

and enthusiasts and, besides, over time, tastes change. As long as we take heed to protect *them* from needless or grasping demolition, the next century will also have plenty of equally old houses to astonish and pleasure future generations. And so theoretically, it ought to go on; an experiential renewal through time.

However, if you try to look further forwards than Victorian and Edwardian houses, things get hazier. How many houses, flats, or blocks from the mid-twentieth century onwards are well enough built to last three centuries? How many will we actually want to keep?

There are gentle lessons to learn from the ravishing old houses in this book. Many were built without what we understand today as foundations: rather, with only a few courses of bricks. Their neighbours, their half-basements, and their solid but flexible flagged floors made of three-inch-thick stone often laid directly on sand or dirt hold them up very effectively (along with, now and then, the introduction of some judiciously placed steel). They show that there are economical and renewable ways to make homes entirely compatible with whatever style of life we choose, which, if we build them now, ought to be standing well into the twenty-fourth century.

The houses shown here are not the almost unimaginably grand, aristocratic eighteenth-century houses of, for example, Mayfair, or in parts of the countryside. Architect and mathematician Peter Nicholson's 1823 *The New Practical Builder*¹ (one of many books written after his first, *The Carpenter's New Guide*, which he published in 1792 at the age of twenty-seven) includes a plate of just such a 'first-rate' house. A large, high, deep, three-bay (or four- or five-bay) house, possibly with balconettes to its tall first-floor windows, and with five or six storeys including basements and attic. He did not bother to draw the scaled-down versions: the second-, third- and fourth-rate houses. A little further on, he drew 'a design for a mansion in the castellated style' that is distinctly large and grand and stylistically related to Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill;² as well as, after that, a more restrained, square-plan, detached villa.

Enthusiasm to teach sound building principles can partly be understood as a lingering recollection of the Great Fire of 1665. Certainly, recessing timber windows by a statutory amount, and removing most timber overhangs, made sense.

The desire to spread the design precepts of Palladianism,³ with its clean lines, generous windows and well-proportioned and well-considered spaces, may also, at first, have been partly reactive; an enjoyment of novelty as well as of elegance. Many pattern books were written with zeal and included copious engraved illustrations. They were mainly aimed at builders and architects and joiners and carpenters, at a time when the distinctions were blurred and

the builder or the carpenter – they often had great practical and frequently overlapping skills – *was* the architect. A relatively early pattern book, and a great success, was *Palladio Londonensis; or, the Art of London Building*, by William Salmon, which went into many editions after its first of 1734. Its attention to geometry in particular would boggle most readers today, but *Palladio Londonensis* was also useful for listing the correct price of every bit of joinery or painting or plumbing or other trade imaginable. Later books were aimed in addition at the house-owning public. George Smith's 1826 *The Cabinet-Maker & Upholsterer's Guide* contained handsome coloured plates at the rear, but was still front-loaded with an indigestible drubbing of geometry. As well as expounding on everything from paints to post beds, with finely drawn examples – and, in the case of paint, an early coloured paint chart – Smith enjoyed occasional digs at other nationalities (and, much more rarely, his own). In a section entitled 'Household Furniture', he writes: 'There are no people of any country whatever that excel the English in the manufacture, the construction, or taste in design as regards the article of cabinet furniture in general . . . The artisans of France are ingenious in their invention, but rarely to be distinguished for their care in construction . . .'

Smith's book aimed to inform the public on the new field of interior decoration. According to architectural and cultural historian and author Steven Parissien,⁴ the term 'interior decoration' was first used by Thomas Hope in 1807.⁵

Most houses in the following pages began life as part of an ordinary or fairly ordinary terrace, although there are some distinctly grander ones among them (see pages 80, 90, 140). Time has rendered them all special. Most but not all are listed, generally Grade II – in other words, they are historically important and usually retain at least some original features, but they have in most cases also been adapted by their many inhabitants. Such adaptations can enhance their appeal and interest. The smallest among them were usually 'fourth-rate': often narrow terrace houses of only three or perhaps four floors including attic and basement. For Londoners today who, unlike their forebears, live without servants, it is a perfect size for a couple or a young family. Yet some are a mere fourteen-feet wide. They represent an economical use of land and have a light footprint both actually and metaphorically, while retaining to a surprising degree the charming proportions of their richer cousins. These fourth-rate houses are the town mice, blackened by soot; these are the London sparrows.

One thing that unites many houses featured is that they were saved as a direct result of the work of the Spitalfields Trust, one of the most successful of all building preservation trusts, certainly responsible for saving important parts of historic