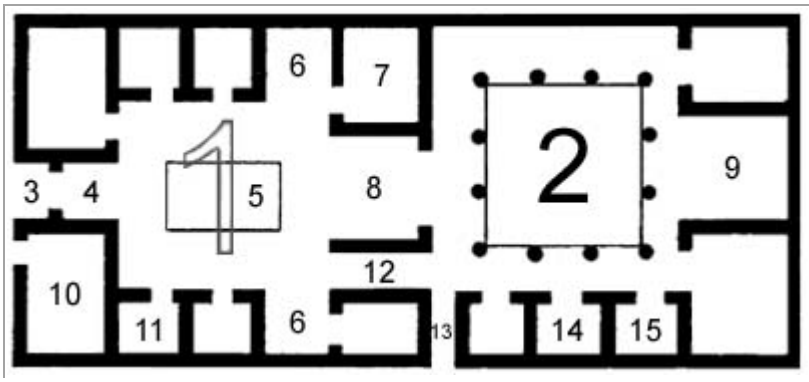
Atrium 2 Peristylium 3 Vestibulum 4 Fauces 5 Impluvium 6 Ala 7 Triclinium		8 Tablinum 9 Exhedra/Oecus 10 Taberna 11 Cubiculum 12 Andron 13 Posticum 14 Bathroom 15 Cucina (kitchen)

Vestibulum	Fauces	Atrium	Ala	Tablinum	Peristylium

Model of a two storey Roman house. *Museo della Civilta, Rome*

Early Italian houses grouped around the *atrium*, with a small garden, the so-called *hortus*, at the back. The classic Roman house, however, was divided into two parts. The first part grouped around the *atrium*, the second around the *peristylium*. The *peristylium* developed out of the earlier *hortus*. The *atrium* and the *peristylium* were perfect adaptations to the heat of the Mediterranean. They were open to the sky, letting fresh air in to circulate among the corridors and rooms. In the *atrium* a small pool, the *impluvium* would catch the rainwater, whereas in the *peristylium*, the rain would water the plants. Further to the *impluvium* there was an underground tank connected to it which could catch any excess rainwater.

The Roman house is very much a house built for the people of southern Europe. So much so, that when the Romans built their houses in northern Italy or the northern European provinces, they adopted a system of heating, circulating warm air under the floors and along the walls.

It was constructed to face inward. Meaning it generally had no windows at all, but drew its air and light from the openings of the *atrium* and *peristylium*. The house was normally only built on the ground floor, and if there was a first floor, it was small and limited to few rooms. Rooms were designed for one specific purpose only, the *triclinium* being for dining, a *cubiculum* for sleeping, etc.

An interesting thing to note about the layout of the Roman house is that the names given to the front part of the house around the *atrium* are Latin, whereas those in the back are largely Greek.

The typical Roman house was, in general, only occupied by one family (including several generations).

Vestibulum and Fauces

A Roman house did not open directly onto the road, but into a small passageway, vestibulum, the corridor that led from the main door onwards into the *atrium* was called the *fauces*.

The Posticum

Aside from the main door, there was a servants' entrance, the *posticum*, usually positioned at the side of the house. It was used slaves, servants, humble visitors or sometimes even by the master of the house, who sought to leave the house unnoticed by the prying eyes of onlookers in the main street.

The Atrium

The *atrium* originally was the bedroom of the mother of the family in an old Latin household. Hence a bed *lectus genialis* stood opposite the main entrance. The Romans kept the bed standing, as a symbol of the sanctity of marriage (the bride was still placed upon it by the groom as part of the marriage ceremony). But to them it served only symbolic use. A further symbol connected with the *atrium* was the hearth. In early houses the hearth, which all its symbolisms of homeliness, was situated in the *atrium* the centre of the house and domestic life. But the more classic Roman houses don't have a hearth in the *atrium*. In fact it remains unclear where the highly symbolic hearth was thereafter moved to.

The *impluvium* was the shallow pool sunk into the floor to catch the rainwater. Some surviving examples are beautifully decorated. The opening in the ceiling above the pool called for some means of support for the roof. And it is here where one differentiates between five different styles of *atrium*:

Atrium tuscanium: this type had no columns. The weight of the ceiling was carried by the rafters, though expensive to build, this seems to have been the most widespread type of *atrium* in the Roman house.
Atrium tetrastylum: this type had one column at each corner of the *impluvium*.
Atrium corinthium: this type was similar to the *atrium tetrastylum* but had a greater opening in the roof and a greater number of columns.
Atrium displuviatum: the roof actually sloped towards the side walls, large rainwater therefore ran off into other outlets than the *impluvium*.
Atrium testudinatum: this atrium had no opening in the roof at all and was only seen in small, unimportant houses.

As the centerpiece of the house The *atrium* was the most lavishly furnished room. Also it contained the little chapel to the ancestral spirits (*lararium*), the household safe (*arca*) and sometimes a bust of the master of the house.

The Tablinum

The *tablinum* was the large reception room of the house. It was situated between the *atrium* and the *peristylium*. The *tablinum* generally had no wall separating it from the *atrium* at all and little if any walls dividing it from the *peristylium*. It was only separated from the *atrium* by a curtain which could easily be drawn back and toward the *peristylium* it was separated by a wooden screen or wide doors. Hence if the doors/screens and curtains of the *tablinum* were all opened to increase ventilation during a hot day, one could see from the *atrium* through the *tablinum* into the *peristylium*. In the early days, the *tablinum* would have acted as the study of the head of the family, the *paterfamilias*.

The Alae

The *alae* (*alae* are the plural of *ala*, the word *ala* means 'wing') were the open rooms on each side of the *atrium*. Their use is largely unknown today. One knows that in the early Italian houses, which had a covered *atrium*, the *alae* had windows to allow light to enter the house. However, with the introduction of the opening in the roof above the *atrium* and the general abandoning of windows in the Roman house, the *alae* became largely obsolete. It appears more that they were incorporated into the house in accordance to tradition, rather than for any specific use.

The Triclinium

The *triclinium* was the Roman dining room. In earlier days the meals were eaten in the *atrium*, the *tablinum*, or a dining room above the *tablinum*, known as the *cenaculum*. But with the introduction of the Greek practice of reclining when eating, the *triclinium* was set aside as a room especially for dining in. In fact, in many houses once would find several *triclinia*, rooms designated as dining areas, allowing the family a choice of which room to eat in on any particular day.

The Andron

The *andron* was the name given to a passageway from the *atrium* to the *peristylium*.

The Peristylium

The *peristylium* (sometimes called the peristyle in English) was in effect the garden of the house. Though in the case of the Roman house, it was incorporated into the house itself and was usually surrounded by columns supporting the roof. In it were grown herbs and flowers, particularly roses, violets and lilies it appears.
Small statues and statuettes and other ornamental artwork or outdoor furniture would adorn the space which, on sunny days, would be used as an outside dining area.

The Exhedra and the Oecus

Just as the *tablinum* lay behind the *atrium*, continuing the space down the center line of the house, so did the *exhedra* extend behind the *peristylium*. It was a spacious room, of similar proportions to the *tablinum* and acted as a large communal dining room or a lounge. The *oecus* (from the Greek *oikos* for 'house' or 'room') appears to have been the same thing as the *exhedra*, but by a different name. If the inside of this room was decorated by columns lining the walls, it was known as a *oecus corinthium*.

The Cubiculum

The *cubiculum* was the bedroom of the Roman house. Those bedrooms situated around the *atrium* tended to be smaller than those round the *peristylium*. To the Romans these rooms were apparently of less importance than the other rooms of the house. The ceilings were vaulted and lower above the bed, often making the room appear a cramped and stuffy place. According to the apparent tradition of the Roman house of giving each room a very specific use, the floor mosaics of the *cubiculum* often clearly marked out the rectangle where the bed was to be placed. Sometimes in front of the bedroom there was a small antechamber, the *procoeton*, where a personal servant would sleep.

The Taberna

The *taberna* could be a room in the Roman house which surrounded the *atrium*, but which had its own entrance from the outside and didn't lead into the interior of the house. These little rooms hence could be used as shops. Usually there was a brick counter to display goods by the entrance. Inside there usually one or more back rooms. There normally was a floor added, cutting the tall room in half to create two low floors, the upper floor being called the *pergula*. These cramped flats housed the very poor, perhaps a poor client family loyal to the family who inhabited the house. A *taberna* though was not necessarily meant as housing for tenants, but could also be a simple shed in which to keep various things not suitable for storage indoors.