

## A Roman Townhouse

In Roman towns and cities, prosperous citizens lived in a style of house known as a domus. Its design reflected Roman values of status, order, and hospitality. Unlike modern homes, the domus turned away from the street, presenting plain outer walls with few windows. Life centred on the interior, where light and air were channelled through open spaces within the building.

The focal point of the house was the atrium, a large central hall open to the sky through a rectangular aperture called the compluvium. Rainwater fell through this into a sunken pool, the impluvium, which both collected water for domestic use and gave the atrium an elegant, cooling effect. This space was carefully presented, as it was here that the owner — the paterfamilias — received clients and conducted public life.

Beyond the atrium lay the tablinum, the master's office, and further still the peristyle, a colonnaded garden that provided a private retreat for the family. Arranged around these spaces were the cubicula (bedrooms), the culina (kitchen), and the triclinium (dining room), where guests were entertained at formal banquets, reclining on couches around low tables.

Floors were laid with intricate mosaics and walls adorned with frescoes depicting mythology, nature, and daily life. The entire household was maintained by slaves. In sharp contrast, poorer Romans crowded into tall, badly constructed apartment buildings called insulae, which frequently suffered from fire and collapse.

## Questions

1. What was a prosperous Roman's townhouse called?
2. Why did a domus have plain outer walls with very few windows?
3. What was the compluvium?
4. What was the impluvium, and what were its two purposes?
5. What was the paterfamilias?
6. What was the tablinum used for?
7. Describe the peristyle.
8. What was the triclinium, and how were guests seated there?
9. What two types of decoration were used on floors and walls?
10. What does the contrast between the domus and the insulae tell us about Roman society?



Text D Quiz



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