

The Age of Comfort

WHEN PARIS DISCOVERED CASUAL—
AND THE MODERN HOME BEGAN



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The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual—and the Modern Home Began Joan DeJean

This remarkable history of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century France introduces the age when comfort became a new ideal. Home life, formerly characterized by stiff formality, was revolutionized by the simultaneous introduction of the sofa (a radical invitation to recline or converse), the original living rooms, and the very concept of private bedrooms and bathrooms, with far-reaching effects on the way people lived and related to one another. DeJean highlights the revolutionary ideas—and the bold personalities behind them—that fomented change in the home and beyond, providing new insight into the household habits and creature comforts we often take for granted.

The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual—and the Modern Home Began Details

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Author : Joan DeJean

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From Reader Review The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual—and the Modern Home Began for online ebook

Marlo says

This book starts large and works its way down. It details how comfort spread from architecture all the way down to furniture, fixtures and what people wore, but also gives an accurate picture of the personalities who made it more than a trend. The little details about the people, some Royal and some not, really made it for me. The final few chapters from 'The Bedroom' to 'The Fabric of Their Lives' are the most enjoyable as they are the most personal. My favorite picture was of the Marquise de Pompadour in her layers and layers of fabric, seated so comfortably on a new padded chair. I had to keep referring back to this picture, for every chapter or so the author would bring out a detail that I never noticed and made the overall portrait so much clearer. It's like that with so many everyday items that you will find yourself looking at chairs, fabric and historic paintings in a different way. A great book.

Darla says

Very useful, and entertaining, reference if European Decorative Arts is your thing. I bought the book after reading it so that I could continue to mine it for all its historical context.

Rachel says

If you've ever enjoyed an episode of Antiques Roadshow, this is at least an interesting skim. I passed my copy on to my mother, who went through an intense French antiques period and who is going to appreciate this book much more than I. :)

Jamie Crouthamel says

This was a really fun read! DeJean walks the reader through the grand, imposing spaces of the Age of Magnificence and explains how the changing cultural, political and economic landscapes morph these spaces into plush, warm and comfortable places where homeowners are given the new freedom of privacy. Learning about how the idea of privacy and private spaces developed was absolutely fascinating! The only fault I could possibly find is there were a few moments that were a bit tedious in their minutiae, however, for the kind of readers that this read would attract, I don't think it would be much of a problem.

MissJessie says

I won this book on a Giveaway and was delighted.

This book, about a subject of particular interest to me (history of decoration, lifestyles in the past, fashion of

the past, etc.) amply fulfilled my expectations.

It was fascinating to learn the history of the development of bedrooms, flush toilets, and the use of cotton in clothing, to name but a few things.

This book would serve, perhaps, as more of a reference type book than just a read-it-all-at-once book; the style of writing is very understandable and detailed, but not the kind of thing that one would sit down and read straight through without having time to think about the subject. At least for me.

I knew absolutely nothing about the life in France during the time period of this book and so found it quite educational in a general way as well. Particularly interesting to me was the description of how clothing went from being miserably uncomfortable to much more relaxed and tolerable to wear; and how furniture became designed to actually be comfortable instead of merely formal.

All in all, a pleasant read and I recommend the book to anyone interested in the subjects it covers.

gina says

I'm very excited! I just won this book and am greatly looking forward to reading it :)

Sherwood Smith says

This book fits nicely into period histories of architecture, clothing, and social history, for example the salon. Anyone who wants to find out how the hostesses fitted up their salons, and how having comfortable rather than stately rooms changed how rooms were used, will enjoy this detailed ramble, but be wary of some of her claims; there are some distressing errors, especially about life in the 1400s and 1500s.

Andreea says

A pure joy for my inner fashionista as it is a plunge into the days of Pompadour with everything that changed (furniture, clothes, lifestyle)

David Richardson says

I received this book for free from the Goodreads first read giveaway. I thought this book was good even though I have no interest in decorating or furniture. The author did some painstaking research. If you want to know about the evolution of decorating, fashion and lifestyle changes in Europe of the 1700's, this is the book for you!

Patty says

The premise of this book is that during a single century (1670-1765) in France, many of the things we consider basic to life were invented or came into use: cotton clothing, clothing designs with the emphasis placed on comfort as opposed to imposing court dress, sofas, armchairs, bedrooms and bathrooms as separate rooms instead of one corner of a grand hall, flush toilets and running water, large paned windows to let in light, nightstands and writing desks, hardwood floors, and more. Part of this was a reaction to the grand magnificence of Versailles – after a day in a boned bodice that wouldn't let you sit down, surrounded by strict rules of etiquette, who wouldn't want to relax in cozy privacy? Another part was simply a consequence of the historic moment: increased trade with India, a newly rich merchant class eager to commission their own architect-designed houses, increased technology in various crafts, Enlightenment philosophers coming up with new ideas for improving "the art of living". It's a fascinating argument, to show how all these disparate things are linked, and DeJean makes her case very well, though I don't know enough about it to say if she missed anything obvious.

DeJean has an entertaining, breezy style that makes the book more fun to read than you might suspect. For example:

From the start (and the stories about [the Marquise de Pompadour] started right away), her biographers agreed that she set her cap for the king, having been encouraged to believe since childhood that she was somehow destined to become his mistress. (Her will contains a curious, and curiously touching, bequest of six hundred livres to "Madame Lebon for having foretold when she was nine years old that she would one day become the king's mistress").

Describing newly curved seating:

And for "those who write" and therefore "spend long periods" leaning forward, [Roubo, a furniture designer] shows how the seat's curves could be adapted to this particular distribution of body weight and thereby help writers "resist fatigue". (I only wish someone would think like this today.)

Describing an early toilet:

Since it was not hooked up to waste piping, it's hard to imagine how well it performed its function. (In the fixtures he created for Pompadour, Migeon did at least use a wood then new to France, mahogany, because of its odor-resistant properties.)

It's a surprisingly quick, easy read, with lots of illustrations and a really intriguing central premise. I recommend it if you have the least interest in the origins of mundane things.

Scottie says

Enjoyed this book I won. This was very interesting and was well written. It told of the invention of some of our modern conveniences, such as indoor plumbing and some of our more comfortable furniture, & how and why these things were conceived. I certainly learned from it. I had not known that a lot of what we enjoy today came from Paris, or what period of time these things were first designed. Anyone interested in history would find this book a good read. Anyone with an interest in Paris or French history would especially like it.

Robin says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Spoiler Alert

I enjoyed this book. I was thinking it would be more of a reference type book but it actually reads like a History book. If you like History and have an interest in Architecture and the History of what goes into one's personal space and how it came about you'll like this one. Parts of it make you thankful you live now rather than in the 1700's but it's quite interesting how the things we take for granted came into being. It seems all it takes is at least one person to decide something is not comfortable or certain habits are rather yucky and convince someone else there must be a better way. The next thing you know you not only have comfy sofas with puffy pillows but toilets that flush and are behind a closed door in a room of their own.

It's also interesting to learn yet again how society seems to go up and down. For example the Egyptians were quite advanced for their time but when they collapsed their culture went with them. It seems the same thing happened to the French they were quite advanced for their time but after the Revolution things reverted back to somewhat primitive standards for the day.

A few of the more interesting things I learned in addition to what I've already mentioned was that Louis XV was actually the Great Grandson of Louis XIV. Even though I've studied the furniture that was around during their reigns and who they were I somehow missed the fact that they were not Father and Son. The English are usually thought to be rather civilized and ahead of their time but it seems that they were actually behind the French. Some of the French innovations apparently were actually not embraced by the English simply because they were French. At some point the English began to develop some of the same innovations and some of them have gotten credit for things that the French already had technology for (I think it was Post-Revolution, I must admit I'm not good with numbers and so dates easily confuse me).

Definitely an interesting read if it's within your area of interest.

Linda Harkins says

This is an informative book by University of Pennsylvania Trustee Professor Joan DeJean that caused me to look at the sofa in an entirely new way. It was not until the turn of the 18th century that the societal desire for comfort and privacy surfaced. People wanted spaces that were less formal and in which they could feel fully at ease. Architecture, clothing, and furniture became more casual. New words describing interior design became part of the lexicon: sofa or couch from the Arab word for cushion, for example. Demeanor, body language, and deportment changed as a result of new furniture that encouraged naturalness. Did new architecture, decorative arts, and interior design really promote a new private, interior life? That's the premise of this informative book.

Margaret Sankey says

The material culture history of several of my favorite markers of civilization--toilets, privacy and comfortable furniture, placing the emergence and availability of these things to the convergence of the whims of French royal mistresses, increasingly rich non-elite merchants who wanted to emulate them, the

availability of lightweight Asian textiles and the new philosophy that suggested human beings did not owe it to humility and propriety to be in physical discomfort all the time.

Ruthmarie says

How does she do it over and over again? Fun read that is just chock full of facts that support a brilliant analysis of the interconnection between philosophy, style, art, fashion, politics, mores. Loved it. Now . . . moving backwards to the Essence of Style.
