

Housing

You are in a mud pit, in which laborers are making mud bricks to build houses.

Most ancient Egyptians lived in towns and villages located in the Nile valley. People lived close together, with the small houses of the lower classes wedged in between the larger, fancier houses of the wealthy. Royal families and other government officials lived in larger cities. These cities, also located in the Nile Valley, were centers of trade and government business.

Temples, tombs, and monuments in ancient Egypt were built of stone so they would last for eternity. In contrast, Egyptian houses, for both the rich and poor, were made of bricks from the Nile mud. These mud houses were built facing north to allow the steady northern wind to enter and circulate throughout the building. They were not as strong as stone structures, but they kept out the intense heat of the sun. To create mud bricks, laborers shaped mud in rectangular molds and left them to bake in the sun. Houses of lower-class people were made from mud bricks alone, while the walls of upper-class houses were also plastered and painted.

House size and furnishings differed greatly between the lower and upper classes. Most lower-class Egyptians lived in simple houses. These houses contained a few small rooms with narrow, high windows and low ceilings. Poorer people had almost no furniture except for a few tables and a bed. They often sat on the floor or on mats or cushions. Wealthier people had bigger and fancier homes. A noble's house might be surrounded by a tree-shaded pool, flowers, bushes, and a high wall. Some houses were two stories high, were built around a central courtyard, and often contained many rooms. Public rooms, where guests were received, were located in the front and center of the house. The rest of the house might contain a large central hall, bedrooms, and, in the rear, the kitchen and servants' quarters. In addition, most rich people's homes had bathrooms. They included a stone slab on which a bather stood while a servant poured water over him. There was also a toilet that consisted of a stone seat with a hole in it. Upper-class homes contained more furniture than poorer homes, including stools, tables, beds, chests, pots, and lamps.

Discussion Question: What were ancient Egyptian houses like?