Stockholm's Skandia cinema. In certain entrance vestibules to the upper floor of the cinema, there are columns very similar to those we can see in Pompeii and frescoes. With the magnificent coherence of the cinema's magical spirit, Asplund turned the paintings of the Pompeii and frescoes into three dimensional reality.

Notes

Summary

13m 46s

