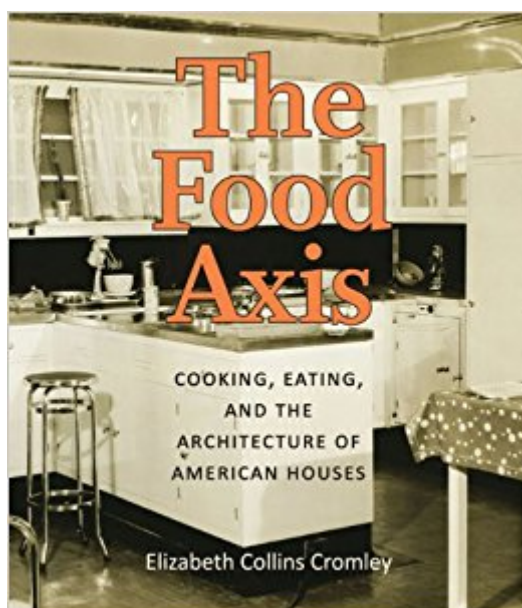


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# The Food Axis: Cooking, Eating, And The Architecture Of American Houses



## Synopsis

Blending architectural and social history with the necessity and the passion for food, this engaging new book attempts to understand the development of the American house by viewing it through one very specific lens: the food axis. Taking in far more than the kitchen, author Elizabeth Collins Cromley explores all areas of food management within the home—preparation, cooking, consumption, and disposal. Her food axis implies a network of related spaces above and below ground, both attached to the house and separate from it. Studying the use and interaction of these spaces, and the ways in which their components change (often radically) over time, the author shows how these elements have helped shape the multiple forms of residential architecture in the United States, from the first settlement period to the present. Beginning with the earliest and relatively simple houses, Cromley traces changes in food spaces through the years, noting a steady escalation in the number of food-related rooms. Along the way, she considers multiple circumstances that shed light on this evolution, including the role of gender in determining food-space design, the relation of food spaces to nature, and the telling ways in which people and food circulate through kitchens and dining rooms. Because Cromley is interested not only in how designed spaces look but how they are used, she cites a wealth of primary sources—autobiographies, travel journals, household diaries, letters, inventories—in her exploration of the habits surrounding all aspects of food in the home. In addition to designers, preservationists, and architectural historians, this book will interest curious cooks as well as home-dwellers who want to better understand the spaces they inhabit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Cromley's is a well-balanced investigation, that will appeal to students and scholars of history, vernacular architecture, foodways and material culture. It is to her credit that I find myself wanting to know more." (Abigail Carroll Winterthur Portfolio)

Elizabeth Collins Cromley is Professor of Architectural History at Northeastern University. She is the author of *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* and coauthor, with Thomas Carter, of *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes*.

The Food Axis is aptly named and sends home the message that food is the center of American life and domestic architecture. Axis is a technical term - a straight line around which objects revolve - but I prefer to understand the term more lyrically: that food is the heart of the home, the center of the family. Cromley delivers an excellent work, well researched and wonderfully written text, filled with diagrams, photographs and additional readings. From the earliest American homes, food has defined the layout and design of living space. The separation of food preparation, storage and eating spaces and their integration describe household wealth, social strata and a woman's role. The outdoor or basement cooking space of homes from 1800s and early 1900s, evolve into today's open kitchen and dining area. The shift is gradual and complex but persistent and consistent. The 1950s modernistic and futuristic kitchens define streamlined, efficient food preparation and women freed from domestic toil. Later, cooking and eating areas are indoor, outdoor, multipurpose social settings. I learned a lot about domestic architecture and American culture in reading *The Food Axis*, and had to laugh recently, when a friend showed off the first addition to their log cabin high in the Applegate: a dining room. All that room suggested crowded into my mind! Later that afternoon, her husband described the outdoor kitchen he planned, off to the side of the deck where it would be central to the gathering, cooled by mountain breezes and brilliant in the sun of Southern Oregon. *The Food Axis* was part of a display at the National Building Museum bookshop in Washington DC., on the occasion of their summer 2012 exhibit, "House and Home". It's a splendid museum and the central hall is worth the visit even if you don't take time for the excellent exhibits.

"The Food Axis" is on the ROROTOKO list of cutting-edge intellectual nonfiction. The book interview

of Professor Cromley ran here as the cover feature on January 19, 2011.

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