

Dustin Valen

“On the Horticultural Origins of Victorian Glasshouse Culture”

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In Victorian Britain, glasshouses were not just for the wealthy elite or the grand display at international exhibitions. In his article on the intersection of architecture, landscape design, and the medical sciences, Dustin Valen shows how the popularity of garden houses in the 19th century shaped the development of domestic and institutional architecture of all types. Horticulture was a modernizing force, introducing a wide audience to the possibility of nature subjected to the laws of reason and the creation of carefully controlled climates. People, like plants, could also be transformed and strengthened through the shaping of an optimal environment; and Dustin Valen draws on a wide range of medical literature, popular horticultural publications, and architectural texts to demonstrate the links between these disciplines in the scientific and popular culture. While the importance of glasshouses as harbingers of modernist construction methods and innovative architectural heating and cooling systems is well known, these discussions have remained in the realm of elites and professionals. A scientific approach to building emerged in other ways, argues Valen, where garden literature, medical knowledge and early environmental studies converged. Elegantly and clearly written and supported by a wealth of research in period publications, Dustin Valen presents a carefully argued article on this episode in nineteenth-century building and culture.

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