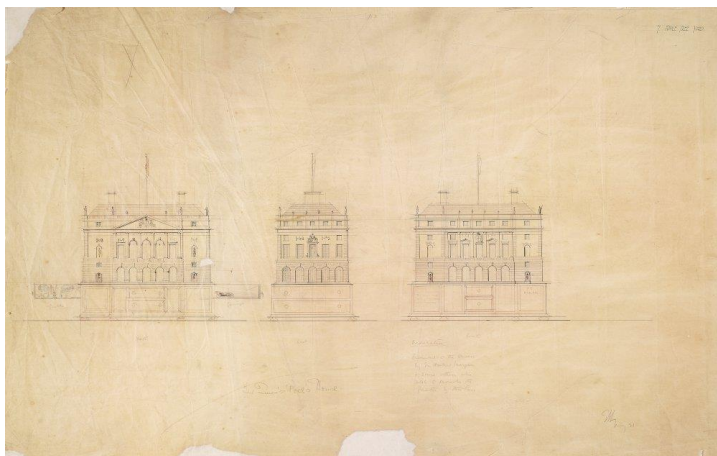


Childs play: an analysis of 20th-century architectural evolution in the form of dolls houses.

Dollhouses, while centuries old, have been used as a method of play and escapism through generations of people, recording their habits, needs, and desires. As well as this, doll houses can be used as an architectural tool – trends have been time capsuled and therefore can be used to analyse how architecture has changed and evolved, especially in the western 20th century. In the essay following, I analyse how architecture and the needs of its users have changed on this miniature scale.



One example of a doll house that demonstrates the themes and trends of the 1920s is the Queen Mary doll house, built by architect Edward Lutyens. Described as a “miniature mansion the king and queen might live in” (‘Queen Mary Dolls House’, n.d.) the goal of this building was to provide “an interesting and lifelike memorial for future times of the sort of

way in which people of our own days found it desirable and agreeable to live.” (royal collection trust).

This quote shows how design and play was aimed at the upper class, with the ideal/goal way of life aimed toward those wealthiest in society. An example of this in the doll house itself would be the Palladian style design, with features such as the symmetry in the façade and triangular lintels above the second storey. Similarly, the layout also demonstrates this, with features such as the wine cellar and working electricity, something only the upper class would have in their private homes this is further reinforced by the inclusion of staff areas which obviously would not be found in many homes today (see model). Over 1500 designers worked on the design and construction, further supporting the idea that the importance was placed among the rich in society since the middle and working class simply didn't have the same amount of resources to access this level of play and escapism.

The doll house captures the significance of the royal family in this period, the aim was to showcase the monarchy and what it represented, with the interior showing the past and changing state of the British empire such as a silver tea chest engraved with a coat of arms from Hanover (royal collection trust), previously ruled by George third and the exterior still reflecting the trends within the country itself, showcasing Edwardian details such as the tiled path to the front door.

This design encapsulates how architecture and society were changing after the First World War. “the Queen’s doll’s house shows a just balance between tradition and invention” (Royal Collection Trust). There was an increasing interest in developing civic space (Ching, Jarzombek and Prakash, 2011) like never before, such as libraries which can be demonstrated in the doll house (see model) with books such as the bible and Quran. this shows the start of both social and architectural change in this period however didn’t quite apply it day to day in terms of lower classes having access.



Although not long after, the 1935 White Ladies House demonstrates how quickly architecture can evolve. After the arts and crafts movement, Moray Thomas built this dollhouse not only to show the change in architectural style but also the “record the habits, homes, tastes and ideas of the people of today”

(Paul Mellon centre, 2015). This house shows how typical floorplans had changed – with less rigid room structure such as an open plan living room (see model), this house shows how there was a breakdown in formality for these new inhabitants as well as a new way of combining spaces. This could be explained by the effort to design and cater to a wider range of people not just the upper class in both architecture and play.

Similarly, this not only reflects the change in architectural style but also the need for escapism and play. This dolls house was curated for “A generation bred in one war and living its little time of sunshine to the full before the next” (Paul Mellon centre, 2015), this quote demonstrates the growing need for young people to escape there day to day to a different world of play. This may also reflect the change in architectural style – modernism representing what the world could be therefore creating hope for younger people and a growing desire for change.

This change in style compared to earlier architecture related to the discussion of modernity at the time (Ching, Jarzombek and Prakash, 2011). While industrialization was happening at a rapid scale, this miniature maison attempted to utilise these new methods whilst also using the core morals of the arts and crafts movement to lessen the monotony the industrial revolution brought (‘Arts and Crafts’, 2022). An example of this would be in the murals of Whiteladies house which used the principle of handcraftsmanship from arts and crafts movement but also used modernism in the form of the large windows (a newer technology as a result of the Industrial Revolution).



As the world of play developed more, eventually Barbie came into play. With this new doll, a whole new way of displaying houses and trends would be developed. A particularly interesting one is the 1990s Barbie mansion. This doll house showed how architecture in the West was changing. With an increase in affluence and disposable income due to a recession, plus an increase in areas becoming suburban due to

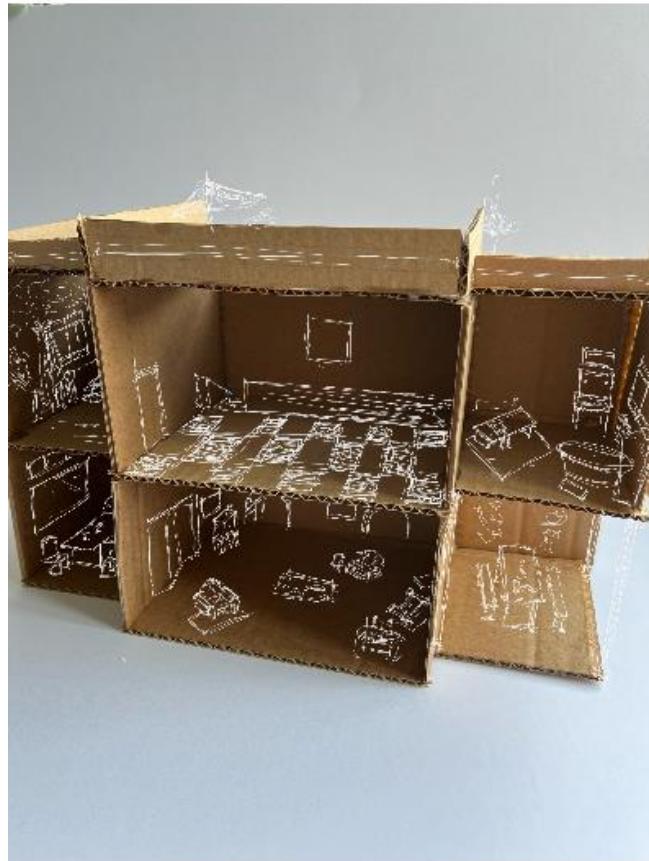
the rapid expansion of cities and ever-growing population, the 'McMansion' became a popular choice.

This dreamhouse captured the trends of the 90s, for example, the size of these houses. Being the largest Barbie house (3x4 foot) ('PIN-UP | BARBIE DREAMHOUSE', n.d.), this reflected the large square footage of the suburban mansions (on average 5000 sq ft) ('Have We Reached the End of the McMansion Era?', 2016) consequently further showing the increase in income since more people were rising into the middle class and could now afford these larger homes. another example would be in the design of the house itself. it uses both Palladian and Tudor bay-style windows ('60 Years of Barbie Architecture: When Popular Culture Meets Design', 2023) these windows could suggest both the evolution of architecture from medieval to Palladian and the move from modernism and arts and crafts into a more postmodern style, which could further show the increase in disposable income at the time as these were seen as more formal and less budget-friendly (Doctor of Arts *et al.*, n.d.). Another feature of the exterior would be the Doric columns – showing the neoclassical elements and 'showiness' ('60 Years of Barbie Architecture: When Popular Culture Meets Design', 2023). Doric columns were seen to show strength, with the rise in feminism at the time these values were reflected in Barbie's dream house through aspects such as these columns to spread these messages to a wider group of the new generation. This shows a change in the necessity of dollhouses – while originally used for escapism of the world they now had an importance in being used as a teaching tool for the new generation. Similarly, to the exterior, the change to postmodernism can be seen in the interior, with wallpaper patterns and the use of furniture such as tv, this reflects the increasing popularity of designer items and the evolution of technology and fashion for example, the floral wallpaper pays homage to Ralph Lauren ('PIN-UP | BARBIE DREAMHOUSE', n.d.). This further displays the changing economy in the West.

Comparisons could be made between Queen Mary's doll house and White ladies doll house, as shown in the models below. one example would be the layout. Queen Mary's house had designated spaces for different activities spread across multiple

floors for example, a library on floor 1 and a saloon on floor 3 whereas white ladies house had a more deconstructed approach such as an open plan living room, with the public areas grouped together on the bottom floor. This reflects the change in the style of the houses, the Queen Marys being a more classical English style whereas the whiteladies house is modernist therefore rejecting the traditional layouts and formality used hundreds of years before. Another comparison can be made in the users of these houses. Queen Mary's house was designed for and marketed toward the upper class and projected the 'ideal life' which reflected the effort and resources the upper class at the time had. Whereas Whiteladies house was for the 'people of today', this is because there was more effort in designing for the younger and middle class than in Queen Mary's house. this change in design reflects the change in the needs and desires of society and therefore the change in architectural style to match. this is because there was more effort in designing for the younger and middle class than in Queen Mary's house. this change in design reflects the change in the needs and desires of society and therefore the change in architectural style to match.

Comparison can also be made between Whiteladies doll house and Barbie Dreamhouse. Modernism is the rejection of classical styles whereas Postmodernism is the reaction against modernism (Digital, 2022) – with a wider range of styles being used, including classical. These two dollhouses show the progression between the two – whiteladies showing modernism through larger windows and barbies Dreamhouse showing postmodernism through the mixture of styles such as Palladian and Tudor windows. similarly, this change can also show the progression in society – the deconstruction of spaces in Whiteladies house shows a more informal ideal way of living whereas the dreamhouse design suggests a more formal way of life.



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