

Otium Made Manifest: An Examination of Private Suites in the Villa A at Oplontis

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**Otium Made Manifest: An Examination of Private Suites in the
Villa A at Oplontis**

by

Kansie Disney

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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in

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Otium Made Manifest: An Examination of Private Suites in the Villa A at Oplontis

here submitted by Kansie Disney in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
_____Masters of Arts_____

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Abstract

Scholars have long discussed that the villa was meant to be a place for the ideal Roman citizen to enjoy *otium*, or “educated leisure.” Villa architecture and design supports this known ideal. Beyond the Virtuvian outline of a Roman villa and its spaces, scholars such as Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, John R. Clarke, and Mantha Zarmakoupi have begun exploring more complicated and specific room relationships. Of particular interest are their studies of private cubiculum suites and *diaetae*. Using the cubiculum suites of Villa A at Oplontis as a major case study, this thesis aims to highlight a sense of differentiation and nuance on what the physical expression of *otium* means in terms of social interaction and relationships in Roman luxury villas. This analysis will demonstrate the way that suites in large luxury villas would provide an opportunity for *otium*, a concept simultaneously connected to and defining the ideal Roman citizen. While Clarke has defined certain cubiculum suites in Villa A, this thesis will focus on the former bath complex of Villa A (Rooms 8, 18, and 31), as another, previously unidentified addition to the corpus, as determined by the archaeological expression of *otium* at the time. As the archaeological evidence suggests, the bath complex was transformed into a reception space of a different function by 45 CE. This thesis analyzes this set of rooms considering private suite trends in the first centuries BCE and CE to help understand the phenomenon and further investigate the dynamic expression of *otium* in this villa and others like it.

Lay Summary

This thesis is an analysis of the rooms in the ancient Roman Villa A at Oplontis, near Pompeii, in modern day Torre Annunziata, Italy. Owned by a Roman elite, this luxury villa is the physical manifestation of leisure, full of fruitful gardens, fountains, wall paintings, marble statues, and even an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Using ancient texts and other case study villas as a guide, this thesis studies the private suites in Villa A which would act as more intimate reception spaces for guests and analyzes how they add to the overall experience of luxury in this villa.

For Shaniah Disney

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Introduction: *Otium* Made Manifest

Your baths which are full of sunshine all day, the dining-rooms for general or private use, the bedrooms for night or the day's *siesta* -- are you there and enjoying them all in turn, or are you as usual for ever being called away to look after your affairs? If you are there, you are a lucky man to be so happy... isn't it really time you handed over those tiresome petty duties to someone else and shut yourself up with your books in the complete peace and comfort of your retreat? This is what should be both *negotium* and *otium*, work and recreation, and should occupy your thoughts awake and asleep!¹

This is the praise that Pliny the Younger gives to his dear friend Caninus Rufus for having a home that is the perfect getaway. The house was located in Pliny's beloved hometown of Comum, and thus he remarks that the villa is the *deliciae* of them both.² This

¹ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 1.3, vol.1, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 7. "Negotium" and "Otium" are left untranslated by the author of this paper for emphasis.

² *Deliciae*: Latin for "delight" or "sweetheart;" Betty Radice, "Introduction" to *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, (London: Penguin Books, 1969) 21; Jacqueline M. Carlon, "You Can Go Home Again: Pliny the

letter is the first of many in his compendium, and thus it is also the first of many instances in which Pliny describes his longing to withdraw into *otium*, usually translated as “educated leisure.”³ Later, in *Epistula* 3.1, he goes on to describe the relaxed daily schedule of Titus Spiurrina, which includes a few walks, a bath, writing time, a nice evening banquet accompanied by *comoedi*,⁴ and so on. Pliny yearns for this lifestyle, being so busy with his duties in Rome, and notes that he is striving for it in his design for his own villas:

I always realize this when I am at Laurentum, reading and writing and finding time to take the exercise which keeps my mind fit for work. There is nothing there for me to say or hear said which I would afterwards regret, no one disturbs me with malicious gossip, and I have no one to blame --but myself -- when writing doesn't come easily. Hopes and fears do not worry me, and I am not bothered by idle talk; I share my thoughts with myself and my books. It is a good life and a genuine one, *otium* which is happy and honorable, more rewarding than almost any “*negotium*” can be. The sea and the shore are truly my private Helicon,⁵ an endless source of inspiration. You should take the first opportunity yourself to leave the din, the futile bustle and useless occupation of the city and devote yourself to literature or to *otium*... it is better...to have *otium* than to work at nothing.⁶

Being “occupied with nothingness” to Pliny does not mean to do nothing or be idle, but to be occupied with *otium*, which goes hand in hand with *studium*.⁷ To experience *otium* is to be in an active state, evidenced by the many leisurely activities with which Spiurrina occupies himself in *Ep.* 3.1. Pliny's villa, then, is designed to provide him with the opportunities to practice *otium* to his liking, to the maximum. His letters include remarks on architectural design to this end. Indeed, the descriptions are so tempting that many have tried to recreate

Younger Writes to Comum,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 61, no. 2 (2018): 58, accessed April 18, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48553802>.

³ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c.100 BCE-79 CE)* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013), 91; Jacqueline M. Carlon, “You Can Go Home Again: Pliny the Younger Writes to Comum,” in *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 2018, Vol. 61, No. 2, Oxford University Press, pgs. 56-65, page 58, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48553802>.

⁴ Actors in comedy.

⁵ Here Pliny uses the Greek μουσείον, displaying his Hellenistic knowledge. This desire to show one's education (particularly in Hellenistic culture) is a theme which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

⁶ Pliny *Ep.* 1.9. Volume 1, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 29. *Negotium*” and “*Otium*” are left untranslated by the author of this paper for emphasis.

⁷ The Latin word *studium* means “study.” Our contemporary idea of leisure may not see study as having anything to do with a leisurely time, but remember that the word “school,” comes from the Greek σχολή, meaning “leisure.” If anything, the leisure of being able to read and write was seen as the goal of working, which seems to be what Pliny is indicating as well: that his hard work for the emperor will one day turn into his retirement. As Aristotle says in his *Nicomedian Ethics*, “we are un-leisurely in order to have leisure.” For more on this, see Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), 26.

floor plans of his Laurentine villa, though most have found it challenging, if not impossible, to do so.⁸ In these remarks, Pliny relates that he desires to order his day around intellectual activities such as reading and writing, and these activities are “staged around” specific, curated architectural structures that allow him to achieve the best possible conditions for any circumstance. Indeed, he “presents his villas as ‘factories of literature’ where literary creation balances and justifies the luxurious life of *otium* in the countryside and gives a structure to his day.”⁹ In other words, Pliny demonstrates that *otium* is not just an abstract ideal, but a concept that can be demonstrated physically through architectural design.

Scholars agree that the villa was meant to be the physical manifestation of *otium*, and thus a place where a Roman citizen could go to express and enjoy that ideal. As illustrated by Pliny’s writing, villa architecture and design support this. Beyond the Virtuvian outline of a Roman villa, scholars such as Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, John R. Clarke, and Mantha Zarmakoupi have recently begun exploring more complicated room relationships. Of particular interest are their studies of private cubiculum suites and *diaetae*. *Diaetae* are room types that Pliny highlights in his writing on the villas of his esteemed colleagues, such as Caninus Rufus’ *suburbanum amoenissimum* in *Ep.1.3*,¹⁰ as well as his own villas, as described in *Ep.5.6*:

In this suite is a bedroom which no daylight, voice, nor sound can penetrate, and next to it an informal dining room where I can entertain my personal friends; it looks on to the small courtyard, a wing of the colonnade, and the view from the colonnade.¹¹ In this passage, Pliny indicates a room type which: (1) is adaptable to conditions such as light, heat and sound; (2) includes a personal dining room for select friends; and (3)

⁸ For examples, see Helen H. Tanzer, *The Villas of Pliny the Younger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 43-136.

⁹ Cf. Stanley E. Hoffer, “The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger,” *American Classical Studies* 43 (1999): 29-44; Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing For Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c.100 BCE-79 CE)* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 88-89

¹⁰ “The most ideal suburban home.”

¹¹ Pliny *Ep. 5.6.21-22*, vol I, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 345.

incorporates nature into its design through a courtyard and views beyond. All of these are elements which support a lifestyle of luxury and *otium*.

The architectural ideals which Pliny discusses were already in place a century before his birth. Suburban and countryside villas began to spring up as Rome expanded and simultaneously gained wealth and power, notably in a building boom along the Bay of Naples in the first century BCE.¹² Unlike houses within the city, these countryside villas tended to be larger in size, they incorporated working or farming elements, and they provided more opportunities for owners to both enjoy *otium* and offer it to others. By the time Pliny was writing his letters, then, these ideals for leisure had found their fully developed architectural forms within the villa.

An example of this kind of luxury can be found in a villa located in the area of ancient Oplontis, in modern day Torre Annunziata, close to both the city of Pompeii and the base of Mt. Vesuvius. Oplontis has been described as a suburb of Pompeii, perhaps not unlike the suburban area where Caninus Rufus' villa was located.¹³ Excavated from under the streets of Torre Annunziata lies what the ancient Roman villa known as Villa A, or the Villa of Poppaea, due to its potential connection to Nero's wife Poppaea: an amphora naming a slave of Poppea's family was found in the excavation.¹⁴ Villa A is a massive structure (Fig. 1), and has not been fully excavated, as the west wing of the villa is still under modern city streets and apartments.¹⁵

¹² Bettina Bergmann, "Art and Nature in the Villa at Oplontis," in T. McGinn, P. Carafa, Nancy de Grummond, Bettina Bergmann and Tina Najbjerg (eds), *Pompeian Brothels, Pompeii's Ancient History, Mirrors and Mysteries, Art and Nature at Oplontis, and The Herculaneum Basilica* (Portsmouth: Journal of Archaeology, 2002), 91.

¹³ Betty Radice, "Introduction" to *The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, (London: Penguin Books, 1969) 21; Ivo van der Graaff, et al. "Preliminary Notes on Two Seasons of Research at Oplontis B (2014-2015)," *The Journal of Fasti Online* (2016): 1. <http://eprints.bice.rm.cnr.it/15014/1/FOLDER-it-2016-362.pdf>; Jacqueline M. Carlon, "You Can Go Home Again: Pliny the Younger Writes to Comum," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 61, no. 2 (2018): 58, accessed April 18, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48553802>.

¹⁴ As lovely as it is to have a name to a home, there is no certainty that Villa A belonged to Poppea, and will be referred to as Villa A for the remainder of this essay. Elaine Gazda, "Villas on the Bay of Naples: The Ancient Setting of Oplontis," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 34.

¹⁵ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 45.

Yet, even without the west wing, it is clear that Villa A is a prime example of a Republican luxury villa built in the area in the first centuries BCE and CE, when the Roman elite would leave their work and city life in order to enjoy the sea, the sun, and the rich land of the Bay.¹⁶ Because the villa experienced several renovations from the first centuries BCE through CE before its final demise due to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, Villa A highlights the development of Roman luxury villas in this dynamic period in a rare and historically significant way. This is particularly true of the wall ornament, as the walls were redecorated over time, and thus allowing for study of a palimpsest of Second, Third and Fourth Style frescoes painted at different times and in different areas of the villa. We also have well-researched ancient landscaping information about the villa due to the work of Wilhemina Jahemski, who in the 1970s used plaster casts of roots, carbonized remains.¹⁷ All these factors make Villa A an ideal case study of Roman luxury villas and particularly the way that Roman ideals in terms of the concept of *otium* changed over this short time period.

In addition to all these factors, Villa A at Oplontis contains a few sets of rooms which Clarke and Zarmakoupi identify as “suites.” These suites are defined as a set of multiple, connected, intimate rooms designed specifically to add a heightened level of privacy, exclusivity, and therefore luxury, either to the owner’s experience, or to a visitor’s experience. Oftentimes, the suites will not be original to the villa’s construction but added to it in reconstruction before the turn of the millennium, transitioning from the first century BCE into the first century CE. In other words, suites were an architectural trend that was pursued around this time. This architectural design is precisely what Pliny wrote about, when he said: “In this suite is a bedroom which no daylight, voice, nor sound can penetrate, and

¹⁶ Bettina Bergmann, “Art and Nature in the Villa at Oplontis,” in T. McGinn, P. Carafa, Nancy de Grummond, Bettina Bergmann and Tina Najbjerb (eds), *Pompeian Brothels, Pompeii’s Ancient History, Mirrors and Mysteries, Art and Nature at Oplontis, and The Herculaneum Basilica* (Portsmouth: Journal of Archaeology, 2002), 91.

¹⁷ Bettina Bergmann, “Art and Nature in the Villa at Oplontis,” in T. McGinn, P. Carafa, Nancy de Grummond, Bettina Bergmann and Tina Najbjerb (eds), *Pompeian Brothels, Pompeii’s Ancient History, Mirrors and Mysteries, Art and Nature at Oplontis, and The Herculaneum Basilica* (Portsmouth: Journal of Archaeology, 2002) 93.

next to it an informal dining room where I can entertain my personal friends.”¹⁸ By observing the floor plan of Villa A, we can begin to see patterns of rooms attesting to this trend in architectural design: bedrooms *en suite* with dining rooms. It is found not only in Villa A at Oplontis, but in other villas throughout the Bay of Naples, such as the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii or the Villa San Marco in Stabiae which have “lifespans” which stretch from this specific period between the first centuries BCE and CE, during which private suites were constructed and added to villas. As will be discussed, suites can even appear in the grand *domus* in Pompeii, such as in the House of the Vettii: houses that were enlarged and filled with architectural aspects and decorative objects perhaps specifically in emulation of the larger contemporary aristocratic villas. By examining these suites, this thesis will suggest that there exist precise but subtle clues that indicate exactly what *otium* meant to the Romans within a villa’s physical design.

Arguably, there are more rooms in the Villa A at Oplontis which fit into the category of private reception suite than have been discussed in previous literature. In addition to Clarke’s defined cubiculum suites in Villa A,¹⁹ the former bath complex of Villa A (Rooms 8, 18, and 31) deserves attention, and will be highlighted in this paper as an expression of *otium* as its new designation as a suite (Fig.1). Archaeological evidence suggests that the bath complex was transformed into a reception space of a different function by 45 CE.²⁰ This thesis will focus on this series of rooms since closer study is required to understand the space as it was reconstructed in 45 CE. The 2018 Pompeii Archaeological Park’s guide for Villa A labels Rooms 8 and 18 as “*caldarium*,” or hot room, and “*tepidarium*,” or tepid room, and states that they were later transformed into regular sitting rooms.²¹ What is the art historical

¹⁸ Pliny *Ep.* 5.6.21, vol I, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 345.

¹⁹ John R. Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250 : Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1991) 13.

²⁰ Ivo van der Graaf, “Ten Seasons of Excavation at Oplontis (2006-2015),” in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 67.

²¹ “Guide to the Oplontis Excavation,” *Pompeii Archaeological Park*, 2018, 17-19; for bath complex rooms, see John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250:Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 13.

and archaeological support for this? Why was the complex remodeled, and what was it remodeled into? Thus, it is the objective of this paper to analyze this set of rooms considering private suite trends in the first centuries BCE to CE to understand its reconstruction and further investigate the villa's dynamic expression of *otium*, a formula that may then be applied to other similar structures.

While scholars have touched on the topic to highlight other aspects of villa architecture and design, villa suites have not thoroughly been expanded upon in and of themselves, with the exception perhaps of the work of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill.²² Therefore, using the cubiculum suites of Villa A at Oplontis as a major case study, this thesis aims to highlight and determine with a greater sense of differentiation and nuance what exactly the emphasis and physical expression of *otium* meant in terms of social interaction and relationships within Roman luxury villas, particularly as those expressions changed over time and became more formulaic. What did these suites provide visually, socially, and practically to elevate the expression of *otium*? These are the questions this thesis seeks to explore.

This thesis will be divided into three sections. The first chapter will include the definition of “suite” within an ancient Roman context and a review of past literature and the identification of suites in the Villa A at Oplontis. The second chapter will focus on Villa A at Oplontis as a major case study and will discuss the way that suites provided visual and physical opportunities for hospitality through subtle spatial control. It will also investigate the fluidity of the villa space itself, including the options it provided and its ability to adapt to changing seasons (seasonality). Lastly, the third chapter will consist of several case studies of “suite architecture” throughout the Campania region, to conclude with a discussion on the way that they are similar to and different from the proposed suites in Oplontis. Thus, the aim

²² See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Social Structure of the Roman House,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988): 89-94, accessed April 18, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40310883>; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, NJ : University Press, 1994), 54-59; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin*, edited by Annalisa Martano and Guy P.R. Metraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 71.

of this thesis is to demonstrate that the existence of suites as a trend in the first centuries BCE and CE is indeed evident, and that these unique spaces were designed to provide an elevated expression of *otium* both for guest and owner.

Chapter 1: Identifying Suites in Villa A

Defining “Suite”

What exactly is meant by “private suite trends” in the first centuries BCE to CE? We must first define privacy as the Romans understood it, as the Roman idea of privacy in the home was different from the modern perception. To explain this, we must examine the basic structure of a Roman domus. Vitruvius states that the general organization of a Roman domus was that the atrium, or the social heart of the house, was located at the front of the house.²³ It was a public space where anyone, invited or uninvited, could enter, particularly the patron’s clients whom he would then meet individually in the tablinum. The tablinum was the owner’s office or study, and it was typically situated on axis with the atrium and located between the atrium and the peristyle garden to the rear. The form of the traditional urban domus, as described by Vitruvius, lends itself to the daily *salutatio* and the social system of *clientela*.²⁴

However, Vitruvius notes a shift in the house layout in his time, where the floor plan in country-side villas is reversed, and the entering visitor was first met with a peristyle, then tablinum, and with the atrium at the back: “In town, the halls adjoin the entrance, in the country the peristyles of mansions built town-fashion come first, then the atria surrounded by paved colonnades overlooking the palestra and the promenades.”²⁵ Thus, the traditional evolution of the domus layout chronologically, as noted by Jens-Arne Dickman, is as follows.²⁶ First, the atrium becomes the central focus of the house, upon which all other

²³ John R. Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250 : Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1991) 2.

²⁴ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, NJ : University Press, 1994), 12.

²⁵ Vitruvius *De Arch.* 6.5.3-4, vol. 2, trans. Frank Granger (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962), 39.

²⁶ Referenced by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Rethinking the Roman Atrium House” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series* 22 (1997): 235; Jens-Arne Dickman, “The Peristyle and the Transformation of Domestic Space in Hellenistic Pompeii,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series* 22 (1997): 122-127.

rooms have primary access.²⁷ Later, peristyles are added which frame gardens, but only for the main purpose of walking, and they contain maybe one or two exedra/ae.²⁸ In its final evolution, as Vitruvius states, the peristyle becomes more central, and the atrium becomes less relevant.²⁹ Additionally, the tablinum becomes more open to views of the peristyle, with larger windows in the back wall.

These standard designs of a home could be observed in the richest of houses but also the humblest of houses: nearly every house of this time has the same spaces, reiterating a specific social significance in private architectural design.³⁰ Lawrence Richardson comments on this aspect: “Even the unpretentious house is a formal setting for the *salutatio* and the *cena*.”³¹ Participation and membership in Roman society was essential, and as Harriet Fertik notes, this “may go some way toward explaining why, excepting for scale, so many Roman houses and villas largely shared a common visual and cultural language.”³²

Returning to the Roman idea of privacy, then, this means that the front of the home was open to any and all visitors. In the morning, the front door of the home was opened and anyone, even someone without invitation, could enter into the atrium area. While most anyone could walk into the atrium, therefore, it was only by invitation of the owner that could someone enter a more specific or specialized room such as the cubiculum. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill notes, “one of the basic social requirements of Roman domestic architecture is that it distinguishes ‘common’ space accessible without invitation from ‘private’ space of

²⁷ Jens-Arne Dickman, “The Peristyle and the Transformation of Domestic Space in Hellenistic Pompeii,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 22* (1997): 122.

²⁸ Jens-Arne Dickman, “The Peristyle and the Transformation of Domestic Space in Hellenistic Pompeii,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 22* (1997): 123.

²⁹ Jens-Arne Dickman, “The Peristyle and the Transformation of Domestic Space in Hellenistic Pompeii,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 22* (1997): 127; cf. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Rethinking the Roman Atrium House” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 22* (1997): 235.

³⁰ Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux, “The Roman Villa: An Overview,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

³¹ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press) 154.

³² Harriet Fertik, *The Ruler’s House: Contesting Power and Privacy in Julio-Claudian Rome* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019) 108.

limited access; the structural distinction of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ rooms is likely to be socially significant.”³³ These private areas of the house were often separated from the rest of the house using doors, curtains, walls and halls which would make viewers aware of what they could access and see, and what they could not.³⁴

This desire for privacy is reflected in an increase in private spaces in villas around the first century BCE. One example may be the space Suetonius references in his biography of Augustus.³⁵ The “Syracuse” of Augustus has been described as a secret place with a view of the landscape below where even he could retreat from the world. While no scholar has yet determined with certainty the exact location of Augustus’ Syracuse, many rooms began to appear in imperial and luxury villas throughout Rome and in the Bay of Naples in the first century BCE. Suddenly, innovative spatial techniques were being used in domestic design to accommodate the new need for restricting visibility and/or public access, whether it be through rooms with a view of the landscape beyond, or sets of private rooms that were only accessible through narrow halls or multiple doorways, which ultimately changed the interior rhythm of the villa into something different than the traditional form.

The need for privacy and to “get away” goes hand in hand with the idea of *otium*, or educated leisure. The concept of *otium* pairs with *negotium*, or “business,” and the ideal Roman citizen would have balance between the two.³⁶ Thus, the concept of *otium* had been around for decades, but it started to become more relevant in a time when now even plebeians could buy large luxury real estates formerly owned exclusively by the aristocratic elite.³⁷

³³ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Development of the Campanian House,” in *The World of Pompeii*, ed. John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss (New York: Routledge 2007), 283.

³⁴ Harriet Fertik, *The Ruler’s House: Contesting Power and Privacy in Julio-Claudian Rome*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019) 107.

³⁵ Emily Gowers, “Augustus and Syracuse,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 100 (2010): 69-70.

³⁶ John D’Arms, *Romans on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970) 166.

³⁷ For *otium*, see Ivan Varriale, “Otium and Negotium - The Breakdown of a Boundary in the Imperial Villas: The Case Study of Pausilypon,” in *Borders: Terminologies, Ideologies, and Performances*, ed. Annette Weissenrieder (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 284; For plebeians buying real estate, see Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux, “The Roman Villa: An Overview,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 26.

While the urban *domus* was a place for business, the countryside villa was meant to be a place for mindful rest.³⁸ The importance of educated leisure is highlighted by Cicero in his letters, as John Bodel says: “Cicero’s principle contribution to the formation of the villa as a cultural ideal was to enshrine the literary form of the dialogue, the Roman’s preferred genre for philosophical, religious, and legal discussion, in a villa setting and thus to fix both the character and the location of honorable *otium* for his own and subsequent generations.”³⁹ Therefore, while the urban houses of Rome were meant for *negotium*, villas were buildings “in the country designed for [their owners’] enjoyment and relaxation,” as James Ackerman states. Therefore, as Cicero suggests in his letters, villas were physical manifestations of *otium*.⁴⁰ They were meant for luxury and leisure, for sophisticated gatherings of friends and conversation and intellectual activities, usually in addition to a practical farming aspect (even if on a small scale).⁴¹ It seems that in the first century BCE a “building-boom” occurred in the Bay of Naples to fulfill the need for this architectural domestic form, and through the first century CE more and more luxury villas were being constructed in that area, likely in imitation of the imperial luxury villas that were springing up in and around Rome. Certainly, these luxury villas were unmistakable signs of Roman social pressure,⁴² or of the need to “keep up with the neighbors.” Suddenly, the larger, richer houses featured more porticoes, peristyles, and cryptoporticoes, which offered walking opportunities⁴³ “to engage in intellectual discussions or to take a break from them.” As Zarmakoupi notes, the number of

³⁸ Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux, “The Roman Villa: An Overview,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 26.

³⁹ John Bodel, “Villaculture,” in *Roman Republican Villas: Architecture, Context, and Ideology*, ed. Jeffrey A. Becker and Nicola Terrenato (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 53.

⁴⁰ James Ackerman, “The Villa as Paradigm,” *Perspecta* 22 (1986): 11.

⁴¹ This farmwork, of course, wouldn’t be done by the owners but by their slaves. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux, “The Roman Villa: An Overview,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 26.

⁴² Annalisa Marzano and Guy P.R. Métraux, introduction to *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P. R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xxviii.

⁴³ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91.

walkways in villas such as the Villa Arianna A in Stabiae or the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum are telling examples of this trend.⁴⁴

Pliny the Younger writes later in the first century CE about his villas as “factories for literature,” where his daily schedule of intellectual reading and writing was supported by the architectural structures of the villa itself, particularly through the walkways of colonnades and the privacy of the cryptoporticus.⁴⁵ In fact, Pliny so desired to implement *otium* in his private life that his schedule would be changed and his location in the house moved to fit the perfect conditions depending on the time of day and, furthermore, the time of year. To accomplish something of this particularity, one requires many rooms and many walkways, and thus as Mantha Zarmakoupi writes, “It is possible that the trend of rebuilding and appropriating properties gave designers the opportunity to develop an architectural response to the owners’ evolving needs; and possible too that Pliny the Younger coined the term cryptoporticus to describe it.”⁴⁶ Indeed, as Zarmakoupi adds, the archaeological dating for construction of porticoes and cryptoporticoes suggests that those structures began to appear in the mid-first century BC and became very popular in the first century CE.⁴⁷

With changing needs, the typical atrium to tablinum with branching cubicula design of a traditional house did not cater to the needs to fulfill *otium*, and suddenly villas were showing more complex designs in order to give precise architectural form to the performance of *otium*, particularly in the design of private suites, the focus of this essay. Pliny the Younger writes about his own private suite in his villa: “In this suite is a bedroom which no daylight, voice, nor sound can penetrate, and next to it an informal dining room where I can entertain my personal friends; it looks on to the small courtyard, a wing of the colonnade, and

⁴⁴ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91.

⁴⁵ Pliny *Ep.* 1.3; Stanley E. Hoffer, “The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger,” *American Classical Studies* 43 (1999): 29-44; Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 88.

⁴⁶ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 93

⁴⁷ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 92.

the view from the colonnade.”⁴⁸ This quotation gives us the structure for a complex of rooms that may be observed more generally in the reconstructed villas of this period. Pliny here is not describing one single room, as the earlier example of Augustus’ Syracuse, but now, a private room which branches off an “informal dining room,” which itself branches off a small courtyard with a colonnade. This is the general format of *diaetae* (as labeled by Pliny) which Wallace-Hadrill, Clarke and Zarmakoupi have referenced in their writings. It is also the foundation of the definition of “private suite” as will be defined and discussed in this thesis.

Different scholars have had their own approach and goal in studying the evolution of suites, in the past. While Wallace-Hadrill has always been interested in the development of a peristyle-focused culture in Late Republican Rome, he directly articulates the idea of suites in luxury villas most recently in his 2018 article, “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality.”⁴⁹ In this article, he briefly examines the Villa of the Mysteries, the Villa of the Papyri, the Villa of Adrianna in Stabiae, and the villa at Settefinestre. After discussing the floor plans of these villas, Wallace-Hadrill concludes that all four examples have “suites” of the same design: clusters of rooms that extend either from the core of the atrium or the newer peristyle, “reinterpreted as the center from which rooms or sets of rooms diverged but to which they also returned in a centrifugal and centripetal disposition.”⁵⁰ Wallace-Hadrill, however, does not specify distinct uses of those rooms individually. Instead, he focuses on where the rooms of a suite would be located, from a social interaction perspective. He determined this would be either off the atrium, or off the peristyle, the most public areas of the house, as he theorizes that these suites were intended

⁴⁸ Pliny *Ep.* 5.6. Volume 1, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 345.

⁴⁹ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin*, edited by Annalisa Martano and Guy P.R. Metraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 63-74.

⁵⁰ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin*, edited by Annalisa Martano and Guy P.R. Metraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 71. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has written on the concept of private suites much earlier than this. For reference, see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “The Social Structure of the Roman House,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988): 89-94, accessed April 18, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40310883>; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, NJ : University Press, 1994), 54-59.

for the reception of guests who could directly pass from the frontmost public area of the house to their own intimate and private space.⁵¹ Thus, Wallace-Hadrill focuses his examination of suites in only this area of the house, positing that it is here that a host would best receive his guests.⁵²

Zarmakoupi, on the other hand, remains closer to Pliny and defines a *diaetae* as “designated nuclei of two or three rooms for daytime (as opposed to nighttime), of which one might be a triclinium.”⁵³ She goes on to ascertain that the main design concern of these groupings was to “perfect their seasonal and spatial qualities and to ensure their view of the landscape.”⁵⁴ Rather than focus on location in a house (as Wallace-Hadrill does), Zarmakoupi narrows in with her definition on the number of rooms included, as well as the potential identification of a room: “one might be a triclinium.” Zarmakoupi gives a plethora of examples in luxury villas around the Bay of Naples in her book *Designing for Luxury of the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes*, and some of these will be observed in Chapter 3.

John Clarke, the head of the Oplontis Project for the study of Villa A, also attempts to define a suite, but gives many different categories, most of which usually branch off the peristyle:⁵⁵

1. The private bath suite complex
2. *Cubicula Diurna*, or “intimate rooms for daytime lounging and reading” which often branch off the peristyle
3. Semicircular or rectangular apses which often branch off the peristyle

⁵¹ See Chapter 2, *Hospitality and Xenia*) Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in Annalisa Marzono and Guy P.R. Metraux (eds) *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) 71.

⁵² In other words, private suites branch off of more social sectors of the house.

⁵³ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014) 191.

⁵⁴ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014) 191.

⁵⁵ John R. Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250 : Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 13.

4. *Diaetae*, which Clarke defines as singular rooms with a view
5. The cubiculum suite, which is composed of a cubiculum with two alcoves connected to an *oecus*

In his definition of “cubiculum suite,” Clarke identifies specific rooms (cubiculum and oecus) that perform in the way that Wallace-Hadrill hypothesized: to act as a reception space that was more intimate.⁵⁶ However, Zarmakoupi groups this kind of *en suite* complex with *diaetae*, as the focus of her study is villa interaction with the environment rather than form, while Clarke separately defines a *diaeta* as a single room with a grand view. While scholars have explored the topic of suites from different angles, what most seem to agree on is that there was a definite design trend in villas observable in the first century BCE in the form of a suite, or subgroup of rooms. By combining the above scholars’ definitions into one, maintaining their commonalities, and advocating what Clarke defines as “cubiculum suite,” we can obtain a general formula for what this kind of “suite” might consist of and where it might be located:

1. One triclinium (or an oecus which function as a triclinium): sometimes two
2. One or more cubiculum/a
3. Branching off either the atrium or a colonnaded peristyle

This is the general layout of rooms that will be observed in this thesis, as it does justice to the definitions of past scholars, but also reflects exactly on the ancient description mentioned above that Pliny gave in his letters: “In this suite is *a bedroom* which no daylight, voice, nor sound can penetrate, and next to it *an informal dining room* where I can entertain my personal friends; it looks on to the *small courtyard, a wing of the colonnade, and the view*

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2, *Hospitality and Xenia*; John R. Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250 : Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 13.

*from the colonnade.*⁵⁷ In earlier villas, the suites could branch off of the atrium, while in later ones they could branch off of the peristyle, depending on what had more social relevance at the time. Again, these suites will consist of one oecus/triclinium and one or more cubiculum/a, often creating a spiral that folds into itself, or has some level of distinct separation from the rest of the villa, whether that be by having a narrow hall that leads into the complex, or having a room that must be entered before entering the private bedroom, or sometimes both. Often, the cubacula are elaborately decorated with special alcoves for the beds, or a barrel-vaulted ceiling, which will be seen in the examples provided in Chapter 2.⁵⁸

The Suites of Villa A

With this foundation established, this section consists of what I have identified as private suites in Villa A at Oplontis. To start, there appears to be suites branching off the atrium in Villa A at Oplontis, all of which are labeled in Figure 2. On the southeastern side of the atrium, portico 24 leads from oecus 23 to cubiculum 25 to cubiculum 38, to cubiculum 41. Cubiculum 41, like the cubacula in the suites in the Villa of the Mysteries, has a double alcove form, being able to hold two beds (compare Figs. 3 and 4): the markings are distinct on the floor (see Fig. 4). Room 23 acts as a larger meeting point for the smaller cubacula 25, 38, and 41, while the entire wing of these rooms acts as its own private and separate entity from the rest of the villa, as according to the definition of suite. This suite has distinct separation from the atrium by a corridor that opens to portico 24 (which is neither strictly an open portico nor a completely closed cryptoporticus), with doorways in between the engaged columns of the outer walls, which gives the suite a sense of private view (Fig. 5).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Emphasis added. Pliny Ep. 5.6.21. Volume 1, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 345.

⁵⁸ The barrel-vaulted ceilings are most characteristically Roman. See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, NJ : University Press, 1994), 22.

⁵⁹ This relationship of private vs. public and spatial control in Villa A will be discussed in Chapter 2.

This suite is mirrored on the opposite side of the atrium by a suite which Clarke uses as a case study example for a cubiculum suite in *The Houses of Roman Italy* (Fig. 6 and 7, cf. Fig. 2).⁶⁰ There on the southwestern side of the atrium, Portico 13 leads one to Rooms 11, and 12 with Room 11 again being of the same form as the cubicula in the Villa of the Mysteries (Fig. 3),⁶¹ and able to hold two beds with two alcoves. Rooms 11 and 12 lead to Triclinium 14, which is repainted in Second Style like Oecus 23 on the opposite side of the atrium. The peristyle garden outside of this suite is only partially excavated, but the suite is framed by Portico 13, which, as far as the current excavations show, ends with Oecus 15, which would have been framed with a set of doors and windows.⁶²

Parallel to this suite on the northern side of the villa is the former bath complex accessible only via the suite south of it or by the narrow hallway 6 running down the main axis of the villa's core (cf. Fig 2). Unfortunately, Room 31 is only partially excavated, and everything to the west of the miniature courtyard Room 16 has yet to be unveiled. Excavations in 2024-25 may uncover the rest of this zone, but some observations may still be made about this complex within this villa. It can be argued that the former bath complex was repurposed into a similar kind of reception suite as the suite just south of it, with Oecus 15 shared by the two (cf. Fig 2). Rooms 17 and 18 are the smaller rooms: Room 17 was certainly a cubiculum with a large window view of the garden as indicated by the floor mosaic and also by its reflection across Oecus 21 in Room 30, which is a room set up in the same manner

⁶⁰ John R. Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 134-135. It should be noted that John Clarke labels Room 12 as an oecus pairing with Room 11, the cubiculum, to form a cubiculum suite. I argue that these rooms both act as bedrooms, with either Room 12 being an antechamber to Room 11, or with both being a type of bedroom, and that the triclinium 14 and/or room 15 acts as the corresponding oeci to this suite. This relationship pairs well with the suite on the opposing side of the atrium, with Room 23 acting as the oecus to the bedrooms of rooms 25, 38, and 41.

⁶¹ John R. Clarke. *The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 119.

⁶² Evan Proudfoot, "Furnishing Luxury and Comfort in the Villa A ('di Poppea') at Oplontis." In *Framing Interactions: Approaches to Coexistence in the Houses of Roman Pompeii*. Poster presented at the 11th Roman Archaeology Conference and the 24th Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, University of Reading, UK, 27-30 March 2014; Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Shaping Roman Landscape: Ecocritical Approaches to Architecture and Wall Painting in Early Imperial Italy* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2023) 63-64.

(Fig. 8-11). Room 31 seems to be a larger room, as indicated by the threshold mosaic and the floor pattern (Fig. 12 and 13), perhaps functioning as another oecus or a triclinium. But, Room 8 could also function as a triclinium with the walls repainted in the Third Style by Fourth Style painters and a niche in the back for the host's kline bed clearly marked out in the floor mosaic (Fig. 14 and 15).⁶³ Some sort of bench or bed must have been in the alcove as that is the only way to truly be able to appreciate the delicate wall painting details on the ceiling of that alcove (Fig. 16-19). Throughout this essay, this set of rooms of the former bath complex will be considered in relationship with the other private suites of the villa, especially in consideration of hospitality and seasonality (cf. Chapter 2).

Additionally, it should be noted that there seems to be a different type of suite that functions distinctly from the established definition, branching from the eastern porticoes of the villa. Zarmakoupi states that Rooms 64/65, 69, and 73/74 on the eastern wing would have been fit to entertain a large number of guests for dinner banquets (cf. Fig 1).⁶⁴ Indeed, if Room 69 was the main venue for entertainment, 64/65 and 73/74 could contain the extra guests, or provide a space for more intimate, but still large gatherings. Notice, however, if one were to walk to the end of Portico 60 there is a uniquely-shaped set of day-rooms: Rooms 66, 77, 78 and 79 make up a kind of suite that is unlike the established definition, as it is a bit more separate from the main dining area. In order to reach the spaces more suitable for sleeping in the eastern side of Villa A, one had to walk from the dining rooms through Portico 60. On the northern side of Portico 60, Rooms 93, 94, 95 and 97 mirror the suite formed by the southern Rooms 66, 77, 78 and 79 (cf. Figs. 1 and 2).⁶⁵ By being slightly

⁶³ Regina Gee, "Layered Histories: The Wall Painting Styles and Painters of Villa A." In *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016) pages 85-95. Page 91.

⁶⁴ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014) 192.

⁶⁵ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014) 194.

distant, these suites have a greater sense of intimacy to them, not unlike what Pliny describes in his letters:

At the head of the terrace and portico successively is a garden suite of rooms, my favourite spot and well worthy of being so. I had them built myself. In this is a sunny chamber which commands the terrace on one side, the sea on another, and the sun on both; besides an apartment which looks on the portico through folding doors and on the sea through a window. In the middle of the wall is a neat recess, which by means of glazed windows and curtains can either be thrown into the adjoining room or be cut off from it. It holds a couch and two easy-chairs, and as you lie on the couch you have the sea at your feet, the villa at your back, and the woods at your head, and all these views may be looked at separately from each window or blended into one prospect. Adjoining is a chamber for passing the night in or taking a nap, and unless the windows are open, you do not hear a sound either of your slaves talking, or the murmur of the sea, or the raging of the storms; nor do you see the flashes of the lightning or know that it is day. This deep seclusion and remoteness is due to the fact that an intervening passage separates the wall of the chamber from that of the garden, and so all the sound is dissipated in the empty space between. A very small heating apparatus has been fitted to the room, which, by means of a narrow trap-door, either diffuses or retains the hot air as may be required. Adjoining it is an ante-room and a chamber projected towards the sun, which the latter room catches immediately upon his rising, and retains his rays beyond mid-day though they fall aslant upon it. When I betake myself into this sitting-room, I seem to be quite away even from my villa, and I find it delightful to sit there, especially during the Saturnalia, when all the rest of the house rings with the merriment and shouts of the festival-makers; for then I do not interfere with their amusements, and they do not distract me from my studies.⁶⁶

In this passage, Pliny paints a picture of a set of rooms not unlike the suites in the east wing of Villa A. He emphasizes that he “had them built [him]self,” demonstrating the role of curation which a villa owner has in choosing its design. Pliny writes that one room has a recess in the wall to hold a couch and chairs with a perfect view of the portico and sea through the window, a design that can be seen in Room 78, which also had a recess in the wall for a bed and windows for viewing the portico and the pool beyond (Fig.1). Pliny also writes that these rooms have an added element of seclusion since one must walk down a passage that separates the chamber from the rest of the villa to reach it. As mentioned earlier, this added seclusion is present in the suites on the east wing of Villa A as well, with Room 78, for example, being at the very end of Portico 60. Without a doubt, these suites on the

⁶⁶ Pliny *Ep.* 2.17, trans. J.B.Firth (1900) - a few words and phrases have been modified, <https://www.attalus.org/old/pliny2.html>.

east wing of Villa A have a different atmosphere than the ones branching off the atrium. Therefore, while certainly creating the opportunity for *otium*, private suites added a sense of differentiation and nuance in design. Using the determined suites in Villa A at Oplontis as a guide and case study, precisely what that emphasis of *otium* means in terms of social interaction in a villa space will be observed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: The Visual Display of Hospitality, Luxury and Seasonality - How Suites Provided Opportunities for Otium

As society's needs change, so does architectural design, especially in domestic space. Open floor plans in home kitchens, for instance, as we know them in the twenty-first century, are only at this point four decades old, as a reaction to prior interior design with closed off kitchens which were considered messy and for work only.⁶⁷ In the late twentieth century, the kitchen opened to the rest of the home. In the modern day, the kitchen has become a more social space, joined to the dining room and living room so one can socialize and relax while cooking and working. While one must be cautious in trying to directly apply contemporary ideas to ancient thought, the universal reality that social change correlates to architectural and interior design changes is a concept that cannot be ignored. This is exactly why, in the first century BCE, elite Romans began to reconsider traditional urban design methods, and become more experimental in their own grand villa designs. Some common social trends can be observed. What is it then that made the idea of private suites so appealing to a first century BCE elite Roman?

Hospitality and Xenia

In terms of determining the social intentions that inspired this specific design of suites in the first century BCE, Wallace-Hadrill quotes Vitruvius and turns to Greek traditions in hospitality.⁶⁸ Vitruvius describes the "Greek house" fondly, as follows:

⁶⁷ Jerzy Charytonowicz and Dzoana Latala, "Evolution of Domestic Kitchen" (paper presented at Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction. Context Diversity - 6th International Conference, UAHCI 2011, Held as Part of HCI International 2011, Orlando, FL, USA, July 9-14, 2011, Proceedings, Part III), 10.1007/978-3-642-21666-4_38.

⁶⁸ In terms of determining the social intentions that inspired this specific design of suites in the 1st century BCE, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill quotes Vitruvius and turns to Greek traditions in hospitality. Vitruvius describes the "Greek house" fondly, as follows:

Moreover, on the right and left lodges are situated with their own entrances, dining-rooms and bedrooms, so that guests on their arrival may be received into the guest-houses and not in the peristyles. For when the Greeks were more luxurious and in circumstances more opulent, they provided for visitors on their arrival, dining-rooms, bedrooms, and store-rooms with supplies. On the first day they invited them to dinner; afterwards they sent poultry, eggs, vegetables, fruit, and other country produce. Therefore painters, when they portrayed what was sent to guests, called them *xenia*. Thus the heads of families in a guest-house do not seem to be away from home with they enjoy private generosity in the visitors' quarters.⁶⁹

It should be noted that the upsurge of Roman luxury villas starting in the first century BCE may be correlated to the Roman conquest of Greece in the century prior. When Greece became a part of the Roman Empire, the Roman elite began to incorporate Greek artistic vocabulary and philosophies into their lifestyles, and particularly into their architectural designs.⁷⁰ Even before the conquest of Greece, Hellenistic culture acted as a common language in the Mediterranean.⁷¹ The building of luxurious villas, as Zarmakoupi writes, “enabled their owners to participate in the social and political maneuvering of the period and served to satisfy their desire for political power and social advancement.”⁷²

Indeed, it is in the above passage that Vitruvius exhorts his Roman audience to use the Greek format of design and *hospitalia* in their own villa designs.⁷³ In fact, the Roman idea of *hospitium* was a relationship of equality, a standard of living that was expected to be had, even expanding into how one treats strangers.⁷⁴ It was of utmost importance to the Romans to entertain guests properly. Vitruvius wrote that it was the *duty* of a nobleman to provide

⁶⁹ Vitruvius *De Arch.* 6.7, vol. 2, trans. Frank Granger (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962), 49. “*Xenia*” was left untranslated by the author of this paper for emphasis.

⁷⁰ Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Light Design Concepts in Roman Luxury Villa Architecture,” in *Licht-Konzepte in der vormodernen Architektur. Internationales Kolloquium in Berlin vom 26. Februar - 1. März 2009 veranstaltet vom Architekturreferat des DAI* (Regensburg: Schnell and Steiner, 2011) 158. [file:///C:/Users/disne/Downloads/Light design concepts in Roman luxury villa architecture.pdf](file:///C:/Users/disne/Downloads/Light%20design%20concepts%20in%20Roman%20luxury%20villa%20architecture.pdf).

⁷¹ Filippo Coarelli, *Rome and Environs: An Archaeological Guide*, trans. James J. Clauss and Daniel P. Harmon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) 531; Judith Barringer *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Greece* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014), 349; Mark Fullerton, *Greek Sculpture* (Newark : John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 475, 477.

⁷² Katherine Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43; Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Shaping Roman Landscape: Ecocritical Approaches to Architecture and Wall Painting in Early Imperial Italy*, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2023), 42.

⁷³ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in Annalisa Marzono and Guy P.R. Metraux (eds) *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) 71.

⁷⁴ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in Annalisa Marzono and Guy P.R. Metraux (eds) *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) 72.

sufficient space and peristyles for their guests, in a similar manner to public space in the city.⁷⁵ Therefore, features such as columned porticoes were ideal, as they reflect the *luxuria* of the columned Greek gymnasiums and palaestrae about which Cicero wrote extensively in his letters to Atticus.⁷⁶ As mentioned earlier, the Roman conquest of Greece influenced architectural design in the first century BCE, and by the first century CE, Greek ideals were starting to be written about by men like Vitruvius and Cicero, especially in regards to the Greek ideal of educated leisure (*otium*). This well-roundedness is a Roman ideal, best described by the Greek word *paideia*, translated as “culture,” in English, and said to be best translated to “*humanitas*” in Latin, relating to the humanities, with which the Roman elite would have been familiar.⁷⁷ Jaś Elsner, while warning of the potential to fit *paideia* into our modern culture and ideals, describes *paideia* specifically for the ancient Romans as a “cultural assumption for ancient literature, history and the social relations of the elite”.⁷⁸ By walling up rooms into several rooms that were smaller in size, villa owners were naturally able to have more space for their guests which acted as the guests’ own private space (“since they enjoy this secluded generosity in their guest quarters.”).⁷⁹ Vitruvius also highlights that these guest quarters had their own distinct entrances, triclinia and comfortable cubicula.

This style of guest quarters is exactly what can be seen, as Wallace-Hadrill points out, in villas such as the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, which went through two phases of modification over time.⁸⁰ Originally, the atrium had access to four branching rooms/suites via

⁷⁵ Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Light Design Concepts in Roman Luxury Villa Architecture,” in *Licht-Konzepte in der vormodernen Architektur. Internationales Kolloquium in Berlin vom 26. Februar - 1. März 2009 veranstaltet vom Architekturreferat des DAI* (Regensburg: Schnell and Steiner, 2011), 159.

⁷⁶ Mantha Zarmakoupi, “Landscape at the “Villa of Poppaea” (Villa A) at Torre Annunziata,” in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. Annalisa Marzano and Guy P.R. Métraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 87-8.

⁷⁷ Jaś Elsner, “Paideia: Ancient Concept and Modern Reception,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 20, no. 4 (2013): 136-7; 148, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12138-013-0332-9.pdf?pdf=button>.

⁷⁸ Jaś Elsner, “Paideia: Ancient Concept and Modern Reception,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 20, no. 4 (2013): 136-7; 148, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12138-013-0332-9.pdf?pdf=button>.

⁷⁹ See also: Pliny Ep. 2.17

⁸⁰ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. “The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality,” in Annalisa Marzano and Guy P.R. Métraux (eds) *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 66.

four doors (Fig. 20). However, the atrium as it stands today shows clear traces of a secondary phase in which these doors were walled off from the atrium, and extra walls were added to the rooms/suites themselves, which could now only be accessed by going around the atrium through porticoed hallways (Fig. 21). This created an extra sense of privacy and visual separation from the main atrium which led Andrew Wallace-Hadrill to conclude that these rooms were used for hosting guests. The level of luxury would have been elevated by the framed views from the rooms which looked out to a view of the sea (Fig. 22).⁸¹

A similar design pattern occurs within Villa A at Oplontis. Not only are the identified suites of the same form (cf. Fig. 2), but in working with the excavations at Villa A, Carlo Malandrino notes that during the villa's reconstruction period around 45 CE, Room 12 had been opened to connect to Room 11, perhaps with the intention of acting as that cubiculum's antechamber.⁸² The same reconstruction occurred in the suite across the atrium, specifically the joining of Rooms 26 and 27. Room 25 was also found in the process of being divided up at that time, with half-timbered partitions. As mentioned in the Introduction, Room 8 of the bath suite was no longer being used as a caldarium by the 45 CE reconstructions and was turned into a reception space of some kind. This is partially discernable because of the stages of development of the walls of the room given by Malandrino: at some point in time, an apse was added to the western wall of Room 8, narrowing the walkway in the courtyard next to it (Fig. 23).⁸³ However, sometime later the apse was walled up, and a doorway was opened through it, giving Room 8 a larger door which connected it to the small courtyard outside and provided a nice view of the fountain from the niche on the eastern end of the Room.⁸⁴ These spaces in Villa A, as with the Villa of the Mysteries, were likely being remodeled and divided

⁸¹ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality," in Annalisa Marzono and Guy P.R. Metraux (eds) *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin: Late Republic to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 65.

⁸² Carlo Malandrino, *Oplontis* (Napoli : Loffredo Editore, 1980), 72; for Villa A's reconstruction, see Ivo van der Graaf, "Ten Seasons of Excavation at Oplontis (2006-2015)," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 79.

⁸³ Carlo Malandrino, *Oplontis* (Napoli : Loffredo Editore, 1980), 72.

⁸⁴ Carlo Malandrino, *Oplontis* (Napoli : Loffredo Editore, 1980), 72.

up for the purposes of creating the kind of spaces which Vitruvius and Pliny describe, in order that the elite Roman owner (1) could host more guests comfortably, and, (2) impressively show off to their guests the educated design of their home, ultimately demonstrating the importance of being able to experience educated leisure in this culture.

One important point must also be mentioned at this point. Vitruvius' description of the hospitality rooms matches the suite model that is being proposed by Wallace-Hadrill, and reinforced in this paper, but the wall paintings also matches Vitruvius' writings on *xenia*. Suites tend to not only spatially accommodate guests with a sense of privacy, but also elevate their experience aesthetically with a variety of visually different wall paintings that depicted the kinds of gifts that a guest may receive while visiting the home (*xenia*). Following Greek traditions of hospitality and gift-giving, Romans too wanted to incorporate this dynamic into their lifestyle, as Vitruvius writes: "*Therefore painters, when they portrayed what was sent to guests, called them xenia.*"⁸⁵ Villa A at Oplontis is itself famous for several depictions of *xenia*. One quite famous example appears in the private suite in Triclinium 14, which features on its northern wall a bowl of two types of figs resting on an illusionary ledge; two of the figs are so ripe that they are shown bursting (Fig. 24).⁸⁶ On the matching left-hand side of the same wall rests a glass bowl of fruit. Crossing the atrium from Triclinium 14, Oecus 23 also features two glass bowls of fruit in an illusionistic Second Style mural, which also depicts a calathus of apples and prunes which are covered with a transparent veil. Michael Squire writes about this painting that it teases the viewer, because while they can see the fruits in the wicker basket, they are still separated from them by a thin veil (Figs. 25-27).⁸⁷ It is as if the

⁸⁵ Vitruvius *De Arch.* 6.7, vol. 2, trans. Frank Granger (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962), 49. "Xenia" was left untranslated by the author of this paper for emphasis. Interestingly, this is the only mention of the word "xenia" in Vitruvius' *De Arch.* For more on this, see Simon Weir, "Xenia in Vitruvius' Greek house: Andron, ξείνία and Xenia from Homer to Augustus," *The Journal of Architecture* 20 (2015): 868, accessed April 19, 2024, 10.1080/13602365.2015.1098717.

⁸⁶ Michael Squire, "Framing the Roman 'Still Life': Campanian Wall-Painting and the Frames of Mural Make-Believe," in *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, ed. Verity Platt and Michael Squire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 214.

⁸⁷ Michael Squire, "Framing the Roman 'Still Life': Campanian Wall-Painting and the Frames of Mural Make-Believe," in *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, ed. Verity Platt and Michael Squire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 215.

calathus is a gift basket, meant to be taken home after a guest's visit. Additionally, it should be noted that these rooms are not the only sign of fruit in Villa A: the Hercules Room (Room 8) features more apples on the ceiling of its painted niche on the east wall (Fig. 19). These same apples can be seen on the eastern wall of Cubiculum 11 as well (Fig. 28). This further associates Room 8 with the same nature of *hospitalia* as the suite on the west side of the atrium around Oecus 15 and Triclinium 14, perhaps indicating a relationship between the spaces, and solidifying Room 8's role as part of a reception suite. Not only, then, do suites physically provide a place for guests to rest, but they can often feature an added element of hospitality through *xenia* paintings. Sometimes, as demonstrated, fruit imagery repeats itself in rooms throughout the villa, perhaps to be a constant reminder to a moving visitor that they are welcome, or perhaps to ensure that each guest (if there are several), has an example painting of what kind of gift they may receive in visiting.

These patterns of fruit such as figs or apples in Villa A are not just for aesthetic. Often, depictions of fruit in wall paintings were the same kind of fruit grown at the villas themselves, and thus functionally displayed to a guest what kind of gift they may enjoy at the villa.⁸⁸ At this point in time, in the first century CE, exotic fruits that used to be imported were now being grown on Roman properties. For example, Bettina Bergmann highlights that, thanks to the archaeological research of Wilhelmina Jahemski at Oplontis, scholars know that the figs painted in Triclinium 14 were also being grown in the northern garden in Villa A. This connection also applies to many other types of vegetation in Villa A that are shown in the murals of the villa, and which truly grew outside.

One important detail, however, is that the *xenia* baskets of fruit most often occur in the triclinia of private suites. The relationship between the illusionary wall painting and the physical fruits in the garden demonstrated to the ancient viewer the level of *luxuria* that they

⁸⁸ Bettina Bergmann, "Art and Nature in the Villa at Oplontis," in T. McGinn, P. Carafa, Nancy de Grummond, Bettina Bergmann and Tina Najbjerg (eds), *Pompeian Brothels, Pompeii's Ancient History, Mirrors and Mysteries, Art and Nature at Oplontis, and The Herculaneum Basilica* (Portsmouth: Journal of Archaeology, 2002), 118.

would experience while visiting the villa: not only could the guest *see* the exotic and idealized fruit on the wall, like the apples in Rooms 8 and 23, but they were also able to *taste* the fruit that they see, and perhaps even take some home as a gift to consume or plant in their own garden. By being placed in what could be considered the dining rooms of the guest suites, the villa owner is establishing a clear relationship of hospitality. Thus, by providing a space that acts as a home-away-from-home, these suites were able to supply space for *otium*, elevated visually through the wall paintings, as well as, in particular, spatially, by the design and location of the suites – which provided private luxury while still in proximity to the main areas of the house and sensually, through the adjacent natural gardens which provided the same kind of fruit depicted in the wall painting.

Visuality and Spatial Control

As Elaine K. Gazda writes, “in seeing and being seen, villa owners...engaged in an ongoing visual dialogue with their peers.”⁸⁹ A villa’s design was a reflection of their owners. While there are standards, villa owners also had agency in how they wished their villa to best describe them, and how they designed their homes (and therefore themselves) to appear to guests. In this sense, the Roman villa owner would have been quite aware of the *viewer*. This idea is applicable not only to wall paintings, but to spatial design of a villa itself. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill suggests that simply having the ability to select between a number of different rooms with different styles of painting or different features was an essential part of domestic luxury and therefore *otium*.⁹⁰

The viewer’s eye is a consideration that archaeologists and historians are now keeping in mind in their study of Roman villas. Access heat-maps, acting as a further development of

⁸⁹ Elaine K. Gazda, “Villas on the Bay of Naples: The Ancient Setting of Oplontis,” in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 44.

⁹⁰ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1994), 54-55.

schematic graphs or “j-graphs,” are becoming a popular way of scientifically calculating visibility. Essentially, as Michael Anderson explains, they reveal “the degree of isolation of integration experience by each point of each room in the house.”⁹¹ For example, by analyzing the House of the Labyrinth in Pompeii in this way (Fig. 29), the patterns of visual control become clearer: by standing at the entrance of the house, a visitor could see the Atrium 27 and the Tablinum 33 in almost their totality. Further behind the tablinum, a visitor can even see into the peristyle, and, by looking straight ahead, catch glimpses of the Corinthian Oecus 43, which although they can see, they cannot physically enter unless by invitation.⁹² This access heat-map, then, practically demonstrates how the design around the axis of the house was made in such a way that the designer was able to show visual control, almost teasing the guests as they enter the home. As Michael Anderson writes:

Despite the variety in the elements presented in the vista from the front door, most share a common spatial characteristic—they present a view of rooms located deep within the structure of the house, to which physical access would have been limited for many of those arriving at the entrance. The depths of features highlighted by vistas from the doorways of Pompeian houses can be quantified coarsely in terms of the number of thresholds that had to be crossed to reach them.⁹³

In other words, even if a floor plan shows direct access through the axis of a house, it must also be considered that a guest may be hindered by doors, windows and light rooms. These access heat-maps, then, demonstrate which areas of the house were more restricted than others, and they do this in a way that is not immediately recognizable in the floor plan alone.

Similar methods of visual study have been applied to Roman villas in this way, such as Elaine K. Gazda’s study of the gazes of figures in the frescoes of Room 5 of the Villa of the Mysteries and how the viewer’s position in the room is impacted by the gaze.⁹⁴ Similarly,

⁹¹ Michael A. Anderson, *Space, Movement, and Visibility in Pompeian Houses* (New York: Ratledge, 2023), 59.

⁹² Michael A. Anderson, *Space, Movement, and Visibility in Pompeian Houses* (New York: Ratledge, 2023), 90.

⁹³ Michael A. Anderson, *Space, Movement, and Visibility in Pompeian Houses* (New York: Ratledge, 2023), 90.

⁹⁴ Elaine K. Gazda, “Portraits and Patrons: The Women of the Villa of the Mysteries in Their Social Context,” in *Women’s Lives, Women’s Voices : Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, vol.1, ed. Brenda Longfellow, and Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021): 133-150.

Allison L.C. Emerson's team from Tulane University and their current work in making a 3D module for Insula I.14 in Pompeii, another example.⁹⁵ Current scholars working on the Oplontis Project are developing a 3D model, which will provide a first person walk-through of Villa A, giving users full control of where they walk, and even what time of day it is.⁹⁶ Developments in technology such as this will help future scholars better understand visual perception of villas as Roman guests would have seen them. Even though the 3D model has not yet been released, and despite the fact that we do not have an access heat-map for the Villa A at Oplontis, visual control can still be observed.

For instance, as opposed to the traditional expectation of a tablinum, walking through the atrium, guests of Villa A were met with a *viridarium* (enclosed garden; Fig. 30), likely with a fountain in the middle.⁹⁷ The murals of the *viridarium* are lined with white and yellow engaged columns that match the outside supporting columns, as well as the painted columns on the portico of the northern garden (Fig. 31 and 32). The concept of boundary and control is present once again: the space is purposefully unreachable due to the low wall between Rooms 5 and 20, and there is both real and man-made nature present with the plants in the *viridarium* complimenting the plants of the wall paintings.

Additionally, in whatever manner a guest ends up being led to Oecus 69, spatial strategies are quickly seen to be used in the mini *viridaria*/light-rooms 68 and 70 on both sides of the room, parallel to Pool 96 (see Figs. 33-37). It should be noted that these light-rooms were painted by the same workshop that painted Room 20, considering the visual similarities in subject matter and style.⁹⁸ Again, the plants in the paintings are related to the

⁹⁵ Allison L.C. Emerson, "New Excavations at Pompeii: Archaeology from the Margins" (lecture at John Cabot University, Rome, Italy, April 9, 2024).

⁹⁶ John R. Clarke, "A Virtual Villa," *Apollo: The International Art Magazine*, February 2014, <https://reader.exacteditions.com/issues/38045/page/48>.

⁹⁷ Bettina Bergmann, "Garden Paintings in Villa A," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 97.

⁹⁸ Bettina Bergmann, "Garden Paintings in Villa A," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 101-3.

plants in the gardens themselves. These windows allow for a vision line like the window of Room 20, acting as real-life picture frames. The difference is that instead of framing a view of real nature, these light-room windows frame *more* mural paintings down the hall. Yet, once again, to see these desired murals across from the line of sight, the viewer must walk around and down Portico 60 (cf. Fig.1). Just as in Room 20, viewers are denied access to the *viridaria* which are surrounded by walls, making a viewer aware of what they can and cannot access. These windows of specific light-rooms 68 and 70 especially boggle the senses.

Bettina Bergmann writes that modern viewers and contemporary writers on the topic will usually say that the sequence of rooms is much longer than it is.⁹⁹ These views are illusionistic, something that Rooms 20 and Oecus 21 also possess, but these rooms are extreme examples. This illusionary visual control almost teases the viewer, as they can experience the house, but not entirely, which counterintuitively elevates one's experience of the house.

I would argue that Oecus 15 acts similarly but differently in spatial divide and illusion. Oecus 15 seems to act as an artificial courtyard locked between two real "courtyards," the northern garden 56 and the southwest peristyle 19, essentially having the same effect as other lightrooms of the house, except that guests can walk through them in this case.¹⁰⁰ Here, instead of viewing beauty they cannot physically access, such as in the light-rooms 68 and 70, the guest is surrounded by natural and illusionary beauty that they are both surrounded by and are allowed to pass through. Perhaps this differing dynamic from the visually teasing Oecus 69, for example, demonstrates to a visitor what is public versus what is private.

⁹⁹ Bettina Bergmann, "Garden Paintings in Villa A," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 107.

¹⁰⁰ For reference, see diagram in Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Shaping Roman Landscape: Ecocritical Approaches to Architecture and Wall Painting in Early Imperial Italy* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2023), 103.

These more public spaces, such as Oecus 21 and 69, are linked by certain wall painting patterns in the hallways which connect them. Crispin Corrado has observed that the so-called “zebra-stripe” patterns in the wall paintings of Villa A appear in seemingly central and vital locations, in spaces which were meant to be walked through or used briefly.¹⁰¹ Thus, there is a possibility these patterns indicated more public spaces in larger luxury villas. As Corrado writes, the evidence suggests that this design in villas “would indeed be ‘practical’ due to dim lighting, to display a vibrant, eye-catching and repeating design; one that would encourage movement as opposed to prolonged periods of hesitation and study.”¹⁰² Specifically on Villa A at Oplontis, Corrado notices that the pattern does not exist in servile areas, but instead what may be the public areas of the building.¹⁰³

The private suites in the villa, on the other hand, are relatively hidden from sight, and not directly accessible by any main hallway. In fact, in observing the zebra-stripe patterns in Figure 38, those zebra- stripes seem to avoid private suite locations. Instead, they seem to serve to link more common places (Atrium 5, Oecus 21, Oecus 69) to each other. Based on Figure 2, the clusters of rooms that seem to be more private are Zone 1 (Rooms 11, 12, 14, 15), Zone 2 (Rooms 23, 25, 38, 41), Zone 3/the former bath complex (Rooms 8, 17, 18, 31, also interacting with Room 15¹⁰⁴), Zone 4 (Rooms 66, 78, 79) and Zone 5 (Rooms 89, 90, and a hypothetical suite of Rooms 95 and 97 which is symmetrical to Zone 3), with Oecus 69, Room 65 and Room 74 working as the definitive banqueting areas for both Zone 4 and 5. The zebra stripe patterns do not exist in the suites themselves, but rather it seems that the pattern *guides* guests from the private suites to the more public areas of the house. With even subtle details such as the zebra stripe pattern to help direct movement, this goes to show that the

¹⁰¹ Crispin Corrado Goulet, “The ‘Zebra Stripe’ Design: An Investigation of Roman Wall Painting in the Periphery,” *Rivista Di Studi Pompeiani* 12-13 (2001): 59.

¹⁰² Crispin Corrado Goulet, “The ‘Zebra Stripe’ Design: An Investigation of Roman Wall Painting in the Periphery,” *Rivista Di Studi Pompeiani* 12-13 (2001): 61-62.

¹⁰³ The Villa A at Oplontis may have even been a public or semi-public structure. See section titled “Fluidity.”

¹⁰⁴ Room 15/Oecus 15 appears to act as a connector of Zones 1 and 2.

experience of *otium* in a villa is a curated experience to create a sense of luxury and leisure for both owner and guest. Through this kind of spatial control, along with the other examples highlighted in this chapter, the villa could guide the eye of the viewer to focus more on the elevated experience of leisure that the villa provides.

Seasonality

The ideal villa, of course, would be designed to provide every opportunity for both owner and guest to enjoy themselves in the best conditions. Pliny the Younger himself would rotate his daily regime around his villa to obtain the best options. His leisurely lifestyle was quite manicured, as he describes:

Three or four hours after I first wake [...] I betake myself according to the weather either to the terrace or the covered arcade, work out the rest of my subject, and dictate it [...] If I am dining alone with my wife or with a few friends, a book is read aloud during the meal and afterwards we listen to a comedy or some music; then I walk again with the members of my household, some of whom are well educated. Thus the evening is prolonged with varied conversation, and, even when the days are at their longest, comes to a satisfying end.¹⁰⁵

In this quote we can see the fullness of Pliny's practice of *otium*, and by having options throughout one's house it shows that the owner is the ideal citizen who has the ability to actively practice *otium* wherever he pleases no matter the time of day. This factor of options can be seen in the set-up of the rooms and suites at Villa A at Oplontis as well. As

Zarmakoupi describes, in Villa A:

Porticus 33 and 34, facing north and with a smaller width and extent, would have been preferred on the hottest days of the summer or when the owners sought privacy. The fact that there was more than one space providing similar environmental advantages but to differing extents, indicates that the designer, responding to the requirements of the owner, intended to create a number of options for him.¹⁰⁶ Zarmakoupi, of course, when she states that Porticus 33 and 34 (connecting to Oecus 21, cf.

Fig. 1) would have been preferred in the summer, is referring to Vitruvius' *De Architectura*

¹⁰⁵ Pliny *Epistulae* 9.36.3-5, vol.II, trans. Betty Radice, (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969) 155.

¹⁰⁶ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE- 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90.

6.4. Here, Vitruvius highlights the best locations for rooms in the villa depending on the season, and states that a summer triclinium should be situated in the north, so that the course of the sun does not shine over it, which ultimately keeps the space cooler than the east or west. Keeping this in mind, Oecus 21, with its adjacent day rooms, Rooms 17 and 30, which match each other in style (Figs. 8-11), would be ideal for keeping cool in the summer.

Arguably, the south suites of the villa (Zone 1 and 2) function in a similar manner, but with different features. Visitors to the villa could be extra protected from the direct sun due to the semi-closed nature of Cryptoporticus 13 and 24 (Figs. 5 and 39), which is not an open walkway lined with columns as with Porticus 33 and 34 in the north (Figs. 40 and 41), but instead has walls between its columns with small openings that still provided a view. Rather than having a view of the north garden, however, guests would look out past Viridaria 19 and 59, and have a clear view of the sea. In fact, Villa A, originally 14 meters above a beach, which was accessible via a ramp, had direct access to the sea itself.¹⁰⁷ The southern suites of the villa take advantage of these sea views by placing windows facing the sea in all of the appropriate rooms: Rooms 14, 11, 23, 25, 38 and 41 all had views of the sea beyond (cf. Fig. 1). In regards to the east, Vitruvius writes that this is the ideal location for bedchambers and libraries, as their direction allows them to catch the dry morning light, but also it is ideal for spring and autumn dining rooms, since their doors and windows of those rooms may be kept

¹⁰⁷ Elaine K. Gazda, "Villas on the Bay of Naples: The Ancient Setting of Oplontis," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 34; see also Nayla Kabazi Muntasser and Giovanni di Maio "The Geological Landscape of Oplontis and the Eruption of Mount Vesuvius," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 52: "Evidence for understanding the configuration of the cliff and the approach to Villa A from the sea has largely been lost because of the construction of the Sarno Canal in the sixteenth century. The canal was created to provide power for the flour mills of Torre Annunziata. The town later developed a flourishing pasta industry, and one factory was built on a plot of land just south of the canal over what would have been the seaward face of Villa A. This plot of land adjacent to the archaeological site of Villa A is known as the 'ex-mulino' and is now being excavated by the Soprintendenza, partly in response to the questions raised by Di Maio's work for the Oplontis project. The results of these excavations are still pending but they promise to shed more light on the state of the southern edge of the villa."

shut until the sun has passed the meridian and thus retain their coolness for when they are in use in the evening.¹⁰⁸

In the context of Oplontis, then, the location of the suite containing Diaeta 78, as well as its counterpart possibly reflected in Room 97 and beyond, would be suitable as it is the best place to catch the morning light. The location of Oecus 69 and its branching entertainment areas (i.e. Room 65 and 74), then, was ideal to keep cool at night when it is time for a banquet.¹⁰⁹ Vitruvius says this eastern location only applies to autumn and spring triclinia. However, in the case of Oecus 69, despite its eastern direction, I argue that it could be suitable for a summer banquet as well, considering that there is a large Olympic-size swimming pool directly across from it (cf. Fig.1). Thus, each of the larger open areas of the house provide relief from hotter temperatures while still providing unique luxurious views depending on location: Oecus 21 and its adjacent day rooms opened towards the north for views of the larger northern garden,¹¹⁰ full of the fruit depicted on wall paintings inside the villa; the suites branching off Atrium 5 in the south, cooled by the walls of each cryptoporticus and pleased by a view of the sea below¹¹¹; and Oecus 69, ideal for an evening banquet as the sun will not be directly in the eyes at sunset, with its branching entertainment rooms, facing the east towards a large pool framed by trees which bloom according to the proper season.¹¹² Additionally, Vitruvius writes that private baths and winter triclinia should face west, so that as the sun sets westward, the water in the bath complex

¹⁰⁸ Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 6.4.

¹⁰⁹ For more on these eastern rooms as dining entertainment spaces, see Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE- 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 194.

¹¹⁰ Additionally, if one were to turn to look through the south window, they would see the sea beyond, framed as if a picture. See Bettina Bergmann, "Art and Nature in the Villa at Oplontis," in *Pompeian Brothels, Pompeii's Ancient History, Mirrors and Mysteries, Art and Nature at Oplontis, and The Herculaneum Basilica*, ed. T. McGinn, P. Carafa, Nancy de Grummond, Bettina Bergmann and Tina Najbjerb (Portsmouth: Journal of Archaeology, 2002), 103-104.

¹¹¹ Additionally, if one were to turn to look through the north side of the atrium they would see the northern garden beyond, framed as if a picture.

¹¹² See also, Mantha Zarmakoupi *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE- 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92.

heats, and the triclinium is warmed.¹¹³ With this in mind, it is quite fitting that the Villa Oplontis' former bath complex is located facing the west (Fig.1).

Thus, there exists a very practical element to the designing of a villa which, I would argue, is often overlooked in scholarship: seasonality and protection from the elements. Reception rooms and dining rooms usually enjoy attractive vistas;¹¹⁴ those that do not likely do this to conserve heat.¹¹⁵ While having these options for *otium* in a villa demonstrates to the visitor a level of sophistication in the owner, it also provides the ability to manage the temperature and outdoor environment. Of course, this is not an unusual statement. However, in thinking about the design of these luxury villas, one cannot forget the practical function of design as well, and be more aware of where walls, windows, and doors are located,¹¹⁶ and the way that the rooms would be heated and/or cooled.

It makes sense that because of these practical concerns, therefore, in Villa A's reconstruction in 45 CE, instead of demolishing its unused bath complex outright, the owner chose to keep it as a private suite that would have provided ample leisure time especially during the colder seasons due to the nature of its bath complex architecture (thicker walls and placement next to the kitchen to keep the heat in) as well as its already ideal location in the house facing west, which is exposed to the sun starting in the afternoon. The key element in these design changes in such large villas is that it provides *options* and *opportunities*, so that no matter the weather or time of day, one can enjoy *otium*, as Pliny does.

¹¹³ Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, Book 6.4.1; Pliny the Younger also discusses the importance of sunshine accessibility in the winter time: see *Ep.* 5.6.

¹¹⁴ Michael A. Anderson, *Space, Movement, and Visibility in Pompeian Houses* (New York: Ratledge, 2023), 96.

¹¹⁵ Michael A. Anderson, *Space, Movement, and Visibility in Pompeian Houses* (New York: Ratledge, 2023), 96.

¹¹⁶ For more on this, see Evan Proudfoot, "Furnishing Luxury and Comfort in the Villa A ('di Poppea') at Oplontis," in *Framing Interactions: Approaches to Coexistence in the Houses of Roman Pompeii*. Poster presented at the 11th Roman Archaeology Conference and the 24th Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, University of Reading, UK, 27-30 March 2014; Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Shaping Roman Landscape: Ecocritical Approaches to Architecture and Wall Painting in Early Imperial Italy* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2023), 63-64.

Reconstructing Villas: Paving the Way for Architectural Trends

What makes the Bay of Naples area around Pompeii even more relevant to this study is that most of the buildings in the area were heavily reconstructed over time.¹¹⁷ Villas like Villa A at Oplontis, as mentioned in the Introduction, had long life spans that sometimes reached over a century. Additionally, most Pompeian houses were under reconstruction by the time of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius due to the large amount of seismic activity in the area, most significantly the devastating earthquake of 62 CE.¹¹⁸ Even before this, many of those same houses underwent several periods of renovation, particularly in terms of the wall paintings. As mentioned, Villa A at Oplontis had at least four distinct wall painting phases.

Therefore, most of the grand structures of this area are significant to our understanding of the development of Roman villas over time. However, it should be noted that the last period of Pompeii's reconstruction is only a pale reflection of the major reconstruction that happens later in Rome, such as with Nero's Domus Aurea, or the second century additions to the Palatine palaces made by Trajan and Hadrian, such as the heated dining room that Hadrian added to Domitian's Palace under the floor of its grand dining room.¹¹⁹ From here, luxury villas would only get larger and larger, especially in imperial palaces. Lawrence Richardson argues that the full expression of a villa is represented in the 2nd century villa of Hadrian at Tivoli:

It entailed the dissolution of a villa into a number of essentially separate complexes and exploitation of the landscape as a garden element, the introduction of rooms of bizarre form and audacious engineering and the creation of vistas in which one looked from covered space across a bright court into another covered space, sometimes with repetition beyond, and lavish displays of water in every imaginable form and context. None of these finds clear expression in Pompeian villas.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ The key example of this is not only the Villa A at Oplontis, but also the Villa of the Mysteries, which will be studied in Chapter 2 and 3.

¹¹⁸ Penelope M. Allison, "Domestic Spaces and Activities," in *The World of Pompeii*, ed. John J. Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss (New York: Routledge 2007), 271.

¹¹⁹ Amanda Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127.

¹²⁰ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press) 347.

The Pompeian villas, then, act as a case study for a change in design elements otherwise witnessed more broadly in the richer houses of the Roman Empire. The development of design trends around first century CE Pompeii was just the start, as Richardson says, to a flourishing of expression that would occur in the homes of the elite in the years to come. It should be noted that, as with anything, there is not a clear linear chain of cause and effect: Pompeian villas did not necessarily directly influence social change nor did social life necessarily instantly and directly influence villa design. The idea of linear progression should therefore be pushed aside. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill writes, “it is neither the new forms of housing that cause social change, nor social change that causes the adoption of new forms, but a continuous and developing dialogue between forms of domestic space and forms of social practice.”¹²¹ Dialogue between villa design and social practice, then, perhaps revolves around and is represented in private suite trends in the first century BCE to the first century CE.

Fluidity

On this note, rather than try to give a precise “definition,” of what each room in Villa A’s bath complex was repurposed into (an effort that seems pointless until the complex is fully excavated), this thesis aims to step back and see how this set of rooms interacts with the rooms of the villa as a whole. While determining function has merit, scholars cannot forget that these spaces were lived spaces by real people. Rooms may have had multiple functions, and those rooms may have changed shape depending on the owner’s needs at the time. For example, Pliny describes a room in his villa:

On the other side of the dining-room is an elegantly decorated bedroom, and then one which can either be a large bedroom or a moderate-sized dining-room and enjoys the

¹²¹ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “Rethinking the Roman Atrium House,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series* 22 (1997): 240.

bright light of the sun reflected from the sea; behind is another room with an antechamber, high enough to be cool in summer and protected as a refuge in winter, for it is sheltered from every wind. A similar room and antechamber are divided off by a single wall.¹²²

There are also, as demonstrated above, many practical elements in designing a home as well. As far as the nature of Villa A at Oplontis itself, it could have been a far more public space than other luxury villas in the area. For example, it has been proposed that Villa A at Oplontis (after the reconstruction of 45 CE) perhaps functioned as a hotel or *sanatorium*.¹²³

The reality is, after many natural disasters leading up to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, many Roman elites resorted to dividing up their estates and renting them out, such as in the Casa Sannitica, Casa del Bicentario, Casa di Pansa, and perhaps most famously, the Praedia of Julia Felix in Pompeii.¹²⁴ As Eve D'Ambra points out, this estate's dynamic helps scholars reconsider the parameters of public and private space in ancient Rome, particularly during the earthquakes of 62 CE.¹²⁵ Made clear by the inscription outside of the main entrance of the baths, the complex of Julia Felix was redesigned and redecorated sometime during these hardships of the first century CE to have a semi-public function featuring a bathhouse, tavern, and triclinium overlooking the gardens.¹²⁶ The large barrel-vaulted summer triclinium found in the Praedia of Julia Felix is like those found in many of the larger homes and villas throughout Pompeii and the Bay of Naples. This triclinium features marble dining couches and a roughened ceiling to imitate a natural grotto.¹²⁷

¹²² Pliny *Epistulae* 2.17.10-11, vol. II, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969), 137.

¹²³ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 180-183; See also Crispin Corrado Goulet, "The 'Zebra Stripe' Design: An Investigation of Roman Wall Painting in the Periphery," *Rivista Di Studi Pompeiani* 12-13 (2001), 74.

¹²⁴ Eve D'Ambra, "Real Estate for Profit," in *Women's Lives, Women's Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, ed. Brenda Longfellow & Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 79.

¹²⁵ Eve D'Ambra, "Real Estate for Profit," in *Women's Lives, Women's Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, ed. Brenda Longfellow & Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 85.

¹²⁶ Eve D'Ambra, "Real Estate for Profit," in *Women's Lives, Women's Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, ed. Brenda Longfellow & Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 87.

¹²⁷ Eve D'Ambra, "Real Estate for Profit," in *Women's Lives, Women's Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, ed. Brenda Longfellow & Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 92.

However, while having a semi-public nature, the complex still had its elements of spatial and social control (semi-private nature). As D’Ambra says, “of particular interest are the features that provided or, conversely, denied access in order to create an atmosphere of privilege for the desired clientele.”¹²⁸ This idea matches the notion of spatial control discussed earlier. She continues:

The views through windows or along colonnaded corridors enhance the experience of moving through a sequence of spaces arranged in a file -- or conversely, of being allowed to look across at sections of the estate not always open and accessible. It is no doubt the tension created by these opposing features of the plan that gave it allure.¹²⁹

Thus, it is important to keep in mind that behind every Roman house was a real person who designed it. No matter the specifics of how a room functioned, these houses changed over time with the developing or varying needs of the owners. The Praedia of Julia Felix made use of its architectural landscape to both control and dazzle its visitors, especially when it became a semi-public structure. This may also reflect what occurred in the reconstruction of Villa A and many other contemporary villas like it.

¹²⁸ Eve D’Ambra, “Real Estate for Profit,” in *Women’s Lives, Women’s Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, ed. Brenda Longfellow & Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 88.

¹²⁹ Eve D’Ambra, “Real Estate for Profit,” in *Women’s Lives, Women’s Voices: Roman Material Culture and Female Agency in the Bay of Naples*, ed. Brenda Longfellow & Molly Swetnam-Burland (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 94.

Chapter 3: Suite Case Studies

With these design concepts established, we may now study their implementation in the architectural designs around suites throughout the Bay of Naples. This chapter will examine the suites in select case studies of luxury villas in the Campania region. Each of these examples of suites will indicate the features discussed in the previous chapter: the ability for options for hospitality, the ability to adapt to environmental conditions, and the ability to demonstrate visual control. Smaller houses, such as the House of the Vettii, will also be studied, to demonstrate the way that, speaking to a greater visual culture, the suites of the grand luxury villas were even seen emulated in smaller homes in Pompeii in the first century CE. With all these case studies established, Villa A at Oplontis will then be reviewed, comparing its design with the design of other suite case studies, while also showing the way that this villa in particular works differently. Thus, these case studies will illustrate the way that these suites as architectural trends became more popular than ever in the early Roman Empire.

The Villa of the Mysteries

Following Wallace-Hadrill's analysis of the structure, the Villa of the Mysteries has many luxurious suites placed around both sides of the atrium.¹³⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, originally these areas were directly connected to the atrium, but in the first century BCE these doorways were walled off, making them accessible only from the external porticoes that featured views of the landscape beyond (Fig. 22). For instance, the famous Mysteries Room of Room 5 overlooks a view from Porticoes P1 and P2 outside of it, and it is

¹³⁰ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Ideals of Hellenistic Hospitality," in *The Roman Villa in the Mediterranean Basin*, ed. Annalisa Martano and Guy P.R. Metraux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 66.

flanked by a cubiculum (Room 4) with a double alcove for two beds and a vaulted ceiling. From Room 4, through another smaller cubiculum (Room 3) which has a single alcove for a bed, the suite is connected to a central corridor. Room 4 also connects to the spacious tablinum (Room 2), which in turn leads to a large exedra in Room 1, flanked by two *viridaria* for landscape views. The suite of Rooms 3, 4 and 5 are connected via the narrow hallway F1 to another suite that mirrors it almost symmetrically in design, composed of Oecus 6 and Room 8, which can be accessed by going through Room 7. Room 8 is also vaulted with two alcoves for beds. This subtle shift from an emphasis on the interiority of the villa to the estate and landscape surrounding it can also be found in other villas of the period.

These two suites are an example of the pattern established in Chapter 1 of an oecus flanked by two cubicula. In this example, the suites branching off from the atrium. Rather than a single cubiculum directly connected to the atrium, as seen in more traditional houses, this suite was a more complex, curated experience that was reconstructed for a specific control of privacy. With the rooms' reconstruction came more wall painting design and an increased difficulty accessing the spaces, providing a luxurious sense of privacy that is framed by a portico with a view.

The number of detectable suites in this villa is so high that the entire structure becomes an example of the epitome of *otium*, since in almost every sector there is a place to enjoy the best possible conditions. Zarmakoupi notes that Pliny would rotate his daily regime around his villa to obtain the best options.¹³¹ His leisurely lifestyle was quite manicured, as he describes his life in his Tuscan villa:

Three or four hours after I first wake... I betake myself according to the weather either to the terrace or the covered arcade, work out the rest of my subject, and dictate it... If I am dining alone with my wife or with a few friends, a book is read aloud during the meal and afterwards we listen to a comedy or some music; then I walk again with the members of my household, some of whom are well educated. Thus the evening is prolonged with varied conversation, and, even when the days are at their longest, comes to a satisfying end.¹³²

¹³¹ Mantha Zarmakoupi *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE- 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 88.

¹³² Pliny Ep. 9.36. Volume II, trans. Betty Radice (London: William Heineman Ltd, 1969), 155.

In this quote one can see the fullness of Pliny's practice of *otium*, and by having options throughout one's house, one has the ability to practice *otium* wherever he pleases no matter the time of day. This factor of options is not just seen in the Villa of the Mysteries.

Villas at Stabiae: Villa San Marco and Villa Arianna

The owners of Villa San Marco and Villa Arianna, two luxury villas in ancient Stabiae, were likely patrons of most high rank. Indeed, the decorative pictorial cycles in both villas have been directly compared to those of the Domus Aurea in Rome, meaning that the owners had the option to hire non-local workshops, even those possibly from the capital itself.¹³³ This elite ability of choice can also be seen in Villa A at Oplontis, with its architecture also often compared to the Domus Aurea.¹³⁴ All these villas make use of the landscape to create opportunities for *otium* within their walls.

The Villa Arianna, for instance, is lined with suites in its northern porticoes, perfect for shade in the summer sun (cf. Fig. 42). Room 3, featuring the famous Ariadne fresco, and Room A act as the main oeci (Figs. 43 and 44). Flanking Room A, there are two suites: Room 12 with antechamber Room 11, and Room E with antechamber F. Both would have been elaborately decorated, although Rooms 11 and 12 are in better condition (Figs. 45 and 46). Rooms 12 and E would make comfortable, panoramic cubicula, with windows or doors on every wall (Figs. 46 and 47). Next to the suite of rooms 11 and 12 is a more multifaceted suite composed of Rooms 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Room 9 has a similar quilt-like pattern on the wall paintings as those of Room 31 in Villa A at Oplontis (compare Figs. 12 and 48). However, this pattern is rare in Italy and more common in Britain, so no solid conclusions

¹³³ Antonio Ferrara, "Stabiae, Turismo e Benessere dal Tempo dei Romani," in *Tesori di Stabiae: Arte Romana Sepolta dal Vesuvio*, a cura di Domenico Camardo e Antonio Ferrara (Castellamare di Stabia: N. Longobardi, 2004), 21.

¹³⁴ Michael Thomas, "Framing Views in Villa A: From the Late Republic to the Age of Nero," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis Near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine K. Gazda and John R. Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 84.

can be made about this pattern. What can be concluded, however, is that suites tend to be decorated in unique patterns in every room, so that guests have a special piece of beauty all to themselves, or even better, a suite with both wall paintings and a view. In fact, Villa Arianna and these suites to the north look out across the sea below.¹³⁵

Villa San Marco (Fig. 49) also made use of seaside views, as the largest entertainment room (Oecus 16) had a floor decorated in gorgeous opus sectile. It also overlooks the sea, with two suites branching off to either side: rooms 6, 10, 18 and 21.¹³⁶ These suites, typically labeled as living room environments, fit the suite pattern established in this essay, and certainly at least were used in relation to Oecus 16. The narrow hallways 11 and 17 connecting the rooms work in a similar way as those which wrap around Oecus 21 in Villa A, hallways 9 and 3 (compare Figs. 1 and 49), except that with the rooms in Villa San Marco, the view is of the sea. Each room is decorated in Fourth Style wall paintings, although most are in poor condition, except for a small figure depicting Hercules in the smaller Room 18 (Fig. 50). Both of the smaller rooms of these suites, Rooms 6 and 18, have views of Garden 9, with a large nymphaeum at the end of the pool within the garden (Fig. 51). Connected to the smaller rooms are the larger Rooms 21 and 10, which both have views of the sea. Room 10 has an interesting floor mosaic, with placements for reclining couches marked for at least two beds (Fig. 52); however, the mosaic is quite irregular as the bed placements seem to jut out into the room rather than being on the sides or in a niche, as is usually the case. Additionally, Room 21 has a window that looks into Room 19, which is a viridarium (Fig. 53).

All of these rooms, then, have design elements that incorporate nature and the man-made, and overall create a more intimate space connected to the larger Oecus 16. In terms of walkways, as Mantha Zarmakoupi analyzes, Villa San Marco contains the large peristyle

¹³⁵ Mantha Zarmakoupi *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE- 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 187.

¹³⁶ Pietro Giovanni Guzzo, Giovanna Bonifacio, and Anna Maria Sodo, *Otium Ludens: Stabiae, at the Heart of the Roman Empire* (Castellammare di Stabia: N. Longobardi, 2007), 129.

garden (9) with a pool in the middle (15), all of which is protected by the western side porticoes which wrap around it (3, 5, and 20), so that guests may find shade in the evening hours as the sun sets in the west.¹³⁷ She continues to identify cryptoporticus 51 and 7 as ideal for midday, and Porticus 1 and 2 ideal for the morning. Once again, here is a villa which is designed to provide options for luxury comfort to choose from depending on the weather and the time of day, so that no matter the external conditions one can enjoy their time in the villa.

The most luxurious suites in Villa San Marco, however, are perhaps the day-suites found on the western side of Garden 9: one is composed on Rooms 30, 50 and 53, the other is composed of Rooms 8, 12, 13 and 14 (cf. Fig. 49). These suites are of similar form to the secondary kind of suite established in Chapter 1: similar in style to Zones 4 and 5 of Villa A at Oplontis (compare Fig. 2 and Fig. 49), which require walking to the end of Portico 60 to access them. Indeed, in order to access these suites in Villa San Marco, one must walk to the end of Portico 3 or 20. These suites' walls are elaborately decorated: even the ceilings are painted with various figures (Fig. 54). The largest rooms, Rooms 12 and 53, are symmetrical to each other from across the pool and garden, which can be seen from large picturesque windows and niches for beds across from those windows (Figs. 55 and 56). These rooms are reminiscent of the "D-shaped" rooms that Pliny speaks of in his own villas, similar to the apsidal room in the Villa of Diomedes in Pompeii, which also has a niche for a bed and picturesque view of the landscape through a large window (Figs. 57 and 58).¹³⁸ The Villa of Diomedes' apsidal room in particular is a great example of architecture design supporting opportunities for *otium*, as partitions in the room create a space for the bed, perhaps surrounded by curtains. Additionally, excavators discovered various pieces of furniture, oil bottles and perfume bottles in the room, which further highlights the luxurious nature of these

¹³⁷ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples: Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE- 79 CE)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92.

¹³⁸ Pliny *Ep.* 2.17; Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 350.

view rooms in suites. One can image a room of that material set-up of grandeur in the Villa of San Marco and Villa A at Oplontis as well.

The House of the Labyrinth

The House of the Labyrinth in Pompeii, while not being a luxury countryside or seaside villa, is a larger elite domus which also illustrates the performance of *otium* in its suites. The suites in question frame one side of the peristyle; in all eight rooms (Rooms 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 and 46) make up two suites, each room being elaborately decorated (Fig. 59).¹³⁹ One suite in this house is created by the Corinthian Oecus 43 flanked by two sets of rooms on either side (Fig. 60). Three doors lead into Oecus 43: one large door in the center of the room, and two smaller doors on the right and left in line with the colonnade inside (Figs. 61 and 62). These give discreet access to the flanking cubicula without crossing the main area of the oecus. This element of access control works differently here than in the Villa of the Mysteries. In the Villa of the Mysteries, the suites were walled off from the atrium, blocking direct access, and instead became accessible only through narrow hallways or outside porticos. The rooms themselves also have an element of added privacy with some rooms having an antechamber of sorts that come before its entrance. In the House of the Labyrinth, however, the larger rooms of the suite are open to the peristyle with grand doors, but still display a level of access control for example with the colonnade “hallways” that give access to the corresponding cubicula. One of those cubicula is Room 42 the famous Labyrinth room, featuring an elaborate Labyrinth mosaic on the floor, centered by a depiction of Theseus slaying the Minotaur. On the wall are megalographic, larger than life Figures in front of a typical Second Style layout. The change in direction of the vaulting and floor mosaic suggests a space for a bed. Room 44 is another small, vaulted room directly

¹³⁹ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 165.

connected to Oecus 43; this too may have contained a bed. The matching cubicula on the other side parallels the form and layout of these two rooms.

To the west of the Corinthian Oecus is another suite with a similar approach but with a different compositional rhythm. The first room in this suite, Room 39, is a long rectangular triclinium with a vaulted ceiling. The vaulted ceilings are a pattern which can be seen in other villas, like the Villa of Mysteries. Close study of the floor shows that the placements for lecti or dining beds were clearly marked on the ground in the floor mosaic (see Figure ?). Room 39 is connected to Room 40 by a smaller cubiculum, Room 41, which has a recess in the wall, perhaps for a bed, and simple Second Style decoration.

Within the House of the Labyrinth, therefore, there are two examples of private suites both affording views of the peristyle, the west suite with two oeci and one cubiculum, and the east suite with one oecus and four cubicula, all of which have a bit of restricted access whether it requires going through one room to get to another or having to go through the colonnade of this oecus. The House of the Labyrinth is also an example of suites occurring not in a larger countryside villa, but a grand domus in the city.

The House of the Vettii

As established by the example of the House of the Labyrinth, while these trending suites are best reflected in the luxurious country villas, whose owners had the space and money to fully express their ability for well-rounded *otium*, these trends can also be seen being emulated in the smaller houses of Pompeii, many of which in the first century CE were taken up by formerly enslaved peoples, including the House of the Vettii, which was owned by two manumitted slave brothers.¹⁴⁰ Even though it is small in nature, there exists a small

¹⁴⁰ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 324; Simon P. Ellis, *Roman Housing* (London: Duckworth, 2000) 1.

suite made up of the so-called “white cubiculum” U and the “black triclinium” T, both linked to a miniature courtyard (Fig. 63).

Richardson makes note of this suite, identifying it as a “ladies dining room,” although this comment has now been deemed insupportable.¹⁴¹ However, what drew Richardson to label the rooms in this way was their unique sense of luxurious privacy: both the cubiculum and the triclinium are elaborately decorated,¹⁴² and the rooms were arranged so that once guests were inside, the outer miniature courtyard doors could be shut to create an environment of intimacy. Richardson even notes that this sense of seclusion can be felt by visitors to the site today, which is why many guidebooks label this set of rooms as women’s quarters, but he questions why the house would be arranged in this way. While Richardson answers his question incorrectly, labeling the rooms as ladies’ dining rooms, he brings to light an important observation: this set of *en suite* rooms in the House of the Vettii creates an overall sense of privacy and personal ownership that totally separates this area of the house from the rest (“one need hardly have known that anyone was there”). Wallace-Hadrill picks up on this observation and explains these rooms through his suite theories described in Chapter 1, showing that, rather than being for a segregation of the sexes, these rooms were used for the reception of guests on a more intimate scale.

These observations of Richardson on the House of the Vettii show that, although these suites are not discussed as a primary focus in scholarship, they are notable enough to warrant identification and even debate. Furthermore, the emulation of this suite-trend in smaller houses, such as the House of the Vettii, suggests a greater overarching social significance of this change in design. If the trend of private suites was solely in larger luxury villas, it would

¹⁴¹ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 327-328; for rebuttals see Roger Ling, “The architecture at Pompeii” (review of Richardson 1988), *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 4, (1991a): 251-252; Pedar William Foss, “Kitchens and Dining Rooms at Pompeii: The Spatial and Social Relationship of Cooking to Eating in the Roman Household,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1994.

¹⁴² In particular, he notes that the same workshop of painters decorated the walls in both rooms. Though the rooms have different color-schemes, “the decorations are harmonious with one another.” Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 328.

be one thing. However, considering that private suites are also then incorporated into smaller houses in Pompeii by the first century CE, a society-wide trend rooted deeper in social norms can be observed. Even the smallest houses in Pompeii have atria or triclina, so perhaps having a private suite in one's home was starting to become in vogue to show one's participation in a greater visual culture.

Villa A at Oplontis

Thus, the existence of suites in the first century BCE and CE Roman villas and houses in the Bay of Naples is more than evident. The general pattern is the same throughout the case studies, though each example has its own unique twist on the architectural trend depending on the needs and desires of the owner. These trends then apply to Villa A at Oplontis as well. As stated at the start of this thesis, in the mid-first century CE, the core of this villa went through a major reconstruction and repainting during which rooms were restyled to look like they were painted in the First, Second, and Third Styles even though they were decorated by Fourth Style painters.¹⁴³ The new arrangement of the villa provided several opportunities for the kind of educated leisure an ideal elite would want to have.

After the reconstruction, here is the layout of rooms. On the southeastern side of the atrium, Portico 24 leads from Oecus 23 to Cubiculum 25 to Cubiculum 38, to Cubiculum 41. Cubiculum 41, just as the examples of cubicula seen in the Villa of the Mysteries, has a double alcove form, being able to hold two beds: the markings are distinct on the floor (Figs. 3 and 4). This suite is mirrored on the opposite side of the Atrium 5: on the southwestern side of the atrium, Portico 13 leads one to Rooms 11, and 12; Room 11 is of the same double alcove form as Cubiculum 41 (Figs. 4 and 6). Rooms 11 and 12 lead to Triclinium 14, which

¹⁴³ Regina Gee, "Layered Histories: The Wall Painting Styles and Painters of Villa A," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 85; 95; 131; 133.

is repainted in Second Style like Oecus 23 on the opposite side of the atrium. The peristyle garden outside of this suite is only partially excavated, but the suite is framed by Portico 13. These suites are framed by porticoes in the same manner and style as in the Villa of the Mysteries discussed earlier, with both porticoes giving views to the sea below.

Parallel to this suite on the northern side of the villa, is the former bath complex introduced in the beginning (Rooms 8, 18, 31), accessible only via the other suite south of it or by the narrow hallway 6 running down the axis (cf. Fig. 1). Unfortunately, Room 31 is only partially excavated (excavations in 2024-25 may uncover the rest), but some observations about its role in this villa may still be made. Rooms 17 and 18 are the smaller rooms. Room 17 was likely a cubiculum with a large window view of the garden as indicated by the floor mosaic and by its reflection across Oecus 21 in Room 30, which is a room set up in the same way (Figs. 8-11). Room 31 seems to be a larger room, as indicated by the threshold mosaic and the floor pattern, so it would not be surprising if it functioned as another oecus or triclinium. Room 8 could also function as a triclinium, as was suggested by Clarke,¹⁴⁴ with the walls repainted in the Third Style by Fourth Style painters¹⁴⁵ and a niche in the back for the host's kline bed clearly marked out in the floor mosaic (Fig. 15). Perhaps, instead, Room 8 functioned as a large cubiculum, with the alcove in the back for the bed -- as Pliny wrote about a room in his Laurentum villa which could function both as a dining room or a large bedroom.¹⁴⁶ Either way, a type of bench or bed must have been in the alcove as that is the only way to truly be able to appreciate the delicate wall painting details on the ceiling of that alcove. The peculiar orientation of the figures on the ceiling frescos (Fig. 16-19) indicate that the intended viewer of the figures was not to be from outside of the niche, but by someone

¹⁴⁴ Mantha Zarmakoupi, *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples. Villas and Landscapes (c. 100 BCE - 79 CE)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 49.

¹⁴⁵ Regina Gee, "Layered Histories: The Wall Painting Styles and Painters of Villa A," in *Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii*, ed. Elaine Gazda and John Clarke (Ann Arbor: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2016), 91.

¹⁴⁶ Pliny *Ep.* 2.17.

reclining inside, on one side or another, to be able to see the female figures in a more correct perspective.

While it is uncertain if the hypocaust system that originally heated these rooms when they were the bath quarters was still functioning by 45 CE, the sheer nature of the bath suite architecture, with its thicker walls and link to the heat of the kitchen allows for it to be a warmer room, eminently suitable for winter. In fact, a similar case can be found in the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii. This house's plan also contains a set of rooms that appears to be a bath complex, but in its final iteration, after the earthquake, had no plumbing or decoration to indicate it functioned as such.¹⁴⁷ Instead, it seems to have been a reception or private suite that reused a former bath complex, maintaining the original shape as an effective means to retain heat. A similar change happened in the Domus Fortuna Annonaria in Ostia, as well. Although it is a later example, constructed in the second century CE and remodeled in the fourth century, Rooms 9 and 10, which were originally a part of the bath complex of the building, were walled up for more restricted access and turned into a heated suite which in this case very much kept the heating system of the original bath.¹⁴⁸ Having a thick-walled room as a winter triclinium may well be the case also at Oplontis.

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence Richardson, *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 168.

¹⁴⁸ John R. Clarke, "Domus/Single Family House" in *A Companion to Roman Architecture*, ed. Roger B. Ulrich, and Caroline K. Quenemoen (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013), 355.

Conclusions

To conclude, Villa A at Oplontis, by the middle of the first century CE, was abundant in luxury suites for both owner and guests. With this established, the reconstruction of the bath complex into a reception space is easier to understand. This thesis defined a “suite” as usually consisting of one triclinium or oecus joined with at least one cubiculum. By applying this formula to the many villas in the Bay of Naples, it has been able to ascertain the patterns of trends within them. This is due to the exalted ideas of private life and educated leisure, or *otium*, that was becoming popular in the first century BCE and into the first century CE. Not only was there a change in home design at the time, but the Romans were becoming more clever and practical about this change as well. In Villa A’s reconstruction in 45 CE, instead of demolishing the unused bath complex outright, the owner chose to keep it as a private suite that would have provided ample leisure time especially during the colder seasons due to the nature of its (previous) bath complex architecture. This new suite would pair well with the already existing suites in the core of the house which branched off the atrium and made use of the views of the sea beyond. The new suite was also established at the same time that the eastern wing’s suites were being constructed. Those suites on the eastern wing featured new “D”-shaped day rooms which were separated from the rest of the villa by a long portico. Villa A at Oplontis was clearly *abundant* with private suites.

The key element in these design changes in these larger villas, such as Villa A, as specified by Pliny, is that they provided *options* and *opportunities*, so that no matter the weather or time of day, one could practice *otium*. Depending on the weather, one may open or close the folded windows or doors to the rooms or move to different areas of the house altogether. By having more suites, a villa owner also has more space to host guests, giving each visitor a special place to call their own. With hospitality culture being so strong in the first century BCE into the first century CE, domestic architecture demanded to be changed to

adapt to this culture. While larger luxury villas were able to demonstrate this architectural need the best, some examples of hospitality suites can still be found in the city-domus, such as in the House of the Vettii or the House of the Labyrinth.

There are many different possible scenarios in which these sets of rooms may be used, either by the owner or by his or her guests. It is hoped that this thesis shows the fluid nature of villa spaces, as they were constantly changing because of trends. Interior design, architecture and social norms change even within the short span of a single century, as the case studies in this thesis illustrate. Rather than seeing the cubiculum, or triclinium, or even bath complex as a static “type” of space within a villa, these spaces should be viewed as malleable reflections of the ever-changing needs and desires of the people who lived within their walls.

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