
Reviewed by Jared Margulies (University of Alabama)
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Commissioned by Daniella McCahey (Texas Tech University)

Mike Maunder's new book, *House Plants*, is a welcome addition to the Reaktion Books Botanical Series. *House Plants* is a valuable contribution to the plant humanities focused on the plants that shape the indoor biome. These affordable books, which emphasize brevity and accessibility in prose paired with high-quality color images, are all beautifully designed, hardcover gems with gorgeously printed color illustrations. Maunder's *House Plants* is no different. Not only is the book a delightful read and resource, but it is one I am bound to return to whenever I want to revisit an interesting historical fact or narrative about my ponytail palm, spider plants, Christmas cactus, or the dozen or so other houseplants with whom I share my home that Maunder narrates through multispecies biography so well.

Across six chapters and an introduction and conclusion, Maunder welcomes readers into the world of house plants, detailing early histories of the rise of house plant cultures and mania along with their attendant cultures of collecting. Maunder relates to readers stories from global expeditions that occurred hand-in-hand with rising European interests in natural history, floriculture, and botanical exploration. On this note, the book is admittedly quite Eurocentric in its offerings on house plant cultures even as it travels the world through the stories of these plants (*bonsai* is notably absent from the index, for example). This is less a criticism of the book, however, than a reflection of the overall power that European desires have wrought over the botanical world.

Maunder deftly details the history and impact of the Wardian Case (chapter 4) as well as the world of cultivation and domestication of house plants’ wild relatives (chapter 2), and offers reflections on relations (so rarely grasped or appreciated!) between species now propagated in the millions, like the golden barrel cactus (*Echinocactus grusonii*) or the ubiquitous ponytail palm (*Beaucarnea recurvata*), that are simultaneously en-
dangered in their wild habitats (chapter 6). Although many readers likely care for a ponytail palm in their own houses and apartments (one cultivated example of which stares back at me as I write this review), Maunder reminds readers that it is highly restricted in its habitat in Mexico and is classified as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Such stories are unfortunately quite common in the world of house plants.

Although I take (playful) issue with some of Maunder’s personal opinions on the various qualities and attributes of some houseplants he describes (he writes that the ubiquitous spider plant, *Chlorophytum comosum*, is among “the least inspiring” of house plants, p. 58), I treasure this book for the clear synthesis of thoughtful research drawing on scholarly references, the author’s personal experiences, and his obvious love for house plants supported by deep botanical knowledge. It is the trait of botanical love, however, that resonates through the text most clearly, as one inspired by a lifetime of learning from plants in their natural habitats, the greenhouse, and the living room. This quality of the text makes the overall reading and viewing experience with this book a true delight.

*House Plants* is filled not only with crisp and engaging prose, but also an incredible set of high-quality color images and illustrations printed on good paper. Having recently published a book on plants that sadly features only black-and-white images, I am both jealous and delighted that this book—like all in the series—remains affordable while also offering high-resolution images. It is because of the images that, rather than occupying my bookshelf, this book will remain on my coffee table for me to revisit and enjoy often. So many of the plants that Maunder details through both historical and contemporary accounts of their “discovery” by Western scientists, cultivation in greenhouses, and circulation through the world of the global house plant economy are also plants that live as companions in my own home.

Learning is a step in the journey toward more-than-human care. In this sense, Maunder’s text is a valuable volume for reconsidering and appreciating the storied worlds of common house plants like the staghorn fern, *Sansevieria*, the Christmas cactus, rubber plant, and the iconic *Monstera deliciosa*, carried into homes around the world. Of course, many of these species have not only moved around the world out of human desire for indoor vegetal companions, but as central actors in histories of empire and colonialism. Maunder acknowledges the inequalities and violences embedded in these plants’ global circulation, while also clearly avoiding diving too deeply or critically into a subject that demands lengthier scholarly treatment than in a book such as this.

*House Plants* not only provides some rich more-than-human biography of house plants, but also shows how their popularity has influenced fashion, design, and architecture. More speculatively, Maunder suggests that future modes of designing the built environment may come to employ plants as part of the building process. Maunder also considers what motivates so many people to bring plants into the indoor world. While he gives (unfairly, in my opinion) very short shrift to how plants may powerfully seed themselves in the human unconscious with more-than-human consequence (he sharply quips, “Much has been written about the psychology of collecting, some of it based on some fairly unsavory Freudian interpretation,” p. 96), he also takes care to consider how human cultures have both shaped and been shaped by vegetal relations, offering examples from a variety of global regions and cultures.

There are far too many bland, poorly researched, and poorly written books on house plants. This book is quite the opposite, and is without question one of the best books on house plants I have ever had the pleasure to read. While Maunder’s book is not for those looking for a how-
to book on caring for house plants (there are countless versions of such books available), it stands out as a contribution to the growing plant humanities as a truly accessible, jargon-free, well-researched, and engaging text that demonstrates both humanities’ love for plants as well as the love of the author for the cherished tradition of caring for plants in the indoor biome. I will be sure to return to its pages, full of wonderful images of plants, time and again as both a resource and a pleasurable reading experience.

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