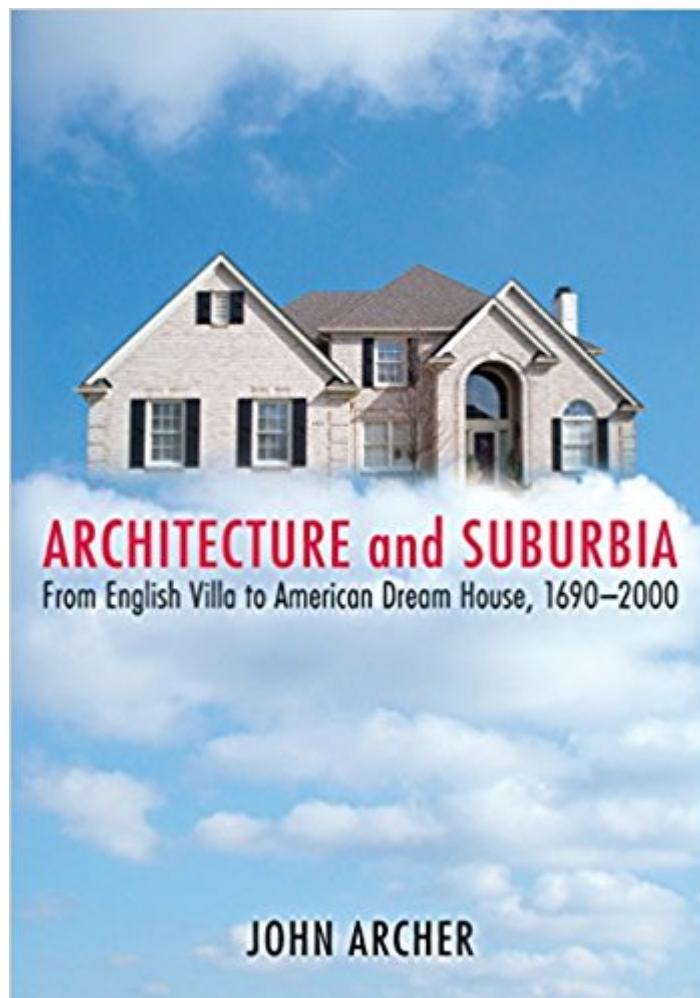




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# Architecture And Suburbia: From English Villa To American Dream House, 1690-2000



## Synopsis

The American suburban dream house—a single-family, detached dwelling, frequently clustered in tight rows and cul-de-sacs—has been attacked for some time as homogeneous and barren, yet the suburbs are home to half of the American population. Architectural historian John Archer suggests the endurance of the ideal house is deeply rooted in the notions of privacy, property, and selfhood that were introduced in late seventeenth-century England and became the foundation of the American nation and identity. • Spanning four centuries, *Architecture and Suburbia* explores phenomena ranging from household furnishings and routines to the proliferation of the dream house in parallel with Cold War politics. Beginning with John Locke, whose Enlightenment philosophy imagined individuals capable of self-fulfillment, Archer examines the eighteenth-century British bourgeois villa and the earliest London suburbs. He recounts how early American homeowners used houses to establish social status and how twentieth-century Americans continued to flock to single-family houses in the suburbs, encouraged by patriotism, fueled by consumerism, and resisting disdain by disaffected youths, designers, and intellectuals. Finally, he recognizes • “hybridized” • or increasingly diverse American suburbs as the dynamic basis for a strengthened social fabric. • From Enlightenment philosophy to rap lyrics, from the rise of a mercantile economy to discussions over neighborhoods, sprawl, and gated communities, Archer addresses the past, present, and future of the American dream house. • John Archer is professor of cultural studies and comparative literature at the University of Minnesota. His book *The Literature of British Domestic Architecture, 1715-1842*, is the standard reference on the subject, and he also contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Urban America* and the *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Architecture*.

## Book Information

Paperback: 496 pages

Publisher: Univ Of Minnesota Press (April 12, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816643040

ISBN-13: 978-0816643042

Product Dimensions: 7 x 1 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #515,152 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #219 in • Books > Arts &

Photography > Architecture > Regional #343 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Criticism](#) #633 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Buildings > Residential](#)

## Customer Reviews

"Archer shows that the creation and evolution of the suburban house and the suburban landscape raise the most profound issues of 'self, identity, gender, and relation to family and society.' . . .

Archer is both a compelling a theorist and an adventurous researcher." -Robert Fishman, University of Michigan --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Traces the evolution of the modern American dream house from seventeenth-century England to the present. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Archer puts suburbia into historical context, going back to before it was even known as this. Its beginnings were in the "nascent bourgeoisie...philosophical, economic, and political circumstances" of late seventeenth century England. Especially, the "new architectural type [of] the compact bourgeois villa" came to be seen as an ideal residence by the nascent bourgeois public. This architecture type allowed for a "new settlement pattern" different from the traditional ones of dense urban development and sprawling manors--namely, suburbia with its homes surrounded by lawns clustered in country-like areas. Along with laying out the cultural and philosophical origins of suburbia, including the developing concept of the self, Archer presents both sides of the assessment of suburbia. In modern-day America, where the majority of the population now live in suburbia, there has for many decades been an ongoing debate over whether suburbia is the acme of the American dream of prosperity and upward mobility or an illusion entailing the stifling of individuality and cultivation of materialism. Archer's book is substantive enough to be a text in college courses on suburban studies, while also being accessible and engaging enough as a timely work of cultural studies for the general reader. The author is a professor of cultural studies and comparative literature at the U. of Minnesota. With material ranging from Enlightenment English philosophy to portrayals of suburbia in recent movies, from architectural plans of the "compact bourgeois villa" to inventions such as lawnmowers and economic changes such as new banking practices associated with suburbia, the work demonstrates how fertile this subject is while bringing it into focus and drawing the avenues for further exploration of it.

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