
Bruce Krushnelnicki
unable or unwilling to conform were left to their own devices.

In contrast to *A Sporting Time*, Rob Ruck’s *Sandlot Seasons* examines the important social role of sport (especially baseball) to Pittsburgh’s black community. Ruck, like Adelman, has a partisan commitment to a specific historiographical tradition. In response to books such as *Beyond the Melting Pot* and Stanley Elkin’s *Slavery*, historians of the Afro-American experience have attempted to show that black Americans possessed a unique cultural experience. Ruck extends this to sport. Sport was not merely a ticket out of the black ghetto, it was a positive element that channeled social behavior into constructive and meaningful experiences. It gave the black community its own heroes and provided one of the few opportunities for inter-racial contact on an equal basis. *Sandlot Seasons* portrays black baseball in Pittsburgh as possessing a character not unlike the pre-modern games described by Adelman. It continued to be a local, ritualistic, simple and vague activity almost a century after the era discussed in *A Sporting Season*.

Ruck’s book romanticizes, is personal and impressionistic, but is consistent in dealing with the aura surrounding semi-professional baseball and the sport’s local heroes. Black baseball survived and even prospered in times of economic depression, extreme racism, and two world wars. Records are sketchy and comparisons with white professional athletes are inconclusive, but the mythology of the sandlot seasons has survived. The shattering of the colour bar in professional baseball signalled the demise of black Pittsburgh. Although many linked the game to petty crime, it provided a focus for community loyalty. Despite sport’s emergence as a middle-class business, Ruck shows that this was not necessary to make baseball socially valuable.

Each of these books contains a disquieting element. *A Sporting Time* is too pat, too homogenized. *Sandlot Seasons* is too sanguine, too romantic. Both, however, are valuable additions to American sport’s history. They succeed in affirming the historical importance of leisure and, like baseball itself, they remain loyal to tradition while extending legitimate boundaries.

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What makes a house a home and how did it get this way? These are the questions McGill University architect Witold Rybczynski addresses in his latest book. The answer for Rybczynski is deceptively simple. The home is an idea invented and developed to provide for the growing needs of comfort and other amenities such as domesticity, privacy, intimacy and efficiency.

The discovery and elucidation of these attributes of hominess and how they evolved make a most interesting journey. It begins in the current age with Rybczynski calling to the page images of contemporary culture. He describes the archetypal man of comfort, Ralph Lauren. Lauren is comfortably dressed in Ralph Lauren shirt and pants, comfortably coiffed and smelling of Ralph Lauren cologne and comfortably housed in a home decorated by none other than Ralph Lauren himself. For Rybczynski, Lauren is not merely a faddish couturier, but a designer who reflects potent bourgeois traditions. His new line of home furnishings has become popular because its design is based on comfortable elegance, rehearsed informality, and polite rusticity, and, most of all, it evokes an idealized sense of the past. Is all this merely nostalgia? What are we missing that makes us willing to pay so dearly and search so diligently for a domestic tradition, Rybczynski asks.

To answer this, Rybczynski examines the evolution of “comfort.” Comparing a 16th century writing-room with his own study, he notes that to a casual observer the modern room is far more comfortable. What is important, however, is that if the same comparison were to be made by a 16th century person, one would expect little more than a puzzled stare since the idea of comfort was unknown. On the basis of this illustration Rybczynski concludes that comfort as a measure of domestic amenity is rather recent in origin.

In tracing the roots of the idea of home, Rybczynski turns his attention to the middle ages. During this era, class divisions distinguished by a wide chasm in housing conditions existed in society. The poor, enduring the most wretched conditions of rural feudalism, did little more than camp out, more or less permanently, in hovels. By contrast, the wealthy enjoyed extravagant, if not especially cozy, lodgings. In neither case, however, was there a concept of “home” or “family” as we understand it today. The revival of towns in the 13th and 14th centuries coincided with the emergence of the free bourgeois or middle-class town dwellers. The burgher’s town house combined the workplace and business establishment of the artisan and craftsman with the living quarters of the owner’s extended family, which often included servants and apprentices. All lived without privacy in one or two large, poorly heated
Home: A Short History of an Idea is an abundantly readable book in the tradition of Lewis Mumford or Jane Jacobs. While it may lack the rigour that follows from the use of original data, preferring instead to pick and choose from secondary sources, its argument is compelling and eloquently made. The author’s style is most pleasant and the work is a thought-provoking reinterpretation of history. This is the broad stroke at work.

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These three papers, based on presentations at a housing tenure workshop sponsored by the Centre for Urban and Community Studies in February 1987, pursue a common discussion. The point of departure is succinctly set out in Harris’s paper on the growth of home ownership during the Toronto boom period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In round numbers, the percentage of owner-occupied housings units in the city increased from slightly more than 25% in the 1890s to nearly 50% by the eve of World War I. Harris and Dennis offer different though not...