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978-1-107-67506-3 - The Modern American House: Spaciousness and Middle-Class Identity

Sandy Isenstadt

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THE MODERN AMERICAN HOUSE

In *The Modern American House*, Sandy Isenstadt examines how architects, interior designers, and landscape designers worked to visually enhance spatial perception in middle-class houses. The desire for spaciousness reached its highest pitch where it was most lacking, in the small, single-family houses that came to be the cornerstone of middle-class life in the nineteenth century. In direct conflict with actual dimensions, spaciousness was linked to a tension unique to the middle class between spatial aspirations and financial limitations. Although rarely addressed in a sustained fashion by theorists and practitioners, Isenstadt argues that spaciousness was central to the development of modern American domestic architecture, with explicit strategies for perceiving space being pivotal to modern house design. Through professional endorsement, concern for visual space found its way into discussions of real estate and law. This book documents how over the course of a century the taste for visual space came to be internalized as a cultural value.

Sandy Isenstadt is assistant professor of art history at Yale University. A scholar of modern architecture, he has written on the work of Richard Neutra, Josep Lluís Sert, Leon Krier, and Rem Koolhaas. His work has been supported by the Center for Advanced Study of the Visual Arts (National Gallery of Art), the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Graham Foundation.

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Modern Architecture and Cultural Identity comprises monographic studies of important movements and buildings by European and American architects created roughly between 1850 and 1950. Unlike the first histories of modernism, which stressed the international aspects of modern architecture, recent scholarship has attempted to clarify the delicate balance achieved by architects working in a modernist idiom who maintained nonetheless a strong allegiance to their cultural roots. This series has been developed in response to this trend and will explore the complex interplay among modern identity and local, regional, national, and related cultural traditions.

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The universe is wider than our views of it.
Henry David Thoreau, 1854

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