



# Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years

By Christine Varga-Harris

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*Stories of House and Home* is a social and cultural history of the massive construction campaign that Khrushchev instituted in 1957 to resolve the housing crisis in the Soviet Union and to provide each family its own apartment. Decent housing was deemed the key to a healthy, productive home life, which was essential to the realization of socialist collectivism. Drawing on archival materials, as well as memoirs, fiction, and the Soviet press, Christine Varga-Harris shows how the many aspects of this enormous state initiative—from neighborhood planning to interior design—sought to alleviate crowded, undignified living conditions and sculpt residents into ideal Soviet citizens. She also details how individual interests intersected with official objectives for Soviet society during the Thaw, a period characterized by both liberalization and vigilance in everyday life.

Set against the backdrop of the widespread transition from communal to one-family living, *Stories of House and Home* explores the daily experiences and aspirations of Soviet citizens who were granted new apartments and those who continued to inhabit the old housing stock due to the chronic problems that beset the housing program. Varga-Harris analyzes the contradictions apparent in heroic advances and seemingly inexplicable delays in construction, model apartments boasting modern conveniences and decrepit dwellings, happy housewarmings and disappointing moves, and new residents and individuals requesting to exchange old apartments. She also reveals how Soviet citizens identified with the state and with the broader project of building socialism.

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#### Review

"Housing tells us a great deal about both Soviet policy and the modernization of Soviet society during the Khrushchev years. *Stories of House and Home* illuminates the linkages, real and imagined, between single-family homes and the morals, tastes, and lifestyles of an emergent 'socialist way of life.'"?Julie Hessler, University of Oregon, author of *A Social History of Soviet Trade, 1917–1953*

"Readers of Christine Varga-Harris's splendid book on Soviet apartment life during the 1950s and 1960s will discover that it is no surprise that so many urban Russians have embraced IKEA in recent years. The desire for an ordered, purposeful, and comfortable domesticity?all in the tight space of the single-family apartment?was deeply embedded in the Soviet past."?Stephen V. Bittner, Sonoma State University, author of *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat*

#### About the Author

Christine Varga-Harris is Associate Professor of History at Illinois State University.

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