

# Your house is a jungle...



Artwork by Olaf Hajek [www.olafhajek.com](http://www.olafhajek.com)

## Anne Sverdrup-Thygesen discovers why sharing our homes is a good thing

Never Home Alone: From Microbes to Millipedes, Camel Crickets, and Honeybees, the Natural History of Where We Live

Rob Dunn

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Imagine a jungle, with thousands of species multiplying, crawling, scurrying and flapping – all intricately connected to each other. A few of them might pose a potential threat to humans, but if the system is healthy they are kept in check by the multitude of other species. This jungle is not outside in a faraway place – it's in your house. This is the image I am left with after reading Rob Dunn's brilliant book *Never Home Alone*. Now, in the morning, I stand under the shower pondering the stream of life pouring down on me, and

Dunn's statement that the healthiest water for bathing comes from aquifers rich with underground biodiversity. When baking, I muse over the microbes that add flavour to the bread I make.

In this book, Dunn explains why we should care about this household biodiversity. He sets the scene by telling us that the average US child spends a whopping 93% of their time inside, in a building or a vehicle. Since we humans built our first primitive houses some 300,000 years ago, we've created more and more indoor space. The indoor area

of Manhattan, for instance, with all its floors, is almost three times bigger than the size of the island itself, Dunn says. Indoor biodiversity matters because it helps to keep these spaces healthy. Incredibly, in their survey of houses in different countries, Dunn and his colleagues found more than 200,000 species. Dunn describes the "biodiversity hypothesis of human health", which observes that biodiversity loss and the increasing incidence of inflammatory diseases seem to be interconnected.

We tend to think we should be at war with our tiny tenants, that their presence always transfers disease. Hence we scrub and spray and clean. But the fight against our household biodiversity is not only futile, as resistance will develop faster than we invent new pesticides. It is also counterproductive.