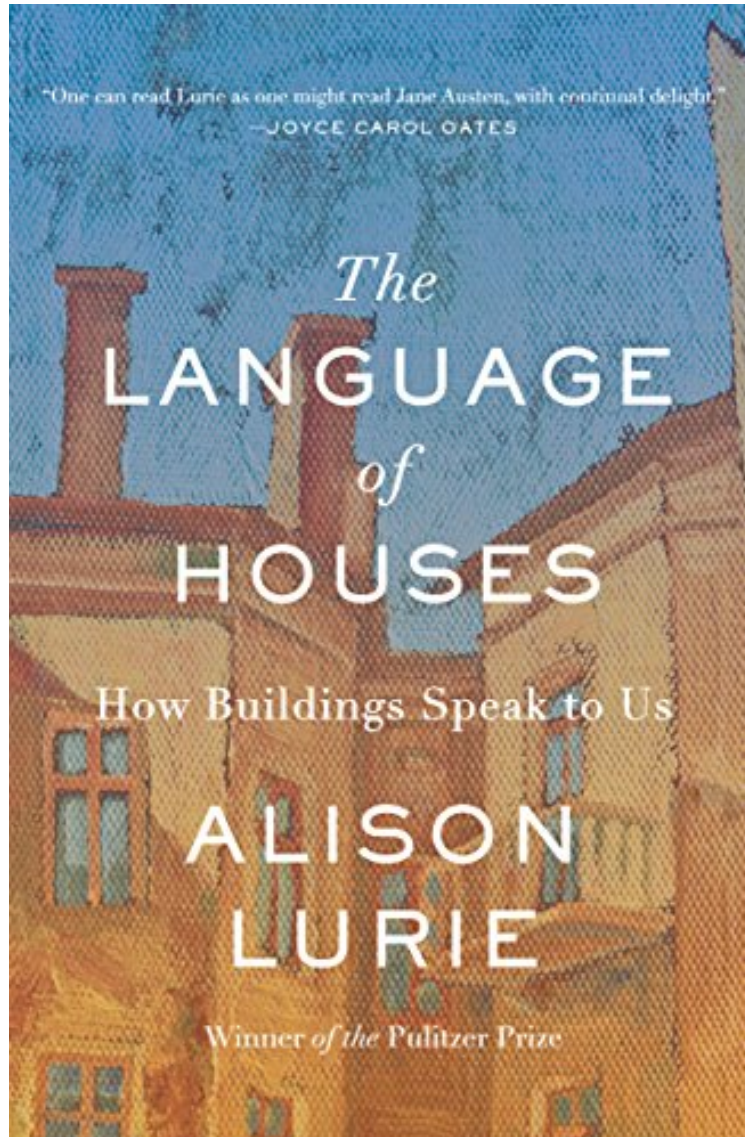


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## The Language of Houses: How Buildings Speak to Us

*Alison Lurie*

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**Alison Lurie : The Language of Houses: How Buildings Speak to Us** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Language of Houses: How Buildings Speak to Us*:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Facts, without opinions. By Jill Meyer 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. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A fascinating, eye-opening read. By Peter Agrafiotis 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 – 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. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. good read By Customer Much like Lurie's "Language of Clothes." Interesting ideas and fun to read. But not one of the best Lurie books.

In 1981, Alison Lurie published *The Language of Clothes*, a meditation on costume and fashion as an expression of history, social status and individual psychology. Amusing, enlightening and full of literary allusion, the book was highly praised and widely anthologized. Now Lurie has returned with a companion book, *The Language of Houses*, a lucid, provocative and entertaining look at how the architecture of buildings and the spaces within them both reflect and affect the people who inhabit them. Schools, churches, government buildings, museums, prisons, hospitals, restaurants, and of course, houses and apartments—all of them speak to human experience in vital and varied ways. *The Language of Houses* discusses historical and regional styles and the use of materials such as stone and wood and concrete, as well as contemplating the roles of stairs and mirrors, windows and doors, tiny rooms and cathedral-like expanses, illustrating its conclusions with illuminating literary references and the comments of experts in the field. Accompanied by lighthearted original drawings, *The Language of Houses* is an essential and highly entertaining new contribution to the literature of modern architecture.

"The Language of Houses.... makes a powerful argument that how we choose to order the space we live and work in reveals far more about us.... full of mischievous aperçus, and Ms. Lurie at her best is bracingly subversive.... a mine of adroit observation, uncovering apparently humdrum details to reveal their unexpected, and occasionally poignant, human meaning." (Wall Street Journal) "... A book meticulously packed with facts, paradoxes and observations. . . . a rich compendium of information, exploring how we inhabit our homes, our offices and our places of learning, leisure and worship, from every conceivable angle, in neatly organized chapters addressing each category of building." (Seattle Times) "Lurie maintains a light touch with such damning observations. . . One of the book's best chapters treats public high schools. . . its insights into our vanity, and capacity for almost negligent public construction, are ripe for the gleaning." (Boston Globe) "Allusions to the work of Charlotte Brontë, Tom Wolfe, Joyce Carol Oates and Michael Lewis... (Lurie) takes a broad look at the design of museums, residences, schools, prisons and restaurants — to name a few of the featured categories — and how they have evolved over time... "The Language of Houses" is light and breezy." (Washington Post) "The Language of Houses has every quality you would expect from a work by Alison Lurie: intelligence, authority, wit and charm." (Louis Begley) "Alison Lurie, in her lucid, jargon-free way, allows us to read what architecture is saying. She has culled the best ideas from a vast secondary literature and passed it all through the sieve of her brilliant mind." (Edmund White) "There's much to absorb in this sequel to Alison Lurie's *The Language of Clothes*, but *The Language of Houses* is an extraordinarily absorbing book—it wears its learning lightly, holding this reader's attention the way a fine novel does. I was particularly fascinated by the linked chapters on religious buildings and museums." (James McConkey) About the Author Alison Lurie (b. 1926) is a Pulitzer

Prize-winning author of fiction and nonfiction. Born in Chicago and raised in White Plains, New York, she joined the English department at Cornell University in 1970, where she taught courses on children's literature, among others. Her first novel, *Love and Friendship* (1962), is a story of romance and deception among the faculty of a snowbound New England college. It won favorable reviews and established her as a keen observer of love in academia. It was followed by the well-received *The Nowhere City* (1966) and *The War Between the Tates* (1974). In 1984, she published *Foreign Affairs*, her best-known novel, which traces the erotic entanglements of two American professors in England. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1985. In 1998, Lurie published *The Last Resort*. In addition to her novels, Lurie's interest in children's literature led to three collections of folk tales and two critical studies of the genre. Lurie officially retired from Cornell in 1998, but continues to teach and write. In 2012, she was awarded a two-year term as the official author of the state of New York. *The Language of Houses* (2014) is her most recent book. Lurie lives in Ithaca, New York, and is married to the writer Edward Hower. She has three grown sons and three grandchildren.