



JSAA ELECTIVE COURSE BLURB

SEMESTER & YEAR	FALL 2026	ELECTIVE TYPE (DEPARTMENTAL / CROSS ELECTIVE) *	CROSS ELECTIVE
COURSE CODE	INTD-7009	ELECTIVE MODE (SEMINAR / STUDIO / WORKSHOP)	Text here
NO. OF CREDITS	3	PREREQUISITE COURSE(S) (IF ANY)	Course(s) name here
COURSE NAME	Furnishing the Self: The secret life of rooms.		
AFFILIATED PROGRAM(S) (select as applicable)	Architecture / Interiors / IDE		

* Departmental Electives are only open to JSAA students and Cross Electives are open to all JGU students.

Faculty Bio

Dr. Esther Schmidt is a global design historian, heritage specialist, and Founding Director of the Centre for Historic Houses of India, a National Expert Heritage Body designated by the Government of India. She is Associate Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, where she teaches architectural history, global design history, and heritage studies. She holds a D.Phil from the University of Oxford and is an Attingham alumna for the study of historic houses and collections. Her work focuses on historic houses and interiors as sites of cultural exchange, with particular emphasis on room typologies, material culture, and the interpretation of collections across Europe and South Asia. She leads research, curatorial, and heritage impact projects ranging from rural unexplored historic sites to UNESCO World Heritage sites, advising on research, curation and sustainable engagement & visitor experience strategies. Alongside her academic work, she develops cultural programming and interpretation frameworks that connect historic spaces with contemporary audiences, integrating research, storytelling, and public engagement

Course Descriptor

The lines between the exterior and interior are often fluid, particularly in the Indian context where rooms in traditional buildings were often not fully enclosed and part of an overall ensemble. A courtyard, garden, balcony or window offering a view of the surrounding landscape could be integrated into the overall room scheme just like specific bio-climatic interventions. In order to grasp and make sense of this elusive phenomenon of the interior in relation to inner world of their inhabitants we often use binary categories such as interior and exterior, private and public or male and female. While these categories are artificial and can also limit our understanding when rigidly applied, we can nevertheless not do fully without them. The connection between the interior and human interiority is not arbitrary but is connected to specific moments in design history as Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Beate Söntgen have pointed out in their book "Interiors and Interiority (2015) which is one of the main texts used in this class. This course explores the room as a psychological, social, environmental and imaginative construct. Moving

across architectural history, design history, material culture and the history of emotions, students investigate the “secret life” of rooms: mirrored rooms, monsoon rooms, porcelain rooms, tents, boudoirs, garden pavilions, cabinets, thresholds, and invented interiors entering a dialogue with landscape where architecture mediates memory, desire, power, climate, and self-fashioning. Treating interiors as epistemic environments and not simply as decorated enclosures, the course asks how rooms furnished thought, staged identity, regulated privacy, shaped sensory experience, and produced relationships between the human interior and the architectural interior.

Part I examines rooms as theatres of the self: privacy, mirrors, domesticity, thresholds and interiority

Part II explores rooms as environmental and sensory entities: monsoon rooms, cooling systems, scent, water, textiles and atmospheric architecture

Part III considers rooms as imaginative worlds: dream spaces, portable interiors, animal rooms, collections, and vanished rooms.

Through visual analysis, curatorial exercises, exhibition-making, and object-based research, students learn to interpret rooms as active historical agents rather than passive containers.

Underlying concept:

- Rooms as concepts (the self)
- Rooms as technologies (environment, climate, sensation)
- Rooms as worlds (imagination, collection, loss)

Assignments mirror this progression:

- Curate a room
- Analyse a room’s life
- Reconstruct water as an interior technology

Keywords: interiors, interiority, room typologies, self-fashioning, material culture, environmental design history, historic houses, sensory history, decorative arts, architecture and emotion.

The course will include at least one day excursion to either Meerut or New Delhi and one weekend excursion to Rajasthan.

Overall course structure & keyword syllabus (15 weeks in 3 parts)

PART I – Rooms and the Making of the Self

Weeks 1–5

WEEK 1

What is a Room? Theoretical Introductions Room as architectural, psychological and cultural construct.

Core reading:

- Ewa Lajer-Burcharth & Beate Söntgen, *Interiors and Interiority*

WEEK 2

Rooms and Self-Fashioning

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning : From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago ; University of Chicago Press, 2006. Exercise: Visual analysis workshop.

WEEK 3

Mirror Rooms and Technologies of the Self Amber, Versailles, reflection, illusion, cognition.

Exercise: Comparative image analysis.

WEEK 4

Thresholds, Curtains and Spaces In-Between Windows, balconies, courtyards, semi-interiors.

Exercise: Threshold mapping.

WEEK 5

Rooms of Withdrawal: Boudoirs, Ermitages, Dream Spaces

Core reading:

- Meredith Martin, *Interiors and Interiority in the Ornamental Dairy Tradition*
- (plus privacy/withdrawal materials)

Case studies:

- Marie Antoinette's Dairy (perfect here)
- Boudoirs
- Ermitages
- Retreat pavilions
- Wilhelmine Encke / Peacock Island

PART II — ROOMS AS ENVIRONMENTAL & SENSORY MACHINES

Weeks 6–10

WEEK 6

Garden Rooms and Invented Nature Chinese tea pavilions, Marie Antoinette's dairy, Peacock Island, artificial ruins, Wilhelmsbad, Wörlitz and the room extended into landscape.

This week will explicitly examine the garden as a furnished exterior behaving like an interior.

Exercise: Comparative analysis of architectural fictions in landscape.

WEEK 7

Monsoon Rooms and Atmospheric Architecture Badal Mahal, seasonal rooms, climate-responsive interiors.

Core reading:

- Rajamani et al., *Monsoon Feelings*
- Schmidt, *Porcelain Rooms*

WEEK 8

. Cooling the Interior Water, airflow, scent, cloth, light.

Core:

- Sylvia Houghteling
- Passive cooling studies

WEEK 9

The Interior as Garden & portable interiors. Floral rooms, carpets, painted gardens, trellis rooms.

Exercise: Object biography workshop **Portable Interiors** Tents, textile rooms, carpets as mobile worlds.

Mini-curatorial exercise.

WEEK 10

Sound, Fragrance and Emotional Rooms Monsoon machines, fountains, scent, music.

Assignment 2 Due

PART III — IMAGINED ROOMS, COLLECTIONS AND VANISHED INTERIORS

Weeks 11–15**WEEK 11**

Animal Rooms and Living Architectures Bird rooms, elephant spaces, animal infrastructures.

WEEK 12

Porcelain Rooms and Global Goods Collections, exotic interiors, furnished cosmopolitanism.

Core text: Schmidt, Esther

WEEK 13

Lake palaces, stepwells and water architecture and interiors.

WEEK 14

Vanished Rooms and Lost Interiors Ruins, reconstructed rooms, museum period rooms.

WEEK 15

The Future of the Interior Can rooms still furnish the self? Student cabinet presentations.

Assignment 3 Due

B. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, the students will be able to:	
LO 1	Explain major theories of interiors, interiority, domesticity, and the relationship between rooms and selfhood.
LO 2	Analyse rooms as historical evidence by interpreting architecture, objects, surfaces, spatial sequences, and sensory design
LO 3	Evaluate how climate, materials, ornament, water, textiles, mirrors, scent, and light shaped room typologies across cultures.
LO 4	Curate and communicate original interpretations of interiors through exhibitions, visual analysis, and object-based storytelling.
LO 5	Produce independent research connecting room typologies to broader questions of identity, ecology, memory

Assessment & Evaluation System

Write a brief summary of assessment and evaluation systems, including activities, exercises, and assignments.

C. ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION SYSTEM (70% Internal / 30% Final Exam)

Internal Assessment (70%)

Assignment 1: Curated Exhibition Project: Inventing a Room (20%)

Students work individually or in pairs to curate a small digital exhibition around a room typology.

Examples:

- The Monsoon Room
- The Mirror Room
- The Boudoir
- The Tent as Portable Interior
- The Porcelain Room
- The Room as Garden

Deliverables:

- Curatorial statement (600 words)
- 8–10 objects/images with labels (museum-style)
- Spatial/visual exhibition layout
- 7-minute presentation

Assignment 2: Room Biography Portfolio (25%)

Students produce an illustrated analytical portfolio tracing the ‘life’ of one room.

Possible lenses:

- Use over time
- Sensory life of the room
- Furniture and objects
- Rituals and inhabitants
- Afterlives/loss/transformation

Deliverables

- 1500 word illustrated portfolio
- Annotated visual evidence
- One interpretative room diagram

Assignment 3: Cooling the interior atlas: Water, climate and sensory design (25%)

Students produce an illustrated atlas investigating how water furnishes the interior as climatic and sensory technology:

Please note that while the overall topic of this assignment will remain the format of this assignment might slightly change depending on the classroom discussions and development.

Possible topics

- Lake palaces as environmental interiors
- The chadar as hydraulic ornament and cooling device
- Fountains as acoustic and thermal technologies
- Water channels in Mughal and Rajput palaces

- Stepwells
- Reflecting pools and the psychology of cooling
- Water, silver, light and lunar atmosphere in historic interiors

Deliverables:

- Illustrated atlas (ca 10-12 pages)
- 5 annotated diagrams/ sections tracing water movement, cooling, sound or reflection
- 1000 word interpretative essay to go with the illustrations
- One speculative design proposition: how a historic cooling strategy might inform a contemporary interior
- 8 minute presentation of the material

Final written exam (30%)

Final Written Exam (30%)

- Image analysis
- Short essays
- One long comparative essay

References/Citations (if any)

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Allan, Graham, and Graham Crow, eds. *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere*. London: Macmillan, 1989.

Appadurai, Arjun. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

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Ariès, Philippe, and Georges Duby, eds. *A History of Private Life*. 5 vols. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987–1991.

- Attfield, Judy, and Pat Kirkham, eds. *A View from the Interior: Women and Design*. London: Women's Press, 1995.
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- Chapman, Perry 'Home and the Display of Privacy', in: Westermann, Mariët, ed. (2000) *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, exhibition catalogue
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- Malnar, J. M., & Vodvarka, F. (1989). *The interior dimension: A theoretical approach to enclosed space*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
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- Meredith Martin (eds.), *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe. Constructing Identities and Interiors*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2010;
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- Sommer, R. (1969). *Personal space: The behavioral basis of design*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.