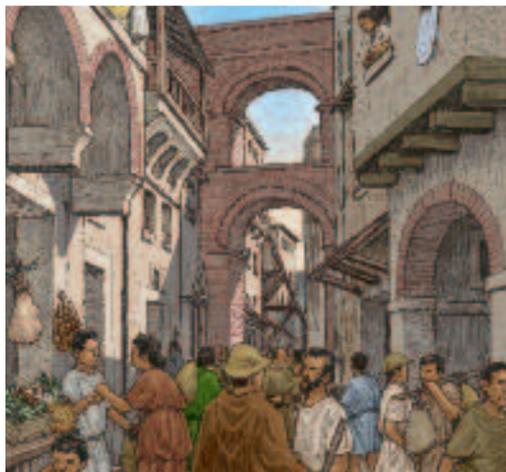


A Roman Domus

As you walk along a street in Rome, it seems that there are no houses, only small shops lining its edges. This is because most better off homes rent the front rooms to tradespeople. Behind the shops, the luxury begins.



Most Romans live packed tightly together, like sardines in cans, in apartment blocks called *insulae* (see pages 34–35). Only very wealthy people can afford a *domus* or private house. The statistics prove the point—one survey shows 1790 private houses to 46,602 apartment blocks in Rome.

Inside a wealthy *domus*

The typical *domus* is built on one floor. Although a few houses boast a second level, this is usually confined to one or two rooms, perhaps a study for the *paterfamilias*. A Roman home is much more sturdily built than a Greek house, using fired clay bricks secured by mortar, as shown on page 52.

The tiled or stone-slab flooring is often laid over a depth of concrete, a construction that allows for cellars underneath (although some districts of Rome are prone to flooding). The wealthiest houses—especially in the colder northern provinces—boast an underfloor central heating system called a *hypocaust* (see pages 90 and 92).

The family rooms are kept separate from the public areas, such as the *atrium*, where the *paterfamilias* greets his clients each workday morning. There is unlikely to be a *balneum* or bathroom, because the custom is to use the many smaller and monumental public baths every day.

1. The janitor greets a caller at the front door. Beyond, the *vestibula* leads to the *atrium*.

2. Rooms at the front, open to the street, are rented out as shops or *caupona* (taverns).

3. Guests are received in the *atrium*, an area open to the sky. The roof slopes down to an opening called the *compluvium*, which can be covered with canvas in cold weather. Rainwater is collected in a small pool, the *impluvium*. The water can be piped to a cistern in the cellar if it rises too high.

4. The family living rooms are located around the *atrium* and on the upper floor.

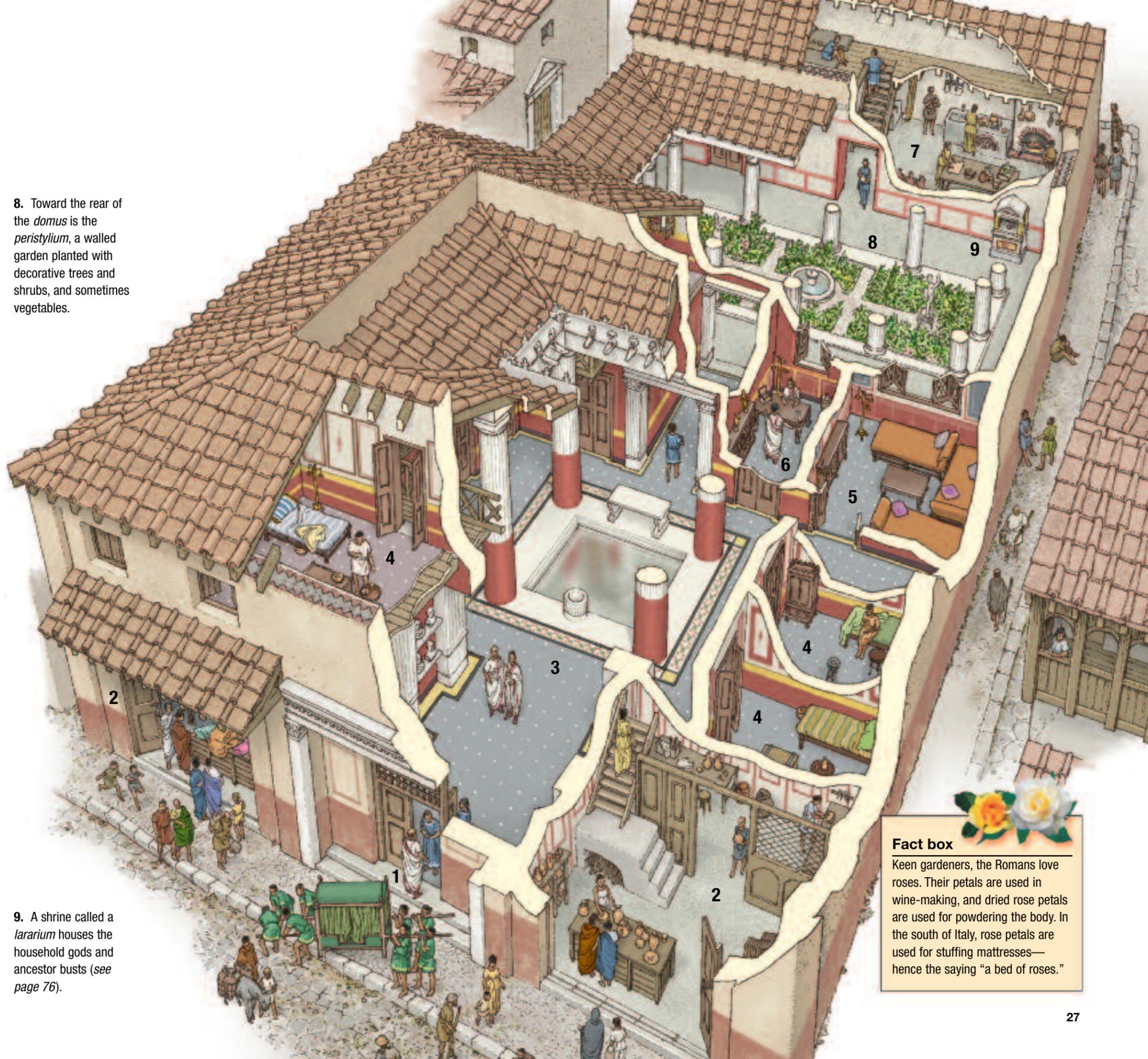
5. The dining room is called a *triclinium* because it contains three reclining couches for diners (see pages 30–31).

6. The *paterfamilias* has his *tablinum* (study) in the back, overlooking the garden.

7. The kitchen and latrine (see pages 32–33). Steps rise to the slave quarters.

8. Toward the rear of the *domus* is the *peristylum*, a walled garden planted with decorative trees and shrubs, and sometimes vegetables.

9. A shrine called a *lararium* houses the household gods and ancestor busts (see page 76).



Fact box

Keen gardeners, the Romans love roses. Their petals are used in wine-making, and dried rose petals are used for powdering the body. In the south of Italy, rose petals are used for stuffing mattresses—hence the saying “a bed of roses.”