

Housing

There were big differences between the housing of the rich and the poor in Roman times

Poor Romans lived in insulae



An insulae consisted of six to eight three-storey apartment blocks, grouped around a central courtyard. The ground floors were used by shops and businesses while the upper floors were rented as living space.

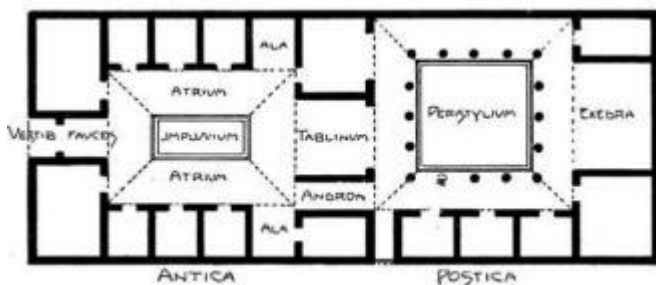
Insulae were made of wood and mud brick and often collapsed or caught fire. There was no heating or running water and often no toilet. The upper floors were the most unsafe and therefore the cheapest to rent.

An entire family would often occupy just one or two rooms. Insulae were dirty, noisy and unhealthy places to live.

Rich Romans lived in a domus

A domus was a very grand single storey building decorated with marble pillars, statues, plaster or mosaic walls and mosaic floors.

A domus was divided into two sections the antica, which was at the front and the postica, which was at the back.



Both sections were designed in the same way with small rooms leading off a large central area. The front door of the domus was at the end of a small passageway called the vestibulum.

A corridor called the fauces led from the front door to the central area of the antica which was called the atrium.

There was an opening in the centre of the atrium ceiling, beneath which there was a shallow pool called an impluvium to catch rainwater.

The bedroom (cubiculum), dining room (triclinium) and other general living rooms surrounded the atrium. The ala was an open room which had windows in the outside wall. There were two alae, found on each side of the atrium, and it is thought that their main function was to let light into the house.



The main reception room of the house was located between the antica and postica and was called the tablinum. It was separated from the atrium by a curtain which was often drawn back when the weather was warm. A door or screen separated the tablinum from the postica.

The main feature of the postica was the peristylum which could be reached by going through the tablinum or through an arched passageway called an andron. The peristylum did not have a roof and was the garden of the house. The Romans grew both herbs and flowers and when the weather was warm would often eat their meals here. The kitchen (cucina), bathroom and other bedrooms surrounded the peristylum. The exhedra was a large room used as a communal dining room or lounge during the summer months.