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Northern comfort and discomfort: Spaces and objects in Swedish country houses, c.1740–1800

Johanna Ilmakunnas

Throughout Europe, a house and an estate were valuable economic, socio-political and cultural resources for landowning elites from the early modern period to the Second World War, and even beyond. A house represented the status and values of the elites, whether belonging to the nobility or aristocracy, or aspiring to social elevation. Furthermore, the house was often – but not necessarily always – a home for the owner family and it offered its inhabitants both bodily and mental comfort. Recent research on European country houses has stressed the complex role the house and estate had locally, nationally and globally.¹ For Sweden, scholarship on eighteenth-century country houses has explored the architecture of and representational spaces at country houses,² the house and estate as economic and social unifications,³ or country house and the

¹ See, for example, Anna-Sophia von Celsing and Rebecka Millhagen Adelsvärd, ed., *Biby: Ett fideikommiss berättar* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Langenskiöld, 2014); Joachim Eibach and Inken Schmidt-Voges, ed., *Das Haus in der Geschichte Europas: Ein Handbuch* (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2015); Michel Figeac, *La douceur des Lumières: Noblesse et art de vivre en Guyenne au XVIII^e siècle* (Bordeaux: Mollat Éditions, 2001); Margot Finn and Kate Smith, ed., *The East India Company at Home, 1757–1857* (London: UCL Press, 2018); Judith S. Lewis, 'When a House Is Not a Home: Elite English Women and the Eighteenth-Century Country House', *Journal for British Studies* 48, no. 2, Special Issue on Material Culture (2009): 366–363; Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

² Göran Alm & al., *Carl Hårleman: Människan och verket* (Stockholm: Byggförlaget, 2000); Gösta Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem under 1700-talet: Arkitektur och inredning 1700–1780* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1937).

³ Anna-Maria Åström, *'Sockenboarne': Herrgårdskultur i Savolax 1790–1850* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1993); Olle Sirén, *Malmgård: Grevliga ätten Creutz' stamgods* (Helsingfors:

everyday life,⁴ among other topics. Moreover, the history of Swedish country houses and manor houses is not limited to the present-day boundaries of Sweden. To understand country house culture in Northern Europe, it is important to remember that large parts of today's Finland were integral to the Swedish realm from the twelfth century until 1809. Thus, when referring in this chapter to Sweden and Swedish country houses, I denote eighteenth-century Sweden, including present day Finland.

In their comparative paper on comfort in English and Swedish eighteenth-century country houses, Jon Stobart and Christina Prytz have analysed comfort as a concept and the use of the word 'comfort' (*bekvämlighet* in Swedish). In their analysis, comfort is essentially well-being, both physical and mental, and is strongly linked to warmth and airiness, but also to social relations.⁵ Their analysis draws on the work of John Crowley who discusses comfort as physical well-being and as access to warmth and light, arguing that towards the end of the eighteenth century, for people physical comfort became more important than aspects of appearance, fashion or taste.⁶ Similarly, Joan DeJean suggests that the period of 1670–1765 was in Paris an 'age of comfort', linking modern comfort to the rise of urban aristocratic culture and informality in late-seventeenth-century Paris and to the emergence of a consumer culture, innovations and the availability of consumer goods that added physical comfort.⁷ Since the Swedish aristocracy had close connections to France, the new ideas of comfort were rapidly

Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1984); Olle Sirén, *Sarvlaks: Gårdshushållningen och gårdssamhället från 1600-talet till 1900-talet* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1980); Göran Ulväng, *Herrgårdarnas historia: Arbete, liv och bebyggelse på uppländska herrgårdar* (Hedemora: Hallgren & Björklund Förlag, 2008); Göran Ulväng, *Hus och gård i förändring: Uppländska herrgårdar, boställen och bondgårdar under 1700- och 1800-talens agrara revolution* (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2004).

⁴ Johanna Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv: Familjen von Fersens livsstil på 1700-talet* (Helsingfors and Stockholm: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland and Atlantis, 2012); Henrika Tandefelt, ed., *Sarvlax: Herrgårdshistoria under 600 år* (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2010).

⁵ Jon Stobart and Christina Prytz, 'Comfort in English and Swedish Country Houses', *Social History* 43, no. 2 (2018): 234–58.

⁶ John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁷ Joan DeJean, *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual – and the Modern Home Began* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009).

imported and in many ways also adapted to Swedish context.⁸ Marie-Odile Bernez links comfort and a comfortable lifestyle to material well-being and a critique of luxury, arguing that, in Britain especially, material comfort was morally superior to (French) luxury.⁹ In Sweden too, public discussion of luxury and necessity affected how country houses were build and decorated.¹⁰

In this chapter, I will analyse how country houses were constructed as comfortable and convenient homes, and how comfort was created in Northern European context, focusing especially on architecture, space and the display of objects in houses. Comfort is here understood as an analytical tool, since it was seldom used explicitly in my sources. My analysis draws on comfort defined by Crowley, DeJean, and Stobart and Prytz as physical and mental well-being linked to furniture, space, and thermal conditions, but also to human relations at home. Firstly, I will explore how new ideas about architecture influenced the distribution of spaces in country houses and how ideals were accommodated to practicalities. Secondly, I will examine objects such as armchairs, movable desks or quilted textiles that enabled new comfortable lifestyle, and how these objects were displayed and used in the house. Thirdly, I will discuss how comfort and discomfort was pictured in text and image. Finally, as a conclusion, I will discuss how, or, indeed, whether, country houses were experienced as homes in eighteenth-century Sweden and in what ways technology, architecture and spaces, objects and things influenced feelings of home.

⁸ Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'Aristocratic Townhouse as Urban Space: The Fersen Palace in Eighteenth-Century Stockholm', in *Gendering Spaces in European Towns, 1500–1914*, ed., Elaine Chalus and Marjo Kaartinen (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 15–31; Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'French Fashions: Aspects of Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century', in *A Taste for Luxury in Early Modern Europe: Display, Acquisition and Boundaries*, ed. Johanna Ilmakunnas and Jon Stobart (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 243–63; Charlotta Wolff, *Vänskap och makt: Den svenska politiska eliten och upplysningstidens Frankrike* (Helsingfors and Stockholm: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland and Atlantis, 2005); see also DeJean, *The Age of Comfort*, passim.

⁹ Marie-Odile Bernez, 'Comfort, the Acceptable Face for Luxury: An Eighteenth-Century Cultural Etymology', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 14, no. 3 (2014): 3–21.

¹⁰ See, for example, Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*; see also Leif Runefelt, *Att hasta mot undergången: Anspråk, flyktighet, förställning i debatten om konsumtion i Sverige 1730–1830* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2015).

Architecture, technology and comfort

From the early eighteenth century onwards, European country house architecture was deeply influenced by novel ideals of architecture and display of rooms, presented by the French architects Charles Étienne Briseux (1680–1754) and Jacques-François Blondel (1705–1774) in their influential treatises on the architecture of country and town houses. As Aurélien Davrius argues in his contribution to this collection and elsewhere, the innovations in spatial distribution of French eighteenth-century country houses shaped comforts and conveniences of the habitants of country houses.¹¹ These ideals were imported into Sweden mainly by Baron Carl Hårleman (1700–1753), an architect educated in Rome and Paris. Hårleman was an architect of royal and aristocratic houses, and his influence on religious and secular architecture was incontestable. Hårleman's designs were engraved and printed as model drawings for different types of buildings.¹² In 1755, Captain Carl Wijnblad (1705–1768) published in Swedish a collection of architectural plans of country houses in a number of sizes, forms and spatial arrangements. Wijnblad's designs were strongly influenced by the work of Hårleman, Blondel and Briseaux, and introduced architectural novelties such as small rooms with specific use, passageways, staircases and servants' quarters, as well as dining rooms to a larger audience. Yet Wijnblad did not slavishly follow French precedents, situating the principal rooms on the first floor, whereas Blondel placed them on the ground floor (Figure 1).¹³ Since Wijnblad's model book included both extravagant palaces and modest

¹¹ Aurélien Davrius, *Jacques-François Blondel, architecte des Lumières* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018).

¹² Göran Alm, *Carl Hårleman och den svenska rokokon* (Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 1993), 79–85, 120–21; Johan Mårtelius, 'Mönsterbildaren', in Göran Alm & al., *Carl Hårleman och den svenska rokokon* (Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 1993), 285–99.

¹³ Carl Wijnblad, *Ritningar på fyratio wåningshus af sten, och trettio af träd, samt åtskilliga lusthus, m.m. För högloflige ridderskapet och adelen, samt andra ståndspersoner på landet; uti 25 kopparstycken med bifogad förklaring och uträkning* (Stockholm, 1755); Carl Wijnblad, *Ytterligare tilökning af ritningar på wåningshus, sextio af sten och tiugu af träd, samt hwarjehanda flygel-byggnader och pavillons, med anmärkningar ledande til et fördelaktigt och sparsamt desze byggnaders utförande, såsom ock uträkning på de förnämsta härtil hörande materialier, hwarjemte följer, anwising til de i detta wärk nyttjade toscaniske, doriske och joniske ordernes indelning och bruk, tillika med particuliere ritningar på gårds-hus och hus-portar samt fönster; ännu tio utkast af general-planer, gårdar til behörig beqwämlighet, ordning och skick at*

one-floor houses with an attic, the plans were widely followed and influenced dwellings across social strata.¹⁴

Figure 1 here

//[caption]// Figure 1. Plate VII from Carl Wijnblad's *Ritningar på fyrtio våningshus*, printed in Stockholm 1755. Photo Lund University Library. CC PD.//

Carl Hårleman and most of his clients belonged to the Swedish aristocracy that spent years in France, where they had opportunities to acquaint themselves with aristocratic houses and new, more comfortable living standards that appeared from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.¹⁵ In Sweden, Hårleman's clients wished to build modern country houses that replaced vast and cold seventeenth-century palaces or to renovate old houses. From 1630 to 1680, the Swedish aristocracy engaged in a frenetic episode of building lavish country houses that displayed the political and economic power of their family.¹⁶ These baroque houses were influenced by Dutch, French and Italian architecture, priority being given to the outer appearance of a house, to communicate the status and wealth of the owner, while thermal comfort or the usability of space were less significant.¹⁷ Whether they were houses rather than homes when erected would be another research question; arguably, they became homes in the eighteenth century when refurnished, redesigned and remodelled according to the needs and wants of those who lived at the house and according to technological and architectural

anläggna, jämwäl ock til mält- brygg- och bränhus samt iskiällare, med flere inrättningar för landthushållningen: uti 26 kopparstycken anwist, och högloflige ridderskapet och adelen, samt andra stånds-personer på landet, til tjenst och nytta. Senare delen (Stockholm 1756); see also Carl Wijnblad, *Tilökning af General-planer til tio sätesgårdar, förestälte uti 11 kopparstycken med deras förklaring* (Stockholm, 1765).

¹⁴ See Johannes Daun and Christer Ahlberger, ed., *Bondeherrgårdar: Den nyrika bondeklassens gårdar 1750–1850* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2018) on how wealthy farmers' houses (*bondgård*) resembled manor houses (*herrgård*).

¹⁵ On the novel standards for aristocratic living in seventeenth-century France, see, for example, Dejean, *The Age of Comfort* and Nina Lewallen, 'Architecture and Performance at the Hôtel du Maine in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 17:1 (Fall–Winter 2009–2010): 2–32.

¹⁶ Fredric Bedoire, *Guldålder: Slott och politik i 1600-talets Sverige* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 2001).

¹⁷ On Dutch influences in Sweden, see Badeloch Vera Noldus, *Town Houses and Country Estates: Dutch Architecture in Sweden* (Stockholm: Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Stockholm, 2013).

innovations that offered more effective heating and lightning. Moreover, for many aristocrats who owned a baroque country house, it was more realistic to improve the old house instead of building a new house.¹⁸

These changes and improvements are illustrated by two different works by Carl Hårleman: the renovation of a seventeenth-century house called Mälsåker and a plan for a new house, Granhammar. Both were country estates relatively close to Stockholm owned and occupied by aristocratic families linked to each other through marriage, military service and political ambitions.

Mälsåker was built by the enormously rich Baron Gustaf Soop (1624–1679) who wanted a country house for his wife and daughter that would also display his wealth and status. The first plans by the architect Nicodemus Tessin the older (1615–1681) date from the 1660s and the building was finished in 1680. The house comprised of more than fifty rooms, including a seventeen-metre wide gallery. The interior was lavishly decorated between 1674 and 1677 in a grandiose baroque style with gilt leather wall hangings, large decorative fireplaces and ceilings of decoratively painted linen cloth (in the dwelling rooms) and Italian stuccowork (in the great gallery, main staircase and a dozen other rooms). In the mid-eighteenth century Count Axel von Fersen (1719–1794), the great-grandson of Gustaf Soop, let Carl Hårleman plan a renovation and redecoration of the first floor of the house. The gallery and other extravagantly decorated baroque rooms on the second floor, in Sweden called festivity floor (*festvåning*), were left as they were. Fersen was one of the most powerful political leaders of his time and strong advocate of political power of the aristocracy instead of that of the sovereign and monarchy. For him, Mälsåker embodied the aristocratic ideals of seventeenth-century Sweden, the era that in the eighteenth century was regarded as the golden age of the nobility and aristocracy in Sweden.¹⁹ At the same time, Mälsåker was a vast stone

¹⁸ See Stobart and Prytz, 'Comfort in English and Swedish Country Houses', 247.

¹⁹ Probate inventory after Axel von Fersen. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv, vol. 34, Stafsundsarkivet, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm; Bedoire, *Guldålder*, 243–45; Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmissigt liv*, 278–80. On Fersen's other building projects, see Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'To Build According to One's Status: A Country House in late 18th-Century Sweden', in *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption*, ed. Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (Swindon: English Heritage, 2016), 33–41. On Fersen and politics, see also Göran Norrby, *Maktens rivaler: Drottning Lovisa Ulrika, Gustav III, Axel von Fersen och Carl Fredrik Pecklin, 1755–1792* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2018).

building with large rooms that did not meet the mid-eighteenth-century ideals of comfortable living.

In creating thermal comfort and a pleasant indoor climate in Northern Europe, warm and smoke-free rooms were key factors, as Gulhild Eriksdotter and Mattias Legnér have stressed. They argue that scholars of domestic material culture tend to overlook the importance of these factors in shaping the spatiality, interior decoration and furniture of house. Furthermore, they remind us that, to better contextualize and understand technological changes and alterations in interior designs, it is crucial to consider also broader influences such as climate.²⁰ In the early modern period, from the 1500s to the mid-nineteenth century, Northern Europe went through a cooling period known as the Little Ice Age, with extremely severe winters and cold, wet summers, which led to frequent crop failures, famines and exceedingly high mortality.²¹ However, as Eriksdotter argues, the Little Ice Age was also a period of transition and adaptation during which buildings 'demonstrate various creative solutions in order to become both more energy efficient and comfortable, which might have led to altered living conditions and new social practices'.²² Adaptations to climatic effects, new technological inventions and new ideals of home and comfort are all apparent in how Fersen and Hårleman, arguably together, refurbished Mälsåker to make it into a comfortable eighteenth-century home.

The renovations that made Mälsåker more comfortable to live involved a reorganisation of space according to novel way to use rooms, and more efficient heating and insulation. Before his death in 1753, Hårleman designed a number of new rooms on the first floor that was the main dwelling floor. A drawing room (*förmak*), dining room and small rooms that presumably were used as bedrooms or closets were created out of the original large, multipurpose rooms. The walls of these rooms were lined with wooden

²⁰ Gunhild Eriksdotter and Mattias Legnér, 'Indoor Climate and Thermal Comfort from a Long-Term Perspective: Burmeister House in Visby, c. 1650–1900', *Home Cultures* 12, no. 1 (2015): 29–53.

²¹ Gunhild Eriksdotter, 'Did the Little Ice Age Affect Indoor Climate and Comfort? Re-Theorizing Climate History and Architecture from the Early Modern Period', *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2013): 24–42; see also Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History 1300–1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

²² Eriksdotter, 'Little Ice Age', 28.

panels and open fireplaces were replaced by tiled stoves; the large windows were changed or renovated and several mirrors were affixed to panels.²³ These renovations considerably enhanced the warmth and lightness of these rooms: regular smoke-free warmth – created by the tiled stoves and accentuated by wooden panelling, shutters and floors, as well as ceilings of cloth – produced a level of thermal comfort that arguably made Mälsåker comfortably warm to live in. However, while tiled stoves gave even and long-term heat and economized considerably on firewood because they needed to be lit only once in a day, they give only little or none light.²⁴ Large windows and mirrors reflecting either daylight or artificial light were thus crucial in adding to the convenience and comfort of the rooms. In Northern Europe, the fluctuation of light conditions according to the season are conspicuous, autumn and winter being extremely dark without artificial light. Thus, technological improvements in mirror making technique also influenced the experience of light and comfort in the home. The large and even surfaces of eighteenth-century mirrors reflected the light more efficiently than older mirrors and the importance of multiplying light was one of the reasons why mirrors became so fashionable in interiors. Added to this, they were essential also for conveniently watching what was happening in the room without needing to move from a comfortable chair by the fire.²⁵

It is noteworthy, however, that not all architectural solutions that enhanced the comfort of a house were eighteenth-century innovations.²⁶ The main living and representative rooms were situated in the first floor at Mälsåker and other seventeenth-century houses. This was in keeping with the fashion of the time, but it also raised these rooms well above the cold and dampness of the ground floor. In addition, the floors were made of wood and the ceilings of main living rooms were covered with cloth, both warmer than the stone or stucco that were used in halls, the main staircase and the gallery. Significantly, while the eighteenth-century French architectural ideals introduced by

²³ Probate inventory after Axel von Fersen. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv, vol. 34, Stafsundsarkivet, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm; Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 279–80.

²⁴ See Susanna Scherman, *Den svenska kakelugnen: 1700-talets tillverkning från Marieberg och Rörstrand* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Wistrand, 2007); Britt and Ingemar Tunander, *Svenska kakelugnar* (Stockholm: Nordiska museets förlag, 1999).

²⁵ See DeJean, *The Age for Comfort*, 94–5.

²⁶ Eriksdotter, 'Little Ice Age'

Blondel and Briseux in France, and adapted in Sweden by Hårleman and his successors, placed key rooms on the ground floor, in Northern Europe, the ground floor was seldom convenient in terms of thermal comfort. For instance at Åkerö, the country house that Hårleman designed for his close friend, Count Carl Gustaf Tessin (1695–1770), the ground floor was so damp and uncomfortable that Tessin moved his rooms from there to the first floor of a wing. At Övedskloster, designed for the enormously wealthy Baron Hans Ramel (1724–1799), Hårleman placed the main building in a slope, making possible an entrance to ground floor, under which is situated an underground floor that no doubt allowed the principal rooms to stay dry and warm, unlike at Åkerö.²⁷

In addition to these grand houses, Hårleman also designed a number of less prominent houses and planned several schemes for modernising seventeenth-century houses.²⁸ While Mälsåker represents an example of the latter, Granhammar, designed for Baron Jacob Albrect von Lantingshausen (1699–1769), is an example of the former.

Granhammar is worth closer analysis because it represents a less well-known house that was designed for an individual commissioner instead of being outlined for a certain administrative position as were, for instance, the drawings for model houses for high officers and civil servants (Figure 2). However, the drawings of Granhammar were engraved as a sole example of a country house in the collection *Plans et Élevations des Bâtimens de Suède* in which Hårleman amassed engravings of his drawings on key buildings, some private but mostly public.²⁹

Figure 2 here

//[caption]// Figure 2. Jean Erik Rehn, after Carl Hårleman, *Granhammar house, façade and plans*, between 1749 and 1759. Photo Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. CC PD.//

²⁷ Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem*, 95–7, 106–8, 111–6, 125, 216–23; see also Johanna Ilmakunnas, 'Högadeln bor i staden: Fersenska palatset som urbant mikrokosmos i Stockholm ca 1740–1795', *Bebyggelsehistorisk tidskrift* 68 (2014): 11–2.

²⁸ Alm, *Carl Hårleman och den svenska rokokon*; Göran Alm & al., *Carl Hårleman: Människan och verket* (Stockholm: Byggförlaget, 2000).

²⁹ Mårtelius, 'Mönsterbildaren', 285–98.

The plans of Granhammar show that the first floor was designed for both representation and habitation, whereas the ground floor was intended for household functions and for guests or children. The importance of the first floor is clear from the drawings of the elevations: the windows are larger and there is a prominent avant-corps on the main façade. In addition, the side risalits on the garden façade emphasize the first floor, while the ground floor with small windows remains less important. Even though the names of rooms are not included on the drawings, it is clear the suites of rooms are divided to the feminine and masculine. The suite of rooms occupied by the mistress of the house comprise of five rooms, including a large drawing room, whereas the rooms of the master of the house comprise three rooms on the opposite side of the building. In between the two suites is a large room, probably a drawing room or a dining room, although the latter may well have been on the ground floor.³⁰ Situating kitchen and other household functions to the ground floor had a significant impact on thermal comfort because the stoves and ovens in the kitchen were almost constantly alight, radiating warmth to the floor above. Furthermore, Granhammar was built on the remains of an older house which, according to Gösta Selling, might have been the reason for applying the seventeenth-century fashion in placing the *piano nobile* on the first floor.³¹ Moreover, at any country house, the view from the windows of the first floor was arguably more expansive than that of the ground floor, which probably added to reasons for situating the representative rooms on the first floor. Thus, comfort was one of several different reasons for favouring the placing of the main rooms on the first floor that for many country house architect and owner was, still in the mid-eighteenth century, the most representative floor plan.

Granhammar also had wooden panelling and niches with tiled stoves.³² In the drawing room, a tiled stove decorated with von Lantingshausen's coat of arms was erected in

³⁰ Jean Erik Rehn, after Carl Hårleman, *Granhammars hus, fasader och planer*, between 1749 and 1759, engraving on paper, 28,5 x 46 cm. NMG 921/1890, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

³¹ Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem*, 203–4.

³² Carl Hårleman, 'Ritning till vägg med kakelugn i bred nisch, elevation', between 1745 and 1753, drawing on paper, 36,6 x 5,1 cm. NMH CC 3245, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

1752. Other stoves on both floors were of fashionable blue and white tiles.³³ One of the most important technical improvements in eighteenth-century Sweden was a novel design for tiled stoves, presented for the Swedish government in 1767.³⁴ As Christina Prytz discusses in her text in this volume, the reason behind the government's assignment to construct a more fuel efficient stove than existing ones was the need to economise the use of firewood that was needed for iron works and production of Sweden's most valuable imported goods, iron. Thus, in eighteenth-century Sweden, concerns for national economics were behind the technological innovation that perhaps most influenced on the comfort of homes through more efficient heating systems. Tiled stoves were often designed by the architects as part of decorative schemes and commissioned from skilful master-craftsmen in towns. From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, there were also a number of factories making tiled stoves. Moreover, the stoves could be dismantled and reassembled when needed, for instance in the case of selling of a house.³⁵ Tiled stoves were the principal heating system at Swedish country houses, even though in the representative rooms there were also open fireplaces in marble or limestone. For instance at Ljung, built for Axel von Fersen in the 1770s and 1780s, the tiled stoves and open fireplaces were situated in the opposite ends of rooms, supplying thus both warmth and light, as well as being indispensable decorative elements.³⁶

Comfort related technical innovations, such as more efficient heating systems, were not exclusively reserved to house owners and their guests.³⁷ In the course of the eighteenth century, thermal comfort was democratized in grand houses, because tiled stoves were often installed in servants' rooms and sometimes in between rooms and passageways, where warmth given by a tiled stove radiated both in the room and in the passageway. Tiled stoves in servants' quarters at Ljung, for example, were technologically similar to

³³ Lars Sjöberg, 'Inredningar', in Göran Alm & al., *Carl Hårleman: Människan och verket* (Stockholm: Byggförlaget, 2000), 225–8.

³⁴ Carl Johan Cronstedt, *Beskrifning på Ny Inrättning af Kakelugnar Til Weds Besparing* (Stockholm: 1767); Carl Johan Cronstedt, *Samling af beskrifningar på Åtskilliga Eldstäder, Inrättande til besparing af wed* (Stockholm: 1775); see also Stobart and Prytz, 'Comfort in English and Swedish Country Houses', 241–3.

³⁵ Scherman, *Den svenska kakelugnen*; Tunander, *Svenska kakelugnar*.

³⁶ Ilmakunnas, 'To build according to one's status'.

³⁷ See Eriksdotter, 'Little Ice Age', 36; see also Scherman, *Den svenska kakelugnen*.

those in representative room, but they differed in style and decoration, as well as in price.³⁸ While we do not know how often the tiled stoves in the servants' rooms actually were used, it is likely that they were heated at least occasionally to keep the rooms in liveable condition during the winter frost.

Architectural and technological innovations had a key impact on thermal comfort during the eighteenth century. Small rooms and floor plans that permitted the separation of spaces according to need made it easier to keep them warm; coupled with double glazing, shutters, wall panels, wooden floors, and more efficient tiled stoves in several or perhaps even every room, this inflected the experience of comfort and discomfort in a house.

Comfortable home seen through objects

How were daily comfort and feelings of home created through objects and the display of interiors in a house? Which objects, both furniture such as beds or tables to smaller items such as tea and coffee sets or bedlinen, were essential for a comfortable home in eighteenth-century Sweden and how can we interpret the comfortability of an item? In contrast to England or a number of Swedish townhouses, large sets of receipted bills are rare for eighteenth-century country houses in Sweden.³⁹ Probate and household inventories are thus the key source for exploring how homes were decorated, what furniture and objects were owned, and how they were displayed in different spaces. These lists and object descriptions can be supplemented by paintings, drawings and other visual material, sources which are especially rich in telling us how objects were displayed spatially and how sentiments of comfort and homeliness were constructed.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, furniture went through a transformation from rigid to comfortable, even though representativeness and display of political power retained their significance.⁴⁰ A similar transformation is visible in

³⁸ Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 294–5; Ilmakunnas, 'To build according to one's status'.

³⁹ See Stobart and Rother, *Consumption and the Country House*; see also Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*, 251–98.

⁴⁰ DeJean, *The Age of Comfort*, 102–30; see also Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Dena Goodman and Kathryn Nordberg, ed.,

Sweden, where homes were strongly influenced by continental fashions in interior decoration and furniture. According to Gösta Selling, furniture still had a representative function in eighteenth-century Sweden, despite augmented emphasis on the 'user experience' and the functionality of materials and design. This duality to representative and comfortable is distinct in easy sitting furniture such as tabourets, stools, chairs, armchairs and sofas. Chairs were the most common sitting furniture and they are far more numerous in probate inventories than sofas and armchairs. In dining rooms, galleries and sometimes also in drawing rooms, chairs were situated by the walls and the upholstery was protected with dust covers when not in use.⁴¹ In the second half of the eighteenth century, comfortable armchairs such as thickly padded bergères, sofas and divans became indispensable furniture at any fashionable country house. For instance, at Mälsåker, one of Axel von Fersen's favourite houses, there were a dozen chairs upholstered in gilded leather in every drawing room and salon, whereas in bedrooms there were comfortable, upholstered armchairs, sofas with cushions and canopy beds with wool and straw mattresses, bolsters and pillows filled with down, quilted blankets and bedsheets in linen.⁴²

Axel von Fersen's 749-page probate inventory, completed a year after his death in 1794, gives a detailed picture of interiors in late-eighteenth-century town and country houses. Fersen owned a palace in Stockholm and a number of estates and houses in Sweden and present day Finland. The most carefully furnished were also those where Fersen spent most of his time, first with his wife and children, two daughters and two sons; later with his wife, their married daughters and their respective children. The Fersen palace in Stockholm and the country houses Mälsåker, Löfstad and Ljung were all comparably furnished and lived by the Fersens, while the family seldom, if ever, stayed overnight at the houses at other estates.⁴³ Display of objects at Mälsåker, Löfstad and Ljung were similar to the display, furniture and decorations at other Swedish country houses. At Mälsåker and Löfstad, both erected in the seventeenth century and rebuilt in the 1750s

Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Past (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴¹ Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem*, 336–42.

⁴² Probate inventory after Axel von Fersen. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv, vol. 34, Stafsundsarkivet, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

⁴³ On the Fersens' lifestyle and property, see Ilmakunnas, *Ett ståndsmässigt liv*.

and 1760s, interiors were a combination of old and new. Baroque tapestries, wall hangings and chairs were reminders of ancestry, while beds, sofas and armchairs in daily use were of eighteenth-century fashion.⁴⁴ Ljung was built to architect Jean Eric Rehn's (1717–1793) drawings of the 1770s and 1780s for entertaining and socializing, and the floorplan and interiors were essentially modern. However, comfortable living at all three houses was characterized by the importance of bedrooms as social space with soft sitting furniture and beds to lounge in, chandeliers and candlesticks to give artificial light and mirrors above fireplaces and console tables to reflect and thus multiply the effect of light, plus a tiled stove to sustain thermal comfort. The fashionable and versatile small tables that were mostly used by women for handiwork, letter writing and reading, and were light and easily moved near windows for better light or near fireplaces for more warmth according to the requirements of the work at hand. Furthermore, a representative house and comfortable home was created through the display and use of objects in daily life. Access and use of clean bed linen, cutlery, coffee and teacups or porcelain decorated with coats of arms assured physical comfort, but had also an impact on the feeling of social comfort, as I will discuss below.

Inventories, catalogues and estate inventory deeds are, indeed, irreplaceable sources to material culture and consumption.⁴⁵ However, the inventories seldom include all objects in a certain room or describe in detail how they were displayed. Drawings, paintings or engraving may give us a better understanding on how a room was used and how a comfortable everyday life was experienced.

In the 1750s and 1760s, painter Olof Fridsberg (1728–1795) realised several decorative *trompe l'œil* paintings at Carl Gustaf Tessin's Åkerö. He also depicted Tessin's wife, Countess Ulla Sparre (1711–1768), at her cabinet.⁴⁶ The bright-coloured watercolour (Figure 3) is a rare example of an interior in mid-eighteenth-century Sweden. Compared

⁴⁴ Probate inventory after Axel von Fersen. Axel von Fersen d.ä.:s arkiv, vol. 34, Stafsundsarkivet, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Annick Pardailhé-Galabrun, *La naissance de l'intime: 3 000 foyers parisiens, XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988) and David M. Mitchell, "My purple will be too sad for that melancholy room": Furnishings for Interiors in London and Paris, 1660–1735', *Textile History* 40, no. 1 (2009): 3–28.

⁴⁶ Olof Fridsberg, *Grevinnan Ulla Tessin i sin skrivkammare*. Watercolour on paper, 16,5 x 12,3 cm. NMH 145/1960. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

to other eighteenth-century Swedish interiors, the cabinet of Ulla Sparre is striking in its bright colours and astonishingly full of stuff. The walls are covered with floral cloth, the curtains that are mirrored from one of the cupboard's doors, are simple green cloth, probably taffeta, and the floor is of plain wooden planks. The small space is furnished with a cupboard and a large French writing desk, richly decorated with gilded fittings. There is also a simple wooden table, a small sewing table and plain grey painted bookshelves, portraits in gilded frames, including a portrait of her husband, a clock, large porcelain pot, small statues, porcelain dogs, stationery and large volumes on the writing desk. The room, situated on the ground floor, was almost four metres high; to keep it warm there is a colourful carpet on the floor and an open marble fireplace, visible only partially on the left hand side. The most conspicuous piece of furniture is the Chinese cabinet in the right-hand corner of the room. The red lacquered cupboard on which sits a small figure clad in striped costume, is actually a simple wooden cupboard in *trompe l'œil*. The *trompe l'œil* piece of furniture comprises not only the Chinese cupboard, but also the shells, figures and teapots on the shelf, two Chinese figures, only partially visible behind the countess's chair, and the opening with a green curtain and a putto near the ceiling.⁴⁷ Linking the richness of fashionable rococo objects such as the porcelain figures, the clock and the cupboard in *trompe l'œil* to functional furniture such as the decorative large writing desk with a shelving unit, on which the countess had sufficiently place for her extensive correspondence and reading, and unadorned bookshelves with small curtains of green silk damask protecting the books from dust to things such as the fireplace and carpet that added to the comfort and usability of the room, the watercolour on Ulla Sparre's cabinet depicts a highly personal space that arguably was a key room for the countess's socializing and work at the Tessins' country house Åkerö.

Figure 3 here

//**[caption]**// Figure 3. Olof Fridsberg, *Countess Ulla Sparre in her writing cabinet*, 1760s. Photo Cecilia Heisser. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. CC PD.//

⁴⁷ Selling, *Svenska herrgårdshem*, 127; Sjöberg, 'Inredningar', 214–17.

Two decades later, in 1783, an aquarelle (Figure 4) by Lorentz Svensson Sparrgren (1763–1828) depicts Count Clas Julius Ekeblad (1742–1808) and his wife Countess Brita Horn (1745–1791) in the countess's bedroom at Stola, the Ekeblads' country house.⁴⁸ Contrary to Ulla Sparre's cabinet, Brita Horn's bedchamber is decorated with pale colours. Even though colour palette of fashionable interior decorations in the second half of the eighteenth century was diverged from bright palette of early rococo, the contrast is strong in terms of both colours, objects displayed and the clothing of portrayed figures. The bedroom at Stola is decorated in a similar manner to bedrooms in many other eighteenth-century Swedish country houses. The walls are split by painted simple dados above which a number of paintings are hung, covering the wall up to the ceiling. Among them are family portraits, placed at eye level; above these are landscapes and higher still are nude studies and engravings of famous men and women. The furniture in the room is sparse, consisting of a canopy bed, a table, a gilded console table and a light armchair. The upholstery of the armchair in which Clas Julius Ekeblad sits is protected from dirt and sunlight by a dustcover made in simple chequered cloth. The bed on which Brita Horn lounges is representative with a canopy decorated with ostrich feathers and gilded wooden sections. The countess has raised her feet on the bed and she reclines comfortably to two large pillows behind her back. She is reading, presumably aloud, while the count is mending a fishing net. The watercolour portrays a harmonious and comfortable looking life that was that in many ways also in reality for Clas Julius Ekeblad and Brita Horn. Despite financial anxieties, which prevented the Ekeblads from redecorating Stola more comfortably, they took great mental comfort in their relationship and spending time together. Thus for the Ekeblads, comfort meant both living in a comfortable home and having the spouse as a friend and solace.⁴⁹

Figure 4 here

⁴⁸ Lorentz Svensson Sparrgren, *Interiör med landshövding greve Claes Ekeblad och hans maka Brita, f. Horn*, 1783. Watercolour, pencil and ink on paper, 38,5 x 33 cm. NMB 1402. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

⁴⁹ Stobart and Prytz, 'Comfort in English and Swedish Country Houses'.

//**[caption]**// Figure 4. Lorentz Svensson Sparrgren, *Interior with Claes Julius Ekebland and his wife, Countess Brita Horn*, 1783. Photo Alexis Daflos. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. CC PD.//

Comfort and discomfort pictured

How was the comfort and discomfort of daily life at houses and homes pictured in visual and verbal interpretations in eighteenth-century Sweden? As argued before, comfort and discomfort were linked by the contemporaries both to physical and mental well-being. In this section, I will analyse how the comforts of home created by architecture, technology and objects was visualised in paintings and private writing, such as letters and diaries. My aim is to show that comfort was pictured both visually and verbally in eighteenth-century Sweden, and that visual interpretations in particular augmented the comfort and 'homeliness' or feeling of a home in spaces where they were hung.

For eighteenth-century aristocracy, the lack of certain furniture, decoration or objects could create uncomfortable or awkward situations at home. Even the highest-ranking families did not necessarily possess enough stylish, comfortable or convenient furniture for entertainments considered necessary for their lifestyle. For instance, Count Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna (1750–1818) describes in his diary in summer 1805 the perturbation of his mother, Countess Sara Gyllenborg (1726–1824), when unexpected guests arrived at Gyllenborg's country house Skenäs at dinnertime. As the hostess and mistress of the house, she had to place the unanticipated guests at the table and ensure that there were enough food for everyone. After the diner, Countess Gyllenborg revealed her concerns to her son and reflected that luckily, she had ten matching chairs and ten similar spoons.⁵⁰ Gyllenborg and Oxenstierna were both wealthy and powerful families, but comfort at a country house was relative and mundane.

Swedish country houses were mainly modest compared to British or continental houses. This meant small spaces easy to warm and illuminate, but also cramped rooms without enough space for comfortable living in unusual circumstances such as when guests had to be accommodated. In early autumn 1766, the then 16-year-old Johan Gabriel

⁵⁰ Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna, *Journal: Skenäs 1805* (Stockholm: Bokvännerna, 1964), 79.

Oxenstierna had to give up his bed for his relative Count Carl Johan Gyllenborg (1741–1811) when the latter visited Oxenstierna's parents at their country house Skenäs. Oxenstierna writes in his diary that he did not have anything against sleeping on the floor, which apparently was not uncomfortable. However, he found sleeping in a small space somewhat difficult, because when turning in his sleep, Oxenstierna was constantly about to knock over a chair or set his hand in the chamber pot. The latter did happen on one occasion, as Oxenstierna remarks with his dry humour.⁵¹ For a young aristocrat, sleeping on the floor and giving up his bed for a relative was a slightly amusing rather than an extraordinary or objectionable event. However, Oxenstierna's bright attitude towards these apparent discomforts is probably due, at least in part, to his age and positive character. For an older person, whether a member of the host family or a guest, a similar situation would probably have been far more unpleasant and uncomfortable.

Another example of the relative nature of comfortable circumstances is weather and its effects on daily life. In August 1779, Countess Hedvig De la Gardie (1732–1800), the wife of Axel von Fersen, wrote from Ljung to her daughter that her rooms, into which the sun shone from morning to evening, were so hot and airless, that it was almost impossible to stay in them.⁵² Only rarely did large trees shelter eighteenth-century houses, which were thus subject to the extremes of wind and sun. Despite the effects of the Little Ice Age, there were also warm days during summer and sunshine impacted significantly on the indoor climate. Large windows might make rooms comfortable warm spring and autumn, but in summer could become overheated, as Hedvig De la Gardie's letter makes clear. The discomfort of hot and airless rooms could, of course, be altered quickly by opening a window.⁵³ However, the house at Ljung about which Hedvig De la Gardie complained was not the modern brick house designed by Jean Eric Rehn, but an older and remarkably small timber house where the Fersens' stayed occasionally during the construction and decoration of the new house.⁵⁴ The small timber house warmed during

⁵¹ 29 Aug 1766, 1 Sept 1766. Johan Gabriel Oxenstiernas journal 1766–1768. Tosterupsamlingen vol. 108, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

⁵² Hedvig De la Gardie to Sophie von Fersen 12 Aug 1779. B XXV a:14, Regional State Archives in Vadstena, Sweden.

⁵³ See Eriksson, 'Little Ice Age', 28.

⁵⁴ Ilmakunnas, 'To Build According to One's Status', 41.

the summer much faster than large houses built of brick and stone, and it might have also lacked the facility to open windows to create a cooling breeze through the rooms.

Eighteenth-century genre painting gives us another perspective on the comforts and discomforts of home and country house. Pehr Hilleström (1732–1816) was a key figure in creating the visual image of homely comfort in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Sweden. Hilleström had studied in France and Holland and had knowledge of both contemporary genre paintings and the tradition of genre paintings with interiors picturing affluent households. Furthermore, he succeeded in establishing a style, which attracted art collectors who wished to hang on their walls Hilleström's harmonious paintings, depicting aristocratic and bourgeoisie interior.⁵⁵ Recurrent subjects of Hilleström's extraordinarily versatile paintings are cosy chairs, soft textiles and warming fires. In a number of his paintings, women are raising their skirts in front of a fire, either in an open fireplace or a tiled stove, in order to get warm under the thick layer of skirts and underskirts.⁵⁶ Naturally, the topic also appealed to his wealthy clientele and was a common theme in genre painting. Nonetheless, Hilleström's scenes give a realistic impression of thermal comfort in eighteenth-century Swedish country houses.⁵⁷

While tiled stoves radiate warmth relatively evenly, open fireplaces, still fashionable in representative rooms, are warming only when someone is very close to the fire, and then only on one side. Quilted petticoats or banyans, caps, shawls and fur-trimmed cloaks were used at home to keep warm in cold weather. Everyday garments were habitually plainer and less ornate in cloth, cut and decoration than formal dresses, adding to daily comfort through ease of movement and adaptation of clothing to thermal conditions accord to the season. This is visible in a number of Hilleström's paintings

⁵⁵ Mikael Ahlund, 'Att se vardagen: 1700-talet genom Pehr Hilleströms ögon', ed. Kirsti Eskelinen & Reetta Kuojärvi-Närhi, *Pehr Hilleström: 1700-talet i blickpunkten* (Helsingfors: Konstmuseet Sinebrychoff 2014).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Gerda Cederblom, *Pehr Hilleström som kulturskildrare*, vol. I (Uppsala: Nordiska museet, 1927), fig. 32, fig. 64, fig. 88.

⁵⁷ On verisimilitude in Hilleström's paintings, see Ahlund, 'Att se vardagen', 56, 60 and Gösta Selling, 'Schablon och realitet i Pehr Hilleströms måleri', in *Gustavianskt: Studier kring den gustavianska tidens kulturhistoria tillägnade Sigurd Wallin på hans femtioårsdag* (Stockholm: 1932), 130–4.

where women wear undecorated, monochrome dresses, jackets, shawls and caps, and are working or socializing in country house interiors.

In the painting called *The Wool winder*, executed in the 1780s–1790s, a young gentlewoman has fallen asleep in the middle of her chore of textile work (Figure 5). Typically for late-eighteenth-century Sweden, furniture is scarce, consisting of two upholstered chairs, an upholstered stool, an ornamental clock on the wall and a simple wooden table on which there is a warp reel and a basket full of balls of wool. Natural light from a large window casts over the women fallen asleep on her monotonous and everyday work of reeling up.⁵⁸ Despite the uncharacteristically large window and sparse furniture for a Swedish country house, Hilleström's painting accurately depicts daily comfort at an upper-class home, experienced through good lighting conditions, a soft chair to sit on, loose-fitting clothes and the possibility to doze off for a short while. All the furniture pictured is easy to move within and between rooms when required.

Figure 5 here

///**caption**///
Figure 5. Pehr Hilleström, *The Wool winder*, c. 1780–1790. Photo Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. CC PD.//

Sleeping figures on a sofa epitomize an eighteenth-century image of comfort. Pehr Hilleström was far from unique in his interest on capturing sleepers in a passing moment. Architect and engraver Jean Eric Rehn, whose work on housing and the use of novel solutions for planning and distribution of spaces was vital in creating comfortable living, has visualized the comforts of home and everyday life in a number of drawings of sleeping people and animals. A drawing depicts a cat and two dogs asleep on a simple sofa with a mattress.⁵⁹ Here a comfortable home is pictured in modest and somewhat

⁵⁸ Pehr Hilleström, *Nysterska*, ca 1780–1790. Oil on wood, 39,5 x 31,5 cm. NM 2453. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

⁵⁹ Jean Eric Rehn, *En katt och två hundar sovande i en sofa*. Drawing on paper, 42 x 55 cm. NMH 559/1995. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

shabby furniture, unpretentious paintings on the wall and a bare chest of drawers. A sense of home and comfort is attached to animals and the obviously well-used sofa.

Creating a comfortable home in northern climate

In the course of the eighteenth-century, ideals of country house architecture changed in Sweden. Following French examples, architects created new arrangements of rooms including small bedchambers, dining rooms and passageways. This resulted in the greater separation of spaces for masters and servants and added privacy for the former in particular. The new spatial order also enhanced thermal comfort because small rooms were easier to heat and rooms could be closed up depending on the need for warmth. In any country house, there was at least a couple of representative rooms that were heated only occasionally, closed doors preventing the cold from spreading out. At the same time, technological innovations such as energy efficient tiled stoves and double-glazed windows added extra thermal comfort, large windows allowing also daylight to better enter and illuminate spaces.

Comfortable, easy armchairs and sofas emerged alongside the upright chairs that had been the most important representative furniture during the seventeenth century. Canopy beds, with curtains that could be drawn against the cold in winter, light in summer and for privacy, became the norm and bedrooms formed an important space for comfortable socializing, reading, writing, working or contemplating. According to eighteenth-century ideals, the apartment of the mistress of the house was larger than that of the master, and included the key social spaces such as drawing rooms and dressing rooms, all furnished with easy seating, light and movable tables, and mirrors to reflect light and enlarge the space. Alongside these changes in space and furniture, smaller objects such as comfortable and warm clothing, tea sets and books were also essential for comfortable lifestyle.

Bodily and mental comfort and discomfort were described in letters and diaries, and depicted in paintings that were hung on country house walls, amplifying the idea of comfortable home in the eyes of inhabitants and guests alike. Clearly, for those who owned and lived in several country houses, some held greater emotional resonance than others. However, the importance to the family of making a house into a comfortable

home is tangible in letters and diaries that describe the everyday events at home with family and friends. Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna's diaries and Hedvig De la Gardie's letters are windows on daily life but also lay bare the importance of physical and mental comfort.