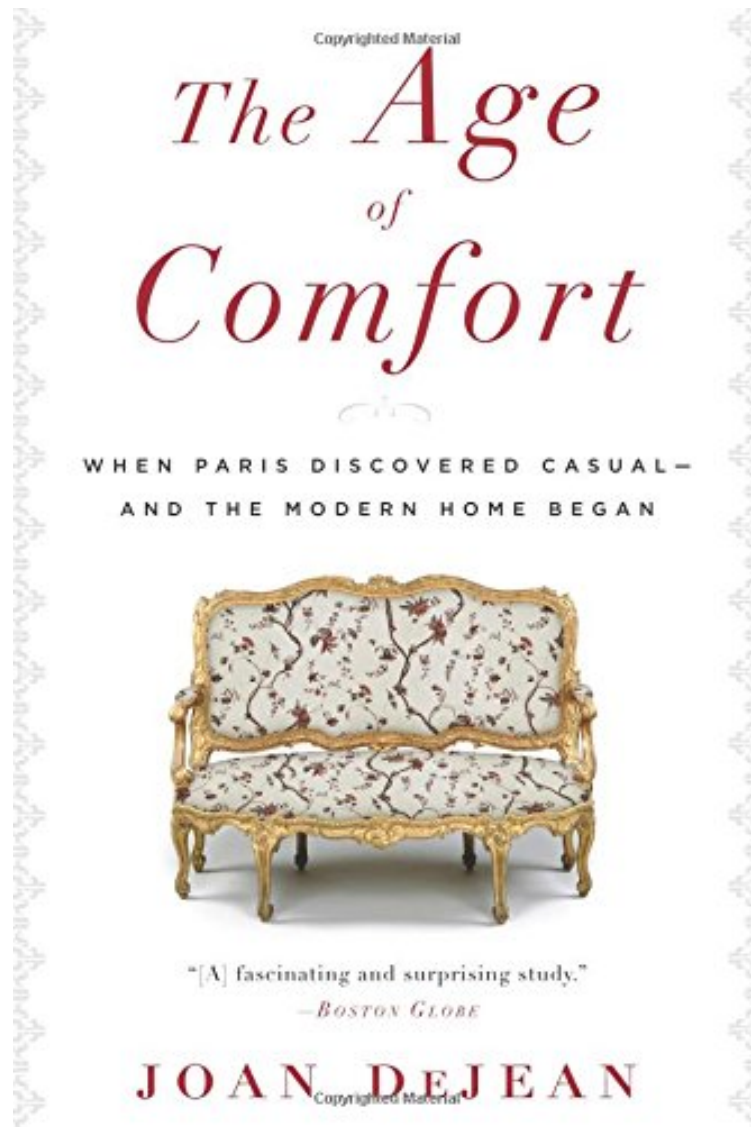


(Download) The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual--and the Modern Home Began

# The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual--and the Modern Home Began

Joan DeJean

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**Joan DeJean : The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual--and the Modern Home Began** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual--and the Modern Home Began:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Quite Boring. By New Yorker this is just barely ok. Absolutely boring presentation and writing. I thought it would be more personal -- about how people lived in their homes. Very

disappointed in this book. every chapter is devoted to one thing -- one chapter on flushing toilets, one chapter on chairs, one chapter on heat .. etc so there is no flow or connection from chapter to chapter. the writing is monotone. Some reviewers say it is like a lot of lecture notes put into a book -- I think it is more as if a series of college essays on this subject were collected and that makes it even more boring. I am interested in the subject and am still reading it but it is certainly not a page turner.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fun and informative  
By Mary A Fanelli  
This is an interesting and well-written book which pretty much illustrates that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The book shows how rich and famous set the standard for comfort and style which was slavishly followed by the wanna-bees before eventually trickling down to the masses and becoming objects of daily life. The author does a great job illustrating how the idea of something nobody absolutely needed- say, a sofa- became the reality of a sofa through trial and error. Then by genius marketing of the simple idea of comfort, with a little sexiness thrown in, turned a sofa into a must-have luxury item for the rich and famous. Thus we see how easily our society is shaped by consumerism today. Seems like we're genetically hard wired for it. It's a fun book, and informative. Any student of cultural anthropology or history would enjoy it.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. When sofas were regarded as untoward  
By M. A Newman  
How much is too much? Joan DeJean addresses these questions in her history of 17th and 18th century French architecture and design, "The Age of Comfort." The story begins at the grandiose court of Louis XIV. Essentially since the renaissance, rulers had been building bigger and less comfortable edifices. When news of the Florentine Renaissance reached the popes in Rome, they wanted much the same thing only bigger. When France discovered, under its late 15th century kings, the innovations of Italy (during wars with the Holy Roman Empire to gain control of it) they wanted the same thing. Buildings became bigger and more grand and at the same time less comfortable, harder to heat and more and more oppressive. Versailles was the crescendo of these attempts at royal grandeur making. It is very likely that during his lifetime Louis XIV never ate hot food in his life, the kitchens were so far removed from the dining room. While it set the standard for regal living quarters, every ruling house built something along its lines, Versailles with its uncomfortable furniture made out of silver, and its lack of comforts sent people in a radical new direction. The novel approach was to build and design for comfort and not just show. This meant houses with flush toilets, smaller easier to heat rooms and more effective chimneys, bathing. Furniture was to be upholstered instead of wood with no padding. The arm chair and the sensual sofa came into vogue. This desire for comfort by the courtiers of Versailles was seen as the thin edge of the wedge in terms of standards declining. Had not one of Louis's mistresses, the formidable Madame de Montespan, this 17th century comfort craze might have died on the vine. Montespan sponsored a generally loosening of standards, if not stays which appalled members of the old order. In their minds good courtiers reflected grandeur in cold rooms, uncomfortable clothing and never had the desire to sit down. While Louis indulged in such revolutionary behavior in private, he took a dim view of this slackening in what was viewed as "standards" and the dangerous innovations proposed by the new generation. Had Montespan not been the king's mistress, she surely would have been dismissed as a "communist" if not a fascist for her instance on bathrooms in lieu of urinating in the corners (the traditional approach). The comfort revolution received a shot in the arm with the death of Louis and the declaration of the regency under Phillip duc D'Orleans. He was the person who New Orleans was named after and as one might expect, a firm believer in all forms of comfort to the point of debauchery. The shift of court life to Paris during his time as regent created a vogue for building there that involved not only the aristocracy, but also the new commercial classes, empowered by the easy credit of John Law. The collapse of Law's financial schemes created both new rich and impoverished aristocrats (who got burned by the vagaries of the market). Under the new world of the regent, architecture took on a different character. Influenced by classical forms, it assumed a more human scale. Patronage was, probably for the first time, not just a product of the aristocracy. If one looks at the paintings of De Troy, which are largely genre paintings of bourgeois domestic life, these are quite different from the allegories that featured Louis XIV as a figure from Greek mythology. Probably the most amusing chapter deals with the invention of the sofa. Like comic books, radio, the internet, and chewing gum, the sofa was seen as a threat to public morals and a source of moral turpitude. Moralists would not have one of these new furniture inventions since artists tended to portray them as alters of seduction. While it was too early for a popular movement trying to ban them (one of the advantages of aristocracy is the lack of importance given over to paranoid ranters), members of the clergy predictably tried to limit their use. However, comfort by this point was here to stay, having acquired a new champion during the reign of Louis XV, the middle class born, Madame de Pompadour. Jefferson would later seek to import ideas of French comfort to his home in Virginia. This is a very entertaining book that shows how conveniences and attitudes evolved today that we take for granted. DeJean brings together a number of trends and attitudes to show how people came to take the idea of comfort not as a sinister movement, but as necessary to human happiness.

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.

From Publishers Weekly French cultural historian DeJean presents an entertaining account of how home life was virtually reinvented in Paris from 1670 to 1765 as sofas, running water and flush toilets appeared in modern residences: the city became a giant workshop in which inventions in the arts and crafts and innovative technologies were tried out. Louis XIV's and Louis XV's royal mistresses displayed a bold vision for integrating architecture, interior decor and fashion, thus influencing modern comfort. In private mansions, French architects subdivided interior space to allow for varying degrees of privacy. As bathing became a pleasurable, commonplace activity, tubs became more comfortable and were redesigned as decorative objects in their own right. Men fell in love with the superexpensive flush toilet; the sofa created by the architect Meissonnier attained instant celebrity status; and interior decoration became a subset of the new architecture of private life as Parisians discovered that domestic interiors should be the expression of their personal taste. DeJean's latest (after *The Essence of Style*) is well researched and brimming with anecdotes and architectural and design details. Illus., color insert, bw photos throughout. (Sept.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Many histories that chronicle the life of an idea make it sound as if change, like the weather, happened as the result of mysterious forces, affecting everyone but brought on by no one. This one gives us the vivid personalities who broke with convention by following their own whims You don't need to be a Francophile to read this book, but you will be one by the time you finish it. Holly Brubach, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine* In this fascinating and carefully researched volume (reminiscent of Fernand Braudel's *The Structures of Everyday Life*) DeJean considers the evolution of each room in the modern home. She looks at the effects of new objects on body language, family configurations and the larger community. This way of looking at history, moving outward from the particulars of everyday life, is particularly thrilling. Susan Salter Reynolds, *Los Angeles Times* In her fascinating, immensely readable new book historian Joan DeJean describes how the French court of the late 17th and early 18th century--and the small army of architects, and designers who attended to its needs--transformed the way we think about personal space and furniture One of these innovations, the fauteuil a coiffer, was an armchair with a heart-shaped back that allowed a woman to recline and place her hair in a basin for washing--and it was made specially for the Duchesse de Bourgogne, Louis XV's mother. No wonder a good haircut makes us feel just a little bit like royalty. Elizabeth Angell, *Allure.com* An entertaining account of how home life was virtually reinvented in Paris from 1670 to 1765 DeJean's latest is well researched and brimming with anecdotes and architectural and design details. Publishers Weekly This lively and engaging volume is a uniquely focused social history that will find broad appeal among scholars and casual historians alike. *Magazine Antiques online* Sounds like it might be just the book for those of us who are craving a good francophile read. My French Corner blog About the Author Joan DeJean is the author of nine books on French literature, history, and culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She is Trustee Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, where she has taught for eighteen years. She divides her time between Philadelphia and Paris.