

WTBBL Recommended Reads: Houses & Homes



I would speculate that I spend about 70% of my free time trawling for houses on Zillow. Is this a particularly healthy habit for me to have? Definitely not. What would I be better off doing? Reading books about houses instead!

Housing is an essential need for us all. Considering that we spend so much time in these dwellings, it is no surprise that literature would have many stories and works that focus on houses and their place in our lives. Here we have books from all sorts of genres that feature places of residence as central characters.

At Home: A Short History of Private Life by Bill Bryson, 2010. ([DB072121](#))

Bill Bryson and his family live in a Victorian parsonage in a part of England where nothing of any great significance has happened since the Romans decamped. Yet one day, he began to consider how very little he knew about the ordinary things of life as he found it in that comfortable home. To remedy this, he formed the idea of journeying about his house from room to room to “write a history of the world without leaving home.” Whatever happens in the world, he demonstrates, ends up in our house, in the paint and the pipes and the pillows and every item of our private lives. – Book description adapted from Goodreads

The Hacienda by Isabel Cañas, 2022. ([DB107997](#), en español [DB115559](#))

In the overthrow of the Mexican government, Beatriz’s father is executed and her home destroyed. When handsome Don Rodolfo Solórzano proposes, Beatriz ignores the rumors surrounding his first wife’s sudden demise, choosing instead to seize the security his estate in the countryside provides. But Hacienda San Isidro is not the sanctuary she imagined. Beatriz only knows two things for certain: Something is wrong with the hacienda. And no one there will help her. Far from a refuge, San Isidro may be Beatriz’s doom. – Book description adapted from Goodreads

The Turner House by Angela Flournoy, 2015. ([DB081739](#))

The Turners have lived on Yarrow Street for over fifty years. Their house has seen thirteen children grown and gone—and some returned; it has seen the arrival of grandchildren, the fall of Detroit’s East Side, the loss of a father. The house still stands despite abandoned lots, an embattled city, and the inevitable shift outward to the suburbs. But now, as ailing matriarch Viola finds herself forced to leave her home and move in with her eldest son, the family discovers that the house is worth just a tenth of its mortgage. The Turner children are called home to decide its fate and to reckon with how each of their pasts haunt—and shape—their family’s future. – Book description from author’s website

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein, 2017. ([DB092052](#))

In this groundbreaking history of the modern American metropolis, Richard Rothstein, a leading authority on housing policy, explodes the myth that America’s cities came to be racially divided through individual prejudices, income differences, or the actions of private institutions like banks and real estate agencies. Rather, *The Color of Law* incontrovertibly makes clear that it was the laws and policy decisions passed by local, state, and federal governments—that actually promoted the discriminatory patterns that continue to this day. – Book description from Google Books

A House with Good Bones by T. Kingfisher, 2023. ([DB114719](#))

“Mom seems off.” Her brother’s words echo in Sam Montgomery’s ear as she turns onto the quiet North Carolina street where their mother lives alone. Stepping inside, she quickly realizes home isn’t what it used to be. Gone is the warm, cluttered charm her mom is known for; now the walls are painted a sterile white. Her mom jumps at the smallest noises and looks over her shoulder even when she’s the only person in the room. And when Sam steps out back to clear her head, she finds a jar of teeth hidden beneath the magazine-worthy rose bushes, and vultures are circling the garden

from above. To find out what's got her mom so frightened in her own home, Sam will go digging for the truth. But some secrets are better left buried. – Book description from publisher's website

Howl's Moving Castle by Diana Wynne Jones, 1986. ([DB025892](#))

Sophie has the great misfortune of being the eldest of three daughters, destined to fail miserably should she ever leave home to seek her fate. But when she unwittingly attracts the ire of the Witch of the Waste, Sophie finds herself under a horrid spell that transforms her into an old lady. Her only chance at breaking it lies in the ever-moving castle in the hills: the Wizard Howl's castle. To untangle the enchantment, Sophie must handle the heartless Howl, strike a bargain with a fire demon, and meet the Witch of the Waste head-on. Along the way, she discovers that there's far more to Howl—and herself—than first meets the eye. – Book description from Goodreads

The Glass Room by Simon Mawer, 2009. ([DB072809](#))

On honeymoon in Venice in 1929, Viktor and Liesel Landauer face a new world when they meet brilliant architect Rainer von Abt. Soon, on a hillside near a provincial Czech town, the Landauer House with its celebrated Glass Room will become von Abt's greatest work, a modernist masterpiece in glass and steel, with travertine floors and onyx walls, filled with light and optimism. But while Viktor's beautiful wife is Aryan, he is Jewish, and so when Nazi troops arrive the family must flee. Yet their exile is not the end of the spectacular building. It slips from hand to hand, from Czech to Nazi to Soviet and finally to the Czechoslovak state, the crystalline perfection of the Glass Room always exerting a gravitational pull on those who know it. – Book description from WorldCat

Under Lock & Skeleton Key: A Secret Staircase Mystery by Gigi Pandian, 2022. ([DB112852](#))

After a disastrous accident derails Tempest Raj's career, and life, she heads back to her childhood home in California to comfort herself with her grandfather's Indian home-cooked meals. Though she resists, every day brings her closer to the inevitable: working for her father's company. Secret Staircase Construction specializes in bringing the magic of childhood to all by transforming clients' homes with sliding bookcases, intricate locks, backyard treehouses, and hidden reading nooks. When Tempest visits her dad's latest renovation project, her former stage double is discovered dead inside a wall that's supposedly been sealed for more than a century. Could Tempest have been the intended victim? – Book description adapted from Goodreads

The House of the Seven Gables by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1851. ([BR012720](#), [DB053471](#), [DB017947](#))

Old Hepzibah Pyncheon lives in her family's decaying mansion, a reportedly cursed house built about 200 years earlier. The Pyncheon family no longer has the riches it once did, and Hepzibah struggles to support herself and her brother Clifford. Their niece Phoebe arrives and asks to live with them, bringing hope back into the house. But another visitor – the conniving Judge Pyncheon – launches his plot to uncover a lost family fortune. As events unfold, the family encounters bloody secrets and sins in their ancestors' history. – Book description from WorldCat

The House of Seven Mabels [#13, Jane Jeffry] by Jill Churchill, 2002. ([DB055577](#))

With parenting demanding less of their time, best pals Jane Jeffrey and Shelley Nowack agree to decorate a house that's being renovated by a bevy of feminist laborers, but when the contractor

winds up in the basement with a broken neck, the plucky duo must determine if the crime was personally or professionally motivated, not to mention stay out of harm's way themselves. – Book description from Publishers Weekly

Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City by Matthew Desmond, 2016. ([DB083870](#))

In *Evicted*, Princeton sociologist and MacArthur “Genius” Matthew Desmond follows eight families in Milwaukee as they each struggle to keep a roof over their heads. *Evicted* transforms our understanding of poverty and economic exploitation while providing fresh ideas for solving one of twenty-first-century America’s most devastating problems. Its unforgettable scenes of hope and loss remind us of the centrality of home, without which nothing else is possible. – Book description from [EvictedBook.com](#)

The Paris Apartment: A Novel by Lucy Foley, 2022. ([DB107433](#), en español [DB112701](#))

Jess needs a fresh start. She’s broke and alone, and she’s just left her job under less than ideal circumstances, so she asks her half-brother Ben if she can crash with him in Paris. Only when she shows up – to find a very nice apartment, that she’s not certain that Ben could have afforded – he’s not there. The longer Ben stays missing, the more Jess starts to dig into her brother’s situation, and the more questions she has. Jess may have come to Paris to escape her past, but it’s starting to look like it’s Ben’s future that’s in question. – Book description adapted from Goodreads