

## Home Life During the Renaissance

Renaissance merchants, shippers, and lenders often lived in relative luxury and stability. Their homes and the lives they created there reveal a sense of pride in accomplishment in the business world. The homes of these merchants were places where their owners could show off their success.

A typical Renaissance merchant's house was at least two stories tall, sometimes three or four. The front door was usually a large opening made of thick wooden planks attached to its frame by heavy iron hinges. (In an urban world where city riots occurred frequently, such a door protected the merchant's family from outsiders.)

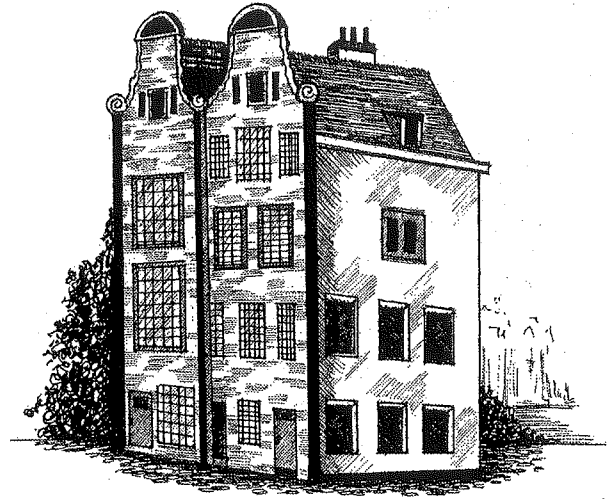
Inside the house, the rooms were usually divided by partitions. There was little privacy and one could pass from room to room. Hallways were rare. Often rooms were used for more than one purpose owing to a lack of adequate space.

The master bedroom, for example, might have been used to entertain company. A large, four-poster bed dominated the space. To provide privacy and to keep out the cold, curtains were hung around the bed. A small children's bed was often stored under the big bed and brought out at night for use.

Much of family life centered in a great room which was a combination kitchen, dining room, and living room. Such a room included a broad fireplace where meals were cooked, shelves for food storage and utensils, a few chairs, perhaps a large table, a long bench, and side tables featuring vases, candles, and other smaller items.

Renaissance houses did not feature many pieces of furniture. The rooms were uncluttered and uncrowded compared to today's homes. Some of the more ornate pieces included intricately carved wood chests, which were typically long, rectangular boxes with heavy lids. Today's cedar chests are the modern equivalent of these functional yet elaborate pieces. A new bride often kept her important items in such a box, and the piece and its contents went with her when she married and left home.

Typically, a family ate two meals during the day—the first at 10 a.m. and supper around 5 p.m. Generally, utensils included a plate, a knife, and a spoon. People drank from wooden cups or metal mugs and tankards. Glasses were very rare. Nearly



everyone drank ale and wine, even children, and a gallon a day for an adult was not considered too much. (Pure drinking water was rare.) By the mid-1500s, drinking chocolate was introduced from the New World, and later, coffee and tea

Glass was available for windows as early as the 1200s, but remained rare as late as the 1500s because of its expense. Windows were often open to the outside world, with wooden shutters to shut out cold weather and bad smells. In winter, such houses, with their shutters closed, were dark indeed. Wood burning fires provided the heat in such houses.

By the late Renaissance, tiled floors were more common in houses. However, many houses had dirt floors scattered with grass rushes as an insulation and to absorb moisture. They also harbored mice, fleas, and lice.

While many Renaissance people did not bathe regularly, most middle-class homes had a bathtub. The old Roman and medieval public baths had fallen out of use since the days of the Black Death, when people feared the spread of the dreaded disease.

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### *Review and Write*

What glaring differences do you notice between the description given here of a typical Renaissance merchant's house and the place where you live?

# Clothing of the Time

## Women's Clothing

Elizabethan women wanted their clothing to look much like the men's with broad shoulders, wide hips, and slim waists. Compare the drawing on this page to that of men's clothing on page 41 and notice how similar it was to that of Elizabethan men's except for the kirtle. Women's dresses were not made all in one piece as they usually are today. Instead, women wore two or more garments as one "dress." After reading the descriptions, label the parts of the clothing.



- **Bodice:** came down to the waist; to make shoulders appear wide the bodice had "wings" and came to a point at the narrow waist
- **Sleeves:** separate garments held to bodice with laces; tight at wrists, but full otherwise. Stuffed to keep shape; sometimes had ruffs at wrists to match ruff at neck
- **Kirtle:** skirt often of different material from bodice; framework underneath called farthingale, made of wire or whalebone, caused kirtle to stand out from the body
- **Headwear:** Hats and hoods very popular; sometimes came to a point over the middle of the forehead, giving face a heart shape; styled very much like men's hats
- **Hair:** Worn in many different styles but always brushed back from forehead
- **Outer garments:** Cloaks and gowns like the men's; often wore a "safeguard," or overskirt, as well, to protect the kirtle, especially when riding horseback.

# Clothing of the Time

## Men's Clothing

In Elizabeth's time men's clothing was as colorful as the ladies', but men wanted to look manly, so they wore clothing in the shape of armor, with broad shoulders, broad hips, and narrow waists. It could be compared with a suit of armor. After reading the descriptions, label the parts of the clothing.

- **Doublet:** like breastplate, covers back and chest, ridge down front; "wings" at shoulders
- **Sleeves:** separate garments, tight at wrists
- **Hose:** covered body from waist down
- **Ruff:** stiffly starched ruffles at neck, usually white
- **Hats:** of many different shapes, usually had bands around them, worn indoors
- **Cloaks:** capes
- **Gowns:** like a cloak, but closed in front, fitted at shoulders

The doublet was stuffed with horsehair, wool, or rags so it would keep its shape. The sleeves were tied to the doublet with laces. The upper part of the hose was stuffed to make them stick out. Sometimes breeches, or "Venetians," were worn over the hose. Cloaks, worn over the doublet, were very fashionable and made in different lengths but usually short. Hats were worn indoors to keep warm.

