The middle-upper classes, made of professionals, merchants and nobles could clearly afford their own private houses, whether in the city or in the country. The "basic" house was focused around an atrium whilst a more elaborate and clearly larger variation on the theme was to add a peristyle around the back garden, thus almost doubling the overall footprint of the house.

Some of the more common Roman home terms are described in the table. The key letters to the left of the terms enable the various areas to be matched to the plan shown below the table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| a | Ala | Two rooms, opposite one another, facing onto the [atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium). Their use is uncertain but may have been for storage, general use and, in Patrician houses, for displaying the face masks of their ancestors preserved from [Roman funerals](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/funerals_in_ancient_rome.htm). |
| b | Andron | Corridor connecting the garden ([hortus](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Hortus)) and the [atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium). |
| c | Atrium | In the most ancient times of Rome the atrium was the area where much of family life went on. The name "atrium" stems for the word "ater" meaning "black" due to the smoke of the fires used for producing light and keeping that area warm.The atrium was rather like a central courtyard in the house with a rectangular opening in the roof above it (the [compluvium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Compluvium)) providing air and light. A rectangular basin in the ground ([impluvium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Impluvium)) corresponded to the opening above in order to collect rain water.All major living areas of Roman homes had direct access to the atrium. |
| d | Compluvium | Rectangular opening in the roof, above the atrium of the house. It let in rain, air and light. Rain fell into the [impluvium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Impluvium).This may seem a mere technical detail but it is easy to see how it conditioned Roman architecture once light could be had through windows and water through pipes. This central element became inessential and hence allowed greater freedom of design of interior space with subsequent impact in all aspects of interior space design, such as mosaics and painting.  |
| e | Cubiculum | A bedroom. |
| f | Culina | Kitchen |
| g | Exedra | An area at the bottom of the garden, at the end of the [peristylium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm). It was more or less equivalent in function to the [tablinum](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Tablinum) ie. for meetings, chatting and generally getting together. |
| h | Fauces | The corridor which led from the front door ([ianua](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Ianua)) to the main part of the house, the [atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium). |
| i | Hortus | The garden. Closed in by a wall. |
| j | Ianua | The front door of the house. It was normally set a little further in from the road, leaving a small entrance area called the [vestibulum](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Vestibulum). Notice the similarity with the word January (Ianuarius), first month of the year in the [Roman calendar](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/Ancient_Roman_Calendar.htm) revised by [Julius Caesar](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/Julius_Caesar_Rome.htm). Some more front door facts....* The front door had great significance for the Romans and hence had its own divinity from the earliest times: the two-faced [Roman god Ianus](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/List_of_Roman_Gods.htm#Janus) whose temple was open during times of war and shut during peace.
* The tradition of carrying one's bride over the doorstep dates back to [Roman marriages](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/marriage_in_ancient_rome.htm).
 |
| k | Impluvium | A shallow rectangular section dug a little into the ground of the [atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium) to collect the rainwater which fell in through the [compluvium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Compluvium). The water drained into a cistern underground which acted as water repository for the household.The development of piped pressurised water diminished the need for the water collection cistern and  allowed the impluvium to be turned into a decorative fountain, contributing to the "centripetal" architecture focused around the centre of the atrium.This might seem like a meaningless detail yet it belies the shift in architectural approach between central focus or one where the sense of space was enhanced by removal of centrality in preference for modularity: particularly evident in the development of [Roman mosaics](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/Ancient_Roman_Mosaics.htm) and [Roman painting](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/Ancient_Roman_Paintings.htm). |
| L | Peristylium | A range of [columns](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/roman_columns.htm) around an area such as a garden. Rather like a cloister. It could even be made of two floors. |
| mm | Piscina | Pool/fountain in the centre of the [peristyle](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Peristylium)/garden. |
| n | Posticum | Back entrance to the house. |
| o | Taberna | A couple of bedrooms, store rooms or [shop](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_rome_shopping.htm) with direct [road](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/romans_road.htm) access. The walls of the two rooms were the sides of the fauces (h). If this was managed by the household [slaves](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/slavery.htm) and servants then it might have access from the [atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium) otherwise it would be made independent of the main household.One particular taberna in Pompeii, attached to the back of a rich villa is an example of how an [ancient Roman prostitution](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/Ancient_Roman_Sex_Prostitution.htm) business might be run. |
| p | Tablinum | In Rome's earliest days the tablinum was the *pater familias*' private study. A sort of drawing room or lounge. It was situated on the [Atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium) on the opposite side from the front door ([ianua](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Ianua)). The interior was often decorated with [frescos](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/rome_art_frescos.htm) and [art](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/roman_art.htm).The tablinum would be closed off from the atrium by heavy curtains and from the garden by way of wooden doors. |
| q | Triclinium | The dining room. There would generally be three couches in this room (hence the name beginning with "tri"). Poorer houses might have a biclinium. The couches would be built at right angles to one another. Those in the garden would be made of brick and then plastered or covered in marble. Those in the house itself would generally be made of wood.The couches would be set around a table called "mensa". The leftmost couch was reserved for the master of the house, his wife and one of his sons or in the absense of a son for one of his liberti. The central couch would be for high ranking guests, particularly the spot next to the master of the house. The third couch would be for other guests. The romans adopted the practice of eating in a lounging position from the Greeks. As we can see from numerous paintings of the time, reclining was generally reserved for men whilst women would sit. Formerly it was habitual to eat in the [atrium](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Atrium), [tablinum](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/ancient_roman_homes.htm#Tablinum) or in a room called the "cenaculum" on the floor above the tablinum. |
| r | Vestibulum | The small hall area which separated the front door from the main road. Rich [Patricians](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/patricians.htm) often started their day by taking visits from their numerous "[clients](http://www.mariamilani.com/ancient_rome/rome_social_structure_class_patricians.htm#Clients) (clientes) who would congregate in the vestibulum early in the morning. |

Some further notes:

* Windows were generally larger on the top floors than the lower ones. Windows were particularly popular on the side of the house facing onto the garden.
* The Lararium, where the family spirits were honored might be in a corner of its own, for example in the peristyle or a discrete corner of the atrium.
* The compluvium above the atrium might have terracotta decorations such as palmettes. It might be supported by columns – e.g. 4 columns would be known as a "tetrastyle atrium".
* The latrine was often next to the kitchen. Refuse from both kitchen and latrine would generally wash directly onto the road through the same drainage duct.
* The kitchens were generally quite small. Cooking would be on tripods above open fires and coals. There might be an oven for baking bread which could in some cases double up to heat water used for the underfloor heating system.
* Larger villas might have one or more rooms called an Oecus - a hall which could be used for receptions and meetings with friends.
* Villas would even have their own roman baths. In their simplest form there would be two rooms: the first would be used as changing room and as tepidarium (luke warm water). The second was the caldarium. The rooms would have few if any windows in order to preserve the heat of the water. The bath might therefore be excavated in a basement area where it would be easiest to conserve heat.
* The richest houses would have an extra bath called a frigidarium (an indoor cold pool) and a natatio (an open air swimming pool).

A plan view of a typical Roman house is described below. The first has a simple garden whilst the second has a peristyle around a pool and various other extra rooms.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| http://www.mariamilani.com/rome_pictures/roman_house_plan1.gifEarly Roman house. The vegetable patch/garden was at the back, through the tablinum. | http://www.mariamilani.com/rome_pictures/roman_house_peristyle_.jpg  Example of a later Roman house where the basic atrium module has been extended towards the back into the garden with its peristyle.The family has progressively moved away from the street side of the house whilst rooms by the door have become service quarters, stores or some sort of public activity. |