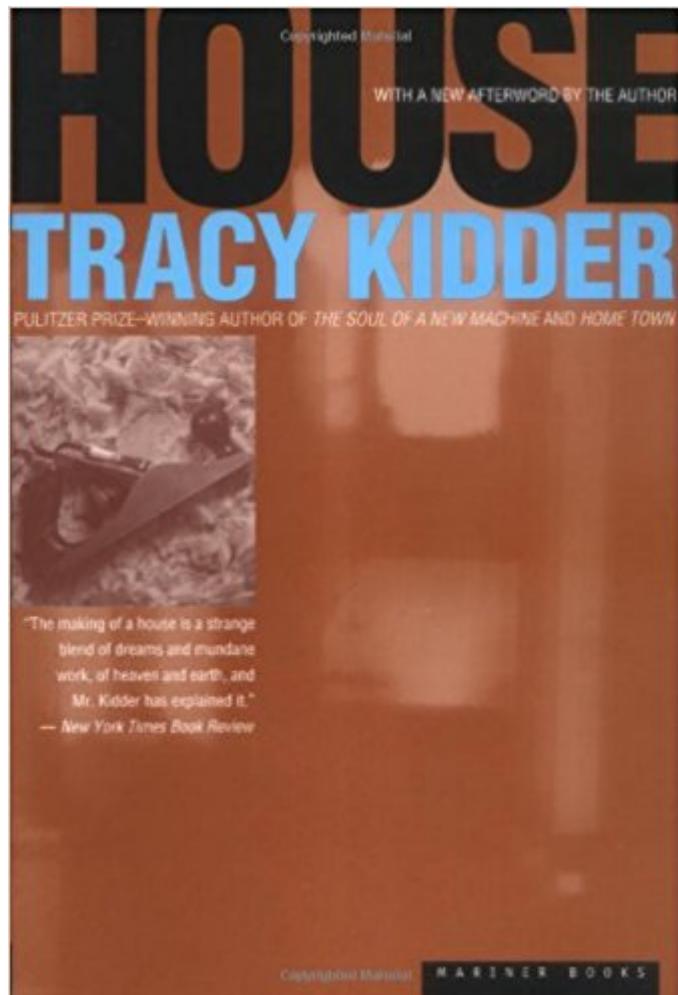


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# House



## **Synopsis**

Tracy Kidder takes readers to the heart of the American Dream: the building of a family's first house with all its day-to-day frustrations, crises, tensions, challenges, and triumphs.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

When I first read House I was enthralled. Finally, a book about the building of a house from inception to possession. I started to use excerpts from the book in my high school construction classes, and then bought 35 copies to use with my students. I now have the book broken down into about 25 lessons and read it each year with my new classes. It adapts very well in a construction technology program for Vocational high school students, and with the current emphasis on literacy we get an added bonus. Thank you Tracy Kidder, you have helped many students over the past 5 years.

I think this book is wonderful. It gives an insight into and expresses an appreciation for those individuals in the building trade -- many of whom are extremely bright, talented and quite often underappreciated. The characters in this book are so lifelike; the conversations so real. I can feel the tension in the air between Jim (the builder and lead carpenter), Bill (the architect), and Jonathan and Judith Souweine (the owners) The workers are great, too. Their comments are snide and funny. I often hear stories from my husband in his concrete business of how architect's plans are not always

practical or realistic when construction actually takes place. I love seeing how this situation plays out in the book. SPOILER--> I really felt for the builders when their profit was disappointingly small in the end. Kidder not only captured the nuances of interpersonal relations between those involved in all aspects of the house's construction, but also the very essence of each character's personality.

If you are thinking about becoming a builder, or are thinking about having a house built for you, this is a must-read. Be prepared for Kidder's no holds barred account of how devious a home buyer can be just to save relatively little money, how unprepared a builder can be to deal with such situations, and what crucial role good communication between the home buyer, architect, and builder plays getting the project completed on time and on budget. Kidder emphasizes the fact that building a house is not just about people doing business in an impersonal manner, but that personalities play a crucial role in any business relationship. Kidder also makes clear that the involved parties' abilities to see the other sides point of view in a dispute are paramount to achieving the ultimate goal in business: the customer gets a quality product on time and no one feels they're cheated at the end of the transaction. This is not an instruction manual; Kidder offers little advice on what is proper or what the characters could do better. Kidder simply relates an accurate account of the process of building a home, mostly with an eye toward human relations; a wise reader will learn from the successes and mistakes of the characters herein.

This book does take you through the process of building a custom house. However, it focuses on the emotional roller-coaster gone through by the principal players -- architect, owner, & builder -- as well as the interpersonal relationships that result. The book reads easily, despite the fact that the author often uses technical terms. He takes many small side trips to describe a number of things: the history of stick-built framing; the characteristics of good wood; the process of lumber making; the emergence of the architect's role. Most of which is fascinating and colorful (though occasionally tedious). This book is NOT a "how-to" book, a "what-to-look-for" book, or even a "how-to-choose-a-builder" book. It's just a story, but a story that vividly describes the interplay between the family (who wants a nice house but is trying to squeeze every penny), the architect (who wants his vision built but sees the lack of money slowly chip away at his vision) and the builder (who wants to maintain a high-quality of workmanship while getting blindsided by changing plans and hard-bargaining clients). The book won't help you build a house, but it will definitely help you prepare mentally for the seemingly endless decisions and challenges inherent in homebuilding.

I read this book when it came out thirteen years ago and I enjoyed every minute. In this book, Tracy Kidder describes the process and personalities involved with building a new home, but it's more than that. Like his "Soul of a New Machine", it chronicles what it's really like to be caught in the middle of a major project. Even someone who hasn't built a home from scratch or developed a new computer system will gain an basic knowledge of the topic and an appreciation for what it takes to do something really big.

If anyone deserves to be compared to John McPhee, Tracey Kidder does. His non-fiction prose comes closest to McPhee's in engaging the reader and making the most minute detail seem fascinating. Aside from the pure pleasure of reading, "House" is also a manual for how and how not to build a house. Every time I have a problem in the construction of my house, I think back to the shabby, confrontational way the builders were treated in "House" and approach my builder with that in mind.

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