

The Domestic Arts in Pompeii



The Roman villa has long epitomized an elegant and luxurious refuge, a haven removed from the commotion of everyday life. Even in ancient times the word conveyed felicity; since the fifteenth century these associations have brought villas back into fashion again and again. In our own day the word “villa” is still used in England, for example, to suggest a touch of elegance, to imply that a house is a “residence of a superior type,” when in fact the opposite is often the case.

For Romans in the late Republic and the Empire, villas and time spent at villas were synonymous with pleasure, wealth, and leisure. This was as true for broad segments of the population as it was for the fortunate few who actually owned villas; the claim applies to the Pompeians, at any rate, if the evidence of the architecture and decor of their homes is anything to go by.

In the very extensive archeological literature on Pompeian houses,¹ however, this phenomenon has received scarcely any attention.² Scholars, of course, frequently make mention of the villa as a model for individual elements of architecture or decor, but to my knowledge the comprehensive taste that prevailed, particularly in the final decades of the city’s existence, has never been analyzed in detail. Pompeian houses represent a unique historical source for answers to such questions of taste, allowing us to draw important conclusions about the values and aspirations of a large segment of the population in the early years of the Empire that emerge only sketchily from literary and epigraphic sources.

In a study such as this, the wealth of material is best illustrated through the use of significant individual examples, entailing references to many familiar paintings and objects. In each case, the choice was dictated by the relationship each example has in common with the overall context under investigation.

The Origins of the Roman Villa

The complex origins of the Roman villa have been little studied to date.³ The villa represents far more than an architectural category, fascinating though its variety may be. In fact it is a key phenomenon in the adoption of Hellenistic culture by upper-class Romans. At the outset I would like to sketch in the background of this process.

When Rome expanded its rule into the western and eastern Mediterranean, Roman aristocrats, who in some respects had retained their traditional simple customs, were brought into direct contact with the opulent style of life in the Hellenistic world, particularly in the dwellings and habits of Eastern potentates. They began to desire lavish surroundings to match their sense of power and dominance. In Rome itself, however, old Republican traditions blocked or hindered open espousal and display of Hellenistic luxury. Isolated country estates offered an escape, so to speak, where aristocrats could spend their leisure time in a completely private sphere. And even Cato the censor recommended adding urban amenities to simple villas on agricultural estates, in order to make the necessary inspection visits more attractive for the proprietor (*De Agri Cultura* 4). Soon afterward Romans began building country retreats in the most beautiful parts of Campania and Latium, for purely recreational purposes.⁴

This new way of life called for opening the house to the landscape and including gardens and parks in the inhabited space. Early villas tended to be built on slopes with expansive and beautiful views.⁵ After Pompey's campaign rid the area of pirates, sites directly on the coast came to be preferred (Plutarch, *Lucullus* 39). Even though the ruins of many such dwellings have been excavated and become well known, they can convey only a very inadequate notion of the great villas' size and rich decoration. The best

impression of the sequence of rooms and their dimensions can be gained today from the Getty Museum in Malibu, California, a reconstruction of the relatively modest Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum,⁶ and from the great villa of Oplontis (Torre Annunziata).⁷ The numerous depictions of villas in Pompeian wall frescos—often in imitation of a panel painting (*pinax*)—are a valuable source for seeing how the estates were embedded in the landscape.⁸

The intent to include gardens and the landscape in the inhabited space is a consequence of the Hellenistic experience of nature. Not infrequently public buildings in the agora or in sanctuaries had colonnades and terraces that served to frame vistas (as at Pergamum, Samothrace, Lindos, and Rhodes).⁹ The latest example comes from a residence, albeit a royal one, namely, the Macedonian palace of Palatitsa, which a growing amount of evidence places in the late fourth century. There a veranda with a view across the plains has been documented.¹⁰ Hellenistic building complexes may also have inspired the ground plans of large villas; for the *villa maritima* one might think of the royal palace quarter in Alexandria, for example, whereas the fortress-like villas of Marius, Pompey, and Caesar in Baiae (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.9.3; Seneca, *Epistles* 51.11), which dominate their surroundings, are reminiscent of the palace at Demetrias.¹¹ Although at the present time we can only speculate about influences in specific cases, the dominant role of large peristyles and the new use of atria (occasionally redecorated in the Greek manner) speak for themselves. Yet however great or small a role one ascribes to the influence of Hellenistic models on the development of the ground plans of early Roman villas, one thing is clear: the clever orientation of porticos, dining rooms, and bedrooms to take advantage of particular vistas shows that Roman aristocrats and their architects consciously included nature and the landscape in their designs to enhance them and add a new dimension to the inhabitants' enjoyment. This takes the Hellenistic approach to an extreme.

Nature was included in another sense as well. The largest villas were often located on landed estates; in such cases, the owner had plenty of space to create sweeping parks and game enclosures, and thus live like a king.

For the imposing architectural forms of their interiors, the early villas

once more probably owed most to Hellenistic courts, for there the owners' emphasis lay on creating magnificent displays. The real structural architecture of lavish Corinthian, tetrastyle, Egyptian, and Cyzicene reception rooms (*oeci*: Vitruvius VI 3.143)¹² was complemented by the architectural wall paintings of the second style.¹³ These increased the effect with painted vistas showing imposing façades, palace courtyards, shrines, and luxurious parks of a royal character. Such paintings served not only to enlarge the actual space, but also to conjure up associations of magnificent surroundings. Characteristically, the owners showed little or no concern with making these vistas spatially logical or consistent in content. What mattered was to have a great variety of scenes, each one full of interesting detail. Small villas in particular often displayed the most disparate views next to one another in confined spaces. One of the best examples of this is to be found in a *cubiculum* (bedroom) of the villa at Boscoreale. Sanctuaries and sacred precincts occur with great frequency in these paintings, reflecting the religious character of gardens around the palaces of Hellenistic rulers.¹⁴

Hellenistic courts provided models for the furnishings of Roman villas as well. It is hardly accidental that Cicero accused Verres of trying to match the aspirant to the throne of Syria in this respect (*In Verrem* II 4.61ff.). Verres was hardly the exceptional figure Cicero made him out to be; he surpassed some of his rich friends only in the degree of his obsession and the extremes to which he was prepared to go to acquire objects he fancied.¹⁵

Congenial company was a requisite of villa life.¹⁶ Cicero's letters offer us a picture of the great figures of Roman society visiting one another when the law courts were not in session, at their large estates in the hills near Tivoli or, above all, on the Bay of Naples, that "charming bowl" (*crater delicatus*: *Letters to Atticus* II 8.2) where they vied to outdo one another in the luxury of the accommodations and the banquets (Plutarch, *Cicero* 7). Of course, in order to enjoy the various landscapes and climates (Plutarch, *Lucullus* 39)—and also not to miss out on what others were doing—one needed to own several villas.¹⁷ Cicero himself, who was not a particularly wealthy man but liked to keep abreast of developments, had no fewer than seven.¹⁸

For those wishing to occupy themselves with philosophical, historical, literary, or artistic matters, villas were more suitable than townhouses,¹⁹ for at one's leisure, far from the press of business, it was possible to feel liberated from the official schizophrenic attitude toward Greek culture.²⁰ When Roman aristocrats conversed informally with philosophers and poets at their villas, and indulged in their own dilettante pursuits of art and literature, they were following the tradition of Hellenistic rulers, whose portraits they occasionally displayed in their colonnades next to the great Greek intellectuals. Cultural interests were deemed such an integral part of villa life that libraries and *pinacothecae* were standard amenities (Vitruvius VI 5.2), regardless of the owner's actual interests or preferences.²¹ Petronius later had his satirical character Trimalchio, the self-made man, boast of the Greek and Latin works in his library (Petronius, *Satyrica* 48). It was fashionable to refer to colonnades or parts of the garden as the "gymnasium" or the "palaestra," or to name them specifically after famous sites of classical learning. Greek names were sometimes given even to lesser rooms (Varro, *Res rusticae* II 2). Collections of statuary and other decor increased the associations with classical culture, making the appellations of these rooms clear to all. The average villa owner, however, certainly did not go to the lengths Cicero did to make his surroundings match his own broad intellectual horizons; many owners were no doubt content to purchase the standard furnishings available on the market.²² The memory of famous cities and tourist spots in the Greek world was cultivated by the names given to individual parts of the villa, along with the corresponding decoration. Hadrian's villa is the latest and richest example of this form of cultural reminiscence, a *Bildungslandschaft* ("educative landscape").²³ External similarities were not always required; any pond, watercourse, or stream could be transformed at will into one of the popular imitations of the Euripus, the strait between Euboea and Boeotia, or the Nile (Cicero, *On Laws* II 2), or a natural grotto such as the one in Sperlonga could be turned into the cave of Polyphemus.

In sum, the adoption of Greek culture by the Roman upper class manifests itself in the late Republican villa. The leisure (*otium*) associated with villas embraces a whole sphere of life in which architecture and decor were

inseparably connected with certain styles, habits, and intellectual pursuits. The painted vistas must be seen in relation to furniture, other furnishings, the silver on the table, and last but not least the exquisite food served there. A herm of Aristotle in the peristyle, for instance, points beyond the specific locale and style of furnishings that may have been used; for one owner it might have served to stimulate or recall to mind a variety of educational experiences, while for another it merely demonstrated that he kept up with current fashions.

The experience of architecture and villa surroundings in connection with an extensive and multifaceted network of associations reflects the villa owners' new and ambivalent sense of identity. Their awareness of their own power and status demanded appropriately princely settings, yet at the same time the dominant Greek cultural tradition was present in every room, inspiring occupants not just to congratulate themselves on how educated they were, but also to continue learning, and to meditate on the past.

Naturally, the unbridled competition for offices, wealth, and prestige so characteristic of the late Republic had a noticeable effect in the area of domestic luxury. After the Social War, participation in an elite culture was open to a large class on the top rungs of the social ladder, including the prominent office-holding families of Italic cities and rich merchants as well as Roman aristocrats.²⁴ Their levels of affluence and education varied, but all felt the same need for self-promotion and display. Thus we find villas of the Republican era across a correspondingly broad spectrum, ranging from enormous complexes resembling little self-contained cities (Sallust, *Catiline* 12–13) to the compact villas just inside Pompeii's southern wall (compare fig. 71). In the first century B.C. such luxurious country estates—referred to euphemistically as “gardens” (*horti*)—had crept up to the old walls of Rome, and the lifestyle cultivated at country villas had become the norm among the upper classes in the city, too. Exploiting Rome's geography, the elite built themselves little urban villas with their own views on the Palatine and Aventine hills.²⁵

The degree to which villas had come to epitomize wealth and luxury is revealed by an episode in the campaign of the tribune A. Gabinius against



Figure 71 Terrace houses in the theater quarter, region VIII 2 (after Noack and Lehmann-Hartleben). The original atrium houses with an orientation toward the street were expanded in the course of the first century B.C. to provide a view across the plain to the sea.

Lucullus. To turn popular opinion against his opponent, Gabinius had a picture of Lucullus' famous villa at Tusculum shown from the rostra (Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 93). During proscriptions, possession of a beautiful villa could seal a man's doom (Plutarch, *Sulla* 31.4).

The example set by the wealthiest and most prestigious aristocratic families in the second century B.C., when they began to adopt Greek culture, had enormous influence in the later climate of competition, when everything the upper classes did was imitated. The phase of discriminating individual selection was thus followed swiftly by one in which the market offered standardized "Greek" house and decor plans suited to every pocketbook.

This cultural and historical setting explains some key features of Roman villas, such as the haphazard assembly of decorative elements, the frequent disregard of organic harmony and proportions, exaggeration in scale and motifs, and excessive use of expensive materials (or imitations of them). This is true not only for lesser villas; even the huge collection of bronze sculptures at the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum and the wall frescos at the recently excavated Villa of Oplontis (Torre Annunziata) display such features.²⁶ The lifestyle associated with the villa proves to have been a

grand and vital mixture of Greek cultural elements that formed different amalgams in each house, depending on the temperament and education of its owner.

Two Forms of Living Space

The Samnite growers and merchants²⁷ in the area around Pompeii had learned about Greek homes and interior decor along with the Romans, either directly, through travel in the East along Roman trade routes, or indirectly, through gradual adoption of trends from Rome, the center of Hellenism in Italy from the second century.²⁸ In contrast to aristocrats in Rome itself, the Samnites had no traditions hostile to indulgence in luxury. There was nothing to prevent them from investing their new wealth in large townhouses. It is characteristic of the richest families in Pompeii that they clearly identified themselves not with middle-class Greeks, such as the merchants and traders who built houses on Delos, for example, but rather with aristocrats and their opulent residences. H. Lauter has offered convincing evidence of a resemblance between the largest of the early houses, the House of the Faun (VI 12), which occupies an entire *insula* measuring roughly 31,000 square feet, and the urban palaces of the Macedonian aristocracy excavated in Pella.²⁹ The Italic atrium is retained in reduced form, as in the early villas, but its original function as the central living space has usually been lost in Pompeian houses. In some instances the whole ground plan is dominated by peristyle gardens. The free combination of atria and peristyles in different sizes is also characteristic of large Pompeian houses. However, in contrast to the palaces of the nobility at Pella, which are even larger than the House of the Faun, the latter contained peristyles that were surrounded by only a few large rooms: the owner of the House of the Faun in fact required far less living space than a Macedonian prince. The second peristyle in his house, for example, had no function beyond creating an impression of grandeur.³⁰

Thus the House of the Faun, although not derived from the villa, contains essential elements of villa architecture, such as peristyle gardens with fountains, extensive rooms with costly mosaics (for example, the exedra

containing the Alexander mosaic), and even a small bath complex.³¹ This elegant, completely inward-looking house provided its occupants with the Hellenistic sense of extensive space and shifting vistas through zones of shade and light in the successive peristyles, much like a villa.

The rooms in other great Pompeian houses built around 100 B.C. display even richer forms of Hellenistic interior design. The opulent living or dining rooms (*oeci*) were probably inspired by villas, that is to say, they were one step removed from Greece; the elaborate painted architectural vistas support this view.³² In the Corinthian room (*oecus corinthicus*) of the House of the Labyrinth (VI 11.10; fig. 111b), for example, a wall painting showed a view of a palace courtyard with a small, round Hellenistic temple in the center.³³ Ptolemy IV once enjoyed a similar view—in actuality, not painted—from the Corinthian salon of his Nile ship, which was itself constructed as a floating palace.³⁴ The two-story arrangement of columns explodes the spatial dimensions of the Pompeian dining room: interior architecture originally intended for a large hall or banquet room was reproduced in such drastically reduced form that the real function of the room as a dining area was considerably restricted.³⁵

In the second century B.C. the wealthy Samnite elite constructed their houses clustered together in the center of town, completely closed off from the landscape. After the Roman colony was founded and the city walls ceased to have any defensive function, however, affluent Pompeians in the first half of the first century began to build on the southern slopes of town, which offered a beautiful vista across the bay to the Sorrento Peninsula. The plan of the town shows that the sites on the southwestern slopes were especially sought after. It is here that the largest houses were built, not much smaller in total area than the House of the Faun (Insula Occidentalis 19–26; see figs. 30 and 31).³⁶ These complexes display the same orientation toward panoramic views as the villas outside the Herculaneum Gate. While the entry area remains connected with the street, the living area extends out to elaborate terraces on different levels, opening the house to the landscape. A present-day visitor can gain a sense of the size of different areas in these new “urban villas” from the portico of the Villa Imperiale next to the Marine Gate below the old museum (VIII 1).

More modest houses were added to and remodeled, spreading down the southwestern slopes toward the theater quarter (VIII 2; see fig. 71). K. Lehmann-Hartleben's study of these houses, based on Noack's notes and published in the 1930s, is a model analysis still of considerable interest for social historians today.³⁷ His research shows that the early first century B.C., the peak period of villa construction in Campania, was also the time when most of these houses were rebuilt as villas to take advantage of the view. Lehmann-Hartleben's drawings of them as they must have looked convey an impression of the sides facing the sea, with staggered porticos and balconies on different stories (fig. 72).³⁸ The extensive excavation and foundation work required for the additions suggests once again that the owners of these houses were well-to-do, but nonetheless they are clearly smaller in scale and less ambitious than the large villas on the western slopes. Although they could not compete with the type of villa that spread out into

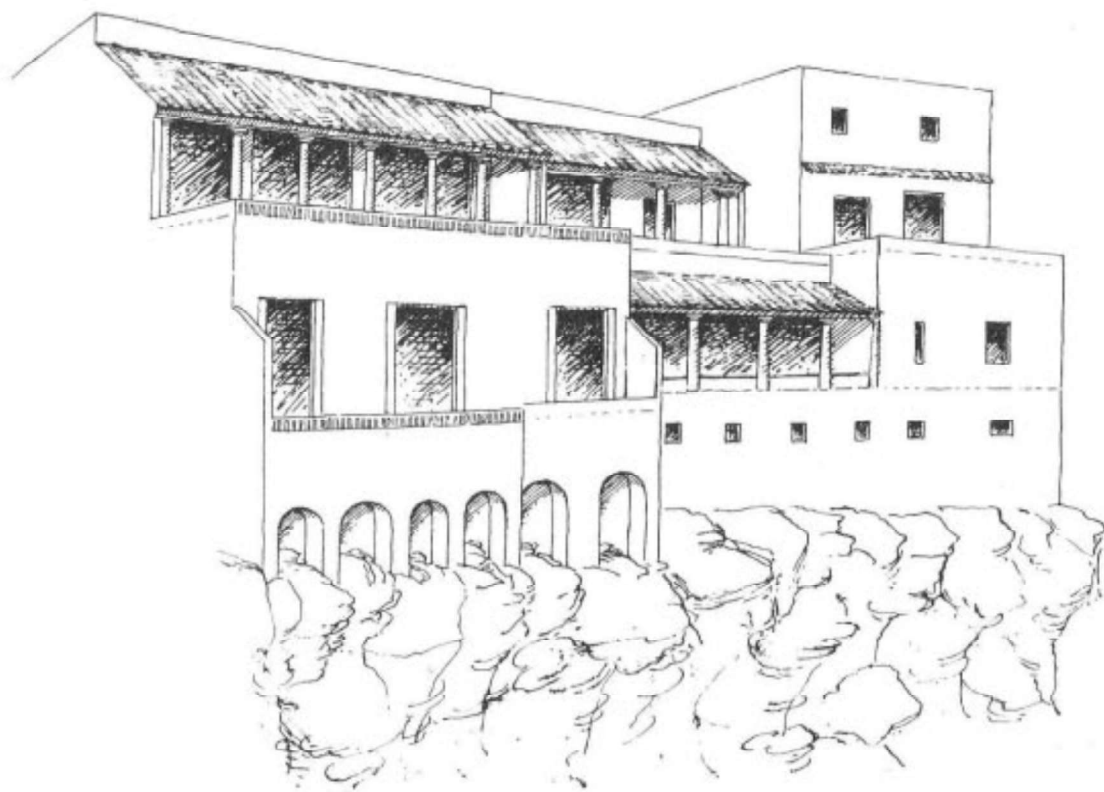


Figure 72 Reconstruction of a terrace house in the theater quarter (after Noack and Lehmann-Hartleben). The architecture of the additions at the rear imitates the terraces and withdrawing rooms of Roman villas.

the landscape, these mini-villas nevertheless provided their occupants with an essential element of the new style, namely, a beautiful view.³⁹

In a few houses in the town center we find renovations and additions dating from the late second and first centuries B.C., showing that here, too, the villa served as a model for cultivated living. They include such features as the bath complex and cryptoporticus in the House of the Cryptoporticus (I 6.2–4),⁴⁰ and the small bath complex and exedra with two apses in the peristyle of the House of Menander (I 10.4; fig. 111c).⁴¹

A Miniature Villa in the Town

As we have seen, the imitation of villa architecture in Pompeii in the first century B.C. was mainly limited to exploitation of sites with the best views on the surrounding slopes and isolated cases of luxurious interior renovation in the grandest houses in town. In the last decades of Pompeii's existence, however, the effect of villas and the decor and lifestyle associated with them spread to a very broad segment of the town's inhabitants. We find many different elements of villa architecture and decor in houses restored or remodeled⁴² after the earthquake of A.D. 62,⁴³ although some of these features might not be recognizable at first glance as having been derived from this source.

As a rule the renovation or remodeling work was limited to the houses' gardens and peristyles. Let us begin by looking at a well-known house in the Via dell'Abbondanza (II 2.2; figs. 73 and 74) named after Loreius Tiburtinus, a fictional character.⁴⁴ The sloping lot covers almost an entire *insula*, more than two-thirds of which is taken up by the garden. When viewed from the bottom of the garden, the living quarters appear mounted on a platform reminiscent of a *basis villae* (foundation wall; Cicero, *Letters to Quintus* 3.1.5). The structure is an instance of renovation in an older, medium-sized atrium house, which in the final period of the town's existence had a tavern occupying the front section. After the earthquake the house underwent extensive remodeling, most of it concentrated on the garden and the rooms adjacent to it. This work was not yet completed at the time of the eruption.⁴⁵

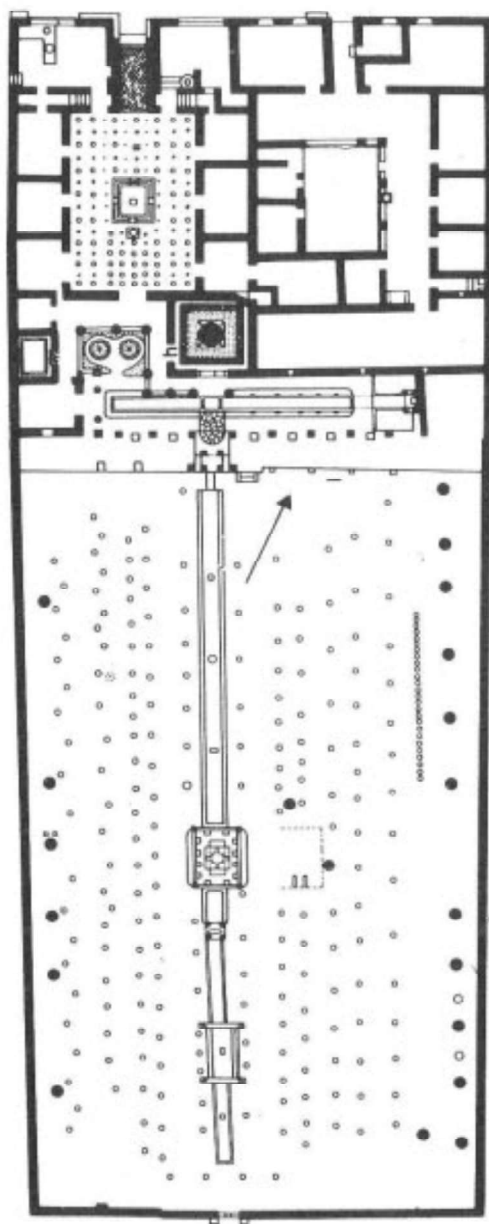


Figure 73 Plan of the "miniature villa" in the Via dell'Abbondanza (II 2.5). The garden of the relatively small atrium house was redesigned to imitate the grounds of a villa in miniature, with pergolas, fountains, porticos, and so on.

The main room or *tablinum* behind the atrium was replaced by a kind of truncated peristyle, leading to a large, almost square dining room (*triclinium*, with three couches) on the left, and to two smaller rooms, one containing a shrine (*sacellum*), to the right. The plaster-covered columns of varying diameters stand at irregular intervals determined by the adjoining rooms. This truncated peristyle connects—but also collides and competes—with two further rows of roof supports, bringing utter confusion into the ground plan. A regular porch (*pronaos*) in front of the shrine has two columns between piers with engaged columns. The pier on the garden side is flush with a row of sturdy brick supports for the more than sixty-five-

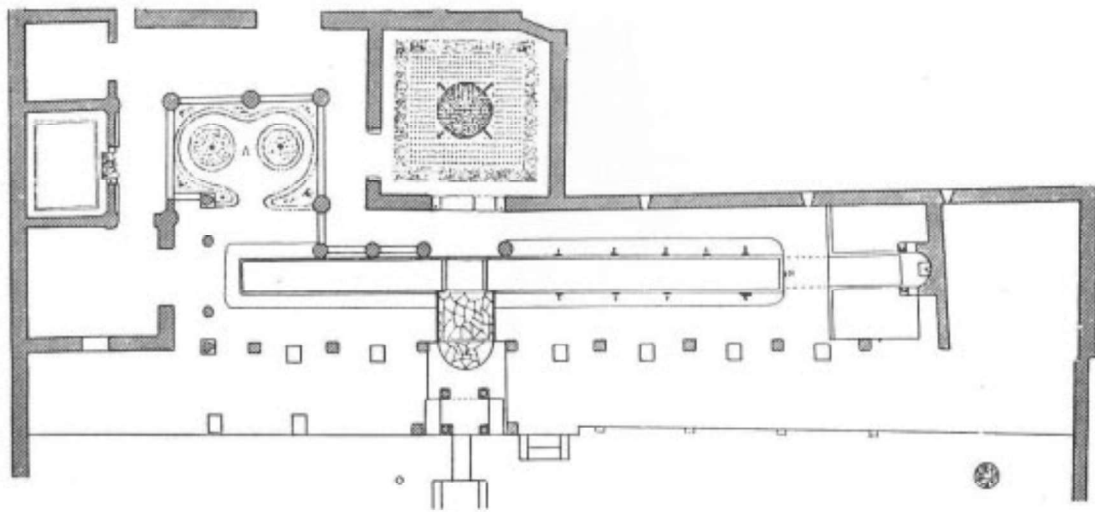


Figure 74 Plan of the terrace at the "miniature villa." Several elements of villa architecture are combined here in such a small space that they partly overlap.

foot-long pergola extending across the rear of the house (fig. 75). The pergola shades a small ornamental canal, only about three feet wide, which runs along the axis of the shrine; it is spanned by two bridge-like structures and ends in a *biclinium* (dining area with two couches) with a fountain at the other end of the terrace.⁴⁶ We know from the collection of statues found here that the ensemble re-created in miniature the type of watercourse (*euripus* or *nilus*) already popular in the villas of Cicero's era.⁴⁷ A surviving example on a monumental scale is the Canopus at Hadrian's Villa.⁴⁸

A total of five elements derived from villa architecture and reduced to miniature size are thus combined and compressed, sometimes one inside the other, onto a terrace that is only twenty-two feet wide: (1) the truncated peristyle with the *triclinium* and day rooms (*diaetae*); (2) the shrine; (3) an aedicula to Artemis behind the fountain and above a *nymphaeum* (discussed below); (4) the watercourse associated with the pergola; and (5) the *biclinium* with the fountain-aedicula (fig. 76). All five are components of the expansive type of villa that opened up the house to the surrounding views and landscape and had become popular by the mid-first century B.C. at the latest.⁴⁹ The villas of Pliny the Younger are good examples of this type, as are some of the excavated houses in Campania and those depicted in wall paintings at Pompeii.⁵⁰ On the terrace of this particular house,

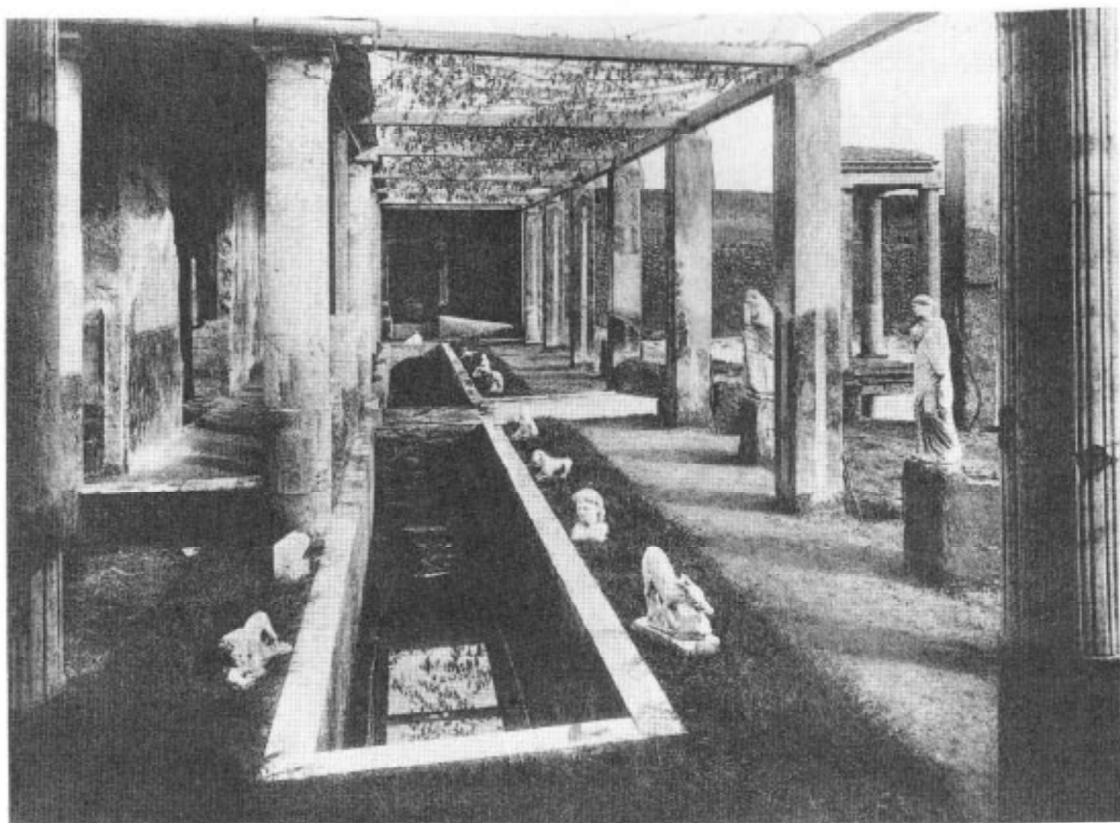


Figure 75 An old photograph of the terrace at the “miniature villa,” showing the collection of garden statuettes (now missing) lined up along the watercourse (*euripus*) spanned by a little bridge. The whole terrace is surmounted by a pergola stretching from a small shrine to Isis at one end to two masonry couches at the other. The paths are too narrow to permit two people to stroll side by side or in groups, an integral feature of the Roman villa.

however, the various components are squeezed into such a small space that two people cannot walk next to each other under the pergola without running up against a fountain, little bridge, pillar, or post at every turn, or tripping over the statuettes in the grass. A portion of the architecture has lost its original function.

The sense of constriction is increased by the excess of decorative painting and statuary. In the large *triclinium* there are two friezes above a wide panel painted to look like expensive multicolored marble incrustations.⁵¹ A raised curtain painted in at the top of the picture is intended to heighten the illusion that the friezes are valuable Greek originals, and it gives the room the aura of a *pinacotheca* (fig. 77). The upper frieze (approximately two and a half feet tall) shows the labors of Hercules—probably following a Hellenistic model; the smaller frieze below contains scenes from the *Iliad*.

This room, distinguished from others in the house by its very elaborate decoration, offered occupants a view through the Artemis aedicula and the lower part of the garden to the city and mountains beyond (plate 9). The *sacellum*, set off by two columns between piers with engaged columns, is also painted elaborately in the fourth style, this time depicting a wall. The figure of a priest of Isis on one of the inner walls and the diptych of Diana and Actaeon on the façade (along with the Egyptian terracottas found in the little garden in front of it) all suggest that the shrine was devoted to Isis/Diana. Her image probably stood in the niche on the back wall.⁵² The architect had to dispense with a gable for the shrine, however, since it would have interfered with the pergola.

Small shrines, sometimes located in a garden, were quite common at



Figure 76 Masonry couches at the “miniature villa,” with a “view” over the *euripus*. In the foreground one can see the slanted surfaces on which mattresses were placed. Behind them are an aedicula and two frescos with mythological motifs designed to look like framed paintings.

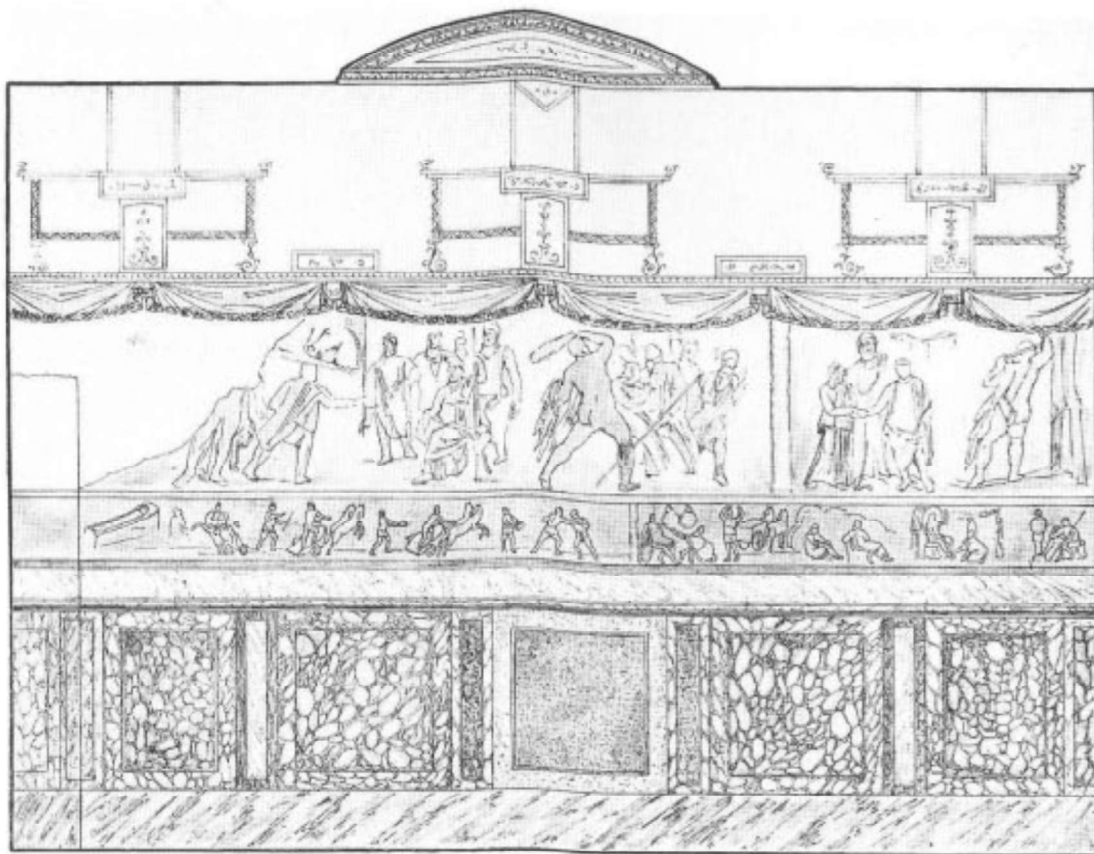


Figure 77 Wall painting in the reception room opening onto the terrace at the “miniature villa” (after Spinazzola; compare fig. 74). This *triclinium* was the most opulently decorated room in the house, and the owner could display his taste and learning in the frescos. The lower part of the wall imitates costly multicolored marble; it is surmounted by a frieze with scenes from Homer’s *Iliad*. The main zone depicts the labors of Hercules. A painted raised “curtain” above these scenes is intended to suggest that they are valuable “paintings” that need to be protected from light, just as in some modern museum displays.

larger villas; one need only think of the “Amaltheion” that Cicero so admired on the country estate of his friend Atticus in Epirus.⁵³ In the house we are concerned with here, the shrine was used as a kind of gazebo, from which one could look out the door toward the terrace and the watercourse, or through the window on the other side toward the lower part of the garden.

The statuary along the “banks” of the watercourse was adapted to the small format of the architecture.⁵⁴ The muses mounted on bases (fig. 78) are of normal statuette size—although there was apparently never a complete set—but the various figures in a seated or recumbent position and scattered about the grass are definitely miniatures (see fig. 75). They are

also associated with a variety of different themes. The recumbent river god and the Sphinx are part of the usual watercourse decor; the herms were usually placed along garden paths. The little seated satyr belongs in a Dionysiac park, while the two sets of figures depicting hounds and quarry belong in a *paradeisos* (preserve for wild animals). The statuettes of the muses themselves belong in a *musaeion* (museum) of the type so frequently found at villas.⁵⁵ To this collection we should also add the little satyr in the



Figure 78 Statuettes of two muses that stood along the *euripus* at the "miniature villa." They are copies of two statuettes from a famous Hellenistic group of all nine muses. As in the case of copies of paintings, such decorative statuary was intended to awaken associations of "Greek sculpture" and "art collections" in visitors.

pose of Atlas supporting the fountain, and there must have been a statue of Artemis/Diana intended as a cult image for the aedicula, since its gable bears a portrait of her (fig. 79).

In addition to these numerous sculptures there was no lack of wall paintings. The fountain aedicula, lined with pumice stone, is flanked by two large mythological scenes, one depicting Pyramus and Thisbe and the other a seated Narcissus (plates 10.1 and 10.2).⁵⁶ An artist named Lucius proudly signed his name to them, although their quality is undistinguished. These frescos in the manner of panel paintings call to mind the passionate art enthusiast and collector Hortensius, who at his villa Tusculum made a shrine (*aedem fecit in Tusculano suo*) for Kydias' painting of the Argonauts (Pliny, *Natural History* 35.130). And there was still more: the entire length of the wall (over twenty-three feet long) to which the pergola was attached was covered with frescos depicting a variety of scenes—Orpheus charming the beasts, a hunting scene in a *paradeisos*, and Venus hovering above a shell on the sea.⁵⁷ These paintings and the statues of the muses on elaborate plinths were intended to give the airy pergola the flair of a lavish portico.

All this decoration and elaboration, however, represents only the upper level of the plan. From the terrace a flight of steps led down to the garden some three feet below, which measured approximately 180 by 95 feet. It was enclosed by a high wall and, like the terrace, bisected by a type of *euripus*. Pergolas and rows of shrubs and trees were arranged parallel to it. Similar paths ran along the brook on Varro's estate near Casinum (*Rustica* 3.9). The remains of a marble table indicate that there was a round seating area, and a recumbent hermaphrodite must be the sole remnant of a group of sculptures placed in the borders.⁵⁸ As mentioned above, the *euripus* ran not down the middle of the garden but rather along the axis of the large dining room decorated to look like a *pinacotheca*. This canal was interrupted or spanned by several structures, and was also linked to the terrace pergola by a hybrid two-story construction, the upper portion of which we have already encountered as the Artemis aedicula. The lower story contained a miniature *nymphaeum*⁵⁹ with a fountain connected to two water spouts: a mask of Oceanus and an Eros with masks sitting above the steps down which the water flowed.⁶⁰ There were also fish painted on the upper basin.

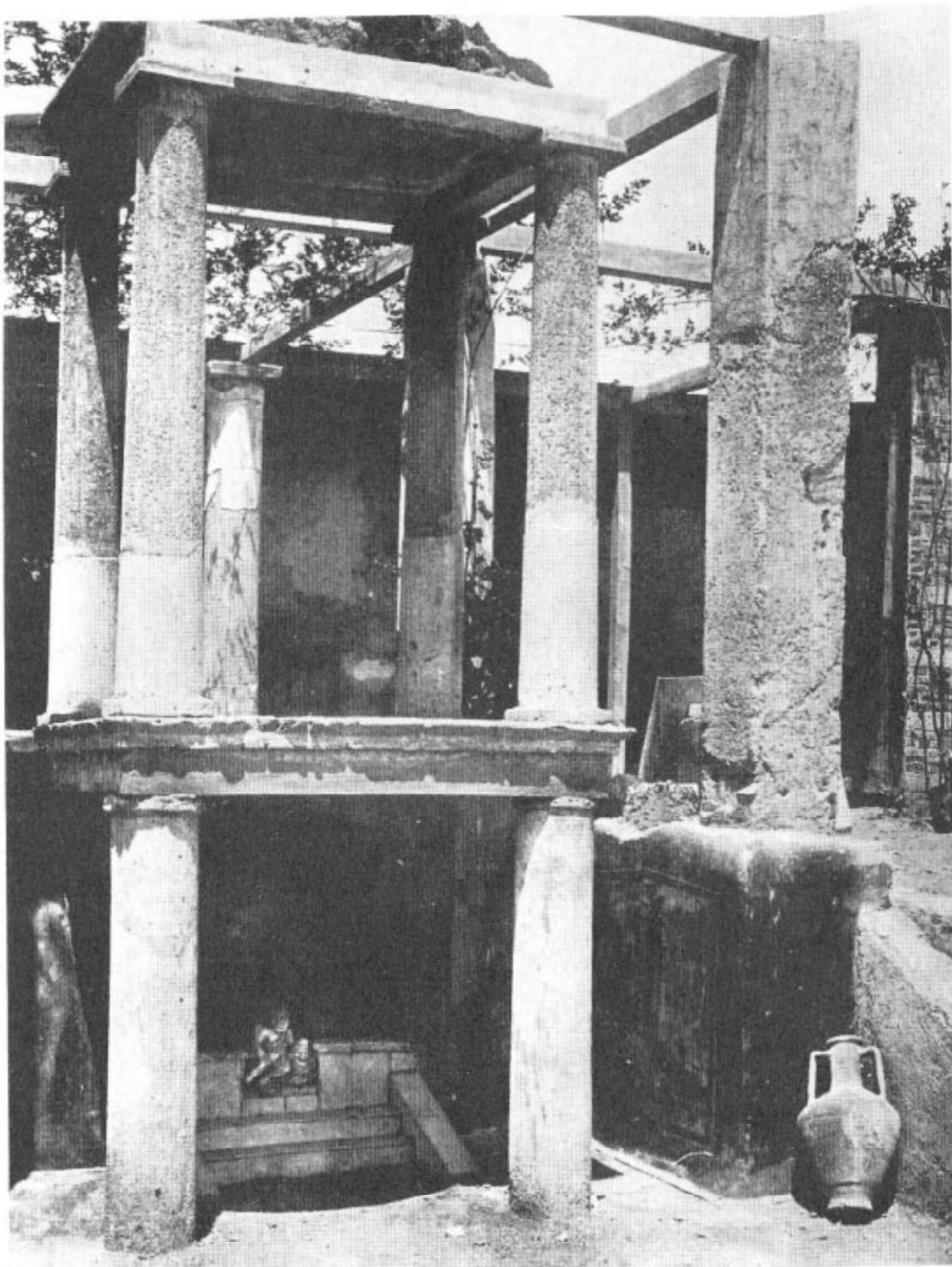


Figure 79 Aedicula with a *nymphaeum* in the garden of the "miniature villa." The aedicula, which was accessible from the garden terrace, originally contained a statue of Artemis, the goddess of hunting. The goddess was placed there in part as an allusion to the hunting preserves connected with great landed estates. The lower story of the structure, accessible only from the garden, is fitted out as a miniature *nymphaeum*. Such a composite, multipurpose structure is characteristic of the overall architectural and decorative style of the house.

To one side of the fountain Actaeon is shown watching Diana bathing, and as if all these were not enough mythological trimmings for one small fountain, on the narrow sides the artist added some small framed landscape scenes with shrines to Apollo and Diana. The room itself measures only about 9.7 by 3.2 feet, and with the fountain in it does not have space for even one couch.

At about the same time that this house was being remodeled, an owner of one of the terrace houses in the theater quarter (VIII 2.28) was building a *nymphaeum* on his property, in the form of a grotto just large enough to use and carefully placed to take advantage of the mountain view across the bay.⁶¹ Thus, the borrowing of elements from villa architecture proceeded in steps, and models for some features could already be found within the town.

To return to the miniature villa: the more than 160-foot-long watercourse below the *nymphaeum* is divided into several sections. The water flowed first into a channel approximately 80 feet long with three jets of water spaced along it. Below this was a large pool lined with marble containing a square fountain in the middle, with steps on each side for the water to flow over and bases for twelve statuettes or vases around the edges (fig. 80).⁶² Only 12 feet further on the channel is spanned by a decorative baldachin bridge, much too small for actual use. Below the bridge the watercourse then shifts direction slightly to point toward the gate in the wall at the bottom of the garden. Clearly there was already a path up to the house from this gate, and the watercourse was designed to run alongside it. By continuing his watercourse down this far, the owner also enabled passers-by to catch a glimpse of it through the gate. The lower channel below the canopied bridge is interrupted once, too, by a wider basin. Both it and the square pool higher up were probably shaded by arbors.

Thus the watercourse actually consisted of a series of separate pools of varying sizes connected by overflow troughs.⁶³ Once this has been recognized, the function of the pools becomes clear: they were fish ponds of the type popular at large seaside villas. Most likely they were painted in distinctive colors.⁶⁴ Varro and Cicero mention both the profits that could be made by raising fish and also the grotesque excesses to which some of these

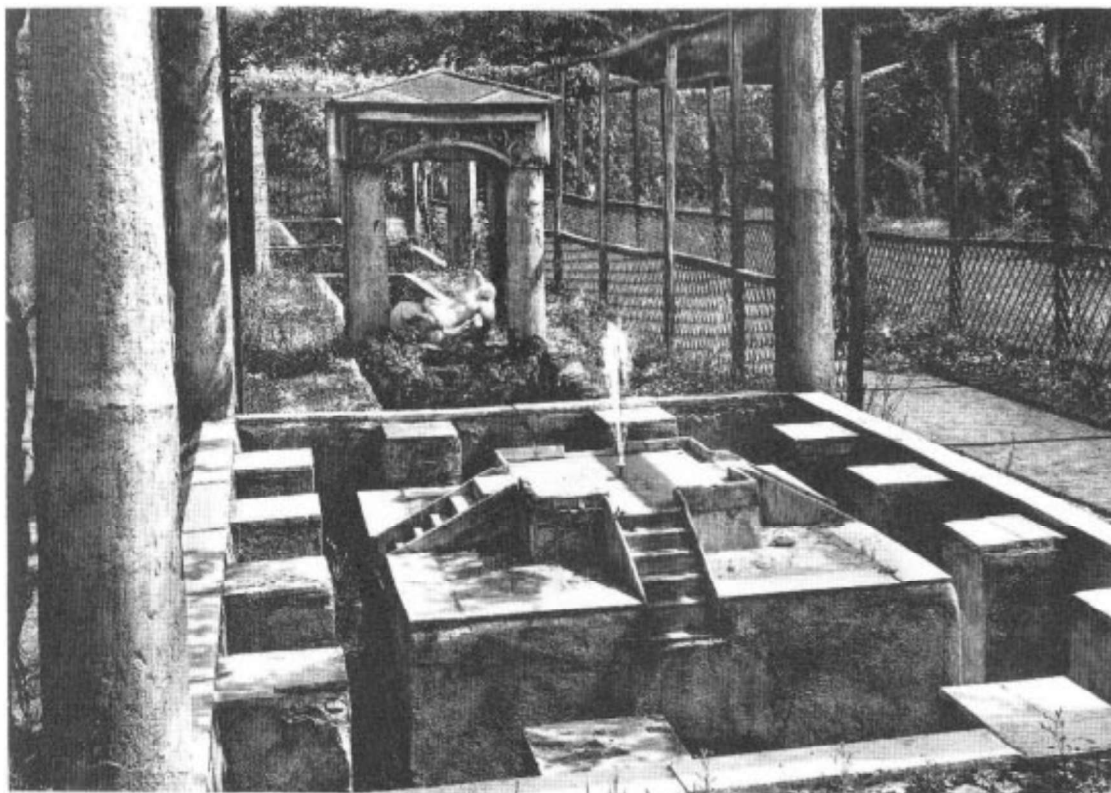


Figure 80 Marble fountain in the lower part of the watercourse at the “miniature villa” (compare fig. 74). This fountain interrupts the flow of the *euripus* and is too large in proportion to the other elements of the garden architecture. In the background a further aedicula is visible.

piscinarii were led by their passion for their favorite breeds.⁶⁵ Fish ponds represent another feature of villa life imported from the courts of Eastern potentates.⁶⁶

In the case of the miniature villa in Pompeii, the clever arrangement of the fish ponds gave the owner a second watercourse! As we have seen, this excess was characteristic of the villa owner. We find the same principle of overkill with some miniaturized elements of villa architecture in the garden as on the terrace; in both places too many separate structures have been crammed into too small a space. Instead of distributing the decorative features around his garden—as the villa model would have suggested and his good-sized lot allowed—he first turned his fish ponds into a *euripus* and then added the *nymphaeum*, marble fountain, baldachin bridge, and pergola. His method did have one advantage, of course: it enabled him to survey the full complement of architectural splendors in his garden from

the door of his dining room. Furthermore, the perspective made the entire layout seem larger than it was (although perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on such effects in recent studies).⁶⁷

In this manner a country villa was re-created in miniature in Pompeii during the last decade of the town's existence. Perspectives actually intended for wider views are cunningly inverted—architectural elements borrowed from villas in the country or by the seaside are crammed together into a Walt Disney world. The elaborate garden is wholly out of proportion to the quite modest size of the actual living quarters; the remodeled section of the house is also characterized by a poor sense of proportion and a low level of artistic skill, in contrast to the “Neronian” wall paintings in the fourth style in the older section. The owner, eager to imitate the lavish world of villas he so clearly admired, preferred quantity over quality.

A Courtyard with a Large Marble Fountain

The miniature villa with the features discussed above is by no means unique to Pompeii; it is only the richest and best preserved example of a widespread taste in domestic environments. Proof that it is no exception is offered by another instance of remodeling in the last decades before the eruption, in a smaller house with a far less advantageous site that appears to have been acquired in bits and pieces. The House of Apolline, located directly in front of the town wall (VI 7.23; fig. 81), was excavated between 1810 and 1840 and, like most of the houses discussed here, is in deplorable condition today.⁶⁸ The marble fittings discovered by the excavators have now virtually all disappeared, and if the team had not jotted down at least a few notes we would not be able to interpret the site today. A small atrium without *alae* (wings) leads to the main room, which in turn gives onto a narrow courtyard almost filled by an elaborate marble fountain similar to the one above the lower watercourse at the miniature villa (fig. 82).⁶⁹ Around the fountain the excavators found double herms and marble vases decorated with reliefs; we should picture these arranged on the surrounding ledge. The scale of the whole ensemble was completely out of propor-

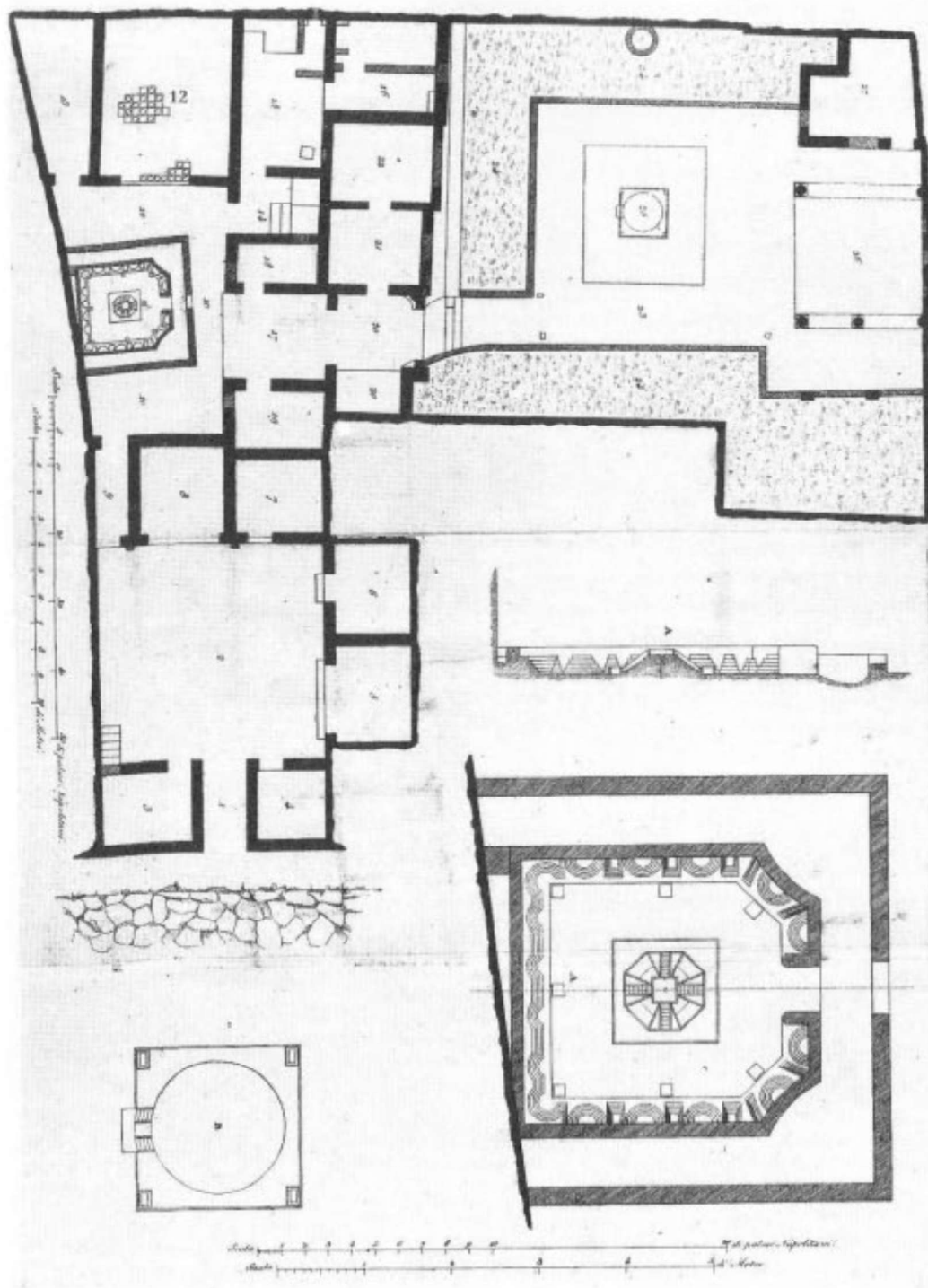


Figure 81 Ground plans of the House of Apolline (VI 7.23) and its two fountains. This is another case of a modest atrium house combined with a large garden, some of which was bought up and added to the property at a later date. The very large reception room at the western end (12) opens onto a court with a large fountain. The actual villa garden was enclosed by porticos and contained a *nymphaeum* and enclosures with couches.

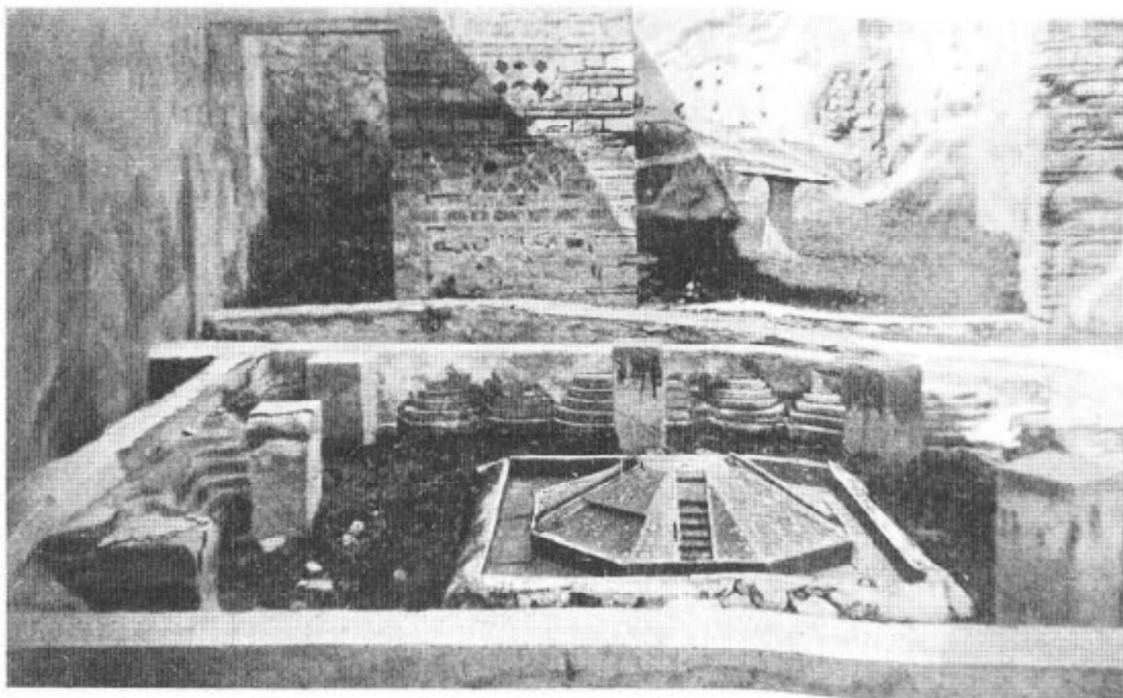


Figure 82 Marble fountain in the courtyard of the House of Apolline. The fountain was originally decorated with double herms and marble vases carved in relief. The wall at the left was decorated with a large painting depicting a villa garden.

tion to the small courtyard (off which lay a rather large dining room, the kitchen area, and two further rooms in addition to the main room). On the wall behind the fountain the owner commissioned a large painting of a garden scene, no doubt to give the illusion of greater space. Its depictions of a park with many different kinds of birds, a fish pond, and a statue of Diana were no doubt intended to call up associations with villas.⁷⁰

The real garden, as opposed to a painted one, is located on a plot of ground to the north that was probably acquired after the house was built and measures only a little over 3,000 square feet. Passing through what used to be two rooms in between, one comes down a few steps into the garden, which was enclosed by a kind of terrace on three sides. The terrace, which varies in width, lies about three and a half feet above the ground and hides a cistern beneath it on the western side. The paintings and mosaic on the walls behind make it seem likely that an arbor ran the entire length of the terrace.⁷¹ The “sunken” garden had a second marble fountain in the middle, this time round in shape, but like the courtyard fountain it was surrounded by marble herms. The figure in the center and

a flight of marble steps face to the north, where on the far wall three intersecting structures were squeezed together (fig. 83).⁷² The middle structure was open on each side, where two columns and one engaged column supported an architrave. The line of its roof is still visible in the garden wall. The wall contained three niches for statuettes; both it and the outside wall of the *cubiculum* to the left had a pumice-stone facing above and marble veneer below, while the columns were decorated with mosaic and shells in elaborate patterns. All these features indicate that the structure was conceived as a kind of open *nymphaeum*.⁷³ The few fragments found at the site suggest that it was lavishly fitted with marble, herms, and the like.

To the right of the *nymphaeum* two posts show that there was probably a deck under a pergola. To the left a door led to a “summer room” lit by two windows and containing two alcoves for beds. This charming room is a modest imitation of the tiny garden houses described by Pliny the



Figure 83 View of the *nymphaeum* and garden rooms at the House of Apolline (from an old photograph). The roof line of the *nymphaeum* can still be discerned in the bricks of the rear wall, whose three niches were designed to hold statues.

Younger, located in the grounds of large villas away from the bustle of the main house (*Epistles* II 17.20).⁷⁴ It seems odd today that a space designed for withdrawal and contemplation should have walls covered with large perspective paintings of stage sets. These are so out of proportion to the room's actual dimensions that the overall effect is disorienting.⁷⁵ Just as in the case of the miniature villa, allusions to Greek culture formed part of the standard decorative repertoire. The same applies to two statues of philosophers, now lost, which stood somewhere in the garden.

A Garden as Sanctuary

The discrepancy between a householder's ambitions and the actual possibilities for realizing them is particularly striking in cases where the goal was to re-create the atmosphere of a grand and sprawling villa in a very confined space. Another owner of a medium-sized house achieved a far better effect by limiting his borrowing to a single villa element, but then incorporating it into his property on a lavish scale. The foundations of the House of the Black Anchor (VI 10.7; figs. 84, 85, and 112c)⁷⁶ date back to the first century B.C. At the time of the eruption the owner was in the process of constructing a very grand two-story peristyle to replace the former garden or courtyard at the bottom of the property; work on it was not quite complete (fig. 85 and plate 11.1). The builder had found a clever way to compensate for the difficult sloping terrain. The garden, only about 1,000 square feet in size, lay off a small atrium and down a staircase; originally it was enclosed by a vaulted arcade. Later the arched openings of this arcade were bricked up, creating a cryptoporticus. This was then lined with a series of stout square pillars, two stories high. In the upper story these pillars alternate with brick columns on the two long sides, whereas on the southern side, at the far end from the house, there are only round columns. The two phases of construction appear to have followed one another in quick succession.⁷⁷

It is evident that the owner did not have the services of a first-rate builder or architect, but he clearly wished the final impression to be very imposing: pedestals reveal that the blind arches were to contain statues or