Redefining Hospitality
The Leisured World of the 1650s English Country House

Geoffrey Whitney and Andrew Marvell describe contrasting conceptions of English country-house hospitality: a sixteenth-century welcome offered to guests of all social rank and a seventeenth-century entertainment reserved for high-ranking elites. The estate described by Whitney provided economic support for “the meaner sort,” or those of lower socioeconomic rank, while Appleton House was a site for noble and gentle recreational pursuits; even the lord of Appleton House used his home as an inn for temporary stay. Marvell’s emphasis on elite entertainment is new and reflects changing practices and spaces of hospitality during the 1650s—changes that occurred in response to the unprecedented social, political, and religious conditions after the Civil War of the 1640s. Responsibility for national welfare and the pursuit of individual interests became competing expectations of the nobility and gentry, and leisureed social circles withdrew from London to their country estates. The architect John Webb (1611–1672), student of court architect Inigo Jones, reworked the country-house plan for these shifting expectations and social circles; he introduced the open enfilade—a sequence of aligned doors connecting rooms and terminating in a window at each end—to replace the traditionally discrete rooms that enclosed and compartmentalized social gatherings. The open enfilade was popular until the last country houses were built in the 1930s, yet scholars have not studied it, examining instead individual room use across the history of the country house. Architectural writings, country-house poems, etiquette manuals, devotional books, and the evidence of Webb’s houses all reveal that the mid-seventeenth-century English country house was rethought to provide more exclusive hospitality and emphasize a visual pleasure that evoked leisure. The study of this transformation underscores the importance of circulation patterns in early modern domestic architecture and, more broadly, the need to examine architecture in an interdisciplinary context.

Public Responsibility and Hospitality: The Traditional Country House and Its Owner

Until the Civil War, English nobility and gentry welcomed guests to country houses that displayed the landowner’s contribution to national prosperity. Traditionally, landowning families were expected to promote England’s welfare by overseeing productive agricultural estates, prosperous parishes, and estate communities. In addition, all those passing the estate gates, from nobility and gentry to the wander-
ing poor, could expect to receive refreshments and other assistance. Inside the country house, the landowner underscored his social responsibility through the sequence of rooms immediately following the entrance. Guests would first enter the great hall, the traditional space where the landowner, workers on his estate, and other guests would gather for meals, and then would pass through a series of discrete rooms, whose hierarchy filtered the wide social range of visitors. At the Duke of Buckingham’s Burley-on-the-Hill, all visitors would traverse the courtyard, then walk through the main entrance and turn right to enter the great hall (Figure 1). From the great hall, a smaller group would turn right again to reach the dining parlor or left to enter the main stair. Only beyond the dining parlor did a range of rooms open in a vista, which was seen solely by Buckingham’s most exclusive social circles.

A guest’s experience of socializing within the traditional layout of rooms reinforced this demonstration of public responsibility and social hierarchy. In the initial rooms, the great hall and dining parlor, guests would be more likely to turn inward to conversations with each other, since they could not glimpse additional rooms; the doors pierce walls perpendicular to each other. These discrete rooms emphasized how little access their occupants, who would have included people of relatively low status, had to the country-house interior. In contrast, guests of Buckingham’s social rank could look through a vista of the more private spaces of the house.
The simultaneous display of public responsibility and elite status was so essential to a landowner’s hospitality that it remained in country-house plans despite the growing popularity of Italian classicism. Inigo Jones, who studied and annotated Italian treatises in detail, designed Lord Dacre’s Chevening like an Italian villa, yet the plan was calculated to display Dacre’s household and the social hierarchy (Figure 2).8 He echoed Italian villa plans by dividing the width of the house into three nearly equal ranges and opening enfilades across the front and back sequences of rooms. In use, however, Chevening both facilitated interactions across socioeconomic groups and offered circulation patterns that filtered visitors. Guests who ascended the main stair would have encountered Dacre’s servants, evoking his household and estate community. Because the basement stair connected directly to the main stair, servants needed to walk through the main stair hall to enter other first-floor rooms. Family and guests could thus see servants and interact with them while observing other elite occupants doing the same.

Elite guests who remained on the ground floor would have moved through a traditionally filtered interior; immediately after entering, they would have turned left into enclosed rooms devoted to their entertainment: the great parlor and withdrawing room. Although Jones opened enfilades across the width of the house, the rooms at the right were service and household spaces, and Dacre would have closed the right-hand door of the enfilade to hide them. Jones had rearticulated—but not removed—the traditional patterns of elite hospitality by adapting the English country-house plan to an imported model.

Sir Francis Bacon and Sir Henry Wotton, two gentlemen who wrote on country-house design in the early seventeenth century, explicitly preferred the display and filtering of social interactions over an evocation of elite status. Both stressed the need to design an interior adapted to its use.

In the first sentence of his essay “Of Building,” Bacon asserted, “[h]ouses are built to live in, and not to look on; therefore let use be preferred over uniformity except where both may be had.”9 A house laid out for hospitality and the rhythms of daily life would be more desirable than a house that had a classically symmetrical exterior but awkward circulation. Bacon translated this axiom into architectural design by describing a courtyard-plan house that, like Burley-on-the-Hill, accommodated guests in discrete rooms. He separated the entertaining rooms by placing them in a front courtyard while devoting a rear courtyard to lodgings. He also suggested that guests be compelled to engage with each other and their hosts by locating them in rooms with “fine colored windows” rather than transparent windows that afforded distracting views of the estate.10 Guests would be surrounded by color—paintings, tapestries, and stained-glass windows illuminated by sunlight—and could see just the shadowy silhouettes of trees, hills, and people outside. Only if admitted to the more private lodgings of the back court could guests look out over the grounds. A first-floor arcade circled this courtyard; a grotto or shady area faced onto the garden; a third-floor gallery opened to “the prospect and freshness of the garden,” and there were “two delicate or rich cabinets . . . glazed with crystalline glass, and a rich cupola in the midst.”11 In such interior and exterior spaces views into the landscape became associated with retreat from social interaction. Few people other than the occupant of the adjoining bedchamber would enter the cabinets, for instance, and Bacon specified transparent “crystalline glass” for the windows.12 At Burley-on-the-Hill, Buckingham’s high-ranking friends were privileged to enjoy views across exclusive social spaces; likewise, visitors to the house described by Bacon could look out to the surrounding estate once they withdrew into the private back courtyard.

Sir Henry Wotton, in his Elements of Architecture, discusses at greater length the use of a compartmentalized plan to filter visitors and facilitate social interactions. He criti-
cizes the enfilade because it inconveniently opens the inte-rior to all guests and household members; it "doth neces-sarily put an intolterable servitude upon all the Chambers save the Inmost, where none can arrive, but through the rest." All occupants of a country house—family, guests, and servants—might pass through such enfilades, converting them into corridors. At Chevening, for instance, the lay-out of enfilades required that servants walk across the main receiving spaces (entrance hall and stair) to move between the service spaces on the right side of the house and the rooms set aside for exclusive entertainment on the left. Owners who chose an enfilade foolishly preferred display over use, Wotton averred, because they had "the fond ambi-tion of displaying to a Stranger all our Furniture at one Sight." They were "fond," or foolish, because they did not consider which rooms would be appropriate for a stranger to see. At Burley-on-the-Hill, Buckingham would have magnificently displayed large interiors and opulent furnish-ings if the architect had aligned the great hall, dining par-lor, and more exclusive rooms; such enfilades, however, would have made those exclusive elite spaces visible to vis-itors of lower rank.

Wotton emphasizes the need to minimize such contra-diction between social practices and domestic planning. In his concluding remarks on the enfilade, he explains how it ill serves the Italian desire for privacy: "I observe no Nation in the World, by Nature more private and reserved, then the Italian, and on the other side, in no Habitations lesse privacie; so as there is a kinde of Conflict betweene their Dwelling and their Being." Italians are the most "private and reserved" of all nations, yet the enfilades in their houses open interior rooms to strangers "at one Sight" and leave few areas to which family and household could withdraw. Consequently, Wotton claims, there is a conflict between "Dwelling"—how the Italians live in their houses—and "Being," how they conduct their daily lives. Like Bacon, who asserts that houses should be designed to be lived in, Wot-ton focuses on how occupants would move through and interact within the interior.

For the early seventeenth-century poets who visited and then described country houses, a primary criterion was the character of the social gatherings that were fostered. In "To My Friend G. N. from Wrest," Thomas Carew lauded his friend G. N. for preferring to define his house by the social interactions it framed rather than by its architectural ornament:

The lord and lady of this place delight
Rather to be in act, than seem in sight.
Instead of statues to adorn their wall
They throng with living men their merry hall,
Where at large tables filled with wholesome meats
The servant, tenant, and kind neighbour eats (ll. 31–36).

The lord and lady might have chosen to adorn the interiors with classical statues, suggestive of wealth and education, or with the clothing and conversations of their guests. They chose “to be in act,” rather than “seem in sight”—that is, to show their status through their gatherings. Guests could observe that their host’s elite status entailed social respon-sibility as they watched him mingle with members of vari-ous socioeconomic ranks.

Because of this focus on social interactions, landscape and house become a little-noted background, except when they contribute to the owner’s interactions with visitors. In “To Penshurst,” Ben Jonson describes how Penshurst sup-port the Sidney family’s mealtine hospitality. Praising the estate, he explains, “Thy copse . . . / that never fails to serve thee seasoned deer,” “The painted partridge [that] lies in every field, And for thy mess, is willing to be killed,” and “thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish” (ll. 19–20, 29–30, 32). The Sidneys use the abundant resources of Penshurst to offer guests a wide range of dishes: venison, partridge, and fish. Inside, Jonson ignores how the house is furnished and describes only how he is welcomed. Even in his bedcham-ber, to which he retreats alone, hospitality remains the main criterion; he does not need to “pray / For fire, or lights, or livery: all is there, / As if thou [Penshurst], then wert mine, or I reigned here” (ll. 72–74).

This insistent emphasis on country-house hospitality bespoke the firmly entrenched connections among the landowner, his estate, and his public responsibility. Even as the nobility and gentry began to reside increasingly in Lon-don in the early seventeenth century, these expectations did not change. Poets praised those who maintained traditional hospitality in the face of the growing elite interest in urban leisure, and James I as well as Charles I required that landowners show public responsibility.

After James I returned the court to London in 1603, eschewing Elizabeth I’s late-sixteenth-century royal pro-gresses through the countryside, the nobility and gentry bought or rented residences to participate in the growing social season of the capital. By the 1630s at least 75 percent held a house or apartment in London. They moved in exclusive social circles and lived in elite neighborhoods such as Westminster, which were unlike the socially varied parish communities of their estates. They also pursued daily leisure activities, including shopping at the New Exchange and socializing, rather than overseeing tenant farmers and adjudicating disputes among local residents. In response to
this unwanted migration from rural areas, James I and Charles I issued several decrees that ordered nobility and gentry to return to their country estates, where their hospitality was needed for the welfare of the nation. James I criticized the nobility and gentry for “liv[ing] in London and about the city privately,” while Charles I stipulated in 1632 that landowners “keep their houses and Hospitality.” Landowners who did not return to their estates faced prosecution in the Star Chamber, unless they obtained royal dispensation to remain in London.

Accepting this public responsibility was widely identified as a primary marker for elite status. Henry Peacham hyperbolically ranked it above lineage when he defined the nobility and gentry as a primary marker for elite status. Henry Peacham in his Compleat Gentleman of 1622, “hardly are they to be admitted for Noble, who (though of never so excellent parts) consume their light, as in a dark Lanthorne in contemplation and a Stoicall retiredness.”

Even a gentleman of high birth—“of never so excellent parts”—might not be considered noble unless he assumed public responsibility. Richard Brathwaite (1587/8–1673), in The English Gentleman (1630) and The English Gentlewoman (1631), argued that social interactions were the primary characteristic of elite behavior. He even redefined the gentleman’s cabinet—usually a space of physical solitude—in terms of social interaction. Brathwaite wrote, “a true and faithful friend is an individual “to whom hee [the reader] might freely impart the secrets of his brest, or open the Cabinet of his counsels.” The “cabinet” is depicted as a figurative space in the gentleman’s mind where he stores the thoughts that he would share in conversation with his most intimate friends. Even the gentlewoman, who held less public responsibility, had to imagine herself continually observed by others. He warns his gentlewoman reader: “Bee you in your Chambers or private Closets; bee you retired from the eyes of men; thinke how the eyes of God are on you.”

Although the seeming solitude of the closet might tempt her toward frivolous actions, such as examining her appearance, she must maintain the decorous behavior appropriate to social gatherings. Members of the elite, both men and women, were defined by how those around them perceived their actions. The sharply subdivided country-house interiors of the early seventeenth century were the product of this conception of public responsibility and accountability.

Leisured Hospitality: The 1650s Country House

After the Civil War, noble and gentle patrons and their architects suddenly reconfigured traditional divided interiors into open vistas through the house and out to the estate. The architect John Webb pioneered open interiors devoted to elite social circles to replace the discrete rooms traditionally encountered immediately inside a country house. At the Earl and Countess of Rutland’s Belvoir Castle, Webb designed an entrance route in which elite guests rarely left the entrance axis and only briefly turned their backs on the land as they ascended to the second-floor rooms designed for their entertainment (Figures 3, 4). They could look across the central hall to the garden as they entered, and they walked alongside windows as they approached the main stair. They turned momentarily away from the garden while climbing the first flight, but they passed windows and finally faced them when climbing to the second-floor central hall. From there they had a view through the depth of the house, as on the first floor, and guests could see an even longer vista once they turned into the entertaining rooms. Across the great chamber, withdrawing rooms, and galleries, Webb aligned an enfilade of 152 feet with a window at either end that created a seemingly infinite vista into the land. Rooms for the household and for lower-ranked visitors were still provided at Belvoir, but they were placed to either side of the main entrance route. The first floor contains the usual service spaces to one side and, on the other side, parlors and the withdrawing room for smaller social and household gatherings. These spaces allowed the earl to fulfill his customary responsibilities, but long vistas for exclusive social circles had replaced traditional household spaces as the marker of his high rank.

This more open interior, epitomized by the enfilade, was such a priority that Webb and his patrons disregarded well-established conventions governing façade design. Before the 1650s, patrons created façades with evenly spaced and symmetrically disposed windows at the expense of interior design. At Sir George St. Paul’s house, for instance, three evenly spaced and centered bay windows light the long gallery (Figure 5). Inside the house, however, St. Paul and his guests entered the gallery off-center from the rear polygonal bay, and so looked through the canted side light rather than the central, flat window. At Amesbury of the late 1650s, in contrast, Webb and the Marquess of Hertford designed asymmetrical side façades because of open enfilades on both first and second floors (Figures 6, 7). The open enfilades occur in the middle of each front range, while the windows on the side façades are irregularly spaced. Webb appears to have centered the enfilade window on the interior walls of the front entertaining rooms and then used the distance between the front corner and that window as the unit for spacing other windows. In the 1650s Webb and the Marquess of Hertford thus reversed usual domestic design criteria by preferring interior enfilades over classically symmetrical façades.
Figure 3  John Webb, Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, 1654–57, first-floor plan

Figure 4  Belvoir Castle, second-floor plan
To create these open interiors Webb reworked traditional room arrangements. Previous English country-house plans often had a side-to-side division, with service or household rooms on one side, the hall and possibly other general receiving rooms at the center, and rooms for elite guests in the range opposite the service spaces. Compact house plans—without wings or a central courtyard—commonly exhibited this arrangement. The second floor of St. Paul’s house, for instance, has a large central great chamber flanked by lodgings to the left and the long gallery to the right (see Figure 5). Houses with a central courtyard combined this side-to-side division with a front-back hierarchy of rooms. The range of rooms at the back of the courtyard would often comprise service spaces at one end, a central hall, and rooms for receiving elite guests at the other corner. The side and front ranges would be occupied by lodgings for servants as well as family and elite guests. At Burley-on-the-Hill, Buckingham placed his service spaces in the rear left corner, the hall in the center of the back range, and more exclusive rooms at the right; the fronts of both side ranges of the court were devoted to lodgings (see Figure 1).

Webb replaced the side-to-side division between service or household rooms and spaces for elite guests with a front-back division. At both Belvoir and Amesbury he placed rooms for receiving large social gatherings in the front range and more private spaces for intimate gatherings, household, and lodging in the back (see Figures 3, 4, 6, 7). In Amesbury he reinforced this division by separating the two ranges with a corridor along which servants or other household members could move unseen while guests were received and entertained in the front rooms. This sharp front-back division created the appearance of a house devoted exclusively to welcoming guests—those of lower rank on the ground floor, and elite, on the second floor. In earlier houses such as Burley-on-the-Hill, Chevening and St. Paul’s house, guests would depart from the entrance axis soon after entering the interior as they turned into the great hall. At midcentury houses such as Belvoir and Amesbury, noble and gentle guests would rarely leave the entrance axis until they reached the rooms for elite social gathering. In Belvoir, they would turn aside only to reach the main stair; they would never leave the main axis inside Amesbury. They would thus avoid rooms for household use and gain the impression that they could move unrestrictedly through an open house devoted to their entertainment.

These new plans suggest a sharp change in the priorities and practices of country-house hospitality: from displaying the household in the more public spaces immediately inside the main entrance to concealing the household in private, less-accessible areas behind elite spaces. At Amesbury, the Marquess of Hertford hid servants until guests had penetrated to the most private household rooms (Figures 6, 7). On the first and second floors, servants would remain concealed in the service corridor and the spiral service stair enclosed within the main stair. To
Figure 6  John Webb, Amesbury, Wiltshire, 1659–64, first-floor plan, from William Kent, Designs of Inigo Jones, 1727

Figure 7  Amesbury, second-floor plan, from William Kent, Designs of Inigo Jones, 1727
reach the cupola, however, elite guests would need to take the spiral stair through the upper floors and attic. In these floors and on the staircase they might encounter servants performing household tasks, and glimpse servant accommodations in the attic. Even those not intimately acquainted with the landowner and his family might visit the cupola, as did Celia Fiennes, who toured English country houses in the late seventeenth century and described both the attic and the view from the cupola at Coleshill.

This welcome for the seventeenth-century elite visitor recast the leisure of exclusive social circles to be at least as important as public responsibility. The vistas across interior and estate metaphorically suggested that land ownership remained the basis for the elite status of owner and guests, and they also evoked the spaces and experiences of elite leisure activities. Ownership of large tracts of land continued to distinguish the nobility and gentry from smaller farmers and entailed responsibility toward those who farmed their land, whom they employed, and who passed through their gates.

Authors of agricultural tracts identified the effective supervision of farming by landowners as the solution to England’s economic and social problems. Walter Blith, in *The English Improver Improved* (1652), explicitly called on landowners to reinstate national prosperity. Although he addressed himself to Oliver Cromwell, landowners, academics, soldiers, and farmers, Blith assigned responsibility for the national economy to landowners alone. They should improve their estates and so “be serviceable to the whole, in being serviceable to your selves and Families.” He described how rural labor would displace idleness and drunkenness, contrasting the “Labouring Country people [who] . . . brew their owne Beere” with “the Townes, where . . . private houses of resort . . . vent so much Beere, or Ale.”

John Beale, in *Herefordshire Orchards: A Pattern for All England* (1657), suggests that local gentry had been improving their farmland through the 1650s; they had, for instance, increased the quality of their cider and pastures. He singles out Lord Scudamore, who maintains a well-ordered family, preserves the woods on his land, offers traditional hospitality, and focuses on agricultural improvements. In the radically different world of 1650s England, nobility and gentry still were expected to contribute to national welfare through their management of large country estates.

However, this traditional emphasis on public responsibility now stood alongside an evocation of elite recreation. As backdrops to elite gatherings, the vistas of land also reminded guests that the estate was the well-established site for exclusive recreational activities, particularly the hunt. High-ranking visitors were traditionally greeted with views out to the property and landscape paintings. As the surveyor John Thorpe depicted in his early seventeenth-century book of house plans, orchards and gardens were often outside the rooms reserved for elite guests and wood yards and kitchen gardens were outside the service rooms. The most sweeping views of land in earlier houses—echoed by the long vistas of the 1650s—were available exclusively to elite guests. The great hall, where a landowner might meet guests of various social ranks, could have large windows but stood on the first floor. Patron and architect placed the spaces for elite visitors, such as the long gallery, on the upper floors to offer more far-reaching views. Landscape paintings were often exhibited in these entertaining rooms; the Countess of Arundel, for instance, hung most of her landscapes in the withdrawing room, great chamber, and south gallery of Tart Hall. Webb’s open interiors could thus locate a landowner’s traditional landowning responsibilities ambivalently alongside a new emphasis on exclusive elite entertainment.

Underpinning Webb’s challenge to established country-house planning was a radical broadening of design priorities to include not only an emphasis on use but also a desire for visual pleasure. The gentleman architect Sir Roger Pratt made notes for books on architecture in 1660 that echoed Bacon and Wotton in their careful prescriptions for filtering family, guests, and household members. Yet he bestowed new praise on enfilades for their display of a pleasant interior. In the 1620s Sir Henry Wotton had restricted visual pleasure to views across the estate, specifying that the interior should be designed for use rather than display. Of the estate, he writes that “vaste and indefinite viewes,” such as those with no clear horizon line, should be “condemned, by good Authors, as if thereby some part of the pleasure (whereof we speake) did perish.” The primary criterion for evaluating such exterior views was the pleasure that they might offer a single viewer. Wotton compares the solitary contemplation of the landscape to how “the Master doth much joy when he walketh about the Line of his owne Possessions.” The landowner surveys and admires his estate alone—that is, he views the land without engaging in the social interactions obligatory on the interior.

When Pratt describes the domestic interior in 1660, he praises the new enfilade for bringing the traditional visual pleasures of the site inside the house. He urges his patron reader to open the interior and exterior with long yet clearly terminated “pleasant” vistas: aligning the entrance and garden doors of the house as well as the gate to the forecourt. The resulting vista will be a “most pleasant Scene, especially
if ye long walke in ye middest of ye garden answering to yt of ye Court...be terminated with some pleasant object as a fountain, Grotte, Statue, somewhat of Perspective as a Triumphal Arch, Banketting house handsome gates opening into some wood or field etc.44

Cutting through the rooms designed for receiving elite guests, Pratt advises, the open enfilade creates a similarly pleasant vista. He explains that the doors in these rooms should “all lie in a direct line one against another out of one roome into another, soe yt they beeing all open you may see from one ende of ye house to ye other answerable to wch if ye windowes bee placed at each ende of ye vista...ye whole will bee soe much ye more pleasant.”45 While Wotton had criticized the enfilade as a foolish display in 1624, Pratt praises it; he imagines how “pleasant” the enfilade will be with all doors open and aligned with windows. The windows will make it “soe much ye more pleasant” by adding a sharp contrast of sunlight, sky, and green expanses to dark interiors of wood paneling, wooden furniture, paintings, and tapestries. Like Wotton, Pratt describes how emphatic end points increase the viewer’s pleasure, but he now suggests how the estate and the main receiving rooms might be admired together at one’s leisure.

Patrons and architects rethought the country house display of elite status in response to an emerging split between public responsibility and high rank after the 1640s Civil War. Political office now depended more on partisan sympathies than noble or gentle birth. Once Charles I’s Parliamentarian critics had defeated the Royalist sympathizers, Parliament abolished the monarchy and dissolved the House of Lords, where the nobility sat. The House of Commons, which included fewer members of the elite, was now the sole legislative body, and only those sympathetic to the Parliamentarians sat in it.46 At the local parish level, there was less opportunity for noble and gentle landowners to mingle with tenant farmers and other residents. Traditionally, religious holidays were celebrated with parish feasts that included those of all socioeconomic ranks.57 The post–Civil War Parliament abolished these feasts and required that worshipers attend sermons and remain in their houses on religious holidays to read the Bible and discuss the sermon.48 At both national and local levels, therefore, landowners were defined less by their public responsibility than by their wealth, ownership of large tracts of land, or the exclusivity of their social circles.

Devotional manuals of the 1650s reveal that these challenges to elite public responsibility were accompanied by a new focus on the individual. In the 1630s Richard Brathwaite had defined the English gentleman and gentlewoman according to their social interactions, and before the 1640s, devotional manuals had likewise described prayer as a form of social interaction with God.49 Manuals published in the 1650s, however, newly insisted on the importance of solitary introspection, which should guide an individual’s comportment throughout the day. In his Golden Grove of 1655, Jeremy Taylor advises his reader, “Before you go forth of your Closet...consider...what matter or business is like to...tempt you; and take particular resolution against that...and when you enter upon it, remember upon what you resolved in your Closet.”50 Readers of all socioeconomic ranks should consult their individual consciences to determine appropriate behavior, and nobility and gentry were now more autonomous individuals than socially-defined actors in the community.

The country house became a site particularly associated with this elite, leisureed individual; but, as noted, expectations of public responsibility did not completely disappear—reinforcing the vista’s dual symbolism of recreational activities and ownership responsibilities. Many members of nobility and gentry withdrew from London to their country estates because they no longer held political office, and Parliamentarian sympathies fomented hostility against them in the capital. Sir John Reresby noted in his journal that “the common salutation to a man well dressed was ‘French dog;’ or the like” and that workmen threw sand at his valet de chambre when he wore a feather in his hat.51 Because of this hostility and an absence of entertainment in London, Reresby observed, “the nobility and gentry lived mostly in the country.”52 Yet this new practice did not dislodge the well-established expectation that landowners were responsible for traditional hospitality and agricultural productivity. John Evelyn, for instance, in A Character of England (1659), described the change and criticized the rowdy gatherings at country houses—where guests might even destroy interior furnishings.53 Traditional patterns of commissions further suggested the ongoing importance of landownership as an important marker of elite status.54 Landowners throughout England built new country houses or refurbished existing ones, and commissions continued at previous rates despite unprecedented economic constraints.55 Patrons needed to revitalize estates that had been damaged or had fallen into disrepair during the Civil War, and Royalist owners had to buy back their estates from Parliament.56 Parliament now collected as much money in one month as it had previously collected in a year; landowners also faced unusually high taxation.57 Yet only fourteen more houses were designed per decade in the earlier seventeenth century than in the ten years of stability between 1640 and 1660.58 Political and religious sympathies, contrary to recent scholarly argument, were of little importance in shaping...
country-house patronage networks. Although he was an architect with established Royalist connections, Webb received commissions from Parliamentarians and Royalists alike. In 1642, Parliament had imprisoned Webb for carrying 500 pounds sterling to Charles I at Beverley, and the Committee of Revenue then dismissed him from office during 1643. In the 1650s, however, Parliamentarians outnumbered Royalists among Webb’s patrons, and these clients included Anglicans, Catholics, and Presbyterians. Nor was social rank a key factor; his patrons were both high-ranking nobility and untitled gentry. Instead, social networks defined Webb’s patrons; they were either members of Charles I’s former court or their acquaintances. Because of such royal connections, Webb’s patrons rarely held political office during the 1650s and so were especially inclined to withdraw to their country or suburban estates. Yet the more open plan that Webb pioneered was also desired by Chief Justice Oliver St. John, a high official in the 1650s government. St. John employed Peter Mills, a City of London bricklayer, to design a new house on his Thorpe Hall estate (Figure 8). Mills’s plan was more traditional than those that Webb designed, but used enfilades across the rooms for receiving elite guests. Thorpe Hall echoes the old side-to-side division, with service and household rooms to the right of the entrance and rooms for receiving guests to the left. Entertaining rooms for more intimate acquaintances extended across the garden façade; this range ended in the little parlor, which was used by the household. Mills stretched open enfilades through these left-hand and back ranges of rooms for guests. The enfilade through the right-side service range, in contrast, terminated in a blank wall at either end. St. John thus offered his guests the vistas of the landscape made fashionable by projects for the courtier elite.

Project-specific factors such as social connections and geographical location determined how and where the open enfilade might be adopted. Mills knew of Webb’s open enfilades because of nearby Lamport Hall, for which Webb was designing an addition. Pratt’s design for his cousin’s Coleshill also incorporated an open enfilade, and he or his cousin likewise would have been acquainted with Webb; drawings by Webb survive for what is most likely an earlier, unexecuted scheme of Coleshill. Other houses without connection to Webb or his patrons, such as Sir Henry Blount’s Tytenhanger, evoke the open interior less markedly (Figure 9). Tytenhanger includes two enfilades, one across the back range and the other through the rooms for receiving guests—the great parlor, hall, and withdrawing room—in the front range. Yet neither enfilade was aligned with a window; they thus do not incorporate Webb’s
vistas across house and estate—innovations which in the 1650s were known only in the immediate circle of Webb and his patrons.

The Open Interior in the Post-Restoration World

Webb designed country houses in the unique political, social, and religious conditions of the 1650s: a national government without a monarchy and with a unicameral legislature, a nobility and gentry who had withdrawn from London to the country, and worship transformed from Anglican ritual to Puritan meditation. In 1660 Charles II reinstated the monarchy, the House of Lords, and the Church of England. Nobility and gentry returned to London as a social season revived around parliamentary sessions. Residence in the capital now became even more permanent than it had been before the Civil War; members of the elite bought houses and new town squares were built for them. The country house correspondingly became a temporary residence for the summer months. Yet the 1650s had created irreversible shifts in the expectations of nobility and gentry and in the design of the country house. Webb’s open interior became increasingly popular; public duty was increasingly overshadowed by individual interests; and landowners were ever more marked by their membership in exclusive social circles.

Although Webb designed few houses in the 1660s, a variety of architects and patrons now created vistas that cut across interior rooms and often reached into the surrounding landscape. From suburban London to remote country estates, architects and patrons offered their guests a view of interior expanses. Hugh May designed Eltham Lodge for Sir John Shaw as a triple pile whose front and back ranges both provided uninterrupted vistas from room to room (Figure 10). At Belton House in Lincolnshire, William Winde designed a double-pile plan that included one enfilade across the front range ending in walls, and an open enfilade across the garden front (Figure 11). Aligning the enfilade with windows appeared less important than simply offering a long vista. Neither did particular architects use the open enfilade across all designs nor did it appear consistently across similar sites. Patrons instead might prefer a window-ended enfilade because of individual priorities. Sir Roger Pratt designed both Horseheath Hall and Kingston Lacy on country estates, yet opened the enfilade to windows at Sir Ralph Bankes’s Kingston Lacy and closed it at Lord Allington’s Horseheath Hall.

Opening views through the interior was so desirable that a few patrons extended the interior by illusionistic means. The Duke of Devonshire placed a mirror on one end of an enfilade at Chatsworth to double its apparent length, while William Blathwayt at Dyrham Park ended his enfilade with a perspectival painting that suggested farther interior spaces receding into the distance.

Even after London became again the primary site of elite leisure activities, country-house patrons increasingly built open interiors. By the 1690s the open interior had become so firmly entrenched that Roger North insisted on creating enfilades for the household as well as for elite guests. The imperative to provide an enfilade could determine the type of plan chosen by a patron. North urged his readers to expand existing houses by creating double-pile plans, which could incorporate an enfilade. If they built a wing parallel to the
Figure 10  Hugh May, Eltham Lodge, London, 1663–64, first-floor plan (H: hall, Ch: chamber, CL: closet, GP: great parlor, A: anteroom, LP: little parlor)

Figure 11  William Winde, Belton House, Lincolnshire, 1684–86, first-floor plan (K: Kitchen, WD: withdrawing room, LP: little parlor, H: hall, Cpl: chapel, GP: great parlor)
the opportunity to admire the house and estate at one’s leisure. The landowner’s hospitality is nearly unmentioned in poems that praise the beauty of interior and estate, opulent furnishings, and the opportunities for individual contemplation. Thomas Shipman, in a 1679 poem about Belvoir, describes the Earl and Countess of Rutland’s hospitality only briefly but enumerates in detail the opulent furnishings throughout the rooms. He writes succinctly of the meal offered him and other guests: “The table’s loaded o’er with choicest meats, / And beautified with delicates” (ll. 156–57). In contrast, he describes the rooms at length, noting, among other features, a “spacious staircase, light as day,” “carpets, weaved in Turkey looms,” and “Rich Parian quarries . . . in chimneypieces” (ll. 160, 163, 196). More than interacting with the earl and countess, Shipman silently and introspectively admires the house around him. Likewise, in writing of the grounds, he does not praise the natural resources that support hospitality—as had Jonson at Penshurst—but admires the beauty. He instructs the reader: “Mind there the valleys richly drest / With Ceres’ favours blest. / That spacious cornfield there behold: / Look how the wind ruffles its ears” (ll. 214–17). The cornfield is praised for the visual patterns created by the wind rather than as the source of a dinner dish. Guests might even observe the landowner from a distance. Richard Flecknoe praises the interior of Welbeck Abbey and then notes: “the Lord / Himself, the noblest prospect does afford” (ll. 39–40). Country-house poets now admired the visually pleasing aspects of interior and exterior—much as Pratt recommended the open enfilade for the pleasure it evoked.

The recast 1650s expectations for the public responsibilities of the landed elite continued in force at the end of the century, underpinning this ongoing emphasis on entertainment of the elite at country houses. Although Charles II had restored traditional government and religion, public duty was not restored as a primary marker of elite status. In practice, landowners continued to oversee their estates, even while residing increasingly in London; they appointed and corresponded weekly with stewards who managed the tenants and oversaw agricultural production. Yet the nobility and gentry now assumed less frequently the political offices formerly expected of those with high rank. At the county level, lower gentry now held office. At the national level, Parliament was more an arena for individual political sympathies than an assembly of England’s elite; partisanship intensified with opposition to Charles II’s policies and the formation of the Whig movement by the Earl of Shaftesbury in 1679.

Religious practices in the 1660s and 1670s underscored the growing split between individual and national interest. When Charles II restored the Church of England, Parliament attempted to enforce the reinstatement of uniform worship. The 1662 Act of Uniformity required that all Englishmen and Englishwomen attend only Anglican services; the 1664 Conventicle Act banned dissenting religious services and imposed a higher penalty for attending them; and the 1665 Five Mile Act forbade dissenting ministers from residing within a five-mile radius of a town. Instead of reinstating uniform worship, however, these acts provoked strong resistance among dissenters; sermons were delivered and pamphlets printed across England.

Individual priorities became the new standards whereby post-Restoration devotional and etiquette manuals advised England’s nobility and gentry. Edward Wettenhall, in his Enter into Thy Closet of 1666, distinguishes nobility and gentry by their opportunity for leisure, solitary introspection. Among his readers, he expects those from the nobility and gentry to withdraw most frequently into their private closets because they have the most leisure. While laborers could only pray at morning and evening, “such who have estates and leisure . . . their daily private devotion cannot be compleat, except consisting of Reading Meditation and Prayer.” Before the 1650s, Henry Peacham had criticized gentlemen and noblemen who withdrew into solitary contemplation; in the later seventeenth century they were expected to be introspective.

In debating the benefits of a contemplative life versus a public one, John Evelyn and George Mackenzie explicitly connect the country house with this split between individual interest and public duty. Mackenzie argues for a solitary life in A Moral Essay, Preferring Solitude to Publick Employment of 1666; a public life, once a desirable marker of elite
status, is an undesirable source of temptation, a lure “to commit the greatest of crimes.” Those engaged in a public life become quarrelsome and avariciously competitive in laying the most opulent table.”

Solitude, which Mackenzie connects particularly to the country estate, avoids these temptations: “Solitude, Contemplation, or a Country-life... have more of pleasure in them then publick Employment.”

Instead of contributing to England’s national prosperity, Mackenzie’s reader is advised to follow what preserves his virtue and gives him the most pleasure.

Evelyn challenges Mackenzie’s argument and issues the traditional call to public office, yet according to Evelyn, his reader should choose the life best suited to his personality: “Let every man... well examine his own Genius, and pursue that kind of life which he is best furnished for.”

Noblemen and gentlemen were no longer expected to assume public responsibility; instead, just as Taylor in The Golden Grove encourages his readers to follow their own guidelines for behavior, Evelyn advises introspective consideration of one’s inclinations. He contrasts the lives appropriate for a “slothful” and an “active” man: “For as to the one... action is labour; so to the other, Otiun [leisure] is labour, and activity the most desirable repose.”

Evelyn’s comparison of these two types reiterates Mackenzie’s contrast between solitary contemplation and public employment.

In his rebuttal of Mackenzie’s argument, Evelyn acknowledges that the country house would likewise remain a site for leisure as well as public responsibility: “Merchants plow the Seas, ... Lawyers break their brains, and Soldiers fight battels: in sum, to live at ease, and splendidly; who before, and whilst employ’d, were the Pillars and Ornaments of their Country.”

The country house, for Evelyn, offered a respite for those members of the elite who had been “the Pillars and Ornaments of their Country.” Even as a site of leisure however, the country house was related to England’s national welfare. Evelyn wrote that a nobleman or gentleman “does not mean by business to reside only in Cities or Courts; since without that of the Country, there would neither be Court nor City.”

Webb’s open interior of the 1650s—in particular, the open enfilade—responded to contemporary political, religious, and social conditions, but the open enfilade was not a short-lived innovation in English country-house planning. It increased in popularity from the end of the seventeenth century, as the window tax transformed windows and the view into a measure of wealth and a new interest in Palladian planning made this enfilade (an Italian device) more desirable. The enfilade then occurred variously opposite one or two windows until the last country houses of the 1930s.

Long vistas of opulently furnished interiors, often extending outward into the land, had become a hallmark of exclusive social life.

Notes


6. This article turns for a methodological model to Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, and Passages,” in Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays (London: Architectural Association, 1997), 55–91. Evans’s argument is more phenomenological than the one presented here; his analysis of changing mentalities through history, however, supports my consideration of how the plan articulates and shapes possible guest experiences and expectations. While a few scholars of early modern domestic architecture have studied circulation, their work has remained more documentary of social practices than analytical of cultural attitudes. See Hugh Murray Baillie, “Etiquette and the Planning of the State Apartments in Baroque Palaces,” Archaeologia 101 (1967), 169–99; Patricia Waddy, Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and Art of the Plan (New York and Cambridge: Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press, 1990).
by Alison Maguire and Andor Gomme before being redrawn by Robert Maguire.
10. Ibid., 116.
11. Ibid., 117.
14. Wotton, Elements of Architecture, 73.
15. On the contemporary definition of fond as foolish, see Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "fond."
23. In fact, 248 men and women were subpoenaed for remaining in London during February 1633, and another 180 were subpoenaed in 1635. Ibid., 221–22.
27. Ibid., 297.
28. Guests would have looked from the entrance door through the garden door which may have been open or possibly have had a window inserted into it. Sir Roger Pratt suggests the possibility of an outer door with glazing in his question about whether to glaze the four outer doors at Horseheath Hall, "Q whither glass doores, or whole ones." Ryston Hall, Norfolk, Pratt Coll. MS. M. 10. Pratt’s architectural notebooks have been republished in R. T. Gunther, ed., The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt, Charles II’s Commissioner for the Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire: New Prints for the First Time from His Note-Books (Oxford, 1928); this quotation appears in Ibid., 123.
29. The wall between windows is either equal to or half of this distance. See dimensions in Figure 6.
30. This overview of previous country houses is based on the plans recorded by the early seventeenth-century surveyor John Thorpe. For a reproduction of Thorpe’s sketchbook, see John Summerson, The Book of Architecture of John Thorpe in Sir John Soane’s Museum, The Walpole Society 40 (1964–66). Andor Gomme and Alison Maguire have argued that the front-back division, here attributed to Webb, occurred in early-seventeenth-century examples. The plans they cite, however, do not show a full-service back range; they instead infer a front-back division from the placement of the kitchen which, in Thorpe’s sketchbook, could be isolated to a back corner. Gomme and Maguire, Design and Plan in the Country House, 142–43.
31. C. J. Richardson shows the plan of the staircase near cupola level in his album of drawings of country houses. Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 26.85, fol. 240v.
35. Walter Blith, The English Improver Improved or the Survey of Unhandyd Surveyed Discovering the Improvableness of all Lands (London: John Wright, 1652), d2v.
36. Ibid., 8.
38. Ibid., 37–38.
40. Landscape paintings constituted more than half of the paintings in the great chamber and withdrawing room and nearly half in the gallery. Henry V. S. Ogden and Margaret S. Ogden, English Taste in Landscape in the Seventeenth Century (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1953), 17, 72–73.
42. Wotton, Elements of Architecture, 4–5.
43. Ibid., 4.
45. Ibid.
46. Only seven peers were MPs until Cromwell re-established the upper house of Parliament in 1657. There were more peers in this house, but they remained a small number in proportion to the gentry. Cromwell appointed seven peers, five sons of peers, four baronets, one Scottish and one Irish peer, and twelve wealthy country gentlemen. Of the sixty-three members, only nine—or one-seventh—were members of the traditional peerage. The sons of peers were most likely younger sons, who would not have inherited their fathers’ titles, and baronets were considered the highest rank of the gentry; David L. Smith, “The Struggle for New Constitutional and Institutional Forms,” in Revolution and Restoration: England in the 1650s, ed. John Morrill (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), 16; Derek Hazr, England in Conflict 1603–1660: Kingdom, Community, Commonwealth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 255, 293, 309; John Morrill, “The Impact on Society,” in Revolution and Restoration: England in the 1650s, ed. John Morrill (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), 95.


49. For instance, they enumerated the clothes and gestures appropriate for respectful devotion in a closet. See Certaine Devout and Godly Petitions, Commonly Called Jesu Psalter (Antwerp: Johannes Foulerus, 1575); Sixe Spirituall Bookes; Full of Merveilous Pietie and Devotion (St.-Omer: P. Auroi, 1618); The Crans of Comfort With Godly Prayers (London, 1628).


52. Ibid., 37.


54. Scholars have frequently assumed that little building occurred in the 1650s. For examples, see J. T. Cliffe, The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-Century England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 4; Cooper, Houses of the Gentry, 225–26. Cliffe assumes little building because he does not take into account the years of political instability noted below.


57. These years were 1646–48, the respite between the two civil wars, and 1653–58, the years between Cromwell’s establishment of the Instrument and his death, which prompted the Restoration. Before 1640, 128 house projects were undertaken per decade, while 114 were pursued between 1640 and 1660. J. T. Cliffe has estimated that 681 projects were undertaken from 1600 to 1640 and 114 between 1640 and 1659. Cliffe, The World of the Country House, 4.

58. Christopher Clay notes that the county of Suffolk had paid £8,000 in Ship Money for 1639 but that during 1644 £7,500 were expected per annum. Clay, “Landlords and Estate Management in England,” 120.

59. Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw have argued that 1650s patrons and architects rethought country-house exteriors symbolically in response to the new political and religious partisanship; they argue for a style called Puritan Minimalism. Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, Architecture Without Kings: The Rise of Puritan Classicism Under Cromwell (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).

60. Bold, John Webb, 3.

61. Seven Parliamentarians, as opposed to four Royalists, commissioned projects from Webb. Sergeant John Maynard and Lord Fairfax were Presbyterian, while Sir Justinian Isham was a Catholic whose sympathies led to his imprisonment during the 1650s. Bold, John Webb, 3; Skelton, “Spaces of Leisure,” 110–36.

62. He received commissions from six members of the nobility (the Duke of Northumberland, the Countess of Rutland, the Earl of Peterborough, Lord Fairfax, Lord Dacre, and the Marquess of Hertford) and from five members of the gentry (Sir Justinian Isham, Sir George Pratt, Sir John Trevor, Chaloner Chute, and John Maynard).

63. Only one patron, Sir Justinian Isham, stood outside these courtier networks. Isham was a personal acquaintance of Webb’s; he would have been acquainted with Webb through Henry Cogan. Cogan knew both Jones and Isham intimately since he was a witness to Jones’s will, and Isham stayed with him at his London house during the 1650s. On 1 February 1653 Bishop Brian Duppa addressed a letter to Isham “For Sir Justinian Isham at Mr Cogan’s House in Charing X.” Gyles Isham, ed., The Correspondence of Bishop Brian Duppa and Sir Justinian Isham 1650–1660, The Publications of the Northamptonshire Record Society 17 (1950–51), 61. I am grateful to Edward Chaney for sharing with me his research into the connection among Cogan, Webb, and Isham; this research now appears in his facsimile of Jones’s Roman sketchbook.

64. Only four patrons (Sir John Trevor, Lord Fairfax, Sergeant John Maynard, Chaloner Chute) held parliamentary office, and only Trevor was elected to Parliament throughout the 1650s; Fairfax, Maynard, and Chute sat in Parliament at the end of the decade. Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. “John Trevor,” “Lord Fairfax,” “John Maynard,” “Chaloner Chute.” On Chute, see also “History and Description of the Vine, in Hampshire,” The Topographer 2 (May 1789), 56; C. W. Chute, A History of the Vine (Winchester; Jacob and Johnson, 1888), 74.


66. Mills appears to have been familiar with Lamport Hall in detail since the chimneypiece in St. John’s study at Thorpe Hall echoes that in the great room of Lamport Hall. It is unclear whether he knew Webb or simply visited the addition to Lamport while it was under construction.


69. Girouard, Life in the English Country House, 152; National Trust, Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire (London: Centurion Press, 1999), 24. The Chatsworth enfrîde was not the first enfrîde to have a mirror, yet it was the first in an English country house. Verulam, a late-sixteenth-century lodge owned by Sir Francis Bacon, had an enfrîde between mirrors. Platt, The Great Rebuildings of Tudor and Stuart England, 95.


71. Ibid., 132.

72. Ibid., 132.


74. On “On Welbeck,” see ibid., 176–78.

76. Heal and Holmes, 188–89.


78. Edward Wettenhall, Enter into Thy Closet (London, 1666), 35, see also 17.

79. Peacham, Compleat Gentleman, 2.


81. Ibid., 73.


83. Ibid.

84. Evelyn, Public Employment, 10.

85. Ibid., 92.

86. For an outline of this subsequent fate of the open enfilade, see Skelton, “Spaces of Leisure,” 311–31.

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Figures 3, 4. RIBA Drawings Collection