

*The Age
of
Comfort*



JOAN DEJEAN

Reading Guide:
The Age of Comfort:
***When Paris Discovered Casual –
and the Modern Home Began***
Joan DeJean (2009)

1. The author of this book is a professor and scholar of French material culture. Do you think this is evident in the way she presents her argument? Why or why not? What did you think of her writing style?
2. At the end of the book, DeJean sums up her argument by stating: "In the new rooms, surrounded by the beginnings of the world of modern convince, people had begun to feel newly comfortable in their bodies. All the creations of the age of comfort – from new kinds of furniture to new styles of dress – were shaped to suit this comfortable body." Based on the evidence she presents in the book, do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. The author notes that French designers, decorators, and architects were some of the first to publish their designs. Do you think that their availability was instrumental in the progress towards comfort and privacy that the French seemingly created in their eighteenth-century homes? What do you think the response would be in today's society if designs were made available to the public?
4. What do you think of the author's references to literature of the period and its references to comfort, privacy, and the interactions it created? What do you think of literature as a source?
5. DeJean frequently ties in examples from paintings referred to as *tableaux de mode*. Do you think this is helpful? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel the author realistically presented the progress of comfort and design in France in the eighteenth century?

About Joan DeJean

Joan DeJean has been Trustee Professor at the University of Pennsylvania since 1988. She has also taught at Princeton and at Yale. She is the author of nine books on French literature, history, and material culture of the 17th and 18th centuries. She splits her time between Paris and Philadelphia.

Other Books by Joan DeJean

- ***The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafés, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour***, Joan DeJean (2006) | A look at how France in the 17th century provided the grounding for the French to be at the epicenter of style.
- ***Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle***, Joan DeJean (1997) | A comparison between the 17th-century French culture wars and those of the 1990s.
- ***Fictions of Sappho, 1546-1937 (Women in Culture and Society)***, Joan DeJean (1989) | A history of the sexual politics of literary reception.
- ***How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City***, Joan DeJean (to be released March 2014) | Most people associate the signature characteristics of Paris with the 19th century. Through original research, Joan DeJean pushes that date back by two centuries, giving readers the just-blossoming city.

Other Related Texts

- ***The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness***, Virginia Postrel (2003) | From airport terminals decorated like Starbucks to the popularity of hair dye among teenage boys, one thing is clear: we have entered the Age of Aesthetics. Sensory appeals are everywhere, and they are intensifying, radically changing how Americans live and work.
- ***At Home: A Short History of Private Life***, Bill Bryson (2011) | With his signature wit, charm, and seemingly limitless knowledge, Bill Bryson takes us on a room-by-room tour through his own house, using each room as a jumping off point into the vast history of the domestic artifacts we take for granted.
- ***Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England***, Amanda Vickery (2010) | Amanda Vickery unlocks the homes of Georgian England to examine the lives of the people who lived there.
- ***If Walls Could Talk: An Intimate History of the Home***, Lucy Worsley (2012) | Lucy Worsley takes us through the bedroom, bathroom, living room, and kitchen, covering the architectural history of each room, but concentrating on what people actually did in bed, in the bath, at the table, and at the stove.