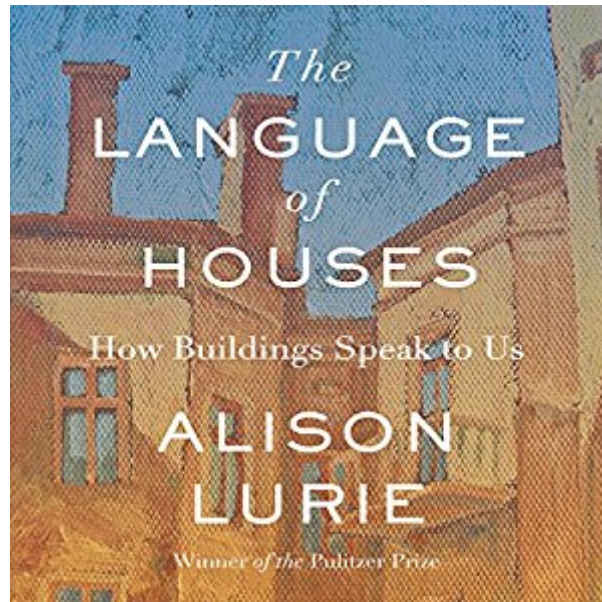


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# The Language Of Houses



## Synopsis

In the 1980's, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Alison Lurie wrote a meditation on clothing as an expression of history, social status and individual psychology. *The Language of Clothes* came to be highly regarded in the literature of couture and design. Lurie has returned with *The Language of Houses*, a provocative and entertaining journey through the architecture of houses and buildings and the divided spaces within come to reflect the attitudes and purposes of the organizations and people who inhabit them. What makes a house is in the eye of the beholder, and the word can mean anything from church to office to domicile and more and relies on the use of materials such as stone and wood and stucco and the roles of stairs and windows, tight interiors and open expanses. Structures under scrutiny include schools, churches, government buildings, museums, prisons, hospitals, restaurants, and of course, houses and homes. Filled with literary references from Kafka to Hawthorne and charming hand-drawings by Karen Chen, Lurie's new work is an essential and highly entertaining new contribution to the literature of buildings and architecture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Alison Lurie has written a book, "The Language of Houses", on a subject that nearly everyone has an opinion - the way we see both "personal" architecture (our homes) and "public" architecture (the other buildings we encounter in our lives). It is an interesting, if not a bit bland, look at architecture. I really think we all have reactions to the spaces we're in - either temporarily (a public building or another person's home) or more lengthy (our own homes). Mostly these feelings are transient - we

either like and feel comfortable in the space we're in...or we don't. And if we don't, we often try to leave as soon as possible. This was an important "jumping off point" for me when I began this book, and I read the entire book without receiving much in the way of that, despite the book's subtitle: "How Buildings Speak to Us". Ms Lurie does an excellent job at looking at the history of buildings and how they're constructed. She covers home styles as they've evolved from one room domains to modern homes with a room for everybody in the family. But she doesn't say much about how these homes affect the families that live within. I'm a compulsive viewer of house plans and love to consider how I could use the house as a home, while also thinking about how others could use it. Lurie writes a bit on how the modern home has moved from being filled with smallish rooms into designs with a lot of open spaces - the country kitchen, the second floor that opens up over the first floor, etc. She also examines how public buildings have evolved. Okay, one thing a decent reviewer of a book should NOT do is to bemoan what the author does NOT include in her book. And that's what I'm doing here. I would have loved for more opinions from Ms Lurie; I wanted some "spice". I'd have liked to see her flay those architects (and the committees who approved their designs) for buildings like Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin which is a completely unusable home for a museum. Now, again, that's MY - violent - opinion. Many people love that building. So Alison Lurie has written a very good book about this history of our buildings. It's interesting reading and can heartily recommend it to the reader who wants the facts without the opinions.

I found *The Language of Houses* fascinating. I'd never realized how many powerful or subtle messages can be conveyed by varieties of rooms, arrangements within them, and by the surrounding whole of the structure. I was especially taken with Ms. Lurie's repeated invoking of sociological and psychological issues relating to status, a factor of life we don't often talk of directly today in our supposed classless society. Ms. Lurie shows us that the environments we create speak truths we hesitate to admit in words. I have read all of Alison Lurie's novels and I find her clear and direct non-fiction style enlivened further with satisfyingly humorous asides to the reader. She presents her font of ideas and well-researched facts in as stimulating (or else soothing) a manner as descriptions of atmospheres, characters and characters' motives in her novels. *The Language of Houses* well met my standard of a good read in non-fiction: encouraging me to look at things around me in a new way, to think of things I hadn't before.

Much like Lurie's "Language of Clothes." Interesting ideas and fun to read. But not one of the best Lurie books.

Fascinating. points up how we build a home, city, village state so reflects our insides, and we may not know we are signaling who we really are.

sure gives a different look about houses yet I found it all true when looking at homes and buildings in my area

A long string of vapid, insipid glittering generalities, undermined by charged language. Save your money and avoid this embarrassment of meaningless froth.

This was a well liked gift for the person who received it.

Great gift!!

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